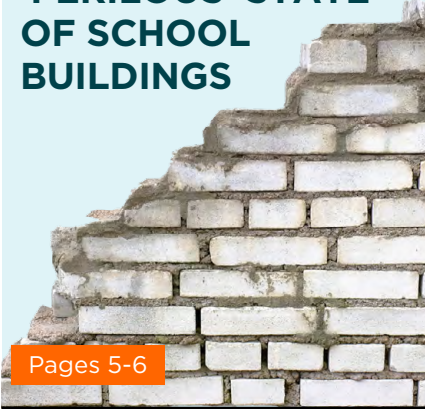




REVEALED: THE 'PERILOUS' STATE OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS



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EARLY SUCCESS, BUT NPQS MUST BEWARE PITFALLS AHEAD



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I WARNED YOU. THE ANTI-TRANS CAT IS OUT OF THE BAG



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POLICE PROBE STOLEN EXAM PAPERS AFTER CYBER ATTACK

- Two exam boards affected, with papers sold online
- Police at 'early stages' of investigating incident

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOTH

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SCHOOLS WEEK

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How can schools do better on inclusion?

SEND children are not consistently being helped to reach their potential. Parents' confidence in their child's education is declining. Many have lost faith in a system they find increasingly adversarial.

That is not the assessment of a campaigner or critic – it's the Department for Education's own view of the education that pupils with special educational needs receive.

The government has put forward its SEND improvement plan to resolve issues. Given how bad things are, it is crucial we get this right.

But a key cog in the plan is making mainstream schools more inclusive, and better equipped to properly support pupils with additional needs.

Given this, we wanted to delve into just how difficult this pledge will be to deliver. It is hard to get useful answers from data alone for SEND pupils, which is beset with problems. But we did find non-inclusive practices that will need to be resolved for

the government to meet its aim.

We've regularly covered the reasons why schools feel either unable – or are being disincentivised – to be truly inclusive.

Funding is a huge issue. Accountability measures drive behaviour. Councils are in a terrible state and making things harder. But, as a sector, we must also understand how desperate things are for parents of SEND pupils. These are the parents and pupils our system needs to be at its best for.

We are spending more than ever on our SEND system. There's been a 50 per cent increase in high needs funding in three years. But the outcome – for schools and parents – seems worse than ever.

Inclusion is hard. It's much harder now. But that's the responsibility school leaders are charged with. We need to see progress measures as secondary to including all pupils in our schools.

The government must come up with better solutions. But the sector must also set itself the challenge to do better.

Most read online this week:



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2 [Teacher given OBE last year guilty of misconduct over £180k bonuses](#)

3 ['Complain, don't withdraw kids' over RSHE concerns, says Gibb](#)

4 [Reject fewer teacher applicants, DfE tells trainers](#)

5 [Gender row school: Badenoch 'grandstanding' over inspection demand](#)

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See story on pages 5 and 6



NEWS: EXAMS

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Police investigate stolen exam papers after cyber attack

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

EXCLUSIVE



Police are investigating a cyber-attack where it is thought a hacker posed as a school to obtain exam papers before selling them online.

Cambridgeshire Police said they are in the "early stages" of investigating a "data breach" involving exam boards Pearson and OCR. The boards had exam papers "extracted from their systems and sold online", the police said.

Officers are working with the National Crime Agency and the Department for Education on the investigation.

Schools Week understands the incident relates to a school's email system being hacked and then used to request papers from the exam boards – before the exam was taken. It is not known which exams this relates to.

Centres usually receive exam papers weeks in advance. However, there is also a process to request "emergency" papers sent electronically, if there is not enough time to post the papers.

The individual exam boards refused

to comment. Instead, they sent a joint statement from their membership organisation, the Joint Council of Qualifications.

A Jcq spokesperson said that "every year, awarding organisations investigate potential breaches of security. When investigations are complete, sanctions, which may be severe, are taken against any individuals found to be involved".

Most summer exams series, rumours circulate online about certain papers being leaked.

But boards told the BBC earlier this year that it was extremely rare for genuine

papers to be leaked. Any attempts to obtain confidential material is malpractice.

Exam boards are required to report to Ofqual when there has been an actual or potential security breach of confidential material.

Last summer, there were 28 leaks of material, including a Pearson GCSE maths question leaked on social media before the exam.

Ofqual's annual report stated the board quickly identified the person involved and carried out "immediate inspections and extra supervision of exams" at the centre.

AQA's A-level chemistry paper last year was stolen from a delivery van. Students who had access to the paper were disqualified and the theft was reported to the police.

On the latest breach, an Ofqual spokesperson said it "requires exam boards to investigate any alleged breaches of security and to take appropriate action.

"This year, as in every year, Ofqual has received reports from exam boards about alleged breaches of security. We would not comment on any investigations being carried out by boards."

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

Ofqual looking at 'fully digital' GCSEs and A-levels

The exams regulator is undertaking a feasibility study alongside the government on "what it would take" to make GCSEs and A-levels "fully digital".

Dr Jo Saxton, Ofqual's chief regulator, told the House of Lords it was important "guardrails" were set so pupils could benefit from technological innovation in a fair way.

Ofqual, with the DfE, is doing a feasibility study on "what it would take" for high-stakes assessments – such as GCSEs and A-levels – to be "fully digital" and delivered on screen, Saxton said.

Speaking at the education for 11 to 16-year-olds committee, Saxton added: "There are huge opportunities, but we've got to make sure that we don't throw any babies out with the bathwater."

The regulator pledged in its corporate plan last year to support exam boards to use "innovative practice and technology".

Some boards are already piloting on-screen assessment, but research by AQA last year found teachers' biggest barrier to digital exams was a lack of infrastructure.

Saxton, a former academy trust boss, said the feasibility study was looking "at things like the national infrastructure" and the "potential for digital and modern technologies to do things like provide additional quality assurance around matters like marking".

There had been "significant issues" in countries that went entirely online with their national assessments "very quickly".

Ofqual also previously promised to look into the use of adaptive testing –

a computerised test that adapts to the pupil's ability – and whether it could be a possible replacement for tiering in certain GCSEs.

Saxton said the testing was "incredibly resource intensive to develop, you need millions of questions for them to be able to be not predictable so young people aren't able to cheat".

"It's a thing personally I care a lot about but I think we're some years away from being able to deliver that."

However Sir Ian Bauckham, Ofqual chair, said artificial intelligence could help with resources. "That's an exciting potential future area."



Dr Jo Saxton

Revealed: How schools are shut out from repairs cash

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

EXCLUSIVE

Sixty per cent of urgent repair bids from small trusts that fear their school buildings could be dangerously run down have been snubbed, *Schools Week* can reveal.

Meanwhile, our analysis shows that more than 70 per cent of academies that don't stump up a large chunk of cash towards repair work are being shunned for government grants.

It comes after a damning National Audit Office report found years of chronic underinvestment have meant 700,000 children are being educated in structures requiring major fixes.

The watchdog revealed a £2 billion annual funding shortfall and that more than a third of school buildings are past their "use-by date", as the government lacks "comprehensive information on the extent of potential safety issues".

Meg Hillier, chair of the public accounts committee, said "worryingly, the government does not know how many schools may be unsafe".

"After years of firefighting issues, parents need reassurance that the department knows where, when and how any risks to their children will be remedied."

Urgent repair bids ignored

Figures obtained through the Freedom of Information Act show three-fifths of applications for urgent capital support have been rejected since 2018.

The DfE fund is only open to small trusts running academies with buildings that "put the safety of pupils or staff at risk" or "threaten the closure" of whole or significant parts of the site.

A separate FOI revealed how the condition improvement fund (CIF) heavily favours schools that stump up more of their own cash.

CIF funding is only available to standalone academies or trusts with fewer than five schools wanting to keep a building "safe and in good working order".

School must bid for cash, but get higher marks if they agree to contribute more of



'Action must be taken if if we are to prevent a catastrophe'

their own cash towards repairs.

has context menu Our FOI found just 217 of the 759 bids (29 per cent) where schools contributed up to 5 per cent of their own cash got approved.

Meanwhile, 38 per cent of schools that stumped up 15 per cent or more of the costs got funding.

The chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, Leora Cruddas, said it was "simply not acceptable" that the state was "effectively putting children and staff at risk". She called for an urgent review of capital funding.

But a DfE spokesperson said it had been "significantly investing" in transforming schools. It would always provide support on a case-by-case basis if it was alerted to a serious safety issue.

Here's what the critical NAO report found:

1. 38 per cent of school buildings past use-by date

About 24,000 school buildings – 38 per cent of the DfE estate – are thought to be "beyond their estimated initial design life".

Among them are 13,800 "system-built" blocks built at speed between 1940 and 1980 with an initial design life of just 30 to 40 years.

While buildings can normally last beyond their initial design life with adequate maintenance, the NAO auditor general, Gareth Davies, said the DfE had for the past two years "recognised the significant safety risk across the school estate".

Its corporate risk register shows as "critical and very likely" the risk that building collapse or failure could cause death or injury.

2. Southern schools in better condition

Condition needs – the cost to fix schools per pupil – varies



Meg Hillier

NEWS: BUILDINGS

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by area. In 114 local authorities (75 per cent of the total), average condition need per pupil was between £1,000 and £2,000.

However, schools in eight local authorities had an average condition need of more than £2,000 per pupil, while the figure was less than £1,000 per child in 30 councils (20 per cent).

Average condition need per pupil is highest in the Midlands, and generally lower in the south.

3. 'Significant' £2 billion capital funding gap

The department is aware of 56 temporary closures because of structural issues over the past six years.

It also has records of "six concrete and timber-framed system-built blocks which have fully or partially shut" due to "structural instability". It was not aware of any injuries to staff or pupils.

The DfE estimated it needs £5.3 billion a year in capital funding to "maintain schools and mitigate the most serious risks of building failure".

The department requested £4 billion a year for 2021 to 2025 from the Treasury, but was allocated £3.1 billion.

Davies said this had "contributed to the estate's deterioration" as councils and trusts were "more likely to prioritise elements of school buildings in the worst condition leaving less to spend on effectively maintaining the other structures and enhancing or developing their estate".

4. 700,000 pupils in buildings needing major work

Davies said the estate's "overall condition is declining" following "years of underinvestment".

This has resulted in "about 700,000 pupils" having to learn in "a school that the responsible body or DfE believes needs major rebuilding or refurbishment".

The government also "lacks comprehensive information on the extent and severity of these safety issues, which would allow it to develop a longer-term plan to address them", Davies said.

Ministers have identified 572 schools that they believe may contain reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC), a material the Office for Government



Property has described as "crumbly" and "liable to collapse". The report said RAAC is the "greatest risk to safety across the school estate".

The DfE has allocated £6 million for 600 on-site surveys to take place by December. More than 150 schools have been identified as potentially having RAAC, with some forced to close immediately.

5. Major rebuilding scheme already falling behind

Davies said the department was already behind on its 10-year programme – launched in 2020 – to rebuild or refurbish 500 schools "in the most urgent need".

Four-hundred sites have been selected. Twenty-two have structures at "high risk of collapse", while 78 have the highest "condition need" per square metre.

However just 24 contracts have been awarded compared to a forecast of 82, with one project completed compared to a forecast of four.

The joint general secretary of the National Education Union, Kevin Courtney, said the school estate was in "a perilous condition. If we are to prevent something catastrophic happening, such as a building collapse, action must be taken and significant funding put in place.

"The era of hoping such problems will go away of their own accord is over."

6. 15 per cent of schools have not bid for repairs cash

In 2021-22, the DfE changed its formula for calculating maintenance and repair funding so it included data on the condition of school buildings. But NAO analysis suggested the tweaks "may not fully reflect the actual work needed".

The funding is directly allocated to academy trusts and councils with at least five schools and 3,000 pupils. Smaller responsible bodies have to bid for cash to fund specific projects.

But the report stated that 15 per cent of the 2,493 schools eligible for funding have made no applications since 2016. Meanwhile a quarter had made more than 10 applications.

7. £85 million slashed from climate change scheme

The watchdog criticised the DfE's green ambitions after it quietly slashed a climate change programme's budget by more than £85 million.

The NAO said the department's sustainability goals were at "risk of being deprioritised or traded-off when making decisions".

It found the department "does not know what contribution" its climate change schemes will have – even though education settings produce 37 per cent of public sector emissions.

It also "descoped" its resilient schools programme, reducing its budget from £90.5 million to £4.6 million.

Grammar school inclusion plan had little impact

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@FCDWHITTAKER

The proportion of poorer pupils attending grammar schools has increased by less than one percentage point in four years, despite extra funding and an agreement with the government to make them more inclusive.

Ministers even admitted to a decline in inclusivity in some selective schools, urging leaders “to challenge themselves to do more”.

A Department for Education evaluation found just 7.9 per cent of children in England’s 163 grammar schools in 2021-22 were eligible for pupil premium funding, up from 7.2 per cent in 2017-18.

The report examines the impact of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the DfE and the Grammar School Heads’ Association (GSHA), in place between 2018 and 2022.

The DfE said the “fact that the number of disadvantaged children at grammar schools remains low in the face of interventions to increase their numbers shows what a complex issue this is to resolve”.

Achieving inclusion would require “multiple



Dr Nuala Burgess

interventions”, it said, and “all schools, especially those that have made no progress or very little progress in admitting greater numbers of disadvantaged children, need to challenge themselves to do more”.

