

SCHOOLS WEEK

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

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SCHOOLS WEEK

Meet the news team



John Dickens
EDITOR

@JOHNDICKENSSW
JOHN.DICKENS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



Freddie Whittaker
DEPUTY EDITOR

@FCDWHITTAKER
FREDDIE.WHITTAKER@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



Samantha Booth
CHIEF REPORTER

@SAMANTHAJBOTH
SAMANTHA.BOOTH@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



Amy Walker
SENIOR REPORTER

@AMYRWALKER
AMY.WALKER@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



Jack Dyson
SENIOR REPORTER

@JACKYDYS
JACK.DYSON@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



JL Dutaut
COMMISSIONING EDITOR

@DUTAUT
JEAN-LOUISDUTAUT@LSECT.COM



Jessica Hill
INVESTIGATIONS AND FEATURES REPORTER

@JESSJANEHILL
JESSICA.HILL@LSECT.COM



Nicky Phillips
HEAD DESIGNER

@GELVETICA
NICKY.PHILLIPS@FEWEEK.CO.UK



Shane Mann
MANAGING DIRECTOR

@SHANERMANN
SHANE.MANN@LSECT.COM

THE TEAM

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

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The government's funding argument is fundamentally flawed

The government's insistence that schools can afford the proposed teacher pay rises has a fundamental flaw.

The £2 billion Autumn statement school cash boost was a welcome surprise.

Education secretary Gillian Keegan said it means next year's school funding packet will be at the "highest level in history".

It would also restore funding levels back to 2010 levels, as confirmed by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Ministers think this ends the argument on schools being underfunded.

But there's a gaping hole in this theory: schools no longer just provide education. While their funding is now restored, their responsibilities have ballooned.

Schools are filling the void left by collapsing state services such as CAMHS, education psychologists, and school nurses.

Meanwhile, the education and wider societal needs of their pupils has soared. There's been a 50 per cent rise in pupils

requiring additional education supports through EHCPs. Some 1.8 million children are now eligible for free school meals – a rise of a third. Nearly one million food bank packages were given to children last year, a staggering 145 per cent rise since 2017.

The scaffold of support services that provided a foundation for young people in school has crumbled away – just when they need them most.

If no more funding is on the table, then these services around schools need to be rebuilt. If not, then ministers need to recognise the new role of schools – as mini welfare states – and fund them accordingly.

Piecemeal policies such as rolling out mental health support teams across small chunks of the country just isn't sufficient.

The distress the current status quo is causing headteachers is laid out all too vividly in the moving testimony of leaders from the NAHT conference this weekend (page 10 and 11).

Something simply must change.

Most read online this week:

- 1 **'The new epidemic': Why more pupils are missing school**
- 2 **DfE on course to recruit less than half of required secondary teachers**
- 3 **Academy trust in union row over £1.5m support staff 'back pay'**
- 4 **Councils shortlisted to test SEND reforms**
- 5 **DfE gives £17m to academy trusts to 'try before you buy'**

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ANALYSIS: RECRUITMENT

'It's everyone's worst nightmare': Schools hit by ITT crisis

AMY WALKER

@AMYRWALKER

EXCLUSIVE

Schools are offering part-time courses, approaching former soldiers and sponsoring sports teams to promote the profession, as more than three-quarters say trainee teacher applications are down on last year.

More than two fifths (43 per cent) of members who took part in a National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers' (NASBTT) survey also reported more difficulty in placing recruits, the result of schools struggling to mentor teachers as staff shortages worsen and workloads increase.

Survey respondents said the most common reasons for the fall were the cost-of-living crisis (22 per cent) and perceptions of the profession (15 per cent).

The crisis is set to deepen this year with the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) predicting the government will recruit fewer than half of the secondary trainees required for 2023-24.

'Everyone's worst nightmare'

Seventy NASBTT members responded to the survey in March and April. Seventy-seven per cent said applications were down this year compared with last. Of those, 18.5 per cent said applications had fallen by more than 40 per cent.

The Wandsworth Primary Schools' Consortium in south London, which was reaccredited to provide training from 2024 as part of the recent ITT reforms, usually would have recruited 20 teachers by early May and reach capacity of 30 by June.

It has just six confirmed trainees so far. Sam Steward, the course director, described it as "the lower end of everyone's worst nightmare. We'll keep recruiting until we've drained every last drop of hope."

Steward admitted the provider could become "non-viable" without a surge in applications for the next two academic years.

James Noble-Rogers, the executive director at the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), said his members echoed Steward's concerns.

"Not enough people are applying. It's an extremely bad year."

Where providers had low recruits for some subjects, including those eligible for government



bursaries, they would "have to look at the viability of the courses".

"If they can't recruit, they can't run those programmes".

Schools lure soldiers and ex-pupils

Tactics to bolster recruitment include advertising boards, luring in former pupils and contacting the armed forces in the hope they might refer retiring soldiers.

Many providers use TikTok, Instagram and LinkedIn to appeal to graduates. Epping Forest Schools Partnership Trust has sponsored a local football team in the hope of arousing supporters' interest, while Nottinghamshire Torch SCITT has launched a part-time primary course.

"We are trying to make routes more accessible. Many of our trainees are studying full-time and working during evenings and weekends," said director Treena Philpotts.

If successful, it will expand to the secondary sector. But courses run over two rather than one year, so the provider has to invest "more of our efforts and energies".

It also gained a government grant to provide teaching internships in shortage subjects this summer. The three-week scheme begins next month, but not all places have been filled.

Steward said several years ago recruitment fairs and word-of-mouth 'would have got us more than we needed in terms of people to interview'.

Noble-Rogers said UCET members were continuing to "target" their own undergraduates, hosting events and promoting their programmes in schools.

Schools can't meet mentor demands

Fewer schools are also taking up the offer of ITT placements.

At secondary-level, Philpotts pointed out, trainees need support from subject specialists. But this is becoming harder as many schools resort to non-specialists to deliver key lessons.

"If you can't provide a good mentor in a particular subject, you may not want to recruit someone," she said.

Of the providers who had fewer school placements this year, 20 per cent said they were more than 30 per cent down.

Schools are also pressed for time. Emma Hollis, NASBTT's executive director, suggested the Early Career Framework – introduced in 2019 – could lead to "a placement crisis for providers".

"We are increasingly hearing of schools withdrawing placements due to the capacity issues created by mentoring and ECT," she said.

A short-term fix would be to require schools to take trainees. "If every school took the option not to engage in ITT, there would be no teachers."

Call for hardship fund

Other touted solutions include DfE-funded hardship payments for all trainees, managed through providers under existing grant funding arrangements.

Noble-Rogers said the government should also look at its national marketing strategy "because it looks like they are not being effective".

A DfE spokesperson said it recognised significant recruitment challenges, including "competing with many other sectors for maths and physics graduates". Tax-free bursaries and scholarships were introduced to address this.

But Steward said: "We're all just hoping and praying things will somehow work themselves out by the time we get to summer."

NEWS: STRIKES

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Unions unite in teacher pay dispute

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@FCDWHITTAKER

Strikes by teachers show no sign of abating after more than half of schools closed or restricted attendance again this week, with the prospect of coordinated action in the autumn.

But fears that parents would keep their children out of school last Friday to take advantage of the strike dates and bank holiday to create a six-day holiday appear to have been overblown.

In an escalation of the bitter dispute over teacher pay and school funding, leaders of all four teaching and leadership unions held an unprecedented joint press conference to announce their intention to coordinate action if they win ballots due to be held this term.

But the government this week continued to refuse to hold fresh pay talks, describing threats of coordinated action as "unreasonable and disproportionate".

The National Education Union has now held eight days of action in England. It is due to call three more once exams are over, and will shortly re-ballot members for a fresh six-month mandate from July.

The NASUWT teaching union and NAHT school leaders' union will also re-ballot members after missing the turnout thresholds last time. The NAHT has widened its dispute to include staff wellbeing and inspection.

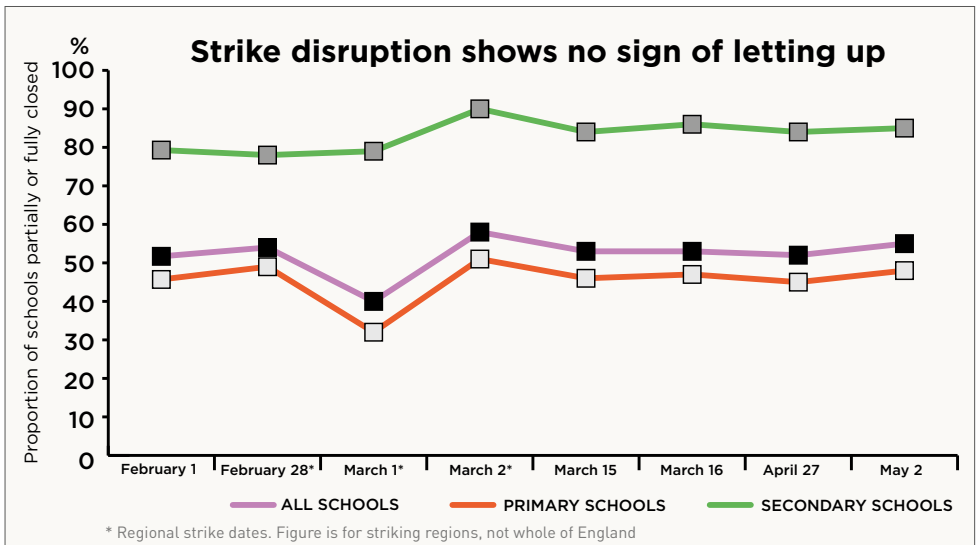
The leaders' union ASCL will also ballot its members for the first time in its history.

It comes after all four unions voted to reject ministers' offer of a £1,000 one-off payment for this year and 4.3 per cent pay rise for 2023-24.

At the NAHT's annual conference in Telford last weekend, the four union heads predicted unprecedented disruption in the autumn if their ballots are successful.

Kevin Courtney, the NEU's joint general secretary, said every state school in England was affected by the dispute. "Acting together...we will all pass the government's undemocratic thresholds."

Paul Whiteman, the NAHT's leader,



added: "This is an unprecedented show of solidarity from the education unions. It sends a clear signal to government that our dispute is not going away."

A spokesperson for the Department of Education said: "For unions to coordinate strike action with the aim of causing maximum disruption to schools is unreasonable and disproportionate, especially given the impact the pandemic has already had on learning."

"We have made a fair and reasonable pay offer ... which recognises teachers' hard work and commitment."

The government claims its pay offer is "fully funded". It pledged £620 million of extra funding for the deal, but said the rest was "affordable" from within school budgets once already-planned increases of £2 billion this year and next are factored-in.

But the Institute for Fiscal Studies said this week that the offer of higher salaries was "only part-funded". And while it predicted it was "still, on average, affordable for schools", it acknowledged there would be "many schools receiving lower than average funding increases".

Government data shows 52 per cent of schools either closed or restricted attendance during last Thursday's strike, rising to 55 per cent on Tuesday. About 5 per cent closed fully on both days.

Closures have remained consistent since strikes began in early February.

The only strike day when partial or full closures dipped below 50 per cent was on March 1, when strikes were called in the east Midlands, West Midlands and east of England.

As during previous strikes, secondary schools were more likely to be affected. London had the highest rate of closures, while the east Midlands had the least.

The strikes on Thursday and Tuesday, coupled with Monday's bank holiday, had prompted fears parents would keep children off school for a six-day weekend. But attendance data from FFT Education Datalab and management information system operator Arbor suggests about 6.5 per cent of primary pupils and 11.5 per cent of secondary pupils were absent on Friday.

Across the autumn term last year, primary absence on a Friday was 7.2 per cent while secondary ranged from 10.4 to 10.6 per cent, depending on the time of day.

Courtney said the action was a matter of "regret" and that Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, "needs to come forward with a better pay and funding offer if she is to avert further strikes".

"As it stands, she has taken her ball home with her and refuses to engage. This is irresponsible in the extreme."

Unions this week began their legal action against the government's law change last year which allows agency staff to cover for striking workers. A result is expected in the coming weeks.

Schools turn to crowdfunding Ofsted challenges

AMY WALKER

@AMYRWALKER

School leaders are turning to crowdfunding legal challenges against Ofsted amid heightened anger over the inspectorate following the death of headteacher Ruth Perry.

Queen Emma Primary School in Cambridge has lodged a request for a judicial review over an 'inadequate' grade, including the watchdog's "limiting judgments".

A school is rated 'inadequate' overall if safeguarding is found to be ineffective – as at Queen Emma.

Schools have historically been put off from challenging Ofsted grades in the courts as it can be expensive and difficult to win.

While it has paid for legal advice from its own budget so far, Queen Emma will now launch a crowdfunder to cover the "substantial costs" of pursuing the case.

It comes as Fair Judgement – a group of headteachers fronted by former Ofsted inspector John Bald – has so far raised more than £44,000 for its own proposed legal challenge.

Lawyers at Irwin Mitchell are advising the group whether there are grounds to bring action against what it deems as a "manifestly unfair" school inspection framework.

It will also seek to challenge the apparent lack of time inspectors have to substantiate their evidence.

Ofsted could potentially face a third case from the NAHT, the leaders' union, which announced in March that it was taking the first steps towards a judicial review against Ofsted.

It follows the watchdog's refusal to heed the union's demand that inspections stop to allow a review of the risk to mental health of school staff in the wake of inspections.

At its annual conference last week, Paul Whiteman, its general secretary, said lawyers were "putting the finishing touches to a legal challenge".

It is understood that 22 judicial reviews have been taken against Ofsted since 2007, although few made it to court before action was withdrawn or settled.

