

SCHOOLS WEEK

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

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The 8 words government spent years trying to keep secret



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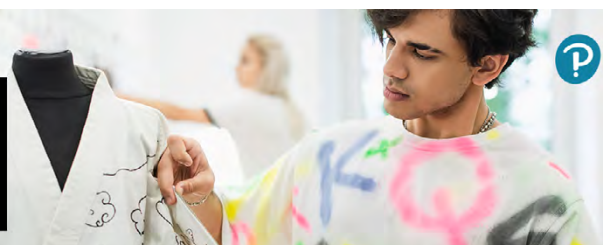


'We cannot accept the continued damage to education caused by government neglect and complacency'

The ASCL school leaders' union ballots its members on strike action for the first time ever

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SCHOOLS WEEK

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Policy paralysis cannot persist until next election

An election is surely still at least a year away, and yet depressingly it feels like we are already in that pre-election purgatory that paralyses progress.

The government faces a huge challenge on teacher pay and school funding. In an unprecedented move, even moderate heads' union ASCL will now ballot its members for strike action (page 5).

But the government appears determined not to engage with the unions, insisting that its offer, arrived at after just six days of talks, is "final".

By putting the ball in the review body's court, Gillian Keegan is kicking the can as far down the road as possible, hoping that falling inflation will pacify fed-up school staff. This will surely backfire.

Potential Ofsted reform falls into the same category. Leaders had expressed dissatisfaction with the inspection system long before the death of Ruth Perry.

While it is reassuring to hear that Amanda Spielman is in listening mode, there is little that she will be able to achieve in the (roughly) eight months she has left in the job. Labour may have more luck, but the strength

of feeling among school leaders is such that the watchdog really cannot afford to wait.

And the consequence of all this is that announcements which actually amount to nothing are dressed up to make it look like the government is doing things.

Spielman has sought to placate the strength of feeling by saying that Ofsted will look at whether inspectors can visit schools that fail over safeguarding issues a bit sooner (page 4).

Meanwhile the government is reannouncing its "ambition" that pupils should study maths to 18, which will only be rolled out in 2025 at the earliest – if at all, as there could be a change of government by then.

And an extended maths hub programme that has already been running for nearly a year is badged up as a new expansion (page 7).

There are quite enough problems facing schools crying out for solutions and, if we remain in this state of lethargy until after the next election, then it is those who learn and work in them who will suffer. They deserve better.

Most read online this week:

- 1 [Trust to give up 'coasting' schools as first intervention published](#)
- 2 [Teacher strikes: How the 'exemption' to support exam pupils will work](#)
- 3 [Keegan: Ofsted 'reviewing' approach to safeguarding](#)
- 4 [Sunak's maths to 18 expert advisory group revealed](#)
- 5 ['Sector-led' attendance hubs to tackle school absence rates](#)

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Ofsted considers safeguarding inspection tweaks after head's death

AMY WALKER
@AMYRWALKER

Ofsted will consider returning earlier to schools that fail inspections because of safeguarding issues, but are “otherwise performing well”, to ensure any improvement is reflected in their grades.

Amanda Spielman, the chief inspector, said in a statement published today that the inspectorate was “making changes” to “acknowledge the continuing debate and strength of feeling” after the death of headteacher Ruth Perry.

The changes also included underlining that heads and teachers could have a colleague from their school or trust join discussions with inspectors. And while they could not share provisional outcomes with parents, they could share it with others “in confidence”.

Spielman also said seminars would be run to “de-mystify” the inspection process for previously exempt schools, who would also get a heads-up of a visit.

Speaking on Times radio yesterday, Nick Gibb, the schools minister, said the watchdog and the Department for Education would “look at” whether the “limiting judgment” was the “right approach”.

Currently schools who fail safeguarding get an ‘inadequate’ grade overall, even if other areas of provision are good.

But unions condemned the announcement.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the leaders’ union ASCL, said Ofsted had “completely lost the trust of leaders and teachers”.

“It will take a great deal more than this to gain their confidence and ensure that the inspection system works in a way that is effective, rather than being punitive and counterproductive.”

Spielman admitted the changes “do not go far or fast enough for some”, but argued Ofsted was constrained by “complexities and boundaries”.

Calls for reforms have heightened following the death of Perry, the headteacher of Caversham Primary School in Berkshire.

Perry’s family said she took her own life in January before the publication of an inspection report that rated the school ‘inadequate’.

Professor Julia Waters, Perry’s sister, said the response “is yet again totally insensitive to the situation and deaf to the urgency of the calls for change”.



Amanda Spielman

‘It will take a great deal more to gain sector’s confidence’

She said neither Spielman or Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, had contacted her.

Spielman said conversations to discuss changes had “intensified” following the “tragic news” of Perry’s death, and she wanted to “bring some of that out into the open”.

While she said Ofsted “won’t be soft on safeguarding”, it recognised “some gaps in schools’ knowledge or practice are easier to put right than others”.

“We are looking at how we can return more quickly to schools who have work to do on safeguarding, but are otherwise performing well,” she said.

“That should enable us to see fast improvements and reflect them in our judgments.”

Ofsted said both options of revisiting either before or after reports are published are under consideration.

On previously exempt ‘outstanding’ schools, Spielman said “for those yet to be inspected we will provide additional clarity about the broad timing of their next visit”.

No further detail was provided.

Perry’s family were critical that she was unable to share the inspection

outcome while waiting for its publication.

Ofsted said while it “strongly recommends” provisional outcomes were not shared with parents, heads and responsible bodies “can share that information with others in confidence”.

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the NAHT, welcomed the changes, but said they would “not go far enough to address either the concerns school leaders have or the strength of feeling amongst the profession”.

Earlier this week Keegan backed Ofsted’s much maligned single-word overall grades, describing them as “clear” and “simple to understand”.

Spielman reiterated that she recognised “distilling all that a school does into a single word makes some in the sector uncomfortable”.

“But as I’ve said previously, the overall grade currently plays an integral part in the wider school system.”

She said she was “not deaf to the calls for change, or insensitive to the needs of schools and their staff; we will continue to listen carefully to the experiences and views of those we inspect.”

“The part we play is small in comparison to those who work in our schools – but it’s in children’s interests that we work constructively together. In that spirit, we will continue to explore ways to make our work as effective and collaborative as it can be.”



Paul Whiteman

NEWS: STRIKES

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Historic ASCL strike ballot is 'last resort' after 'government neglect'

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The dispute over teacher pay and school funding deepened this week as the leaders' union ASCL announced plans to ballot its members on strike action for the first time in its history.

The move raises the prospect of coordinated strikes by teachers and leaders in the autumn term, after the National Education Union (NEU) and NASUWT also announced they would re-ballot their members. The NAHT leaders' union will decide next week whether to go back to members.

ASCL was the only union of the four not to ballot last year in response to the pay deal for 2022-23. But it said it had been left with "no option" after its members rejected ministers' offer of a one-off payment for this year and 4.3 per cent rise for most staff from September.

Its ballot will be held at some point this term, and "if members vote for strike action, we expect that this would take place during the autumn term".

Action is a last resort

Geoff Barton, the union's general secretary, said it was "clearly a very significant step", but the government had "left us with no option other than to conduct a formal ballot for national strike action".

"This action is taken as a last resort and with a heavy heart, but we cannot accept the continued damage to education caused by government neglect and complacency."

He criticised the "intransigence of a government that we can only conclude does not value the education workforce or recognise the severe pressures facing the sector".

Unions had made every effort to resolve the matter through negotiation, he added.

"Unfortunately, the government's offer has failed to sufficiently address pay and conditions, and, critically, did not provide enough funding for even the meagre proposal it put forward."

Ministers' mixed messages

The government gave mixed messages over the dispute earlier this week, when Rishi Sunak insisted his door was "always open", just hours after Gillian Keegan, the education secretary,



Geoff Barton

rejected calls for fresh talks.

Ministers had warned their pay offer was final, and that they would revert to the School Teachers' Review Body process as normal if it was rejected.

Sunak appeared to strike a more conciliatory note as he took questions at a school in north London on Monday.

"Our door is always open, and we continue to hope that we can find a way through," he said.

But that same morning, Keegan insisted discussions about pay would "now happen via the independent pay review body".

Strikes 'exemption' guidance

Keegan also criticised the NEU for calling strikes in the run-up to exams.

Proposed walkouts on April 27 and May 2 would take place about two weeks before the

start of GCSE and A-level tests. Any further strikes announced by the union would take place in late June at the earliest.

However, the union has asked districts to make local arrangements for year 11 and 13 pupils so they could continue to go to school during strike days.

In guidance published this week, it said members given an exemption to support exam year pupils during strikes should be paid for a full day, even if they only worked for part of that day.

Those paid for strike days would be encouraged to donate to the union's hardship fund.

Ofsted inspectors and senior Department for Education staff will also be balloted for strike action by their union, the FDA. Junior staff in the PCS union are also being re-balloted for more action following several walkouts earlier this year.

What the unions are doing next



First ever ballot this term, potential strikes in the autumn



Decision on whether to ballot again due next week



Five further strike days this term and a re-ballot for action in the autumn



Members to be re-balloted this term

£114m of tutoring cash heads back to the Treasury

SAMANTHA BOOTH
@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Ministers have clawed back £114 million of unspent tutoring cash – over a third of the amount handed out last year – with nearly half of the country’s schools not using all their catch-up allocation.

Controversial league tables showing each school’s National Tutoring Programme (NTP) uptake last academic year were published on Thursday, despite unions saying the figures show how cash-strapped schools are, rather than their appetite for tutoring.

The data reveals that 10,700 of about 21,000 eligible schools did not spend all their school-led catch-up allocation.

The cash only subsidised tuition, with schools last year expected to contribute 25 per cent.

Schools Week analysis of the league table data found the amount of unspent cash for school-led tutoring totalled £114 million – 36 per cent of the original £314 million allocated in 2021-22.

The recovered cash will now be returned to the Treasury.

Schools Week revealed in November last year how the scale of clawback was likely to be more than £100 million.

‘Money is lost to education’

Nick Brook, the chair of the DfE’s strategic tutoring advisory group, said the money was “now lost to education”.

He said unspent funding instead should be “rolled forward, to either allow higher subsidy levels in future years or to extend the volume of tutoring taking place in those schools that are making good use of it”.

This year, schools have to fund 40 per cent of costs themselves, rising to 75 per cent from September.

“This year is tough in schools, and next year is likely to be tougher still, financially,” Brook said. “A commitment from the Treasury, that in 2023 tutoring underspend will be reinvested in education recovery and young people, would be hugely welcome.”



The figures show that one in eight schools (2,645) did not use any of the three NTP tutoring routes – school-led, tuition partners or academic mentors – last year when the scheme was run by the HR firm Randstad. More than a quarter used less than 50 per cent of their school-led tutoring funding.

Schools in Birmingham only spent £7 million out of a £12 million allocation – the largest underspend by council area.

Priorities in the wrong place

Heads have previously told *Schools Week* how they have struggled to afford the top-up costs and local tutors.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of ASCL school leaders’ union, said the league tables “tell us little more than what schools have been able to afford”.

“It certainly should not be used as major indicator of a school’s appetite to make use of the tutoring scheme.

“Right from the start, the NTP has been a textbook lesson

in how to take a good idea and undermine it through bureaucracy and inflexibility.

“The publication of these statistics is just the latest example and suggests the DfE’s priorities are in completely the wrong place.”

