

# SCHOOLS WEEK

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FRIDAY, FEB 10, 2023 | EDITION 312

Strikes show the art of protest



The inside story of the SIMS turf war



DfE 'half-hearted' on kids' social care



**Opportunity for all**  
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- 2030 MAT ambition canned by Keegan
- Council trusts policy also axed
- Leaders demand clarity amid policy 'vacuum'

SCHOOLS WEEK

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# With flagship policies abandoned, ministers cannot claim to prioritise education

March 2022 feels like decades ago. Since then we've changed prime minister (twice), had five education secretaries and four schools ministers.

Yet not even a year has passed since Nadhim Zahawi (remember him?) unveiled his schools white paper. The government promised "real action to level up education", and plans to "make sure every child can reach the full height of their potential".

There were a lot of pledges, but among the stand-out policies were an ambition to have all schools in, or at least planning to join, a multi-academy trust by 2030, and a plan to let councils establish their own MATs in an effort to boost academisation.

There were warning signs from the start. Sector experts expressed misgivings about putting a deadline on the academisation drive, while those against conversion were wary about putting pressure on council-maintained schools to convert.

Regardless of whether you agreed with the pledges and policies in the white paper, at least its publication was a sign that the government was carving out a path for itself, nailing its colours to the mast.

Fast-forward just over 10 months, and ministers are once again lost. The 2030 ambition is gone, replaced by even woollier language. And councils that expressed an interest in setting up their own MATs are not likely to hear back from officials any time soon.

But that's not all. Our analysis reveals that of 42 main proposals in the document, just 19 have been implemented or are still on track.

Many proposals in the white paper were imperfect, and some were downright unworkable.

But abandoning flagship policies after less than a year proves that education is no longer a priority for a government whose main focus seems to be its own survival.

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# London secondary's planned expansion angers nearby heads

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A London council has waded into a bitter dispute between local headteachers to urge a popular school to withdraw plans to increase its capacity.

In a statutory consultation, the oversubscribed Kingsdale Foundation School in Dulwich, south London, set out plans to boost its formal capacity by more than 42 per cent from 2024.

The Southwark school has argued it already recruits well above its published admissions number (PAN), and that its plans simply formalise its current approach.

But neighbouring Lambeth has opposed the proposal because of its potential impact on schools, with declining pupil numbers due to reduce rolls in the coming years.

The council urged the school to “work as part of the community rather than to act in isolation”. Southwark has also emphasised the lack of demand for more places, although it has not formally opposed the move.

Neighbouring schools, including those run by prominent trusts such as Ark and the Harris Federation, have accused Kingsdale of “undermining” them.

Responses to the consultation, which closed at the end of January, warned the increase would make other “excellent provision unviable”.

But Steve Morrison, Kingsdale's headteacher, described such claims as “propaganda”, and alleged a “scurrilous disinformation campaign” fuelled in part by “envy”.

Kingsdale is rated ‘outstanding’ and offers places to children in neighbouring boroughs, including Lambeth, Greenwich and Croydon. No special preference is given to Southwark residents.

The school's official capacity is 1,750, but government data shows it had 2,466 pupils on-roll as of last January.

Schools are allowed to exceed their PAN without officially increasing it, as Kingsdale has done in recent years. But it is now proposing to make it formal through an increase in year 7 from 300 to 420 pupils. It also wants to increase its sixth form from 250 to 400.

In a letter signed by 16 other Lambeth heads, Dominic Bergin, the head of The Elmgreen School, part of the Dunraven Educational Trust,



said Kingsdale's rising numbers had driven down intakes at neighbouring schools.

“To formalise and increase the number permanently will therefore continue to have a detrimental effect ... as well as ultimately to reduce parental preference should any of those schools affected become non-viable as a result.”

In a statement, Ben Kind, Lambeth's cabinet member for children, said the council supported the heads because of the impact on other schools “especially at a time of failing pupil number and strategic pupil place planning, which is a key priority for us”.

Department for Education data shows Lambeth will have the highest proportion of spare secondary places of any area next year, at 28 per cent.

Kingsdale was once undersubscribed, but had not attempted to halt the opening of new free schools and academies, Morrison pointed out.

“We accepted the challenge of rising to meet what can be the exceptionally demanding expectations of parental preference.”

But Bergin underlined that the stakes had changed since “15 years ago”.

“I've got absolutely no issue with the excellent work Kingsdale has done over many years. The key issue is that there are fewer children in the system.”

With numbers soaring, some Kingsdale pupils are taught in marquees, although Morrison described these as “deluxe” and said they had been added during building work.

A “multi-million pound” expansion is due to be

completed in the summer term and a condition of receiving such funding was to “accept more students”, he said.

Leaders have also criticised other changes to the admissions policy, including a plan to designate 10 per cent of its PAN for disadvantaged children.

Currently, 11.8 per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, well below the average of 34.2 per cent in Southwark and 33.7 per cent in Lambeth

The Southwark Association of Headteachers said the proposal could mean “access for disadvantaged families will continue to be extremely low against the context of the area that the school seeks to serve”.

However, Morrison said Kingsdale's proposal was intended to increase the number of disadvantaged students and was not an upper limit.

“Kingsdale recruits disproportionately high numbers of disadvantaged students relative to the pocket of affluence in which it is situated.”

But Bergin suggested such an argument was “counterintuitive”, given the school recruited far beyond its immediate locality.

The school has also said that places for students with education, health and care plans (EHCPs) will be allocated in addition to, rather than as part of its PAN.

Lambeth heads said it should continue to allocate these places as part of the PAN to “help ensure that Kingsdale's intake remains comprehensive in nature”.

NEWS

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# Schools need 'strengthened' training on Prevent

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The Department for Education will update training for schools on the Prevent duty in light of a review of the counter-extremism programme.

But a call for independent oversight of schools' compliance with the duty will not be acted on, with the government opting to strengthen how it deals with complaints instead.

The review, by former Charity Commission head William Shawcross, warned some staff needed "strengthened training on the causes of radicalisation and the ideological nature of terrorism".

It also warned of "ambiguity" over how schools' compliance is monitored.

Prevent requires teachers to identify pupils at risk of radicalisation and report incidents they believe are linked to extremism or terrorism.

Earlier this week Suella Braverman, the home secretary, accepted 34 formal recommendations from Shawcross.

While schools were not explicitly mentioned



in the proposals, the DfE confirmed it would be working with the Home Office to upgrade its training programme.

This would ensure Prevent partners had the most "comprehensive" understanding of potential threats, as well as the expertise to deliver on the duty.

Education settings are the most common source of referrals, accounting for 36 per cent, or 2,305 referrals, in the year to March 31 2022.

Overall, the report found the duty was well embedded and broadly well understood in schools.

However, it warned some frontline education staff lacked the proper training.

The review said the DfE's analysis of schoolchildren travelling or attempting to travel to Syria to join the so-called Islamic State stated that in most cases there was "no prior indication

of extremism".

But Shawcross said he was "concerned" that not all practitioners were "sufficiently adept" at recognising how ideological drivers of terrorism manifested in young people, and were missing signs of "radicalisation risk".

He also warned schools were "not formally monitored for compliance with the duty".

Checking compliance currently "falls under the auspices of Ofsted and the DfE", which "largely take a reactive approach with issues alerted to them".

Shawcross said he considered "this ambiguity a potential risk for effective Prevent delivery", adding that an independent oversight function would "strengthen compliance".

While this proposal will not be implemented, a new standards and compliance unit answerable to ministers will be created in line with formal recommendations.

The Home Office said this would "provide a clear and accessible route for the public and practitioners to raise concerns about Prevent activity where it may have fallen short of its standards".

TOM BELGER | @TOM\_BELGER

## 52-school Oasis transfers Kent secondary 'with heavy heart'

Oasis Community Learning will give up control of a school for the first time after a damning Ofsted report found more than half of pupils did not attend regularly.

Oasis Academy Isle Of Sheppey in Kent has never been rated 'good' or better since opening from the merger of two schools in 2009, with Oasis, the sixth largest trust in England, taking over as sponsor in 2014.

The school has been rated 'requires improvement' three times since, before sliding into special measures last year.

Inspectors found more than half of pupils were not attending regularly, while behaviour was "often dangerous" and the trust did "too little to tackle...racist, sexist and homophobic language".

The school has seen "too many false fresh starts", the watchdog warned. The Department for Education also then threatened to rebroker it last year.

Parents and staff have now been told it will

be transferred, although a new sponsor has not been named.

Isle of Sheppey will be the first school to transfer out of the 52-school Oasis, which started in 2005.

A trust spokesperson said the decision was made "with a heavy heart", but followed a "mutual agreement" with government.

Oasis had been unable to deliver the "exceptional" environment young people deserved, despite hard work, significant investment and new processes.

"There are considerable challenges to providing exceptional secondary education on the island, not least the levels of disadvantage that some experience."

Parts of the Isle of Sheppey rank among the most deprived 10 per cent of areas nationally.

Last year the trust also highlighted challenges including "increased disengagement" during Covid and recruitment challenges.

The trust has previously said it "intentionally"

focused on "the most challenging and disadvantaged communities".

The government began alerting schools with repeat 'requires improvement' ratings they were eligible to be rebrokered in the autumn. Previously powers applied only to 'inadequate' schools.

The DfE could have intervened in this case as early as 2015 if powers had been introduced earlier. It has emphasised decisions are "case-by-case" basis however.

A government spokesperson said the Isle of Sheppey transfer would ensure "appropriate steps are taken to provide the best possible standard of education". Officials are working to ensure a smooth transfer.

The trust spokesperson said it remained "deeply committed" to the school and community. In total, 21 of the 25 most recent inspections of Oasis schools were 'good' or better.

INVESTIGATION

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# SIMS tries to stem exodus of schools

**TOM BELGER**  
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England's largest school management information system provider is "radically" cutting prices and undercutting long-standing local authority partners in a fresh bid to stop schools ditching it.

Schools Week can also reveal that Education Software Solutions (ESS) suffered a write-down of £36 million on an abandoned version of SIMS – and how this contributed to controversial contract changes widely seen to have fuelled a record exodus of schools last year.

Experts and trust leaders said schools now had more choice of systems than ever. But they have also become "bystanders in a turf war" between suppliers, which is spilling into legal battles and sparking regulator intervention.

## MIS = SIMS

For decades, management information systems (MIS), sometimes called the "backbone" of schools, have been near-synonymous with School Information Management System (SIMS).

Developed by Bedfordshire teacher Phil Neal in the 1980s, SIMS was the first software to collate all pupil data, and its obvious value saw it quickly spread.

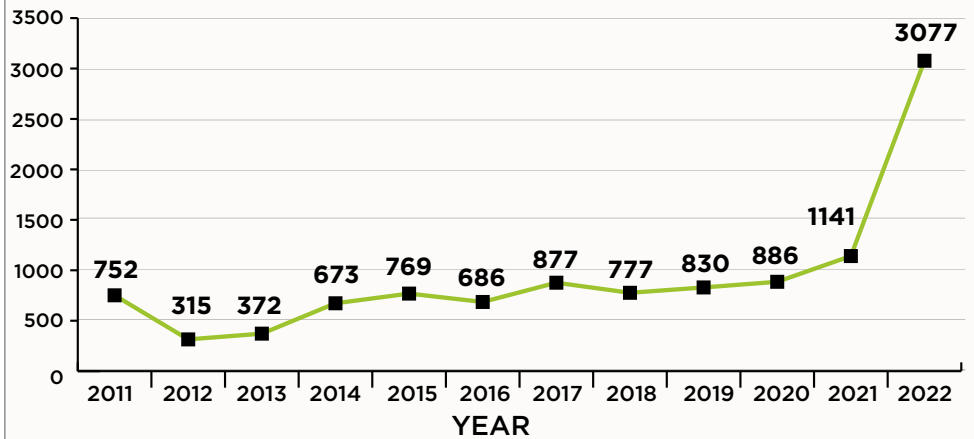
Outsourcing giant Capita bought the company in 1994, and SIMS has remained the most popular pupil and staff data platform since. ParentPay Group has owned it since 2021.