In an impact statement included in Queen Emma's formal complaint to the watchdog, Sarah Jarman, the school's head, said its



inspection in October 2022 "shattered every piece of self-belief I have".

The school wants an internal review over the way Ofsted has handled its complaint – which is stage three of the inspectorate's complaints procedure.

Queen Emma said an inspector took away confidential information about children. BBC News reported that it had seen a letter in which the watchdog apologised for information being "inadvertently removed".

But the school is separately seeking the judicial review "with the expectation that Ofsted will most likely say to us 'there's nothing wrong with this inspection,'" Jarman told *Schools Week*.

"In our experience, Ofsted has been such a shut shop that there seems to be no openness and transparency."

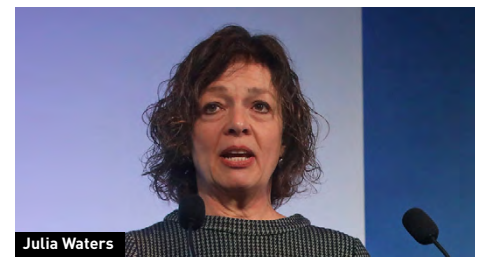
Gerard Clarke, a dispute resolution lawyer who represented Durand Academy in its High Court challenge over an 'inadequate' rating, said there were "a number of problems" for those seeking action against the watchdog.

"Often schools do not have the funds to litigate and they cannot take the risk of adverse cost orders being made against them," he said.

"Another factor [is that] the bar is set quite high in terms of challenging any decision of any public authority, particularly when you're challenging what can be said to be the exercise of judgment."

But he it was "possible" that more could seek action if they were able to raise funds.

Calls for Ofsted reform have intensified after Mrs Perry's death. Her family say she took her



own life in January before the publication of an 'inadequate' judgment at Caversham Primary School in Reading.

Julia Waters, Mrs Perry's sister, blamed pressure from the Ofsted process for her death and last week called on school leaders who worked as inspectors to "hand in your badges". An inquest into the head's death has not yet been held.

Jarman said Perry's death had "influenced" her to come forward and "share my feelings and my experience".

She encouraged other leaders who "have felt they haven't had a voice" to "come forward and have that voice".

Bald said the grounds in the three proposed legal challenges against Ofsted were "essentially the same – that no reasonable person could think this is a fair way to inspect schools".

The complainants were currently "discussing to see what common ground there is for cooperation".

Fair Judgement said if it were "unreasonable, impractical, or unnecessary to pursue legal action" or if it had cash leftover, funds would be donated to a memorial to Perry at Caversham.

Ofsted declined to comment.

INVESTIGATION: FUNDING

How schools were left to fill the void



The widespread collapse in support services feeding into schools since the Conservatives took office has been fully revealed in a *Schools Week* investigation – exposing government claims that restoring cash to 2010 levels will solve funding woes. Samantha Booth reports ...

Gillian Keegan has promised that “parents everywhere can be confident” that schools and teachers have the resources they need after a £2 billion funding boost in the autumn statement.

The education secretary pointed to analysis from the Institute for Fiscal Studies saying the cash “would allow schools to return to at least 2010 levels in real terms – the highest spending year in history – and is what the sector said it needed”.

But a collapse in state services brought on by austerity and worsening child poverty rates as the cost-of-living soars has left schools to pick up the pieces.

James Bowen, the assistant general secretary of the school leaders’ union NAHT, said the government’s funding rhetoric “completely ignores all the additional costs schools are now facing” as they fill the void out of their own dwindling budgets.

Schools Week analysed data across six key areas of health, special educational needs, child poverty, teacher recruitment, local authority support and rising costs to reveal the full scale of the crisis.

Health: Kids being ‘picked out the fire’

Health services are creaking as demand for interventions spikes.

More than 733,756 children and young people were in contact with children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) in 2021-22, a 116 per cent rise on the 338,633 children who needed such support in 2017-18.

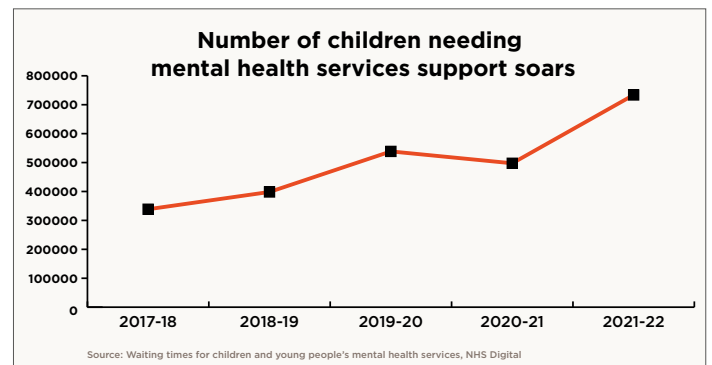
Schools Week previously revealed how suicidal children were being turned away from CAMHS, with schools instead told to “keep them safe”.

Nearly 33 per cent of referrals were assessed as not needing specialist treatment, down from the 37 per cent of five years ago. But it means that 238,000 children were turned down for treatment.

The average waiting time has dropped from 57 days in 2017 to 32 in 2020. But it rose last year, up to 40 days. It also varies hugely by area, from 13 days in Leicester to 80 days in Sunderland.

It’s not just mental health services. NHS data shows there was one school nurse for every seven schools in 2010. That’s now one for every 11 schools.

Sharon White, the chief executive of the School and Public Health Nurses Association (Saphna), said nurses now dealt with safeguarding, child



INVESTIGATION: FUNDING

protection and mental health issues – rather than prevention.

“We are picking kids out of the fire instead of stopping them falling in in the first place.”

Schools are “buying in” private nurses to fill the gap, she said. Likewise, Schools Week analysis of local authority data estimates there are 360 fewer full-time equivalent educational psychologists (EPs) compared with 2010.

Dr Cath Lowther, the general secretary of the Association for Educational Psychologists, said shortages meant children “not receiving the early intervention support” that might prevent an escalation to more costly education, health and care plans (EHCPs).

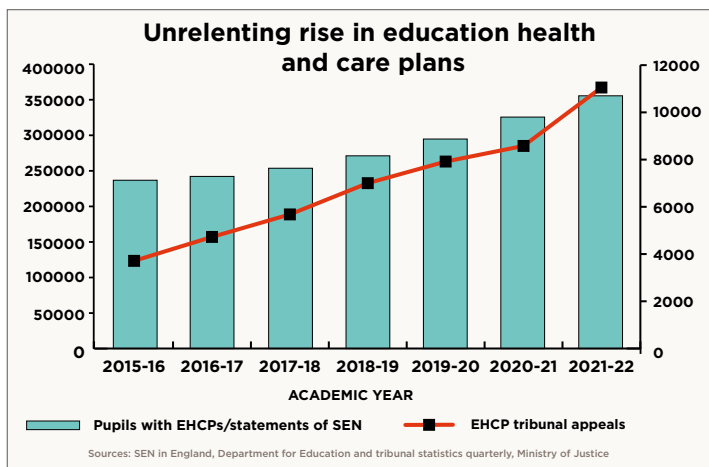
The government has vowed to train 200 more EPs per year, but Lowther said this was not enough to “offset the numbers leaving the profession each year” because of workload and pay cuts.

SEND: Soaring need leaves children waiting

Soaring numbers of pupils requiring additional education support has left the SEND system unable to cope.

There has been a 50 per cent rise in pupils with an EHCP since 2015 (statements of SEN before the 2014 reforms), shows the first available DfE data since the changes. This compares with a 5 per cent rise in the number of pupils during the same period.

It has resulted in two in five families waiting longer than the 20-week legal limit for their child to be issued an EHCP, little change since 2015.



In 2015, just 1,010 assessments led to no EHCP (3.9 per cent), compared with 3,903 in 2021 (5.9 per cent).

The number of families appealing decisions at the first-tier tribunal has soared to 11,000, from 3,712 in 2015-16.

They are now waiting up to a year for a decision, leaving schools to plug the gap in support.

Proposed SEND and alternative provision reforms aim to help ease pressures, but most won't be rolled out nationwide for two to three years.



Gillian Keegan

Poverty: Explosion in child foodbank use

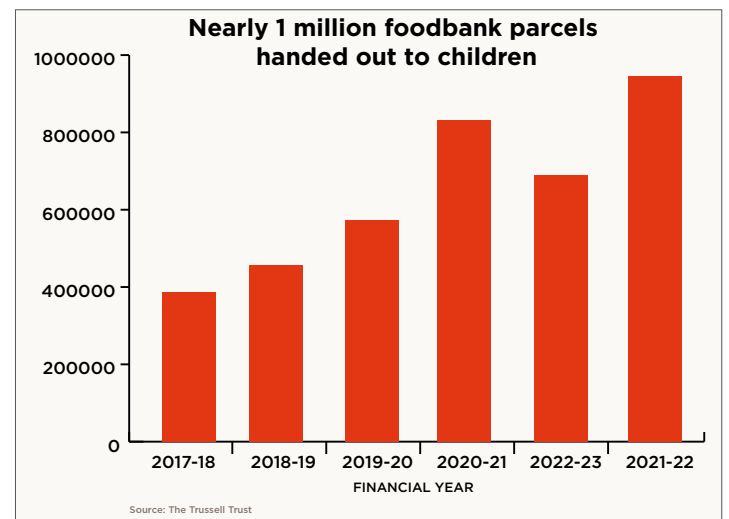
Headteachers have told Schools Week heart-breaking stories of pupils living without electricity, wearing dirty clothes that are too small and withdrawing from school dinners and clubs.

About 600,000 more children now live in relative poverty in the United Kingdom. About 4.2 million (29 per cent) lived in a household with relative low income last year, compared with 3.6 million (27 per cent) in 2010-11.

Just 17 per cent of children were eligible for free school meals in 2010. That now sits at 22.5 per cent – 1.8 million children. Nearly 1 million food bank packages were given to children last year by the Trussell Trust charity, a 145 per cent rise from 386,000 in 2017.

Tunde King, a school social resilience co-ordinator, previously told Schools Week it felt like schools were “now part of the welfare state”.

The cost-of-living crunch isn't just hitting the poorest. A survey by the Sutton Trust found 52 per cent of 6,200 senior leaders saw an increase in the number of non-free school meal children unable to afford lunch during the autumn term last year.



Councils: ‘We used to broker support. We now provide it’

Massive cuts in local authority funding have also resulted in their school services scaling back.

Child social worker vacancy rates hit 20 per cent last year, up from 17 per cent in 2017, with more than 5,400 agency staff needed to cover gaps.

The number of social workers quitting in 2022 (5,422) was higher than those starting (4,826) for the first time since records began in 2017.

Amy Lassman, the head of Nelson Mandela Primary School in Birmingham, said councils were expecting “more and more to be done by schools”.

She hired a family support worker for one-day-a-week, costing £10,000, but budget pressure will force her to cut the role next year.

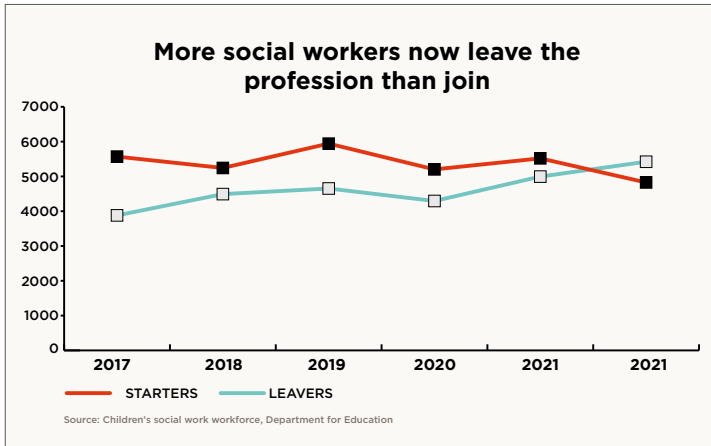
Instead, a senior leader will become pastoral lead – but that means they will no longer teach for two days in the classroom.

“I want us to support our community and have that central role, but we used to be the broker of that support. We are now the provider.”

Meanwhile, the number of attendance officers across councils plummeted by 35 per cent since 2011, a Schools Week investigation found last year.

Kate Davies, the head of Ash Lea special school in Nottinghamshire, said

INVESTIGATION: FUNDING



schools had “often become the only consistent support for families.”
 “It’s a mission creep as we are plugging NHS and social care provision gaps and now our budgets are more challenged.”

The Department for Education said councils were given £59.7 billion this year in “core spending power” and high-needs funding will rise to £10.1 billion this financial year – an increase of more than 50 per cent since 2019. It will invest “more than” £50 million every year on recruiting family social workers.

Recruitment: Shortages worsen as pay stalls

While managing the knock-on effects of creaking health and social services, heads are grappling with their own worsening recruitment crisis.

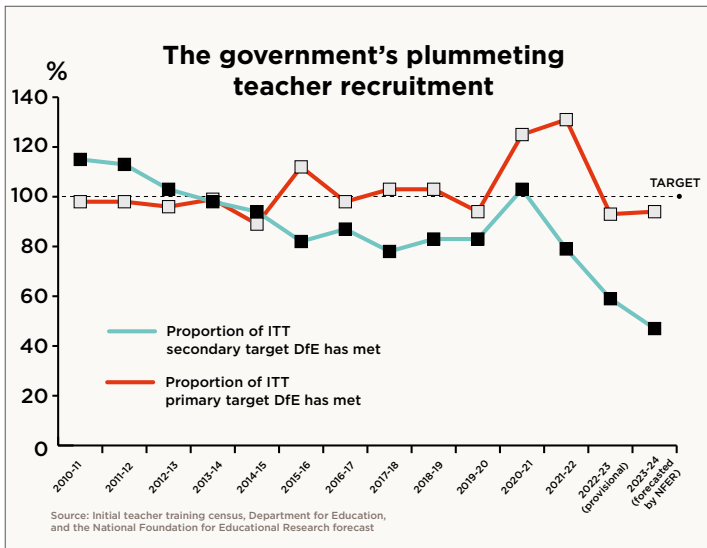
Analysis by Jack Worth from the National Foundation for Educational Research found that England’s real-terms pay for primary teachers in 2020 was 10 per cent lower than in 2010.

