

# SCHOOLS WEEK

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

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## 'Enough is enough': Devastating special school budgets revealed

- Leaders face deficits of up to £1.5m over unfunded pay rises
- But defiant heads refuse to make more cuts amid safety warning
- Fightback starts as national campaign launched to lobby MPs

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

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# SCHOOLS WEEK

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# Special schools should no longer be an afterthought

With fewer pupils per teacher, special schools have always borne the brunt of staff pay rises.

It is well documented how the unique mix in recent years of larger, and unfunded, pay rises for support staff – of whom special schools have greater numbers – and cash-strapped councils not passing on grants or upping their funding rates has left special schools on the brink.

Things have been tough for a while. Staff have been cut, class sizes are getting bigger, provision is being scaled back.

But our investigation today (pages 4 and 5) shows the situation is at crisis point. One hundred special school leaders have bravely opened up their predicted budgets for our inspection – and it makes for grim reading.

We fully back the national campaign for leaders of those schools who are now saying “enough is enough” and rightly refusing to make more cuts that they say could endanger not only the quality of education but also the safety of their

schools and pupils.

The government likes to fall back on its correct claim that, nationally, its teacher pay rise offer was “fully funded”. But the fact this calculation simply excluded special schools – those most likely to be hit hardest – is another depressing example of how these schools seem to be an afterthought for Westminster policymakers.

High-needs funding has increased massively in recent years, but making the necessary policy changes that will create a fairer, more equitable system that is fit for purpose is much more complex than spending money alone.

The proposed SEND reforms should help, but national roll out being another two years away will make little difference to special schools on the brink right now.

The government will have to rethink its funding pledge for schools, given the teacher pay review body has called for a 6.5 per cent rise. This time round, special schools can't just be ignored.

## Most read online this week:

- 1 [Pay review body 'recommends 6.5% rise for teachers'](#)
- 2 [How stressed are teachers compared with other professions?](#)
- 3 [Rebroker U-turn after Ofsted rapid return](#)
- 4 [How new attendance guidelines could affect anxious pupils](#)
- 5 [Tax agency assessors to run school capacity checks](#)

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INVESTIGATION: FUNDING

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# 'We've slashed to the bone. But no more..'

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Special schools are staring into budget holes as deep as £1.5 million, a Schools Week investigation has found, as heads say "enough is enough" and launch a national campaign against more cuts.

Nearly nine in ten special schools are forecasting a budget deficit over the next two years as unfunded pay rises, soaring energy costs and inflation take their toll.

A poll of 100 schools by the National Network of Specialist Provision (NNSP) has found that the average deficit across 80 schools in the red is forecast as £144,176 next year, rising to £225,926 across nearly 90 schools in 2024-25.

But after years of slashing provision "to the bone", heads are now refusing to make more cuts – warning they would breach their legal duty to provide care for the country's most vulnerable children.

While the government has claimed its recent teacher pay offer was fully funded, it has emerged that special schools were excluded from its calculations.

Special school heads are today launching a national campaign calling for urgent action from MPs, saying the "operational safety" of their schools is at "immediate risk".

Alistair Crawford and Alison Ashley, NNSP co-chairs, said the sector was "facing a financial crisis that will not only lessen and limit the life chances of the most vulnerable learners in society but also threaten the viability of many specialist schools in the next 18 months.

"What has to happen – from a critical incident point of view or serious mistake – for something to change? Enough is enough."

## 'Pupil safety is at risk – this is uncharted territory'

Special schools had to fund 5 per cent pay rises for teachers and up to 10 per cent pay rises for support staff. Their low pupil-to-teacher ratios and large numbers of support staff meant they were hit hard.

While the schools got an extra £325



million to cover increased costs last year, Schools Week investigations revealed that some cash-strapped councils kept millions of pounds, rather than pass it on.

The £400 million extra funding for 2023-24 has been ring-fenced for special schools. But leaders say this is plugging budget holes and other additional costs caused by rising inflation.

The NNSP poll reached 10 per cent of the country's 1,000 special schools, which educate about 140,000 youngsters. While the survey was self-selecting, special school leaders said they were surprised and horrified to see the devastating scale of financial ruin facing the sector.

The cumulative deficit of schools in the red will total £14 million next year and £22 million in 2024-25.

Just over half of respondents said "unfunded pay rises and staffing" were the most significant driver of deficits.

The government teacher pay body has recommended pay rises of 6.5 per cent next year, while support staff unions have rejected a rise of up to 9.4 per cent this year.

In March, Perseid School, a maintained special school for children with severe and profound learning difficulties in Merton, south London,

has a deficit just under £500,000. Its projected funding shortfall will be £1.5 million by next March.

Tina Harvey, its headteacher, said it had no reserves but vowed that it would not cut services because of its legal duty to keep schools safe and provide a level of education specified by a pupil's education, health and care plan.

"Sometimes, people think cutting staff is the obvious answer, but we have a high staff to pupil ratio because that is what the pupils need," she said. "It's wrong to think heads should be able to solve a problem of this magnitude when it is not of our making"

The Eden Academy Trust is predicting deficit budgets of between £190,000 to £250,000 across its seven schools, compared with £60,000 for each school this year.

Susan Douglas, its chief executive, said reserves – money saved for fixing buildings or big-ticket expenditure – plugged shortfalls in the past, but are now "all used up".

The trust has not replaced departing staff and has hit the limit on class sizes. Any more cuts would "risk health and safety, or possibly even medical issues for pupils and staff" Douglas said.

Figures are not published for class sizes in special schools because they are dictated more by



Susan Douglas

## SPECIAL SCHOOL FUNDING CRISIS:

- ◆ 86% FORECAST A DEFICIT BUDGET IN 2024-25, AN AVERAGE OF £225,926
- ◆ NEARLY HALF OF HEADS CONSIDERING QUITTING OVER FUNDING WOES
- ◆ 51% SAY UNFUNDED PAY RISES ARE BIGGEST DRAIN ON RESOURCES

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INVESTIGATION: FUNDING

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pupil need. But the average number of pupils in special schools has risen every year from 108 in 2015-16, to 139 last year.

“I’ve heard people talking about 4.5 day weeks,” Douglas said. “That’s not a route we want to go down but we are worried – this is uncharted territory. This isn’t a financial competency issue, we are simply underfunded and our children and young people deserve better.”

She said top-up funding in Hillingdon, north London – where three of their schools are based – hasn’t increased since 2015. The council said it was reviewing funding levels.

The Learn to Live Foundation, with two special schools in Devon, said lower staffing levels often forced it to cancel outdoor education.

Nikki Burroughs, its executive head, said it cut five staff to help set a balanced budget this year. Last year it didn’t fill staff vacancies or cover maternity leave.

Pressure from councils and MATs to cut costs

Maintained schools must get permission from their council to set a budget deficit. While individual academies in trusts can be in deficit, a trust in the red would face government intervention.

Heads told the NNSP how some councils and MATs are putting “significant pressure on specialist school leaders to make difficult and sometimes dangerous decisions to ‘balance the books’”

Simon Knight, the joint head of Frank Wise School in Oxfordshire, is still in talks with his council over a £52,000 forecast deficit, but said he “will not be making cuts”.

“This situation is not a result of poor financial control or extravagance, but a consequence of insufficient income resulting from the decisions made at a local and national government level.

“If we cut staffing, we will not be able to fulfil our legal responsibilities.”

Some heads have been encouraged to set budgets based on unrealistic 2 per cent pay rises, NNSP said. While others opened up about “heartbreaking conversations in which they have to ‘manage expectations’ of families as key aspects of the curriculum have become simply unaffordable”.

Forty-eight heads said they had “considered their position because of the current landscape”.

Harvey is retiring in July, unrelated



‘It’s not financial incompetency, it’s underfunding’

to the current climate, but said “it makes you question how long you can sustain this level of pressure from external partners to try to rectify something that actually isn’t of our making.”

A Schools Week investigation last year found special schools and alternative provision had nearly three times more teaching posts filled by temporary workers.

Survival of SEND infrastructure is at risk

The government has claimed its proposed 4.5 per cent pay rise for teachers next year is fully funded.

While that stands up on a national scale, it ignores that many individual schools will still face cuts.

However, the government’s technical note – the evidence to back up its “fully funded” claim – “excluded” special schools.

While the government plans to publish more information “in future” on high-needs funding, it only looks at what goes to mainstream schools.

Leora Cruddas, the chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, said its analysis “strongly indicates real-terms cuts in funding for vulnerable pupils and those with SEND.”

“Any trust with a special school or alternative provision setting will not

recognise the assessment of headroom informed by the technical note.”

Luke Sibieta, from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), said measuring the exact cost pressures of special schools was “challenging” because funding was decided by the needs of pupils and varied across councils.

But he said staffing costs “will be rising faster” than mainstream schools and that the schools “have faced significant budgetary challenges for a while due to the growing pressures on the high-needs budget”.

A DfE spokesperson said the proposed additional £620 million funding for the now-rejected 4.5 per cent teacher pay rise would have “benefited” both mainstream and special schools.

The high needs budget will be £10.1 billion by 2023-24, fifty per cent more than four years ago.

They highlighted the long-awaited SEND reforms that would set national standards, including for funding bands and tariffs. But there will be no nationwide roll-out until a two-year trial ends.

Margaret Mulholland, a SEND specialist at the school leaders’ union ASCL, said if there was no additional funding the future survival of SEND infrastructure was at risk. “This is not a sustainable direction of travel.”



Simon Knight



Margaret Mulholland

NEWS: CATCH-UP

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# Ministers abandon hope of Johnson's six million tutoring target

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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EXCLUSIVE

The government has quietly abandoned hope of reaching its target of six million course starts under the flagship National Tutoring Programme.

Ministers repeatedly pledged to deliver the target by 2024. But with the latest official figures showing just 3.4 million starts as of January, and ministers only expecting to fund one million next year, the benchmark is now unlikely to be met.

The Department for Education announced this week that schools will only have to contribute 50 per cent of the costs towards tutoring under the catch-up scheme next year. Its subsidy had been due to fall from 60 per cent to 25 per cent.

However, there is no extra cash. The government is seemingly forecasting less demand next year than anticipated, meaning its contribution will go further.

Nick Brook, the chair of the DfE's strategic tutoring advisory group, said it was "hard to see" how the six million target could be reached "without substantial further investment".

The DfE did not deny the target had been dropped, and referred *Schools Week* to its "commitment to £1 billion in funding over the duration of the programme".

However, poor take-up means the full amount has not been spent. *Schools Week* reported earlier this year that an unspent £114 million was due to be clawed back by the Treasury for the past academic year alone.

According to the BBC, the underspend on tutoring since the programme's launch is now £209 million.

Brook said the "fundamental problem is that there was a four-year objective to deliver around six million programmes of tutoring that was calculated to need £1 billion of investment".

"Yet [the Treasury] has clawed back over a fifth of that already, as unspent grant – money that is now lost to education and tutoring."

Guidance for the next academic year shows schools will receive the same amounts they were due to receive



Nick Brook



had the government subsidy fallen to 25 per cent – but will have to contribute less from their own budgets to use the funding.

Mainstream schools will receive a minimum of £67.50 per pupil-premium eligible child, while special schools will get at least £176.25. However, these rates are less than half of what was paid this year, when mainstream schools got £162 and special schools £423 per eligible pupil.

By doubling the planned subsidy while giving schools the same amount of money, the government has effectively halved the number of sessions that can be funded next year. Ministers now predict a million courses will be paid-for in 2023-24.

Brook said he hoped that "in raising the subsidy, less money will be returned to the Treasury next year".

But he added: "Let's not fool ourselves though into believing that two million programmes would have been delivered next year, had the subsidy reduced to 25 per cent.

"Indications from schools are that tutoring numbers would have collapsed. This was the right decision in the circumstances, but far from a perfect solution."

Despite long-standing problems with take-up of the scheme, politicians had remained bullish about its prospects.

