

# SCHOOLS WEEK

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

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- Rebroker U-turn after academy's rapid safeguarding improvement
- Case shows huge implications of Ofsted plans to speed up revisits

JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS

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# SCHOOLS WEEK

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## education week jobs

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# Reading rise is welcome good news (for once)

Let's take the chance to embrace a rare bit of optimism for once. England's achievement in the PIRLS reading rankings is good news (page 19 to 21).

Yes, there are caveats around how Covid impacted the study. There are also worrying findings around pupils' enjoyment and a lack of experience in our classrooms.

But our pupils are now outperforming those of many countries we previously lagged behind. Schools have done this by maintaining reading standards while other countries have seen theirs knocked off a cliff by Covid.

That is testament to the talent and commitment of our country's teachers. And it is also thanks to government reforms.

Looking back at our recent front pages, it is easy to be demoralised about the state of our schools. There is a collapse in children's services, recruitment woes,

strikes, workload issues, too many children not in school, the SEND system on the brink of collapse, concerns over accountability.

But what this seems to show is that, actually, what is going on inside the classroom is good and getting better. This helps us in moving forward: future reforms don't need to worry so much about the classroom.

Ministers should instead concentrate on solving entrenched problems outside of the classroom: getting children back to school, getting them the right educational support, rebuilding the health services safety net for children who fall into crisis.

With the current government pulling back from a push for all schools to join MATs, and the Labour Party ambivalent on the subject, it could mean that the focus on structures and standards is off the political table for the first time in over a decade.

## Most read online this week:

- 1 [Schools offer £10k 'golden hellos' – but with a big catch](#)
- 2 [Keegan tells NEU to check its facts on teacher pay](#)
- 3 [It's time to decide what our schools and teachers are for](#)
- 4 [Capita pulls out of flagship early career framework](#)
- 5 [The ECF's problem isn't workload. Workload is the ECF's](#)

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# Rebrokerer U-turn after Ofsted rapid return

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

Government plans to rebroker a 'coasting' secondary that failed an Ofsted have been binned after it was judged 'good' just four months later.

Department for Education chiefs had wanted to strip the Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust (DNEAT) of the Open Academy in Norwich after it was rated 'inadequate' in November last year following concerns about safeguarding.

The secondary fell into ministers' 'coasting' category for receiving two consecutive less-than-good scores in a row, before proposals to hand it over to Community Schools Trust were unveiled.

But the transfer appears to have been ditched in the wake of a follow-up visit in March in which the school leapt to 'good' – nine months after the original inspection and four months after the report was published.

Rebrokering U-turns are rare. But the case also seems to fit the profile of new plans under consideration by Ofsted to return more quickly to schools that fail over safeguarding issues.

It follows calls for reform after the death of Ruth Perry, the headteacher of Caversham Primary School in Berkshire.

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

Speaking on Wednesday, Chris Russell, Ofsted's national director for education, said the watchdog "recognises there are particular anxieties around safeguarding and I don't think those anxieties are new".

But the former HMI and headteacher said only about 0.15 per cent of schools with ineffective safeguarding were rated 'good' or 'outstanding' in every other area.

During its Ofsted visit last June, assessors marked the Open Academy 'requires improvement' in two of five key areas.

However, the grade was pulled down to 'inadequate' over concerns that the "arrangements for safeguarding were not



effective".

The report said leaders did not always "share the information that they should with external agencies" and when they did it was "not always done quickly enough".

Records of safeguarding cases were also found to be "not thorough enough", leaving "pupils potentially at risk".

Oliver Burwood, DNEAT's chief executive, told *Schools Week* the problems stemmed from a trebling of safeguarding reports since the pandemic, as well as the departure of a "key staff member".

"It would have been an RI that's improving if it wasn't for this issue. It wasn't something that could have been fixed overnight, but it was something we felt we'd addressed within six months."

Following the latest assessment, inspectors said safeguarding arrangements were now "effective". They also noted leaders "acted swiftly to improve procedures".

Staff were retrained, with school bosses "ensuring that every concern is followed up promptly and appropriately".

The report – which is not yet published but has been seen by *Schools Week* – also praised teachers for knowing "pupils very well", "quickly spotting any concerns" and helping youngsters "access a wide range of support".

The academy, which is DNEAT's only secondary, was rated 'good' in all five of the key areas, as it moved above 'requires improvement' for the first time since 2018.



Oliver Burwood, DNEAT chief executive

Burwood said the proposed rebrokering was due to go before an advisory board in May, but has now been dropped. The DfE did not respond to a request for comment.

Sam Freedman, a former DfE adviser, believes the case shows "the primary issue is not with the way inspections work, but the way their reports are used" to inform rebrokering decisions.

"I don't know if this is a test case, but if Ofsted continues to be used to regulate trusts in this way then it makes sense to speed up the returns to provide a check before re-brokering.

"We need to completely overhaul the regulation of trusts because doing it with a single Ofsted inspection is crazy. These reports are useful pieces of information in context, but we don't have the mechanisms to consider any context."

Meanwhile, Russell said Ofsted is finalising its plans to give schools "more of an idea" about when an inspection "might be likely". This will not just apply to 'outstanding' schools as previously said, but also "other schools as well".

NEWS: FUNDING

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# DfE delays report to 'hide evidence' of funding woes

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Ministers have been accused of "avoiding scrutiny" about funding woes during the pay dispute after delaying a crucial study on how schools are handling cost pressures.

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) told ministers last year to collect "reliable evidence" on the impact of financial pressures on schools as reports circulated of narrowing curriculums and dwindling support for vulnerable pupils.

The Department for Education promised to publish the report by March. But a letter sent to the PAC on the day of a teacher strike in April, and published this week, reveals it has been pushed back until after September.

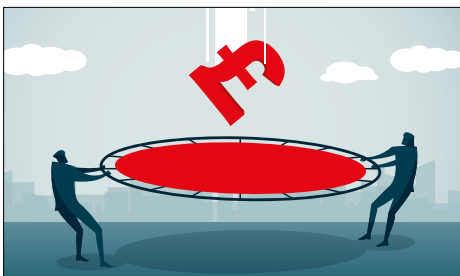
The government said this would make the research "more useful and informative" by including recent funding boosts.

But Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the school leaders' union NAHT, said the government "seems to want to choose the timeframe... to best suit its contention that schools have sufficient funds to meet pay and other cost pressures".

The government is locked in a row with unions over claims that its proposed pay deal was fully funded. Union's turned down the deal.

Dr Mary Bousted, the NEU's joint general secretary, said the education secretary and the DfE needed to be "in full possession of the facts, and, crucially, being open about them. Unfortunately, they show no sign of learning or wanting to learn."

Dr Mary Bousted



Instead they sought to avoid scrutiny of school funding. "On a day when hundreds of thousands of NEU members were demonstrating their concern about pay and school funding, the DfE was choosing to hide the evidence."

But a DfE spokesperson said: "Any suggestions the department has neglected to carry out this study are wrong and research is underway."

They added funding is now at its "highest levels".

The cross-party PAC warned in March 2022 that financial pressures faced by schools could "damage children's education".

The DfE committed to studying a sample of schools' responses to tightened purse-strings as well as looking at the "anticipated impact" of the announced additional funding.

The research was due to take place earlier this academic year with findings published by the end of March.

In her letter, dated April 27, Susan Acland-Hood, the department's permanent secretary, said the "context of schools' finances had changed". She pointed to schools and trusts on average adding to their financial reserves

in 2020-21 and 2021-22.

Analysis during Covid years "may be of little value going forwards as a guide to likely responses to current or future inflationary cost pressures".

She also said schools were dealing with inflation-related rises, such as increases to energy costs and teacher pay, which they may "still be adjusting to".

The research will instead cover this financial year, starting in April, when an extra £2 billion in school funding was handed out.

"We think that it would also be useful to be able to take account of the impact of this additional Autumn Statement funding: to understand how schools' responses evolve as real terms funding levels increase again," Acland-Hood said.

The report would now be published in early autumn.

Julie McCulloch, the policy director at the heads' union ASCL, said it was "disappointing that this study was not available during the recent period of negotiations between the government and the trade unions. It may have helped the government to understand that the funding it was offering for its proposed pay award was wholly inadequate.

"Instead, it ploughed ahead with an offer that was bound to be refused by the memberships of the unions - and this has prolonged a dispute that could easily have been settled by now."

Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, this week said the NEU should "seek clarity" from the UK Statistics Authority about its claim the government had "failed to provide adequate information on funding" for teacher pay.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

## NEU: Further strikes hinge on Keegan's STRB response

The National Education Union will call further teacher strikes in early July if the government does not move to settle the dispute in the next month.

Leaders of the union made the ultimatum after weeks of stalemate with the government after its pay offer was roundly rejected. The NEU is currently re-balloting members for a renewed mandate for strikes in the autumn term,

The union said education secretary Gillian Keegan had now received recommendations pay from the School Teachers' Review Body "and so she now has to make decisions".

"If she makes the right call, she can start to move our schools in a better direction," said joint leaders Dr Mary Bousted and Kevin Courtney.

"She can fund schools properly, start to address the decline in teacher pay and its consequences for the appalling state of teacher recruitment and retention. If she makes the right decisions, she could also avoid further strike action."

A motion passed at the NEU's conference in April had proposed dates for further strikes in late June and early July, after exams are

over, would be set at an executive meeting on Thursday.

However, Bousted and Courtney announced they were pushing the decision back to their next meeting on June 17.

"We hope that by then she will have discussed the STRB report and her reaction to it with teacher and headteacher unions, and discussed both workload and this year's pay which remains unsettled.

"If she hasn't moved to settle the dispute, then that meeting will decide on further strike action in the week commencing July 3."

ANALYSIS: FALLING ROLLS

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# Study reveals full scale of London pupil exodus

AMY WALKER  
@AMYRWALKER

The full scale of the capital's exodus of children has been revealed in a new study showing nearly 50,000 pupils left London's schools last year.

Ministers have now been told to get a grip on a situation that is threatening to derail London's successful schools, with some already announcing closure.

Analysis of school census data by Education Datalab shows 49,730 pupils left schools in the capital during the past academic year, while 38,591 joined.

That equates to a net change of -1.2 per cent across its secondaries, and -0.9 per cent within its primaries, following consecutive falls in pupil rolls since 2016.

The net change for secondaries across England was +0.7 per cent and -0.2 per cent for primaries.

"Soaring housing and childcare costs are driving families away from the capital, compounding schools' financial woes," said Munira Wilson, the education spokesperson for the Lib Dems.

"The government needs to get a grip on the issue before it's too late. London's schools must be fully funded and councils need new powers to plan school places ... so that every child can go to a good, local school."

While the number of primary pupils enrolled in the state school system fell during 2020-21, it has otherwise grown in the past seven academic years.

Between 2015-16 and 2021-22, pupil numbers across both phases in England grew by 521,000 to 6.9 million.

During the same period, the number of pupils in London fell by 62,600 to 10.4 million.

The Datalab study defines leavers as including those who go to school outside their borough, private school or home education. London fared particularly badly during the pandemic, with 1.67 pupils leaving for every pupil who joined a school between 2020 and 2021. While the situation improved post-Covid, the rate at which primary pupils left the capital for other regions also grew.

Schools receive funding based on the number of pupils they have, not their capacity, so surplus places create a huge financial strain.

Several schools have now announced closure. Lambeth is among the boroughs to have experienced the steepest falls. This month it was



announced that the 324-year-old St Martin-in-the-Field School for Girls would close.

In a letter to parents, its headteacher said despite exploring options to stay open "in detail, none was viable, nor could they overcome the fundamental issue of falling pupil numbers that we are facing in Lambeth".

It follows the announcement of the closure of Archbishop Tenison's secondary in Oval, which was also set up in the 1600s.