Pay had grown the slowest compared with all other countries that provided data for the OECD study.

A rise in private sector pay and flexible working since Covid has left schools unable to compete.

Worth’s analysis predicts the government will fall 41 per cent short of its overall teacher targets next year – the lowest since records began in 2010.

Teacher vacancies are also on the rise, government data shows, up from 452 in 2010-11 to 1,564 in 2021-22.

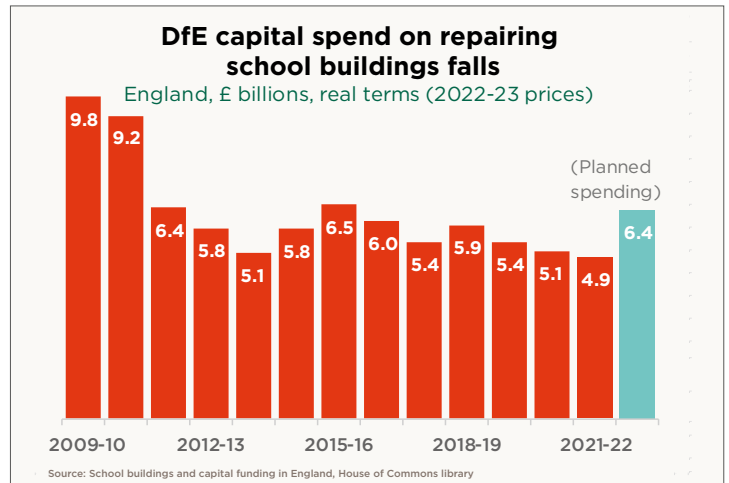


Rising costs: School budgets take the hit

Meanwhile, as budget demands to fill creaking services grows, schools are dealing with their own cost-of-living crisis.

Some faced energy price hikes of up to 587 per cent, according to Schools Week analysis last year.

While wholesale gas and electricity prices have dropped dramatically, they were still nearly three times higher in February than before the war in Ukraine.



Alongside a rise in overheads, soaring food and labour costs mean the cost of providing a hot meal for a primary pupil is now £3.30, up from £2.30 in 2010, National Education Union analysis suggests.

But schools receive just £2.47 per meal for means-tested free school meals – a shortfall of about 83p for every meal. It means schools are having to find an extra £288 million nationally to subsidise the costs, the analysis suggests.

Heads are also having to deal with crumbling school buildings. Repairing or replacing all defects in the country’s schools was estimated to cost £11.4 million in 2021 – almost double the 6.7 million estimate just four years earlier.

Bowen said the answer was “really quite simple: properly funded schools being supported by well-resourced specialist services”.



ON LOCATION



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The plight of heads, in their own words

School leaders are in a “fight for the heart and soul of education”, according to the NAHT union’s general secretary Paul Whiteman. Speaking at the union’s conference this weekend, he said overworked leaders and underpaid teachers can no longer afford “empty promises” from government to solve the sector’s many ills.

“We’ve been on this cliff edge for far too long, and enough is enough,” he added.

Headteachers at the conference made heartfelt and emotional pleas for change. Here’s what they had to say ...

‘I’m angry education is not properly funded’

AMY LASSMAN

HEADTEACHER AT NELSON MANDELA SCHOOL, BIRMINGHAM

I stand before you as a very angry woman. I am angry that I’ve lost count of the number of secretaries of state that have failed us and children over the last year, never mind the last 12 years.

That I’ve had to cancel our one-day-a-week family support worker at school as we can’t afford it anymore. That I’ve had to cut

educational visits to the bare minimum as parents can’t afford them and schools can’t subsidise them anymore.

I’m angry that I have to cut corners on SEN provision as the funding is so woefully inadequate. That it’s becoming impossible to recruit or retain teachers and support staff.



I’m angry that I have to give out food bank vouchers every day to parents and now to staff. I’m angry that I need to save money and can only do this by further reducing vital support staff.

We all know that the issues of inadequate funding punitive and dangerous accountability measures and the recruitment and retention crisis are all inextricably linked with the erosion of our pay over the last 12 years.

This government does not value children and young people enough to fund their education properly.

‘I’m on antidepressants’

KEITH WRIGHT

WESTGATE PRIMARY SCHOOL, LANCASHIRE

“The public had been given the impression that we provide a first-class education, but they don’t understand that we’ve been provided with steerage-class resources.

“I will have lost 18 support staff in my school – they’ve gone to jobs outside of the education sector because they can’t afford to feed their families.

“They’ve gone to places like car dealerships. One’s quite assertive, she’ll probably put the

sales through the roof. But she was in tears because she did not want to leave.

“I’ve got staff in tears working incredibly long hours because of vulnerable children who were told they don’t meet the thresholds for additional support or provision, but we know they fully do, or they are at risk every time

“I’ve got peers in my area that are going to call it a day because



they can’t do it anymore.

“I’m grateful for a knight of the realm. It’s called “ser”-traline. I’m on it – antidepressants first time in my 30-year career to keep me going. I shouldn’t have to.

“I had emails from a parent saying ‘we know the school is closed. But we understand why. We know you’re losing great staff through no fault of your own because you don’t have the resources. We recognise that you spend more time with our children than your own and we want to let you know it does not go unappreciated.’

“That keeps me going but I don’t know for how much longer.”

‘We’ve had to exclude because we cannot meet needs’

MARK MACKLEY

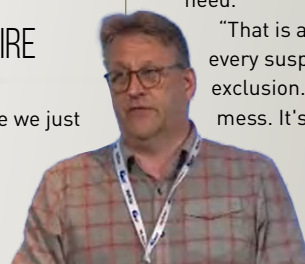
HEADTEACHER AT ST MATTHEW’S CE PRIMARY ACADEMY, LANCASHIRE

“We’re a two-form entry nursery to year six – 450 Children – 17 EHCPs, two in the pipeline.

“We have a lack of services, lack of access to them. We’ve ended up as a school having to resort to suspensions and permanent

exclusions for SEND children because we just cannot meet their needs.

“I’ve had a parent actually begging me to permanently exclude that child so they can get the services that they



need.

“That is a travesty. Like you, I weep over every suspension and every permanent exclusion. SEND funding is an absolute mess. It’s got to be sorted.”

ON LOCATION



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'Three rounds of adverts – nobody wants the job'

GEORGE SAMIOS

HEADTEACHER AT TWERTON INFANT SCHOOL, BATH

"With a shortage of spaces in special schools, the number of children with significant additional needs in mainstream schools continues to rise.

"In my school, we have 16 children with an education and health care plan - almost one in 10 children have significant needs.

"Without a team of over 20 teaching assistants, our teachers would simply not be able to teach the class that they have and the children would not make the progress they do.

"This year we broke new ground in three rounds of recruiting for a TA – advertising on the DfE teaching vacancies website, on Eteach, in local shops. We received a grand total of zero applications.

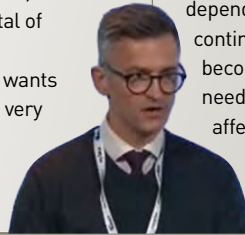
"Three rounds of adverts. Nobody wants to do the job. A big fat 'no thank you very much'.

"Over the past few years we have seen excellent TAs Leave to work

as managers in shops, as ward clerks, one even for a funeral director. All important jobs, but no longer within education.

"The one common factor is they are now earning more than they did as a teaching assistant. And in one case, over twice as much.

"This is serious. The future of our schools depends on this. Unless things change, TAs will continue to leave and without them everything becomes harder. The impact of one child's needs not being met in a class can adversely affect the rest of the class and put at risk the right that children have to be safe, to feel safe and to learn in an orderly and a safe environment."



'Families have been pushed out'

JO RILEY

HEADTEACHER AT RANDAL CREMER PRIMARY SCHOOL, HACKNEY

A little over a week ago I stood in a packed hall – full of parents and staff – as the local council explained their proposal to close my school from July 2024.

The school has been in the community for 150 years. The anger, anxiety and overwhelming sadness in the room was palpable as the council explained the factors that had impacted mine and so many schools locally and across London with the falling rolls.

What the explanations didn't do was tell the story behind the falling roll. They said Brexit – which was a Romanian family of seven children that returned to Romania because they no longer felt wanted or needed in London.

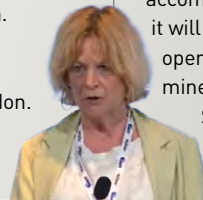
Housing policy: the lack of council and social housing, forcing many of my families further and further out of London. Our beautiful 31 Afghani refugee children who had been dispersed

across the UK as there was no housing for them locally.

A cruel benefit cap system where [people claiming] universal credit are not allowed to have certain rents. In Hackney, the average rent is £2,000 a month and that's for a one or two bedroom flat.

I've got families that have lived in temporary accommodation for 6 years and have been told it will be 13 years before they are rehoused. The opening of a local free school five minutes from mine.

Some of the most marginalised families in the borough are feeling once again pushed out and unwanted and unheard.



'It breaks my heart to reject children'

ADRIENNE WRIGHT

HEADTEACHER AT HATTON SPECIAL SCHOOL, ESSEX

It breaks my heart every time I have to reject a child that needs a place in my school because I know the impact that will have on that child, their family and my colleagues in mainstream schools.

Mainstream colleagues look to special schools and say can you help us? I wish I could. I would love to share my staff and expertise with you to try and help alleviate those issues, but I can't.

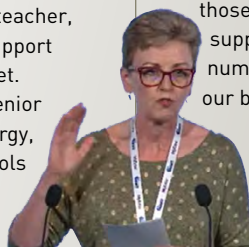
As a special school I have 191 pupils, I employ 155 staff, and we are struggling. My budget is coming in, my staffing just for headteacher, classroom teachers and learning support assistants – 80 per cent of my budget.

That's no admin, that's no other senior staff, no caretaking, no bills, no energy, no resources, nothing. Special schools were cutting posts – family support to help those most vulnerable

families, gone, therapies, gone. We can't recruit and retain learning support assistants (LSAs). I need 100 LSAs to staff my school. At points, this term I've had almost 50 per cent agency, if I can get them.

The additional costs of that, the instability for those most complex pupils, no external support. Numbers are falling, but the number of children with SEN is going up in our borough.

This needs strategic thought, it needs long term planning and investment in our most vulnerable pupils because they deserve better.



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'No amount of advice can balance the books'

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

Schools are enacting fewer savings identified by government cost cutters, prompting warnings "no amount of advice" can balance shrinking budgets.

Schools Week analysis reveals leaders made, on average, £10,100 of reductions after they were visited by school resource management advisers (SRMAs) last year.

That compares to nearly £19,000 of savings headteachers implemented, on average, in the three years between 2018 and 2021, backing up concerns schools are running out of financial wiggle room.

"You cannot advise your way out of a funding crisis," said Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders.

"The reality is schools and trusts are thinking all the time about how to reduce costs with minimum impact on provision, and advice from SRMAs is one way they do this.

"But the level of funding is such that no amount of advice can balance the books. Schools are often left having to set deficit budgets and plan for cuts, which impact on the curriculum and support they are able to offer."

Barton also argued that many heads given advice by SRMAs factor it into other considerations around provision and "make decisions on how far to go with savings identified".

The government has claimed a 4 per cent pay rise for teachers and leaders next year can be funded from within existing school budgets, thanks to a £2 billion uplift in allocation.

But many schools say they are facing further cuts to balance budgets.

Tom Goldman, the deputy director of the Department for Education's funding policy unit, told a webinar last week that leaders facing "bankruptcy" should use cost-cutters or go to councils or government for financial help.

The cost-cutters – normally school business leaders – have been visiting schools since September 2018 as part of an economy drive under then-academies minister Lord Agnew.

However, government research concluded more than half of schools said the advisers did not find them new ways to save cash.

Our findings show SRMAs proposed more than £1 billion of cuts during 1,454 visits over the past five years.



Paul Whiteman and Geoff Barton

The Department for Education said the figure was a "total cumulative value of all opportunities identified over a three-year period", including revenue-generating options and "recommendations considered to be of low achievability".

About £450 million of those savings were thought to be achievable through "individual, one-off opportunities, excluding revenue generation".

Despite this, heads only made reductions totalling £24.3 million in the six months after they were checked.

But last year, £3.7 million was saved within six months after 366 visits. Cost-cutters identified £292 million of savings overall.

Government officials said the savings figures do not provide a "comprehensive" picture, as many "of the opportunities trusts and schools plan to take forward will be realised over a longer period".

However, the department admitted it did "not hold actual figures" beyond the six-month mark.

Stephen Morales, the chief executive of the Institute of Schools Business Leadership, said the "extent to which schools are prepared to make the suggested savings or adjust the way they're working to realise them will vary".

The visits help school leaders "make better judgments and more informed decisions", he added.

Paul Wheeler, the chief operating officer of the East Midlands Academy Trust, who is also an SRMA, said the advisers did not have targets and were instead focused on

"sharing best practice".

"When you start the deployment there are more opportunities to find savings, but as good practice gets disseminated schools manage their resources better".

Morales added that SRMAs were charged with identifying ways to "redeploy resources without taking anything out of the school".

"We shouldn't be recklessly removing important resources from faculties, cutting out important capital improvement projects or disinvesting in tech – all that would be backwards."

An evaluation of the SRMA, held between 2017 and 2018, found a "benefit-cost ratio of £13 for every £1 spent". The DfE said it "broadly expects to see a similar return from the programme as it rolls out".

