

SCHOOLS WEEK

A digital newspaper determined to get past the bluster and explain the facts.

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OpenAI: This machine kills workload. Let it!



Snooping schools: Will social media checks put off teachers?



Investigation: Special schools bear brunt of recruitment crisis



OFSTED ADMITS ITS INSPECTION COMPLAINTS POLICY ISN'T WORKING

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One down, now two to go: NASUWT fails in strike ballot

- First teacher union to announce strike ballot misses threshold
- But bigger test awaits as NEU set to reveal results next week

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

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PRE-16 DELIVERY

- Programmes that embed into your existing school timetable
- Aims to support learner development and enhance school performance.
- Schools can utilise Pupil Premium or PE & Sport Premium funding to support placement



SCHOOLS WEEK

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Warning to ministers: the NASUWT vote is no reason to celebrate

The NASUWT union has fallen short of the threshold required to go on strike.

While nine in ten of the union's members who voted wanted to strike, only 42 per cent of the union's 300,000 members replied to the ballot, missing the 50 per cent needed.

There are fears the postal strike may have impacted the outcome, with some members already saying they did not receive ballot forms. Others accuse the union of not doing enough to drum up support.

Those are both debatable, but it is clear that this not a good result for the NASUWT. And while ministers are likely elated, this isn't a good result for government either.

Work *does* need to be done to recognise the very real dissatisfaction amongst the school workforce.

Whatever the reasons, it's important to acknowledge that tens of thousands of school staff voted to strike, and the fact that multiple ballots are being held for the first time in years is testament to the frustration

among those who work in our schools.

We are still waiting the outcome of the NAHT and NEU ballots, and ASCL's decision on whether to proceed to a formal ballot after also narrowly missing the threshold in its indicative vote.

Whatever happens, it will take more than threats of strike-breaking legislation from the government to pacify workers who feel underpaid, undervalued and overworked after years of turmoil.

Our school staffing crisis investigation (page 12) reveals a glimpse of this. There are not enough teachers in the system. That needs to be resolved.

But a current tidal wave of sickness is exacerbating those problems.

The worst outcome of this vote will be for ministers to become complacent and think it resolves matters. It doesn't. It's just another indicator that things need to change.

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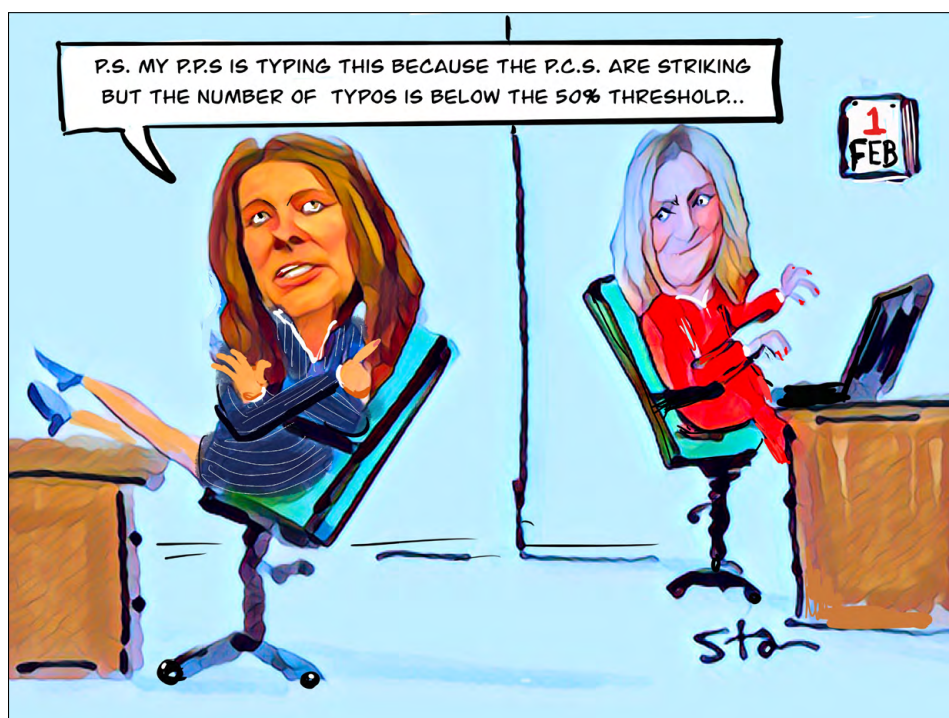


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NEWS

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Ofsted admits complaints policy 'isn't working'

JOHN DICKENS & AMY WALKER

@SCHOOLSWEEK

EXCLUSIVE

Ofsted senior leaders have admitted its complaints policy "is not working" and will be reviewed.

Officials have been asked to make the process more human and less bureaucratic, Schools Week understands.

During an invite-only briefing to trust leaders this week, the watchdog also revealed that inspectors have been trained on how to see "the big picture", following complaints about inconsistent grades.

Trust bosses have said that some inspectors made "over-zealous" judgments based on some pupils' derogatory language or behaviour issues during inspections.

The rare admission from Ofsted – and action – has been praised in private by some trust leaders, who feel the watchdog is listening.

The percentage of complaints about inspections that were at least partially upheld fell to its lowest level in eight years last year (see table).

Just 17 per cent of 718 complaints closed in the 2021-22 academic year had aspects upheld. This followed a record high of 26 per cent out of 320 complaints closed in the previous year, but this was heavily impacted by Covid.

Ofsted's admission was made during a meeting with members of the Confederation of School Trusts (CST). Ofsted officials Chris Jones and Lee Owston addressed trust leaders on Tuesday before the pair spoke again to about 400 CST members at a Wednesday meeting.

They admitted the complaints process was "not working", both for schools and the inspectorate.

Ofsted officials are now reviewing policy to see how it can be improved.

One change includes a new "enhanced oversight", Schools Week understands, which should lead to "problematic" inspections being picked up before issues arise with contentious



judgments.

Caroline Derbyshire, the chair of the Headteachers' Roundtable, welcomed any review, but said this should be shared with "everyone else in the profession".

Schools Week understands the NAHT school leaders' union was also informed of the changes.

Derbyshire said many heads believed that any issues picked up during inspections could often be "dealt with", but issues occurring post-inspection and requiring the complaints process "rarely result in a different outcome".

The meeting followed the CST last year sharing its concerns about inspections.

A major concern was inspectors jumping to snap judgments based on what pupils said. Until recently, Ofsted inspectors have not had external results data to inform their judgment.

Trust leaders said a resulting over-focus on comments made during the pupil voice part of inspections – particularly relating to behaviour and derogatory language – were given too much weight in final judgments.

The watchdog admitted to leaders there had been inconsistency in judgments across these areas. They also said they were aware of allegations relating to inappropriate questions to pupils.

Last month Philip Hollobone, the Tory MP for Kettering, claimed that inspectors visiting his child's Bishop Stopford's school asked a boy if he thought it was a

OFSTED COMPLAINTS UPHELD

2021-22	17%
2020-21	26%
2019-20	19%
2018-19	22%

"white, middle-class school".

A girl was asked if she felt uncomfortable walking upstairs when wearing a skirt, the MP claimed.

Hollobone was due to meet Amanda Spielman, Ofsted's chief inspector, this week to discuss the concerns.

Trust leaders were told new training called "seeing the big picture" started last week.

This was to ensure inspectors knew the framework should not be taken verbatim and that inspectors must not leap to snap judgments that any such issues were endemic in the school.

A spokesperson for Ofsted said: "The landscape in which inspectors and school leaders work is always evolving, which is why we run a continuous training programme for all our inspectors. We also make every effort to engage with people from the sectors we inspect and act on their feedback where we can."

They added that any "formal proposals for changes to our processes, such as complaints, will always be subject to wider consultation".



Caroline Derbyshire



Chris Jones

NEWS

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Union fails to meet threshold for strike vote

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

A ballot of teachers in the NASUWT has failed to meet the turnout threshold for strike action, despite broad support from those who did vote.

Although about nine in 10 members who voted did support strikes and action short of a strike, turnout nationally was just 42 per cent, below the threshold of 50 per cent required by law.

In the ballot of state school staff in England, 88.5 per cent voted in favour of strikes and 94.1 per cent voted in favour of action short of a strike.

Overall, the figures mean about 37 per cent of eligible members voted to strike.

Since 2016, unions have had to reach the turnout threshold of 50 per cent and secure "yes" votes from 40 per cent of eligible members to win ballots for action in the public sector.

Dr Patrick Roach, the union's general secretary, said it was clear that members were sending a strong message to the government on the need to address teachers' pay concerns.

"Whilst the government's anti-trade union legislation prevents members in state-funded schools and colleges from taking industrial action, we remain in formal disputes with ministers and employers and will be continuing to take forward our campaigning for a better deal for teachers."

He said the readiness to support industrial



Dr Patrick Roach

action "demonstrates the anger of the profession and the need for governments in England and Wales to engage in meaningful negotiations to address the deep concerns of our members".

"Our campaign to fight for the real terms pay awards that teachers and headteachers deserve continues."

Some union members have complained on Twitter that they did not receive their ballots, with complications linked to the postal vote strikes.

However, the NASUWT also carried out ballots in independent schools on a "disaggregated" basis, and said it had secured mandates for industrial action at 125 settings in England.

The results prompted anger from some union members who criticised members who did not vote.

English teacher Rebecca Boxall tweeted that she was "fairly used to being furious with a percentage of the population, but this one might tip me over the edge".

"We get what we deserve if colleagues can't even be bothered to vote. Hugely disappointed

and angry."

Kirsty Wilkinson tweeted: "I am stunned by this. I don't know a single teacher in my school who's in NASUWT and didn't vote. Who isn't returning that form? If NEU [the National Education Union] vote to strike I'm moving to them."

Primary teacher Hazel Pinner tweeted that NASUWT members who did not return their ballot should "join Edapt for legal support & advice instead". Edapt is a membership organisation for teachers that offers an alternative to joining a union.

"If you're not even going to engage to vote then leave," she tweeted.

Chris Dyson, a school leader, called for Roach to stand down following the "pathetic turnout".

Mark Lehair, a former government special adviser and now head of education at the right-wing think tank, the Centre for Policy Studies, said the news would bring "huge relief to pupils and their families".

"The result shows how divisive the issue is amongst teachers too, with fewer than 40 per cent of NASUWT members voting for a strike, even after all the encouragement by the union leadership." All eyes are now on the NAHT school leaders' union, whose ballot closed on Wednesday, and the NEU, which is balloting members until today. Results of both are expected on Monday.

[A Department for Education spokesperson said "families will be relieved that these teachers did not choose to strike".

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

DfE staff to join civil service day of action on February 1

Staff at the Department for Education and Ofsted will stop work on February 1 as part of coordinated action across the civil service.

It is not yet known how many staff will walk out as part of the one-day strike by the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) in 124 government departments and agencies, which also includes the Office for Students and Institute for Apprenticeships.

It follows votes in favour of industrial action over pay, pensions, jobs and redundancy terms last year.

At the DfE, 911 staff, or 88 per cent of the

1,031 employees who voted in the ballot were in favour of industrial action. The 1,816 PCS members at the department equate to 24 per cent of its total workforce.

Of the 161 Ofsted employees who voted, 88 per cent were in favour. In total, 291 staff members – 16 per cent of the inspectorate's workforce – were entitled to vote.

Mark Serwotka, the general secretary of the PCS, said he had "warned the government our dispute would escalate if they did not listen – and we're as good as our word".

If ministers put more money on the table there was "a chance this dispute can be resolved".

If not, public services "from benefits to driving tests, from passports to driving licences, from ports to airports" would be affected by industrial action".

Schools Week revealed that more than 500 Department for Education staff have applied for pay-outs under a "selective voluntary exit scheme" for staff "who don't have the skills the department needs for the future".

INVESTIGATION: SAFEGUARDING

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Teaching hopefuls asked for details of 'any website you're named on'

SAMANTHA BOOTH
@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Ministers are being urged to clarify how schools should check the online behaviour of prospective staff after some asked applicants for all their social media usernames, pseudonyms and “any websites you are involved with ... or named on”.

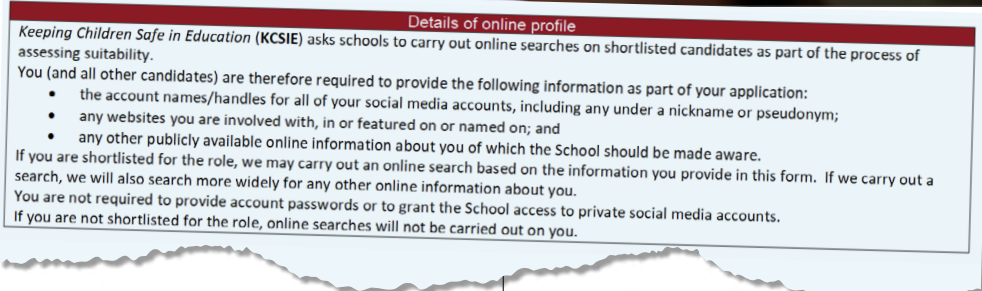
Updated safeguarding guidance last year states schools “should consider carrying out an online search” on shortlisted candidates that could be explored during interviews.

It followed the 2021 murder of Sarah Everard in south London – and her killer’s use of social media – as well as more online issues cropping up in Teacher Regulation Agency (TRA) cases.

