

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

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## Walkout Wednesday: Union says 300,000 teachers strike as education secretary 'put on notice' over further action



# SCHOOLS WEEK

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## Hoping public opinion turns against teachers is not a sustainable strategy

Headteacher and former NEU president Robin Bevan described Wednesday's strikes as a "tragedy" that should "never have got this far". He's right. And this is just the start.

Schools, pupils and their families may be able to cope with one day of disruption. But schools closing twice a month – or even more often if the action is escalated?

The strength of feeling on Wednesday demonstrates that this is not for show.

Teachers are at the end of their tether, and willing to lose pay to push for a better deal – not only for themselves, but for their schools.

Education secretary Gillian Keegan isn't interested in negotiations over increasing this year's pay offer, which is what the NEU wants.

In any case, she lacks the political power – the Treasury holds the purse strings.

But what was clear from the picket lines is that this is about much more than teacher pay. School funding, workload, and teachers having to pick up the slack for the collapse of other support services were all important factors.

So it's clear that increasing pay for staff wouldn't solve everything. Finding a solution will be difficult.

But the government's strategy to do nothing and hope the public mood turns against

teachers is regrettable. What happens if it doesn't?

Will the government just let pupils, whose education has already been ravaged by Covid, miss more school? Given the current ministers may only have at the most two years left in government, do they even care?

While government will point to fewer than one in ten schools closing completely this week, most schools did either fully or partially close.

Attendance data from a sample of more than 3,000 schools shows 40 per cent of pupils missed school. Nationally, that's 3.2 million pupils. The strikes were hugely disruptive.

Improved online learning in schools, and facilities such as Oak National Academy, may help mitigate learning loss, but it's not a sustainable approach.

For a taste of what could result from a protracted dispute, ministers need only look at the higher education sector. The University and College Union recently announced 18 days of strikes throughout February and March, three times the number scheduled by the NEU.

This is what Keegan faces if she continues with her approach. It simply cannot happen. Both sides must be willing to compromise to find a solution.

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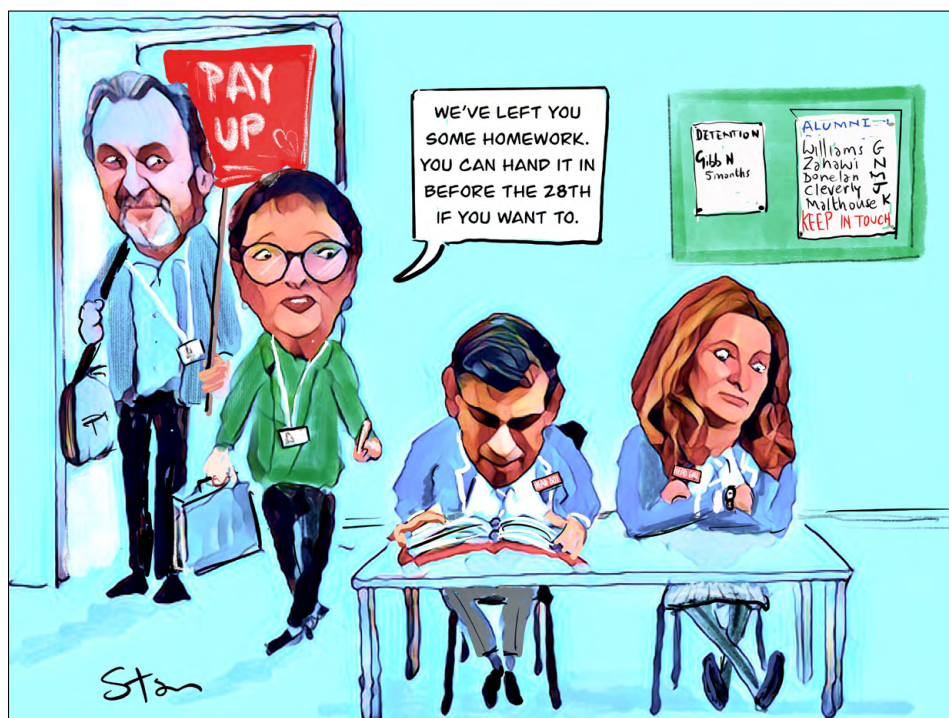


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## NEWS: STRIKES

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## Change tactics or there's more to come, union warns Keegan

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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Union bosses say the education secretary is "on notice" to start proper pay negotiations or face millions of pupils missing school again through further strikes.

The National Education Union (NEU) claimed about 300,000 teachers went on strike on Wednesday.

More than half of schools in England closed partially or fully, with attendance data from Arbor Education's 3,300 schools showing that about four in ten pupils were out of the classroom. If extrapolated this means 3.2 million pupils missed school because of strikes.

Use of the Oak National Academy was double last year's Omicron peak.

Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, has accused the NEU of putting forward an "economically incoherent" argument. The union wants a fully-funded, inflation-related rise.

Keegan said on Wednesday the government could not "bake in" inflation which is what would happen "if we start to get wages spiralling out of control".

**'If it's ministers v teachers – we'll win'**

Further talks between ministers and union leaders are expected in the coming weeks. But Dr Mary Bousted and Kevin Courtney, the joint general secretaries of the NEU, warned that teachers would walk out again this month unless Keegan came up with "concrete and meaningful proposals".

"Today, we put the education secretary on notice. She has until our next strike day for England, February 28, to change her stance."

Speaking to *Schools Week* at a picket in south London, Bousted said the government acted in "cynical disregard", but said she "regretted" disruption to parents.

"I think that [ministers] believed that we wouldn't make the threshold for action. If it comes up to ministers against teachers, teachers will win."

Teachers joined other public sector



workers on picket lines and attended marches and rallies across England.

In London, an estimated 40,000 people marched on Downing Street. In a colourful, noisy protest, demonstrators chanted and held placards and banners that demanded more funding for schools and highlighted teacher burnout and retention woes.

"Please Sir, can I have some more," read one. Another said: "I would have finished this sign but I ran out of funds."

Miranda, a teacher at Isleworth Town Primary School in south-west London, had made a cardboard bar of gold for her banner. "Worth my weight in gold," it read.

"I feel an immense pride just seeing all these people together, fighting for what we believe in," she said.

According to the NEU, more than 60 rallies took place across England, including members in Bristol who were among an estimated 3,500 who turned out to march.

Armed with colourful placards, a group of teachers from Air Balloon Primary School warned that underfunding and pay erosion was resulting in fewer opportunities for children and fewer resources. "Potentially it's going to impact on staffing."



Dr Mary Bousted

The resounding message from picket lines was that strikes were about much more than pay (see voxpop, page 6).

**'Parents understand why we're doing this'**

In Carlisle, Louise Atkinson, the NEU president, said parents had been supportive and had turned up with cake. "They understand what we're doing this for."

Recent polling by Public First found 46 per cent of respondents felt teachers would not be justified in going on strike, compared with 43 per cent who said they would be.

However, parents of school-age children were more supportive, with 47 per cent saying strikes would be justified, compared with 40 per cent who said they would not.



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Daniel Kebede, a past-president of the NEU who visited picket lines in Newcastle, said: "Often there is a bit of cautiousness around picketing in our profession, and that didn't seem the case today. It was just tremendous."

In Keegan's own constituency of Chichester, hundreds of public sector workers marched through the city chanting "where's Gill?"

Dave Jones, a NEU organiser, said Keegan "should be concerned that so many of her constituents seem to be supporting the trade union and their strike rather than her department's approach to teacher's pay".

Phil Walker, a drama teacher at Chichester High School, said he was "amazed how many people were honking and giving us a thumbs-up".

"I've been a rep for a long time, I've been a teacher for 30 years. I've never known anything like it. I've never known people just at the end of their



Mark Lehain

tethers, crying in the staffroom, and just not knowing which way to turn."

Teachers from neighbouring Bognor Regis and Littlehampton, the constituency of schools minister Nick Gibb, were also marching. He has said strikes were "not a way to conduct negotiations".

But Susan Buckland, a teacher at Felpham Community College in Bognor Regis, said the government was "not willing to have sensible conversations with our union leaders over pay".

"What is their suggestion for how we manage this?"

### 'Unreasonable workload is poor leadership'

Mark Lehain, a former DfE special adviser, said things such as "unreasonable workloads, over-emphasis on marking and poor classroom behaviour" were the "result of poor leadership — not a lack of money. Strikes won't address any of

these longstanding problems."

Keegan said that "one school closure is too many", adding she was "very grateful" to headteachers "for all their work to keep our schools open and to minimise the impact" of strikes.

Ministers were now looking at workload and flexible working, as well as future pay.

She said they missed Friday's deadline to provide evidence for next year's pay review process "to keep open to discussions about future pay."

There are also reports the government is now looking at changing the law so teachers must tell schools if they plan to strike.



TOM BELGER | @TOM\_BELGER

## 'Morale at all-time low' say striking DfE staff

Department for Education staff criticised real-terms pay cuts, with one claiming morale was at "an all-time low", as they joined teachers in the biggest strike for a decade.

About a dozen staff and union representatives gathered at a Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union picket outside the department's London office on Wednesday. They held banners and were handing out leaflets to colleagues heading to work.

It follows an 88 per cent vote in favour of industrial action, with PCS calling for a 10 per cent pay rise, "pensions justice", job security and no cuts to redundancy terms.

The DfE and other departments were told to only offer average pay rises of 2 per cent.

PCS has 1,816 members at the DfE, about a quarter of the workforce. Ofsted staff also walked out, but a ballot failed to meet government turnout thresholds at Ofqual.

Owen Mooney, who works in the DfE's strategy group on disadvantage, said he had worked there for just over a year but had "already had a real-



terms pay cut. The cost of everything is going up. Everyone is feeling it."

It would be "impossible" for lower-paid staff, he said – with some colleagues telling him they could not afford to strike.

"It's important those who can afford to lose a day's pay do strike. You can't run public services unless you fund them properly. Morale is at an all-time low."

Another DfE civil servant, Jack Hampton, said issues had been "building up" for years, including pay, pensions and increased outsourcing of lower-paid staff.

"You hear arguments about a wage-price spiral – but they don't work as people don't pay for public services."

He said he used to save £350 a month, but with his rent rising and a below-inflation pay rise he now manages £150. If he didn't split the £1,100-a-month rent for a room in a house share with his girlfriend it would be "abysmal".

Hampton said he was not among the lowest-paid at the department, but an inflation-matching pay rise would have helped him to save for his own property.

David Withey, the chief executive of the Education and Skills Funding Agency, was among staff passing the picket line on their way to work. He declined to comment.

Paul Nowak, the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress, said civil servants were treated as "back-room staff who don't make any difference", but this "couldn't be further from the truth".

Mark Serwotka, the general secretary of the PCS, told a union rally later in the day that civil servants were seen as "bowler-hatted Sir Humphreys", but thousands were claiming benefits and using food banks.



NEWS: STRIKES

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# Messages from the picket lines

**“It’s more than just pay.” That was the resounding message from teachers who downed tools this week. Here’s what school staff told our reporters from the picket lines ...**

## ‘Staff have to teach outside their specialism’ Fiona Stuart, science teacher, Archway School, Stroud

“The recent pay rise that did go through had to be funded by schools, which then directly impacted on the kids because it was coming out of school budgets. I’ve been in education for 25 years, and I’ve seen the increase in workload, I’ve seen the lack of life outside school. People are having to work longer and longer hours and are having to do more.

“And we’re often not having fully qualified staff. And they are having to teach outside their specialism more and more. Again, it all leads back to the impact on the education of children.”



## ‘Not unusual to spend eight hours marking on a Sunday’ Jeremy Taylor, head of history, Bishop Thomas Grant School, Streatham, south London

“It would not be unusual for me to spend the best part of seven or eight hours on a Sunday afternoon, Sunday evening, marking pupils’ work.

“It would not be unusual for me to be still in my office at 6.30pm on a Friday, when the school finishes at 3.15pm, because I’m trying to get Monday and Tuesday lessons planned. As head of department, I’ll be catching up with admin and paperwork.

“But there’s a bigger picture here as well, which is that schools are really struggling to recruit.”



## ‘I’m getting more money working in retail’ Sandrine Baker, art teacher, Bishop Thomas Grant School, Streatham

“As a newly qualified teacher, obviously I’m in the classroom by myself. It’s a lot. And I’m going home and I’m still working.

“I can understand why so many newly qualified teachers leave. I’m a resilient person, and very well supported in my department. If you didn’t have that, I could have left too.

“I know some of my ECT [early career teacher] cohort ... the level of stress they’re under. Some of them are still considering [the job] because they’ve done part-time jobs in retail before and they were like ‘I’m getting more money doing retail’.”