In a written statement last July, Boris Johnson cited the "programme to reach six million [courses] by 2024".

The former prime minister even

referred to the target in his response to Rishi Sunak's resignation as chancellor last summer, declaring that the government was "delivering six million tutoring courses to help pupils catch up lost learning".

And in October, a DfE blog post referred to "our target of starting six million tutoring courses by 2024".

Nick Gibb, the schools minister, said: "Since its inception in 2020, we have continuously evolved the National Tutoring Programme to ensure it works for pupils and schools.

"Over three million courses have been started as a result and we remain committed to supporting schools to embed tutoring long term because we know the positive impact it can have on pupils."

The latest DfE statistics show that 3,365,598 tutoring courses had been started as of the end of January. That included 2,215,386 in the 2021-22 academic year, meeting ministers' initial target of two million starts for that year.

The government has also urged schools to prioritise pupils for tutoring who are "below the expected standard or grade boundary in an applicable subject".

Among this group, schools should "focus on pupils who are below the expected standard or grade boundary in an applicable subject". This means primary pupils needing support to meet the expected standard in SATs, and those predicted to get grades 3 or 4 at GCSE.



Boris Johnson

## INVESTIGATION: COST OF LIVING

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## How schools became the frontline against hunger

AMY WALKER  
@AMYRWALKER

EXCLUSIVE

Heads are spending weekends running foodbanks, despite their crippling workloads, as data shows a rise in the number of schools offering the provision since the cost-of-living crisis took hold.

Teacher Tapp surveys show the number of teachers who receive food parcels has also rocketed almost three-fold since the pandemic.

The banks are becoming the new frontline of the cost-of-living crisis as food prices soar, despite a dip in inflation.

Office for National Statistics figures published this week show UK food inflation sat at 19.1 per cent in April, despite overall inflation of 8.7 per cent.

A report by the Resolution Foundation on Friday found food will this summer overtake energy costs as the biggest hit to family finances.

But schools say the quality and quantity of donations they're able to hand out has fallen, with shelves more likely to contain instant noodles and biscuits than meat, vegetables and grains.

Benefactors, including other staff and parents, are having to tighten their own pursestrings.

"It's a chicken and egg situation...we're here to educate but you can't educate children who are hungry," said Jane Lunn, pastoral and welfare manager at Bracken Edge Primary School in Leeds.

Teacher Tapp data from 4,823 state school teachers last Thursday shows 21 per cent said their school ran a foodbank.

A smaller poll conducted by YouGov in February 2021 showed 19 per cent of surveyed schools started a foodbank, but this related just to during the pandemic.

The Teacher Tapp findings show 6 per cent of respondents said their provision launched in the "past year or so".

**Primary school reopens food bank**

Bracken Edge set up a bank during Covid, but closed it when community donations dropped off.

But it relaunched it six weeks ago, with donations provided by the Leeds City Council-funded charity Give A Gift. It helps about 35 families whose children attend the school.

"We record if children are coming in in dirty



Parents visiting the food stall at St George's CoE Community Primary School in Gainsborough Source: Resolution Foundation

uniforms, if they're asking for breakfast. We pick it up that way," Lunn said.

"If that basic being fed and feeling cared for is not there, then they're not going to learn anything."

Pupils in families who used foodbanks scored almost half a grade lower per GCSE subject, even controlling for prior attainment and other aspects of household finances.

Authors of a COSMO study of 13,000 youngsters in England said its findings raised additional concerns about the long-term impact of the cost-of-living crisis and called for an urgent review of free school meal criteria.

St Andrew's C of E Primary in Enfield, north London, opened its food pantry in October after staff noticed how often parents were talking about the cost of living.

Other services were available within the borough, but Jude Statham, the school's head, said parents were "very proud, they want discretion".

About 12 families, who access the tucked-away pantry during drop off, regularly use the government grant-funded provision.

But it adds extra hours on to Statham's already "immense" workload. She stocks up on food at the weekend before filling the shelves on Monday mornings.

**One in six leaders say staff use foodbanks**

A separate Teacher Tapp survey also shows an increase in staff using the banks.

In December 2019, 6 per cent of headteachers

said they were aware of someone in the school who had used a foodbank that term. This rose to 16 per cent last week.

Andrew Carter, head of Sandal Castle VA Community Primary School in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, has run a foodbank from his office for eight years.

He first noticed staff using it during Covid, and now has three support staff users. Two early career teachers sometimes drop in.

"I suspect there's more but I don't keep any records. They come in when I'm out and about in classes."

Caroline Derbyshire, the chief executive of Saffron Academy Trust, said at least two of the trust's seven schools had recently set up pantries where staff could donate items for their colleagues – including teachers – to pick up.

"If a society wants to take its own temperature, it's a fairly poor indication if highly-qualified professions have people in these situations," she said.

**'We only have instant noodles'**

But as demand has grown, donations have dwindled.

Katie Barry, head of St George's CoE Community Primary in Lincolnshire, has run a foodbank since the pandemic.

"A couple of years ago there was often chicken, there was often mince, you might get rice or pasta and some jars of sauce," she said.

"Now it's items like instant noodles, cereals and biscuits."

Continued on next page

INVESTIGATION: COST OF LIVING

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Shelves of donations line the walls of Andrew Carter's office at Sandal Castle VA Community Primary School in Wakefield

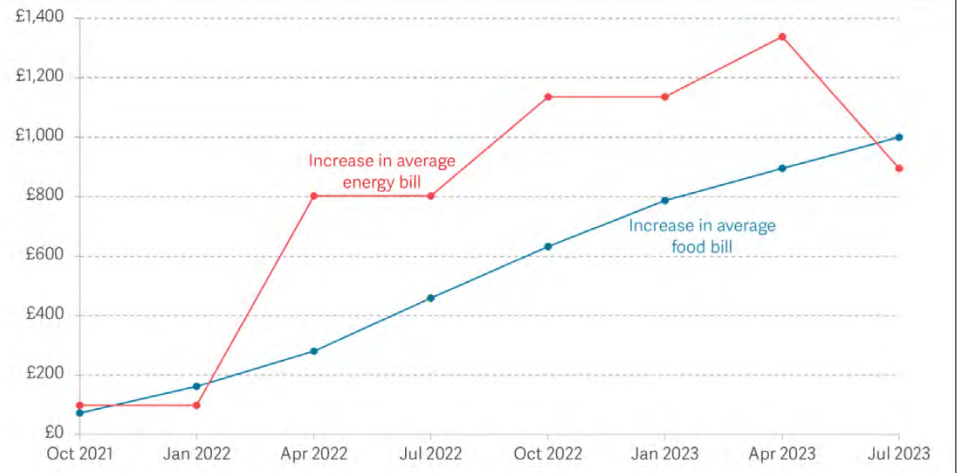
Carter – whose foodbank relies almost entirely on staff and parents – said donations had fallen by around a fifth.

“We’re not getting some of the more expensive items – sources of protein like tins of tuna. We’re getting more of the basics like pasta,” he said.

“At the minute we’re just about offering what we need to but we’re going to struggle to sustain

The average food bill increase since 2019-20 will be larger than the average energy bill increase by the summer

Average increase in annual household consumption on food and energy since 2019-20 at prices in each quarter: UK



it without some more donations coming in.”

He said he could only see “things getting worse. The way food prices are going, and wages not keeping up.

“We’re going to see a lot more families finding themselves in really difficult times.”

The leaders’ union NAHT said members had reported a “significant” increase in the use of foodbanks.

“While schools will always try to do their best for their pupils and families, this really is going way beyond what we should expect of them,” said James Bowen, its assistant general secretary.

“The government must urgently address the root causes of the scandal of rising child poverty, which is harming not only children’s education, but also their life chances.”

The Department for Education was contacted for comment.

EXCLUSIVE

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Soaring food costs leave special schools with hole in budgets

Special school leaders have called for extra funding to cover the costs of providing free school meals as soaring food and staff costs leave gaping holes in their budgets.

Unlike mainstream schools, special schools do not receive specific funding for means-tested free school meals. Although they receive more funding per-pupil and top-up funding from councils based on pupils’ individual needs, leaders say their budgets have become increasingly stretched by competing costs and static funding.

The number of special school pupils eligible for free school meals has also risen from 36.5 per cent in 2017 to 44.7 per cent last year.

Marijke Miles, headteacher of Baycroft School in Hampshire, said the cost of providing food to pupils had risen from £2.40 per meal in 2020 to £3 this year. Almost half of her 200 pupils are eligible, meaning providing meals costs her £51,000 a year.

She said the DfE had said it did not want to

change funding formulas for what it saw as “relatively small amounts of money... but it’s increasingly becoming a large amount of money”.

Miles added: “If I didn’t have to feed the children on their education money, I could have an extra teacher.”

The Eden Academy Trust has seven special schools and estimates the cost of providing meals has increased by £27,000 in just three years.

The cost of ingredients alone has risen from £1.77 to £2.60 per meal, but chief operating officer Sudhi Pathak said staff costs, including supervisory assistants needed to help pupils who struggle to feed themselves, took the per-meal cost to over £8.00.

He said the lack of ring-fenced funding “causes us problems”, with competing “pulls” on core funding.

To complicate matters, five of the trust’s schools are in London, where the mayor Sadiq Khan recently announced funding to extend

universal free school meals to all primary pupils.

However, funding has been set at £2.65 per meal, far short of Eden’s projected costs. *Schools Week* has estimated the shortfall across London between funding and the actual cost of providing meals is around £33 million.

“It’s not just the cost of the meal. It’s the equipment that we need, or extra staff in the kitchen,” Pathak said.

James Bowen, assistant general secretary at school leaders’ union NAHT, warned that “soaring” inflation has “heaped more pressure on these schools, as seen through the increasing cost of school meals, for which special schools receive no specific funding”.

He added: “What’s needed is a significant uplift in funding for the sector.”

A Department for Education spokesperson said special schools were “funded from local authorities’ high needs budgets, at funding levels that reflect the varying costs of provision for their pupils, including the costs of meals”.



NEWS

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# Stop abusing my staff, trust CEO tells parents

AMY WALKER  
@AMYRWALKER

A trust chief executive has warned parents across its seven schools she will lose talented staff if they don't cut out "personally abusive" and "sometimes threatening" communications.

Christine Stansfield, chief executive of the Mowbray Education Trust in Leicestershire, told *Schools Week* two teachers were leaving this summer because of "low-level" but "repeated" abuse in emails and on social media.

She said parents had sworn and personally insulted staff. One called a head of year a "head of twat" after complaining about an English literature GCSE exam clashing with a family holiday.

In an email to parents on Monday, the CEO said: "I am concerned that this might well result in headteachers and staff deciding to leave our schools and possibly the profession: frankly, why would you subject yourself to that level of abuse?"

"I am sure that the people reading this would be horrified by the personally abusive and sometimes threatening communications that have been received. I am therefore asking you to help me to ensure our heads are enjoying their work: be reasonable in your interactions, be fair and be kind."

She said some parents' emails "repeatedly complaining about a perceived injustice" had the "potential for harassment" and were written in a "vexatious tone".

Such complaints followed a refusal to issue some pupils with toilet passes for anxiety or other mental health problems because of a lack of medical evidence.

"There's a sense that as people are increasingly struggling, somebody's got to be to blame," Stansfield said.

In an earlier letter in 2021, she said parents would be "horrified by the personally abusive and sometimes threatening communications" some staff received.

"It is worse," she told parents this week.



Geoff Barton



A recent Teacher Tapp on behalf of educational support firm Edapt, found 17 per cent of 6,720 teacher respondents said they had been subject to an allegation – unfounded or otherwise – made by a parent.

Meanwhile, 35 per cent said they were concerned they might face this situation in the future.

Alistair Wood, Edapt's chief executive, said its casework team had been supporting more staff following parental allegations.

"Social media use means that it is much easier for comments and rumours to spread before schools have a chance to engage in a meaningful complaints process, leaving staff vulnerable," he said.