An application form for Chesham Grammar School, in Buckinghamshire, asks teacher candidates to provide account names and handles for “all of your” social media accounts, including any under a nickname or pseudonym.

Applicants are also told to provide “any websites you are involved with, in or featured on or named on” and “any other publicly available online information about you of which the school should be made aware”.

The recruitment policy at Red Kite School Trust, which runs the school, states searches are only conducted for shortlisted candidates to provide the appointment panel with any information that may be relevant to their suitability or “have



an impact on the trust’s reputation”.

The school said the form, provided by its lawyers, was now being reviewed as was the way [safeguarding] guidance was interpreted.

Arnold House School, a prep school in London that uses the same wording on application forms,

did not respond to a request for comment.

Dr Aimee Quickfall, who runs initial teacher training at a northern university, said such policies could make the profession “even less attractive when the first experience is having your digital identity trawled... My worry is what

The companies paid to search your social media

Several companies provide online reports of prospective employees for less than £50.

Security Watchdog, part of outsourcing firm Capita, charges £30.

On its website it says its reports “complement traditional employment screening” and can help to find online activities that could damage a brand or reputation, leaks of company confidential information or behaviour that encourages illegal activities.

It says it should only be used as part of the

pre-employment process and should not be used for general candidate assessment.

Social Media Check, which provides reports based on automated software for about 40 multi-academy trusts, charges between £30 to £35 for each report, with a same-day turnaround.

The school can ask for checks on public or private profiles, but the applicant must first consent. The company said its consent rate was about 98 per cent for education requests.



The school then receives a report that highlights posts that might include hate speech, swearing, violent images and toxic language. The software can also scan pictures for words.

Nic Whelan (pictured), a director at the company, said the service helped to negate “risks with subjectively and unconscious bias” and was secure and compliant.

INVESTIGATION: SAFEGUARDING

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will come up is things that should never come into that decision-making process. Is that going to cloud people's judgements?"

The Recruitment and Employment Confederation has already raised with government officials the "lack of practicality" in the updated Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) guidance.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the school leaders' union ASCL, said employers should decide how to use the guidance based on HR and legal advice. But he said further advice on a recommended approach would be helpful.

The Department for Education, in response to a consultation on the changes, said it wanted recruiters to "use their professional curiosity and use a search engine as another tool that provides more information about the suitability of an individual to work with children".

Schools should use "professional judgement" in considering any information that comes to light, it added.

Seventy per cent of respondents to the consultation agreed the plans to suggest schools consider online searches would be helpful, while just 15 per cent disagreed.

The department said searches might help to identify any incidents or issues that have happened and were publicly available online, which the school might "want to explore" during interviews.

It follows "increasing prevalence" of online behaviour in TRA hearings. Primary teacher

Thomas Heayel was banned last year after posting inappropriate pictures of himself and offering to sell sexual services online.

Ofsted checks how schools manage safe recruitment, but it does not have specific rules on what level of checks it expects.

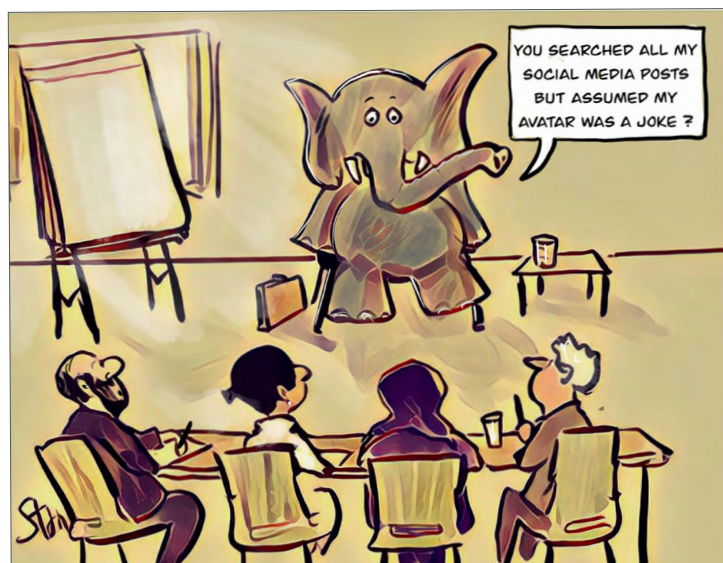
George Mair, director of EdEx Education Recruitment, said checks before employment could protect staff from pupils finding

information about them online, as it could be made private or removed.

"But where is the line?" he added. "How far do they take investigating someone's personal life out of school before it becomes too invasive? It should be clear-cut guidance on what schools should and shouldn't do."

Dozens of multi-academy trusts now pay third-party companies to search applicants' social media (see box).

Law firm Browne Jacobson suggested five years was a "sensible timeframe" for any search of popular social media platforms. Things to look out for included inappropriate or offensive behaviour, discrimination and drug or alcohol



misuse.

HCR Law, another law firm, said the search should be done by someone not involved in any decisions on appointments to minimise the risk of discrimination and unconscious bias.

"Clearly defined parameters" were necessary to ensure "a consistent approach".

A YouGov survey in 2017 found one in five employers had turned down a candidate because of their social media activity.

Red Kite's policy shows that online search information is held for as long as the successful candidate is employed and six months for those who did not get the post.

The Department for Education was asked for comment.

My retweet about a choc ice was flagged as hate speech

Reporter Samantha Booth signed up for an online search with Social Media Check. Here's what it found ...

About 3 per cent of my 13,000 Twitter and Facebook posts were flagged up as potential risks, including swearing, hate speech and toxic language.

I was shocked. I've been on social media for more than a decade, but I didn't recognise myself in those definitions.

But the results show the potential false flags that can be thrown up.

For instance, some posts flagged as "toxic language" included factual tweets about murder and other criminal investigations that I covered as a local newspaper reporter.

A quote from a council meeting during

which someone asked for "legal sites for gypsies and travellers" in 2016 was potential "hate speech".

It also brought up a post I had retweeted in 2018 about "a man having a choc ice for breakfast". Choc ice can be a racial slur, so I guess it was flagged for that reason.

It also pointed to pictures from the Women's March I joined in London in 2017 after Donald Trump was elected as US president. A picture I posted showed a placard stating: "This pussy grabs back."

There was nothing hugely concerning in my report, but it provided a real insight into what my digital footprint looks like.

Ultimately, I think the process is reliant on a human being looking at the context of posts. Mine wasn't shared with my employer, either.



The photo of the Women's March flagged by the software

Perhaps I would feel a bit uneasy about some of my immature, younger-self posts being viewed – but at least they didn't scroll through all my other social media posts of nights out, holidays and the like.

It has reminded me, however, of the importance of spring cleaning your social media every few years.

NEWS

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Failed SEND councils could get four-year reprieve

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

Councils with “significant weaknesses” in special educational needs and disabilities provision may not be inspected again for up to four and a half years, following the introduction of Ofsted’s new framework.

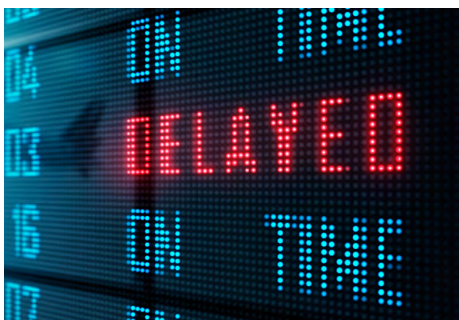
The new regime by the inspectorate and the Care Quality Commission came into effect on January 1.

Local SEND services will be judged more on the impact they have on children, with more scrutiny on alternative provision.

Figures show that more than two thirds of councils inspected by Ofsted last year had “significant weaknesses” in how they supported pupils with SEND – the worst record since the watchdog started its visits six years ago.

Areas found to have significant weaknesses produced a “written statement of action” (WSOA), and then faced a revisit, usually within 18 months.

But revisits for areas subject to WSOAs under



the old framework ended in December, and although Ofsted completed 13 last term, 23 areas have not received them.

Seven were last inspected in mid-2021, meaning their revisits would have been due soon. But Ofsted is now only guaranteeing those areas will get an inspection within three years, meaning some could wait more than four years.

Hayley Harding, the founder of the SEND pupil and parent campaign group Let Us Learn Too, said delays would “just mean problems getting worse, more pressure being put on families and ultimately more children’s educational futures being lost”.

She said inspections were the only form

of investigation for local authority SEND departments that “actually highlight the challenges that disabled children and young people face when trying to get the services and help that they need”.

Steven Wright, a parent campaigner on SEND in Suffolk, warned that if areas were left unchecked “there would be a very high chance that there would be no improvement”.

“Ofsted inspections are currently the only motivation for improvement. And if that’s taken away, even if it’s just a delay ... the council as a system will effectively relax and allow things to drift.”

An Ofsted spokesperson said full inspections of areas previously subject to a WSoA would consider “previously identified weaknesses and any progress made” when reaching a judgment.

When scheduling inspections, Ofsted said it would take account of previous outcomes, the time since the last inspection and “any other information” that may “indicate that an inspection may need to take place sooner”.

During engagement meetings with all local areas, the bodies will also “identify any issues of concern”.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Soaring absence rates prompt inquiry

MPs will investigate school absences and how best to support disadvantaged pupils after official statistics showed soaring persistent absences in the wake of Covid.

Latest Department for Education attendance data shows absences continued to rise in the last weeks of term last year, driven by illness, with one in seven pupils away in the week beginning December 12.

However, early estimates suggest rates halved to about 7 per cent by last week.

The parliamentary education committee has announced a new inquiry focusing on persistent absence. It will “investigate causes and possible solutions to the growing issue of children’s absence from school”.

DfE data published last year showed one in four pupils in England missed 10 per cent or more possible sessions in the autumn term of 2021, up from 13.1 per cent in 2019.

MPs will examine “links between pupil

absence and factors such as economic disadvantage, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), ethnic background, and whether a child or a family member is clinically vulnerable to Covid-19”.

In autumn 2021, 33.6 per cent of pupils eligible for free school meals were persistently absent, compared with 20 per cent of pupils not eligible.

Persistent absence among SEND pupils was 30.6 per cent, compared with 21.5 per cent for those without SEND.

Attendance at alternative provision schools “will also be considered”.

The inquiry will look for ways to “better support pupils and their families both inside and beyond the school system to improve attendance”.

It will also examine whether schools providing breakfast clubs, free meals, and after-school or holiday activities “can have a positive impact”.

Robin Walker, the former schools minister

who now chairs the committee, said missing school undermined a child’s education and future life chances.

“My colleagues and I will examine what innovative methods school leaders may be employing to help stop children and their families falling into a habit of missing school, with the risk of such habits becoming a downward spiral towards ‘severe’ absence.

“We will look at how targeted support can help to improve attendance and seek evidence as to what works both within and beyond the school system to create a positive culture of attendance.”

The committee is inviting written submissions of up to 3,000 words addressing the absences of disadvantaged pupils and those with other characteristics, as well as ways schools and families can improve attendance.

A full terms of reference has been [published online](#).



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KEYNOTE:

Dr Shabna Begum, Head of Research at the Runnymede Trust

Dr Shabna Begum is Head of Research at the Runnymede Trust. She oversees the research delivery of every major project and ongoing programme across the Runnymede Trust's esteemed research portfolio. Shabna's expertise includes racial inequalities in education and in access to housing as well as the intersection between gender and generation with race.

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- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities' voices
- Special Educational Needs and Disability awareness
- See full programme at bit.ly/BAMEEDJAN



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INVESTIGATION: RECRUITMENT

Special schools bear brunt of recruitment crisis

AMY WALKER

@AMYRWALKER

EXCLUSIVE

Special schools and alternative provision (AP) are bearing the brunt of the recruitment crisis with nearly three times more teaching posts filled by temporary workers, analysis reveals.

An investigation by *Schools Week* reveals the full scale of the specialist sector's challenge to attract staff, leaving schools for the most vulnerable children regularly having to use unqualified teachers.

One school has nearly two in five teaching posts staffed by agency staff or teaching assistants.

Special school leaders are now calling for initial teacher training bursaries and recruitment campaigns specific to the sector.

Paul van Walwyk, director for schools at The Eden Academy Trust – which runs seven special schools – said the sector was not “valued in the same way” as subjects with shortages, where bursaries of up to £27,000 are handed out.

“We know maths, chemistry and physics are really important,” he said. “But so is giving children the education that keeps them out of the care system and gives them independence.”

An analysis of latest Department for Education workforce figures, from November 2021, shows that for every 1,000 teacher posts in special schools, 13 were filled by a temporary staff member (1.3 per cent). This compares with five in 1,000 (0.5 per cent) across all state-funded schools.

Meanwhile the rate of teacher vacancies was also twice as high in special schools and AP.

Six in every 1,000 teacher posts within the specialist sector were vacant, compared with three in every 1,000 posts across state schools.

‘It’s not sustainable’

Nearly 25 per cent of teaching posts at Eden (38 per cent in one school) are filled by agency staff or higher-level teaching assistants (TAs) under teacher supervision.