## ‘It’s hard to do a hard job when you’re also worrying about money’ Antonia Debbonaire, primary teacher, Bristol

“The pay rise ... it’s not in line with inflation, so it’s not a pay rise, it’s a pay cut, and it’s really affecting lots of teachers.

“Teachers are using food banks. And it’s really hard to do a really hard job when you’re worrying about money and how you’re going to survive and all of that. So there needs to be some respect given to teachers and dignity. We should be paid properly.

“Lots of people are struggling, and we’re seeing it with the children that we teach and we’re not able to give them what they need.”



## ‘It’s not just about teaching, it’s helping with special needs, anxiety...’ Alyson Knight, maths teacher, Archway School, Stroud

“We’re using textbooks that are falling apart, and you can’t attract people ... there’s a reason why teachers aren’t coming into the profession and not staying. People forget it’s actually quite strenuous teaching 32 15 to 16-year-olds.

“And it’s not just about teaching a subject. It’s about helping them with their special needs, their anxiety, making sure you’re doing it at different levels. And yet your pay isn’t reflecting that.

“People are coming out of university and looking at teaching – or something else where they can earn half as much again.”



## ‘I’m having to buy basic things such as pens’ Sam Davis, (pictured left), textiles teacher, Bishop Thomas Grant School, Streatham

“We are buying materials – fabric or buying threads – regularly, so that we can give kids what they need. I’m buying pens. It’s just basic things that we do not have the funding for.

“I think what all these strikes are raising is that there is something that has gone fundamentally wrong with the way things are being funded generally.

“And the cost-of-living crisis is real and it is affecting people’s lives. It’s affecting people across the board.”





## NEWS

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# DfE gives vague response to landmark social care review

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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The government has published its response to last year's landmark review of children's social care, but has only committed to consult on the main schools' proposals.

Here's what you need to know ...

## 1. Make schools 'corporate parents'

**Proposal** In his review, Josh MacAlister said making schools corporate parents in England would "more accurately reflect the role that schools...play in the lives of children in care and those with a care experience".

**Response** The government said it would consult this month on "extending corporate parenting responsibilities to a wider set of public bodies", and then again in the autumn "as necessary" on proposals for legislative reform.

## 2. Make schools statutory safeguarding partners

**Proposal** Last year's review said schools should become "statutory safeguarding partners", alongside councils, health services and police, warning leaving schools out as at present meant the voice of education was "missing".

**Response** The government said it agreed education "needs to play a greater role in local safeguarding arrangements". It will consult in the spring on how to "strengthen the role of education settings".

Proposals "will include whether to clarify their roles and responsibilities within multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, and how they operate within the strategic and operational levels of partnerships".

The DfE will then "use learning from this to help form proposals on whether and how to make education a fourth safeguarding partner through consultation in autumn 2023".

If agreed, the government will "bring forward legislation when parliamentary time allows".

## 3. Base 'family help teams' in schools

**Proposal** The review wanted a new category of "family help", based in community settings such as schools, to replace "targeted early help" and "child in need" work.



**Response** Ministers have pledged a £45 million pilot in 12 areas to implement new "family help" services, but made no firm commitment to putting them in schools

## 4. Let school staff foster children they teach

**Proposal** The culture of care meant it was "often considered inappropriate" to ask a teacher or friend's parent to become a specific child's foster carer. This needed to change.

**Response** The DfE simply pointed to its existing fostering recruitment and retention programme, making no mention of teachers.

## 5. Hold virtual school heads to account for progress

**Proposal** Virtual school heads have a duty to promote the educational achievement of children in care and manage their pupil premium funding, but the review found a "real lack of accountability".

It said virtual school heads should be held to account for the Progress 8 scores of children in care.

**Response** The government made no mention of this, but did commit to consult "as necessary" in the autumn on "expanding the virtual school head role to include children in care and care leavers up to the age of 25".

## 6. Use pupil premium on 'well-evidenced' programmes

**Proposal** Schools receive extra funding for looked-after children through the pupil premium-plus.

The review said virtual school heads should direct this funding "towards interventions that are well evidenced".

**Response** The DfE said it would "ensure pupil premium-plus funding for children in care is spent on well-evidenced interventions". But it did not say how.

However, it will extend the "post-16 pupil premium-plus style of funding" with a further £24 million between 2023 and 2025 to "address the cliff edge in educational support that children in care and care leavers face in 16 to 19-year-old education".

## 7. Divert free schools cash to create state boarding places

**Proposal** MacAlister's review recommended that the free schools capital budget should be used to create capacity for looked-after children in boarding schools.

**Response** The DfE said it had already extended its "broadening educational pathways" programme to "increase the number of children in care in independent and state boarding schools". There was no mention of where the funding came from.

## 8. Replace young offender institutions with secure schools

**Proposal** The review said young offender institutions and secure training centres should be "phased out" within the next ten years and replaced with secure children's homes and secure schools.

**Response** There is no mention of secure schools.

## 9. Train all staff on mental health response

**Proposal** The identification and response to poor mental health issues should be a "core part of training programmes for any professionals working with children and young people that have involvement with children's services".

**Response** The DfE said it would "review current levels of knowledge and skills" among those working in virtual schools.



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## NEWS: OFSTED

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## Ofsted suspends 'independent' scrutiny panels

AMY WALKER &amp; JESSICA HILL

@SCHOOLSWEEK

EXCLUSIVE

Ofsted stands accused of being "unaccountable to anyone but themselves" after it emerged scrutiny panels that oversee how it handles complaints about inspections have been suspended.

The panels, which crucially include a sector representative who does not work for Ofsted, check the "robustness" of how complaints are handled at the internal review stage.

Introduced in 2015, Ofsted said the "independent scrutiny" would make the complaints process "more transparent, fair and fully objective".

But the panels have been paused as Ofsted reviews how it deals with complaints. *Schools Week* revealed last month a review had been launched after the watchdog admitted its complaints policy was "not working".

Ofsted told *Schools Week* the panels had been suspended since Covid. They remain so while officials consider "how best to incorporate external sector representation in our complaints handling process".

The watchdog aims to consult on any changes later this year.

Ian Hartwright, a senior policy adviser at the



school leaders' union NAHT, said the suspension was a step backwards.

"An independent external view is required if schools are to have more confidence in Ofsted's handling of complaints, otherwise the inspectorate will stand accused of marking its own work."

Headteacher Kulvarn Atwal recently requested an internal review of an inspection at Uphall Primary School in east London. Inspectors rated it 'requires improvement'.

But after Ofsted's original findings were upheld, Atwal said the absence of external oversight meant it had not been "properly investigated".

"It creates distrust within the system and makes them unaccountable to anyone but themselves.

"It's important for an effective complaints process within any organisation to have an independent person involved."

In correspondence with Atwal, Ofsted said a "further quality assurance check" was carried out by a senior Ofsted officer before the findings were

finalised.

Independent representatives on scrutiny panels were originally chosen from Ofsted's headteacher reference groups.

Alongside an His Majesty's Inspector (HMI) and a senior HMI, the panel would "test" the "robustness of the complaints handling process" for each case before confirming a final response.

Following internal reviews, complainants are able to apply to the Independent Complaints Adjudication Service for Ofsted (ICASO).

The service may then investigate alleged failures by Ofsted to follow proper procedures.

But David Whitehead, the chief executive of the Our Community Multi-Academy Trust in Kent, said Ofsted was a "closed shop".

His recent submission for an internal review following the inspection of one of his trust's schools upheld the original findings.

"As schools we would be held to account if we were constantly conducting complaints processes ourselves," he said. "But [Ofsted] feels like a closed shop, the way it's operated."

ASCL said the internal review only considered if Ofsted followed its proper procedures and could not overturn outcomes.

An external representative "does not change the fact that this is a largely toothless stage of the process", a spokesperson added.

**Kulvarn Atwal profile, page 19**

EXCLUSIVE

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOTH

## Teachers cross picket lines to prepare for inspection

Thirty teachers were given "exemptions" by their union to cross the picket line on Wednesday so they could prepare for an Ofsted inspection.

The watchdog said it would not inspect schools on strike days as the full scale of disruption "might not be known until the day of the strike".

It also pledged to notify schools the day before strikes if it planned an inspection the day after walkouts.

The leaders' union ASCL had pushed for no inspections at all during strike weeks, but Ofsted said schools could ask for deferrals as usual.

Meols Cop High School, in Southport, was told on Tuesday it would be inspected on Thursday and Friday this week. The school was

rated 'outstanding' in 2012.

Jim Dye, a senior regional officer at the National Education Union (NEU), said its members at the school were "shocked and angry".

The union gave the school's 32 members a ceremonial "exemption".

While NEU members can go into work on strike days if they choose not to walk out, Dye said the exemption meant staff felt they could go in and prepare for Ofsted "without breaking the strike".

"Members at the school were solidly behind the dispute for better pay and funding. We are proud that they still demonstrated outside the school in support of NEU early on the morning of the strike.

"We believe that Ofsted's decision to ignore

union calls to reschedule inspections to a different week risks Ofsted being seen as politically motivated and politically directed."

Ofsted told *Schools Week* it received a "small number of requests for deferral due to the industrial action, the vast majority of which were granted". It would not provide figures on how many inspections were carried out on Thursday and Friday.

Inspectors visited Burford School's boarding house in Oxfordshire on Wednesday as visits under the social care common framework continued.

Matthew Albrighton, the School's head, said inspectors had been "nothing but supportive and mindful of the context".



## SPEED READ: OFSTED

# Women inspectors tougher on primary schools

Female Ofsted inspectors are more likely to hand out harsher grades for primary schools than their male colleagues, new research suggests.

A study by the University of Southampton and UCL shows too that freelance inspectors – usually people who also work in schools – hand out higher grades than those who work for the watchdog full-time.

It is the first independent research into how school inspection outcomes are linked to characteristics of lead inspectors, authors said.

Academics looked at overall Ofsted grades awarded by 1,376 inspectors across 35,751 inspections between 2012 and 2019 – before the change in inspection framework.

## 1 Male Ofsted inspectors more lenient at primary ...

The study found 36.4 per cent of primary inspections led by a woman resulted in 'requires improvement' (RI) or 'inadequate' ratings, compared with 33.1 per cent of those led by men.

Researchers say that while the three percentage point difference is "modest", the large sample size means it is "statistically significant".

The analysis looked at 22,754 inspections – 11,056 of which were led by women and 11,698 by men.

The types of schools inspected also looked similar. For example, 8 per cent of primary school inspections led by both genders were previously 'outstanding', while 4 per cent were previously 'inadequate'.

Looking at short inspections, 9.6 per cent of those led by men led to a "negative outcome" – either an immediate downgrade in the school's overall effectiveness or a recommendation for a full inspection.

This compares with 12.1 per cent of those led by women, meaning short inspections are about 25 per cent more likely to result in a negative outcome if led by a female inspector.

Dr Sam Sims of the UCL Centre for Education Policy, who co-authored the report, said the analysis showed "characteristics of the lead inspector can influence the Ofsted grade awarded to the school".

Ruth Maisey, programme head for education at the Nuffield Foundation, which supported the study, said the 2019 framework was "arguably more subjective" than its predecessor, meaning the difference could be greater.

## 2... But no clear-cut differences among secondaries

There was less evidence of a gender difference in secondary school outcomes.

Of those inspections led by women, 10.9 per cent were rated 'outstanding', compared with 10.1 per cent led by men.

The difference between the genders was also less than 1 per cent for 'good' and 'requires improvement'.

The analysis found that 10.5 per cent of inspections led by men resulted in 'inadequate' ratings, versus 9.1 per cent of those led by women.

But researchers said the "much smaller sample size means we have much less confidence in this difference being a genuine result".

Researchers looked at 2,188 inspections led by women and 2,813 led by men.

Ofsted said inspections were based on "human judgements and not a tick-box exercise so there will always be a small unavoidable element of variability between inspectors".

It was "pleased" to see the research "shows broadly that our inspectors reach consistent conclusions".

## 3 HMIs might be harsher than part-time inspectors

But the study also found His Majesty's Inspectors were less likely than Ofsted inspectors (those who work on a freelance basis and normally also hold roles in schools) to judge a primary school to be 'good' – 47 per cent compared with 60 per cent.

HMIs were also more likely to award a 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' grade.

The "magnitude of difference" was smaller at secondary level, "though a similar pattern emerges".

There is evidence that HMIs disproportionately lead inspections of schools that had 'inadequate' ratings and lower performance in national exams.

However there was still a gap, even after "controlling" for such differences.

## 4 Call for transparency over inspector deployments

Researchers have now urged Ofsted to publish details about how inspectors are deployed to different inspections.

"This is important because, if different inspectors award slightly different grades, we need to know which types of schools are likely to be disadvantaged by this," they said.