Alongside the MoU covering 152 grammar schools, the DfE also gave £64 in expansion cash to 22 schools in exchange for efforts to boost inclusion.

Dr Nuala Burgess, the chair of campaign group Comprehensive Future, said the 0.7 per cent rise in four years was a “shocking figure”.

“Grammar school heads should be ashamed. They make a very big deal about their schools being a force for social mobility. They are nothing of the sort. It looks like business as usual.”

The DfE said the number of selective schools offering a level of priority to disadvantaged children increased from 63 in 2017 to 136 in 2022.

Of the GSHA’s 52 members, 104 now prioritise children eligible for free school meals or the pupil premium. Looked-after and previously looked-after children have to be first by law.

However, of those, 42 “cap the numbers of disadvantaged children to be admitted under this priority criterion”. Some schools also lowered their pass mark for disadvantaged children.

The DfE said only high-ability pupils who met the required standard in a selection test were eligible for admission “and, like their non-pupil premium peers, not all pupil premium children will meet the required standard”.

It said the Covid-19 pandemic had “understandably, been a challenge for schools in undertaking outreach activity”, but added there were “many good examples” of work by schools.

Dr Mark Fenton, the association’s chief executive, said schools had been “experimenting with different ways of adjusting their admissions policies to widen access”.

As part of a new MoU, the organisation would encourage governors to take a fresh look at admissions policies “in light of experience from across the sector”.

But he said it was “encouraging” that the overall number of poorer children in grammar schools had “continued to rise”, despite a drop in attainment of disadvantaged primary pupils.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

EPs lose confidence in ability to meet demand

Educational psychologists are locked in a “vicious cycle” with soaring demand for education, health and care plans (EHCPs) preventing early intervention.

Meanwhile, just one in ten are confident of their ability to meet demand, a government research report on their work has found.

Psychologists play a key role in getting the right support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and have to be consulted whether an EHCP be issued.

Recent analysis by *Schools Week* estimated there are now 360 fewer full-time equivalent educational psychologists compared with 2010.

But there were 114,500 initial requests for EHCPs in 2022, up 23 per cent on 2021.

The DfE research identified a “vicious cycle” in which the need for EPs to prioritise EHCPs “reduced the time available for early intervention work and whole-school advisory work”.

“Without this early intervention, the issues experienced by the child or young person can intensify, leading them to need an EHCP, and placing further pressure on EPs’ capacity to engage in early intervention and systemic work.”

Only 11 per cent of principal educational psychologists – those who lead services within councils – said they were “very or quite confident” in their continuing ability to meet demand if funding, training and service delivery models stayed the same.

Sixty-nine per cent said they were not confident.

Nine in ten reported difficulties recruiting. They cited a lack of applicants, negative perceptions of local authority work and competition from other local providers.

The DfE concluded that EPs delivered an “important and valued service, providing unique functions as part of a complex system of support for children and young people”.

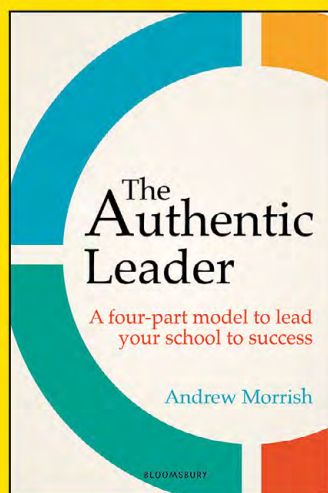
But capacity, primarily driven by rising EHCP numbers, “was consistently identified as the main barrier to delivering the most effective service”.

The Association of Educational Psychologists recently announced a ballot for strike action over a 3 per cent pay offer.

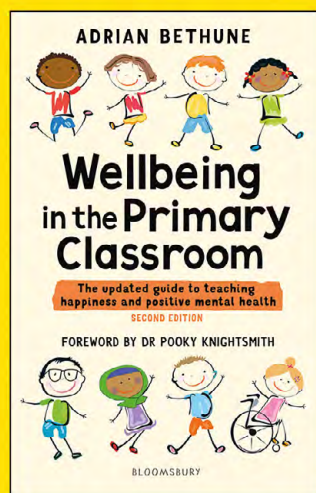
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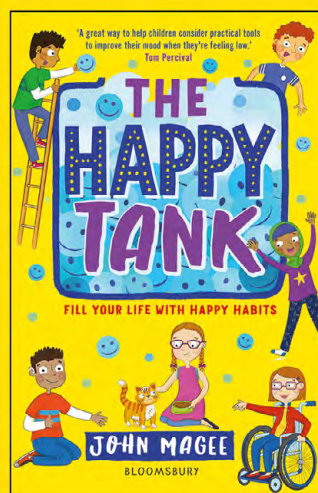
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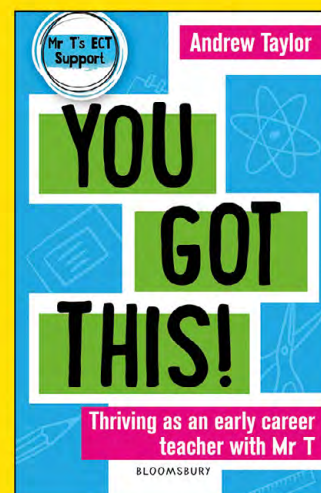
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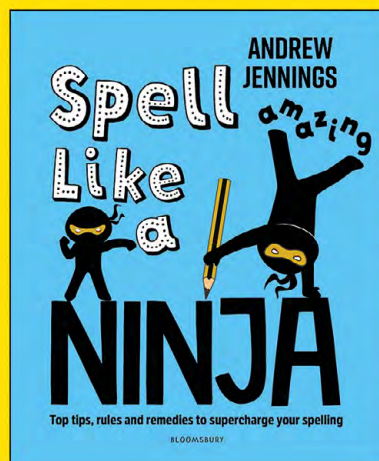
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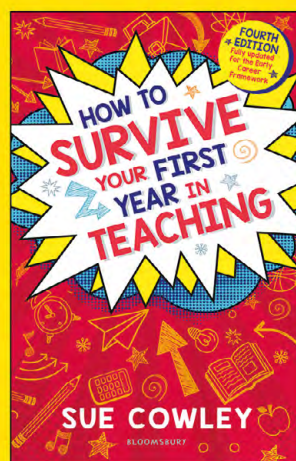
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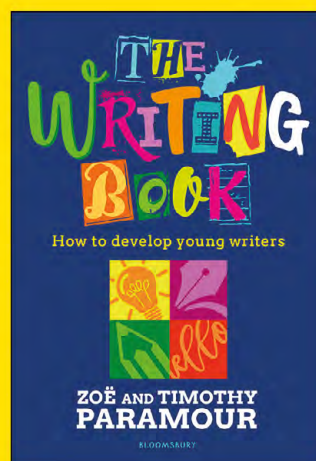
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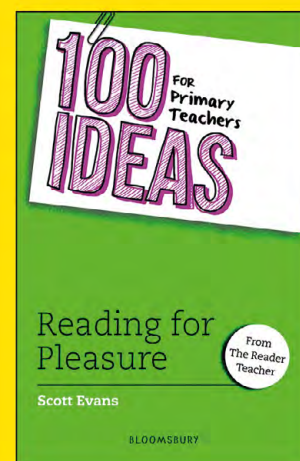
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How inclusive are mainstream schools?

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

The government's key promise to fix the broken SEND system is to make mainstream schools more inclusive. But how big a challenge will this be? Samantha Booth investigates ...

The government's long-awaited SEND reforms have promised a more "inclusive education system".

But the Department of Education's own research last year found that while some schools have "legitimate" reasons for saying they can't meet the needs of a pupil with education, health and care plans (EHCPs), a "minority" of schools and trusts used "inappropriate and unlawful practices" to "avoid" admitting these children.

Schools are "subtly" dissuading parents by claiming they could not meet their child's needs, the research says. But it happens "overtly" too, with schools refusing admission.

Schools Week wanted to establish just how inclusive mainstream schools are and the reasons behind any bad practices.

We took a three-pronged approach: trying to interrogate the government's claims over non-inclusive practice in the sector, delving into the data and gathering evidence relating to admissions.

'I don't feel we could meet his needs'

We emailed 68 mainstream schools posing as a parent of a child with moderate special needs, but not a formal diagnosis.

Our email explained we were moving to the area in the next year and wanted to see if the school would be suitable for our child.

We said the child had support from a teaching assistant with reading and behaviour management in their current school, adding they sometimes needed things such as time out and time to talk with a teacher, as well as help to catch up in reading.

The sample of schools was chosen on a range of factors, including parental concerns, low numbers of EHCP pupils and a random selection. It was made up of 49 academies and 19 local authorities.

Twenty-seven schools did not reply. Another 20 wanted a follow-up meeting or phone call and



'The only way to get help is to demonstrate your child has failed'

nine said the school was full. Three sent a link to their website which stated their SEND support.

Just eight provided full responses, although experts say four could have acted as a deterrent.

Schools Week has chosen not to name the schools.

A north west primary academy said: "Unfortunately, we don't have teaching assistants in all our classes, year 4 being one of those without a TA.

"Therefore, I don't feel we could meet his needs effectively at the moment as we just wouldn't have the staff to support his time out and help manage his behaviour."

A grammar in the north west said that without a formal diagnosis or "official report we would be unable to offer support on a day-to-day basis without the funding that an official report may provide.

"They would also not be eligible for any access arrangements for the testing process. Also, as you can imagine a grammar school is a pressured environment and a challenge for any students, as any secondary school can be."

An East Midlands secondary academy said: "I would advise you that without a formal EHCP we would not receive this support."

An academy in the north east said it did not have TAs in lessons unless an EHCP said they were required. If the child had SEN support, they would produce a one-page profile on his needs and support strategies for teachers to differentiate

classwork for him and make "reasonable adjustments" to the behaviour system.

However it "stressed" that "ultimately the school expectations are the same for all students and if students don't respond to the support offered and continue to not follow school expectations then the behaviour system is applied as appropriate".

In a response to a request for comment, the school's trust said it was "extremely inclusive" with above-average numbers of SEN children on roll. It said that without additional income linked to the EHCP, it was "not financially sustainable" to routinely have TAs in classes.

Mainstream schools receive a notional SEN budget calculated by councils. But schools have to contribute the first £6,000 a year towards the costs of SEN provision, with further funding normally provided if a child secures an EHCP.

The other schools did not respond to a request for comment.

'Schools desperately need resources'

Matt Keer, a SEND specialist at Special Needs Jungle, said the responses "will come as no surprise" to most parents. Most mainstream schools "aren't like this, but deterrence is easy, and consequence-light".

Margaret Mulholland, a SEND and inclusion specialist at ASCL, said schools often could not offer support because they "desperately require additional resources and training", combined with a lack of



Matt Keer

INVESTIGATION: INCLUSION

space, people and skills.

However Ben Newmark, a teacher and parent of a child with SEND, said families were “primed for hurt”, so a school’s wording “can be so subtle as to be off-putting”.

“When your child doesn’t find learning easy the only way to get them help is to demonstrate they’ve failed. It can make you feel awful – like the whole world thinks there is something wrong with your child and you’re an inconvenience.

“For inclusion you have to be enthusiastic, you have to go further to say ‘you’re all right, we’re glad you’re here.’”

Two responses were positive.

One secondary in the north east said it “would be confident that most mainstream schools, including ourselves, would be able to provide” the support required.

Another London primary maintained school said that while it did not have teaching assistants in the year group, “support time is allocated to any children in the year group who need support over and above that of their peers”.

‘We always do our best to accept EHCP pupils’

Every child with an EHCP – a legal entitlement to additional support – should be given a named school to attend.

However, that school can challenge the admission on grounds that include that it is unsuitable for the child, or that their attendance would be “incompatible” with the provision of efficient education for others or efficient use of resources.

Despite this, councils can still legally force the school to admit them.

We approached councils that had previously complained about schools challenging EHCP decisions. Just Redcar and Cleveland said it had the data. The council recorded 18 challenges from eight schools in 2021-22, up from eight from five schools in 2019-20

Two Outwood Grange Academies Trust schools, Normanby and Bydales, were named.

The trust said it did its “best to accept” EHCP pupils, but in a “very small number of cases” the specific needs of a child “may be such that the school is not best placed to support”.

They said in most cases the council would agree, but if there were no other options they would always take the child as



Margaret Mulholland

supporting children with SEND was “a guiding principle of the trust”.

Alistair Crawford, co-chair of the National Network of Specialist Provision, said schools are facing “a range of multifaceted challenges” such as funding and school building problems. But there are “brilliant examples” of schools “working hard to meet the needs of an increasingly complex and diverse set of learners.

“We are far less likely to hear schools say that they are unable to meet the need than we were a few years back.”

Can data provide any answers?

This month’s SEN data revealed a 9.5 per cent rise in the number of pupils with EHCPs, rising from 355,566 to 389,171.

The number of children given SEN support – without an EHCP – now sits at 13 per cent, more than 1.1 million children.

Jo Hutchinson, director for SEND at the Education Policy Institute (EPI), said trying to understand which schools “admit their fair share of pupils with SEND” from data was “often complex”.

A 2021 EPI report found a “lottery” in identification of SEND at school level, something that new national standards seek to rectify.

Ministers shelved plans to include contextual information in league tables

showing inclusivity of mainstream schools after “mixed feedback” suggested it would “risk generating perverse incentives”.

Hutchinson said while there were NHS assessment services for some types of SEND, others had no common assessment criteria so it was down to a school’s decision.