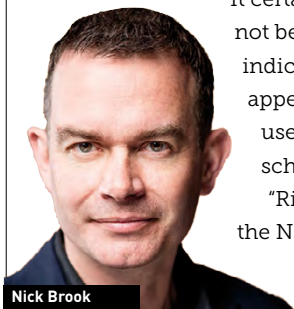
Data reveals 65.7 per cent of schools used the NTP between September and January this academic year, up from 43.7 per cent in October.

The DfE estimates that by January, 3.3 million tutoring courses had started since the programme’s launch in November 2020. Ministers set a target to deliver six million courses by August 2024 – when the four-year programme ends.

Schools had to complete a form detailing how much they spent of their allocation. But some headteachers said they were told they would have cash clawed back, despite claiming to have used all their tutoring cash.

A DfE spokesperson said: “The publication of school level data gives parents valuable information about how schools are delivering tutoring. It is not intended as an accountability measure for schools.”

The Treasury was approached for comment.



Nick Brook

ANALYSIS: MATHS

Sunak's maths hub promise, times-two...

AMY WALKER
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EXCLUSIVE

A promised extension of the government's maths hub school support scheme – announced during prime minister Rishi Sunak's major speech on the subject this week – is not new.

Sunak's re-announced his "ambition" to introduce compulsory maths to 18 on Monday, with a new expert advisory group.

A Number 10 press release stated "the prime minister also committed to extending maths hubs".

Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, said in a written ministerial statement: "To continue this progress, the government is today also announcing an increase in the number of schools supported by the maths hub teaching for mastery programme".

The scheme would now reach 75 per cent of primary schools and 65 per cent of secondaries by 2025, she said.

But *Schools Week* found this is already the aim of the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics, the government's flagship maths scheme, run by Tribal Group.

The £8.9 million contract for the scheme, which outlines the aim, was published early last year and launched in July

When asked for comment, the Department for Education justified its claim of a new announcement because it had "not previously put forward a general public statement announcing these detailed plans".

Its previous public commitment on the reach of the scheme was for 11,000 primary and secondary schools by 2023.

A new national professional qualification (NPQ) for teachers leading maths in primary schools will be fully funded for one year from February.

There will also be updated "targeted support funding" to incentivise staff to take part, including in the smallest schools, for the 2023-24 academic year.

The government also promised to extend its



Gillian Keegan



Rishi Sunak

Mastering Number programme, which supports children in the first years of primary school, to cover years 4 and 5.

Intensive maths hub support will also be introduced for "the schools that need it most", with further support for staff teaching 16 to 19-year-olds resitting maths GCSE or functional skills qualifications.

Sunak said the government needed to change what he described as an "anti-maths mindset".

The new expert group (see box out below) will look at what content students should study up

to 18.

However, it won't look at how to recruit more maths teachers, despite the government falling short of its targets and Sunak admitting: "We need already and we will need more maths teachers and we know that."

Keegan suggested dedicated maths teachers might not be essential for every 16 to 18-year-old because extra maths content could be built into post-16 technical qualifications.

But she admitted the government did not know how many extra teachers would be needed.

"It depends on what the experts' panel say they're actually going to be learning," she said.

Dr Mary Bousted, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said: "Parents and school staff will be left scratching their heads at this latest announcement from the prime minister. Taken as a whole, the government's policies on education simply don't add up."

Nearly half of secondary schools have used non-specialists to teach at least some maths lessons as recruitment crises loom, a recent NFER analysis has found.

Sunak previously admitted the maths-to-18 plan would not be introduced until at least 2025, after a general election.

THE MATHS EXPERT PANEL

Dr Maggie Aderin-Pocock, chancellor, University of Leicester

Peter Cooper, executive principal and chief executive, Heart of Mercia Multi-Academy Trust

Lucy-Marie Hagues, chief executive, Capital One UK

Professor Jeremy Hodgen, professor of mathematics education, University College London

Simon Lebus, non-executive chairman, Sparx

Tim Oates, group director of assessment research and development, Cambridge University Press & Assessment

Charlie Stripp, chief executive, National Centre for Excellence in Teaching of Mathematics

Fionnuala Swann, assistant principal, Nelson and Colne College Group

WHAT IT WILL DO Take evidence from countries with high rates of post-16 numeracy and UK employers to come up with proposals on what "best in class" compulsory maths to 18 might look like, including whether a new qualification is required.

This will include advising what is essential content for 16 to 18-year-olds to be globally competitive, including the skills needed for jobs in the modern economy, and how many hours of study are needed.

WHAT IT WON'T DO Look at how to solve a shortage of maths teachers.

WHEN WILL IT REPORT BACK The end of July.

WILL WE SEE WHAT THEY SAY? Probably not. Terms of reference state it is not a formal review and the group won't be asked to publish its work.

NEWS: RECRUITMENT

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Schools cut classroom hours to hold on to teachers

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Two schools are trialling a four-day teaching week to boost ailing recruitment and retention, with one head saying “yoga or free biscuits” just aren’t enough anymore.

Court Moor School, a secondary in Hampshire, will launch a £300,000 two-year trial from September for all teachers to teach four days, but continue to receive full-time pay

St Philip Howard Catholic Primary in Hertfordshire launched a similar scheme earlier this week, allowing staff one day a week off timetable for planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) and subject leader tasks.

The schemes come as recruitment numbers plunge, with teachers left behind in the rise of flexible working since Covid (see graph).

Paul Jenkins, head of Court Moor School, said it had tried everything from an extra paid day off a year to free yoga classes and health checks.

“But they don’t address the fundamental issue. When you’ve got great staff, you need to make it somewhere they want to stay. It’s not about yoga or free biscuits – it’s about having less time in the classroom.”

An extra five teachers have been recruited, including a maths and a geography teacher attracted by the new flexibility.

The school will cut the number of classes per week for teachers from about 26 each to 20.

But the amount of work teachers already do outside school hours means staff will not get a full day off.

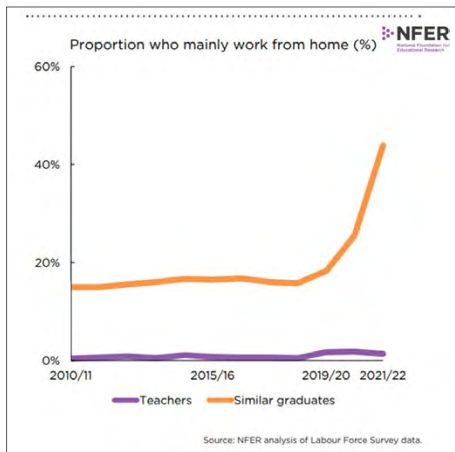
The government’s recent survey found the average working week for teachers was 48.7 hours.

Jenkins said staff could use their non-teaching day for admin tasks or complete them on the other four evenings.

St Philip Howard has also employed an extra full-time and part-time teacher for its scheme, which will run until the end of the next academic year.

Staff must be in school on their “admin day”, however. Mairéad Waugh, its head, said the scheme aimed to “build up flexibility... We’re working towards [them being able to] drop the children off at school or get that elusive dentist or doctor’s appointment.”

The schemes will cost Court Moor about



£150,000 and St Philip Howard about £60,124 a year.

Jenkins said Court Moor had been “prudent” and had reduced capital spending. The extra £2.3 billion, announced in the autumn statement, had made the move a “possibility”.

Waugh said St Philip Howard had raised additional funds through regularly renting out its building.

Suzanne Beckley, the National Education Union’s policy specialist, said unfunded pay rises, record inflation and soaring energy costs would be “the main barrier” to such schemes in many schools.

Schools spend about £26.8 billion on teaching staff each year, so cover to allow all teachers in England to teach for four days a week would cost about £5.36 billion extra.

It would also put more pressure on recruitment as more staff would be needed.

“The question isn’t really whether it’s had an effect or not, it’s whether it’s financially sustainable,” Jenkins said.

Improving flexible working in schools is a key part of the DfE’s teacher recruitment and retention strategy, launched in 2019.

Earlier this year, it awarded outsourcing company Capita a £768,000 contract to run a national programme promoting flexibility across schools and multi-academy trusts.

The government’s working lives survey shows that, as of last year, fewer than half of teachers had some kind of flexible working – with working part-time being the most popular.

Data from the Labour Force Survey shows that the pandemic did not substantively affect the prevalence of home-working for teachers.

But the proportion of similar graduates who reported mainly working from home increased rapidly from about 15 per cent in 2018-19 to 44 per cent in 2021-22.

Teach First has called for a funded 20 per cent reduction in teacher classroom timetables in schools serving the most disadvantaged areas in a bid to make them more “competitive employers”.

Jack Kellam, a researcher at thinktank Autonomy – which has previously touted shortened weeks for schools – said it was important to have “more ambitious policies in place in education” or be left behind.

Teacher Tapp data shows that in January 2018, 42 per cent of teachers said they would choose the profession again if given the option.

When asked the same question this month, just 23 per cent said they would.

“Flexible working allows for a life and the more it becomes a standard in industry, the more Victorian education looks in comparison,” Kellam said.

The DfE was contacted for comment.

Financial headroom? There isn't any, trusts warn

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

The government's claim that schools have the "headroom" in budgets to cover pay rises and other increasing costs "does not resonate" with academy trusts, an influential sector leader has warned.

Leora Cruddas, the chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts (CST), said her members anticipated "a prolonged period of financial challenge and instability", despite claims from ministers that schools could weather the financial storm.

In its evidence to the School Teachers' Review Body, the Department for Education estimated that schools overall could afford £2.4 billion in "new spending" between 2022 and 2024 before facing a "net pressure on their budgets".

'Real concerns' over financial sustainability

Ministers have subsequently claimed schools could afford a 4.5 per cent average teacher pay rise next year with just £90 million of additional funding, after allocating £2 billion for each of the next two years at last year's autumn statement.

In a blog post, Cruddas said: "In contrast to the findings of the DfE", CST members anticipated a prolonged period of financial challenge.

"The DfE's technical note and resultant conclusions about headroom in school budgets does not resonate with the experience and planning in school trusts.

"Trust leaders have reported very real concerns about future financial sustainability."

She warned trust budgets for 2022-23 were prepared last summer "before inflationary increases and before that year's pay offers for teachers and support staff".

"Whilst inflation may be falling, it is not negative, and the cumulative impact across two years may only just be hitting budget plans."

The DfE's calculations also assumed that increases in top-up funding for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities in mainstream schools would cover rising costs.

But Cruddas warned it was "extremely likely that increased costs of SEND provision in mainstream schools have exceeded increases in top-up funding".



The level of funding for the high-needs sector was also "very significantly lower than that experienced by mainstream schools". And Cruddas warned capital investment in the school estate was now "urgent and chronic".

Even the biggest trusts struggle

The Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust, which has 38 schools, said its financial position had "tightened significantly" this year, mostly as a result of pay rises from September 2022.

Oliver Burwood, its chief executive, said additional funding pledged at the autumn statement was "much needed" but came "too late".

"This heaps additional pressure on schools when they are setting next year's budget with us and is leading to some very difficult decisions around staffing. We continue to lobby with the sector for additional funds, but also for a longer-term financial settlement for all schools.

"It feels slightly farcical that yet again we are guessing at next year's pay settlement, and what proportion of this will be funded. The result is felt by our leaders in academies and has a real-life impact upon those that we employ and care for."



Leora Cruddas

Chris Wiseman, the deputy chief executive of the 28-school E-ACT, said as a larger trust it was "arguably more financially resilient than many". It leveraged purchasing power for lower supply chain costs and

pooled funding to centralise costs and move it "to where it is most needed".

