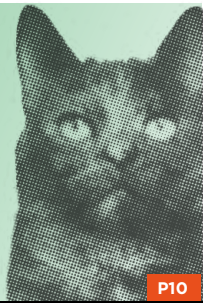


SCHOOLS WEEK

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

Gender row school: 'No children identify as cats'



P10

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MAT CEO gender progress stalls



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WHY THE AI REVOLUTION HASN'T TAKEN OFF IN SCHOOLS

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Reject fewer teacher applicants, DfE chief tells training providers

- Providers ordered to improve 'significant' rejection rates in shortage subjects
- But bursaries could be withheld from graduates caught up in marking delay
- Meanwhile two snubbed 'cold spot' teacher trainers see partnerships collapse

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SCHOOLS WEEK

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Focus on rejection rates won't solve recruitment crisis

The government reckons it has spotted a kink in the system of recruiting trainee teachers.

An increase in applications this year has not translated into more graduates getting offers with teacher training places. Officials say this is because some teacher training providers have sky-high rejection rates.

A sharply-worded letter from the Department for Education's top civil servant makes clear that providers should look again at the candidates they are rejecting (page 5).

Teachers are in short supply. This isn't just a problem in England, it's a problem for other countries too. And it's not confined to just teaching – lots of professions face worker shortages.

So a move to nudge providers to double-check that good candidates are not getting lost in the system is fine. But this does look like tinkering around the edges.

Recruitment numbers are staggering low. This won't solve that. Providers also say

rejection rates are linked to more overseas applicants. The move could also be perceived as putting pressure on providers to lower the bar.

It somewhat echoes a "Thank a Teacher Day" video from ministers telling teachers how important they are. Meanwhile, they are doing diddly squat to solve the teacher pay row.

And that lack of action has led to more strike days announced for next month which will see pupils lose out again, this time with transition days and school trips cancelled (page 9).

Elsewhere, we thought it was a good time to check if government pledges to improve diversity in top education jobs was improving. But, after a rise in recent years in the proportion of women leading the country's top trusts, progress has stalled (page 6).

We also take a deep dive into why the AI revolution has not taken hold in England's schools, just yet (pages 12 and 13).

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Reject fewer teacher applicants, DfE tells trainers

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Teacher trainers have been told by the Department for Education's top civil servant to stop turning away so many applicants amid "significant rejection rates", even in shortage subjects.

But initial teacher training providers have accused ministers of "trying to wring the towel dry" by "blaming" them for the chronic recruitment and retention crisis.

Susan Acland-Hood, the DfE's permanent secretary, told providers a 7 per cent jump in applicants this year had not led to an equivalent rise in offers for courses.

"This is concerning when we know we have need of teachers," she wrote in a letter seen by Schools Week. "This is not explained by the subjects or phases being applied for – we are seeing significant rejection rates even for subjects we know are in shortage."

Analysis has shown the government is likely to recruit fewer than half of the required secondary teachers for September.

Acland-Hood said she was "keen" providers "look carefully at rejection rates, as well as ensuring that all eligible applicants... are given the opportunity to demonstrate their suitability".

Another "concerning" trend was a 27 per cent increase in automatic rejections, which happen if no offer is made within six weeks of the application.

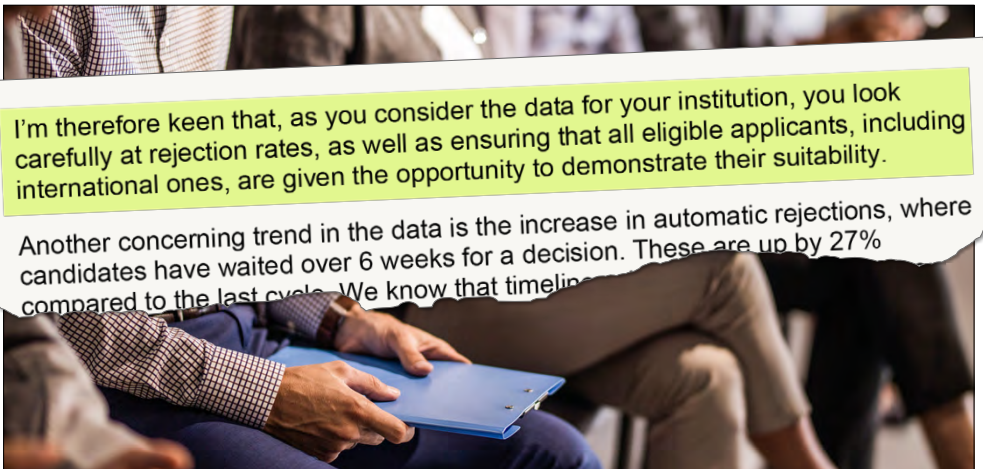
She urged providers to consider if any of these applicants should be encouraged to reapply.

Providers have since been told how their rejection rates compare to national rates.

In its submission to the education select committee's inquiry on recruitment and retention, the government said this would "drive behaviour change and maximise candidates' chances of success".

"We know that timeliness is important to candidates and to be rejected automatically simply because decision-making is taking a long time will be a very negative experience," she said.

But Emma Hollis, the



I'm therefore keen that, as you consider the data for your institution, you look carefully at rejection rates, as well as ensuring that all eligible applicants, including international ones, are given the opportunity to demonstrate their suitability.

Another concerning trend in the data is the increase in automatic rejections, where candidates have waited over 6 weeks for a decision. These are up by 27% compared to the last cycle. We know that timeliness is important to candidates and to be rejected automatically simply because decision-making is taking a long time will be a very negative experience.

executive director of the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT), said providers felt they "were being blamed for something that really isn't happening".

She said automatic rejections could happen where an applicant did not turn up for an interview and had withdrawn, or had not updated their application.

"The letter seemed a little out of step with what is happening in the sector. The DfE is trying to wring the towel dry as it is struggling to recruit.

"It's right it looks at every bit of data, but focusing on this is the wrong place to focus. It needs to do more to recruit people in – the providers are doing everything they can."

Analysis by the National Foundation for Educational Research found the number of applications overall is up 21 per cent compared with last year. But the number of people placed on courses – so have accepted an offer – is 7 per cent down.

Overall, the application-to-places ratio has risen from 4.3-to-one last year to 5.6-to-one this year.

Jack Worth, the NFER's education economist, said applications from outside the European Union rose 150 per cent over the same time period.

But only 58 per cent got places, meaning there was a "considerable number disproportionately rejected".

Acland-Hood said she was keen to ensure overseas applications "are being considered

carefully and seriously".

But she said even discounting these applicants, "we see a bigger drop-off than usual between application and acceptance, without an apparent reduction in the quality of applicant".

James Noble-Rogers, the executive director at the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers, said the problems with ITT recruitment were "nothing to do with the way that providers process applications.

"The government needs to look closer to home to explain that. There are good reasons why people are not offered places. It may be because of a lack of placement capacity, concerns about subject knowledge or the quality of applications themselves."

However, the DfE is looking to reform the automatic rejection process, perhaps making such applications "dormant", rather than flat-out rejected, Hollis said.

In its submission to the ITT inquiry, the National Institute of Teaching (NioT) reported a "marked decline in quality and quantity" of teacher training applications, citing money as an issue.

One SCITT had set up a "hardship fund" for its primary recruits, NioT said in its submission to the education committee. Nearly all applicants wanted training places near to their home.

The DfE said it could now act on "real-time data" on candidate behaviour and was "exploring how we can make even more data available to the sector".



Susan Acland-Hood



Emma Hollis

Marking boycott students could see bursaries withheld

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Teacher trainers have been told they can withhold bursaries of up to £27,000 while waiting for a trainee's graduate status to be confirmed amid the university marking boycott, *Schools Week* has learned.

Government guidance was updated last week to ensure that prospective trainees whose undergraduate degrees are delayed can start courses in September.

University and College Union (UCU) members are taking action short of a strike in a dispute over pay, affecting 145 institutions and including a marking and assessment boycott.

Providers were given flexibility to "exercise discretion and review other relevant evidence that would demonstrate confidence" from the university to ensure that graduates could start courses in September.

The Department for Education has also told providers they can use predicted grades to decide whether graduates are entitled to a bursary.

Bursaries of between £15,000 and £27,000 are



being offered next year to attract trainees into 10 subjects experiencing shortages, including physics and maths. But they must achieve a 2:2 or above in their degree. Providers receive monthly payments from the DfE based on recruits and pass that on to trainees.

The DfE said it will work with schools and universities that provide ITT to "find appropriate evidence where candidates do not have predicted marks". However, if providers want to start payments to trainees before confirmation, "this is at their own risk".

Providers also have the option to "withhold the bursary payments" until confirmation of degree status and classification is known. Payments could then be backdated.

One provider, who wanted to remain anonymous, told *Schools Week* they would not be releasing bursaries until they had degree confirmation as "the risk sits with the providers and the DfE have left it up to providers decide.

"It really is a tricky one given the imperative to bring more teachers into the profession," they added.

The cohort potentially affected were also those that had their A-levels cancelled in the summer of 2020 and saw their first year of university hit by lockdowns.

In evidence to the education select committee on the recruitment and retention crisis, the DfE pointed towards bursary hikes working. Their own evidence showed the nine subjects where bursaries were increased this year comprised 70 per cent of all applications, compared with 61 per cent last year.

The government also said it would be "looking at its long-term vision for pay in the teaching profession" after starting salaries rise to £30,000 this September. Ministers have previously said they expect the number of candidates affected by degree delays to be "small".

EXCLUSIVE

AMY WALKER | @AMYRWALKER

ITT partnerships to help 'cold spots' fall through

Two potential initial teacher training (ITT) partnerships that would plug gaps in "cold spot" regions with little training provision have fallen through.

A proposed partnership between the University of Cumbria (UoC) and University College London (UCL) will not go ahead after "detailed discussions" led to a dead end.

Similar talks between the University of East Anglia (UEA) and the University of Roehampton are also understood to have collapsed.

UoC, which was rated 'good' by Ofsted in its last inspection and is in an area previously identified as a cold spot by the Department for Education, was not reaccruited to provide ITT in the government's market review of the sector.

After all appeals against unsuccessful bids were turned down, it announced in January that it was in "early stage discussions" to form

a partnership with UCL, which is accredited to continue ITT from September 2024.

Unaccredited providers are able to remain in ITT as "delivery" or "lead" partners to an accredited provider.

Dr Ruth Harrison-Palmer, Cumbria's Institute of Education director, earlier said the talks presented an "exciting route to continue to provide our county and communities with the teachers needed".

"UCL shares our core mission and values... and we are intent on maximising the benefits of a partnership approach."

But in a statement shared with *Schools Week* this week, UoC said after "more detailed discussions, UCL has made the difficult decision not to proceed any further".

"UCL [has] stressed that this decision is in no way a reflection on us or of any doubts as to the potential mutual benefits of partnership", a spokesperson said.

They added that UCL had "indicated" it was keen to explore "other opportunities for broad partnership working" between the institutions, and it was UoC's "intention" to continue to deliver ITT through a partnership.

A UCL spokesperson confirmed the decision.

Meanwhile, it understood that initial discussions between UEA and Roehampton did not lead to a formalised partnership, but neither institution would comment.

A UEA spokesperson said: "We are working to establish a new partnership and due to the commercially sensitive stage of discussions we are unable to comment further at present."

Government-funded grants for ITT partnerships between accredited and unaccredited providers were only available for 11 eligible areas, understood to be the "cold spot" areas identified in the government's market review of the sector.

INVESTIGATION: DIVERSITY

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Diversity slows in top jobs at largest trusts

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

Progress in bridging the gender gap at the top of England's biggest academy trusts has stalled.

The latest Schools Week diversity audit of the trusts with 15 or more schools has revealed women occupy just under 33 per cent of the top jobs.

This halts the progress made in previous years in boosting the number of female leaders, up from 26 per cent in 2018.

The number of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) leaders across the trusts has risen from two (1.7 per cent) in 2021 to four (2.8 per cent).

Ann Palmer, the chief executive of the leadership support organisation Fig Tree International, said system-wide change was needed to ensure senior and executive leadership reflected the diversity of the student body.

Our audit found 46 of the 143 chief executives leading the country's biggest trusts were women (32 per cent). This is slightly down from 33 per cent in the last audit two years ago.