Basic data on how many EHCP pupils a school has is also problematic. A low number could mean a school offers effective, early support and a statutory plan isn’t needed, or that a need hasn’t yet been identified.

To try and get a more accurate picture, Datalab created an hypothetical “catchment” of year 7 pupils with EHCPs for each mainstream secondary, to see how it compared to actual intake last year.

Analysts found there were almost 400 schools with at least 5 per cent of pupils with EHCPs, but 276 schools had none. A third of the latter were grammar schools.

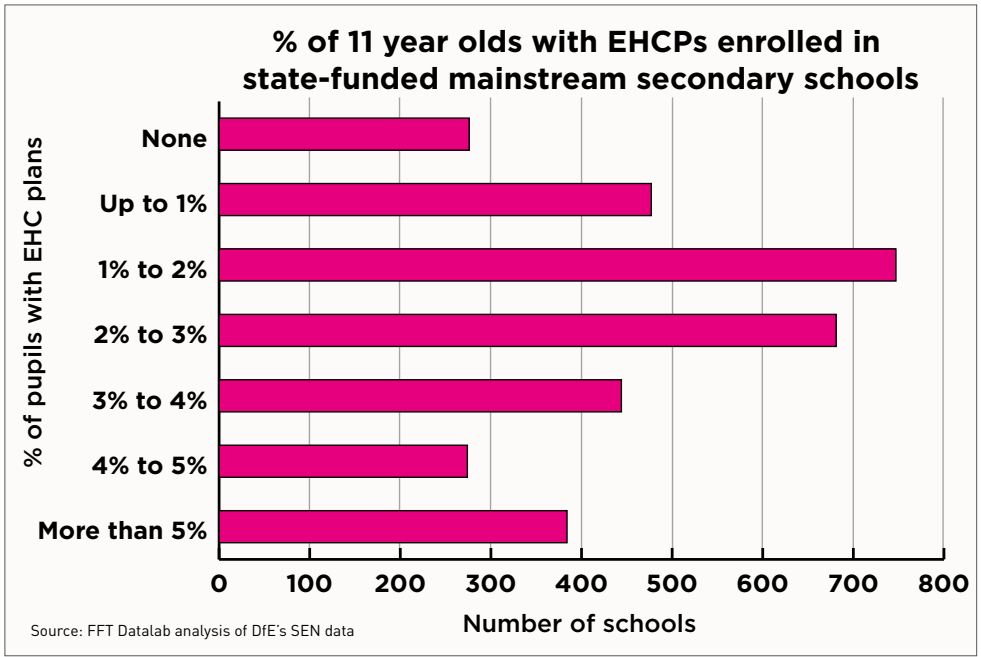
There was little difference between maintained schools or academies, but free schools tended to have slightly more representative intakes of their area.

Limited state resources and funding

However, the study did find differences when looking at individual regions



Jo Hutchinson



‘Deterrence is easy, and consequence-light’

INVESTIGATION: INCLUSION

based on their schools' Ofsted ratings, as of August 2021.

The three areas with the largest gaps between the expected and actual number of EHCP pupils were 'inadequate' schools in London, 'requires improvement' schools in the south east and 'outstanding' north east schools.

London's 17 'inadequate' schools and the south east's 61 'RI' schools had, on average, nearly four times fewer EHCP pupils on roll compared with their local catchments.

Of those London schools, Gaynes School in Havering had the lowest EHCP rate (0.44 per cent of pupils on roll in 2022). It did not respond to a request for comment.

In the south-east schools, 0.48 per cent of 1,400 pupils had an EHCP at Ark Alexandra Academy in East Sussex.

However, the trust's regional director, Lorraine Clarke, said it had "robust procedures in place to identify students with additional needs".

"Sadly, state resources and funding are limited and not all our applications [to councils for EHCPs] are successful."

Nationally, councils rejected one in five requests in 2022.

The 24 'outstanding' schools in the north east had, on average, three times fewer EHCP pupils on roll compared with their local catchment area.

The Academy at Shotton Hall, in Durham, had the lowest with 0.26 per cent.

The largest trusts – those with 10 or more secondaries – had slightly below average numbers of EHCP pupils.

Two of these had way fewer pupils with EHCPs than expected, but Datalab did not name the trusts.

One with 11 secondaries had a 2.3 per cent intake of EHCP pupils, compared with a 6.7 per cent estimated catchment. Another had 2.2 per cent compared with a 5.7 per cent expectation.

Researchers also said some of the difference could be down to some schools being closer to special schools or other mainstream schools with dedicated SEN units.

Hutchinson said the system would benefit from better assessment of SEND needs, "which would feed through to more consistent and useful data system.

"This would be a substantial undertaking as it involves a combination of greater capacity in NHS assessment and educational psychologist services and better training for teachers and school staff."

Rise in 'resisting admission' reports

Councils must also submit annual reports to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA), flagging any major themes relating to school admissions.

In her latest annual report published in April, the chief school adjudicator, Shan Scott, said it was "most concerning" that councils kept reporting some schools "resist the admission" of children with EHCPs.

'The reality? Schools do not have the resources'

Schools Week's analysis of council's own reports to the OSA, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, found that nearly 50 out of 152 submitted raised issues with admission of SEN children in some way.

For usual admission points, such as reception and year 7, Bracknell Forest told the OSA that "many schools are not open to receiving children with EHCPs", adding: "I have been told by SENCOs that there is a tension between wanting to be inclusive and feeling the pressure of knowing that the school will be judged on attainment."

Suffolk said it was "not uncommon to receive a response to formal consultations" from mainstream schools stating that they would not be "a suitable school".

"Whilst the [council] challenges where appropriate to do so, in some cases where discussions have taken place between the school and a family, the family has lost confidence in the school's ability to meet their child's needs."

Families then go on to request a place in an already stretched special school.

Darlington told the OSA it was challenging "unlawful" responses from schools that declined year 7s with EHCPs.

Bath and North East Somerset said recruitment difficulties had led "to higher numbers of schools raising objections to the placement".

Inclusion drive 'exacerbating' issues

Bromley council in south-east London said some schools cited issues around support at transition between lessons, a lack of breakout space and the length of lessons being 100 minutes with no adaptation.

Liverpool said schools could be "reluctant" to admit a child with an EHCP amid a "lack of understanding" that the SEND code "trumps" the admissions code.

The council's "drive" to "place more EHCP children in mainstream education was exacerbating" the issue. Schools often cited "resource issues", the council added.

Merton in south London said placements of SEN pupils "continue to be unevenly distributed" amid "anecdotal evidence that some schools will use informal means to discourage parents of SEN pupils to apply for them".

Meanwhile, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough said "many schools always cite the high level of current SEN need – a tiring argument and one that is challenged but causes delays".

In her report, Scott said councils' approaches to admissions of these children "diverge – with one group content that many schools give a high priority to children with additional social or medical needs, and another group encouraging schools to have no regard to such matters but simply to act inclusively in making admissions".

Lambeth in south London said there was "resistance and delay" in admitting SEN children without an EHCP. A spokesperson said many felt they could not "meet the needs of the child", especially in academies and foundation schools.

Merton called for a "national reminder of the need for inclusive practice in all schools regardless of their admission authority status", adding: "The needs of the child, rather than the financial position of the school and their approach to admissions, needs to be the driving force behind the admissions process."

The councils who responded to our request did not want to name schools they had complained about.

The government's SEND review will push for early intervention in mainstream schools, mostly through the national standards – which could be three years away.

But there are calls for further funding to instigate change.

Mulholland added: "The SEND Green Paper promised a plan to achieve the right support at the right time and in the right place, but the current daily reality for schools is that they do not have the resources to meet the needs of the pupils they are being asked to support."

The DfE was approached for comment.

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MATs should publish metrics on spend and autonomy

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

EXCLUSIVE

Academy trusts should publish how much they spend on central teams and how much autonomy their schools have, a think tank has said.

A Centre for Policy Studies report says an online dashboard containing such information would allow headteachers to make informed decision about joining trusts.

Written by Mark Lehain, a former special adviser to the education secretary, the study found heads have been “put off conversion” by the “significant effort” needed to gather the data themselves.

It also urged the government to fork out as much £600,000 on a “Tinder for trusts” to match them with schools.

But sector leaders have warned the proposals would not be a silver bullet – as they stressed the suitability of trusts “cannot be assessed from data alone”.

Lehain said the proposals would “make it as easy as possible for schools that are keen to join a trust to actually find one”.

“This would give them the information they need to start talking to potential partners and understand each other through their due diligence.

“It’s all about reducing the burden on individual heads or CEOs... It would also provide greater accountability for trusts since there would be a publicly available set of metrics that permit comparison on a local or national scale.”

The report suggested an “expert group of trust and school partners” define “a non-exhaustive but broad set of aspects” to be collated.

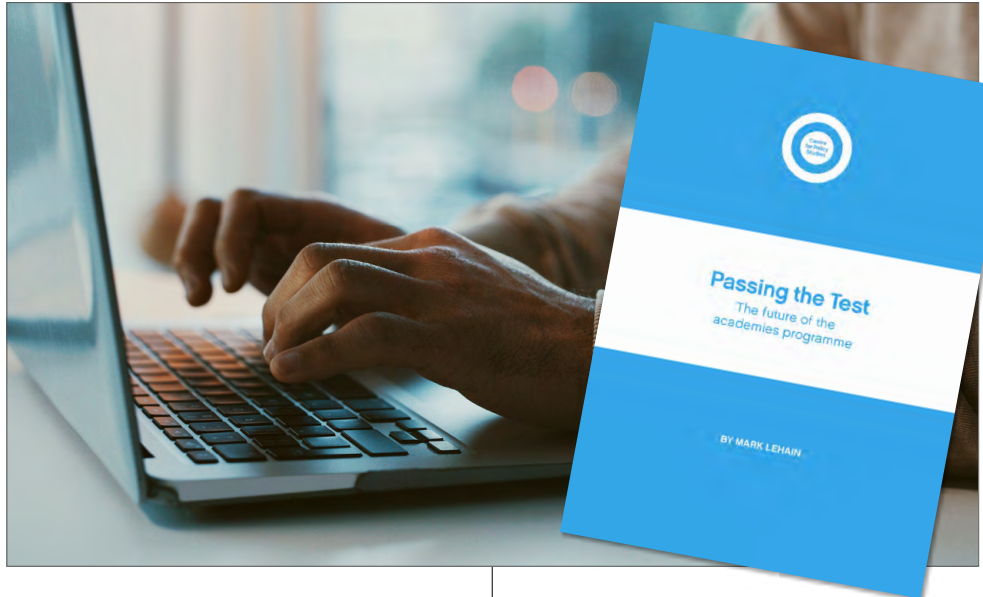
The information would be published in “a searchable database, potentially as part of the ‘get information about schools’ service”.

He wanted the dashboard to contain “qualitative” metrics, such as the extent to which curriculums and policies are different across academies, and what school improvement support is provided by chains.

“It would also be important to have a description of the ethos and character of trusts. This would be especially



Leora Cruddas



important for faith schools to see how their ethos and character would be protected in a trust.”

Lehain added that figures comparing the proportion of funding spent on schools and central teams, as well as the sizes of their workforces, should also be collected.

The academies accounts direction currently states MATs “must describe the types of central services provided to schools during the year”. But they aren’t obliged to include how many people are centrally employed.

The Education Skills and Funding Agency admitted in April it had a “data gap” and was reviewing whether to collect information on them.

Of the 30 biggest trusts, 15 either did not list the information on their website or provide their central team numbers to Schools Week earlier this month.

Meanwhile, Lehain reasoned his so-called “Tinder for trusts” or “MATchmaking” scheme would smooth the conversion and merger process.

“I’d imagine there would a website. The costs of this programme would be relatively small – anything from £300,000-£600,000 per year.

“It wouldn’t have to be a huge organisation with loads and loads of people – it’d only need a small team of people who really know their stuff and help it happen independent to the DfE.”

The academies regulatory and commissioning review noted the DfE needed “to articulate what we mean by trust quality” to “make it easier for schools to see and realise the benefits of forming or joining” a MAT.

Among the other recommendations Lehain puts forward are calls for a “Domesday Book” of the state sector. He said this would create an accurate record of the employees, buildings and land across the state sector “to make future conversions easier in terms of legalities”.

He also told the government to create a “process for batch academisation of schools” and “increase the funding and support available for those joining or forming strong trusts”.

However Mark Greatrex, who leads the 10-school Bellevue Place Education Trust, said “further onerous reporting is not what chains need to be spending their valuable time on”.

Any details “beyond the headline information which can be easily pulled together from existing reports” would usually be given by trusts to schools considering conversions.

The chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, Leora Cruddas, said that while some of this data might be useful, “the important thing is that there is a good fit and values-alignment”.

“This ... is unlikely to be assessed via a third-party match-making service.”

See Mark Lehain's piece on page 14

Opinion

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MARK LEHAIN

Head of education, Centre for Policy Studies

Why MATs matter – and why we need a Tinder for trusts

The case for MATs is practical and pragmatic, not political, says Mark Lehain. They are, he says, simply the best way to run and improve schools

Education is an important and beautiful thing in its own right. It's also the closest thing we've got to a silver bullet if your aim is for people to be happier, healthier, richer or live longer.

It's why having children in brilliant schools from day one is so vital – for them, their families and society as a whole. Add to this how tough things are in the classroom, I am more convinced than ever that schools collaborating within a great multi-academy trust (MAT) is one of the most effective things we can do to help pupils and teachers.

