

# SCHOOLS WEEK

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

'The amount of vitriol I have received is extraordinary'

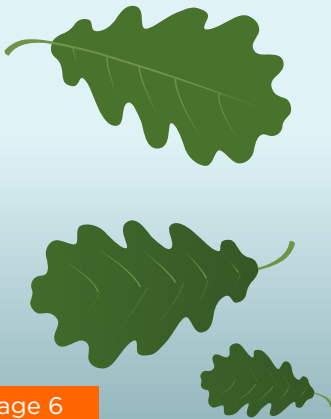


P17-19

SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK | @SCHOOLSWEEK

FRIDAY, MAR 10, 2023 | EDITION 315

## OAK ACADEMY FOUNDERS SNUB QUANGO



Page 6

## THE DISADVANTAGE GAP WILL DISAPPEAR - BUT NOT THE WAY IT SHOULD



Page 28

## WHY WE NEED A TINDER FOR TRUSTS



Page 13

## SEND: A SHADOW OF THE PLAN WE NEEDED



Page 23

# How schools are in the grip of an online abuse crisis



INVESTIGATION | Pages 7-8

# INCLUSIVE SCHOOL LEAGUE TABLES PLAN SHELVED

Proposal to incentivise schools to take in SEND pupils put on back burner

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

EXCLUSIVE | Page 5

SCHOOLS WEEK

Meet the news team



John Dickens  
EDITOR

@JOHNDICKENSSW  
JOHN.DICKENS@SCHOOLSWEK.CO.UK



Freddie Whittaker  
DEPUTY EDITOR

@FCDWHITTAKER  
FREDDIE.WHITTAKER@SCHOOLSWEK.CO.UK



Samantha Booth  
CHIEF REPORTER

@SAMANTHAJBOTH  
SAMANTHA.BOOTH@SCHOOLSWEK.CO.UK



Tom Belger  
SENIOR REPORTER

@TOM\_BELGER  
TOM.BELGER@SCHOOLSWEK.CO.UK



Amy Walker  
SENIOR REPORTER

@AMYRWALKER  
AMY.WALKER@SCHOOLSWEK.CO.UK



JL Dutaut  
COMMISSIONING EDITOR

@DUTAUT  
JEAN-LOUISDUTAUT@LSECT.COM



Jessica Hill  
INVESTIGATIONS AND FEATURES REPORTER

@JESSJANEHILL  
JESSICA.HILL@LSECT.COM



Nicky Phillips  
HEAD DESIGNER

@GELVETICA  
NICKY.PHILLIPS@FEWEEK.CO.UK



Shane Mann  
MANAGING DIRECTOR

@SHANERMANN  
SHANE.MANN@LSECT.COM

THE TEAM

Senior designer: Simon Kay | Classifieds Manager: Clare Halliday | Sales Executive: Tony Hudson | Operations and Finance Manager: Victoria Boyle | Event Manager: Frances Ogefere Dell | Senior Administrator: Evie Hayes | Office Administrator: Zoe Tuffin | Office Administrator - Apprentice: Sanchez Nandi

EDU WEEK JOBS



Achieving excellence together

GREAT HEIGHTS ACADEMY TRUST -  
SECONDARY PRINCIPAL - L24 - L39

[HTTPS://HTTPSLINK.COM/VSIJ](https://httpslink.com/vsij)



THE AURIGA ACADEMY TRUST - HEADTEACHER - RANGE  
L28-L32, INCREASING TO L35 ON FULL EXPANSION

[HTTPS://HTTPSLINK.COM/NNXT](https://httpslink.com/nnxt)



WOODSIDE PRIMARY SCHOOL - HEADTEACHER -  
COMPETITIVE

[HTTPS://HTTPSLINK.COM/YD22](https://httpslink.com/yd22)

# Ministers must approach strike talks with same urgency as culture wars

For the first time in recent memory – particularly that of ASCL’s current general secretary Geoff Barton – an education secretary will not address the union’s annual conference.

Gillian Keegan pretends that she might be needed for “urgent pay talks”, despite being locked in a stalemate with the National Education Union (page 10).

In a pre-conference interview, Barton doesn’t hold back, saying the government’s handling of it all has been “almost amateurish” (page 9).

Unlike other unions, ASCL has not balloted its members. But it’s clear that patience is wearing thin.

“We can’t keep doing our best to be constructive and feeling that actually nothing is happening,” Barton said.

But he said progress has been made on workload. This will be hard to unwind though, with school staff now expected to do more than ever.

Our investigation into the vile social media abuse that schools face is an eye-opening insight into the rise of cyber bullying (pages 7 and 8).

Tackling this issue rests with the government’s

online safety bill, which needs to put more accountability onto the social media firms to police their platforms. This shouldn’t be a job for school leaders.

A delay in the bill last year is unhelpful, but unsurprising given the government’s seeming reluctance to find serious solutions to tricky problems (page 21).

However, they do seem to act with urgency on culture war issues. Prime minister Rishi Sunak pledged this week to bring forward a review of sex and relationships guidance (page 15) amid claims by Conservative MPs that inappropriate content is being taught.

Guidance is the current buzzword, with government also announcing new advice that schools teach two hours of PE a week (page 4).

It’s an easy political win for ministers that grabs a few headlines following calls from the England women’s football team. Ofsted has been advising schools to do two hours of PE a week since 2013.

Unfortunately for ministers, the approach doesn’t work with strikes – which is why the issue has been dragging on for weeks and there is still no end in sight.

**Disclaimer:**

Schools Week is owned and published by Lsect Ltd. The views expressed within the publication are those of the authors named, and are not necessarily those of Schools Week, Lsect Ltd or any of its employees. While we try to ensure that the information we provide is correct, mistakes do occur and we cannot guarantee the accuracy of our material.

The design of the digital newspaper and of the website is copyright of Lsect Ltd and material from the newspaper should not be reproduced without prior permission. If you wish to reproduce an article from either the digital paper or the website, both the article’s author and Schools Week must be referenced (to not do so, would be an infringement on copyright).

Lsect Ltd is not responsible for the content of any external internet sites linked to.

Please address any complaints to the editor.

Email: [John.Dickens@Schoolsweek.co.uk](mailto:John.Dickens@Schoolsweek.co.uk) with Error/

Concern in the subject line. Please include the page number and story headline, and explain what the problem is.

SCHOOLS WEEK IS PROUD TO BE A MEMBER OF



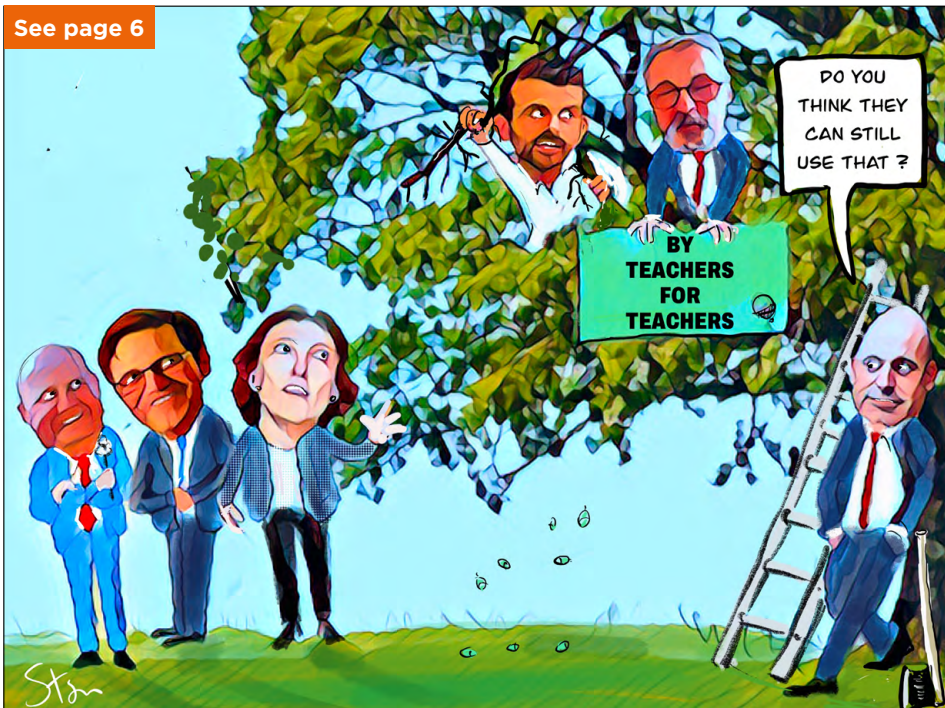
LEARNING & SKILLS EVENTS, CONSULTANCY AND TRAINING LTD  
C/O MINDSPACE, 9 APPOLD STREET, LONDON EC2A 2AP  
T: 020 8123 4778  
E: [NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK)

**ADVERTISE WITH US**

If you are interested in placing a product or job advert in a future edition please click on the ‘advertise’ link at the top of the page on [schoolsweek.co.uk](http://schoolsweek.co.uk) or contact:

E: [advertising@schoolsweek.co.uk](mailto:advertising@schoolsweek.co.uk)  
T: 020 81234 778 or click here

See page 6



**SUBSCRIBE**



From as little as

**£1.65**

Per edition

[schoolsweek.co.uk](http://schoolsweek.co.uk) or call 020 8123 4778 to subscribe or click here.

# DfE snubs Braverman pledge for blasphemy guidance

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

The Department for Education will not publish new guidance on blasphemy in schools, despite an earlier pledge from the home secretary.

Suella Braverman had said she would work with the Department for Education “to issue new guidance” after four children at a Wakefield school were suspended when a copy of the Quran was damaged last month.

Police recorded a hate incident, but said no criminal offences were committed.

The boy who reportedly brought the Islamic text into Kettlethorpe High School has “high-functioning” autism and received “death threats” over the incident, according to the BBC.

Nick Gibb, the schools minister, intervened last week saying the threats were “totally unacceptable”.

In a column for *The Times*, Braverman said the education sector and police had “a duty” to prioritise the physical safety of children “over the hurt feelings of adults”. Schools did not have to answer to “self-appointed community activists”.

Braverman, who co-founded the Michaela Community School in west London, said she



Suella Braverman

would “work with” the DfE “to issue new guidance spelling this out”.

However, the DfE told *Schools Week* it did not plan to issue additional guidance on managing blasphemy-related incidents.

It said existing guidance – such as on behaviour, exclusions and the political impartiality – helped schools to make decisions on how to meet “the needs of their pupils and to manage and resolve concerns and complaints”.

When asked for clarity, the Home Office pointed us back to the DfE’s comment and did not provide further information.

Tudor Griffiths, the head of Kettlethorpe, said the book remained “fully intact and that our initial

enquiries indicate there was no malicious intent by those involved”.

The school had made it clear to pupils that their actions “did not treat the Quran with the respect it should have, so those involved have been suspended. We will be working with them to ensure they understand why their actions were unacceptable.”

The school met with local Muslim community leaders, local councillors and police to show the “immediate steps we have taken to reinforce the values and behaviour we expect from every member of this school community to ensure that all religions are respected”.

West Yorkshire Police said it also received a malicious communications offence over threats to a child. The suspect, also a child, was given “words of advice”.

Gibb wrote to the headteacher and council to “offer” his support.

He said schools should be promoting “fundamental British values of the respect for rule of law, individual liberty and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs”.

Humanists UK has urged the DfE to issue guidance to schools “making clear that ‘blasphemy’ shouldn’t be censured when explored in a lesson in a sensitive way or in normal interactions between pupils”.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

## ‘Huge boost’, really? Schools asked to do two hours of PE

The government has said it will give a “huge boost” to school sports by advising that at least two hours of PE is taught every week and offering an award to those providing equal access to girls.

Ministers also confirmed extensions for other schemes, including an extra two years of primary PE and sport premium funding, worth £600 million, and £22 million for two more years of its school games organisers’ network.

A further £57 million will keep school sports facilities open outside the normal school day.

Run by Active Partnerships, the scheme will reach 1,350 schools and target girls, disadvantaged children and those with SEND.

To coincide with international women’s day, prime minister Rishi Sunak announced an expansion of the “school games mark”.

The award will now be given to schools that “successfully deliver equal opportunities for girls and boys”.

Schools will also be “asked to offer a minimum of two hours curriculum PE time”, with government support on how to do so through an update of the school sport action plan.

*Schools Week* understands neither requirement will be statutory, although Ofsted will be asked to check on equal access to sport.

The announcement follows a campaign last year by the England women’s football team that said “every girl in the nation” should be offered the chance to play football at school.

Sunak said the Lionesses’ victory in the Euros “changed the game. We want schools

to build on this legacy and give every girl the opportunity to do the same sports as boys, as well as provide a minimum of two hours of PE.”

Ofsted will be asked to check up on school PE when it looks at enrichment during inspections and will comment if there are issues with equal access.

This follows a pledge Sunak made during the first 2022 Conservative leadership campaign to ask Ofsted to assess PE in every school.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the ASCL school leaders’ union, welcomed the funding announcement’s “warm words”, but said there needed to be a “reality check”. School timetables were “crammed with a multitude of expectations from the government in all sorts of areas and it is a constant battle to find the time for everything”.

# SEND contextual league tables plan shelved

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Ministers have shelved plans to use performance league tables to reveal how inclusive mainstream schools are.

The SEND and AP green paper said adding contextual information alongside results would "make it easier to recognise" schools that were "doing well for children with SEND".