Van Walwyk said: “It is very challenging,



‘We’re not valued in the same way’

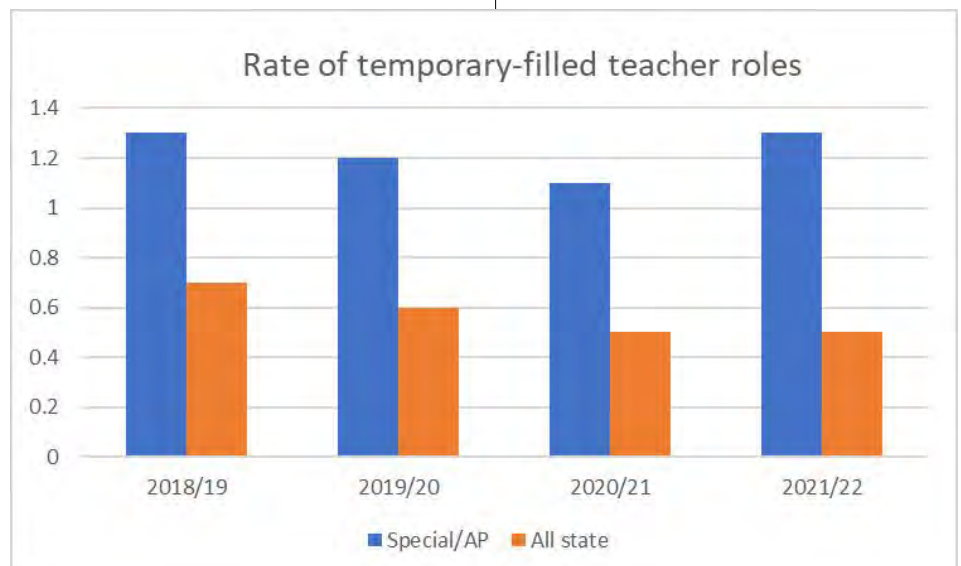
but it’s massively rewarding. But people who haven’t worked in special schools don’t want to work there because they haven’t experienced that.”

While all of the schools are rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’, Van Walwyk says the current staffing model isn’t sustainable.

“We’re in a bit of a crisis, but [the real concern] is when will that really start affecting school performance,” he said.

“And I worry the goodwill will run out – we can’t keep asking support staff to just do a bit more.”

As a result of “significant recruitment



INVESTIGATION: RECRUITMENT

challenges", the Parallel Learning Trust last year paid about £16,000 for four TAs to gain qualified teacher status.

"We had to home grow our own because we couldn't find them elsewhere," said Mark Jordan, its chief executive.

But the number of vacancies grows. Sixteen vacancies for teaching staff are filled temporarily – a fifth of overall teacher posts across the trust, and an increase of three from last January.

The New Bridge Group, which runs six special schools in Greater Manchester, has 11 teacher vacancies – 1.4 per cent of its teaching roles – temporarily filled by supply staff.

The trust is looking for an ICT teacher at Spring Brook Academy, a school that serves pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties.

"You've got the challenge of finding an ICT teacher, with the added layer of one that can cope with SEMH teenagers," said Suzanne Smith, the trust's HR manager. "It's that extra layer of expertise and calibre that you're looking for within an SEN setting."

The rate of teacher posts filled by temporary staff in the specialist sector has remained stubbornly high since 2018-19, when it was also 1.3 per cent.

But it has fallen at all state schools in that period, from 0.7 to 0.5 per cent last year.

'We're reliant on very low-paid people'

The sector is also struggling to attract other staff. It has double the number of leader vacancies (0.6 per cent) compared with all state schools (0.3).

Paul Silvester, head of the Newman Special School in Rotherham, south Yorkshire, said the data did not capture issues with recruiting support staff, which the specialist sector relied on.

DfE figures show 52 per cent of the total workforce within special schools and AP are teaching assistants, compared with 28 per cent of the total state school workforce.

In November, Newman school had a vacancy rate of 10 per cent across its support roles.

"We're reliant on very low-paid people," Silvester said. "I'm actually puzzled as to why those who do apply do, because what we're offering is so little, but it comes from a



'I worry the goodwill will run out'

genuine desire to help."

The picture is similar in an academy trust that did not want to be named because it believed the figures could alarm parents who would "rightly be extremely worried".

Currently 27 per cent of its TA posts are vacant, compared with 5 per cent of teaching posts. While it has also supported TAs to become qualified teachers, the chief executive said this "just moves the vacancy".

As a result of general shortages, Annemarie Hassall, chief executive of the National Association for Special Educational Needs (nasen), said she had heard of schools "resorting to strategies such as having classes in on a rotational basis".

What are the solutions?

Van Walwyk suggested specialist teacher training courses should come attached with bursaries similar to secondary subjects identified as having shortfalls.

"If we got the same weighting as maths and physics, we'd have the staff."

Meanwhile, Hassall suggested government recruitment drives should give more prominence to specialist teaching.

"In [the DfE's] recruitment campaigns, there's no focus or spotlight on those with learning difference," she said. "Yet that could be such a huge motivator for those coming into the profession."

Simon Knight, joint head of the Frank Wise special school in Oxfordshire, echoed that the government needed a "coherent strategy" to address vacancies.

"A failure to do so would be an abdication of its responsibility to ensure that children with SEND have access to high-quality teachers skilled in meeting their developmental requirements," he said.

The DfE said it had set out an "ambitious programme of improvement to the special educational needs system" in its SEND review, with its consultation due early this year. Proposals include a new qualification for teachers training as SENCOs.



Annemarie Hassall



Simon Knight

INVESTIGATION: SCHOOL STAFFING

Cover costs soar as teacher shortages and illness bite

TOM BELGER

@TOM_BELGER

EXCLUSIVE

Unprecedented supply cover costs are draining school budgets as staff illness soars and teacher shortages spread, costing the sector hundreds of millions a year.

Recently filed annual accounts from large academy trusts reveal the toll of shrinking workforces.

Separate Schools Week analysis shows maintained schools spent a combined £622 million on supply cover in 2021-22, up more than a third year-on-year.

Local authority-maintained schools spent £171 per pupil on supply costs last year – a five-year high and up from £160-a-head in 2019, before Covid.

Figures from jobs site Indeed show 2,000 live adverts for supply teachers, with postings more than doubling as a share of total jobs on pre-pandemic trends.

Leora Cruddas, the chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, said schools were “undoubtedly” more reliant on supply staff, not only because of sickness absence but also the “very serious crisis in recruitment and retention”.

Sickness cover drains budgets

Cabot Learning Federation's supply costs hit £2.3 million, up £500,000 on pre-Covid levels and rising twice as fast as its increased school numbers. A spokesperson said the pandemic's “lingering impact” pushed absence well above pre-Covid trends, with cover demand at “unprecedented highs”.

Cabot has had to look beyond its usual contractors to find staff, which “inevitably” hiked costs.

The bills at Plymouth CAST also jumped from £500,000 pre-pandemic to £636,000 in 2020-21 and £979,000 in the past academic year – despite a slight fall in school and pupil numbers.

The accounts from the trusts state schools “experienced significant pressure of teaching supply costs, due to heavy sickness through winter and spring of the academic year”.

Creative Education Trust said staff “stress levels and absence were high” in 2021-22, and highlighted “loss of key staff through resignation, ill health or otherwise” as one of the major risks facing its 17 schools. It

Leora Cruddas



spent £2.85 million on agency staff.

Last week Schools Week reported how high sickness absence continued into this academic year. Data from software firm Arbor showed staff absences last term at double 2019 levels.

Recruitment woes exacerbate demand

Gavin Beart, the education managing director at recruiters Reed, said Covid absences had “added fuel to the fire” of pre-pandemic recruitment challenges.

Accounts from the Northern Education Trust showed recruitment had been “significantly challenging”, with some posts remaining vacant throughout the year “despite rigorous efforts to recruit staff and increased employee incentive schemes”.

Its agency bills reached £3.6 million, up from £2.7 million two years before. The 34 per cent jump is twice the rate of its growth in school numbers.

Even a trust founded by Lord Agnew, a former academies minister, warned of a “nationwide shortage of qualified teachers, with high numbers of individuals leaving the profession”.

Inspiration Trust added “soaring” wider costs and higher-than-expected staff pay would force it to tap reserves and limit some spending plans, blaming this too on “political instability”.

Pupil numbers have risen 27 per cent faster than teachers since 2017, with 3,600 more teachers needed to keep pace, analysis of official figures shows.

An Institute for Fiscal Studies report this week suggested recruitment and retention “have got worse this year”.

The National Education Union said this was “no surprise” given real-terms pay cuts. It warned that pupils would “suffer greatly” from teacher shortages,

linking it to its current strike ballot.

Ofsted's annual report last month warned staffing shortages and Covid absences had “compounded” the pandemic's impact on children's progress since schools reopened.

“It also delayed the return of sports, drama, music and other programmes,” it said.

Knock-on supply shortages

Niall Bradley, the chair of the National Supply Teachers Network, said demand had evaporated during lockdown, but rose for much of the pandemic – including autumn last year, despite the relaxation of Covid isolation rules.

Demand last half-term at supply matching service Zen Educate jumped almost a third year-on-year.

Ofsted itself also noted Covid absences “left gaps not easily filled by the limited number of supply teachers”.

Figures are unavailable for England, but the number of supply teachers in Wales dropped 11 per cent between 2019 and 2021.

Beart claimed while Reed had not hiked costs, some agencies “have used this time to capitalise” with higher demand driving up teachers' rates.

However, he said many supply teachers were still earning no more than they did a decade ago, with staff not covered by national pay frameworks.

Half the supply teachers in a 2021 poll earned less than £125 a day. Ark Schools recently advertised for cover supervisors for as little as £74 a day, and supply teachers as little as £110.

A spokesperson said it paid supervisors “fairly”, with only a “tiny percentage” earning the “entry-level” minimum threshold and pay above the living wage.

Beart said many new teachers' first jobs were as supply staff, but some left teaching altogether because of “dire rates and lots of pressure” – suggesting higher rates could help wider retention problems.

NEWS: ENERGY

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Energy support scaled back for schools from April

TOM BELGER

@TOM_BELGER

Schools will get energy support from April, but only those paying the highest rates will benefit and financial support has been vastly scaled back.

The government confirmed this week that schools will get support after the current £18 billion energy bill relief scheme ends in March, alongside other public sector bodies, charities and businesses.

However, fewer schools are eligible under the new Energy Bills Discount Scheme, which runs for 12 months from April 1.

Under the new scheme, only those paying above £107 per megawatt hour for gas or £302/MWh for electricity will receive help, automatically applied to bills.

The previous scheme had significantly lower thresholds of £75 per unit of gas and £211 for electricity.

Fewer than one in five schools surveyed by the Department for Education last spring – the most recent data available – would be eligible now if they remain on the same tariffs.

Many will have entered costlier contracts since. Yet the average school taking out a new deal last April – a common period for renewals – would have had gas and electricity prices capped under the previous scheme. But they will lose this under the new scheme, according to *Schools Week* analysis of data from brokers Zenergi.

They stand to lose a discount worth about £5,000 a year if their usage is in line with a recent government case study explaining the existing scheme.

Meanwhile, the average school taking out a year-long contract now would have to be paying twice current market rates for gas – and triple what schools polled in the spring were paying – to qualify for support.

Schools Week previously reported how even under the previous scheme, some schools were likely to have their costs double on previous levels.

Financial support is capped

The government noted wholesale prices



had fallen significantly in recent months. The measures would still help some of those “locked into contracts signed before recent substantial falls...and provide others with reassurance against the risk of prices rises again”.

Price thresholds are around half of what schools renewing in August faced when the market spiked, keeping their costs down.

But the government is also no longer guaranteeing it will cover all costs above its thresholds, potentially raising costs further for those on particularly expensive tariffs.

The unit discount will be capped at £6.97 per megawatt hour for gas, and £19.61/MWh will be applied to electricity bills.

Support under the new scheme is capped at £5.5 billion.

The government said the lower level of support “strikes a balance between supporting businesses over the next 12 months and limiting taxpayer’s exposure to volatile energy

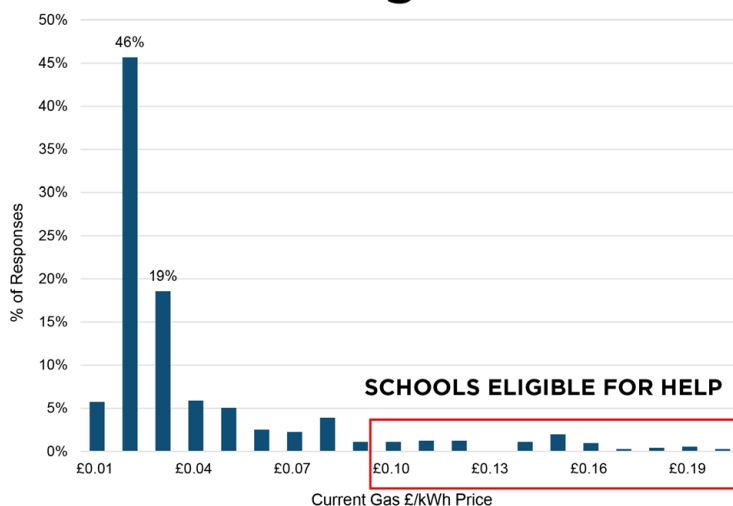
markets”.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said the announcement provided “welcome clarity after months of uncertainty” on whether schools would receive any help beyond March.

But he added: “While it is right that there is a discount for those with the highest bills, we are concerned that many schools may not be eligible.”