The market was "stagnant for decades", according to one trust leader, although Neal told Schools Week many companies "tried to break into it but didn't succeed".

Neal claimed it once benefited from local authorities not "going out to tender when they should have". They appreciated SIMS' benefits, and balked at full procurement given high costs and few alternative suppliers.

In 2012, 18,051 English state schools – 84 per cent – were using SIMS, DfE data suggests.

## Number of schools switching MIS supplier



Source: Analysis of DfE data

## Market shake-up

A decade on, the market has been "shaken up", according to Joshua Perry, an edtech entrepreneur who runs the MIS blog Bring More Data.

By last autumn, ESS was used in about 12,281 schools, meaning it now holds 56 per cent of the market, official data obtained by Perry shows.

Arbor, another MIS provider that launched in 2011, now boasts 3,500 schools.

James Weatherill, its chief executive, said cloud-based alternatives emerged just as academisation was encouraging schools to review council-negotiated deals.

Covid fuelled further demand for cloud products, offering remote access when staff could otherwise only access data via on-site servers.

Arbor said teachers and leaders found its systems intuitive and easy-to-use.

Meanwhile Ali Guyrel, the founder of another fast-growing challenger, Bromcom, attributed its expansion to "comprehensive functionality" and cost savings too.

A recent poll suggested three-fifths of UK schools now have at least partly cloud-based systems.

## £36 million write-down of 'shelved' SIMS 8

ESS has launched cloud services, but only 40 per cent of its schools use them, despite Capita unveiling a "next-generation, cloud-based" MIS five years ago.

ParentPay Group also said in 2020 that its looming takeover would "accelerate innovation...including the roll-out of ESS's cloud-native SIMS 8". The current version is SIMS 7.

But new ESS documents show a review under Montagu Private Equity, which briefly owned ESS in 2021 before it joined ParentPay Group, found "significant issues with the technological feasibility" of SIMS 8 – reportedly making it "not commercially feasible" by late 2020.

Developer Neal called it a "great shame", saying he'd hoped it would take SIMS "to the next level". He left in 2017, and said he even advised some organisations not to buy the company he started.

SIMS 8's stated value was slashed by more than £36 million and the latest accounts highlight its "retirement", removing it from balance sheets altogether.

ESS halted investment, deciding to "instead invest in a new cloud proposition". It subsequently pledged £40 million towards SIMS Next Gen, with some features released last year.

INVESTIGATION

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In October ParentPay also appointed Lewis Alcraft as chief executive.

He said the decision to shelve SIMS 8 was "correct". ParentPay instead would use its experience developing cloud-hosted, SIMS-integrated applications to offer "a raft of functionality" due via Next Gen this year."

But Duncan Baldwin, a former headteacher and SIMS employee who now works as a consultant, said the "hanging question" was: "Will they get it right next time?"

One trust leader told *Schools Week* the pace of ESS' cloud rollout had allowed rivals to pounce, but they only had a "narrow window" given ESS' three-year Next Gen investment.

"Whichever rival steals a march could position themselves as the new SIMS."

Perry agreed there was "something of a gold rush", estimating schools spent up to £200 million annually on MIS.

ESS recorded profits of £22.4 million in 2021, and its sale netted Capita £343.5 million.

The Key Group plans to buy competitor RM's Integris and finance businesses for up to £16 million this year, after buying Arbor for £28.1 million in 2020 and another rival ScholarPack for £13.2 million in 2018.

But the trust source said changes to the market had made schools "innocent bystanders in a turf war".

**Three-year deal controversy**

ESS itself sparked major controversy in late 2021 over its handling of a move from one- to three-year contracts.

The company said it needed "certainty of revenues" for SIMS Next Gen, which in turn was vital if it were to compete and meet demand.

But hundreds of schools sought to take legal action, and the CMA launched an investigation.

The watchdog's preliminary finding in November was that ESS "unilaterally" imposed "unfair terms", with regulators not persuaded that the investment required justified the "limited opportunity" for schools to switch.

ESS maintained its conduct was not anti-competitive, but the CMA closed the case without ruling either way after ESS offered further extended break clauses. Schools have until Friday to apply to adjudicators.



Phil Neal



Joshua Perry

# 'Schools are innocent bystanders in a turf war'

**ESS undercuts partners**

ESS told adjudicators last month that "large numbers...were able to switch", acknowledging up to 3,000 schools abandoned SIMS within a year.

Documents reveal "the loss rate occasioned by the move...was on a monthly basis over six times the rate experienced in the previous three years".

ESS is now trying further tactics to stem the tide.

In the 2000s, a government review found its licensing costs had roughly trebled in three years. But a December letter seen by *Schools Week* offered some customers a 16 per cent price cut on SIMS, and said it would "radically reduce" in-house support costs to almost half of the prices offered by so-called "SIMS support units".

The company once encouraged councils to launch these units. Many still run them, although some have been spun off.

Alcraft said he expected attractive pricing to win over "many more schools", and "we very much hope" support units would match or even better ESS prices.

But Somerset County Council dubbed this "another sudden and significant change". A spokesperson said it was "exploring the implications".

One support unit employee questioned how ESS could afford to cut costs, and how units would survive if many schools moved to SIMS's in-house support.

**Fears of fresh legal battles**

The "turf war" has also reached the courts. Bromcom recently sued United Learning and Academies Enterprise Trust over deals with Arbor.

The AET case is ongoing, but a judge last month said United Learning breached procurement law and he would award Bromcom damages.

Guyrel said Bromcom sued to promote "best practice", but United Learning hopes to appeal, warning that other schools risked "repeated litigation".

Paul Wareing, who once worked at the defunct government edtech body Becta, said the organisation could have provided guidance and limited this risk had it not been culled in the 2010 "bonfire of the quangos".

**ESS: Competition 'keeps us focused'**

Alcraft noted new entrants to the market were launching "all the time", and welcomed increased competition that "keeps us focused".

He said some schools had even returned to SIMS as they had "not been able to get rich functionality" elsewhere.

He said SIMS offered an "unrivalled range" of products via partners. Any rival attempting to offer everything themselves risked doing things "not very well".

Ultimately, as Baldwin noted, "the market will decide".

ANALYSIS: WHITE PAPER

# DfE ditches two key proposals on academies

JOHN DICKENS

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EXCLUSIVE

The government’s target for all schools to be in or preparing to join multi-academy trusts by 2030 is officially dead, with another key white paper pledge for councils to set up their own trusts also axed.

A Schools Week analysis of the 42 main proposals from the Opportunity for All white paper, published in March last year, found just 19 have been implemented or are still on track.

There have been five education secretaries since the paper was launched, with the resulting schools bill, which proposed legislation to help meet many of the policies, also canned last year.

But dropping two of the paper’s main policies to boost academisation – neither of which required legislation – marks a major shift in policy under education secretary Gillian Keegan.

The government had said it wanted “all schools to be in or joining a strong trust by 2030...to achieve a fully trust-led system”.

But Keegan has remained quiet on the pledge since October when she became the fifth education secretary in just four months.

Schools minister Nick Gibb said yesterday in an answer to a written Parliamentary question that “over time”, the government “would like all schools to be in a strong multi-academy trust, because we see the positive impact it can have on children’s lives”.

“If we get this right then we will see the vast majority of schools in trusts before 2030.”

He added that his department was “exploring how to further support the growth of strong multi-academy trusts” through its regulation and commissioning review.

However, Schools Week understands the specific ambition from the white paper – that schools would either have joined or be joining a trust by 2030 – has officially been dropped.

### Councils won’t get power to establish trusts

The white paper also outlined plans for local authorities to set up their own academy trusts with officials hoping this would speed up conversions among reluctant council schools.

A pilot with ten councils was supposed to start last year. The



Gillian Keegan



30 or so that applied have been left in the dark.

The policy has now been ditched, Schools Week can reveal.

Liberal Democrat education spokesperson Munira Wilson demanded Keegan “apologise to parents across the country for wasting inordinate amounts of schools’ time, energy and money that should’ve been spent on children’s education”.

A briefing from a Schools North East roundtable of trust chief executives, published yesterday, said schools have been “waiting on announcements” on the council MAT pilot.

The briefing said there “seems to be a vacuum on education policy, with no clear steer from the DfE”.

Workforce data published in June shows just 40 per cent of schools are academies, although they educate more than half of pupils (53 per cent).

Four in five secondaries are academies, but just 30 per cent of primaries.

The government’s annual academy accounts report for 2020-21, published last week, shows most primary schools at nearly two-thirds of councils have still not academised.

But the Schools North East briefing stated a “lack of clear and consistent approach” to the proposed policy had “led to some deterioration in relations between LAs and trusts”, with some councils “being increasingly ‘defensive’ over ‘their’ maintained schools”.

### Leaders ‘frustrated’ by lack of clarity

As well as slowing academisation, the ditched policies will likely impede MAT growth.

A major report from Kreston academies group this week found many single-academy trusts, while recognising “the benefits of MATs”, were “clearly waiting on the government to clarify their policy” towards the 2030 target.

But school leaders in the north east also said the “pressure to grow and merge MATs has been time-consuming, and is taking school leaders away from embedding school improvement”.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the ASCL school leaders’ union, said it was “extremely frustrating” schools had not been told which policies would continue.

“It shows a total disregard for school leaders and makes it very difficult for them to plan. Clarity is desperately needed.”

Wilson said the government should now “finally get round to tackling the issues that parents care about: investing in mental health support in schools, extending free school meals and a fair deal for teachers that ends these strikes”.

A DfE spokesperson said the white paper set out an “ambitious agenda for transforming the education system to ensure all children in England have a world-class education”.

See Schools Week’s white paper policy tracker on pages 9 and 10.



ANALYSIS: WHITE PAPER

# The Schools Week white paper policy tracker

Five education secretaries and one scrapped schools bill later, here's what we could find out about what remains of the government's 'Opportunity for All' white paper. John Dickens reports ...

## The two 'ambitions'

**Policy:** By 2030, 90 per cent of primary pupils will meet the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, up from 65 per cent in 2019.  
**Progress:** Ministers are even further away from when they started at key stage 2, with the percentage of children leaving primary at the expected standard falling to 59 per cent last year.

**Policy:** An "ambition" to increase the national GCSE average grade in English language and maths from 4.5 in 2019, to 5 by 2030.  
**Progress:** The allowance of some grade inflation last year led to the average maths GCSE score rising from 4.53 in 2019 to 4.72, while the average English grade rose from 4.96 to 5.17.

A true comparison will not be possible until at least 2024, when grade inflation is expected to be eradicated.  
 A report last week by the National Audit Office told ministers to "further develop" their approach to monitoring progress as no milestones had been set.


## The new policies

### Chapter 1: An excellent teacher for every child

**1 Consult on leadership NPQ for SENCOs**

 Tied up in the delayed SEND review.


**2 Scholarships for language graduates**

 175 scholarships worth £27,000 are available. BUT this support was reinstated after it was axed a few years ago.

**3 ITT course to get engineers teaching physics**


 Trialled early last year then rolled out in October.

**4 Digital service to recognise international teaching qualifications and relocation premium**


 Tender exploring "future contract" for both published in August. Digital service launched this month; relocation payment "due to launch" early this year.

### Chapter 2: Delivering high standards of curriculum, behaviour and attendance


**5 Literacy and numeracy sample test for year 9s**

 Standards and Testing Agency is "working on the development of the new tests".