While it provided few details, the government admitted it had heard "too many examples" of mainstream schools that were not inclusive, although accountability measures could be seen as "a disincentive" to take on SEND pupils.

But last week's finalised SEND improvement plan failed to mention the proposal.

The Department for Education told *Schools Week* it had "carefully" considered the "benefits and drawbacks of making data on how many pupils in a school have SEN more prominent in performance tables".

But the proposals had "mixed feedback", with concerns it could "risk generating perverse incentives".

"We will continue to show information about a school's cohort, including pupils with SEN, alongside attainment and progress data, but we do not plan to make cohort information more prominent for now."

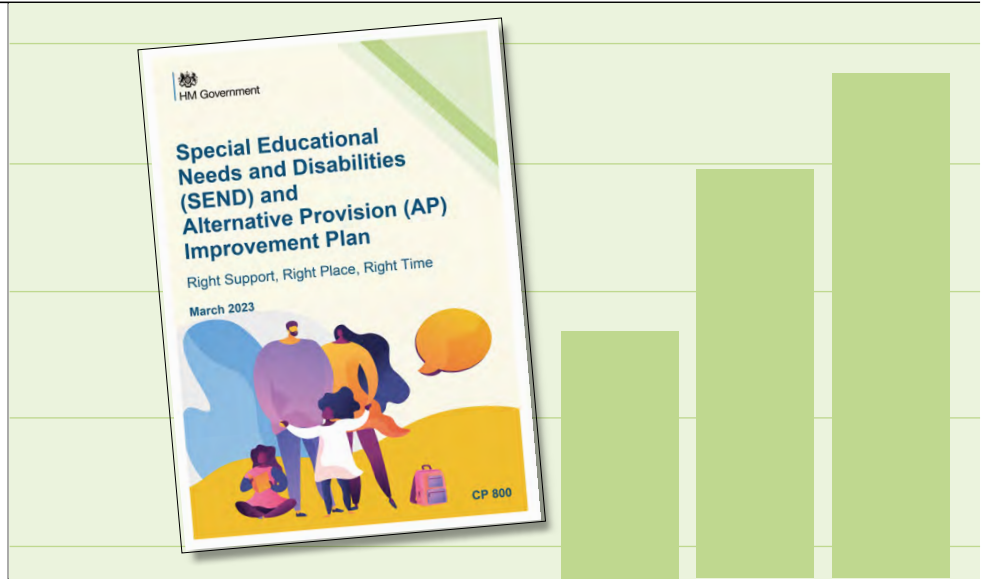
It is understood concerns related to inconsistencies in how children with SEND are identified, which the new national standards seek to rectify.

A 2021 report by the Education Policy Institute found a "lottery" in SEND identification.

The primary school a pupil attended made more difference to their chances of being identified as SEND than anything about them as an individual, their experiences or where they lived.

Leora Cruddas, the chief executive at the Confederation of School Trusts, said it was the right decision "at the moment".

"What the improvement plan rightly focuses on is improving



the expertise of the workforce...this is likely to result in much better outcomes for pupils and young people."

But James Bowen, a policy director at the heads' union NAHT, said it was "disappointing" as there "is a strong sense within the profession [that] the current accountability system does not appropriately recognise the most inclusive schools".

"There is no doubt this would be a complex issue to deal with, but it is important that schools doing a particularly good job for pupils with SEND are recognised and certainly not penalised."

Vic Goddard, the headteacher of Passmores Academy in Essex, which is known as a "SEND magnet school", said contextual league tables would tell "a story" to parents that was not just about results.

Scrapping the idea was "just another weakening of the position of the schools that are inclusive".

Plans to publish "inclusion dashboards" are due to be trialled next month, but they will only show metrics based on the local area rather than school-level.

It will take at least three years for the government's major SEND reforms to be fully rolled out. Key policies, such as producing national SEND standards and funding tariffs, will be trialled as part of a £70 million "change programme".

Ministers will then finalise policies and decide whether to legislate, but not in this parliament.

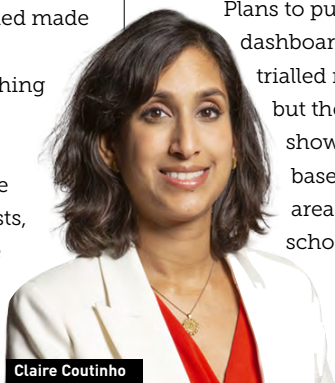
A £9.8 million, two-year contract has now gone live for the creation of "a blueprint of the future system".

Documents say testing "will be the critical success factor along with the ability to iterate at pace".

A "continuous feedback loop of intelligence" will need to be made to the DfE to "learn fast and understand in real time what is working and what isn't".

Bridget Phillipson, Labour's shadow education secretary, told MPs on Monday the plan was "symptomatic of a government who have simply given up and who are governing through a mixture of distraction and delay, pushing the tough decisions to the other side of the election".

But Claire Coutinho, the children's minister, told the Commons that "it is important that we consult and take time to get it right" when "setting out steps like national standards".



Claire Coutinho



Bridget Phillipson

NEWS: CURRICULUM

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

# Oak founders abandon national academy

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Leading academy trusts that helped to found the Oak National Academy at the height of the pandemic have severed ties with the government quango after choosing not to bid to supply lessons.

Meanwhile, *Schools Week* understands that publishing giant Pearson has won one of the 12 contracts worth a total of £8.2 million to create curriculum packages for the website.

At least seven of Oak's original 11 trust curriculum partners have snubbed the new arms-length government body. They include Ark Schools, one of the country's leading trusts on curriculum, and Reach Academy Trust, which incubated Oak before it was nationalised.

Sir Jon Coles, the chief executive of United Learning, which has already pulled its lessons from the platform, said: "That so few of the original schools' groups who supported Oak are now prepared to work with it shows just how far away it is from its original model and its intention to be 'by teachers, for teachers'."

Backed by £43 million in government funding, Oak launched its first procurement for new curriculum materials covering six subjects in November.

The government paid the original curriculum partners to obtain the intellectual property so Oak could host their lessons in the meantime. But they were able to bid to become a new curriculum partner.

*Schools Week* asked all 11 of the original partner MATs whether they had applied. The seven that replied said they did not bid.

Reach said it was "proud of the role our teachers played in developing the curriculum and the offer for children".

But the trust was now focused on its own work, including supporting schools to develop cradle-to-career pipelines of support for children and families in their communities.



Ark, which provides curriculum programmes across several subjects, including the popular Mathematics Mastery, also did not apply for "a variety of reasons".

Liz Tyler, managing director of the trust's curriculum arm Ark Curriculum Plus, said it was "proud" to have supported Oak through a "national emergency", but it now wanted to "focus on continuing to improve our own curriculum and professional development offer".

"We think it is important that nationally schools have a choice of high-quality programmes that support curriculum implementation and great subject teaching."

White Rose Maths, which supports more than 4,000 schools in the UK and abroad, said Oak "didn't align with our priorities". The organisation, owned by the Trinity MAT, felt "we might end up creating something we have already created", a spokesperson said.

Tenax MAT, whose chief executive Sir Ian Bauckham is Oak's interim chair, did not bid. Neither did Inspiration Trust and Star Academies.

United Learning, the country's largest trust, set up its own website after refusing to hand over the 1,500 lessons it provided for Oak because it did not support a



"government-approved curriculum". Coles added: "We have always argued that this is morally wrong and the fact that others are abandoning the project suggests that many share our concerns. It undoubtedly points to the need for the government to reflect urgently on the future of Oak in its current form."

Pearson declined to comment. The company is a member of the British Educational Suppliers Association, which is taking legal action over the new quango, saying it was set up illegally and poses a risk to the future viability of the sector.

An Oak spokesperson said: "We're still finalising arrangements with our new partners and will announce them shortly. We are delighted with the wide range of organisations who've chosen to partner with Oak.

"It's a powerful collaboration, truly bringing together expertise from every part of the education sector, with the largest number of partners represented by schools."



Lucy Heller



Ed Vainker

INVESTIGATION: SOCIAL MEDIA

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

# Schools report children as young as 10 to police over social media abuse

AMY WALKER  
@AMYRWALKER

INVESTIGATES

Children as young as 10 are among the offenders in thousands of social media abuse cases linked to schools that have been reported to the police over the past four years.

Shocking incidents uncovered as part of a Schools Week investigation reveal the scale and severity of issues schools are now dealing with from pupils using apps such as Snapchat, TikTok and Instagram.

They include female pupils edited into images of the holocaust to a pupil's picture doctored to show she was a "suicide bomber".

Videos of assault on pupils during school and threats to stab classmates have also been reported. One pupil messaged a classmate to say he would slit their throat, while another used TikTok to offer schoolmates £20 to stamp on another pupil.

Meanwhile, classmates sent a year 10 girl hate messages about her terminally ill mother. Other cases include racist and homophobic abuse.

Parents have also been reported for "slandering" comments about a headteacher and a fake account that made inappropriate posts on photos of teenage girls.

Social media companies are under heightened scrutiny after weeks of pupil protests at schools, mostly arranged via their apps.



Sean Maher, the head of the Richard Challoner School in Surrey, said flagging problematic posts to sites was "hopeless. I worry the only way to get this under control is for [companies] to say this is not acceptable on my platform and ban or block accounts."

### Schools 'not seeking punishment'

Schools Week asked English police forces for details of social media abuse cases reported by schools in the past four years. A total of 2,336 incidents were recorded between January 2018 and July last year, when our request was submitted.

But just four led to charges. Police said this

was down to difficulty obtaining evidence and identifying the suspect, or victims withdrawing support.

Nine youths and three adults received a caution or conditional caution, while other cases may be ongoing. Crimes were recorded as harassment or malicious communications.

However, just 28 of the country's 39 forces provided information, meaning the true figure is likely to be larger. The Metropolitan Police – the country's largest force – refused to provide information.

Maher said pastoral staff dealt with social media incidents every day.

Continued on next page →

## The vile social media abuse reported by schools

⊗ A Lancashire teenager said in a group chat she would "stab" another pupil, alongside a photo of a knife, while another messaged a classmate to say he would slit their throat.

⊗ In 2019, a year 10 girl in Cambridgeshire was sent messages of a "hate-filled nature" about her terminally ill mother.

⊗ Various Instagram accounts doctored images of the holocaust to add female pupils, while in

Cambridgeshire an offender in 2019 tried to coerce pupils over TikTok into "stomping" on a victim for £20.

⊗ The same force recorded a 10-year-old asking a child of the same age for naked photos, before continuing "bullying" at school in 2021.

⊗ A male "spread rumours" that another pupil was gay via Snapchat last year, calling him a "faggot, poof, gayboy", in a case reported to Cambridgeshire

⊗ Three suspects sent a racist voice note in which they called the victim a "fucking Paki" and told her to "kill herself" in an undated case recorded by Cleveland Police.

⊗ Pupils in Wiltshire doctored a photo of a classmate to make it look like she was a "suicide bomber", alongside the caption "I've got a bomb".

## INVESTIGATION: SOCIAL MEDIA

Schools often did not seek “punishment” from police, but for officers to outline to pupils the potential consequences of behaviour “if they do it again. For the vast majority of young people, that’ll be enough.”

Nearly two-thirds of cases showed victims were children, with 77 per cent of wrongdoers identified as youngsters.

Cases were most likely to be on Instagram and Snapchat. TikTok was the third most cited, with some also on Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter.

Cases reported by schools where adults were suspects included parents allegedly posting “false and slanderous” messages about a head in Lancashire. No date was provided.

Another, recorded by the same force, involved a man accusing a victim on Facebook of “child abuse against his son”.

In May last year Wiltshire Police were told of an unknown suspect setting up a fake Instagram account before commenting “sexy” on a photo of 13 to 14-year-old female pupils.

Police notes show the “distressed” complainant was suspended from their job as a result. At the time the data was shared, the case was ongoing.

It is not known if the victim was a school staff member, but it is likely as all cases were linked to schools.

Schools Week previously revealed attacks on teachers in “abhorrent” TikTok videos. But teachers were left “banging their heads against a brick wall” trying to get posts removed.

### Schools should deal with incidents first, say police

Hertfordshire, one of the five forces with the most incidents, said it worked “loosely” with local schools, including by “running educational sessions targeting local youth crime trends”.

A spokesperson for Merseyside police said its officers are “effectively embedded in schools supporting these matters” which was why so many cases were recorded and “fully investigated”.

The other three, Northamptonshire, West Midlands and Lancashire, did not respond.

A spokesperson for the National Police Chiefs’ Council said the “emphasis” was on schools to “initially deal with incidents themselves”, but to call police where there were aggravating factors or offences committed.

“Police do not seek to criminalise children, but if we are called to a school then officers have a responsibility to support that education partner, and keep the young person safe. Policing is only



one part of the wider solution.”

Paul Walton, the deputy head at All Saints Catholic College in west London, has called in police several times over the past year, including over threats of violence. None led to police action.

He said staff were always “one step behind” as they tended not to use the apps themselves. Snapchat was “particularly difficult to police” because messages disappeared after views.

“A lot of our work is reactionary”, with pastoral staff “spending significant time investigating incidents”.

Pan Panayiotou, the head of Worthing High School in West Sussex, said he had spoken to leaders “looking to employ individuals who can police social media sites to keep abreast of what’s going on”.

Worthing had investigated claims made on TikTok about teachers.

Online safety and harms are often now taught as part of statutory relationships, sex and health education (RSHE).