The council is considering merging up to 16 of its primaries, with government data showing that it will have the highest proportion - 29.2 per cent - of spare places of any area next year.

Cllr Ben Kind, Lambeth's cabinet member for children and young people, called the latest figures "a stark warning".

"Once a school is not there, if the population of young people increases, as we've seen before in Lambeth, we have to scrabble to build a new school."

Earlier this year, Kingsdale Foundation School, in the London borough of Southwark, caused furore when it proposed plans to increase its

pupil capacity.

Local headteachers argued it would "undermine" other schools because of declining pupil numbers, but councils have little power over academies - which are their own admission authorities.

Currently, 16 Southwark primary schools are at risk of closure due to funding issues caused by plummeting numbers. St Francesca Cabrini Primary has already closed.

In Camden, falling numbers have closed four primary schools, while Hackney has warned two of its primaries could fold next year.

In last year's GCSE exams, pupils in London achieved an average attainment 8 score of 52.7, compared with the national average of 48.9.

London Councils said it was "working closely" with regional education partners to "mitigate the impact" of the drop in demand.

"We remain keen to work with the government to respond to pressures surrounding primary school places, ensuring that that all London pupils have the best start in life."

The DfE was contacted for comment.

## HOW LONDON'S SCHOOLS LOST THEIR PUPILS

ENGLAND		LONDON	
NET CHANGE IN PUPIL LEAVERS/JOINERS		NET CHANGE IN PUPIL LEAVERS/JOINERS	
	2019/20		2019/20
Primary	0.20%	Primary	-0.90%
Secondary	-0.50%	Secondary	-1.30%
2020/21		2020/21	
Primary	-0.40%	Primary	-1.80%
Secondary	-0.60%	Secondary	-1.50%
2021/22		2021/22	
Primary	0.70%	Primary	-0.90%
Secondary	-0.20%	Secondary	-1.20%



# MAT inspections ‘not helpful at this point’, says Barran

**SAMANTHA BOOTH**  
@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Academy trusts need “more support and capacity building” rather than Ofsted inspections, the academies minister has said.

Explaining more about the government’s decision not to push ahead with MAT inspections, Baroness Barran said ministers thought it would not be “a helpful thing to do at this point”.

The government’s recent regulatory and commissioning review did not include plans to inspect trusts, despite its terms of reference stating it would look at trust-level inspection.

At present, Ofsted carries out summary evaluations of trusts by batch-inspecting some of their schools.

Speaking at the Schools and Academies Show on Wednesday, Barran said ministers “felt we need to put in more support and more capacity building because so many



Baroness Barran

trusts are young and not yet fully mature”.

“[We] weren’t sure it was really a helpful thing to do at this point.”

The review’s expert advisory group had also warned ministers not to “introduce MAT inspections without thinking about school inspection”, she said.

“Because to layer one thing on another just

creates a huge burden – so that’s literally where we are at in our thinking.”

An Ofsted report last month found the current inspection model does not hold MATs “sufficiently accountable” or attribute enough credit to their work.

Meanwhile, the government has promised to slim down the rules MATs must follow under the academy trust handbook.

Barran promised a “slimmer, shorter and friendlier handbook. I think it will be significant change this year, more change next year. There’s some things we just can’t implement quickly enough.”

But she said there would be new things too “principally around school capital and the responsibility of responsible bodies around that”.

Barran reportedly told an attendee after the session that the academy trust handbook was due in July. Last year’s was published just days before the start of the new academic year.

AMY WALKER | @AMYRWALKER

## Part-time inspectors ignore unions’ plea to leave

Ofsted’s national director for education has said part-time inspectors are not quitting, despite widespread calls for them to leave the watchdog.

“Ultimately it’s for individuals to decide what they think is most appropriate. Our experience is people aren’t doing that,” said Chris Russell.

The education unions NEU and NAHT urged their school leader members who also worked as Ofsted inspectors (OIs) to stop taking part in inspections as calls for reform swell.

Julia Waters, the sister of Ruth Perry, last month called on headteachers to “hand in your badges” and “refuse to be complicit in Ofsted’s reign of terror”.

Her family said the primary head took her own life before the publication of an ‘inadequate’ inspection report at Caversham Primary School in Reading.

But Russell said OIs “benefit” from working for the inspectorate, as do their schools and colleagues. “I think people do recognise that.”

“We also recognise that when working with

the OIs, that gives us a relationship with the sector because those people are wearing two hats.”

When *Schools Week* asked Ofsted how many OIs had formally withdrawn their contract to inspect between mid-March – when the latest backlash took hold – and mid-April, it said it was “aware of a small number”.

The number remained in the single figures last month, it said.

The NEU wanted leaders to refuse work until Ofsted carried out a health and safety assessment of the inspection system.

Meanwhile, the NAHT, which has threatened the watchdog with a judicial review over its refusal to pause school visits, asked members to consider not carrying out inspections until its ongoing dispute was resolved.

Asked if Ofsted regretted its response to the wave of concerns from the sector, Russell said he was “sorry” if people felt the watchdog had not listened.

“What happened to Ruth Perry was clearly



Chris Russell

a tragic event and we all absolutely recognise that.”

“In terms of us responding widely to those broader issues ... we’re not tin-eared, we’re not just ignoring all of that.”

He claimed that “most people” have a positive experience of inspection”.



# Regional directors reveal academisation approach

**FREDDIE WHITTAKER**

**@FCDWHITTAKER**

School leaders have been offered a glimpse of how the government's new approach to academisation will work, with officials deploying "soft levers" to encourage small schools to convert and build capacity in the system.

But Baroness Barran, the academy minister, this week insisted a planned shake-up of school commissioning would not equate to "a kind of algorithm that sends people to the top or the bottom".

As part of the academies commissioning review, the government pledged to introduce a new, "more transparent" system of decision-making over school sponsorship, conversion and trust mergers.

Barran said this week she wants an approach that is "as transparent as possible... because what we've heard from all of you was it felt like it was at best a black box, and at worst a kind of list of the friends of the regional director".

The government has published new quality descriptors for trusts, which will be used to help to inform commissioning decisions.

But Barran said these were to make sure the government was "always objective", adding: "In no place in the framework does achieving a quantitative metric mean, you know, pass [go], earn £200, get a new school."

Last year, the government reorganised its team of regional schools commissioners into regional directors. They oversee commissioning decisions such as school sponsorship, conversion and trust mergers.

Ministers want to see all schools in multi-academy trusts, but do not plan to force well-performing schools over the line.

Instead, regional directors and their teams will coax maintained schools into trusts and encourage mergers of smaller trusts and standalone academies.

Hannah Woodhouse, the DfE's regional director for the south west, told a panel discussion the directors only had "very limited formal levers", and could not force mergers of schools or trusts that were performing well.



"Our role is about leadership, convening, soft power as it were, to be leading those conversations on the ground."

Andrew Warren, who oversees the West Midlands, admitted there was "a lot of pushing, shoving, enabling, facilitating discussions".

"We're not dating agencies. We're not going to set things up. But we are a lot of talking on the ground about how we can make this work."

Part of the government's academisation strategy involves targeting faith schools, thousands of which remain in the maintained sector.

Warren acknowledged village schools were "important" to their communities and faced viability problems. He said directors talked "lots and lots with our dioceses about what their plans are".

"Again, we have to use our soft levers.

Where a headteacher is retiring, it's having the opportunity to discuss with the diocese, 'so is this the time to bring a few of those [schools] together to safeguard that, so that we have one overall leader for two, three, four, five schools?

"If you want that village school staying open, what's the viable plan? It's having

some difficult conversations with chairs of governors and groups about 'if you want this to stay, it will mean x, y and z'."

However, Woodhouse said it was "worth saying we have got some outstanding trusts doing incredible work with large groups of very small schools".

"I think they're keeping them open actually. Otherwise, we may well see schools struggling with financial viability and leadership capacity."

Realising ministers' ambitions for academisation would spell the end of single-academy trusts (SATs). There are about 1,000 in England.

Woodhouse said they were "still seeing a number of single academy trusts continuing to stay individual", and she didn't "see an appetite from ministers to challenge that, particularly wholesale...[to] remove SATs entirely".

"That said, we are seeing quite a number of SATs choosing to join MATs. Where they are vulnerable, we are encouraging it even more."



Hannah Woodhouse





# Avoid costly survey on 'crumbly concrete', DfE tells schools

**SAMANTHA BOOTH**  
@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

Schools do not need to splash out on "costly" surveys when scoping out their school buildings for a material liable to collapse, officials have said.

For the past year, the Department for Education has been urging schools and responsible bodies to check for reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) and complete a questionnaire.

Government property officials say the material – a "crumbly type of concrete used widely in flat-roofed school buildings mostly built pre-1980s – can be "liable to collapse".

Guidance sent out in December sets out a five-stage RAAC identification process, with "information collection" at the top.

Rob Read, the department's education estates building safety lead, said some schools and responsible bodies used external suppliers for surveys, "which have been costly".

"That cost could have been avoided through information gathering, record information, understanding anecdotal



anything that is known by any other staff about the school or just by looking at the structure. There's not a very high bar for that."

The guidance says that a specialist engineer need not be appointed until stage three.

All reports of suspected RAAC are investigated by DfE-commissioned

structural engineers with site surveys confirming its presence, the department said.

Ministers appear to have rowed back on the idea of publishing survey responses.

Jonathan Gullis, the then schools minister, said in October that "depending upon the survey uptake in the next six months, an initial estimate may be issued in April 2023".

However, last month, Nick Gibb, the current minister, said the DfE "only holds partial data and is not able to provide details of schools that contain RAAC elements".

The government would, however, consider releasing outcomes from the questionnaire in the future. Read added it was an "evolving picture"

A Schools Week investigation last autumn found at least 41 schools across 15 councils had RAAC. Another 150 were suspected or needed extensive investigation.

Read said the department had not found any RAAC in school walls, but had discovered it in floors and roofs.

Existing capital programmes would support schools, among "ongoing conversations" with Treasury about "what next", he said.

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

## Tax agency assessors to run school capacity checks

Property assessors who usually help set business rates and council tax bands will start checking capacity limits in up to 5,000 schools from July.

"Net capacity assessment" (NCA) visits will take place in all secondary and special schools to get accurate figures of school size until about October 2025, as first revealed by Schools Week.

The visits follow our investigation that revealed the Department for Education does not collect capacity data for special schools, which instead falls to local authorities. It is beginning to collect this from councils this summer.

Government officials said property assessors who have worked on business rate and council tax will be trained to calculate the number of children a school can accommodate.

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA), a HMRC executive agency, provides valuations and

property advice to government and councils to support taxation and benefits.

Paula Dixon, a VOA director, said it has "extensive relevant experience" and has assessors in 30 regional offices.

The DfE will split visits into six tranches, which will be published online. A small number of "testbed" schools will be visited before the summer holidays.

Laurence Jones, the DfE programme director, said schools, responsible bodies and dioceses will get "clear, up to date" capacity information to help with "decision-making about admissions, estate management and timetabling".

"For local authorities it will help provide key data on planning and the provision of school places across their particular regions. And for us in the DfE it helps us an awful lot around determining capital funding for school places and decision-making on new schools, school

closures and expansions."

A pilot involving NCA visits in more than 200 mainstream schools last year found 6,000 potential extra places. The pilot results are expected to be published in the coming months.

The DfE previously said figures could show where additional pupils could be accommodated without the need for major building work. It also meant funding for new school places was "targeted most effectively".

Documents presented to councils in June last year showed officials "envisaged" local authorities would use the assessments as evidence in objections against academies unwilling to increase their published admissions number (PAN).

However, government plans for a beefed-up role for councils over admissions, including "backspot powers" to force trusts to admit children, have since been dropped.