**6 Legislation to "modernise" attendance rules**

 The government has not responded to a consultation that closed last July.


**7 'National data solution' for attendance tracking**

 Dashboard launched in September for schools to compare attendance, 14,000 schools signed up.


**8 Legislate for attendance statutory guidance**

 Non-statutory guidance published in May with "expectation" on schools to publish their policy.







**9 Legislation to increase Ofsted's powers to inspect illegal schools**

 Part of axed schools bill, but government has suggested it will still try to legislate.


**10 Expectation that all mainstream schools run a 32.5-hour week by September**

 No sign of "detailed guidance and case studies" promised by summer 2022. DfE "expects" schools to "work towards meeting this expectation as soon as possible".


### White paper policy tracker key

-  Implemented
-  Appears on track
-  Scrapped
-  Part of scrapped schools bill
-  Delayed (at the least)
-  We couldn't find out more

**11 Network of modern foreign language hubs from 2023**

 Tender launched in November for new centre of excellence, with up to 25 school hubs, over three years. Centre supposed to launch March 3.

**12 Updated sport education plan in 2022**

 Missed pledge, but DfE said it is "progressing".


**13 Updated music education plan in 2022**

 National music plan published last June.

**14 New cultural education plan in 2023**

 No plan yet, but DfE said it is "progressing".

**15 Careers programme for primary schools in areas of disadvantage**

 Two-year, £2.6 million scheme to reach 600,000 pupils in 2,200 primaries underway.

ANALYSIS: WHITE PAPER

16 Turn Oak Academy into curriculum quango

Launched with a reduced curriculum offer in September.

Chapter 3: Target support for every child who needs it

17 Legislate for not-in-school register

Gillian Keegan told MPs in December she remained "committed" to the register, but could not "commit to dates or times".

18 Ofsted will hold schools to account for a new "parent pledge"

Schools were told to budget to meet the pledge this year, but nothing further published.

19 Catch-up 'targeted support' guidance

Ofsted has produced reports on catch-up, but publication of guidance is down to the DfE, the watchdog said.

20 Tutoring to become a "core academic option" funded by the pupil premium and a "vibrant tutoring market" from 2024

This is still the plan.

21 At least £100 million to fund the Education Endowment Foundation

£137 million grant announced in September to fund the evidence broker organisation for another 10 years.

Chapter 4: A stronger and fairer system

22 All schools to be in a MAT or have plans to join one by 2030

Policy has been dropped. See our exclusive story here.

23 Most trusts to work towards serving at least 10 schools or 7,500 pupils

Linked to above, and DfE would not commit to the target. Instead officials are "exploring how to further support the growth of MATs" through the academy regulation review.

24 The proportion of schools a trust can run in a particular area will be capped

DfE would only say "work is proceeding" through its regulatory review.

25 Review to consider new intervention powers and "expectations" of what makes a good trust

Launched in June, the academies regulation and commissioning review missed a December deadline to publish its report. Repurposed slightly after schools bill ditched, but still set to advise on things such as defining a "strong trust" and how regulation should work.

26 Statutory duties for trusts to work with other bodies, and requirement to follow the admissions code

Part of axed schools bill.

27 Transparency for MAT top-slicing

DfE and ESFA "exploring how best to achieve greater financial transparency" over MATs pooling and top-slicing funding.

28 Right for good schools to request to move trust in "exceptional circumstances"

DfE again punted this back to the academy regulation review.

29 £86 million in trust capacity funding

Schools were invited to submit bids in October.

30 Options for extra financial support for dioceses to launch trusts

A pilot scheme was run, but has not been rolled out further.

31 New CEO development scheme

Expert group came up with development framework. Was expected in January.

32 Powers to force "coasting" schools to convert or change trusts

First letters published last year.

33 Regional schools commissioners rebranded as regional directors

Launched in September.

34 £40 million for 24 priority education investment areas

Announced in March, but no details on when funding will be handed out.

35 Those areas targeted for new academically focused 16-19 free schools

At least six "elite" sixth forms vying to be among next wave of 15 free schools.

36 Legislation to protect faith schools' freedoms and protections when converting

Keegan told MPs in December this was not something she could "completely confirm is going to happen".

37 Pledge to ensure selective schools are "secure" in MATs

A future projects document published by the DfE on Friday listed "appointment of a supplier to administer the grammar school ballots system" from September. It later said it was published in error.

38 All trusts to have local governance arrangements for their schools

Schools Week understands informal conversations have been held, but no recent progress.

39 Powers for councils to force trusts to admit children and object to published admission numbers

Part of axed schools bill.

40 Councils will be able to launch spin-off MATs

Schools Week understands it has been canned.

41 Powers to mass convert all maintained schools in an area at a council's request

Part of axed schools bill.

42 New system of proactive assurance with safeguarding audits every three years

DfE said it will consult on Working Together guidance in spring to "explore... whether to set out an expectation around safeguarding audits".



# 'Go further' on social care reform, says review author

AMY WALKER

@AMYRWALKER

EXCLUSIVE

The government must "go much further" to boost schools' safeguarding role, the author of a landmark review of social care has said.

Ministers' have faced criticism for their "half-hearted" response to Josh MacAlister's review, which recommended that schools should become statutory safeguarding partners alongside police, health services and councils, and that they should be considered "corporate parents" of children in care.

The Department for Education's response last week pledged only to consult on these changes, while other recommendations were not addressed.

The review called for £2.6 billion over five years but ministers have allocated just £200 million over two years.

MacAlister said that changes to statutory guidance in the next two years will give education a bigger role in safeguarding but warned that ministers "will need to go much further to give schools a seat at the table as a full safeguarding partner".

His report called for schools to become corporate parents in England to "more accurately reflect the role" they play in the lives of looked-after children.

The government's response pledged only to consult 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.

It will also consult in the spring on how to "strengthen the role of education settings", following a warning in the review that the fact schools are not currently statutory safeguarding partners means the voice of education is "missing".

The DfE said it would use responses to the consultation to help form proposals on "whether and how" to make education a fourth safeguarding partner through consultation in autumn 2023, but made no firm commitment to doing so.

Anne Longfield, the former children's commissioner, said the DfE's response to the "sensible proposals for schools" in the



review "seems half-hearted".

"The time for consultations is surely now over, and we need the government to get on with making immediate improvements and setting out a fully funded long-term plan to improve the care system," she said.

Other proposals included a new category of "family help" services, based in community settings like schools. The government has so far pledged a £45 million pilot in 12 areas to improve current services.

MacAlister suggested education settings were the "most obvious" location for family help services but the DfE has made no firm commitment to this.

He added that he hoped "changes to what we measure and prioritise in the care system results in a small number of teachers taking on the role of foster carer".

MacAlister's review warned the culture of care meant it was "often considered inappropriate" to ask a teacher to consider becoming a child's foster carer.

It said this "needs to change", with teachers being identified in circumstances where fostering within a family network was not going to work.

The government pointed to its current fostering recruitment

and retention programme, making no mention of teachers.

Longfield said there was a "national shortage of foster carers and the government needs to be more ambitious about how it is going to recruit them" and that school staff represented a "hugely untapped resource" for fostering support.

Matthew Cooke, incoming chair of the National Association of Virtual School Heads, said the DfE's response had offered "some meaningful approaches" to improving children's social care.

However, he questioned the review's assertion that there was a "lack of accountability" for virtual school heads in their duty to promote the educational achievement of children in care.

The original document also called for these leaders to be held to account for the progress 8 scores of looked-after children, but the government did not mention this in its response.

Instead, ministers pledged 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".

Cooke defended his colleagues, saying there were "countless examples and positive write-ups in [Ofsted] reports that suggest virtual heads use additional funding in effective ways".

"Every single inspection I've been involved in has held me to account for my progress 8 score with my children in care."

The DfE did not respond to requests to comment.

Anne Longfield

# Another UTC to close after failing to attract students

**JASON NOBLE**

**@JASON\_NOBLE89**

Leaders of a university technical college in Hertfordshire have spoken of their “disappointment” after the government confirmed it will close due to low student demand.

The Watford UTC will see its current students in years 11 and 13 through to the end of the academic year before it closes. New starts for years 10 and 12 were suspended last year.

Its closure means an uncertain future for the college’s 22 staff members.

Watford UTC will be the 13th UTC to cease operation since their inception in 2010.

Year-end accounts at the college for 2022 indicated its governing body had agreed “by mutual consent” with the Department for Education to close.

A “solvent winding up” of the organisation will be completed within 12 months of its accounts being filed.

The college has not attracted as many students as projected since it opened in 2014, receiving less funding than anticipated as a consequence.

Financial figures showed a net revenue deficit of £103,000 in 2021-22, with a net book value of fixed assets valued at £7.7 million.

The Baker Dearing Trust, which exists to support and licence UTCs, said efforts to stabilise the college had included bolstering numbers by applying to lower its entry age and a proposal to join a multi-academy trust.

A spokesperson said those efforts offered “promising results for the long-term sustainability,” to both the school and education provision in Watford.

“We are disappointed in this outcome, especially considering the UTC’s ‘good’ rating from Ofsted and the high-quality destinations the UTC students have been able to achieve with staff,” they said.

Ash Patil, chair of governors at the UTC, said they were “disappointed with this outcome, as staff, governors and stakeholders have been working hard on a solution to safeguard the future of the UTC”.



Watford University Technical College

“Every effort will be made to ensure students are supported to complete their studies successfully.”

The UTC’s website said it offered full-time and technically orientated courses for up to 600 students aged 14 to 19, but actual numbers have been far lower in recent years.

At the time of its Ofsted inspection in March 2017 it had 169 students, about half of whom were on 16 to 19 programmes.

The college currently has 54 students – 39 in year 11 and 15 in year 13. New enrolments stopped last year while the DfE considered the college’s future.

In May 2018, the Education and Skills Funding Agency handed the college a financial notice to improve because of budget concerns.

Officials tasked the UTC’s governing board with securing a balanced budget and growing student numbers at a realistic rate.

More than 50 UTCs have opened since they were launched in 2010 by former education secretary Lord Baker. Many of the colleges have, however, faced financial difficulties and struggled to attract students.

The Baker Dearing Trust shared figures last year that showed student recruitment was improving across most UTCs,

but *Schools Week* analysis found that while five are oversubscribed, more than half are less than two-thirds full.

The BDT has said that UTCs must be two-thirds full to be financially viable.

In November, chief executive Simon Connell said there were plans for three new UTCs.

Two of those were submitted in the most recent round of free school bids – one for a new UTC in Southampton being led by UTC Portsmouth, while the existing Doncaster UTC has applied for a health sciences and green technologies school.

Work on a third bid for Suffolk is ongoing with the aim of being lodged in a future application window.

Conservative MP for Watford, Dean Russell, who is also a governor at the college, paid tribute to Watford’s staff and governors and said that UTCs “have an important role to play in the country’s education”.

“That being said, following exhaustive efforts to find a route to keep the UTC open with every option examined and explored, I accept the Department for Education has had to come to this decision.”



Dean Russell

# Pick a word to guess Ofsted's rating

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Ofsted inspectors are more likely to mention exclusions and absences in negative Ofsted inspections, whereas words such as “art”, “culture” and “wellbeing” feature more often in reports on top-rated schools, new analysis shows.

SchoolDash said its snapshot data “tells us something about Ofsted’s past and present preoccupations”.

Analysis of about 60,000 Ofsted mainstream state school reports since 2006 looked at the words that appeared most often in reports on ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ schools, and compared them with inspections of ‘requires improvement’ and ‘inadequate’ settings.

“Art”, “culture” and “Covid-19” were the top three words most likely to come up in positive primary school inspections, whereas “assessment”, “exclusions” and “absences” were more likely to crop up in negative reports.