He also warned some special schools faced especially high costs because of provision such as hydrotherapy pools, but were not included among high-usage sectors eligible for a separate support package also unveiled this week.

School gas costs



Note: Respondents circled in red would be eligible for support.
Source: DfE survey, spring 2022 (most recent figures available).

NEWS: UNIONS

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Two candidates vie for the NEU top job

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

The race to lead the National Education Union – which represents about 450,000 school staff – will be between former president Daniel Kebede and deputy general secretary Niamh Sweeney.

Dr Mary Bousted and Kevin Courtney, the present joint leaders, will stand down this year, having run the union since its 2017 formation from the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL).

The union will now be led by one general secretary. An election will be held after two candidates emerged from a nominations process that closed last month.

Kebede, who served as the union's president last year, and Sweeney, who became the NEU's first elected deputy general secretary in October 2021, were the only two names put forward. They had a deadline of last Monday if they wanted to withdraw.

Sweeney, a sixth-form college teacher and Labour councillor in Cambridge, is seen as a moderate. She was active in the ATL before the two unions merged.

Her election in 2021 as deputy general secretary was seen as an upset after she beat two challengers from established factions on the left of the union.

Kebede, who was active in the NUT before the new union formed, has taught in early years, primary and secondary schools and is backed by the union's left wing.

Presiding over last year's NEU conference, Kebede defended Bridget Phillipson, the shadow education secretary, when she was heckled from the floor, describing delegates as acting like "children".

But he faced criticism after posting an NEU statement on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which said the crisis must "not lead to the expansion and consolidation of military alliances in Europe". The union later withdrew the statement "pending further discussion".

Bousted and Courtney have been



Daniel Kebede and Niamh Sweeney

prominent in the education sector and trade union movement for decades.

Courtney was deputy general secretary of the NUT from 2010 to 2016, when he was elected to replace Christine Blower as its boss. He was previously a physics teacher, an NUT activist and official.

Bousted ran the ATL from 2003 to 2017. She was an English teacher, a lecturer and then held senior roles in teacher training at Edge Hill and Kingston universities.

Kebede said following in the joint leaders' footsteps would be "a huge task for the next single general secretary", and said he was "thrilled" to be nominated.

"It is absolutely imperative that our union continues to be a force in the education debate."

He said education was "in crisis", with schools, colleges and children facing the same struggles.

"I am determined to lead a union that improves the lives of our members and children – one that lifts the pay of educators, wins fair funding for education, reduces workload to manageable levels, fights to end child poverty and returns joy to our classrooms."

Sweeney said she was "humbled and delighted by the support of colleagues across the country who have nominated me".



Dr Mary Bousted and Kevin Courtney

"This is a really important decision about the future of the union, so it is right there is going to be an election. Democracy across all levels of our union really matters."

Sweeney said she would "support all our members to be the best educators for all our children and young people."

"Members are backing me because I'm a strong, experienced candidate. I work day-in day-out with NEU members in all sectors of education to help them achieve what they need to improve their pay and working conditions."

Kebede was nominated by 101 districts while Sweeney received the backing of 25. But the election will be open to the entire membership.

The poll opens on February 6 and runs until March 31.



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NEWS IN BRIEF

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Information systems investigations closes

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has closed its investigation into England's largest school management information system (MIS) provider after it agreed to let eligible schools leave long-term contracts a year early.

But the watchdog will not rule on whether the company breached competition law when it scrapped normal one-year rolling contracts in favour of three-year deals.

Education Software Solutions (ESS) SIMS has given "legally binding" commitments to a break clause for eligible schools as part of the investigation launched last April. The CMA has now accepted these following a consultation with schools.

It means schools that "genuinely considered" switching providers before ESS SIMS scrapped one-year rolling contracts will now be able to apply to an independent adjudicator to exit their current three-year contracts on March 31 next year.

Schools said the change to contracts in autumn 2021 did not leave them enough time

to find new deals.

At the time, the Department for Education said it was looking into the change and encouraged "all schools to pause before agreeing to this new contract whilst we investigate", as revealed by *Schools Week*.

The CMA launched its investigation into whether the move was "anti-competitive", and whether ESS was "abusing a dominant position" to push the new contracts on to schools.

In November, the watchdog said the company – which is owned by Parent Pay – had offered legally binding assurances to allow some schools to escape contracts early.

At the time, the CMA proposed to accept the offer, believing it would address competition concerns by "giving affected schools the choice to exit their three-year contract and switch to another MIS supplier, facilitating competition".

Schools have until February 10 to apply for a break clause. They will know by the end of March if they have been successful.

DfE eases T-level work placement rules



The government has watered down its rules on T-level industry placements, allowing up to 20 per cent of hours to be delivered remotely in certain subjects.

Updated guidance lays out an "expectation" that students will "spend the majority of their placement hours in-person, within an external workplace setting".

Previous rules made clear that all placements, which must be a minimum of 315-hours (45 days), "cannot be delivered virtually/remotely, except for work taster activities".

The Department for Education said all T-level students could undertake a maximum of 35 hours of work taster activities as part of their placement remotely – a rule that has been in place since the launch of the qualification. The remaining hours must be delivered in person.

However, the DfE has made clear that in six of the 23 available subjects, 20 per cent of a student's industry placement hours can now be done remotely. The remote working can even take place from a learner's home in "exceptional cases" for digital, finance, legal services, management and administration, and media, broadcast and production.

For example, a digital student undertaking a 315-hour industry placement can spend up to nine days of it remotely.

Explaining the rationale behind this decision, the DfE's guidance said "hybrid placements" could be used in office-based environments where hybrid working was established.

This would "facilitate greater access to a wider range of employers as providers will be able to access businesses outside of their immediate local area".

[Full story here](#)

Post-16 providers get an extra £100 a head

Post-16 providers will receive a 2.2 per cent increase in the national base rate for full-time students aged 16 and 17 from August next year – equivalent to an extra £100 per head.

It means the rate for full-time 16 to 17-year-old learners on sixth-form courses of 580 hours or more will increase from £4,542 to £4,642 in the 2023-24 academic year.

The new rate will continue to fund the extra 40 hours per student requirement introduced this year, the Department for Education said.

But James Kewin, the deputy chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association, said a larger increase was needed and that some changes could "dampen the impact of the rise".

"We would also like to have seen a much-needed increase to bursary and free meal funding and will continue to make the case for adequate student support funding alongside a major increase to the funding rate," he said.

The funding bands for T-levels have also been upped by between £1,174 and £1,624, depending on number of study hours.



It comes as part of the £1.6 billion funding commitment in the three-year spending review period up to 2024-25.

The DfE said that programme cost weightings have also been increased for engineering and manufacturing, construction and digital subjects to help providers, colleges and sixth forms with the additional burden of recruiting and retaining teachers in those sectors.

The overall cash boost is worth about £125 million for 2023-24 – £85 million from the 2.2 per cent increase and £40 million in the subject-specific funding.

ANALYSIS: POST-16 MATHS

Impact of £57m grant to boost maths take-up criticised

JASON NOBLE

@JASON_NOBLE89

Schools that traditionally have larger numbers of pupils already studying maths post-16 have taken the bulk of cash under a government initiative aimed at boosting take-up, analysis shows.

Nick Gibb, the schools minister, said in 2018 the advanced maths premium (AMP) would “open up the opportunity” for more young people to study the subject.

A total of £56.7 million has been paid out in the past four years. But 86 per cent has gone to schools and just 14 per cent to colleges, which provide about 25 per cent of level 3 maths entries.

Maths remains the most popular group of subjects at A-level, with just shy of 90,000 entries this summer.

Eddie Playfair, the senior policy manager at the Association of Colleges, said: “The AMP has played out in a very lopsided way and probably hasn’t done what it set out to do, which was to incentivise growth.

“It’s a bit of a paradox to be incentivising something that is already very popular.”

The premium is paid to providers for the numbers of students studying level 3 maths courses – AS-levels, A-levels or core maths – above a baseline figure.

To date, the baseline has been calculated as an average of level 3 maths learners in 2015-16 and 2017-18 academic years, with the payment made to institutions at £600 per student above that figure.

Analysis by Playfair found the biggest beneficiary was Brompton Manor Academy in London with £280,800 allocated for 2022-23.

Brompton is a highly-selective sixth form dubbed the “East End Eton” for the number of its students who go on to study at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

The second largest beneficiary was Hereford Sixth Form College, with just over £250,000.

But the analysis found a number



Eddie Playfair



of general further education colleges and sixth-form colleges with high numbers of maths students – more than 350 – failed to get a penny. They included Peter Symonds College in Winchester with more than 600 maths entries, as well as Runshaw College, Lancashire, and Exeter College that each had about 500.

The premium rules mean funding rewarded those that had escalated their maths student numbers on the baseline, rather than those with consistently high numbers of level 3 maths learners, Playfair said.

“Colleges have told us it hasn’t changed their behaviours, so the fact there is an advanced maths premium hasn’t made them promote maths any more than they already do.

“The big beneficiaries have been newer and more selective school providers that are growing, rather than those who already had high numbers and are keeping them up,” he tweeted.

But Ed Senior, the principal of Worcester Sixth Form College, which received more than £178,000 for 2022-23, said the premium had been instrumental in boosting level 3 maths.

And Peter Cooper, the chief executive of the Heart of Mercia Trust that runs Hereford and Worcester sixth form colleges, said the funding had allowed it to encourage the take-up of core maths, believing it helped

achievement in other subjects.

But from 2023-24, the baseline funding will be calculated on an average of the 2019-20 and 2020-21 data, which means the pay-outs will likely be smaller.

“The adjustment to a new baseline means we will get no money at all for doing the course in the future. This now perversely forces us to do less of it as we would have to take the money from other areas. A prime example of central bureaucratic incompetence in implementing a worthy aim,” Cooper said.

The DfE’s advanced maths premium guidance says that its processes will ensure “only genuine increases in level 3 maths participation attract the premium,” saying it will “monitor behaviour at institution level to indicate adverse behaviour and may follow up where data gives us cause for concern.”

Core maths qualifications were announced in December 2014 as a means of aiding progression in maths post-16 for students who did not want to study maths at A-level. In 2022 there were 12,311 entries – the highest number since the first exams in 2016 when just under 3,000 entries were reported.

Playfair said that “at the very least it would have been better to spend this money on volumes,” as it would reward providers for consistently delivering A-level maths.

The DfE has been approached for comment.

NEWS

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Birbalsingh stands down from commission

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

College principal Alun Francis has taken over as interim chair of the social mobility commission after headteacher Katharine Birbalsingh stood down last week.

Writing in *Schools Week*, Birbalsingh said her controversial opinions “put the commission in jeopardy” and was doing “more harm than good”.

Francis, principal of Oldham College and the commission's former deputy chair, said it had had a “fantastic 12 months” and continued to go from “strength to strength”.

Birbalsingh – Britain's so-called “strictest headteacher” at Michaela Community School in north London – was appointed to lead the commission in November 2021.

The outspoken leader has always courted controversy and was widely criticised after telling a parliamentary committee hearing that girls shunned physics because they would rather not do “hard maths”.

But her comments about shifting the social mobility focus away from Oxbridge were inaccurately reported by a national newspaper, leading to a correction.

Writing exclusively for *Schools Week*, Birbalsingh said she “comes with too much baggage”.

“Over this past year, I have become increasingly aware that my propensity to voice opinions that are considered controversial puts the commission in jeopardy.”



Katharine Birbalsingh

“Instead of going out there to bat for the team and celebrate our achievements, I am becoming a politician. And I can't bear the idea of ever being a politician. It just isn't who I am or a skillset I wish to develop.”

At Michaela, she said, governors could “decide whether or not they wish to employ me despite my outspoken nature. So I feel free to comment on society.”

“But as chair of the commission, people feel I need to be impartial and it irks many that for many years I have been anything but. So in some people's minds, I am not right for the job.”

“Sadly, I have come to agree.”

The commission is investigating which teaching styles work best to boost outcomes for poorer pupils, with critics questioning whether it would solely recommend the approaches used by Birbalsingh's school.

Michaela has been dubbed the strictest school

in the country, with silent corridors and other controversial policies such as ditching SEND labels and giving detentions for failing to have a pen.

“Leaving before key research takes place on schools also allows that work to happen without my perceived influence,” Birbalsingh said.

Mark Lehair, a former adviser at the Department for Education and the head of education at the centre-right think tank Centre for Policy Studies, said Birbalsingh's “reputation for independence of mind ... guaranteed that the SMC would pursue its own agenda, rather than slavishly toe the government line”.

However Sam Freedman, also a former government adviser, said it was the “correct decision”, saying it was “never a sensible role for her and it shouldn't have been offered”.

The government this week said it had “no plans to review the job specification” following Birbalsingh's resignation.

TOM BELGER | @TOM_BELGER

E-ACT appoints new chief executive

Tom Campbell has been appointed as the permanent chief executive of E-ACT, after leading the 28-school trust last year in an interim role.

Campbell took over after the suspension of the former chief executive, Jane Millward.

A trust spokesperson said this week Millward had decided to “move on”. It had previously said she was “away from work”, and did not confirm her suspension when it was first revealed by *Schools Week* in November 2021.

Millward, a former Ofsted inspector, was appointed chief executive in 2019 after joining

the trust in 2017.