I explore the reasons for this in a new Centre for Policy Studies report released today, *Passing the Test: The future of the academies programme*.

We've already come a long way towards a MAT-led system: just under half of the country's state schools are already an academy or becoming one, and well over 85 per cent of these are already in a MAT.

And while we're all familiar with the horror stories of when things go wrong, MAT successes keep

building, and the case for them as the best way to run and improve schools grows ever stronger in a variety of ways.

Research suggests they are better at helping "stuck" schools get "unstuck". They seem to be better at recruitment and retention of staff too, particularly in terms of getting more experienced staff into schools with more disadvantaged pupils.

It all leads to better outcomes for kids. For example, if all pupils did

as well in their key stage 23 SATs as pupils in the 75th percentile of MATs, national outcomes would have been eight percentage points higher, and ten points higher for disadvantaged pupils. At the performance of the 90th percentile it would have been 14 points and 19 points higher!

These things are possible because the MAT model enables great trustees and leaders to make an impact across a whole group of schools, not just one. They can pool leadership, money, expertise and resources, and get it into the right place at the right time. They seem to have better financial management, which allows for more frontline investment and greater resilience.

And we know that MATs are getting better all the time at what they do, as good practice is spread and embedded, and new lessons learned.

The case for MATs is practical and

pragmatic, not political. It's why there are more than 4,000 Church of England and Catholic maintained schools due to convert and join trusts over the next few years About 1,000 others will follow in their wake.

The question is how we help make the process as easy as possible for those making the move.

Some things are pretty technical. For example, the government should fund a national "Domesday Book" across the maintained sector, so there is a clear record of assets and liabilities in place at each school ready for when a school joins a trust.

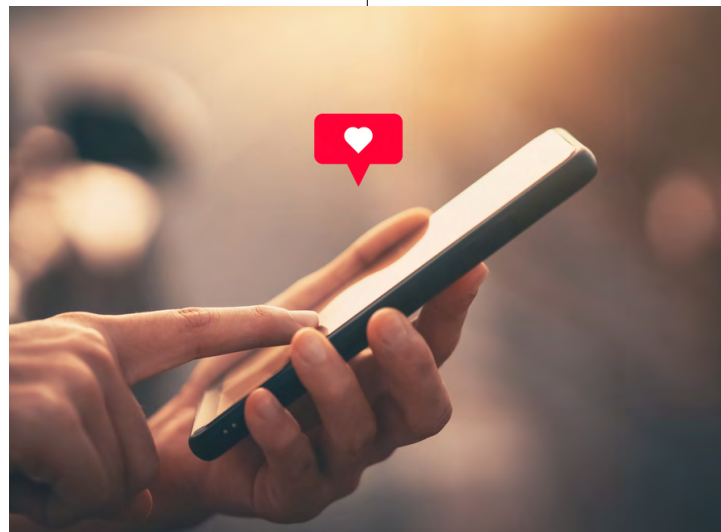
It needs to legislate to address the land ownership issues that face many church schools when they become academies. And it should support the sector to develop and publish interoperability standards for information and data, to make changing IT systems easier.

Others are about helping schools and trusts explore possible relationships. Trusts should publish a standard set of information about how they operate, so that schools can easily assess who they'd consider working with (or not.)

This could form the basis of a "Tinder for trusts", as part of an independent MATchmaking service to help school-to-MAT and MAT-to-MAT hookups. Left-swipe for a standardised curriculum, right-swipe for more in-school support!

Regardless of the political weather, we are heading towards a system where MATs will be the key drivers of school improvement. We just need politicians and officials to trust teachers and leaders, and give them what they need to make it happen.

“ MATs are getting better all the time at what they do



Interest falters in maths skilling-up scheme

AMY WALKER
@AMYRWALKER

EXCLUSIVE

Interest in a scheme to boost the number of maths teachers by skilling-up non-specialists plunged after it was taken on by the government's flagship hub for the subject.

In the past academic year, just 369 secondary teachers took part in specialist knowledge for teaching mathematics (SKTM) training provided by the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics (NCETM).

Alongside 31 recruits during its pilot in 2020-21, it means NCETM met just 57 per cent of its target of 700 across the two years.

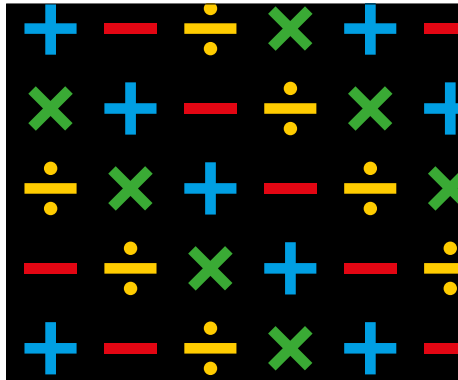
The scheme's predecessor, teacher subject specialism training (TSST), run by the Department for Education, also missed its target in 2019-20 – its final year – but by just 15 per cent.

Julie McCulloch, the director of policy at the leaders' union ASCL, said this "reflects the worsening depths of the teacher recruitment and retention crisis".

"Converting non-specialists to become maths teachers is one approach to trying to fill the gaps, but the targets are also being missed here by what is now a country mile."

A report from the National Foundation for Educational Research last year found that 45 per cent of state secondary schools had used non-specialists to teach at least some maths lessons in the past two academic years.

"What will it take for the government to accept that teacher shortages are at such a critical point that tinkering around



the edges cannot possibly work?" McCulloch said.

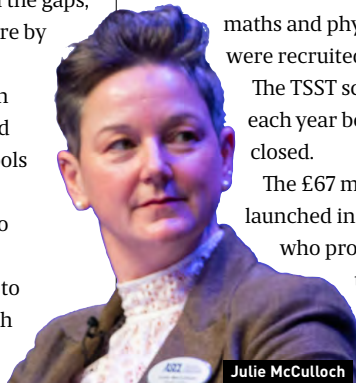
Figures on the skilling-up schemes were obtained through a freedom of information (FOI) request to the DfE.

In the 2019-20 academic year, TSST attracted 1,595 teachers to secondary maths training. However, these figures cover an extended period as the scheme ran until March 2021 because of Covid disruption.

The government's target was for 3,000 participants in specialist STEM training that year – which included secondary maths, core maths and physics. But 2,560 teachers were recruited, 15 per cent below target.

The TSST scheme missed its target each year between 2015 and when it closed.

The £67 million initiative was launched in 2014 by David Cameron who promised to upskill 15,000 teachers in maths and science to "pull our country up in the



Julie McCulloch

world".

Between 2016 and 2021, the training was delivered to just 9,165 participants.

The scheme morphed into the SKTM and is now a fully funded course designed for teachers in state schools and colleges currently teaching maths who did not undertake initial teacher training (ITT) in the subject.

It takes place over six days, with recruits supported to develop "the blend of subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge" for teaching maths.

The NCETM would not comment on the under-recruitment last year.

Up to January 5, it had recruited 364 non-specialist secondary teachers to its SKTM training for the current academic year.

However, the target this year has changed to 3,548, which includes primary and early years.

Figures for the subject knowledge for physics teaching (SKPT) programme, which also succeeded the TSST, show that it exceeded its target for last year by 60 per cent.

A total of 319 courses were delivered to teachers in 2021-22, versus a target of 200. However that target has more than doubled this year to 565.

STEM Learning, which runs the Stimulating Physics Network in charge of SKPT, did not respond to a request for comment.

Josh Hillman, education director at the Nuffield Foundation, said the government needed to do more to attract people and to improve retention "by tackling the big issues, including pay and workload".

The DfE was contacted for comment.

AMY WALKER | @AMYRWALKER

Teach First offers grants to ease relocation costs

Teach First will give some trainees who need to relocate a one-off grant of £2,000 to help with the cost-of-living crisis.

Those who commute rather than relocate to take up their place in the autumn will be eligible for £1,000 if it costs them more than £150 a month to get to their school.

But the scheme will only cover 150 recruits.

Those who are ineligible for the one-off grants will be able to access a hardship grant in "exceptional circumstances".

Russell Hobby, Teach First's chief executive, said many requests for trainee teachers had come from "isolated" parts of the country. The

scheme would address "financial barriers" trainees faced in "low-income areas" in schools "that need them most".

To qualify for the relocation grant, trainees will need to provide evidence of a new address between gaining a place at a school and starting work.

The Department for Education is set to fall well short of its target for secondary teacher trainees this year, after missing its target by 41 per cent last year.

The Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) said a hardship fund for all trainees could be set up from unspent cash

allocated for bursaries for shortage subjects.

The National Institute of Teaching (NIOT) has also warned that the cost-of-living crisis meant "significant changes" in the "demographics and location" of those applying to ITT.

Those with financial support from families were more likely to apply, while a "smaller pool of graduates" were available in coastal and rural areas, and areas not "served well" by universities.

Last year Teach First signed up 1,394 would-be teachers, its lowest number in four years.

The DfE was contacted for comment.

Trust boss expands into teacher supply

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

EXCLUSIVE

An academy trust boss who set up a staff absence protection provider has now set up what he calls the only "school-owned" teacher supply service.

The chief executive of the Bishop Wilkinson Education Trust, Nick Hurn, in 2018 launched a mutual that aimed to offer schools cheaper sickness cover and ensure they retained surpluses for themselves.

He has since created a spin-off recruitment company called Schools Mutual Services, which provides substitute staff at short notice.

Schools Week analysis in January showed maintained primaries and secondaries forked out £622 million, or £171 per pupil, on supply cover in 2021-22, a five-year high.

Hurn, whose trust runs 48 schools in the north east, said the new company was an attempt to ensure less money was taken "out of the public purse".

"We're trying to be a disruptor in the market. We were surprised about how much profit supply companies actually make and the amounts being paid to teachers.

"A school might be charged £140 for a particular member of staff, and the supply staff would take home £90. In that example,



Nick Hurn

we pay that member of staff £110 as well as pension and national insurance."

Ofsted had noted the spike in Covid absences "left gaps not easily filled by the limited number of supply teachers".

Hurn described this as a "problem" for the company as "there aren't a great number of people out there".

"We tend to get people moving to us from existing companies, ECTs [early career teachers], people who have retired who want to work a few days a week – we have a whole range of people we target."

Hurn estimates that the first of his

companies, the not-for-profit Education Mutual, now has almost 2,500 schools across England on its books.

Schools Mutual Services, formed in 2021, is said to have more than 100 north-east primaries and secondaries signed up.

Bishop Wilkinson and the 39-school Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust both use the company, which describes itself as "only school-owned supply and recruitment service". It provides teaching, support and business-related roles.

Accounts published last summer showed it had more than £123,000 "cash at bank and in hand".

Hurn said Schools Mutual Services was "breaking about even because we're trying to expand the business and we're just early days". Its vice-chair is South Shields executive headteacher Sir Ken Gibson.

However, full-time staff run the company. "I'm basically working on the strategic side of things – I run the board meetings and rely on the people who are working behind the scenes on the operational side of things," Hurn said.

Both of the ventures are run as mutuals, which means they are owned by their customers. Surplus cash is returned to members through benefits.

JACK DYSON | @JACKDYDS

New trust found for Isle of Sheppey school

An isolated secondary school that has never been rated 'good' or better by Ofsted has a new sponsor lined up.

Department for Education southeast regional director Dame Kate Dethridge plans to re-broker Oasis Academy Isle of Sheppey into the Leigh Academies Trust.

The academy, which is the only secondary school on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent, is the first to be given up by Oasis Community Learning, one of England's largest trusts, in its almost two-decade history.

Inspectors warned last year the school had

seen "too many fresh starts" as it slid into special measures.

They found more than half of pupils were not attending regularly, while behaviour was "often dangerous", and the trust did "too little" to tackle racist, sexist and homophobic language.

Leigh and the DfE confirmed in a joint statement that the trust will now begin "diligence to undertake a full assessment of the needs of the academy".

"If content to proceed, Leigh will submit a detailed plan for the academy's future to the department for consideration, ahead of a final

decision being made by the regional director and the Leigh board on the transfer of the academy."

The school had been rated 'requires improvement' three times since Oasis took it on in 2009, before it was slapped with an 'inadequate' grade.

An Oasis spokesperson stressed "before a final decision of a transfer is made, the priority of our dedicated and hardworking staff will remain the young people and wider academy community we serve and supporting our students to achieve their best".

NEWS IN BRIEF

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12p rise in funds for school meals ‘falls short’

Government funding for universal infant free school meals (UIFSM) will rise by 5 per cent, but critics say the increase “falls far too short” of what is needed.

Guidance published on Wednesday shows the funding for all pupils in reception, year 1 and year 2 will rise by 12p, from £2.41 to £2.53 a meal.

The uplift will be backdated to April 1. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) shows inflation rose by 7.8 per cent in the 12 months to April 2023.

Brad Pearce, the chair of LACA, which represents school food providers, said the rise

fell “far too short. The government urgently needs to act now and increase funding in line with inflation of food and labour”.

When universal free meals for infants were introduced in 2014-15, the rate per meal was set at £2.30.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimated that if funding had kept pace with inflation, the rate per meal would now stand at £2.87.

Analysis by the National Education Union suggests the actual cost of providing meals is even higher – about £3.30 once rising food, energy and staff costs are taken into account.



[Full story here](#)

Secondary uniforms cost parents £400 a year

A secondary school uniform now costs parents £400 a year, according to a poll suggesting new government rules have had limited impact.