NEWS

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# GLF Schools' chief executive steps down

SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER

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EXCLUSIVE

The founding chief executive of one of the country's largest academy trusts will step down in December – the third large trust boss to leave their role this year.

Jon Chaloner, the chief executive of GLF Schools, said "the time is right" for a change after 25 years in school leadership.

With 42 schools, GLF is the country's twelfth largest trust. Chaloner's departure follows that of John Murphy, who announced in April he would be leaving Oasis Community Learning, the country's sixth largest trust, to pursue other projects in education.

Nick Hudson is also retiring from leading the 43-school Ormiston Academies Trust at the end of this academic year, with Ambition Institute's Tom Rees to take over the helm.

By the end of this year, five of the 15 largest trusts will have had a change of chief executive since mid-2021.

Lynne O'Reilly, GLF's chair, said: "Jon's legacy is immense: 17,600 children are taught across our schools every year, and I know that our staff hold a high regard for and greatly value his leadership.

"The trust's record of successful school



Jon Chaloner

improvement is testament to Jon's determination to ensure that every child has the opportunity to 'grow, learn and flourish.'"

Chaloner, 53, has led the trust for 11 years, is a national leader of education and serves on the Department for Education's south east regional director advisory board.

GLF is also a teaching school hub and runs a SCITT.

Chaloner told colleagues it had been a "privilege" to serve in his current role, growing the trust from just two schools.

"Educating our children and young people, past and present, in Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Surrey, West Sussex and the London boroughs of Croydon

and Wandsworth has been immensely rewarding and it has enabled me to enjoy the most fulfilling career.

"It has been 25 years since I joined a school's leadership team and, for nearly 20 years, I have been a headteacher or CEO. I believe that the time is right to make a change and I shall always be grateful for the opportunities that I have been given since my association with Glyn School began 17 years ago."

Acknowledging that the change in leadership "may be unsettling", he will support trustees with recruiting his successor and ensure a "smooth transition".

"I am grateful to the executive team, central team, as well as heads and all GLF staff based in schools, for the unstinting support and hard work that they give daily for the benefit of the children and students attending our schools."

O'Reilly added: "I wish Jon success for the next phase of his life, and I would like to take this opportunity to reassure all families and colleagues that the trust board is committed to recruiting a new CEO for GLF Schools who will continue Jon's hard work and, crucially, maintain and develop the culture and ethos that Jon has created and which we know is important to all stakeholders".

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

## Phonics standards lift in reading hub schools

A £100 million reading improvement scheme may have helped participating schools weather the impact of Covid-19.

However, the Department for Education study found no firm "causal" link between participation in the English hubs programme and improved outcomes in the phonics screening check.

English hubs were launched in 2018 with £26 million in set-up funding. Each of 34 "hubs" is a school selected for its "expertise" in teaching early reading.

They work with selected schools in their area to improve teaching. A further £48 million has been spent since then, and £19.8 million has been allocated for next year.

Government researchers analysed results from the phonics screening check in year 1 for schools that participated in the English hubs

scheme and those that did not.

They found that between 2018-19 – the last year the phonics check was conducted before pandemic disruption – and 2021-22, the proportion of pupils in partner schools meeting the "expected standard" rose by about one percentage point.

In non-partner schools, the proportion fell by about seven percentage points.

The DfE said this meant schools supported by English hubs "appear to have therefore fared better than other schools, on average, in dealing with the negative impacts of the pandemic on PSC attainment".

The research said this was "possibly" due to the English hubs programme. However, there were "limitations" to the findings.

To interpret the results as "genuine programme impacts" relied on "strong

assumptions about what would have happened to partner schools' attainment in 2021-22 if they had not been enrolled into the programme".

A causal interpretation "also requires the assumption that the results are not being biased by variables we do not or cannot control for", such as schools implementing interventions that were not at the behest of the English hubs scheme.

"Ultimately, we cannot definitively rule out that omitted variable bias is driving part or all of the estimates and therefore none of these results can be interpreted as causal.

"However, given the size of the coefficients across the various methodologies and sensitivity analysis carried out, it seems more likely than not that the [programme] is having an impact on phonics results."

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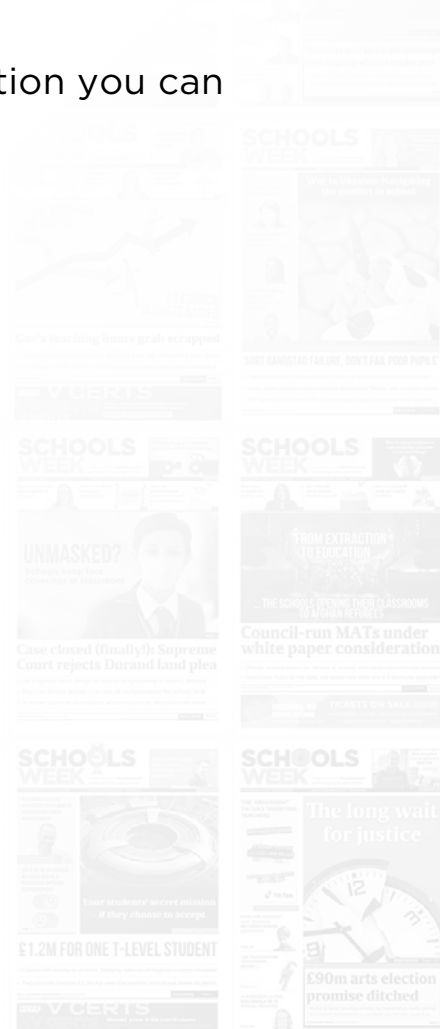
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# SCHOOLS WEEK

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



# Mental health leads struggle to find time for the job

**FREDDIE WHITTAKER**

**@FCDWHITTAKER**

Most schools have taken up a grant to train a senior mental health lead, but almost half of those in post do not feel they have enough time to achieve their goals.

The Department for Education has published take-up data for its senior mental health lead training programme and mental health support teams. Both schemes were key pillars of the government's 2018 mental health green paper.

A *Schools Week* investigation last year revealed how thousands of children are stuck on waiting lists for expert help, with schools digging into their own pockets to fund support.

MPs have also criticised the ambition of the green paper proposals and called for faster rollout of support teams.

Since 2021, schools and colleges have been offered a grant of £1,200 to train a senior member of staff to "implement an effective whole school or college approach to mental health and wellbeing in their setting".

Today's data shows 13,800 schools and colleges, 58 per cent of those eligible nationally, had claimed a grant by March this year. This represents a spend of £16.6 million.

## Staff struggle to find time for lead role

However, data from a survey published alongside take-up figures shows many leads are struggling to find time for the role.

A DfE survey of 3,730 senior mental health leads working in schools and colleges found 43 per cent spent half a day a week on the role, while 10 per cent spent between half and one day a week.

Thirteen per cent spent more than one day a week, and 33 per cent said the time varied too much to say.

However, 47 per cent of senior mental health leads said they did not have enough time to achieve their goals; 38 per cent said that they did.

Asked their main role in their school, 29



per cent of mental health leads said they were also the safeguarding lead, while 22 per cent were SENCOs.

Eighteen per cent were headteachers, 18 per cent were pastoral leads and 17 per cent were assistant heads. Sixteen per cent were deputy heads.

## Take-up highest in secondary schools

Despite concerns about workload, 83 per cent of participants said they would recommend the course and 87 per cent said the training had helped them to plan or improve a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing.

Data also shows take-up varied by region and school type. For example, 56 per cent of schools and colleges in London had claimed the grant, compared with 69 per cent in the West Midlands.

Secondary schools were most likely to take up the grant (73 per cent), followed by special schools (66 per cent), alternative provision (62 per cent), post-16 (60 per cent) and primary schools (56 per cent).

Maintained schools were slightly less likely to take up the grant (59 per cent) than academies (64 per cent).

## Support will cover a third of schools by April

Mental health support teams were set up in 2018 to provide a link between schools and health services and help pupils with mild to moderate

mental health problems.

About 3.4 million pupils were covered by a support team in 2022-23, equating to about 35 per cent of eligible pupils and learners. In total 399 teams were up and running by this March, the DfE said.

Across the country, 6,800 schools and colleges are participating in the programme this year, equating to about 28 per cent of eligible institutions.

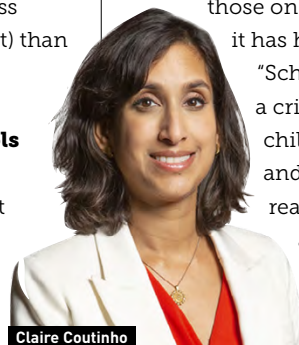
It means on average there are 8,500 pupils and 17 schools or colleges per support team. The DfE said it expected to have 500 teams, and coverage to increase to 44 per cent of pupils and 35 per cent of schools by next April.

Twenty-two per cent of schools and colleges in the Midlands are participating in the programme, compared with 34 per cent in the south west.

Secondary schools are also more likely to be involved.

Claire Coutinho, the children's minister, said she was "delighted to see the success of the rollout ... with the vast majority of those on the training praising how it has helped their school".

"Schools and colleges can play a critical role in supporting children's mental wellbeing and I'd urge any leaders reading this who haven't had a member of staff sign up for the training to do so now."



Claire Coutinho

# 3 proposals to solve ECF training woes

AMY WALKER  
@AMYRWALKER

Ministers should review the external training provided to early career teachers, deliver more subject or phase-specific coaching materials and ensure staff get time off timetable.

The recommendations come from a study published on Thursday that again exposes the extra workload heaped on new teachers by the flagship early career framework.

About two thirds of early career teachers (ECTs) felt the training added to their workload. Similar numbers also said the training did not cover anything they did not already know.

Four in five new teachers wanted to spend less time on it or opt out of aspects altogether, the study found.

One in 10 said they would drop out of the entire framework if they could, while more than two-fifths (44 per cent) would opt out of external provision.

Jenni French, the head of STEM in Schools at the Gatsby Charitable Foundation, which paid for the study, said: "If we are to ensure that all pupils are taught by well-qualified, specialist teachers, then the challenges raised in this report should be addressed by government, in particular increasing the focus on subject-specific support."

Schools Week has previously revealed a lack of mentors, as well as wider complaints the training increased workloads with staff not being given the time off timetable to complete it.



ECTs get an extra 10 per cent off timetable in their first year, and 5 per cent in their second year.

The report suggests a "comprehensive review of the external training" for ECTs. The government should also consider an "increased focus on timetable allocations" and "address the challenge of developing specialised materials tailored to subjects and phases".

Four per cent of ECTs said their self-study materials were specialised with 9 per cent feeling the same about their external training.

About 20 per cent of all ECTs also said their mentor did not teach the same phase or subject as them.

Becky Allen, the chief analyst at Teacher Tapp and co-author of the report, said there was a "clear consensus that ECTs require training that aligns closely with their subject and phase specialism.

"However, finding a cost-effective approach for training providers to deliver this, considering the wide range of subjects and year groups, poses a significant challenge."

The report was based on three surveys since the reforms launched in 2021, finding



Becky Allen

"limited amount of change" across the years. It included responses from more than 400 ECTs, 600 ECT mentors and 2,000 senior school leaders.

The reforms are supposed to increase retention, but just 23 per cent of ECTs surveyed in February said the training made them more likely to remain in teaching.

Nearly a fifth (19 per cent) of secondary ECTs said they were more likely to leave the profession because of the programme.

Marie Hamer, an executive director at Ambition Institute – one of the government-contracted lead providers for the ECF rollout – advised caution about how "representative the claims in this report are".

She said more than 100,000 new teachers and mentors have engaged with the framework, "but the self-selected responses to this survey had sample sizes as small as 69 teachers in some cases".

Hamer cited a recent review by Ofsted that found wider teacher workloads were "getting in the way" of the government's training and development reforms.