Of the four BAME chief executives, just one is a woman, Jennese Alozie of the University of Chichester Academy Trust.

Latest workforce data shows almost 75 per cent of teachers and more than 66 per cent of heads are female.

Mohsen Ojja, the chief executive of the 16-academy Anthem Schools Trust, said he was "genuinely surprised" by the findings.

He believes leadership "practices and procedures should be geared towards capitalising on the skills of all groups, including those that are under-represented".

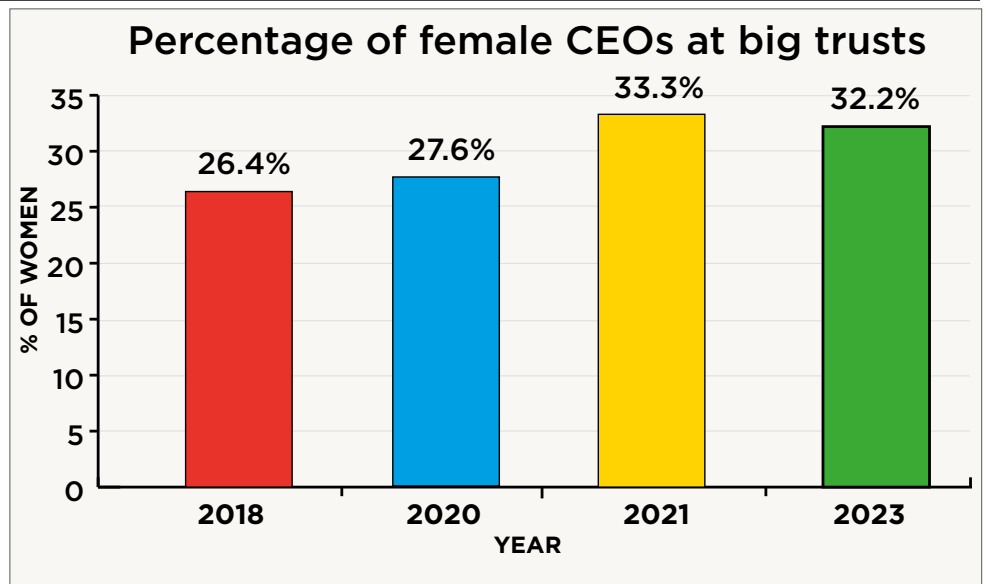
The government last week awarded a contract to develop "the next generation" of trust chief executives to the National Institute of Teaching (NioT). The first 25 participants will start in February, with another 50 later.

A spokesperson for NioT said it will "pay attention to diversity in our communications, recruitment and programme design" and expose those taking part in its programme "to highly skilled leaders from a range of backgrounds".

Sir Hamid Patel, the chief executive of Star Academies and one of the four BAME leaders in our analysis, added: "We



Jennese Alozie



need to embed meritocratic principles at every level so that barriers to individuals' progress are removed, irrespective of their gender or ethnicity."

He said policies must be developed that "shatter glass ceilings that still depress progression, not only for women and the BAME community but also for people with white working-class backgrounds".

Academy trust quality descriptors published two months ago by the government noted that trusts will be expected to "take action to promote equality and diversity" in their workforces.

In September, 15 key sector bodies – including the Confederation of School Trusts and school leaders' union ASCL – made commitments to help improve the level of diversity in the profession.

Oasis Community Learning was the only academy trust to sign up to the commitment. Paul Tarry, its director of people, said staff networks were helping to devise action plans for the rest of the trust.

He added that the results of new equality, diversity and inclusion surveys were also informing decisions. The proportion of black and Asian staff has risen across its 4,500-strong workforce in the last 12 months from 12.4 per cent to 12.9 per cent.

A report published two years ago by the Forum Strategy – a MAT chief executive

network organisation – called on the government to commit to addressing the diversity of boards that appoint and promote senior leaders.

It also recommended that CEO diversity should be tracked.



Sir Hamid Patel

A National Governance Association report in September found just 6 per cent of school governors and trustees responding to its annual survey were BAME.

Earlier this year the DfE told governing boards to collate and publish their own diversity data, saying "we want governing boards to be increasingly reflective of the communities they serve".

The issue of representation is not only prevalent in education. About 24 per cent of the NHS workforce is made up of black and minority ethnic staff – but they account for just one in 10 "very senior managers".

In the police, just 5.5 per cent of senior roles are held by BAME officers.

And across the Department for Education, Ofsted and Ofqual, fewer than 39 per cent of those listed as ministers or in the "our management" sections of their websites are female, a 4 per cent fall since 2021.

Just one person – children's minister Clare Coutinho – is BAME.

Ofsted insisted the data was "not representative of our entire senior civil service workforce" and it was "taking action to address this through our attraction strategy and development programmes".

An Ofqual spokesperson stressed nearly 66 per cent of the watchdog's workforce and 55 per cent of its "most senior managers" were women.

DfE said they "know there is more to do" on leadership diversity. Its MAT CEO programme will "increase the quality and diversity of leaders in the system".

Sixth-form loses employment tribunal over Covid shortcomings

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

A sixth-form academy in north London has lost an employment tribunal because of its “failure to take on board” the complaints of a 71-year-old teacher about working in a classroom with no windows during Covid.

Lorraine Naidoo, a part-time English as a second language teacher, took the 16-19 Haringey Sixth Form College, to an employment tribunal over its actions in 2020.

Naidoo’s classrooms had no limit on the number of pupils to make sure they were social distanced and one had a window that wouldn’t open, a judgment published this week said.

She repeatedly raised her concerns because of her age, as older people were at higher risk of serious illness if infected with Covid-19.

Judge Jeremy Lewis backed her claim of indirect age discrimination.

While there was a general risk assessment, the tribunal judges said there was a “serious failure” to adequately consider if additional requirements were needed.

Judge Lewis, who signed the judgment, said there was also a “wholly unreasonable failure” to comply with ACAS fairness practices.

Haringey said it was “disappointed” and is considering an appeal. A separate hearing will consider compensation for Naidoo.

Naidoo used two classrooms, one of which had a single window that was sealed shut.

The space tended to become “stuff and smelly” in the summer, she claimed, which health and safety guidance has suggested is a sign of poor ventilation.

The sixth form said there was a system to draw in fresh air, but the judges said such systems were “recognised as less than satisfactory”.

Judge Lewis also said there was “no evidence” the sixth form was unable to buy carbon dioxide monitors before the government rolled them out in September 2021.

Naidoo was moved to a “smaller teaching



room without notice” on one occasion.

In a risk assessment, Naidoo asked for each pupil to have their own table to help physical distancing, and windows that could be opened.

But Judge Lewis said there was a “failure to take on board and take into account” her concerns.

Naidoo was signed off with work-related stress at the end of September and never returned.

An occupational health report indicated that her concerns on the lack of safeguards was an “obvious impediment to her health recovering”, the judgment said.

It wasn’t until October 9 that a “nine-point plan” was sent by the sixth form that included the suggestion to “cap your group size”. It also said she could request personal protective equipment “at any time”.

But Naidoo said it didn’t “sound like the detailed formalised plan I requested”. Judge Lewis also said in “large part” the nine points were “merely a restatement of existing practice and guidance rather than being additional measures”.

In her formal grievance, Naidoo said her risk assessment was “ignored” and “made me feel that I was alone in dealing with the increased serious health risks I was being exposed to at work.”

Judge Lewis said the sixth form “did not deal with the issues raised promptly” and that there was “no adequate investigation” in response to Naidoo’s grievances.

There was a “wholesale and wholly unreasonable failure” to comply with the ACAS code of practice, which sets out principles for handling disciplinary and grievance situations in workplaces.

Esther Maxwell, partner at Shakespeare Martineau, said the finding was a “timely reminder for schools and colleges to ensure that they take the health and safety obligations seriously, especially for the more vulnerable parts of their workforce”.

A sixth form spokesperson said it was “very proud” of how it dealt with the “many challenges arising from the pandemic, to ensure we continued to deliver a high-quality teaching and learning experience for our students, whilst doing our very best to comply with Covid guidelines, rule, recommendations and regulations and keep all within our college community safe”.

Its Covid data “evidenced the extremely low infection rates” at the sixth form, “with no serious cases of Covid-related illness”.

Naidoo started at the sixth form in 2008, but retired to work part-time in 2012. She had worked for less than three weeks of the September 2020 college year, which Haringey said was “unfortunate” as she was unable to see “the many measures we put in place for all in our college community, with a great deal of success”.

The Health and Safety Executive spot checks of schools in March 2021 found that 80 per cent had a good understanding of what it meant to be Covid secure.

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Strikes threaten 'one-off' experiences for pupils

SAMANTHA BOOTH
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Two in five secondary schools have transition days planned for primary pupils on next month's strike days, according to a survey that shows the potential disruption of new industrial action during an "unusually busy week".

TeacherTapp surveyed more than 7,000 teachers to estimate potential disruption after the National Education Union (NEU) confirmed strike action on July 5 and 7.

While schools are yet to finalise decisions on affected events, two in five (39 per cent) of secondaries had transition days planned for year 6 pupils to visit ahead of their start date in September.

Nearly one in five (17 per cent) of teachers' school trips had been planned, while 7 per cent said residential trips had been scheduled.

Sports days were planned for 14 per cent of teachers, with 12 per cent of secondary teachers expecting children to be on work experience.

In primary schools, 12 per cent of teachers said their schools had scheduled concerts or performances on one of the strike days.

'Disruption may be more noticeable'

Laura McInerney, the chief executive of TeacherTapp, said it was an "unusually busy week for schools", adding: "The wide range of potentially disrupted activities, including sports days, residential trips and concerts, shows how much schools do beyond their teaching remits.

"On the one hand, putting strike actions on these days may make the disruption more noticeable; on the other hand it may put teachers in difficult positions, as these are one-off experiences for pupils that are difficult to replicate."

The latest strike dates appear to have attracted harsher criticism than earlier action.

Chris Dyson, the deputy chief executive of the Create Partnership Trust, tweeted that while he "loves the NEU ... I am struggling to support the strike". A conference he had booked for trust staff cost £15,000.

He criticised the NEU executive who "sit in offices" and "sadly have made a call that does not reflect the people working in schools".

Strikes will 'rob children of special memories'



Photos: Carmen Valino



Kevin Courtney

Sufian Sadiq, the Chiltern Learning Trust's director of teaching school, said while the union had done a "great job to defend and protect the sector", these days "genuinely rob children of special memories: enrichment days, transition days, sports day, trips and performances. Kids shouldn't suffer. Please reconsider!"

Other leaders hit out at how the split day strikes will continue to impact attendance.

Matt Taylor, an assistant principal in Manchester, tweeted: "It's so unfair on attendance teams. My team has worked tremendously hard this year, we are currently running at a 0.5 per cent improvement on last year. I'm convinced it would be more without the strike days."

But Kevin Courtney, the

NEU's joint general secretary, said: "No teacher wants to be taking strike action. The education secretary has it within her grasp to have the strikes halted."

He urged Gillian Keegan to "acknowledge the seriousness of the problem and start negotiating with the education unions to resolve the dispute on a fully funded pay increase for the teaching profession".

Meanwhile, Ofsted confirmed that it won't inspect on strike days. Instead it will notify schools on Friday, June 30 for inspections taking place on Monday, July 3 and Tuesday, July 4.

It said any deferral requests made as a result of strike action would be considered on a -case-by-case basis.

'Extraordinary brewing crisis'

Unions held a joint lobby of Parliament in Westminster on Tuesday.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the leaders' union ASCL, said Keegan was facing an "extraordinary brewing crisis" in education and that "attitudes are going to harden" the longer the dispute was unresolved.

"We are here because education matters, because we want to save our schools and because we are hurtling towards an autumn term where there is going to be unrest in our classrooms ..."



Geoff Barton

NEWS

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Spielman's EBacc inspection claims don't stand up

AMY WALKER
@AMYRWALKER

EXCLUSIVE

Ofsted's chief inspector has said it does "not translate" the government's EBacc ambition "into an expectation for schools", despite critiquing low take-up of the qualifications in inspection reports.

Speaking to the House of Lords education for 11 to 16-year-olds committee on Thursday, Amanda Spielman said Ofsted did not judge schools on the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) in line with the government's aims "because it is not a value-added measure".