It’s a similar pattern at secondary level, where “wellbeing”, “culture” and “Ebacc” (the English Baccalaureate accountability measure) were frequently used in top rated inspections, compared with “absences”, “spelling” and “alternative provision” in those with poor ratings.

Trends have shifted over time too. Since September 2021, under the new inspection framework, words such as “destinations”, “art”, “technology”, “English and maths” and “science” have become more common in positive secondary reports.

“British values”, “attainment”, “computing” and “English as an additional language” have become more frequent in reports of schools with negative grades.

Timo Hannay, from SchoolDash, said: “On a practical level, if your inspectors are taking an overt interest in school culture, pupil wellbeing or art – or, more recently, in science and technology – then, at least statistically speaking, you would appear to be in good shape.

“On the other hand, if they’re unduly concerned about absences, exclusions or British values then you might need to prepare that most British of all attributes, a stiff upper lip.”

Julie McCulloch, policy director at the leaders’

## The most used words at school-phase by Ofsted report rating between 2006 and 2022

### Good or outstanding

Art  
Culture

Covid-19

Languages

Memory

Punctuation

Teaching

Assessment

Exclusions

Absences

Wellbeing  
Culture

Ebacc

Attitude

Covid-19

Disadvantage

Pupil premium

Alternative provision

Spelling

Absences

### Requires improvement or inadequate

● PRIMARY ● SECONDARY

Source: SchoolDash analysis of Ofsted reports

union ASCL, said it was “concerning” exclusions and attendance featured so heavily in negative judgments.

“While these are crucial issues that schools have responsibility for, they also reflect wider problems. Current accountability metrics, including Ofsted grades, correlate closely with factors not necessarily within a school’s control.”

Schools Week dug out some reports where the most prominent words feature.



Julie McCulloch

At ‘inadequate’ Tendring Technology College, a secondary academy in Essex, Ofsted said in 2021 that pupils’ “understanding of health relationships, fundamental British values and protected characteristics is underdeveloped”.

Meanwhile at Admiral Lord Nelson secondary in Hampshire, Ofsted said the ‘good’ school had “very good systems in place to secure the wellbeing and safety of pupils”.

James Bowen, policy director at the National Association of Headteachers, warned against over-interpreting the data, but said schools needed to know there was a “consistent approach to inspection and that outcomes do not depend on the nature” of the inspection team.

“We know that one of the biggest frustrations for school leaders is the way some inspectors become seemingly obsessed with individual and sometimes quite narrow lines of enquiry.

“A one-off comment or single piece of evidence can lead to inspectors narrowing their focus and losing sight of the wood for the trees.” Ofsted declined to comment.

# Pressure on Keegan grows as Wales improves pay offer

**FREDDIE WHITTAKER**

**@FCDWHITTAKER**

Education secretary Gillian Keegan faces greater pressure to reach a deal with unions on pay after teacher strikes were suspended in Wales following an improved offer.

Ministers over the border have offered teachers an additional 1.5 per cent increase in base pay, plus another 1.5 per cent "lump sum".

The National Education Union has suspended Tuesday's planned walk-outs in Wales to consult with members on the proposals.

If accepted, the deal would mean teachers' pay would increase by 8 per cent this year, but with only a 6.5 per cent increase in base pay that would then affect future years.

The NEU wants a fully funded, above inflation pay rise. But Keegan has accused the union of putting forward an "economically incoherent" argument.

NEU joint general secretary Kevin Courtney said the "willingness of the Welsh government to engage in talks" with unions was "in stark contrast to the position taken by Westminster" and Keegan.

He told *Schools Week* the NEU's executive "will consider any serious offer made by the UK government but we are waiting for negotiations to start".

"We wrote to the secretary of state on Monday calling for her to enter into serious and sustained negotiations. She has not responded.

"If the government wants to prevent the next strikes they need to start negotiations quickly and make a real offer."

Courtney said the offer in Wales "remains significantly below our members' demands, and does not begin to address the real terms cuts visited upon teachers since 2010".

But he said the union "will consult with our branches and workplace representatives to secure the views of members in Wales".

"In the meantime, next Tuesday's strike action will be postponed until March 2. Meanwhile, we will continue to press for



Kevin Courtney

a fully consolidated award and to seek an offer in respect of support staff members, who have also provided a clear mandate for action."

Leaders have said ministers have until February 28, the next planned date of strike action in England, to strike a deal.

New data shows how only one in ten pupils in year 8 to 10 went to school on the first day of NEU strike action last Wednesday.

Data published by FFT Education Datalab also shows that poorer pupils were less likely to be in school on the day of the teachers' walk-out, and local authority schools were more likely than academies to close.

Year 11s had the highest attendance, at 54 per cent, close to the attendance in primary year groups. The DfE had urged schools to prioritise exam year groups.

It comes as unions announced a second day of walk-outs at the Department for Education and Ofsted.

The Public and Commercial Services union

has coordinated strike action on March 15 across 123 government departments in England, Scotland and Wales, coinciding with budget day and planned NEU strikes in England.

Civil servants on the picket line last week told *Schools Week* that "morale is at an all-time low" and issues had been "building up" for years.

Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary, said members are "suffering a completely unacceptable decline in their pay.

"Rishi Sunak can end this dispute tomorrow if he puts more money on the table. If he refuses to do that, more action is inevitable."

The NEU has secured an average pay rise of 6.4 per cent for teachers at Winchester College, a private school formerly attended by prime minister Rishi Sunak.

But the NEU said it remained in dispute with the college over plans to close the teacher's pension scheme to new entrants from this September.

# DfE: No evidence needed for mental health absence

**AMY WALKER**  
**@AMYRWALKER**

Schools do not need medical evidence to authorise short-term pupil absences caused by mental health issues, according to new government guidance.

In advice published this week, the Department for Education (DfE) reiterated that schools are expected to ensure regular attendance.

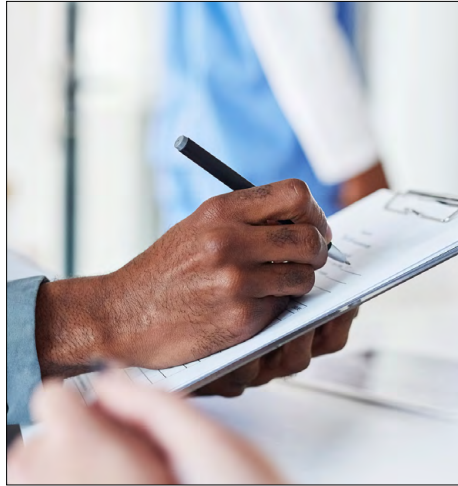
However the guidance adds that there is no need to "routinely" ask for medical evidence to support an authorised absence for mental health reasons.

This is because GPs and other medical professionals are "unlikely to be able to offer such evidence to support one-off absences related to mental health".

The new guidance comes in the wake of a report on the wellbeing of children and young people that found the level of probable disorders has remained "elevated" since the pandemic, and warned anxiety increased in pupils of all ages last year.

School leaders have warned that their pupils face lengthy waits to access external mental health services, with schools increasingly providing services to those with "lower-level needs" to plug gap.

Whilst teachers do not need to routinely



seek medical evidence for short-term absences, the guidance said that where children's mental health causes them to be absent in the long-term, or repeatedly, it "may be appropriate" to seek medical evidence.

In "very exceptional circumstances", temporary part-time timetables can be used to help those with mental health issues to "reintegrate" into school.

However, part-time timetables "must not be used to manage a pupil's behaviour", the DfE said.

This comes after Ofsted warned in its annual report that part-time timetables were being used as an "alternative" to exclusion.

Schools should also mitigate absences by

implementing "reasonable adjustments" to alleviate specific barriers to attendance.

This could involve a "trusted" adult periodically checking how the pupil is feeling, allowing them to access a quiet space at break times or providing access to additional educational support and tutoring.

Plans to improve attendance may also involve referrals to in-school or external professional support, such as counselling services, mental health support teams and school nursing services.

But leaders have warned that support from mental health support teams is not being rolled out fast enough. The teams are only due to cover 35 per cent of pupils by this year.

The DfE guidance said schools were "not expected to diagnose mental health conditions or perform mental health interventions, but they are expected to work to ensure regular attendance for every child".

The government has also published its latest state of the nation report on children's wellbeing, which warned almost one in ten young people now report low happiness with their health last year.

The rate has steadily increased in recent years, from 5.2 per cent in 2019 to 6.8 per cent in 2020, and then to 8.9 per cent last year.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the NAHT school leaders' union, said the "extremely worrying findings" chimed with the experiences of his members.

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

## Treasury keeps unused cash from summer schools

More than £120 million of unspent money for the government's undersubscribed summer schools programme was kept by the Treasury, ministers have admitted.

The National Audit Office revealed last week that £226 million in education recovery money went unspent by the end of the 2021-22 financial year.

This included £124 million for secondary summer schools in 2021.

The DfE said this week that while £200 million was initially allocated to the "demand-led" programme, the estimate "was reduced during the course of the programme".

The department only "drew on the necessary amount" from the Treasury, it

confirmed this week.

Data published last year showed 2,780 schools claimed just £75.3 million for summer schools. The programme's aim was to help with the education recovery of pupils moving between primary and secondary school.

The remaining underspend reported by the NAO relates to the first two years of the government's National Tutoring Programme, but it is not clear what happened to the leftover cash.

The DfE said it would "share information in due course" on how funding was used in the past academic year.

An evaluation of school-led tutoring in which schools were given cash directly to

hire their own tutors was published this week.

A lack of suitable space was "a potential barrier" for some schools, ImpactEd found.

Some school leaders also said the grant's one-year term "did not allow much space for long-term strategy and planning for children who require and benefit from more intensive support".

But schools said the "flexible nature" of the programme had "allowed schools to target support to pupils who need it the most throughout the year".

The evaluation of 29 schools was commissioned by the Education Development Trust, which also delivered tutor training last year.

## SPEED READ: ACADEMIES

## Trusts face having to raid flourishing reserves

Academy trusts still boast “significant surpluses”, but standalone primary schools are struggling and most leaders expect to have to raid their reserves, according to a new report.

The Kreston academies group, a network of accountancy companies, has published its latest academies benchmark report that is based on more than 320 of the group’s clients.

The report found academy trusts are top-slicing more money from their schools’ budgets, and about one in ten has racked up reserves equivalent to more than 20 per cent of income.

But despite “significant surpluses”, per-pupil income increased by just 1 per cent in the past year against inflation of more than 10 per cent.

As a result, 88 per cent of trusts expected “future reductions in surpluses and reserves”, the report warned.

Here’s what you need to know...

## 1 Fewer trusts are in deficit...

Figures for deficits and surpluses show a mixed picture. Overall, the number of chains reporting a cumulative deficit has continued to drop, from 8.2 per cent in 2019 and 3.8 per cent in 2021 to 0.6 per cent last year.

However, the average surpluses in standalone secondary academies and all types of multi-academy trust have fallen after record highs last year.

## 2...but smaller schools are suffering

Forty-seven per cent of primary single-academy trusts (SAT) reported in-year deficits in 2021-22.

The average was £40,000, compared with a £103,000 surplus for a secondary SAT and £1.5 million for a large multi-academy trust (MAT).

Kreston said a “small number” of primary SATs “with very large deficits, resulting from capital and maintenance expenditure” had dragged down the overall average.

Heating and lighting costs also jumped in primary SATs, rising by £26 to £84 per pupil in 2022. This is compared to a £16 jump at secondary SATs and £11 at MATs.

There has also been a “staggering increase” in supply costs for primary SATs – up 76 per cent in a year. Primary school pupil rolls are also falling.

## 3 One in 10 trusts has 20 per cent reserves...

The National Audit Office and the parliamentary public accounts committee have said the government should provide information on trusts that hold reserves of more than 20 per cent of their income.