"What's important is that we keep listening to teachers and improving the training they receive."

All the other providers did not respond or refused to comment.

A Department for Education said: "We are listening to teachers and working with them to address issues such as workload, including through development of a workload reduction toolkit."

EXCLUSIVE

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

## Capita drops out of framework, but won't say why

Capita has withdrawn from delivering the teacher training and development programme to new teachers.

The outsourcing company is one of six founding providers overseeing the national rollout of the early career framework.

The company was recruited to deliver the programme on a four-year framework, but has decided it will not train new recruits in September 2023 and 2024.

It will continue training for those already on the two-year course. It would not comment on its decision.

But a spokesperson said it was "proud" of what it had delivered "to support people embarking on their teaching careers, and remain committed to providing an outstanding service for our existing participants".

A £95 million contract document published this week shows that providers Ambition Institute, Best Practice Network, Education Development Trust, Teach First and UCL Institute of Education have been reappointed.

The National Institute of Teaching, founded by the School-Led Development Trust, is also a provider.

Monitoring visits by Ofsted showed that across the six regions Capita worked in, there were just 578 participants on its ECT programme as of June 2022. Four of the other providers, which worked across all nine regions, had between 4,000 to 5,900, while Ambition had 14,615.

It is not clear exactly how much Capita has been paid so far through the ECF. The initial framework of six providers was worth up to £250 million.

Capita also runs the SATs series in schools, which ran into several problems last year, and the teacher pension service.

NEWS: ABSENCE

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# 9 more attendance hubs and mentor scheme expansion

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



Nine schools and academy trusts will become “attendance hubs” under plans to expand a pilot scheme, while a mentoring programme aimed at tackling absence will be extended to four more areas of England.

The Department for Education has named seven academies and two alternative provision trusts that will support 600 schools to “improve their attendance by sharing effective practice and practical resources” (see list below).

And an attendance mentoring programme under trial in Middlesbrough will be extended to Knowsley, Doncaster, Stoke-on-Trent and Salford, with an aim to work with 1,665 persistently and severely absent children.

Expansion of the two programmes forms part of a government drive to improve attendance, which has stalled following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Nick Gibb, the schools minister, said the “best place for children to learn is in the classroom, and the vast majority of children are currently in school and learning”.

### Proposals ‘barely scratch the surface’

But Julie McCulloch, the director of policy at the ASCL school leaders’ union, said the support “barely scratches the surface of this problem”.

A Schools Week investigation last year revealed more than 600 council attendance support staff had been cut in the past 10 years.

McCulloch said absence issues were “driven largely by a rising tide of mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, which are exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis”.

She urged the government to “provide solutions that address the root causes of absence”.

“As ever, this is likely to take investment in terms of staffing and specialist mental health support, and the government’s record on providing the necessary resources is sorely lacking.”

### Absence remains high post-Covid

Data published on Thursday shows absence last autumn was 7.5 per cent – up almost a percentage point on autumn 2021.

More than 1.7 million pupils, about 24 per cent of the total population, missed 10 per cent or more possible



Julie McCulloch

sessions across the term, while 125,000 (1.7 per cent) missed 50 per cent or more.

The mentoring programme, led by the children’s charity Barnardo’s, is funded with £2.32 million from the DfE. The hubs scheme is “sector-led” and receives no extra funding.

North Shore Academy, part of the Northern Education Trust and the first hub in the country, has reported “significantly improved” attendance. Last year its absence rate was 8.2 per cent, compared with 9 per cent in secondary schools nationally.

In pre-pandemic 2018-19, the school’s absence rate was 7.5 per cent, compared with a national average of 5.5 per cent.

### Call for evidence on missing pupils

The DfE on Thursday launched a “call for evidence” on children missing education – those neither on a school roll nor being “suitably” home educated.

There is “currently variation” in how the sector “identifies and supports” such children, the document said. Officials “want to ensure that everybody has the information, skills and tools they need to do this effectively”.

The call for evidence, which closes on July 20,

is “intended to allow respondents to put forward ideas and proposals for change, and justification for such change”.

### Council action varies across England

Data on how councils act on children not considered to be getting an adequate education was also published. No comparison data is available as it is the first time the DfE has collected and published it.

Section 437(l) notices are issued to parents and carers of children of compulsory school age who are not receiving a “suitable” education. They are sent in advance of a school attendance order, which requires children to be registered at a named school or face prosecution.

In 2021-22, councils issued an estimated 3,800 notices, and about 1,300 school attendance orders. About 300 of those orders were subsequently revoked in the same year.

Fifty-three councils issued no school attendance orders, while seven contributed to more than half of the national total.

### Older pupils more likely to be home-educated

The DfE also published the outcome from its first survey of councils on the number of children in elective home education across England.

The findings are similar to those of a Schools Week investigation earlier this year, which revealed that about 125,000 children were home-educated at some point in the 2021-22 academic year.

The most common reason was “philosophical or preferential reasons” (16 per cent of cases).

However, in 21 per cent of cases the primary reason was “unknown”, and parents did not give a reason in another 14 per cent.

A third of those taught at home were in years 10 or 11.

## THE 9 NEW ATTENDANCE HUBS:

- Bar Hill Community Primary School, Meridian Trust
- Wallscourt Farm Academy, Cabot Learning Federation
- Abbots Green Primary Academy, Unity Schools Partnership
- Willows Academy, DELTA
- Eden Boys School, STAR Academies
- Ely College, Unity Schools Partnership
- St Edward’s Church of England Academy, Unity Schools Partnership
- Olive Academies, an alternative provision trust based in the East of England
- River Tees Academies, an alternative provision trust based in the North East

NEWS: SATS

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# SATs paper wasn't too difficult, says DfE

SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER  
@SCHOOLSWEEK

The Department for Education is "confident" this year's controversial SATs reading paper was "set to an appropriate level of difficulty", despite complaints from parents and teachers that it left pupils in tears.

Teachers and school leaders reported that 10 and 11-year-old pupils had struggled with the test last Wednesday, warning it was far more challenging than previous years.

Nick Gibb, the schools minister, said this week he would "certainly look at [the criticism] because I know that there has been concern expressed by some schools".

In a blog post today, the Department for Education said evidence from its trialling processes "indicated that the tests were of similar difficulty to previous years. As a result, we are confident the test was set to an appropriate level of difficulty."

The DfE said it took three years to create appropriate tests. The texts and questions were also "rigorously trialled twice" with thousands of pupils.

Gibb said the Standards and Testing Agency found 85 per cent enjoyed taking the test, which measured children's educational achievement in years 2 and 6.

In its post, the DfE said the difficulty of a test "is reflected" in SATs results.

A DfE spokesperson said: "Our test development process is extremely rigorous and includes reviews by a large number of education and inclusion experts and professionals, including teachers."

But they added that while it was "important that schools encourage pupils to do their best", "preparing for these exams should not be at the expense of their wellbeing".

The DfE has stopped short of offering to review complaints, including those from the leaders' union ASCL, which claimed children had been left distressed and teachers "very anxious".

The reading paper



was published today, earlier than planned given the "public interest" in the tests, the Standards and Testing Agency said.

One question involved US geography while another included an extract from *The Rise of Wolves*, which has a reading age of 13 and over.

"We don't want these tests to be too hard for children. That's not the purpose," Gibb said. "The purpose is to test the range of ability and the Standards and Testing Agency is charged with making sure that these tests are appropriate for this age group."

The NAHT has also raised concerns with the DfE and test regulator Ofqual.

The school leaders' union said it was "very concerned" after members said the choice of texts was "not accessible for the wide range of experiences and backgrounds children have".

Sarah Hannafin, the union's head of policy, said the difficulty was "beyond previous tests leaving children upset and with even staff struggling to understand questions".

Sarah Hewitt-Clarkson, the head of Anderton Park in Birmingham, said it was the "hardest" paper she had seen in her 29 years in the sector.

She said some of the school's highest attainers did not finish.

The DfE blogpost said reports pupils had only 34 seconds to answer each question

as "some questions will take longer, whilst some can be answered more quickly".

When similar concerns were raised in 2016, an Ofqual review found the reading test was probably "unduly hard" for pupils with low attainment and special educational needs.

Ofqual said this week that it routinely monitored the standards maintenance process and reviewed "key evidence" on test accessibility.

Daisy Christodoulou, director of education at No More Marking, suggested moving SATs back to a two-test structure or introducing on-screen adaptive tests, which tailored content based on each pupil's answers.

Another solution was to specify the broad content areas the reading test would be drawn from, for example telling schools a test would be taken from the history, science or geography curriculum.

She also said officials could "abolish the labels and standards and just report the underlying scaled score".

"These reforms have their challenges and drawbacks too, but we might decide those challenges are preferable to the ones we are facing at the moment," she said.



Nick Gibb



Daisy Christodoulou

# 'Political adversarialism' hampering Birmingham SEND improvements

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

A "deep-set culture of political adversarialism" is hampering improvements in SEND services in Birmingham, the first government-imposed commissioner has warned.

John Coughlan also flagged "unhelpful and even illegal practices around exclusions and part-time provision" in the city.

In the first intervention of its kind, ministers sent Coughlan to take over SEND services in 2021. The council had failed to remedy "significant weaknesses".

In his second report, published on Thursday, Coughlan found there had been "measurable progress" in some areas. But Birmingham is still missing its legal deadlines for a third of education, health and care plans and almost half of annual reviews.

The fixer praised the appointment of chief executive Deborah Cadman. However, the council has been "significantly affected by fundamental problems in its implementation of an essential upgrade to its financial management and monitoring systems".

This caused "significant disruption" to effective service management, including for SEND and schools.

Sue Harrison, the city's director of children's services, has now been in place for over a year. Coughlan described her as the "first 'fully-fledged' DCS in Birmingham for several years".

But the commissioner's report is scathing about "adversarial politics" in the city. It comes amid reports that council leader Ian Ward will be replaced by the Labour Party nationally amid criticism of the wider culture at the council.

Coughlan said he had "genuinely been concerned" that Harrison "might resign because of some of the political challenges".

The report warned that the "context for school involvement in the SEND system remains subject to the challenges and pressures" outlined in the previous report. "These include varying degrees of fragmentation in the way schools work with each other and the local authority, and at best inconsistencies in the levels of trust between parties."

The report also warned there was "substantial



Birmingham City Hall

work to be done for schools to address their own performance, notwithstanding the strains of their own environment".

"At worst there are issues to do with unhelpful and even illegal practices around exclusions and part-time provision which probably also reflect a historical failure of leadership between the local authority and schools as poor practices have been allowed to develop and sustain."

The report is deeply critical of the city's SEND information, advice and support service (SENDIASS), previously run by the partner of Ward.

Coughlan said there "has never been a direct question of impropriety in this relationship". But it is "reasonable to assume that at best there will have been complicated management implications, related to this connection and in the context of a wider failing service".

Several "legitimate" attempts to formally review the service "had failed (or been thwarted) for various reasons".

He has also ordered independent audits of the service's finances and of "related political activities and potential conflicts of interest with the service".

Coughlan said he shared concerns that the service had worked "unilaterally, beyond its brief and in a manner which has probably, at least indirectly, contributed to wider SEND failings".

The commissioner said his "genuine concern for the long term is that what I perceive to be a deep-set culture of political adversarialism in Birmingham".

He decried a "culture in which the members

appear to feel more comfortable in their role of challenging officers and services rather than their critical roles of also supporting and enabling them".

This will "remain a structural impediment to long-term improvement in SEND".

He said political behaviours in Birmingham were "some of the poorest I have encountered across several failing authorities". However, Coughlan said he stood by his decision not to carve off the council's SEND services into a trust.

The possibility of such a move "cannot yet be finally rejected, though it should still not be required".

But he said there had been "various informal voices in some political conversations suggesting that the local authority might actually prefer for SEND to move to a trust".