Statutory guidance, which came into force last September to ensure “the cost of school uniforms is reasonable and secures the best value for money”, asked schools to keep branded items “to a minimum”.

But a poll of 2,000 parents by The Children’s Society in May found total costs were on average £422 per year for a secondary uniform and £287 for primary.

Less than a quarter of respondents said there had been no reduction in the number of branded items.

Labour MP Mike Amesbury said it appeared the new rules “aren’t clear enough so can be interpreted differently by schools, or the message isn’t getting through.”

The poll shows the average pupil was expected to have three branded items, while 29 per cent of secondary pupils were required to own four to five branded items.

Schools were expected to review policies to ensure they were compliant with the guidance by September last year. But nearly half (45 per cent) of parents reported that policies had not been updated.

[Full story here](#)

Ofsted inspects school at centre of gender row

Inspectors have been sent into the school at the centre of a gender row following complaints including from a government minister.

Rye College in East Sussex made national headlines last week after a recording went viral of a teacher branding a pupil “despicable” during an argument over identity.

It was reported the dispute erupted after the child rejected a classmate’s request to be identified as a cat. But this is not clear from the recording, and the college has insisted none of its pupils “identify as a cat or any other animal”.

The incident prompted equalities minister Kemi Badenoch to demand a snap inspection

of the school. This week Ofsted returned to the school it rated as ‘good’ earlier this year.

A spokesperson said they had “considered the letter from the minister as a complaint, alongside others, and followed up with the school and other relevant agencies”.

The Aquinas Church of England Trust, which runs Rye College, said “Ofsted has now visited the school and we of course, as always, fully supported and engaged with the process”.

They added that they “remain committed to offering our pupils an inclusive education in line with best practice”.

[Full story here](#)

Ofsted changes as leaders head for new jobs

The head of Ofsted’s curriculum unit, Heather Fearn, is to become director of curriculum and assessment at Ark Schools in September.

Meanwhile, the watchdog’s strategy director, Chris Jones, this week joins the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities as its director for communities and integration.

Chief inspector Amanda Spielman’s tenure ends this year.

Fearn has worked for Ofsted for the past six years. Before that she taught in private and state schools for more than two decades, describing herself as a “conservative teacher”.

She went on to become executive vice-principal and curriculum director at Thetford Academy, part of the Inspiration Trust.

A job advert for the Ark role states the post-holder will “ensure that curriculum intent and implementation...is delivering highest impact”.

They would be able to “research, seek and bring evidence-based best practice” to schools as well as “maintaining a strong personal knowledge” of the demands of external assessment and accountability frameworks.

Schools Week understands interviews for the new chief inspector role have been held. It is hoped a successor will be named before the end of July.

[Full story here](#)

NEWS

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Few original flexible working schools stay on

AMY WALKER
@AMYRWALKER

Just three of the original flexible working “ambassador” schools have been retained under a new version of the scheme.

The government in 2021 appointed eight schools under its flexible working ambassador multi-academy trusts and school programme with the aim of delivering a “culture change” in the sector.

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

But data from its own working lives survey shows that, as of last year, fewer than half of teachers had some kind of flexible working, such as a part-time role.

Charles Dickens Primary School in south London, Malmesbury School in Wiltshire and Upton Court Grammar School in Berkshire each received £60,000 as part of the programme between April 2021 and December 2022.



Following a tendering process for a new group of ambassadors, the three will each receive another £55,000 to serve from this month until March 2025.

The four new ambassadors joining the programme, which is run by the outsourcing company Capita, are Abbey School in Rotherham, Harrogate Grammar School, Ormiston South Parade Academy in Grimbsy and Thomas Gainsborough School in Suffolk.

Five of the original ambassadors are not on the DfE’s list.

Impington Village College in Cambridge said it did not bid “to enable other schools in the region to apply and continue to build on the foundations that we laid”.

The new appointments bring the ambassador list to seven. The DfE originally said it would select 12, but added “we are working on plans to secure full coverage”.

Under the scheme, ambassadors will offer other schools advice on flexible hiring and “overcoming” common challenges such as timetabling and budgeting.

They will also work with Capita on a national programme of free workshops and webinars covering topics such as co-headship and job sharing.

Capita won the two-year, £768,000 contract in February.

Data from the labour force survey shows the pandemic did not substantively affect the prevalence of home-working for teachers.

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

AMY WALKER | @AMYRWALKER

Capita loses contract for teachers’ pensions scheme

The outsourcing company Capita has lost its government contract to administer the Teachers’ Pension Scheme (TPS) after 27 years.

Tata Consultancy Services, an Indian IT company, will now administer the scheme under a 10-year, £233 million contract.

The Department for Education said it would “transition” the scheme to Tata over a two-year period from this October, with the new contract beginning in October 2025.

Capita took over the administration of teachers’ pensions in 1996 and was reappointed in 2011 under an £80 million contract. It tendered this year to keep to contract.

In 2018 it was given a three-year £32 million extension and in 2021 received a further four-year extension worth £60 million.

The current contract was first published two years ago.

The DfE said it evaluated bids through a “weighted consideration” of technical quality, social value and price.

“Given the scale and complexity of the [TPS], this approach was deemed most suitable by our business cases, as it enabled sufficient time and engagement with the market to ensure a fair and competitive procurement process,” it added.

Schools Week revealed in 2020 that teachers’ pensions could be tens of thousands of pounds short because of administrative failures.

The investigation found some teachers were missing up to 80 per cent of their pensionable service, finding gaps from almost 30 years ago.

Others struggled to find information from schools that had closed, with the growth of academy rebrokers said to increase the “risk of errors” in the system.

At the time, the DfE admitted it had no idea how big the problem was as it did not record how many corrections were made.

TPS is one of the largest pension schemes in the country. Tata already administers the government’s workplace pension scheme Nest.

Tata’s president for financial products and

platforms, Vivekanand Ramgopal, vowed to “digitally transform” the administration of the TPS.

“Enhanced customer service has been the cornerstone of our platform’s value proposition to clients in the UK pensions industry.”

The DfE said the new contract would “provide a more automated, digitalised and personalised service to our members and employers”.

This included providing “enhanced” access to data and an “improved ability” to self-service pension processes.

Capita declined to comment.

Last month, *Schools Week* revealed the company would cease to provide early career framework (ECF) courses starting from September after low take-up.

Capita oversees several schemes on behalf of the department, including most recently a flexible working programme.

It also runs the SATs series in schools, which ran into several problems last year.

“A REALITY CHECK: THE ESSENTIAL NEED FOR TEACHER PROTECTION”



BY ALISTAIR WOOD, CEO EDAPT

Last week I had the pleasure of talking to a fresh batch of student teachers as they began their journey into teaching. Bright-eyed and eager, they were clearly excited and curious about what a career in the classroom might entail. I therefore felt a little guilty about having to deliver a reality check about the risks they and their colleagues might face in the months and years to come.

One of the first pieces of advice you get as a new teacher is to join a union or apolitical alternative like Edapt so that you are protected against allegations. Indeed, in April this year Teacher Tapp found that 75% of teachers said that this was the most important reason for joining such an organisation. Are teachers right to be worried or are school staff being overly anxious?

We wanted to find out more and commissioned Teacher Tapp to dig deeper into the prevalence of allegations. Unfortunately, the results do not make for positive reading. Of the almost 7000 teachers surveyed, 20% of teachers had been the subject of an allegation from either a student or parent at some point in their career with the number rising to 25% for those working in secondary schools.

The figures are even bleaker for other subgroups. Male teachers are more likely than female teachers to be the subject of an allegation from a student with almost 1 in 3 reporting this happening to them compared to 1 in 6 for females. 15% of new teachers (defined as being in



the classroom for less than 5 years) had already been the subject of an allegation. Unsurprisingly, headteachers bear the biggest brunt of allegations from parents as they are twice as likely than any other member of staff to be the subject of a parental allegation.

With figures this high, it is imperative that we provide teachers with the necessary protection and support to navigate the difficult landscape of allegations. While teachers are knowledgeable professionals, their expertise do not necessarily extend to the legal intricacies or nuances of carefully worded legislation and policies. Consequently, access to expert guidance and employment support becomes essential.

At Edapt, this is precisely the work we specialise in. We're different from a traditional trade union as we're apolitical and focus solely on the legal and employment support that teachers say is their primary motivation for joining unions. Edapt provides protection without the politics. Unions of course play an important wider role in the sector but we believe that every teacher should have the choice to be able to access professional support without having to join a political organisation.

No teacher should gamble their professional security by forgoing adequate protection. The

reality that allegations can arise casts a sobering light on the need for all teachers to secure the support and representation they require. Whether through Edapt or a trade union, every teacher deserves unwavering access to the support and representation necessary to thrive in the profession. Schools and employers play an important role in safeguarding staff and their careers. Best practice includes termly reminders of the need for protection and salary sacrifice schemes to help staff take advantage of annual discounts for a union membership or Edapt subscription.

So as I said to those new teachers starting out last week whether you choose to subscribe to Edapt or join a union, it doesn't matter, but make sure you join somebody. The risk is simply not worth it.

Find out more about how Edapt can support you or your school at www.edapt.org.uk.



Feature

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL

Miss Hayley Bridge (Third in charge, Character Education – Communities) with students playing Kin-Ball in the background



Anyone for a spot of Kin-Ball?

In an education world dominated by academic results, a West Sussex school is bucking the trend and focusing on well-being and inclusivity. Jessica Hill discovers how the approach has lifted attendance and improved pupils' mental health

Imagine three teams of secondary pupils, all frantically battling to keep a 42in ball up in the air.

Welcome to a game of Kin-Ball, the latest sport introduced by a school that since September 2021 has more than doubled the share of pupil premium and SEND pupils taking part in extra-curricular activities.

Mark Wignall, head of Downlands Community School in West Sussex, believes the sporty approach is helping with attendance, too.

It chose Kin-Ball because it's inclusive: all players have to be involved for their team to score, and it is easy to learn.

Post-pandemic, pupils at Downlands were reluctant to take part in extra-curricular clubs with numbers dropping from 70 per cent in 2018 to 47 per cent in 2021. Just 26 per cent of pupil premium youngsters were participating.

It was a pattern reflected nationwide. Almost 66 per cent of the country's wealthiest children do more than 30 minutes activity outside school, compared with 46 per cent of those from the least affluent families, research by the Onward think tank shows.

A government survey found 56 per cent of five to ten-year-olds took part in organised sport competitions at school in 2018, down from 62 per

cent in 2016.

At key stage 4, pupils do an average 98 minutes of PE a week, down 38 per cent over the previous five years. The government is due to publish its school sports plan anytime now to boost participation.

"It was quite surprising how few kids actually were engaged in clubs, fixtures or trips," admits Wignall, a former PE teacher who became Downland's head in 2016.

Pandemic hit pupils' resilience

Downlands has an enviable location, set against the rolling hills of South Downs National Park. It's a relatively affluent area – only a sixth of its 1,200

Feature: Downlands

pupils are pupil premium.

But Wignall believes being a predominantly middle-class school means poorer pupils “sometimes don’t feel part of the community”.

He had worked hard to nurture a “growth mindset”, but the pandemic hit kids’ resilience hard, with a survey in 2021 suggesting almost half felt affected by their mental health. One in ten didn’t like coming to school.

As well as individual support, Wignall set about making wellbeing and inclusivity a focus of everything the school does.

He employed a head of character, Noel Buckley (We couldn’t find any other state school with such a full time role) who is supported by two “character assistant” teachers.

Under the ROCKS (Resilient, Optimistic, Community, Kind and Self-Aware) rewards system, pupils get points for displaying those attributes. Prizes include lunch queue jump passes and pizza parties.

“Trying to instil positive behaviour was the part of the job I wanted to do before but never had time because I was always running around focusing on the negative,” says Buckley, formerly a deputy head in a London school.

Community more than just a name

Many schools still retain the word “community” in their name as a historic legacy. But for Downlands it holds real meaning.

Each year more than 50,000 local people use the school’s gym, sports hall, dance studio and floodlit artificial grass pitch. It makes a tidy profit: the sports centre brings in more than £300,000 a year and the pitch another £40,000 to £50,000.

As well as paying for rising energy, it allowed Wignall to launch the “student character passport”. This guarantees pupils the opportunity to do character-building activities such as residential trips (with the school paying for poorer pupils), Shakespeare productions and visiting a museum and art gallery during their school lives.

Wignall sees it as “probably one of the pinnacles” of his career that will contribute to



L-R- Toby, Ellen Thorne [Second in charge, Character Education], Lorenzo, Noel Buckley (Head of Character Education), Alex, Andrii – some of the students who enjoy playing Capture the Flag



Downlands Community School

‘Poorer pupils sometimes don’t feel part of the community’

outcomes “just as much” as lesson time.

“If you build cultural capital that really helps some kids out-compete against other, more middle-class kids.”

Downland’s parent-teacher association recently funded a £30,000 common room refurbishment.

I tell Wignall he’s lucky to have such support, but he sees it as more than just good fortune.

“I’ve really worked hard to keep the PTA going,” he says. “We’ve worked hard on community, and we’re reaping the benefits.”

Capturing imaginations

Downlands’ website boasts “elite” sports teams that “regularly achieve regional and national

recognition”.

But how to attract the kids less interested in sport to get involved? Wignall did another survey – this time to interrogate the post-pandemic dip in participation.

