

From GCHQ, with love: An exclusive festive puzzle for your pupils

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Year in review special

TEACHERS
HAVE DECIDED
ENOUGH IS
ENOUGH



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THEY HOKEY
COKEYED



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TIME TO FOCUS
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UNITES US



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WHAT NOW FOR THE ACADEMY REVOLUTION?



Pages 6-7

Just half of tutoring benefits poorer pupils

- Flagship National Tutoring Programme fell well short of pupil premium target last year
- Secret documents reveal just 30% of tutoring in north east benefited poor pupils
- Internal KPI reports obtained by Schools Week reveal full scale of Randstad failure

SCHOOLS WEEK

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Axing the Schools Bill – a fitting tribute for a chaotic year

Confirmation that the Schools Bill will finally be axed feels like an appropriate end to the year for schools. It sums up the past 12 months well: political limbo stifling any progress on actual policies (remember all those headlines about new grammar schools?).

As Diana Ohene-Darko writes on page 23, it was the year of the hokey-cokey.

There are comparisons to the government itself, too, which also seems to be hanging around in limbo for someone to put it out its misery.

The Schools Bill was the blueprint for finishing off the all-academy reforms. The fact it was sunk by two former academies ministers (so integral to driving the revolution to this point) makes the whole thing even more remarkable.

The government still hopes to find legislative time to pass some of the non-academy reforms (such as the out-of-school register) and says it will do all it can without legislation to further its academy aims (page 6 and 7).

But, in proposing the new laws, the government itself admitted the current academy rules were “complex”, “inconsistent” and “ineffective”. And how right it was.

Ministers will try to add some coherence and structure even without new legislation, but these

moves are surely just several sticking plasters.

While government has delivered on extra funding for schools, leaders would say other pressing issues, such as recruitment and retention, mental wellbeing of the workforce and pupils, and support services for students are all currently being held together by sticking plasters, too.

As NASUWT’s general secretary Patrick Roach writes this week (page 22), it does feel like the year that things started to break.

That certainly seems to be the case for teachers – likely to soon strike for the first time in years over their pay and conditions. It remains to be seen whether the £2.3 billion funding boost will be enough to stave off potential widespread disruption in the new year.

This is our last edition of the year, our weekly edition will be back Friday, January 6. In the meantime, we’ll continue to bring you the latest news on our website.

For the second year, we’re really proud to give you all a sneak peek of the festive puzzle from spy agency GCHQ. So, make sure to check it out on pages 31-33 if you think your pupils will be up for trying to crack the code!

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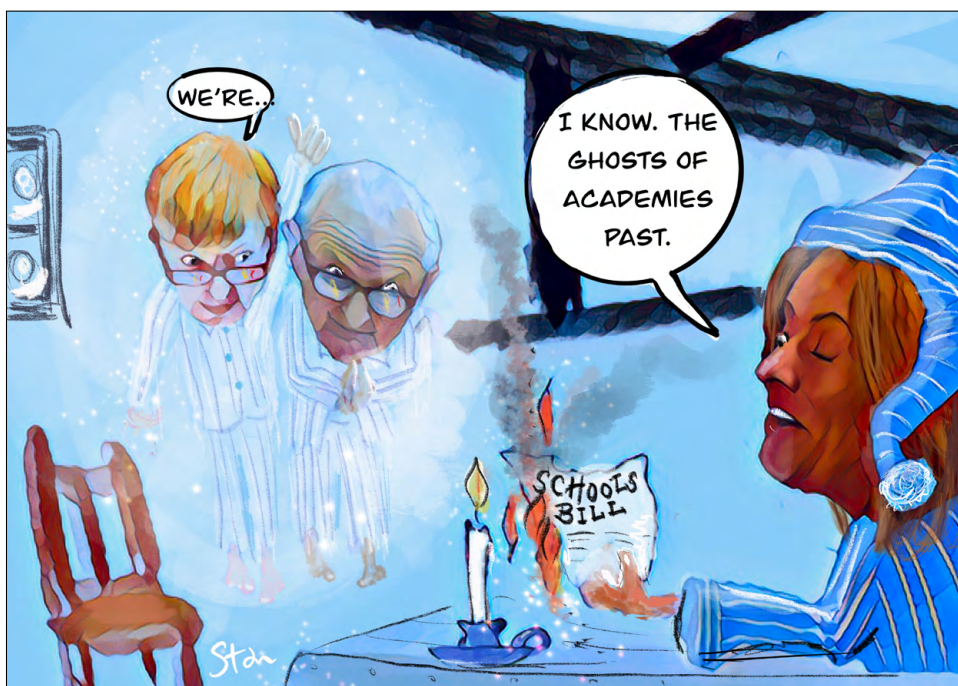


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INVESTIGATION: TUTORING

Revealed: Tutoring scheme missed disadvantage target

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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EXCLUSIVE

Far fewer poorer pupils than expected were tutored under the flagship catch-up scheme last year, ministers have revealed after a four-month freedom of information battle.

The Dutch HR company Randstad was axed from running the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) last year after slow take-up in the routes it was responsible for.

Sixty-five per cent of the tutoring provided under the tuition partners' arm – the key catch-up route run by Randstad – was supposed to reach disadvantaged pupils.

But internal performance reports obtained under FOI by Schools Week suggest just 49 per cent of tutoring reached pupil premium pupils, hitting as low as 30 per cent in the north east.

Randstad failed to meet its 65 per cent disadvantage target every month last year for the tuition partners' strand, where schools paid for catch-up sessions with accredited organisations, the reports show.

Lee Elliot Major, a social mobility professor at the University of Exeter, said the findings confirmed fears that the NTP failed to deliver on its most important aim of targeting support to poorer pupils.

The catch-up scheme is aimed at disadvantaged pupils, but heads have flexibility to decide who receives tutoring.

In the scheme's first year – when the tuition partners' arm was run by the Education Endowment Foundation – just 46 per cent of 184,000 pupils receiving tutoring were on pupil premium.

A recent evaluation found it “failed” to achieve its “intended focus”.

The 65 per cent target was written into Randstad's contract for year two to help drive this up.

But as take-up stalled, tuition providers were told in March they no longer had to ensure their catch-up reached this.

Randstad told education committee MPs in January that it could not provide take-up figures for disadvantaged pupils as they were being “quality assured”.

But neither the company nor government has released the figures since.

Schools Week requested the performance



reports Randstad had to submit to the Department for Education showing how it was meeting key performance indicators.

The DfE said at first it could not release the information because of “exit arrangements” with Randstad.

But it released the information after we appealed to the Information Commissioner's Office, saying commercial matters had been completed.

In December last year, 56 per cent of tutoring was for pupil premium students – the highest of any month. The lowest month was September (43 per cent) and then June (46 per cent).

By the end of August, just 6,100 pupil premium children in the north east had got tutoring, 30 per cent of the 20,400 target and the lowest of any region. In London, 45 per cent of tutoring was completed by poorer pupils, the highest.

In July, Randstad told the DfE it was “continuing to encourage schools to focus on their pupil premium pupils as a priority group”.

Nick Brook, chair of the DfE's independent tutoring troubleshooter group, said the scheme had an “identity crisis where it was unclear whether the priority was catch-up for all or support for disadvantaged pupils who were hardest hit by Covid”.

“We risk widening the achievement gap, rather than narrowing it, unless the NTP is much more sharply focused on disadvantage.”

The report also shows that at the end of Randstad's tenure, 59,055 15-hour packages of tuition – 30 per cent – were completed under the tuition partners' arm. The forecast was for 194,224.

Only 236,000 pupils started packages, against a target of 524,000. The most recent figures only



Randstad's Karen Guthrie giving evidence to MPs this year

cover to June.

Randstad told the DfE that the school-led tutoring route – introduced in September last year to give cash to schools directly to organise their own tuition and which has no pupil premium target – “significantly impacted” take-up of other arms.

This also led to some schools not completing the full 15-hour packages because pupils were not engaging or schools could not timetable all the hours.

The company said tutors were “encouraged to identify incomplete programmes and recommend pupil swapping”.

In August, 18,461 pupil sessions were “cancelled before starting”.

Randstad declined to comment. A DfE spokesperson said the NTP “is helping to level up opportunities for millions of children across England, including in areas with high proportions of children are in receipt of pupil premium funding.”

“Whilst our guidance is clear that schools should consider all pupils that are eligible for pupil premium funding in their tutoring offer, ultimately it is for schools to decide which pupils are most in need of this support.”

NEWS

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Attendance dip follows rise in Strep A cases

AMY WALKER

@AMYRWALKER

EXCLUSIVE

One in ten pupils was off school on Tuesday as the rates for strep A and winter respiratory viruses stepped up, new figures suggest.

Data from more than 4,000 schools also show absences at the start of December were higher than at the same time last year when Omicron was circulating in the UK.

On Wednesday, the Department for Education issued an update to schools, saying it was "closely monitoring" cases of Strep A and scarlet fever.

Thirteen school-age children have died in England since September after developing invasive Strep A, known as iGAS.

There have been 652 recorded cases of iGAS since September, compared with an average of 311 in the same timeframe over the past five years.

Attendance data was shared with *Schools Week* by the school management information system operator Arbor Education.

It shows that between November 30 and December 6, attendance fell from 90.9 per cent to 89.1 per cent – the lowest since September.

While the 1.8 percentage point fall may seem slight, there are more than nine million pupils in England. Extrapolated nationally, this means 161,101 more pupils off school this week than last.

Data for the same dates in 2021 shows attendance at 91.9 per cent on November 30 and 91.6 per cent on December 6.

On the same date in December 2021, Sajid Javid, the then health secretary, told MPs the highly transmissible Covid variant Omicron was circulating within the community.

There is no way to tie absence rates to the rise in Strep A cases, as the reasons for absences were not recorded in the data.

UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) data published on Thursday shows there were 1,062 reported cases of



scarlet fever – which is caused by Strep A – in the week beginning November 28, up from 851 in the week before.

Jonny Uttley, the chief executive of The Educational Alliance trust in Yorkshire said attendance was declining "and talking to other school leaders, everybody's seeing a fall".

"We're just very watchful at the moment. We're not in emergency planning mode, but we're conscious we have parents who are worried."

The Diocese of Ely multi-academy trust (DEMAT) said Strep A and scarlet fever had "affected" some of its schools.

Of its 6,800 pupils, eight have confirmed non-invasive Strep A and five have scarlet fever.

A spokesperson said the trust was revising its infectious disease risk assessments, providing advice to each academy and liaising with local public health bodies.

"Catch it, kill it, bin it" posters were making sure pupils understood the the importance of handwashing, and covering their noses and mouths when they sneezed and coughed, they added.

Ark Schools said it was "closely monitoring" government guidance on infections, and sharing it with families.

A spokesperson said the trust had "balanced this with a reminder that being in school is critical unless [pupils] are sick".

This is in line with DfE advice sent to schools this week. It said children with scarlet fever should stay at home until at least 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment.

An outbreak is defined as two or more scarlet fever cases within 10 days of each other if the individuals have a link, such as being in the same class.

If schools suspect an outbreak, they should notify their local health protection team, which will investigate.

UKHSA guidance states that in "exceptional" circumstances, such as reports of hospital admissions, an outbreak control team could consider the use of antibiotics as a "blanket prevention measure".

Antibiotics would then be prescribed to individuals with no signs of illness to prevent any infection developing.

But even if there were confirmed or suspected cases in a school, "there is no reason for children to be kept at home if they are well", the DfE said.

During an education committee hearing on Wednesday, Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, said the department was "working closely" with the UKHSA and monitoring a "worrying" situation.



Sajid Javid



Jonny Uttley

ANALYSIS: ACADEMIES

The schools bill is dead, so where next for academies?

TOM BELGER

@TOM_BELGER

The government's proposed blueprint to reform the academy system and lay the groundwork to finish off its multi-academy trust revolution has finally been ditched.

What happens now? *Schools Week* investigates ...

It's official. On Wednesday the education secretary announced the sinking of the schools bill.

But while Gillian Keegan said it "will not progress", she also said she remained "committed" to its aims – and signalled various measures that would make a comeback.

The government still hopes to introduce powers and duties over home, private and illegal schooling, teacher misconduct, council attendance work and pupils not in school.

It will also seek to revive plans removing barriers to faith and grammar schools joining multi-academy trusts, and push national funding formula reforms without legislation.

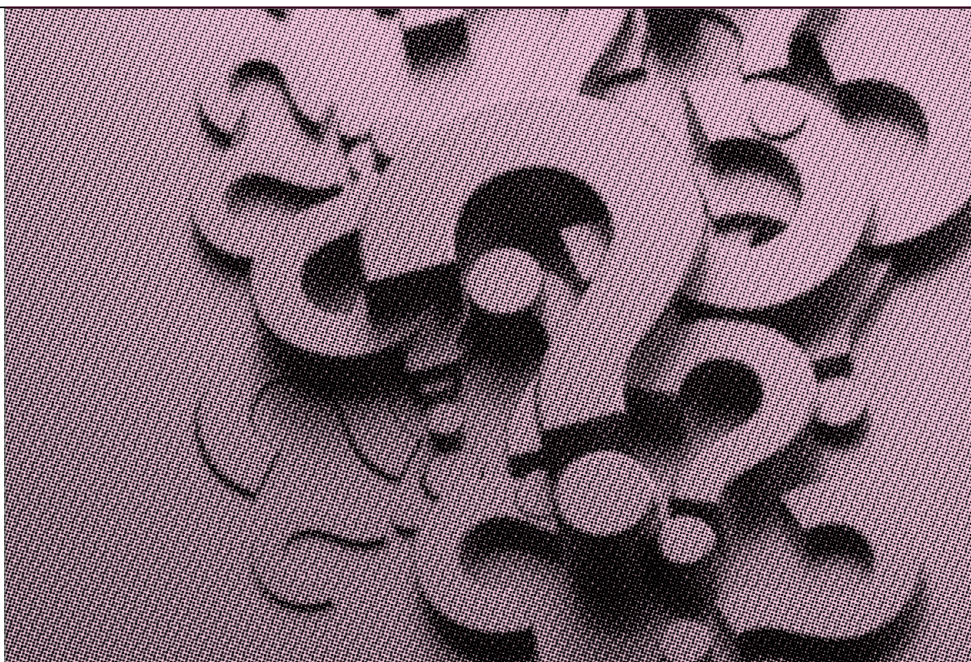
But the remaining academy reforms that required new laws have been ditched.