"Certainly, this is my first experience of a local authority in intervention expressing such apparent ambivalence about its own service being removed."

However, "aside from those noises" and "notwithstanding the slow progress of some aspects of the improvement programme, this report does outline significant progress overall especially corporately and in the leadership of children services themselves".

Councillor Karen McCarthy, Birmingham's lead member for children's services, was "really pleased" with the progress made, but said they "know there is much more progress to be made and we are not complacent; we have said all along that we are on an improvement journey that will take a number of years".



# What does Burnham's new 'MBacc' mean for schools?

SHANE CHOWEN

@SHANECHOWEN

Andy Burnham has launched proposals for a "Greater Manchester Baccalaureate" to promote technical education courses to the city region's young people.

Set to be up and running for year 9 options in 2024, the MBacc will be a list of qualifications that steer pupils towards technical training routes leading to in-demand jobs in the local economy.

The MBacc proposals have put the mayor of Greater Manchester on a collision course with Department for Education ministers, who have fiercely resisted calls to expand EBacc subjects to include creative or technical subjects.

But, unlike the EBacc, there are currently no plans to publish league table measures on entries and achievements on the MBacc subjects, raising questions over how the mayor will incentivise schools to offer more technical options to 14- to 16-year-olds.

Ministers are also set on delivering a Conservative party manifesto "ambition" to see 90 per cent of pupils studying EBacc subjects by 2025.

But the Greater Manchester Combined Authority said that only 36 per cent of 16-year-olds in the area leave compulsory education with EBacc subjects, prompting Burnham to create his alternative.

"The question we've all got to consider is what about the 64 per cent? Are we doing enough to help those thousands of young people across Greater Manchester to find their way in life and find their way to all the good jobs that are here. I don't think we are," Burnham said at the launch event for his plans on Wednesday.

## What is the MBacc?

Like the EBacc, the MBacc is not a qualification in itself. Burnham's baccalaureate would include a core set of GCSEs in English language, maths and a technology subject such as ICT or computer science.

Alongside those would be options including a GCSE in engineering, creative subjects and the sciences. In addition, the mayor is consulting on including GCSEs in business, economics, humanities, languages and physical education.

With those MBacc GCSEs in the bag, the idea is that 16-year-olds will progress to one of seven



Andy Burnham

"career gateways", each leading to a T-level or other level 3 qualification, like BTECs in certain subjects.

Then, at 18, MBacc holders would access employment, a degree apprenticeship or a higher technical qualification (HTQ).

The final set of MBacc subjects will be subject to consultation with government and local partners.

## No plans for new league tables

Published school performance measures include data on how many pupils are entered for EBacc subjects at GCSE and what grades they achieve.

The DfE also incentivises schools towards EBacc subjects by shutting out heads from schools with low take-up from opportunities to advise on policy and take part in certain government schemes.

Sister title FE Week asked Burnham whether he would be introducing similar incentives, like league tables, to encourage schools towards MBacc subjects.

"I'm not going to be in a position to change those things. I'm not seeking to. The EBacc is important," Burnham said.

"We'll have to have a conversation with the DfE. None of this is confrontational. This is about making some of their policies work better.

"Let's go on this journey and see if we can help knock T-levels into shape."

## 'New powers' make MBacc possible

Since becoming the first elected metro mayor of Greater Manchester, Burnham has called for more control over post-technical education.

He describes the MBacc as "the first step on the

journey" for Greater Manchester to become "the UK's first technical education city-region".

This week's announcement comes months after Greater Manchester and the West Midlands gained extra skills powers in the Spring Statement.

The pair won the ability to form "joint governance boards" between their combined authorities and the DfE to "provide oversight of post-16 technical education and skills" and become "central convenors" for careers provision in their regions.

Burnham said it was the new board with DfE help that makes his academic and technical pathway options possible.

"What you are hearing today is our first sort of 'starter for ten'. To say, look, this is what we would want to get to, through this joint board, those two clear equal paths."

## 'What about everybody else?'

James Eldon, principal of Manchester Academy, who already runs an MBacc scheme said it came out of thinking about what his school did for pupils who did not want to study the EBacc.

While future options for EBacc students were "clear and delineated", which he said as going A-levels and going to university, the route was less clear for other pupils until T-levels came in.

He said technical education now has a "reputation and esteem that's valuable".

Addressing concerns the plans are a form of "soft selection" at age 14, meaning children from less advantaged families are pushed to a path that shuts the door on university, Burnham said there was "zero selection about giving [the 64 per cent] stronger, clearer paths".



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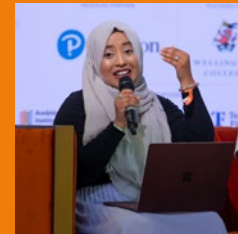
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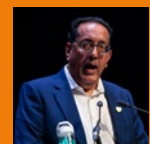
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# Feature

AMY WALKER | @AMYRWALKER

TOP 20 COUNTRIES	AVERAGE SCALE SCORE
Singapore	587
Hong Kong SAR	573
Russian Federation	567
England	558
Finland	549
Poland	547



# England becomes best of the West in global reading ranks

### England moves to fourth in world for reading, but caution urged over pandemic-hit study as enjoyment levels fall

England has risen to fourth in the PIRLS international reading league tables as schools weathered the Covid attainment hit better than other countries.

Schools minister Nick Gibb said the rise in rankings – from joint eighth out of 50 countries in 2016 – was down to primary school teachers’ “commitment to reading, their commitment to phonics and embracing of the phonics approach introduced by the government”.

The tables this year included only 43 countries as the study was severely disrupted Covid, with some nations previously ahead of England not featuring.

Here’s everything you need to know ...

#### Rankings rise for England ...

Literacy test and questionnaires were collected from 4,150 year 5 pupils across 162 schools in England. The country achieved an average reading score of 558, one point below the score when the tests were last held in 2016.

Despite this, the country moved from joint eighth out of 50 countries to fourth of 43 countries this year. Only Russia, Hong Kong and Singapore had higher average scores.

England outperformed countries including Finland, Poland, Sweden, Bulgaria and Norway who previously either achieved similar or better scores.

It has been well reported that reading in

England held up during the pandemic. An Education Policy Institute report last week found outcomes “appear to have recovered for most year groups”.

But the EPI study found primary school children were struggling to catch up on maths, with those aged between four and 11 around five weeks behind expectations prior to the outbreak.

#### ... as other countries have bigger Covid hit

The rankings rise is mostly down to “significant drops” in attainment among pupils in other countries as the pandemic posed huge global challenges to education in the years between the studies.

Of the 32 countries with data in both 2016 and

# Feature: PIRLS



## ‘The government approach has been successful in seeing children’s reading improving’

2021, 21 countries had lower average reading attainment in the most recent year, eight had little or no change, and only three had higher average achievement.

Twenty-six countries saw their scores fall by more points than in England in the same timeframe.

It meant England’s score of 558 was statistically significantly higher than the international median score of 520. It is also six points higher than England’s score in 2011, and five points higher than in 2001, when the PIRLS first started.

### Caution over pandemic impact on study

While most countries collected data from fourth grade (year 5) pupils in the autumn term of 2020 and spring term of 2021, England was among a handful to collect data in 2022 due to Covid delays.

However, because it still assessed pupils at the end of the same school year, the IEA – which conducts PIRLS – said “no discernible achievement differences had been identified”.

Gibb said “what matters is the age of the pupils

more than the distance from the pandemic”.

But the National Report for England, carried out by the Government Social Research team, cautioned that drops in attainment “may reflect the fact that many systems collected data for PIRLS during the COVID-19 pandemic”.

Ireland and Northern Ireland, which had higher average reading achievement scores than England, were also left out of the league table because they assessed pupils at the start of their fifth year due to Covid disruption.

Both countries finished higher than England last time round too.

### Findings ‘point to phonics success’ ...

Similar to 2016, a moderate correlation of 0.46 was found between pupils’ performance in their year 1 phonic check and their performance in PIRLS 2021.

It means that, generally, pupils who performed well in their year 1 phonics check also performed well in PIRLS 2021. This was the strongest predictor of PIRLS performance, followed by the number of books at home a child has.

“All this points to the fact that the approach the government has taken, in the face of quite a lot of opposition from the vested interests, has been successful in seeing children’s reading improving in this country,” said Gibb.

### ... but fewer pupils now enjoy reading

But, interestingly, just 29 per cent of English children agreed with the statement they “very much like” reading, compared to 42 per cent internationally. Another 48 per cent said they “somewhat like reading”. Boys are less likely to enjoy reading.

Changes in questions mean direct comparisons aren’t possible. But looking at individual statements that contributed towards the score show fewer children are enjoying reading.

In 2021, 54 per cent of girls said they ‘agree a lot’ that they enjoy reading, down from 62 per cent in 2016. For boys, this dropped from 50 per cent to 44 per cent.

Meanwhile, confidence in reading has also fallen. In 2016, more than half (53 per cent) of

ENGLAND BEST OF THE WEST IN GLOBAL READING RANKINGS	
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Chinese Taipei	544
Sweden	544
Australia	540
Bulgaria	540
Czech Republic	540
Denmark	539
Norway	539
Italy	537
Macao SAR	536
Austria	530
Slovak Republic	529
Netherlands	527
Germany	524
New Zealand	521

## Feature: PIRLS

English pupils said they felt very confident in reading. This fell to 45 per cent in 2021.

Almost half (49 per cent) of children in England reported spending less than 30 minutes a day reading outside of school. The international median was 44 per cent.

### Gender gap narrows as girls' scores drop

English girls outperformed boys by 10 points on average in PIRLS 2021, compared to 15 points in 2016 and 23 points in 2011.

Girls had higher average achievement than boys in almost all countries, with an average advantage of 16 points.

But the gender reading gap in England closed because girls' reading scores fell from 566 in 2016 to 562 in 2021.

Boys' average reading scores actually increased from 551 to 553 in the same timeframe.

Gibb argued that the decline for girls had been "very minimal" at a time when "Covid was a challenge to schools across the country".

### Teachers less experienced and satisfied

In England, teachers who took part in the study reported having an average of 11 years of experience, lower than the international median of 18 years.

England was among just five participating education systems where the average number of years of teaching experience was less than 12 years. The other countries were the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Jordan and Bahrain.

Of the English teachers who participated in the study, 22 per cent had less than five years' experience and 30 per cent had between five and nine years' experience. Nearly a third (31 per cent) had 10 to 19 years' teaching experience and 17 per cent had 20 years or more.

In Singapore and Hong Kong, which scored higher in the league table than England, 35 per cent and 42 per cent of participating teachers had 20 years or more teaching experience.

Internationally, a higher proportion (56 per cent) of teachers reported being very satisfied in



## 'What matters is the age of the pupils more than the distance from the pandemic'

their careers than in England (44 per cent).

But the study did not find a clear relationship between teaching experience or career satisfaction and pupils' PIRLS performance.

"What matters is the overall results – there's been no significant reduction," Gibb told reporters on Monday.

### Students now better at fact than fiction

In the last assessment in 2016, English pupils performed better in "literary" reading than in "informational" reading, with average scores of 563 and 556 respectively.

But the tables have flipped in the latest assessment, with pupils now faring better at informational reading (559), versus literary reading (558).

Passages classed as literary are more fictional, with questions involving theme, plot, events, characters, and settings, while informational passages contain facts for pupils to identify.

As was the case in 2016, however, English pupils were still better at "interpreting, integrating and

evaluating" the texts they were given, scoring 561 points on average for these skills, while their aptitude for "retrieving" information or "straightforward inferencing", scored an average of 554 points.

### 1 in 3 pupils experience monthly bullying

Around a third (35 per cent) of English pupils who took part in the study reported experiencing bullying at school monthly.