The report found 11 per cent are over that threshold, which, if extrapolated, could mean more than 1,000 trusts with deficits of more than a fifth of the value of their income.

Kreston said trusts had had “relative financial success” in building up reserves “to protect them from a period of great uncertainty”.

Although the government announced more money for schools next year, “very few trusts will feel that the future is anything other than hugely uncertain – and although they have been predicting falling reserves for a number of years this time they really mean it”.

## 4...but trusts are taking more from school budgets

Academy trusts can “top-slice” funding from their schools’ budgets to run central services.

Kreston shows that a third now charge 6 to 7 per cent of income when top slicing – a sharp rise from about a sixth in 2021 and 2020.

And 6.5 per cent now charge a top slice of more than 8 per cent, up from 2.5 per cent of trusts in 2020 and 2.8 per cent in 2021. The most common top-slice is still about 5 per cent.

Kreston said general annual grant (GAG) pooling is also becoming more attractive. Twenty-three per cent of its MAT clients now did this, compared with 14 per cent previously.

## 5 Executive pay has risen 10 per cent

Although per-pupil funding has not kept up with inflation, pay for academy leaders seems to have fared better.

The average MAT chief executive officer or headteacher is now paid £127,969 – a 10 per cent hike from £116,476 the year before.

However, changes in pay varied based on the size of trusts, and average CEO pay in large MATs actually fell by 2.5 per cent last year.

Kreston said this could be because of “a lot of fluidity in the sector”, and “less experienced” leaders moving into the roles.





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**Feature**  
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# School leaders rebel over raid on reserves amid ‘shameful’ bail-out ultimatum

A council set for a multi-million pound government bailout to bring its soaring SEND deficit under control will claw back “surplus” reserves held by schools to plug the shortfall.

Mainstream schools, already struggling under shrinking budgets as councils try to cover high needs shortfalls, face a raid on their reserves as a condition of the “safety valve” deals Town Halls have struck with government.

Now school leaders have started to rebel, with one school threatening legal action over the budget transfer until it was warned that “targeted support” would end.

The findings expose the impact of the Westminster intervention to help councils get a grip on SEND funding deficits estimated at more than £2 billion.

Government said the bailouts – totalling £377 million for 14 councils – were “not a cost

cutting exercise” but were about “improving the performance of local high needs systems.”

Another 31 areas are lining up such deals.

Shadow schools minister Stephen Morgan said it was “truly shameful that ministers have given desperate local authorities an ultimatum over whether to support special schools or go bankrupt.

“Children with SEND should be given the best support possible, not used as a bargaining chip.”

## Feature

We analysed council and school forum meeting minutes to reveal the problems the scheme is causing on the ground. All but two councils featured in our article declined requests for comment.

### Deficit progress stalls

Councils with safety valve deals have pledged to bring down their deficits in exchange for DfE cash but are still struggling to do so.

Bury council, which clinched a £20 million bailout in the first wave of deals struck in 2020-21, has made £2.9 million of savings this financial year but is below its £3.3 million target.

Kingston, which pledged to eliminate its deficit by 2025-26 in return for £27 million, is projecting high needs overspend of £5.3m this year. Bailout payments are normally made over a five-year period.

The pressure to save costs is causing tension between councils and schools, which are scrapping to receive their share of top-up funds amid rising SEND demand.

In Hillingdon, given £11 million, school leaders voiced “frustration” over “inaccuracies” in top-up payments over the last 17 months.

Schools reported “significant underpayments” due to problems with information sharing.

Leaders even warned there was a risk the council “did not know where children were placed”, although Hillingdon officers denied this.

### Transfer tensions

Safety valve councils agree to transfer 0.5 to 1.5 per cent of funding from their schools funding to their high needs blocks. Normally, transfers are only made with school forum agreement.

Oxfordshire school leaders expressed “deep dissatisfaction” over a proposed transfer “when schools are already hugely underfunded”.

The schools forum for Kirklees council, given a £33.5 million bailout, noted “difficulty” in transferring the £2.1 million agreed for 2023-24. This led to a £423,000 shortfall, with schools sharing the burden. The council is expected to transfer a further £2.6 million in 2024-25 but school leaders have warned of a “very serious



## ‘The pressure to save costs is causing tension between councils and schools’

funding problem”.

In North Tyneside, which is planning a safety valve deal, one school leader suggested a High Court injunction against the transfer.

Hillingdon schools forum heads wanted to consult with local schools before making a decision, but did not get the chance to do so.

Hammersmith and Fulham Council is eyeing a one per cent transfer for 2023-24, worth £1.2 million. Council officers invited headteachers to attend meetings with DfE to discuss the “impact of these decisions”.

### Councils commence clawbacks

Government guidance states councils can claw back excess surpluses from schools. This applies where primaries and special schools have a year-end revenue balance greater than 8 per cent of their annual budget, or secondaries 5 per cent.

Councils until now have been reluctant to do so but North Somerset, set to sign a safety valve deal this year, has decided to claw back balances of over 6 per cent, or £70,000, from April onwards, unless they are required “for a specific purpose”.

The council said with “the pressures on the DSG” [dedicated schools grant, funding that

includes high needs] it is “incumbent on the council to review schools’ balances, particularly those of our maintained special schools”.

The forum only voted in favour of transferring £1.5 million after the council warned “targeted support” for schools would otherwise “end”.

One school leader suggested DfE was “putting pressure” on the council to make the transfer.

A North Somerset Council spokesperson pointed out that the transfer includes the “continuation of targeted support, which is part of our schools’ commitment to providing additional support to local schools where there is a high level of demand”. “We’re delighted that education leaders at both a national and local level are working together to make sustainable funding available for [SEND] children,” they said.

Salford, which has a £6.6 million safety valve deal, is proposing a clawback, citing “very high levels of surplus balances” at some schools, including one with “savings of £1.5 million, way more than the guidance”.

### Challenges reducing EHCPs

The DfE told bailed-out councils it expects a “stabilisation” in the number of EHCPs issued.

# Feature

The department said there is “no evidential basis for the indefinite increase”.

But three years after the first five deals were struck, none have yet managed to stem EHCP growth.

An initial rise in EHCPs was factored into the safety valve deals, giving councils time to put measures in place to bring them down.

But the continued rise has been blamed partly on developmental delays in young children arising from the pandemic.

Bury council predicts a 23 per cent rise in EHCP plans by 2025, the final year of its deal. The council is now set to miss its own budget plans by £2.4 million this year.

But this is still masking the real rise in demand for SEND services.

For instance, Bury approved eight per cent more EHCPs last year, but requests increased by 23 per cent. The council told *Schools Week* this has “outstripped” safety valve forecasts.

Hammersmith and Fulham, given a £20 million bailout, saw a 25 per cent increase in EHCP applications in the 18 months to November 2022.

This was “not reflected in additional funding from the government”, the council said. This sparked a “significant impact on the high needs block” – with a budget gap of £800,000 in 2024-25 and £200,000 in 2025-26.

The rises are also contributing to children waiting longer for support they are legally entitled to.

Of the 198 EHCP applications Stoke-on-Trent council reviewed in the second quarter of 2022-23, only 30 per cent were completed on time – compared to a national average of 58 per cent.

However other councils seem to be bringing EHCP numbers in line.

Richmond received 322 EHC requests in 2022 – a 30 per cent increase on 2021. But its number of EHCPs, 1,706, is lower than the 1,812 forecast in its safety valve agreement.

Kingston is also keeping to safety valve EHCP forecasts, despite a 23 per cent rise in requests for assessments.

The council warned it will “not be possible” to



Tony McArdle, DfE's chief safety valve negotiator

## ‘School leaders warned there was a risk the council 'did not know where children were placed’

bring spending in line if growth “continues at current rates”.

### Councils start funding shake-up

The SEND review proposed a new national framework of banding and price tariffs for funding. This would be matched to levels of need and types of education provision.

The DfE said a national framework would give clarity on how much funding children should get. It would also help “control high costs attributed to expensive provision”.

Ministers still have not published their implementation plan. But some councils are

starting to realign their banding policies, with higher levels of funding being cut back.

Bury council is trying scrap the top band of top-funding it provides special schools for pupils with

EHCPs, replacing it with a “process or requests for exceptional funding”. They hoped this would save up to £1 million.

But the council is now bringing in “external moderation” as “internal moderation did not achieve the re-balancing of bands...as hoped”.

Bury is now trying to claw back the £1 million from what it calls excess balances at its maintained special schools and a pupil referral unit.

Stoke-on-Trent is also reviewing banding, incorporating a “matrices of need approach based on defined criteria”, along with an audit review of all existing and future EHCPs.

Matt Keer, SEND funding expert for parent network Special Needs Jungle, said he “won’t be crying in his sleep” if private equity-run special schools are not able to “charge what they want” for provision.

But he is concerned independent schools for children with “low incidence types of disability”, who are not generally catered-for by councils, might not be able to continue to provide support.

Another potential issue, flagged in a report for Kingston-upon-Thames council, is that explicitly stating the level of funding on offer for specific needs can lead to “perverse incentives” for parents.

Keer sees evidence from parents that it is “becoming harder” to get EHCPs and believes councils are “under a lot of pressure from the centre to cease plans”.



Matt Keer, Special Needs Jungle

The DfE’s chief safety valve negotiator Tony McArdle recently told *Schools Week* how EHCP support for many children should “diminish each year”.

But Keer accused him of being “fixated with the idea” that support for children with permanent disabilities “works like temporary medicine - you put it down the patient, the patient

gets better”.

The DfE did not respond to a request for comment.

# Opinion

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## LEYLA TOVEY

Managing director, School Business Services

### Budgets: Cost pressures call for careful forecasting

**With no end in sight, school and trust leaders must keep their eyes on the horizon to weather the financial storm, writes Leyla Tovey**

To say that the past 12 months have been a turbulent time for education finance is something of an understatement. The new reality for schools is energy cost hikes of about 400 per cent, in many cases, and a cluster of other budget-hitting inflationary pressures causing concern over financial sustainability.

To understanding what school leaders feel about those pressures, in late 2022 we conducted a survey with Supporting Education Group. We received 428 responses from headteachers, chief operating officers, financial officers, and business leaders in schools and academies. Most of them are concerned about financial sustainability, with the vast majority digging into their reserves to cover costs.

Just 2 per cent of academies and 1 per cent of local authority schools told us that they will break even, and those using reserves to balance the books still face serious challenges during the 2022/23 budget year. This is despite a £2.3 billion cash injection announced by Jeremy Hunt, the chancellor, in his

autumn statement. Schools will be forced to make agonising decisions that impact staff and pupils.

Some schools will be limited in their ability to balance their budgets back to health; the survey revealed that about one-fifth of them worry about their ability to set and manage their budgets.

Factors underpinning these worries include the availability of effective budgeting tools and staff expertise.

Some 62 per cent of respondents said that saving on energy costs was a priority, and leaders are finding ways of mitigating these costs. We have seen that larger academy trusts are often in a better position on energy. They are more likely to have made greater investment in energy solutions such as solar panels or LED lighting, and can often negotiate better contracts due to their combined purchasing power and centralised operations. Even so, these trusts are only looking okay and will likely need to dig into any surpluses for the following round of budget setting.

Typically, LA-maintained schools and single or small academy trusts are less likely to have reserves to buffer their position. These schools will be feeling more exposed to the challenges and many are exploring radical ways to stay financially viable. For example, maintained



“ Three- to five-year budget planning has become essential

schools that have stayed loyal to local authority support are beginning to really scrutinise value for money on their contracts. This is leading to a new willingness to engage external providers to deliver similar services.

It is clear that the impact of the funding crisis is set to continue long into next year and beyond. Three- to five-year budget planning has become essential to allow for a clearer view of the financial forecast towards the end of the year and a little further down the road.