But Bryden Joy, the lead practitioner for

citizenship at Ormiston Academies Trust, said “more and more keeps getting put into PSHE”.

“And there rarely seems to be an addition of time to cover that. So how well can you cover the depth of what is needed to support these children?” he said during a Westminster Education Forum on children’s online safety this week.

Tom Quinn, the chief executive of the Frank Field Education Trust, said schools could not police children’s use of social media “when they’re not in school”.

If parents were letting their children go through social media all hours of the night, “that’s irresponsible”.

Maher added that reporting issues to the platforms was “hopeless. We do occasionally report stuff and you get an automated message, but it usually takes a few weeks for it to come down.”

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the school leaders union ASCL, said schools were at the mercy of technology companies and their terms of service. “Time spent resolving these issues also has an impact on workload.”

A Snapchat spokesperson said it had “zero tolerance” towards platform misuse “and explicitly prohibits bullying and harassment of any kind”.

A TikTok spokesperson said bullying and harassment had “no place”. The app “proactively” removed content violating its community guidelines and encouraged users to report potentially “violative” videos.

Meta, which runs Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, said it had clear policies against bullying, harassment and hate speech and removed content when it became aware of it.

The Department for Education pointed to its proposed online safety bill which would force companies to make it easier to report harmful content online.

## What the guidance says

- Schools deciding whether to involve police in such cases must ensure a “balance is struck” between the needs of students involved and the wider school community, NPCC guidance says.
- Many incidents can be dealt with and resolved internally, and their seriousness is a “judgment call for the school”.
- “Aggravating factors” which could make the incident more serious should be considered.



## INTERVIEW: ASCL

# 'Everyone's cross': Barton on pay talks, workload and Keegan's no-show

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

ASCL general secretary Geoff Barton (pictured) is deeply frustrated. Pay talks with the government remain in stalemate. His members' jobs have "never felt more challenging". And for the first time since 2006, the education secretary will snub his leaders' union conference.

"Everyone's cross," the former headteacher tells Schools Week. "Added to which I think, particularly in the teaching profession, there's a sense of being taken for granted."

"Probably that will intensify on Friday with the absence for the first time, certainly in my memory, of a secretary of state."

Gillian Keegan has told the union she won't appear in Birmingham in case she is needed for urgent pay talks.

"If the reason is that we're suddenly going to see crisis talks happening on Friday, nobody's told me," Barton says.

"It feels like there's a lot more of a sense of urgency from the union side on all of this, which frankly wants to get this resolved, than there is on the government side, which seems to deem that being able to say 'we had more talks' is, in itself, the endgame."

Unlike other unions, ASCL has not balloted its members for industrial action, holding off in favour of negotiation.

Barton believes this puts the leaders' union in a "unique position". Its first indicative ballot last year showed the "strength of feeling" in the traditionally moderate union.

He believes Keegan understands that the symbolism of a formal ASCL vote would be "pretty catastrophic. It gives us a distinctive position of being able to articulate a sense of urgency."

The government says it won't enter formal talks unless the National Education Union (NEU) calls off next week's strikes. The NEU insists the DfE drops its "pre-conditions".

Keegan this week rejected calls for mediated talks via the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration



**'If crisis talks are happening, nobody's told me'**

Service. For Barton's members, the clock is ticking.

"What you need as a general secretary is something you can take back to the members and say, here's what we've been offered. That's all we're looking for."

"The fact we haven't even had that, and that there's a condition put to the NEU that affects all of us around that, I think shows a kind of almost amateurishness in terms of trying to get this done. It's frustrating. Really."

ASCL may be reluctant to move to a ballot, but Barton is clear the union cannot hold out indefinitely.

A "key moment" will be next week's budget. If there's no extra investment, ASCL will reconsider its position.

"We're probably moving towards the end of this phase of simply doing our very best to be constructive and feeling that actually nothing is happening."

The latest teacher recruitment figures are dire, but retention is "eye-wateringly problematic" – and pay isn't the only factor.

Evelyn Forde, ASCL's president, will warn tomorrow that schools have become a "fourth emergency service", left with an "unsustainable burden" by collapsing children's support services.

On workload, however, Barton believes unions have made some "progress" in DfE talks.

He detects a "willingness to consider" calls to end

performance-related pay, opposed by the unions since its introduction almost 10 years ago, with officials recognising axing the policy is a "no-brainer".

While Conservative politicians might face a "political challenge ... there are times when you have to stand by your principles and point to the evidence and say, for you as a parent, this means your child is going to get a teacher who's spending more time planning, teaching, marking, instead of filling in forms to show they've done all of that stuff."

Heads also want Ofsted to inform schools of the year of their next inspection. Barton says this would allow leaders to "focus on the stuff that matters. It would be such an easy win, and there's no cost."

Barton was re-elected in 2021. But he surprised the sector last year, announcing he will stand down in 2024.

He doesn't want to talk about it, but says it was a "relatively easy decision. I've always been conscious that you want to choose the right time to leave. So that people aren't saying, 'yeah he used to be good, and he brought a lot of energy to the job, but actually, he's lost it'."

What will he do next? He "genuinely" hasn't thought about it. But one thing he doesn't want to do is sit on boards.

"That's really not my skillset. I'm not going to be somebody who is mired in meetings."

NEWS: STRIKES

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

# What would it take to pause next week's teacher strikes?

**FREDDIE WHITTAKER**  
**@FCDWHITTAKER**

The National Education Union has said it will pause upcoming strike action – but only if a “decent” and “serious” pay offer from the government is made first.

Walk-outs by teachers across England look set to go ahead next Wednesday and Thursday, with a stalemate between the government and unions showing no signs of being resolved.

### What is the education secretary asking for?

Gillian Keegan has offered to “consider a settlement” on pay, including discussions about next year’s increase and a “non-consolidated award for 2022-23”. She would also continue discussions on “workload, terms and conditions’ improvements, and productivity-enhancing reforms”.

But the education secretary is still insisting next week’s strikes across England must be called off for formal talks to begin.

In a letter to the National Education Union (NEU) sent on March 3, seen by *Schools Week*, Keegan insisted the offer of talks was “entirely in line” with that made to health unions, which have agreed to pause ambulance strikes.

The government has so far made no formal offer over the 5 per cent awarded to most teachers and leaders for this year, and has proposed a rise of 3 per cent for most teachers next year.



### What is the NEU asking for?

But Dr Mary Bousted, the union’s joint general secretary, said if the government had “reached the decision that it is now serious about teacher pay negotiations and is prepared to move” on the current offer for next year, then it “needs to get to the negotiating table”.

She said there was “no need for a precondition of halting strikes. A decent offer will result in the NEU pausing strike action as members consider the pay deal. Halting strike action for a serious offer can be done quickly, as all at the DfE know.”

“What is being asked of teachers who voted in a legal democratic ballot recognised by this government and law, is to pause action when they know the only reason the education secretary has moved beyond a 3 per cent pay offer is down to their action.”

Unions this week invited Keegan to

mediated talks facilitated by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. They hoped the process would provide cover for both sides to more easily negotiate the terms of further discussions without abandoning their public positions.

In their letter, the unions said ACAS usually operated with the parties in different rooms, and discussions remained private and confidential until both parties agreed otherwise.

“This would enable all parties to attend talks without publicly altering their position but would allow consideration of what the government may be minded to offer formally at any subsequent talks and consideration of how the unions may respond.”

But Keegan rejected the invitation, saying she recognised “that ACAS can sometimes play an important role in moving negotiations forward but I do not think it is the right step in our current situation”.

### ‘Government not taking this seriously’

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the NAHT, which is also in dispute with the government, said he was really worried it was not serious about finding ways through. “I hope for the sake of children the government can see beyond political posturing and join us all around a table.”

Ofsted announced it will not inspect schools next Wednesday or Thursday. Instead, it will notify schools today about inspections due to start on Monday.

TOM BELGER | @TOM\_BELGER

## Support staff likely to ballot over strike action

Unions are preparing to ballot support staff over potential strike action, warning that the offer from employers for the next financial year “falls short of what’s needed”.

The Unison and GMB move comes a fortnight after local government employers issued a “full and final” offer of a flat £1,925 hike from April.

The proposals are similar to last year’s deal, amounting to about 9 per cent for the lowest-paid and 4 per cent for higher-paid staff covered by the agreement. Unions had wanted 12.7 per cent.

Negotiations, which cover the pay of about 1.4 million workers, are between National Employers, representing councils, and unions. Trusts are not included in the talks, but many honour agreements and could face ballots too.

Mike Short, the head of local government at Unison, said: “This offer falls short of what’s needed when the value of their pay has been chipped away for years and bills are soaring.”

The GMB also plans a consultative ballot, but will conduct a strike vote if members back its recommendation to reject the deal.

Unite rejected the offer too. Sharon Graham, its general secretary, said councils must “make a decent pay offer if industrial action is to be avoided”.

But a National Employers spokesperson said councils had reaffirmed their “offer of at least £1,925, is full and final”.

Unions said rises would be considerably less for many staff on term-time only contracts.

The employers’ spokesperson said Unison’s ballot meant “months of uncertainty” when councils had tried to get rises agreed and paid swiftly.

SEE THE



DIFFERENCE

See The Difference is a project created by a group of young people who are passionate about creating a safer and more comfortable learning environment for students.



Signs to look out for if a young person is being affected by subtle bullying:

- fatigue
- introverted behaviour
- putting head down when others are laughing
- change in behaviour
- not paying attention in class

How would you like a teacher to approach you if you were being bullied in school?

- centred around the person – if they would like someone else there or not
- speaking calmly
- ask if they would like to speak to you or another teacher

What should teachers do if they see subtle bullying?

- address it without saying who is being bullied
- talk to everyone who is involved in the situation
- using a different form of communication e.g. letter box, online support services, support page

What policies should be put in place, in schools against bullying?

- consequences are person specific – based on the background and context of the individual
- relationship building in year groups – team building to help prevent these forms of bullying
- increase student support services and reducing the intimidation surrounding reaching out for support

“ I feel like teachers do see a lot of the bullying that does go on but they don't act because they see it as minor. However, those minor forms can build up and really affect the person. ”

“ Speak to the individuals being teased in private (out of the classroom) and provide support and properly communicate what they can do. ”

“ Digging into why the situation is happening, even for those subtle forms of bullying – talking to the parents would be useful. ”

Email [seethedifferenceproject@gmail.com](mailto:seethedifferenceproject@gmail.com)



ANALYSIS: MATS

# The schools who fought off academy orders

**TOM BELGER**

@TOM\_BELGER

EXCLUSIVE

A flagship turnaround trust set up to transform “the most challenging schools in the north” was lined by government to sponsor a Midlands school two days after it was rated ‘good’.

It is one of more than 50 cases since 2016 in which ministers have U-turned on a forced academisation order.

In 2019 ministers unveiled Falcon Education Academies Trust with a remit to transform challenging northern schools.

Schools Week has learned that the Department for Education told West Gate School in Leicester that Falcon was its preferred sponsor in September 2021, and that the board had a “duty” to facilitate transfer.

But an Ofsted report published two days earlier rated the all-through special school ‘good’ in all areas – with inspectors praising leaders’ “effective action” towards removing special measures since 2019.

Falcon had just two schools at the time, when 62 other schools were earmarked for sponsorship nationally, including 31 across the north.

Falcon has since said it would work nationally, with two more Midlands schools now.

## ‘We expected a harder fight’

Rhian Richardson, West Gate’s head, said proposals felt like an “expensive solution to do what we’d already done; more about fulfilling a process than improvement”.

She joined alongside a new deputy in 2018, overhauling the curriculum, starting to tackle its deficit and improving its systems, ethos and collaboration locally.

The school formally requested the DfE abandon forced academisation shortly after the Falcon announcement – and within three months the DfE gave way. “We’d expected to have to fight harder,” she said.

A Falcon spokesperson said the government approached it before Ofsted’s report, following a previous sponsor’s withdrawal and financial challenges at the school.

A Schools Week freedom of information request found 52 other academy orders have been revoked since the escape clause was introduced in 2016.

Revocations are permitted case-by-case in “exceptional



Rhian Richardson



West Gate School

circumstances”.

Abandoned conversions remain rare but hit a four-year high last year (eight). Both orders and revocations slumped during Covid.

## Academy order school now wants to run own MAT

Andrew Murray, the head of Chadwick High School in Lancaster, said he was frustrated that a ‘good’ rating in January 2020 had not automatically halted its conversion. The school was rated ‘inadequate’ in 2015 and ‘requires improvement’ in 2017.

The TBAP trust was proposed as Chadwick’s new sponsor in 2018, despite having a £1 million deficit. It later closed. The academy order was revoked in July 2021.

Murray blamed the delay on Lancashire county council, but it said it helped the revocation request, which had required “significant amounts of information”.

Both Murray and Richardson said their schools were now masters of their own destinies. They were even considering conversion, despite ministers dropping academy legislation and targets.

Murray hoped to “create our own MAT” with nearby like-minded schools, while Richardson and local special school heads were “looking at all options”.

Even Yew Tree Primary School in Walsall – which defeated the DfE at the High Court in 2021 – “is thinking about academisation”.

Head Jamie Barry said: “We were never saying it’s the wrong thing, just the wrong time and trust.

“Now we’ve got a stable school, supporting others and with

admissions up, we’d look for one aligned with our values and where we’d complement them.”

## Tinder for trusts would speed up matchmaking

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the school leaders’ union NAHT, said it was “immensely frustrating” schools had to take such steps, which distracted from improvement.