The government wants 90 per cent of pupils entering the full suite of qualifications – English, maths, science, history or geography and a language – by 2025.

"There's no basis on which we could link a national ambition of 90 per cent to an appropriate aspiration for an individual school," Spielman said.

"So to the extent it comes up, it's in the context of a school offering a broad and balanced curriculum to all pupils aged 16. Not as a thing in itself."

But examples of reports seem to contradict this. In an inspection for King James's School in North



Yorkshire in January, inspectors said: "Leaders... offer a broad range of curriculum subjects. The breadth of the offer means the number of pupils following the English Baccalaureate sometimes falls below national expectations."

Meanwhile, the proportion of pupils at Avon Valley School in Warwickshire who choose EBacc subjects was "much lower than the government's ambition", a March inspection said.

In a report for Debenham High School in Suffolk, which also took place in March, inspectors noted that "the take-up of the English Baccalaureate is low. This is because only a third of pupils choose to study a language at GCSE".

The inspection framework states that the government's EBacc ambition is "not a target for any individual school."

"Inspectors will not make a judgment about the

quality of education based solely or primarily on the school's progress towards the EBacc ambition."

But it adds that EBacc take-up is an "important factor" in understanding a school's ambition for pupils.

Inspectors "should take those preparations into consideration when evaluating the intent of the school's curriculum".

Ofsted has been contacted to clarify the meaning behind Spielman's comments.

During the hearing, Spielman also countered criticisms that the EBacc had led to a decline in pupils studying technology, instead suggesting one issue was the amount of choice pupils had at GCSEs.

"I'm concerned that not enough children are choosing the path that would appear to put them on the best track for technological education," she said. "Almost every child in this country is able to select themselves out of many GCSE subjects or many other curriculum subjects at age 13 or 14.

"If we want more children taking technology subjects throughout the system, then probably removing some of that flexibility of freedom of choice...is the only sensible way of achieving that."

JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS

'None of our pupils identifies as a cat – or any other animal'

A school at the centre of a gender row now under government investigation has said none of its pupils "identify as a cat or any other animal".

Dame Kate Dethridge, the regional director for the south east, has been sent into Rye College in East Sussex after an audio recording went viral of a teacher calling a pupil "despicable" during an argument over identity.

It has been reported the dispute erupted after the child rejected a year 8 classmate's request to be identified as a cat, but this is not clear from the recording.

In a statement to *Schools Week*, the trust said it wanted to "clarify that no children at Rye College identifies as a cat or any other animal".

During the recording of the argument, the teacher can be heard saying "gender is not linked to the parts you were born with – [it's] about how you identify".

They added "if you're talking about the fact

that cisgender is the norm, that you identify with the sexual organ you are born with... that's basically what you're saying, which is really despicable".

The member of staff tells the pupil "if you don't like it you need to go to a different school", before the child says "how can you identify as a cat when you're a girl?" at the end of the row.

Bosses from the Aquinas Church of England Trust, which runs Rye College, met with Dethridge on Thursday.

"We have now met with the DfE to share an update on the events which took place before, during and after the recording," a spokesperson said.

"This meeting was a positive step and we will continue working closely with them to ensure any appropriate action is taken."

The Department for Education long-awaited guidance on gender identity in schools was due

this week, but may not be released yet.

The Rye College spokesperson welcomed the upcoming advice and said she hoped it would help "all teachers and schools" address the topic in the classroom.

"This will be particularly useful in developing future training to ensure staff feel confident, well-equipped and well-prepared to address these issues."

The Sun reported on Sunday the guidance will say schools will be banned from allowing youngsters to change their gender without their parents' consent.

Commenting on the Rye College incident, a DfE spokesperson said the government has been "clear teachers should not teach contested views as fact".

"It's important that parents and carers are reassured their children aren't being influenced by the personal views of those teaching them."

15

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FEATURE: AI

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AI: a hindrance or help in the classroom?

AMY WALKER
@AMYRWALKER

As the government consults on how schools can “get the best” out of artificial intelligence, Amy Walker delves into why the revolution hasn’t taken off in classrooms ... just yet

Harris Federation, one of the country’s largest academy trusts, is training staff in how to use large language models, including ChatGPT and Bing Chat.

“We’re telling staff members how to use it to inspire them,” said Jonathan O’Donnell, the trust’s lead IT consultant. “It’s up to them to implement it within their curriculums and practices.

“We’re looking at ways in which we can support staff with their workloads so they can really concentrate on teaching and learning.”

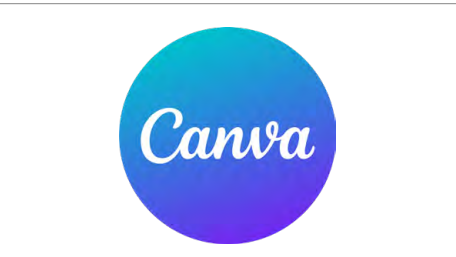
A government report in March shows nearly one in five teachers work at least 60 hours a week – and most spend less than half of that teaching.

One of the ways Harris staff are using ChatGPT is to rewrite text for pupils to make it more accessible for different age groups.

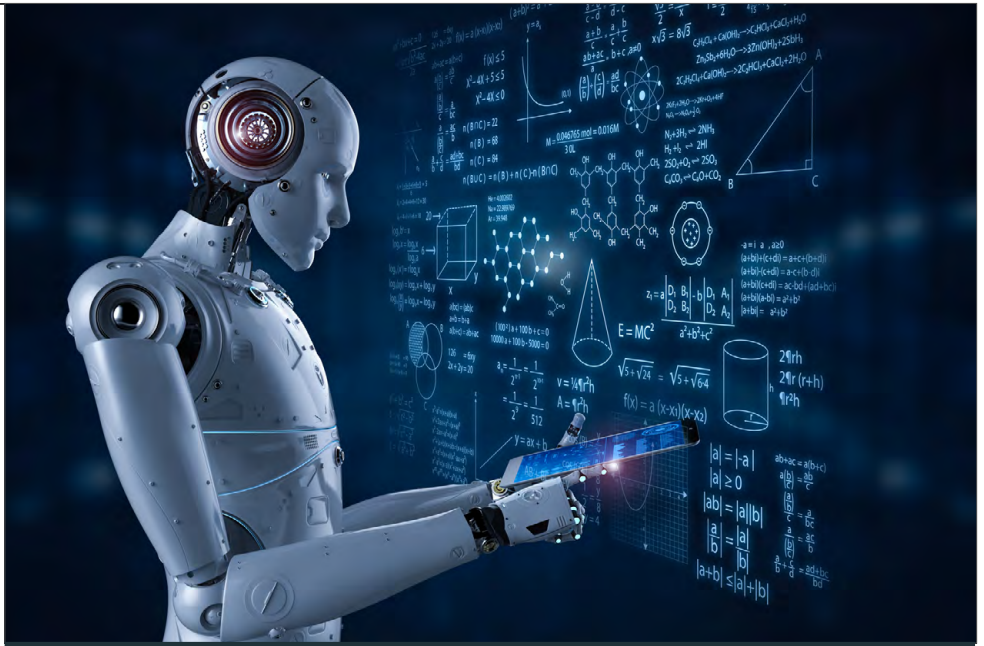
Microsoft Live is also being used to translate classes for pupils with English as an additional language, including Ukrainian pupils.

Teachers speak into a microphone and pupils can pick up subtitles in their chosen language on their devices.

The picture is similar at Academies Enterprise Trust (AET), another of England’s largest trusts, which says it has been exploring AI use “for some time”.



It will provide schools with access to generative AI options in tools such as , which allows users to generate presentations from text prompts “in seconds”, and Google Classroom, which uses AI to provide pupils with real-time



‘If teachers can’t harmonise with AI, they’ll fall behind’

feedback.

In March, Joel Kenyon, a science teacher at Dormers Wells High School in Liverpool, told the Commons science and technology committee that he uses ChatGPT to produce good and bad examples of answers.

He also creates specific tasks with AI while lesson planning. “If you wanted to generate five key stage 3 questions on atoms, you could do that really quickly,” Kenyon told Schools Week. The process has shaved “hours” of his workload.

Real Fast Reports, which describes itself as the leading AI school report writer, boasts 1,500 teachers in England among its users.

About 50 schools have signed up for its school package trial this term, the company says.

Most teachers still haven’t used AI

While some schools are ploughing ahead with AI advances, figures collected by Teacher Tapp on behalf of education publisher Oriel Square, show just 17 per cent of teachers in April had used AI tools to help with school work.

Another 62 per cent had never used the technology.

Separate data collected from 500 secondary

teachers by RM Technology, suggests that for most of the sector, it is a hindrance rather than a help.

More than half (56 per cent) told RM that they felt education professionals needed proper training, with nearly a quarter believing it added additional pressure on teachers because of its use by pupils. One private school said it was likely to scrap homework essays because of the potential for cheating.

But over a third of respondents felt the sector was not moving fast enough to adapt to it.

Lucas Moffitt, a former design and technology teacher, has recently set up “pedagogy infused” AI platform Teachology. It aims to help teachers build lesson plans that can pull in educational videos and scientific journals from the web.

“If I could do that when I was teaching, I’d probably still be a teacher,” says Moffitt, who estimates the technology could save teachers “between four and eight hours” a week.

But the UK is currently its “slowest market”, with 1,300 current users. “If teachers aren’t able to find a way to harmonise with AI and include the benefits of what they’re doing, they’re absolutely going to fall behind.”

FEATURE: AI

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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It's not just about reducing workload

AI is also being used to enhance lessons too.

Nino Trentinella, the head of art and photography at Sutton Grammar School in Surrey, won the Pearson National Teaching Award for digital innovator of the year this week.

It came in part for her integration of AI into the curriculum, including to help children learn art history by using platforms such as Scribble Diffusion and NightCafe Creator to create artwork in the style of famous artists, or to brainstorm ideas for physical artwork by generating AI paintings first.

"I think it has a lot of potential, and we don't even know what most of that potential is. But I think by the time they have finished school, this will have evolved millions of times. They really need to be ready and already thinking about how to use it," Trentinella said.

Harris's O'Donnell has also used it to create songs and poems about "less captivating" topics.

"It's inspiring pupils to explore topics...that might have been a bit dry before."

What might the future hold?

John Roberts, Oak National Academy's director of product and engineering, thinks the adoption of AI will grow with more specialist applications.

"We'll definitely start to see that embedded for solutions and products that support workflow, for example."

When Oak starts publishing its new teaching resources on an open government licence this autumn, edtech and publishing companies using AI models will be able to adapt and reduce any free.

The government's flagship national teacher training initiative, the National Institute of Teaching (NIoT) is trying to work out how it could use the technology within professional development.

Callum Davey, its executive director research and best practice, says it is considering the use of AI to listen to trainee teachers' presentations to check whether language and tone is "appropriate" for age groups.

What should we be worried about?

But Daisy Christodoulou, the director of education at assessment firm No More Marking, warns that conversations with heads



'We've gone from huge optimism to relative scepticism'

and teachers makes her "worried that there's quite a lot of misconceptions" about how large language models work.

In particular, the extent to which it is capable of making mistakes, which Christodoulou calls its frequent "hallucinations".

A recent experience with ChatGPT, used to build No More Marking's AI feedback site, has led it from a "position of huge optimism to relative scepticism".

The site was intended to provide marking and leave feedback for in-year assessment, but made "big mistakes" and was "inconsistent" in results.

"We've been really clear with users that we don't think it's fit for purpose in terms of assigning a grade," she says.

"With anything it does produce, you have to spend a lot of time scrutinising it."

Roberts warns that given potential inaccuracies in the content produced, there are "obviously risks associated" where it is used in a class taught by a non-specialist.

"We want to make sure that highly-trained, specialist teachers are able to make sure the output is accurate," he says.

However, Morgan Dee, director of AI and data science at EDUCATE Ventures, says that potential inaccuracies and biases within AI-generated content are already in other information tools.

"When you use the internet or you're reading a newspaper article, you should be thinking about all these things as well."

Concerns have been raised about sharing personal information of pupils with such technology, including by the Information Commissioner's Office, given unclear guarantees from tech companies about how information is protected.

OpenAI, which developed ChatGPT, Google and Microsoft, which runs Bing Chat, were contacted for comment.

Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, said in March that teachers' day-to-day work could be "transformed" by AI, but it's not yet at the standard needed.

Launching a call for evidence last week, she said responses would help the Department for Education "make the right decisions to get the best out of generative AI in a safe and secure way".

The DfE has previously advised schools they "may wish" to review homework policies and that sensitive data should not be entered into AI tools.



John Roberts



Daisy Christodoulou

Honoured teacher found guilty of misconduct over 'improper' bonuses

SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER

@SCHOOLSWEEK

A maths teacher awarded an OBE last year for fundraising during Covid has been found guilty of misconduct over “improper” bonuses of almost £180,000.

But Dr Richard Evans has avoided a ban from the profession, with the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA) citing a “considerable delay” in the ruling, which relates to allegations more than 15 years ago.

The then deputy head of Copland Community School in Wembley, west London, Evans was suspended and sacked in 2009. He was one of four ex-staffers, including headteacher Alan Davies, and two governors, accused of defrauding the school to the tune of £2.7 million in bonuses.

Five of the so-called “Copland Six” were acquitted of conspiracy to defraud in 2013. Davies pleaded guilty to six counts of false accounting.

But in 2018, the High Court ruled that four, including Evans, had knowingly taken unlawful, unjustified overpayments.

Evans received £600,000 in salary increases and one-off payments in the period.

A TRA hearing, published on Tuesday, found the payments amounted to “unacceptable professional conduct”. His actions were also deemed “unconscionable and lacked integrity”.

The TRA said 10 payments totalling at least £179,000 were “an improper use of school funds” and non-compliant with the ‘school teachers’ pay and conditions document’.

After a hearing in May, the panel was “satisfied” that Evans’ conduct “did amount to misconduct of a serious nature which fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession”.

Evans, a former education adviser to David Cameron, was a “senior and experienced practitioner” and “role model”.

The “average member of the public would be shocked and troubled by the nature and extent of the payments”.

“Dr Evans must have been aware of the risk that every one of these payments, from public funds designated for the school, which was located in an area of socio-economic



Dr Richard Evans

deprivation, could not be justified.”

The panel was also critical that he was “still of a mindset ... that his actions were defensible”.

But the panel noted Evans had “demonstrated exceptionally high standards in both personal and professional conduct both prior to and since these events”. He continued to work in education.

The panel admitted the proceedings “have been ongoing for an extremely long time”. The risk this posed to his teaching career “will have weighed heavily upon him”.

The “considerable delay” was due to other proceedings. However, the TRA did not respond to a request for comment about why it took five years since the High Court ruling to deliver its verdict.

A Schools Week investigation in 2021 revealed the regulator missed its internal targets for completing cases involving hearings within a year. It took 66 weeks in 2020-21, but this ballooned to 85 weeks last year.

This was blamed on a Covid-induced backlog, postponed hearings and misconduct panellist capacity.

The panel in the Evans case also said the “entire ethos” of Copland relating to bonuses “went badly awry and Dr Evans was one of a number of people who got caught up in all that went on”. The chance of repetition was “extremely low”.

Alan Meyrick, ruling on behalf of the education secretary, agreed with the panel, saying

publication of the findings “would be sufficient to send an appropriate message to the teacher as to the standards of behaviour that were not acceptable”.

Evans received an OBE for services to charitable fundraising during Covid. He ran the London Marathon for charity after surviving a heart attack. He was treated at the Royal Free Hospital, to which he had delivered food parcels for frontline staff just days before.

He laid the blame for the heart attack at the door of his ex-employer, the London borough of Brent, over it pursuing the fraud case.

Evans maintained he had no idea he was being overpaid. He believed the payments had been approved by the local authority.

The High Court judge had accepted Evans probably had not thought the payments were unlawful. But the judge found the payments to be “unconscionable” and said a “reasonable person” in Evans’s position would have questioned them.

Guidance states honours can be “forfeited” for reasons that include “behaviour which results in censure by a regulatory or a professional body, or any other behaviour that is deemed to bring the honours system into disrepute”. This can be based on events that pre-date awards.

A Cabinet Office spokesperson said it would be “inappropriate to comment” on individual cases.

Evans said “the money I received was honestly earned for work fully done. It was properly paid as salary by my local authority/employer and correctly declared to HMRC”.

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

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Headteachers turn their back on NTP

SAMANTHA BOOTH
@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

The government’s flagship catch-up programme has failed to create a “sustainable” tutoring market – despite promises from ministers to make such support a “permanent feature” of education.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), which surveyed more than 400 school leaders in March, said the leaders had “significant concerns” about sourcing suitable tutors.

It indicated the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) “has not yet facilitated the creation of a sustainable tutoring market” as intended when it launched during the pandemic.

This would “likely hinder schools’ ability to use tutoring as a tool” for supporting poorer pupils in the long term, the NFER report published on Wednesday said.

This is despite the NTP entering its fourth and final year from September. Ministers pledged in the 2022 schools white paper to make tutoring a “permanent feature”.

The NFER, which also runs the government-funded NTP evaluations, found only 36 per cent of senior leaders using the programme were “confident” they would be able to continue finding tutors.

It was also one of the top five reasons why schools stopped using the programme, with heads’ funding concerns also having a “substantial impact” on sustainability.

The foundation recommends more research to understand “regional preparedness and functioning” of local tutoring markets to help target support and include tutors as part of the wider school workforce strategy.

Funding and admin prompting drop-outs

Funding was the “main reason” schools stopped the programme, researchers found.

More than half of leaders (55 per cent) said the reduced government subsidy was why they dropped out.

Annual funding arrangements making it difficult to forward plan and the administrative burden required to access funding were also listed as “significant deterrents”.

However, this may have changed. Since the survey, the government has increased next year’s subsidy from 25 per cent to 50 per cent.



But only 46 per cent agreed tutoring would be their top priority for supporting poorer pupils if more funding was available.

Opinions were split on its cost-effectiveness in improving attainment for disadvantaged pupils – with 42 per cent saying it was, while 45 per cent said it was not.

The NFER recommended exploring how additional financial support could be given to schools over a longer period.

Doubt on tutoring longevity

Three quarters of respondents said the NTP was improving the attainment of their poorer pupils, but more than half (58 per cent) did not think tutoring was a long-term solution to closing the attainment gap.

Nearly half said their school only offered tutoring during normal lesson times. Pupils therefore missed lessons and the benefits were “potentially reduced”.

The NFER’s other recommendations include reducing the administrative requirements and providing more notice for schools on funding.

Dr Ben Styles, the foundation’s head of classroom practice and workforce, said tutoring was “not yet embedded in schools. Long-term financial support is needed alongside reductions to the administrative burden on staff.

“Overcoming these barriers is vital if tutoring is to win the hearts and minds of schools and be seen as a sustainable way of helping to close the attainment disadvantage gap.”

Schools Week revealed how the government has quietly abandoned hope of reaching its target of six million course starts under the programme. Latest official figures show just 3.4 million starts as of January.

A DfE spokesperson said the NTP was “helping those pupils most in need of support”. The subsidy increase followed “feedback from schools”.

TOP 5 REASONS FOR DROPPING OUT OF THE NTP

The reduced subsidy (55%)

Annual funding arrangements for the NTP made it difficult to forward plan (35%)

Difficulties sourcing suitable tutors (28%)

Administrative burden required to access the funding was too high (27%)

Reporting requirements for the funding were too burdensome (23%)

NEWS IN BRIEF

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Oak has £7m for curriculum partners in eight more subjects



Oak National Academy is inviting organisations to bid for a share of £7 million to create free curriculum materials for eight more subjects.

The quango is looking for suppliers in modern foreign languages (covering French, Spanish and German), computing, religious education, RSHE, physical education, citizenship, art and design and finally, design and technology.

They all cover primary and secondary, with the exception of citizenship which is secondary only. Resources should be available from autumn 2024.

Curriculum partners will once again be sought for primary music and secondary geography, after no supplier met the quality standards in Oak’s first procurement round.

Winners of that £8.2 million round, covering six subjects, were announced in March.

Market engagement webinars for the second

round will take place next month, ahead of a formal procurement in the autumn. Oak will also be looking for expert group members later this year.

Oak has also appointed seven subject leads to oversee the work with the new partners:

Art and design: Emily Gopaul, art teacher and author of *Teaching Primary Art and Design*

RSHE and citizenship: Geoff Wells, assistant headteacher at Mossley Hollins High School, Manchester

Computing: Stuart Davison, trust lead practitioner of computing at Midland Academies Trust

MFL: Alice Harrison, languages teacher and chair of The National Association of Language Advisers

PE: Hannah Packer, associate assistant principal and head of PE at Fallibroome Academy, Macclesfield

RE: Adam Robertson, former primary teacher and current adviser for school consultants RE Today

Design and technology: Sam Booth, curriculum leader for design, technology and engineering at Bradfield Secondary School, Sheffield

[Full story here](#)

Government waits for survey replies on ‘crumbly’ building material



Baroness Barran

More than 10 per cent of trusts and councils still haven’t responded to a vital government survey on “crumbly” reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC).

Officials have been asking responsible bodies to complete questionnaires on the presence of the potentially dangerous material on their sites since last March.

But speaking in the House of Lords on Tuesday, Baroness Barran, the academies minister, said: “Nearly 90 per cent of schools and responsible bodies have sent in their initial responses [to our questionnaire] and we are working closely with structural engineering sector to identify accurately both if the RAAC is present and if it poses a risk.

“We’re now running a small call centre within the department and there are, including sadly some local authorities, organisations we’ve had to contact multiple times. We’re working with MPs and others to make sure we get all the returns.”

Barran added that she was “very confident we will have carried out at least 600 surveys by the autumn”.

This comes amid fears from the Office for Government Property that the “crumbly” material, used widely in flat-roofed school buildings, is “liable to collapse”.

Last week, six schools – spread across Kent, the north east and Essex – were temporarily closed following discovery of RAAC on their sites.

[Full story here](#)

Free eye tests to come in all special schools

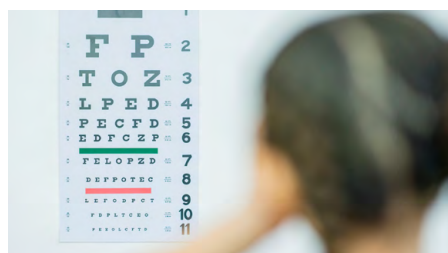
Free NHS eye tests will be available to all special schools from April next year in a £10 million government scheme.

The NHS’s Long Term Plan committed in 2019 to sight tests in all special residential schools. Following a trial, it will now be rolled out nationally to about 165,000 more children in all special schools from April.

Charity SeeAbility says children with learning disabilities are 28 times more likely to have a serious sight problem.

While free NHS sight tests are available for all children, some face particular challenges in accessing high street testing services.

Testing in school allows children to receive “personalised advice on optimising the environment for learning,” said Neil O’Brien,



the health minister.

If a child needed glasses, an optical voucher would be provided to help with the cost of glasses.

Earlier this year, the Clinical Council for Eye Health Commissioning wrote to the NHS urging it to commission a school eye care service, bemoaning a “lack of progress” on the scheme.

[Full story here](#)

BIRTHDAY HONOURS

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King salutes educators in Birthday Honours

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@FCDWHITTAKER

Academy trust chief executives, headteachers and governors have been recognised in the King's Birthday Honours.

The headteacher of a Ukrainian Saturday school in London that has supported hundreds of refugees since Russia's invasion is among those to be recognised in the first honours list announced by King Charles.

Forty-eight people with links to England's school system have been recognised for their services to education, including five CBEs, 13 OBEs, 26 MBEs and four BEMs.

Receiving the CBE are Mark Ducker, the former boss of the STEP Academy Trust, Judith



Mark Ducker

Ragan, the former head of Queensmill School in Hammersmith west London, and Nigel Genders, the chief education officer at the Church of England.

Simon Lebus, who served as interim chief regulator at Ofqual in 2021, will also receive the honour, as will Mary Ryan, the founder of Cyber Girls First.

Ducker said he had been "enormously grateful to receive such a prestigious honour".

"Throughout my career I have been fortunate to work with some truly amazing colleagues, all sharing an unswerving determination to make a positive difference, regardless of challenge and context. To all of them – hopefully, they know who they are – thank you."