A *Schools Week* investigation last year found police had dealt with more than 2,000 cases of social media abuse in schools since 2018, which included teacher abuse. In its 2023 Big Question Survey, 3 per cent of NASUWT members said they had received abuse or allegations from pupils on social media in the past year.

The figure was the same for the previous four years, bar 2021 when it dropped to 1 per cent amid school closures.

However Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the teachers' union ASCL, said while most



Christine Stansfield

parents were "polite and respectful, there does appear to be a growing trend of inappropriate behaviour towards staff".

This could be "deeply distressing" for those targeted, he said, calling for investigations into the "reasons behind these behavioural changes in schools and to find solutions".

While rising abuse was part of a "national picture", Stansfield said she was "responsible for delivering the local. I can only do this if the brilliant people I employ enjoy their jobs enough to stay in the profession."

She called on parents to "help me to redress the balance of a small minority of voices that sometimes appear to be overwhelming in their negative attacks on great teachers and leaders. I want those great people to teach your children without distraction."

## NEWS: SATs

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# It's the same pay for double the work, says SATs markers

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

Capita, the outsourcing giant paid £107 million to run SATs, has again slashed rates for markers – who say their pay packets remain the same despite a doubled workload.

Technical issues already delayed marking by a week, with some markers unable to access training for the second year.

But teachers employed to mark tests this year say their pay has been slashed, also an issue last year when the company first delivered SATs.

They also warned that big increases to their workload risked rushed marking and a backlog as some walked away from the job.

Markers were only told of their exact pay at the end of last week, days before their work was due to start.

Rate cards show how those marking some SATs scripts are due to receive as little as 2p per segment, down from 6p last year.

One marker, who spoke to *Schools Week* on condition of anonymity, calculated they would earn just £6 an hour based on the speed at which they could mark.

Although their overall fee this year will be similar to last, the number of responses they were expected to mark had increased by more than 50 per cent.

Capita reported pre-tax profits of £61 million last year.

"This is a very underhand and disrespectful move from Capita who clearly place no value on the expertise their markers bring to this process," the marker said.

"The poor fees Capita are offering this year will just encourage quick and rushed marking, which will lead to errors in award of marks to pupils. But I anticipate many markers will just walk away, leaving Capita with a huge backlog of unmarked scripts, risking missing the deadline to return marks to schools in July."

Another marker who spoke to *Schools Week* said they had six segments and 3,289 scripts per segment to mark. Their rate is 4p per segment.

They had not marked last year and "had I known



the pay in advance this year, I wouldn't have signed up. There seems to be a lot to do and not much time to do it"

Another teacher said that although their overall pay will be slightly higher this year, the work will take "1.5 times longer". They also reported that scripts were slow to load on the marking system, damaging productivity.

As an experienced GCSE and A-level marker, this was "by far the worst experience of marking, utterly shambolic".

"[I] will probably quit in the next day or so as it is a very stressful and an unpleasant experience."

Earlier this year, the exams regulator Ofqual demanded evidence of improvements from the Standards and Testing Agency and Capita after a series of failings during last year's tests, many highlighted by *Schools Week*.

These included technical issues with marker training, repeated this year, and thousands of missing papers.

This year markers have complained on the social media site Reddit. One said they had worked for two hours and would earn £12.45. "I think I will be quitting it." Another said they had marked about 1,000 responses and would earn near to £30.

One user said their husband had "decided to quit after seeing the rates this year...it's insulting.

They've essentially given almost twice as much work/marking and slashed the pay in half."

Other markers' displeasure on Twitter was shared by teacher Sophie Bartlett, who received anonymous reports after posting about the problems.

"In none of the paperwork do they tell you pay or number of scripts, just that you are contracted to work for them for a three-week period and the dates of the online training," one said.

Another marker told Bartlett the system was "absolutely shambolic", adding that it was "so slow and absolutely pitiful pay".

"Currently on 13 hours of marking and after tax earned about £80. On verge of quitting but soul-destroying to do so after giving up a Saturday to train."

Another said they are marking "over 26,000 questions. I am completely overwhelmed and it's only day three."

A Capita spokesperson claimed hourly rates for markers had risen "by at least 3 per cent year-on-year, with regular markers' rates increasing by more than 6 per cent".

"In the majority of test segments there is also a greater allocation pool for each marker, meaning potential earnings have also increased. We had a very positive response to our recruitment campaign and there is no shortfall in markers."

NEWS

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# Law change eases way for church schools to academise

FREDDIE WHITTAKER  
@FCDWHITTAKER



A “significant barrier” to the academisation of church schools looks set to be lifted after the government revived a law change from its scrapped schools bill.

Many Church of England and Catholic schools operate on sites owned by special charitable trusts.

But under a legal technicality, when they academise and move site, councils currently only have to give these trusts a 125-year lease – whereas maintained schools would be handed land freehold.

The Department for Education pledged last year to end this “unequal” setup by mandating that councils hand over sites freehold. In exchange, trusts will hand over their old sites or pay councils the proceeds from the sale.

The change was proposed as part of the schools bill, which was subsequently scrapped.

But last week, the government amended its levelling-up and regeneration bill to enact the change.

Encouraging church schools, which make

up almost a third of state schools, to become academies is a key plank of the government’s ambition for all schools to be in trusts.

But Nigel Genders, the Church of England’s head of education, last year cited the land issue as one of two significant barriers. Extra resources for the transition process was also a problem.

Speaking in a House of Lords debate last week, the Rt Revd Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani, the Bishop of Chelmsford, said the amendment was “important for all schools with a religious character...it will remove a significant barrier on the journey to academisation for church schools, which is vital in the government’s policy aims.”

Government data shows there were 1,590

Church of England academies in January 2022, up 4 per cent on the previous year, and representing about 35 per cent of the church’s schools. There are now 280 Church of England MATs.

Academisation of Catholic schools is moving at a greater pace. As of last January, there were 809 Catholic academies, up 17 per cent on the year before, representing around 41 per cent of Catholic schools. There are 77 Catholic academy trusts.

Paul Barber, the director of the Catholic Education Service, said the amendment was a “welcome measure to safeguard the charitable purpose of school land”.

“This legislation will help to ensure the church’s mission in education is protected as schools move toward a multi-academy trust model.”

Neither church has set central targets for academisation, and both told *Schools Week* that decisions would be made by local dioceses, rather than by central organisations.

The amendment passed at the bill’s committee stage in the House of Lords last week. It must now go through report stage and have its third reading before going back to the Commons for amendments to be considered.

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## Gibb promises school building data ‘before summer recess’

The government will publish long overdue school building condition data before the summer parliamentary recess, ministers have pledged.

The school condition data collection (CDC), the first survey of every state school in the country, was completed in 2019, yet only summary data has been published so far.

The document released in May 2021 revised up the cost of repairing or replacing all defects in England’s schools to £11.4 billion.

Ministers had pledged to release more detailed data by the end of last year, but failed to do so.

This prompted a debate in the Commons on Tuesday, in which Labour tried to force publication of the data. But Conservative MPs blocked the motion.

Nick Gibb, the schools minister, said the government was “committed to publishing

more detailed data as soon as possible”.

“It is an extremely large dataset, with 1.2 billion data points, and it is taking some time to prepare it for publication in a useful format.

“But we are none the less preparing it, and I can give a commitment that we will publish as soon as possible, and certainly before the summer recess.”

The government has been repeatedly criticised for its secrecy over the results of the survey.

In 2021, the Department for Education was ordered to release CDC reports for the first 50 schools in its rebuilding programme, following a lengthy freedom of information battle with *Schools Week*.

The Information Commissioner’s Office ruled that the department had failed to demonstrate that releasing the reports would have an adverse effect on schools, and that the reports

were “not commercial in nature”.

Ministers came under fresh pressure to release more details last year, after *Schools Week* revealed almost a third of buildings included materials either at the end of their shelf life or that posed a “serious risk of imminent failure”.

In December, government officials escalated the risk level of school buildings collapsing to “very likely”. However, the DfE said in February it did not know which schools were at risk of collapse.

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the NAHT school leaders’ union, said data “needs to be followed by an ambitious plan and major new government investment in school repairs and rebuilding.

“Continued failure to act with the necessary urgency risks putting the lives of children and school staff at risk.”

NEWS

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# Oak lifts its copyright on 14,000 resources

SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER  
@SCHOOLSWEEK

The Oak National Academy will throw open the copyright for most of its lessons – allowing them to be adapted and developed free, including by private companies.

The government quango said the move would allow schools to share and modify its 14,000-odd resources to suit their needs.

Private companies will be able to do the same, such as publishers using resources to create textbooks. This is despite Oak committing to ensure nobody makes profit from its lessons.

Oak said putting its resources on an open government licence (OGL) would not interfere with its no-profit commitment. The online platform's founding body, the Reach Foundation, has also given its blessing to the plans.

Matt Hood, Oak's interim chief executive, said: "With the public investment in Oak, we want to make sure all organisations have equal and free access to our content.

"Our open approach means they



Matt Hood



can innovate and create exciting new offers to support teachers and pupils, including through emerging AI technologies."

OGLs are the default licence for public services to allow easy sharing of content for the public benefit, Oak said.

They are used with other government-funded education schemes, including the National Centre for Excellence, the National Centre for Computing Education and music hubs.

Any third-party copyrighted content, though, would be exempt.

Oak also said the move would provide a "significant boost" to the potential use of AI in schools, as well as a "guardrail on reliability".

The quango has open-sourced its platform code too.

Hood said the moves "show our commitment to enabling others to benefit from our work... We hope it can help put the UK at the forefront of supporting AI in education."

However the online academy has U-turned on its pledge to geo-restrict lessons so they would only be accessible in the UK, a concession it made after legal threats from the British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA).

Oak said the change was to safeguard against other organisations replicating its platform and content internationally and charging for access.

Caroline Wright, BESA's director general, said rolling-back on the pledge was "hugely disappointing and will inflict yet more damage on UK-based curriculum publishers ... and subsequently reduce the range and variety of resources available to teachers and pupils".

She added the "decision to throw away IP protection and the competitive advantage of the UK edtech and digital curriculum publishers is a direct result of the DfE's botched business planning and a woefully under-par market impact analysis of the UK and international curriculum economy."

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## 'Invisible' children in care missing school

Nearly 1,500 children in care are missing from school, leaving youngsters "invisible to the services designed to support them".

These children's attendance "needs to be at the top of every policymaker's agenda", said Dame Rachel de Souza, the children's commissioner.

Using her statutory powers to collect information from councils, de Souza found 1,363 of the 50,846 school-age children who had been in care for at least four weeks last year were missing from school (2.7 per cent). It is the first time such data has been collected.

This includes not being enrolled in any school (541), in unregistered settings such as home education or private tuition (673) or enrolled at a school but missing without authorisation for 100 per cent of the time (149).

"These are not big numbers, which makes it all

the more shocking that we are allowing children in care to be failed like this, becoming invisible to many of the services designed to support them," de Souza said.

While national data is collected on children missing school, it does not include pupil characteristics.

De Souza makes several recommendations to tackle the problems, including schools having "corporate parent" legal duties, also called for in last year's MacAlister review into social care. This is already the case in Scotland.

The government has so far only committed to consulting on whether additional responsibilities for such children should be widened to more bodies.

The commissioner also said training for supporting looked-after children should be mandatory for all school governors and trustees.

Virtual school heads, employed by councils to promote the education of children in care, should also have powers to direct academies to admit such pupils. At present they only can force admission in council-maintained schools.

The government's schools white paper set out similar plans, but they have been all but scrapped after the schools bill – which contained the policies requiring legislation – was ditched.

Another recommendation was for a ban on home education for children in care who are identified as being at risk of harm in their home environment.

De Souza also wants all council SEND teams to have a Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO), a directory of unregistered alternative provision and the pupil premium-plus funding to include 16 to 18-year-olds.