He said transfer decisions should be for schools, and backed a “quicker, transparent review process” for revocations to reduce the need for court action.

But Andrea Squires, head of education at the law firm Winckworth Sherwood, said guidance on criteria and processes was limited.

Leaving statutory conversion duties hanging over schools for extended periods was “lop-sided” if schools could not find strong trusts.

The DfE ordered Hatherden Church of England Primary School in Hampshire to convert in 2019, but gave up its “exhaustive” sponsor search and ruled out a federation in 2022, according to county council documents. Its order was revoked and it closed last year.

Mark Lehain, an ex-DfE adviser now at the Centre for Policy Studies, said ministers could do more to facilitate conversions, even without the schools bill.

A government-funded, independent “MATCHmaker” or “Tinder for Trusts” service could informally connect schools and MATs. A DfE catalogue of trust information and metrics could show schools “what they’d be getting”.

The DfE was approached for comment.



Mark Lehain

# REAch2 plans to centralise all school funding

**TOM BELGER**  
**@TOM\_BELGER**

England's largest primary-only multi-academy trust REAch2 plans to centralise the regular funding and reserves of its 60 schools

The second largest trust in the country is launching a consultation on moving to so-called general annual grant (GAG) pooling, as well as pooling individual schools' reserves.

It will also centralise finance and HR, with a restructure expected to deliver "around £2.5 million of investment...in frontline activities". But unions fear that up to 57 jobs are at risk.

Currently REAch2's schools receive funding allocated to them directly from government. The trust then takes a 6.5 per cent slice to cover its central services, which include accountancy, HR, governance, estates, policy, performance and risk management, and leadership development.

Under GAG pooling, all cash would instead sit with the trust, allowing it to "look at what each school needs to deliver a great education in the most efficient and effective way".

Pooling reserves would also allow "more strategic" planning, the trust said, both through trust-wide initiatives and responses to unforeseen costs such as energy price hikes. GAG pooling will begin in September 2024, but reserves pooling from this September.

Lord Agnew, the former academies minister, said pooling was one of "the greatest freedoms" for MATs.



The recent Kreston academies benchmark report found 23 per cent of MATs surveyed were using GAG pooling, up from 14 per cent the previous year.

But it remains controversial, undermining government efforts to equalise funding under the national funding formula. The Kreston report's authors have previously noted the "perception that in the short term some schools will gain and others will lose out".

Cathie Paine, the chief executive of REAch2, said: "Our fundamental aim is to achieve equity for every child in our trust.

"And whilst we are incredibly proud of the work that our schools do, the reality is that the current model has a number of inequities."

Gavin Robert, the chair of the trust, said the organisation was "based on solidarity", adding: "By leveraging the full power of our trust, we can accomplish so much more."

But it will also help to plug a budget gap in the trust's central

services team.

School-level data for 2021-22 was not available, but in 2020-21 individual schools had £14.6 million in reserves – whereas the trust's central team recorded a £5.8 million deficit.

Schools' budgets varied significantly too, from an £899,000 surplus to a £595,000 deficit – with seven schools in deficit in 2020-21.

A REAch2 spokesperson said it had been building central capacity in recent years to move to a cluster model, support new schools and offer specialist help on compliance to reduce school-level workloads.

The trust also said its new financial model would be "accompanied by a move to a shared services model for operations" from January, covering finance and HR. A consultation has begun.

The spokesperson added that details still had to be agreed with school leaders, but the move would free up funding for initiatives such as trust-wide educational psychologists, speech and language therapists and counsellors.

Staff unions claim that up to 57 of more than 200 office jobs – such as school business managers, finance and other administrative staff – could be cut.

REAch2 said centralising support roles would "free up schools' time, not add to their workload", and allow more investment in frontline activity.



Cathie Paine

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOTH

## Advantage chief executive joins behaviour advisory group

The chief executive of Advantage Schools has been appointed as a government behaviour adviser.

Stuart Lock has joined five existing advisors working on the Department for Education's £10 million behaviour hubs programme.

Led by behaviour tsar Tom Bennett, they train schools to better tackle classroom disruption.

Lock's £27,500, 28-month contract is paid to the trust, which has four schools in Bedfordshire. Bedford Free School is one of

the lead behaviour hubs.

The Department for Education interviewed "a number of high-calibre candidates", but said Lock's "expertise and experience most closely matched" their requirements.

Lock told *Schools Week* the hubs programme "was a supportive, collegiate programme and there are many examples of it contributing to the running of increasingly effective schools.

"I wanted to be involved because I believe that strong conduct is the

foundation of brilliant schools, but it requires expertise, hard-work and strong leadership."

Launched in 2021, the hubs aim to support 500 schools that struggle with poor discipline.

The other advisers include Mark Emmerson, the chief executive of City of London Academy Trust and Marie Gentles, the former principal of Hawkswood AP Primary in London.



Stuart Lock

NEWS

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

# Coronation will delay key stage 2 results

**FREDDIE WHITTAKER**  
**@FCDWHITTAKER**

Some schools will receive key stage 2 SATs results in the last week of their summer term because of disruption caused by the coronation of King Charles.

The Standards and Testing Agency (STA) has announced schools will receive results, and headline data will be published, on Tuesday July 11, a week later than planned. The date of tests were shifted by a day each because of the extra bank holiday on May 8.

The organisation admitted the change may impact schools whose summer holidays start in early July, or "where schools have events booked in the week results will now be returned".

Although the summer term is not due to end until later in the month in many areas of England, some will break up just days after results are issued.

In Leicestershire, for example, schools break up on Wednesday July 12. In Leicester, term ends on July 14.

Schools submit marking reviews after results



King Charles

are received. The STA has moved the deadline for these back to July 21, raising the prospect some schools will have to continue this work into their holidays.

The checking exercise for school performance data will also move back to Monday September 11.

Sarah Hannafin, a senior policy adviser at school leaders' union NAHT, said the delay was "incredibly disappointing and was completely avoidable".

"It is difficult to accept that a one-day delay to the tests leads to a week's delay to results,

particularly with the expectations put on school leaders to fulfil their obligations and specific deadlines regarding SATs.

"This decision will have a negative impact on schools, particularly those that break up for the summer holidays the week that results will now be returned."

The STA said it had done "everything possible to limit the extent of this delay and appreciate a later date for return of results has a significant impact on schools".

"We understand this impact may be greater where summer holidays commence earlier in July, or where schools have events booked in the week results will now be returned. We regret the inconvenience this change will cause schools. We expect to return to the usual timings in 2024."

The deadline for schools to upload key stage 2 teacher assessment data on the primary assessment gateway has moved to June 30. But the deadline for submission of key stage 1 teacher assessment data "has not changed and will remain Tuesday June 27".

The STA has also confirmed that test scripts for maths paper 3 will be collected on May 15, not May 12.

JASON NOBLE | @JASON\_NOBLE89

## No BTEC cull delay despite T-levels hitch

Plans to axe level 3 qualifications like BTECs will go ahead unchanged, despite four of the new flagship T-levels due to launch in just six months now delayed.

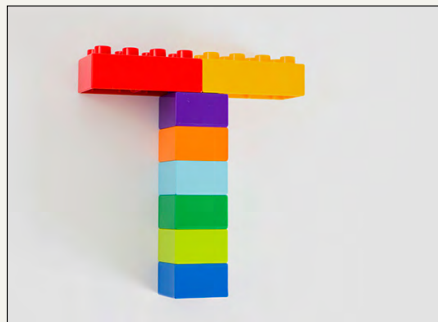
Education secretary Gillian Keegan said yesterday three T-levels to be offered by awarding body NCFE from September 2023 – in hair, beauty and aesthetics; craft and design; and media broadcast and production – have been pushed back by a year.

Another in catering, being developed by awarding body Highfield, has been delayed to 2025 at the earliest.

Keegan said quality issues needed sorting out first.

The government wants to defund qualifications that it says compete with T-levels by September 2025, despite school sector leaders just last week asking for the plan to be delayed a year.

They said the timeline was "not credible"



and "reckless" as it would leave insufficient time to ensure "students are on the right courses, or the right staff are in place with the right level of training".

Government plans to publish a list of new qualifications that will replace axed BTECs in July 2024.

Despite the T-level delays, Keegan said the defund timeline "will not change".

James Kewin, deputy chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association said it

"makes absolutely no sense" to press on with axing existing level 3s in those subjects.

He pointed out that when problems emerged with the health and science T-levels last summer, in which the exams were not deemed to be an adequate measure of students' performance and led to a re-grading based on other assessments, the cull of overlapping levels 3s was paused.

"It is astonishing that DfE has not at least taken the same approach with these wave 4 T-levels. The government's dogmatic approach to level 3 reform will leave many young people without a viable pathway to higher education or employment," he added.

An NCFE spokesperson said it was "confident in the quality of the technical development to date" for its delayed T-levels, but agreed that by slowing down the rollout "we can be certain [they] support every student to reach their potential".

NEWS IN BRIEF

# Schools skip on language catch-up scheme

Just 6 per cent of schools on a flagship government early language catch-up programme completed the scheme as intended in its first year.

An evaluation of the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) course also found under half of schools completed the full 20-week course in 2021-22, the second year of its roll out.

Backed by £17 million of government funding, the scheme was launched to raise outcomes in early language, communication and speech skills following pandemic disruption.

Almost 11,000 schools – nearly two-thirds of primaries – were recruited over the two years, and four in five teachers reported an increase in pupils’ confidence in their use of language.

But an evaluation by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) found Covid disruption – closures and staff and pupil absences – hit both years. A third of surveyed staff blamed competing priorities, such as other catch-up programmes.

Children were meant to get two lots of 15-minute individual sessions and three lots of



30-minute group sessions a week delivered by trained teaching assistants or teachers.

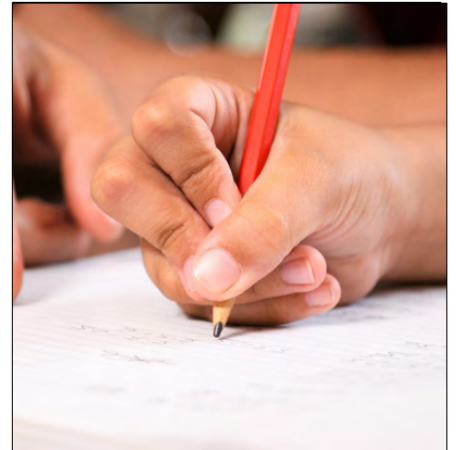
But surveys suggest just 65 per cent of schools followed the programme plan and that group sessions were prioritised.

Just 30 per cent of respondents to a 2022 survey said they always delivered the two individual sessions.

Despite problems, 83 per cent of staff surveyed said they observed an increase in pupils’ confidence in their use of language.

[Full story here](#)

# Hold off on NTP cuts, says Sutton Trust



Ministers have been asked not to slash funding for the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) while it is still taking hold in schools, as new figures show poorer pupils are nearly catching up with wealthier peers.

Research published by The Sutton Trust shows that in 2021-22 the proportion of pupils accessing any form of tutoring was almost level between the most and least deprived.

Trust research shows 39 per cent of year 11s from the highest-earning households in 2021-22 received tutoring, 20 per cent of which was private.

But 37 per cent of year 11 pupils from households in the lowest quartile of earners also received tuition. This was despite just 5 per cent receiving private tuition.

However the government subsidy paid to schools is due to drop from 60 per cent this year to just 25 per cent next year.

The Sutton Trust wants this planned cut to be postponed to give tutoring “more time to embed fully” into the system.

Sir Peter Lampl, the trust’s founder and chair, said there had been issues with delivery, but the NTP had “changed the landscape of tutoring. Rather than treating it as a short-term catch-up programme, it should be part of an ongoing national effort to tackle the attainment gap.”

The research also shows regions with the lowest rates of private tutoring, such as the north east, East Midlands and Yorkshire, have the highest in-school tutoring take-ups.

[Full story here](#)

# Sunak hastens changes to sex education

Rishi Sunak said this week he was “bringing forward” a review of statutory relationships, sex and health education guidance for schools.

Current guidance, which came into effect in September 2020, was due to be reviewed later this year.

But the prime minister on Wednesday said the consultation would now be launched “as soon as possible”.

Responding to a question from Conservative MP Miriam Cates about claims that “age-inappropriate” lessons were taught in some schools, Sunak said he shared her concerns.

He had asked the Department for Education to “make sure schools are not teaching inappropriate or contested content in RSHE.

“Our priority should always be the safety and wellbeing of children. And schools should also make curriculum content and materials available to parents.”

But James Bowen, the director of policy at the NAHT school leaders’ union, said the “overwhelming majority” of schools followed government guidance.

There was a “real concern that this is a politically motivated review, rather than one based on the reality of what is happening in the vast majority of schools up and down the country”.

Mark Lehain, a former DfE special adviser who now works as head of education at the Centre for Policy Studies think tank, said the review must focus on “what an age-appropriate ‘ceiling looks like, and how parents are listened to”.

[Full story here](#)

IN PARLIAMENT

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

# De Souza wants stronger focus on attendance

**FREDDIE WHITTAKER**  
**@FCDWHITTAKER**

Ofsted should hold councils to account for poor school attendance to ensure a "razor-sharp focus" on the issue, the children's commissioner has said.

Dame Rachel de Souza told the parliamentary education committee that while Covid "had an impact" on attendance, illness only accounted for about half of the 1.6 million children persistently absent in the autumn of 2021-22.

