

SCHOOLS WEEK

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

The Conversation:
The 42 days
(and counting)
of October



P29

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SCHOOLS WEEK

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All that glitters isn't Labour's school plans

While Sir Keir Starmer was very literally glittering on stage at Labour conference this week, the party's offer for schools was anything but.

Firstly, Labour has the bones of a solid schools policy. It has focused help on solving some of the bigger issues that stop leaders from doing the day job – be it counsellors in every school to deal with rising mental health issues or breakfast clubs for all to tackle child poverty.

But, the clear message from the party this week was one of discipline. Shadow education ministers wouldn't speak to press. When asked during a Q and A to put some more meat on the bones of current policies, they had little to offer.

Example A: The party has pledged to recruit 6,500 more teachers – an ambition that is getting more challenging as each year goes by.

But all shadow education secretary Bridget Phillipson had to offer was that a "reset" of the relationship between government and schools might somehow magically make thousands more teachers appear (page 9).

Labour could be in power in a matter of months (May and autumn are both currently being talked about for a potential election). It's not unfair to expect them to have a plan to deliver on their promises.

We had two new schools policies this week: toothbrushing lessons in schools and a new "phonics for maths" scheme (page 8). But, worryingly, the party was unable to provide any more detail on either of them.

And they still seem to have their head in the sand about resolving the myriad of issues with our broken SEND system (page 10).

Phillipson was honest that she knows there is much more to do on education, but she admirably would not commit to any new funding unless it could be paid for – and that's reliant on the economy to start growing again.

But, when the Conservatives came into power in 2010, Michael Gove et al hit the ground running – overseeing some of the widest ranging school reforms in decades.

Is Labour in the same position? Not if this week is anything to go by.

Most read online this week:

- 1 [School budget 'chaos' after DfE's £370m funding gaffe](#)
- 2 ['Grounds to reopen' pay dispute over £370m funding gaffe, says NEU boss](#)
- 3 [Barran 'worries' teachers 'don't believe' pledge to cut workload](#)
- 4 [Jamaican teachers ease Harris Federation's recruitment woes](#)
- 5 ['Out of sight, out of mind': The rise of unregistered alternative provision](#)

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£370m funding gaffe leaves heads having to shelve plans for the 'nice-to-haves'

FREDDIE WHITTAKER & AMY WALKER

@SCHOOLSWEEK

Ministers must restore £370 million stripped from next year's school budgets after a funding gaffe, unions say, as heads shelve plans to boost staff, run more trips and improve SEND provision.

Last Friday, the Department for Education admitted it had inflated the amount of money schools would get in 2024-25 by 0.62 per cent after miscalculating pupil numbers.

It means a typical secondary will be £58,000 worse-off than it expected based on indicative allocations published in July. An average primary will be £12,000 worse-off.

Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, has ordered an investigation into the error, while Susan Acland-Hood, the department's permanent secretary, has apologised.

But in a letter to Keegan on Thursday, the unions ASCL, NAHT, NASUWT and the NEU warned some schools were facing "the very real prospect of cuts to provision".

They highlighted a pledge by Rishi Sunak at the Conservative Party conference to make education his "main funding priority" in future spending reviews.

"In light of this, we call on your government to meet that commitment to invest in education, by honouring the commitments your minister made and by restoring the original [national funding formula] rates."

'Hope has just disappeared'

It also breached a pledge made in a written statement to parliament by Nick Gibb, the schools minister, unions said.

Gibb said that "funding for mainstream schools through the schools national funding formula is increasing by 2.7 per cent per pupil

Vic Goddard



'Hope has disappeared because... somebody made a mistake'

compared to 2023-24". In fact, it will rise by just 1.9 per cent.

Schools use July allocations data as an indicative idea of future budgets, which they are expected to forecast over three-year periods.

In an email on Wednesday, the DfE tried to downplay the situation saying school leaders who had not already started planning would "not need to re-plan on the basis of this change".

Final allocations are also published each December based on school census data, which means some schools had not drawn up plans for additional spending.

However Vic Goddard, the co-principal of Passmores Academy in Essex, said the original funding allocations "felt like an opportunity to reintroduce stuff to give kids opportunities they should have had already".

"That hope has just disappeared because... somebody made a mistake."



Susan Acland-Hood

The error means a budget of about £66,000 less than presumed. It also means an end to plans to hire support staff and redevelop a sensory space for autistic pupils.

"We've had to make do...with lightbulbs going [in the sensory space] and not be able to afford to replace them," a "heartbroken" Goddard said. "It's the first time I've been excited about a budget for years."

Schools Week analysis shows England's three largest academy trusts will be millions of pounds worse-off.

United Learning Trust will miss out on about £2.6 million. Projected budgets at the

NEWS: FUNDING

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Academies Enterprise Trust and Reach2 will fall by about £1.7 million and £810,000 respectively.

At Nelson Mandela Primary School in Birmingham, £20,000 less than expected means potential cuts to the number of teaching assistants.

"We're already at a skeleton staff of teachers", said Amy Lassman, the school's head. "There will [also] be further cuts to trips and enrichment."

'It stops us going above and beyond'

Robert Farmer, the chief executive of the Hamwic Trust, said his chain would cope "reasonably OK". But he would rather the DfE "got it right first time".

However, the changes would "restrict" schools' opportunities "to go above and beyond".

"To me it's about schools stripping back the nice-to-haves again. It does impact on being able to have TAs in classrooms; it can impact on music provision at primary.

"It's the things you might be doing to enrich the curriculum for pupils or give them better support...school trips for a start."

The budget at Chilwell School in Nottingham will go down by about £46,000.

But David Phillips, its head, said he had "always worked on the basis of taking the most negative view" in financial projections and would not need to make changes.

Richard Challoner School in Surrey will miss out on £40,000. Head Sean Maher said three-year financial projections were "works of fiction" because of unpredictability of changes to the funding formula, inflation and pay awards.

But while the school has not made plans to spend extra cash, it does have plans to cut staff numbers.

"I've got to try and save about £100,000 to £120,000 next year. It's probably going to look a bit grimmer now."

NEU decides not to reopen pay dispute

The overall amount awarded to schools hasn't changed and is still at £59.6 billion. The error was in adding up how many

THE GOVERNMENT'S FUNDING GAFFE IN FIGURES

£370M LESS FROM INDICATIVE BUDGETS PUBLISHED JULY

£58K LESS THAN EXPECTED PER AVERAGE SECONDARY

£12K LESS THAN EXPECTED PER AVERAGE PRIMARY

£55 LESS PER-SECONDARY PUPIL

£45 LESS PER-PRIMARY PUPIL

1.9% INCREASE IN FUNDING, DOWN FROM 2.7%

'Three-year financial projections are works of fiction'

pupils will receive cash next year.

It is understood the mistake was down to pupil numbers for at least one council that recently split into two not being counted. Just the pupil numbers for the original council, and not the new one, were factored into funding calculations .

At the weekend, Daniel Kebede, the NEU's general secretary, told members the error gave "grounds to reopen" its pay and funding dispute.

Kebede said the pay deal was agreed "on the premise that there would be protections around pupil funding".

The union's executive met on Thursday, but did not resolve to reopen the dispute or call any action at this stage.

Kebede told *Schools Week* members were "rightly furious", and would "continue to put pressure" on the government to commit to the £370 million



Gillian Keegan

uplift, along with £4.4 billion annually to fix the school estate.

"We need to see a drastic gear-change from a government which appears not to value education."

The department told *Schools Week* on Friday it had discovered the error in September, but did not say when in the month it was found.



David Phillips



Daniel Kebede

INVESTIGATION: LEVELLING UP

Levelling-up cash to ‘transform education’ just £50 per kid, analysis suggests

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

Ministers have been accused of failing to bridge the attainment gap after handing schools in left-behind parts of England just £50 per child through a major levelling-up scheme.

Several multi-million-pound government grants either prioritise cash for the towns and counties with the lowest results or give them exclusive access to extra money through the education investment areas (EIA) programme.

But *Schools Week* analysis suggests that one of the funding channels works out at just 83p extra a year for every pupil – while another offers less than £3 a head. However the Department for Education has contested our analysis (see nerd note).

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the NAHT, said: “We said at the time that the funding for investment areas was insufficient, and these figures seem to bear that out.

“If the government is serious about tackling the attainment gap, then schools must be given the resources they require to do the job.”

More than £83 million allocated

The EIAs were chosen because they were the “the weakest [places in the country] based on sustained low performance” across key stages 2 and 4 between 2017 and 2019.

The DfE hopes the initiative will help the areas “achieve the fastest progress” under its “national mission” to ensure 90 per cent of pupils meet expected standards at key stage 2 and increase average GCSE maths and English language grades from 4.5 to 5 by 2030.

Schools in the EIAs are prioritised money through the trust capacity fund (TCaF) and the Connect the



Paul Whiteman



Classroom scheme, which aims to improve internet speeds.

Meanwhile, secondary teachers working in the areas can access larger retention payments through the levelling-up premium.

Calculations using figures obtained through Freedom of Information requests show more than £83



Nadhim Zahawi

million a year has been allocated to the EIAs.

Twenty-four of the regions are also classified as priority education investment areas (PEIAs), places with high levels of deprivation as well as low achievement.

Ministers unveiled these investment areas last year “to address entrenched

How much cash are schools in 'education investment areas' actually getting?

Education Investment Areas: 3,146,915 pupils

Scheme	Total funding	Number of years	Annual investment per pupil
Trust Capacity fund	£22m	1	£7
Connect the Classroom	£105m	2	£16.63
Levelling-up premium	£9m	1	£2.88
Total:			£26.51

Priority Education Investment Areas: 933,693 pupils

Local needs fund	£42m	2	£22.49
Attendance mentoring pilot	£2.3m	3	£0.83
Total:			£23.32
Overall investment total			£49.83

SCHOOLS WEEK

Continued on next page

INVESTIGATION: LEVELLING UP

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underperformance, including in literacy and numeracy, in areas with some of the highest rates of disadvantage in the country", according to the schools white paper.