## Billionaire commits millions to make English pupils 'world's best at maths'

**JOHN DICKENS**

@JOHNDICKENSSW

A Russian-born billionaire who was the UK's biggest taxpayer last year is committing tens of millions of pounds to make English school pupils the world's best in maths.

Alex Gerko's algorithmic trading company XTX Markets has already given £20 million to maths projects since 2020.

That includes piloting a key stage 4 curriculum with Mathematics Mastery and establishing "maths circles" through the Mathematics Education for Social Mobility and Excellence charity (MESME), which Gerko set up.

XTX is now launching a maths excellence fund, backed by at least £5 million to "develop, test and evaluate collaborative ways to increase attainment and progression" for children aged from 11 to 18.

Opening next month, the fund will initially support schools in a few regions before expanding nationally "as we better understand what is working", said Si Coyle, XTX's head of philanthropy.

The scale of the investment puts the company among the biggest philanthropic donors in education. Just 71 charitable foundations – across all sectors – handed out more than £10 million last year, according to a report from the Association of Charitable Foundations.

Coyle said the priority was to "help schools serving disadvantaged communities to provide outstanding support for their high potential pupils".

The cash would "combine direct support for schools and support for charities that work with schools, including curriculum, enrichment, tutoring and teacher development."

Coyle said three million jobs in England needed advanced maths skills, a figure that would "only increase in the years ahead, driven by growth industries like data science and technology".

Research the company commissioned from the University of Nottingham found that while 75 per cent of the most advantaged pupils stayed on the maths "excellence pathway" from 11 to 16, that dropped to 40 per cent of pupils on free school meals.



David Thomas



One of the key focuses will be "maths circles", trialled by MESME since 2020. The free, out-of-class maths clubs aim to boost state school pupils' mathematical thinking and curiosity.

About 2,300 pupils now take part. The aim is for a nationwide network, with 10,000 new pupils joining each year.

David Thomas, a former DfE special adviser who recently joined MESME as its chief executive, said while England was performing better at maths than ever, there was a "huge opportunity to go further and be the best in the world.

"This is an achievable goal. If half of top-performing but disadvantaged 11-year-olds don't go on to get at least a grade 7 at GCSE, then we have both a duty and an opportunity to be better."

MESME pledges to double the number of PhD pupils in mathematical sciences at a UK university by 2035, including poorer pupils in England.

They also want to boost the number of pupils achieving "high grades" in A-level and GCSE maths.

The charity says year 7 and 8 pupils suitable to take part in maths circles are those who have achieved greater depth in key stage 2 SATs, or those enthusiastic about the subject.

The charity tells schools at least 30 per cent of pupils taking part should be eligible for pupil premium.

The maths circles are an export from Russia, where Gerko was born. He grew up in a deprived suburb of Moscow, but studied a specialist maths programme at the city's renowned School 57, which he credits for his business success.



Alex Gerko

His company made £667 million in net profits alone in 2021. The Sunday Times Rich List estimated he paid £487.4 million in tax last year – making him the biggest single taxpayer in the country.

Gerko, who has spoken out against the Russian invasion of Ukraine, became a British citizen in 2016.

He has previously said maths circles were aimed at parents who could not afford to pay for private tuition. They would show youngsters, no matter their background, "how beautiful maths actually is".

Teaching expertise, however, is a sticking point. The circles require one mentor for every six pupils and the charity wants mentors who are "mathematically well-qualified".

Thomas admitted they will have to be "creative about how to find enough quality people". They are trialling "all kinds of ideas from training sixth-formers to employing part-time graduates.

"Half of disadvantaged children who are high-attainers at 11 are no longer high-attainers by 16. That is a huge loss of human potential that affects both those children as individuals and us as a wider society.

"We are focused on stopping that loss."

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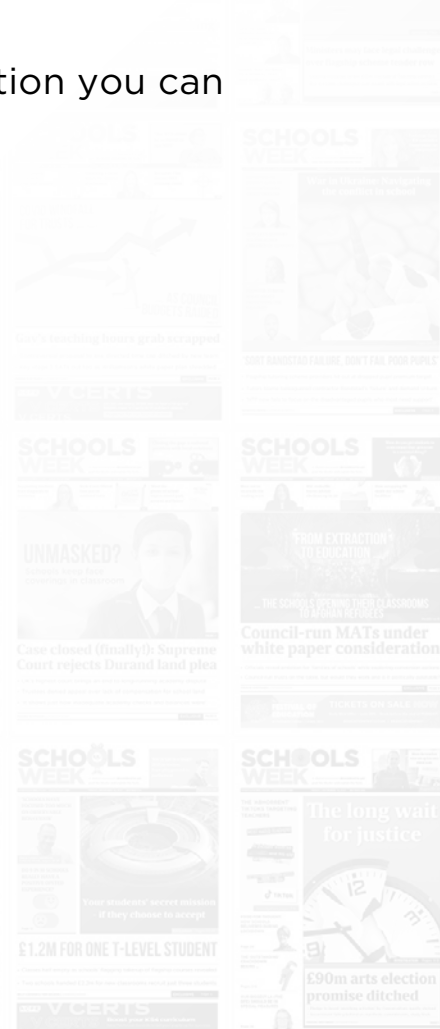
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# SCHOOLS WEEK

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



# Successful bids for repair work fall as material costs soar

**JOHN DICKENS**  
@JOHNDICKENSSW

Fewer schools have been given cash for repair work as soaring building material costs mean static government funding does not spread as far, Schools Week analysis suggests.

The government published the 2023-24 funding outcomes for its Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) this week.

The £450 million pot for repair works, including new boilers and roof repairs, is available to just over 4,500 academies in small trusts, sixth-form colleges and voluntary-aided schools, who have to bid for the cash.

Large trusts and council schools get capital funding allocated automatically through a separate route.

Here's what you need to know about this year's funding round...

## 1. 25 per cent drop in successful repair bids...

A total of £456 million has been handed out this year, compared to £498 million last year.

The number of projects getting the go-ahead dropped by a quarter, from 1,405 last year to 1,033 this year.

It means just a third of the 3,061 bids that were submitted were successful.

Nearly 300 fewer schools have also benefited – down from 1,129 last year to just 859 this year. (Schools can make several bids for different projects.)

This comes despite government officials last year escalating the risk level of school buildings collapsing to “very likely”.

Of the 4,547 eligible schools, just under half (2,076) applied for cash.

## 2. ...as building costs rise

The average project cost rose from about £350,000 last year to £440,000 this year.

This is likely because the CIF funding pot remained static against a backdrop of rising material and labour costs, said Tim Warneford, an academy funding consultant.

The price of materials rose by 10.4 per cent in January compared to a year earlier, government figures show.

This followed an increase of 11.2 per cent in December 2022 compared with December 2021.

## 3. Which schools were most successful?

For the first time, the government has provided information on bids by geography, phase of education and type of project.

Of the 1,033 successful bids this year, just over half were primaries (56 per cent), roughly a third were secondaries (36 per cent) and 5 per cent special schools.

The CIF phase of education statistics show secondary schools were more likely to apply for cash (56 per cent of those eligible), with 45 per cent of those applying successful.

This was higher than primary schools (which had a 39 per cent success rate) and similar to special schools (45 per cent).

## 4. South west schools least likely to get cash

Schools in the south west were least likely to win funding with just 24 per cent of bids successful, followed by the north east (26 per cent).

The largest proportion of successful bids was in the north west (44 per cent).

By funding amount, schools in the north east got £8.4 million while schools in the south east got £106 million.

## 5. Repairs ‘won’t make major contribution’ to wider landscape

Schools Week searched popular building work terms to get an idea of what the cash was going towards.

Projects seem to be named based on what

was written on the application, so there isn't uniformity. But it still gives an interesting insight.

For instance, 373 projects (36 per cent) had the word “urgent” in them. Nearly 200 were for work to repair roofs. Schools Week reported in 2019 how two-fifths of schools had buckets catching drips from leaky roofs.

About 200 related to boilers and heating, and 219 to “fire safety”. Just six had the term “RAAC” in them.

Building experts have called RAAC – reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete – a “ticking time bomb” leaving schools “liable to collapse”.

Repairing or replacing all defects in England's schools is estimated to cost £11.4 billion.

## 6. 1 in 8 awards for schools that coughed up lots of cash

The government has also published how many projects were successful based on the size of the financial contribution they pledged.

Schools can only get full marks on the funding section of their bid if they pledge to pay more than 30 per cent of the work either out of their own pocket or via a loan, rather than relying fully on grant funding.

However, interest rates for loans, via the Public Works Loan Board, have shot up from about 1 to 5 per cent this year.

The DfE stats show that around one in eight successful bids were for schools willing to stump up more than 30 per cent of the costs themselves.

### School building repairs: which regions did best

REGION	PROPORTION OF ELIGIBLE SCHOOLS THAT APPLIED	NUMBER OF PROJECTS APPLIED	TOTAL FUNDING REQUESTED	NUMBER OF SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS	SUCCESSFUL FUNDING REQUESTED	PERCENTAGE OF SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS
North West	44%	356	£139,520,203	158	£58,450,018	44%
South East	51%	515	£277,052,950	188	£106,179,820	37%
Yorkshire and the Humber	48%	263	£108,926,943	95	£39,738,336	36%
East of England	53%	512	£201,977,381	179	£81,316,668	35%
East Midlands	47%	291	£128,305,400	101	£41,964,017	35%
West Midlands	41%	322	£139,146,950	103	£37,930,631	32%
London	46%	411	£210,601,680	115	£58,711,968	28%
North East	24%	73	£32,981,339	19	£8,434,081	26%
South West	44%	318	£129,655,078	75	£23,104,444	24%
<b>Total</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>3,061</b>	<b>£1,368,167,924</b>	<b>1,033</b>	<b>£455,829,983</b>	<b>34%</b>

NEWS

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# Calling all curmudgeons: a small trust needs you

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

A small special school trust has sought to beat recruitment woes with a job advert for its next "Curmudgeonly Eccentric Oddball".

The two-school Kingsley Learning Foundation is seeking a part-time chief executive to replace Tom O'Dwyer, but admits it is "not entirely sure" what the role entails.

The first half of the advertisement treads familiar ground. It seeks a leader to articulate the trust's "evolving vision", someone who can "empower" its two headteachers and who has a "profound understanding of educational systems".

Then things go a little off-piste. The trust's "Curmudgeonly Eccentric Oddball has decided to focus his diminishing wit, energy and time to tending his garden, in particular to nurturing his chrysanthemums, echinacea and orchids".

"Are you a Cheerful, Extroverted Optimist with a Confident Expansive Outlook? Perhaps a Choreographer of Educational Objectives for a Charismatic and Empathetic Organisation.

"Maybe you're a Collision Evasion Overseer navigating the pitfalls? Or a Clairvoyant of Esoteric Orientation? It could simply be that you're an omelette fan with a taste for Cheese Eggs and Onions!"

O'Dwyer, who is retiring, told Schools Week he had become a chief executive "by accident" when the school he headed wanted to open a free school.

"I didn't want to stop being a serving head. I adored the job, loved our families and our team, we were having a ball. But I also didn't want somebody over me telling me what to do."

He continued to lead one of the schools, but then stepped full-time into the CEO role, admitting he initially "didn't know what to do". Supporting two leaders new to headship had been an important part of the job.

It will be for his successor to decide how the role will evolve.

"This is what we're asking in the ad – come and define it with us, because we're not sure what it blooming is. We really genuinely have sat down often enough, looked at the job description and said 'that bears no relation whatsoever to what I do on a day-to-day basis'."

The current recruitment crisis in schools was part of the reason for the advert's innovative approach, he added.

Our Curmudgeonly Eccentric Oddball has decided to focus his diminishing wit, energy and time to tending his garden, in particular to nurturing his Chrysanthemums, Echinacea and Orchids.

And so we find ourselves on the hunt for a CEO.