“During her time at the trust our academies have been transformed, and almost all are now judged to be good or outstanding. E-ACT is in excellent financial health,” the spokesperson said. Trustees “wish Jane well for the future”.

Campbell started as substantive chief executive this month after joining in December 2021 on secondment from Greenwood Academies Trust, where he was chief education officer.

He is a member of the Department for Education's secondary headteacher

reference group, which advises on policy.

He was principal of Fullhurst Community College in Leicester, where he said on LinkedIn that he had “turned around one of the country's most challenging schools into one of the highest-performing” in the region.

E-ACT is also recruiting for two new members. Michael Wilshaw, the former chief inspector, left last March after only seven months, while businessman David Roper left in 2021.

Last year E-ACT also revealed it had commissioned advisers to see if certain payments had breached funding rules.



Tom Campbell



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Feature

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL

How the MAT era is squeezing out small schools

Small schools can be the last bastion of a sense of place in communities that have lost their local pub, post office, doctor's surgery or bus services.

Jo Luxford, an executive principal in Dartmoor, describes her three primaries in Dartmoor, which all have fewer than 30 pupils, as "the beating heart of our village communities ... acting as hubs for families and fulfilling a unique and important role".

"It is an honour and a privilege to teach in a tiny school because if we get it right we are a window on the world, a social space and a beacon of hope for the future in areas where these things are few and far between."

Since 1980, the number of primary schools in England with 200 or fewer pupils has halved from 11,464 to 5,784, analysis of data from FFT Education Datalab and Onward shows.

While it's not clear how many of these closed

or just expanded, 71 small primaries have closed altogether since the end of 2019 – despite the number of state-funded primaries overall increasing by 17 in that time, up to 16,786.

The MAT problem

Speaking at a children's services directors' conference last summer, Paul Cohen, the Department for Education's deputy director for school improvement and MAT growth, said there

Feature: Small schools

has been an historic pattern in which small schools have been unattractive to MATs that “we have to break”.

“There is a part of me that feels if existing MATs are not prepared to take them on, then we need new MATs.”

Government data from June shows there are now 2,034 state-funded primary schools with 100 or fewer pupils. Of those, 626 are academies – 31 per cent – compared with 39 per cent of primaries overall. (We excluded new free schools in our analysis).

Seamus Murphy, the chief executive of Turner Schools, cites “challenges around mixed [age] classes, recruitment, cost and particularly building cost” as reasons why trusts, including his own, are “really reluctant” to take on small schools.

In a report last year, the Commons public accounts committee warned that “financially struggling”, “small secular” and “rural” primaries were becoming “orphaned”.

“There’s a real risk we end up with some stronger schools being taken into trusts but leaving some unable to make friends because financially, they’re just not going to be viable,” says Paul Wagstaff, director of education and skills at West Sussex.

Around half of West Sussex’s primaries have fewer than 150 pupils.

Andy Park, an executive headteacher within Prosper Learning Trust, which has eight schools in Greater Manchester, says while trusts can “utilise their forms to support smaller contexts, they cannot do that if long term the school is not viable.

“If it’s not viable for a local authority, it’s not going to be viable for a trust.”

David Whitehead, the chief executive of Our Community, an MAT of ten mostly church schools with two small schools in Kent, says this leaves those playing a vital role in sustaining rural communities “stuck between a rock and a hard place. [They are] surrounded by lots of MATs that don’t want them and



Black Torrington Church of England Primary school

‘If we get it right we are a window on the world’

dwindling support from their local authorities”.

With a “perfect storm brewing”, he says it is “wrong that some MATs treat themselves as businesses... fundamentally our job is education. If a small school wants to work with us, then I feel duty bound to work with them.”

Are churches their saviour?

Our analysis shows 56 per cent of the state-funded primaries with fewer than 100 pupils are still run by the Church of England.

The Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust, which has 39 primaries – half with fewer than 150 pupils – predominantly in Cambridgeshire, is “underpinned” by its “Christian distinctiveness”.

Adrian Ball, its chief executive, believes “following God’s values helps us recognise the importance of keeping these schools going. But equally we won’t keep them going if it means being too much of a drain on the rest of the trust.”

A 2018 report by the CoE education office, “Embracing Change: Rural and Small Schools”, advised leaders to be

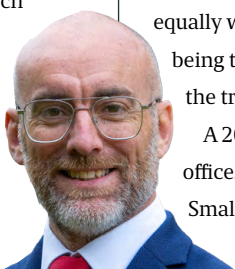


Campaigner Catherine Leeson (middle) outside since-closed Ripley primary school, Surrey

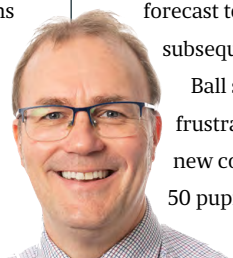
realistic about the future and take into account projected demographic developments “in the best interests of children and the education they deserve to receive”.

The Diocese of Ely trust merged two schools last year in west Norfolk because one of them, Wormegay, had only 25 students and was forecast to go down to single figures in the subsequent five years.

Ball says “pockets of angry and frustrated parents” objected, but the new combined school – Holy Cross – has 50 pupils, enough to fill three classes



Adrian Ball, chief executive of the Diocese of Ely MAT



David Whitehead, CEO of Our Community

Feature: Small schools

rather than the two each school had previously.

The religious affiliation has not helped all schools. Ripley Primary in Surrey closed in 2018, despite having between 140 and 170 students in the prior years.

Mervyn Benford of the National Association of Small Schools says two secular MATs stepped forwards to take the school on, pledging to follow Christian principles. But the Diocese of Guildford turned them down and the site now houses a pre-school.

Campaigner Catherine Leeson says Ripley had had a school since 1874. "For four years, the community was really fighting for and championing this school, they really believed in it."

Many parents now drive their children to another primary two miles away.

Most of Kent's small rural primaries are church schools, which Murphy says makes it "impossible" for his non-religious MAT to take them on "even if we wanted to, because it would involve changes to our designation".

Ofsted sets up small school taskforce

Small schools are also much more likely to get poor Ofsted grades.

Of the 424 graded Ofsted inspections of primaries with fewer than 200 pupils in 2021-22, just 62 per cent were rated 'good' or 'outstanding' (60 per cent of which were 'good'). This compares with 88 per cent of all schools that are rated 'good' nationally.

Whitehead says the ratings have "unintended consequences" because even a small reduction in pupil numbers threatens their survival.

His MAT took on Lynsted and Norton, in Sittingbourne, last year as part of a merger. The school was in special measures and its intake fell from 10-15 pupils to six this September.

"This school has a huge deficit and a reduced number of children coming in, so unless we get government support it is going to really struggle."

Whitehead accuses Ofsted of "not operating on a level playing field. If you're in a small school, one person could be leading three or four



Bradford Primary School

'They are surrounded by MATs that don't want them'

subjects – other schools might have heads of department as well as individual subject leads. But the same framework applies to all."

Ofsted acknowledges that small schools face some particular challenges. "However, we always take each school's circumstances into account on inspection, including the very smallest. However, the inspectorate has formed a new taskforce, which includes the National Association of Small Schools, to advise on how it can improve inspector training on curriculum at small schools.

'It's a bit Robin Hood'

Small schools have increasingly formed "federations" to share resources.

Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust has three secondaries and 14 small primaries, including



Holycross C of E school



Ripley Primary

the three schools run by Luxford.

"We see ourselves as a big team across lots of sites," she says. "It's impossible for two teachers

Feature: Small schools

be experts in every subject, but in our trust we have science and English leads who work across schools and a shared Senco. In the past the head was also Senco and designated safeguarding lead, and juggling all that is difficult.”

While Ball admits that teachers in small schools have to be “jacks of all trades”, his trust has aligned its curriculum across its schools “so the initial heavy lifting in terms of content is all done centrally”.

But being in a trust “doesn’t necessarily ensure financial stability”, he says, with MATs with small schools facing “more financial challenges”.

“We reallocate our money to support small schools – it’s a bit Robin Hood. We pool [capital] funding where we can to fix roofs and boilers, where schools on their own don’t always have the money.”

Whitehead says his 10-school trust’s finances are “balance[d] because of what the other schools bring to the picture”.

But the Lynsted and Norton school’s deficit, now sitting at £300,000, is one “we cannot fix by ourselves. We’ve talked to the [government] and there is no support whatsoever.”

“I’m not going to give up on this school. But it needs support beyond us to get it back on track financially.”

More problems on the horizon

There is also an upcoming drop in pupil numbers to consider: primary numbers across England are due to fall by 16.6 per cent over the next 10 years – more than 750,000 fewer pupils.

Ball says the Diocese of Ely can already identify which schools will be hit. “We’re looking at how with declining pupil numbers we can realign staffing structures to bring costs down. But there’s only so far we can go – we still need bodies in there to teach.”

Consortium Trust has nine primaries in Suffolk and two in Norfolk, most of which have fewer than 100 pupils.

Andrew Aalders-Dunthorne, its chief executive, says any drop in pupil numbers has a more significant financial and viability impact on a small school. His trust plans to take on larger



Jo Luxford at Bradford Primary School

‘Taking them on would change our designation’

schools to balance against the pressures faced by its small schools, with two large special schools being admitted in April.

But he believes the current funding system – based on funding per pupil – “penalises schools with relatively fewer pupils.”

Some local authorities are clustering small schools to create a more attractive package for MATs.

But Murphy says there are “only so many of those you can take on without subsidising the education of the majority of children in the trust – there are always trade-offs.”

The Church of England has also estimated that schools in rural areas would need to belong to trusts with at least 35 schools for it to add up, the Church Times reported last year. Less than one per cent of trusts (22) currently have 35 schools or more.

Tanya Ovenden-Hope, an education professor at Plymouth Marjon University, says national MATs do not grasp the value small schools play

to their communities. “The more localised the MAT, the more likely it is to put time and effort into supporting and saving those small schools”.

Ball sees his small schools as “a constant” in geographically isolated areas where “other services have declined”.

Murphy suggests local areas raising council tax to keep such schools open, but acknowledges the move is likely to be unpopular.

“This is a case of politicians wanting the sector to solve a problem that is not of the sector’s making.”

Luxford believes that “at their best”, small schools can be “really agile and innovative. They’re not big juggernauts to change and if they are able to leverage that agility, they can do really great things.”

A spokesperson for the Department for Education says that under the national funding formula, cash for small rural schools has doubled from £42 million in 2021-22 to £95 million in 2022-2023.



Tanya Ovenden-Hope

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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STEPHEN
LOCKYER

Primary teacher, London

OpenAI: How the new tech can drastically cut workload

Primary teacher, Stephen Lockyer is stunned at how well the ChatGPT tool planned his lessons and sets out his Top tips for making the most of its capabilities

ChatGPT is the latest iteration of OpenAI, one the leading artificial intelligence tools that will essentially generate anything you ask it to. It's been around for a while, but 2023 is the year teachers have woken up to its potential.

Until now, I've been primarily using AI to create visual stimuli for specific tasks. In effect, I have found it easier and faster to generate the images in my mind to stimulate writing or illustrate handouts than to scroll through Google Images for their likeness. ChatGPT does the same for text. If you can type it, ChatGPT can probably type it for you – smarter and faster, albeit with fewer personal touches.

So, egged on by all the media attention, I decided to recruit the software to help me with my biggest bugbear: Fear Of The Empty Lesson Plan Template. I asked ChatGPT to plan three lessons, gave it the criteria and a rough lesson layout, and was astounded by how quickly

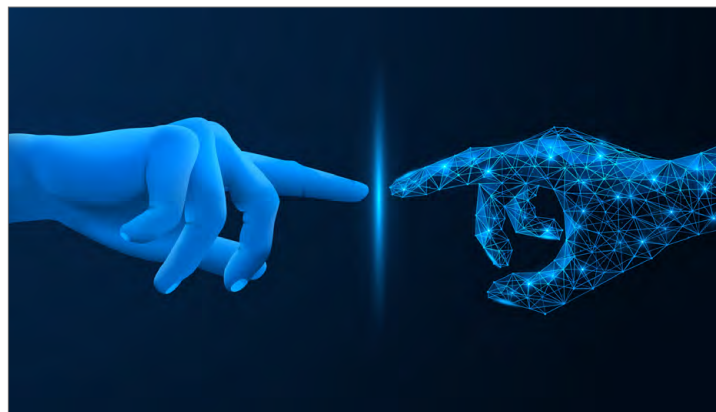
and well it managed to produce a bare-bones lesson plan unit.

When I shared the results on Twitter, it's fair to say it blew up, beating my "show your cat socially distancing" tweet of 2020 by some margin. Most comments recognised that it could immediately be a force for good, saving hours, but others pointed out three areas of concern.

The robots are coming for our jobs

Some saw this as the final nail in the profession's coffin. Others derided the plans themselves. Congratulations to both groups for missing the point. Just as a Nigella recipe can result in carnage in my kitchen, these plans can be brilliant on paper and totally ineffective in the classroom. They can also be bad, but easier to improve on than to create from scratch.

The point is that we can't complain about workload and resist a dumb tool that offers to remove a lot of the grunt work. Try it. Your jaw will drop. Paste in a story and ask it to write six VIPER questions about it or ask it to write a parent letter about next week's cake sale. It can do all of that and more, and do it effectively given the correct inputs.