Schools in PEIAs are also eligible to receive cash through the local needs fund, while a handful of children in five of the priority areas will be given one-to-one support until 2026 through the attendance mentoring pilot.

In all, the two projects will direct a further £21.7 million a year into the priority areas.

When taken together, the five funding streams dish out £105 million on average every 12 months. This equates to £49.83 for each pupil, our analysis suggests.

'Drop in the ocean'

A trust chief executive – who asked to remain anonymous – called the EIA funds a "drop in the ocean" when compared with pupil premium payments, which start at £1,035 for each free school meal or looked-after child.

Of the five funding channels, the attendance mentoring pilot had the lowest cash-per-pupil pay-out (83p). The figure for the levelling-up premium stood at £2.88 (see table).

Academy trust leaders have also stressed that some EIA schools may not be eligible to bid for finances through any of the funding channels.

Howard Nelson, the chief operating officer of the Peterborough Keys Academies Trust (PKAT), said that TCaF – used to help form and grow trusts – was only suited to chains looking to expand. Even though its five schools were in an EIA, PKAT "hasn't been in a place to use the money from the fund, [but] at some point we would like to grow and that's when it'll become very useful".

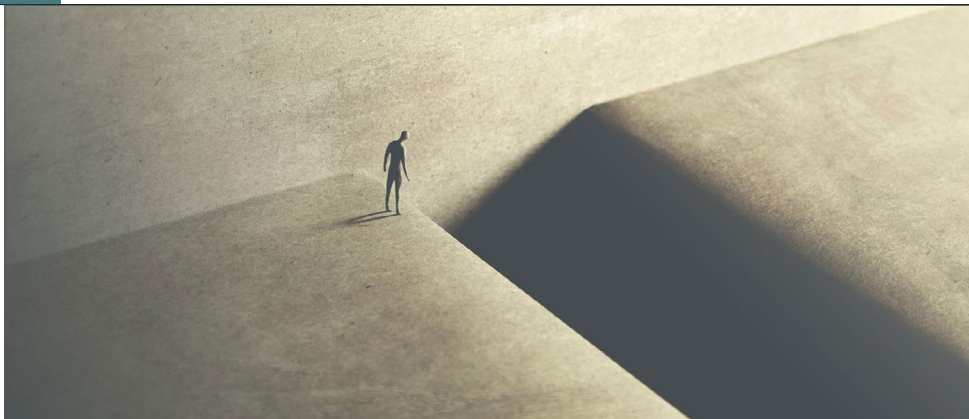
Another trust leader said: "We've not seen any benefit at all for our infant school. It's already got good connectivity and the pupil premium only applies to secondary schools."

Scheme 'making a difference'

Despite this, Nelson believes that Connect the Classroom is a good example of capital funding to help improve outcomes.

PKAT has lodged an application for £8,000 through the programme to upgrade one of its academy's wi-fi networks.

Hugh Greenway, the chief executive of the



Elliot Foundation, also credited the scheme for "making a big difference in terms of equality of access" across his trust, after 12 of his academies got cash through the grant.

Clare Flintoff, the chief executive of Asset Education, which runs eight schools in the Ipswich PEIA, said the town has been allocated more than £1 million through the local needs fund. She said the money – which will be used over the next two years – will "support schools where pupil attendance has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels".

"This all follows the opportunity area programme which has provided additional funding to the vast majority of schools in Ipswich in a myriad of ways, for example [through] training for teachers and leaders [and] remote learning support assistants," she said.

The £72 million opportunity areas scheme gave additional cash to 12 social mobility "cold spots" but ended last year, before EIAs were set up.

Schools Week's FOI shows 118 of the 211 successful TCaF bids in 2022-23 – the first year in which investment areas were prioritised for the cash – involved schools in EIAs. They got on average £187,000 per application, while trusts wanting to expand into other parts of the country received £125,673.38.

In all, the government dished out £33.7 million through TCaF in 2022-23. The figure stood at just under £17.5 million the year before.

PEIAs have also been allocated a further £42.3 million through the family hubs and start for life programme across two years. We did not

include this in our analysis because the cash is for councils, not schools, and much of its focus is on early years' provision.

A DfE spokesperson claimed our findings "entirely misrepresent the funding allocations". The various grants "go towards pupils and teachers in schools with the poorest outcomes to drive up standards as opposed to all pupils in each area".

The DfE added that it will "double the rates of the levelling-up premium [from £3,000 tax-free annually] to up to £6,000 tax-free and...extend it to those teaching eligible subjects in all general FE colleges".

Nerd note 

Our analysis is based on data obtained under freedom of information requests. It allowed us to work out how much funding was being issued to schools each year under separate schemes, which we then divided by the total number of pupils in those areas.

The trust capacity funding was harder to work out as cash was given to trusts and sometimes covered both investment area and non-investment area schools.

In this case, we divided the total funding for the bid by the number of schools to get a figure just for investment area schools.

The attendance pilot has only been rolled out in five council areas. But we still divided the funding by the total number of pupils in the priority investment areas, because it was a government decision to limit the scheme's reach.

The Department for Education said this was misleading and we should divide the funding amount by the number of pupils actually benefitting. We disagreed. We also excluded the £21 million yearly funding as part of a family hubs programme because this goes to councils for early years' provision, not schools.



Clare Flintoff



Forget post-16, it's primary maths we'll focus on says Labour

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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A Labour government would “upskill” non-maths specialists in primary schools in a bid to create the “maths equivalent to phonics”, Bridget Phillipson has announced.

But the party has not said what this training entitlement will consist of, how many teachers will benefit, nor what it will spend on the measure.

At its conference in Liverpool, Labour sought to mark a clear dividing line with the Conservatives, focusing on the youngest schoolchildren while prime minister Rishi Sunak wants to extend compulsory maths to 18.

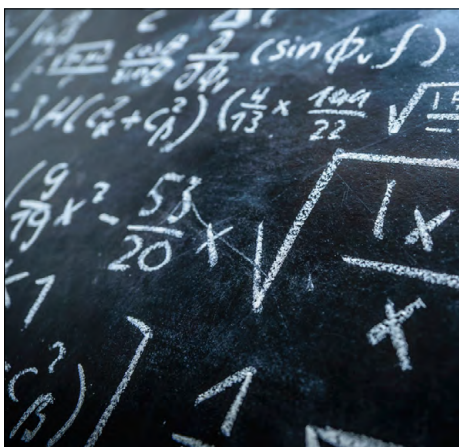
Labour even said it would reform the PM's maths to 18 working group, “so it focuses on primary maths as a first priority and investigates the maths equivalent to phonics”.

The party's already-announced curriculum review would also be tasked with “bringing maths to life and directing teachers to show children how numeracy is used in the world around them”.

Examples include “household budgeting, currency exchange rates when going on holiday, sports league tables and cookery recipes”.

This would include bringing elements of financial literacy into teaching, Labour said. Again, the party has not said more on this, but it is understood this relates to primary schools, as financial literacy is already included in the key stage 3 curriculum.

At primary school, pupils do already learn



some of the skills associated with the examples given by the party, such as percentages, measuring quantities and counting small amounts of money.

The upskilling would be delivered through the party's “teacher training entitlement”, which will be funded with £210 million from money it expects to raise by gathering VAT from private schools. However, the party has not said what proportion would be spent on maths.

Labour also sought to take some credit for the recent boost to literacy rates, pointing to the “achievements of the work started by the last Labour government on phonics”.

Phonics was given a higher profile in England in the 1998 national literacy strategy, but its use was ramped up



Geoff Barton

nationally by the Conservatives under Michael Gove from 2010, and is now tested through the phonics screening check.

The party said its work had “laid the basis for a policy which has improved the reading ability of children throughout their time at school” and would form a “template for its plans for primary maths”.

Phillipson said: “Maths is the language of the universe, the underpinning of our collective understanding. It cannot be left till the last years of school. It's why I'm proud to tell you today, that we'll tackle our chronic cultural problem with maths, by making sure it's better taught at 6, never mind 16.”

She said she was determined that Labour would bring “maths to life” for the next generation.

“I want the numeracy all our young people need – for life and for work, to earn and to spend, to understand and to challenge. I want that to be part of their learning right from the start.”

The plans were tentatively welcomed by the school leaders' union NAHT. Paul Whiteman, its general secretary, said it was vital that Labour built on the excellent maths teaching already taking place in primary schools.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of ASCL, added: “Ensuring that primary schools have the funding for the resources they need, and that primary teachers have the time and capacity to develop their maths expertise, is vital to improving attainment.”

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

Few details on early years dentistry plan

Labour's plan for “supervised toothbrushing” in schools will be delivered during breakfast clubs, but few further details have been released.

As part of a plan to reform dentistry, the party last week said it would introduce “supervised toothbrushing in schools for three to five-year-olds”.

This would be “targeted at the areas with the highest childhood tooth decay”. But no further details were released.

At the time, the school leaders' union NAHT criticised the policy, saying it was not up to teachers to make sure pupils brushed their

teeth every day.

Helen Hayes, the shadow children's minister, said at the Labour conference that the policy “sits alongside our commitment to universal free breakfast clubs in every primary school in the country”.

“I think someone was suggesting maybe that's a responsibility we were giving to teachers – that's not the case. It's a commitment to make resource available in those breakfast club settings to teach children the very basics of oral hygiene.”

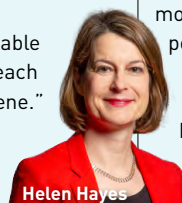
Since Monday, *Schools Week* has repeatedly asked Labour for clarity

on how this would work, but has received no response.