While schools and academies closely scrutinise future funding, looking for example at ways to boost pupil numbers and revenue through marketing initiatives and community engagement, is there anything else they can do to get through this turbulent time?

A budget is only as good as the day it is built, so regular re-forecasting will be crucial, providing governors and trustees with reassurance and confidence in

the latest budget position.

Using procurement frameworks to access the best deals is vital, while multi-academy trusts and federations should approach their suppliers regarding coterminous contracts for ease of management and price leverage.

Consideration should be given to external support providers: established education sector organisations work in partnership with schools and academies to find solutions that are fit for purpose, ensure value for money and ultimately benefit children and young people. External support doesn't have to be expensive; it might include attending a free webinar or conference event, which also acts as valuable staff CPD.

School budgets will be in choppy waters for some time to come. Keeping a clear head and a firm hand on budget management will help as we navigate our way towards calmer seas.

# Opinion

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## Schools can help under-represented students break into top universities and overcome imposter syndrome, write Kalwant Bhopal and Martin Myers

When we think of elite universities, institutions such as Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard and Yale come to mind. These universities are recognisable by their status, prestige and position in the league tables. They are highly sought after by students because they often lead to employment in well-paid, rewarding and powerful professions.

In our new book, *Elite universities and the making of privilege*, we found that elite universities are dominated by white, wealthy students who have attended private fee-paying schools. While state school students, working-class students and students of colour did attend these universities, they often expressed a sense of imposter syndrome. They did not feel a sense of belonging.

Many students from under-represented backgrounds aspire to attend elite universities, but what can schools do to support them in this? The following mechanisms can be used to ensure that such students at least have a chance to be included in the selection process.

Many students (and parents) are unaware of the different deadlines for applying to Oxford and Cambridge. The deadline is in October and not the usual January deadline for applications to other universities. Schools must ensure that pupils are aware of these deadlines. For many, just deciding to apply to Oxbridge can be a daunting decision. Unfortunately, they have less rather than more time to apply, so they need to be primed to do so well ahead of the beginning of the school year.

PROF KALWANT BHOPAL

Director, Centre for Research in Race and Education (CRRE), University of Birmingham

MARTIN MYERS

Assistant professor, School of education, University of Nottingham



## Elite universities protect privilege – but schools can break the barriers

Students are often daunted by the prospect of having to write a personal statement. They have a limited amount of space (usually just over 500 words) to make a convincing case for admission. It is important that schools understand what makes

these should be discussed in relation to their academic knowledge. Schools should direct students to university websites, particularly those of Oxford and Cambridge, which give excellent tips on how to write engaging and compelling personal

“We must encourage pupils to take their rightful places

a good personal statement and what does not, and to communicate those requirements to students. Personal statements should reflect students’ passion, knowledge and ambitions for their academic interests. If they are including extra-curricular activities

statements. They need to direct pupils to these sites as early as possible so they can acquire knowledge of the mindset that elite universities associate with successful students. In private, fee-paying schools, knowledge about the Oxbridge system



is commonplace among parents and teachers. For many state schools this is not the case; teachers need to make time to bridge that gap.

Interviews are no longer commonly used by most universities, but they remain important for elite universities. In the interview, students need to think on their feet and demonstrate their ability to play an academic game. Again, these skills are more likely to be fostered in private schools than in over-worked, under-resourced, curriculum-focused state schools. But it is possible to bridge these gaps. Establishing debating forums and encouraging pupils to think and argue outside the box is one effective way to imbue language and reasoning skills. It is also worth seeking out parents who have a feel for the Oxbridge admissions process to conduct mock interviews with pupils.

In writing this article, we are very aware elite universities remain spaces of privilege in which the interests of white, wealthy, privately-educated students are protected. Many pupils also recognise this and choose not to apply, fearing they will never be happy in such environments. Elite universities may yet become genuine spaces of inclusion for all students, but right now it would be remiss not to acknowledge such pressures act as deterrents.

We also know that many state schools have excellent records of supporting pupils to gain admission. Despite all the downsides, elite universities offer exceptional, life-changing opportunities. Even if the universities themselves are resistant, as teachers and educators it is important that we still encourage all pupils, from all backgrounds, to take their rightful places.

# National Apprenticeships Week

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## JUSTINE KENNY

National director of people and culture,  
Ormiston Academies Trust

### How apprenticeships can improve school recruitment

**From teaching assistants to school business managers, apprenticeships are excellent pathways to recruit, develop and retain staff, says Justine Kenny**

This National Apprenticeship Week we wanted to shine a light on how valuable investment in the creation of apprenticeships can be, both for recruiting and for upskilling of staff.

There is a wide range of jobs, in addition to teaching roles, that have a real impact on raising the aspirations of students. Whether providing extra support for young people as a teaching assistant or ensuring the effective administration of a school, such roles are often overlooked when discussing recruitment, despite the vital part they play in the success of a school.

Promoting different pathways, such as apprenticeships, is a great way for schools to recruit people with diverse skillsets, prior experience and new knowledge. We know that having staff from a wide variety of backgrounds can bring new ideas to a school, ensuring they are delivering the best possible education and delivering opportunities for all students.

Apprenticeships can help achieve this ambition by opening the door to new people and a range of skills.

Offering apprenticeships as a pathway into education can help to ease recruitment strains, while providing new staff with the opportunity to gain the skills and experience required to hit the ground running upon completing their training. In providing opportunities for apprentices to get the most out of their time at a school, they should be encouraged to take any opportunity to experience other roles and specialisms related to their course. For example, TAs can be offered experience in working with subject specialists or shadowing staff members who have specialised in providing SEND support.

Paige Manship is one of 263 apprentices across Ormiston Academies Trust. Passionate about working with young people and keen to play a role in supporting their personal and educational development, she is studying a level 3 business administration apprenticeship at Ormiston Maritime Academy. Without a career path that provided her on-the-ground experience and financial stability as she learned, it is unlikely she would have ended up in this



“ Apprenticeships open the door to new skill

role. Paige now intends to develop her skillset further, in areas such as finance, attendance and first aid, and aspires to a management role.

We have also seen a huge benefit in offering apprenticeships as a way for our staff to upskill. Instead of risking losing great talent, we enable them to retrain in an area where they can continue to have an immeasurable impact on our students.

While progression routes for teachers are clearer, for other roles within schools there can be less of a defined path. This can deter prospective staff from applying and be isolating for current employees who are unsure about their roles' ability to grow.

In recognition of these important roles, schools should explore a breadth of development opportunities to ensure that apprentices are well embedded in their school. As with teachers, leaders should prioritise creating an environment where all support staff feel the same responsibility

and pride in wanting their school to thrive.

Apprenticeships can be key in ensuring people get the most out of a career in education. While offering CPD courses for all of our staff has been successful, further opportunities to take part in or lead projects helps to develop skillsets more meaningfully. For example, our apprentices are encouraged to get involved in trust-wide initiatives like our social action projects, helping students make a difference to their communities.

This week is an important opportunity to celebrate the positive impact investing in apprenticeships can have on schools, but we should recognise the benefits of creating diverse pathways into the sector all year round.

Through apprenticeships, we are able to showcase a wide range of rewarding careers available within education. And that benefits our staff, our schools, our pupils and our communities.

# National Apprenticeships Week

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**Apprenticeships are accessed least by those who could benefit most. Schools are part of the solution, write Jo Foster and Katherine Doherty**

“Provide apprenticeships careers talks or face legal action”, ran a headline in Schools Week in the summer.

It’s a bit nerve-racking, isn’t it? Understandable then, that the reporting requirements of the Baker Dearing clause might not have filled school leaders with enthusiasm.

The government is right to take vocational and technical education extremely seriously, and to let schools know students should be taking it seriously too. Ministers are bang-on in banging on about it.

But teachers need support to boost their knowledge and schools are under huge pressures. They are expected to meet so many millions of requirements, and many school leaders and teachers won’t have done an apprenticeship or worked with an apprentice before. Passion comes from deep understanding. Do you and your staff have a deep understanding of apprenticeships?

We now know that apprenticeships are not working for students – especially disadvantaged ones – in the way that they should. In December, the Sutton Trust published a report called The Recent Evolution of Apprenticeships, which revealed major warning signs.

It found that although about 17 per cent of students were eligible for free school meals, the proportion was much lower for apprentices under 30: only 13 per cent at level 2; nine per cent at level 3; seven per cent at level 4/5, and just five per cent at level 6 (or degree level). More disadvantaged students chose to go to university (6.7 per cent) than take a higher-level apprenticeship.

This is despite apprenticeships

JO FOSTER

Director, Institute for Research in Schools



KATHERINE DOHERTY

Senior Programmes Manager: Apprenticeships and Employability, The Sutton Trust

## Apprenticeships: It’s time to cross the Baker Dearing line

allowing students to pursue qualifications, get paid, side-step university debt, and get a head start on the skills needed for the jobs market.

Even more worryingly, while the gap in representation is most noticeable in

said the report.

What could be an easier sell at a time of skills shortages and a cost-of-living crisis? As far back as 2014, the Richard review of apprenticeships argued that they support both the economy and the apprentice.

“It’s lack of knowledge, not will, that’s holding back students

the highest-level apprenticeships, there was a decline of up to two percentage points in the representation of students from poorer backgrounds within each level of apprenticeship between 2015 and 2020. This is not the right direction.

It means that young people and those in deprived areas “have not been the beneficiaries so far of this expansion”;

There is nothing like a real-life example to ignite enthusiasm. The Institute for Research in Schools focuses on helping students run real science research projects, so we’ve found a few science apprenticeships that should spark your interest.

Did you know that your students could do a laboratory scientist



apprenticeship with AstraZeneca? It would be a specialist apprenticeship in microbiology, based in a small town in the north. Those kinds of local opportunities can be lifechanging for a young person who can’t or doesn’t want to move far from home.

Or what about a physics technologist apprentice at a cancer centre in Liverpool? They want one right now.

And do your staff know about higher-level apprenticeships? Because National Grid, another huge and well-known employer, is looking for a cyber technologist higher apprentice to join them. What about an apprentice pharmacy assistant? An environmental consultancy apprenticeship (with the promise of excellent pay)?

Apprenticeships can help more students towards some of the most exciting, high-status careers around – and not just in science and tech.

So, ask yourself. Have you been to see an apprenticeship in action? Have you made use of the huge bank of free resources on Amazing Apprenticeships? Do you know what the Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge programme is and how it can support schools? Did you invite students who went on to undertake apprenticeships back to talk to current students? Do you direct students to additional opportunities such as the Sutton Trust’s Apprenticeship Summer School or your staff to webinars like ‘Making higher and degree apprenticeships accessible and attainable for your students’?

Forget the threat of legal action. It’s lack of knowledge, not will, that’s holding students back from applying. So this National Apprenticeships Week, get knowledgeable and let’s ensure all our students have access to these opportunities.



# Solutions

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## JAMES GRIFFITHS

Co-founder and technical director,  
Cyber Security Associates

### How to minimise the damage from cyber attacks

**Even the best-protected systems can be breached, says James Griffiths, so it's important to plan what to do when a cyber attack succeeds**

The education sector has been hit hard recently by cyber attacks that leaked parents' highly confidential data onto the dark web.

This month alone, hackers leaked documents online from 14 schools, while Vice Society, a ransomware cybercriminal gang, were responsible for a string of attacks on schools in the US and UK last year.

Documents sold on the dark web included children's SEND information, child and parent passport scans, staff pay scales and contract details. Some of the passport scans dated back to school trips from 2011.

Schools are high on the target list due to the rich data they hold. According to the UK government's 2022 cyber breaches survey, 41 per cent of primary and 71 per cent of secondary schools reported an attack in the previous 12 months. They're also considered a soft target, often because of inadequate protection in place due to a lack of budget and resource.