Just over half – 54 per cent – said they 'never or almost never' experienced bullying. This was lower than the international median of 62 per cent.

Pupils who experienced bullying monthly had lower average achievement in PIRLS (555), while those who almost never experienced it had the highest (568).

Most pupils were found to attend schools where teachers and leaders reported high levels of emphasis on academic success, a safe and orderly school environment and "hardly any" problems with school discipline.

# Opinion

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



## NICK HILLMAN

Director, Higher Education Policy Institute  
(writing in a personal capacity)

### It's time to end the scandal of religious tests for church schools

**If universities behaved like this, they'd face potential closure, writes Nick Hillman, so why do we accept it from a sizeable portion of state schools?**

I used to think it was reasonable for schools backed by religious groups such as the Church of England to expect some say on admissions in return. But after six months watching my local church school, I've changed my mind.

The school altered their admissions without consultation or sign-off. After I complained, they denied doing it before conducting a search into my background.

On scratching the surface, I found a festering mess that no one was prepared to take responsibility for, or to clean up.

As every child knows, if you cannot be trusted to behave responsibly, then it could be time to have your freedoms removed. This is not an isolated case. Indeed, Schools Week has reported 'near-universal non-compliance' when it comes to admissions at faith schools.

The individual school in question has long had a regular church attendance test as part of their entry procedures. Parents must attend church regularly for three years to pass. But during the pandemic the school changed the rules.

Periods when a place of worship was 'compulsorily closed' became

exempt from the church attendance test. This was well-intentioned but badly misguided because some local religious authorities kept their places of worship shut for much longer than necessary.

In our village, for example, the local church was not fully reopened for over a year, meaning it was closed for three times longer than the Government insisted. But even though regular services were suspended, the church was not 'compulsorily closed'.

As a result, it became impossible for local families to pass the school's test. When I queried this, the school denied there was a problem. Instead, as I subsequently found out, they scraped social media (including a private Facebook group) to dig into my life.

When I pressed the point, the school finally admitted they had altered their rules without consultation. The change had not even been signed off by their governing body. Unfortunately, this cock-up was followed by another cover up and then another cock-up.

While the school changed their historic 2022 admissions rules, thereby concealing the original source of the error, they made no change to their live arrangements for 2023 admissions. So, it remained impossible even for committed church-goers to pass their test.

Eventually, I felt forced to flag the problem with the Office of the



“ Religious tests are at odds with serving 'the whole community' ”

Schools Adjudicator. They quickly declared the arrangements 'unclear', 'irrational' and 'unreasonable' as well as 'likely to have the effect of inadvertently excluding some faith-based applicants'.

My complaint was only about the school's procedures. It did not mention my children. Yet the school still chose to pass on irrelevant personal information about my daughter to the adjudicator in an attempt to obfuscate. To this day, they have failed to apologise.

Of course, this story is about just one school, one church and a few parents. But as someone who works in higher education, it shocks me. Universities have much more autonomy on admissions than schools, but they have been banned from having religious tests since Victorian times.

The Office for Students would come down like a ton of bricks on any institution that behaved like this school has. Universities breaching admissions rules face a lower tuition fee cap that could put some out of business.

The story also reveals a chasm between the reasons why religious bodies profess to deliver education

and the reality. The Church of England say their educational 'vision is for the common good of the whole community'. Religious tests are clearly at odds with this.

Academics tend to direct their ire at the few areas of the country that retain the 11+, but the bigger school admissions scandal is more widespread. There are 40 times more faith-based schools in England than there are grammar schools (though not all impose religious tests).

If church schools are incompetent at running their own admissions, it reflects badly on the schools but also on their parent religious bodies. Perhaps the time has come to limit their autonomy to decide who can cross their hallowed portals.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Schools Week presented the allegations of inappropriate social media use to the school's governing body. They declined to comment, but say they will comply fully with any formal investigation. The school wishes to draw attention to the Adjudicator's statement: "I do not believe the school to have intentionally set out to make a change which has had these effects."

# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## SABAH AHMEDI

Imam and RE Champion

### Young people need guidance to explore their faith safely online

**RE's decline means young people are increasingly seeking answers to life's big questions online, writes Sabah Ahmedi, and schools can help to mitigate the risks**

As a faith leader with a visible presence on social media, one thing is clear to me: everyone in life is on a spiritual path whether they embrace Islam or a non-religious worldview like humanism. I experience first-hand the hunger young people have for life's big questions.

What's also clear to me is that turning to the unregulated marketplace of ideas that is the internet for answers presents dangers as well as opportunities. Young people should be empowered to explore their spirituality, but schools must always be there to guide them on that path.

Having spoken to teachers about this issue, I know there is an interest in opening up more conversations in schools about these big questions and helping students build an understanding of their different religious and non-religious beliefs.

However, schools are in a tricky position. Teacher recruitment for religious education is down by one-third following the axing of

a teacher training bursary. This leaves many humanities teachers – or even form tutors with little to no academic grasp of the subject – to tackle what many agree is a fundamental part of young people's education.

Some suggest the census provides evidence that the subject matters less than it used to. Young people are turning away from organised religions, they say, and strongly held beliefs about morality, God and life after death have little place in their lives in an increasingly secular society.

In fact, young people have no less interest in these big ideas than those of previous generations. But the disdain and ridicule they encounter act as a barrier to asking questions from adults in their daily lives.

As a result, they are turning to the internet. The lucky ones come across religious leaders with integrity, but there's no telling what else they are being exposed to.

So, we need to make schools a place where young people can discuss these questions openly and freely without being judged, and we need to do this irrespective of recruitment challenges. That means teachers and school leaders alike picking up the questions I see young people ask online at every opportunity and as part of their



**“ We need to do this irrespective of recruitment challenges**

wider school cultures.

Thankfully, there are a number of excellent, free and paid professional development courses designed to help guide these conversations, for example from the Culham St Gabriel's Trust and the National Association of Teachers of RE.

These courses are centred upon a worldviews approach to religious education, built on the idea that every young person has their own unique way of understanding and experiencing the world, which can be made up of both religious and non-religious ideas.

Helping young people get to grips with their worldview ought to be the job of a trained specialist, but there's no reason a broader group of mentors can't positively influence this journey – not least by helping young people to undertake their independent exploration safely.

School leaders and department heads can play a role in making space for discussion of religion and belief across the curriculum,

including in English, history and the arts. Young people's capacity to think about the big questions in life can also be built into a wider school culture that encourages asking these questions as part of developing a sense of purpose, direction, and community – whether the answer they arrive at is religious or not.

Rachel de Souza, the Children's Commissioner and a former RE teacher herself, recently spoke of RE as “the one place in the curriculum” where young people could discuss “important and exciting philosophical, religious, and moral conundrums in safe spaces”.

Judging by my social media accounts, young people's curiosity for these big questions is as dynamic as ever. And if it's a conversation that's increasingly happening online, then that's all the more reason for schools to provide those safe spaces and the context for taking their questions further.

# Opinion

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

## New DfE guidance for improving school attendance leaves little space to accommodate students who face emotional and psychological barriers, writes Stephanie Smith

The Department of Education's strategy for improving school attendance came into effect from September 2022. The guidance is currently non-statutory but could become mandatory from September 2023.

The new guidance includes significant changes to the registration process, including an enforced 30-minute timeframe for student attendance to be recorded, and the removal of secondary timetables that accommodate students with special needs.

Its aim is to "maintain the same ambition for attendance and work with pupils and parents to maximise attendance", leaving little space to accommodate students who face barriers to attendance, such as school-based anxiety.

Students with special education needs are disproportionately affected by these changes. The risk of 'school refusal' for students with autism is 42.6 per cent in comparison to 7.1 per cent for neurotypical students. The word 'refusal' itself is problematic because it implies a choice. The reality is that students with school-based anxiety don't feel able to attend school.

This applies to several of our students, and the new guidance requires that they be registered as unauthorised absences, with vastly different implications to an authorised late attendance mark. Local authorities can take legal action through mandatory parenting classes, fines or even prosecution, subjecting parents who are already concerned for their children to further pressure during an already distressing period.

But there are ways that we can



STEPHANIE SMITH

Head of school,  
The Cavendish School

## How new attendance guidelines could affect anxious pupils

work within the framework of the new guidance to support those who struggle with anxiety and distress triggered by the school environment so that they can access their learning.

The first step is to identify specific times of the day when students feel heightened levels of anxiety and to understand the root cause of these feelings. This enables us to develop

distrustful of our efforts, and enforcing attendance may only increase their anxiety. Rebuilding trust is essential, and this starts outside of the school environment. Visiting students in locations where they feel comfortable removes one of the sources of anxiety, allowing the focus to remain on preventing that anxiety escalating into avoidance and,

“ There are ways we can work within the new framework

appropriate strategies to support them.

Typically we are able to do this before our students start at the school, and previous attendance records provide strong evidence.

Students who have had a negative experiences of school may be

ultimately, poor attendance.

It also means students feel safe and familiar with at least one member of the team. We organise activities with our art or occupational therapists outside of school to build on this approach too.

Investing time into building



relationships with students, understanding their special interests, and listening to their needs is important to create a comfortable atmosphere where they can thrive. Ensuring school is somewhere they want to be can develop into an 'irresistible invitation' to attend.

One of the keys to success is to intervene before a pattern of absence materialises. We sometimes find our students feel anxious about how busy the main entrance is at the start of the day. The new 30-minute registration window makes managing this more complicated. However, there are workarounds.

For some who struggle with enclosed spaces or large groups, we have had some success with using an alternative entrance, and with later arrivals prohibited under the new guidance, we've begun inviting them to start earlier instead.

For those whose anxiety is harder to accommodate, therapy can be key to breaking down barriers. Accessing support from an NHS therapist can be a frustratingly lengthy process when school attendance is at stake. We've found on occasion that a clinical assessment from a private provider often helps our students and their families access support more quickly.

Regarding families, the post-Covid work-from-home culture presents an opportunity. Students are often significantly more relaxed when a parent or guardian is nearby, and we've found providing spaces for family members to work from the school premises helpful.

Working together, we really can remove the barriers to attendance facing students with school-based anxiety and improve access to learning. And that's a worth doing, whether the new guidance becomes law or not.



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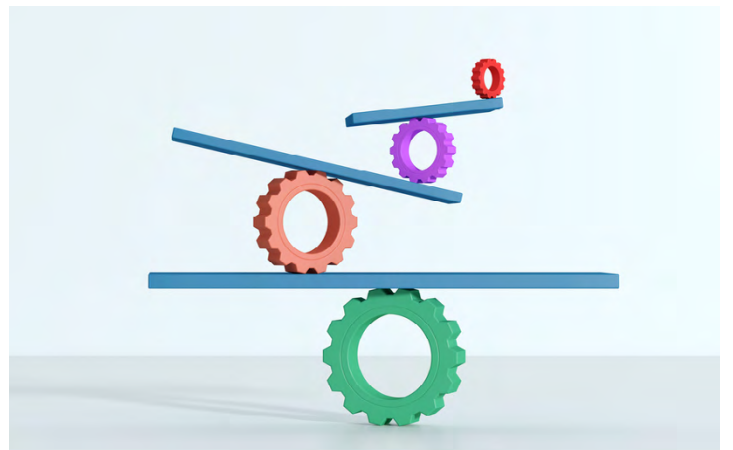
# The Solutions Toolkit

Teacher Toolkit founder, Ross McGill hosts a monthly take-over of our new 'Solutions' column



## ROSS MCGILL

Former school leader, author and EdD student



“ Have a clear goal in mind, developed collectively

## How can schools balance wellbeing and accountability?

**Ross McGill sets out the key factors for creating a resilient culture of wellbeing that can withstand the pressures of external accountability**

It's a truism to say that Ofsted inspections cause stress. There's the inspection itself, of course, but there is also the constant background pressure to be 'Ofsted-ready', the adrenaline crash when inspectors leave and the impact of the official outcome, good or bad.