When announcing the £365 million breakfast clubs last year, Labour said schools would be given money directly to buy their own food and choose how to staff the clubs.

Paul Whiteman, the NAHT's general secretary, said last week: “We should demand more than window-dressing from all our politicians.”

In 2014, The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and Public Health England recommended supervised toothbrushing in early years' settings.



Helen Hayes



Tell us how you will fix recruitment, Labour told

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Labour has been told to reveal its plan for recruiting 6,500 extra teachers, as new analysis shows the promise would no longer plug the widening recruitment gap.

In 2021 Sir Keir Starmer told the Labour Party conference that his government would spend £347 million to fill "over 6,500 vacancies and skills gaps" across schools in England.

But two years on, and despite the party having fleshed out its education "mission" in July, details are scarce on how the additional teachers will be recruited.

Labour has so far only announced plans to award £2,400 teacher retention bonuses to all those who complete the two-year early career framework.

Natalie Perera, the chief executive of the Education Policy Institute, warned this week that "more details" were needed on the party's education policy "such as how a Labour government would tackle the crisis in teacher retention".

Current recruitment statistics also suggest Labour would need to recruit far more than 6,500 teachers to plug gaps.

In 2021 the gap between the number of teachers recruited and the government's target was just 937.

But last year, the government recruited 9,376 fewer teachers than it needed, and almost 40,000 left the profession. This year the shortfall is expected to be even larger.

Shadow ministers were asked several times at the party conference this week how they would recruit the teachers they have promised.

Bridget Phillipson, the shadow education secretary, could only say her party wanted to make teaching "a more attractive place to be ... that's the starting point".

She added the relationship between the government and education had to be reset, as did the message that government could send about the value of education – "and that teachers have a role to play in shaping that national mission".



Bridget Phillipson

This was "not the entire answer" but "we have to start somewhere".

Catherine McKinnell, the shadow schools minister, also spoke of the need for a "reset", adding that the "challenge" on recruitment was part of a bigger picture that included workload and accountability.

"So I know I've possibly not directly answered your questions. But I hope that gives you a sense of... how Labour wants to approach this."

However Sam Freedman, a former adviser to Michael Gove when he was education secretary, told a conference fringe: "I don't think Labour will fix recruitment.

"It's really quite fundamentally broken, and you'd have to put up pay far more than the Treasury will let them to get back to where we were in terms of an equilibrium on recruitment."

He said education would become a "visa profession" like health care, where "half of nurses and doctors are recruited from outside the EU".

Responding to his comments, McKinnell said she was "not oblivious to the scale of the challenge", but "the idea that these things can't change, I do not share".

"I feel very optimistic that with a reset relationship between

government and our public services...that we can really start to bring changes that will have an impact on teacher retention, that will have an impact on recruitment."

But Phillipson admitted this week there was "much more" a Labour government would need to do in education.

She explained the 6,500 figure was based on what the party deemed affordable with the money it would raise from charging private schools VAT. Any new investment would be reliant on the economy growing again.

But Lucy Heller, the chief executive of Ark Schools, also told a panel that even if Labour got "funding right", it would "probably not" solve "all the problems" in the sector.

She said during "battles" over school funding in recent years, there had been a lot of "talk around teaching that makes it sound the closest thing to hell, when most of us ... think it's incredibly tough but it's also the best job in the world when it works. So there is definitely some new marketing needed."

She also pointed to "a schizophrenic thing, I think, occasionally from government in [saying] 'you're all great, you're so wonderful' but 'you're not working hard enough'.

"With some of that we just say 'no, the single most important thing we can do is get it right for our children'. That's an amazing thing to do."



Natalie Perera

LABOUR CONFERENCE



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Phillipson says little on SEND

Labour offered little about how it might fix the “fundamentally broken” SEND system, although it did promise not to “rip everything up” if elected.

The party previously pledged to “improve inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools”, echoing the Tories’ plans, and to “join up services and improve data use” to identify children’s needs earlier.

But it has said little on solving the many challenges in the SEND system, including how it would deal with the estimated £2.4 billion high-needs deficits faced by councils.

When challenged this week, Bridget Phillipson admitted the current system “is fundamentally broken” and “increasingly adversarial”.

The shadow education secretary said she wished the government was “progressing a bit quicker” on its SEND forms

Labour would take some changes forward it it were clear that they were working and were “not about ripping everything up. If something is effective and it’s working, we will be led by the best evidence on it.”

Key policies from the government’s SEND reforms, signed off in March, are being piloted in certain areas, but may not be rolled out until 2026. No new legislation will be enacted in this



Bridget Phillipson

parliament.

Phillipson told the Labour conference: “It will take a lot to fix but it is my determination that we make sure we have a system that supports all children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities who at the moment frequently don’t have a voice at all.”



Sir Keir Starmer

Schools policy fails to get a mention

Labour will “ignore the appeals for the status quo on private school tax breaks or an outdated national curriculum”, Sir Keir Starmer pledged.

In a speech that did not include any new schools policy, the party leader praised teachers for their work during the RAAC crisis, while warning that teaching assistants were “walking a little more slowly past the food bank in their town”.

The party has pledged to remove the current exemption from VAT and business rates for private schools, which it believes will raise more than £1 billion for state education.

An incoming Labour government would also reform the curriculum with a “greater emphasis on creativity and resilience”.

During his speech on Tuesday, interrupted by a protester who showered him with glitter, the Labour leader pledged a “mission government”, focused on “long-term national renewal”.

“People will say ‘don’t rock the boat, we’ve always done it like this, is this really necessary?’ I’ve reformed a public service before. I know how it goes. But it’s our responsibility to do it. And across our public services the prize is huge.

“If we ignore the appeals for the status quo on private school tax breaks or an outdated national curriculum, then we can have mental health staff in every school, expert teachers in the classroom, more creativity, speaking skills, confidence. Shatter the class ceiling at source.”

Ofsted reforms will be ‘a priority’

Reform to Ofsted will happen “in the shortest time possible” if Labour wins the next election, but with “the greatest engagement possible” with schools, the new shadow schools minister has said.

Catherine McKinnell said changes to inspection were a “priority” and “time-critical”.

Labour announced earlier this year that it would replace the four current headline judgments with report cards that set out the strengths and weaknesses of schools.

It would also inspect multi-academy trusts, and create an annual safeguarding audit for all schools.

McKinnell, who was appointed last month, on Monday told a fringe event organised by the Education Policy Institute and ASCL school

leaders’ union that “it really does feel that we have a system currently where inspections aren’t just dreaded, but ineffective”.

“They are adding to the recruitment and retention crisis. And they are providing very little useful information for parents.”

She said Labour wanted “every school leader, every teacher, not just to be achieving for our children, but to be supported in achieving the best for our children. That is the ultimate aim.”

“And so we will look to achieve that in the shortest time possible, but with the greatest engagement possible to get it right.”

Ofsted reform would be “jointly created” so that it was an inspectorate “we can have confidence in, that it is achieving its aims, and that parents can have confidence in again”.

KS1 results stay below pandemic levels

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Attainment in the national SATs for seven-year-olds shows a slight improvement on last year, but remains below pre-pandemic levels.

Results for the key stage 1 tests sat last academic year were published on Thursday. The assessments have become non-statutory from this year, meaning schools no longer have to participate.

The results show that 68 per cent of pupils met the expected standard in reading, up from 67 per cent last year, but below the 75 per cent of 2019.

Sixty per cent met the expected standard in writing, up from 58 per cent last year, but down from 69 per cent in 2019.

The proportion achieving the benchmark in maths rose to 70 per cent from 68 per cent last year. Again, this is below the 76 per cent of 2019.

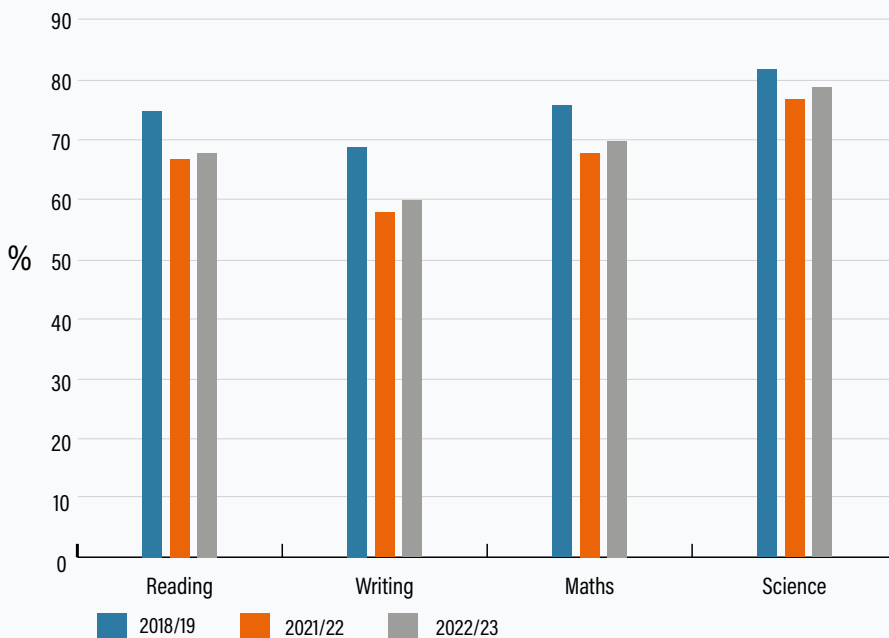
And science attainment has increased from 77 per cent in 2022 to 79 per cent this year. It was 82 per cent in 2019.

The Department for Education pointed out that the year 2 pupils who took the tests last year “experienced disruption to their learning during the pandemic”.

“On-site attendance was limited to children of key workers and vulnerable children in January and February of their first year of school, with attendance mandatory except for self-isolating pupils for the remainder of the year.”