New academy standards, trust intervention powers and support for councils that want to force school conversions en-masse are among the major casualties.

Regulatory review continues

Ministers now face attempting to drive academy take-up with their credibility shattered and powers constrained.

The DfE had said the bill would "pave the way" for all schools to join strong trusts, with rules aiming to drive up



'Defining trust strength is a waste of time and money'

standards and steer more schools into MATs by 2030.

The DfE itself had dubbed existing academy rules "complex," "inconsistent" and "ineffective".

The academy regulatory review, set up to decide what new academy standards should look like and shape future powers, will now simply define what a "strong trust" looks like.

A recent MAT trustee poll by the National Governance Association showed most supported more stringent trust standards and inspections.

Cathie Paine, the chief executive of REAch2, said the sector needed clarity and transparency about how trusts should grow, collaboration to be "hardwired", and high performance to be defined.

"We all know there are schools

performing well in key stage 2, and yet their curriculums are neither broad nor balanced."

Paul Tarn, the chief executive of Delta Academies Trust, said trusts' control over academy clusters should be kept under review, using local feedback and metrics that included not only academic outcomes and ratings, but also attendance, exclusions and how they spend funds.

Poor performers "should be asked to hand over those academies" after five years.

But Leora Cruddas, the chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts and review adviser, warned the government must not "pin down the definition" so as to curb trust innovation and creativity.

And others believe such work is now useless. Hugh Greenway, the chief executive of the Elliot Foundation, said defining trust strength was a "waste of time and money".



Paul Tarn



Leora Cruddas

ANALYSIS: ACADEMIES

Intervention without new powers

Even if ministers can agree on a definition of a "strong trust", they face an uphill struggle promoting it without legislative powers.

Schools Week recently reported on the DfE's inability to intervene directly in one trust, despite its four "inadequate" ratings in six years.

But the growing use of non-statutory guidance faces resistance from unions, including the leaders' union ASCL, while many maintained schools can simply ignore pressure to academise.

MAT inspections are under consideration, but might also require legislation.

Greenway warned they would encourage "performative compliance – behaving like strong trusts without actually being one".

Some in the sector fear trust standards could alternatively be shoe-horned without legislation into the trust handbook, which trusts must comply with or risk losing schools.

A new taskforce on cutting red tape – likely to be welcomed in principle – could also similarly provide a backdoor route to greater intervention.

But the widening of the handbook beyond finances last year sparked a sector revolt.

Mark Lehair, an ex-DfE special adviser and now head of education at the Centre for Policy Studies, said one option was publishing a catalogue of metrics – encouraging improvement and helping schools choose trusts.

But Cruddas noted the government had already "intimated" the definition could instead inform regional director decisions over which trusts take on schools.

Proposals in the schools white paper that do not require new laws – such as the "expectation" all schools have a 32.5 hour day – also remain.

Momentum towards 2030

The other big question for ministers is how far the bill's demise – on top of the summer's political chaos and



'This is good news for strong single-academy trusts'

Labour's surge in the polls – undermines the white paper vision for all schools to join trusts.

A key relevant bill reform – letting councils request ministers academise their schools en-masse irrespective of governors' consent – is also dead.

One government source suggested non-legislative measures may still emerge to facilitate bulk conversions and council-established MATs are likely to go ahead as they do not require legislation.

But political uncertainty now means "quite a lot" of maintained and standalone academy leaders will now continue to say "let's wait and see", according to ASCL's Julie McCulloch.

Dr Mark Fenton, the chief executive of the Grammar School Heads Association (GSHA), said the bill's demise was "good news" for the survival of strong single-academy trusts.

Even Cruddas, who supports the all-MAT vision, said: "Let's not fight about 2030."

Nigel Genders, the chief education officer at the Church of England education service, said the government needed "some other way to incentivise" stronger schools to convert – or risk insufficient trust capacity to take on those deemed underperforming.

He voiced his disappointment the bill had not progressed on removing various barriers to church schools joining MATs, but welcomed Keegan's commitment to prioritise this.

Fenton also said GSHA remained committed to working with the government to tackle grammar school concerns about their status within MATs.

John Jolly, the chief executive of the parents' charity Parentkind, also said reforms must "urgently" address an "accountability gap" between MATs and parents, backing new duties to consult parents.

But the key question is whether ministers can now revive credibility at all.

As Bridget Phillipson, the shadow education secretary, wrote on Wednesday: "Their schools bill was to be their flagship legislation on education. And today it's gone."



Julie McCulloch

NEWS: RECRUITMENT

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Rejected teacher trainers lose appeals for accreditation

AMY WALKER

@AMYRWALKER

All appeals made by teacher trainers unsuccessful in the government's ITT market review accreditation process have been rejected.

Just 179 providers made it through the Department for Education's two reaccreditation rounds this year, well below the 240 providers operating in England last year.

Snubbed trainers were offered a last-ditch chance to appeal. But in a decision that could prompt legal action, DfE sources confirmed this week that none had been successful.

It comes as new analysis from the Education Policy Institute (EPI) suggested more than 4,000 places could be lost if non-accredited providers left the market.

James Noble-Rogers, from the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), said the process was "seriously flawed".

"We are both surprised and disappointed that none of the appeals were successful and that ITE providers...who have been supplying schools with excellent teachers for many years... will be forced out of the market."

Noble-Rogers said the 500 word-limit for appeal applications had been "unduly restrictive". Appeals could also only be submitted based on an administrative or processing error.

Emma Hollis, from the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT), said it was "extremely disappointed".

She said the 500-word limit "did not allow room for extenuating circumstances, and there should have been an offer of an additional word count for providers appealing the decision on more than one question".

Teacher trainers were also subjected to weeks of delays. Reaccreditation outcomes were known at the end of September, and appeals had to be submitted by October 20.



The DfE did not set a formal date for its response, but providers were told to expect it in mid-November.

Providers that did not get reaccredited can continue until 2024, but sector leaders have warned some could drop out of the market early. The next opportunity to gain accreditation is not until 2025 at the earliest.

UCET said it would continue to support its members, either to partner with accredited providers, to diversify their provision, or through "further challenges". It is understood the latter could mean legal action.

Hollis also said individual providers "may wish to take further action against their outcome".

Durham University, a member of the elite Russell Group, was one of the trainers to appeal.

The EPI said the 68 providers that either did not apply or were unsuccessful were responsible for 4,491 trainees, 16 per cent of those nationally, including 605 teachers in STEM subjects.

The government had predicted its review would lead to "significant market reconfiguration and the development of new capacity will be necessary".

But James Zuccollo, the EPI's director for school workforce, said removing

accreditation from providers risked "exacerbating the existing teacher shortages that already plague schools".

DfE figures published last week showed it missed its recruitment target for secondary trainee teachers this year by 41 per cent. It also failed to meet primary teacher targets.

During a House of Lords debate earlier this week, Labour peer Mike Watson said the culling of former providers could cause potential regional cold spots.

Cumbria Teacher Training was unsuccessful, as was the University of Cumbria, leaving a sole provider in the county that is a new entrant to the market.

But One Cumbria told *Schools Week* its provision would be countywide.

The number of places would be based on the level of need after appeal outcomes for existing providers were known.

The government's flagship National Institute of Teaching (NIOT) is among the new providers that received accreditation.

REach2 academy trust, which was also accredited to launch a training arm, said it would offer about 100 primary places in parts of London, the south east, east of England and the West Midlands.

"We will grow carefully, considering local need, said Cathie Paine, its chief executive. "The vision for REACH2 is for every one of our schools to be a great school, and that will only happen if we can ensure great teachers in the classroom."



Emma Hollis

GIVING DISADVANTAGED PUPILS A STRONGER HEAD START IN LIFE THROUGH TUTORING

Solving simple maths problems was a challenge for Skyanna, a Year 5 pupil in Islington, *"I wasn't really sure about maths before because it was really tricky."* After ten weeks of tutoring with her assigned tutor from Action Tutoring, she gained more confidence: *"In my maths class at school I was on challenge one, but I've moved to challenge two, and once I even moved up to challenge three, which is the hardest... It was [my tutor] that was helping."*

Like Skyanna, many pupils across the country need additional help through tutoring but with schools across England facing spiralling costs, there is a risk that valuable interventions for disadvantaged pupils are likely to get scrapped.

Tackling the attainment gap

The academic attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their better-off peers at both [primary](#) and [secondary](#) is at its widest for ten years. Tutoring is an intervention with proven impact. A report from the [Education Endowment Foundation](#) shows that a course of tutoring can add up to five months of progress for pupils.

Action Tutoring, an official Tuition Partner of the National Tutoring Programme (NTP), has over a decade of experience supporting thousands of pupils facing disadvantage to improve their academic outcomes. Our high-quality, trained volunteer tutors help pupils to increase their subject knowledge, confidence, and study skills. By providing tailored maths and English tuition, online and face-to-face, to pupils in Years 5, 6, 7, 10, and 11, we target young people who are in the greatest need of our support.

Lucy Walker-Collins is a headteacher at an Action Tutoring partner school, *"We really love to see the accelerated academic progress. The real impact is in the children's confidence and attitudes... Having worked with Action Tutoring across two schools for a number of years I am highly impressed with the on-the-ground logistics, delivery and management."*



The difference our tutoring makes

Since 2012, through the support of over 11,500 volunteer tutors, we've provided tutoring to over 26,000 primary and secondary school pupils who are facing disadvantage.

Despite the challenging backdrop of Covid-19, Year 6 children eligible for the Pupil Premium supported by Action Tutoring **were more likely to achieve the expected standards** than other disadvantaged pupils across the country — by eight percentage points in both maths and reading - despite being considered at risk of not reaching the standards.

Action Tutoring focuses on supporting pupils facing disadvantage who are at risk of not achieving a grade 4 in their English or maths GCSE. Our findings show that **61% of disadvantaged pupils passed their English GCSE** and **72% of disadvantaged pupils passed maths** after attending at least 10 tutoring sessions. According to an external evaluator, NIESR, our programme has a positive impact on GCSE point scores equivalent to one-third of a grade with just 5-6 sessions, against a matched control group. For pupils who attend 7-8 sessions, an additional half a grade of progress was recorded.

Why should schools partner with us?

Our tutors tailor their delivery to address the gaps in pupils' learning identified in the baseline and progress reports we

run with them. In line with [Ofsted](#) recommendations for tutoring, we provide tutors with workbooks designed by curriculum experts and aligned with classroom learning.

In each of our partner schools, **we designate an Action Tutoring staff member to oversee the programme delivery**, reducing the administrative and organisational burden on schools.

Through tutoring, more pupils are experiencing a difference in their academic performance. Year 6 pupil, Elizabet, said tutoring has transformed her perception and understanding of both maths and English in school: *"I didn't like to study maths and English as much, but after tutoring, I've been reading a lot more fluently and learned maths a lot quicker... It's really fun and now that I've learnt more things, it's a lot easier."*

We are keen to partner with more schools across the country to provide support for pupils facing disadvantage. Through our tutoring programmes, we can expand its benefits to more pupils who need it.

For more information, get in touch:

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INVESTIGATION: ABUSE

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Poor data collection on sexual abuse 'fails children'

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Ofsted receives hundreds of reports of peer-on-peer sexual abuse in schools every year, but cannot say how many have prompted inspections.

A Schools Week investigation also found the Department for Education does not collect data on the number of reports it receives, which campaigners say could result in cases slipping through the net.

The government says abuse should be reported to schools and then referred to the police. But victims and their families can also report issues to sector organisations such as Ofsted and the DfE.

Freedom of information data shows Ofsted received 1,582 reports of sexual abuse in schools between 2016 and 2021. But when asked how many had sparked inspections, Ofsted said such data was not centrally held.

The watchdog has been repeatedly criticised over its handling of sexual abuse.

The recent Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse found Ofsted "did not do enough" to identify serious child protection weaknesses in some schools. Inspectors even gave clean bills of health to settings in which children were being sexually abused, it found.

One parent, who complained in 2018 that Ofsted gave their daughter's school the all-clear after a boy accused of raping her was put back into her class during an investigation, said the watchdog had "failed children catastrophically".

The DfE, meanwhile, admitted it did not routinely collect or collate any data about reports of peer-on-peer abuse.

It said it believed the current system of schools collecting their own data and making referrals to children's social care and the police was "effective".

A lack of national data on sexual abuse was raised in a 2016 report by the parliamentary women and equalities committee.

Emma Hardy, the Labour MP for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle, told Schools Week she was "extremely concerned" Ofsted and the DfE did not keep central records.

"Without proper data, important patterns and opportunities to introduce improved



safeguarding will be missed. Student safeguarding and welfare is the responsibility of all those involved in education, not just a matter for each individual school."

But Ofsted said risk assessment was "not a tick-box exercise and there isn't single way of dealing with complaints about schools". Complaints were "handled individually and carefully assessed to determine what action is required" and then held on school records.