But Paul Whiteman, who leads the National Association of Head Teachers, said cost savings could only take schools "so far", calling for significant new investment.

A DfE spokesperson said they do not ask for savings after six months to "reduce further reporting burdens on schools".

She said it was "incorrect to assume SRMA reviews are about cutting costs", as their "focus is on reallocating resource to school improvement and pupil needs".

Schools are able to choose "which of the [savings] options may work for their individual context".

Nearly nine in ten schools said they found the visit 'good' or 'very good', a DfE survey found.



Stephen Morales

NEWS: OFSTED

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Ofsted lauds free school that posted controversial job ad

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@FCDWHITTAKER

A free school criticised for a job advertisement that warned candidates they would need to work “ridiculously hard” and be “wedded” to the role has been rated ‘outstanding’ across the board.

Mercia School in Sheffield faced a fierce backlash in February over its advert for an assistant headteacher. The role “may dominate your life on occasions” and the successful candidate must “live and breathe the school”, it said.

Applicants were asked if they would be “OK with the team contacting you in the evening”, “meeting in holidays” and holding detentions on Saturday mornings.

Critics said it showed why there was a teacher recruitment and retention crisis and that it backed up their own decisions to leave the profession.

But others praised its honesty. It was later taken down.

Ofsted visited the free school, which opened in 2018, for the first time in February, rating it ‘outstanding’ in every area.

Inspectors described a “warm and welcoming” school with “positive relationships...at the heart of the school’s approach to education”.

Leaders’ “ambitious vision for the school has been realised”, and the head and senior leaders “have created an exceptional learning environment, where staff and pupils can flourish”, the report said.

Inspectors also noted the “high” staff morale. “They are proud to work at the school. Leaders have prioritised professional development to ensure that staff are expertly trained to perform their roles.

“Those responsible for governance are knowledgeable and committed to the school. They have a strong understanding of the quality of education that pupils receive, and provide highly effective challenge and support to leaders.”

Dean Webster, the school’s head, said he “would like to place on record” his appreciation to parents and carers who took a “huge leap of faith” sending their child to a new school.

“I hope this report vindicates their decision. We thank all our families for their unwavering support, it means a lot to us all.”

Mercia’s controversial advert asked applicants

We are very protective of our culture and want a likeminded individual who will work ridiculously hard to deliver for our pupils. When I state ridiculously hard, I mean it! You will have to live and breathe the school, and be wedded to it. It may dominate your life on occasions.

Ask yourself before applying:

Are you ok with the team contacting you in the evening? Meeting in holidays and being prepared to do detentions on a Saturday morning? Can you cope with huge demands throughout the day, which include teaching a high load, managing pastoral issues and being on alert from 7am through until 6pm, once we have walked the pupils safely down the road and finished detentions? High energy and sacrifice are required to excel in this position at Mercia School. We cannot carry anyone; we need a commitment from our Assistant Headteacher to stay until the job is done.

A screenshot of Mercia’s controversial job advert

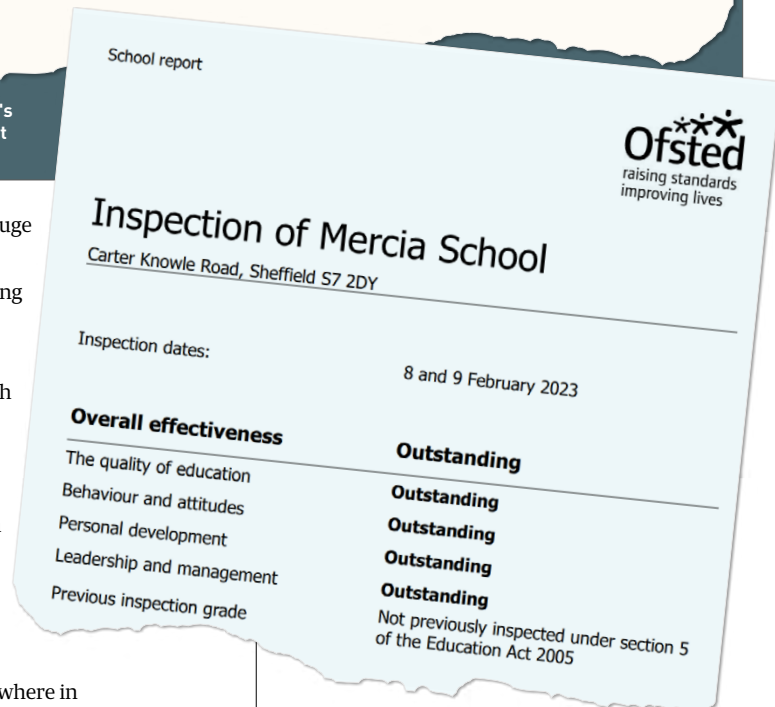
if they could “cope with huge demands throughout the day, which include teaching a high load, managing pastoral issues and being on alert from 7am through until 6pm”.

Niamh Sweeney, the deputy general secretary of the National Education Union, said at the time that senior leaders “can certainly expect higher demands of their time, but we will never get anywhere in dealing with the workload crisis in this country by embedding it further in working culture”.

The government’s landmark working lives of teachers and leaders report, which was leaked to Schools Week in March, found senior leaders worked an average of 56.8 hours a week. Two in five worked more than 60 hours, equivalent to five 12-hour days.



Mercia School headteacher Dean Webster



Mercia’s inspection report

Webster said he was “unapologetic for doing all we can to ensure our pupils receive an exceptional education”.

“We will remain committed to ensuring all our pupils achieve their ambitions by driving high expectations and ‘sweating the small stuff”.

The school will open its Mercia Collegiate Sixth Form in September to pupils “from across the city of Sheffield; with an ambition for scholars to gain entry to the most prestigious universities in the world”.

Ofsted also found pupils were “polite and understand the importance of respect”.

“They recognise how the structures that leaders have put in place help them to stay safe and learn. Pupils feel happy and safe in school. Bullying is extremely rare ... pupils’ behaviour is exemplary. Parents and pupils are proud to be part of the school community,” its report said.

BESA-backed parliamentary group at centre of MP probe

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

The Parliamentary watchdog is investigating an MP over possible transparency breaches by a committee backed by the British Educational Suppliers Association.

The standards commissioner is probing allegations that Conservative MP Marcus Fysh broke all-party parliamentary group (APPG) rules concerning “income and expenditure statements” and the publication of “mandatory information”.

Fysh said the inquiry relates to reported breaches by the BESA-supported APPG for education, which he chairs.

After the investigation was revealed this week, Fysh stressed he was looking into the matter himself.

“The group has had no income or expenditure and has simply received secretariat services from Ranelagh Political Communications funded by BESA,” he said. “Such benefits need to be reported along with the provision of various notices of meetings and minutes.

“I am checking whether this has been done correctly on the advice of the secretariat prior to my becoming chairman in February 2020 and since, including during Covid when normal annual general meetings could not take place.”

BESA has paid Ranelagh at least £132,000 over the last eight years to act as the group’s secretariat.

The register of APPGs shows the group published its income and expenditure statement for this year.

It did not publish one for the years between 2017 and 2021. Rules state APPGs only need to do so if they have received more than £12,500 over the previous 12 months.

Guidance says the papers “must be published on the group’s website, or – if it has no website – produce it on request”. The APPG’s website currently does not load, saying “the page isn’t redirecting properly”.

The APPG has held meetings with the likes of Labour deputy leader Angela Rayner, former children’s minister Will Quince, and children’s commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza to discuss issues such as SEND reforms and alternative provision.

It described itself as a group that “promotes



Marcus Fysh

and stimulates debates across all sectors of education”. In 2017, it produced a report into “how schools prepare young people for the future”.

Fysh said the group has also engaged “with the roll out of technical education”, despite being “relatively inactive due to Covid restrictions over the past few years”.

When asked about the standards probe, BESA director general Caroline Wright and Ranelagh managing director Anna Wolffe said they had not been contacted by the commissioner.

“As such I’m unable to comment on any investigation that may be underway,” Wright added. “BESA would obviously provide any support and information required should it be contacted in the future.”

Analysis by *The Guardian* and *OpenDemocracy* website last year found more than £13 million had been poured into a growing number of APPGs, fuelling concerns over the potential for backdoor influence. Of the 755 groups last year, more than half of the total £25 million funding came from private firms. The rest was charities and trade unions.

Steve Goodrich, of Transparency International, told *The Guardian* there is a “plethora of interests behind these groups that remain [largely] unchecked by formal rules. Without greater transparency over lobbying, much of what happens in these groups will remain behind closed doors.”

On its website, Ranelagh said it is “fully versed in all the rules governing the provision of secretariat services for APPGs and we ensure all groups for which we provide support comply with these regulations”.

BESA has also paid the communications firm to act as secretariat for the APPG for education technology.

The group was previously chaired by former education secretary Damian Hinds and Chris Skidmore, who was once a minister at the DfE.

Wright explained that the group does not currently appear on the register of APPGs “because it has not met or appointed officers during the current period”.

A standards commissioner spokesperson said she was unable to comment on the conduct of individual MPs outside the information published online.

BESA has been in the headlines over its public opposition to the £42 million Oak curriculum government quango.

A letter to education secretary Gillian Keegan, co-ordinated by BESA six months ago, said Oak was a waste of “public funding on what looks set to become another ill-fated government technology project”, calling for it to be scrapped.

Four of the five members of the House of Lords who signed the letter had paid roles with potential firms that are rivals to Oak.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Schools sought for air quality study

Up to 2,000 schools are being sought for what is expected to be the "biggest study of air quality in schools anywhere in the world".

The Schools' Air Quality Monitoring for Health and Education project, or SAMHE, will provide free air quality monitors to measure carbon dioxide, total volatile organic compounds, particulate matter, temperature and relative humidity.

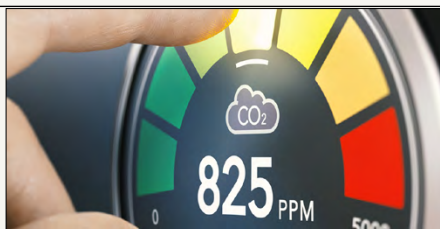
The programme is being run by the Stockholm Environment Institute at the University of York, Imperial College, London, and the University of Cambridge.

It follows calls from the chief medical officer Professor Chris Whitty for schools, offices, supermarkets and hospitals to be monitored for indoor air pollutants, prompted by fears about harms caused by dirty air.

Analysis by the campaign group Global Action Plan in 2021 found more than a quarter of schools were in locations with high levels of small particle pollution.

The Department for Education said schools were "invited to register for a free air quality monitor, linked to a web app where teachers and pupils can view and use the data".

It is separate from a government scheme



launched during the Covid-19 pandemic that distributed carbon dioxide monitors to schools.

The programme's website states it recruiting between 1,000 to 2,000 schools to "generate enough data for our project scientists to analyse and to understand schools' air quality across the UK."

Dr Henry Burridge, project lead for SAMHE at Imperial College London, said the data would "provide evidence for better national policies and practice".

Twenty schools worked with the team to design the project. One of those, Elangeni School in Buckinghamshire, said the "children's enthusiasm has been infectious and there is tangible excitement at being able to access the data in real time at home".

Schools can register online [here](#).

[Full story here](#)

Stressed examiners unhappy with pay



About half of examiners are unhappy with their pay and almost six in ten find their work stressful, according to a survey by Ofqual.

It follows several tumultuous years in which the Covid pandemic caused widespread disruption. Examiners were furloughed and offered pay-offs not to work – and faced delays to payments last year.

The survey of almost 15,000 examiners was conducted last year. Although about nine in ten respondents found their role meaningful and were proud of what they did, "not all aspects of examining were viewed as positively".

Fifty-seven per cent reported their roles were stressful, slightly more than in the last Ofqual survey.

Forty-eight per cent reported "unsatisfactory" pay, down slightly from 49 per cent four years ago, while 25 per cent said they were happy with their pay.

Ofqual said it was "reassuring" the examining hiatus in 2020 and 2021 had not affected results. Examiners are generally keen to continue, it said.

[Full story here](#)

Exam appeals down, grade changes up

Appeals against GCSE and A-level grades have plummeted below pre-Covid levels.

Ofqual data published on Thursday shows 2,460 grades were challenged last year, equating to 0.04 per cent of the 6.1 million certificates issued. This is 23 per cent lower than in 2018-19, the last year to use normal grading and appeals systems.

The number of GCSE grades challenged fell 13 per cent, while the number of AS and A-level grades challenged plummeted 45 per cent.

However, the proportion of appeals upheld and grades changed increased.

Between 2019 and 2022, the proportion of GCSE appeals upheld rose 2 per cent to 58 per cent, while the proportion of grade changes rose from 63 to 74 per cent.



Half resulted in change of one grade. Five per cent resulted in a change of three or more, while 38 per cent stayed as they were, compared with 69 per cent in 2019.

[Full story here](#)



The 13th annual

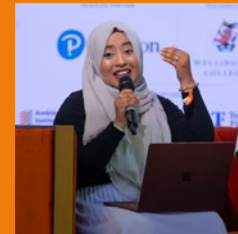
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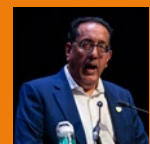


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Profile

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‘We’re seen as irritation that gets in the way of learning’

Persistent absences would drop if schools were more inclusive, says Ellie Costello. The leader of the parent support group Square Peg tells Jessica Hill why she is determined to raise the challenges faced by school refuser families

Ellie Costello is at the front of a growing movement against the “one-size-fits-all” education system that creates, she says, kids who cannot cope in school.