Jude Ragan

'Honoured and delighted'

Genders said he was "honoured and delighted" to receive the award which was "a tribute to all the incredible people I have been blessed to work alongside: educators and leaders around the country and my amazing team".

Ragan, who received the OBE in 2010 and now serves as a trustee of The Queensmill Trust, was nominated for services to children with special educational needs.

This year, there are 14 honours for trust chief executives and executive heads, seven for headteachers, two for deputies or assistant heads, one for a teacher, two for civil servants, seven for governors and trustees and 15 for



Nigel Genders

those in the third and charity sectors.

Among the executive leaders recognised are Simon Flowers, the executive principal of Carr Manor Community School in Leeds, Tina Harvey, the executive head of Perseid School in Merton, south London, and Stephen Hughes, the chief executive of the Education Impact Academy Trust in Birmingham.

They all receive the OBE.

Flowers said the award was "recognition of our commitment to providing opportunities for all".

'Incredibly lucky to work with fabulous people'

John Camp, the chief executive of the Compass Partnership of Schools in south London and Essex, and incoming president of the school leaders' union ASCL, will also receive the OBE.

He said he was "incredibly lucky to work with a fabulous team of people...who make my work so rewarding. They are simply superb and it is because of them and their tireless dedication to children that I have received this honour.

"I dedicate this honour to my mum. She passed



John Camp

BIRTHDAY HONOURS

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away this year and I know she would have been very proud."

Also receiving the OBE is Graham Quinn, the chief executive of New Bridge Multi-Academy Trust and the Schools, Students and Teachers network's national SEND ambassador.

He said it had "been my absolute privilege to serve our communities in the north west and across the country".

"This award is dedicated to the amazing colleagues, governors and trustees I have worked with throughout my career.

"I'd also like to thank the most incredible children and young people who have made coming to work every day a real joy. They are the ones equally deserving of this accolade."

Headteachers and trust directors honoured

Seven headteachers have been recognised, including Gillian Carver of St Ann's School in Hanwell, west London, Caroline Evans of Parks Primary in Leicester and Lynne Haines of Greenvale School in Lewisham, south London.

They all receive the MBE, with Kathryn Harper-Quinn, the head of Hounslow Heath Infant and Nursery School, west London, Mary Harrison of St Francis Primary in Morley, Leeds, and Rizwana Mahmood-Ahmed, from Carlton Junior and Infants School in Dewsbury.



Graham Quinn

Georgina Masters, the assistant director of HISP Multi-Academy Trust in Hampshire, will receive the OBE.

She said she was "humbled, proud and incredibly grateful... Throughout my career I have been blessed to work with many phenomenal leaders, all striving to improve educational outcomes for young children.

"This would not be possible without the team around them and to anyone who works tirelessly to make a difference to young children's lives, then this award is also for you."

Alan Meyrick, the deputy director of the Teaching Regulation Agency, also receives the OBE.



Rizwana Mahmood-Ahmed



Georgina Masters

'We have become a sanctuary for children from the war'

Inna Hryhorovych, the head of St Mary's Ukrainian School in London will also receive the MBE for "services to education and to the Ukrainian community in the UK".

Hryhorovych moved to the UK 13 years ago after working as a university lecturer at Chernivtsi University in western Ukraine.

She was supported by "great people, true role models" as she retrained to teach in England, and admits her "resilience has been tested quite a few times but it was worth it".

"Sometimes, it feels as if life was preparing me to be able to withstand the last 15 months."

St Mary's is a Saturday school that provides extra tuition for Ukrainian children. It raises funds to provide places for those whose families cannot afford to pay.

Since Russia's invasion, she says the school has "gradually mastered a new role of becoming a sanctuary for children who have been saved from the war, but are still far from feeling



Inna Hryhorovych

secure in a big world".

"[They are] far from their home, friends, favourite toys, photo memories on the walls, members of their family. Confusion, despair and tiny spark of fading hope in the eyes of those children fill me and my team with a strive to act,

to help, to return them their childhood back."

She said her MBE was a "huge honour" and "really unexpected recognition which squeezed my heart when I opened the envelope".

"Fifteen months of my life have gone in front of my eyes in a moment and a feeling of warmth cuddled me. Are we really making a difference? Is it noticeable? Every morning in the last 15 months, I would wake up with a feeling I have not done enough, that there are more children to help, that better impact can be made.

"This profession has stolen my heart many years ago and I cannot express how grateful I am for this honourable recognition from the country that has become my second home and today, kindly homes 170,000 other Ukrainians."

You can download our PDF list of all the winners linked to England's schools [here](#).



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Feature

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL



Who's supporting our school leaders?

Headteachers say their job is getting harder, leaving them 'exhausted trying to keep all the plates spinning'. Jessica Hill investigates what support is available to stop them reaching crisis point

Executive head Sara-Jane Baker has had a rough week. After a gruelling three-hour child protection review the day before we speak, she was straight into other meetings while also dealing with parent complaints and providing emotional support to her staff, without getting a chance to catch her breath.

The myriad of responsibilities in leading a federation of three small schools sometimes makes her feel overwhelmed. She has considered quitting.

But in those dark moments, it's the reassurance and advice she receives from her mentor David

Barnett that keep her going. Former head Barnett is lead partner of aHead, a peer support programme run by Devon Schools Leadership Services (DSLS), one of several newish support charities for distressed heads that is seeing growing demand.

Just over half of Devon heads took up the support offer when the charity was set up in 2020. Last year it was just over three-quarters.

Recruitment and retention difficulties, Ofsted pressures, and the dismantling of other public services is leaving heads, as Baker puts it, "exhausted trying to keep all the plates spinning".

"We are so busy looking after everybody else – but we need looking after too."

Talking heads

Barnett leads a team of 10 retired or serving experienced heads who each support around 40 school leaders across Devon. The service is funded via a top slice from the local authority which schools vote on each year, although dwindling budgets mean its future is uncertain.

In other areas, where such support existed before, it was mostly disbanded with the advent of the national

Feature: Heads support

funding formula in 2018. But DSLs's operations manager, Clare Coates, believes their model is "eminently workable" elsewhere.

The scheme's success is put down to the fact it is head-on-head support. "With the greatest respect, a local authority [support] team ... don't know what it's like doing the day job," says Coates.

Support ranges from one-to-one sessions in which heads offload their troubles or get practical advice, to group CPD sessions based on the challenges their mentees are most frequently encountering. One recent session was on dealing with parental complaints.

Mentor Melanie Smallwood blames this on schools being "one of few [public services] left you can come in and speak to somebody". Baker said a recent session on managing workload helped alleviate the guilt she feels when she chooses not to work at weekends.

'It's like admitting I'm vulnerable'

Heads say a key benefit is that the support is confidential. Devon has more than its share of small schools, and Barnett believes leading them is particularly isolating and demanding.

But even heads in large MATs "often don't feel they can talk to their line manager because it's almost admitting, 'I don't know what I'm doing, I'm vulnerable.'"

Dan Polak has been supported by the service since he moved from the deputy to head position at Pilton Bluecoat Academy, part of TEAM MAT, in 2020. When Polak, who recently became the trust's director of education, was first offered the support, he "questioned the need" for it as TEAM is "incredibly supportive" on wellbeing matters.

But he discovered it provides a "different dimension" of support because of its anonymity.

"When you start out as a trust head it doesn't matter how supportive people are, you're conscious of the implications of saying 'I'm not confident in that area'".

Polak compares new headship with becoming a parent: "disorientating in a way you can't anticipate".

"You have all these hopes and dreams, then the



Left to right is Melanie Smallwood, Clare Coates, and David Barnett of Devon Schools Leadership Services

'We are so busy looking after everybody else, but we need looking after too'

reality is different. I noticed how much less secure I was in my decision making because I now held the ultimate accountability."

Polak was proud of a feedback policy he championed as a deputy to cut workload, but when "the buck stopped" with him, he started questioning its effectiveness.

"The [DSLS] service gave me that forum where I could openly wonder about things that I previously thought I was sure about."

'That's my mental health man!'

Baker started working with Barnett as assistant executive head, and doesn't think she would have stepped up as acting head when the opportunity arose if it had not been for his encouragement.

She recalls being in "floods of tears" within ten minutes of their Zoom call.

They talked online for another 12 months before she first met him, accidentally, at a conference.

"I saw him across the room and thought, that's my mental health man! The person I bear my inner soul to on a screen for an hour in half term. It was a bit surreal."

Barnett emphasises that none of the scheme's partners are trained therapists. DSLS pays for

members to have access to the charity Education Support's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), which provides access to trained counsellors and a confidential 24-hour wellbeing helpline.

Education Support's leaders service, which provides heads with six one-hour sessions of professional supervision, is currently experiencing "very high demand" – with a waiting list of around 12 weeks.

More than 1,000 heads have benefited from the £760,000 government-funded scheme.

After the death of Caversham headteacher Ruth Perry, whose family say she killed herself after her school was downgraded from 'outstanding' to 'inadequate', the government expanded the scheme. Further funding of up to £380,000 will double the number expected to benefit over the next year from 500 to 1,000.

The charity previously only hit around half of its target, though. Faye McGuinness, the programme's director, said low take-up was due to many heads feeling like they "simply don't have the time and capacity to do it". But there was also "almost a feeling of guilt" from heads that they were "spending the time looking after themselves".

But they had 490 sign-ups between January and

Feature: Heads support

May, compared to just 149 during the same period last year.

Workload worries

A recent report from the charity concluded long working hours have become “wholly normalised within schools”. Latest workload figures show senior leaders’ average week dropped from 60.5 hours in 2016, to 55.1 in 2019. But it has crept back up and now stands at 56.8 hours. Two in five leaders work more 60 hours a week.

Governors and trustees have a statutory duty to ensure heads’ wellbeing and oversee their workload.

The National Agreement, Raising Standards and Tackling Workload (2003), struck between government, employers and unions, states that governing bodies should ensure heads have “dedicated time to lead their schools, not just manage them”.

Yet a DSLS survey in December found only 19% of Devon heads were taking any sort of dedicated leadership time.

The National Governance Association’s chief executive Emma Knights says chairs “tell us how worried they are about their heads in their workload pressures”.

The charity last year reported a rise in governing boards monitoring the workload, wellbeing and work life balance of headteachers and MAT chiefs (from 73 per cent in 2021 to 79 per cent last year). It has since produced resources to help chairs better support heads.

Funding demise

Barnett blames rising workloads on the demise of other public services.

Whereas in the past heads could rely on local authority behaviour support teams and educational psychologists, after years of austerity, “schools are the only services left to deal with sometimes very serious issues. Ultimately, everybody’s looking to you to sort it out. One final little thing might just tip someone over the edge.”

One of DSLS’s mentors, Steve



Steve Hitchcock

Hitchcock, recently launched a funding campaign to pay for services that used to be funded by the local authority for his maintained primary, St. Peter’s in Budleigh Salterton.

The crowdfunding campaign requested donations for resources including SEND sponsorship (£2,500) for dyslexia assessment or to see an educational psychologist, and for everyday items like A4 paper.

Hitchcock, who has been a head for 14 years, is in his second year of supporting others and says he finds the process helps him build empathy.

“It makes me reflect on how I do things like

‘You have all these hopes and dreams, then the reality is different’

dealing with parents, governors, or a tricky member of staff, or manage workload. I get such a breadth of views from people telling me ‘things are really awful’ to ‘things are great’ and I can calibrate where I am in between.”

Watchdog pressure

Ofsted pressure is also keeping heads awake at night. Heads Up was started in 2019 by James Pope, a head who handed his resignation on the BBC 2 series School after an ‘inadequate’ Ofsted report.

He wanted to help heads who like him felt “squeezed out by the system”. It has since expanded to establish peer support networks of past and

present school leaders at local authority, regional and trust levels, supporting 3,500 heads in double the number of local authorities (30) than last year.

He says heads are increasingly feeling a “sense of isolation” and a “notion of imposter syndrome”



James Pope



Ros McMullen

because the “feedback loops” they are subject to, including local authority improvement teams as well as Ofsted, are “nearly always negative”.

The free headteacher support helpline Headrest, like DSLS, sprung up in 2020 – initially to help heads “struggling with contradictory Covid guidance and late information”, its co-founder Ros McMullen explains. It soon broadened its scope. It registered a 500 per cent increase in calls in March this year compared to the same month last year.