The results also show that 79 per cent of pupils met the expected standard in the phonics screening check in year 1, up from 75 per cent

Pupils meeting the expected standard in key stage 1 SATs

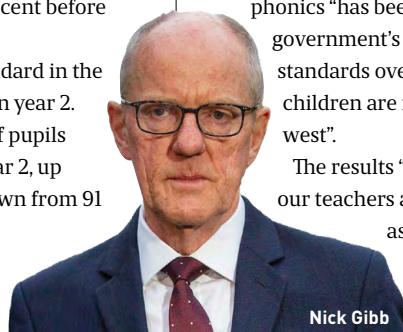


Source: Department for Education

last year, but less than the 82 per cent before the pandemic.

Pupils who fail to meet the standard in the year 1 phonics check do it again in year 2. Today's data shows 89 per cent of pupils met the expected standard by year 2, up from 87 per cent last year, but down from 91 per cent in 2019.

Nick Gibb, the schools minister, said teaching reading using



Nick Gibb

phonics “has been a key part of this government’s focus on driving up school standards over the past 13 years, and our children are now the best readers in the west”.

The results “reflect the hard work of our teachers and show strong progress as pupils continue to recover from the impact of the pandemic”.

Oliver gets the go ahead

The Privy Council has approved Sir Martyn Oliver’s appointment as the next chief inspector.

The chief executive of the Outwood Grange Academies Trust, put forward earlier this year as the government’s preferred candidate, was endorsed by the education committee last month.

Approval by the Privy Council – which advises the King – means he will take over from Amanda Spielman in January.

Oliver said he felt “deeply honoured and hugely privileged” and looked forward to “engaging with all parts of the sector that Ofsted regulates and inspects through a big listen”.

He promised to be “empathetic, compassionate and understanding of the challenges that those of us working in education, children’s services and skills face, especially in terms of the recovery post-Covid”.

Absence rate doubles

Almost one in ten secondary school pupils missed school in the last week of September after sickness absence doubled in two weeks.

Attendance data published by the Department for Education on Thursday showed overall absence leapt to 6.9 per cent in the week beginning September 25.

Although absence was still lower than during much of the spring and summer term, which was affected by strikes, it marks a 38

per cent rise on the 5 per cent in the week of September 11.

Before Covid, absences of about 4.5 per cent were more common.

Secondary absence reached 8.8 per cent, up from 6.2 per cent, while primary absence hit 5.2 per cent, up from 3.9 per cent.

The DfE said the increase “appears to be driven primarily by illness absence”.

The rate of people testing positive for Covid in England has been rising since July.

Jewish schools get extra cash for security

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Jewish schools will get extra security guards after the government gave £3 million to keep pupils safe amid rising antisemitic incidents following the violence in Israel.

Security and police patrols had already been increased, with pupils in some schools told to take off blazers in case it led to abuse.

Detentions have been cancelled and school trips have also been postponed.

The Community Security Trust (CST), which provides protection for Jewish communities in the UK, said there had been 139 antisemitic incidents since Hamas launched an attack on Israel at the weekend.

At this time last year there had been 21 incidents.

While there is no breakdown on school-specific figures, CST said a group of children in an unnamed school “cornered a Jewish pupil, said they were ‘Jewphobic’ and blamed him for the killings of Palestinians”.

The £3 million boosts this year’s government funding for the Jewish Community Protection Security scheme to £18 million. The extra cash will help provide more guards outside schools.

‘No detentions’

Melanie Lee, the headteacher at the Jewish Community Secondary School (JCoSS) in Hertfordshire, told parents this week there would be “heightened vigilance”, an increase in its school security team and enhanced entrance checks.

A dedicated space has been created so pupils “can talk to someone throughout the day but especially at break and lunch times” as many members of the school community were “deeply and personally affected”.

The Metropolitan Police is increasing its presence at schools and synagogues and will investigate any instances of hate or harassment.

David Moody, the head of the Jewish Free School in north London, said he would understand any pupil’s decision not to wear a blazer.

In an extract of his letter to parents, published by the radio station LBC, Moody added: “The most important thing is to ensure the safe passage of students between home and school



and to make sure that this school is set up to care for our children during the school day.

“To that end, there will be no after-school detentions this week so that we can make sure everyone is able to access the school buses should this be their normal route home.” Two former JFS pupils died in Israel this week.

Steven Lewis, head of the Yavneh College in Hertfordshire, already has a four-strong security team, CCTV and high fencing. He said they were “vigilant and a little anxious”.

“I have run a number of assemblies throughout the week to talk about how intrinsic the concept of peace is for us as Jews, it sits at the heart of our daily prayers, it is how we greet each other and how we part from each other every day of the week.”

King David High School in Manchester said there was a drop in attendance on Monday, but the Guardian said numbers had since risen.

John Dalziel, its head, said: “Our main priority is that our school is a place of safety where normal life is continuing away from the 24-hour news cycle.”

Patrick Moriarty, a former head of JCoSS, said leaders would be working hard to promote pupils’ safety “emotionally, physically, educationally and spiritually”.

‘Head are not alone’

Guidance for heads from the Partnerships for Jewish Schools (PaJeS) says children’s

fears should “not be dismissed but need to be recognised and addressed with sensitivity”. It was important staff were “reassured” that everything was being done to ensure “a safe and secure environment”.

The guidance said heads were not alone. They were not “trained experts in security or psychological matters” and were not expected “to have all the answers”.

Rabbi David Meyer, PaJeS chief executive, said during the last conflict, there were many Jewish children in mainstream schools who felt deeply uncomfortable by pro-Palestine demonstrations.

The Board of Deputies of British Jews said teacher forums, such as on Facebook, “could become not only politically charged and rife with rhetoric, but also be sharing and promoting the use of biased or anti-Israel resources for use in the classroom.”

“This is not only problematic educationally but potentially intimidating for Jewish teachers.”

DfE guidance on political impartiality, published last year, says school leaders must not promote partisan political views in teaching and should offer a balanced presentation of opposing views when political issues were raised.

Rishi Sunak said the Jewish community had “our complete backing”.



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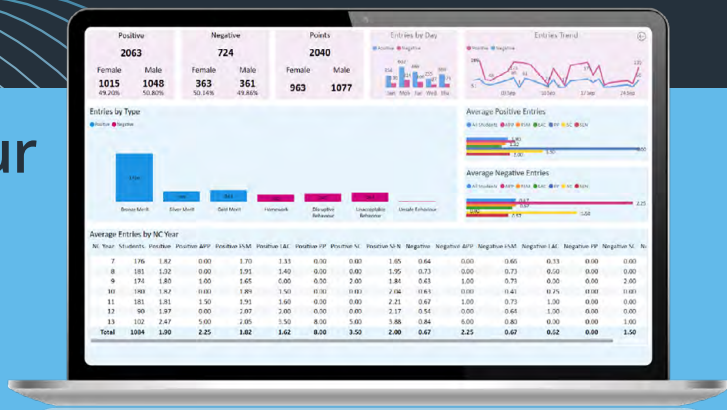
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'Hackathon' could test AI role in EHCPs and careers advice

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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Ministers are keen to discover whether artificial intelligence could help schools to provide careers advice and propose interventions for vulnerable children as part of an education "hackathon" run by a firm with links to the Vote Leave campaign.

Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, believes AI could have "huge potential to transform" education, including personalised support for pupils and helping with teachers' workload.

To test ideas, the Department for Education has announced a "hackathon" this month working with leading school trusts and the National Institute of Teaching (NioT).

Tech firm Faculty AI will help to run the events under a £350,000 contract to "understand possible use cases for generative AI in education", according to contract documents seen by Schools Week.

The Guardian reported that the firm's first high-profile contract was supplying data science services to the Vote Leave campaign, which Dominic Cummings ran before becoming Boris Johnson's chief adviser.

Former academies minister Lord Agnew also has shares in the company. The Guardian estimated that these were worth £90,000 in 2020.

The company's contract states that it will collaborate with the DfE and pedagogical experts appointed by the department to create a series of 20 "use cases" to be tested at hackathons.

DfE 'interested' to try AI in EHCP process

While the DfE and Faculty will agree on the details, the department included examples of what it "would be most interested in" testing.

For management and administrative processes, this might include whether AI could "summarise an EHCP and make recommendations for interventions" or "create a policy document on phone usage on school premises".

For teaching, the department is interested in whether it could "mark a piece of year 12 English coursework" or "produce an end-of-unit formative assessment for 'The Vikings' in year 4".

Finally, for pupils, example uses could be "careers advice for someone selecting the subjects they intend to take for



their GCSEs" and to "act as a historical figure to explain historical events in context".

It will build a "proof-of-concept" generative AI tool and test it with users before analysing the results.

For scenarios that turn out to be unsuccessful during the hackathon, Faculty will see whether AI can be trained to complete those tasks.

The DfE told Schools Week that any examples at this stage are just "illustrative". It would not support the use of AI to "draft personalised plans or guidance without expert human involvement".

Solutions shared with workload taskforce

In a press release, the DfE said the best of the solutions would be shared with its new workload reduction taskforce and a demonstration of the tools made available for schools to test.

Faculty's contract states that the project "has significant ministerial and prime ministerial interest" and it was "therefore highly important that we can conduct this research in a timely and comprehensive manner".

The firm was contracted through the Crown Commercial Service framework. The DfE said it was a "fair, open and competitive tender process".

Roger Taylor, former Ofqual chair, will be a senior adviser on the programme.

Faculty AI said it has never been political. It decided after the referendum to stop working in politics because it was distracting from its work helping organisations to harness the power of AI.

The National Audit Office found "no evidence" that Agnew had been involved in the awarding of contracts to

Faculty during the pandemic.

Tom Nixon, director of government at Faculty AI, said AI was "the defining technology of our generation – and now is the time to safely bring its vast benefits to schools".