Calls for multi-year settlement

But he said there was "no getting away from the truth – the financial pressures facing schools are considerable".

"It's not about a single cost pressure...it's the compound effect of all of this, at the same time."

He said protecting pupils' education would "require long-term thinking – not just a wing and a prayer from one budgeting cycle to the next".

One large trust finance lead, who asked to remain anonymous, said they were already running a deficit driven by high energy costs.

Extra government funding did not cover costs, "which means that if we are to avoid insolvency then we need to reduce that cost base".

They also pointed to falling primary rolls, which they said were seen by the DfE as a "cost saving to return to the Treasury" but "progressively undermining the economics of each class".

Cruddas urged the government to "work with us to build the resilience of the school system". Additional funding announced in the autumn was "welcome, but we need a sustainable, multi-year funding settlement which recognises the cost pressures on schools".

A government spokesperson said its calculations showed that after accounting for pay increases in 2022, £2.4 billion would remain nationally in schools' budgets to cover other rising costs.

INVESTIGATION: ACADEMIES

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Trusts drive suspensions in areas DfE wants them to cut rates

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

EXCLUSIVE

Government plans to slash suspension rates by expanding academy trusts in left-behind regions have been branded naïve after analysis reveals chains in those areas suspend the most pupils.

Department for Education officials set out how expansions and mergers of academy trusts could boost attainment in 55 priority areas said to have the lowest key stage 2 and GCSE results.

New “trust development statements” put forward plans to tackle a range of issues, including cutting temporary and permanent exclusion rates in seven of the areas.

But analysis by Schools Week shows academies in those regions are, on average, suspending more children over the age of 11 than maintained schools.

Our findings have prompted calls for the government to rethink its strategy. But turnaround trusts said suspensions were necessary to ensure failing schools were safe for pupils and staff while embedding better behaviour standards.

‘We’re not making hamburgers’

Stephen Morales, the chief executive of the Institute of School Business Leaders, called for a more “nuanced” approach.

“You can’t assume that a structure that works somewhere in the system is transferrable elsewhere – we’re not making hamburgers.”

“I’m worried we’re thinking this will solve everything. There are important ingredients – like good governance, strong leaders, talented teachers – but to take an entire approach and drop it on another setting I think is a bit naïve.”

The development statements welcomed growth bids from trusts with – among other things – a track record of cutting suspension and exclusion rates in Bolton, Bradford, Doncaster, Kirklees, Liverpool, North Yorkshire and Peterborough.

However, latest figures show the areas’ secondary academies issued, on average, 303 suspensions between September 2019 and December 2021. The number at local authority-maintained schools was 239.

In each of the seven regions – identified as “education investment areas” by the DfE – at least three of the five schools with the highest number of suspensions were



EXCLUSIONS BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 2019 AND DECEMBER 2021			
	AVERAGE HEADCOUNT	EXCLUSIONS/SCHOOL	SUSPENSIONS/SCHOOL
ACADEMIES	1003	3.4	303
LOCAL AUTHORITY-MAINTAINED SCHOOLS	978	3.9	239

academies.

However, academies in those regions did exclude fewer children on average (three over the period) than maintained schools (four).

Doncaster had the four schools with the highest number of suspensions – all of them academies – across the seven EIAs. Each member of the quartet issued at least 2,146 sanctions over the period.

Outwood Academy Danum, run by the Outwood Grange Academies Trust, was first with more than 3,000 suspensions, equating to about eight every school day.

A spokesperson noted “unsatisfactory behaviour within our academies will neither be ignored nor tolerated”.

She insisted most parents and carers expected “no less”, adding that the “focus of sanctions is to provide guidance” so youngsters could make positive changes.

Bolton St Catherine’s, run by the Bishop Fraser Trust, issued 887 suspensions over the two years, the highest of any secondary in the borough.

Rachel Lucas, the school’s head, said her “red-line policy ensures consistency of sanctions for students so our school is safe and children are happy to be here”.

“We want them to follow the rules, accept the consequences if they make a wrong choice and know what their choices mean, both in school and in the wider community.”

“This has not been

a quick process and has meant that we have had an increase in suspensions whilst we embed this culture.”

Suspensions shrink as learning climate improves

Kearsley Academy, which is part of the Northern Education Trust, registered the second-highest number of sanctions (590) in Bolton.

However, Rob Tarn, Northern’s chief executive, said suspensions had shrunk by “more than half” since the end of 2021 as the school had developed a “much-improved climate for learning”.

“We would always strongly advise against setting numerical targets for suspension rates. These are easily achieved by headteachers simply no longer signing suspension letters.

“This can result in unethical leadership behaviours such as illegal exclusions or lower expectations of student conduct, children feeling less safe and declining standards.

“The only reduction in suspensions of any value are those driven by improved school cultures.”

Responding to our findings, a DfE spokeswoman said it was not possible “to draw conclusions by comparing top-line data” in this way.

She also stressed “permanent exclusions and suspensions are more common in secondaries – over 80 per cent of which are academies – and many of the poorest-performing ones have been placed in trusts”.

“Schools benefit from shared resources and knowledge when they are part of a family of schools, including on how to support positive behaviour.”



Stephen Morales

NEWS: ACADEMIES

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Parents' academy fight reignites transparency row

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

Parents are fighting plans to force Sheffield's last maintained secondary into a trust that has "coasting" schools, reigniting controversies over the transparency of academy decisions.

The Department for Education wants the Brigantia Learning Trust to take over the King Edward VII School (KES) after its 'inadequate' Ofsted in September.

Department bosses said its regional director had taken "swift action" to give the secondary – which calls itself one of the "most prestigious" in the city – a "rapid" boost.

Contradicts 'coasting' crackdown

But education professor Mark Boylan, whose daughter is a pupil at KES, said the move contradicted the government's own "coasting" crackdown to force schools with two less-than-good inspections into new academy trusts.

Two of Brigantia's five schools – Yewlands and Concord Junior – are 'requires improvement' and classed as "coasting" under the government's criteria. The latter has been run by the trust for nine years with less-than-good Ofsteds in 2017 and 2019.

Parents, who said most did not think Brigantia was the right choice, also criticised transparency over the decision. They planned to protest outside Sheffield's City Hall this weekend.

They were only alerted to the proposal when a "vigilant parent" spotted a copy of a draft agenda for a regional director's meeting next week.

Parents said this left them with just three days to "make our views known". They also claimed KES was not made aware until this point. The school has not responded to a request for comment.

'This has been done to us, not with us'

Emma Wilkinson, whose 12-year-old daughter attends KES, said: "This has been done to us, not with us.

"It's being done behind closed doors. We have asked for the criteria used to select this academy trust, but have been told we're not allowed to have it.

"We asked who else came forward, to be told



King Edward VII Upper School

we're not allowed that information. There's no transparency at all."

An official complaint to the government from Boylan, seen by Schools Week, also questioned a potential conflict of interest.

Rizwana Parveen, one of Brigantia's trustees, is a senior DfE civil servant, based in the Greater Sheffield area.

She also worked in the office of the regional schools commissioner (RSC) for the East Midlands and Humber between 2020 and 2021, which made decisions for Sheffield schools before boundaries were redrawn and it became known as the current Yorkshire and Humber office.

Boylan called on Alison Wilson, the regional director, to "consider whether it would be appropriate to declare a conflict of interest in the matter".

Previous guidance outlining the approach of RSCs to finding sponsors for schools stated factors that included the trust's capacity and "track record of school improvement" be considered.

But it has since been superseded by the regional directors' decision-making framework, which is less specific and notes that the aims of transfers are "educational excellence for all", "creating a self-improving system" and "preserving independence".

Boylan said Brigantia had not delivered significant and sustained improvement for its existing academies. "Adding KES to its

portfolio sends an unfortunate message to schools and trusts about DfE expectations."

'Academisation is liberating'

However when challenged by Wilkinson during a Times Radio call-in on Thursday, Nick Gibb, the schools minister, said: "I wouldn't worry about academisation – it's a liberating experience.

"It's not a punishment. It gives professional autonomy to the school. They'll have a sponsor to help them [KES] deal with the problems of safeguarding to help them improve."

KES was rated 'inadequate' over ineffective safeguarding. Inspectors said leaders did not do enough to keep children safe, with a significant minority of pupils feeling they did not have "an adult to speak to".

But three of the five areas were rated 'good'.

The DfE said there was "no requirement" for the governing body, the chain or regional director to carry out a consultation.

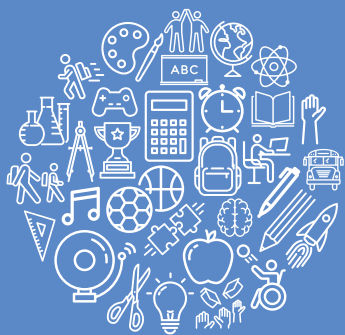
The department also claimed Brigantia was in "the process of driving up standards" at its two less-than-good schools and had "already made improvements".

A Brigantia spokesperson said further information would be provided by the regional director, advisory board and the DfE after the regional meeting. "Ultimately a decision will be made by the secretary of state."

The trust and the DfE did not comment when asked about Parveen's position in the civil service.



Nick Gibb



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NEWS

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Think tank reveals plan to cut chatbot cheating

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@FCDWHITTAKER

Sixth-formers should take an additional subject in year 12 assessed solely by speaking tests to broaden the curriculum while curbing the risk of chatbot cheating, a think tank has said.

A report from the EDSK also recommended that the extended project qualification should become compulsory, but be ungraded, and sixth-form funding should be increased to expand the curriculum as they grapple with the rise of generative AI systems such as ChatGPT.

The development of more sophisticated “generative” AI has prompted widespread concern in education, albeit alongside hope that such technology could have a positive impact on teacher workload. Exam boards and the government recently published guidance for schools on its use.

Today, EDSK, which is run by Tom Richmond a former Department for Education adviser, warned written exams must “continue to be the main method of assessing students’ knowledge and understanding”.

“In contrast, placing a greater emphasis



on coursework and other forms of ‘teacher assessment’ would increase teachers’ workload and lead to less reliable grades that may be biased against students from disadvantaged backgrounds.”

There was “no realistic prospect” of teachers, headteachers or exam boards being able to consistently detect malpractice, making coursework-style tasks unsuitable for A-levels and other high-stakes exams.

However, EDSK has also recommended some changes to the qualifications pupils sit in the sixth form, warning that written exams “focus on testing students’ knowledge and understanding in written form in a silent exam hall, rather than

reflecting the wider skills that many employers and universities prize”.

To broaden the curriculum and develop a “wider range of skills than those promoted by written exams”, students aged 16 to 19 taking classroom-based courses “should be required to take one additional subject in year 12”. This would be “examined entirely through an oral assessment”.

To ensure students could develop their research and writing skills beyond exams, the think tank also said the extended project qualification should be made compulsory.

However, it should be used as a “low-stakes skills development programme”, and should “therefore be ungraded”.

To allow schools to expand their curriculum to include the additional subject and extended project, per-pupil funding for sixth forms should rise by £200 a year to reach £6,000 by 2030.

Richmond said the best way to produce rigorous and credible grades while guarding against malpractice, “particularly when faced with increasingly sophisticated AI”, was to keep written exams but add in new challenges to help students develop a broader range of skills.

“The future of assessment for A-level students should therefore be a combination of written exams and oral exams alongside an independent research project of their choice.”

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

Teach First holds on to its contract for another two years

Teach First’s contract has been extended for another two years, despite missing its targets as the teacher recruitment crisis worsens.