"While those records are not immediately accessible to anyone outside Ofsted, we are confident that our complaints about schools process is rigorous, prioritises children, and treats each case with the appropriate care and consideration it needs."

Ofsted carried out its own review of sexual abuse in schools last year, following allegations of abuse shared on the Everyone's Invited website.

It concluded that it was unable to say whether its own inspections were "sufficiently assessing" the extent of sexual harassment and violence.

The watchdog updated its approach, telling inspectors to speak to pupils about such issues and better interrogate schools' data.

However, the parent who complained in 2018 said parents reporting issues were "treated as the problem. There is a culture of disbelief and silencing that is dangerous and unpleasant".

"When Ofsted gives a judgment that safeguarding is effective in a school, it means nothing. Parents cannot rely on it. Ofsted listens to school leadership

but does not want to hear from parents or the public who are trying to raise the alarm."

Ofsted has also been accused of shunning uncomfortable decisions on inappropriate sex education materials.

Campaigners questioned its decision to give a clean bill of health to St Mary's RC High School in Herefordshire last year, after a monitoring inspection was prompted by concerns about relationships and sex education resources called "A Fertile Heart".

Nick Gibb, the schools minister, last year raised "serious concerns" about the materials, which suggested it was a woman's role to "receive" and men's to "initiate" love in relationships.

Ofsted concluded it did not believe the materials would be used in a way that promoted "misogynistic or discriminatory attitudes" or breached equality law.

Amanda Attfield, a local campaigner, questioned whether Ofsted had properly assessed the materials. Her complaint to the watchdog was not taken forward because she was not a teacher, governor or parent, she said, warning the "inspection system disincentivises challenge".

But the watchdog said it stood by its report. A Fertile Heart said it had "made appropriate amendments" to the resources, and received "positive feedback" from schools. St Mary's referred Schools Week back to its inspection report.



Emma Hardy

NEWS: SEND

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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You'll get your money, ministers promise special schools

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Ministers have promised special schools that they will receive their share of additional funding after some councils seized previous cash boosts.

Schools Week investigations have revealed how cash-strapped local authorities kept millions of pounds in previous school funding rises.

While cash goes straight to mainstream schools, additional funding for special schools goes to councils as part of high needs funding.

Last month, Schools Week launched a campaign to ensure schools for the most vulnerable children were not "robbed" of their share of the £2 billion extra cash announced in the autumn statement.

The Department for Education said that special schools would be "guaranteed" a funding boost from April next year.

Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, told MPs that the government was "making sure we set out the expectation" that funding "goes directly to the schools".



"I'm aware of that issue to make sure that the funding actually does flow through to the school," she told the education select committee on Wednesday.

A department spokesperson told Schools Week that a "new condition" would ensure a "proportionate share" of the £400 million in extra high needs funding next year reached special schools. The remainder of the £2 billion in new cash, announced last month, would go to mainstream schools.

However, specific details on how the government delivers its promise for special schools are not expected until next week.

Government guidance over this year's £325

million extra in high needs funding told special schools to "discuss" potential increases with councils.

Headteachers said they were having to go with "begging bowls" to councils or threaten legal action to get the cash.

Schools Week found examples of at least two cash-strapped councils that kept millions of additional high needs funding this financial year.

Further analysis suggested about 40 councils did not increase top-up funding for special schools.

Ministers had introduced a minimum funding guarantee requiring councils to increase special schools' top-up funding by 3 per cent in 2023-24.

However, councils could apply to exclude "some or all" of their schools from this.

The DfE said it would only consider applications from councils to disapply the new condition in "exceptional, individual circumstances where the position of a particular special school meant that it would be clearly unreasonable to pass that funding on in that way".

Quizzed on this by the committee, Susan Acland-Hood, the DfE's permanent secretary, said it would be "very much the exception".

SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER | @SCHOOLSWEEK

SEND tribunal appeals top 10,000 for first time

The number of parents launching tribunal appeals over a council's refusal to provide support for their vulnerable child has passed 10,000 in a year for the first time.

In the past academic year, 11,052 SEND appeals were registered – a 29 per cent rise from 8,579 the previous year.

This is more than triple the number of appeals when landmark special educational needs and disability reforms were introduced in 2014. It's also the largest annual hike in appeals.

Parents can appeal against council refusals to assess a child's needs or to issue an education, health and care plans (EHCP).

Of the 5,600 that went to a hearing, 5,393 (96 per cent) tribunals sided with families either in whole or in part.

Professor Brian Lamb, whose 2009 review influenced reforms, said: "These figures show that the current system is failing too many children and families."

Schools Week previously revealed parents had used their life insurances and spent tens of thousands to challenge their local authorities

in court.

The number of children and young people with EHCPs is now at 473,330 after a 10 per cent increase in a year.

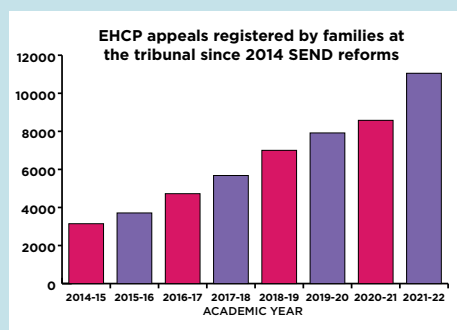
Ministry of Justice (MoJ) data shows 27 per cent of appeals were against a council's refusal to secure an assessment for a plan, while 54 per cent were against the council's choice of a school or college.

Half of registered appeals were for children with autism and 15 per cent were related to social, emotional and mental health needs.

Another 13 per cent were related to a moderate learning difficulty – a near tripling from the previous year.

Matt Keer, a SEND researcher, said it showed the "enormous human and financial cost to families. What families are 'winning' here is the same right to an appropriate education that families of children without SEND take for granted. There are no magic prizes, no golden tickets, no stairways to heaven here."

The government's SEND green paper plans to introduce mandatory mediation on EHCP



disputes, but experts say this could further slow the system.

Currently, families only need a mediation certificate to register, but do not have to go through the mediation itself.

The SEND implementation plan has been delayed until early next year. The MoJ did not respond to a request for comment.

A Local Government Association spokesperson said the figures were "indicative of a system that is not working. Councils do everything they can... within the budgets made available by the government."

IN PARLIAMENT

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We're drawing up school strikes plan, Keegan tells MPs

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Education secretary Gillian Keegan faced her first education committee grilling on Wednesday.

Here's what happened...

1. DfE drawing up strike contingency plans

The National Education Union, teaching union NASUWT and headteachers' union the NAHT are currently balloting members for potential strike action in the new year.

Keegan was asked whether the DfE would adopt an approach used in the pandemic – when schools remained open for the most vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers – to mitigate the impact of any strikes.

She said there was “a lot of planning going on across government to mitigate the impact of harmful strike action”.

“That is of course one of the factors we're looking at – how we can do that relying on various other pools of people and staff, so yes that's something that's part of the planning.

“Whilst hopeful that teachers won't vote for strike action, we are planning to make sure that we have some mitigations in place.”

2. Physics and maths teacher apprenticeships

DfE officials are looking into the feasibility of undergraduate apprenticeships for physics and maths teachers.

A postgraduate teaching apprenticeship exists, but discussions about an apprenticeship route for those without a degree have had little success.

One of the key barriers has been how subject specialism for secondary teachers could be factored-in to an apprenticeship course.

But Keegan suggested the department was now looking at separate frameworks for certain shortage subjects.

“I'm always keen to look at what more we can do, and I believe that we could potentially, well I want them to look at maybe an apprenticeship for undergraduates...a maths and physics teaching apprenticeship.

“I've asked the department to look into that. Is that something we could develop? Would that broaden the pipeline?”



Gillian Keegan

3. Grammars making 'smaller' social mobility contribution

Unlike her predecessor, Keegan has made it clear the government would not lift the ban on new grammar schools on her watch.

While existing grammars were “safe in my hands” and did a “fantastic job”, Keegan said she would focus on “making sure everybody has a fantastic comprehensive state school education”.

Pressed on why new grammars were not a priority, Keegan warned the proportion of disadvantaged children in selective schools “does remain stubbornly low”.

She said the latest data showed 7.9 per cent of grammar pupils were disadvantaged this year, compared with 26.6 per cent in all mainstream schools.

“So as an engine for social mobility, I don't know what they were like years ago, but I know that many of our colleagues, it was their life chance and they absolutely loved the fact they got to go to a grammar school... but I would imagine that the figures were probably different then.

“They have become much smaller as a contribution to that social mobility, to help disadvantaged kids.”

4. British baccalaureate: Ministers eye post-16 maths boost

Rishi Sunak set out plans in the summer for a “British baccalaureate”, potentially involving a requirement for all pupils to study core

subjects in sixth forms.

There have been no more details. But Keegan said discussions were “focused around maths to 18”.

“We know that maths is a key foundation for many pathways, but particularly STEM and others as well.

“We've done a lot of work to make sure that there is better maths teaching, people going further with maths, and I think A-level maths is the most popular now.

“Clearly there's scope to go further to improve and look at that, so they're the kind of discussions in that space...what more should we be doing to really look at how we can increase the proportion of young people who study maths post-16.”

5. The attendance alliance continues

Nadhim Zahawi, then education secretary, last year launched a 17-member “attendance alliance” to reduce absence from schools.

Last week, Ofsted chief Amanda Spielman said the alliance had been “helpful” but had not met since the Cabinet reshuffle in the summer.

But Keegan said reports of its death were greatly exaggerated.

“I don't think it has been discontinued. In fact I think I'm attending one early next year.”



Rishi Sunak



Nadhim Zahawi

NEWS: OFSTED

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MP: Ofsted sent 'rogue hit squad' to my child's school

AMY WALKER

@AMYRWALKER

A Tory MP has launched a scathing attack on Ofsted, accusing a "rogue" inspection "hit squad" of engineering a downgrade of the school his child attends.

Philip Hollobone claimed the team sent to inspect Bishop Stopford School in his Kettering constituency in June 2022 had a "prearranged agenda".

After raising his concerns in a parliamentary debate on Tuesday, the MP was offered a meeting with the watchdog's chief inspector Amanda Spielman.

In the inspection report, published last month, the school was rated as 'requires improvement', an outcome its headteacher described as "extremely disappointing".

The Church of England school, rated 'outstanding' in its last inspection in 2008, converted to a single-academy trust in 2011 and was not reinspected until the government removed the exemption for top-rated schools last year.

Hollobone said his claims were based on "evidence" from the school's head, deputy head and pupils.

"Ofsted has sent in an educational inspection hit squad with a pre-arranged agenda to downgrade this faith-based school, whatever it found on its visit," he said.



Philip Hollobone

The MP claimed inspectors had "disparaged the school's Christian ethos" in interviews with pupils.

He said a boy was asked if he thought 'this is a white, middle-class school', while a girl was asked if she felt uncomfortable walking upstairs when wearing a skirt.

According to Hollobone, who admitted one of his children attended Bishop Stopford, Ofsted refuted the claim, saying there was "no record in the evidence of the exact line of questioning".

But he added: "I raise the matter not because of my child, but because I think a genuine injustice has been done with this inspection."

Bishop Stopford received judgments of 'good' for its quality of education and sixth-form provision, but was judged 'requires improvement' in behaviour and attitudes, personal development and leadership and management.

Ofsted said the school did not record and

share safeguarding information "effectively", and pupils did "not always feel confident" reporting bullying and inappropriate language.

But Hollobone accused the inspectorate of "pursuing an agenda".

"Unable to criticise the school's educational achievements, inspectors have pursued an agenda against a top-performing school with a Christian ethos by engineering criticisms of the behaviour and attitudes, personal development, and leadership and management criteria," he said.

He also claimed Ofsted had "leaked" its rating as two schools had heard of the downgrade before the report was published.

Bishop Stopford's complaints to Ofsted were not upheld. The inspectorate would not be able to look into the claims further without "further evidence", Hollobone said.

But responding in parliament, Nick Gibb, the schools minister, said given the "specific concerns" he would request the MP "get the opportunity to discuss them directly with His Majesty's chief inspector".

Ofsted said an invitation had been extended, but a spokesperson added: "The concerns raised about this inspection have been investigated thoroughly."

Bishop Stopford said it was "grateful" to the MP for "seeking to engender debate which has the potential to significantly improve the system".

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Watchdog needs to catch up to meet 2025 target

Ofsted is nearly 2,000 inspections (29 per cent) off the pace to meet its target to inspect all schools by 2025, new figures suggest.

Figures submitted to the education select committee show the watchdog completed 4,814 inspections between April last year and August this year.

It was given a £23 million funding boost last year to inspect all schools between April 2021 and July 2025.

Latest figures show there are 21,602 state schools. Reaching the target would equate to completing an average of 424 inspections a month over that period.



To be on track Ofsted should have completed 6,784 inspections – suggesting it is 1,970 (29 per cent) off course.

Amanda Spielman, the chief inspector, told MPs few schools were inspected in summer last year, with visits paused in December, and

deferrals and fewer inspectors reducing the number completed in January and February.

Spielman, who told MPs during the hearing last month that "about 1,000" inspections had been lost because of Covid, said: "We are now accelerating our inspection cycle by recruiting more inspectors and increasing the number of inspections we carry out each year."

"We are currently on track to meet our commitment to inspect all schools, at least once, by July 2025."

She previously told MPs that Omicron setbacks had been "factored into planning".

NEWS: ENERGY

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DfE 'repurposes' cash to £500m energy fund

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

The £500 million government fund to "future-proof" school buildings by making them more energy efficient has been "repurposed" from an underspend in capital cash.