The fantasy tabletop role-playing game Dungeons and Dragons “kept coming up” in requests. Buckley had never heard of it, but a club run three times a week now attracts between 30 to 40 pupils to each session.

Street dance was also introduced for boys who wouldn’t normally do dance, with songwriting and jazz ensemble clubs offered too.

The PE department’s “main focus” was on new sports to inspire youngsters who “wouldn’t in a

Feature: Downlands



Mark Wignall, head of Downlands Community School



L-R: Corbin, Ryan, Zac, Arthur, Tate, Downlands students playing Dungeons and Dragons

million years come over to PE after school to do rugby or basketball”.

They captured their imaginations (literally) through Capture the Flag, a simple game where teams pull a tag from an opposition member’s waistband.

Players caught go to “prison” – although they “might change” that terminology, Buckley says.

Wignall recalls when it was introduced hearing from his office the sound of “pupils screaming in excitement” drifting over from the sports field. “It’s so simple, yet so engaging and they can’t get enough of it.”

Now, 40 to 50 pupils play regularly after school –crucially often youngsters who previously “just keep to themselves at lunch time and go home at the end of the school day”.

Like schools everywhere, Downlands saw a rise in persistent absentees (pupils with attendance below 90 per cent) after Covid.

But its persistent absence rate has improved from 29 per cent last academic year to 17.9 per cent this year, bucking national trends.

“You find something they really want to do, like Capture the Flag, that’s the hook for them to come in. If there isn’t one, they’re not coming in.”

Buckley muses that the game, which builds “leadership skills, teamwork and tactics”, took off

‘You find something that’s the hook for them to come in’

because it’s “similar to Call of Duty that they’re playing at home”.

It was a teacher trainee who suggested that Kin-Ball might prove popular, after playing it at university. Two balls (costing £800) arrived just before Easter.

Started in Canada but introduced in the UK in 2018, more than 1,000 schools now play it.

Downlands PE teacher Hayley Bridge says the game “works for those more disengaged in PE because it’s a bit different and easier in terms of skill level. It’s such a massive ball, you need teamwork to play.”

‘You can’t let it drag you down’

Not everything is rosy at Downlands. Wignall is battling recruitment challenges, with at least two staff on long-term sick leave and the departure of several support staff. Ofsted recently downgraded it from ‘outstanding’ to ‘good’ for safeguarding record-keeping and curriculum

access issues. Wignall disagrees with the way the inspection was conducted and complained, but to no avail.

“I’m on the radio moaning about the pay and conditions,” he says. “But we’ve got a job to do it here. You can’t let it drag you down. The kids are still our future.”

And the latest pupil survey has given him something to celebrate.

The number of pupils doing extra-curricular activities has shot up to 81 per cent from 47 per cent in 2021. Crucially, participation more than doubled among pupil premium (from 26 to 53 per cent) and SEND pupils (30 to 65 per cent).

Only 27 per cent are now affected by their mental health – down from 47 per cent – and the share who don’t like coming to school has fallen.

“I want our students to be kind, resilient and have a healthy mind and body,” Wignall says. “They need to show the leadership skills that the world requires right now.”



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Opinion

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TABITHA MCINTOSH

Head of key stage 5 English,
Nower Hill High School, Middlesex

Rise of the furrries: A purr-fect storm for transgender rights

Claims of children identifying as cats would be hilarious if they weren't so dangerous for their real target group, writes Tabitha McIntosh

Last year I said in *Schools Week* that we were sleepwalking back into section 28. I'd like to retract that. We're not sleepwalking back into it: we're being frogmarched into something much worse.

Or maybe that should have read "cat-marched", because last week the escalation of anti-LGBT+ rhetoric reached the improbable height of a full-blown, five-alarm, international media moral panic about British teenagers identifying as cats. And dinosaurs. Oh, and gay male holograms.

According to the nation's most easily outraged educators and opinion-havers, adults in schools have lost all control in the face of what the *Daily Mail* called "the rise of the furrries": an unstoppable tide of children identifying as animals, minerals, and random objects found behind the sofa cushions. Woke teachers, captured by post-human-moral-relativist-transgenderist-ideology, have no choice but to respect these identities. The west has fallen. You know the drill.

It's hilarious. Except it's not. It's

not at all funny that anecdotes entirely unsupported by basic fact-checking can spread so virally. It is not hilarious that journalists are offering money to any parent willing to claim that woke schools secretly transitioned their children into exo-planets. It is terrifying because these kinds of stories aren't about furrries or dinosaurs or holograms. They are aimed at undoing two decades of law that grant people the right to change their legal gender (Gender Recognition Act 2004) and protects them from discrimination if they do or plan to do so (Equality Act of 2010).

Think I'm exaggerating? The government's minister for women and equalities is using the debunked catgender story to ask for an emergency inspection of the school at the eye of that culture war hurricane on the basis that a teacher supported the "contested political belief" that gender "is not linked to the parts that you were born with". Radical proponents of this belief that sex and gender are different include the law of the United Kingdom since 2004 and every dictionary of the English language.

In February, that same minister invited the equality and human rights commission – the body responsible for the promotion



“ This is aimed at undoing two decades of law

and enforcement of our equality and non-discrimination laws – to reconsider the definition of “the protected characteristic of sex”. The commission's chair dutifully provided a letter invoking the dystopian future that may ensue if people continue to be allowed to be treated in law according to their legal gender. Brace yourselves: “A women's book club (for instance) may have to admit a trans woman who had obtained a gender recognition certificate.”

We have entered an entirely imaginary yet profoundly authoritarian parallel world in which you need to show your birth certificate before you can discuss Richard Osman's latest. A world in which *The Sunday Times* thinks there is such a thing as a "biological name" that presumably emerges from one's chromosomes. I was biologically determined as Tabitha from conception. That's just science.

Meanwhile, in the real world, an entire category of people protected under the Equality Act

of 2010 is being called “politically controversial” by the minister responsible for protecting their rights. Meanwhile, in the real world, the government is drafting schools policy that is much, much worse than section 28.

Section 28 didn't say that teachers will be forced to tell parents their child is questioning their sexuality “even if the child objects”. It didn't say that heads must “consider the mental effects on other children” before allowing pupils to be lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Claims that an epidemic of cat children has been unleashed by the Pride flag don't take place in a vacuum. They are happening in the context of attempts to undo human rights law for all LGBT+ adults. They are happening during what the UN expert on sexual orientation and gender identity calls “a rampant surge in hate crimes in the UK”. And our classrooms are the battlefield where this culture war is being fought. Fight back.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Uptake of the new NPQs has been impressive, says Gareth Conyard, but there are some pitfalls ahead

While plenty has been written and said recently about the successes and challenges of the early career framework (ECF), the next phase of the "golden thread" has had less attention. And yet, the DfE heralded the reformed national professional qualifications (NPQs) with much fanfare as part of the wider programme of support for education recovery post-pandemic

With two full cohorts of participants completing their specialist NPQs and receiving their results, and the first cohort on the leadership NPQs waiting to discover theirs, the most obvious headline is that NPQ take-up has not met expectations. The DfE set a target of delivering 150,000 NPQs in a three-year period, but only a little over 51,500 NPQs were started in the first 18 months. This leaves an unlikely figure of nearly 100,000 starts in the second 18 months. Nobody thinks the DfE will reach this.

However, this headline figure hides a significant success story. These 51,000 NPQ starts in under two years are in sharp contrast with a total of about 33,500 for the four years from 2017-18 to 2020-21. That's a growth from an average of about 8,000 a year to well over 30,000 – an impressive testament to the policy and its execution, regardless of any arbitrary target and especially against the backdrop of the post-pandemic challenges.

The fact that so many have already engaged in the new NPQs suggests a significant success for the "golden thread" – not least because of its participant satisfaction rates, which would make a North Korean dictator



GARETH CONYARD

Joint chief executive, Teacher Development Trust

If NPQs don't reflect the job as it is, they will not hold their value

blush.

Understandably, the DfE is keen to build on the approach with the expansion of the NPQ suite. *Leading literacy* and *Early years leadership* have been added this year, and NPQs in primary maths and SEND will follow.

The growth in NPQ numbers would not have been possible without the investment made by the DfE and the Treasury to make NPQs free. If the money disappears, take-up will suffer.

DfE funding isn't guaranteed

“ Too much is too similar across the current frameworks

This is welcome, but it should not be done without considering areas that could be improved.

The DfE has pledged to review the frameworks – just as it is with the ECF – but three areas already stand out.

First, funding needs to be confirmed.

beyond those starting in the 2023-24 academic year, which makes it hard for schools and delivery partners to plan for the future. The kind of mobilisation that has been needed to expand NPQs needs long-term security to become embedded.



The DfE should commit to it, and the Labour Party should be considering it as it draws up its manifesto.

Second, we need to take a clear-sighted look at how teachers will progress through their careers. There are already well-publicised concerns about repetition between ITT and the ECF. As new teachers start NPQs and more experienced teachers move from specialist to leadership NPQs, there is a risk that the consistency of the "golden thread" becomes unhelpfully repetitive. Too much is too similar across the current frameworks and the underpinning evidence base, which could undermine NPQs' role in supporting progression.

Third, any review must engage with teachers and leaders to ensure that the frameworks fully equip them for future challenges. Recent work by organisations such as Education Support shows the time teachers and leaders are spending on what we might refer to as "non-teaching" activities (such as supporting the mental health of pupils and their families who are struggling to access specialist help), and a rise in behaviour issues that do not appear to improve with established approaches. If NPQs don't reflect the job as it is, fail to adapt to new information and fixate on protecting an increasingly irrelevant evidence base, they will not hold their value.

Everybody involved in the reformed NPQs should be proud of what has been achieved, but there is room for improvement if we want to ensure they remain relevant and valuable.

Opinion

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SHAZAD ALI

Lead alternative provision manager, Bradford Academy

How to think creatively about alternative provision

Not everyone can have on-site provision, but we can all help learners reset with careful intervention and thoughtful reintegration, writes Shazad Ali

School leaders need solutions as concerns grow about attendance, exclusions and children's mental health – and with the government's SEND and AP improvement plan still in the works.

Bradford Academy has developed RESET, its own, bespoke, purpose-built, on-site alternative provision. This isn't easily or quickly accessible to everyone, but what are transferable are elements of our programme of support for learners at risk of permanent exclusion, refusing to access school, trauma-experienced or struggling with their mental health.

With a shortage of placements nationally, the alternative doesn't have to be permanent exclusion or a managed move to a setting that provides more of the same. There are creative ways we can adapt our offer, and other partners such as FE colleges (who are increasingly able to enrol pupils full-time from age 14) who could prove fruitful.

RESET supports learners to re-integrate into the mainstream. The setting accommodates 24 learners from key stages 3 and 4 who are

supported in the RESET building by three full-time qualified teachers (in maths, English and science) and three teaching assistants. At any given time, eight learners are supported by two members of staff.

The aim is to support pupils' wellbeing while keeping them on a learning track that is meaningful to them and opens up opportunities. To that end, our key stage 3 learners access social, emotional and mental health interventions in a programme that offers cooking, adventure, forest schools, leisure and mindfulness (CALM for short).

Meanwhile, key stage 4 learners access the vocational qualifications pathway, which focuses on level 1 entry-level courses in motor vehicles, construction, hair and beauty, plumbing and electrics. This allows them to begin to prepare for life after school, whether that's at a FE college or on an apprenticeship.

But before any intervention is put in place, it's important to review the learner's profile to ensure we provide the right support. We involve all stakeholders, including the learner and their parents or carers, to agree a support package. At that point, we decide whether the young person needs a long-term intervention (24 to 30 weeks), or a shorter turnaround intervention (usually ranging from six to 12 weeks).

Once a decision is made, staff can



“ Interventions must support pupils to learn to self-regulate

provide the correct wrap-around support. A short-term turnaround provision could focus on providing respite for the learner, but also targeted additional opportunities. One learner was recently offered the chance to go boxing three times a week to support them with anger management. Others regularly benefit from the therapeutic benefits of a practical curriculum.

For those on longer-term support, there is additional benefit in achieving actual qualifications. A 24-week project where learners get recognition and an official certificate for a relevant qualification not only boosts their confidence but raises their aspirations. This is invaluable in terms of re-integrating into mainstream classes, where a sense of accomplishment and an understanding of their career path motivates them to see their studies through.

However the intervention is structured, we find that monitoring attitudes to learning helps to measure impact and to

allow us to adapt as we go. We use an attitude to learning tracking tool, which outputs six-week overviews across a range of measures.

In the end, the aim is re-integration. This is not an escape from schools' normal expectations, but an opportunity to reinforce the value and necessity of consistent routines and structures, including time-keeping, behaviour, uniform and, of course, learning. Interventions must support pupils to learn to self-regulate on these important aspects.

The final and crucial step is to support the teachers who will be welcoming these learners back into their classrooms. Our learning passport ensures their achievements and progress are shared with all staff.

The SEND and AP improvement plan signals a general understanding that education itself needs a reset. In the meantime, there's plenty we can do to ensure young people don't fall through the cracks.

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.

SABRINA HOBBS

Principal, St Martins Special School, Derby

VIC GODDARD

Co-principal, Passmores Academy, Essex



“ We operate within an outdated, buckling framework

The SEND crisis means it is time to focus on integration

Why wait for slow governmental reform when a “hub and spoke” model could deliver better practice now, ask Sabrina Hobbs and Vic Goddard

Too often, SEND and AP feel peripheral to what we identify as “normal” - a set of over-complicated strategies that end up stacked on to the too difficult pile.