It's critical that schools have an incident response plan that

helps quickly contain a threat and minimise damage. It should cover the following:

#### Prepare

This was the topic of last week's Solutions article in these pages, but it bears repeating: An effective incident response plan is crucial to mitigating the risk of a data breach.

Understand what data you're holding and mark this data with an expiry date to be auto-archived or deleted. Have a good patch management policy in place, conduct regular vulnerability assessments, and keep end-point protection up to date.

Encrypting data at rest is key and could act as a second line of defence should an attacker gain access. Segregate data too, to limit people's level of access.

Finally, ensure that your security policies align with your data protection regulations and, at a minimum, employees should receive regular cyber awareness training and your systems should be audited regularly.

#### Identify

The next stage is what to do should your systems be compromised.

The sooner you spot an intrusion, the better, so the network must be monitored constantly and



### “ Hackers often leave a mess behind

automated response systems are available.

When identifying a security incident, everyone who needs to know must be contacted in a timely manner, and decisions authorised swiftly.

#### Contain

Thirdly, know how to mitigate the damage once you've been breached. This could mean removing or taking systems offline and steps to close vulnerabilities, as well as action to remove or isolate the hacker from your system.

If it is a ransomware attack – a hacker demanding money in exchange for returning your data – do not pay the demand if you can avoid it. Ransome payments only fund future strikes, with no guarantee that your data will remain intact.

#### Eradicate

Identify how the network was compromised and rectify the weaknesses to reduce future risk.

Actions during this phase will depend on what type of attack occurred. For example, if it was through an employee's login credentials, freeze their account.

#### Recover

Once the threat has been contained or removed, you can focus on getting your systems back online. This can be complex as hackers often leave a mess behind, but it is essential to do this speedily to avoid a repeat attack.

Once complete, test and monitor the affected systems to ensure that new measures you've put in place are working effectively.

Despite a school's best effort to stay cyber secure, and no matter how strong your cyber security is, attacks and breaches will slip through the cracks. This means it's critical to be prepared.

Always take time to assess how an attack happened and to learn lessons so that your school's cyber defence grows stronger against present and future threats.

## THE REVIEW

BOOK  
TV  
FILM  
RADIO  
EVENT  
RESOURCE

## ON THE WRITE TRACK

**Author:** Title: *On the Write Track*

**Author:** James Clements

**Publisher:** Routledge

**Publication date:** 13 October 2022

**ISBN:** 0367695960

**Reviewer:** Robbie Burns, assistant vice principal, Bede Academy  
(Emmanuel Schools Foundation)

In *On the Write Track*, James Clements offers writing scheme-weary primary educators something refreshingly simple, sensible and well-researched. He argues for several pathways (or in his words, a number of “tracks”) which teachers can take with their students, responding and using their professional judgment wisely. This book makes big, satisfying, broad-brush claims that don’t overreach, and I took up his guide with interest.

The first strength to note about *On the Write Track* is the strong research base for the principles and insights it provides. This for me is an important part of books that call themselves guides: they should work as catalysts, as launching points for further reading and should not be ends in themselves. Clements has set the book up in this way, drawing together strands of international research on primary writing, and describes them succinctly.

What he suggests has a timeless and sensible feel which naturally lends itself to high levels of flexibility. Regardless of the curriculum scheme or approach that you take in your school, *On the Write Track* has something to offer that is rich and balanced and will develop your subject knowledge. For me, as a leader of English, I developed a deeper knowledge that underpinned hunches I already had about good teaching of writing. I’ve also found a few more books to read - a testament to the author’s commitment not to offer a definitive guide, but rather to offer the reader signposts to develop

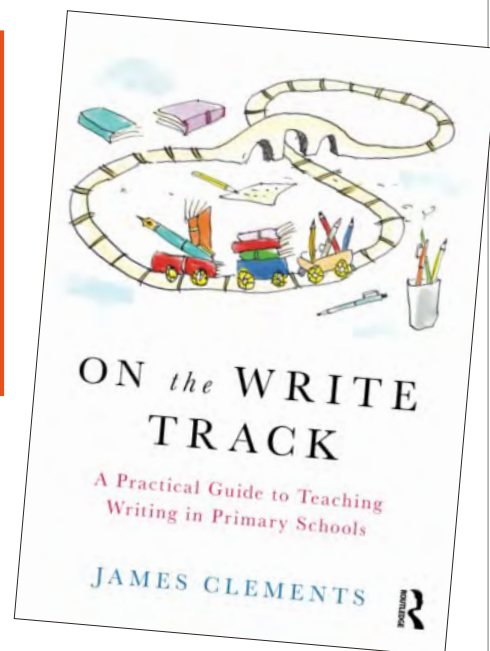
their own best practice.

Clements’ heart is clearly in teaching and seeing every child become a writer. This personal passion in turn helped me understand his principles and tracks more clearly. Rather than simply providing takeaways or tips and tricks, *On The Write Track* thoughtfully applies the research evidence it cites to provide excellent descriptions of sequences of lessons across a range of contexts and settings that exemplify its principles.

This adds another layer of important nuance: research does not always cross over directly into the classroom, and Clements sidesteps this pitfall with grace. The narratives he provides enable the reader to understand how his ideas work in large schools, small schools, mixed-age classes and how they apply to poetry, fiction and non-fiction.

As much as I enjoyed and took from this book, there were two areas not fully covered that feel like they should have been. First, supporting struggling writers and those with SEND. Of course, whole books have been written about this and many more could add to our knowledge, and Clements does provide a smattering of discussion throughout. However, I wanted to understand his insights into this area more fully. I know I could have learned from him here and I am sure he has much to say about the topic.

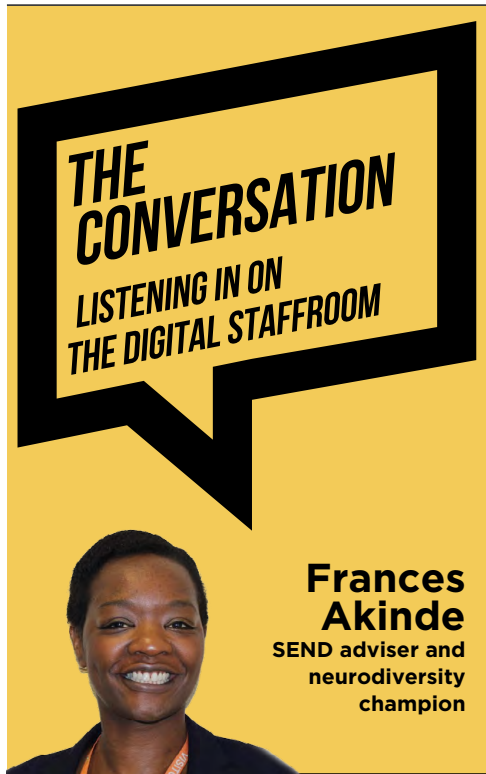
Another is a discussion, or at least a fuller understanding, of disciplinary literacy and



writing across the curriculum. It could be said that one of the tracks, “beginning with knowledge”, alluded to this. However, my experiences of teaching across both primary and secondary education has shown me how ill-equipped to write students often are when they arrive at secondary school. It is common for them to be a little befuddled about the nature of writing in, say, RE or Science; I think we can do more and better in this area in the primary sector to prepare our students for the next phase of their education.

An equal balance of depth and accessibility make *On the Write Track* worth reading for all primary teachers. You will need to go elsewhere for the topics noted above, but a good guide shows you the sights and sets you up to explore further by yourself – and this one does exactly that.

★★★★☆  
Rating



### THE ART OF PROTEST

It's been a busy week in education. At the TUC's anti-racist workplace conference on Saturday, the NEU joint general secretary Kevin Courtney said that "we've seen a decade's worth of activism in a week". It seems that, like me, he was impressed by the creativity on display during the teacher strikes, celebrating their skills with a great Twitter thread of his favourite placards.



There are many reasons why educators are going on strike, all of them serious. These have been thoroughly reported in *Schools Week* and I won't go into them here, but as educators we know that peaceful protest can be a powerful way to effect change and make voices heard. We also know that a good placard conveying all that seriousness with humour is a great way to get people talking.

As a former headteacher, I'm very supportive of the strikes. As an art teacher, I was particularly interested in how teachers would use the placard – that ultimate artform – to bring attention to the dispute.

Expectations were high. Twitter user @MisterFirth set the bar high, promising "the most grammatically correct placards this country's ever seen". Meanwhile, @ellasmr made a valid point that teachers' placards are so good because they are "honed from years of display making". And @Alistair\_Scown agreed: "Teachers placards are going to be amazing. 100% they've all been laminated ready for the picket lines in the morning."

So I'm pleased to say that they didn't disappoint. As you might have expected, the National Society for Educators of Art and Design (The Art and Design teachers' trade union, subject association and learned society) chimed in with a top-class effort at a beautiful banner.

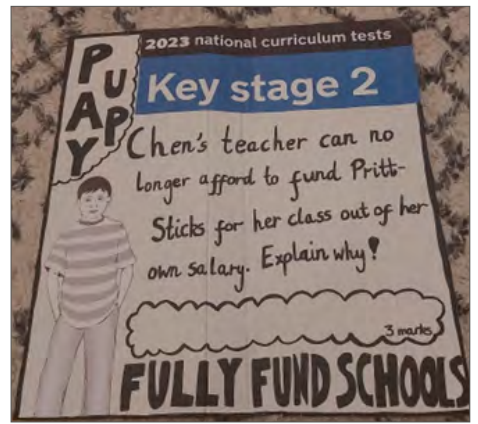


But the quality of placards is about so much more than the craft. It plays to another one of the profession's strengths: use of language. As @TeachLeadAali summed up after the event: "No one can write puns better than a teacher. The placards are incredible."

A final, important element of the effective placard is the use of cultural references. This is also something teachers are adept at. From South Park to national curriculum tests, last week's placards leaned into the profession's ability to connect the message they are trying to impart with ideas that are familiar to their audience.



The result of all that humour and creativity was that social media channels were teeming with expressions of teachers' frustrations – few of them about pay and most about school funding. What better way to get the public on side?



No one was more pleased, perhaps, than the NEU themselves, who didn't miss the opportunity to celebrate and draw attention to their members' creative expression.

Some joked that art teachers should deliver Continuing Professional Development on placard-making.



Indeed, Tate Kids was so inspired by Wednesday's mobile displays that they got involved, on Thursday publishing a teaching resource with "steps to make your own protest sign and show



others what cause you feel passionate about today", inspired by the work of the great artist Bob and Roberta Smith.

Art has long been a form of protest. This week has been a fantastic reminder of its power to effect social change and if there exists any equal to art's power to inspire action, it is teaching. Last week's placards were a match made in heaven.

With any luck, they will have been enough to persuade ministers to prevent another opportunity for teachers to take to the streets with their display-making skills.

Whether or not ministers have learned anything, the profession hasn't missed a teachable moment. Headteacher, Simon Smith (@smithsmm) has a book for every occasion. This week, he recommended *The Art of Protest*, by De Nichols.

Reason enough to look forward to the next walk-out.

# The Knowledge

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



## What makes leaders most effective in improving student outcomes?

**Viviane Robinson, Distinguished professor emeritus at the University of Auckland and visiting professor at University College London**

The dedicated pursuit of improvement in student achievement and wellbeing is a key responsibility of educational leaders, whether they lead a team, a school or a network. At a time of marked disparities in attainment, this responsibility carries even greater weight.

Our focus is rightly on closing these gaps in classrooms and professional development is often aimed at teachers. But mid-level and senior leaders are left to rely on intuition in their efforts to drive rapid and sustained improvement.