Ministers this week announced the money to help schools and colleges save on heating and electricity bills.

Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, said they were "putting this cash in the hands of school and college leaders quickly, so they can decide what is needed and so that our brilliant teachers can focus on teaching in a warm and safe environment".

The Department for Education told Schools Week the funding was not new money but came from capital programme underspends this financial year.

The money was being "repurposed", but



"existing programmes will continue unchanged".

A spokesperson said the capital budget – £6.4 billion for 2022-23 – was "managed carefully through the year" so that any underspends "can be reprioritised to get the best value for money".

But they were unable to provide a more detailed breakdown of the unused cash.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said the investment would "not pay energy bills in the immediate future".

"We are deeply concerned that the government intends to end the energy relief scheme that is currently in place to help schools and colleges meet rising costs at the end of March.

"Removing this support will expose them to massive increases in energy bills that are simply unaffordable, and this will necessitate cuts in educational provision. Funding for energy efficiency upgrades is a longer-term undertaking and will not address the present crisis."

The funding will be made available to schools through the devolved formula capital allocations in this financial year.

Schools can decide how best to invest the cash. They also have "discretion" to spend it on other capital projects if that is appropriate "based on local circumstances".

DfE analysis shows repairing or replacing all defects in England's schools would cost £11.4 billion.

Keegan said the war in Ukraine was driving up energy prices "so it is important to look at the things we can do to make classrooms more energy efficient and resilient to price fluctuations."

But the government confirmed that schools would no longer benefit from capped costs under the energy price guarantee after spring.

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EXPLAINER: ENERGY

Do energy 'spot checks' to keep costs down, DfE suggests

The government is urging schools to carry out energy "spot checks" that include switching off lights and turning heating off an hour before the building empties.

New guidance on energy efficiency tells schools that installing wind turbines could help to generate their own electricity. It also recommends minimum temperatures, which had been scrapped as statutory regulations.

A pot of £500 million for energy efficiency building upgrades for schools and colleges was also announced.

1 £442M CAN BE USED FOR WIDER REPAIRS

Schools will split £442 million in capital funding to "prioritise" projects that make buildings more energy-efficient.

But leaders have "discretion to spend this on other capital projects" if they "judge this is not appropriate based on local circumstances".

The average primary will receive about £16,000 and secondaries £42,000, although funding will be based on a formula that includes a flat £10,000 rate and an additional sum based on weighted pupil numbers.

The government said it "expects" schools to spend the money in this financial year. This leaves maintained schools with only four months – and limited holiday periods, where many schools tend to carry out work – to plan and implement capital projects.

Asked by *Schools Week*, the Department for Education confirmed cash could be carried into 2023-24 if needed.

2 LEADERS SHOULD DO AN 'ENERGY AUDIT'

The new guidance on cutting costs follows concern from schools about the expected wind-down of the government's energy bill relief scheme in April.

An "energy audit" and understanding usage would prioritise where to cut consumption, it said.

This could include senior leaders, premises managers or external experts "walking around the site" to consider how to reduce consumption.

Schools should review the annual maintenance contracts for heating systems, ensure and evaluate regular meter readings, and understand energy bill data to budget and compare tariffs more accurately.

Analysis by the software company Access suggests many schools have used less energy recently than the average non-domestic building.

The average secondary in the 50 largest areas of England and Wales already has the second-highest energy efficiency rating on a seven-point scale, although figures may be affected by lower usage during Covid lockdowns.

3 TURN HEATING OFF AN HOUR BEFORE BUILDINGS CLOSE

Schools "could turn the heating off at 5pm" if the building emptied an hour later, "as there will be latent heat within the building and the system itself".

Leaders could also "consider reducing temperatures in some areas", with a 1degC cut wiping up to 10 per cent off bills.

The DfE suggested school "eco clubs" carrying out "spot checks" – such as whether lights and equipment are off in empty rooms.

It also suggested "prompts" such as posters to remind staff and learners to switch equipment off, and to discuss efficiency in staff meetings, assemblies and lessons.

Cleaners played a "key role" turning off items at the end of the day, with site staff who controlled heating and hot water, and catering teams in high-usage kitchens "key members in your community". Heating controls should match building needs such as class timetables, and CO2 monitors could "help balance" ventilation and warmth.

Schools should "maximise" daylight to reduce the need for lighting, drawing blinds up and regularly cleaning windows. Printing should be "only when necessary".

4 COOL BRITANNIA – BUT NOT TOO COOL

The DfE's new recommended minimum temperatures include a recommended internal set point of 20degC, with minimum temperatures of 15degC in washrooms, circulation areas and any teacher accommodation, 18degC for classrooms and offices, and 21degC for spaces where occupants were inactive or sick.

The recommendations are similar to the previous statutory temperature requirements introduced by Labour in 1999, which appear to have been scrapped by the government a decade ago as "unnecessary".

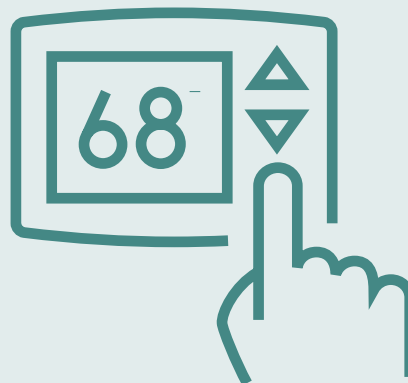
5 TURBINES AND CLOUD SYSTEMS

Schools could consider getting "expert guidance" on renewables, such as solar panels and wind turbines, although they should consider if they could afford turbine maintenance.

Thermostatic radiator valves should be installed, pipes insulated, and swimming pools covered to retain heat.

Meanwhile energy efficiency should be factored into equipment purchases – laptops were up to 80 per cent more efficient than desktop computers.

Schools should also "migrate to cloud-based alternatives" to replace energy-intensive management information systems or file storage.



NEWS: FUNDING

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Reserves rise leaves LA schools sitting on £2.2bn

TOM BELGER

@TOM_BELGER

Reserves in the average maintained school have jumped by 61.3 per cent in two years, leaving the sector sitting on more than £2 billion.

Official data suggests schools went into the recent cost-of-living squeeze with the healthiest balance sheets since 2016.

The average school had £178,500 in the bank at the end of the 2021-22 financial year in April, up from £160,486 a year earlier and £110,692 the previous year.

The sector's combined net reserves across all local authority schools rose by 5 per cent annually to £2.18 billion, also the highest on record. The figure covers the total surpluses of schools in the black, minus the deficits of those in the red.

However, the Department for Education figures show regional gaps and a divide between primaries and secondaries.

Balance sheets in primaries were little-changed on a year earlier, after a more significant rise the previous year.

Meanwhile, average balances in secondaries leapt from £151,343 in 2019-20 to £322,615 last year, jumping to £538,673 this year.

Figures for the number of schools in



financial distress show a similar pattern. The percentage of primaries in deficit edged up 0.9 percentage points to 7.6 per cent, whereas the number of secondaries in deficit dropped six percentage points to 12.9 per cent.

It meant the overall proportion of schools in deficit rose from 8.4 to 8.8 per cent, although this is still lower than four years earlier.

Average reserves in special schools and pupil referral units increased in 2021-22, but dipped in nurseries.

Increases in recent years are likely to be partly linked to Covid, with closures cutting bills and the pandemic derailing many capital and other spending projects.

Academy trust figures for 2021-22 are

yet to be released, but last year's showed a similar picture with a combined £3.9 billion in reserves. Trusts have faced some criticism over their reserves, but say they are much-needed for capital projects and emergencies - such as the current energy crisis.

The figures, which reflect maintained schools' financial position up to April 2022, are striking in the context of an estimated £2.4 billion high-needs deficit across councils and widespread alarm over core school budgets for much of this year.

Schools subsequently have been lumped with higher-than-expected pay awards, spiralling inflation and higher energy costs.

The lack of extra funding sparked warnings that more than half of schools and trusts could fall into deficit, but the government hopes £2 billion in new funding announced last month can alleviate pressures.

National averages also obscure local differences. A quarter of primaries in eight local authorities in the south east and London are in deficit, potentially linked to falling rolls and funding reforms.

Every secondary in four local authorities are in deficit, although two only have a single school - with most secondaries nationally now academies.

By contrast 22 councils, mostly in the Midlands and the north, have no primaries in deficit.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

FSM change could add thousands to schools' incomes

Schools are being encouraged to get thousands of pounds of extra funding by helping children ineligible for free school meals (FSM) because of their parents' immigration status to register before the next school census.

The government announced earlier this year that it was making permanent its extension of FSM eligibility to children from families with "no recourse to public funds". These children did not qualify, even if their household income was below the threshold.

Schools receive up to £1,385 in pupil premium funding for every child who has been eligible for FSMs at any point in the past six years.

Leaders initially had to make a separate claim for the pupil premium for children with "no recourse to public funds", but the process will be rolled into the school census from next month.

Citizens UK is encouraging schools to sign up eligible families before the census on January 19 and then record their status in their submission to the Department for Education.

James Asfa, the group's assistant director, said that not all parents and schools knew about the change "which means they could lose out on meals for children and a significant amount of funding for their school".

It is not known how many children with "no recourse to public funds" live in England, but Citizens UK said larger schools could end up tens of thousands of pounds better-off.

St Mary's Lewisham Primary School in south London has already gained more than £13,000 by supporting 10 pupils to sign up for meals under the extension.

Marta Tildesley, the school's family support worker, said: "This is a significant amount of money that has made a big difference."

Families can apply for free school meals on the DfE website.

SPEED READ: RECRUITMENT

Who's leaving and where? 5 key findings

A new National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) dashboard shows teacher recruitment and retention challenges across English local authorities.

Jack Worth, the organisation's school workforce lead, said it would "support local and national decision-makers to take action to address teacher shortages in areas struggling the most".

Here are five key findings.

1 TEACHERS MORE LIKELY TO LEAVE HIGH-FSM SCHOOLS

The data used by NFER spans five years from 2015 to 2020.

In 2020, the rate of secondary teachers leaving the state-funded sector was higher in schools with larger proportions of pupils on free school meals: 9.5 per cent compared with 7.1 per cent in schools with the lowest proportion.

Departure rates were calculated on the number of teachers absent from the school workforce census that were present in the previous census. The figure used was worked out as a proportion of the number of full-time teachers in the previous census.

2 POORER-INTAKE SCHOOLS STRUGGLE TO GET SCIENCE TEACHERS

Data on the proportion of science hours taught by teachers without a relevant undergraduate degree in 2020 is not included.

But figures for 2016 to 2019 show a strong correlation between levels of pupil deprivation and the amount of science classes taught by a non-expert.

In 2019, 9.1 per cent of science hours were taught by teachers without a relevant degree in schools with the highest proportion of FSM compared with 5.4 per cent for those with the lowest.

3 SOME AREAS LOSE UP TO A THIRD OF THEIR SECONDARY TEACHERS

The dashboard shows huge discrepancies in the attrition rate of secondary teachers across different local authorities.

In 2020, secondary teachers left Nottingham schools at a rate of 33 per cent, equivalent to three in 10 secondary teachers.

The rates for Pendle in Lancashire and Rother in East Sussex were also high – at 24.6 per cent and 19.3 per cent respectively.

The median rate across local authority areas was 7.6 per cent,

but was only 2.7 per cent in West Lindsey, Lincolnshire.

However, patterns of teacher departures are likely to have changed in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic.

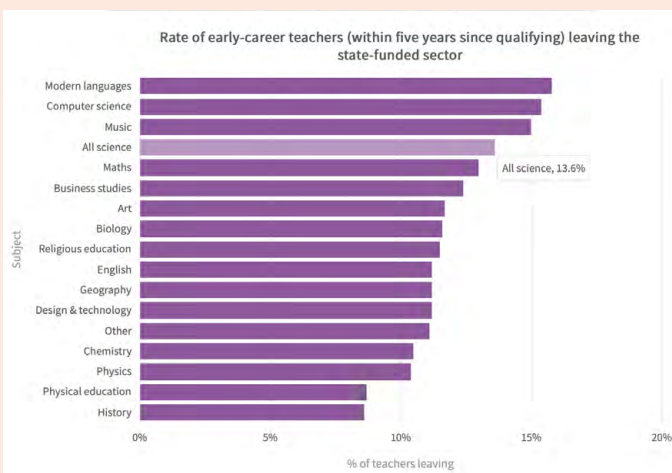
4 NEW LANGUAGE AND COMPUTING TEACHERS MOST LIKELY TO LEAVE

Subjects in which the Department for Education (DfE) struggles with ITT recruitment have high leaving rates.

In 2020, 15.8 per cent of modern languages teachers left the state-funded sector within five years of qualifying.

Computer science was close behind at 5.4 per cent, with science subjects at 13.6 per cent.

In 2022, the government met only 17 per cent of its recruitment target for trainee physics teachers, and 30 per cent and 34 per cent of its target for modern languages and computing teachers respectively.



5 AREAS SPEND £200-PLUS PER PUPIL ON SUPPLY STAFF

In 2020, the median average spent on supply teachers per pupil in English schools was £74.40.

However, schools in 79 local authorities spent an average of £100 or more per pupil, while schools in six local authorities spent £200 or more on average.

The discrepancy does not appear to show a distinct north-south divide, nor one between rural and urban areas.

Schools in South Holland in Lincolnshire spent the most per pupil, at £269.70. Burnley, in Lancashire, spent an average of £239.

Schools in Newham in east London, Westminster in central London, Watford in Hertfordshire and Bury in Greater Manchester also spent on average more than £200 per pupil on supply teachers.