“It quickly produced a bare-bones lesson plan

The end of assessment as we know it

Imagine this terrifying scenario: Teacher uses AI to generate question; students use AI to generate answers; teacher uses AI to mark answers.

Nightmarish, right? Also unlikely at this point. Regardless, further and higher education settings are already exploring the "Milestones" model, whereby versions of an assignment are handed in or evidence of a development are submitted. If you use Google Drive, this is already baked in with "previous versions". Cheating adapts. So does assessment.

'Danger panic'

"This Bad Thing will make teachers lazy, so we must ban or block it." I'd humbly suggest leaders who are considering doing this test it out for themselves first and see what workload it can relieve for them. Their hourly rate is greater, and I can't imagine any headteacher applied for the role hoping to spend hours writing administrative

documents.

Imagine what teachers could do if they spent less time at their laptops, or how they might feel with some of their evenings and weekends back.

Top tips

For image generating, the two frontrunners are DALL-E and Midjourney. Midjourney is the better of the two overall, but appallingly designed and not for the Discord-uninitiated.

The power of AI lies in input so be as specific as possible with requests, including word limits, key words and what to avoid.

ChatGPT is designed for your enquiry to be the basis of a conversation, so ask follow-up questions. Could you add more detail to the third paragraph? Can you turn those ideas into a bulleted list? Can you generate more challenges to that concept?

I'd share more, but why bother? Just get ChatGPT to fill in the gaps.

This article is the second of 3-part series on the implications of openAI software for teaching and learning.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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STEVE EDMONDS
Director of advice and guidance,
National Governance Association

Governance professionals need a clear career pathway

The people who keep the governance show on the road are too often “out of sight, out of mind”. The NGA is determined that must change, writes Steve Edmonds

The National Governance Association takes every opportunity to highlight the work of governing boards. We support and encourage the 250,000 volunteers governing our state schools to stand up and shout about what they do and the difference they make.

What may come as a surprise is that we also champion and celebrate the people who ensure that boards stay out of the spotlight, because governance is almost invisible when it is working well: the 20,000 or more paid governance professionals. Most of them are clerks, which governing boards are required to have, and includes all those who provide strategic leadership of services supporting governance across a number of schools.

They keep the governance show on the road, support a volunteer workforce to stay on the right side of complex rules and procedures and ensure decisions are made in the interests of children and young people. It is one of the most

important professions in education, yet it is held back by its outdated image and is easily overlooked.

This must change if we are to attract and retain people with the skills and knowledge needed to ensure our schools and trusts are guided by an effective and robust governance structure that exemplifies ethical standards.

Changes in school structures and the creation of academies and MATs have led to more complicated and multi-layered governance arrangements. These carry greater risks because of the requirements of education and charity law.

While clerks fulfil an invaluable role, they are no longer the sole level of professional support needed to ensure effective governance. MATs and commercial service providers are developing roles at a leadership level and are seeking skilled and qualified individuals to quality assure governance across schools, line manage, develop clerks and design governance models that align with their strategies for future growth.

At the same time, many governance professionals in schools and trusts are also building a career that incorporates training and consultancy. Currently, half the designated national leaders of governance work in governance



“Governance is almost invisible when it is working well

professional roles, most of them as lead governance professionals in trusts. This is far removed from the traditional view of the governance professional as part-time clerk and minute-taker.

The NGA has long believed that there needs to be a vehicle for raising the profile, status and reward of a profession that makes an invaluable contribution and is a crucial vehicle for attracting new entrants. Through extensive consultation, we have created the career pathway, a free resource that contains a wealth of information and links to resources. It is designed to support individuals to develop and progress as governance professionals either within or working towards one of three levels our research found most governance professional roles fall under – clerking, governance co-ordinator and lead governance professional.

Within each level of the pathway are examples of relevant job titles, a description of the type of work and hours involved, a broad estimate of earning potential and a summary of

individual requirements, including qualifications and CPD.

The pathway doesn't just serve current and aspiring governance professionals. Far from it. The content is also highly relevant to governing boards and employers in schools, trusts and service providers. We hope they will use it to improve their understanding of the expertise and value that a governance professional brings to a school or trust and reflect it in the approach they take to recruitment, line management, appraisal, pay and ensuring an entitlement to professional learning.

With enough momentum and “buy in” from the sector, the career pathway can be a game-changer, both for building a stronger governance professional workforce and for giving the experts who are so vital to governance the credit and support they deserve.

When it comes to the often invisible efforts of governance professionals, we can't afford “out of sight” to mean “out of mind”. The future of good governance demands it.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Schools must be more than exam factories, say Nitesh Gor and Mike Ion as they outline how their trust is developing an holistic dimension to education

The purpose of school is a big question that our trust thinks is important to discuss, not just with staff but perhaps more importantly with parents and pupils. Avanti exists to help each person become a well-rounded human being through intellectual, moral and spiritual growth, and so make the world a better place.

Like many education leaders, we are concerned that state schools are being pushed towards becoming exam factories, concentrating their energies on securing high attainment and progress and thus giving too little attention to the overall development of the child and their character. We also believe the obsession with outcomes has often been at the cost of innovative learning and creative teaching.

We make this point as leaders of a high-performing multi-academy trust (MAT) whose schools achieve outcomes that rank in the top 5 per cent of all state schools nationally. We believe passionately that the pursuit of education excellence is a vital part of school improvement, but it is not enough for young people to emerge from our schools with only academic achievement. This is only a part of the whole-school journey. High attainment can never be more than part of the story of the responsibility of schools to children, to parents and to the wider community.

We strongly believe that our schools should focus as much on character-building and spiritual insight as they do on academic attainment, not as an alternative to it but as an essential adjunct. Our over-arching approach to

NITESH
GOR

CEO, Avanti
Schools Trust

MIKE
ION

Education director,
Avanti Schools Trust

Our challenging times demand more than academic attainment

education is captured in our "Avanti Way", which outlines our philosophy of education and makes the case for children having a sound grasp of moral virtues such as empathy, integrity and courage.

to develop character or uncover spiritual insight. But just because it is difficult, or because it is less tangible, or because it can be a nightmare to try and measure, does not mean that we shouldn't try. We cannot abdicate

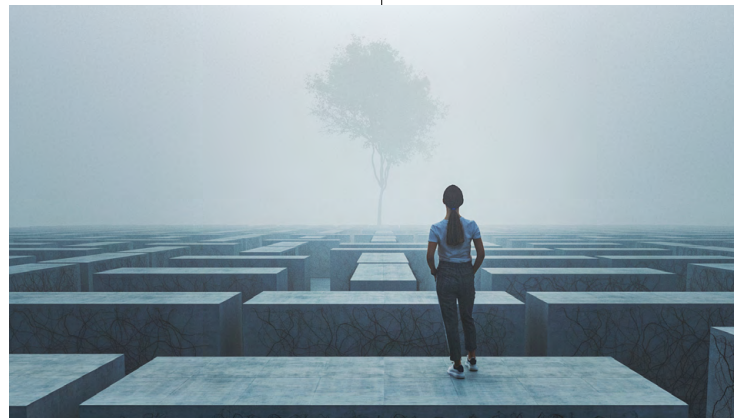
"High attainment can never be more than part of the story"

Our own experience is that such an approach will also lead to improvements in the classroom. But this level of understanding doesn't just happen; it needs to be nurtured and encouraged.

We do not underestimate the challenge. It is not an easy thing

the school's role in this crucial aspect of human endeavour and growth.

Conversely, it is precisely because it is so challenging that schools are so well-placed to support this holistic dimension to education. Part of the answer to character development is modelling, and where better for



young people to find adults they can look up to than here?

This is why we spend a lot of time encouraging and facilitating all adults within our MAT to take up the same challenge that we pose to our pupils of developing character and uncovering spiritual insight. We cannot expect adults to guide pupils on a path that they themselves are unwilling to tread.

To that end, we offer residential experiences to all staff that focus on wellbeing and include practical exercises and seminars based on character formation and spiritual insight. Stemming from these, conversation groups proved so popular with pupils and adults alike that we are beginning to train facilitators so that every pupil and every adult has this experience at least once a week.

We are also investing in our yoga and meditation curriculum and a new personal development curriculum, both in collaboration with experts. In addition, we have started implementing a 360-degree feedback model matched against the trust's core principles with our executive team, which we plan to roll out for all senior leaders. Meanwhile, our new pastoral system will support every child and adult in our schools proactively, not just reactively.

At a time when schools are increasingly becoming central hubs for their communities, our focus on purpose and character is delivering innovative solutions to wellbeing and cohesion within and without the school gates.

That's something academic attainment alone could never deliver, and it is vital in these challenging times.

Opinion

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RACHAEL GREEN

Assistant vice principal
for quality of education,
Manchester Academy

We must rethink English for our times to prevent its decline

Too many pupils see English simply as a gateway to further education. So the subject must adapt to reflect the reality of their lives, says Rachel Green

There are many reasons to love English and the many core skills it offers pupils. Critical, independent thinking teaches them how to interpret information throughout their lives. Developing socio-emotional intelligence creates confident, articulate and empathic adults. However, passing on that passion is becoming increasingly challenging. As a result, the next generation risks missing out.

At Manchester Academy, we have a wide mix of learners and abilities. An inner-city school for years 7 to 11, 80 per cent of our pupils have EAL, 65 per cent are eligible for additional funding and a higher-than-average number have SEND. Pupils are highly aspirational and a good English qualification is key to their futures.

Pupils enjoy English and build strong relationships with English teachers. Yet, for many, its value is purely functional; a gateway to further education. Aspirations around high grades are more about the best college places

than enjoyment of the subject. The 5+ grade is everything, and appreciation of language and literature is being lost.

It is easy to understand why pupils are attracted to subjects such as maths, business and the sciences; the lure of high-status and high-salary careers is powerful in the current economic climate. To combat this, we incorporate role models and pathways to future careers in our lessons and materials to emphasise the links between English and employability.

We also find ourselves battling a misconception that getting top grades in the subject is near-impossible. Pupils see English as more subjective than maths or the sciences, and this is off-putting for high-achievers who want high grades across the board, as well as those with lower prior attainment who want to feel safe about their exam prospects. Demonstrating that good grades are within reach, and how they are achievable, is essential.

If we want more pupils to take English beyond GCSE, we must think about the spectrum of learners approaching English today. It must be adaptable to suit their individual learning needs, providing a real-world variety that reflects them. Are the texts you study likely to attract



“Appreciation of language and literature is being lost

and appeal to this generation?

New, more future-facing GCSE courses such as Edexcel's English 2.0 not only expose pupils to a diversity of authors and narratives but give scope for teachers to utilise texts that they feel work best for their cohorts. Focusing on small chunks from longer texts in course modules allows our most able pupils to deeply analyse the language, while pupils who struggle are less likely to be overwhelmed.

There has already been a sizeable shift to include more representative texts within qualifications and school curriculums. This enables learners to see links between English and other subjects, opening their eyes to the world around them and undoubtedly helps regain interest among pupils considering arts or humanities subjects.

In recent years, exam pressure and the removal of coursework have left teachers with limited opportunities to explore beyond specifications. My colleagues try to address this by interweaving some of the forgotten, highly-relevant aspects of English into classwork,

such as using quality pieces of journalism when teaching pupils to evaluate writers' techniques, and introducing concepts of global English or language/gender identity into analyses.

This kind of specialism, which features more strongly at A level, can go far to spark student engagement. So do opportunities for pupils to look at the subject through the lens of what matters to them, especially during independent-working projects – when researching for their spoken language endorsement, for instance.

The English syllabus is designed to have broad appeal, but if we don't hone in on the intricacies of the subject itself, we are doing it and our pupils a disservice. In the short term, sharing elements of the A level syllabus as well as sampling A level lessons can positively influence many who feel unsure about their next steps.

Meanwhile, looking ahead to what the system needs to aim for is critical: to that future in which English supports all types of learners to engage, aspire and achieve.

THE REVIEW

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GREAT TEACHING

Authors: Pedro De Bruyckere, Casper Hulshof and Liese Missinne

Publisher: SAGE

Publication date: July 2022

ISBN: 1529767504

Reviewer: Marc Smith, chartered psychologist and education author

It's only in the past few years that psychology has played a larger role in teaching and learning, despite many aspects of psychology relating directly to it. However, there has been a tendency to place psychology under the umbrella of cognitive science and to focus on aspects of memory rather than a much broader appreciation of multiple psychological approaches. This results in a plethora of books on cognitive load theory, direct instruction and other aspects related to the retention of information, often to the detriment of other important areas.

The Psychology of Great Teaching is different, attempting – with varying degrees of success – to cover much of what psychology has been about for more than a century. The book's subtitle, (Almost) Everything Teachers Ought to Know, is a tall order indeed, as is selecting what exactly teachers ought to know.

The authors' wide range of topics broadly cover developmental, social, cognitive, and behavioural aspects of learning and teaching, divided neatly between four sections: "I", "Other", "Learning" and "Behaviour". There's also a useful preamble on research, including observation, hypothesis testing, and the ever-present (and potentially over-hyped) replication crisis. That's an awful lot to cover, especially in what is essentially less than 300 pages, if we exclude the extensive reference section.