They also called for Ofsted to make an inspection-inspector linked dataset accessible to researchers to allow further analysis of inspections.

As public data does not include such information, researchers used coding to predict the gender of inspectors, based on their first names.

# Opinion

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DR SAM  
SIMS

OE, UCL's Faculty of  
education and society

## Ofsted reform should focus on inspection reliability first

**School inspections add value to data-driven school performance metrics by sending an experienced educator to collect first-hand evidence from inside a school. The human element of an Ofsted judgment is a feature, not a bug.**

But each inspector comes with their own unique set of experiences and priorities. This can lead to inconsistency. Two inspectors might reach different conclusions about the same school.

Given that perfect reliability is not desirable, how much reliability should we expect?

The American Educational Research Organisation argues that the higher the stakes of any assessment, the more reliable it should be. Big decisions require reliable judgments.

It is well known that Ofsted 'inadequate' judgments can lead to school closures or heads losing their jobs. So when it comes to the lowest Ofsted judgments, we should expect good reliability.

Christian Bokhove, John Jerrim and I have just released new Nuffield-funded research comparing the judgments reached by 1,376 different inspectors across 35,751 schools between 2012 and 2019.

We found that primary schools

assigned a female lead inspector are around one-third more likely to receive an 'inadequate' judgment. Just under 6 per cent of judgments reached by female inspectors were 'inadequate' versus 4.5 per cent by male inspectors.

Maybe female inspectors tend to get sent to weaker schools? But we found that this pattern held even when we compared male and female inspectors sent to inspect schools with the same prior Ofsted inspection rating, exam results, levels of pupil absences, pupil intake, and in the same region of the country.

Of course, we can't definitively establish that there were no differences between the schools to which male and female lead inspectors were assigned. Maybe there were subtle differences – visible to the inspectors, but not in our data.

The only way to definitively establish the reliability of Ofsted inspections is to send two Ofsted inspectors to the same school, and check whether they agree. Indeed, you may remember that Ofsted did just such a study back in 2016 and found that the two inspectors tended to agree.

But this research had some important limitations. Crucially, the inspected schools were all previously rated 'good',



### “ ‘Inadequate’ judgments may not be reliable

meaning they were subject to a short inspection in which the presumption was that they remained 'good' unless proven otherwise. The inspections were also conducted by more senior inspectors, known as HMIs.

At the time, Amanda Spielman described this study as a "first step" and said that Ofsted should "routinely be looking at issues of consistency and reliability". Ofsted has conducted a range of research since. However, there have been no more of these gold-standard two-inspector-one-school studies since.

Crucially, there has been no research on the critical 'inadequate' judgments. These are big decisions, but we do not have any evidence to suggest that they are reliable. Indeed, our new research provides some evidence to suggest they may not be.

Spielman's term as chief inspector comes to an end in January 2024. And current polling suggests the government may lose power in the general election soon after. This creates a window of opportunity for modernising Ofsted. But what should be done?

Labour has recently dropped its Corbyn-era policy of abolishing Ofsted, promising instead to reform the inspectorate and focus it more directly on school improvement. Retaining Ofsted will likely be popular with parents. But Bridget Phillipson was heckled by teachers when she announced the plan at a union conference this week.

I would advise the shadow secretary of state to announce a series of new Ofsted reliability studies. These should use the gold-standard two-inspector-one-school methodology. And there should be four studies, focusing on schools in each of the four categories.

This would likely be popular with teachers who demand to know whether the methods by which they are held to account are reliable. It should also be popular with parents who will learn about how much weight to place on judgments.

Importantly, the results would also provide the information policymakers need to make an informed decision about whether we have struck the right balance between the consequences of inspections and their reliability.



## NEWS: FREE SCHOOLS

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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# DfE loses millions on unused free school sites

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

The Department for Education has taken a £10 million hit after selling the buildings of failed free schools to mostly private property developers.

An investigation by Schools Week found it also spent an additional £10.9 million on upkeep, such as security, maintenance and utility bills, on the empty sites.

The government revealed after a parliamentary question last year that it had sold 20 buildings due to house free schools since 2017.

A later Freedom of Information request from Schools Week showed the it had spent £131 million snapping up 16 of the sites for which it held full data.

But these were sold on years later for just £120 million.

Experts suggest prices may have been high initially as developers pushed prices up if they knew the government and its property company LocatED were interested. The need for school-suitable sites may also have limited choice.

Hayley Dunn, a business leadership specialist at the school leaders' union ASCL, said the findings were "alarming", adding the amount of money lost "raises serious questions around due diligence".

"The DfE needs to urgently review its processes to stop this from happening. At a time when schools and colleges have to fight for every penny they receive from the government, these staggering losses make for particularly grim reading."

The department lost money on 11 sites.

Hampstead Police Station in north London was bought for £14.1 million in 2015, but sold for just £8.9 million in 2021 after planning permission for a free school failed.

The department also paid £1.4 million in upkeep costs on the vacant site, including £700,000 on security.

The Camden New Journal reported the building was vandalised during a Halloween party in 2020. It was bought by Redington Development to be turned into homes and offices.

Another £4.3 million was lost when Penn School in Buckinghamshire was sold to software billionaire Peter Kelly for £7.2 million in 2021. There are no details on why a planned free school was scrapped.

The DfE spent £1.3 million on upkeep and made £300,000 from location charges for filming, but



Vandalism in the former Hampstead police station sold by government for a £5.2m loss

Photo: Jill Furmanovsky

it was reportedly in a poor state of repair. The Victorian building also became grade II listed, which may have impacted the price. It could now become a boutique hotel and restaurant.

Christine Bayliss, a former civil servant in DfE's free school unit, said in the "early days" of the free school programme she would advise "proposer groups not to make it public that they were searching for land as it was a well-known thing that developers would push their price up".

Jeremy Pilgrim, the managing director of School Property Matters, said because schools needed unique buildings, it could "make it harder to get a good deal – the market is much tighter".

The department made a profit on four buildings, including £4 million on the Met Building in east London which sold to Metcom Ltd last year for £57 million. But it spent £2.4 million on the building's upkeep during attempts to open an all-through school.

When demand for primary school places declined in Croydon, Ark scrapped plans for a school and the site was sold for £4.2 million to Mayday Road LLP. Although this was £100,000 more than the buying price, profits were wiped out by £800,000 upkeep fees.

In total, £2.4 million was made from 16 sites,

including £800,000 from commercial leases, filming and parking charges at the Met Building.

Dunn said property was usually "one of the best assets for wealth growth and these sales have been carried out at a time when the market was booming".

According to the Office for National Statistics, the average UK house price has risen by 31 per cent between November 2017 and 2022.

Meg Hillier, the Labour chair of the public accounts committee, said if the money was put into existing capital for building repairs "it might be better" for children in crumbling schools.

The DfE said it did not pay in excess of what a site was worth, or purchase expensive sites, if there were better value-for-money choices in the area. It would also aim to recover assets and identify an alternative educational use for a site.

A spokesperson said: "The free schools programme has allocated more than £8.5 billion since 2010, delivering over 650 new schools and providing more than 390,000 good school places across the country.

"We take a strategic approach to the overall management of that investment, taking account of the overall value-for-money position when making decisions to acquire or dispose of a site."

## DfE's biggest failed free school losses

Proposed free school site	Bought	Price	Sold	Price	Loss
Former Hampstead Police Station, London	2015	£14.1m	2021	£8.9m	£5.2m
Penn School, Buckinghamshire	2016	£11.5m	2021	£7.2m	£4.3m
Kingston GEMS site, London	2015	£9.5m	2021	£6.3m	£3.2m
Westway Guildford	2016	£4.6m	2021	£3m	£1.6m
Thamesfield Way, Great Yarmouth	2016	£4.1m	2021	£2.7m	£1.4m

## NEWS: ACADEMIES

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## Academy CEO pay crackdown to focus on 'outliers'

TOM BELGER

@TOM\_BELGER

Academy leaders earning significantly more than their peers at similar trusts face new scrutiny from government.

Sector leaders welcomed a seemingly "more proportionate" approach to chief executive pay after the government said officials were looking at academy accounts to find "outlier levels of leadership pay across similar academy trusts".

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) used to write public letters demanding justifications from trusts that paid their leaders more than £150,000, but the clampdown has been in limbo since mid-2020.

Data blunders sparked a wider review of whether the agency's approach was "reasonable".

*Schools Week* previously reported the government was considering new methodology to decide which trusts to write to.

New emphasis on "outliers", revealed in Department for Education academy accounts published last week, points to how the new approach might work.

But both trust pay data and how "excessive" pay cases are dealt with remain under review, with no final decisions understood to have been made or signed off by ministers. The DfE declined to comment.

Leora Cruddas, the chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts (CST), said: "We welcome what looks to be a more proportionate approach."

Giving benchmarking data to the sector itself would also help it "make good pay decisions", she added.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the school and college leaders' union ASCL, said "blunt" £150,000 thresholds failed to reflect context.

While pay should not be "excessive", there was a "market rate" for leaders with significant responsibilities.

The number of earners on £150,000



or more rose from 473 in 2019-20 to 563 in 2020-21.

The DfE's academy accounts name these trusts, but do not define how "similar" trusts will be worked out, or suggest how "outliers" will be dealt with.

Sharon O'Ryan, the director of the salary benchmarking company Pay in Education (PiE), said clients often defined "similar trusts" differently, and even changed definitions after working with her.

Meanwhile the law firm Browne Jacobson has highlighted the "danger" comparing pay with particular CEOs when their pay may not be "evidence-based", as guidance requires.

Boards are advised to consider context and compare pay with "similar" trusts.

But only 60 per cent of trustees polled by the National Governance Association in 2021 said they used benchmarking.

While this was "useful", Sam Henson, the association's policy director, said benchmarking risked a "race to the top".

The sector had made "real progress", but economic conditions made outliers "more unpalatable", he said.

CST research in November found "continued pay restraint" for leaders, with chief executive pay rising 1.5 per cent to £137,000 on average in 2022.

But *Schools Week's* annual CEO pay investigation last year revealed the country's best-paid leaders enjoyed bigger pay rises than their peers.

The country's highest-paid chief executive is Harris Federation's Sir Dan Moynihan. Accounts published for the 51-school trust this week show his pay for last year remained at £455,000 to £460,000.

The government has been dubbed "toothless" over high pay rising – despite its letters – and the schools bill's demise leaves ministers without new powers of intervention.

But the opposite is happening among colleges, which were recently reclassified as public sector bodies.

Treasury sign-off will be needed for any new appointments paid £150,000 or more and for any bonuses in excess of £17,500.

Antony Power, a partner at PHP Law, said stricter college rules raised the question: "Will the government decide academies should be caught by similar rules?"





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NEWS: SUPPORT STAFF

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# Council shuns support staff pay rise in 'challenging climate'

TOM BELGER

@TOM\_BELGER

EXCLUSIVE

Some school support staff got pay rises up to five times lower than their peers last year because their employers ditched national pay agreements.

Schools Week has learnt that Buckinghamshire County Council offered support staff a 2 per cent rise last year, despite the national pay deal in which most local authorities offered a £1,925 hike.

That increase, which many academy trusts also honoured, marked the highest rise in a decade – worth 10.5 per cent for the lowest earners and 4 per cent for higher earners.

One higher-level teaching assistant in Buckinghamshire said 2 per cent fell “way short” of his rising bills, diesel and food costs. It marked “another pay cut that will drive people out of educational support roles”.

A Local Government Association poll last month found a quarter of county councils were struggling to recruit teaching assistants.

Buckinghamshire recently warned of an “incredibly challenging climate” amid soaring demand and prices, launching a £10 million cost-cutting drive despite having “no more easy efficiencies”.



Anita Cranmer, its cabinet member for education, said support staff had received “local terms and conditions for a number of years”, agreed by elected members.

The 2 per cent rise likely affected about 155 maintained schools. It is not known if the 80 or so local academies used their own agreements, Buckinghamshire's or national ones.

Most councils negotiate support staff pay scales nationally with unions through the National Joint Council (NJC), committing to a “green book” of terms and conditions.

But a handful of councils do not.

North Northamptonshire joined the NJC when the county split in two in 2021, whereas West Northamptonshire did not.

Yet the latter still bases school wages on NJC pay scales – and even offered staff 0.25 per cent more last year.

Medway Council also left in 2013, with schools using a “mix of nationally and locally agreed terms”, but mirroring the NJC deal on pay, according to a spokesperson. Hampshire also negotiates local terms, but copies NJC pay awards.

Ruth Levin, a senior national officer at the union Unison, said 2 per cent awards were “out of step in a cost-of-living crisis”, risked staff leaving and showed national pay rates were “essential”.

Aida Smajlovic, a partner at the law firm Winckworth Sherwood, said all trusts set their own pay, but most still followed national agreements.