It doesn't have to be this way. Intuition based on experience can be effective, but it has shortcomings, not least that it is slower, less precise and assumes agreement from others. Instead, a more deliberative approach can lead to leadership of improvement through a more collaborative and respectful approach without apportioning blame.

School-based problems that contribute to unsatisfactory student outcomes are common across settings. They might include:

- Team meetings with more time spent discussing behaviour than the relationship between teaching and outcomes;
- Leaders assuming that team members are doing what they think has been agreed;
- Reluctance of a department to alter its curriculum despite student feedback and consistently declining enrolment;
- Scepticism about the validity and importance of data showing considerable underachievement.

Tackling problems such as these requires high-quality conversations with those involved so that common ground can be reached about what is happening, why it is happening and what, if anything, to do about it.

*Leading by Learning* (LbL) is a development programme based on research into the leadership capabilities required to resolve such problems. Launched as a UK pilot this January through Ambition Institute, the research that underpins it addressed three main questions:



1. Why do educational leaders find such problems difficult to resolve?
2. How do they think and act while talking about these problems with those involved?
3. What type of professional learning builds a leaders' capability in collaboratively resolving such problems?

The research shows that intuitive leaders frequently delay discussion of such problems or address them so indirectly that little improves. They often feel caught between maintaining good relationships or tackling the problem, typically giving priority to the former by minimising their concern, asking leading questions or putting off the conversation. Another equally ineffective strategy is being blunt and task-focused, risking defensiveness or grievance.

LbL teaches a theory and practice of interpersonal effectiveness which enables leaders to build trust while tackling problems. Leaders learn to express their beliefs about a perceived problem in ways which enable them to check, rather than assume, their validity. Their goal is not to win and be right but to collaboratively test the quality of their own and others' thinking. This approach stops ineffective quick fixes by promoting a culture of rigorous thinking and respectful discussion about how to understand and resolve problems of teaching and learning.

In LbL workshops, participants work through on-the-job problems which they themselves

have identified, so they are not left wondering how to apply the learning to their own context. Rather than focusing on what to say, facilitators help participants examine how their thinking and motivations produce more and less effective meetings and conversations.

It is exciting to move beyond descriptions and explanations of leaders' difficulties to interventions that offer practical and effective assistance. For example, a recent study showed that focusing on the quality of middle leaders' collaborative problem-solving skills significantly improved the effectiveness of their conversations with their teachers about the long-standing underachievement of target students in reading.

Even more pleasing was the evidence that the improved and more focused collaboration between leaders and teachers resulted in accelerated improvement in the students' achievement.

The pandemic wiped out a decade of progress in closing disadvantage gaps, and indeed pre-pandemic evidence showed that such efforts had already plateaued, so it's important to remain focused on evidence to drive improvement.

Teachers need support to make effective change, but we can't rely on iterative, intuitive leadership to create the environments where such change happens effectively. Middle and senior leaders need support too, to seize the best evidence about what works and deliberately contextualise it for their settings.

Week in

# Westminster

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



## FRIDAY

The Week in Westminster team was left scratching its heads when the Department for Education set out the commercial activity it has planned for this year.

Under "grammar school ballots", the department said it was looking for the "appointment of a supplier to administer the grammar school ballots system".

We went on the hunt, but Google didn't cough up much – and neither did our contacts.

After we approached the DfE to ask for more details, it turns out the line shouldn't have been included at all and the plans aren't going ahead. It was an error. All very odd.

## SUNDAY

From behind the safety of *The Telegraph's* paywall, schools minister Nick Gibb blames Labour mayors for higher strike turnout in London and Manchester.

Gibb said in a column that it was "upsetting that these teachers and children were let down by some in positions of political leadership, such as Sadiq Khan in London and Andy Burnham in Manchester, appearing to support the strikes".

"In the north west, some 14 per cent of schools closed, and in London the figure was 25 per cent, significantly higher than the national average."

He declared that "no political leader should put any child's education in jeopardy by condoning strike action, even for a day."

It's certainly a take...

## MONDAY

Health minister Maria Caulfield "admitted" to MPs in a Westminster Hall debate on mental health support that

the connections between health and education authorities "has not been great until now".

Ya think! Let's cast our minds back to the sunny days of 2018 BC (before Covid) when the government published its green paper proposals for young people's mental health.

This paper was meant to be a "significant step" towards a "new joined-up approach" between authorities to help kids with mental health needs.

FIVE YEARS LATER we hear the same complaints from parents and schools, except now we've got primary pupils talking about suicide. And the government's go-to response? Its mental health support teams will reach JUST 35 PER CENT of the country by next year.

Please drop the #ChildrensMentalHealthWeek hashtag ministers and sort it out. Not next year. Now.

## TUESDAY

We almost ruined our keyboard this week spitting tea out when laughing during the education select committee.

In what was quite a serious discussion on Rishi Sunak's plans to make all kids do maths to 18, Martin Taylor from The Royal Society was talking about teachers filling in for subjects they are not an expert in.

"Your PE teacher. He's got to teach a subject he doesn't really know, he's not very confident, think what that does to the children. They absorb his lack of confidence, there's an anxiety that comes from it..."

Ian Mearns, committee deputy chair, pointed out the teacher "might be a her".

Taylor asked him to repeat and said: "I thought you said 'he might get a hernia.'"

\*\*\*

Taylor has also been to some interesting dinner parties. In France, he said, people admired maths because it was seen as "the gateway for success".

"In England, I've never, ever heard people discuss mathematics in a positive way at a dinner party. I would never meet someone who said 'I've never read Jane Austen'.

"They wouldn't want to admit to that. But they're ever so happy to say 'I hate mathematics, I've never liked it.'"

\*\*\*

While the education committee was knee-deep in maths policy, Nick Gibb enjoyed a "wonderful visit" to the science museum for national apprenticeship week.

"Great to learn about some of the career options available to young people through apprenticeships, from a rollercoaster welder to a film-set lightening technician".

We'd never heard of a "lightening technician" before, so unless he means the medical definition of the descent of the uterus before the onset of Labour, we presume he must have made a typo.

It takes us back to 2016 when a government video on children's literacy had misspelt subtitles. The lovely, lovely irony.

A wonderful visit to the @sciencemuseum today to view its Technicians Gallery for #NAW2023. Great to learn about some of the career options available to young people through apprenticeships, from a rollercoaster welder to a film-set lightening technician. @educationgovuk





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**Paradigm Trust is looking to appoint the following team members for our new academy, Woodbridge Road Academy, for September 2023 (early start date is possible).**

- **Assistant Principal**
- **SEN Teachers**

As we move into our exciting, purpose built facilities, we are expanding our team significantly and therefore we are recruiting for leadership, teaching and support staff roles. As a new and growing school, we have plenty of opportunities for career development.

Whether your background is primary, secondary or SEND, we would love to hear from you. We are seeking to appoint a range of subject specialists. This is an amazing opportunity to have a real impact on the new academy and its pupils.

We will provide a highly structured and well organised environment in order to allow our pupils to develop both academically and socially. We want our pupils to be equipped to lead lives of happiness, fulfilment and independence. We will work closely with families and external agencies to help us achieve this goal for each young person.

Typically, pupils who attend WRA have complex communication and interaction needs which create significant barriers to learning in a mainstream environment. Many pupils are likely to have Autism Spectrum Condition and others have a profile with a similar presentation.



**The Trust**

This is an exciting time to join Paradigm Trust. We are a not-for-profit, state-funded educational trust consisting of seven schools based in Suffolk and London, including Woodbridge Road Academy, our new school for children with complex social and interaction needs.

Our vision is to develop and sustain great schools where we can make the biggest difference to pupils. We are strongly values-led (integrity, community, excellence) and work hard to be inclusive. We deliver high quality education and play a positive role in local and national education systems.

The Trust is educationally strong - every Trust school that has been inspected has been judged to be good or better. We offer a well-developed and well-resourced, knowledge-based curriculum; have lots of experience of school-to-school support; operate effective teacher training programmes and provide strong operational support services to our schools. Paradigm also benefits from effective governance, backed by secure finances.

If you have a passion to make a difference, we would love to hear from you.

We would love to chat with you about our unique school and the opportunities available, to arrange this please contact [charlotte.miles@paradigmtrust.org](mailto:charlotte.miles@paradigmtrust.org)

As a Trust, we are committed to reducing unnecessary workload and are outcomes-driven; flexible working options can be accommodated.

Relocation packages may be available for the right candidate.

**To further details and to apply for any of our vacancies, please use the following link to the Paradigm Trust website: <https://paradigmtrust.org/careers/current-vacancies/>**





## SECONDARY EXECUTIVE HEAD

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

**We know that people thrive more when they work in supportive teams, so we will be with you every step of the way.**

We are currently looking for a secondary Executive Headteacher to work alongside an existing Headteacher to rapidly improve provision and outcomes at Havant Academy. You won't be alone in this role, but supported by a strong network within our TKAT family, including our Director of Education, a wide range of Trust Subject Lead Practitioners, and a welcoming local network of Headteachers.

We are looking for a candidate who can demonstrate a track record of sustained school improvement whilst operating within the Trust's ethos of working inclusively, respecting and caring for others, and having ambition and aspiration for all. You will be able to demonstrate the ability to develop, motivate and empower teams, work with agility to achieve the best outcomes for students, and employ high levels of emotional intelligence to galvanise school communities to bring about sustainable change.

Experience of successful headship, particularly in challenging situations or areas of deprivation, is essential to this role.

If you would like to know more about this post or to organise an informal discussion, please contact Mike Garlick, Director of Education at [mike.garlick@tkat.org](mailto:mike.garlick@tkat.org)



## SECONDARY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

Are you an experienced and successful head looking for a new venture? Are you looking for a supportive Trust who works with integrity and innovation? If so, we'd like to hear from you.

We are currently looking for a secondary Director of Education to join our extensive school development team. Based in our TKAT Coast region, your role will be to support schools to become exceptional, deploy a team of subject and teaching Lead Practitioners, and be part of setting our Secondary Strategy. You will get to work within a supportive team of Directors from across the Trust and benefit from our life-changing leadership development programme.

**We know that people thrive more when they work in supportive teams, so we will be with you every step of the way.**

We are looking for a candidate who can demonstrate a track record of sustained school improvement, is creative in their approach to school development, and enjoys achieving their successes through empowering others.

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

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





## Headteacher Robert Fitzroy Primary Academy

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

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

For an informal discussion please contact Mr Justin Burt, Deputy Director of Education using [justin.burt@reach2.org](mailto:justin.burt@reach2.org)

**Closing date: Friday 13th January 2023 at Midday**  
**Link to advert: <https://www.reach2.org/vacancy/headteacher-2/>**

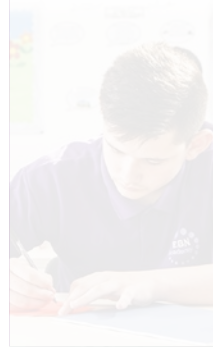


## Teacher in Charge of Maths

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](#)



## 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**



# 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.*



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)

# DID YOU KNOW?

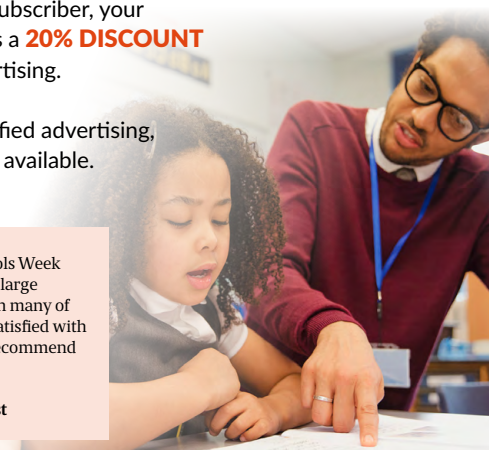
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## HEADTEACHER

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**