McMullen says they had a spike in calls after the death of Perry – some of whom had known her personally. Several said “it could have been me. Some were really serious.” They say the toll of an Ofsted inspection was so great that even when the outcome is ‘good’, “they can’t go through that again”.

Baker has undergone four inspections in the last 14 months, including one of her schools being downgraded to ‘requires improvement’.

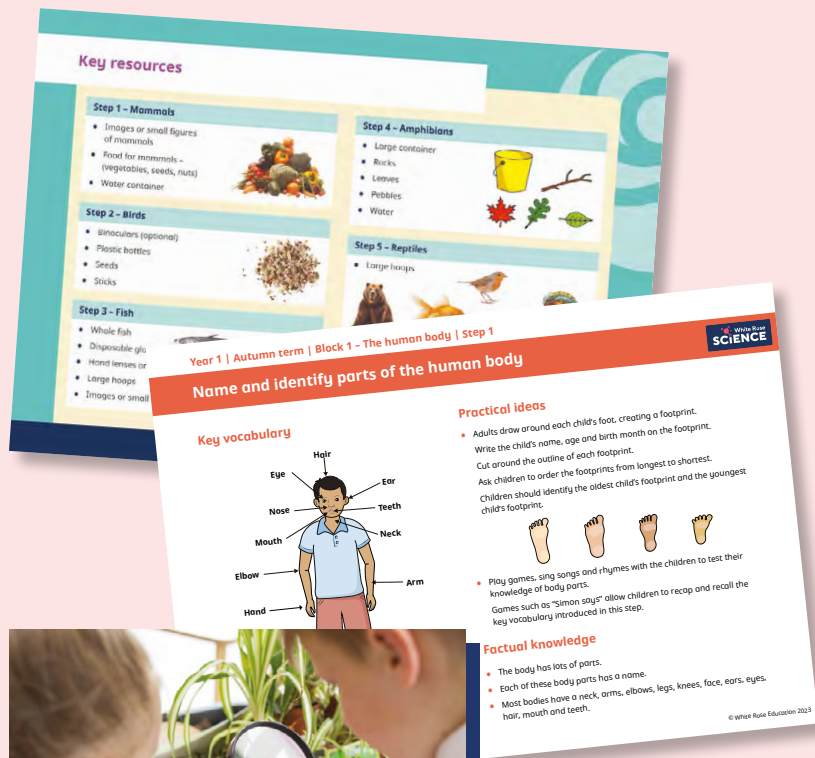
It was “hard not to personalise” the criticism. “You try really hard to think ‘this is a team’, not just me. But it still it knocks you sideways and makes you feel like you’re not good enough.”

Despite the challenges, Baker feels “very lucky” to have a support service available during stressful moments. She worries that other heads facing similar pressures elsewhere don’t have a ‘David’ they can ring up anytime.

“That’s what makes me feel really sad,” she adds.

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Opinion

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DR DOUG LOWES

Former headteacher and former Ofsted inspector

Ofsted's problem is that it isn't 'wicked' enough

No I'm not picking up the baton of hard-nosed leadership Michael Wilshaw just dropped, says Doug Lowes, but Ofsted really is too tame

Ofsted has finally announced its proposals to reform its practices following the outcry after the death of Ruth Perry. Missing from its list of changes is anything to do with summative one-word judgments.

Back in March, even Michael Gove said this should be 'looked at', and less than a week after the announcement, that other Michael from a time gone by, former HMCI Wilshaw, chimed in to echo that call.

Pity Amanda Spielman. Months from stepping down from the role, her legacy is likely to be defined by this event and her inability or unwillingness to countenance this single change may see her remembered by the profession as even more wicked than her notoriously hard-nosed predecessor.

But what if the problem with our inspection system is, in fact, that Ofsted is not wicked enough? Bear with me, this takes some explaining.

By wicked, I don't mean its dictionary definition of 'sinful, ill-tempered or iniquitous'. Nobody

wants an inspectorate that acts like Elphaba, Lord Voldemort, or Aunts Sponge and Spiker. I have a more theoretical definition in mind.

In 1973, Rittel and Webber described as 'wicked issues' those that included a large number of complex variables. These variables are dynamic, context-dependent and interrelated.

They contrasted 'wicked' issues to 'tame' ones – those with relatively simple solutions and low levels of uncertainty. Tame issues behave in a linear fashion – beginning, middle and end – and respond to tried-and-tested solutions (or will, once those have been identified). Wicked ones ... don't.

So, when I say that Ofsted is not wicked enough, what I mean is that its highly structured, standardised inspection framework is not equal to the complexity of the schools it sets out to assess. It is incapable of encapsulating their unique contexts, their dynamic human relationships and the complex web of beliefs and practices they have evolved with their communities over time.

Take the pandemic as an example. During that period, schools did amazing things. Teachers were preparing lessons for children of essential workers to be delivered face-to-face while adapting lessons for remote learners. School workers delivered books,



“ The framework is not equal to the complexity of schools

homework and even school meals to families. Departments re-engineered themselves to create PPE for local hospitals.

Meanwhile, Ofsted effectively went home. Its systems had nothing to contribute and the right decision was taken to just get out of the way. Upon its return, it can be little surprise that so many see in it only the potential encumbrance its tameness represents for the profession's wicked thinkers and doers.

Headteachers, school leaders, teachers, governors and inspectors themselves have known for years that inspecting schools is too complex a process to be reduced to single-word judgements when so much rests on those words.

Schools are complex and dynamic places, teachers teach in a variety of ways and pupils learn in different ways, meaning the learning culture in one school is likely to be different from another. Headteachers often say that preserving their school's uniqueness is an important goal for them.

But Ofsted's one-word judgements

usurp and come to define what schools mean for their communities. This is true whether the result is an 'outstanding' on the letterhead or the word 'inadequate' in the local newspaper.

Instead of informing parents and driving improvement, it acts as a barrier to genuine communication and encourage unhelpful behaviours from complacency to over-activity. The re-inspection of previously exempt 'outstanding' schools proves the first, and the recruitment and retention crisis proves the second.

This is what comes from trying to use a tame inspection framework to assess wicked issues. And the solution is for Ofsted to embrace its true wickedness. That starts with ditching its one-word judgments.

The formulaic, cartoon version of wickedness the inspectorate currently embodies is not helping schools, parents, or children.

If its aim is to raise standards in education – or even just to adequately account for them – it needs to raise the bar for communicating what schools do in its full and glorious complexity.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Nobody wants the cost of uncovering and remediating crumbly building material, says Lucia Glynn, but the cost of not doing so could be far higher

Last week, four schools were told to shut by the Department for Education after Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) was found in their ceilings, evidence of what's been labelled a 'ticking timebomb' for school buildings across the country.

Even without this developing crisis, the safety of schools and the maintenance of an ageing educational estate continue to be major challenges that are rarely out of the spotlight.

In the past few weeks, questions have been raised about when information from the condition survey will finally be released, and we have had the announcement of the latest round of successful projects from the squeezed Condition Improvement Fund (CIF). This sits alongside the ongoing challenge of rising costs for managing repairs.

Funding, as ever, remains one of the largest uncertainties. For many schools, the unknowns relating to RAAC (whether they have it, and what they then may need to do) add a layer of complexity.

We understand that the commission set up by the DfE to help schools with RAAC is currently considering options around how funding for this essential remedial work could be managed.

In the meantime, if you suspect your school (or an extension or alteration) may have been built using RAAC, there are a few initial steps you can take to confirm that.

How to spot RAAC

First, RAAC was typically used from the 1960s to the 1980s, so any buildings constructed outside of



LUCIA GLYNN

Partner (schools and academies), Rider Levett Bucknall

RAAC: How to spot this 'ticking timebomb' and what to do next

this time frame can be discounted. Then, if construction drawings are available, these can be really useful in identifying how the school was built and the materials used. Previous Condition Data Collection (CDC) surveys may also provide information

asbestos, so review the asbestos register or undertake a survey prior to inspection if no information is available.

RAAC is typically found in the form of planks, around 450 to 600mm wide and around 2.4 to 3m long,

“ The unknowns relating to RAAC add a layer of complexity

on whether RAAC is present.

If your building was built within that time frame, the next step is a visual inspection. This may involve high-level access (ladder or scaffolding) and opening-up works to reveal the building structure.

Buildings constructed in the relevant timeframe are also likely to contain

with a chamfered edge detail. The 'concrete' has an aerated, 'bubbly' texture and is softer than typical concrete, which may be able to be indented with a sharp tool such as a screwdriver. Typical defects include mass hairline cracking and deflection of the planks between the structural supports.



If you believe that RAAC is in place, further investigation will be required in the form of sampling for lab analysis and the appointment of a structural engineer. It would also be worthwhile considering putting in place planned preventative maintenance given the susceptibility of the material to water damage.

What next?

The government has just ordered all departments to investigate whether RAAC is an issue in their related estates. Clearly, the magnitude of the problem and the size of the pot required to address it are a pressing issue for ministers, and it is likely that any solution will have repercussions for other funding.

We already know that an estimated £11.4 billion is needed to repair the schools' estate. The work required to address RAAC will only add to that. With a finite amount of money available for investment from the treasury, it will be interesting to see how this is managed and if it leads to a decrease in size of the Condition Improvement Fund going forward.

We've already seen this pot squeezed from an initial £498 million down to £456 million in the past year, with 25 per cent fewer projects being awarded. It seems likely that this could be tightened further.

School budgets themselves are tight, and without local authority support it's likely the process of identifying RAAC will come at a cost. However, it's a really prudent investment that will not only save money in the long term, but could eventually save something far more valuable than that.

Opinion

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PATRICK ROACH

General secretary, NASUWT

Union partnerships are key to a better deal for schools

NASUWT's work with Citizens UK is helping schools to adapt to their communities' needs and providing a model for new ways of unlocking support, explains Patrick Roach

As well as providing professional support for members and representing their interests in negotiations with government over pay and conditions, the NASUWT has long recognised its role in social action to secure improvements for the benefit of our members and the communities they serve.

As our members continue to grapple with helping pupils and their families to recover from the pandemic, and with supporting them through the cost-of-living crisis, we fully recognise that schools are vital community assets. They educate the children who live in the area, of course, but they are also workplaces for many local people and they contribute to a wider common good for the benefit of society generally.

Working with grassroots campaigning organisations, our members are forging powerful alliances within their local communities who are working to deliver a better deal for children, young people and communities, while also enabling us to address

issues of concern to our members.

Following their lead, Citizens UK and the NASUWT formed a strategic partnership last year that cemented collaborative work that had already been ongoing for five years. One of the big successes of this joint approach has been the 'Refugee Welcome Schools' initiative.

This project brought together a joint commitment to playing a part in responding to the global refugee crisis. A key part of the initiative was the development and promotion of a Refugee Welcome Schools accreditation scheme. This aims to recognise schools' commitment and essential role in supporting refugees to integrate into their new communities.

Schools applying for the accreditation develop plans to set out a range of positive actions they will take, including how they intend to create a welcoming environment for refugee families, and an inclusive one for the children of those families.

But accreditation of excellent practice can't be the end game. The programme also aims to share best practice for the benefit of schools who may be welcoming their first refugee pupils or struggling to build their capacity to do so.

That's why the accreditation scheme is supported by a co-



“ Our members are forging powerful alliances

created guide promoting the work teachers are doing and setting out how and where to find support, with links to some key campaigns.

The NASUWT and Citizens UK partnership is also underpinning a national campaign calling for the roll-out of school-based counselling across the UK. The action first began in 2019, when local leaders in Tyne & Wear Citizens, a Citizens UK chapter, saw how young people in their communities were not getting the mental health services they needed.

Local NASUWT activists joined the campaign. Together, with other partners including the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, a pilot project was undertaken at the NEAT academy trust.

As anticipated, the introduction of school-based counselling had hugely positive effects, with evidence of improved pupil outcomes about wellbeing, attainment and personal goal achievement.

Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, all have statutory requirement for, or provision of, school-based counselling.

Last week, Ireland announced a €5 million pilot to trial free counselling in schools. Meanwhile, pupils in England continue to be left without access to a counsellor.