The flagship teacher training provider admitted “significant recruitment challenges” last year when taking on 1,394 recruits, missing its target by a fifth. Teacher recruitment overall was 40 per cent below target.

The charity lost £2 million in bonuses and their recruitment was branded “inadequate” by the Department for Education in its key performance indicator monitoring. It was rated as “good” against three other government targets.

The programme recruits the “best and brightest” graduates and career changers who could be “highly skilled teachers and leaders”.

Teach First’s contract has now been extended until October 2027, taking the overall grants it

will have received since 2021 to £169 million. But it must still recruit 1,750 trainees each year in 2024 and 2025 for the two-year courses.

Meanwhile, a tendering exercise for the contract after 2027 has been launched.

The DfE said it was “keen to gain market insights and understand market capacity, capability and interest”.

It is also “receptive to understanding alternative and innovative solutions” outside the current delivery model.

Prospective bidders are being asked what they think are the “main barriers to enter and operate in the market to attract, train and develop” high-flying teacher trainees with leadership capacity.

They are also asked how attractive the existing Teach First model is.

Teach First declined to comment. But it

previously said it was “proud” of last year’s numbers “given the significant recruitment challenges the whole sector is facing”.

A new autumn institute, which it piloted last year, will re-run this year.

The charity is also operating in a much tougher market. A recent report from High Fliers Research found four top graduate employers offering starting salaries of more than £50,000 this year, while a quarter of the top 100 employers were offering salaries of more than £40,000.

Teacher starting salaries are currently £28,000 outside London.

Teach First has previously called for the government to offer a £5,000 recruitment bonus for teachers who work in the most deprived areas “to ensure the profession remains competitive”.

NEWS: ACADEMIES

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School that spent thousands overturning academy order to now join MAT

AMY WALKER
@AMYRWALKER

A primary school that won a judicial review against the government’s refusal to revoke a previous academy order – costing tens of thousands of pounds – is now consulting on plans to join a trust.

The High Court quashed an academy order against Yew Tree Primary School in the West Midlands in July 2021 after a judge ruled the Department for Education’s decision was “irrational”.

The department was forced to pay the school costs of £75,000, as well as its own legal fees.

But less than two years later, Yew Tree has now launched a formal consultation to join Leigh Trust.

Jamie Barry, the school’s headteacher, said it had long been open to considering academisation, just at “the right time”.

An academy order was issued in 2019 following an ‘inadequate’ Ofsted rating in January that year.

By October, a month after Barry joined, a further inspection led



Jamie Barry



an ‘requires improvement’ rating.

“We needed to make sure we maintained the momentum of our school improvement journey, so to try and also deal with academisation at the same time would have been counter-intuitive,” he said.

The school argued in court that it was unable to demonstrate further improvement while inspections were suspended during the pandemic. It was rated ‘good’ in October 2021.

Barry said dwindling local authority

budgets and difficult recruitment helped to prompt its recent decision to look again at becoming an academy.

“If we’re part of a multi-academy trust we can get better value in terms of procurements, we can share resources,” he said.

“We didn’t want to be in the position ever again where we were being forced,” he said.

As well as “strong” similarities in “vision and values” and approaches to curriculum and assessment, Barry said it was important to join a smaller trust.

“We wanted a more local trust...that was still growing so we could be part of that development.”

Leigh runs six primary schools in the West Midlands. The chosen sponsor for Yew Tree under the previous academy order, Shine Academies, runs four.

The DfE, which said it was “pleased” about the consultation, refused to divulge how much it had spent fighting the judicial review.

“We know the best trusts enable the best leaders to support more schools, while empowering teachers to improve educational outcomes,” said a spokesperson.

JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS

Northern ‘transforms’ its schools after damning Ofsted

A multi-academy trust that failed to give children “the education they deserve” has made “monumental and life-changing” improvements, Ofsted inspectors said.

The Northern Education Trust has become the first MAT in seven years to have been assessed twice by the watchdog.

Leaders were told in a summary evaluation in 2017 – which took place after inspectors raised “concerns” – that the chain had “failed to secure urgent and necessary improvements in too many of its schools”.

But in an evaluation due to be published, Ofsted said leaders and trustees had “transformed how the trust operates. This has transformed the schools in the trust and the experiences and life chances of the pupils who attend them.”

Inspectors noted “schools that have recently joined the trust have undergone monumental improvements that are life-changing for pupils and staff”.

Of the trust’s 22 schools, based across the north of England, six are ‘outstanding’ and 15 ‘good’. One has yet to be inspected since joining.

Ofsted said many served communities with high levels of deprivation. Nearly half of the trust’s pupils were eligible for pupil premium funding, compared with a quarter nationally.

It praised how leaders “see the trust as ‘one school over many sites’. There was no real distinction between trust leaders and school leaders.

The report said the trust employed an “80:20” model across its sites. This worked with leaders using “the ‘80’ for consistent trust strategies such as expectations for learning, curriculum and attendance policies”.

Headteachers “ensure these methods work for their school community by devising local ‘20’ variations”. When these tweaks “are successful, leaders find out why and, sometimes, incorporate them into the ‘80’ that everyone uses”.

Reading also ran through the curriculum like “letters through a stick of rock”.

Inspectors noted six years ago Northern’s pupils did “not receive the quality of education they deserve” and that the achievement of disadvantaged youngsters was “especially poor”.

Eight schools were ‘requires improvement’, four ‘inadequate’.

Following his appointment in 2017 after the inspections, Rob Tarn, the trust’s chief executive, said schools were revamped with “a list as long as your arm of the things we’d done”. This included new marking, assessment and reporting systems within the first half-term.

“What this latest evaluation does is say ‘there’s a group of schools that historically never performed well, everyone believes in the same vision, the kids’ outcomes are exceptional, so why’s it not OK to think of it as one school over many sites?’”

INVESTIGATION: TRANSPARENCY

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Influencer ad spend finally revealed after 2.5-year battle

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Ministers have finally revealed how much two influencers were paid to promote its £3.6 million back-to-school campaign after lockdown - releasing an eight-word response after a two-and-a-half year battle for transparency.

The fight is likely to have cost the Cabinet Office thousands of pounds more on top of the £13,000 it has now admitted it paid the pair during August 2020.

The government department - previously slammed by MPs over "substandard" Freedom of Information handling - was in the process of taking court action over our request for information, but dropped the case at the last minute.

TV presenter Kirsty Gallacher used her Twitter and Instagram accounts to "reassure parents on the changes and safety measures in place at schools" during the pandemic.

She was pictured with Dr Philippa Kaye, a celebrity GP, visiting Charles Dickens Primary in south London to "hear about the new measures put in place to make schools as safe as possible on our kids' return".

In November 2020, Schools Week submitted a FOI request on costs, including how much the two were paid.

But the Cabinet Office claimed disclosure would "prejudice the commercial interests" of the department, celebrities and MullenLowe Group, the advertising company involved.

After Schools Week complained to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), the department did reveal the overall campaign cost £3.6 million.

The ICO last year ordered the Cabinet Office to disclose influencer pay, saying: "Any celebrity seeking to tender for such a role in a future campaign is likely to submit the most competitive tender/fee, as it is in their interests to do so.

"Additionally, although some contracts may be similar in nature, they will not be the same, and different factors will be taken into account when pricing and awarding future contracts of this nature."

In October last year, ministers said they would challenge the ICO's decision in the first-tier tribunal court.

But four months later, after various legal



Kirsty Gallacher @TheRealKirstyG · Sep 2

#AD It's #BackToSchool this week! I visited @CDPS_Southwark to hear about the new measures put in place to make schools as safe as possible on our kid's return, supported by @educationgovuk. Visit gov.uk/backtoschool for more info #BackToSchool2020 #backtoschoolsafely



3

2

41



documents had been prepared and submitted by both parties, the department suddenly withdrew its appeal after "reassessing its position".

Finally - 890 days later - the Cabinet Office revealed it paid Gallacher £10,000 and Kaye £3,000. The FOI response contained eight words (see image).

Transparency laws state public bodies should respond to requests within 20 working days.

Maurice Frankel, the director of the Campaign for Freedom of Information, said the case was "wholly unreasonable. There's no reason why finding out about government spending should be so difficult.

"Government departments would do themselves a lot of good by being more open in the first place. Handing the information over at a very late stage ... is usually a sign that it's finally dawned ... that it's likely to lose its appeal."

The Cabinet Office press team refused to say how much it spent challenging the case, claiming details of any legal costs would be in its annual accounts.

But Geraldine Swanton, a legal director at Shakespeare Martineau law firm, said legal fees could be "substantial and depending on the complexity of the matter, can cost thousands of pounds".

The department had previously spent at least £300,000 blocking similar information requests in court, *The Times* reported last year.

MPs on the public administration and constitutional affairs committee last year found there had been a "slide away from transparency" on some FOIs.

William Wragg, the committee's chair, said the department had "substandard FOI handling"

Annex - Information for disclosure

Ms Kirsty Gallagher - £10,000
Dr Philippa Kaye - £3,000

The eight words the Cabinet Office kept secret for two and half years

and must improve compliance and "regain public confidence". An ICO spokesperson said withdrawing tribunal appeals can "waste" public resources. It would keep the issue under review, they added.

Cabinet Office analysis showed that Gallacher's social media posts had 1,912 likes and 27 comments. She later deleted one of the tweets that did not disclose it was an advert.

The department said her posts and others by the influencer duo This Is Mothership had a reach of more than 800,000.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the ASCL school leaders' union, said: "Schools take extremely seriously their duty to use public money in a transparent and responsible manner. There is therefore an expectation that the government will do the same."

A government spokesperson said it "used every means possible to keep the public informed during the pandemic. This included our use of social media influencers, who helped us reach a wider audience than using only traditional advertising."

Kaye declined to comment. Gallacher did not respond.

Governors told to publish diversity data, but MAT report delay

SAMANTHA BOOTH & JACK DYSON
@SCHOOLSWEEK

Governing boards have been told to collate and publish their own diversity data, although campaigners say the move is not enough to address “alarming” representation numbers.

Meanwhile, a pledge to research how successful multi-academy trusts narrow attainment gaps for different ethnic groups to help drive up attainment nationally has been delayed.

The government promised action as part of a more “Inclusive Britain” following the controversial Sewell report on race and ethnic disparities published last March.

The Department for Education has updated guidance encouraging heads of academies, colleges and maintained schools to collect the information on its trustees.

Officials stressed the figures “must be [made] widely accessible”, as they aimed to make boards “increasingly reflective of the communities they serve”.

However, the guidance only “encouraged” boards to “collect and publish diversity data about the board and any local committees.

“Board members can opt out of sharing their information, including protected characteristics, at any given time, including after publication.”

The government suggested a similar approach to how schools collated the diversity data of pupils.

But Sam Henson, the National Governance Association’s (NGA) director of policy and information, said he did not think the guidance “is enough on its own”.



“They need to be doing way more to increase the awareness of what governing bodies do and why people should get involved as it’s largely unseen now – just tweaking the guidance doesn’t do that. This could be done through a recruitment drive led by the DfE.”

The NGA revealed in September that just 6 per cent of school governors and trustees who responded to its annual survey were black, Asian or minority ethnic.

The study of 4,000 volunteers also showed the number aged under 40 was also the lowest on record at 6 per cent.

The findings suggest boards have become less representative. Twelve months before the most recent survey, 93 per cent of respondents were white, while just under a tenth were under 40.

Henson said the diversity figures “don’t really reflect the communities that governing boards serve – the truth is they paint an alarming picture.