MPs were also warned schools were misusing attendance codes to avoid being "caught out" doing "managed moves".

Lucy Nethsingha, the leader of Cambridgeshire County Council and a Local Government Association spokesperson on education, told MPs councils needed the power to direct schools to take children.

De Souza said she accepted the "point about placing children, and I think that really needs to be strengthened", adding that councils should be "champions of our vulnerable children and all our children".

"So I think obviously there is a request here for resource, but with that should come accountability too.

"I would like to see Ofsted actually inspecting attendance as part of local authority children's services inspections. Then there might be a bit more of a razor-sharp focus on it."

Such inspections already look at whether



"urgent action is taken if children are missing from education or if their attendance reduces".

But de Souza wants Ofsted to go further. A report from her office last year called for a stronger focus on attendance in school inspections, and consideration of new inspections that looked specifically at attendance approaches across a whole area.

She said she was "particularly concerned" about use of the "B" attendance code, which is supposed to record authorised absence when pupils are at another education setting.

Alice Wilcock, from the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), said she'd "heard of some settings using it now to send children home, to work from home, saying they have been B-coded, when actually they're not in an education setting, they're just at home".

"We've also heard of B-coding being used for managed moves, such that schools now scared about being caught-out for managed moves are saying 'we'll B-code it rather than put it down as a dual registration.'"

MPs were also told better-off parents abused the system of fines for term-time holidays, with some councils receiving cheques from rule-breakers before penalties were issued.

Wilcock said the CSJ had "heard of some local authorities that receive cheques in the post from parents".

"They knew they were going to be fined, and so before they got a fixed penalty notice, they went 'here's my cheque'. And you can understand why: £60 for a fine. It's much cheaper."

De Souza also revealed that data from large multi-academy trusts for the periods before and after Covid revealed a "huge amount of Friday absence, that wasn't there before".

"Parents are at home on Fridays. And we've had evidence from kids, 'well, mum and dad are at home, stay at home'. We're seeing in the post-Covid world slightly different attitudes."

Analysis by FFT Education Datalab found absence last autumn was higher on Fridays in primary (7.2 per cent) and secondary schools (10.4 per cent in the morning and 10.6 per cent in the afternoon).

Severely and persistently absent pupils were also more likely to miss school on Fridays, especially in the afternoon.

AMY WALKER | @AMYRALKER

## Repairs to school buildings 'won't eliminate risk', admits DfE

Department for Education plans to rebuild and repair schools across England may not be enough to "eliminate risk", its permanent secretary has admitted.

The admission came during a public accounts committee hearing on Thursday, in which Susan Acland-Hood was quizzed about the rapidly deteriorating school estate.

The senior civil servant warned there was no form of condition survey that would "reliably guarantee it has picked up every possible issue a building might suffer".



Current efforts to address the issue include the school rebuilding programme, in which 500 schools will be partially or fully rebuilt. There is also ongoing research into the use of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) across schools.

The government also provides annual maintenance funding to schools, trusts and councils.

Pressed by MPs, Acland-Hood said: "If the question is am I confident that the scale of programmes we have at the moment will eliminate risk across the school estate, I can't say that.

"What I can say is we have got the best possible information we have to allow us to target the money in the programmes we have at the areas of greatest risk."





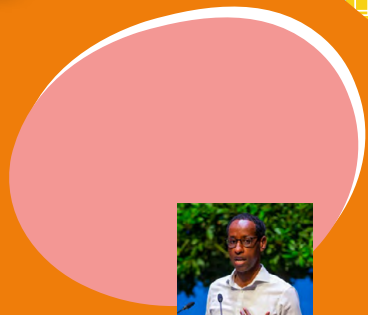
The 13th annual

# FESTIVAL OF EDUCATION

at Wellington College | 6-7 July 2023



# HAVE YOU GOT YOUR TICKET YET?



Tickets are now on sale for the most inspiring education event of the year

**EDUCATIONFEST.CO.UK**  
**#EDUCATIONFEST**

**BOOK YOUR TICKETS TODAY**



FOUNDED BY



WELLINGTON COLLEGE



**Profile**  
 JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL

# ‘I was laughed out of the door by every venture capitalist’

From libel barrister to global ed tech entrepreneur, Priya Lakhani's career has been marked by a formidable work ethic. She tells Jessica Hill what drives her

**P**riya Lakhani is at pains to express how many of the achievements in her colourful career were driven by a strong moral conviction to make the world a better place.

The founder of ed tech firm Century Tech is

acutely aware of fears over the potential harms from technology being misused (she sits on the government's AI Council). But also because of the “cruel” accusations thrown her way.

She recounts one investor meeting where an ed tech entrepreneur held up on stage a picture of

Elizabeth Holmes – the American facing jail for fraud related to her failed blood-testing company – and told the audience: “This is the AI in Ed tech in the UK”.

This was “really awful and very hurtful”, Lakhani says, because “everyone knows” that her social

## Profile: Priya Lakhani

enterprise firm, which provides a personalised learning platform for 1.2 million students in 55 countries, is “the big AI company not just in the UK, but Europe...and frankly the US. How dare they do that? That’s a defamation case, isn’t it?”

Lakhani would know the answer – before moving into business she was a libel barrister.

It means I’m at pains to walk the line between asking probing questions for objective journalism and not offending Lakhani.

In some ways it is easy: she is instantly likeable. Her door sign at Century’s London office, where Lakhani has been making “pancake cakes” for staff (like pancakes but deliciously spongy) reads ‘Dumbledore’s office’.

Like Harry Potter’s headmaster, she’s a wise and morally steadfast educational leader. Unlike him, her thoughts tumble out at 100 miles an hour, leaving me struggling to get a word in edgeways. Pinning her down on some of the tougher questions isn’t easy.

### Autism claim questions

Century’s AI-powered, adaptive learning platform is used by 1,200 schools in England. Some 75 per cent of them are state-run and the rest independent, including Eton College.

It can be used in class for diagnostic assessments and lesson planning, or outside the classroom for homework or revision.

Its “personalised” approach adapts learning to the user and Lakhani says it saves teachers time by marking pupils’ progress. A dashboard tells them which students are struggling, why, and how to deal with them.

Prices start at £1,200 for primaries and £3,500 for secondaries. A randomised control trial of the AI is still lacking but Lakhani points to independent studies, such as one by Nesta which shows a 20-30 per cent improvement in adult learners’ digital skills.

Century’s AI, which incorporates “neuroscientific theories on memory function, engagement and motivation”, has been “trained on big data” for almost a decade now, “getting smarter” every time a learner uses it.



Priya with mum Dipa Lakhani, cooking up their Masala Masala sauce at a tasting in Harvey Nichols

## ‘With autism, it was overwhelming, the patterns that we saw’

Lakhani bats off GDPR concerns about harvesting data: users are told the AI is analysing their data, which is later provided to teachers.

Schools Week has also unsuccessfully tried to get answers to a well-reported claim from Lakhani that her AI can predict with 96 per cent accuracy whether a child is autistic.

Lakhani says behavioural tracking movements detected by the platform’s AI correlate with demographic data from school information management systems indicating whether a child has special needs.

“With autism, it was overwhelming, the patterns that we saw,” she says.

Studies show as many as one in 44 children may have autism. An Observer newspaper investigation last year found some children were waiting five years for an NHS autism appointment.

A tool to diagnose the condition could revolutionise the education and health sectors, and make big money. So why the secrecy?

She refuses again to publish “commercially

sensitive” studies, adding: “We are an EdTech company, we put the ed before the tech...I have learned from the experts who know what they’re talking about that this [technology] is not an appropriate way to diagnose autism.

“It may be helpful in the future, with a human being as an aide. But if you’re going to advertise it can diagnose, it has to be done right. Century has to do things the right way.”

While she would “love to” work with an autism charity and academia to publish a “full study”, this is “a matter of timing and resources”.

### Entrepreneurialism runs in the family

For now, Lakhani’s focus is “getting the technology in front of as many students as possible, improving outcomes, reducing teacher workload and to personalize as much as we can”.

She has a formidable work ethic that makes it hard to doubt she will succeed.

At grammar school, Lakhani was told by some teachers she would “never be a lawyer” because she was “brown and female”. She worked through lunch hours to prove them wrong.

At university, while other law students had two or three work placements, she had 20.

The day before her wedding, she made her own iced version of Nigella Lawson’s chocolate fudge cake for 600 guests.

On Christmas Day last year, Lakhani – accompanied by her 12-year-old daughter and ten-year-old son and two dogs – provided dinner for the homeless in Hamstead Heath.

How much of this boundless energy is perhaps down to her own ADHD?

Lakhani discovered she had the condition in her thirties but was “quite happy” not to have been diagnosed earlier. “Maybe the label would have affected me negatively, maybe not”, she says.

Growing up in Cheshire, Lakhani’s parents ran a manufacturing business. She spent holidays with family in Nairobi and was “spoiled rotten”, waited on by servants.

“It never felt quite right to me,” she says.

Her parents later moved to London, where her dad retrained as a “Grand Designs”-style

# Profile: Priya Lakhani

architect designing “phenomenal” homes – including Lakhani’s.

Entrepreneurialism runs in the family: by 2012, Lakhani had quit law and built the country’s first fresh ethnic sauce company, Masala Masala, based on her mum’s traditional recipe. The social enterprise provided over three million meals and thousands of vaccines to the underprivileged in India and Africa, and funded nine schools there.

She was appointed an adviser to then business secretary Vince Cable’s entrepreneurs forum, alongside Dragon’s Den’s Julie Meyer and James Caan.

Lakhani recalls a meeting when Matt Hancock, then a junior business minister, said: “20 per cent of our nation can’t read, write or do maths well enough to get a good job at the end of formal education – and this is a problem that we need to solve”.

Lakhani calls it a “real wake up moment... I’d just spent four years funding schools in Commonwealth countries that all replicate the British model, which doesn’t work for 20 per cent of our kids. What’s going on?”

## The turn of the Century

So she turned her sights to education and learned from leaders across all types of schools that, while different, they used the same “one size fits all delivery”.

“Teachers were complaining... They were showing me all this marking and assessing they were doing which looked just like when I was at school. They were frazzled with all this work.”

Lakhani took several ‘nanodegree’ online AI courses and became “completely hooked”.

She already knew neuroscience: after being beaten with a brick during a robbery 13 years ago, she read “every medical journal related to PTSD written since the Vietnam War”.

When building the company, she said she was “laughed out the door by every venture capitalist” because she is “not a former Google engineer”.

She was told “you don’t look like an AI entrepreneur”, and one investor asked her: “Sweetheart, can you explain what AI is to me?”



## ‘Teachers were complaining... They were frazzled with all this work’

But Lakhani convinced enough backers to believe in her. Century has raised £22 million in investment, and Lakhani claims it no longer requires further funding.

Despite being 10 years old, it is still classed as a “small” company and does not have to file audited accounts (it meets two of the three thresholds: a turnover of £10.2 million or less, £5.1 million or less on its balance sheet, or fewer than 50 employees).

Annual accounts show Century has posted a £16.5 million loss since it was founded - £3.3 million of that was in 2021-22.

Lakhani says this shows the invested money being spent. But she gives the impression throughout our conversation that her overriding objective is to improve education, rather than make as much money as possible.

She said the company is “on the path to break even”. A global expansion includes partnering with the Canadian online learning company D2L to host its K-12 curriculum which last month launched in the US. Six other partnerships are planned over the next six months.

### Vitriol is ‘extraordinary’

Lakhani is now writing a book on disinformation and fake news. It follows someone creating a fake Twitter account of her in 2019 when ministers across different countries were seeking to adopt Century’s tech. The account tweeted ministers “calling them really horrible words” that Lakhani “would never repeat”.

The ruse was so authentic, she was messaged by a Department for Education official asking her to stop tweeting.

“I’m just trying to mind my own business, just trying to solve a couple of problems in education and the amount of vitriol I have received...is extraordinary.”

But she points to the “extraordinarily kind” people in the education sector who “keep [her] going. When I meet them, it just reminds me why I’m doing what I’m doing. People think entrepreneurs are just so resilient, but actually it does take the community.”

**Correction: We incorrectly stated the £16.5 million loss was a yearly figure, when it is actually the cumulative amount.**

# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



JO HUTCHINSON

Director for SEND and additional needs, Education Policy Institute



## SEND review: A far cry from transformative plan we need

**The government’s plan fails to address some fundamental and desperately needed changes to SEND and alternative provision, writes Jo Hutchinson**

The government recently published its long-awaited SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan, setting out how it will implement the green paper.

Since the Education Act 1981 first envisioned the inclusion of most children with SEND in mainstream schools, its history has been a long tale of obstacles and frustrations for families. The failure of the 2014 reforms to deliver tangible progress was the latest of many disappointments whilst families continued to struggle to access the support needed for their children to flourish in school.

The Improvement Plan was keenly awaited but met with understandable trepidation given the weak track record of successive governments.

### Deaf children held back

Today, EPI publishes research examining the attainment of deaf children, in partnership with the National Deaf Children’s Society. The headline finding is that deaf children’s attainment in GCSE English and maths is substantially

lower than that of hearing children. Worryingly, the 17-month gap facing deaf children is similar in size to that experienced by economically disadvantaged children.

It’s clear more must be done to support deaf children. In particular, the high needs budget must better reflect current needs rather than historical spending. It should also be based on the actual cost of providing support, such as specialist teachers of the deaf in schools.