Changing staff terms was “difficult”, while trusts feared a “two-tier workforce” or recruitment challenges if new hires received different terms.

Smajlovic said the economic climate, inflation and industrial action might also trigger “more radical changes, because trusts just don't have the funding”.

The GMB union on Thursday singled out Queensmill Trust, where support staff at its two London special schools have not received the “green book” rises due in 2021 and 2022.

Freddie Adu, the executive head, said the trust, embroiled in a funding row with a local council, faced “exceptionally difficult choices” as it had “simply not had sufficient funds”. But it was working with regulators to cover the payments.

TOM BELGER | @TOM\_BELGER

## Unions chase 12.7 per cent for support staff

Unions representing support staff are calling for an inflation-busting 12.7 per cent pay rise from April, a £15-an-hour minimum wage and “recognition” for those supporting pupils with additional needs.

Unison, GMB and Unite filed their 2023 pay claim this week to kickstart bargaining with local authority employers, with wages negotiated between them rather than involving central government – as for teachers.

The pay hike would affect not only maintained school staff and wider local government workforces represented by the unions, but also employees at many academy trusts. Trusts are not involved in negotiations, but typically honour the deals.

The unions want pay spines to increase by 2 per cent more than inflation in 2023, to ensure gains are not eroded by rising costs. They claim past pay freezes and below-inflation rises have left teaching assistants 23 per cent worse off in real-terms than in 2010.

They warn even a £1,925 pay rise last year was “completely wiped out by rising household costs”, and school workers were experiencing “the fastest fall in living standards since records began”.

They also argue higher pay would tackle staffing shortages, with “even some traditionally low-paid high street/retail jobs” overtaking council pay.

But Leora Cruddas, the chief executive of the

Confederation of School Trusts, warned any rise would need to be fully funded as current budgets “do not have room for large increases in pay”.

The 12.7 per cent demand is based on the retail price index (RPI), which government statisticians call “not fit for purpose”. The consumer price index, the main alternative measure of inflation, is expected to rise 7.4 per cent.

Other demands include two hours off the working week and recognition of special educational needs and disability (SEND) specialism in support staff pay.



## NEWS

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# HPV inoculation rates lag behind pre-Covid levels

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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Ministers have been told to “step-up” efforts to get more teenagers vaccinated against HPV as rates are yet to return to pre-pandemic levels.

The routine human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, which helps to prevent most cervical cancers, is delivered in schools to year 8 and 9 pupils in roughly two doses about 12 months apart.

But health officials say the programme has been impacted by closures, pupil and staff absences, and Covid-19 and flu vaccination programmes.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) also says there have been reduced consent rates and reports of vaccine hesitancy in some areas.

The latest data for 2021-22 shows take-up rates are 18 percentage points lower for year 8 girls than before the pandemic.

Their lowest rate was in London at 61.6 per cent compared with 74.9 per cent in the south east.

*Schools Week* previously reported how an NHS trust apologised in 2021 for delaying teenagers’ first jabs until 2022 because of “high demand” for Covid vaccines.



The UKHSA is now urging parents to ensure eligible young people are inoculated before they leave school, although they are eligible up to 25.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary at school leaders’ union ASCL, said: “We would encourage the government to step-up its efforts to promote higher levels of take-up.”

The data shows 69.9 per cent of year 8 girls had their first dose last year, compared with 88 per cent before the pandemic in 2018-19. It dropped dramatically to 59.2 per cent in 2019-20, and rose again to 76.6 in 2020-21.

Boys became eligible for the jab in 2019. The data shows coverage for year 8 was 62.4

per cent in 2021-22, 8.7 percentage points lower than the previous year.

Data suggests some catch-up with year 10 pupils, but coverage is still below pre-pandemic levels.

A study published in *The Lancet* in 2021 found the HPV programme had prevented about 450 cancers and 17,200 pre-cancers up to mid-2019. Cervical cancer rates were 87 per cent lower.

Dr Vanessa Saliba, a consultant epidemiologist at the UKHSA, said pupils who missed their HPV jabs should contact their school nurse, immunisation team or GP surgery to arrange a catch-up.

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## Watchdog finds £226m underspend in recovery funds

Education recovery cash of £226 million went unspent, a report has found, renewing calls that ministers’ plans to embed tutoring in schools while withdrawing subsidies is “unsustainable”.

The National Audit Office (NAO) assessed the value-for-money of the £3.5 billion designated to help pupils catch up.

Children are “making progress” in recovering lost learning, but disadvantaged pupils remain further behind compared with their peers, the report said.

But the public spending watchdog found a £226 million underspend in recovery funds at the end of the 2021-22 financial year. This was about 14 per cent of the “available funding”.

The NAO would not provide a breakdown, but part of this will be a £124 million underspend on 2021 summer schools, which had low take up.

The overall figure is also likely to be “understated” as it does not include any unused National Tutoring Programme money.

*Schools Week* has reported early estimates that this could be more than £100 million. But the government is now negotiating with schools who say clawback figures are incorrect, meaning the actual figure could be lower.

Ministers want to “embed” tutoring in schools to address low attainment, even after the subsidy stops at the end of 2023-24 academic year.

*Schools Week* has reported how schools are

struggling with larger contributions to tutoring as this year’s 60 per cent government subsidy drops to 25 per cent next year.

The NAO now recommends ministers “assess whether tutoring in schools is financially sustainable given DfE’s objective for tutoring to become embedded in the school system”.

The government should also report regularly on its white paper ambitions, including that 90 per cent of children by 2030 leave primary school with the expected standard in reading, writing and maths.

This fell to 59 per cent last year. The disadvantage gap at primary and secondary is also at its widest in 10 years.

## NEWS

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# 'Inadequate' Teach First loses £2m bonus in struggle to recruit

AMY WALKER

@AMYRWALKER

Teach First's flagging recruitment last year has been branded "inadequate" by the Department for Education.

The teacher training provider has also missed out on bonuses of up to £2 million after signing up its smallest cohort in four years.

*Schools Week* revealed in November that the government's flagship provider for attracting high-flying graduates missed its target for 2022-23 by a fifth.

Newly published data on key performance indicators for government contracts shows this led to an 'inadequate' rating, a downgrade from 2021 when the government rated recruitment as 'requires improvement' – although it said performance had been impacted by Covid.

DfE officials noted this year had been "challenging", with the government missing its recruitment target for secondary schools



by 41 per cent.

The contractor was rated as 'good' against three other government targets.

This included ensuring 90 per cent of participants who started training achieved qualified teacher status (QTS) and that 94 per cent of this group then completed year 2 as teachers.

On recruitment, Teach First has since agreed to "make adjustments" to its approach and "pilot new initiatives" to boost numbers.

It told *Schools Week* this included rerunning its autumn institute, which allowed recruits to apply outside the usual recruitment window.

Of the 2022-23 cohort, just 122 used this

route.

Other new approaches include an "expansive, targeted campus recruitment campaign" in which the provider will visit 60 universities and host and attend 350 graduate events.

It will also launch a "self-led taster course" this month, focusing on STEM subjects.

Undergraduates interested in Teach First will be able to access "a bank of online, internship-style content".

The DfE said its key performance indicator targets – such as Teach First's recruitment target – were set to "challenge providers, in order to drive performance".

It added that it was "working closely with Teach First to support it with adjustments to its recruitment approach".

Public documents show that Teach First's current four-year government contract, which covers two cohorts, is worth £113 million.

Teach First was eligible for a £1 million bonus in 2021 and 2022 if it snared 1,750 new trainees in each year.

But it enrolled 1,521 in 2021 and just 1,394 last year.

TOM BELGER | @TOM\_BELGER

## DfE gives more than £21m to struggling academy trusts

The government handed £21.2 million to more than 70 academy trusts in financial difficulty in 2020-21, new figures show.

Some £17.1 million of the exceptional funding will never be repaid, with the remaining £4.1 million given as loans.

Guidance says the funding is only approved case-by-case "in the most serious circumstances", and non-repayable grants only when there is "no other means to protect pupils' interests".

Troubled trusts received a combined £31.3 million the previous year, and £28.2 million in 2017-18. Figures for 2018-19 and 2021-22 were not available.

While guidance says there are "consequences if an academy trust is found to be poorly managed", payouts may raise eyebrows at other cash-strapped trusts and councils.

Non-repayable funding totalled £43.5 million over the three years where data was available – more than the £41 million local authorities

will see cut from school improvement grants from April.

Eleven recipients in 2020-21 were university technical colleges, a sector plagued by financial problems.

Thirty-nine were "financially triggered" to support the "rapid transfer of academies out of a closing trust".

Twenty-two were to "secure a return to financial stability for a trust in cumulative deficit".

Four grants were "educationally triggered".

Recipients include the scandal-hit the SchoolsCompany Trust, which is suing ex-trustees over "lost public funds".

The largest was a £2.4 million grant to the Hinckley Academy, on top of £1.4 million in 2019-20. Regulators slapped financial controls on the standalone trust before it joined The Futures Trust, which has said it received capital funding for site "improvements".

Big Education Trust received £1.2 million,



which it said covered staffing, fixed and closure costs after the International Academy of Greenwich free school closed. It had struggled to find a permanent site.

The pay-outs were detailed last week in the Department for Education's annual academy accounts for 2020-21. The document was published later than in previous years.



# Empowering young people through a personalised approach to learning

Exams dominate the UK's education system. They have come to define what is taught, how it is taught, and young people's educational experience. The grades race exacerbates inequalities and detracts from developing the kinds of qualities and skills that young people need to thrive in learning, work and life.

Education leaders and employers are increasingly looking beyond exams, considering how to provide a well-rounded education for their learners and how to find out more about an employee's potential and what kind of person they are.

ASDAN has an established history of developing young people's competencies and personal qualities to build their confidence, wellbeing and personal resilience. Through advocating personal and social effectiveness, ASDAN is driven to inspire confidence in young learners and prepare them for the challenges and opportunities ahead.

In response to the abrupt changes in education and society that 2020 brought, ASDAN began updating their personal effectiveness courses. Continuing the focus of preparing young people for their futures, they developed new qualifications to meet their needs in an uncertain world.

The Personal and Social Effectiveness (PSE) qualifications were designed to develop modern and future-facing competencies in communication, collaboration and emotional intelligence. Aimed at learners aged 14 to 19 working at Level 1 and 2, the PSE qualifications offer a unique and personalised approach to enabling individual progress, assessed by a portfolio of evidence.

The ASDAN Award in Personal and Social Effectiveness covers three skilled-based units at Award level:

- Developing myself and my performance
- Working with others
- Problem solving



Learners can advance to the Certificate in Personal and Social Effectiveness by delivering a project linked to a topic covered in one of the three units. These cover a wide range of topics such as health and wellbeing, science and technology, the environment and independent living.

By selecting to study topics that interest and motivate them, learners can create experiences they find meaningful. Their positive engagement with the subject matter provides a solid framework for developing the targeted skills, attributes and values of the core units. This approach to learning can help improve behaviours and grow confidence, crucial for young people's future development.

The qualification was created in close collaboration with education practitioners and ASDAN members, incorporating their input to guide its development. Employing this pedagogical approach to feedback, ASDAN's PSE evaluation project continues to gather rich insights to reflect on and help shape learning processes.

Offering a unique flexibility for teachers, the course is equipped with intuitive and adaptable resources to design their curriculum in a way that reflects and meets the needs of their learners. The Scheme of Learning provides support in planning and managing the course delivery, and accompanying resource packs include over 30 hours of robust teaching resources.

Susannah Harlow of ASDAN is a co-author of

the PSE qualifications and notes how they are "incredibly flexible and adaptable and can be tailored to a variety of curriculum models in education settings." She adds how PSE can motivate and assist with existing studies, giving "learners the personal effectiveness to transfer into their core subject GCSEs."

Carolyn Rolleston, Head of Department (Vocational) at Katharine Lady Berkeley's School, Gloucestershire, was one of several members who collaborated with ASDAN to ensure the qualification met the needs of both teachers and learners. She noted how the PSE qualification engaged and motivated her learners, as well as increasing confidence.

"The personalised learning aspect is crucial for learners' future development," Carolyn said. "It is totally a unique course that is valued by the learners, their parents, and the staff delivering it. I value it immensely."

Read more about the Personal and Social Effectiveness qualifications:  
<https://www.asdan.org.uk/personal-and-social-effectiveness-level-1-and-2/>

Get in touch with an ASDAN advisor to discuss the benefit to your learners:  
**0117 941 1126 | [info@asdان.org.uk](mailto:info@asdان.org.uk)**



## Profile

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL

# ‘Not one parent here gives a hoot about Ofsted’

Jessica Hill meets Kulvarn Atwal, a “maverick” Essex headteacher determined to question Ofsted’s ruling on one of his two maintained primary schools

**D**r Kulvarn Atwal’s reputation for teacher development recently attracted the entire staff of a Norwegian school to Essex, just to watch him teach.