This is an untenable situation. The NASUWT recognises the positive impact the provision of school-based counselling in every primary and secondary school could have on the lives of many children and young people.

Teachers cannot be expected to fill the gaps caused by cuts to mental health and wellbeing provision over the past decade. So, while we campaign together nationally for change, NASUWT and Citizens UK will continue to work together to close the gap on this postcode-lottery – ensuring that every child has access to school-based counselling.

These are just two examples of how trade unions and community organisations can work collaboratively to make positive change happen. Demanding a better deal for our teachers means demanding – and working for – a better deal for their communities too. This is no doubt just the beginning.

Headteachers' Roundtable The Big Five

With both main parties' general election campaigns centred on five key priorities, the Headteachers' Roundtable sets out their own five urgent concerns for education. Read each in turn this half term, and visit them at the Festival of Education to add to the discussion.



KEZIAH FEATHERSTONE

Executive headteacher,
Q3 Academy Tipton

Schools can't continue to be the fourth emergency service

It's not sustainable to keep asking heads to help families in crisis through our fractured welfare system, says Keziah Featherstone

The services required to fully support all children to flourish have been wholly insufficient since Covid and the cost-of-living crisis. But to be frank, they were not even enabling most children to be safe, fed, warm and happy before then. Now, they are woefully over-stretched, disconnected, under-funded, demoralised, and completely overwhelmed.

For the second wealthiest country in Europe, how we look after our most vulnerable children verges on criminal and negligent.

And when the services required to meet the needs of children are shocking, you can absolutely guarantee those in place to support their parents and carers are just as bad, or worse. As a result, families in need have fewer and fewer resources and places of help, exacerbating already appalling situations.

As the need for them has skyrocketed, we have seen these essential services starved of

money, losing staff and struggling to meet their own soaring running costs. We simply must redress the imbalance caused by over a decade of neglect, but also put into place a more carefully considered, localised and contextualised offer that wraps care around children and their families to enable them to thrive.

No one is coordinating any joined-up thinking with regards to what children require.

A child with special educational needs, who may also be on a long waiting list for CAMHs, may also live with a parent whose own mental health has declined, whose family income does not meet the threshold for benefits, but because of the electricity bill cannot afford food, uniform or to fix the washing machine.

The last thing this family needs is to navigate ten or so agencies and professionals at a time: they need one person to help them through. Add in social care, physical health or illness, unemployment, domestic abuse or any other crimes and the number of people supposedly helping this family will double. Everything that's in place to make things better for them makes them far worse.



“ Responsibility is simply assumed to fall on headteachers

We talk about a 'team around the family' or a 'team around the child'. Too often, children and families are not experiencing these as a team but as a confusing array of people with different, sometimes overlapping and often clashing agendas. It can't be beyond our wit to allocate one person the job of identifying the support they need and liaising with professionals to coordinate support and avoid overwhelm.

In many areas, that responsibility is simply assumed to fall on the shoulders of headteachers. In mine, several charities and community champions provide this service.

They're not paid much, or at all, but they all live on the same estates as the children and often went to school with their parents. These are the heroes who are contacting school if something has gone wrong to avoid an angry confrontation at the school gates, who attend GP appointments, help to write a CV or an application form, secure free replacement white goods, offer constant and reliable counselling, or provide transport to school or to the food bank.

What might the work of these volunteers and charity workers be worth if we truly valued their contribution to our economy and to our society now and in the future? As growing poverty increasingly impacts on mental health, attendance, engagement and learning, what might it cost a local authority to properly commission such individuals to do this vital work for our communities and our schools?

The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) reported that there were 4.2 million children living in poverty in 2021-22, around 350,000 more than the previous year.

Of these, some 800,000 are not eligible for free school meals because their household earns over £7,400 a year after tax and not including benefits. For a frightening number of them, hunger, cold and the stress poverty puts on their families is an everyday reality.

If the second wealthiest European nation can't afford to put that right, it can surely ensure the help that does exist isn't making a hard life altogether unbearable for them, or the hard job of leading a school completely unsustainable.

Solutions

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TABATHA SHEEHAN

Head of English and media,
Westonbirt School

Six top tips to diversify your English curriculum

It's not about scrapping Shakespeare but complementing and enriching students' reading, explains Tabatha Sheehan

Educators and pupils are entreating their schools and exam boards for more diversity and inclusivity with regards to whose stories are being told and through which lens they are being viewed.

In a world where books can still be banned, we must instead open our curricula to the wealth of literature beyond the standard, rigid canon.

As a department in a predominantly white, middle-class school in the Cotswolds, we knew we needed to better explore and fully acknowledge the wealth of talent that exists beyond the typical experience of English literature in schools. There can be no place for 'intellectual' prescriptivism or elitism in our subject.

Before anyone shouts that we are 'scrapping Shakespeare' or ignoring our literary heritage, let's be clear: What we are doing is complementing the tried-and-tested writers of old. As we have discovered, there is space for them to co-exist with writers and texts from a more diverse range. This isn't restricted to race. Neurodivergence,

disability, gender identity, sexuality and class all need greater representation.

Here are six actions we took that allowed us to make progress and will benefit pupils in any school.

Research and network

We reached out to other schools in our area to see what they were doing. We went into bookshops and onto websites to explore what stories were on offer.

And we campaigned to our exam board to do more to diversify the exam specifications. We also researched free programmes and became a pioneer school for a programme that has given us access to an excellent range of free books, CPD events, and even a chance to contribute to their research.

Make diversity visible

We created diversity book clubs for pupils and staff and encouraged all members to bring books in to complement those we set. Promoting these with posters also contributed to increasing our visual representation of Britain's diverse range of authors around the school. Everyone in our department promotes these in lessons, communicating our unity of purpose.



“ Improving representation isn't restricted to race

Start early

Working diversity into the younger years is vital. We've worked hard to diversify our key stage 3 curriculum, with units of study in every year group that explore diversity in a range of ways. We work harder still to consider the way we frame and discuss these stories in age-appropriate ways. It simply won't do to read only books where those with protected characteristics are victims, for instance, or from one period in time.

Contextualise the canon

Literature provides space for students to understand the facts of our socio-political history and to engage with stories that explore the emotive and ethical struggles of other times and of our own.

Whether or not your exam board's specs are up to speed with that, wider reading in key stages 4 and 5 can nevertheless enhance students' learning.

For instance, studying 'Othello' at A level alongside restoration playwright Aphra Behn's Oroonoko and Ignatius Sancho's accounts of slavery makes for powerful (and more accurate) analysis.

Rethink your CPD library

We are also integrating many diverse books through our staff diversity policy and training group. This is feeding into our behaviour policy, our curriculum development team's work and our enrichment programme. These books are on display in all our English classrooms and we actively encourage our staff (and pupils) to browse and borrow.

Beyond the curriculum

Most, if not all schools already acknowledge Britain's diversity with assemblies, events and fundraising for a whole calendar of celebrations, from Pride month to Black History Month. Most will engage with parents about what is happening, but it's important to also communicate why.

We are open and frank about this at parents' evenings and other events, and our newsletter always includes 'recommended reads' to bring the vibrancy of our curriculum into our pupil's homes.

Much like an essay answer in an English exam, there is no single, perfect way to diversify your curriculum. There is one sure-fire way to get it wrong though, and that is to not make a start.

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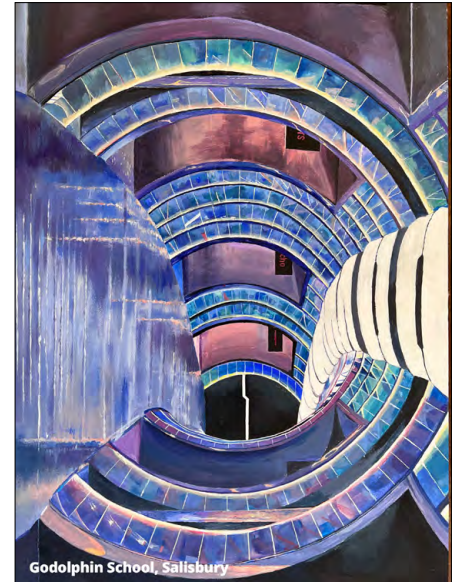
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Godolphin School, Salisbury



Godolphin School, Salisbury



THE REVIEW

BUBBLE SCHOOLS AND THE LONG ROAD FROM LOCKDOWN

Author: Tony Breslin**Publisher:** Routledge**Publication date:** 21 December 2022**ISBN:** 1032069791**Reviewer:** John Cosgrove, former headteacher and author

Calmer corridors in secondary schools, better independent learning skills developed by older primary pupils, greater involvement of many parents in their children's learning ... As Tony Breslin explains in his book on 'the educational legacy of COVID-19', there were real advantages to teaching in "bubbles" during that interim phase between lockdown and schools fully re-opening.

Teachers, parents and pupils really appreciated these aspects of bubbling, though other features were less welcome: pupils' limited opportunities to socialise, many secondary teachers' exile from their specialist class bases, and of course the anxiety and stress caused by bubbles 'bursting' without warning, sending pupils and staff into isolation.

I don't have to explain for *Schools Week* readers how bubbles worked, though Breslin spells it out.

He points out how exhaustingly hard it was for school staff to deliver, quotes a headteacher as saying: "We're all making it up as we go along," and describes how bubbling in some primary schools with large classrooms could be a world away from what was possible in a secondary.

"No two children, families, classes or year groups," Breslin comments more than once, had the same experiences.

Bubble Schools is partly an account of what happened in schools and other educational establishments during 2020-21 seen through the eyes and given in the words of school leaders, governors, teachers, support staff, parents and pupils from different settings. This method captures the variety of experience and allows Breslin to draw broad, relevant conclusions.

A public policy analyst and a National Leader

of Governance, Chair of Bushey Primary Federation and of the Education Committee in Anthem Schools' Trust, Breslin has formerly been a school leader, a local authority school improvement adviser, a GCSE chief examiner at GCSE and A level principal examiner and CEO of the Citizenship Foundation.

For him, the main point of recounting the history, important as this is of itself, is to ask: what are the lessons? What could be the legacy? So every chapter of *Bubble Schools* except the last concludes with a list of very well-informed recommendations.

For example, many will remember the disgraceful episode in December 2020 when some London Boroughs, faced with record numbers of Covid cases, decided to close their schools early for Christmas and the Secretary of State threatened legal action against them.

Breslin recounts the facts in all their unbelievable detail – not improved by the added context of the video, released this week, of a Downing Street party that very night – then goes on to recommend greater local autonomy on decisions about opening and closing schools. Professionals delivering public services should not, he argues, be threatened with legal action by policymakers except in "the most extreme of circumstances".

Bubble Schools is the second in a trilogy. Breslin's much praised *Lessons from Lockdown* told of Covid's effect on schools up to the end of the "eat out to help out" summer of 2020 when the Government, keen to ensure a swift return to 'normality, insisted that schools re-opened as usual in September.

The third instalment, *Reschooling Society After Lockdown* will pick up the story almost where *Bubble Schools* finishes in September

BOOK

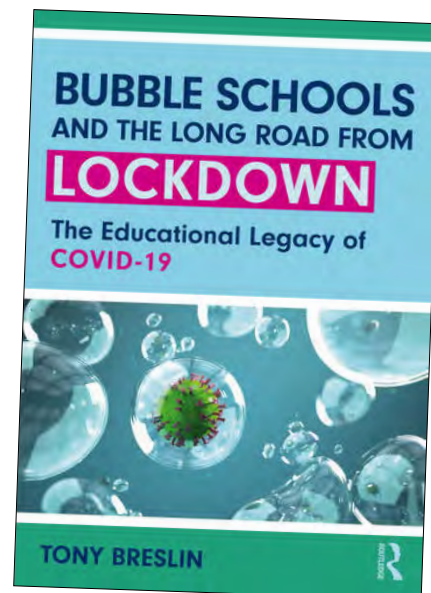
TV

FILM

RADIO

EVENT

RESOURCE



2021: 'almost,' because there is a deliberate overlap.

As this overlap no doubt makes inevitable, Breslin ends up repeating himself regularly for clarity and coherence. This can be irritating, particularly when he quotes from *Lessons From Lockdown* and repeats points made in it. But it does emphasise that all three books have a unity of purpose, and will perhaps serve as some kind of spaced retrieval practice to ensure policy makers retain the important lesson.