He added: "From creating timetables and lesson resources to supporting students with personalised feedback, AI has the power to cut workloads and improve young people's education."

'Time to bring AI benefits to schools'

The NioT will also work on the project, which will bring teachers and leaders together including from the Harris Federation, Star Academies, Outwood Grange Academies Trust and Inspiration Trust.

Dr Calum Davey, the NioT's executive director of research, said it was "proud to work with Faculty to connect the experts in AI technology with the experts in the classroom. Our researchers will be listening to those involved and sharing what we learn."

Hackathon results will be published alongside submissions from the DfE's call for evidence on AI in November.

Keegan said that to "reap the benefits" of AI in education "we need to improve our understanding of how AI works and safely".

She added: "Participants of the hackathons will be supported by Faculty AI and the National Institute of Teaching to experiment and put forward solutions, paving the way for the future."



Roger Taylor



Gillian Keegan

Teacher training portal 'favours big providers'

AMY WALKER

@AMYRWALKER

EXCLUSIVE

Universities have written to ministers about their concern that the government's teacher training application portal "inadvertently" favours big national providers such as the National Institute of Teaching (NioT).

Prospective teachers can search for courses online by entering their postcode, which brings up a list of courses in their area sorted by distance.

However, rather than just list their courses, national providers such as NioT list each of the partner schools they work with on placements.

It means those searching for a course can face hundreds of results, seemingly going against the government's promise that its controversial market review of ITT would "simplify" and "streamline" the process.

But it also means university providers, which are less likely to list all their placement schools, are "less visible".

"The listing of so many schools could, albeit inadvertently, disadvantage some providers because the schools that they work with are less visible amongst all of the detail," said James Noble-Rogers, the executive director of the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET).

"The listing of so many schools might also give prospective students the impression that they can choose a placement school, which is something that providers will not always be able to guarantee."

UCET has raised the issue with the Department for Education.

Peter Flew, dean of the school of education at the University of Roehampton, pointed out that a candidate looking for a primary course in Roehampton would be faced with 380 choices. In York a search brings up 160 choices.

Reaccreditation led to a 25 per cent cut in the number of teacher training providers, but also to 16 newly-accredited providers,



including NioT and the Ambition Institute.

"The only national presence previously was Teach First," Flew said. "Those with a national or regional presence don't quite know how to sell themselves to candidates searching for a place [locally]."

"I understand why they're doing it. It's a perfectly valid business reason – to make it obvious that they work at a local level – but because of the way the system's set up makes it very confusing for candidates."

Noble-Rogers suggested the government should consider making providers only advertise the area they work in, rather than list all their placement schools.

The Cathedral Group of universities, which covers 14 higher education institutions that will operate in the ITT market next year – including Roehampton – said there was "widespread concern"

about the issue.

"It risks creating greater complexity for those interested in applying for teacher education courses," said a spokesman.

The group plans to take "this issue up with ministers".

In its consultation on the ITT market review, the DfE identified a potential for "streamlining" recruitment, suggesting reforms would create an "ITT landscape that is more easily navigable for potential trainees".

It is understood that part of this improvement was hoped to have been achieved through cutting provider numbers.

In its response to the ITT market review report, the government added that it had "heard during our engagement that, as a result of the reforms to market structure, providers and their partners should be able to establish streamlined recruitment and selection processes".

The DfE did not respond to a request for comment. NioT declined to comment.



James Noble-Rogers

Bursary boost, but still £54m off pre-pandemic spend

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER



The Department for Education will increase teaching incentives in most subjects next year, but its spend on getting more trainees into the classroom remains behind pre-pandemic levels.

Overall spending on teacher incentives in 2024-25 will rise to £196 million, up from £181 million this year. However, this is still £54 million less than the £250 million spent in 2020.

Incentives were heavily slashed when Covid prompted what turned out to be a short-lived a spike in interest in teaching.

The government missed its secondary recruitment targets by 40 per cent last year, and is expected to miss them by about half this year.

Ministers announced on Tuesday that bursaries in maths, physics, chemistry and computing will rise 3.7 per cent from £27,000 to £28,000 in 2024-25.

Bursaries in geography and design and technology will rise 25 per cent, from £20,000 to £25,000.

Geography and languages bursaries will remain the same at £25,000, and the government will re-introduce £10,000 bursaries in art and design, music and religious education.

However, the bursary for English trainees will fall from £15,000 to £10,000.

Scholarships in maths, physics, chemistry and computing teaching will rise 3.4 per cent from £29,000 to £30,000. They will remain at £27,000 in French, German and Spanish.

'Like filling a bath without a plug'

The National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers welcomed new bursaries, but Emma Hollis, its executive director, said there would be "concern in the sector" that primary teachers were not eligible.

The government last year recruited 93 per cent of its target for primary trainees, the first time it has been missed since 2019.

The target has fallen 22 per cent – from 11,655 last year to 9,180 this year – as plunging pupil numbers start to hit.

The DfE said this was also due to "more favourable primary recruitment and retention forecasts".

But despite the drop, the National Foundation for Educational Research earlier this year

predicted the government would still miss its primary teacher recruitment goal.

Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, said teachers were "key to the success" of the prime minister's recent announcement of a new qualification for sixth-formers.

"That's why we need the best and the brightest teaching throughout our schools. These bursaries give trainee teachers even more choice and

support to help them start their journey into the classroom."

But Ian Hartwright, the head of policy at the school leaders' union NAHT, said the proposals "follow a well-worn path that has failed to deliver".

"It's like filling a bath without a plug to keep the water in. Almost 44,000 teachers left the profession last year and retention rates for new recruits after their first year teaching actually fell.

"Without a far more ambitious and comprehensive approach from the government, school leaders will continue to struggle to ensure all children have the teachers they need to flourish."

The government has pledged to update its recruitment and retention strategy this autumn. Levelling-up premium payments for teachers in shortage subjects will also be doubled from the 2024-25 financial year, making £30,000 tax-free available over five years.

Teaching bursaries and scholarships for 2024-25

	Bursary		Scholarship	
	2023	2024	2023	2024
Chemistry	£27,000	£28,000	£29,000	£30,000
Computing	£27,000	£28,000	£29,000	£30,000
Maths	£27,000	£28,000	£29,000	£30,000
Physics	£27,000	£28,000	£29,000	£30,000
Biology	£20,000	£25,000		
Design and technology	£20,000	£25,000		
Geography	£25,000	£25,000		
Languages (including ancient)	£25,000	£25,000		
Art and design	£0	£10,000		
English	£15,000	£10,000		
Music	£0	£10,000		
Religious education	£0	£10,000		
French			£27,000	£27,000
German			£27,000	£27,000
Spanish			£27,000	£27,000

Ofqual extends new vocational qualification checkpoints

ANVIKSHA PATEL

@ANNIESEATING

Ofqual's new term-time checkpoints that aim to ensure vocational and technical qualification (VTQ) students get their results on time have been extended to level 1/2 and level 2 courses.

The expansion beyond level 3 VTQs forms part of the regulator's efforts to avoid a repeat of the 2022 BTECs fiasco that led to tens of thousands of delayed results.

In March, Ofqual introduced strict deadlines for awarding bodies to agree with schools and colleges which students should expect to receive their level 3 VTQ grades on results day.

The regulator also introduced a term-time checkpoint for schools and colleges to check any missing information is addressed as quickly as possible before results day.

In a letter from Ofqual's outgoing chief regulator Jo Saxton, schools and colleges were today told that the term-time checkpoint, which should be completed before the May exam season, will now apply to level 1/2 and level 2 VTQs for 2024 onwards.

"The checkpoint process is designed to ensure that students who need a result on results days get one," Saxton said.

"Schools and colleges recognised that it would be helpful to extend this arrangement to level 1/2 and level 2 qualifications, where they are taken alongside GCSEs at key stage 4, for progression," the letter added. "Ofqual is expanding the scope of these arrangements accordingly."

Around 370,000 level 3 VTQ results were awarded in 2022/23.

An additional 400,000 level 1/2 and level 2 VTQs are taken by students each year. Level 1/2 courses are an alternative qualification to GCSEs for learners aged 14 to 16 that includes a vocational and project-based aspect. They span both levels 1 and 2 qualifications.



Saxton said the "ability" of staff to review results and engage with awarding organisations prior to results days proved a "critical aspect of the success of the summer of 2023", and recognised this was a "demanding time for schools and colleges".

She added: "If your school or college handles high volumes of results, I encourage you to consider which staff will need to be available."

The letter said that individual awarding organisations will confirm when results for their qualifications will be issued to schools and colleges.

Colleges should expect Ofqual's Information Hub to publish awarding organisations' key dates and deadlines in the new year.

Ofqual has been told that awarding organisations' communication with colleges "sometimes felt overwhelming and heavy-handed" last year and is therefore working to consider "the content, volume and timing" of their communication with schools and colleges.

For level 3 results, awarding bodies must agree with schools and colleges by May 26



Jo Saxton

which students expect to receive grades on level 3 results day in the summer. They must also check-up around mid-term on missing information needed for students' results by June 23. The deadline for issuing VTQ results to schools and colleges is August 14 – three days before the level 3 results day.

The change came after 21,000 BTEC and Cambridge Technical (CTEC) results were issued late in 2022, leaving students stuck and in the dark.

Reform funding and do SEND checks to close gap, says EPI

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

The government should reform additional funding for poorer pupils to ensure those “persistently disadvantaged” get more cash, a think tank said after it found such children were almost two years behind their peers by the end of secondary school.

The Education Policy Institute also said all pupils should get a “thorough screening check” for special educational needs and disabilities at the start of primary school to close growing attainment gaps.

The think tank’s annual report for 2022 found that at age 5, disadvantaged pupils were already 4.8 months behind their peers, up from 4.2 months in 2019 and its highest level since 2014.