But the headteacher of two maintained primaries in Ilford admits his innovative

approach means some consider him a “maverick”.

And right now he’s wielding a mighty axe to grind against Ofsted. Its determination to ensure all schools stick to set curriculum guidelines could mean he loses his headship.

While one of the primaries he leads, Highlands,

is deemed to be ‘outstanding’, the other, Uphall, where he has applied the same approach with similarly impressive behaviour and attainment outcomes, has just been graded ‘requires improvement’ for a second time.

Atwal has just 15 days from last Monday to



# Profile: Dr Kulvarn Atwal

make the case to their regional director as to why the school should not be ordered to become an academy and join a trust, which will he believes would see him “removed” from post.

“There’s nothing more we can do. Our local authority legal team just think you cannot win against Ofsted.”

Atwal, the author of two books on teacher development, believes the current culture of “monitoring, compliance and control” is to blame. He says the “ears of government” are held by those who don’t believe teachers can be trusted.

He looks aghast at the 11,000-word formal complaint he wrote to the watchdog – which made no difference to the grading, despite it acknowledging errors made during and after the inspection.

“They’re destroying a school community that is absolutely thriving,” he says.

## Funding teachers to learn

Atwal believes his schools are thriving because of investing heavily in teachers’ professional development, with graded observations ditched.

It all started when, three years into his doctorate in education while deputy head of Uphall, he discovered workplace learning theories arguing that more learning takes place informally than can ever take place formally. The theories – which “blew” his mind – are not unusual in the corporate world, but have yet to gain traction in schools.

Atwal went on to design a model for school leaders to maximise teachers’ learning opportunities. At the crux is the notion that for children to be critical thinkers, their teachers must be empowered to be so.

Atwal pays 60 per cent of the cost for any teacher at either of his schools to study a masters in education-related subjects, and gives them time off during the day for research. At Highlands, up to 50 per cent of teachers have completed the higher degree, part-funded by the school, while at Uphall it’s 15 per cent.

His approach is rare in the UK, where just over 20 per cent of teachers are believed to have a



## ‘They’re destroying a thriving school community’

master’s degree. In Finland, it’s 100 per cent.

CPD here is normally restricted to five training days a year and weekly after-school meetings, when Atwal claims teachers are “knackered”.

While other heads dismiss his strategy “because their teachers could go work elsewhere” after graduating, he believes in “developing teachers for the profession, not just for our schools”.

The funding his schools provide – £600 per module – is the same as three days’ supply cover. While maintained schools are facing severe cost pressures, Atwal claims he spends much less on supply and recruitment than other schools.

When he arrived at Highlands his supply budget was about £100,000, with £15,000 for recruitment and retention and £5,000 for CPD. Atwal boosted the CPD budget to £20,000 and cut supply funding to £80,000, because “teachers don’t get stressed and pressured, so they don’t get sick so much.

“I don’t need to be covering these people because they’re happy, they’d rather come into work.”

Sandy Kaur, Highlands’ deputy head, never believed she was capable of a masters. She is now on her second – in race, education and decolonial thought.

But finding the time to study doesn’t come easy, she admits. “It’s getting harder, because the pressures and workload are tougher than I’ve ever known. But we all wanted to go for it because it makes us better teachers.”

## Pupil-turned-head

Atwal identifies with his working-class Highlands kids because he was a pupil there himself; his grandfather was illiterate, dad worked on a building site and mum in a factory.

School reports show teachers saw him as a chatterbox who would “only work with constant supervision”.

He began studying for a MEd in his NQT year “in secret” after being told by leaders of the resource provision school in Stratford where he taught that it was “not appropriate” for someone in their first year teaching. But by the end of his sixth

# Profile: Dr Kulvarn Atwal

year, Atwal was managing a teacher training school there.

Five weeks before he began leading Highlands in 2012, it went from 'outstanding' to 'requires improvement'.

He was under pressure from council officials to turn it around. But his plan – a cull of graded lesson observations, with teachers instead “developing their understanding of the craft of teaching” through peer learning and research – was not what they had in mind.

Atwal said he was looked at as if he were “completely mad” and ordered to observe every teacher, with warnings he “could lose his job” if the school did not improve.

He chose to ignore them. Teachers who “preferred a more hierarchical model” – including the entire leadership team – left.

Atwal, who was then in the fourth year of his doctorate, could not afford for his teachers to do advanced study, so he led their research instead.

They studied a book by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam, *Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment*, which explored how to “enable children to become self evaluative”. Then each year group team came up with a research question to investigate.

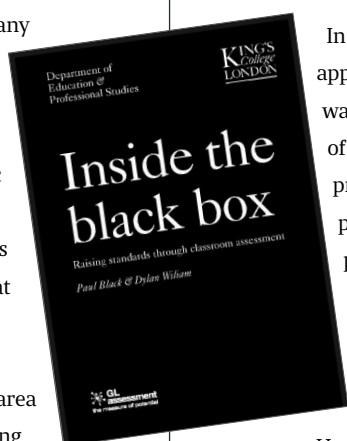
Instead of leaders observing lessons, Atwal extended an “open invitation” for any teacher to observe him teach each day – “not because I’m the best teacher, but because they can begin to understand what dialogic teaching looks like. You’re more interested in the quality of a child’s thinking and motivation than what they’re producing in books”.

‘Peer learning’ involved three teachers observing another in an area of practice they “might be struggling with”, which Atwal explains “can only happen within a culture of high trust”.

At the end of term a celebration evening was held in which each group presented findings. They were then incorporated into a “roadmap to improvement”.



## ‘When you’re running a school, just be cleaner than clean’



In testament to the success of his approach, in five years Highlands was recognised under the Mayor of London’s School for Success programme as one of the highest-performing primaries for pupil progress. Ofsted graded it ‘good’, then ‘outstanding’ in 2019 – the year Atwal’s first book, *The Thinking School*, set out his ideas.

He took over at Uphill just after Ofsted had rated it ‘requires improvement’. “Everything you possibly could think of as wrong with a school was wrong”. He removed the entire leadership team.

He describes the next phase as “the messy stuff – the restructuring, which then becomes

allegations against me. But when you’re running a school, just be cleaner than clean. Go by processes. That way, unions can’t say anything.”

Atwal’s claims to have cut £1 million in annual costs from the five-form entry school partly by shedding leadership positions. He “empowers everybody to be seen as a leader”.

### Battle with Ofsted

He was relieved to get a call from Ofsted last year, because as an RI school Uphall is not entitled to DfE funding for falling rolls – worth £307,000 that year. The falling number of pupils is a “massive issue in London” and has a greater impact on larger schools like his.

He thinks the funding exemption exists to “suck the energy out” of schools, forcing them to academise.

But Atwal says the feedback after the first inspection day was “the best I’ve ever received in any school” He was “cock-a-hoop”.

But then concerns emerged about sequencing in some foundation subjects, which was contained in one document as opposed to being presented separately. Atwal was told this spelt a ‘requires improvement’ grade for “quality of education”, which then brought the overall grade down.

Despite spending the next six months disputing “factual inaccuracies” in the report – Atwal lodged a formal complaint, followed by an internal review of the complaints process – the watchdog has refused to back down.

He defiantly claims that “not one parent” at Uphall “gives a hoot about Ofsted”, and that pupil numbers are still rising.

Last year, Uphall’s early years group was the second-highest performing in Redbridge, despite it being in the most deprived ward.

Atwal remains convinced he is building his pupils “to be successful lifelong learners, not just to regurgitate knowledge”.

The government’s focus on “making the curriculum as robust as possible” is turning teachers into “trained monkeys, getting kids to start preparing for GCSEs aged five”, he says.



# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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ANONYMOUS

Director of education,  
Multi Academy Trust

## Dear Amanda. I'm reporting a serious safeguarding concern

**An anonymous director of education calls out 'the big ask' from schools and calls on Ofsted's chief inspector to provide more support and speak truth to power**

To: Amanda Spielman

Re: **SERIOUS SAFEGUARDING CONCERN**

Dear Amanda,  
As *Keeping Children Safe In Education* requires, I am writing to report a safeguarding concern that only you are in a position to address. I am publishing it here not as a provocation but to ensure that this reaches you rapidly, so that you might act with haste.

As the person leading Ofsted, with oversight of those who determine how well we respond to these issues ourselves, the action you take will be a model to us and to your inspectorate.

We are doing what is required of us by the Department for Education, by inspectors and by our moral compass. We focus on the quality of the curriculum and on personal development. We make reasonable adjustments and maintain high expectations. We go above and beyond every day, and every day this takes us ever further away from our own health and wellbeing.

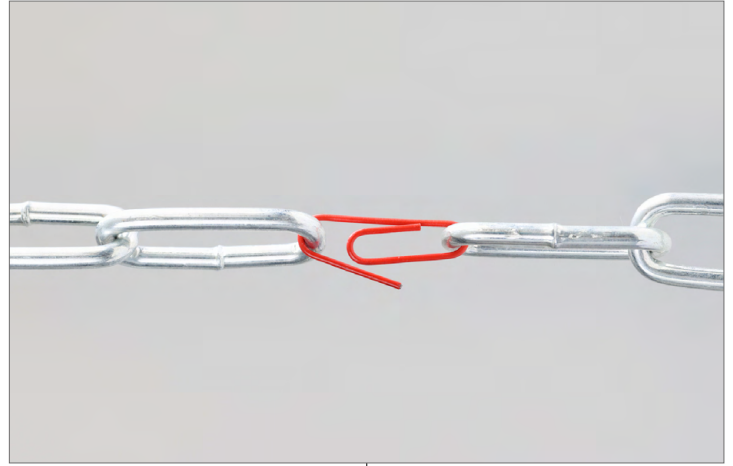
But we keep going. We hold up communities with no other safety net. We make phone calls, home visits and threaten fines to those with no means of paying. We promise one-to-one care without knowing how we will resource it, and we always find a way.

Despite all this, the children in our care (in your care) are not faring well and this worsens daily.

We understand that the pandemic appears to be over. We come to work suspecting we're infected, but knowing a positive test result only makes life harder. So we say we have a cold and we work through it, surreptitiously holding our breaths when frail colleagues or students come near.

What's more difficult is the big ask: normalising abject poverty. Pretending lockdowns didn't rock the lives of our children and their families to the ground in a violent avalanche of jagged edges. Keeping calm and carrying on when we know they're slipping through the net and there's nothing more we can do.

Your latest annual report provided a glimmer of hope that you understood. Low attendance, lack of social services capacity, dreadful SEND and mental health services due to underfunding. Yes, we thought. She will do as she said and make Ofsted a force for



“Our children are in more and more danger each day

improvement and for good.

Then inspections began. They asked us how we were addressing societal woes we had no hope of remedying. More evidence for you to fight the Good Fight, we hoped. Ofsted will share best practice and dig others out of the hole. Amanda will shout and scream that our children are in trouble.

That's not what happened. You asked why children weren't in school even though you knew. You asked what we were doing about it and we told you. Good work, you said, but behaviour and attitudes were "Inadequate" because all of our "good work" wasn't showing sustained improvement on the attendance graph.

You asked if we were keeping our kids safe and we showed you we were. We explained that part of this was excluding those few children who posed a serious danger to others despite all of the support we'd offered them and our countless emails begging for help from LAs and CAMHS. Good work, you said, but leadership and management were "Inadequate"

because too many of those children were SEND.

Because of this, our children are in more and more danger each day. More of us are leaving, unwell, not applying or afraid to lead. We're retiring, retreating and tired. Our workforce is dwindling in number and stamina at the same time as our children's position worsens.

Many will have quietly become young carers during the pandemic or have hidden safeguarding concerns. Many will have been introduced to gangs, drugs and porn. Many will need academic interventions and specialist support.

How will we know or address any of this when we are so stretched and exhausted? When we simply don't have the manpower and our Ofsted outcome scares off the few who were interested?

Therefore, as I am required to do, I formally report that our children are in danger. We are out of funds, options, capacity and answers. So if not for what is right, then for your legacy, what will you do to save them?

# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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GUY  
SHEARS

CEO, Central Region Schools Trust

## What Labour can learn from visiting trusts like ours

**Guy Shears reflects on the shadow education minister's visit to one of his schools and what he hopes it can contribute to the Labour party's policy agenda**

Recently, we hosted Bridget Phillipson, shadow education minister, at Oldbury Park Primary School in Worcester to discuss the work we have been doing to tackle the attainment gap within our communities.