### Good moves on raising awareness

It’s encouraging that the improvement plan includes funding for the training of specialist teachers for children with sensory impairment. On wider training for non-specialist teachers, the plan includes a review of the core content for initial teacher training and the early career framework. If done well, this could create a foundation for better awareness of condition-specific needs, which is required to increase early identification and appropriate support in schools.

It would be unrealistic to expect teachers to become experts in every type of need: we hope that the regional expert partnerships outlined in the improvement plan will provide ongoing support to schools on specific needs. While specialist training is planned for sensory impairments and basic

“ The plan only promises some standards by 2025

training is funded for autistic spectrum disorder, we’d like to see awareness training rolled out for every type of need.

### What about national standards?

Introducing national standards setting out what support families can expect and who will provide it could bring exactly the kind of certainty and consistency families need. So far so good then? Well, no.

The prospect of a potential change of government means that if the current government wants to claim any credit, it will need to make specific commitments before the next election. There needs to be a full working draft of the national standards (even if not legislation-ready) before the election is called. Otherwise, how can families weigh up what’s promised against other manifestos?

This isn’t a new government that can ask for more time to finish its homework. And yet the improvement plan only promises some national standards by the end of 2025 – those seen as low-hanging fruit. We must do better than this for children with SEND. Co-production

is vital, but it’s no excuse to kick reform into the long grass.

### Missing pieces

Other issues that require firmer commitments include specifying when the promised additional special schools will be ready to admit pupils, plus a plan for how many more schools, of which types, and in what locations, will still be required.

Meanwhile, the lack of a commitment to roll out mental health support teams to all parts of the country is also a gaping hole. There’s also no commitment to fund post-16 alternative provision, nor to consider how pupil-teacher ratios influence the number of children pushed out of mainstream schools.

The commitments on early years and further education as well as on NHS services are weakened because there isn’t a plan for delivering consistent standards in a mixed market that includes private providers.

So while the plans for SEND and AP offer some progress from the current system, they cannot be considered transformative given these limitations of scope and timing.

# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



## BILKIS MIAH

Founder, You Be You

### Dismissing 'wokeness' jibes undermines equity work

**Inclusivity, or 'wokeness' as it's come to be known, isn't political correctness gone mad but essential work for children and communities, writes Bilkis Miah**

To see how conversations on 'wokeness' have permeated the education sector, you only have to listen to Robert Halfon, the skills minister and former chair of the education select committee, who last year condemned the use of the term 'white privilege'. Halfon claimed – and this much we can agree on – that there is an “opposite reality [to privilege] for the white working class across society”.

But pitting one group against another offers no meaningful insights. Avoiding the use of terms like 'white privilege' won't answer why so many white working-class children are failing. It's a systemic problem fuelled by under-funded schools, economic inequality and a lack of opportunities for social mobility.

#### Understanding communities

Rather than stoking class or culture wars, our duty is to help future generations overcome these deep-seated divides. To that end, it's important to listen to the whole of our school communities, including teachers, parents and children. We

need to understand the context that is breeding such inequalities, and let communities know their voices are being heard.

Creating change can't be up to teachers alone; it depends on the whole community beyond the school gates, and there are nuances to navigate. For example, Tower Hamlets has a majority British-Bangladeshi and white working-class population. Living in intergenerational homes and having parents with little or no formal education are real issues for our children. When You Be You asked parents what they were worried about, there was a common theme: losing their children to a world they didn't understand.

Our interventions therefore had to impact on their beliefs and dismantle their understanding about 'woke' issues. We saw an opportunity to promote awareness – to help everyone understand what we mean by diversity and inclusion and share tools to negotiate these in their lives. The result is our home activity kits, which encourage families and children to think and learn about themselves and their world through fun, paper-based activities (side-stepping the very real obstacle of digital poverty and keeping the focus on quality bonding time away from screens).



“ ‘Woke’ has become a catch-all for people’s concerns

#### Real-world wokeness

Last year, we saw St Paul's Girls School rename their 'head girl' position to 'head of school'. This may seem like a superficial change, but the reasons behind it are key. And no, this isn't 'political correctness gone mad'.

It's important that we don't define our pupils by gender, race, religion, sexuality, class or ability. All the stereotypes that come with these narrow categorisations have wider societal implications. By changing the title from 'head girl' to 'head of school', staff are saying to their pupils: "We recognise you, and you can achieve anything regardless of your gender". It's not boxing girls into certain roles, or qualifying success with terms like 'girl boss'. You're a boss, period.

This is crucial in creating a healthy, diverse workforce and society for the future. In our pilot project, we heard comments from children such as: "Boys will have more important jobs as they have bigger brains". Statements like these may seem inane but it's

essential to dismantle them as soon as they're noticed to ensure they are not further entrenched.

'Woke' has become a catch-all for a large number of people's concerns about deep societal change. But deep societal change is necessary and inevitable. The more we avoid this, the more we create conflict within our communities.

Instead, we must take families on the journey with us. It never ceases to amaze me how many schools don't ask parents the tough questions: 'What worries you?', 'What are your main concerns around teaching about stereotypes?'. Doing so lets families feel heard. But more than that, it ensures teachers and school leaders understand their concerns and can create opportunities to allay some of their fears.

The alternative is to trap children between our work in class and its dismissal as 'wokeness' at home. Or worse still, to give up on education's potential to change the world for the better.

# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



## ADAM SELDON

Head of history,  
King Solomon Academy

### Our insular profession is weakened by narrow debate

**The teaching profession is progressively narrowing its focus from the big picture to technical minutiae, says Adam Seldon, and everyone loses out as a result**

Once I came across a paper that spoke to my disenchantment with politics academia. It argued that academics discuss a narrow range of topics among themselves without much external input. Now I find myself feeling a similar disenchantment with a narrowness and insularity with current education debate.

Educators are often protective of their patch and reports or commissions are frequently dismissed by the sector's thought leaders and influencers. Daisy Christodoulou recently lambasted Labour's learning and skills report as referring to "an education system that doesn't exist".

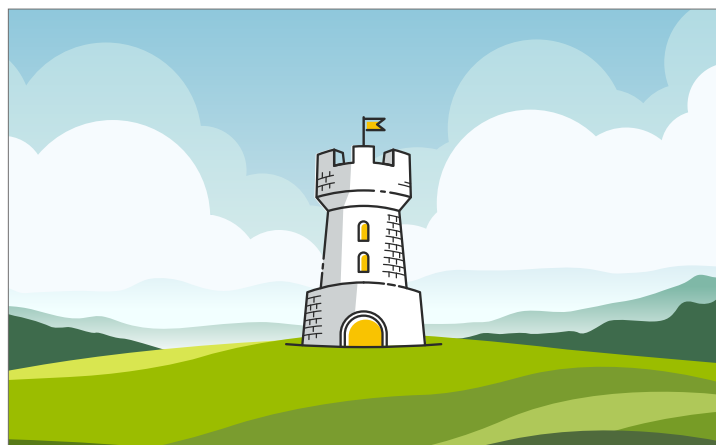
How many times must universities and employers tell us that young people lack the skills to succeed in their spheres before we listen? Schools do not exist just to serve business and universities, but they are a public good. The privilege of being on the frontline is accompanied by a responsibility to engage with the sectors our students go onto in the next stages of their lives.

Often in the media, organisations or esteemed individuals demand that "schools teach X to solve problem Y". Recently, I heard a guest on the BBC's Today programme calling for bereavement lessons. Worthy no doubt, but where to fit this in? Schools cannot be the repository to resolve all our social ills.

But this general unawareness of what goes on in schools is sustained by the profession's undeservedly low reputation ("Those who can't, teach"), which in turn is fed by our insularity. It isn't enough just to say no to every suggestion. Professionals from a range of careers recently visited my school and heard student presentations on their work. I saw the veil being lifted for those adults, and valuable dialogue took place. This shouldn't be so rare.

But we don't help ourselves. Indeed, we reinforce this insularity through the narrow framing of our discussions in books, on 'edu-Twitter' and at conferences focused on the 'how' of education, pedagogy and behaviour management.

The more research-informed approach adopted by many schools has heralded many positive impacts, but the cost is a restricted Overton window. The grip of cognitive science means that if contributions do not have some alleged grounding in research or linkage to sacred



**“ We need to climb down from our ivory tower**

texts like Teach Like a Champion or Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction, it is harder to get a hearing.

The publishing industry has become almost entirely focused on catering to that, with books churned out about teaching techniques, or how to deliver a broadly standardised curriculum. More fundamental questions such as the purpose of education or interrogating whether schools are best serving their students are rarely touched upon.

This focus on the 'how' and 'what works' is understandable. Schools are subject to high-stakes accountability systems based on exam results and Ofsted judgements. But we debase our value if we reinforce the idea that a school and student's worth can be reduced to a metric or scored fairly in a game with constantly shifting goalposts.

Following the recent downgrade of numerous schools from 'Outstanding' due to the updated inspection framework, Ofsted's national director of education said the new judgments did not necessarily mean the schools had

reduced in quality, that the opposite could in fact be true. Educators would do better to debate and communicate what makes our schools great, rather than letting Ofsted and exam grades define this.

Exam cancellations during the pandemic sparked a fleeting renaissance of educational thinking. We asked whether a more capacious vision for our schools could be realised, but we have reverted to the norm.

With the frenzied demands of the school day, teaching can feel a thoroughly unintellectual profession that does not actually discuss education. Trainee teachers might consider big picture ideas, never to engage in such questions again.

Online platforms, conferences and books, where there is more breathing space, are exactly where there should be an open and thriving discussion on education in its broadest sense.

Such breadth would benefit us as educators, our schools, our students and our communities. We just need to climb down from our ivory tower, whether we were marched up there, or ascended willingly.

# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



DAVID  
CHAPMAN

Head of school, Aston University  
Engineering Academy

## Video tech has turned our lesson observation on its head

**Video recording of lessons has reduced fear of the dreaded observation and drawn our focus to the small details that make a big difference, writes David Chapman**

The first image that comes to many people's minds when they hear the words 'lesson observation' is a variation on Jaws, complete with ominous theme music. Even the most experienced teachers show a detectable edge of nerves. Lesson observations do provide useful insights for improving practice, but the stressful, formal once-a-term snapshot isn't an accurate gauge of quality and clearly needs a rethink.

In that context, we're pleased that our lower-stakes approach has positively impacted on pupil engagement and teacher development. More than that, our focus on small adjustments has given teachers more autonomy and recast lesson observations in a more positive light. Here are three key insights from our experience of bringing about that important change.

### Upside down

Lesson observations typically focus too much on teaching and not enough on learning, and it's this emphasis that can lead teachers to

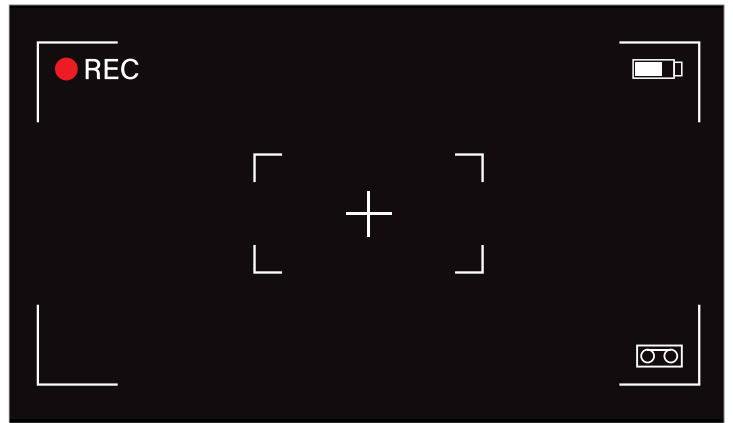
feel nervous and reluctant when it's 'their turn'. But knowing what went well and what didn't in a lesson and the impact this had on pupils' learning is mission-critical to school improvement. We turned lesson observation on its head by focussing on student learning behaviours rather than teaching practice.

We encourage our teachers to identify students' 'small tells,' the finer details that can sometimes be overlooked mid-teaching flow. Every class has its share of 'influencers' who can, sometimes inadvertently, dictate the overall behaviour and mood of a lesson. Small tells like body language can reflect how engaged everyone is, and reflecting on them can help teachers maximise learning.

### Inside out

Lesson observations have a bad rap when they focus solely on the parts that went wrong. It's just as important to focus on when things go right as they are both sides of the same coin. Building on your strengths (and the confidence that comes from having them acknowledged) are crucial to develop teachers' will to improve and their understanding of how to do it, continually and practically.

In addition, infrequent feedback is often more intense, overloading teachers with a list of things to



**“ We focus on students' learning rather than teaching practice**

change all at once. We encourage our teachers to take an active role in reviewing how their lesson went and to do so regularly. To that end, we have brought in Onvu video technology to help staff self-reflect more easily and to identify the small, critical improvements it's in their gift to make. The camera technology is always available to them and they can choose to review footage by themselves or with the guidance of colleagues.

One teacher thought her class understood a complex maths problem, only to find that when they submitted the work, not everyone had grasped it. Reviewing the footage helped her identify where in the lesson the disconnect had happened between how she thought she had taught the problem and how it had been understood. She could then make the necessary adjustments.

Having the time and space to reflect on how a particular lesson went was always a challenge, but capturing footage makes the process easier, quicker and more objective. Indeed, contrary to some concerns, the technology has been well received by our staff.