Square Peg, the parent support organization she leads, is particularly concerned by the top-down pressures schools are facing to bolster attendance. This forces “square pegs” to fit round holes that damages “the peg, not the hole”.

Many heads will challenge that view – and it is clear children not being in school leads to its own dangers – but Square Peg’s mission is one that can’t be ignored.

Persistent absenteeism (where pupils miss 10 per cent or more classes) doubled from 10.9 per cent in 2018-19 to 22.5 per cent last year. Getting those children back in class is creating a battleground between schools and frustrated parents.

Costello says parents like her are seen in education circles as an “irritation” who “get in the way of children’s learning”.

She has spent the past two years “networking [her] socks off” to raise the challenges that school refuser families face amid a “relentless focus on data” and “poor understanding of complexities at play”.

But Covid has at least legitimised attendance as an area of concern, she says. “Suddenly, we’ve gone from nobody, to everybody wanting to talk about attendance.”

But this has unleashed a bigger stick with which to beat families and hold the sector to account.

Costello believes the solutions lie in making schools more inclusive and has just co-authored a handbook, *Square Pegs*, helping them do so.

Harmful narratives

Her journey of fighting on her children’s behalf led her away from a promising career in television

Profile: Ellie Costello



Costello with mental health campaigner Natasha Devon, who contributed to the Square Pegs book

production – she worked on *Poldark* and *Holby City* – towards supporting other struggling parents. Her son and daughter, now aged 17 and 15, are at a “tiny specialist school on very expensive [education, health and care plans]. But that was “never the plan”.

Costello’s son was born with a rare condition that left him in chronic pain. He became “mentally unstable” while still at primary age – something still “really hard” for Costello to admit – and both her children went on to become school refusers.

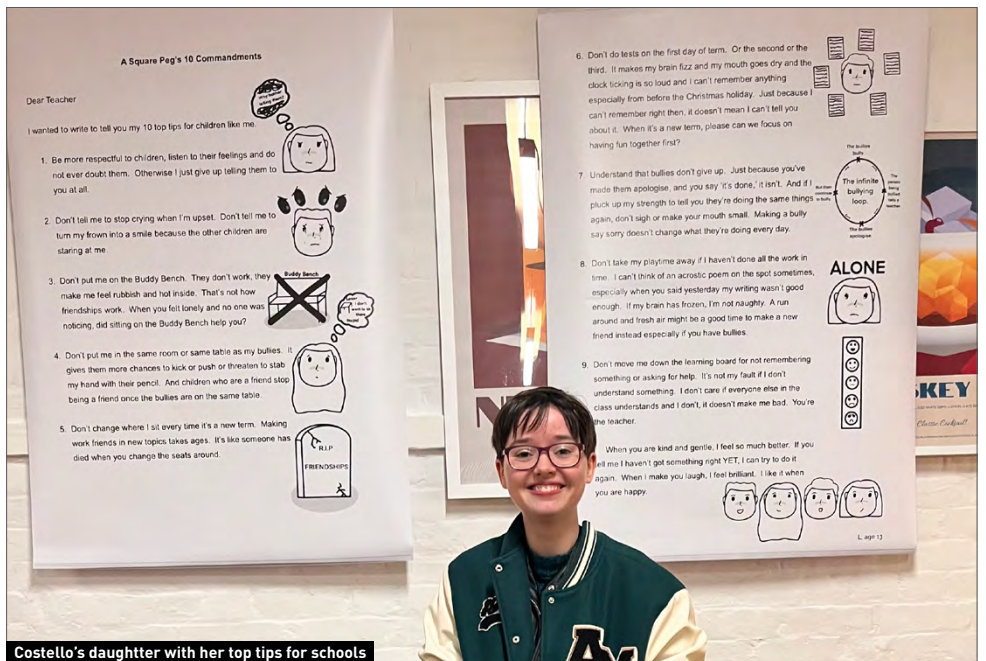
The eventual diagnoses for them was “developmental trauma... normally seen in children who are abused and neglected”. It was a “tough freaking label” which Costello fought against.

“It would have been easier for them to be diagnosed autistic, because at least there are some pathways to support and understanding. Complex trauma diagnosis broke me as it happened on my watch and despite my efforts to find support for my kids (to no avail) on top of the pressure of being threatened with fines or prison for non attendance.”

She was hopeful at first that it was a phase they would grow out of and bought into “harmful narratives” such as “children always bounce back”.

“But you wear down that resilience and they go into a hole. It’s a really scary, dark place to have a nine-year-old with such escalating needs that they’re harming themselves out of sheer despair.”

Her son’s “school refusal label” also irked Costello, because she knew he was not doing it wilfully but had serious levels of need.



Costello's daughter with her top tips for schools

‘Suddenly everybody now wants to talk about attendance’

Rather than prioritising those needs, the education system was focused on getting him back to school – with national conversations around attendance dominated by truancy and exclusions.

At the time, the coalition government was introducing parental accountability measures, tightening up on term-time absences and slashing support services. Then the Children and Families Act 2014 introduced a SEND support system without adequately funding it.

Costello found it “eye-opening” to be told by her son’s primary there was “very little” they could do for a school refuser. The waiting list for an NHS mental health appointment was at least two years.

“All I knew was that I had an eight-year-old whose top-level needs – the one people were paying attention to – were attendance and anxiety. We were led to believe school refusal was an emotional-based disorder, and we were the only ones in the world struggling with attendance.”

Not fine in school

Social media allowed Costello to connect with other parents, at first through a closed forum set

up in 2018, Not Fine in School.

The group’s name reflects how some parents, herself included, are told their children are “fine” when they are at school but display challenging behaviours at home.

Costello’s son had good grades and was quiet in school; at home, he stopped eating, talking, sleeping and washing.

She claims attendance barriers faced by parents often relate to unmet SEND, excessive academic pressure, overly strict behaviour policies and an irrelevant curriculum.

But the government’s solution has been to take a tougher stance. Proposals in the shelved schools bill and last year’s fines and registrations consultation tightened existing policy around attendance enforcement.

Last year, after the Department for Education issued its new guidance and the children’s commissioner launched her 100 per cent attendance drive, membership requests at Not Fine in School soared by 70 per cent to more than 37,000.

Costello says families started reporting an

Profile: Ellie Costello

immediate increase in fines and a drive to being back into school full-time as soon as possible. This “massively destabilised kids attending as best they could part-time”, she says.

She believes schools’ policies are now a mixed bag, with some “coercively refusing to authorise absence, jettisoning families into fines and prosecutions”, while others take a more conciliatory approach.

Covid’s legacy

Through her engagement with Not Fine in School, in 2019 Costello met Fran Morgan who founded Square Peg, a community interest company funded by donation. Costello joined Square Peg in 2020 and took over the organisation in 2022 as Fran stepped into retirement.

Ironically lockdowns, a shock to millions of parents, did not feel much different for her as she’d spent six years “non-electively homeeducating”.

‘She says the DfE ignored Square Peg at first, assuming that persistent attendance was a “I thought schools thought attendance would go away as kids got used to going back to school”’.

But following pressure from other groups such as The National Children’s Bureau and ASCL, the school leaders’ union, Square Peg has met DfE teams to discuss attendance barriers.

Costello believes the department’s “top-down” approach can “pit schools, parents and children against each other”, creating stress on leaders.

And she believes it is “chasing the wrong key performance indicators. We’ve prized attainment above all else in the belief that that equals social mobility. That’s a complete lie. You can have a fistful of qualifications and be divorced three times, mentally unwell, and in insecure housing aged 50, going ‘pop’.

“It comes back to learning how to navigate the emotional world, and negotiating relationships with others. How do we disagree agreeably? These skills that employers are crying out for aren’t being delivered – at such a detriment to our children.”

‘Lack of tolerance to diversity’

Costello believes her son should never have been diagnosed with SEND, but that his mental health



Susan Liverman, Heidi Mavir, Harleigh Roberts, Maddie Roberts, and Ellie Costello in March handing in their ‘no fines’ petition

‘Attainment is prized in the belief that it equals social mobility’

became so disabling it became an educational need.

She thinks more children are exhibiting similar symptoms of developmental trauma after exposure to “too much toxic stress for too long”. But schools often mistake this for additional learning needs such as autism.

Her son is now “frothing at the mouth in anger” that he ended up at a special school, and Costello believes the notion that some parents see EHCPs as a “golden ticket” is pernicious. “Nobody wants [their child to be labelled] as having special needs ... All you want is for your kids to be happy and attending, so you can get on with your job and be their Mum.”

The absence rate for SEND pupils has risen to such an extent since Covid that almost half of SEND pupils (40 per cent in secondaries and 49 per cent in special schools) are now frequently absent.

Costello believes some of this is an understandable stress response from children being “traumatically bereaved in Covid, or the existential threat of it”.

But it is also symptomatic of the lack of tolerance to diversity that has been woven through education by implicit messages in behaviour policies that “we all need to be the same”.

“Our children are holding up a mirror. They’re saying this isn’t working – and it’s not because I’m a snowflake or have a helicopter parent”

Inclusion ‘not just a fluffy ideal’

She believes that if the DfE’s policy of providing more mainstream provision for children with SEND (rather than more special schools) is to work, “we need to really get up close with our implicit bias”.

“There has to be not just a will from schools to accept 20 of those [SEND] children, but an absolute philosophy of practice to make it work. Inclusion has to run through the values of the whole school, not be just a fluffy ideal.”

But she still wonders whether this is the solution, as her own children were “shoved through classes” in mainstream schools in the name of inclusion, to their detriment.

Costello also worries the relentless focus on data is leading to “othering and splitting” in schools through “well-intended” solutions such as SEND, attendance and behaviour hubs.

The solution instead involves “rethinking the curriculum, assessment, and the size and scope of education settings”.

But there is now, she believes, an “appetite to try to do things differently. The question is, are ministers brave enough to really run with that?”

Opinion

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



EMMA KNIGHTS

Chief executive, National Governance Association

The DfE's new trust quality descriptors require scrutiny

The long-awaited descriptors may seem like small beer in the present febrile climate, but they need careful (and slow) study, says Emma Knights

There has been little comment on the long-awaited trust quality descriptions that the Department for Education published in draft recently. These will seem small beer compared with pay, strikes, funding and inspection, but perhaps the lack of concern is because they are really little more than a starting point.

The DfE claims that these quality descriptors “represent a clear and ambitious vision for the academies sector”, but in reality they are the basics that competent boards and executives will already be doing. Arguably that is no bad thing; it avoids high stakes being attached to them. But lack of interrogation and debate poses the risk that we walk into another period of confusion on the role of the regulator.

Seasoned Schools Week readers will remember when, a few years back, there was a stand-off between the national schools commissioner and HMCI. Regional schools commissioners were sending consultants into trusts and their schools to ascertain the strength of their school improvement. Ultimately, the practice was

stopped to keep the space clear for Ofsted.

The National Governance Association (NGA) has for some time supported the introduction of the inspection of multi-academy trusts as single organisations, but Ofsted in its present form does not have the capacity or expertise to carry out that task. The current system is quite different as it assesses the quality of education and leadership in a single school, whereas the quality descriptions would rightly require MAT inspections to cover finance and operations, plus workforce and governance to a level not seen. But until MATs are inspected, how can regional directors make good judgments about a trust’s strength against these descriptors?

In the year between the publication last March of the Opportunity for All white paper and publication this March of the Academies regulatory and commissioning review, there has been much discussion about the need for the descriptions to be measurable. This has not been achieved, but rightly so. This sort of exercise should not be rushed.

I once led a project to develop measures for civil legal advice provision. During that year, my team became experts on intelligent accountability and measuring what we value. After much testing



“ Neglecting this could lead to regret later

and consultation, we did come up with a balanced score card which several funders adopted and others adapted and developed further.

The DfE has already funded a feasibility study on defining and collecting metrics on the quality of school governance. And after a very extensive study, the National Foundation for Educational Research and NGA concluded that this was just not feasible to do in a meaningful way.

Instead, in 2021, the DfE set up a quality-assured programme dedicated to making an assessment of trust governance. The NGA won the tender to deliver that programme, but the DfE recently decided to discontinue it on the grounds of affordability. This removes a ready-made way for commissioners to at least understand governance success.

Which brings us back to the quality descriptors. In the absence of agreed and valid measures, it’s unclear how regional directors will decide whether trusts are meeting their “clear and ambitious vision”.

There is rightly a commitment to transparency; the sector wants and needs to know why some trusts are chosen to grow while others are not.

Take two of the descriptors, for example. One is about trusts taking on challenging schools and transforming underperforming schools. Another requires them to share earning for best practice and help underperforming schools to improve. The NGA’s research shows many MATs are not able to fulfil their strategic ambitions for growth. Some, especially smaller trusts, contend that it isn’t about strength, ambition or quality, but that they are being overlooked for opportunities to do these things.

So we look forward to engaging with the development of the imminent commissioning guidance and understanding a little more about how the trust sector will be overseen by its regulator. But we encourage others to as well. It may seem small beer right now, but neglecting it could lead to regret later.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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The lack of a clear government strategy to ensure the safe exploration of artificial intelligence in education puts children at significant risk, writes Victoria Nash

We've come a long way since electronic calculators revolutionised our ability to complete maths problems without pen or paper. With the advent of ChatGPT, Dall-E and a huge host of "edtech" apps and programs, important questions are once again being asked about the appropriate role of technology in classrooms.

The potential benefits of these new AI-driven tools are extensive: greater personalisation for learners, a reduction in teacher workload and opportunities to prepare learners for the jobs of the future.

But the stakes are incredibly high and an unreflective approach could result in significant harms to children, as well as destroying trust in innovation.

So far, the government has indicated a largely hands-off approach to regulating AI, framing this as fundamentally "pro-innovation" and preferring to leave it to existing regulators. This seems risky, not least because it's unclear which regulator could take responsibility. This leads us to ask: shouldn't the government regulate now to ensure safe and positive use of AI in schools?