But what if we viewed every child as having individual needs rather than just those with SEND? What if our mainstream schools were accountable in the same way as our specialist schools, and exam scores weren't a disproportionately large measure of success? What would it look and feel like?

With no places left in the specialist sector, our crisis is reaching new heights; even money can't buy provision. The independent sector, which charges between £60,000 and £150,000 per child per year, is full. Those with additional needs languish in a mainstream backlog of despair and those in the specialist sector in overcrowded conditions.

Following the long-overdue SEND and AP green paper, last

year's schools white paper detailed the cycle of late intervention, low confidence and inefficient resource allocation. The inadequacy of the current state of affairs is not disputed, nor is the ambition for all young people to fulfil their potential. What is the subject of debate is how the government should act on these proposals.

Our system once totally excluded those with additional needs. The first special school wasn't created until 1907, and it took 86 years more for children with SEND to have the legal right to be educated in mainstream schools. Another 30 years on, we struggle to be as inclusive as we'd like to be because we operate within an outdated framework, now buckling under the pressure.

As leaders, we should absolutely argue for system reform, a sustainable and consistent funding model, fair and inclusive accountability and investment in multi-disciplinary strategies. In fact, it's essential we do so for the white paper to succeed. But it will take time, so we must also start to identify what we can do now to create a climate ready for inclusion.

It is time we evolved beyond

the separation that currently characterises special from mainstream, and put a focus on the integration of the two. It is the next logical step.

The concept of integrating special school provision into mainstream schools is not new. There are several innovative examples of what has recently been termed “hub and spoke” around the country. A relatively underrated model of great practice, it is rightly beginning to gain traction as more school and system leaders realise the potential of a solution-focused, joint approach to SEND and AP.

The hub (special school) and spoke (mainstream school) model works across any phase of education to meet local pressures. This formalised partnership maximises the impact and life chances of children and young people attending special schools and enriches the education and experience of those in the mainstream.

What's more, it releases capacity within the specialist sector for more complex individuals, enabling them to be educated within their local area as opposed

to sending them “out of county” to access appropriate provision – at great cost to them and the taxpayer.

To work, the hub and spoke solution relies heavily on distributed leadership of SEND. The best examples empower organic development of partnership working and result in adaptations to all aspects of school operations, not just teaching practice.

It requires school leaders to embrace their role as civic leaders, with a responsibility to work with a broad range of partners to deliver for all young people, no matter where they are. It asks us and empowers us to be positive and adaptive – in short, to be the solution rather than to accept disincentives as reasons not to act.

It isn't a silver bullet for the crisis, and it isn't the golden ticket to full inclusion. But it does offer a practical stepping stone and some important respite from the pressures of our current status quo. And importantly, it represents an evolutionary stride towards the shift in culture needed to shape an inclusive future for society.

Solutions

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



KATHLEEN MCBRIDE

Learning design lead, Voice 21

Improving maths outcomes through classroom dialogue

A few simple tweaks and oracy can be as impactful in maths as any other area of the curriculum, writes Kathleen McBride

Maths teachers in Voice 21 oracy schools are less likely to access professional development in oracy than teachers and leads of other subject areas. Research tells us that high-quality dialogue has the capacity to improve outcomes in maths, and yet we know that pupils don't instinctively understand how to engage effectively in classroom talk.

With this in mind, we have spent the past year working with schools and external organisations to better understand the role of oracy in maths. We have surfaced several practices that we believe lead to better dialogue by encouraging participation, deepening mathematical thinking and strengthening subject knowledge.

Connecting language to subject identity

Articulating what it means to "be a mathematician" connects the oracy skills pupils develop in class to disciplinary practice, creating a shared understanding of the purpose of dialogue in mathematics. Linking language to the creativity

of mathematical thinking and practices encourages pupils to perceive talk as a tool for "doing" maths.

What can teachers do?

Signal to pupils that they are expected to think and speak in subject-specific ways. Subtle shifts in teacher language such as "talk to the mathematician next to you" can support this.

Deconstruct what it means to be a mathematician by linking maths to skills such as reasoning, collaboration, problem-solving and creative thinking. You could create a visual (eg, a poster) to support this which you return to during maths lessons – linking pupils' work in the classroom to real-world mathematical practice.

Planning opportunities for exploratory talk

To build a classroom culture where dialogue is a tool for learning and a product of learning, it is essential to provide opportunities for pupils to engage in exploratory talk. This builds curiosity and encourages pupils to consider and respond to multiple perspectives. Exploratory talk offers genuine insights into pupils' mathematical understanding and ways of thinking. Being explicit about how to engage in exploratory



“ Pupils perceive talk as a tool for “doing” maths

talk is essential to support effective dialogue.

What can teachers do?

Teach pupils about the different roles involved in exploratory talk. Voice 21's "Talk Tactics" are a good place to start and include sentence starters to support pupils as they become more proficient in this type of interaction.

Expect pupils to provide extended responses (although not necessarily complete or "correct" ones). Making processing and reasoning visible to the group will lead to increasingly dialogic exchanges in which pupils probe different aspects of each other's ideas, building new understanding along the way.

Promote listening. Encourage pupils to ask questions about specific details in each other's responses, for example "What did you do to get 120?" or "How do you know the angle is 60deg?"

Harnessing errors as a springboard

A culture in which making mistakes and exploring misconceptions through talk is central to learning encourages pupils to see error as a necessary part of understanding and applying new mathematical concepts and methods.

Through whole-class discussion,

refining an answer becomes a collective undertaking as the thinking that led to an error or misconception is explained, listened to and understood before being adjusted. In a classroom where mistakes are communicated rather than hidden, answering a question becomes the instigation of "inter-thinking" rather than the presentation of a final idea.

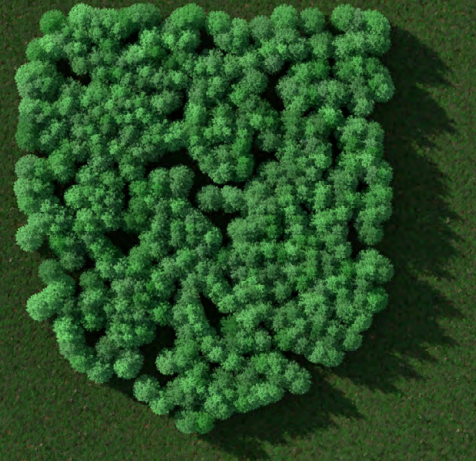
What can teachers do?

Create space for pupil talk. Pupils might not find the right answers or most effective methods immediately but by allowing time to share emerging ideas, you can identify and address the root of errors without interrupting pupils' thinking.

Praise participation as well as right answers. This builds pupils' confidence to offer their thinking to the group and to respond to others' ideas without fear of getting it wrong – which can be just as helpful as getting it right!

High-quality dialogue in maths has the capacity to support pupils to co-construct knowledge leading to deeper understanding of mathematical concepts and processes. Creating the conditions for effective classroom talk is time well spent.

Helping prepare students for the jobs of the future



Sustainability Hub partner at the Festival of Education

Thursday 6 – Friday 7 July 2023

Thursday, 12:45, venue 7

Closing the green gap: helping students prepare for the jobs of the future



Dr Amy Munro-Faure
Cambridge Zero



Jonathan Rice
Climate Adapted Pathways
for Education



Fariha Agha
Chester Zoo Youth Board



Dr Steven Evans
OCR

Friday, 12:45, venue 10

Inspiration and implementation: putting climate change and sustainability know-how into educational practice



Jonathan Deswsbury
Department for Education



Emily Shuckburgh
Cambridge Zero OBE



Christine Özden
Cambridge University Press
& Assessment

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Find out more at cambrid.ge/festival-of-education-2023

THE REVIEW

BOOK
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SENTENCE MODELS FOR CREATIVE WRITING

Author: Christopher Youles

Publisher: John Catt

ISBN: 1398340065

Published: May 2023

Reviewer: Terry Freedman, freelance edtech writer and publisher of the Eclecticism newsletter

Perhaps I'm judging by my own standards here, but I think a big mistake you could make with this book is to try to "get into it". You can't, because it hasn't really been designed to be readable. It's more of a source of reference material and ideas.

These are important points to make because most books on creative writing tend to be less technical, at least in appearance, than "sentence models". For example, opening a page at random I come across this:

Using the settings to show feelings.

We can use the setting that we place our characters in to show their emotions or to create feelings for our reader.

SETTING + FEELING

The tall trees made her feel small.

Clearly, this is no Stephen King or Kurt Vonnegut writing manual. Faced with this kind of stuff on double-page spreads, it looks more like a maths book.

None of which I say to put you off, but adjust your expectations. Analysing writing to find out how it produces the effect it does is usually hard work, not least because it can be so amorphous. What you regard as a marvellous oxymoron might seem to me to be an unfortunate juxtaposition. What Youles has done is attempt to avoid this kind of vagueness by reducing sentences down to their underlying structures.

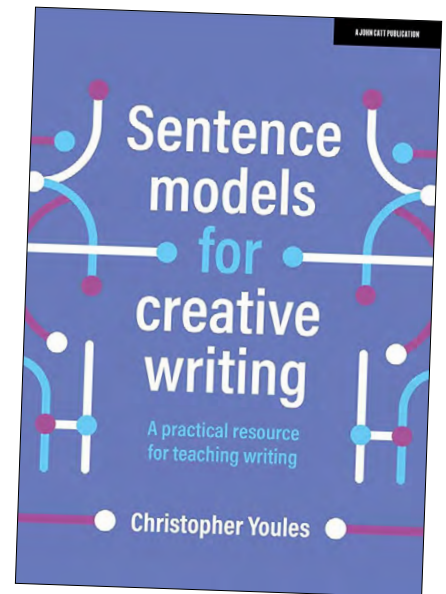
For example, the sentence "Ira stormed into the room" uses the structure Who? + Weather Verb.

This is all very well, but it raises the question of how best to use the book. The author has three approaches. One is to highlight interesting techniques in the book he is reading with his class and to encourage pupils to keep a journal of sentences they encounter. Another is to write model texts into which he inserts sentences from his list, and then discuss how and why he has used them. And finally, he teaches his pupils a sentence structure and then gets the class to play around with it, trying out different words and syntax.

This last approach seems potentially problematic. Regarding the parts of a sentence as a kind of set of Lego bricks does not strike me as a way to guarantee good writing. When the new computing programme of study was on the horizon in 2014, many teachers were rewriting their schemes of work to meet the new requirements. In a talk at the time, education consultant Niel McLean made the point that no architect ever started work on designing a new building by consulting the building regulations.

The same applies here. It could well be useful to look at a piece of writing and attempt to match its structure to one of these sample sentences to see what the writer has done. But starting with the basic structures and building on them? I'm not convinced.

There are a few other irritating things, not least of which is Youles's use of "pouring through" when presumably what he intended was "poring over". In a book for English teachers?




Elsewhere, he writes that "a budding writer needs to master the short sentence first". Why? You can't state something like that and provide no explanation or evidence.

At one point, he presents a sentence and then declares how many of the words are verbs, based on an average result gleaned from asking on Twitter. This seems a rather dubious practice, unless it was to highlight that not everyone knows what a verb looks like.


Sentence Models does have some very good features. In particular, I think the section on how word order can affect the pace of a sentence is excellent. Used as a dictionary or almanac for this kind of reference work, I can see how a teacher might find useful stimuli for the odd classroom activity.

But don't expect it to improve your subject knowledge or revolutionise your pedagogy. For that, you'll have to look elsewhere.

★★★★☆
Rating



THE CONVERSATION
LISTENING IN ON
THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM



Robert Gasson
CEO, Wave Multi-Academy Trust

A BEHAVIOUR DEEP DIVE

In this heartfelt, intelligent and personal piece, PRUsAP president, Sarah Johnson takes us through approaches to behaviour that appear to polarise so many on Twitter and elsewhere.

There is undoubtedly a move to a certain style of behaviour management in many mainstream secondary schools that is designed to create order so that pupils can just get on with learning. One of its consequences appears to be a growing number of pupils for whom school isn't working.

Johnson describes some personal experiences that are still common among the pupils I come across.

Her description of a child's apparent violent outbursts and uncooperative behaviours contrasts sharply with the harrowing reasons she gives for each one. It is a revelatory account, and a call to rethink our priorities.

While others seized on Seerut Chawla's tweet (above) to justify unbending behaviour policies and call to cool the profession's keen adoption of trauma-informed practice, Johnson's final plea seems to perfectly encapsulate why it matters so much.

"Make school a real safe place," she writes, not one that just appears so on the surface, "disguised by quiet corridors".

Trauma isn't everywhere, but it isn't always evident where it is. More flexibility in our

No, you do not have trauma.

Seerut K. Chawla | @seerutkchawla

- Everyone has *pain* everyone does not 'have trauma.'
- Trauma and pain are not synonyms.
- Trauma is a very specific injury not a universal experience.
- Being impacted by the past is not the same as being traumatised.
- PTSD is like living with a disability- not a trendy buzzword.
- It's morally reprehensible the only language people with PTSD have for their experience has been diluted into a buzzword.



policies is unlikely to do harm, but is likely to do a lot of good.

THE WORST TIME TO STRIKE

Meanwhile, debate over the National Education Union's planned strike continues. Fiona Atherton did justice to the various views of the profession in last week's column, and a *Schools Week* article went on to give a great analysis of what it all means for summer events, including transition days, sports days, residential and performances.