“I’m not convinced boards publishing data on this is going to do much, but anything to get the discussion focused on this is a positive.”

The government also pledged to investigate strategies used by MATs “who are most successful at bridging achievement gaps for different ethnic groups and raising overall life chances”.

These were due in 2022, but an update this week showed the research was only commissioned in January this year.

Isos Partnership will look at secondary schools and report back on good practice that can be used by others to reduce attainment gaps.

Researchers will also seek views on “any other contextual influences” identified as influencing attainment by different ethnic minority groups.

This will be finalised by summer 2023.

The DfE has ruled out publishing school-level data on academic performance of ethnic groups for fears it could lead to identification and “harm” a pupil’s prospect, “for example when seeking job opportunities”.

Black Caribbean, mixed white and black Caribbean, and other black pupils are all less likely to meet the expected standard at all stages than white British pupils.

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOTH

DfE’s top SEND official leaves as reforms introduced

A senior Department for Education civil servant overseeing the SEND review is leaving just as implementation of the long-awaited reforms begin.

Indra Morris, the department’s director general for families, will leave in the coming months after six years.

Her portfolio includes children’s social care, attendance and exclusions, as well as special educational needs and alternative provision.

The DfE has just started implementing its SEND and AP reforms, three years after the landmark review was launched in 2019. There have been six children’s ministers in that time.

A department spokesperson said Morris “led teams with compassion to help improve the lives of families and young people”.

“This includes reform of children’s social care, special educational needs and disabilities, alternative provision, the Covid response for vulnerable children and the recent expansion of childcare provision. We wish Indra all the best in her future endeavours.”

A recruitment drive has been launched to find a new £130,000 a year director general. A job advert said the successful applicant for the £130,000 a year post would lead 800

staff through “once in a generation” reforms, including the childcare expansion announced in the spring budget.

Prospective candidates should have experience of “successful transformational delivery and implementation in large complex systems”.

They will be interviewed by a panel, whose members include DfE permanent secretary Susan Acland-Hood and Steve Crocker, previously president of the Association of Directors of Children’s Services.

Graham Archer will be acting director general until a replacement is appointed.



The 13th annual

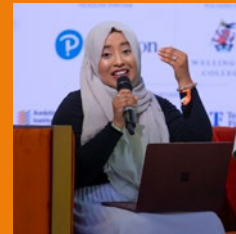
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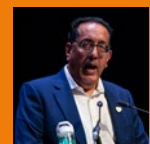
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Profile

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL



‘You have to let go of your ego, and that’s hard’

Trust, transparency and shared accountability are themes that run through trust boss Christine Stansfield’s conversation. The former car saleswoman tells Jessica Hill why it’s also important to leave your ego at the door...

Christine Stansfield tells me she was on the verge of pulling out of this interview because she feared she might “say something stupid”. It is symbolic of her leadership style that

she is upfront about it, and about how important it is for her school leaders to “let go” of their egos and embrace “heartfelt collaboration” with each other. Stansfield claims the close working

approach of leaders of the seven Leicestershire schools within her trust, and their willingness to leave their egos at the door, is a strategy that holds the key to “future-proofing education”.

Profile: Christine Stansfield

She acknowledges she has “high expectations and there are aspects of the trust that are not where I want them to be”, but believes she could not have survived as a chief executive if she were “not ready to be transparent and vulnerable”.

Heartfelt collaboration

The death of headteacher Ruth Perry has prompted soul-searching from school leaders of late, and the “pressure and vulnerability being felt across leadership in schools” worries Stansfield.

“It was difficult enough to recruit and retain the best leaders before, and I’m seeing many people considering carefully how they want to spend their time on the planet,” she says.

Her solution lies in how leadership teams support each other.

Every Friday morning, school heads meet as a team for nearly three hours for “support and challenge”, with a “shared high expectation of ourselves”.

“More than to the trust, there’s an accountability into the team ... that feels first and foremost that it belongs together, rather than belonging to an individual school.”

In the past she moved heads between schools, believing that leaders who remain at the same school have an “overpowering” relationship with it that “makes it increasingly difficult to keep focus on pupils...because sometimes they’d far rather just not have difficult conversations.

“Belonging first and foremost to a trust leadership team enables leaders to look reflectively. The school’s problems then are not the headteacher’s but the trust’s shared problems, and we solve them together. That feels like a much more sustainable model.”

Stansfield believes the “shared accountability” her heads have gives a “huge sense of security” for their schools, because if “something happened to a leader, there’s a



‘I’m way too honest to sell cars convincingly’

group of people with collective ownership of that [school]”.

Before she became chief executive in 2017, Stansfield admits she was “quite competition orientated” and “would not have believed this depth of collaboration was possible. Now I’ve seen what real collaboration feels like...heartfelt collaboration, which is palpable and exciting.”

Recruiting pupils as teachers

Founded in 2014, Mowbray changed direction when Stansfield took over to focus entirely on school improvement – and the evidence points to her success. Her six Melton Mowbray schools all have a ‘good’ rating, and only one – Iveshead School in Shepshed – remains ‘requires improvement’, having not been inspected since Mowbray took over in December.

But it has been a rocky road, with some

“really difficult” relationships between the central and school-based teams and challenges in school performance. The improvement model has, she says, “evolved significantly” over time.

Whereas previously the trust had improvement leaders for maths and English, they were expected to deliver “better and more” than teachers.

“It implies most trust employees are going wait for this person to come along and tell them how to do everything. I’d find that quite insulting.”

The current strategy is all about tackling her greatest challenge, recruitment and retention.

The trust employs a “talent manager” and ensures six-weekly conversations with those teachers “absolutely smashing it” to know their “direction of travel”. Heads have organised secondments to hold on to their

Profile: Christine Stansfield



Stansfield as a child

most talented teachers and Stansfield is also turning to her pupils as potential recruits.

"We're asking how many of our existing key stage 4 and 5 pupils we think might have the potential [to become teachers]. Let's start career conversations with them... Let's track those we think have the potential [when they finish school] and support them. Let's get them in for taster days...get them immersed."

Pandemic has set back family dialogue

Stansfield believes the pandemic has "interrupted the dialogue" of schools with some families and, for some vulnerable children, attendance has become a daily negotiation.

The "assumed professionalism and gravitas" of heads and teachers is up for grabs, making staff retention even harder. "The challenge is everything has to be argued, and we need even better people then to negotiate and get things back on track."

Stansfield believes the business model, upheld since 1944, of "dividing pupils into chunks of 30 and dividing the day into five hours" is still "just about affordable. But the emerging needs of students and their feelings about school are challenging that. It

'Heartfelt collaboration is palpable and exciting'

is impossible for schools to make the level of response being demanded by communities. That's quite frightening."

Letting go of ego

Having once been a "competitive headteacher with an ego" – she was head of John Ferneley College for five years – she understands that "you can tell me to collaborate and I'll smile and nod, but actually really collaborating feels completely different...you have to let go of your ego, and that's hard."

When did she first let go of her ego? "I'm not sure I have." But she has "carried" the realisation of her own ego since, as a head of department, she asked herself whether she would rather her department got the best exam results, but her own classes were two thirds from the bottom, or that her results were the best and her department's were poor.

It was a "pin-drop moment" when she asked a similar question to her trust's heads. Would they rather their own school achieve 'outstanding' but one trust school remain 'inadequate' – or that they are all rated 'good'. Not everyone put the interests of the wider trust above their school, but she says that's fine as long as those leaders understand that's what it feels like and wrestle with it.

Plan to tackle community needs

Collaboration also means schools working with other public bodies to tackle rural deprivation. She believes many trusts are "spiralling away" from their communities,

but with council services significantly diminishing, who's stepping into the space if not schools?

Mowbray is starting a campaign over local bus service cuts that she blames for reducing her schools' post-16 provision. She also wants to "do something powerful" on poverty – "firstly as a group of schools, then involving other community settings".

She also wants to grow the trust. Mowbray has one secondary and five feeder primaries in Melton Mowbray, and is seeking to "create the same collaborative group of schools" 20 miles away in Shepshed.

The ultimate aim is for 12 to 14 schools in clusters of nearby communities, but Stansfield "worries about swift growth". Taking on a school that could not thrive within her trust is "a red line" she will not cross. "We have to make sure the ambition and values are there, because that's the bit that we can't shift on. Most other things are up for discussion."

From selling cars to teaching

Stansfield grew up in east London and after studying English at the University of Kent and an MA at Lancaster, had a brief stint as a car salesperson – "I'm way too honest to sell cars convincingly". But it is a memory she evokes when feeling downbeat about her current job.

"When it's dark on a Thursday and we're managing behaviour, I think 'but I could be selling cars in Lincolnshire'. That has motivated me through quite a lot of my career."

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Colin Diamond sets out what the DfE might do to bring school inspection in line with high-performing systems – if only it listened to its own research

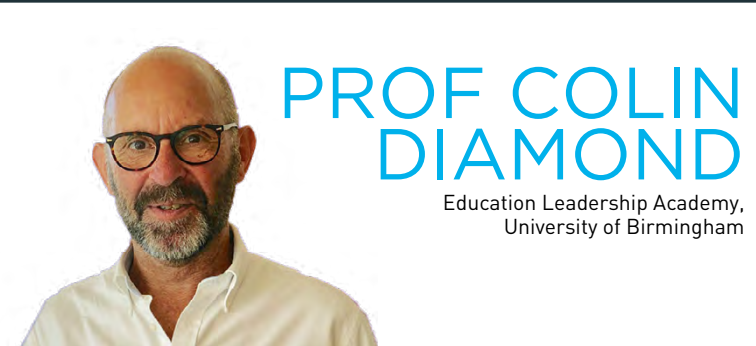
The cumulative impact of staying open during Covid, compensating for increasing levels of child poverty and a crisis in recruiting and retaining teachers has required extraordinary resilience from schools, especially those serving disadvantaged communities. Then, amid increasing frustration about an accountability system growing ever more disconnected from the realities of teaching and school leadership, came news of the death of headteacher Ruth Perry.

The response has been raw, visceral and disturbing, catapulting the debate about Ofsted on to the national stage. We must explore the role of inspections in school improvement, and where better to turn than the DfE's own research?

There can be no denying that something was needed to shake things up when Ofsted was created in 1992. Under-performance was rife, and there was a good argument for grading lessons and schools. Since then, the values of high standards, educational equity, professional accountability and evidence-based practice have become deeply embedded. But it has come at a cost.

Too often “doing things right” overrides “doing the right thing”. Costly armies of consultants provide pre-inspection “mocksteds”; schools know when they are “in the window” and monitor website activity to ascertain when inspectors are gearing up for their visit. Each new framework attempts to undo the gaming the previous framework set into motion.

So what can we learn from the DfE's research about the characteristics of



PROF COLIN DIAMOND

Education Leadership Academy,
University of Birmingham

There's a better system than Ofsted – and the DfE knows it

“high-performing” education systems and what is the role of “high-stakes” inspection in European countries?

A DfE study looked at Estonia, Finland and Germany, which all have high levels of decentralisation. It also looked at Singapore and Taiwan, which are harder to compare with England as both have centralised systems.

from disadvantaged backgrounds.

It found no overall correlation between high-stakes inspection systems and high-performing schools.

Where inspection exists and adds value, it is one component of a balanced system that supports lower-performing schools through a range

“ The debate has been catapulted on to the national stage

The study found that the common factors associated with high performance are the weight given to three core elements: the value placed on high levels of equity in outcomes and achievement, high-quality teacher development, and support for pupils

of approaches, including assistance from inspectors (but not relying on their feedback, and recognising that follow-up is required), school-to-school collaboration, investment in additional resources and teachers' professional development, and a non-



time-limited approach.