The meeting was a really positive opportunity to share our work. As a trust dedicated to our core purpose of driving social mobility, we believe that no matter what the political landscape of the day happens to be, education policy should be resolute in raising aspiration and ensuring strong outcomes for all students. At the heart of any party's educational policy should be a commitment to ensuring that a young person's background and personal circumstances are never a barrier to reaching their full potential.

In that spirit, there are a number of key takeaways we hope Labour's education team gained from their visit, not least that on-the-ground insights should help to shape future policy decisions.

### Support for disadvantaged students

One of the main ways to achieve social mobility is to provide exceptional education and tailored support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds by ensuring support and funding is directed where it is most needed.

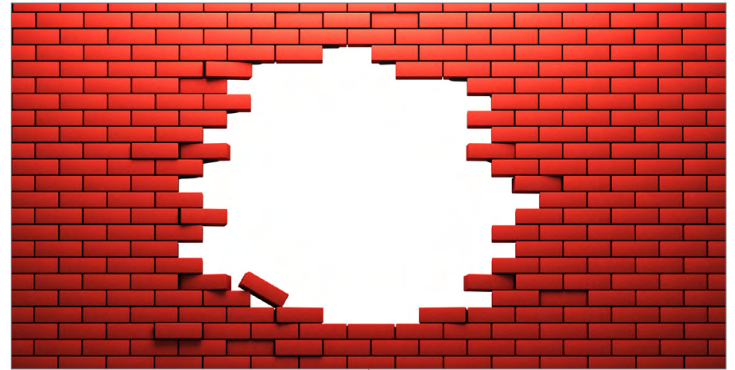
A central component of our own disadvantaged strategy is the provision of targeted academic support. This includes introducing a specific focus on reading across our trust – identifying pupils who are falling behind their peers in literacy skills early and helping them to catch up.

In introducing any type of support programmes, schools, trusts, and policy makers need to understand that every child is different and that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work. This is why strong and flexible plans for supporting disadvantaged students need to be introduced at every level.

The subsequent impact of going above and beyond for these pupils in unquantifiable, and we hope a true commitment to ensuring this level of support is replicated in the formulation of education policy moving forward.

### Investing in the school workforce

What should underpin all education policy is a commitment to investing in the recruitment, training and



## “ We need to dismantle non-academic barriers

retention of high-quality teachers and support staff. To make the most difference for every student, the best teachers and staff need to be in every classroom and every school.

Within our trust, this is manifest through our focus on creating individualised continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities that enable our staff to continue to boost and refine their own skillsets.

This comes through nurturing effective teacher talent through investment in widespread CPD opportunities and outspoken support for the importance of the profession in its influence on raising the aspirations of local communities by shaping future minds.

### Non-academic barriers

Outside of the classroom, there also needs to be a clear commitment to dismantling non-academic barriers. This includes a focus on attendance, behaviour and social and emotional learning support. These barriers tend to disproportionately affect disadvantaged students and so present more of a challenge for some schools than others.

Ignoring or deprioritising these factors will impact outcomes.

All students need to be in class on time and in the right frame of mind to learn well. Really focusing on detailed pupil premium plans tailored to each pupil's individual context is crucial. So too is ensuring that these plans adequately respond to how such factors impact a student's ability to engage in their lessons.

Of course, plans are meaningless without effective implementation and measurable impact. However, when making decisions about the future of education and about how to assess the success of schools in supporting students, there should be a strong consideration of their efforts to tackle these outside factors.

As schools and trusts across the country face historic challenges such as recruitment and retention, and the cost-of-living crisis, we encourage decision-makers from all parties to ensure the success of young people stays at the forefront of education policy so that no child falls through gaps.

Indeed, it would be better if there were fewer gaps for them to fall through. And the more policy makers visit schools, the fewer gaps there will be in their understanding of what that will take.



# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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RACHAEL  
HOWELL

CEO, The Stour Academy Trust

## 21st-Century learning saved our deprived school

**Rescuing Richmond Academy from poor performance meant ditching ideologies and trying something new, explains Rachael Howell**

The famous saying that ‘insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results’ helps to understand the journey we have been on at Richmond Academy. I only wish that I had fully grasped this earlier in our journey.

When the Stour Academy Trust arrived at Richmond Academy (the eighth most deprived school in Kent) in January 2017, the school had never achieved a ‘Good’ grading from Ofsted and it was quickly apparent that its problems were endemic. Aspiration, hope and trust were in short supply, and I was frequently met with variations of “well, this is Richmond, what do you expect?”

Meanwhile, behaviours were extreme, engagement was non-existent and attendance was extremely low. Provision was poor for all children, SEND support was barely existent and parents were rightly angry.

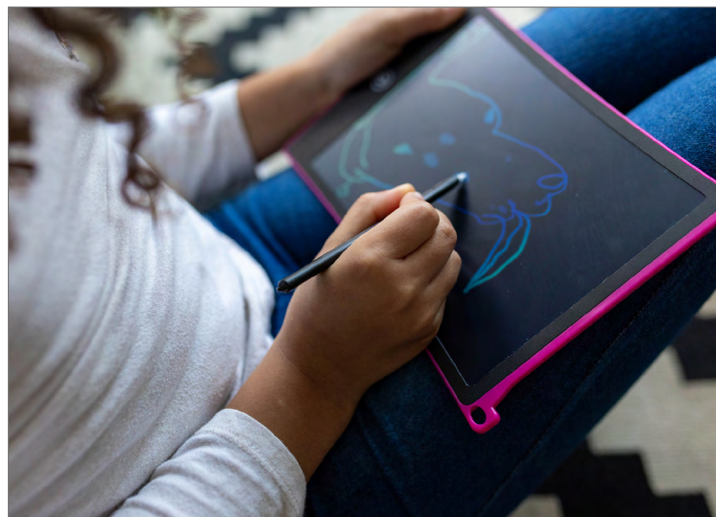
Since then, we have developed a more acute understanding of what it means to say that deprived schools have a tougher journey to ‘Good’. But at the time I thought I knew what to do, so we did all the

things you would do. We appointed the right staff, put a curriculum in place, a behaviour policy, raised expectations, invested in resources, professional development and the environment.

It took two years. We hit many setbacks, and things got worse before they got better, but by 2019 all the children were in classrooms, behaviour was stable, exclusions were falling and we had a strong and stable staff. Crucially, we had a headteacher who was strong enough to captain the ship and resilient enough to weather the storms. Before Helen Every, Richmond Academy had had 14 headteachers in 10 years, and it was easy to see why.

But the school still wasn’t good. We weren’t making enough progress at the required pace. That’s when doubt set in. Strong captains, stable ships and capable crews were forging forward in other schools, but not here. Our children were in classrooms, but engagement and enjoyment were low. They did as they were told but only because they didn’t want to lose privileges. They did their work, but they were only motivated to finish and not to learn.

So we decided to be bold and embrace change. We developed a vision that would challenge the dominant traditional ideologies and better prepare our children for the



“We challenged dominant ideologies and the risk paid off

21st century workplace. That risk has paid off.

We started by redesigning our classrooms to create developmentally sensitive settings. Our children struggled to sit still, to listen for long periods and to not talk to their peers – so we stopped asking them to. Our only non-negotiable would be learning.

We provided classrooms where children could move freely, built space for collaboration and designed learning to actively promote collaboration. We don’t mind if they stand, bounce on a ball or sit on a beanbag – as long as they are learning.

We planned for the intentional deployment of technology to help us deliver personalised learning and remove barriers for all children, especially those with SEND. Our children do not have exercise books; they all have access to pen-enabled devices.

Technology has allowed us to provide alternative ways for children to share their learning and receive feedback. They can now

share their learning through Green Screen, Flip and Minecraft, and our teachers can leave voice notes and screen recordings when marking.

We stopped giving identified resources to children with SEND and made them accessible to all. We stopped differentiation and started adapting. More importantly, we teach the children to adapt for themselves – a skill that will take them much further than year 6.

And then things happened. Our children began to positively engage, regulate their own behaviours and enjoy learning. Richmond Academy became the first primary in Kent to be awarded Microsoft Showcase Status and achieved its first ever ‘Good’ rating from Ofsted in late 2022.

George Bernard Shaw said: ‘Progress is impossible without change; and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.’ Schools like Richmond Academy need leaders who can change their minds, because doing the same thing over and over again just isn’t working.

# Opinion

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DIANA  
YOUNG

Governor, Richard Atkins Primary School

## The online safety bill leaves schools exposed

**Schools can be effective in helping to keep children safe online but they shouldn't have to and this bill could change that, writes Diana Young**

As a marketer, school governor and parent with primary-aged children, I am worried that the Online Safety Bill working its way through parliament does not go far enough. It should go one step further by banning access to social media platforms for everyone under 18-years-old.

As a consultant, I conduct daily research on the latest trends across TikTok, Instagram and Facebook, resulting in the most distressing content on my curated 'For You' feed based on the platforms' algorithms. Content from creators suffering the effects of an eating disorder, mental health issue, drug or alcohol abuse regularly appears. Many creators strive for virality, producing distressing content containing violence, racism, misogyny or even child neglect.

Most shockingly, despite flagging disturbing content as either 'inappropriate' or 'not interested', some social media algorithms continue to drive more of it.

A BBC report has found that demand for so-called Instagram smiles has left people with damage

from wearing braces or aligners ordered online, while hashtag #tiktokmademebuyit contains 38.7 billion views on TikTok. Social media channels have the power to indoctrinate young children by driving unsolicited content or viral trends, such as the latest TikTok trend that sees creators prepare and eat balut, a Filipino delicacy of embryonated eggs.

Teachers and school leaders know that children are impressionable. Pressure from children demanding mobile phones seems to be coming at a younger and younger age, and social media channels will not actively deter under 13s from joining their platforms.

In a recent broadcast interview, Kate Winslet spoke out against the negative impact of social media on children's mental health and urged the government to make social media firms enforce age limits to help tackle the problem. However, other social media sites such as Roblox, offer "users of all ages the ability to socialize and play experiences with others in the community". This continues amid concerning reports about the moderation of its bathroom voyeur roleplays. There are also reports of cyber bullying on WhatsApp, and Snapchat has been cited in numerous child murder investigations.



“ Schools can do plenty but they shouldn't have to

For these reasons and more, the age limit to join social media platforms should be raised to 18 years-old, with ID verification required to remove anonymity. Facebook appears to be moving towards this model with periodic requests for government ID to validate accounts.

Aside from government intervention, the roles of teachers, school leaders and governors are paramount to safeguarding and educating children on safe internet use. Online safety and social media policies should be updated regularly to reflect a changing landscape.

At Richard Atkins Primary School, where I am governor, we have bolstered our curriculum with online safety and relationships through PSHE and the computing curriculum from Year 1 upwards. We also host workshops with learning mentors on "Gang awareness and social media" for year 5 and 6 pupils.

However, schools cannot take responsibility for this alone. Parents are vital allies in monitoring and shaping how children and young people engage online. Girls Day School Trust schools, which my

children attend, have embraced parent power and regularly host evening workshops with educational specialists such as Emma Gleadhill to assist parents as their children navigate the rapidly changing world of social media with their peer groups. The sessions are well-received and enable parents to share experiences.

We have already seen multiple child suicide cases reported globally with parents fighting to hold social media companies accountable. An inquest found content on Pinterest and Instagram contributed to the death of Molly Russell in 2017, while a report by the Samaritans revealed the dangers of social media's self-harm content.

But how many more schoolchildren should die as a result of harmful content on social media sites before the government takes firmer action? Schools are already taking preventative measures, and there is plenty they can do. Ultimately they shouldn't have to though. It is in the government's power to ensure accountability falls where it should: with the platforms themselves, and with families.



## Solutions

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UKJAMIE  
MOLESSenior sales engineer,  
ExtraHopSolutions: How Schools Can  
Protect Against Cyber Attacks

**Concerns about cybersecurity are justified, says Jamie Moles, but there's plenty schools can do to protect themselves and their students**

Cybersecurity in the education sector has become an increasingly pressing concern in recent years as hackers target the sensitive data of students, teachers and staff. In the UK, the issue came to a head over the Christmas holidays when hackers demanded £15 million in ransom money after successfully attacking at least 16 schools. Teachers returning to work after Christmas were unable to access their computer systems, causing major disruption. In the United States, an apparent cyber attack on Iowa's largest school district, Des Moines Public Schools, led officials to cancel classes for 30,000 students for two consecutive days as technicians worked to restore the computer system and protect data.

These cases highlight the vulnerability of schools to cyber attacks, particularly due to understaffed IT teams and a lack of cybersecurity education among staff and pupils. The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and edtech charity London Grid for Learning

recently highlighted the issue with a report which revealed that 78 per cent of UK schools experienced at least one type of cyber incident in 2022, with 7 per cent reporting significant disruption.