By the end of primary school, the gap was 10.3 months, up from 9.3 in 2019 and higher than in 2012, reversing a “sustained period of decreasing inequalities between 2011 and 2018”.

At the end of secondary school, poorer pupils were more than 18.8 months behind. This gap has also widened by 0.7 months since 2019 and is the highest since 2012.

However, children with a “high persistence of poverty” fared worse. The EPI found these pupils were 12.2 months behind by the end of primary school and 22.7 months behind by the time they finished key stage 4.

These gaps have not widened since 2019, but there was also no progress in reducing them before the pandemic, as there was for other disadvantaged pupils.

Adjusting for changes in the composition of those eligible for free school meals because of transitional arrangements following the introduction of universal credit, the EPI found “some evidence that underlying attainment gaps for persistently disadvantaged pupils have widened since 2019”.

Emily Hunt, from the think tank, said the research showed a “troubling picture of the stark inequalities in English education, years after the initial disruption of the pandemic”.

The report called for higher levels of funding for disadvantage, which would be “then weighted more heavily towards persistently disadvantaged pupils”.

To target this additional support, the DfE



“should ensure persistently disadvantaged pupils can be easily identified by schools”.

Including these identifiers on the National Pupil Database “will additionally support research on the outcomes of these pupils”.

The DfE should “also make available centrally held data linking family income to pupil-level attainment, given that universal credit protections will continue to affect who is considered disadvantaged based on FSM eligibility”.

The EPI research also found reception children with education, health and care plans (EHCPs) in 2022 were already 19.7 months behind, while those receiving SEN support were 12.4 months behind.

These gaps have “flatlined and widened respectively during the pandemic and, unlike for later phases, they have also widened since the start of the series in 2013”.

Pupils with EHCPs were 28.3 months behind by the end of key stage 2, and those getting SEN support were 18.1 months behind. By the end of

key stage 4, these gaps were 40.7 months and 23 months respectively.

The EPI called for “more effective support for the very youngest children with SEND and for all children with the most significant SEND, as there has been no progress in closing the gap for these groups in recent years”.

“There is also a need for improved early identification of SEND... This could take the form of a thorough screening check during reception year.”

The DfE should also publish a strategy to reduce the disadvantage gap, clarifying the government’s “level of ambition regarding educational inequalities”, EPI said. The think tank also called for an “urgent” cross-government child poverty strategy.

Researchers also looked at attainment by ethnicity. They found Gypsy Roma pupils were 31.4 months behind white British pupils by the end of secondary school.

At the same stage, Chinese pupils were 24.1 months ahead of white British pupils.

7 policy solutions from EPI to close gap

- DfE to publish strategy to close disadvantage gap, including review of existing policies
- Cross-government child poverty strategy recognising social determinants of education inequality
- Boost funding for poorer pupils, including being weighted more heavily towards those persistently disadvantaged
- Include identifiers for such pupils on the National Pupil Database and make available data linking family income to pupil-level attainment
- Better support youngest children with SEND, including better teacher training, high-needs budget review and ensuring access to specialist services
- Thorough screen check during reception for improved early identification of SEND
- DfE should understand why performance of white and black Caribbean pupils has been more adversely impacted by the pandemic

Advertorial

WHY TEACHER APPRENTICESHIPS CAN HELP TACKLE THE TEACHER RECRUITMENT CHALLENGE

By Best Practice Network

When you hear the word apprenticeship, what comes to mind? Vocational training routes for school-leavers would probably be high on the list, but that would overlook the revolution that has happened in apprenticeship provision for the school workforce in recent years.

There has never been a more pressing need for alternative, cost-effective ways of training and recruiting new teachers. Teacher apprenticeships will help fulfil that demand – offering an attractive pathway to QTS for TAs and other support staff whilst widening the pool of trainee teachers by removing the financial constraints of ITT.

The challenge is certainly substantial. England is facing a shortage of teachers. With expensive tuition fees and an unpaid year of training, it is understandable why some are hesitant to pursue a career in teaching. Also, new teachers often lack the support they need to succeed, which can lead to high turnover rates.

The fact is that apprenticeships can offer schools a much more affordable, flexible and supportive tool to help increase the number of new teachers in the profession – and keep them there.

So why should you consider teacher apprenticeships? They are funded by the Apprenticeship Levy, so there are no tuition fees to pay, for a start.

MATs and LEAs can use their Levy pot to pay for 100% of the training fees for their academies and maintained schools, thereby avoiding having their Levy contributions being clawed back by central



government. Accessing Apprenticeship Levy funding, previously seen as a somewhat complex and even daunting task, is made easy by Best Practice Network's award-winning apprenticeship support team.

Apprentices also get a salary while they are training, which can help to cover their living expenses. The salary is paid on the unqualified teacher pay scale so that when taking employer grants into account, schools can employ an apprentice teacher for as little as £2,598 a year.

Teacher apprenticeships typically last for 12 months – shorter than the traditional two-year teacher training programme. This makes them a more flexible option for people who are already working or have other commitments.

Best Practice Network – one of the UK's leading providers of training and professional development – is playing a major role in providing

those apprenticeships to schools and trusts across the country. Our Teacher Apprenticeships provide a fee-free and salaried route into teaching.

It's an approach which not only bridges the experience gap but also ensures that apprentice teachers are well-prepared to step into full teaching roles with confidence and competence. Throughout their 12-month programme, apprentice teachers are immersed in the day-to-day realities of the classroom, gaining valuable hands-on experience under the dedicated mentorship of seasoned teachers.

In a landscape where the shortage of teachers threatens the quality of education, the time has come for school and MAT leaders to take a proactive stance.

The teacher shortage crisis is not insurmountable; it's an opportunity to explore innovative avenues for growth.

By embracing teacher apprenticeships, schools and MATs will not only help to fill those gaps in staffing – they can also enhance the standard of education they provide.

Viewpoint: why we took on an apprentice teacher

"We decided to take on an apprentice teacher because we knew they had a lot to offer the department, school and profession," writes Aidan Jenkins, Director of Teacher Development, Futures Teaching School Alliance.

"Although it's just as seamless to hire an apprentice without previous experience in our school, this apprentice was a current staff member in a non-teaching role who was simply blossoming.

"The idea of them having their training within the school, with the high-quality support of

Best Practice Network's teacher apprenticeship programme, seemed a better fit than the traditional teacher training route.

"Our apprentice made really good progress because they already felt a sense of belonging in the school and had a clear understanding of our ethos.

"Our apprentice is now a qualified teacher and part of the school's fabric. And they are now ready to take their next steps in their professional learning by starting an NPQ."



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BEST PRACTICE NETWORK'S TEACHER APPRENTICESHIPS, [CLICK HERE](#)

Profile

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL

‘They leave our conferences thinking, ‘I’m gonna change the world’

PiXL chief executive Rachel Johnson tells Jessica Hill how the network is on a mission to help leaders become better human beings

The moment when Rachel Johnson announced that she was taking over as school and college leadership network PiXL’s new chief executive was one that still gives her shivers.

It was January 2020, and little did any of the 1,200 headteachers present at PiXL’s conference realise that, over in China, a new virus was taking hold that would change the world forever. Back then, PiXL’s operation was mostly reliant on live events.

A former English teacher who at the time was PiXL’s head of strategy, Johnson recalls her heart going “mad and fluttery” as she told the audience that Sir John Rowling, the charismatic

chief executive who had personified PiXL since founding it 15 years earlier, had died. He had kept his five-month battle with cancer a secret from everyone except close family.

“I’m his daughter,” Johnson continued to a “massive gasp” from PiXL members, most of whom had had no idea that the pair were related.

Then, she dropped her final bombshell: “I’m taking over.”

Johnson had left her husband to care for their children while she moved back in with her parents to nurse her father in his final weeks. But, when she revealed her desire to succeed him, Rowling refused to give his opinion.

“I couldn’t get my head around it because I

wanted him to say, ‘go on, you’re going to be brilliant’. I was imagining that *Lion King* moment of him saying, ‘here’s my legacy, you take it’”

Now, she believes his silence was “the biggest gift” he could have given her, because it meant she “wasn’t trying to fill his shoes”.

He had wanted his daughter to feel free to make her own choices. She was free to lead PiXL in her own way, and to shake off a reputation that the company was encouraging schools to game the system – but more on that later.

At the time, she told the conference there was “so much” she could fear in “trying to grieve and lead in real time in a public way. I’ve got the biggest job of my entire life.

Profile: Rachel Johnson



Johnson as a toddler with her dad, PiXL founder Sir John Rowling

“I don’t know if you’re going to leave because he’s not here anymore. But I don’t want to choose fear... I want to choose hope.”

Such openness about her vulnerability triggered an outpouring of support from the heads who gave her a “teary-eyed”, standing ovation. And that message of embracing hope through adversity has epitomised her leadership ever since, because it had to.

It was the last time that Johnson would be in a real-life conference of headteachers for the next two years. During that time, she was forced to find other ways for PiXL to generate revenue while supporting headteachers through the toughest of times. She also had to deal with the death of her mother.

Her formidable resilience and determination to see the best in situations was clear long before that, however. At the age of 29, Johnson’s legs were “smashed to pieces” after she was hit by a car one icy evening. It was on the second date with her now-husband.

After eight hours of surgery, Johnson was told that she would never walk well again without a stick. She was determined to prove her doctors wrong, and she did.

Two years before that, when Johnson found a burglar in her home, she “went all teachery” on him, persuading 19-year-old Darren to have “a chat in the lounge” and return all that he had stolen.

It turned out that Darren was an orphan who was “completely lost”, and Johnson helped to get him into drugs rehabilitation.



‘What’s important is the sense that people are not on their own’

She says that leading through grief has made her “unquestionably more understanding and compassionate” to herself, too.