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Profile

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'I don't teach a knowledge-rich curriculum because of politics. I do it because it works'

Steve Mastin doesn't fit the mould of a Tory activist. Freddie Whittaker finds out why

Steve Mastin doesn't want to talk about politics. That may come as a bit of surprise if you read his Conservative argument against grammar schools in this newspaper last week.

But while it might be easy to typecast some teachers for their political activism, it can also

be foolish, as there's almost always more to their story.

Mastin, the vice-chair of the Conservative Education Society, is no exception. Having taught and then led history in a Cambridgeshire state school for 17 years before two as a subject specialist for one of the country's highest-

profile academy trusts, he now helps develop curriculums world-wide.

He runs his own secondary consultancy, but is also the co-founder with Christine Counsell of Opening Worlds, which provides a "knowledge-rich humanities programme for teaching history, geography and religion in years 3 to 6".

Profile: Steve Mastin



Mastin with pupils at a north London school

For Mastin, born to a Scottish mother and English father but privately educated in Brisbane, Australia, teaching was his “destiny” from an early age. He remembers his father making a blackboard for his bedroom where he “used to sit up teddy bears in seats to teach them lessons”.

“It was a trajectory from I think the moment I started school. I was inspired by teachers and the power to teach, the power to inspire.” He credits his “inspirational” history teacher, Max Wilkinson, who had “one of those booming voices that he didn’t need to project” with instilling a love of history.

“When it came to storytelling, he was a master,” Mastin recalls.

Returning to the UK, he studied history and classics at the University of St Andrews in Scotland, where he developed a love for “reading, writing, discussing and arguing”.

His application for teacher training in Edinburgh was rejected. He was working in Burger King and had resigned himself to a year out working at Jenners department store when a teacher friend advised him to apply to do a PGCE at Cambridge.

“I phoned them up. They’d had one person drop out of their PGCE course for history, starting the next week! And they said, well, can you get here tomorrow for an interview? So I booked a train. And that was it.”

Walking into a classroom for the first time was a “mixture of a huge excitement, because you’re going to set the world on fire, and also nerves, a knot in the pit of your stomach”.

“If it doesn’t sound too pretentious, there’s a sense of nobility about teaching,” he tells me.

“The idea of giving of yourself to other people, and expecting nothing in return. Standing up there, you realise that there are 30 people in front of you, and you’re responsible for their education.



Mastin dressed up William Pitt the Younger

‘There’s a sense of nobility about teaching’

That’s a huge responsibility.”

Mastin settled in Cambridgeshire, and worked at Sawston Village College for 17 years. He still sings the praises of England’s comprehensive school system, where he was teaching kids from the local council estate, the children of Trinity College fellows and “everything in between”.

“The wonderful thing about growing up in this country is that you have an entitlement, no matter where you come from, whatever your background, to a good history education. That’s why grammar schools, I think, are not the solution to anything.”

Mastin holds firm on his stance of no politics, but he does occasionally stray, and his views certainly don’t pigeonhole him as a Tory.

He believes all children should receive free school meals, for example, and says he would “love to see a government of whatever political colour pay for people to train to teach in the state sector”.

“So if you do your degree in history, and you then do a PGCE, and you then go and teach in the state sector for five to eight years, the government will wipe your debt. The Royal Navy does it. I think it would be a great policy.”

He may not have a full timetable anymore, but Mastin says he insists on teaching “whenever I go into a school”.

In 2017, Counsell recruited him to join the Inspiration Trust’s team of subject experts. This was a “hugely positive experience” in which he expanded his work to the primary phase.

“Primary school teachers, they have to be Leonardo da Vincis. They have to be good at every subject, experts in everything. Whereas in secondary, you can specialise in history, or geography or religion. But primary teachers – I take my hat off to them.

“It’s just so inspiring to see a teacher who can get excited about number bonds when they’re teaching the difference in hundreds and thousands. And then in the next lesson, they’re teaching about Baghdad. Then after that they’re teaching about rivers.”

After 17 years at Sawston and two at Inspiration, Mastin set out on his own, something he’d been keen to do for some time.

“As much as I’d loved being a head of history, I was finding myself asked to do other things. For example, every summer holiday I was going out to central Asia, working for three weeks with

Profile: Steve Mastin



Mastin as a young teenager

ministries of education, helping them to improve their history curriculum."

He worked in Kazakhstan, where the country's national story had, he said, been "subsumed under a Soviet identity" for decades.

"They were looking for a way of telling their national story, but telling it in a way that was rigorous. So it wasn't just storytelling. It was faithful to the discipline of history."

Soon he was being asked to do work in Egypt and Singapore, as well as other parts of England; the idea of a consultancy was born.

Branching out was "quite nerve-racking", he admits, from "a very safe job in a lovely school with a great history team... It can become quite comfortable."

"But when the job came up across 14 schools in a trust, I thought, wow, what an offer. So I did it. And they were very responsive. They allowed me to do many of these things that I was wanting to do. I gave them two years and then moved on."

Mastin now splits his time between his consultancy work in secondary schools and the Opening Worlds business.

Its curriculum is knowledge-rich, and "sequenced from one year to the next year to the next year".

That curriculum sequencing is key, Mastin believes. He cites the example of a school in north London that faces "lots of challenges". Having taught six lessons "thoroughly" on Ancient Egypt, the school then took its pupils to the British Museum.

"So instead of doing the trip first to inspire them, they did it after, so the children were going around saying, 'that's the double crown that the Pharaohs wore'. Oh, what's the double crown?



Mastin speaks at the 2022 Conservative Party conference alongside ASCL's Evelyn Forde

'Primary teachers – I take my hat off to them'

'That means he's Pharaoh of Upper Egypt'. Oh, what's Upper and Lower Egypt? 'Well, the River Nile separated them'. Brilliant, brilliant.

"I would say most schools in the country cover Ancient Egypt. But the difference between a knowledge-rich curriculum, and what you might call an information-rich curriculum, where you just throw lots of facts at children...is where you link it up, where you make that connection."

The knowledge-rich approach has become somewhat synonymous with the work of Nick Gibb, the long-serving schools minister who recently returned to the Department for Education after a brief stint on the backbenches.

But Mastin insists the approach has "nothing to do with party politics", and describes the knowledge vs skills debate raging in education as "silly".

"It's to do with these children having a rich, deep, secure and fun understanding of these civilisations in Asia and Africa and Europe and being able to make connections and compare them," he says.

"It's only when you have a secure knowledge of each one, that you can have a conversation where you start comparing and contrasting. You can't compare and contrast if you don't know enough.

"One of the biggest liberators and equalisers, one of the biggest proponents of social justice is a

knowledge-rich curriculum. I don't do it because of politics. I do it because it works."

What has Mastin made of the debate around how schools teach about the British Empire?

Kemi Badenoch, then equalities minister, said earlier this year that schools needed to teach "both sides of the story". But Mastin disagrees.

He says you "might still find some history teachers somewhere that still regard the teaching of empire as a balance sheet, pros and cons", but "in the wider history community that's not an argument".

"Not only is it not rigorous, historical thinking, it's not the sort of question a historian would ask. The idea that you would do that with Oliver Cromwell, or that you would do that with the Vikings. Good or bad? It's not a rigorous historical question.

"You wouldn't do it with the Ancient Egyptians. And I wouldn't do it with the British Empire. It reduces it to quite superficial ways of thinking and is really unhelpful."

Mastin believes history teaching in England is admired overseas in part because the sector is "having honest conversations about things like rigorous historical thinking, and also hidden voices, voices that for decades have been missed in the teaching of empire".

"And we're now looking at, thinking about indigenous voices in Australia, or in Canada, or in Kenya, or Tanzania, or wherever it was that the British colonised.

"We're not looking at it simply from a British perspective, we're looking at it from an indigenous perspective. And that's a positive thing. I don't think that's controversial."

2022 Politics review

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PATRICK
ROACH

General secretary, NASUWT

This was the year teachers decided enough was enough

The effects of political turmoil and financial strain have not gone away with the flutter of an autumn statement, says Patrick Roach

We'll remember 2022 for many things. Three prime ministers. A succession of ministers at the DfE. The worst cost-of-living crisis in living memory made in No 10 by a government whose actions crashed the economy. Deepening teacher supply pressures and government data confirming that a crisis has turned to disaster with some of the worst-ever initial teacher training recruitment figures. Teacher wellbeing and morale at rock bottom. And the government's flagship schools bill in tatters, with no clarity on what plans there are for its resurrection.

The government will want to claim that November's budget statement committing an extra £2 billion per year for the next two years for schools will mean education has turned a corner. But the reality is that even on the government's own figures, this only takes school spending per pupil back to levels last seen in 2010 in real terms, despite mounting evidence of a crisis in the provision of support as schools try to fill the

gaps caused by massive cuts to wider children's services.

But 2022 marks a turning point. As the year draws to a close, teachers and headteachers are preparing for industrial action to demand a better deal for teachers and for pupils' education. Their message

“There might not be anyone left to run our schools

is clear: enough is enough. The government is out of touch with the public mood, blaming everybody but itself for the crisis in our schools and across the country; its refusal to engage in genuine dialogue and negotiation demonstrates contempt for the profession.

This year, we have seen reports of more and more teachers struggling to make ends meet – worried about how they will pay their rent or mortgage, put food on the table or heat their homes. The government's claim of delivering the biggest pay rise for a generation was exposed by the shocking evidence that teachers' pay is 25 per cent lower in real terms than it was a decade ago, and that the generality of classroom teachers are now £50,000 worse off.

Following the chancellor's



autumn statement, independent economic forecasters predicted that all households will experience their

biggest drop in living standards on record in the next few years. And with inflation at a 41-year high, bodies such as the Institute for Fiscal Studies are highlighting the chasm between pay and household bills and the risk that, unless things change, there won't be anyone left to run our schools.

And the reality is that the government's promise of cash for schools hasn't signified any extra money. Ministers have admitted that the announcement will only return spending to 2010 levels, while the squeeze on early years and post-16 provision and cuts to other children's services continue.

This year has not just marked a twelfth milestone on the long road of under-investment, but signalled more to come. After 12 years wasted by a government that has let down

children and young people and given up on teachers, the latest remit letter to the pay review body shows the government is planning more misery by capping teachers' pay at 2 per cent in 2023.

For years, the government has worked on the principle that it can get away with paying teachers as little as possible. And, for years, it has asserted that it's possible to run our schools, colleges and other public services on a shoestring. Teachers have had enough.

They didn't create the cost-of-living crisis and trade unions such as the NASUWT are demanding that teachers and other working people shouldn't be left to pay the price for it. We are sending a clear and emphatic message to the government and employers that they deserve better; nothing less than a fully-funded real-terms pay award of 12 per cent will do.

Economically and politically, 2022 has been a grim year. But it has marked the beginning of the fight to secure decent work and fair pay for teachers, and that gives me hope – not just for 2023 but beyond.

2022 Governance review

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DR RUBY
BHATTI

Trustee and chair of governors,
Bradford Diocesan Academies
Trust and Dixons Academies Trust

Governance has emerged transformed and stronger

A year of continuing crises has proven the benefits of a reimagined school governance emboldened in its priorities, writes Ruby Bhatti

Far from the mere bystanders they are sometimes portrayed as – who applaud when all is well and complain when they aren't – governors and trustees have again worked voluntarily and tirelessly throughout 2022. Just like in the lockdown years, we have continued to struggle against unrelenting local and global factors influencing our schools, stubbornly refusing to match up with our school strategic priorities.

Even medium-term planning has become challenging, with the most experienced and skilled boards at times unable to fully insulate their schools. But amid the lingering effects of Covid and the simmering cost-of-living crisis, a new definition of school governance has emerged among strategic leadership teams.

In the early months of 2022, with budgets set early, we watched with trepidation as a perfect storm brewed and then broke over the sector. Rising energy bills and unfunded pay awards worsened existing pressures – and all this amid inflation that made life less affordable for staff and families. We

have mostly spent the year diligently supporting leadership teams to monitor resources and finance, and as Christmas nears nobody has been able to rule out future restructures.

Meanwhile, we've been alert to the effects of all of this on the wellbeing of staff and pupils. We

“It hasn't all been about resisting the headwinds

have monitored workload balance, constantly checking that everyone is well and provided with adequate support. But there's no escaping the impact of the pandemic on retention, an effect worsened by low recruitment. As a result, the wellbeing of leaders is now a cause for concern too.

But every cloud has a silver lining, and governors have an important role in pointing these out. For example, recruitment and retention have highlighted gaps in equality and diversity and created opportunities to build teams that are reflective and inclusive of the communities we serve.

This year we also began to rebuild a sense of “normality”, with the return of SATs, and GCSE and A-level exams.

And the community work schools



did during Covid has meant that we have been well positioned to reach out to our hardest-hit families. We've built closer relationships with pupils, parents and carers to ensure

Meanwhile, the boards I sit on have also built on the technological development that came with the pandemic response. We have tightened up our safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure that online teaching and home-working are safe for our staff and pupils.

So it hasn't all been about resisting the headwinds. Governors and trustees have pressed on and adapted to a changed climate. We are now more inclusive, thanks in part to hybrid meetings. Online platforms mean we are more resilient against unforeseen circumstances too. And we are better trained, thanks to an expansion of online CPD, conferences and briefings. We are no longer looking at these as innovative short-term solutions; governance has changed forever.

That gives me hope for the new year and beyond. Deep challenges lie ahead, not least a shortage of governors. But if we continue to build quietly on these gains, governance can emerge improved – and can perhaps build itself a better portrayal. How would that be for a silver lining.