Working alongside schools rather than telling them what to do is a common feature and, as in some parts of Germany, they operate in a low-stakes way by not generally publishing inspection results and keeping the emphasis on quality process criteria, not outcomes. Consequently, these models are not punitive towards schools in socio-economically challenged areas.

In short, they are designed to improve schools, not to help them pass inspections and punish them for failing to do so.

Given that much of the above is lifted from DfE's own research, it is hard not to conclude that the current government likes things as they are. But the evidence-based approach to raising standards and reducing heads' collective blood pressure would be to abandon the crude, narrow way of defining success that ministers and the chief inspector appear wedded to.

Overnight, the 'outstanding' and 'inadequate' grades could be removed in favour of 'good' and 'requires support'. School performance could be summarised in a scorecard rather than one-word judgments.

In the medium term, appointing a new chief inspector with teaching experience would be a big step towards restoring confidence. The role should be seen to be independent and distant from government, its statements evidence-based and unafraid to speak truth to power.

And in the longer term, we should be confident enough to learn from international research about the standing and performance of our education system, rather than cherry-picking ideologies from the US.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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HUGH GREENWAY

Chief executive, The Elliot Foundation Academies Trust

The fault is not in Ofsted. It is in in ourselves

We attach too much to inspectors' reports – and that's something that we can control, writes Hugh Greenway

I did not want to write this piece. I've watched from the sidelines over the past month as social media filled with the views of people taking private tragedy and making it about themselves, projecting on to it their own sense of injustice or their own agenda. All this has only confirmed my view that the real trouble with Ofsted is us – what we do with its "judgments", our gross over-reactions and over-simplifications.

Ofsted is not a regulator or an employer. It does not end people's careers. It is merely an inspector. No more. No less. The responsibility for the broken and dysfunctional contract between school leaders and society lies with us, the employers.

I am not saying that many school leaders do not live in fear of an unfair or unreasonable outcome. Or that headteachers do not fear for their livelihoods and sanity.

But the reason they fear a rigged accountability system is because we have not done our job. We have not told them regularly that Ofsted

is merely one input among many others about school effectiveness. We have not reassured them that an unfavourable judgment leads to support and reinforcement, rather than exile and shame.

Unfortunately, because education has become so fragmented over the past 13 years, accountability is all that is left. Cynically, one might observe that it is much simpler and cheaper for the government to blame someone else for failure than to engage in the complex and expensive process of improving public services. A school has been found to be under-performing. The sword of Damocles has fallen on its leader. All is well in the world.

If we want a fairer system, then we must stand with school leaders whose schools could do better. To do that, we need to genuinely know our schools, and Ofsted is part of how we do. Looking the world in the eye and arguing that a poor Ofsted report is leading to improvements that would be ill-served by a change of leadership – that's on us.

If you want to improve a system (rather than giving the appearance of it), you have two inputs: picking the team and setting the direction. And one of the core elements of setting the direction is making a



“ Ofsted is probably the least broken bit of our system

judgment about how much change your team can cope with.

An organisation cannot get better faster than its people can cope with change. Poor leaders either underestimate tolerance for change and accept under-performance, or they over-estimate it and break the whole organisation. Keeping the organisation in the sweet spot between complacency and recklessness can only be done with detailed knowledge of its component parts, and an Ofsted report every five years falls well short of that.

Ofsted is far from perfect. However, unlike most instruments of government, it knows this and doesn't pretend to be. In fact, it is probably the least broken bit of our education system. Respected internationally, it is in the main staffed by people who are knowledgeable about education

and who want to improve our system.

Of the 60 inspections I have been on the receiving end of over the past decade or more, only one was genuinely inaccurate – an error rate of 1.66 per cent. Even then, we didn't dispute the grade but the tone of the report. And then we made it clear to the senior leadership team that we saw the judgment in the broader context of the progress they were making and that they should not worry.

Knee-jerk responses to single inspections are driving this pervasive and high-stakes sense of dread and all the bad practice it engenders. They represent a failure of governance in maintained schools and academies, not Ofsted. Creating the psychological safety that school leaders and teachers deserve and need to drive genuine improvement is our job.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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The SEND and AP improvement plan offers no answers for children with autism from marginalised groups, writes Prithvi Perepa

Recent data from the Department for Education shows that about 2.2 per cent of the school population has autism as their primary need – and that this is increasing at an average of 9.5 per cent each year. With more children on the autism spectrum in schools, one would think that their access to education would be improving. Unfortunately, for many children from marginalised groups, this is not the case.

Recent research undertaken by the Autism Centre for Education and Research has found that autistic children from marginalised groups – such as those from an ethnic group other than white British, those with English as an additional language (EAL), and those on free school meals and in care – face numerous and complex issues. We refer to these groups as marginalised because all too often their views are missing from discussions about autism and SEND provision. Sadly, this is also the case with the government's recent SEND and AP improvement plan.

Our research found that while the overall rate of autism diagnosis is increasing, the likelihood of receiving a diagnosis varies on the basis of a child's ethnicity, with children from communities such as white British and black African being over-represented, while children from Pakistani, Indian and other white backgrounds are under-represented. Similarly, children with EAL are less likely to get a diagnosis, while those on free school meals are more likely to.

While the government's new SEND



DR PRITHVI PEREPA

Lecturer in autism studies, Autism Centre for Education Research (ACER), University of Birmingham

Where is the SEND improvement plan for marginalised children?

and AP plan recognises the need for diagnosis, it does not consider how to address these differing prevalence rates, which indicate varying levels of awareness of autism in different communities as well as a lack of understanding among professionals

of exclusion increased again for children on free school meals, those from ethnic minority backgrounds and boys. A number end up being educated in AP settings or at home.

It is heartening that the SEND and AP plan aims to create local

“ Their views are often missing from discussions about SEND

about autism in children belonging to such marginalised groups.

In previous research, we found a worrying increase in the numbers of autistic pupils excluded from schools. We also found that the chance

partnerships for AP provision and will focus on evidence-based practices. However, it is important that careful planning makes sure these settings do not end up being a parallel provision or a further means



of marginalisation.

Parents and professionals involved in our project highlighted the lack of representation in teacher populations as one of the underlying causes of the difficulties autistic children from marginalised communities face. For example, while 64 per cent of pupils are white British, that rises to about 90 per cent for teachers and 96 per cent for heads.

While the SEND and AP plan provides some intentions for developing a better-skilled workforce, it says nothing about working towards a more diverse and representative one, which would make engaging with schools less daunting for families.

Parents and carers also report difficulties in negotiating the SEND system and lack of guidance for newly migrated families and families who need information in languages other than English. The aim to move towards digitisation of EHCPs may speed up completing these plans – but may not be accessible for these families. Similarly, the development of new special schools that are not necessarily managed by local authorities could make access more difficult for children and families from marginalised groups.

While the SEND and AP improvement plan sets out some useful long-term ambitions, it is incredibly disappointing to note that the families and children our research has focused on continue to be marginalised. Schools can break down barriers, stigma, and isolation for these children, but it's much harder to achieve as long as they remain invisible to government and system leaders.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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CAROL DEWHURST

Chief executive, Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust



ESHA DIN ARBAB

Year 10 pupil, Belle Vue Girls' Academy



How schools in Bradford are empowering youth-led change

A pupil voice summit offers more than the chance for young people to air their priorities, write Carol Dewhurst and Esha Din Arbab

It is incredibly important to not only inspire young people to become leaders in their community, but to empower them to do so by building their voices, skills and confidence. Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust (BDAT) is committed to supporting pupils to develop a strong understanding of the issues they are concerned about and encouraging them to drive forward meaningful change.

BDAT's vision centres around enabling confidence and competence in each of our pupils to allow them to thrive, laying the foundations to develop strong and thoughtful voices. We advocate for amplifying the ideas of young people who wish to see positive change in their communities. We ensure they are equipped to use their voices safely and wisely, producing the greatest impacts possible.

To achieve this, we set up an annual Bradford Pupil Voice Summit organised with Bradford Citizens, a branch of Citizens UK, and four other trusts: Dixons Academies Trust,

Beckfoot Trust, Carlton Academy Trust and Exceed Academies Trust. This summit provides a platform for pupils to discuss their priorities for change in their communities and offers a wider forum to support young leaders to realise their goals.

But don't take it from me. What better way to show the impact than to hand over this platform to Esha.

As a young person, it can sometimes be difficult to develop real-world skills and understanding while spending most of our time in the classroom. The Bradford Pupil Voice Summit has allowed many of us to gain skills such as public speaking and problem-solving, while also leading on the issues that are most relevant to us. After all, if a resource or provision is designed for pupils, it should be led by pupils.

Before the summit, each form group at my school and in 20 other schools across the five trusts identified three major issues facing the young people of Bradford. This helped each school to determine the issues it would present at the summit.

It was difficult to narrow to just three, but after much discussion

“Hearing my peers tell their own stories was incredibly inspiring

we decided on mental health resources, racism and the cost-of-living crisis.

Those of us who represented our peers at the summit learned a great deal from the experience. For example, I already knew about the major issues and their impacts, but hearing my peers tell their own stories and what others are facing was incredibly inspiring. It made me feel the weight of our power as young people and led me to realise that awareness is one of the most significant parts of the battle. We cannot focus on driving change without first shedding light on what needs to be addressed in our schools and communities.

We raised that awareness through a local radio broadcast during which we discussed the issues at the forefront of our minds, and the importance of addressing them. We also made

a presentation to our local city council, telling our stories and highlighting why our three key issues – and our views – are critical for them to consider. This step was especially big for two reasons: it laid the foundations for ongoing collaboration with local policymakers, and it gave us confidence and public speaking skills.

The impacts of the annual summit are already being seen across our community, from our work with the local NHS in designing a youth mental health resource to our collaboration with the police to develop anti-racism training.

Ultimately, we will continue to push forward meaningful change while raising awareness, both to enlist help from the community and to encourage our peers to use the resources available to them to improve their lives.

Solutions

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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MONICA BHO GAL

Director, The Schools Consent Project

Making conversations about consent effective

Many teachers lack the knowledge and confidence to teach consent. But this crucial topic doesn't have to be intimidating, says Monica Bhogal

Preventive, empowering consent education is the best way to challenge sexually harmful attitudes and to reduce offending rates. It is imperative that we provide young people with accurate, reliable information and safe spaces in which to have these conversations and ensure they feel heard.

The statutory guidance on relationships and sex education obliges schools to teach consent, including what the law says. In reality, though, many teachers do not feel comfortable, confident or sufficiently supported or trained to do this, so here are some key considerations.

Practise and prepare

These are formative conversations. Taking a direct, clear and factual approach without moralising or judgment is highly effective.

We tell pupils to practise and prepare for difficult or challenging tests and exams. We should do the same. Know what you might struggle with or what concerns you most about the conversation. Practise what you want to say and

how you might deal with responses or questions.

Plan your approach and get comfortable with the language you will use, ensuring that you are confident of terminology (for example, nudes, upskirting, stealthing and sexual assault). Acknowledging colloquialisms or slang while responding with accurate language builds trust and respect.

Acknowledge and inform

The concept of consent is broader than sexual or intimate consent. Using non-sexual examples serves as a reminder that often we are already capable of understanding it

through everyday situations.