The NCSC's report makes clear that the education sector is a prime target for cybercriminals and they say schools are at "particular risk". It's crucial that schools are proactive in their cybersecurity defence and are better prepared to handle attacks – but how?

#### Educating educators

Perhaps fittingly, education is the sector's best bet. One of the most effective, low-cost measures to ensure safety is through staff training and awareness. By teaching staff to spot and avoid phishing attempts, and providing training on best practices, schools can bolster their defences. This is particularly important as phishing is a major threat to staff members who may lack awareness of how hackers gain access to systems, steal data or spread malware.

However, education may not be enough. In the digital age, schools face an ongoing threat of cyber attacks with a near constant stream of intruders attempting to breach networks. It is not only a question of how and when a bad actor will



“Fittingly, education is the sector's best bet

breach the network, but also how much damage they will cause once inside.

#### Network Detection and Response

To combat these threats, schools must act quickly and efficiently. A few seconds can mean the difference between a minor inconvenience and a major disaster.

One way to keep school's computer networks safe is by using advanced technology like Network Detection and Response (NDR) systems. These systems use real-time information to watch over the network, determining whether or not something is a problem. These tools measure the risk level of a problem and how often it has happened before, which helps to filter out false alarms and lets the security team focus on the most serious threats.

NDR systems are powered by AI and machine learning, which means they can work on their own and take some of the burden off a school's IT team.

#### Endpoint protection and updates

Another important technology to consider is endpoint protection. This helps protect devices like laptops, desktop computers and mobile phones from harmful software and viruses. Additionally, schools can keep networks safe by diligently making sure software is always up-to-date with the latest patch and using two-factor authentication for sensitive information access.

Ultimately, the education sector will continue to be a target for cyber criminals. Hackers are constantly evolving and developing new methods to penetrate networks. To stay ahead of these threats, schools must implement robust cyber-security measures such as staff training, advanced technology solutions and regular software updates and monitoring.

In particular, utilising smart technologies like machine learning and artificial intelligence can help improve defences and help schools keep up at a time when time and resources are stretched.

## THE REVIEW

BOOK  
TV  
FILM  
RADIO  
EVENT  
RESOURCE

## MAKING SCHOOLS BETTER FOR DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

**Author:** Stephen Gorard, Beng Huat See and Nadia Siddiqui**Publisher:** Routledge**Publication date:** 25 November 2022**ISBN:** 1032262494**Reviewer:** Natalie Perera, CEO, Education Policy Institute

As CEO of the Education Policy Institute, I'm often asked about the impact of the pupil premium. Mostly, the question comes from a place of genuine curiosity among my peers. Occasionally, it is asked to trip me up, knowing that I and some of my colleagues in the EPI had various degrees of responsibility for introducing and refining the pupil premium policy while working at the Department for Education.

Irrespective of the motives of the question, my answer has generally been the same. It is near impossible to evaluate because it was introduced across the country at the same time, so there is no control group. It was also introduced alongside a range of other changes including decreases to core school budgets, the end of grants for other vulnerable pupils and cuts to wider children's services.

So, I was very keen to read the latest book by Professor Stephen Gorard and his team at Durham University. It claims to present "the strongest and most up-to-date evidence so far on how funding can be best deployed to improve schooling and narrow the disadvantage attainment gap" and includes seven whole chapters dedicated to the pupil premium.

The book starts with an explanation of why we care about attainment gaps and some of the wider societal factors that drive inequality. It sounds obvious but the more we can reinforce the fact that so much of what we are trying to achieve sits outside the control of schools, the better.

There are then a further five chapters on the efficacy of interventions aimed at improving school attendance and attainment. Most of

the interventions covered were from studies in developing countries so the context is not necessarily comparable if you're looking for ways to improve policy in the UK. Nevertheless, these sections serve as a sobering reminder that access to education cannot be taken for granted in many parts of the world. While a synthesis of evidence can often be dry, Gorard and co present their findings accessibly, in small vignettes with similarities to the Education Endowment Foundation's toolkit.

On then to the much-anticipated pupil premium sections, in which Gorard repeats the difficulties in evaluating the policy and pulls no punches in his criticism of reports that have attempted to do so. At the heart of his critique is the fact that persistence of poverty is key and that children experiencing long-term poverty have much lower outcomes than those in temporary poverty. This is, of course, not new and something that the EPI and, before that, the late, great Mike Treadaway have researched for years.

So Gorard argues that persistence of poverty, alongside wider economic changes and the prevalence of privately educated pupils, inhibit how we can assess the pupil premium and trends in the size of the disadvantage gap. Gorard controls for those factors in his own research and (spoiler alert) uncovers some

very positive findings on reduced school segregation. Not a spoiler: the trends in the disadvantage gap vary, with more positive trends in Key Stages 1 and 2, and a more mixed picture in Key Stage 4.

Towards the end, Gorard warns that Ofsted and others are wrong in criticising certain areas of the country (the West Midlands and the North East) for the underperformance of disadvantaged pupils, given that those areas have a large proportion of persistently disadvantaged pupils. Something I think we can all agree on is the implication that policymakers should be working with these areas to understand better the deep challenges

they face rather than "denigrating" them.

Overall, this is a helpful contribution to research on the impact of the pupil premium, but it's important to distinguish between research that aims to isolate the impact of a single intervention (which is Gorard's aim) and research that is intended to shed light on inequalities and hold the government to account for its overall endeavours.

Meanwhile, my answer to the question about the impact of the pupil premium is often: "Imagine everything else over the past decade stayed the same, but there was no pupil premium." This is often met with a thoughtful pause. I imagine much of this book will cause a similar response – as it should.

★★★★☆  
Rating



## THE CONVERSATION

### LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM



**Sarah Gallagher**

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

## POETRY BY HEART

There is no better virtual place to go in the winter months than a book site, and Just Imagine is perfect for perusing children's and young people's literature. But it is much more than that. It's a one-stop shop for "blog posts, podcasts and reviews promoting excellent practice in teaching reading, writing and oracy".



This week, the site's guest blogger is Julie Blake, co-founder and director of Poetry By Heart and a passionate advocate for the power of children learning poetry out loud.

Here, Blake talks about teachers in primary schools feeling intimidated by teaching poetry because they often think it requires GCSE-level analysis. She recommends that we turn poetry into something else instead, enjoying the sound of it and the pleasure of saying it aloud as it was meant to be. Her warning against rushing through the performance in order to analyse a poem to within an inch of its life is spot on, and her enthusiasm is infectious. It has certainly inspired us to rethink our poetry offer and to re-focus on oracy, literacy and enjoyment.



## OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Cosy Direct is a resources site with an active presence on social media that promotes hands-on early learning. It is also home to an interesting blog packed with practical activities for which you don't need to buy anything.

The latest blog ties in with the RSPB's Big Garden Bird Watch weekend. Green education and giving all our children a love of nature grows ever more important. We know what being outdoors can do for all of us, and this post takes this as its starting point to promote activities that can build into habits for life: respect and kindness towards nature, and simple tricks like walking quietly to spot more wildlife, or cupping our hands around our ears so we can listen more closely.

More than that, the post argues compellingly that outdoor learning must be given the same consideration as other aspects of the curriculum. We can't expect children simply to grow their own understanding of the environment. If we want our children to look after their planet, we must first promote awe and wonder, and then we must support them to turn those sentiments into something meaningful. This blog is a great place to start.

## THINKING TIME

In this week's episode of the John Catt podcast Mind the Gap hosts Emma Turner and Tom Sherrington interview Efrat Furst, a researcher at the Mofet Institute, a centre for research, curriculum and programme development in teacher education in Tel Aviv.

Sometimes the world of cognitive science seems geared towards secondary schools, particularly with regard to retrieval practice. This sparky and down-to-earth conversation bucks that trend.

All three educators warn that an obsession

with organising and neatening curriculum design risks outweighing whether children are truly making meaningful long-term connections. Instead, they argue for the importance of providing much more consolidation time for learners to encode what they've learnt. I will certainly be taking this back into school to apply to our work ... adding a little more thinking time.

## A NEW IDEA OF RESILIENCE

Building resilience in our teams, in ourselves and in our learners is key to coping with the ups and downs of education and of life. However, resilience has come to mean different things, which is the starting point for this episode of The Social Matters Podcast with Nadia Galvani, Fran Feeley and Eugene Ogbewe.

Their discussion with resilience coach Josh Connolly centres around definitions of resilience. I'm certainly guilty of describing children as remarkably resilient, but is what I'm describing really a well-developed coping mechanism? Connolly uses the analogy of a piece of plastic that can endure a lot before it eventually breaks. By contrast, a piece of elastic may go profoundly out of shape but will return to its original state.

It's a powerful argument for acknowledging that we all fall from time to time, rather than presenting a front of unshakeable strength as a model of resilience. After all, it's not healthy to be a superhero — and lycra doesn't suit everybody!



Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts



# The Knowledge

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



## How to make the most of everything oracy has to offer

**Amy Gaunt, Director of learning and impact, Voice 21**

According to recent Teacher Tapp polling, 56 per cent of teachers feel that oracy should be one of their school's top priorities for the coming year. With good reason. Voice21's new impact report explains why schools are increasingly choosing to focus on oracy and, if they are not, why they should be.

The report, which draws on survey data from 12,313 staff and 46,636 students in Voice 21 Oracy Schools, as well as findings from research projects led by the charity over the past year, illustrates the value and impact of oracy education.

As you might expect, it shows that oracy teaching is vital in the early years. Communication and language skills provide the foundation for the development of later literacy skills. Explicitly teaching oracy in the early years sets students up for success as they progress through school.

But the benefits don't stop there.

### Oracy boosts reading

Progress in reading is accelerated through high-quality oracy education. In our research project to explore the impact of an oracy-rich approach to vocabulary development, 80 per cent of students met or exceeded expected progress in reading, with one third of students exceeding expected progress. These findings are consistent with those from other studies, such as an Education Endowment Foundation meta-analysis which found that oral language interventions had a positive impact on attainment, particularly in reading.

The mechanism by which oracy benefits reading is better understood too. Vocabulary plays a fundamental role in the reading process, both in terms of word recognition and language comprehension. And as Isabel Beck and colleagues explain in their ground-breaking book *Bringing Words to Life*, oral language is the most effective vehicle for learning new words. In oracy-rich classrooms, students have structured opportunities to try out and experiment with new vocabulary



in their speech and to hear new language in context, ultimately benefiting their reading.

### Oracy supports transition

Student respondents to our survey told us that oracy education boosted their confidence academically and socially. This is particularly important at transition, when students are adapting to a new social environment and academic challenges.

Oracy education also supports students with their emotional transition into and development throughout adolescence. Our research demonstrates that students' perceptions of speaking itself change at transition: anxiety and nervousness increase dramatically in year 7 and rise steadily throughout secondary school. Explicitly teaching students the oracy skills they need to speak effectively in different contexts gives them the confidence they need to speak up in secondary school.

### Oracy is subject-specific

Oracy improves outcomes across the curriculum. However, in secondary schools oracy expertise is not evenly distributed across departments. We found that English and humanities teachers are most likely to be "definitely" involved in the development of their school's oracy provision, while maths and science teachers are least likely to be "definitely" involved.

To realise the benefits of oracy education, schools should embrace oracy in all subjects.

As Neil Mercer and Karen Littleton famously said in *Dialogue and the Development of Children's Thinking*: "Ways of thinking are embedded in ways of using language."

Teaching students to speak like scientists, mathematicians and historians empowers them to think like specialists.

### Oracy can be assessed

Not being able to assess and track student progress continues to be the most cited barrier to a greater focus on oracy in schools. However, our pilot *Comparing Talk* established that comparative judgement is a reliable way to assess oracy.

This method of assessment relies on assessors making lots of quick comparisons between videos of student talk rather than "marking" each video in a traditional way against a mark scheme or rubric. As such, it overcomes concerns about the reliability of other approaches while giving teachers and schools the confidence that they can track students' progress.

Given the obvious benefits of oracy education across subject areas and at all stages of education as highlighted in this report, it is unsurprising that it is a priority for so many teachers. As the evidence base for oracy education and strategies for its implementation strengthen, expect to see oracy as a focus for even more teachers and school leaders, in every type of school.



Week in

## Westminster

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

## FRIDAY

In the Department for Education's 2019 recruitment and retention strategy, ministers pledged to "explore" if there was demand to build homes for teachers on surplus school land.

The plans were dropped last year after "initial discussions" with schools and responsible bodies and no evidence of demand.

Wanting to make sure the government had actually consulted with the sector and wasn't just using this as an easy out to drop the policy, we put in an FOI to find out more.

But the department told us it holds no information on the (supposed) discussions that took place, because no notes were taken.