Having set himself a mission this broad which he executes in such depth, I can certainly forgive him some repetition. Indeed, it will be welcomed by readers of *Bubble Schools* who haven't read *Lessons from Lockdown*, as will the additional appendix re-stating the recommendations from the earlier book.

This is a very important book. Easy to read and more likely to provide catharsis than to re-traumatise those who kept education going almost in spite of the DfE. It is a valiant effort to secure "a positive legacy from an awful episode".

I can't wait for volume three.



Rating



THE CONVERSATION
LISTENING IN ON
THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM



Fiona Atherton
Headteacher,
Ladypool
Primary School

UNITED IN DISCONTENT

And the summer of discontent in education rolls on. This week started with the announcements from Ofsted of reforms it hoped would alleviate the sector's deep concerns about its practices.

As detailed in *Schools Week*, the amendments include a reduction in time for a return visit if a school is rated inadequate for safeguarding (with an explanation for parents to go alongside that), and a consultation about improving their long-criticised complaints process.

But any hope Ofsted had of an 'as you were' was clearly for the birds. I expect the consultation will result in plenty of evidence that the current model doesn't work.

And the proposal to offer additional support for headteachers around their mental health suggests they either haven't accepted the link between what they do and the profession's collapsing wellbeing, or see remedial action as just a cost of doing business.

In any case, the general feeling among my professional networks is that Ofsted and the DfE's response was far from equal to the intensity of feeling since the death of Ruth Perry and all the tragic stories that have been told since. [This blog by John Cosgrove](#) (Warning: it discusses suicide) describes others who have struggled

under the Ofsted regime and is a powerful reminder of the organisation's sometimes devastating impact.

Time will tell whether these measures will make any real difference, or whether clamour for a new accountability system only grows. Given Amanda Spielman's predecessor, Sir Michael Wilshaw – infamous for saying all-time-low morale is evidence that leaders are 'doing something right' – announced this week that he has changed his mind about single-word judgements, there's certainly hope others might be convinced.

BUT DIVIDED OVER STRIKES

Remaining in the political sphere for a moment, [the NEU's latest announcement about July strike dates](#) has caused controversy. For many this time round, the intended disruption is a step too far, coming to clash with lots of important events planned for the end of term.

There has been a real outpouring of emotion about cancelling or postponing transition activities, sports days, residentials and much more besides. The fact that this comes so soon after so many children missed important milestones because of the pandemic only adds to teachers' concerns – and it isn't without cost implications for already struggling schools.

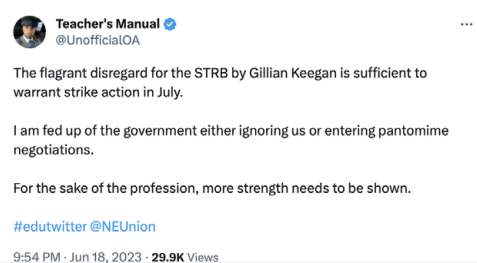


Chris Dyson FCCT
@chrisdysonHT

Now nobody loves the #Neu more than me BUT I am struggling to support the strike on the 7th ... I have a conference booked JUST for the staff @trust_create - TAs, Kitchen, mentors, teachers with a luxury lunch and @TeachLeadAAli @SerdarFerit speaking £15000 in - what do I do?

5:28 PM · Jun 17, 2023 · 84.2K Views

A deliberate act of sabotage, or a necessary action forced by the government? You decide.



Teacher's Manual
@UnofficialOA

The flagrant disregard for the STRB by Gillian Keegan is sufficient to warrant strike action in July.

I am fed up of the government either ignoring us or entering pantomime negotiations.

For the sake of the profession, more strength needs to be shown.

#edutwitter @NEUnion

9:54 PM · Jun 18, 2023 · 29.9K Views

Either way, the profession's resilience and adaptability remain remarkable. Ministers, take note.

AND CONFUSED ABOUT A MORAL PANIC

Finally this week, a [disturbing 'news' report](#) has resurfaced causing many parents to worry about what their children are being taught through the RHSE curriculum. Not the first of its kind, the article includes graphic images and 'shocking' lesson plans selected to create panic and drive maximum traffic to the news story.




Now, I am sure those resources exist, but I have never seen or heard of any school that I, or any of my colleagues, using them. And as educators have made abundantly clear on social media, neither the article nor any of the comments below it provide evidence of even one school where these resources are being used.

That hasn't stopped lots of parent groups commenting on the story, seemingly believing that schools are keeping these materials secret and using them without permission.

This undermines us at a time when we need to be on the best terms with our parents, and it seems a little more than a coincidence that it came just as *The Sun* published leaked content from the government's imminent and long-overdue transgender guidance for schools.

But that's a controversy for next week. You'd be hard-pressed to find positive news stories about education now, and there's no let-up on the horizon. Is it any wonder mental health, recruitment and retention are collapsing when this is our professional conversation?

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts 

The Knowledge

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



Can adventure learning improve student outcomes?

Ben Willis, Senior Research Fellow at Sheffield Hallam University, and Dr Sarah Reaney-Wood, Research Fellow at Sheffield Hallam University

Our new EEF report on the educational impact of adventure learning supports the well-documented positive effects of the great outdoors on children. But more than that, our research shows that experiencing adventure learning has the potential for longer-lasting benefits, inspiring hard-to-reach students to re-engage with school, while giving them skills they can draw on throughout their lives.

We conducted one of the largest ever randomised control trials about adventure learning involving two providers, Commando Joes and Outward Bound Trust. Both took 'disengaged' students from 97 schools and gave them opportunities for adventure learning, either on an outdoor residential trip or in school.

Students were given tasks involving practical problem-solving, teamwork and physical challenges. A third control group received funding for enrichment activities.

The students chosen for the trial had been identified as being disengaged from school in some way. This covered everything from disruptive behaviour to being very shy and lacking in confidence. We found that students from right across this spectrum engaged with the activities on the adventure learning programmes, which included gorge walking, climbing or solving top secret missions.

For many, adventure learning was a chance to reset. It provided a level playing field where students and teachers had new experiences together, reframing and strengthening their relationships. When you're waist-deep in freezing water or hanging off a cliff face, you develop a bond — and we found these bonds continued back at school.

Students were given rare opportunities to achieve success and to be seen by their teachers doing so. They were offered the chance to come out of their shell by taking on roles like leading and coordinating their team to solve missions such as orienteering tasks,



and the experience often changed the way they felt about themselves. The evidence is that building key life skills like teamwork, resilience and self-regulation opened up potential for improved behaviour back in the classroom.

One of the most striking aspects of our research was how adventure learning gave young people a chance to do things they may not otherwise have experienced. Half of the students selected by their schools to take part in our trial received Pupil Premium – a group of children known to often have restricted access to experiences and activities that boost their cultural capital.

Based on our findings, adventure learning has potential to help students that may be struggling with their engagement in mainstream school for any number of reasons. In addition, offering such opportunities through school evidently helps parents struggling to offer these kinds of experiences to their children because of the cost-of-living crisis.

An outdoor education bill is being considered by the Scottish and Welsh governments that would entitle all secondary students to a week-long outdoor learning residential experience. The closest English equivalent is the National Youth Guarantee, but there is scope for legislation in England to match that suggested in Scotland and Wales.

Doing so would not only help to re-engage students with school amid fears about post-Covid behaviour and attendance, but it would offer benefits across wider society, spanning across espoused government commitments to levelling up and student wellbeing.

To get the most from these opportunities and truly embed the gains students make, our findings lead us to recommend that they should be followed up in school, in partnership with providers.

For schools, we recommend they prioritise signposting students to other opportunities such as Cadets, Duke of Edinburgh, volunteering, sports and other school clubs. They could also build on positive staff-student relationships through informal check-ins or more formal mentoring with SMART goals. We have been moved by the testimonies of young people and their teachers throughout this research. We can't make causal claims because of the disruption Covid had on our project. However, there is sufficient evidence from interviews with pupils, teachers, school leaders and providers that adventure learning can help students build character traits like confidence, self-efficacy and resilience, that can ultimately help them achieve their goals in life.

That's enough for us to recommend that it should be available to all our young people.

Week in

Westminster

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



FRIDAY

Much hullabaloo about the Scottish government's "independent" assessment review set to recommend scrapping exams in favour of coursework and a diploma.

The outcome was somewhat predictable.

The inquiry was led by Louise Hayward, an assessment expert from the University of Edinburgh, who just last year also called for an end to "inequitable and unreliable" exams in England after being commissioned by the National Education Union's "independent" assessment commission.

MONDAY

In the second-most-anticipated vote of the year (behind Eurovision), MPs backed a scathing report by the privileges committee that concluded Boris Johnson deliberately misled the Commons over repeated denials he broke Covid rules. That is, he's a serial liar.

While the disgraced former prime minister sidestepped the recommended 90-day suspension by quitting as an MP before the report came out, he will still be stripped of his parliamentary pass.

Despite the damning evidence, plenty of Tory MPs (224 to be precise) dodged the vote, including children's minister Claire Coutinho and skills minister Robert Halfon.

Kudos to education secretary Gillian Keegan, schools minister Nick Gibb and education committee chair Robin Walker for doing the right thing and voting for it.

TUESDAY

During today's education committee hearing into the recruitment and retention

crisis, MPs heard how losing experienced teachers is also making it harder to keep pupil behaviour in check.

Showing the importance of experienced teachers, NEU joint general secretary Dr Mary Bousted claimed that after seven years as a teacher "all I had to do was walk down a corridor" to make kids behave because "they knew what would happen if they stepped a centimetre out of line".

It's good to see she's kept up that trait after leaving the classroom. Committee MP Ian Mearns retorted: "You've spent the last 13 years scaring me, Mary."

WEDNESDAY

The Gibbster reported he was "delighted" to celebrate International Day of Yoga while in India for a meeting with education ministers.

Unfortunately, we don't think you can just "namaste" away the government's teacher strikes problem.

Speaking of which, while ministers can't find the time to reopen pay negotiations with unions, they did find time to mark "Thank A Teacher Day" with a lovely video that shared their warm words on how important teachers are. Awesome, that will *defo* solve the recruitment crisis.

PS. Multi-academy trusts can now get their hands on a new "Thank a Teacher Day" dashboard! It will show trusts who has been thanked across their schools and allow them to "track their thank-you milestones".

THURSDAY

The government's big plan to fix the broken SEND system is to make mainstream schools more inclusive. So how's that going?

Figures today show the number of mainstream schools that have a SEN unit – which allows pupils to get specialist support while also having access to mainstream – has fallen this year to 373 from 377 in 2022!

A DfE press release published today hyped up its "Skills for Growth" conference, hosting "some of the biggest British and international companies to discuss how we can create a workforce fit for the future and address the urgent recruitment needs of businesses".

Gillian Keegan was one of the attendees, alongside chancellor Jeremy Hunt and skills adviser Michael Barber – big hitters designed to show the government is serious over delivering skills reform.

But it turns out trying to get some coverage of the event doesn't extend to letting journalists do proper journalism (attend the event to question ministers, rather than just rewrite a press release).

When our sister title *FE Week* – the sector newspaper that covers the skills sector – asked to go along, it was told it wasn't allowed in.

However, with a bit more questioning, it turned out that some selected journos from other national outlets *had* been invited – and would be doing a "private huddle" with ministers.

Perhaps time for some *media* skills reform?





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Required September 2023

Salary: competitive to reflect the skills and experience of the candidate and the scope of the role

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We are seeking to appoint a skilled leader with a demonstrable track record of school improvement to join our team and work with us on the transformation of schools and communities. This is a key role in the Trust and the Secondary Director will form part of our Directorate, driving Trust policies and practice to improve the educational experience of our students and ensure they enjoy their education and succeed.

If you are interested in the role and wish to find out more, then please contact Jane Hughes, CEO of the Learning Community Trust at jane.hughes@lct.education or Paul Roberts, Executive Director at paul.roberts@lct.education

Closing Date for applications: 10.00am, Tuesday 27th June
Interviews will take place on Friday 30th June

The Learning Community Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. Successful candidates will be subject to an Enhanced DBS check, and satisfactory references.



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

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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.

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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](https://www.st-edwards-sheerness.co.uk)

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