It's important to give accurate information so you do not confuse or misinform pupils – and this may mean acknowledging any gaps in your own knowledge. You are not expected to have every answer and certain questions (eg, about the law) will not be within your area. Saying "I don't know but I can help you find out" demonstrates humility and your genuine desire to help pupils navigate the topic. It also ensures they get accurate information from reliable sources, rather than turning to online sources that may be misleading.

Some questions and comments may seem trivial or designed to derail, but it's important not to dismiss them. Take every question seriously and respond accordingly, or ask them to rephrase it. A little humour in the right places, if it feels appropriate, will also go a long way to diffusing what might feel like an awkward discussion.

Normalise and model

Normalise consent, communication and meaningful conversations. This includes normalising asking, respecting boundaries and the

concept of caring about and wanting our partners to be comfortable, happy and to enjoy any interaction or experience.

Having an open discussion in an honest and clear way allows us to model what positive, respectful and healthy communication looks like.

Make these regular and ongoing, rather than one-offs. Short, consistent conversations are most effective.

Listen and facilitate

The clear feedback from pupils is that they really appreciate the opportunity to be heard by us, but also by their peers. This enables them to become comfortable and confident in expressing themselves, as well as listening and responding to others.

Respond appropriately

The lack of pupil reporting is a major concern because it prevents access to help and support. One of the reasons for this is a worry about adult reactions and responses.

Be clear about what your obligations are and what assurances you are able to give, and relay these with sensitivity. Listen, validate and reassure any pupil who discloses that the fundamental premise of any response is to keep them safe.

Make the most of the community

Ofsted's review of sexual harassment in schools makes it clear that conversations about consent are crucial, but the problem is a societal one. Accordingly, schools will find they are not alone in taking responsibility for consent education.

Involve parents. Inform them of your approach and enable them to support conversations at home. Share concerns and knowledge with colleagues and counterparts, and seek out external providers who can help to kickstart the conversation. You are not alone.

“ You are not expected to have every answer ”



THE REVIEW

TECHNICIANS: THE DAVID SAINSBURY GALLERY

BOOK
TV
FILM
RADIO
EVENT
RESOURCE

Venue: The Science Museum, London

Date: Ongoing

Reviewer: Terry Freedman, freelance edtech writer and publisher

Should you ever find yourself having to choose between me administering medication or waiting for a paramedic, my advice would be to wait. One of the things I discovered on my recent visit to the Science Museum is that my fine motor skills leave much to be desired. Trying out the role of lab technician, I either over-filled the solution or under-filled it. As Dirty Harry was wont to say, a man's got to know his limitations.

I also discovered there are many more types of technician than I'd realised. Indeed, one of the key benefits teachers and pupils are likely to draw from this exhibition is a better grasp of the breathtaking array of "invisible careers" that are out there.

I was pleasantly surprised to bump into a group of primary school children on my visit. Their teacher told me she'd brought them to fire up their curiosity and widen their interests, and from what I saw they were definitely very engaged.

However, the exhibition is clearly aimed at secondary pupils – and for obvious reasons. By year 9, they will be weighing up their GCSE options. By year 11, they will be thinking about work or higher education.



Building on this time of important choices, the first thing you are presented with when you enter the exhibition is an opportunity to reflect on the areas that interest you. Your answers lead to a list of options to explore.

And there are many. Perhaps I've led a sheltered life, but the word "technician" conjures up images of a science lab or a roomful of servers. It is, of course, much wider than that, describing any job that requires particular technical skills.

The field of health alone encompasses pharmacy technicians, clinical coders, healthcare lab technicians and simulation technicians, among many others. If you're not sure what all of these are, fret not. Large-screen videos feature people in these (and other) technical fields explaining what they do.

Moreover, these very technicians will often be the ones running the "meet an employee" workshops available to school groups. These take place on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10:30am, noon and 1.30pm, can accommodate 60 pupils at a time and must be booked in advance. Be warned, though: it's pot luck what kind of technician will run your workshop, depending on availability. Your workshop may even be hosted by one of the Science Museum's volunteer technicians instead of the professionals in the videos.

There is also a variety of free workshops. One is run by a structural technician and asks pupils to build a tower in such a way that it collapses, and then discusses why. The sessions include headphones for pupils and a Q & A session.

For people like me who don't want to risk killing anyone, there are other roles too, such as



matching the sound and visual effects on a film, and welding parts of a roller coaster. I tried the latter, and was very impressed with the high-tech, haptic feedback of the simulation.

Such attention to detail is hardly surprising given that the Science Museum collaborated with Marvel Studios, the NHS, National Grid and the University of Sheffield Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre in devising the exhibits.

The simulations are almost uniformly excellent. Each guides you through a series of steps and invites you to try again. I experienced a glitch in the pharmacy technician simulation, which referred to a worksheet before it actually appeared, but perhaps this kind of nit-picking should be left to a veterinary technician.

A timely contribution at a time of renewed focus on careers education, the Science Museum has even done some of the work of mapping the exhibition to the national curriculum [on its website](#).

Fun, informative and (very important in my case) safe too. I highly recommend the trip.



Rating



Penny Rabiger

Associate, Centre for Race, Education and Decoloniality, Leeds Beckett University

CELEBRATING DIFFERENCE

I always get the post-holidays' gig for *The Conversation*. But what a bumper holiday it was, with Easter, Passover and Ramadan all happening at once.

This Friday marks the end of Ramadan, so you might be thinking about how you might support Muslim pupils to celebrate Eid, and educate all pupils about this important time.

This piece by young reporter, Loretta Hasanaj caught my eye as she reminds us that with two billion or so Muslims worldwide, there are many different ways to commemorate Eid al-Fitr.



'NOT A RACIST COUNTRY'

A constant theme over the holiday period, sadly, has been various government debacles around racism, whether that be immigration policy, the institutional racism of the Metropolitan police force, views around child-grooming legislation, or racist dolls.

All of which reinforces findings of the

most comprehensive survey of race inequality in the UK for more than 25 years, including what its authors say is unprecedented insight into the experiences of Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, and Jewish communities.

The report reveals that more than a third of people from ethnic and religious minorities have experienced racially motivated physical or verbal abuse, including children at school. And yet the government has rejected demands for schools to make it mandatory to record racist incidents.

STAYING EDUCATED

Luckily, there are some great new books and resources that can support anti-racism efforts.

Though written for early years educators, Valerie Daniel's *Anti-Racist Practice in the Early Years: A Holistic Framework for the Wellbeing of All Children* is relevant across the sector. And out this week, Sarah Wordlaw's *Time to Shake Up the Primary Curriculum: A step-by-step guide to creating a global, diverse and inclusive school* promises to be a treat, supporting efforts to ensure the curriculum whispers "you belong" to all children in meaningful and non-tokenistic ways.

Of course, our society is divided along more than racial lines. The UK National Archives has created some resources for secondary schools to mark the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement that are worth checking out, as is an article that helps to highlight where the resources overlook political nuance.

CHEATGPT?

A lot has been written recently about artificial intelligence (AI), so I decided to give it a go this week. I'm using it to help me to write a literature review and a blog post – and so far, so good!

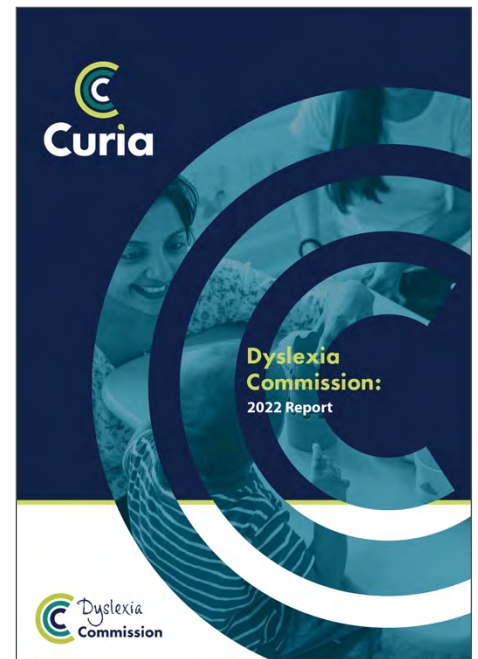
Evidently, I'm not alone. In Wales, university students have "confessed" to writing essays with the help of ChatGPT. But before we rush to dismiss this as cheating, it's probably worth understanding how we might incorporate AI into our teaching and young people's learning.

In the 1970s, teachers were up in arms about calculators. Today, they are on every

year 7's list of essential items. The main concern then was that maths instruction would need to change in response to their use. Once educators understood that calculators could accelerate pupils' access to more complex maths, and that there were ways to firmly embed mental maths into the curriculum early on, teaching and learning changed accordingly.

It's a reminder that the narrative around cheating doesn't tell the whole story when new tech comes on the scene. Indeed, many teachers think generative AI could actually make learning better, believing that ChatGPT will change education, not destroy it.

Meanwhile, technology is already making learning better for some, prompting the Dyslexia Commission to recommend in its new report that children in every school should be introduced to assistive technology. This, it argues, will help create equitable access.



We shouldn't allow this attempt to raise awareness of the benefits of incorporating technology within mainstream teaching and learning go unheard. Especially not when the biggest blocker to this is teachers who feel unfamiliar and sometimes overwhelmed by the idea of learning how to use it themselves.

Plus ça change!

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts

The Knowledge

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



How can partnerships prosper in a competitive system?

Mel Ainscow, emeritus professor of education, University of Manchester; Paul Armstrong, senior lecturer, Manchester Institute of Education

The English school system is producing more and more losers. Indeed, the number of children and young people excluded from schools or placed in segregated provision is increasing again after a pandemic lull. There is a sad inevitability about this situation within a policy context that places so much emphasis on competition: the creation of winners means that there will inevitably be those that lose out. Our school system, those that lead and teach within it, and the young people it serves, deserve better.

We have long argued that an approach based on the UNESCO mantra that "every learner matters and matters equally" is necessary to address this challenge. This also builds on the OECD's view that equity is the pathway to excellence.

Our research team at the University of Manchester has recently carried out a study on behalf of the Staff College that points to a possible way forward. It involves area partnerships that combine competition, collaboration and contextually informed accountability.

The study analysed a series of well-established partnerships in different parts of the country. All involve headteachers – including senior staff from MATs – taking on system leadership roles. Local authority involvement varies across the sample, with some leading and orchestrating the partnership, others working as joint partners with schools, and some having no role whatsoever.

In the most effective examples it was evident that the partnerships were guided by a strong commitment to equity, underpinned by context informed decision-making at the local level. These developments build on earlier research that suggests that collaboration between schools has enormous potential for fostering the capacity of education systems to respond to learner diversity. Moreover, such partnerships can help



reduce the polarisation of schools within a local area, to the particular benefit of marginalised pupils and whose progress is a cause for concern.

The report offers reasons to be optimistic. Despite the competitive atmosphere that permeates education and the fragmentation that this has encouraged, a strong appetite remains to engage in collaboration. Indeed, several new area partnerships have emerged in recent months. It is significant, too, that many experienced school leaders – including the chief executives of MATs – are taking on leadership roles beyond their duties within their own institutions.

That said, although the examples we have examined are fulfilling an important means of encouraging mutual support, there is less evidence that they are making direct contributions to changes in practice that address the barriers faced by many young people. A common set of factors were in place where we saw evidence of this beginning to happen.

Most important of these is the use of available statistical evidence to identify concerns such as poor attendance, increased exclusions, and dips in outcomes as determined by test and exam results. However, what made these data more powerful was when, as a result of the partnership

structures, local practitioners were able to provide an informed interpretation to guide the actions that were taken.