2022 Primary review

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DIANA
OHENE-DARKO

Assistant headteacher, Pinner Park Primary School and national executive member, NAHT, Greater London region

As ministers hokey cokeyed, schools took the lead again

A year characterised by an in, out, in, out, shake it all about of personnel and policy ends with a well deserved 'rah, rah, rah' from teachers, writes Diana Ohene-Darko

This year might best be summarised by a rendition of the hokey cokey, and not just because it's delivered three prime ministers and five education secretaries.

January started (again) with a dramatic number of staff and pupil out of the classroom, as Omicron brought another wave of illness, causing schools to look again at their post-Covid (is it post- yet?) provision. Retired teachers were called to arms amid unprecedented declines in teacher recruitment and retention. Few came in.

In February, the NAHT's report, *Fixing the Leadership Crisis: Time for Change* revealed stark figures about low levels of aspiration for leadership, or even for staying in the profession. Unsurprisingly, 80 per cent of respondents felt that the 12-year pay cut in real terms had negatively impacted their morale. A lack of agency, autonomy and indeed credibility from government had left them feeling they were at the bottom of the barrel compared with other frontline services.

And then came the war in Ukraine, with schools responding by placing Ukrainian refugees into classrooms – many with no English or even a home. Sadly, the DfE seems to have been too distracted by the governmental musical chairs to thank them.

“The much-vaunted schools bill was in, then out again

In March, racism was out. The Sewell report disregarded the lived experiences of those who have been subjected to overt and covert racism and argued that there is no institutional or structural racism in Britain. Thankfully, it didn't stop schools from taking the lead (again) with designing curricular work and rethinking their inclusive practices.

In April, sustainability was in as the DfE published its climate change strategy in response to COP26. Schools had hoped for more, and so delivered more. It's unusual to find a primary without a green curriculum woven throughout its subjects: biodiversity projects and eco-warriors are as commonplace as school councils. So it made little difference when Rishi Sunak said he was out of COP27. Then back in.

Meanwhile, energy prices are



making investment in more sustainable alternatives inevitable. Some support beyond a strategy document would make that faster and more equitable. But it took until September to bring support with

Things are a blur after that. Zahawi was quickly out, replaced by Michelle Donelan who was in and out in 36 hours. Then it was the turn of Kit Malthouse, under whose watch in September a £43 million kitty was set aside for Oak National Academy. The “independent” curriculum publishing quango was in the money. But a judicial review launched this month means it's also in the courts. So that idea might be out of the DfE window even before the help with bills runs out.

And as if to ensure the hilarity doesn't boost morale too much, Ofsted published a report this month revealing that since inspectors have gone back in, 80 per cent of previously ‘outstanding’ schools are out of that category.

Given this state of affairs – without even considering pay rises announced in July for which additional funding was out of the question until it was introduced as a surprise “thank you” by Jeremy Hunt in October – it can be no surprise education unions are ending the year by balloting for strike action and action short of strike. Constant underestimation of how much they put in was always going to lead to them thinking about walking out.

bills in. And by next April, it'll be out again.

In May, racism was back in as the National Foundation for Educational Research published its *Racial Equality in the Teacher Workforce* report, showing the very clear and present racism affecting every part of the profession from ITT to leadership. Still, schools' unaltered course to improve equality, diversity and inclusion was at least revealed as a good investment.

Then in June, the much-vaunted schools bill was in, then out again, as several clauses were stripped out by the Lords. Even those who were supposed to be its proponents pushed back against what they saw as a DfE power grab hidden among Zahawi's attempt to push through a legal route to full academisation.

2022 Secondary review

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KATHARINE
BIRBALSINGH

Headteacher, Michaela
Community School and chair,
Social Mobility Commission

What we need now is consolidation, not upheaval

We can be grateful for more settled politics and reduced financial pressures, says Katharine Birbalsingh, so let's focus on what we agree on and deliver

Teachers tend to think in terms of school rather than calendar years. But the holiday season and the inevitable new year resolutions should give us all cause to reflect.

This was the year that we were finally able to get back to normal in schools; finally able to get on with the task of educating the future generation without the constant threat of lockdowns and cancelled exams.

We all know how hard 2020 and 2021 were for teachers. We had to go above and beyond to move lessons online and provide critical pastoral care to the most vulnerable children. But 2022 brought its own challenges. Pupils returning to school were behind in their learning and needed extra support to catch up. Rising costs squeezed budgets even further.

Some people saw Covid and the recent disruption as an opportunity to argue for wholesale change. But I believe now is a time for consolidation, not more upheaval.

Students need routine and predictability. So do staff and school leaders. We need to do more of what works.

Recent evidence suggests a widening of the divide because of Covid. Then there is the question of what schools can do about it.

“We need to do more of what works

The Social Mobility Commission, which I chair, is considering the evidence of what works generally, looking at a range of successful schools in different circumstances to see what they have in common. And given that the grammar schools debate rekindled this year, we'll be reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of different schools' admissions policies - rather than the flawed 11-plus.

We are also looking at the evidence of what works for families: what do families do that has real success in helping their children be more socially mobile?

I mentioned the cost-of-living crisis, and the squeeze on school budgets. So it was good to see additional funding announced in the autumn statement. It will not



offset all of the challenges (teachers' pay, recruitment and retention)

and are then encouraged to pursue work channels that will allow them to maximise their talents and find fulfilment, then we enable more social mobility.

So many of us want the same things. We might disagree on which is the most important, but does it matter? For example, encouraging reading in the home is surely a good thing. It isn't the only thing, but any teacher will tell you how hard it is to catch children up in the skill of reading, which begins at home long before children get to school. In 2023, I hope we can focus more on what we agree on and deliver those things for young people.

I recently hosted my full board of social mobility commissioners at Michaela to think about what we want to achieve. We talked about how we're all driven to make a difference, and how hard work and determination can't fix everything, but they can really speed you on your way. Wouldn't that be a good new year's message to give our children?

2022 SEND review

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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MADELAINE CAPLIN

Caplin, director of school improvement, London South East Academies Trust

Creativity saw us through a year of plentiful challenges

Two weeks from retirement, Madelaine Caplin looks back on a tumultuous, frustrating but also joyous final year in special education

When people talk about life having returned to “normal” this year, the reality is that things have changed enormously.

For those of us working in special schools, the challenges of Covid were immense and forced us to think differently and more creatively. Staff had to come up with ways to support children and families, providing care and continuity of education in what felt, at times, like impossible circumstances.

Whether this was delivering food parcels to homes or ensuring that classes were up and running for vulnerable children who needed to be in school, the focus was solely on making a positive difference to a child's life.

The ongoing impact of Covid is stark. Lost learning has affected academic achievement across the board and there has been an exponential increase in mental health issues among already vulnerable young people.

But the abundance of creativity that emerged during the pandemic

has had a positive effect on our schools. Staff have continued to think outside the box, focusing on what we do so well: ensuring children are in school, safe and well taught.

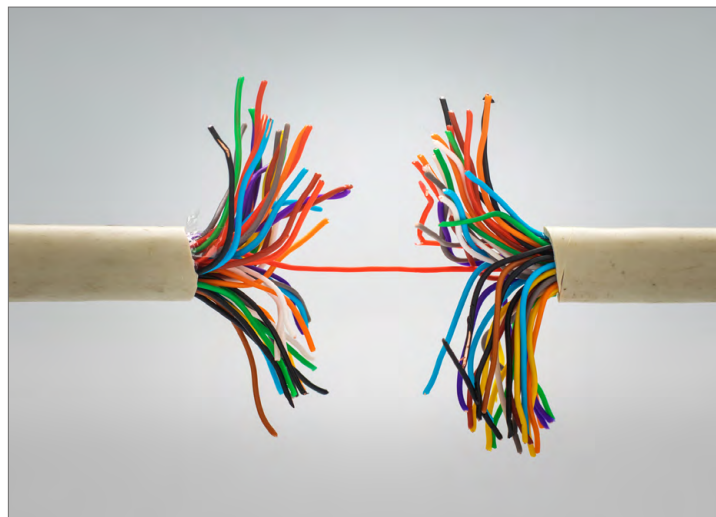
This creativity was reflected in the bids submitted for our trust's Covid

“We can't fix a broken system by ourselves

recovery fund. Our schools bid for money to enhance the children's school experience and some amazing suggestions were funded, including outdoor gym equipment, a sensory garden, balance bikes, trampolines and reading sofas.

The pandemic has made us refocus on our core business of making a positive difference to children's lives. This has been particularly important when considering the political context we have been operating in.

The merry-go-round of prime ministers, education secretaries and ministers has left even the most politically savvy among us struggling to keep up. This instability has impacted policy development and made it even harder to make sense of the government's planned direction for education, as set out in



the schools white paper and SEND review.

This has come at a time when schools and trusts are grappling with energy and cost-of-living

crises, industrial action and financial challenges. Not easy at all.

But by remaining calm, holding our nerve and maintaining our integrity, our pupils have celebrated some amazing achievements and successes.

One of our biggest challenges has been (and continues to be) recruitment. This is very much a national issue, but finding the right staff for special schools can be even harder. And when you do find them, they need to be nurtured and supported.

Our trust has recognised the need for longer induction periods, ensuring staff are supported to adapt to a special school environment and have the resources to do their job well. We want staff to be able to focus on supporting pupils, giving them the

autonomy and confidence to do this. This applies to staff wellbeing too.

All the children and young people in our SEMH schools have EHCPs and we need to work closely with other agencies to ensure their needs are met. But local authorities have been under increased pressure this year, something that we need to understand and acknowledge – although it is frustrating. We can only hope that the SEND review will effect the positive change that is so badly needed to fix a system bursting at the seams.

After four decades working in education, I am now two weeks from retirement. I have felt privileged to do this job, working with magical people every day who transform the lives of children. No matter what's been thrown at staff over the past few years, they have continued to put pupils at the front and centre.

We can't right all the wrongs in the world or fix a broken system by ourselves, but by being open to opportunity, having hope, building resilience and focusing on things we do well, I know our schools will continue to flourish despite the inevitable (and plentiful) challenges they face.

2022 Alternative Provision review

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SARAH
JOHNSON

President, PRUsAP

We've been listened to, but now we need action

There were encouraging signs in January that APs and PRUs were finally getting the attention they deserve, writes Sarah Johnson, but the year has ended with an echoing silence

As ministers have come and gone throughout 2022, alternative provision (AP) schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) have been at the coalface, safeguarding young people and families as best they can from the multiple challenges of what is sometimes labelled a "perma-crisis". Perhaps the best way to look back on the year is to disentangle a few key threads from that cluster.

The green paper

This year has reminded us that we still need to strive to have the voice of PRU and AP listened to, but we have made some headway. In late March, the *SEND and AP green paper* was published, and not only was alternative provision mentioned, but it had a whole chapter.

The proposals gave clear recognition that AP should be seen as part of the wider educational offer and as part of a continuum of support. They were widely welcomed, not least (encouragingly) the central focus on working collaboratively for the benefit of

the young people who need this provision.

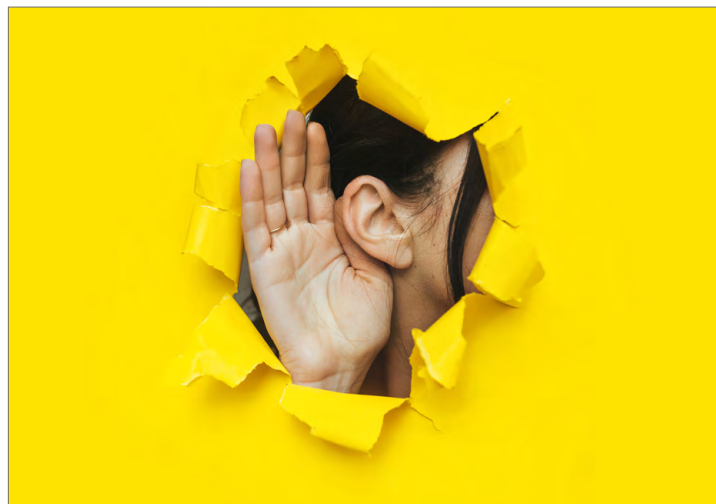
But that was in March. The consultation ended in July. It is now December, and the DfE website still reads "We are analysing your feedback". It's all very well being listened to, but let's hope next year brings action.

Crime and its causes

AP often features negatively in the media, especially because of its association with exclusions and crime rates. So it was heartening when the DfE published research in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice that indicated PRUs and AP could be a protective factor against youth offending.

To continue to build these protective factors, we must work together – across schools, social care, families, youth offending teams and beyond. Sadly, November ended with the *Evening Standard* in London claiming in a tweet that "School exclusions are contributing to violence on London streets". Prominent commentators then engaged on the causality (or not) of exclusions and crime, rather than the content of the article or, indeed, the fantastic work that we know helps to reduce both.

So there's still work to be done on listening too.



“Less funding for preventive work has a knock-on effect

Funding, recruitment and retention

It's hard to look back on this year without talking about the financial crisis. Often funded through local authorities' high needs block, and with fluctuating rolls and smaller sites, AP is more vulnerable than most. And when the schools we work with face their own financial difficulties, that only increases the stresses. Less funding for preventive work has a knock-on effect on exclusions.

On top of it all, there are significant issues with recruitment and retention. Supermarkets are offering more money, term-time only contracts and a better work-life balance, and if that's a challenge for mainstream schools, it's even harder for setting with a reputation for being more challenging.

Rising instability and deprivation are likely to have a profound effect on vulnerable children. While we are still grappling with the effects of lockdowns, the long-term consequences of a new austerity are being etched into their lives.

Mental health

Which brings us to November, and rising concerns about children's mental health difficulties. Last month, the NHS digital team provided data from a survey of young people that indicated that 18 per cent of children aged 7 to 16 – nearly one in five – had a probable mental health disorder. Those children are more likely to suffer from online bullying and to feel unsafe at school.