OK, so what about \*who\* they asked? Nope, not allowed to know that either as it would "adversely affect the confidentiality of commercial or industrial information".

## MONDAY

The DfE isn't known for a straight-talking, no-nonsense approach when talking about its policies, but a National Audit Office report into education recovery included a line that epitomises just how reticent the department is to put anything in simple plain English.

"DfE told us that it would be more accurate to think of its approach to education recovery as an iterative or evolutionary process, rather than a fully developed portfolio from the outset."

Has there ever been a MORE DfE phrase?!

## TUESDAY

Councils have been ordered to consider the impact new free schools could have on

"community cohesion".

It's a helpful enough intervention, but the guidance comes a little late in the day to really influence the movement, given its schools are now approved in dribs and drabs, and their need is going to decrease rapidly as pupil numbers fall off.

Still, better late than never...

## WEDNESDAY

It's a tired and often disproved cliché that technology can confound the more senior generation. But Lord Baker wasn't defying the stereotype when he gave a television interview this week.

The *Newsnight* studio descended into chaos when the former education secretary's phone, which of course was not on silent, rang four times while he was on air.

It would have been funnier if the subject of the interview hadn't been so serious. He was being quizzed by Victoria Derbyshire about the current crises facing the Conservative Party – including the fallout over Nadhim Zahawi's tax affairs and bullying allegations against Dominic Raab.

Baker rejected the first call, but when the phone immediately rang again, he handed it to Derbyshire, saying "would you turn it off?". She said she would put it on silent, but also apparently failed to do so, as it rang again. Twice.

"The prime minister's very insistent isn't he," Baker joked.

\*\*\*

Journalist Matt Chorley asked the National Education Union joint general secretary Kevin Courtney whether union staff had received a 12 per cent pay hike this year – a similar figure he is demanding the government give teachers.

According to Chorley, Courtney told him they did not receive such a rise because the union could not afford it.

Perhaps that will change? The union has been boasting about how many school staff – mostly teachers – have joined since it secured a mandate to go on strike (43,000 new members at the last count).

Presuming all of them are full-time teachers, and paying the £203 year sub, then the union will now rake in an extra £8.7 million a year! Cough up Kev.

\*\*\*

Tenacious *Schools Week* reporter Tom Belger left no stone unturned in his coverage of the PCS picket outside the DfE this week. He even collared Education and Skills Funding Agency chief executive David Withey on his way into work.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the senior official did not want to comment on a strike by departmental staff.

Education secretary Gillian Keegan managed to avoid a standoff with our correspondent – by spending her morning touring the TV studios!





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## PRINCIPAL

**Salary: L23-L27**

**Horncastle Primary**

This is an exciting opportunity for a caring and passionate school leader to join a values-driven and vibrant community of twenty-nine schools across Greater Lincolnshire and Yorkshire.

The school will soon see an exciting rebuild as part of the Government's School Rebuild Programme. Our new Principal will therefore be a key member of the team set to make an historic contribution to and lasting legacy for the town and its children.

Wellspring Academy Trust prides itself on providing a high quality, inclusive education. The Trust believes strongly that unconditional positive regard for all is the key to a thriving community, strong schools and a great education. We seek to make a difference to the lives and life chances of all our children and young people.

We are looking for a committed professional with a clear sense of purpose to join us in our mission.



## Executive Leader for Schools

**Leadership Scale 38-43**

We are seeking to recruit a highly motivated, dedicated, and inspirational Executive Leader for Schools from 1st September 2023. The Executive Leaders work as a team, each responsible for a number of schools within Stour Vale and together leading trust-wide projects and developments. This is an exciting opportunity for an experienced primary headteacher with a passion for school improvement and improving the life opportunities for children and young people to add to our collective capacity to support continuous improvement.

At this key point in Stour Vale's growth and development, the successful candidate will also play a substantial role in creating the structures and processes which will enable us to be a larger, successful family of schools. You must be committed to our ethos and values and to secure autonomy; our approach to working with member schools.

**Closing date: Monday 27th February 2023**



## HEADTEACHER

**Salary: Points L25 -31 (£79,948 - £92,596) | Location: Sir William Romney's School, Tetbury.**



The Athelstan Trust is a successful and growing Multi-Academy Trust consisting of five secondary schools in the South West. In April 2023, we are excited to welcome two primary schools, and this will provide new opportunities for collaboration and strengthen the Trust further.

Sir William Romney's School is a relatively small, friendly 11 - 16 school in Tetbury. We are proudly comprehensive and committed to ensuring that our students are successful both academically and holistically. We are in the process of developing a Trust sixth form with Bradon Forest School and Malmesbury School.

**As a member of the Athelstan Trust, you will benefit from:**

- Being part of a Trust that is committed to raising educational standards for all the children in our schools.
- Our commitment to developing the skills of all our staff throughout their career.
- Being part of a caring, collaborative and excellent community.

The Trustees of the Athelstan Trust wish to appoint an excellent teacher and school leader to the post of Headteacher at Sir William Romney's School from September 2023.

This is a very exciting time to be joining a successful, growing Trust where we all work together to raise standards in all our schools.

This post offers a talented and ambitious school leader a wonderful opportunity to work in a supportive Trust that is committed to high quality professional development for its staff.

Please feel free to contact [sjones@theathelstantrust.org](mailto:sjones@theathelstantrust.org) for an informal conversation with Tim Gilson CEO.

An application pack is available on the Athelstan Trust website.

**Closing date: 17 February 2023 at 12 noon**

[www.theathelstantrust.org](http://www.theathelstantrust.org)

A charitable company limited by guarantee, registered in England & Wales, as The Athelstan Trust, Company No: 7699625



# Deputy Principal

Essa Primary is seeking to recruit a dynamic, talented individual to become our new Deputy Principal and to play a pivotal role in crafting the future success of our school. This is an exciting career opportunity for the successful candidate as we transition to the next stage of our aspirational journey. Our purpose at Essa is 'all will succeed' and our core values of effort, standards, spirit and achievement permeate through all that we do. This post is required for after the Easter holidays; however, we are willing to wait until after SATs for a current Year 6 teacher or offer a September start to attract the right candidate.

Essa Primary is a large primary school, close to Bolton Town Centre and within 5 minutes of the M61 motorway, with good access links to Manchester, Salford, Chorley and Preston. As part of the EFA Trust, our shared campus with Essa Academy offers fantastic facilities.

The successful candidate will play a key role in the development of Essa Primary by leading either our 'Inclusion, Pastoral and Safeguarding Team' or our 'Curriculum, Teaching, Learning and Assessment Team'. It is vital that candidates share their strengths and experience as part of their application.

#### The successful candidate will:

- Be an outstanding practitioner with experience in KS1 and KS2.
- Be a passionate and driven professional, wanting to increase standards for children.
- Put our children first, ensuring relationships, curriculum and quality first teaching supports all children to achieve
- Demonstrate strong leadership and people management skills, with the ability to further develop the leadership team.
- Be a positive role model with the ability to motivate our children and staff alike, inspiring all to reach their full potential.

#### In return, we can offer:

- Amazing children who are enthusiastic about their learning and want to be taught.
- A supportive Principal, CEO and wider leadership team who are determined and committed to the development of the school.

- A friendly, supportive and hard working staff team.
- A welcoming and warm community who embrace our vision and values.
- Commitment to professional development.
- Amazing facilities as part of the Essa campus.

Applicants are warmly invited to visit the school. Tours of the school will be conducted by our Principal, Peter Stewart on the following dates:

- **Thursday 2nd February at 10am**
- **Thursday 2nd February at 2pm**
- **Monday 6th February at 10am**

Please contact Allison O'Connell, School Administrator by emailing [office@efatrust.org](mailto:office@efatrust.org) or by phoning 01204 201310 to book on one of the above tours.

For more information and to apply, please visit our website <http://www.essaprimery.org/vacancies>

#### Closing date:

Wednesday 8th February at 9:00am

#### Interviews:

Monday 13th and Tuesday 14th February 2023

#### Start date:

1st April 2023 (Willing to wait until after SATS or to offer a 1st September start for the right candidate)



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# HEAD TEACHER

**Group L20 - 26 (£70,733 - £81,927)**

Robin Hood Academy is a vibrant and innovative primary school that maintained its 'Good' OFSTED judgement with a strong report in September 2022 Robin Hood Academy has a rich history of constantly seeking to innovate and improve. We are now seeking to appoint our next leader with the drive and determination to build upon the excellent work of our current HT and to plot the school on its future development path. It is the desire to constantly improve, refine our practices and further develop the learning experiences for our children that lie at the heart of the culture and ethos of the school. The Trust wishes to recruit a Headteacher with a passion and drive to create the next exciting chapter in the history of the school and help it on its journey towards providing a truly outstanding learning experience for all of our pupils.

**The successful candidate will:**

- Have a proven track record in school leadership and making a difference.
- Have a passion for pedagogy and be as focused on the foundations of learning as on innovation.
- Be an excellent communicator and have outstanding emotional intelligence.
- Have strong team ethic and moral purpose.
- Have a strong vision for education and high aspirations for pupils and staff.
- Be willing to contribute their skillset to the wider Multi Academy Trust and work with our team of Headteachers to improve outcomes for all Trust pupils.
- Have a desire to impact on the wider education system in order to make a true difference.

Robin Hood Academy is part of Robin Hood Multi Academy Trust which also consists of Birches Green Infant, Birches Green Junior, Cedars Academy, Ulverley School and Yenton Primary. The Trust is built on the principles of working collaboratively across each school to create unique learning experiences for children that they wouldn't get in any other organisation. The Trust believes that each school's vision and ethos is unique to their own setting and community. With this in mind, space is provided for leaders to lead their schools whilst also offering the support of a team of highly skilled professionals from the MAT to enable the sharing of best practice. We believe that, with the collaborative leadership across our schools, we can create something truly special. To gain an understanding of the vision for the Trust please visit [www.robinhoodMAT.co.uk](http://www.robinhoodMAT.co.uk) and watch our vision.

For more information about the post we strongly encourage prospective candidates to contact our CEO, Steve Taylor (via our MAT PA, Jo Green [pa@robinhoodmat.co.uk](mailto:pa@robinhoodmat.co.uk)), to arrange an informal and confidential chat with a view to visiting the school for a tour.

**Closing date: 10th March 2023 (No later than 12pm)**

**Interview date: Day 1: 27th March 2023**

**Day 2: 28th March 2023**

**For more information and an application pack please contact Jo Green via [pa@robinhoodmat.co.uk](mailto:pa@robinhoodmat.co.uk)**

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*Robin Hood MAT is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and expect all staff to share this commitment. The successful candidate will be subject to all necessary pre-employment checks, including: an enhanced DBS; Prohibition check; section 128 check, Childcare Disqualification (where applicable); qualifications (where applicable); medical fitness; identity and right to work. All applicants will be required to provide two suitable references.*



# 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](mailto: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.







**City of Norwich School**  
An Ormiston Academy

## Deputy Headteacher

Leadership Scale points L20 - L24

Actual starting salary: £67,364

Permanent post, Full time

The appointed Deputy Headteacher will be an exceptional strategic thinker with senior leadership experience, highly effective management skills and a team player with strong intellectual abilities. A charismatic, visible leader, they will inspire exemplary staff, and engage students, parents and other external stakeholders to ensure CNS achieves its aim of 'Excellence in All'.

We are rated 'Good' by OFSTED, with high expectations for all its staff and students. We offer a broad, well-designed curriculum, teachers have strong subject knowledge and students with additional needs receive strong support. The KS5 curriculum ensures students learn what they need to be successful in their next stage and develop deep knowledge about their subjects beyond the remit of the formal examinations.

Closing date for applications is 9am on 20th February 2023

Interviews will be 27th & 28th Feb

(date changed due to planned Strike action on 1st March)

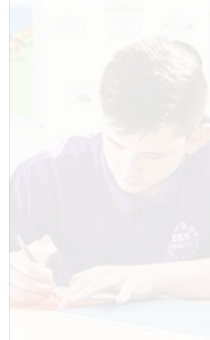


## Teacher in Charge of Maths

EBN Academy 2 is seeking to appoint a highly motivated and committed Maths teacher to join our teaching team and lead Maths within the academy; you will oversee Maths and numeracy within the academy and you will also manage the second maths teacher within the department. The successful applicant will be committed to raising the achievement of all learners by ensuring teaching of maths is of the highest quality and is innovative, engaging and enjoyable. Key qualities of the successful candidate will include, high expectations of themselves and others with a strong determination to raise standards and accelerate progress in an Alternative Provision setting.

Each member of the Academy's teaching staff is seen as an integral part of the team, working together and sharing ideas to developing teaching practice across the school.

[Click here for more information](#)



## 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/>



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