Are you a Cheerful, Extroverted Optimist with a Confident Expansive Outlook? Perhaps a Choreographer of Educational Objectives for a Charismatic and Empathetic Organisation. Maybe you're a Collision Evasion Overseer navigating the pitfalls? Or a Clairvoyant of Esoteric Orientation? It could simply be that you're an omelette fan with a taste for Cheese Eggs and Onions!

By now you are probably realising that we are not entirely sure what CEO stands for and what a CEO does. But we know what we stand for – we stand for families at the front and centre of educational provision. And we know what we do – we Cultivate Excellence and Opportunity for our astonishing young learners.

"We are a quirky enough kind of organisation. We're two special schools, a tiny MAT, not in a hurry to grow."

John Howson, chair of teacher vacancy site TeachVac, said quirky job adverts were nothing new, but "in the end what matters most is the balance between supply of candidates and demand".

Last year, The Elliot Foundation Academies Trust earned plaudits for its "refreshing" approach in an advert for a regional director. It sought to discourage applicants, warning leaders were "exhausted, worn down and over-stretched".

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

## AQA look at 'Duolingo-style' test for GCSE resitters

England's largest exam board is investigating whether a new "Duolingo-like" on-screen, on-demand test could help young people who repeatedly fail GCSE maths and English.

AQA is exploring whether a numeracy and literacy assessment would support more pupils who don't get the grade 4 in both subjects needed to complete an apprenticeship or get a job.

It follows calls from the school leaders' union ASCL for a "passport" in the two subjects – a test taken between 15 and 19 when the pupil is ready.

The recommendation was part of its "forgotten third" inquiry to "end the wasteful GCSE resit industry".

In pre-pandemic 2019, just 30 per cent of pupils aged 17 or more achieved a grade 4 or above in English; 21 per cent in maths.

AQA is in the early stages of consulting school

and college leaders and employers.

Ed Reza Schwitzer, the board's head of external affairs, compared the potential assessment to the Duolingo app for learning languages, which also has an English proficiency assessment accepted by 4,000 universities worldwide.

"Most people will accept now that Duolingo is a pretty good measure that someone can speak a language.

"So there's a world in which you say – actually this young person hasn't necessarily got a good grade on their maths GCSE, they want to do this apprenticeship, would it be enough to have a high-quality assessment from some sort of on-demand, on-screen provider?"

"But it would be enough to say actually yes I can do statistics, I can do proportions and the kind of numeracy you need me to do to do this apprenticeship."

Tom Middlehurst, ASCL's assessment specialist, said the union was "encouraged" by the research, but would prefer to see a new qualification.

Dr Michelle Meadows, the former deputy Ofqual regulator, said AQA's plan could help. "But we need to invest in creating programmes of teaching and learning that really engage and support pupils who find maths and literacy very challenging.

"Without this foundation, even the cleverest approach to assessment won't get us very far in solving this enduring problem."

Kate Shoesmith, from the Recruitment and Employment Confederation, said many people had the skill sets in literacy and numeracy for work or vocational qualifications, but struggled to sit "really pressurised" exams. "Anything that unlocks potential has to be positive."





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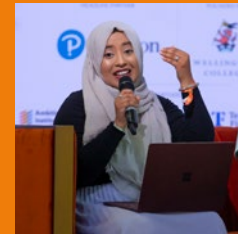
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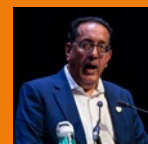


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**Profile**

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL



# ‘I didn't have the right skills to be a teacher’

Recent polls predict a hung parliament at the next general election, raising the prospect that Labour might need to join with the Liberal Democrats to form the next government. But where does the party stand on education? Jessica Hill meets Munira Wilson, the Lib Dem’s education spokesperson, to find out ...

Munira Wilson, the MP for Twickenham and since 2021 the Lib Dems’ spokesperson for education, proudly describes the party as the “party of education”. But does this hold up?

The “latest news” section of its website features 97 stories – all the way back to the 2019 election review. Not one relates to education, with the focus instead on health, the environment and the cost of living.

She blames this on education being a “low

public priority”. In an Ipsos Mori poll last year, only 6 per cent of respondents cited “education/schools” as the most important issues facing Britain – the lowest score since 1984.

“When my team go out to journalists with education stories, there’s such little interest,” Wilson says. “It’s polling at such a low priority amongst the public. That makes me weep because...we need to see education as a future investment like infrastructure. It should be one of the biggest priorities for any government.”

### Putting together the manifesto

Wilson is currently drawing up what she says is a “strong education offer” in the Lib Dem manifesto.

Memories of its infamous U-turn over tuition fees are still engrained deeply in the minds of the electorate, with Wilson saying her party has “paid the price for making a pledge that we couldn’t keep”.

So would she have any red lines on schools policy if her party was to form a coalition with Labour this time round? Wilson says she’s “not thinking about what happens the day after the next election”.

# Profile: Munira Wilson

However, one “very clear area of difference” is free school meals.

The Lib Dems introduced universal infant free school meals in 2014 and under Nick Clegg championed extending it to all primary school children.

Wilson is “still committed” to free school meals for all primary pupils, and secondary pupils whose families are on universal credit.

But she has been “particularly focused” on extending them to families of children on universal credit – a recommendation from the 2021 National Food Strategy.

## Labour’s ‘disappointing’ approach

Last June, the party tabled an amendment to the since defunct Schools Bill to that end, but Labour abstained. Wilson believes it would have passed if it had had Labour’s support. “I found that disappointing.”

However, she believes “a number” of her Labour colleagues want the party to embrace free school meals. Labour’s Zarah Sultana introduced a bill earlier this year to extend them to all primary pupils, as Labour mayor Sadiq Khan is doing in London – although this only covers the 2023-24 academic year, while the Lib Dems offer would be “properly funded, with capital costs to expand it”.

Wilson has costed this at an annual £500 million, which could be paid for by increasing the surcharge on banks’ profits that the government cut last November from 8 to 3 per cent.

She believes most people “would rather see hungry children getting a hot healthy meal, as opposed to seeing a tax cut for bankers”.

## Private school plans

Another area of notable difference is the stance on private schools.

Labour would levy VAT on private schools’ fees and remove their charitable status. Wilson wouldn’t do this, instead making schools “prove they’re doing lots to earn” it.

She wants more “partnership working” between private and state schools – “not just a tokenistic ‘we’re giving away a few bursaries, or



## ‘I’m not thinking about the day after the next election’

doing a bit of charity work”.

For example, she is passionate about broader extracurricular activities and giving pupils at least two hours a week of access to PE. Private schools could be compelled to provide sports facilities to neighbouring state schools as part of their partnership work, she suggests.

## Ofsted overhaul

But the two parties do align on Ofsted. While the Lib Dem’s 2019 manifesto pledged to scrap Ofsted, the party is now proposing reform instead – a similar policy shift taken by Labour.

Wilson wants a “root and branch reform”. Ofsted is “far too high stakes. It needs to be much more holistic in its approach...and critically, when schools perhaps do badly... there needs to be a supportive body working alongside them to address those shortcomings.”

In practice, she says this means ending forced academisation for poor Ofsted grades, something she does not believe “deals with the problem”.

However she does want to extend Ofsted’s scope to include MAT-level inspections.

## More power for councils

As champions of devolution, the Lib Dems have



Former Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg and his wife Miriam Gonzalez Durantez visit Castlehill Primary School in 2014

pledged to give local authorities the power to act as strategic education authorities for their areas, including responsibilities for admissions, exclusions and opening new community schools.

But council funding has taken a hammering and Wilson concedes such an initiative would take a long time as councils need to rebuild their capacity.

She believes the way exclusions and admissions are currently managed has “unintended consequences where schools are acting independently of each other”, with the problem acute in London because of falling rolls.

Councils should also have “more locus” by

## Profile: Munira Wilson

“participating in governing bodies and having a seat at the table in terms of how academies are governed”.

But she does not want her party to be seen as threatening the survival of MATs. There is “no point in ripping up the whole academy system”, with most parents not caring about governance structures.

### Not cut out for teaching

Wilson’s own two children attend a small church primary (Wilson was raised a Muslim and now identifies as Christian) a few hundred metres from her house, which means they are “always the last ones to arrive at school”.

She wanted to be teacher when she was a child, but “quickly realised” after volunteering in her youth as a school teaching assistant that she was not “cut out” for that.

“I realised I didn’t have the right skills to be a teacher, which requires the patience of a saint and the ability to explain complex things in simple ways – which ought to be a gift for a politician. So maybe I’m not very gifted politician either!”

She was previously a lobbyist for Save the Children and pharmaceutical company Novartis, and attributes her success to her parents’ influence.

They emigrated from Zanzibar and “drummed into” her and her older sisters “from a very young age the importance of education”, prepping Wilson for north London’s Henrietta Barnett School.

These days, Wilson – who went on to study modern languages at Cambridge – is sceptical that grammar schools help with social mobility, believing entry is “a case of who can afford to coach their children to go”.

While it would be “divisive” to close existing grammar schools, she “wouldn’t necessarily” create new ones.

### Mental health practitioner in every school

Whether it’s grammar, private or state schools, she believes the mental health crisis is affecting



Wilson challenging the Prime Minister

## ‘There is no point in ripping up the academy system’

children everywhere.

She does not believe mental health funding levels should be linked to deprivation, and is “constantly battling” her integrated care system in south west London in which the mental health-deprivation link means a child in Croydon “probably gets per head double the funding” as a child in Richmond, which has “one of the highest levels of self-harm hospital admissions”.

She has been “pushing hard” for a policy of having a dedicated mental health professional in every school, which Labour is also committed to.

She tells of a seven-year-old who had to be locked in a classroom because they were a “danger to other pupils”, and a similar case where a sibling ended up in hospital. In both cases, the children had been waiting many months for NHS treatment.

“I often end up in tears in my surgery because I just want to help [these families]. But all I can genuinely do is check that processes have been followed to get them at the right place on whatever waiting list they need to be on.”

The current NHS mental health support teams are only due to reach 40 per cent of schools by

next year. Wilson says schools may only get “one day a week, if they’re lucky. The need is so much greater”.

### Curriculum review, but less meddling

So what else would be on her agenda? She wants all three main political parties to commit to a review on curriculum and exam reform. She wants to re-create the Department for Children, Schools and Families and to create a cabinet member for children with a “roving brief” to stop young people’s policy being “fragmented across several different departments”.

But she won’t recommit to a 2019 manifesto promise to recruit 20,000 more teachers, only acknowledging there is a “huge problem with recruitment and retention”.

And she gets agitated when I ask whether mobile phones should be banned in schools, as former education secretary Gavin Williamson proposed in 2021.

“What I think headteachers are fed up of is that top-down meddling from the government telling them what to do...they just want to be empowered. That’s why I’m a Liberal.”

# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## ANDY BURNHAM

Mayor, Greater Manchester

### Our MBacc will redress policy's academic bias

**Manchester's new MBacc will offer young people plenty of academic and technical options at 16 – and the ability to switch between the two, says Andy Burnham**

I am all in favour of helping young people who want to go to university to do so. But after decades of education policy dominated by the University route, under governments of all colours, 36 per cent of young people make that choice in Greater Manchester. Which begs the question: what about the 64 per cent who don't?

Our surveys of GM teenagers provide an answer to this question and make for difficult reading. Too many are left without a sense of direction or hope for their future, and feeling like second-class students.

We are determined to change this. Last week, seizing on the opportunities presented by the trailblazer devolution deal we recently agreed with the government, I unveiled plans for the UK's first integrated technical education system with the aim of giving young people two clear, equal paths at 14: one academic, one technical.

Young people wishing to go to university have a clear path. The English Baccalaureate - or EBacc – is based on the GCSEs most favoured

by universities. From there, they progress to A Levels and use the UCAS system to find a university place.

But there is no equivalent for the young people who wish to take technical qualifications and a more direct route to the world of work.