### Round and round

Avoiding a 'them and us' mindset is essential for the lessons learned in any observation to be of value and acted upon. Teachers learn best from other teachers and creating a collegiate approach removes the sense of judgement, instead promoting an environment where everyone learns from everyone else. This helps teachers feel more valued and trusted, and less isolated when faced with classroom challenges.

Here, video technology has also helped. Our teachers share best practice by saving video clips of strategies that have worked well with a particular set of pupils in a shared folder for everyone to access. They hold small, informal sessions to seek different perspectives to help them teach more effectively.

When observations are viewed positively, this creates a chain reaction. Teachers feel safe in their own continuous professional development journeys and pupils flourish because teaching quality improves.

And to do that, we don't need a bigger boat. We need a smaller lens.



# Solutions

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



## CAROLINE DOHERTY

Head of public affairs, Ark

### How to organise a conference in the age of online learning

**The recent Ark Curriculum Plus event demonstrated exactly what the CPD conference still has to offer in the post-Covid digital age, writes Caroline Doherty**

Many a CPD conference blurb promises “practical interactive sessions” and exciting opportunities for “professional networking”. In truth, teachers often spend their time trying to find a quiet spot to ring their school, or to catch up on work when the content gets a bit dry.

In a world where meeting online is so much easier and cheaper, face-to-face events owe it to teachers to do better. The organisers of last week’s Ark Curriculum Plus conference at Twickenham Stadium set out to do just that, and the result was a captivating event full of great professional development.

**Less is more**

The organiser’s temptation is to generate excitement by cramming as much as possible into their programme, but an overly packed agenda can leave people’s brains frazzled by choice – let alone processing everything they’ve heard.

Curation is critical. Oliver Caviglioli, a master of conveying information effectively, exemplified this when he implanted a thought-

provoking idea in all our heads in a handful of sentences. He told us that learning doesn’t just occur in the brain but involves the body too. The mere act of writing information down or using gestures can reduce cognitive load in a way that supports working memory.

I suspect I’m not the only audience member who then ordered the suggested further reading, but more than that: this nugget was referenced by others throughout the day, proof that the quality of input trumps the quantity of time given to speakers. In fact, because there are so many ways to catch up with content on demand via podcasts and videos, the team specifically reduced the amount of time delegates spent passively, listening to speakers, in favour of well-facilitated workshop sessions.

**Be bold about breaks**

It takes a lot of nerve to counter the urge to squeeze yet more content in, but proper breaks mean everyone can relax rather than queue feverishly for a drink or the bathroom, leaving time for longer and deeper conversations. At this conference, 25 per cent of the timetable was given over to lunch and coffee breaks and ultimately more peer-to-peer learning.

Most of the delegates I interrupted chatting happily away had never met before and had



“ It takes a lot of nerve not to squeeze in more content

gone straight into tackling big issues around planning, curriculum and assessment. I witnessed two delegates who had sat together by chance redesign their key stage 3 subject plans while sucking lollipops. You can’t force that kind of serendipity, but you can make it more likely.

**Shared expertise**

As well as the separate subject streams, the delegates had a shared language as they all use at least one of the Ark Curriculum Plus programmes. This gave them a quick route into key questions about classroom practice. They were also sat in small enough groups that they could all hear each other and contribute.

Helen Drury, creator of Maths Mastery, observed that teaching is a solitary profession: teachers are surrounded by young people but don’t get much time with peers. Schools and trusts are also bubbles governed by orthodoxies and policies. As much as hearing new content, CPD should give participants space to critically examine their own practice with

other professionals. It was great that facilitators were able to let these fascinating conversations run a little bit longer rather than racing to get to the end of their slides.

**Presence and fun**

I popped into a session with about 100 primary school maths teachers getting their hands on a rekenrek, many for the first time. The curiosity and joy in the room were palpable.

The key challenge with online CPD is the temptation to mute your mic, turn off your camera and get on with other work, but face-to-face organisers mustn’t assume physical presence negates all of that in and of itself.

Senior leaders will worry that their school might have caught fire in their absence. Over-worked teachers will think their time might be better spent planning or marking. But with fewer, more sharply presented insights, a little physicality and plenty of time for fruitful conversations, days like this can truly deliver on the blurb with memorable CPD that has a lasting impact.

## THE REVIEW

## TILTING EDUCATION

**Author:** Jo Clemmet**Publisher:** Routledge**Publication date:** 18 November 2022**ISBN:** 1032148780**Reviewer:** Sanum Jawaid Khan, Assistant headteacher,  
Sir Henry Floyd Grammar School

We know that educators are burning out and working towards some seemingly unattainable standards – often ones which they don't even believe to be just. We need systemic change and this can't be achieved by people working in schools alone. What Jo Clemmet offers here is neither radical nor revolutionary, but if implemented well it could be the solution we all need.

Clemmet starts with values, and it makes no sense to begin elsewhere. In a system where the goalposts seem to move regularly and there is no limit to what can be asked of us, we are desperately in need of something to help us decide what is enough and what is reasonable.

My mother has always said that a tree, no matter how tall, will blow over with one gust of wind if it does not have strong roots. The chapter on values is the roots of this book. Clemmet writes that "the argument is not that values are more important than results but that focusing more on values will relieve the pressure associated with succeeding at all costs".

He goes on to suggest that 'good enough' is actually 'good, simpliciter'. We need to understand success as part of an interconnected web of projects and people, where binary models of success are harmful. Here kindness begins with expressing it to ourselves and becomes the measure of success we use for our own pursuits.

The narrative evolves well and perhaps it helped that I read it as someone new in senior leadership and part of a committed, kind and progressive team. The thought that "the type

of person you are is far more important for motivating others than your organisational skills or stunning vision for your team" did give me ease, and indeed a sense of security, that I was recruited for who I am rather than what outcomes I can evidence. I reflected on my own position often as I read this book and could easily identify successes that were planned for, and those which I need to unpack further.

There are a few key threads running through *Tilting education* and an important one is the need for diversity of thought among a team and across a school. As the range of perspectives grow, so too should the understanding of 'success' that goes beyond the seemingly measurable. This cements the view that discussions of wellbeing, values, diversity, equity and inclusion all sit under the umbrella of 'school culture' and such a step towards this understanding is certainly welcome.

The pessimist in me does have reservations, however. Clemmet points out that leadership is about mindsets, not hierarchy, and that 'good' is good enough. While this perspective certainly sounds wholesome, it is perhaps too idealistic at the moment. Unless every stakeholder in every school in the country is willing to buy into this manifesto in order to prioritise wellbeing and immeasurable means of success, Clemmet's suggestions can only be fully embraced by the privileged few who don't need to compete against respected local peers.

This book is packed with 'nudge' behaviours we can employ to work towards kinder schools, and

BOOK

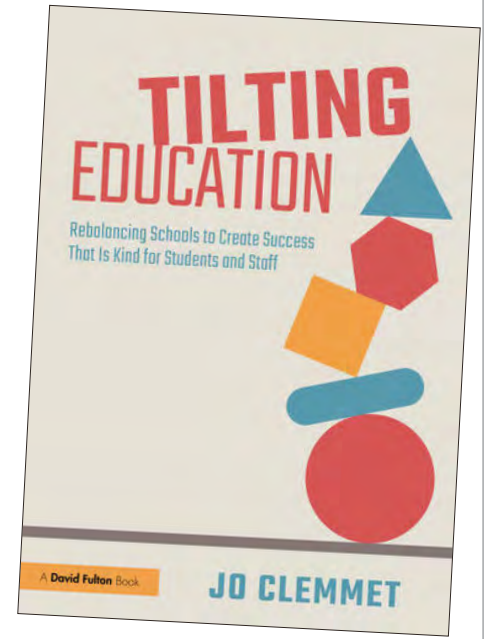
TV

FILM

RADIO

EVENT

RESOURCE



it is worth reading to see which of these can be adopted for your practice. Clemmet edges us towards embracing the notion of everyday leadership – a leadership that is rooted in a strong set of organisational values where each person is fully represented, engaged and empowered to drive a culture of kindness. Exam data and Ofsted inspections do not tell us all there is to know about the success of a school and Clemmet outlines a good case for this, as well as some sound suggestions for how else to identify our own achievements.

On balance then, *Tilting education* is neither radical nor revolutionary but that is not what Clemmet sets out to do. It is insightful and influential, but only if you begin with your values and reflect along the way.



Rating



**THE CONVERSATION**  
LISTENING IN ON  
THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM

**Fiona Atherton**  
Headteacher,  
Ladypool  
Primary School

**EERILY QUIET AND SAD**

Rather than a blog or podcast, what really hit home for me this week was a feature in *The Times* exploring the impact of the pandemic on school pupils through interviews with headteachers and a professor of education. While I disagree with the article's portrayal of a "lost generation" (There is still time after all for these youngsters to get the help and support they deserve), I agree with the points made around focus, concentration and engagement in school life. The impact is still evident.

I have taught some upper key stage two children who have still not fully settled back into school life and routine, even two years later. Instead, school is something to be endured because they would much rather be on a games console or device of some kind. I still don't think we have found the solution to support disengaged children who have missed out on some of those childhood pleasures.

But labelling them as a lost generation is unlikely to help.

**A CRISIS OF COMMUNICATION**

For children coming into school who missed out on those formative school years - learning to play, to use their imaginations and to socialise with each other - the impact is even more pronounced. Reflecting on that brought me back to

an insightful blog post on the Early Years Staffroom website.

Here, Sarah Detheridge brings together the evidence of the impact on these young learners, arguing that what we have is a communication and language crisis. This will continue to manifest in reception classes for the next few years, especially in schools within areas of high deprivation, and we will continue to see children who are less able to tackle small problems independently (especially those that involve talking things out).

Children who struggle with communication in the first five years of life often struggle to catch up with their peers. At the other end of the school pipeline, as many of 50 per cent of young offenders have an unmet communication and language / learning need. Addressing this crisis is going to define our work for years to come.

**READ THE ROOM**

Staying on the theme of communication, last week was the typically gorgeous World Book Day. Amid the age-old debate about whether dressing up as a superhero is really going to get children reading, the hidden truth was that lots of schools have scaled back on this approach, mostly led by financial considerations. However, celebrating a love of reading is still mission critical, and many have instead gone down the route of book talk, enjoying and sharing books.

Gillian Keegan drew a sarcastic chuckle from me though, as the secretary of state for education marked the day by praising her schools minister.



Going by that tweet, Nick Gibb has single-handedly driven forward a decade's worth of improvements in reading standards. No mention of the teachers at the chalkface actually teaching phonics and the dreaded nonsense words.

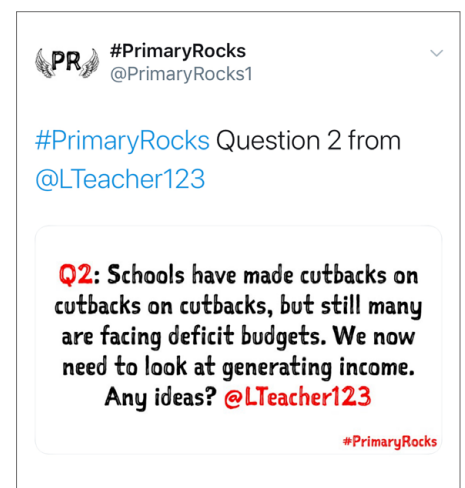
Still, the comments are funny, and a reminder that you can (and should) read rooms as well as books.

**THE QUIET PART OUT LOUD**

Communication was also central to the biggest story in education this week: Matt Hancock's WhatsApp messages leaked by Isabel Oakeshott. Gavin Williamson came under heavy fire from the unions after the content of his messages during the pandemic became public, but are we really surprised?

It feels like a bit of an open secret that government messages of gratitude to teachers for what a wonderful job we did during the pandemic were at odds with their true beliefs. Witness Gillian Keegan's World Book Day tweet and the media representation of teachers during the ongoing strike action. We are work-shy and militant, and it's the government that is doing what is needed to keep children learning.

Meanwhile, this is the kind of discussion school leaders are having on the weekly #PrimaryRocks chat.



I look forward to *The Times* interviewing teachers about that.

**Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts**

# The Knowledge

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



## Universal credit will make closing disadvantage gaps harder

Jenna Julius, Senior economist, NFER

There is a large and long-standing gap in education outcomes between pupils from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers in England. As schools continue to grapple with the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis, it's vital that there are well-targeted and effective strategies to help close this gap.

However, an unintended consequence of the government's roll-out of Universal Credit (UC) means that it will become almost impossible to understand how the performance of disadvantaged pupils is evolving over the next decade.

### Transitional arrangements

Following the introduction of UC in April 2018, all pupils whose families are in receipt of this benefit with household income less than £7,400 are eligible for free school meals (FSM). This is alongside pupils who meet the eligibility requirements for FSM as part of legacy schemes.

At the same time, the government introduced some temporary transitional arrangements to smoothen the roll-out of UC. These arrangements protect the FSM eligibility status of pupils, regardless of whether their family circumstances improve (e.g., their household income increases above the FSM threshold or they cease to be eligible for UC).

These UC transitional arrangements have contributed to large recent increases in the number of pupils who are eligible for FSM, and all else being equal this upward trend is expected to continue until at least the end of the current decade. This is in spite of the fact that the household income threshold for becoming FSM-eligible has not increased since 2018 even though there has been significant wage inflation, which means the criteria for becoming newly eligible for FSM have been getting increasingly stringent.

It is important to note, however, that increases



in FSM eligibility are largely among pupils who may already have been considered in need of additional support.