The EU has somewhat of a headstart, and a UK strategy could usefully build on measures developed there. The draft European AI Act adopts a risk-based approach, imposing the strictest obligations where the risks of AI are greatest. Specific mention is given to AI in educational contexts where the use of such tools could alter someone's life course, such as in exams or assessments. Companies producing these higher-risk AI products will be obliged to abide by rules such as



PROF VICTORIA NASH

Director and senior policy fellow, Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford

The government must do more to regulate AI in education

mandatory risk assessments, use of high-quality training datasets and provision of additional documentation to enable oversight of compliance.

In addition to this draft law, the EU has also produced detailed guidelines setting out key considerations to support the positive use of AI in schools. These include both ethical

suggest that educators should consider whether the proposed AI tools leave room for human decision-making, whether they treat everyone fairly, whether they respect human dignity and whether they provide transparent justifications for decisions made. To ensure the tools are trustworthy, the guidance

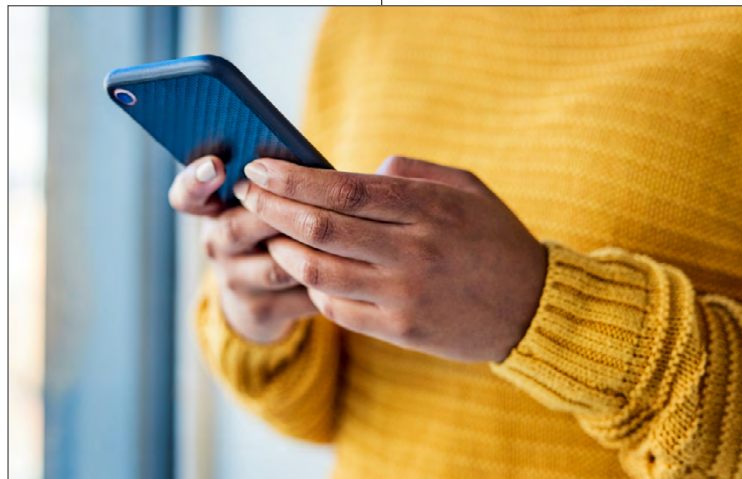
“ Anyone can design an AI-based educational app or service

principles and recommendations necessary to ensure that the technologies are trustworthy. This seems like a good starting point for any UK strategy.

In terms of ethics, the guidelines

highlights accreditation and the need for companies producing educational AI tools to observe similar ethical principles.

Accreditation or certification seems obvious, indeed its absence



is rather shocking. Playground equipment must meet appropriate safety standards and should be installed by expert contractors. Reading schemes are designed for specific learning outcomes and based on well-researched pedagogy. In contrast, anyone can design an AI-based educational app or service without any specialist educational input, and that tool can be rolled out to a whole class or school – and many are. Greater oversight is necessary if we are to ensure first that such technologies are safe, secure, reliable and, just as importantly, that they deliver real benefits to learning.

The final aspect of a comprehensive regulatory strategy should be support for more effective data governance. As the Digital Futures Commission noted, this is vital if children are not to be exploited commercially whilst gaining an education. Many digital services and apps harvest huge amounts of data from their users, often in lieu of payment, whilst the terms of service explaining this are painfully obscure. Navigating such data protection responsibilities is complex, and schools are poorly resourced in expertise and infrastructure to manage it. Investment and training in data protection, as well as provision of more government support and advice, is needed.

Together, these three components – ethical guidelines for design and use, certification or accreditation, and comprehensive data governance – would provide a decent starting point for a UK strategy that would enable safe, positive and effective exploration of the great potential of AI technologies in schools. This conversation must start now.

Opinion

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

There's no reason for any school to miss out on the joyful results – for pupils and staff – of bringing in new texts, says Joy Mbakwe

I remember it clearly. I was 16 and found myself in a grammar school where I was deemed a minority. It didn't seem to matter how high my grades were; I was consistently predicted lower outcomes than my white counterparts. It was a violent introduction to how the world perceived me, which inevitably led to me questioning the legitimacy of my presence in the classroom.

In my NQT year, I continuously felt like I needed to prove myself worthy of the label "teacher". I worked harder than my peers, arriving at school as early as 6.30am. I didn't want to be seen as inferior, although it happened many times. I often questioned the legitimacy of my voice; whether I should speak and then, if so, how loudly?

Years have passed. I have been deputy head of English, head of English and I'm now an assistant head on a mission to ensure all pupils believe they deserve to be heard with a curriculum that represents them.

Decolonisation was and always will be at the heart of my vision and the rich, diverse English curriculum at my school speaks to the necessity of representation and diversity. When I was head of English I decided to rewrite the key stage 4 curriculum to ensure, where possible, that it reflected our pupils. I facilitated training and ensured each member of my team was on their own journey towards anti-racism. By taking intentional and incremental steps, my vision started to come to life.

The department became passionate about the need for inclusion. Key stage



JOY
MBAKWE

Assistant headteacher,
Lilian Baylis Technology College

How diversifying our curriculum made English engaging again

3 leads were appointed on the basis that they would create a curriculum that was diverse and fresh, one that inspired pupils to become avid readers and writers. We were rewarded over time – and with effort.

So I feel genuinely disheartened

per cent) see lack of diversity and representation as a barrier to pupil learning. I can honestly say that when our pupils started saying "English isn't that bad", it felt like my greatest achievement. Requiring students to read is hard work, and to write, even

“ It won't just change your classroom, it will change you

when I read statistics like those in Pearson's 2022 School Report, which show that only one in 10 teachers (11

harder. When they started speaking favourably about English, the work we have done and our clear anti-



racist intent, it filled my heart with pride.

Things must continue to change. The government needs to do more and Ofsted should see that diversity is paramount to a successful curriculum. Until that is the case, I fear steps will only be taken by a few schools, like mine, who realise that this work is imperative. English departments are missing out on that joyful feeling of success while pupils are missing out on studying some extraordinary texts and exploring and understanding different viewpoints and opinions.

Changing texts is not easy. It takes time to learn them and create teaching resources. But exam boards are introducing more diverse texts and whole new GCSE specifications, and there are free initiatives to help you. Besides, nobody expects overnight transformation.

Start the slow, incremental work of diversifying your curriculum now and I assure you, the work you do won't just change the classroom, it will change you. There will be difficult moments and challenging conversations, but these are necessary for the classroom and society. How else will we ever find ourselves in a world where people no longer need to fight for the right to be seen and heard?

We have an opportunity to be part of change so that the teachers of tomorrow no longer have to justify the necessity of a representative curriculum and their pupils never have to suffer the pain of questioning their legitimate place in the classroom. Our discomfort will be worth it.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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NIC PONSFORD

Founder, Global Equality Collective

Making careers visible is the secret to success for many pupils

We must unpick why so many pupils are excluded from potential careers simply because they don't know about them, writes Nic Ponsford

Pupils are often asked what they want to be when they grow up. This is an easy question for some: those with privilege have generational role models of careers and networks, are able to attend work experience or get help from knowledgeable teachers to work out a clear career roadmap.

But the answer is not so clear for many others. They may not know what they want to do and may not even be aware of all the options, let alone the qualifications and skills required. This lack of awareness is particularly acute for students from under-represented backgrounds.

Invisible careers are professions that are not widely known, talked about, or understood by certain groups of pupils. For example, girls often overlook careers in STEM. This can be because of a lack of resources in schools – or even systemic bias about who can succeed in these fields (such as the idea that boys are better at maths). Careers in creative industries, such

as animation, software design and game development, are equally little known or understood by pupils who do not have access to relevant information or resources, or who face systemic barriers.

Under-represented pupils find it most challenging to access these invisible careers; identifying who they are is an important first step in addressing the issue. Data collection and analysis can help and provide them with targeted support.

Like everyone else, teachers have unique experiences and perspectives that shape their biases. While some are beneficial and help them to connect with and understand their pupils better, some may be harmful. Teachers may not intentionally discriminate, but their unconscious biases can still impact the way they perceive and interact with certain pupils and the career advice they give. Their own experiences can also impact their understanding of possible jobs, what employers expect and what Generation Z wants from the world of work.

By understanding unconscious bias and its impact, teachers can work towards creating a more inclusive classroom environment. This is not at all about blaming or shaming teachers, but entirely



Unconscious biases can impact teachers' career advice

about empowering them to better support their pupils to understand the options open to them.

Promoting diversity in the curriculum is another important way to make invisible careers visible to all. This can include highlighting the contributions of people from diverse backgrounds in different fields.

Equally, exploring the role that diversity plays (or fails to play) in different industries not only makes the curriculum more engaging and relatable, but also challenges stereotypes and provides pupils with a more realistic and accurate view of the world of work – one they can feel emboldened to change.

Visible role models can be a powerful way to inspire and motivate pupils, allowing them to see themselves in that same role or as a pioneer in another field.

However, it's important that these role models represent a diverse range of backgrounds,

including people from different ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as those living with disabilities or who identify as LGBTQ+. These characteristics are all part of our pupils' lived experiences, and none should be left to stand as a barrier to their progress.

Making invisible careers visible to all pupils requires a multifaceted approach that addresses bias, privilege and the needs of under-represented pupils. By creating dynamic and engaging conversations about work, teachers can break down the barriers faced by under-represented pupils and open doors to a vast array of careers.

At a time of deep skills shortages, we simply can't afford to keep excluding so much talent from so many industries by keeping them hidden. It's time to consider what we want our economy to be when it grows up.

Solutions

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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EVIE CRYER

Year 6 teacher and member of the LGBTQ+ & Allies network, Oasis Community Learning

Solutions: How to make LGBTQ+ inclusion a reality in any school

Evie Cryer reflects on the gains Oasis Community Learning has made in safeguarding LGBTQ+ pupils and staff by creating a trust-wide, inclusive culture

Earlier this year, Edurio and The Key released their national review of safeguarding, drawing on the views of 70,000 pupils. The study found concerning differences in feelings of safety between pupils with different sexual orientations and gender identities.

While most pupils overall felt safe in school, this number dropped significantly among pupils who did not identify as heterosexual, and those with a gender identity other than male or female. With these alarming findings in mind, and in anticipation of the government's promised guidance on transgender pupils, I'm proud to share my trust's approach to inclusive safeguarding.

It is non-negotiable that safeguarding provision is available to all in a way that best meets the needs of the individual. Issues around sexual orientation and gender identity can be emotive but, as all educators know, knowledge and clear communication are powerful tools for fostering an inclusive community.

Our trust-wide LGBTQ+ & Allies network began with staff, as we felt that without staff we would struggle to encourage pupils to follow. Our networks now stretch across the pupil population as well, with pupil voice, champions and events a vital part of the equation.

Our first and most important step was to ensure LGBTQ+ stories were represented across our curriculum. This goes beyond awareness days or PSHE/RSE sessions; it's about supporting all subjects to highlight the experiences of people from different backgrounds.

Setting an example and encouraging an open and accepting mindset is the best way to ensure the long-term safety of all pupils. In the short term, however, interventions may be necessary. We categorise incidents into three tiers, developed with our LGBTQ+ & Allies network. Tier 1 represents a learning opportunity, with advice on what to do next time; tier 2 requires more structured sanction from school leadership; tier 3 covers serious incidents that may require police intervention.

For tier 1 and 2 incidents, we've produced an educational booklet for pupils in detention so that, alongside the sanction, they get the information they need to grow from the experience. Staff are trained to support young people work through the booklet.

We bring parents into the conversation where possible. This again recognises that it is adults who set the culture within which children grow and act.

However, in most situations we

would not discuss a pupil's gender identity with parents. Acting in the best interests of the child, we instead help them to decide whether this is a conversation they are ready to have. If so, we support them in their "coming out" story.

As a large trust, we have access to a wide a range of excellent people and practices. However, delivering genuine LGBTQ+ inclusion is within any school or trust's reach. Here are nine actions that have helped us to deliver genuine LGBTQ+ inclusion:

1. Zero tolerance to homophobia, aligned to our values and ethos.
2. Capturing pupil voice often and involving pupils on the journey of acceptance.
3. Providing definitions of our policy's terminology and examples of what it references in action, including what breaking it looks like.
4. Checking our policy's wording with someone from within the community the policy serves.
5. Not overlook things we think will "never happen". If you can think it, it needs a policy to protect the community from it.
6. Ensuring our policies have a mental health focus, working on the assumption that there are hidden harms. In severe cases, suppression can cause extreme feelings of stress, anxiety, and trauma.
7. Getting buy-in from staff. Policy is only as good as the people who implement it.
8. Integrating pupil networks by sharing what they do with the wider school on a regular basis.
9. Share lessons from those with established whole-school approaches with those who are beginning the journey.

“ We bring parents into the conversation where possible



THE REVIEW

WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH YOUR TEACHING ASSISTANT

BOOK
TV
FILM
RADIO
EVENT
RESOURCE

Author: Sara Alston

Publisher: Bloomsbury Education

Publication date: February 2023

ISBN: 1472992563

Reviewer: Sarah Johnson, president, PRUsAP

Education's recruitment and retention crisis is just as applicable to teaching assistants as it is to teachers. Indeed, the effect of teaching assistants leaving the classroom only worsens workload issues for teachers and means swathes of vulnerable children do not have the support they need.

In the midst of strikes over pay and funding, the SEND and AP implementation plan has also generated heated debate. Least problematic among its recommendations is the need to develop a longer-term approach to deploying, supporting and upskilling teaching assistants.

Against this backdrop, Sara Alston's *Working Effectively with your Teaching Assistant* couldn't be more timely. Its very title expresses a realisation that teaching assistants do not work in isolation and that a collegial approach is required to deliver for all pupils. It's refreshingly unpatronising about the role too, fully recognising its value, its specific skillset, and the importance of these professionals' agency and leadership in the classroom and across the school.