As a child growing up in a household where her mum was a teacher and her dad was a head (of Nunthorpe Comprehensive in Middlesbrough), Johnson’s dream had been to become a head herself one day. She had just started teaching English at a secondary school in Stockton-on-Tees in 2006 when PiXL was formed.

The Department for Education had pulled funding for the London Challenge school improvement programme that Rowling was helping to lead. Its then 55 partner schools pledged to continue working together under a new network, with him at the helm.

PiXL stands for Partners in Excellence, which seems apt when Johnson – a self-confessed “book addict” – points at a stack of books and explains that three, titled *Climbing towards Excellence*, *Changing towards Excellence* and *Heading towards Excellence*, were written by her father.

Rowling grew PiXL by “word of mouth” through its reputation for providing strategies to raise

attainment. Meanwhile, Johnson became head of English at Cramlington Learning Village in Northumberland.

But she “didn’t really enjoy” being “in and out” of school on maternity leave after having the first of her three children. She began writing English resources for PiXL instead.

Rowling was adamant that, if his daughter wanted to climb the career ladder at his company, she would have to get there on her “own merits”. He left others to make decisions over appointing her head of strategy and director.

The network had grown rapidly due to his ability to build “relationships with people personally”. There were moments after his death when Johnson questioned whether PiXL could continue.

But it had not all been plain sailing. The company was sporadically dogged with accusations over gaming – so much so that in 2018, new Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman said inspecting curriculum rather than results would help “undo the ‘Pixlification’ of education”.

Johnson takes offence at the statement. She was “confused by the narrative” of the “whole hoo-ha

Profile: Rachel Johnson

over gaming. How can it be gaming when everyone else is allowed?"

In 2012 PiXL had been criticised after encouraging schools to enter pupils into both English GCSE and its iGCSE counterpart to boost grades. Three years later it was the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), with the organisation said to have advised members to enter their "vulnerable" pupils into the IT qualification, which was worth a full GCSE but which they claimed could be taught in just three days, to ensure they achieved five A* to C grades. Take-up of the qualification and pass rates soared, but it was soon dropped from league tables in 2019.

For the iGCSE, Johnson said that some schools had presented at a PiXL conference about how the qualifications were "much easier" for lower attaining pupils to "get their heads around" because the exam involved more "tangible" concepts.

Johnson claims that PiXL was not telling heads to "do this and get 20 per cent on your results". Rather it was asking: "Who are the young people who will leave your school with hardly anything because they are struggling?"

"It was a mechanism for them. But obviously, it grows legs. Then it looks like we're trying to cheat the system."

On the ECDL, she said a school leader's story of how they had boosted attainment by enrolling some vulnerable pupils in the qualification spiralled into some heads entering entire cohorts.

"No one ever said, 'do it with 150 pupils'. And we don't tell schools what to do.

"We say, 'here's what people are doing... use your own knowledge of your school and your kids to make that discernment.'"

But Johnson said the organisation, which has 2,500 members who pay between £1,625 and £3,375 plus VAT a year (frozen since 2019), "has evolved" since she took over.

While she still wants to "provide practical things for school leaders to help them improve life chances", its focus is on "doing this across



Johnson after she was knocked over by a car and had to learn how to walk again



'Who are the young people who will leave your school with hardly anything because they are struggling?'

character and culture as well as academic outcomes".

Although she and her father shared the same values, she has been "more relentless" in pursuit of "integrity, kindness, humility, pursuit of excellence and constant talk about how we all behave".

She now commands a team of nearly 50 staff across separate primary and secondary, alternative provision and post-16 divisions, as well as a TV platform and leadership-themed podcasts.

As well as access to resources, members get three national conferences per sector a year and a networking associate to work alongside the senior leadership team.

PiXL is a limited company by guarantee, which means there are no shareholders and it "tries to invest any reserves back into schools". If it were to be disbanded, any money left would go to seven children's charities.

But it is a profitable enterprise. In 2022, PiXL generated £7.2 million in revenue with an operating surplus of just over £1.1 million. Its five directors were paid £400,000, with Johnson paid

£130,000 that year (similar to the maximum level on the headteacher pay scale).

She describes the support as, "when things are getting to feel a bit too much, our associates and our staff team are here to walk alongside school leaders, with no motive and no political agenda". An example she gives of this is dealing with RAAC.

One of the biggest challenges for school leaders now is the "whirlwind [they're] caught up in", she says. With many "absolutely exhausted" and seeking to leave the profession, now is the "time for them to make time to think" – and Johnson has written a book urging them to do so, *Time to Think: The things that stop us and how to deal with them*, out this week.

"They leave our conferences and network meetings thinking, 'I'm gonna change the world'. That's what PiXL does. You can talk about resources, but they're just notes or PowerPoint slides with pictures on.

"What's important is the sense that people are not on their own, that we're giving guidance around how we can lead better and be better as human beings."

Opinion

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DAVID THOMAS

Former policy adviser at the Department for Education

Trusts face a reckoning over their growth plans

More interest in sponsorship of a dwindling number of schools means smaller trusts should bet on expansion by other means, argues David Thomas

The past three years have been a test of resilience for our schools system. We should be proud that it is a test in which, on the whole, we have done remarkably well.

But the tests keep coming: an energy crisis hot on the heels of the pandemic, followed by industrial action and now crumbly concrete. Trust leaders understandably feel strained.

It is therefore not surprising that the Confederation of School Trusts' (CST) annual trust CEO survey, conducted with 400 leaders in the early summer, found them focused on issues around resilience. But that same survey shows signs that not all of their plans to become more resilient will work.

Smaller trusts (those with two to nine schools) are overwhelmingly betting on growth as the answer to greater resilience. Almost three-quarters of these trusts listed growth as a top priority for this academic year. And more than half of those trusts expected to grow by

sponsoring one or more academies.

The next most common route – opening new schools – was selected by just under one-quarter of those small trusts looking to grow this year. Their ambitions are not small: two-thirds expect to add two or more schools to their trust this academic year.

But small trusts are not the only ones hoping to grow. Their larger counterparts are also overwhelmingly planning for growth, with more than three-

quarters of them expecting to add two or more schools to their trusts this year. Again, they expect to do this mostly by sponsoring academies.

Can everyone's expectations come true? I doubt there will be enough schools requiring sponsorship to go around. And if there is tough competition for the ones that are available, who will win?

The CEO survey also shows us what trusts are focused on. For small trusts it is overwhelmingly growth and financial resilience. Larger trusts, although they expect to grow, do not see it as a priority.

They are focused more on workforce, on pupil outcomes, on civic partnerships and on strategic issues such as digital infrastructure. This list is remarkably similar to the DfE's high-quality trust framework, which regional directors will be using to decide which trusts get to sponsor a school.

Imagine the regional director faced with a choice: on the one

hand, a small trust that wants to grow to become more resilient but will struggle to make the forward investment in improving a challenging school, and on the other a larger trust with improving pupil outcomes, a workforce strategy and a programme of community engagement.

The choice that they make will of course depend on local context, but I can see why they might, on average, lean towards the latter option.

If I am right, then we have a problem coming. A large group of smaller trusts will face a sort of reckoning, as they bet on growth as their road to resilience but find that this road is not as open as they thought it would be.

So, what should they do? Last week I discussed this at the CST's annual conference with Ernest Jenavs, chief executive of Edurio, who carried out the survey. As one attendee pointed out during the discussion in our session, the answer lies in the conference's theme of belonging.

Instead of relying on sponsorship and opening new schools – two narrow routes that are less consensual – trusts should focus on building and joining communities where schools feel like they belong. This might be where maintained schools feel they belong and want to join the trust, or it might be where two trusts decide to join and merge.

The mindset of growth by takeover is running out of steam and cannot work for every trust looking to grow. A mindset of belonging, where leaders come together to achieve resilience with like-minded colleagues, should replace it.

“ Growth by takeover is running out of steam



Opinion

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MELANIE RENOWDEN

Chief executive officer,
National Institute of Teaching

Degree apprenticeships are key to better recruitment

Work to deliver the new qualification should continue at pace to meet recruitment challenges by making teaching more accessible, writes Melanie Renowden

At 9am on Tuesday, thousands of eager would-be teachers were poring over phones and laptops, ready to sign on to the DfE's teacher training platform. By 10.30am, the National Institute of Teaching already had over 120 applications for our 2024-25 cohort, and it's been captivating to watch the numbers tick up.

But as exciting as it is to see a new generation of teachers take their first steps into the profession, we also know that all of us working in initial teacher education have a steep mountain to climb. Recruitment remains an enormous challenge.

It's therefore essential that everyone who has the ability and commitment to become a teacher can find a route that works for them. We must redouble our efforts to diversify pathways into teaching. Whoever you are, whatever your background, there should be a route for you.

The ITT sector understands how vital the flow of new teachers is to our schools. There is a huge amount of hard work underway

across the country to make this happen. At the NIoT, we are doing everything we can to appeal to as diverse a group of entrants as possible. We have full-time trainees, part-time trainees, career changers, new graduates and postgraduate apprentices and we're working with brilliant partners like the University of Birmingham and Now Teach, as well as our large network of partner schools to ensure our training works in a multitude of circumstances. This emphasis on flexibility and diversity is a major ingredient in the recruitment of the 515 trainees we are supporting with their first steps into the classroom this year.

One area in which we see potential for growth is the Postgraduate Teaching Apprenticeship (PGTA). We've found it to be an attractive option for people who work in schools already as it offers them the chance to get their teaching qualification while they are still employed. Apprentices earn while they learn, training costs are covered by the apprenticeship levy and, crucially, there are no tuition fees involved.

However, our conversations with schools indicate that there's a lack of awareness and understanding about the PGTA among headteachers, as well as concern about the administration surrounding it. Giving more guidance to headteachers on the opportunities it presents and streamlining the process for all involved could help open up this route to many more future teachers.