### Implications for the attainment gap

Our NFER research published last year highlighted that the transitional arrangements will effectively change the definition of disadvantage each year from 2024 onwards. This will make it increasingly difficult to assess the government's progress in reducing disadvantaged pupils' attainment gap, because we will no longer be comparing like with like. It will become increasingly hard to tell whether observed changes are being driven by the changing composition of the disadvantaged group, economic conditions or changes in the relative attainment of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils.

This has been further exacerbated by the fact that in January the government extended the transitional arrangements for a further two years, to finish in March 2025. This will mean that the measurement of the disadvantaged attainment gap will be impacted until at least 2036.

### What can be done?

Today, NFER has published new insights from a roundtable with experts involved in policy and research on disadvantage and education.

The event was held specifically to discuss the implications of the UC roll-out on the disadvantage gap and explore the best ways forward.

The paper outlines potential policy solutions, including that the government should explore the feasibility of establishing a household income-based measure of disadvantage for the future. This would enable the construction of a comparable disadvantage gap measure over time and provide the basis to achieve a greater understanding of the relationship between the extent of economic disadvantage and pupil outcomes. This is not possible using the existing binary FSM eligibility measure and was a key recommendation from our recent research for the Social Mobility Commission.

If the government takes no action to address this issue, the current disadvantage gap measure will be undermined and unfit for purpose. This would leave the wholly unsatisfactory situation of having no credible national metric for monitoring progress in closing the disadvantage attainment gap for the next decade or more, just as the cost-of-living crisis looks set to multiply the number of disadvantaged children.

Action is needed now to avoid this and ensure that long-standing gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are being adequately addressed.

Week in

# Westminster

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



## FRIDAY

Good news for publishing giant Pearson. Profits for its assessments and qualifications arm went up 17.8 per cent last year to £258 million, higher than the wider company's profit growth.

It includes all its UK GCSE and A-level qualifications, as well as other bits of the business such as Pearson VUE, US school and clinical assessments, as well as international courses. The company expects even higher profits this year and beyond.

Pearson says UK and international qualifications sales in particular are up 16 per cent "as exams resumed following Covid-19".

Meanwhile, bad news for publishing giant Pearson. Turns out it is under assessment from UK tax authorities and has set aside a "provision" of £13 million.

It hopes there will be "no liability", but fears "full exposure" could cost it up to £44 million for an "issue" between 2019 and 2021.

It comes after the EU ruled in 2019 that UK tax rules – which allow multinationals to pay little or no tax on profits from financing foreign group companies – "unduly exempted" companies from tax avoidance.

The EU said this constituted "illegal state aid" and ordered the UK to recover it. Pearson has previously appealed the decision.

Phew, that was pretty heavy for Week in Westminster. Now back to the political shenanigans ...

## MONDAY

Uh-oh. Looks like the Sue Gray departure for Labour has shaken the Department for Education.

According to Tory MP Matthew Offord,

the DfE's permanent secretary Susan Acland-Hood has highlighted the details of the civil service code to all her staff should Labour come a-knocking.

"If anybody receives contact from the Leader of the Opposition or a member of the Shadow Cabinet you should tell your permanent secretary right away," she said, according to Offord.

\*\*\*

We know Ben Bradley is a busy man. MP for Mansfield and leader of Nottinghamshire County Council is a pretty full plate.

But the Westminster Education Forum seems to think the Tory has a third job. In a conference about social media, it included a picture of Ben Bradley MP for a speaker of the same name – who is the government relations and public policy manager at TikTok.

## TUESDAY

Good news for Ofqual! An estimate memorandum (basically information about its budget) submitted to the education select committee shows that £300,000 kept aside for potential legal challenges following Covid grades wasn't used because nobody submitted a challenge.

Bad news for Ofqual! It's had to "surrender" the funds (presumably back to the Treasury).

## WEDNESDAY

Amanda Spielman gave headteachers in the north east the inside track on finding her replacement as chief inspector (her term will finish at the end of this year).

According to one, she implied that government folk are looking for a "continuity candidate", rather than a "rip everything up", Michael Wilshaw-type.

Welcome news for the sector?

\*\*\*

The SEND review was launched in 2019 and missed several deadlines before its eventual publication.

But Acland-Hood says publishing this spring is actually "not bad", given the ministerial merry-go-round last year when nearly every Tory MP had a turn as education secretary.

That's all right then!

\*\*\*

For the second year, the pay gap gender bot is retweeting and adding pay gap information on companies that send out tweets about all the lovely work they are doing for International Women's Day.

Some of our favourites include the DfE – which celebrated moves to close the gender gap on science, technology, engineering and maths subjects. But the bot points out that women's median hourly pay at the department is 4.9 per cent lower than that of men.

After the National Education Union shared a message from its joint general secretary Mary Bousted, the bot tweeted that the median hourly pay for women was 7.1 per cent lower than for men.

\*\*\*

Christmas has come early for secondary schools. They will all soon be receiving a free "school kit" containing two copies of the book *Engineers Making a Difference*, 12 "hot topic" posters and a timeline wall chart.

They are created by What on Earth publishing in collaboration with Imperial College London and Gatsby Charitable Foundation.

And people whinge the DfE doesn't do anything for schools...





*Achieving excellence together*

## SECONDARY PRINCIPAL

L24 - L39 | TO START SEPTEMBER 2023


*Do you want to be part of a growing Multi Academy Trust?*

*Are you looking for your next challenge?*

*Great Heights Academy Trust is going through an exciting time of growth and is looking for Principals to help shape the future of our secondary schools.*

We are seeking experienced, ambitious and highly driven secondary leaders to join Great Heights Academy Trust. We are taking a bold and distinctive approach to the appointment of Principals to lead our secondary academies from September 2023. The post holders will be accountable for one allocated secondary school and, in addition, will have opportunities to work as part of our dedicated School Improvement team, and across and beyond the region to shape and deliver exceptional 2-18 inclusive provision for pupils in our growing MAT. We are keen to hear from candidates who are fully committed to making a difference to the life chances of young people and would appreciate the support a MAT provides.

The Great Heights Academy Trust currently comprises six primary schools located in Calderdale, Kirklees and Leeds, and one secondary school located in Kirklees. A further secondary school is due to join us on 1st April 2023. The Trust continues to play a pivotal role both across the region and nationally through our Research School, English Hub, SCITT and Trust & School Improvement Offer (TSIO) work.

 The Mirfield Free Grammar, located in Mirfield, West Yorkshire, joined Great Heights Academy Trust on 1st February 2023. The MFG is an 11-18 provider with 1465 pupils on roll, 325 of which are in the sixth form. The school was graded 'good' by Ofsted in February 2020. Following a period of change in leadership, this is a unique opportunity for an ambitious leader to set the vision and strategic direction of the school.



Colne Valley High School, located in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, is due to join Great Heights Academy Trust on 1st April 2023. The school is an 11-16 provider with 1385 pupils on roll and was graded 'good' by Ofsted in September 2019. This is an exciting opportunity to align the vision and strategic direction moving forward.

**We ask that in your application, you state whether you wish to be considered for either schools or just one particular school.**

**Further information about the role and the MAT can be viewed in the recruitment pack on our website.**

**Visits to the academies and discussions with trust leaders are encouraged. Please contact Great Heights Academy Trust to arrange visits or to discuss further via [mat@greatheightstrust.org.uk](mailto:mat@greatheightstrust.org.uk) or please contact Roz Wood-Ives, Deputy Director of Secondary School Improvement on 01422 761019.**

**Closing Date: 9am Thursday 16th March 2023**

**Interview/Assessment: W/C Monday 20th March 2023**



# HEADTEACHER

Clarendon School

Salary Range L28-L32, (L35 on full expansion)

Required: September 2023 Full Time, Permanent



An exciting opportunity for new Headteacher to lead us on the next stage in our innovative journey.

Clarendon is a specialist school for children with moderate and complex learning difficulties, part of the Auriga Academy Trust, including the three special schools within Richmond Upon Thames.

Situated across three campuses, all co-located with mainstream schools, in modern, purpose built facilities and expanding further to meet increasing need for places. You will inspire, motivate and lead the school community, provide a coherent vision, strategic and creative leadership, and professional management for all parts of Clarendon School and Gateway Centre, ensuring a high-quality inclusive education for all.

You will be the public face and main advocate of the school, connecting and co-operating with pupils, families and staff from across our community including our co-located and Trust partner schools.

We will give you the support and opportunity to provide successful, leadership for an exceptional happy and growing school community.

**Closing Date: 09:00 Monday 24th April 2023**

**Interviews: Thursday & Friday 4th & 5th May 2023**

Visits to school are welcome and conversations with current Head/CEO expected. Please contact Ivan Pryce on 020 3146 1441 or email [HR@aurigaacademytrust.org.uk](mailto:HR@aurigaacademytrust.org.uk) to make an appointment

Clarendon School is committed to the safeguarding and welfare of its pupils and expects all staff to share this commitment. All posts are subject to an Enhanced Disclosure Check from the Disclosure and Barring Service

*The Auriga Academy Trust supports an inclusive culture and diversity for our staff and pupils. We are committed to encouraging further growth from diverse groups and we welcome applications from currently underrepresented groups. We currently have an underrepresentation from ethnic minorities at leadership.*

Clarendon School, Egerton Road, Twickenham, TW2 7SL [www.clarendon.richmond.sch.uk](http://www.clarendon.richmond.sch.uk)

## Virtual School Education Advisor Children Previously Looked After and Children with a Social Worker

Full time, 1-year fixed term post  
£29,439 - £34,723 pa



**Closing date: 26/03/2023**  
**Interview date: 4/04/2023**

This is an exciting opportunity to join Reading's Virtual School (VS) for Children Looked After, Children Previously Looked After and Children with a Social Worker. The Virtual School is committed to promoting the educational achievement of Children Looked After and supports young people to achieve their educational potential, to enable them through attaining good qualifications and a positive school experience to have more fulfilling careers, higher incomes, greater self-confidence and ultimately a better quality of life.

You will report to the VS Assistant Headteacher for Children with a Social Worker and will provide support and guidance, which fosters, sustains and develops the aspirations and achievement of Children Previously Looked After and Children with a Social Worker.

## Virtual School Inclusion Support Officer Full time, 1-year fixed term post

£24,054 - £29,439 per annum



**Closing on 21/03/2023**  
**Interview on 30/03/2023**

Brighter Futures for Children is an independent, not-for-profit-company, wholly owned by Reading Borough Council.

This is an exciting opportunity to join Reading's Virtual School (VS) for Children Looked After, Children Previously Looked After and Children with a Social Worker.

The Virtual School Inclusion Support Officer will report to the VS Data, Inclusion and Finance Manager and will support the VS Assistant Headteachers for Early Years/Primary and Secondary/Post 16 to promote the educational achievement of children looked after by monitoring attendance, supporting with Personal Education Plans (PEPs), preventing exclusion and promoting inclusive practice with schools and partner agencies in order to improve outcomes for children looked after.

**We offer a competitive salary alongside a range of benefits:**

- LG Pension Scheme
- 25 days incremental holiday plus bank-holidays
- Discounted Child Care
- Car Lease Scheme
- Cycle to work scheme
- Season ticket loans
- A range of local discounts



# Headteacher – Woodside Primary School

Permanent and Full-Time

No later than a September 2023 Start

Wonderful Opportunity - Competitive Salary

Woodside Primary School is a three-form entry primary school located in Croydon. Part of the Inspire Partnership Academy Trust, we are a family of schools across Croydon, Medway, and Greenwich, who aim to offer a life changing education for all of our children.

The school is a larger than average school with a thriving nursery provision. Additionally, we are a UNICEF Rights Respecting School. We currently hold Silver level accreditation, and are working towards Gold. We support UNICEF’s Convention of the Rights of the child and encourage our children to reflect on their own rights, and those of others in both a local and global context.

We are seeking to appoint a visionary headteacher who will be relentless in the pursuit of excellence across the curriculum, leading our wonderful community into an exciting future. This role offers a fantastic career opportunity for the successful candidate to shape the strategic vision and direction not only for Woodside, but also make a difference across our Partnership. Working in

collaboration with other school leaders and sharing best practice lies at the core of our school improvement work, so the successful candidate would benefit from these opportunities.

We can offer the successful candidate high quality professional development and coaching opportunities, including involvement with our Headteacher Network for Excellence Programme. You will receive the very best support from both our central services and education leadership teams. You will also be joining a Partnership of truly collaborative and values led professionals.

**Further information about our Trust is available at:**

**<https://www.inspirepartnership.co.uk>** or to discuss this opportunity, please contact Mrs Melissa Carpenter, Trust Education Leader at **[mcarpenter@inspirepartnership.co.uk](mailto:mcarpenter@inspirepartnership.co.uk)**.

Visits to our school are strongly encouraged. Please contact Abby Wong, Executive Assistant on **07828 293392** or **[awong@inspirepartnership.co.uk](mailto:awong@inspirepartnership.co.uk)**.



Closing date for applications:  
**9am on Monday 20th March 2023**  
Interview date:  
**28th or 30th March 2023**

*The Inspire Partnership Academy Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. This post is subject to an Enhanced DBS check. The Inspire Partnership is an equal opportunities employer and welcomes applications from men and women of all ages from any background and from candidates with disabilities.*



# DID YOU KNOW?

As a Schools Week subscriber, your organisation receives a **20% DISCOUNT** on recruitment advertising.

Online listings, classified advertising, and package options available.

“

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

**The Shared Learning Trust**



**Click here** to contact our team