The findings lead us to propose a system of evidence-based professional accountability, coordinated at local level. This implies a move away from a heavy reliance on external accountability towards an investment in the professional capital of teachers and school leaders. However, this has to be challenging and credible. In other words, it must not involve forms of collusion within which partners endorse one another in an acceptance of mediocrity.

The implication of these proposals is that the national system of inspection needs to be redesigned as a means of moderating local accountability procedures. At the same time, inspectors will be in a position to develop links between area partnerships so that they can learn from one another's experiences.

There is no doubt that schools should be held accountable. Adopting an area-based approach would allow the process to be informed directly by those closest to practice.

Read *Turning the tide: A study of place-based school partnerships* in full at: bit.ly/3L8olvT

Week in

Westminster

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

MONDAY

Setting out his vision for pupils to study maths up to the age of 18 ... err, for the second time in four months ... Rishi Sunak admitted the government won't be able to get the plan off the ground "overnight".

"We're going to need to recruit and train the maths teachers."

NO SHIT SHERLOCK.

While the prime minister managed to grab lots of column inches for his "announcement", not everyone was as enthused.

During his speech on the Monday about how we're all so anti-maths, Sky News cut away from the live broadcast for a feature on World Malbec Day.

Let's hope no one drinks and derives.

Having served as shadow chancellor for four years, economic secretary to the Treasury under Tony Blair and as one of Gordon Brown's key advisers, Ed Balls has decided now is the time to study A-level maths.

While hosting *Good Morning Britain*, the former Labour MP told his co-host Susanna Reid that he aims to sit his exams in 2025 – but that he is finding it "really hard".

"In two years' time – it could be five, let's wait and see – I'll be turning up at some college to sit at desks with a bunch of 18-year-olds.

"I did additional maths at O-level back in the 1980s, I did economics all the way through to two years at graduate school – but I never did A-level maths and I've always regretted it."

And who's teaching the former shadow chancellor, who is married to the current shadow home secretary Yvette Cooper? His mother-in-law.

WEDNESDAY

This week we heard from the ever present but often under-reported Office of the Schools Adjudicator.

In her annual report, chief adjudicator Shan Scott said three of her adjudicators would be retiring this spring. They were "exemplary adjudicators whose support, good sense and good humour" she would "miss". N'aww.

However, she seemed less pleased at one determined objector complaining about the arrangements of 11 grammar schools, which for the most part stayed in line with admissions codes.

She said it "concerned" her "that these particular objections appeared to be driven by a wish to change the requirements relating to admissions at selective schools".

"Schools are busy institutions and I share their frustrations when they have to deal with objections which reflect the personal views of the objector rather than well founded concerns that arrangements do not meet requirements as they are (rather than as the objector would like them to be)."

That's you told!

Ooh – sneaky DfE sneaking out a sneaky change on its initial teacher training provider guidance.

Serial less-than-good ITT providers normally lose their accreditation. But the government will now allow providers lucky enough to be reaccredited for 2024 and beyond, but who have two poor Ofsted inspections, to get a third chance.

Watch out, however, you'll be inspected again early doors in 2025. And if you are then judged less than good, your accreditation will be withdrawn "without the opportunity for further reinspection".

Just another totally coherent and definitely not utterly chaotic bump in the road of the ITT reforms.

THURSDAY

These aren't just any Nick Gibb friends *Fleetwood Mac's "Albatross" plays in the background* ... these are The Nick Gibb "very good" friends (who can get a cartoon version of yourself drawn up and played on primetime early Noughties television).

In a shock to the sector, Gibb revealed in a listeners' Q&A on Times Radio that he featured on *The Simpsons* – thanks to some very good pals.

He didn't have a speaking part, but an animated version of the politician did break into dance during a scene set in Parliament. Carefree dancing in the Commons, classic Nick Gibb.

"I met some of the writers about 20 years ago, and we became very good, very good friends," the schools minister since 1807 said.

"I don't have a huge number of friends, but those I do have I value very much, grappling to their soul with hoops of steel."

Sadly, Gibb declined presenter Matt Chorley's invitation to dance in the studio.

The debacle of the National Tutoring Programme last year resulted in £114 million – more than a third – of the funding for catch-up left unspent. It will now go back to the Treasury, at a time schools are crying out for more cash.

That money would pay for 10 full school refurbishments, or a 0.5 percentage point increase in teacher pay for a year. What a woeful state of affairs.





Vice Principal (Standards & Subject Progress)

Great Academy Ashton part of Great Academies Education Trust

Contract Type: Permanent

Salary: Leadership Scale 18 – 22 (£67,351 - £74,283)

Start Date: September 2023

Do you have a passion for ensuring young people have the best possible outcomes for life? Do you have the ability to inspire and motivate both students and staff, have strong communication and interpersonal skills and a commitment to our school's GREAT values and to the school's mission? Are you looking for a school where you can develop your career, receive excellent work and career support and make a difference in the lives of young people? Look no further than Great Academy Ashton!

Great Academy Ashton, part of Great Academies Education Trust, is seeking an experienced and passionate strategic leader to join our team. At GAA, our mission is to metamorphosise the life chances of the young people from the community we serve and the role of Vice-Principal is pivotal in delivering this aim. We do this by giving our students the best outcomes, the best experiences and the greatest of participation and celebration so that they will achieve in line with the best students in our country.

We are looking for a committed individual who shares our values of Genuine, Respect, Excellence, Achievement, and Togetherness (GREAT) and who can help us deliver on our mission.

At GAA, we value our staff and are committed to providing a supportive and inclusive work environment. Here are just some of the benefits you can expect when you join our team:

- Extensive leadership and subject based CPD, including paid memberships of such professional bodies as The Chartered College of Teaching, The Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors membership and Subject Association memberships.
- Free health protection: we understand the importance of health and wellbeing, which is why we offer free health protection to all staff, including free NHS health checks and yearly flu vaccinations.
- Cycle to work scheme: We encourage sustainable transportation options by offering a cycle to work scheme.
- Wider personal benefits such as discounted eye tests, well-being clinics, dentistry, financial and legal advice.
- Paid bonuses for those staff who are markers for examination bodies

- Committed to supporting the well-being of our workforce, we are part of the DfE Workforce Wellbeing Charter, GAET have expanded this creating our own Wellbeing Charter. We have an Assistant Principal with a strategic lead for staff well-being. We have implemented several initiatives to reduce workload, including assessing the workload of new initiatives, reduced unnecessary communication through email protocols, have a staff well-being working group and we conduct regular well-being questionnaires to guide further improvements.

At GAA, we believe that happy and supported staff leads to better outcomes for our students. If you are passionate about inclusive education and transforming the lives of young people then join our team and experience the benefits of working in a school and trust that values its staff and its community.

If you would wish to have an informal discussion with the Principal (Mr David Waugh) please email him directly at david.waugh@gaa.org.uk.

If you wish to visit the academy in advance of applying, we will be holding tours of the school and an informal opportunity to ask questions on Thursday 27th April 2023 between 4.00pm and 6.00pm.

If you wish to secure a place at this please email Laura Schofield at laura.schofield@gaa.org.uk.

To make an application, please visit: <https://gaa.greatacademies.co.uk/academy-information/work-for-us/current-vacancies/>

Great Academies Education Trust is committed to safeguarding the welfare of children and the successful candidate will be required to apply for an Enhanced Disclosure from the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Closing date for applications: 10.00am Thursday 4th May 2023

Shortlisting: Friday 5th May 2023 Interviews: Thursday 11th May 2023 and Friday 12th May 2023



PRINCIPAL DESIGNATE

£64,225 - £74,283 p.a.

Start Date: 1st September 2023

North Star was born out of a drive to do something different for those who need more

Formed by the desire to shape futures, North Star emerged

We remain where others may part

Equipping young minds to join with their communities

Forging together the path ahead, traveling alongside

Our team can bring dreams to fruition. Join us and thrive.

This role will play a key part in realising this vision.

North Star Alternative Learning provision is a new school currently being built in the north of Bristol with easy access to the M4 and M5, due to open in October 2023. The successful applicant will project manage the opening of the new school, recruit experienced staff, develop robust systems

and procedures and shape the culture of the new school.

This is an exciting opportunity for an experienced senior leader who has a proven track record in:

- working with children with Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs
- setting up a new learning provision
- leading and developing staff
- embedding policies, procedures and new ways of working
- providing opportunities for children who are not engaging with learning in mainstream school.
- supporting children with successful re-integration into mainstream school

Both the secondary and primary school have been rated by OFSTED as good. Now the Trust is expanding, we are looking for a dynamic leader who has a clear vision for the future and who has the ability to put that vision into practice.

We can offer you the chance to make a difference to children's lives and provide them with opportunities to grow into responsible adults. You will become part of a close and supportive management team who have a wealth of experience working with children in SEMH.



CREATIVE, INSPIRATIONAL HEADTEACHER REQUIRED

Eden Park Primary is a happy 2-form entry school, in the heart of Brixham, Torbay with 2 onsite nurseries. This is a very successful school, with a strong ethos and where children consistently achieve above average. We are now looking for Eden Park's next Headteacher, to lead the school into the next stage of its development. Please see the school website for further details and the Trust website for more information about this position and Connect.

Connect is fully committed to equal opportunities, safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expect all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. An on-line check of publicly available information will be completed to assess the successful candidate's suitability to work with children.

Closing date Wednesday 10/5/23 (midday).

Interview w/c 15/5/23. 1/9/23 start preferred.

Full time, permanent position: L17-L22 (depending on skills and experience)

Head of School for Woodlands CofE Primary School



Working in partnership with St Oswald's C of E Primary School

Full Time, Permanent, Required September 2023
Salary L14 – L18 (£61,042 - £67,351)

Our amazing children are looking for a new Head of School to lead their school from September 2023.

Could you be their perfect candidate?

The Trustees of BDAT and Governors at Woodlands C of E Primary School wish to appoint an inspirational Head of School for this rewarding leadership role. The school is seeking a strong leader and team player who will build on existing strengths to ensure the school achieves its ambitions for excellence and

success at every level.

Woodlands C of E Primary School is a welcoming Church of England Primary School where the appreciation of others is encouraged and attitudes of tolerance, care, concern and self-respect are developed in a happy, safe and secure environment.

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 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

Vice Principal Behaviour and Attitudes



Our Academy has consistently high expectations for all learners linked to their behaviour and conduct. The successful candidate will be passionate and committed to upholding our visions and values in all that we do.

Under the direction of the Principal, the successful candidate will be an exceptional practitioner, adept at behaviour management. They will have experience of leading whole school change and leading a large team of pastoral staff.

The successful candidate will need to inspire others, be able to support and challenge all stakeholders in equal measure. Team work and a strong focus on the care and the well-being of all learners and staff is essential to us as a leadership team. The candidate would need to fully buy in to this ethos.

We work hard to put out students at the forefront of everything we do, loyally serving the local community, a community disproportionately impacted during the pandemic.

Resilience, tenacity, strategic thinking, compassion and good humour are a pre-requisite for any one wishing to join our team. In return you will have professional development opportunities and a pathway to headship if that where you aspire to be. If you would like to arrange a tour and/or chat, please email alison.wilde@efatrust.org. I would be delighted to meet you.

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

Good luck!

**Martin Knowles
Principal**

Closing date: 24th April 2023

Interviews: 4th/5th May 2023

Start date: September 2023

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

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“

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

The Shared Learning Trust



[Click here](#) to contact our team