To create this balance, we are proposing a Greater Manchester Baccalaureate or MBacc, which would sit alongside the EBacc and be based on GCSEs and other qualifications most favoured by Greater Manchester employers. Our aim is to maximise people's chances of getting valuable qualifications and a good job in the growing success story of the Greater Manchester economy.

There will be a range of views on what should and shouldn't be included in the MBacc, so I am keen to hear from employers and educators. Following consultation, and subject to agreement with the government, our ambition is to start in September 2024.

For my part, I don't envisage two rigid, parallel routes but an approach with as much commonality as possible that will offer young people plenty of academic and technical options at 16 and the ability to switch between the two.

Here's my starter for ten to get the discussion going. I would propose that the MBacc has three



“ Too many feel like second-class students

core, compulsory subjects: English, maths and – because practically every job in the GM economy is to some extent a digital job – either computer science or an alternative ICT qualification. Beyond that, students could choose from existing EBacc subjects and, critically, also subjects that are often currently excluded. That could be engineering, business studies or any of the creative subjects that have been worryingly downgraded over the past decade or so.

The MBacc's aim is to lead people to a productive destination. To that end, we will build our integrated system around seven gateways reflecting the strongest areas of the Greater Manchester economy. These include sectors like manufacturing and engineering, digital and technology, and health and social care. Each of the gateways will lead to a group of quality T Levels, other technical qualifications, apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships.

This approach will only work if young people have access to wider careers and life advice to make informed decisions, and enrichment opportunities to help them become

'work-ready'. It is also underpinned by 'Our Pass' - our free bus pass for 16- to 18-year-olds which opens up cultural and sporting activities, but also greater choice of education providers.

My belief is that a system of this kind, which offers a path for everyone, will help raise overall levels of attainment and school performance. If more students feel school is taking them somewhere and are constructively engaged at key stage 4, that can only be beneficial for all students.

My sense is our secondary headteachers feel the same way. James Eldon, headteacher of the Manchester Academy in Moss Side, told our launch event last week that he had invented his own version of the MBacc because he didn't feel he had enough to say to students and parents at options evenings. It made the case for change more powerfully than anything else.

We can no longer afford our historic snobbery about technical education. Devolution to the English regions finally gives us the chance to get this right - and fix another issue Westminster has long neglected.

# Opinion

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## BECKY ALLEN

Co-founder and chief analyst,  
Teacher Tapp

### Better than before doesn't mean the ECF is good enough

**The Early Career Framework may be built on sound pedagogical foundations, but trainees need to enjoy and value the experience too, says Becky Allen**

The Early Career Framework (ECF) was introduced with the intention of addressing the pressing needs of new teachers: lower workloads and enhanced training opportunities over a longer induction period. However, recent survey responses collected by Teacher Tapp from early career teachers and their mentors have revealed concerns that warrant attention.

These professionals expressed reservations about increased workloads and the redundancy of materials provided by external providers that often overlapped with topics covered during their initial teacher training. In addition, secondary teachers specifically called for subject-specific learning materials. These concerns align with a report on professional development published by Ofsted earlier this month.

Acknowledging these pose a challenge for those involved in the framework's implementation. While it is widely recognised that it is not flawless, some argue against vocalising complaints, asserting

that it is an improvement over the previous provision and that we risk losing it.

Inching closer to an ideal solution is undoubtedly preferable to having no improvements at all. However, while this argument is logical to those who make comparisons with the past, new teachers know nothing of the old arrangements. They simply evaluate the present demands on them based on their own experiences, considering whether these demands are worthwhile and engaging.

Irrespective of whether the framework is an improvement, it is disheartening for new teachers to invest effort in tasks they perceive as lacking value. Others involved in implementing the ECF genuinely believe in its current form and deem requests for subject and year group-specific attention as misplaced. They argue that pedagogy related to classroom and instructional management cannot be fully developed during the training years. Consequently, revisiting the material and bridging gaps in understanding through practice in the classroom are seen as valid approaches.

They are right that new teachers may not possess the full knowledge of what is best for their professional development. However, new teachers do have a



### “ New teachers know nothing of the old arrangements

clear understanding of their own interests and what they wish to learn. A crucial factor in raising teaching standards lies in retaining staff in the profession. Therefore, providing new teachers with enjoyable training experiences that contribute to their identity as educators should be one of the framework's goals.

On the other hand, it is important to note that those advocating for subject-specific materials often overlook the substantial costs associated with developing bespoke courses for each subject and year group. While it may be relatively feasible to establish specialist routes for larger subjects such as maths and English, the challenge lies in improving the experience for teachers of smaller subjects such as music and economics.

If the government were to allocate funds to develop specialised materials across all subjects, it is likely that everyone would agree on their value to new teachers. But given the current financial constraints it is difficult to envision how this can be accomplished.

Consequently, we find ourselves with an early career framework that surpasses its predecessors but falls short of the ideal provision that new teachers aspire to. Frustrations persist.

The criticisms of increased workloads, duplicated material and the need for subject-specific attention are valid. There are equally valid arguments to defend the current framework, including revisiting foundational pedagogy, but it is vital to recognise the significance of providing enjoyable and engaging training experiences that nurture new teachers' identities.

Stakeholders must grapple with the challenge of developing subject-specific materials within limited budgets. Despite the frustrations inherent in the current situation, it is crucial that we endeavour to pursue improvements that are conducive to enhancing new teachers' abilities and rewarding for professionals starting out on what we all hope are long and fulfilling careers.

# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## The DfE's culture of secrecy and expediency over forced academisation needs to change, says Mark Boylan



# MARK BOYLAN

Professor in education,  
Sheffield Hallam University

Research shows that whether a school academises makes no long-term difference to exam outcomes. On the other hand, parental and carer engagement in their children's education does make a big difference.

For just about any other issue in education, evidence is usually mixed and different sides of a debate can find support for their views. Not so when it comes to the importance of families; the research and the experiences of school leaders and teachers all point in the same direction – involving families matters.

Unfortunately, the Department for Education appears to think differently, at least when it comes to academisation. The result of its policy is that there are essentially two types of families: those whose children attend schools where leaders and governors have decided that the school should become an academy, and those whose children go to a school where the decision has been triggered by an Ofsted inspection.

For the first type of family, there is a clearly defined process of consultation about becoming an academy and which trust the school joins. This is the most likely way to sustain community cohesion around the change.

For the second type of family, however, there is no say. Indeed, they might not even be told which trust is proposed as a sponsor until after the decision is made. Instead of transparency, these families get no information.

This happened to my family this year. The DfE posted an agenda for my daughter's school to join a particular trust without publicly announcing

## Academisation should not create second-class families

a proposal or a meeting planned to discuss it. Shamelessly, the agenda was posted with a tag that publication was for "transparency".

The DfE didn't just disregard parents, carers and pupils: the headteacher, governing body and local authority were also left in the dark.

The only conclusion is that the school

consultation, but sacrificed its parents' rights too.

No other government action is so lacking in scrutiny. Those charged with crimes have more rights than families whose school has received a poor Ofsted judgment, and all evidently for the convenience of the DfE.

“ Those charged with crimes have more rights

that has lost the Ofsted inspection lottery has not just foregone its rights to basic information, let alone

It is hard to see how the academisation policy meets the UK's commitment to the United



Nations declaration on the rights of children, which states that children have the right to consultation on decisions that affect their lives. But rights notwithstanding, picking a trust for a school in a meeting in a regional office or on a Teams call is simply a bad way to make decisions.

Before proposals are made, DfE staff should visit schools, talk to senior leaders, consult with trade unions and gather views of parents, carers and pupils. In our case, the department has accepted that it may not have got things right and is rethinking, although still without asking for parents' views.

A more thoughtful and careful approach is also fairer to potential sponsors as it allows them to make a more informed decision.

The 2010 Academy Act sets out a legal framework for the DfE to follow. The department says the act does not require them to consult with school leaders or families following Ofsted downgrades. But the regional directors' guidance is an operational policy that could and should go beyond the legal minimum.

Trust leaders say transparency is also lacking from DfE decision-making about schools that are already academies. Clearly, there is a culture that places expediency above all else. This models a lack of care and undermines schools' efforts to engage parents in other important decisions. It needs to change, and a good place to start would be a consultation on the new guidance itself.

Parents' and carers' priorities about what makes a good trust differ from officials', and there should be no second-class families when it comes to that.

# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## BEN PEPPER

Senior associate, Bolt Burdon Kemp

### How compensation claims work in an increasingly risky profession

**Staffing shortages and strained budgets are leading to more compensation claims, explains Ben Pepper**

The NASUWT recently revealed that of the £15 million in compensation it had secured for its members for a variety of issues, including discrimination, bullying and contractual disputes, 10 per cent related directly to compensation for assaults.

One particular case attracted attention after a teacher attacked by a pupil was left with a brain injury, partial loss of sight and hearing, and bladder and kidney damage. The teacher was awarded £850,000.

This problem seems to be growing. In 2021, for example, the NASUWT announced it had secured £340,000 in compensation for members following assaults. A YouGov survey last year showed that one in seven secondary teachers reported facing violence from pupils at least once a month.

It's a sad fact that being a teacher appears to be an increasingly risky profession. However, there are legal protections in place and teachers should consider legal action if they have been the victim

of any act of aggression or violence – especially if it impacts on their job day-to-day.

If a teacher is assaulted by a pupil, they will be able to bring a claim against the local authority or governing body where it can be established that the teacher was owed a duty of care, that the duty was breached and that the breach caused the harm suffered. In *Violence at work: a guide for employers*, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines workplace violence as "any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work".

An injured teacher might allege that the local authority or governing body failed to assess the risk that the pupil might become violent and then devise a handling plan for the pupil. They could also claim that training in relation to the pupil's needs was inadequate, or that the pupil failed to have the one-on-one support required.

If a claim against the local authority or governing body cannot be established because there was no breach of duty, the teacher could look to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA). The CICA is a government agency, which provides compensation for



### “ Every incident must be reported and recorded ”

victims of violent crime.

As with all personal injury claims, each case will turn on its own facts. The experience of the individual teacher and the history of the child in question will be taken into consideration. If it can be established that the local authority or governing body were responsible for the assault occurring, the teacher would also need to demonstrate the extent of their injuries and losses. The severity of the injury will dictate the level of damages awarded, as will the level of financial losses. Such losses might include loss of earnings, as well as care, treatment, medication and travel expenses, all of which will need to be demonstrated with evidence.

It is worth noting that personal injury claims must be issued at court within three years of the date of the incident. The time limit for CICA claims is within two years.

Despite these strict deadlines, it can take much longer for personal injury claims to come to fruition, so we may still see cases in the courts that occurred pre-pandemic. While remote teaching will have prevented some assaults, we should expect a rise in cases following the re-opening of schools and the impact it had on pupil behaviour – coupled with stretched resources and shrinking staff numbers.

Teachers who have been assaulted must report and record the incident. And they should seek expert legal advice if they wish to seek compensation for their injuries and losses.

Stretched budgets and staffing shortages coupled with increased pupil need are likely to put more teachers at risk. Eventually, policymakers will need to reassess the savings of not investing in the sector as the cost of not doing so continues to grow.



# Opinion

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**SIMON COYLE**

Head of philanthropy,  
XTX Markets

## Together we can deliver maths excellence in every classroom

**Maths is a powerful driver of social mobility and we must do more to ensure more disadvantaged students stay on the excellence pathway, writes Simon Coyle**

Years ago, I co-founded a charity called The Brilliant Club, which supports PhD tutors to deliver courses based on their research to school students. From this, I saw how students can benefit from a curriculum that is diverse, interdisciplinary and – on occasion – wildly esoteric.

Today, as head of philanthropy at XTX Markets, an algorithmic trading company, my focus is on ensuring that all students can excel in maths. And while I still believe that every subject has its place, maths is undeniably special. As well as being a foundational science, it is a powerful driver of social mobility and economic prosperity.