Leaders will also have to manage staff feelings around their personal performance during the inspection – the teacher who feels they've let the side down, the one who's walking on air, and those caught between commiserating with one and congratulating the other.

Leaders must manage their own feelings too, all while trying to strike a balance between meeting inspectors' expectations head-on and being mindful of their staff. How does anyone manage all that?

Ofsted's workload and wellbeing commitments from May 2021 say inspectors should take staff wellbeing into account when determining judgments. They also remind schools that they should not create documentation solely for inspection purposes.

All of which is easy for the

inspectorate to say, and much harder for its inspectors to deliver. Indeed, Ofsted has so far shirked a proper review of its framework's impact on wellbeing, instead expecting school leaders to "hold themselves accountable" for it!

But we know accountability drives workload, and workload is a significant factor affecting teacher wellbeing. Indeed, it is the primary reason for leaving the profession. A solution is required, and waiting and hoping for accountability reform is unlikely to deliver what's needed.

In my work in schools across the country, I come across broadly two types of approach to wellbeing: those that embed wellbeing into their culture and long-term strategy, and those that treat wellbeing as a bolt-on initiative.

Neither is wrong in itself. It's really a question of context. In a school where results are good, parental support is high, staffing is consistent and external pressure is low, the bolt-on approach is likely to be sufficient. Elsewhere, it isn't.

Pizzas for staff staying late to prepare for next day's Ofsted visit are great in both contexts, as is a treat in everyone's staffroom pigeonhole once the inspection is over. But this isn't leadership for wellbeing. It's leadership that assumes wellbeing.

For those who can't afford that assumption, the key is to develop and sustain a culture of wellbeing. As I mentioned in my previous article, implementation science tells us it can take anywhere from two to four years to see the results of change. It's a marathon, not a sprint, and trying to rush the process could have the opposite effect to what you're trying to achieve.

The first step, then, is to be honest about the state of your staff's wellbeing. Research by Donohoo and colleagues suggests five factors are key to happier school environments: teacher influence, feedback, cohesion, consensus, and responsiveness. These are a safe bet to form the basis of a wellbeing audit which can feed directly into concrete plans for action.

My experience is that consensus and cohesion are particularly important. Wellbeing is a very broad concept with any number of possible interventions, from meditation sessions to paid term-time leave. Schools should have a clear goal in mind, developed collectively. What will wellbeing

look like when we have it? How will it manifest? How will we get there?

Of course, there will be obstacles and you will need to adapt your strategy as you go. These obstacles will be easier to manage if you display leadership behaviours that are consistent with your goals, including prioritising your own wellbeing and modelling that.

Your HR systems and other policies should also support your goal by ensuring your processes are evaluated in terms of their workload implications. You'll know great systems and procedures are in place when your focus shifts from mitigating the negatives to genuinely adding value to the lives of your staff.

Ofsted may or may not notice the effort, but they are bound to value the efficacy your wellbeing strategy results in and its positive effects on staff and students. What they certainly won't notice is the increased nonchalance before, during and after your next inspection.

But everyone else will.

# THE REVIEW

## THE TEACHERS: A YEAR INSIDE AMERICA'S MOST VULNERABLE, IMPORTANT PROFESSION

BOOK  
TV  
FILM  
RADIO  
EVENT  
RESOURCE

**Author:** Alexandra Robbins

**Publisher:** Dutton

**Publication date:** 14 March 2023

**ISBN:** 1101986751

**Reviewer:** Emma Cate Stokes, Key stage one phase lead, East Sussex

Alexandra Robbins' *The Teachers* is a powerful and moving portrayal of the challenges, triumphs and realities educators face in the American education system. Centred on the experiences of three incredibly dedicated and talented teachers, it masterfully weaves in crucial research and anecdotes from educators across the country to provide a broader context to their stories and those of their students.

It is a raw, emotional, and unflinchingly honest account of the realities of teaching that often brought me to tears. Rarely have I encountered a book that so accurately captures the obstacles, fears, hopes, and achievements that we teachers confront daily. Robbins allows us to glimpse these teachers' personal lives, humanising them and illustrating their struggles in balancing their careers with their personal lives.

By now, we've all grown grimly accustomed to stories of school shootings. Nevertheless, we tend to think of them as dreadful one-offs, manifestations of a problem with gun culture. What Robbins reveals here is a distressing reality that many teachers face daily, encountering physical violence from students and even parents.

She recounts incidents of educators being assaulted, threatened, and verbally abused, demonstrating that violence is not a rare occurrence in the educational landscape but a normal one. This stark revelation illuminates teachers' immense daily challenges.

Robbins exposes how school administrations and policymakers often adopt a dismissive attitude towards such incidents, telling teachers to anticipate and tolerate such violence as part of the job. This expectation, coupled with the lack of adequate support and resources, places an immense emotional and psychological burden on teachers, forcing many to question their career choices and even leave the profession.

The author also explores the mounting

pressures educators faced leading up to the pandemic, detailing how these issues spiralled into widespread resignations and a growing sense of malaise within the profession. What *The Teachers* skilfully demonstrates is that the pandemic did not create the challenges of workplace and parent bullying, constantly shifting curriculums, understaffing, decaying classrooms, lack of basic supplies and planning time, and low pay.

Rather, Covid exposed and exacerbated them, making these pre-existing problems increasingly difficult to ignore.

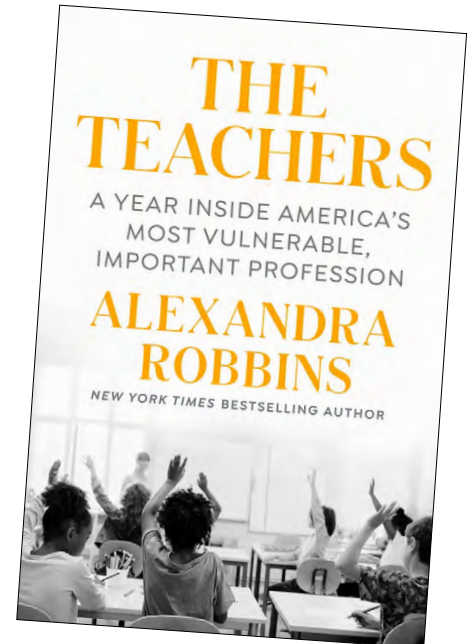
Despite the harrowing nature of these issues, *The Teachers* also celebrates the joy and fulfilment that comes with being an educator. The featured teachers share heart-warming, amusing and relatable moments from their classrooms that had me nodding and laughing in recognition.

By the end of the school year, readers have journeyed through a rollercoaster of emotions alongside these educators, sharing in their pride and love for their students, the incredible progress many have made, and the bittersweet goodbyes at the end of the year.

The contrasting emotions and the depth with which they are laid out do more than any campaign could to raise awareness of physical violence in schools. They add up to a clarion call for a collective effort to address and resolve this pervasive problem.

Robbins emphasises the importance of fostering a safe and supportive environment for students and educators, underpinned by adequate policies, increased funding, and a genuine commitment to the well-being of all school community members.

As a teacher, I found Robbins' portrayal of this complex subject matter to be both validating and empowering. While acknowledging the immense challenges and dangers that educators face,



the book also serves as a reminder of the incredible impact that we can have on our students' lives, inspiring us to continue advocating for a safer and more equitable education system.

All in all, I found *The Teachers* a profoundly insightful, compassionate and unapologetically honest portrayal of the teaching profession. It is an essential read for anyone looking to understand the challenges, joys and realities of education in the United States.

But more than that, it's a vivid warning to other systems, including ours, of the dangers of normalising abusive behaviours in and around schools.

By providing a much-needed platform for voices from the classroom, Robbins has managed to explain the often seemingly unexplainable experiences of teachers. I can't recommend it enough to educators and non-educators alike, and I can only hope someone will give our own education system the same candid treatment.

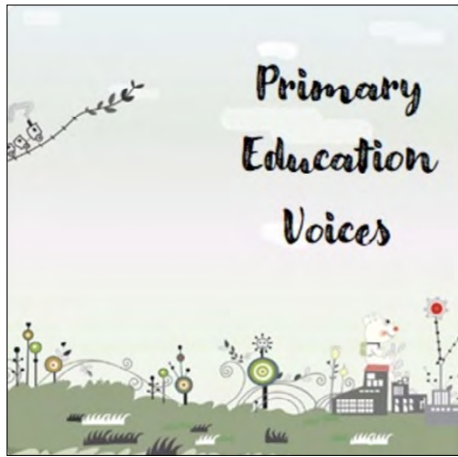


Rating

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



**Sarah Gallagher**  
Headteacher, Snape Primary School and PGCE tutor, University of Cambridge



range of settings and age ranges, Allen speaks passionately and movingly about why she became a teacher and what drove her to keep going – once setting up a mini school in her garage!

It's a heart-warming conversation that reminded me, in this SATs week, about the real heart of what we do. The sheer delight in Allen's voice when she relates the story of a child 'getting' reading gave me goosebumps. A powerful antidote to needless bolt-ons and meaningless hoops.

### THE TURBULENCE OF THE PANDEMIC

New to me this week, the T and Teaching podcast is billed as 'the education podcast that you can listen to with a cup of tea', which suits me to a T. In the latest episode, teacher-hosts Arthur Moore and Mike Harrowell discuss post-pandemic behaviour over a cuppa with their guest Adele Bates, author of *Miss, I Don't Give a Shit*.

All three discuss how difficult behaviour has become in recent years and how challenging dealing with it is proving. Part of the problem in my mind is that while the pandemic itself feels ever more distant, the reality is that its impact on children and young people is still very much a live issue.

As edu-social media seemingly becomes

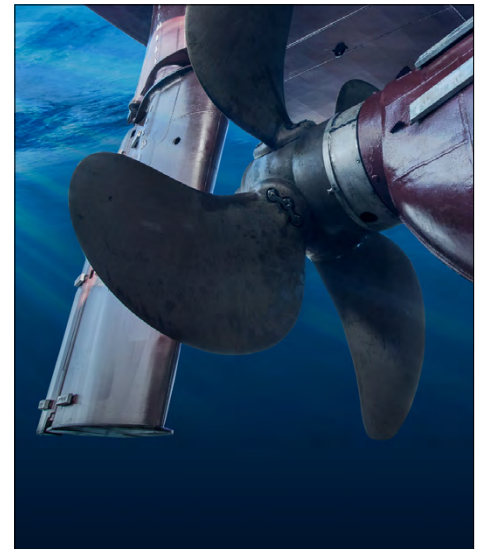


ever more polarised, I found hearing these three being honest and open about their struggles refreshing. Bates talks openly about a class where the dynamic simply wasn't working and how she gave them some agency in fixing it – a healthy reminder that young people are not automatons.

Encouraging us to address our own wellbeing, she also reminds us that we must be in a good place ourselves before we can address challenging behaviour. All of which is highly pertinent at this time of year.

### A RUDDER FOR THE LIFEBOAT

Pertinent too was this blog by Anaheim University professor Hayo Reinders. 'We have to place more trust in our teacher and better support them to face future challenges,' it reads, and given our leadership recruitment and retention crisis I very much hope this comes to pass. If it doesn't, I fear there will be many rudderless schools in the next few years.



The blog is about values-based leadership and what motivates people to take on leadership roles. Starting with a walk-through of the 'Bull's Eye' exercise, which poses reflective questions about all aspects of our lives, Reinders then suggests making an action plan to better align our lives outside school with our school values.

Just like Bates earlier, Reinders's point about putting our own life-vest on before helping anyone else is also well made here. Almost as if we were on a sinking ship.

And yet the DfE violins still play.