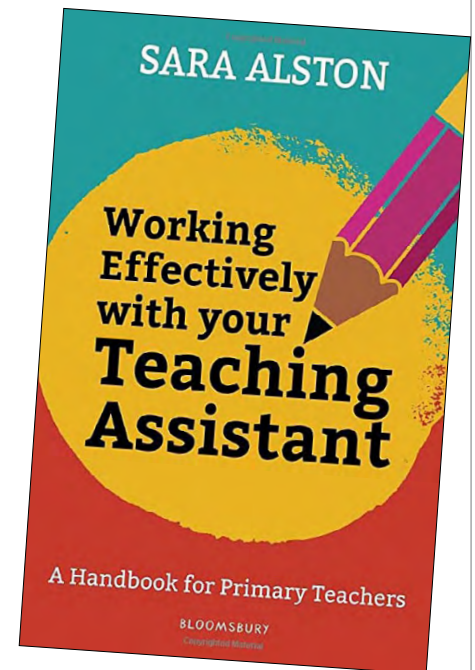
From a purely financial point of view, with staffing costs the largest proportion of any school's expenditures, it is a no-brainer to make sure staff are working effectively together. But working effectively with teaching assistants is much more than a financial imperative, as Alston's book makes clear. Classroom partnerships that work don't just deliver for pupils; they also improve the wellbeing of teachers and teaching assistants alike. As such, investing in them is as much an investment in retention as it is in results.

Alston has significant experience in working with TAs, and this book is a testament to that. The book is filled with relevant examples, good practice and reflective questions. These all help to guide the reader to consider a range of approaches to develop effective working relationships with support staff. I particularly liked that its examples draw on children with a range of needs, making the book relevant to different educational settings.

Working Effectively with your Teaching Assistant is a well-structured book that begins by setting the scene through an exploration of ten challenges that arise from the role. Each section then focuses on a specific area, such as reflecting on what you might want a TA to do within the classroom, children with SEND, interventions, how to provide feedback, and finishing on behaviour and communication.

I did wonder whether it might have been better served by starting with behaviour and communication as they seem to underpin everything else. Granted, the book is structured so that readers can dip in and re-read sections to remind themselves of good practice. But there is still something to be said for the importance of sequencing and, from my perspective, communication and behaviour really are a starting point.

That aside, Alston helpfully punctuates all her strategies with real-life practice, embedded within the relationships between teachers and teaching assistants, but extending beyond them to children, families and the wider school community. They demonstrate how crucial these partnerships can be and offer proven



techniques to ensure any school can reap their benefits.

Rooted in everyday challenges, it's hard to imagine any primary practitioner who wouldn't benefit from Alston's solutions to secure better outcomes for children, schools and staff. And I am certain the book would benefit veteran educators just as well as early-career teachers, and be just as useful for teaching assistants themselves as for senior leaders.

Not only should this book be part of any primary school's CPD library, it's one that should be checked out regularly by all staff. The core to any working relationship is effective reflection and communication and, as we finally come to realise the vital importance of teaching assistants, Alston's work will prove invaluable to realising their full potential in our primary classrooms.

★★★★☆
Rating




THE CONVERSATION
LISTENING IN ON
THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM



Fiona Atherton
Headteacher,
Ladypool
Primary School

THINK OF THE CHILDREN!

This week's conversation has been dominated by politics, led by the unprecedented joint appearance of all four teaching unions at a press conference. The show of unity was intended to send a clear signal to the government that while Gillian Keegan might be intent on ignoring them, the unions' fight is far from over. Indeed, teachers and school leaders are increasingly pushing back against the government line that they should be putting children first by remaining in the classroom.



Jon Biddle
@jonnybid

A pay offer that comes at the expense of the children we teach was never going to be accepted and @GillianKeegan knew it. Her lack of empathy and reluctance to hold genuine negotiations has led to the latest round of strikes. We're not giving up, Gillian. #PayUp #TeacherStrike

Though she'd previously stated that she would now be awaiting for the School Teachers' Review Body pay recommendations to arrive at a pay deal, many had hoped the latest round of walk-outs would be the ideal opportunity for Ms Keegan to make her way back to the negotiating table. Instead, she appears to

have been far too busy tweeting about the upcoming coronation (more on that later).



Gillian Keegan MP
@GillianKeegan

It's great that school children will be able to mark His Majesty The King's #Coronation by planting wildflower seeds from @educationgovuk @EdenProject.

As well as an opportunity to learn about nature, this will boost biodiversity & sustainability.



We are all aware of the King's love of nature, and the gift of wildflower seeds might have been better received but for its timing. At a cost of £350,000 to the Department for Education, it all feels not only last minute but also tone deaf. If you aren't lucky enough to have green space, you will now be frantically trying to find the money or local sponsors to provide soil and pots so that your children don't miss out on planting these seeds. More evidence of the growing "green gap" at the heart of the department's climate change policy. So much for thinking of the children.

ONE NATION CORONATION?

I'm not sure whether it's because the late Queen was so admired, the current state of the economy or even just a question of poor timing (No, not Archie's birthday but the additional bank holiday at the start of SATs week!), but whatever it just seems as if the energy level for coronation celebrations is nowhere near the level of the platinum jubilee.


Resources are being shared with schools as expected and Buckingham Palace-approved lessons are being sent out to schools. But if the intent was to create more traction for the event or even ensure a level of uniformity, the plan appears to be backfiring in Scotland. The DfE opted to send the resources directly to Scottish councils, despite education being a devolved matter to Holyrood. A right royal faux pas.

BRING YOUR OWN SLANT

Don't be fooled by unity over pay and the low-energy response to the coronation. Edu-Twitter is proving that teachers are as invested in high-octane disagreements as ever. The latest falling out started with a very strongly worded blog by author Phil Beadle about the controversial technique

SLANT from Doug Lemov's Teach Like a Champion.

It's not a particularly new technique, or even a particularly new dispute, but it seems calling the teaching strategy an act of "symbolic violence being perpetrated on some of our nation's [...] children" was too much for some. To little avail, Ben Newmark tried to give the long view of the argument.




Ben Newmark
@bennewmark

For those new to this the SLANT debate recurs about once every two years. This is unusual as it's more typically over half term. It usually ends when a primary teacher pops in to say something like "oh *that's* what SLANT is? We have it my school! It's called Magnet Eyes!"

I tend to agree. I have seen SLANT used in secondary schools and a watered-down version in a few primary schools. It seems fairly similar to the "good sitting" mantra that was popular when I was a class teacher and that I still use as a headteacher.

That was quite a long time ago, however. Considering the level of more complex needs in our schools, I can also see why its use is more questionable now.




Pastoral Katy
@PastoralKaty

In 2023 there are teachers who think SLANT is a great classroom strategy.

These same teachers talk about toxic work places. Can you imagine their response if a headteacher demanded they frequently nod their head and track every move?

It's ableist, authoritarian and ridiculous.

The row goes on, with Phil Beadle appearing this Tuesday on the Teacher Talk Radio podcast and spectacularly storming off after calling SLANT "fascistic". But that's for next week's Conversation!

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts 

The Knowledge

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



Are we now experiencing a cost-of-teaching crisis?

Storm Postlethwaite, managing director, Discounts for Teachers

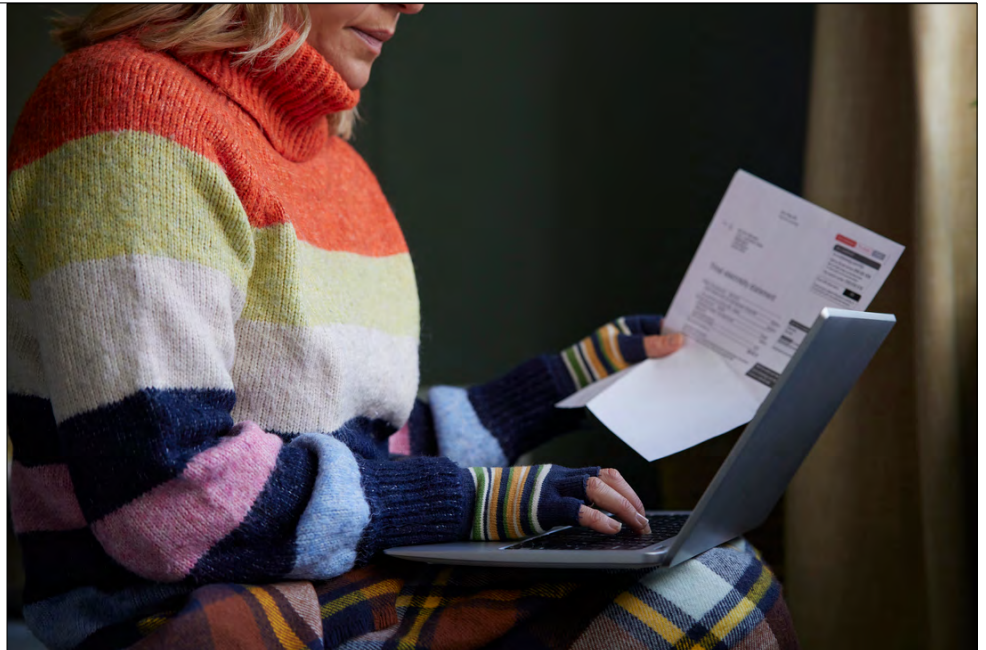
As industrial action continues, job satisfaction plummets and the recruitment and retention crisis worsens, new research into how the cost-of-living crisis is affecting the schools workforce reveals a sector that is being brought to its knees by a lack of investment.

Our survey of more than 1,000 education workers has found that the current crisis is manifesting two-fold for school staff, who are not only facing extraordinary price hikes in their personal lives but are also covering the increasing costs of classroom resources. These costs are being borne by the same teachers who have seen a real-terms pay cut of some 23 per cent over the past 13 years.

Our stark findings show the time has come for the burden of responsibility to lift from school staff who are implicitly expected to cover the shortfall in funding and ensure pupils receive the resources they need for their education. It is a responsibility they simply cannot (and shouldn't have to) afford.

When it comes to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on their own lives, 78 per cent of our respondents (who include teachers and teaching assistants) said they had restricted their heating this winter. Sixty-four per cent have stopped saving and, perhaps, most shockingly, one in five said they had a second job to cover their increasing costs.

Those who work in schools already face the extreme demands of increased workloads, in large part because of the recruitment and retention crisis and the repercussions of the pandemic. Pushing dedicated professionals into finding work elsewhere is not a sustainable workforce strategy and is only likely to drive even more staff out of schools permanently



as they find that other sectors pay better and provide a better work-life balance.

Equally striking is our finding that 25 per cent of respondents said their financial situation had impacted their ability to take industrial action. This implies that the government's assessment of teachers' appetite for strike action is substantially under-inflated. But worse, perhaps: if teachers are in such a financially precarious situation that they can't harness collective bargaining, then the relationship between staff and government appears to be almost irreparably broken.

This all reflects a dysfunctional sector that doesn't prioritise its staff. Indeed, 75 per cent of respondents say that their current financial situation is affecting their mental health and wellbeing. And contrary to tabloid reports this weekend calling out striking teachers for planning "samba lessons and posh lunches when they should be teaching", 80 per cent said they were foregoing dining out to save money. Nor is it just the small luxuries such as restaurant meals and cinema trips that have

taken a hit; 16 per cent said they have made the biggest cutbacks in groceries and food.

For a sector facing a deep recruitment and retention crisis, our findings underline the risk that financial pressures pose to retaining high-quality educators. They indicate that teaching is now a profession where staff cannot save for the future, pay their bills or implement their right to strike. They are increasingly unable even to reward themselves for their hard work, and the toll on their mental health and wellbeing is widespread.

Yet they continue to be expected to plug gaps in funding and family finances in their communities by providing classroom resources from their own pockets.

With recruitment and retention already in dire straits and so many already taking second jobs, the only conclusion we can draw is that the long-term sustainability of the sector demands urgent action. Without a significant increase in school funding, in part to support better pay for teachers, the talent pipeline will continue to shrink.

Week in

Westminster

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



FRIDAY

More flip-flopping on the government's supposed "blasphemy guidance"?

In the well-worn tradition of "making-policies-by-newspaper-headlines", home secretary Suella Braverman last month promised in *The Times* to "work with" the Department for Education "to issue new guidance" on blasphemy. It followed damage to a Quran in a school.

The DfE and Home Office then told *Schools Week* they had no plans to produce such guidance, before the Home Office a couple of days later said it actually would look to draft new guidance that would cover schools. Up to speed? Great.

Well, answering a parliamentary question today about whether such guidance would be statutory for schools, academies minister Baroness Barran said again the DfE had "no plans to produce specific guidance on blasphemy for schools".

Did she mention that it will assist the Home Office in drawing up the guidance? Nope.

She instead said headteachers were best placed to make the decisions on how to meet their pupils' needs.

Jesus Christ – what a mess (hang on, are we allowed to say that? We'll see what the guidance says).

SATURDAY

Labour shadow education secretary Bridget Phillipson told the NAHT conference that if she were secretary of state it would be the sector's job "to make life really hard for me and to make life hard for the government. That's as it

should be and no government minister should be afraid of challenge, should be afraid to defend their position."

We'd be happy to do that now if the party fancied telling anyone a few details about how it would implement its policies.

For example: It's quite hard to know if its recent proposal to recruit more teachers stands up to scrutiny without any idea of how it'd do it.

MONDAY

In a famous episode of the TV satirical show *The Thick of It*, civil servants and MPs sit in a circle throwing around a bean bag in an effort to brainstorm new policies. They say "yes" and "ho" after coming up with a new idea.