It's refreshing to see often neglected topics. The section on attachment, for example, takes the reader on a whistle-stop tour of classic theories from Bowlby and Ainsworth to more contemporary research. Other areas covered within the "I" section include nature-

nurture, moral development, personality, and intelligence. I could list more, but there are too many – a good example of the main weakness of what is essentially an excellent resource.

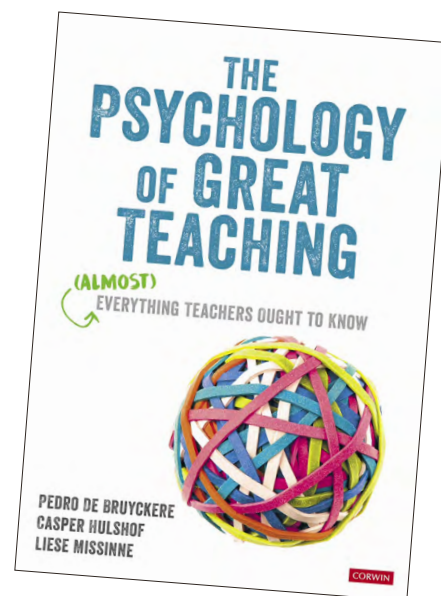
One of the joys of a book like this is the chance to discover or re-discover topics that haven't managed to make much of an impression on contemporary educational thought. The section on Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model, for example, is a refreshing addition, looking as it does at broader aspects of community teaching.

What *The Psychology of Great Teaching* does is sacrifice depth for breadth. Cognitive load theory, for example, is allocated only a couple of pages. This is fine if all you're looking for is a brief overview, but if your intention is to learn about cognitive load, there are better choices. This breadth-depth payoff also means there is little room for critical evaluation, and the closest the authors get to evaluating cognitive load theory is admitting that the theory is not without its problems, with little elaboration.

The danger is that the reader assumes there are absolutes within psychology, a discipline renowned for having very few (although the authors do acknowledge this in some topics). For example, in the section on screen time and social media use, they do recognise the complexity of reaching definite conclusions. This criticism isn't unique to *The Psychology of Great Teaching*, of course, and many similar books provide only shallow soundbites rather than in-depth knowledge – ironic perhaps, in an educational system that appears to favour everything knowledge-rich.

It could be that in deciding what teachers

BOOK
TV
FILM
RADIO
EVENT
RESOURCE



ought to know, the assumption is that breadth is more important. There is certainly an element of logic here, in that teachers can still successfully apply the basic tenets of cognitive load, attachment or personality without becoming overwhelmed by detail.

Who, then, will find this book useful? It has many excellent qualities, such as the number of topics covered and useful "takeaway" boxes that summarise the main points and offer important advice, particularly in the section on bullying. The authors certainly provide just about enough information for real-world application.

What readers might find most useful, however, is the way the book can act as springboard for further inquiry. For these reasons, it is likely to appeal most to teachers in training and those at the start of their careers.

★★★★☆
Rating

THE CONVERSATION LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM



Diana Young
Governor,
Richard
Atkins School

DO THE PM'S PLANS ADD UP?

The new year started with a bang following **Rishi Sunak's plan to ensure all pupils in England study maths until the age of 18** to equip young people "with the quantitative and statistical skills ... including finding the best mortgage deal or savings rate".

A tirade from critics followed, led by **Simon Pegg's** furious, expletive-filled outburst in a video on Instagram. As a survey of more than 7,500 teachers by Teacher Tapp revealed that 34 per cent strongly disagreed with the PM's ambition, **one tweet by a teacher** more politely and more succinctly voiced the concerns of many.



GCSE Maths nearly broke me. I stayed behind after school twice a week for a year to get my grade B. The thought of having to carry on until I was 18 would have filled me with dread. We have workforce gaps but is this the way to solve it? #Maths #edutwitter

Meanwhile, Therese Andrews, the co-head and director of curriculum innovation at an independent London school, shared a **blog** with a more balanced view of the PM's proposals, taking curriculum reform, recruitment, retention and the purpose of education into consideration.

Governors strive for higher standards of educational achievement. Therefore, we welcome strategies that boost young people's potential. As such, I support

children being taught life skills such as money management, budgeting and financial analysis. The internet is full of resources to help teachers deliver that, and I look forward to the PM outlining his plans for how he will support them to accomplish his ambition.

IS IT TIME TO PAY UP?

The threat of teacher strikes is concerning for school governors. Having experienced the impact of Girls' Day School Trust NEU members striking in February 2022 to protect their pensions, I am almost certain that nationwide strikes will have a detrimental effect on educational standards, further exacerbated for disadvantaged children. That said, the government's new anti-strike laws are likely to further diminish the sector's propensity to recruit and retain teachers, now and in the long term.

But as anonymous Twitter user, **Secret TA**, says, there are bigger problems than pay alone.

In that context, the PM's new year's



Education has a RETENTION crisis - pay is a factor but the reality is that teachers are leaving in droves because of workload and SLTs who are incompetent & toxic. Simply upping pay won't fix this for schools who can't keep their staff 🙄🙄

#edutwitter #Strike

resolution for maths teaching seems all the more unlikely. As the Higher Education Policy Institute put it in a tweet promoting **a new blog on their site by chief executive of Million Plus, Pam Tamlow**: "If you're going to compel the growing number of young people to do maths until the age of 18, you're going to need a lot of new maths teachers."

Meanwhile, **guidance published by the Department for Education in 2016** offers a useful resource on how school leaders can minimise strike disruption.

ONLINE MISOGYNY: IS THE GAME UP?

Following the arrest of online influencer and self-titled "misogynist", Andrew Tate, **educators** have called for resources that counter his anti-feminist arguments. **The Safe Schools Alliance** rightly highlights that Tate's harmful content is not unique. Indeed, Twitter user, **justanotherfemale** makes the point forcefully that misogyny is pervasive in the culture young people consume.



Replying to @MrH_DSL

Im absolutely stunned you think this is an Andrew Tate issue. There are Andrew Tates EVERYWHERE.

You could start by looking at the music children are listening to and maybe look at how easily accessible on line porn is to school kids - maybe start there?

Governors have a duty to ensure that teachers are well equipped to challenge discussion. However, I am concerned that our response should avoid aggrandising Tate's discourse, thereby amplifying misinformation and spreading anti-feminist rhetoric. To that end, I'm looking forward to next week's **misogynistic online influencers** webinar organised by community-interest company, Men At Work.

CAN ALL TEACHERS LOOK UP?

Finally, following an article by a **BBC young reporter** who asked "why don't more teachers look like me?", UCL professor Alice Bradbury **hit the airwaves**, revisiting her and her colleagues' **2021 research** showing that that minority teachers felt there was a glass ceiling inhibiting retention and paths to leadership.

Further confirmed last year by NFER



research on **racial equality in the teacher workforce**, it's good to see that diversity in educational leadership is hitting headlines. Governors have a duty to ensure children are educated in inclusive and representative environments and must hold their schools to account for establishing diverse teams.

Click the links to access
the blogs and podcasts



The Knowledge

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



NTP: What impact has online tuition had?

Will Chambers, co-founder, Bramble, and Kristina Altoft, head of assessment services, Pearson

There has been a lot of recent discussion around the impact of online tutoring programmes, with a variety of experiences and analyses reported across the country. The latest set of data unveiled by Pearson and Bramble this week shows the approach has substantial qualitative and quantitative benefits.

The strong sense we get from listening to the pupils, teachers and tutors we work with is that live online tuition really is having a significant, positive impact on pupils' attainment, confidence, understanding and engagement. All well and good, but it's even better to have the hard stats to back this up, which they do – and particularly when it comes to those eligible for pupil premium funding.

Our new impact report analyses online tuition sessions delivered by Pearson tutors using the Bramble online tutoring and teaching platform during the 2021-22 academic year. It shows that very encouraging progress has been made by pupils eligible for pupil premium across a range of phases and subjects. Among a range of positive outcome measures, the most striking headlines are that:

- Key stage 2 pupil premium pupils increased their attainment scores by 73 per cent across all subjects, compared with 67 per cent for non-pupil premium pupils.
- Key stage 4 pupil premium pupils, who started from a higher baseline, made impressive gains of 59 per cent across all subjects. The figure for non-pupil premium pupils was 47 per cent.
- Pupil premium pupils across all key stages increased their maths scores by 76 per cent. The figure was the same for non-pupil premium maths pupils.
- Pupil premium pupils across all key stages increased their English scores by 52 per cent, compared to 42 per cent for non-pupil premium pupils.



Based on 93,000 hours of tutoring sessions in English, maths or science, 4,400 pre- and post-tuition assessments and almost 80,000 CUE (confidence, understanding and engagement) ratings, the data also revealed a 76 per cent increase in assessment scores following maths catch-up tutoring across key stages 2 and 4, average student confidence of 73 per cent across the board and average student understanding of 77 per cent across all subjects. Pupil premium pupils made up 49 per cent of the sample used for our analysis.

The impact report also highlights findings from Bramble's annual tuition survey that surveyed more than 2,200 teachers, tutors, pupils and parents during the summer. This indicates that online tuition is now firmly embedded as part of the education landscape, reporting that 87 per cent of all pupils found online tutoring to be more effective or as effective as the in-person alternative, with 81 per cent of tutors and teachers reporting a positive impact from external tuition.

Online tuition was also rated highly by tutors, teachers and pupils for creating a learning environment that helped pupils become more relaxed and focused.

Interaction and search data collated from the

Bramble platform showed that in addition to the millions of words spoken during the tuition sessions we analysed, 641,000 resources were shared. Number, algebra and geometry were the top three topics covered in maths tutoring sessions. We also discovered that pupils searched their recorded lessons for revision more than 127,000 times.

The report analyses the largest ever sample of pupils to participate in live online tuition during the second year of the National Tutoring Programme, and offers real proof that online tuition delivers a significant and sustained impact on pupil progress, particularly for pupils eligible for pupil premium funding.

It is clear is that high-quality, engaging online tuition sessions can ensure that thousands of pupils reach their potential. Doing so depends on a tutor workforce comprised of fully-qualified teachers, skilled in meeting individual learning needs with flexible teaching approaches, and aligning the content of sessions with existing classroom plans and practices.

These findings reinforce what we know – that when the right people, right processes and right tools are on hand to deliver tutoring, learners clearly can and do succeed.

Week in

Westminster

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

MONDAY

Catching up with the times, The Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC) has had a gender-neutral makeover.

It comes after its membership voted overwhelmingly in support of changing its name to HMC (The Heads' Conference) back in October.

HMC said the move reflected that members now included principals, rectors and directors.

Schools Week understands *The Daily Mail* and Piers Morgan were too busy frothing at the mouth over Prince Harry's latest publicity to share their views.

The AQA's annual accounts reveal details of a "reputation campaign" last year to "reconnect with customers" after two years without exams. This was done with a "third-party agency" so people "truly understand who we are and what we stand for".

While it is the country's most popular exam board, it did fall out of favour with some trust leaders after hiking exam entry fees (when there were no exams) and then handing back lower than average rebates.

There's also the delays to examiner pay last summer and a couple of errors in exam papers to try and patch up ...

Talking of annual accounts, those for the Outwood Grange Academies Trust made quite the admission. One of the four founders of the National Institute of Teaching, the trust said it had sought government approval for the "novel and contentious" payments to the new flagship teacher trainer – LOL. That would certainly be how many critics would describe it.

Attention started to turn on whether the teaching unions would meet the threshold to send hundreds of thousands of school staff on strike – or perhaps not, with news other strikes may be thwarting them.

The National Education Union updated



members on postal times following the Royal Mail strikes.

"While postal workers are still clearing a significant backlog of mail posted prior to last week, Royal Mail has recently said that delivery times are back to normal for newly posted mail."

Oh comrades!

TUESDAY

Schools might be feeling the pinch over energy market chaos, but it's boom time for energy firms and consultants.

Schools Week texted an energy broker today who works with schools to ask about how useful – or not – the government's latest energy bills discount scheme would be.

Response: "I'm skiing, sorry."

Adding its name to the latest list of groups reviewing whether exams are working is the new all-parliamentary group on "schools, learning and assessment".

It includes some pretty reputable MPs of all stripes. But, as usual with these shady groups that are actually just all about lobbying, it's funded by that very non-partisan ... National Education Union!

The same one campaigning for assessment reform because the "current high-stakes system is not fit for purpose". We *wonder* what the new review will come up with.

Fresh from suggesting bishops should stop "using the pulpit to preach from", Jonathan Gullis is on it again.

During a Commons debate on Tuesday, the former education minister "proudly" reiterated his interests as a former teacher and a former NASUWT member and representative.

But he emphasised that despite this experience, there was no love lost between him and the trade union he was never part of.

"While I am a huge admirer of the incredible work that teachers do, they are sadly being cajoled out of the classroom by baron bosses in unions such as the 'Not Education Union', led by Bolshevik Boustead and Commie Courtney," he said.

WEDNESDAY

Education secretary Gillian Keegan has been busy meeting with unions trying to quell the prospect of striking teachers. Meanwhile, staff in her own department have just voted to go on strike for one day in February over pay, pensions, jobs and redundancy terms last year. D'OH!

THURSDAY

The NASUWT finally revealed today that it ... hadn't met the thresholds for its members to go on strike.