PRUs and APs service children with mental health difficulties as well as those at risk of exclusion, so the increase is likely to be felt acutely in these settings over the coming months and years.

Some of the solutions in the green paper will help us to tackle some of that together. The increased funding announced in the autumn statement will have a cushioning effect too. But the turnaround in 2023 will need to be substantial to make a genuine change for the children most at risk of exclusion and those with medical needs.

THE REVIEW

FOUR NATIONS FOUR SCHOOLS

Presenter: Laura McInerney**Producer:** BBC Radio 4**Broadcast date:** November 29**Reviewer:** Mike Taylor, professional tutor for ITE,
Liverpool Hope University

If you're like me, you may have considered job searches for teaching on a remote Caribbean island. Imagine swimming in the sea during your PPA and without worries about Ofsted, Progress 8 or attendance. But comparing your current setting to paradise isn't always realistic, and palm trees and sunshine won't help improve learning in real classrooms.

When touring schools for this BBC Radio 4 documentary, Laura McInerney didn't choose Caribbean schools for comparison (although I'm available if a sequel is in the offing). Instead, she took a much less glamorous but better-intended tour of the UK to discuss how school leaders tackle challenges in diverse ways. Others, such as Lucy Crehan, have sought to contrast and learn from education systems that are geographically and culturally distant, but McInerney set out to find what we can learn from our closest neighbours.

Twenty-five years ago, three nations of the UK were given devolved powers over their education policies. Although there were already differences, especially in Scotland, these powers meant education systems could genuinely diversify. Here, McInerney explores the home nations' different pathways to school improvement through skilful interviews with school leaders about their nation's unique approaches to core issues that range from school governance through to curriculum.

Starting with England, *Schools Week* readers will have no trouble identifying with conversations about academisation and the freedoms this can provide over curriculum and school admissions. One school describes how vocational courses allow their students to obtain

qualifications in exam-based subjects while still gaining recognition for their creative passions.

Later, McInerney explores how schools are embracing the *Curriculum for Wales* and *Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland*. The focus in Scotland is for schools to develop students' skills through interdisciplinary work through a curriculum that spans ages 3 to 18. Schools here describe their focus as being as much about personal achievement and skills development as about knowledge.

One sixth-form leader describes their development of wellbeing and mental health as part of everyday school life – a focus that could prove helpful in other parts of the UK where concerns are sometimes not addressed until a referral for mental health services is needed. A headteacher in Scotland describes the importance placed on inclusion, nurture and wellbeing in inspections too – an interesting contrast to other parts of the UK, where these are a lower priority, if mentioned at all.

One criticism of international comparisons is that cultures are too dissimilar for meaningful conclusions to be drawn or transfer to take place. This is perhaps more obvious when comparing England with a paradise island, but what's evident here is that nations within the UK have different priorities too. Wellbeing and inclusion, for example, mean very different things in response to poverty in Scotland and segregation in Northern Ireland.

Yet there has never been a better time to explore how common challenges can be tackled with diverse strategies. Current comparison tools, such as PISA, have their critics, not least because some consider their measures too

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RESOURCE



narrow, and it is certainly worth considering what we value in education before we settle on any benchmark of comparison.

What McInerney's programme offers, if not practicable or transferrable solutions, is exactly that: a glimpse into the similar concerns that still drive our four education systems and the schools within them. Indeed, that four nations that are so close in so many ways can offer such different educational experiences is, in itself, fascinating.

But sometimes policies can't be borrowed because teachers face systemic barriers to their enactment in the classroom. In that respect, I felt the voice of teachers would have improved the programme.

That aside, like my research comparing schooling and assessment between the four nations, I came away thinking that our differences, rather than the source of cross-border criticism they often become, are golden opportunities for inspiration for school and system development. As such, you won't spend a better half-hour listening to the radio than peering over Hadrian's wall and across the Irish Sea with Laura McInerney.

★★★★☆
Rating

THE CONVERSATION LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM

**Jess
Mahdavi-
Gladwell**

SENCO and head of
assessment centre,
Newhaven School

COSTS AND BENEFITS OF FREE SCHOOL MEALS



December is firmly here with the temperature dropping and snow forecast. As many in schools of all faiths and none look forward to the upcoming break, there is awareness that for many this will not be a time of overeating.

While Christmas is not a universal time of excess in any year, Angus Holford's article in *The Conversation* this week reminds us of the potential impact of universal free school meals on our under-served communities. The article summarises some measures announced in the recent autumn statement, while acknowledging the disappointment no doubt felt by those hoping for an extended entitlement to free school lunches.

Meals are free for children in year 3 and above if the family receives particular benefits. The threshold for universal credit is £7,400, while the cost for a school meal is on average £18.50 per month per child, which reminds us starkly of the

challenges faced by some families. Holford also references the link between universal provision of free school meals and reduced obesity.

As more families rely on foodbanks and more schools are thinking about ways to support their families through the cold months, those who work in schools may witness the impact of poverty on the quality of food in packed lunches and numbers of hungry children.

LEVELLING UP FOCUS – IS IT TOO LATE?



Blogging for Unicef, Claire O'Meara reflects on the recent release of data related to children's development. This data has not been shared since 2019 because of Covid, and the change in framework reduces potential for direct comparisons. However, there are some clear headlines.

More than one third of children at the end of their first year of education do not meet expected milestones. This has increased from 28.2 per cent in 2019 and, more worryingly, this year's data show that almost 52 per cent of children in receipt of free school meals do not achieve these milestones.

The children represented by these numbers were about two-years-old when the pandemic impacted living, socialising, working, learning and many other things. Poignantly, O'Meara asks how the levelling-up strategy's focus on improving end-of-key stage 2 outcomes can be realised when the interventions come arguably too late for children starting key stage 1.

SLEEP – LEARNING FROM HISTORY AND OTHER CULTURES

Sleep preoccupies me as a parent of a teenager, a teacher and as someone experiencing perimenopause. Pam Jarvis is reassuring, writing that poor health is unlikely to result from broken sleep totalling six or more hours.



Reflecting on differing sleep patterns based on age and society, she comments on the adaptive nature of short periods of sleep in hunter-gatherer societies where vigilance against threat is a matter of survival. More saliently for most readers of *Schools Week*, perhaps, periods of wakefulness impair work performance and exacerbate grumpiness.

Various impacts of poor sleep are explained; for me the most interesting is the link between poor REM sleep and reduced ability to regulate emotions. As adults in school, we need to be regulated to support regulation in those with immature nervous systems. The impact of poor sleep goes beyond us as individuals. I am left wondering if the Christmas break is a good time to try out biphasic sleep – or whether retirement might be a better bet.

WORK AND LIFE – A BALANCE OR A BATTLE?

Finally, Lindsay Patience blogs for WomenEd on flexible working, with a particular focus on the impact for school leaders. She identifies key drivers to increased flexibility, considering the impact of awareness of the need for equity and inclusion and more value given to diversity, as well as the DfE's commitment to flexible working.

The blog makes the value of flexible working clear, not least in its emphasis that showing those we teach that women and men with responsibilities outside work can lead.



Click the headings to
access the blogs and
podcasts



The Knowledge

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



Are there any signs of levelling up in the north east?

Chris Zarraga, Director, Schools North East

In the depths of the pandemic and the alleged return to "normality" nobody could have anticipated that things could actually get worse. The impact of school closures on young people continues into this academic year, and is complemented by a cost-of living-crisis, rampant inflation, rising energy costs, war in Ukraine, the ongoing impact of the pandemic itself, and, we've been reliably informed, a looming carbon dioxide crisis that could lead to "rapidly rising pint costs" (yes, really!).

In 2021-22, Schools North East began termly "state of the region" surveys to monitor Covid's lasting impact. [Our survey for this autumn term](#) highlights significant, ongoing challenges around attendance, persistent absence, behaviour, mental health and wellbeing.

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds in the north east have had greatly reduced time in class compared with their less disadvantaged peers nationally, with a severe impact on staff and pupil wellbeing.

We asked schools to rate current staff wellbeing on a scale of one (very poor) to five (very good). Forty-six per cent rated staff wellbeing as three, and 35 per cent as four. More than 30 per cent rated wellbeing as worse than in the summer term, and nearly two-thirds said wellbeing was worse or much worse than the pre-pandemic autumn term. Three-quarters of school leaders rated their own wellbeing as three or below.

Before the pandemic, education was already facing a recruitment and retention crisis, often related to issues of workload. These challenges have been further exacerbated as staff support pupils returning from disrupted education and schools are asked to taken on an even greater range of responsibilities.

One clear survey result is positive pupil wellbeing, with more than 70 per cent of schools rating it as four or above. A focus on wellbeing as part of a full and engaging curriculum and the return to pre-Covid routines are driving this



encouraging outcome.

But more than 60 per cent of schools said they were experiencing more behaviour-related challenges than pre-pandemic, particularly among younger students. Schools noted their lack of social skills and emotional preparedness, with pupils in reception and year 1 being markedly less mature than pre-pandemic cohorts.

There are similar issues for year 7s transitioning to secondary. However, these are generally increased by additional challenges around anxiety, resilience and respect for authority. Almost 80 per cent of schools – primary and secondary – said that students are not "stage ready".

These challenges are putting significant strain on schools and their staff, and come at a time of stretched budgets. According to our survey, just under half of schools in the north east are expecting their energy costs to double or more in 2022-23. Most said that increased staffing and energy costs will push them into a deficit in the next three years. Almost three-quarters said they would use reserves to address those higher outgoings.

So the announcement in the autumn statement of additional funding is welcome. However, it is still not clear whether the government has adequately grasped the full extent of the challenges facing schools in areas such as the north east, which saw some of the highest rates of disruption, particularly in the [2021 summer term](#). Coupled with high rates of long-term disadvantage, our region's pupils are disproportionately affected.

Too often policy on catch-up has taken a one-size-fits-all approach. Take the National Tutoring Programme (NTP), for example. Our lack of pre-existing tutoring infrastructure and the recruitment and retention crisis have made it particularly difficult for our schools to engage with the NTP. Engagement is further impacted by schools having to subsidise 40 per cent of sessions. And yet funds are going unspent and remain with the Treasury.

Term by term, our research proves how vital it is that adequate resources are targeted at those schools and communities that need it most. For now, rather than "levelling-up", key numbers in the north east are still travelling in the wrong direction.

A festive secret mission from GCHQ. Shhh!



For the second time, *Schools Week* readers get a top secret first look at a festive challenge from GCHQ.

The intelligence agency traditionally hides a puzzle in director Jeremy Fleming's annual Christmas card to national security colleagues. This is the second card for young people, and your pupils once again have the chance to solve it before it's made public next week.

Your mission, if you choose to accept it, is to print out the puzzle and bring your students in from the cold to solve it. Uncover the hidden message and sign up for the challenge on [GCHQ's website](https://www.gchq.gov.uk) from Wednesday.

///feasibly.influx.expectation



PRINT OUT
FOR YOUR PUPILS

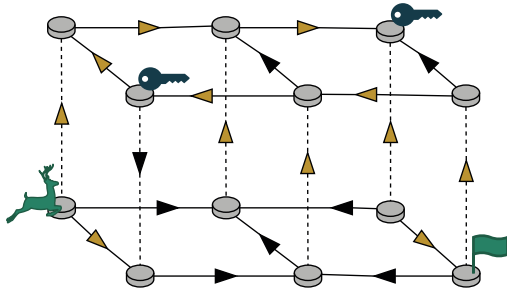
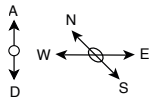


GCHQ | FESTIVE CHALLENGE

Six of the puzzles below have one-word answers. Using the design on the front of the card, arrange these to form two what3words addresses. The remaining puzzle contains a third address. Once you've found the locations, take a single word from each one to find our seasonal message.



Cyber Security



Rudolph needs to escape from this cyberspace maze by reaching the flag. He starts where indicated and can move North/East/South/West to points along the same layer, or he can Ascend/Descend between layers (as shown by the dashed lines).

He can only go in the direction of the arrows. If he touches a key, then ALL the gold arrows will swap direction. What is his shortest route to get to the flag – and can you describe it using one 7-letter word?



Languages

If a French ailurophile fancies a chat, what does a Polish cynophile fancy?



Coding

F	O	R
M	A	T
I	O	N

1. Replace all the blue cells with a letter from PART
2. Replace all the green cells with a letter from EYES
3. Replace all the gold cells with a letter from UNCURL

After each step you should have three 3-letter words in the rows of the grid, and you need to finish with a 9-letter word in the same formation as FORMATION.

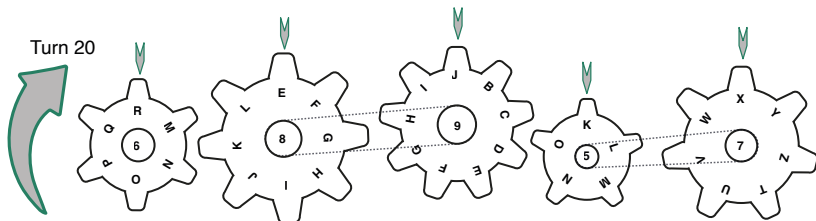


Analysis

The Director has written his usual Christmas message, but now uncover the odd one out amongst the words forming these two sentences. It's odd because it's **not odd!**



Engineering



Codebreaking

xibu4xpset beesftt jt pvucpbse.hsje.sfkpjot



Mathematics

If 2=GROWTH and 6=EXIST, then 9= what seven letter word which describes what you'll be doing with your presents on Christmas Day?