We can only think the Department for Education had its own "yes and ho" moment this week while coming up with ideas for how to celebrate the King's coronation.

"New 'green Coronation' emblems for apprenticeships that have sustainability credentials?"... "yes and ho".

"A bag of wildflower seeds for every primary school?" ... "yes and ho".

One optimistic head quipped the seeds might grow into a magic money tree, meaning their school could balance its books for next year. Alas, they did not. However, they did cost the DfE £364,000.

WEDNESDAY

Children's minister Claire Coutinho was grilled today on her SEND reforms by the experts at the Special Needs Jungle website.

She started by backtracking on one of its pledges: to test a proposal for mandatory mediation between parents who challenge councils over education, health and care plan support.

Currently thousands of appeals go to the first-tier tribunal with some parents waiting up to a year for help.

The government's SEND review response stated it "remains committed" to the proposal, but recognised "challenges and risks" involved so will "test these policies carefully" to ensure they do not create "unintended consequences" for families before deciding whether to bring forward legislation.

But Coutinho said mediation "isn't going to be mandatory", adding: "We don't have any plans to bring forward legislation now."

She added the government is "not even testing mandatory mediation, which I don't think we would be able to do without a legal change anyway."

PS. Coutinho was also asked about teacher recruitment woes. After announcing stuff it has already done that doesn't appear to have made much of a difference (increasing starting salaries and apparently reducing workload), she said: "Ultimately, it's a fantastic profession. I have seen the recruitment of teachers do quite well and I think the thing is to make sure that we are explaining what a wonderful profession it is, which it clearly is."

Why on earth did no one else think of this bullet-proof solution before?!



Haberdashers' Academies Trust South



Director of Sport and Wellbeing

We are looking for a Director of Sport and Wellbeing who will lead the Trusts Wellbeing Strategy through Sport and PE.

Working with the Youth Sports Trusts Well Trust framework, this will be an opportunity for someone who is passionate about this area, to make a significant difference. The post is in recognition of the role sport and physical activity plays in supporting well-being.

This role will form part of our school improvement team, working with leaders to bring our strategy to life. The role combines the opportunity to demonstrate impact both within and across schools in the Trust. Being a new role, there is scope for the post holder to shape it as they wish. The role description is deliberately broad at this stage.

The post is flexible, and we will consider full time, part time and flexible working. It may also suit a secondment opportunity, alongside another role. It will require travel to each of our school sites, alongside opportunities to work from home. We are a Trust of nine schools, all based in South-

East London. Whilst each of our schools maintains its individuality, we share a common mission: to ensure that every single child and young person in our care is successful at school so that they can flourish and be successful in their lives.

We are a Trust with great potential, and school improvement is at the heart of everything we do. This role will be integral to our success. Our scale of expertise and leadership gives us the capacity to achieve great things. It is this capacity which will allow us to take on new challenges and allow our staff to become the best version of themselves.

We want the best people to join our Haberdashers' community and we are committed to a diverse and inclusive student and staff body. If you are passionate about making a difference and feel that you have the right experience and expertise, we encourage you to apply to join us on our journey.

If you are interested in learning more about the position, please do get in touch with Yas Affum [EA to the CEO] via email to y.affum@habstrustsouth.org.uk

HAYS Working for
your tomorrow



Outwood Grange Academies Trust (OGAT) is an education charity and not-for-profit sponsor of primary, junior and secondary academies.

We are a dynamic organisation, recognised nationally as one of the highest performing family of schools in the North of England, and we currently sponsor over 40 schools.

We feel strongly that academies should enhance the education provision of the community they serve, in addition to driving up standards and playing a central role in regeneration. This is because we believe that improving the life chances of young people is essential to developing a strong local and national economy.

Outwood Academy Easingwold – York, North Yorkshire Cover Supervisor

Salary Range: Actual £18,830 - £19,528 per annum - Grade 5 SCP 9-11 (FTE £23,194 - £24,054)

Start date: As soon as possible.

Outwood Grange Academy – Wakefield, West Yorkshire Head of Chemistry or Physics

Main Pay Scale / Upper Pay Scale plus TLR 2.2 (£5,028 per annum)

Start date: September 2023

Outwood Academy Acklam – Middlesbrough, Teesside Progress Leader in English

MPS/UPS + TLR 2a (£3,017 per annum)

Start date: September 2023

Outwood Academy Freston – Wakefield, West Yorkshire Head of Science

Outwood Welcome Bonus of £5000 in addition to an annual salary paid in first month's pay

Salary: L7 – L11 (£51,470 - £56,796)

Start date: September 2023

[Click here for more information](#) 



Babington Academy | 11-16 | Ofsted Outstanding | Leicester

It is a very exciting time to join us at Babington; we are a popular, vibrant and diverse 11-16 school where our students are our best resource. Babington is an exceptional place where students, staff and leaders really do flourish. We provide an environment where the best teachers can make a huge difference to the outcomes of our students. No student is left behind, they are courteous and respectful with high standards of behaviour, conduct and learning.

We are delighted to offer the opportunity for inspirational and knowledgeable colleagues to join our team on a permanent basis from September 2023.

Current Vacancies:

- Subject Leader of Food Technology - MPS/UPS + TLR2b
- Head of History – MPS/UPS + TLR2b
- Head of PE – MPS/UPS + TLR2b
- Teacher of Maths – ECT/MPS/UPS (TLR available for the right candidate)
- Teacher of Geography/Humanities – ECT/MPS/UPS (TLR available for the right candidate)
- Teacher of Art and Design Technology – ECT/MPS/UPS

Please contact Mike Sherwin at Hays via the Apply Now tab for a full application pack, to arrange a visit or if you have any questions about the role. Visits to the school are encouraged.

T: 07525 889925

E: babingtonacademy@hays.com

Closing date for applications: ASAP and by Monday 15th May 2023

[Click here for more information](#) 



Virtual School Assistant Headteacher Secondary/Post 16 Virtual School for Children Looked after

Salary: RG8 (SCP 39-45) £45,495- £51,627

Full-time, Permanent post

Hybrid/Agile working available

Closing date: 16 May 2023

Interview date: 23 May 2023

This is an exciting opportunity to join Reading's Virtual School for Children Looked After and Care Leavers. The Virtual School is committed to promoting the educational achievement of Children Looked After and supports young people to achieve their educational potential, to enable them through attaining good qualifications and a positive school experience to have more fulfilling careers, higher incomes, greater self-confidence and ultimately a better quality of life. There is absolute commitment from the Virtual School to aim to deliver an outstanding service through strong advocacy and collaborative engagement for Reading's children looked after wherever they are placed.

We are seeking to appoint a highly committed and inspirational Virtual School Assistant Headteacher Secondary/Post 16 with a proven track

record of improving educational outcomes for Children Looked After in the Secondary/Post 16 phase. You will be passionate about tackling inequality and narrowing the achievement gap between children looked after and their peers, ensuring that children have the support and opportunity to grow, flourish and realise their full potential.

As Assistant Headteacher Secondary/Post 16 you will have QTS or equivalent a breadth of experience and expertise in Secondary and Post 16 education. You will also be highly skilled in providing challenge, advice and support to schools, social care teams and carers, working in partnership to ensure that all children have a timely and high quality electronic Personal Education Plan.

We offer a supportive environment to grow and develop your career with the opportunity to put your ideas across. Innovation and ambition are strongly encouraged, and you'll get a great feel for that working in our friendly and collaborative environment.



**Truro and Penwith
Academy Trust**



Chief Finance and Operating Officer

The Truro and Penwith Academy Trust is a multi academy trust currently operating across Cornwall with ambitions to continue to grow. We are proud to serve circa 8,700 pupils who all attend one of our five secondary schools, 28 primary schools and 1 infants school.

With a turnover in excess of £50m and employing over 1200 colleagues this is a significant role which requires a highly talented leader who will lead trust-wide professional services including finance, IT, payroll, property and estate, health and safety, communications and buildings development.

You will play a leading role in the development of organisational strategies which ultimately lead to improving standards in all areas across the Trust. Externally you will positively represent the Trust in a range of forums and will be a key player in ensuring the continued sustainability and growth of our Trust.

tpacademytrust.org



**STOUR VALE
ACADEMY
TRUST**

DEPUTY HEADTEACHER £52,917-£58,105 PER ANNUM

We are seeking to appoint a highly motivated and committed deputy headteacher to join the senior leadership team at Newtown Primary School, following the deployment of current postholder to support in other Stour Vale member schools. The current postholder is a member of the Central Team. Because the school has rapidly improved, the time is now right to appoint a substantive deputy to complete the journey to good.



The new deputy headteacher would take a lead role in supporting the headteacher to raise standards of academic achievement, whilst developing a cohesive school community where children and staff flourish. This is an exciting opportunity for an ambitious and effective school leader.

For an informal conversation to discuss the role, please contact:
Simone Chesney-Ly, Head Teacher, 0121 557 8504

Closing date: 15 May 2023 @ 9.00 am
Interviews: W/C 22 May 2023



Haberdashers' Academies Trust South



Director of HR

We are looking for an experienced HR professional to join our Central Trust team as a member of our Executive. You will work closely with the CEO and Principals in bringing to life our ambitious People Strategy.

As Director of HR, you will oversee HR across the Trust, providing expertise and advice, and leading the HR team. This is a team currently going through an important transformation, as we increase the degree of centralisation for this function. This presents an opportunity for the new Director to embed the structure.

The successful implementation of our People Strategy (which includes our EDI and well-being strategies) will guide our success and integrate closely with our school improvement and business sustainability strategies. We know that to be successful, we need great people. Therefore, it is integral to our core business. Our scale of expertise and leadership gives us the capacity to achieve great things. It is this capacity which will allow us to take on new challenges and allow our staff to become the best version of themselves.

We are a Trust of nine schools, all based in South-East London. Whilst each of our schools maintains its individuality, we share a common mission: to ensure that every single child and young person in our care is successful at school so that they can flourish and be successful in their lives. We are excited by the steps we have taken together and the future ambitions we have set.

We want the best people to join our Haberdashers' community and we are committed to a diverse and inclusive student and staff body. If you are passionate about making a difference and feel that you have the right experience and expertise, we encourage you to apply to join us on our journey.

If you are interested in learning more about the position, please do get in touch with Minerva who are supporting us with the appointment of this role

habstrustsouth@minervasearch.com .

This post will require travel to each of our sites alongside opportunities to work from home and flexibly



Director of Education Required for September 2023 Salary: circa £100,000



Following confirmation of the merger of Trust in Learning (Academies) and Endeavour Academy Trust, the Board is looking to appoint their first Director of Education.

This is a unique opportunity to develop the next five-year Education Strategy for our growing Trust of eight schools. Working with the newly appointed CEO and Executive Team you will help lead our Bristol based Trust into its next stage of development. You will be working closely with the CEO as principal lead on Education for a Trust committed to revolutionising education for our children, many of whom face disadvantages. Our passion is to ensure gaps are eradicated and that we stand on a platform of championing the voice of our children and parents.

Our core value and vision has always been three-fold:

- A non-negotiable commitment to an inclusive approach to education
- A non-negotiable commitment to over-coming any and all disadvantage (in its widest sense)
- A passion for local school identity centred on its community

You will be committed to delivering an Education Strategy that embraces research-based teaching to deliver the multifaceted classroom practice our children need. Passion and commitment to this is essential. You should be able to demonstrate a track record in engaging in this arena and to improving the outcomes to children who face disadvantages. This is an opportunity to stamp your vision for education and help lead an organisation into its next evolution with a team of passionate leaders committed to school improvement and development driven from its chalk face. The Trust places no limits on the aspirations for our students and we all believe strongly in the importance of opening horizons and opportunities for those less well placed to see it for themselves.

You will:

- Be an inspirational leader, strategic thinker and creative problem-solver
- Want to make a difference and help transform opportunities for children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Have experience of consistently delivering high standards of achievement
- Have excellent motivational and communication skills to lead successfully
- Be committed to professional development and improving yourself and others
- Be committed to the principle of comprehensive education

Supporting you:

- Trust in Learning (Academies) is committed to high quality professional development and career opportunities for all staff
- You will work closely with the CEO who will fully support you in this role
- You will work in collaboration with other leaders across the Trust in developing the Trust's vision and values

Trust in Learning (Academies) is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. All appointments will be subject to a satisfactory enhanced DBS disclosure.

We would encourage potential applicants to visit the Trust and to arrange a visit please contact Clare Anderson, PA to the CEO on **0117 377 3442** or email **canderson@tila.school**

Key Dates:

9th May 2023 - Deadline for applications

9th May 2023 - Shortlisting

17th and 18th May 2023 - Assessments and Interview

Application packs can be downloaded by clicking here. Please send your completed application by email to **recruitment@tila.school** by midday on Tuesday 9th May 2023.



HAYS Working for
your tomorrow

Outwood Academy Ormesby
Middlesbrough

Head of Maths

Salary: £51,470 - £56,796 per year (L7-L11)

Full Time, Permanent

Start date September 2023

The Maths department at Outwood Academy Ormesby consists of a great variety of dedicated teachers with a wealth of experience. There are significant opportunities for your own continuing professional development through the Trust should you wish for either Senior Leadership in school or becoming a Director of Mathematics across a number of academies within the Outwood Family. You will be an excellent teacher with the experience to deliver in KS3 & 4. You will also have the leadership qualities to challenge individuals within your team whilst supporting them to achieve outstanding results.

To find out more, or to apply for this post or have a confidential career conversation, please contact James Hall or Lauren Panter, our Recruitment Partners at Hays on 0191 261 3980 or email outwoodnorth@hays.com.



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)



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.

DID YOU KNOW?

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

Online listings, classified advertising, and package options available.

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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