Although you'd be surprised to know that given the union's tweet on the matter. It claimed: "Ballot Result: 9 in 10 of our members voted to strike for the pay they deserve. But despite this overwhelming result, the government's anti-trade union legislation has prevented members in state-funded schools and colleges from taking industrial action."

Ermmm ... That's not actually right. Nine of ten members *who bothered to respond* wanted to go on strike. The issue was that just 42 per cent of members voted!





PRINCIPAL

Location: Farnborough, Hampshire

Start date: 1 September 2023

Application deadline: 9.00am on Monday 6 February 2023

Salary: Competitive salary and wider benefits

- Do you have extensive experience of delivering high-quality educational provision and outcomes, ideally within the post-16 sector?
- Do you have the highest expectations for every student and staff member?
- Are you passionate about high-quality teaching and learning?
- Are you able to win hearts and minds with your inspirational vision for excellence?
- Do you have outstanding interpersonal, communication and leadership skills?

If you can answer yes to these five questions, we would love to hear from you.

A Centre of Excellence

Judged outstanding in all areas by Ofsted in September 2021, the College now has almost 4,000 students enrolled on over 40 Level 3 courses. The College community continues to grow and a record number of applications were received for September 2023.

In recent years, academic outcomes have been well above the national average both in attainment and progress. Aps value added measures put the College in the top 10% of providers nationally both at A level and for vocational courses.

As well as the pursuit of academic excellence, the College is renowned for its commitment to providing the highest possible standard of pastoral care. A team of highly experienced tutors provide group/one-to-one support and students also have access to an on-site counselling service. The College benefits from excellent facilities and educational resources, and works closely with seventeen partner secondary schools to ensure students enjoy a smooth transition to College.

The Prospect Trust

The Sixth Form College Farnborough is a founding member of The Prospect Trust. The Trust is a dynamic and ambitious multi-academy Trust on the Hampshire/Surrey border, providing outstanding education and support for almost 6,000 learners through its family of local academies. The Trust has a relentless desire to improve the educational outcomes and lives of the young people in our local communities. The successful candidate will be expected to embrace the Trust's values and play a key role in supporting its further growth and development.

How to apply

A recruitment information pack, incorporating a detailed role and person specification, provides additional context to help you better understand this exciting and rewarding opportunity.

If you believe that you have the required qualifications, experience, skills and personal attributes to deliver high performance within this role, we would welcome your application.

Candidates should contact Kate Thomlinson (Trust Executive Assistant) on kate.thomlinson@theprospecttrust.org.uk to express interest and to request an application form. Your application should evidence the requirements outlined within the person specification.

Prior to application, candidates are strongly encouraged to contact Andy Yarrow (Chief Executive Officer) for an informal discussion about this role opportunity.

Other information

The Prospect Trust takes the control and processing of employee data very seriously and is committed to acting in line with the GDPR regulations; please read the attached applicant privacy notice which explains how your data is processed.

The Prospect Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people within our care and requires all staff and volunteers to share and demonstrate this commitment.

Any future offer of employment remains subject to satisfactory pre-employment checks, including enhanced DBS clearance, a health check and references.





Churston Ferrers Grammar School

Headteacher

From 1 September 2023

Leadership Range L31 – L39 (£92,596 – £112,601)

Churston Ferrers Grammar School is a high performing, oversubscribed standalone selective academy situated in a beautiful rural setting close to the sea between Paignton and Brixham.

Churston Ferrers Grammar School has a long-standing reputation for combining academic excellence with outstanding personal development and pastoral care. The school is well known in the local area for its distinctive family feel, backed up by exceptionally strong pastoral care, which ensures all students feel able to do their very best academically. This emphasis on student welfare is underpinned by a wide range of extra-curricular activities to build confidence and self-esteem. It is this combination of high academic standards within a relaxed and supportive environment that makes Churston Ferrers Grammar School so unique.

All staff and students are actively encouraged to build self-esteem and work towards the school motto of learning to create a better world.

The Governors are seeking to appoint a Headteacher who will build on our ethos and achievements ensuring that our students achieve their academic and personal goals within a friendly and nurturing school which has their welfare at its heart, whilst bringing their own vision and style to this successful school. The Governors are proud of the school and are looking for someone who will uphold our excellent reputation and nurture our existing positive relations with staff, parents, carers and the wider community.

The Headteacher will:

- Have a clear vision and the commitment to ensure that every pupil achieves their full potential and attains the best possible outcomes.
- Be an inclusive leader with a strong sense of moral purpose,

ethical principles and values.

- Be committed to promoting exceptional opportunities for every student whatever their background and who believes in celebrating diversity.
- Have proven extensive leadership skills to challenge, inspire and drive improvements for staff and pupils.
- Be committed to safeguarding and the welfare of all pupils, ensuring a caring and nurturing environment.
- Have excellent communication skills that allow you to build and sustain strong relationships with all internal and external stakeholders including our wider community.
- Take lead of the financial management and strategic planning of the school.

In return we offer:

- The opportunity to follow our vision and shape the continued and future success of Churston Ferrers Grammar School, continuing to provide our students with a broad, balanced and enriching curriculum.
- An experienced, creative and dedicated staff team who provide high quality teaching and learning opportunities, challenging all students whilst giving them the opportunity to flourish and succeed.
- A dedicated Governing Body who are all very engaged and determined to help you and support the school towards the school motto of learning to create a better world.
- A supportive parent community and an outstanding PTA that play a key role in raising funds for the school and are invested in their children's education.
- Access to a tailored CPD programme using Bluesky.
- Extensive grounds for all our sporting activities including our own swimming pool.

Churston Ferrers Grammar School is an equal opportunities employer and is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. The successful candidate will be required to undertake an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check and references will be taken for all shortlisted candidates.

Please contact the Headteacher's PA, Mrs Vanessa Wolf by email on vanessa.wolf@churston.torbay.sch.uk or call **01803 842289** (option 3) for further information regarding this post and/or visit our website <https://churstongrammar.com/vacancies>



DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

Are you an experienced and successful head looking for a role where you will have wider impact? Do you hold the principles of family, collaboration and integrity close to your heart? If so, we'd like to hear from you.

We are currently looking for a secondary Director of Education to join our school development team. In the first phase of this role, the successful candidate will initially work as Executive Headteacher in one school alongside an existing Headteacher to rapidly improve the provision and outcomes. The next phase will broaden the remit as Director of Education across our Coast region of secondary schools.

At The Kemnal Academies Trust (TKAT) we believe that for all of our staff to be truly fulfilled and successful, they need to be heard, developed and empowered. Therefore we are looking for someone who can demonstrate our values of shared voice, shared belief and shared success to work within our TKAT family.

If you would like to know more about this post or to organise an informal discussion, please contact Matt Batchelor, Senior Director of Education at matt.batchelor@tkat.org



HEADTEACHER

Start Date: **September 2023**
Contract: **Permanent and Fulltime**
Salary: **Outer London L28-L35**

Clarendon needs a new Headteacher to lead them into an exciting future. We are an Ofsted Outstanding special academy for 160 pupils aged 4-16 with Moderate and Complex Learning Difficulties. You need to be confident, committed, considerate, collaborative and inclusive minded. You will inspire, motivate, support and encourage pupils, families and staff from across our community.

For full details please see our website and applicant pack: <https://www.clarendon.richmond.sch.uk/>



Trust Inclusion Lead

Salary: L16 - L21 (£64,225 - £72,483)

This is an exciting and unique opportunity for a highly effective leader, with passion and expertise in inclusion, SEND and wellbeing strategies and practice.

In this newly developed post, you will take on the role of lead professional and will shape inclusive provision and opportunities for all pupils across our Trust with a focus on the most vulnerable.

The successful candidate will be a key member of the Trust School Improvement Team. You will work closely with the Trust Executive Leadership Team, Headteachers and school colleagues to shape the Trust's inclusion strategy, ensuring consistently high-quality delivery within our schools.

You will be a skilled communicator and strong advocate for the pupils and families we serve. We are determined to maximise the achievement of all pupils, thereby improving their life chances.

Interested candidates are encouraged to contact James Hill, Executive Director of School Improvement to discuss the opportunity in more detail.

Closing date: Friday 27th January 2023, 12pm

Interviews: w/c Monday 5th February 2023





STEPHENSON (MK) TRUST

Stephenson (MK) Trust currently comprising Stephenson Academy, Bridge Academy and Milton Keynes Primary PRU, has been delivering high quality Special Education and Alternative Provision across Milton Keynes since 2012 and we are proud of our track record of making a real difference to children's lives in our area.

Executive Principal & CEO

Salary: L35 – L43 or equivalent salary range on the Stephenson (MK) Trust Staff Pay Scales

Contract type: Full Time

Contract term: Permanent

Pension Arrangements: TPS or LGPS

Start date: 01 September 2023

Stephenson (MK) Trust is based in Milton Keynes and its academies include an SEMH special school and the Primary and Secondary Alternative Provisions for the city. The Trust was established in 2012 and has an excellent record in the development and improvement of provision and outcomes for vulnerable young people in Milton Keynes.

Due to the retirement of our current Executive Principal & CEO, Dr Neil Barrett, the Trust wishes to appoint a new leader. This is a rare and exciting opportunity for the right person.

The Trust is about so much more than just results. Everything we do is underpinned by our commitment to develop approaches to learning and wider life experiences that promote independence and confidence in its young people who then make a positive contribution to the community.

The Governors wish to appoint an Executive Principal & CEO committed to this ethos and who will lead and develop the school based on this mission.

Applications are invited from senior leaders with outstanding leadership experience.

The successful candidate will have:

- Successful senior leadership and management experience in a school or an academy in a MAT
- The ability to work closely with other schools, the Local Authority and the wider community for the good of young people in the care of the Trust and in schools in Milton Keynes
- The ability to inspire and motivate staff, students, parents and other key groups to achieve the aims of the Trust
- A commitment to the care, success and futures of vulnerable young people

We can offer the successful candidate:

- The leadership of a strong Trust at an exciting stage of its development that will be the responsibility of the person appointed to shape.
- Professional and dedicated staff, Governors and Trustees.
- Excellent opportunities for further professional development.
- Strong support from parents, Governors, Trustees and the wider Milton Keynes community

Visits are encouraged and warmly welcomed. If you think this exciting opportunity is for you, the Trust looks forward to meeting you and receiving your application.

Closing Date for Applications: Friday 20 January 2023 at 12.00pm

Interview Dates: Thursday and Friday 9/10 February 2023

Stephenson (MK) Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all its children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. This post is subject to an enhanced DBS check.



Providence Place, West Bromwich



Director of Music

Salary: L12 – L16 £58,104 - £64,223

Hours: Full Time - Permanent

Opening September 2023

This is a unique opportunity to be Shireland CBSO Academy's first Director of Music. Play a key role in the senior team of this exciting new academy and work with our partners, including the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, to deliver an outstanding experience for our students academically, musically and pastorally.

The Academy

Shireland CBSO Academy is an exciting new school opening to Years 7 and 12 in September 2023 and is the first state school in the country to have a partnership with a professional orchestra. Based in Providence Place, West Bromwich, the Academy will work in partnership with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO) and serve all of Sandwell and the wider West Midlands. The Academy is for all students who have a passion or talent for music – they do not necessarily need to already play an instrument.

Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust is a recognised leader in education and was founded by three-times Ofsted 'Outstanding' Shireland Collegiate Academy: Our students will study a full, broad and balanced curriculum, seen through the lens of music. In Year 7, we will follow the 'Literacy for Life' model developed by our Trust over the last 15 years: Students learn via a thematic approach to their studies, spending 17 hours a week with the same teacher, enabling them to smoothly transition from primary to secondary school.

In Year 12, students will be part of a cohort of 60 young people studying at least one music A level or equivalent qualification. With many schools no longer offering A level music qualifications, and those that do only having a handful of students, the opportunity to join a cohort of this size who have a common interest in music brings exciting possibilities for collaboration.

Director of Music

The successful candidate will be responsible for leading on all aspects of music at the academy, including:

- Curriculum, assessment and qualifications across all Key Stages
- Liaison with the CBSO
- Oversight, management and quality assurance of instrumental and vocal lessons
- Relationships with a range of external partners, such as primary schools and organisations committed to musical education

- Extra-curricular activities
- A programme of performances
- Engagement in music of students of all backgrounds

They must:

- Be passionate about improving the lives of our students
- Role model a commitment to excellence
- Want to collaborate as part of a team
- Believe they have both a pastoral and academic responsibility
- Be flexible and adaptable, rising to the challenge of creating a new Academy
- Have high standards for students and themselves.

In return we will offer:

- Excellent career development opportunities and access to a comprehensive programme of CPD
- An ICT-rich environment which allows staff to be innovative in harnessing technology for learning
- The opportunity to be involved in the opening of a new Academy
- Staff health and wellbeing package

Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff to share this commitment.

For an informal discussion contact our HR Director Melanie Adams on 0121 565 8811. Information and application form available from careers site:

Careers - Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust (shirelandcat.net)

Closing date: Monday 30th January 2023

Interviews: Week commencing 6th February 2023

Come and meet us and find out more about the Trust, the school and the role at our Secondary Teacher Recruitment Event. Wednesday 11 January 2023, 4.30pm – 7.00pm at West Bromwich Collegiate Academy, Kelvin Way, West Bromwich.

To register please email: recruitment@shirelandcat.net

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“

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

The Shared Learning Trust

Click here to contact our team