The political commentary that has followed bears a closer look, however.

First, Gillian Keegan gave an interview to *The Times* (paywalled) in which she claimed teachers "couldn't pick a worse time to strike". Citing the damage caused by Covid, she deplored the damage further school closures and missed opportunities would cause.

Which is true, but disruption is rather the point of strikes, and Keegan's argument omits a fair few other damaging things for children's prospects. To say nothing of crumbling mental health and other support services, as mentioned so eloquently by Keziah Featherstone last week, Vic Goddard summarises the key problem with Keegan's reasoning eloquently and passionately here.



Vic Goddard @vicgoddard

It is always a terrible time to strike. The bit you don't understand is that we're trying to help children to have teachers in front of them and books to use. It's in your power not ours. @GillianKeegan : 'you couldn't pick a worse time to strike'

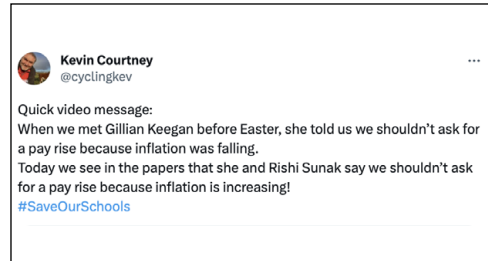
thetimes.co.uk
Gillian Keegan: 'Children have been through so much — you couldn't pick a ...
When Gillian Keegan became education secretary in October last year she found herself being castigated by unions over her choice of watch — a ...

Nevertheless, the decision to support the next two days of action will be tough, and the view in the staffroom this week was that this could be a tactical mistake from the NEU.

DEFEAT FROM THE JAWS OF VICTORY

One thing alone seemed likely to bring the profession back together, and the prime minister duly obliged: at the time of writing, Rishi Sunak is said to be likely to overrule the "independent" pay review bodies, including the STRB's recommendation to raise teacher pay by 6.5 per cent.

Easy pickings for the NEU, and Kevin Courtney's quick take was all that was needed to show the dissonance in the pay negotiations, such as they are.




Kevin Courtney @cyclingkev

Quick video message:
When we met Gillian Keegan before Easter, she told us we shouldn't ask for a pay rise because inflation was falling.
Today we see in the papers that she and Rishi Sunak say we shouldn't ask for a pay rise because inflation is increasing!
[#SaveOurSchools](#)

Arguably, one way to neutralise the leadership unions' concerns over unfunded pay rises is to get rid of pay rises altogether. But come the autumn, when recruitment and retention continue to prove impossible challenges, it's unlikely that they will feel any differently about continued industrial action.

In the end, if Covid has taught us anything, it is to re-schedule and re-invent important events at the drop of a hat. Disruption to sports days will be long forgotten by September, while the stark unfairness of public sector pay restraint will continue to be a live issue.

This, in a week when ONS figures revealed the unabated wage growth of the top 10 per cent of earners has been a prime driver of an inflation that will see everyone else's mortgages become unsustainable – teachers and headteachers included.

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts 

The Knowledge

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



What might a more holistic primary assessment look like?

**Alix Robertson, head of engagement,
The Centre for Education and Youth**

SATs week triggered the same discussions it has sparked every year for the past decade. Concerns about the key stage 2 tests are well-known: some have raised fears that direct links between results and school performance measures lead to too much teaching to the test at the expense of broader learning opportunities. Others have suggested the narrow focus on literacy and numeracy leads to increased stress for teachers and families, and neglects pupils' wider strengths.

These are perennial worries, and there's reason to believe they may grow in the coming decade. The government's 2022 schools white paper announced an ambition for 90 per cent of key stage 2 pupils to reach the expected standard in reading, writing and maths tests by 2030. With only 59 per cent of pupils meeting this last year, primary schools may be feeling more pressure to focus on boosting attainment.

SATs have their place, but how can we manage these valid concerns and ensure pupils have the chance to show the full range of their strengths?

Part of the answer must be to advance our understanding of complementary approaches. That's why we teamed up with Big Education and, with support from the NCFE Assessment Innovation Fund, set out to create the Primary Extended Project Award (PEPA). Our aim was to develop a rigorous, flexible and scalable project-based assessment for 10 and 11-year-olds that any primary school could use to enhance existing practice.

We began by reviewing other high-quality project-based assessments. Among local and international examples, we found a wealth of work in the early years foundation stage and secondary schools, but only limited opportunities for primary pupils, particularly in state-funded education. Nonetheless, our review set out the importance of striking a balance between independent learning and structured guidance from teachers, of providing a range of resources for teachers and pupils,



'Pupils will gain gold, silver, and bronze awards'

and of building in opportunities for reflection and feedback, as well as an end-point assessment.

Next, we began a collaboration with primary teachers and leaders to co-design the PEPA.

We developed a curriculum, teaching sequence and assessment framework to ensure the programme was clear and inclusive enough to appeal to staff, parents and pupils.

Teachers gathered feedback from colleagues and pupils, and worked through the PEPA plan with a particular child in mind. This helped to test pinch points, especially for busy timetables and pupils with additional needs, and enabled us to complete the programme's design and plan the resources schools need to deliver it, from assessment rubrics to professional development materials.

The result is a programme that enables pupils to carry out an extended project addressing a real-world challenge, while developing skills and dispositions in research and presentation, imagination, inquisitiveness, and persistence. Children will learn how to select reliable sources of information, drive and manage their own learning, and self and peer-assess.

CfEY and Big Education will help to safely connect pupils with expert mentors, who can share their knowledge of chosen topics. Pupils will also choose how to present their final project, for example through a performance, artwork, video or podcast at the end of year 6.

Pupils will receive formative feedback from peers, parents, teachers and mentors and when they complete their project, will gain gold, silver, and bronze awards. Expectations for their work, evidence of progress, feedback, and self-reflection will be recorded in an online record that pupils can take with them when they leave primary school, as a rounded picture of their interests, talents and goals.

CfEY and Big Education are now seeking funding and partnerships with schools and mentors to enable us to prototype the PEPA and conduct a full pilot; [you can find out more information and get involved here](#).

We can't afford to keep ignoring valid concerns about the impact of SATs, but new approaches must be workable, teacher-led, and grounded in good evidence. The PEPA is a step on the journey to a more holistic assessment system.

Week in

Westminster

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



FRIDAY

Showing what an absolute nonsense the rebranding of regional school directors as regional directors is, even the education secretary still calls them by their original name.

Speaking on the Newscast podcast, Gillian Keegan relayed how she'd asked the RSC to speak to Rye College over #Catgate.

Busy few days for Keegz. Despite still shying away from the education unions over a pay deal, she found time, according to Playbook, to attend media mogul Rupert Murdoch's summer party at an 18th-century palace.

TUESDAY

Schools minister Nick Gibb was in good spirits when he appeared before education committee MPs as part of their inquiry into persistent absence.

After his phone started ringing mid-session, he quipped: "I don't know who that is, probably my mother" – getting a few laughs from MPs.

Committee chair Robin Walker also gave Gibb some homework, asking him to remind his colleague, skills minister Rob Halfon, that his response to an inquiry on post-16 qualifications was now overdue, with a debate scheduled for next week.

"If you could assist in chasing him up," Walker said, pointing out Gibb had endured "plenty of challenge" from Halfon in his former role as committee chair.

"I certainly will," Gibb responded. "It would be my pleasure to do so."

A reminder for y'all: Twitter isn't always representative.

Just a few weeks ago, the social media cesspit (sorry, website) was awash with complaints about the English key stage 2 SATs reading paper

It was all over the national newspapers. Teachers were on radio saying how it had traumatised their kids.

So we asked the Department for Education how many actual complaints it had during the two test weeks. It had 51, just 30 related to that test.

Maybe social media is the new complaints hotline?

WEDNESDAY

School staff are waiting with bated breath for the government's response to the School Teachers' Review Body's recommendations – and indeed the report itself – which ministers have been sitting on for weeks.

But good news! The education secretary is offering our hardworking teachers, leaders and support staff the opportunity to be "first to know" what level of real-terms pay cut she intends to impose.

In an email to school staff, Gillian Keegan says those who sign up to receive new emails direct from her will get first look at the government's announcement.

Given there are protocols requiring big announcements to be made before Parliament first, we assume that Keegan is stretching her use of the phrase "first to know".

THURSDAY

You may have blinked and missed their tenure at the Department for Education last year, but former education ministers Brendan Clarke-Smith and Dame (yes, yes,

we know) Andrea Jenkyns were among those very publicly called out this week for allegedly trying to undermine the work of the partygate inquiry.

Tweets from the pair of Conservative MPs were highlighted in a report by the privileges committee, which found earlier this month that former prime minister Boris Johnson had committed "repeated contempts" of Parliament through his denials of events in Westminster during Covid lockdowns.

On June 9, Clarke-Smith, who was children's minister for about four hours, tweeted: "Tonight we saw the end result of a parliamentary witch-hunt which would put a banana republic to shame.

"It is the people of this country who elect and decide on their MPs. It's called democracy and we used to value it here. Sadly this no longer appears to be the case."

Jenkyns, who took time out of her busy schedule of swearing at the public last summer, tweeted in March: "I hope to see him fully exonerated and to put an end to this kangaroo court."

The committee said it was "concerned" at the involvement of MPs and peers "in attempting to influence the outcome of the inquiry".

"Those members did not choose to engage through any proper process, such as the submission of letters or evidence to our inquiry, but by attacking the members of the committee in order to influence their judgment."

What was it that David Cameron said about "too many tweets"?



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

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Haberdashers' Academies Trust South



Director of People

Contract type: Permanent

Salary: L24 (£86,609) – L26 (£90,417)

School/ Service: Central Trust Team

**Location: Hatcham College, Jerningham Road,
London SE14 5NY**

Hours per week: Full time (flexible working considered)

Accountable to: Reporting to the CEO

We are looking to appoint a Director of People to join our Trust. Reporting to the CEO, you will work closely with other members of the Executive in bringing to life our ambitious People Strategy.

This role is crucial to us and presents an opportunity to make a significant difference to our culture and climate, and directly impact on the life chances of our children and young people and the working environment of our staff. There is nothing more important to us than our people and one of our key objectives is to be a 'great employer'.

To support us in driving this ambition, we are seeking an experienced professional to join our Executive team, working in partnership with other members of the Executive in ensuring we bring our People Strategy to life.

As Director, you will oversee our People function across the Trust, providing expertise and advice, and leading the HR team. This function has recently been centralised which presents an opportunity for the new Director to embed the structure.

Haberdashers' Academies Trust South is a multi-academy trust with five primary and four secondary schools in and around south-east London. Our mission is for all our children and young people to flourish in their lives. We will only be able

to achieve this ambition if we are a great employer who can attract, retain and develop great staff.

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

Join Haberdashers' Academies Trust South and belong to something more:

- An extensive support network, opening doors to countless growth opportunities.
- An established name, which you can be proud to work for.
- An unrivalled legacy, born out of a vision to reach young people through education

How to apply:

To apply, please send your CV and cover letter to centralhr@habstrustsouth.org.uk by 12pm on **Monday 10th July 2023**.

Shortlisted candidates will then be invited to complete our application form.

Recruitment Process:

Shortlisting and screening:

Week commencing Monday 10th July 2023

First stage interview: Friday 14th July 2023

Final interview: Tuesday 18th July 2023



Penwortham Girls'
High School



Headteacher

The Governors wish to appoint an energetic Headteacher to lead this forward-thinking school into a new chapter, planning and developing a brand-new building with recently secured funding from the Schools Rebuilding Programme. This is an exciting time for the right candidate to influence the new school building whilst retaining the school's strong values and consistently high standards.

You will be joining an outstanding school with a committed and ambitious staff and students who relish learning. Outcomes are consistently high in all areas, whilst the school remains a non-fee paying and non-selective community school at the heart of

Penwortham. It retains a strong reputation locally and beyond and consistently positive parental support.

You will have a highly successful evidenced track record in educational leadership. Able to think strategically, analytically, and creatively about learning and teaching, you will have the vision, drive and resilience to take on the new build. You are highly motivated and passionate about making a difference to the lives of young people with the natural ability to inspire and motivate. As a natural collaborator committed to developing partnerships, you are open to new ideas, you are aspirational, solution-focussed and committed to upholding high

standards. You are an Equality, Inclusion and Diversity champion, leading by example. Penwortham Girls' High School is highly committed to the continual improvement of the quality of education and ultimately excellent outcomes, both academically and more widely, for all our young people. The new Headteacher will be at the heart of this school improvement work, working closely with our senior leadership team, other school leaders, colleagues, families and most importantly with the young people themselves.

Closing date:

12 noon on 1st September 2023

[Click here for more information](#)



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Leading Edge Academies Partnership are looking for an inspirational Executive Leader of School Improvement with Secondary expertise. The successful candidate will have delegated strategic responsibility for the leadership, development, and implementation of our School Improvement Strategy in-line with our Trust values, mission and vision. Building on the success of our current school improvement model, they will ensure that all schools provide the highest quality education for all pupils through the efficient and effective use of resources, people, and partnerships.

The Executive Leader of School Improvement will have delegated strategic responsibility for the leadership, development and implementation of our School Improvement Strategy in-line with our Trust values, mission and vision. Building on the success of our current school improvement model and strategic school improvement objectives, they will ensure that all schools provide the highest quality education for all pupils through the efficient and effective use of resources, people and partnerships.



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The Shared Learning Trust

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