Adults with low numeracy tend to experience negative effects on their continuing education, earnings and quality of life. Conversely, adults with advanced maths skills benefit from a valuable toolkit for study and in life, and command a significant salary premium.

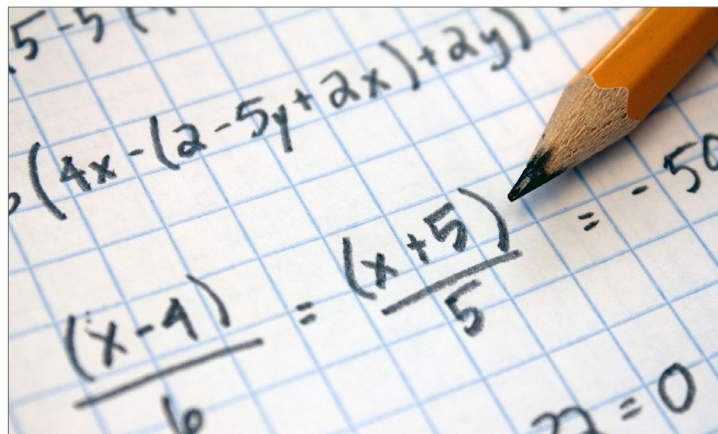
Three million jobs in England currently require advanced maths skills. This will only increase in the years ahead, driven by growth industries like data science and

technology. Mathematical sciences research is a major contributor to the economy, including breakthrough discoveries and the development of public goods.

The UK rightly aspires to be a leader in these areas, but this is only possible with outstanding maths education. Over the past decade, there has been some remarkable progress. Last year, 71 per cent of 11-year-olds in England achieved the expected standard, and maths is now the most popular A level with 90,000 entries every year.

However, we face persistent challenges. While students achieve well at age 11, the upward trend in GCSE performance has stalled. And although more students are taking A level, this is not translating into more maths undergraduates. We also desperately need more specialist teachers, as only 44 per cent of teachers of secondary maths have a maths-related degree.

At XTX Markets, our philanthropy focuses on supporting disadvantaged students to progress to A level, university and into mathematical careers. We have already committed over £20 million to maths education projects, including establishing 'maths circles' through MESME, piloting a key stage 4 curriculum with Mathematics Mastery, and campaigning to protect pure



### “ Three million jobs currently require advanced maths skills

maths in universities. We are also incubating initiatives like the Martingale Foundation, which enables students from low-income backgrounds to complete master's degrees and PhDs in maths.

We recently partnered with the University of Nottingham to publish Maths Excellence Pathways, a longitudinal study into which groups of students excel in maths, including where they join and leave the 'excellence pathway'. This highlighted major disparities. For example, 74 per cent of the most advantaged students stay on the excellence pathway from 11 to 16, compared with only 49 per cent of students on free school meals.

Building on this research, XTX Markets is now prioritising several areas for funding, including attainment from 11 to 16 and progression to A level. These should both be key considerations for the prime minister's ambition to extend maths to 18.

Our priority is to help schools serving disadvantaged communities to provide outstanding support for their high-potential students. To that end, our funding will combine direct support for schools with support

for charities that work with schools, including curriculum, enrichment, tutoring and teacher development.

As a next step, we are working with partners to launch a new Maths Excellence Fund, worth at least £5 million. This will develop, test and evaluate collaborative ways to increase attainment and progression from 11 to 18. The fund will open in June 2023 and will initially support groups of local schools, then expand nationally as we better understand what is working.

We are committed to help transform maths education, but we do not have all the answers. So, in the coming months we will be holding events and inviting engagement from teachers, schools leaders, charities, universities and policymakers on all sides.

Together, we want to advance the conversation around how to make maths excellence a reality in every school. If you would like to join that conversation, my inbox is open.

Join the conversation.  
You can email Simon Coyle on [philanthropy@xtxmarkets.com](mailto:philanthropy@xtxmarkets.com)

# Solutions

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**THERESA KERR**

**RICHARD WRIGHT-PHILLIPS**

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Solicitor, Education  
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## How to prepare for the next disruptive social media trend



**TikTok protests may have eased, but schools should be prepared for further disruptions, write Theresa Kerr and Richard Wright-Phillips**

The recent wave of so-called TikTok protests got a lot of media cover and caused a lot of alarm as schools considered how best to manage the situation. This has abated for now, but social media trends have a way of evolving and schools should be prepared for similar situations.

Sharing videos on social media adds a complication to protests on issues from toilet access to skirt length. Learning is disrupted and relationships between staff and the community take a hit. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to end disorder swiftly and bring pupils and their families back on board.

First, even if your school has not been directly affected, it is wise to plan ahead and review the security protocols you have in place for any serious disorder. One measure may well involve the need to contact the police if a situation escalates out of control. Advice and template risk assessments on school and college

security are available from the Department for Education.

Schools have a duty of care to provide a safe environment for staff and pupils. Therefore you should also think about whether there are any pre-emptive steps you can take to deter pupils from acting in a way that is disorderly or dangerous.

It is likely that your behaviour policy already caters for lesson disruption, truancy and damage to school property. Existing policy will guide you to appropriate sanctions – and to a rationale for them that pupils and their families will understand, even if they do not agree with them.

If your school intends to sanction pupils for their involvement in any kind of protest or unsanctioned sharing of videos online (or both), it is still important that an investigation is undertaken. Pupils should be given a chance to give their account and any sanction applied should be lawful, reasonable and proportionate.

Alongside this, it may be helpful to ensure that there is a forum for pupils and their families to air any legitimate concerns. Again, it is probable that you already have

**“ It is wise to review security protocols for serious disorder**

pupil and parent-voice channels in place, although in some schools pupils say they are protesting because they do not feel listened to via these existing forums.

There is perhaps an opportunity here to reflect objectively on whether the underlying policies that may be the focus of some of the protests are compliant with the principles set out in the Department for Education's Behaviour in schools advice document.

For example, are the policies clearly communicated to all stakeholders and are they applied consistently and fairly? Do they reflect your duties under the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that they are not indirectly discriminatory against pupils with certain protected characteristics and that reasonable adjustments are made for pupils with disabilities? Is flexibility built in for pupils who have medical conditions and do such pupils have an up-to-date individual healthcare plan

in place that staff are aware of, as appropriate? Can other measures be used alongside the policies to encourage compliance?

Finally, let's talk about education. Do pupils know the rationale behind their school rules? Do they know what the Human Rights Act actually does and how the right to protest can be exercised legitimately? Maintained schools and academies have a duty to actively promote fundamental British values, including democracy and the rule of law, so these questions could be considered in form time, assemblies, PSHE lessons or more widely across the curriculum.

You know what will be best for your pupils and your community. Finding the right combination of the above levers, however, will help to end any resurgence of the disruption in March and promptly restore a sense of community and goodwill that our schools need now more than ever.

# THE REVIEW

## PRETENDED. SCHOOLS AND SECTION 28. HISTORICAL, CULTURAL AND PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES

**Author:** Catherine Lee

**Publisher:** John Catt Educational

**Publication date:** February 2023

**ISBN:** 1915261694

**Reviewer:** Jared Cawley, international teacher specialising in diversity, equality and inclusion

*Pretended* takes readers on an emotionally charged journey through the dark corridors of Margaret Thatcher's infamous section 28 legislation, which prohibited schools from acknowledging homosexuality. Its title, if you're wondering, derives from its disturbing description of homosexuality as a "pretended family relationship".

Catherine Lee, a teacher who experienced the law's oppressive grip for its 15-year duration from 1988 to 2003, delves into its political, cultural, and deeply personal repercussions. The result is a remarkable book that presents a meticulously detailed narrative of pivotal moments in the history of education and the LGBTQ+ community.

Even before venturing into the heart of the narrative, Lee's dedication in the form of a heartfelt apology to all the LGBT+ pupils she couldn't be there for when they needed her most, sets a poignant tone. What follows is just as deeply personal. She shares her journey from PE teacher in inner-city Liverpool, to special educational needs coordinator and pastoral leader in rural Suffolk, recounting the pain of pretending to be someone she wasn't, living a life of secrecy, fabricating relationships and guarding her true identity.

This is a well-structured narrative in three compelling parts. The first examines the political and historical landscape of same-sex relationships in the UK and documents the emergence of section 28 from its initial discussions in the House of Lords to its passing in the Commons. The parliamentary transcripts reveal shocking and infuriating statements.

Lord Halsbury's derogatory remarks about homosexuals as "reservoirs of venereal diseases" and the portrayal of homosexuality as "disgusting and unnatural" by various peers, including Lord Longford, are deeply unsettling. Leading the charge in the Commons, Conservative MP Jill Knight labelled teaching about homosexuality as "perverted", arguing that it would lead to the spread of Aids.

Lee documents the joyful and sometimes bewildering protests that accompanied all this. In February 1988, ten lesbians absented into the chamber of the Lords with a washing line bought from Clapham market. Another group disrupted a BBC studio during the *Six O'Clock News*. But fearful for their jobs and livelihoods, teachers were in the main too afraid to publicly join the protests.

Part two is centred around excerpts from Lee's diary, giving us a personal glimpse into the life of a lesbian teacher navigating the classroom under the oppressive grip of this legislation. In an entry from 1995, she candidly expresses her fear of being unjustly labelled as a paedophile—a fear research has since revealed to have been widely shared by other gay and lesbian PE teachers during that time.

In the book's empowering and uplifting third part, readers are introduced to a cascade of positive changes and advancements for the LGBTQ+ community and inclusive education. From the transformative Equality Act 2010 to the nurturing of inclusive relationship, sex and health education in schools, these developments exemplify the progress towards fostering equality

BOOK

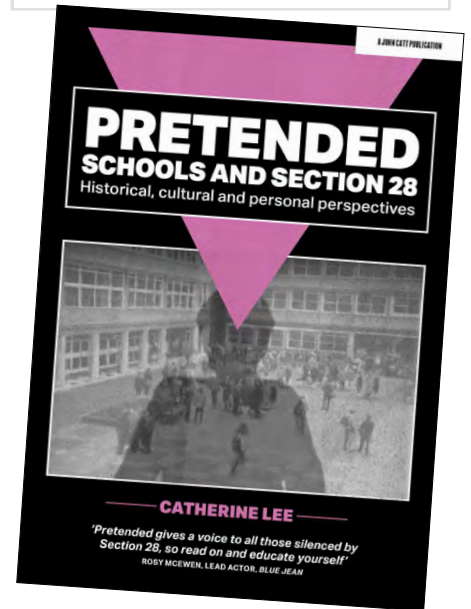
TV

FILM

RADIO

EVENT

RESOURCE



and acceptance.

The book's final pages are a joyful reflection on the author's involvement as an adviser to the award-winning film *Blue Jean*, which played a significant role in her journey of reconciling with the legacy of section 28.

But they are also a cautionary reminder that progress is neither linear nor guaranteed. Lee highlights Florida's "Don't Say Gay" bill, a disturbing parallel to section 28 that bans LGBTQ+ topics from discussion in the classroom and removes books about inclusion from libraries.

As we navigate these turbulent times, *Pretended* stands as a powerful testament to the ongoing struggle for LGBTQ+ rights. It urges us to confront the violence and polarisation in public discourse, to challenge harmful stereotypes and to strive for a more inclusive and accepting society.

It is an essential read for anyone seeking to champion the future of LGBTQ+ pupils and educators and actively contribute to positive change.



Rating




**Frances Akinde**  
SEND adviser and neurodiversity champion

#3goodthings, listing three positive experiences each day. They are lovely to read and remind you of the importance of gratitude around everyday moments.



### COMING IN FROM THE COLD

Mental health awareness week may have ended with *The Daily Telegraph* calling children snowflakes who need to toughen up about getting exam questions wrong, but it was something more relevant and helpful that caught my eye.