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts



### THE WAKE OF SATS

The past week's many social media spats have sometimes felt like so many efforts to talk about anything other than the elephant in the staffroom. Which one, you might well ask. The answer this week, as set out brilliantly in this blog by headteacher Simon Smith, is SATs.

To be perfectly honest, I wasn't sure I was going to read much further than Smith's opening comment that there is some sense to these tests. But read on I did, and I am glad because his assessment of the high level of challenge this year's reading test presented to able readers is debated with a twist.

On one level, it was comforting to find that it wasn't just our pupils who found it hard going. On another, as Smith points out, this year's uproar at the difficulty only highlights the invisibility of pupils with SEND when it comes to SATs. The distress able readers experienced last week is felt by many children every year. But it's okay, apparently, because the DfE says the tests are "designed to be challenging".

Quite how any of this helps with the current mental health crisis, I'm yet to understand.

### A CAREER IN FLOW

Sticking with the theme of inclusion, the latest episode of the Primary Education Voices podcast welcomed seasoned primary educator and inclusion adviser Carol Allen to chat about all things SEND.

With 43 years' experience across a huge

# The Knowledge

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



## How stressed are teachers compared with other professions?

**Our new research makes harrowing reading for anyone concerned about recruitment, retention or wellbeing, writes Russell Glass**

The *Headspace 2023 Workforce Attitudes Toward Mental Health* report finds that the British population overwhelmingly deems education to be the most stressful career path, with a staggering 93 per cent of those in the profession feeling stressed at least once a week.

The education sector was one of eight sectors involved in this latest report, which analysed the state of workplace wellbeing. Education came out on top, beating even financial services and insurance for stressfulness. In that sector, 91 per cent experienced stress at least once a week.

Those in the hospitality industry experience less stress than any of the sectors surveyed, with 17 per cent of these employees either experiencing no stress, or only rarely. This was followed closely by the retail sector, where 16 per cent of respondents say they rarely or never experience stress at work.

I am sure educators will not be shocked by this finding given the ongoing strike action and the evolution of teaching practices following the pandemic. Indeed, we've all heard the stories of classroom practitioners opting instead to work at Tesco's, and we can see why. But the fact remains: this number is harrowing and should serve as a wake-up call.

At least once a month, 83 per cent of education workers feel a sense of dread relating to work. This is being driven by a fear of being overwhelmed due to unrealistic expectations to take on more responsibility (41 per cent) above and beyond their job description.

The working environment is also a contributing factor to the deterioration of educators' mental health, with managers being called out for their



lack of understanding of life outside work (47 per cent) and an absence of respect when it comes to working hours (44 per cent).

All of this, coupled with stress due to economic uncertainty (46 per cent), inequalities relating to marginalised communities (43 per cent), political uncertainty (33 per cent) and Covid (29 per cent), has had a distinct negative impact on the emotional wellbeing of education workers.

Many also still feel unsettled by the instability and constant change during and after the pandemic. Sadly, this decline looks set to continue with 30 per cent of education workers saying they feel worse than they did last year.

Research shows that stress at work often leads to several other mental health struggles. Taking all these factors together, it is evident that the stress experienced by educators is verging on extreme and thus having a highly detrimental effect on their mental wellbeing both in and out of the classroom.

However, research also shows that the right support can mitigate this. This can be clinical support as offered through the NHS, or sub-clinical support as offered by Headspace and

others. The key is to ensure the right support is there at the right time. Whoever provides that support, and however they provide it, early identification and intervention are particularly important.

When it comes to the mental health support of education workers, 44 per cent say would like a system that offers quick access. Forty-six per cent say they'd like that to include multiple support streams (such as in-person, virtual, or app-based talk therapy). And 45 per cent would feel most comfortable with behavioural health coaches, therapists or psychiatrists who share their life experience.

Workplace mental health is now a key business priority for employers in every sector across the UK. Ultimately, keeping staff healthy and offering support to those who are suffering more acutely makes business as well as human sense. It results in lower absenteeism and an overall happier and more productive staff.

The key is that employee wellbeing is within our control. It comes from our workplace environments, our understanding of existing pressures facing employees both in and out of the office, and the support we offer.

Week in

# Westminster

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



## MONDAY

Nick Gibb's Christmas and birthday came all at once this week with the latest PIRLS results and nothing – especially us pesky journalists – can ruin his special day.

One keen-eyed journalist asked why Russia came ahead of England in the PIRLS 2021, to which Gibb retorted "typical journalist question, we came fourth and you're criticising us for not coming third".

Gibb also claimed that all four teaching unions "principally" rejected the government's last pay offer because they thought it wasn't fully funded.

"I think if teachers had understood that it was fully funded, the ballot might have gone a different way," he told reporters.

But last week, the Office for Statistics Regulation said that while the government's claim its deal was fully funded – the important caveat was that it was only fully funded based on the government's own interpretation of what that meant.

Its interpretation was that on a national level, it was. But that's not what everyone is up in arms about: individually lots of schools won't be funded and will have to make cuts. Something that the government has admitted.

However, ministers won't probably care too much since these are likely to be council schools and not those in big multi-academy trusts.

## TUESDAY

Claire Coutinho wasn't afraid to hit back at Jacob Rees-Mogg's claims at the eyebrow raising NatCon event that extending free childcare is "fundamentally anti-Conservative."

The children's minister told HuffPost that the plans set out in the March budget will make it easier to have a family.

Hear, hear.

Also – we won't even get into *that*\* Katharine Birbalsingh speech at the event. But do have a listen. It's totally nuts.

\*\*\*

What is going on with the Tories' lofty "arts premium" pledge from their 2019 election manifesto.

We reported how ministers quietly shelved the £90 million premium during the pandemic. The DfE had said its "priorities have inevitably had to focus on education recovery over the next three years".

But to much surprise, academies minister Baroness Barran said this week that "consideration for an arts premium will be given in due course" this month.

All very confusing. We asked the DfE for some clarification. The response: nothing to add to Barran's response. Clear as mud.

\*\*\*

Backbench Tory MP Flick Drummond is keeping ministers' feet to the fire over a register for children not in school. Introducing her private members' bill this week, she said "we must act now, or we will have failed this generation".

Among the bill's cross-party backers are four former education ministers including Edward Timpson, Robin Walker and the (albeit shortlived ministers) Andrea Jenkyns and Jonathan Gullis.

But we had to double take at (Sir) Gavin Williamson's name. The same Gavin Williamson who in 2021 said a register was to be introduced "imminently"...

\*\*\*

In a sign of the changing politics times, a drinks reception for lobbyists Public First was opened by Labour's shadow business secretary Jonathan Reynolds.

WiW also spotted Labour's shadow schools minister Stephen Morgan enjoying the wine and canapés. The company's last drinks' do a few years back was opened by Michael Gove.

But the times they are a-changing.

## WEDNESDAY

Yes, reader, for the third week running we have news to bring you on those £364,000 wildflowers for the King's Coronation.

It appears the 200,000 packets may have cost us all (taxpayers) *another*\* £117,000 to deliver and distribute to primary schools, according to a contract award.

And for those of you unable to plant seeds, don't worry. The Eden Project was hosting a live webinar this week to help!

\*\*\*

Barran may have survived the 47 reshuffles last year, but we got an idea of what she'd have done if she had actually been booted.

On the new academy trust chief executive development programme, Barran said "if I wasn't doing this, I would love to go on it."

## THURSDAY

Meanwhile, the lauded PIRLS reading scores is a rare bit of good news for the sector. Gillian Keegan was keen to dish out the praise. And how well all our primary school teachers had done!

Er, no. She tweeted today: "Rightly deserved recognition for my brilliant friend and colleague Nick Gibb, who's done so much to raise standards in our schools."



## NURSERY MANAGER

If you are an enthusiastic and motivated individual who is looking for an exciting opportunity in the early years and childcare workforce, we want to hear from you.

We are an innovative company and are looking for like-minded people to join our family and have a positive impact on outcomes for our children.

You will effectively lead, inspire and take responsibility for the overall leadership and management of a high-performing early years and childcare provision.

You will lead the delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage and develop collaborative partnerships to ensure all children get the best start in their early years through a sufficient, diverse, accessible, high quality and inclusive provision.

Do you have excellent communication skills, are you highly motivated and approachable then we want to hear from you. This is an exciting opportunity for a Nursery Manager to be part of The Education People based at our Oaks Day Nursery in Swanley.

**As part of the family group, these are some of the benefits you can expect to receive:**

- Competitive salary
- 25 Days Annual Leave + Bank Holidays
- Pension Programme
- High quality regular professional development training to support and develop your skills
- Career progression opportunities across the nursery family
- Support from the highly qualified and experienced advisory team at The Education People
- Dedicated team days with colleagues from across the family to network and develop strong pedagogy

**Closing date is Thursday 25 May 2023 with interviews held on Thursday 8 June 2023.**

We look forward to receiving your application.

**For further information on this role, please contact Emma Ashdown [emma.ashdown@theeducationpeople.org](mailto:emma.ashdown@theeducationpeople.org) | 03301 651258**



Pearson

## Become a Pearson examiner

Have you ever thought about becoming an examiner? At Pearson we're currently recruiting examiners for the May/June 2023 exam series.

### What are the benefits of being an examiner?

- Develop a deeper level of subject understanding and knowledge and the assessment process.
- Flexibility to work remotely around other commitments and increase your income.
- Help your students to progress by gaining insights into the assessment process which will help you to prepare your learners for their exams.
- Network with your fellow educational professionals, sharing great ideas and building a support network.
- Share your assessment expertise and unique insights with your whole department to encourage a consistent approach to marking across your whole team.
- Progression and CPD.

**Full training and support will be provided**

# THE EDUCATION PEOPLE

## BECOME A CLERK (THE GOVERNANCE PROFESSIONAL TO THE BOARD)

If you are looking for an exciting and flexible **part-time role** and would like the opportunity to grow professionally, joining The Education People's Clerking Service might be just what you are looking for!

The flexibility of the role means other than attending the governing board meeting, work can be completed at any time of the day to suit your existing demands of either family or work life.

We are looking for prospective employees to work with schools either in person or virtually all over Kent, Medway and beyond!

### Role of a Governance Professional

- Organise meeting dates, write agenda in collaboration with the chair of governors and headteacher.
- Collect supporting documents and distribute with an agenda.
- Attend meetings, give professional advice on governance procedural aspects and take minutes.
- Write minutes for chair's approval and send to governors.
- Carry out administrative tasks relating to keeping governors' names and business interest details up to date.

- Support, administer and advise for any required panel process as received to the governing board.
- Be the professional adviser by helping the board understand its role and legal duties so that it functions efficiently and effectively.

### Skills Required

- IT literate
- Well organised
- Good listening and interpersonal skills
- Good grammar and typing skills
- Attention to detail
- Team player
- Able to work on own
- Self-motivator
- Commitment to self-development.

If you have these skills, we want to hear from you. This could be the start of your journey to become part of our Clerking family.

Email us at [clerkingservice@theeducationpeople.org](mailto:clerkingservice@theeducationpeople.org) or drop us a line at 03301 651 100.



## EXECUTIVE LEAD FOR SECONDARIES

We are delighted to be appointing an Executive Leader to take strategic oversight of our secondary schools at this very exciting time for Mowbray Education Trust. The Executive Lead for Secondaries will play a crucial role in developing our secondary phase, bringing leaders together as one new team within the culture of the Trust. As a member of the Executive Team, you will play a key role in the strategic direction setting and oversight of the Trust.

Much of our most recent success, we attribute to identifying, attracting and retaining people with humility, warmth and the potential to be brilliant. If you are an inspirational Headteacher with an ability to motivate others to develop a culture of high expectations and are interested in taking a key role, not only in our Trust, but in shaping the future of education, we can't wait to hear from you.

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO](#)

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