#GCHQChristmasChallenge



PRINT OUT
FOR YOUR PUPILS

TURN THE PAGE
FOR HINTS

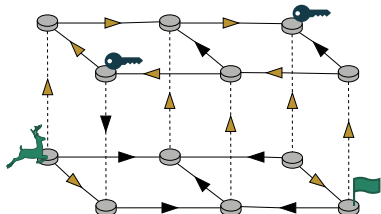
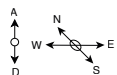


Hints

The GCHQ Christmas Challenge



Cyber Security



Rudolph needs to escape from this cyberspace maze by reaching the flag. He starts where indicated and can move North/East/South/West to points along the same layer, or he can Ascend/Descend between layers (as shown by the dashed lines).

He can only go in the direction of the arrows. If he touches a key, then ALL the gold arrows will swap direction. What is his shortest route to get to the flag – and can you describe it using one 7-letter word?



HINT: Rudolph has 3 possible directions to begin with. Following two of the routes takes you to the same place – and you will find you are stuck, so they must be wrong. Following the third route can also take you to the same place, so be careful.



Languages

If a French ailurophile fancies a chat, what does a Polish cynophile fancy?



HINT: If you don't know what an ailurophile or a cynophile are then look them up. Do you know what 'chat' means in French?



Coding

F	O	R
M	A	T
I	O	N

1. Replace all the blue cells with a letter from PART
2. Replace all the green cells with a letter from EYES
3. Replace all the gold cells with a letter from UNCURL

After each step you should have three 3-letter words in the rows of the grid, and you need to finish with a 9-letter word in the same formation as FORMATION.



HINT: After each step you must have 3-letter words in every row. Only one of FPR, FAR, FRR and FTR is a word, and similarly only one of PON, AON, RON and TON is a word. There's more than one possibility for the second row, so you should make a note of all the options and then see what happens when you do step 2.



Analysis

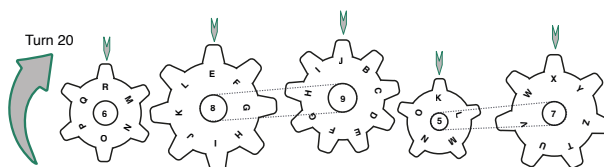
The Director has written his usual Christmas message, but now uncover the odd one out amongst the words forming these two sentences. It's odd because it's **not odd**!



HINT: Look closely at all the words in the question. Consider what might be 'odd' about them. Then find the one which isn't 'odd'.



Engineering



HINT: As the first gear turns, different letters come to the top position, under the arrow. Count carefully and note which one is at the top after 20 turns. As the first gear is turning clockwise, which way does the second gear turn? The third gear is attached to the second gear by a chain, so which way will that turn? In each case, count carefully and note which letter is at the top after 20 turns.



Codebreaking

xibu4xpset beesftt jt pvucpbse.hsje.sfkpjot



HINT: What do you think the first codegroup might represent? You might be able to find it on the card. See if you can work out how the encoding has been done.



Mathematics

If 2=GROWTH and 6=EXIST, then 9= what seven letter word which describes what you'll be doing with your presents on Christmas Day?



HINT: Look carefully and think why TWO is associated with GROWTH, and SIX with EXIST.



If you have all the answers but aren't sure what to do next, why not look at the front of the card whilst you're thinking?



#GCHQChristmasChallenge

Follow us! @GCHQ - GCHQ



PRINT OUT
FOR YOUR PUPILS

Week in

Westminster

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

MONDAY

As teacher trainers grapple with delays to the initial teacher training market review appeals, *Schools Week* asked Leicester & Leicestershire Primary SCITT what its next steps were, given it didn't appear on the DfE's list of those accredited from 2024.

It turns out it did receive accreditation. The DfE just missed it off the list.

TUESDAY

We all knew it, but now it's official – MPs aren't as bright as 10-year-olds.

Or so the results of an unusual set of SATs held in Parliament this week would suggest.

The campaign group More Than a Score invited parliamentarians to take maths and spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPAG) tests to highlight its calls to end high-stakes testing.

Pupils invigilated while politicians puzzled over adding a relative pronoun to a sentence and explaining the number of factors you get when you square a prime number.

And the results are in: 44 per cent of politicians reached the government's "expected standard" in maths, while 50 per cent reached the SPAG benchmark. In this year's official tests, 72 per cent of year 6 pupils achieved the expected standard in SPAG, while 71 per cent met it in maths.

Individual MPs' results have not been released, but former schools minister and education committee chair Robin Walker (pictured, top) told *The Times* he got nine out of ten right in SPAG, but just seven out of ten in the maths paper, which he did not finish.

"There will always be a place for testing,



but that cannot be the be-all and end-all to accessing the most opportunity," he said.

We doubt this will change anything, but it's certainly a clever way to draw attention to the issue.

WEDNESDAY

Gillian Keegan's first outing as education secretary in front of the education committee was pretty enlightening, given her apparent willingness to actually answer questions – a novel thing among cabinet ministers.

During a heated exchange about political impartiality in schools, it was good to hear her say teachers take their responsibilities

in that area seriously, and that claims of widespread outrage over teaching about gender is "not happening".

But she also admitted to being "frightened to go on Twitter", adding that "we have seen very high-profile people become targeted because of their views on either side of that debate".

However, we suspect Keegan won't attract too much ire as a result of her Twitter feed, which is pretty bland in comparison with other politicians.

What is likely to lead to criticism, however, are her comments about cooking risotto ... on a campfire. We're no experts, but we can certainly think of easier things to cook on a such a rudimentary cooker.

THURSDAY

There's a SEND funding crisis, but this doesn't appear to have dawned on one unnamed London council that wants a contractor to help with "SEND transformation" – for a tidy £650 a day.

The role involves helping the council with the government's "safety valve" programme, which involves it giving bailouts to councils with deficits in exchange for certain conditions.

The six-month contract could set the council back more than £80,000 if the new hire works five days a week.

The successful contractor will "monitor and manage the SEN budgets to ensure the effective use of resources, value for money and compliance with the LA financial management requirements".

Trebles all round!



Virtual School Assistant Headteacher Secondary/Post 16 Virtual School for Children Looked after

Salary: RG8 (SCP 39-45) £45,495- £51,627

Full-time, Permanent post

Hybrid/Agile working available

Closing date: 11 December 2022

Interview date: 15 December 2022

This is an exciting opportunity to join Reading's Virtual School for Children Looked After and Care Leavers. The Virtual School is committed to promoting the educational achievement of Children Looked After and supports young people to achieve their educational potential, to enable them through attaining good qualifications and a positive school experience to have more fulfilling careers, higher incomes, greater self-confidence and ultimately a better quality of life. There is absolute commitment from the Virtual School to aim to deliver an outstanding service through strong advocacy and collaborative engagement for Reading's children looked after wherever they are placed.

We are seeking to appoint a highly committed and inspirational Virtual School Assistant Headteacher Secondary/Post 16 with a proven track

record of improving educational outcomes for Children Looked After in the Secondary/Post 16 phase. You will be passionate about tackling inequality and narrowing the achievement gap between children looked after and their peers, ensuring that children have the support and opportunity to grow, flourish and realise their full potential.

As Assistant Headteacher Secondary/Post 16 you will have a breadth of experience and expertise in Secondary and Post 16 education. You will also be highly skilled in providing challenge, advice and support to schools, social care teams and carers, working in partnership to ensure that all children have a timely and high quality electronic Personal Education Plan.

We offer a supportive environment to grow and develop your career with the opportunity to put your ideas across. Innovation and ambition are strongly encouraged, and you'll get a great feel for that working in our friendly and collaborative environment.



Chief Finance Officer

Bolton Impact Trust (BIT) are seeking to appoint an enthusiastic and dedicated Chief Finance Officer to manage and co-ordinate the financial requirements and processes across the Trust, and its academies. The Trust currently consists of four AP and Special Academies and further growth is likely. You will support the ongoing operational and financial development of our schools. To ensure that your role responds to the Trust's needs and delivers the Trust's visions and aims you will be work closely with the CEO and Central Team Colleagues as part of the Trust's Senior Leadership Team.

Why you?

- You are an experienced finance professional, able to take lead responsibility for the Trust financial arrangements and requirements.
- You are highly organised and an effective communicator.
- You have commitment to partnership working across our Academies and with external stakeholders.

The successful applicant will be enthusiastic, positive, optimistic, flexible and motivated, with personal drive. You will need the right balance of emotional intelligence, teambuilding and networking skills, with the ability to see what needs to be done and to prioritise work accordingly.

You will have strong analytical skills and a meticulous attention to detail. You will have the ability to build strong working relationships with leadership, administrative staff, teachers and support staff colleagues, as well as leadership skills which ensure the right balance of appropriate workload, support and challenge.

Why choose us?

- At BIT we value all members of staff. We have a strong focus on staff wellbeing, providing access to wellbeing support services via a dedicated wellbeing charter
- We are a growing Multi Academy Trust (MAT)
- Guidance of a supportive and experienced executive leadership team who invest in the development of their teams and the Trust
- Encouragement of further and continued professional development
- Competitive salary
- Fantastic Local Government Pension Scheme

This role is full time and permanent

Applications should be submitted by Friday 6th January 2023 at 12pm

Interviews will be held in the week commencing 16th January 2023



Headteacher at Eastbrook Primary Academy, Brighton L18 – L24 (£67,351 - £78,010)

REACH2 Academy Trust and Eastbrook Primary Academy are seeking an outstanding Headteacher, or an outstanding Deputy Headteacher, who is an innovative, responsible and insightful professional, with the passion, drive, and enthusiasm to build on Eastbrook's considerable strengths. We are seeking an individual to take up position at the start of the summer term 2023. You will be able to lead, motivate, develop, and inspire a school team who are passionately committed to giving pupils a wide range of real-life and enriching experiences, within a culture of highest expectations.

There are over 60 schools within our organisation, grouped into clusters. Being part of that family, you will benefit from the expertise, support and opportunities offered by the largest, primary only, multi-academy trust in the country.

For an informal discussion please contact Mr Justin Burt, Deputy Director of Education using justin.burt@reach2.org

Closing date: **Friday 13th January 2023 at Midday**

Link to advert: <https://www.reach2.org/vacancy/headteacher-2/>



Chief Executive Officer

Due to the pending retirement of our founding CEO, the Trustees of Scholars Academy Trust are now seeking to make a permanent appointment of an exceptional individual to lead the Trust towards the next stage of its development.

It is important to us that the leader we appoint will follow the seven principles of public life and have the confidence, vision and skills to lead the continued improvement and growth of the Trust, whilst at the same time ensuring the health and wellbeing of children and staff. We are also looking for a leader who will support and nurture the unique ethos of the academies across the Trust.

Full recruitment pack and application details can be found on our website - www.scholarstrust.co.uk. We hope it gives you a flavour of the inspiring and exciting opportunity this post offers.



Department
for Education

School Teachers' Review Body – Educationalist (primary) and Generalist Member roles

The School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) is now seeking to fill two vacancies, we are looking to recruit an educationalist and generalist member.

These roles will provide the right individuals with an exciting opportunity to influence the recruitment and retention of teachers, creating a career path that motivates teachers to thrive and excel.

About the School Teachers' Review Body

Being a member of the School Teacher's Review Body (STRB) is an opportunity to use your experience and expertise to make a positive contribution to school education.

The STRB is an independent body which makes recommendations to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Education on the pay and conditions of school teachers in England.

The STRB is a multi-disciplinary team. The members bring a diverse range of skills, experiences and views to bear, in order to give balanced and evidence-based

recommendations. Further information on the STRB is available at:

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/school-teachers-review-body

Key responsibilities of the members of the STRB

Members of the review body contribute to crucial decisions impacting on the future of the teaching profession in England, working alongside a range of members from diverse professional backgrounds.

As a member of the STRB you will bring your own expertise, alongside a high degree of analytical ability, strong communication skills and, ideally, an appreciation of public sector reward issues.

How to Apply

The closing date for applications is **Monday 19 December 10am**

Please visit the public appointments website for full details of these vacancies and information on how to apply, available at:

School Teachers' Review Body – Primary Educationalist Member

School Teachers' Review Body – Generalist Member



STUDENT SUPPORT AND SIXTH FORM SUPPORT ADMINISTRATORS, MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING OFFICER

Wycombe High School have exciting term time support staff opportunities within our outstanding all girls' grammar school. We are currently advertising for Student Support and Sixth Form Support administrators, both full and part time positions.

In addition to the above mentioned administrative roles, we are now also recruiting for our newly created role of Mental Health and Wellbeing Officer (part time). Mental health and wellbeing are very high on the Wycombe High School agenda and we are proud to work in partnership with the mental health charity Mind who, in 2021-2022, awarded us their Silver Index Award for 'making demonstrable achievements in promoting staff mental health, demonstrating progress and impact over time'.

If you would like to work in a friendly, vibrant, outstanding school, with staff access to a free award-winning EAP, extremely generous employer pension contributions, cycle to work scheme and mental health first aiders for staff in addition to students, then please apply now!

Informal visits in advance of application are welcomed.

For full details and an application form please visit our school's website or contact Mrs Maggie Brookling, HR Manager

Closing date for applications: as soon as possible

Interviews will be held: as soon as possible

(We reserve the right to close the vacancy if we have sufficient applications)

Wycombe High School and WHSAT are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expect all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. The successful applicant will be subject to a disclosure of criminal records at an enhanced level and must provide proof of the right to work in the UK.

Marlow Road, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP11 1TB
01494 523961

www.whs.bucks.sch.uk | mbrookling@whs.bucks.sch.uk

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Contact the team