As part of its inquiry into post-Covid school attendance, the education select committee this week heard evidence from the mental health charity, Mind, about the links between mental health and attendance. I urge you to watch the testimony.



### SNOWED UNDER

It got me thinking: the same could be applied to absence among teaching staff. If we don't support their mental health, how can teachers and leaders be well enough to

support their pupils?

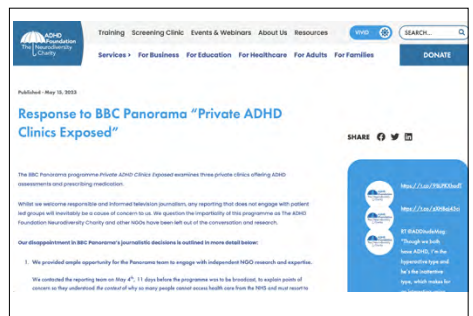
This blog from Strictly Education, the education support organisation, makes the important point that mental health support for teachers "also contributes to better educational outcomes for students".

I find it concerning, as reported in *Schools Week*, that only six in ten schools have taken up the DfE's training grant funding for mental health leads. The most common reason cited is finding time for the course, once again highlighting the real and tangible impacts of the sector's ongoing workload problem.


### A BLIZZARD OF NEED

But while this week gave many struggling teachers the space and confidence to talk about their mental health, there was less evidence of sympathy for people with ADHD. It's great to see the stigma lifted from conditions such as anxiety that some might call situational or environmental, but there's clearly a way to go to before we're clear of prejudice for others.

Comments flooded my timeline in response to last week's BBC *Panorama*, *Private ADHD clinics exposed*, that I don't need to repeat. But while the programme seemed to have taken us back a massive step with regards to ADHD awareness, the result was an avalanche of support as people with the condition found the courage to speak out. Indeed, the *ADHD Foundation* called the programme "a poorly researched, sensationalist piece of television journalism".



And so mental health week provided nothing if not a flurry of evidence that mental health is in the grip of toxic public discourse. But within that, connections were made, people were supported and minds were changed. That's enough to keep me engaging.

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts 

# The Knowledge

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



## What school leaders in the east are saying about Ofsted

**Rebecca Leek, executive director,  
Suffolk Primary Headteachers'  
Association**

The medical profession has now added its voice to the wide-ranging calls for Ofsted reform that erupted following the death of headteacher Ruth Perry. An article published in the *British Medical Journal* this week reports an "almost complete loss of confidence in Ofsted".

As school leaders in the east of England, we felt it important to undertake a structured inquiry to explore perceptions of Ofsted to discern common themes. A survey for leaders was designed by chief executives, headteachers and leads of headteacher associations. It was piloted with a range of professionals, including inspectors, to ensure clarity and objectivity before it was shared more widely.

We received 528 responses and have summarised the findings. The participants are broadly reflective of the education sector as a whole, with a ratio of 1:4 secondary to primary colleagues. Special school and early years leaders were represented, 95 per cent of respondents were or had been headteachers and 53 per cent had led teams through an inspection under the current framework.

The "loss of confidence" the *BMJ* refers to is unequivocally evident throughout the data. Responses are overwhelmingly negative and demonstrate a profession articulating deep dissatisfaction with the impact of the current inspection framework.

Using an effectiveness scale, we asked leaders to rate Ofsted on three areas that were cited as the core purpose of inspections in the last parliamentary review of the regulatory body. These relate to accountability, school improvement and providing information for parents. We used a seven-point scale, ranging from *extremely effective* to *not at all effective*.

The overall mean score was 1.8 (largely ineffective) with only 3.4 per cent of leaders judging the effectiveness of Ofsted as *largely*



*or extremely effective* in all three areas. The lowest effectiveness rating related to whether Ofsted provides parents with the information they need to compare schools on a consistent basis. The mode here was 0 (*not at all effective*).

Lack of consistency is the most common thread across the data. This was apparent in open-text answers and in descriptions of incidents during inspections.

"Inconsistent" was also the word with the highest occurrence in answer to the question: *If you were judging the overall effectiveness of Ofsted in meeting the aims above, what three words would you use?* Nineteen per cent included inconsistent. The next three most highly occurring words were: inadequate (18 per cent), requires improvement (17 per cent) and ineffective (14 per cent). Even the 2 per cent of respondents who said they had no concerns with Ofsted in answer to another question, used words such as "stressful" and "misaligned", alongside "professional" and "detailed".

When asked to select their top three concerns from a list (including an option for "no concerns"), the top four were "one-word judgments" (57 per cent), "reliability" (43 per cent), "limiting judgments" (38 per cent) and

"impact on schools during inspection" (34 per cent).

We also asked respondents to give their thoughts in just ten words on an inspection system that would raise standards and improve lives, as Ofsted's tagline says it does.

Answers included: professional and supportive dialogue, a robust complaints' procedure, and a reflection on other countries' systems with "high-trust, low-stakes" approaches. The "one-word judgment" issue came through again and again, as did "unpredictability", the strain of timeframes and the stress this causes.

These results contradict in no uncertain terms Amanda Spielman's claim during her April interview with Laura Kuenssberg on BBC One's Sunday morning politics show that "we get plenty of feedback to say that inspection is a constructive professional dialogue".

In the east of England, at least, this survey provides evidence of "an almost complete loss of confidence in Ofsted". The unwillingness from the watchdog to engage with the sector at large, despite the mounting evidence that the system does more harm than good, is of great concern to the profession.

Week in

# Westminster

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



## FRIDAY

**BREAKING:** A fourth week of updates on those £364,000 wildflowers for the King's coronation.

While all state-funded primary schools have already received the 200,000 packets, the DfE is keen to get its facts blooming straight.

"The percentage figure of wildflower habitats lost in the UK has been amended, from 98% to 97%. This was a typo in the original version," an update to its press release on the scheme published today stated.

It followed a live webinar from The Eden Project \*showing teachers how to scatter the seeds\* last week.

\*\*\*

Last week we revealed how ministers had been accused of "avoiding scrutiny" about funding woes during the pay dispute by delaying a crucial study on how schools are handling cost pressures.

The DfE was, though, very keen to point out that the research was (reluctantly) underway.

And, by total coincidence, the contract for the research was published the day after we approached the department for comment.

BMG Research will be paid £94,000 to understand how schools are responding to financial pressures. It shows the contract actually started in April and will run until September.

We wait with bated breath.

## MONDAY

Timely for Ofsted to announce it has outsourced monitoring of national and regional media to PR firm Cision Group.

As the watchdog is heavily featured

almost weekly across all media following the death of headteacher Ruth Perry, the firm will have to work hard for its £18,928 yearly fee.

## TUESDAY

A major flashback to 2021 this week when we saw a tender award for abacuses – sorry, no, rekenreks – published. They became all the rage in maths catch-up in the wake of the pandemic.

Now an additional 81,000 have been bought by the department for the mastering number programme, at a cost of £242,190. It's sure adding up!

\*\*\*

The last five years at the DfE must have been \*trying\* for some, and apparently there are not enough happy memories for ministers to cherish either.

It is supposedly a longstanding convention under successive administrations that ministers can pay to retain their red boxes as a memento of their time in their role – so long as security features are removed (007 style).

Schools minister Nick Gibb said in a written question response that there is no record of this happening between 2018 and now.

Surely, surely, with Gibb back in post, he will eventually decide to take his home after his 1,000 years in office?

## WEDNESDAY:

Former social mobility commission chair Katharine Birbalsingh puts her foot in it again.

Lamenting the death of singer Tina Turner, she posted a gif showing a number of pictures of the star – but it rested on one showing her alongside her abusive ex-husband, Ike Turner.

Everyone makes mistakes, and Birbalsingh did cop flak for it – but, when she realised her mistake, she instead berated the "lunatics accusing me of celebrating wife-beating".

## THURSDAY:

Proof that there's substance behind the idea of speaking things into existence. Skills minister Robert Halfon has repeated the phrase "ladder of opportunity" when discussing technical routes so much that the DfE has made it a noun, capitalising it in written versions of his speeches.

\*\*\*

Labour's Bridget Phillipson was at a primary school in Doncaster talking about parliament and government today.

But we couldn't help but notice that, behind her, a video of her opposite number Gillian Keegan was playing in the background.

How we wish we were a fly on the wall. We imagine it went something like this: "So this, kids, is whose job I'll probably be taking in a few years' time."

\*\*\*

During a Q+A session with internet forum Mumsnet, G Keegs said "there's definitely a lot of things we will look at" in terms of current anger about Ofsted, without specifying what.

She also reiterated that "parents definitely should be informed" if children come out as transgender at school.

All pretty non-committal. As it turns out, the most enlightening response we got was that her favourite biscuit is pink-iced gems.





St Edward's Catholic Primary School, New Road, Sheerness, Kent ME12 1BW

## VACANCY: HEADTEACHER

GRADE: L14 - L21 (£58,135 - £72,483) (WITH POTENTIAL UPLIFT FOR EXCEPTIONAL CANDIDATE)

Are you passionate about ensuring the best outcomes for children? Are you a creative and strong leader with the vision and ability to inspire and positively motivate a team? If the answer to both questions is yes, then our Trust would love to hear from you!

The Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership (KCSP), is a multi-academy trust (MAT) established by the Archdiocese of Southwark for Catholic education across Kent. Currently a MAT comprising 25 schools (20 primary and 5 secondary), our Trust is seeking to appoint a dynamic and innovative Headteacher for one of our wonderful schools - St Edward's Catholic Primary School, ideally from September 2023.

St Edward's is a one form entry primary school serving the Parish of Ss Henry & Elizabeth in Sheerness and the local area; it is an inclusive school in which every pupil is supported and challenged to be their very best and encouraged to grow spiritually and intellectually. St Edward's is graded as a 'Good' school both by Ofsted and for its denominational inspection.

Reporting to the Area Director, the Headteacher will build upon and further develop the excellent work that is already taking place at the school and will be responsible for its day-to-day leadership and management, leading a highly skilled and enthusiastic team.

The successful applicant will also take the lead role in providing inspirational Catholic education based on our shared Gospel values and will be the school's pastoral leader. We are therefore seeking to appoint a practising Catholic to this role.

Please visit <https://www.kcsp.org.uk/headteacher-st-edwards-primary/> to view the full job description and person specification for this role and to download an application form and all related documents.

**Closing date for applications: Midday on Wednesday 28 June 2023**

**Interviews to be held during the week commencing: Monday 03 July 2023**

**Start date: September 2023/January 2024**

[ST-EDWARDS-SHEERNESS.CO.UK](http://ST-EDWARDS-SHEERNESS.CO.UK)



### Principal Of Quest Academy

We are seeking an inspirational and imaginative leader who can build on the highly successful accomplishments of the founding Principal and her team, and deliver a 'centre of expertise' for children with autism spectrum conditions and SEMH.

Alongside delivering the highest standards of education, our aim is to raise the profile of what we do, share it more widely with others and expand the impact of our work. The new Principal of Quest Academy will be key to driving this agenda forward.

You will have experience of school leadership, at a Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher level; ideally in a special school and have a DfE recognised teaching qualification and The National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) or other relevant post-graduate qualification. You will have practical experience of working with children and young people who have social, emotional and mental health needs and/or autism.



### KS1 / KS2 TEACHER

Are you a class teacher looking for a fulfilling job supporting local children with social, emotional and mental health needs? Do you want to join a dedicated team of skilled and compassionate staff? Apply to join Aspire Academy now.

We are looking for an experienced practitioner to join our team of professional, skilled and compassionate staff to work with a small class of SEN students and the wider school community, delivering high quality education to our learners.

A proven interest in managing challenging behaviour alongside evidence of securing successful academic outcomes are essential requirements. If you have enthusiasm, commitment and a desire to work with some of the most vulnerable and complex young people in our community, we would welcome your application. High aspirations and a relentless approach towards excellence are the key skills we are looking for along with evidence of previous outstanding classroom teaching.



# 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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