But what about those who don't yet have their degree? Data from the Office for National Statistics shows that around one-fifth of adults (21 per cent) in Redcar and Cleveland (where we have a campus)

have a qualification at level 4 or above, compared to 40 per cent in Greater London. It is one of the most economically deprived parts of the country. Like other areas with a similar profile, it struggles with teacher recruitment. But that doesn't mean there isn't a pool of brilliant people there who would make great teachers. So how to open up access for them?

We agree with those who say teaching must remain a graduate profession. But we also have to recognise the economic barriers which lie in people's paths. Going to university often comes with a daunting financial burden which can deter prospective applicants. Should teaching only be accessible to those with the resources to sustain four years of full-time study?

That's why I'm excited about the prospect of degree apprenticeships for teaching. The DfE, alongside experts from across the sector, have been working on this idea for some time and there is clearly a commitment to creating a high-quality graduate programme.

It's necessarily demanding to establish a new route into teaching and there are difficult technical issues to overcome. However, the recruitment and retention challenges, particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged communities, mean that this work must continue at pace.

Adding degree apprenticeships to the mix of routes into teaching alongside the PGTA and more traditional pathways would open more doors for those wanting to teach the next generation. With a collective effort, we can clear the road of obstacles to ensure anyone with the ability and commitment to become a teacher can start their journey to the classroom.

“ Whoever you are, there should be a route for you ”



Opinion

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**PENELOPE
SHORTLAND-
PALMER**
SEND in education specialist
and consultant

A smartphone ban isn't just a wrong answer. It's the wrong problem

Calls to ban smartphones mis-diagnose the causes of the mental health crisis and could make some worse off, says Penelope Shortland-Palmer

To suggest that surging mental health problems among young people are the result of ubiquitous smartphone use diagnoses the wrong problem and ignores the real and glaring issues that young people are facing.

Nearly every mention of mental health in young people references the pandemic. Yes, they are more likely to spend longer online, but much of that is a result of the loneliness and isolation they suffered during lockdown. Stopping there completely misses what is really driving the mental health crisis.

Good mental health is driven by three key factors: a reasonable level of control over your environment and choices; a strong and supportive community; and the ability to access positive experiences. Young people have seen all three decimated.

An absence of choice

For years, control over their environment all but evaporated. Stay home. Go to school. Learn online. Learn face-to-face. Don't wear a mask. Now do. When to go for a walk, who to see, whether or not you can attend your nan's funeral – all

decisions made by remote adults.

With the psychological pressure that came with these decisions, it is hardly surprising that control-based mental health problems have exploded. What food goes into our bodies and what happens to them are some of the few things that remain in their power to control. Witness the rise in eating disorders and self-harm.

We see it in the unwillingness of some to attend school at all. We see it in their presence in strong online communities where they feel seen and heard. Maybe young people are just tired of being told what to do. Yet our response seems to be to make schools ever more draconian.

An absence of opportunity

Community life has also been radically altered. Entire year groups missed out on trips, end-of-year plays, graduation ceremonies, assemblies, sports fixtures, music events... The list goes on. And, due to the cost-of-living crisis, schools have struggled to reestablish all kinds of norms which form that vital sense of community.

Half of schools are cutting back on trips. The arts are squeezed from the "catch-up" curriculum. Is it any wonder that young people turn to online communities or draw into themselves?

This is exacerbated by the gutting of almost all youth services – including social and physical activities and access to help and support.

Loneliness and depression are not consequences of smartphone use; smartphone use is a logical response to the withdrawal of opportunities to take part in real, live activities. Working out how to ensure their phones stay in their bags isn't rocket science.

An absence of optimism

Young people have also seen their

quality of life decline, their parents struggling to pay bills, keep jobs and provide necessities. Millions have been forced into poverty, with spiralling food bank use, homelessness and destitution.

Some 8,500 children are Covid orphans and 34,000 are estimated to be struggling with long Covid. Many more suffer repeated sickness, schools reporting much higher rates of absence including from mass outbreaks of infections such as scarlet fever.

Fewer young people are therefore able to participate in the positive events that are available. And we wonder why they are unhappier and more vulnerable to online harm than before.

All of these adversities disproportionately affect certain students. Those with SEND, for example, are much more likely to suffer poor mental health. For them, smartphones are often a lifeline.

Many autistic students are simply unable to cope with the anxiety and stress caused by flip-flopping policy and a constantly changing landscape. They cannot return to a "normal" because they have no memory of pre-pandemic norms.

Many are accessing school through various types of online provision. All their social activity takes place online and their phones are their safe space.

Tackling the mental health crisis therefore requires nothing short of investing in communities and in empowering and diverse learning experiences. And, for a growing segment, it's time to rethink what education looks like rather than taking away their one social connection.

Either way, the mobile phone ban isn't just the wrong solution; it is a response to the wrong problem.

“ It is hardly surprising that mental health problems have exploded



Solutions

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ANJUM PEERBACOS

Senior Pastoral leader for year 13 and co-founder, Hijabi Half Hour

How to talk to students about Israel and Palestine

Anjum Peerbacos offers some short- and longer-term ideas to ensure all teachers are able to reassure students about a highly complex and sensitive subject

The world has witnessed shocking events unfold since last Saturday. Escalating violence in the Middle East is once again dominating the news.

As educators, we cannot work, live and learn in a silo, pretending our students are not affected or at least curious about such events. The classroom is precisely where they should be able to ask questions with the expectation of informed and knowledgeable answers. But how many of us can honestly say they feel confident and comfortable with this complex topic?

History is worth repeating

First, there is the question of the historical context of these attacks. This needs to be explained incredibly clearly and in sufficient detail. It isn't just a matter of exercising great sensitivity, but also a great deal of knowledge of the region's history. Indeed, one might argue that greater sensitivity can only come from being knowledge-rich.

Unfortunately, our young people are not always given the opportunity to learn about this region in our

history curriculums. For all the diversity of periods of history we can teach in primary and secondary, there is no compulsion or statutory requirement to teach any other than the Holocaust.

Students can study the Ancient Egyptians, the Aztecs, the Tudors, the Stewarts and the Sioux tribe. However, their understanding of the British Empire is still inconsistent at best and largely absent in the worst-case scenarios.

Yet its consequences have largely shaped the world as we know it today. Without this fundamental understanding of its legacy, it is incredibly challenging to comprehend why we are where we are today, as a nation and globally.

As a result of its optionality as a topic, there are gaping holes in our historical understanding across the nation. And as any historian knows, you cannot understand the present (or gaze into the future) without an awareness of the past.

How to respond now

Brushing up every teacher's knowledge of the Middle East in time to field the burning questions in our classrooms over the coming weeks is an unlikely ask (though it is undoubtedly a worthwhile CPD endeavour given the regularity with which conflict in the region flares up).



“ Honestly, if you don't know, tell them so

In the meantime, history teachers will be best placed to teach this important knowledge in the informed, impartial, balanced and age-appropriate way legally required of us all. Perhaps it's their time to shine in assembly this week.

'Fine, Anjum,' I hear you say. 'But I'm tutor/English teacher/pastoral lead. What should I say now?'

There are some handy quick guides out there that might be worth brushing up on. But honestly, if you don't know, tell the students you don't know. Please do not try and make up a version of the answers that they need. The situation is too sensitive.

One clear teachable moment here – for us and our students – is about news gathering. A lack of knowledge makes us susceptible to misinformation and disinformation, which always grow amid the fog of war – and especially so in our social media age. This makes it all the harder to exercise the necessary criticality about the content we are exposed to. This includes teaching resources.

As teachers, it should be easy

at least to remind students that knowledge is power (which includes knowing what we don't know).

Inform yourselves together if you can, and in doing so model best practice. Access information from a variety of sources, ensuring each one is reputable and robustly fact-checked.

The same approach is crucial too in combating antisemitism and Islamophobia, which also heighten with every new Middle East conflict. Knowing what they are and how they manifest can protect us all from falling into that trap.

In the end, the big takeaways should always be that violence and war are never the solution. Everything should, can, and ultimately will be resolved with diplomacy. Peace is always the ultimate outcome.

And the best way to model that is to allow students to discuss these issues in an open manner as you learn collectively. We may not all know the history of Israel and Palestine, but we do all know when a conversation is uncivil or uninformed.



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THE REVIEW

LETTERS TO A YOUNG GENERATION: ASPIRING SCHOOL LEADERS

Edited by: Amanda Wilson

Publisher: 9:10 Publishing

Publication date: 30 September, 2023

ISBN: 0957136773

Reviewer: Jess Mahdavi-Gladwell, Deputy head, Robson House

This is the third book in the series (the first two being written for boys/young men and girls/young women) and I was excited to read it having enjoyed the earlier books. I was not disappointed; it genuinely made my scalp prickle.

Though I do not fit into the target audience that the authors of each letter were writing for, this did not impact my enjoyment of or learning from this book.

The individual letters, each a story in its own right, stand alone to speak to the reader. Together, the curation and editing crafts a whole which is more than a sum of its parts.

The messages end and begin, but there is a flow throughout the book which kept me reading late into the evening, as I struggled to resist reading "just one more" letter.

The editor, Amanda Wilson, introduces the letters by sharing her own journey to leadership, reflecting on the practical and emotional support that has smoothed her own journey. She states her aim – to encourage aspiring black leaders – explicitly. It is framed by the disparity between the percentage of black leaders and white leaders, as is well evidenced in publicly available teacher workforce data and analysis.

Humour and warmth radiate from the pages, messages for many felt as if they spoke personally for me. Certain phrases stuck out as being particularly pertinent.

Emmanuel Botwe recommends being "generous with the time you give to others" and seeing the ability to provide inspiration, support and guidance as a privilege. Elsewhere, the reader is entreated to have self-belief greater than the belief others have in them and to acknowledge

that inner narratives can be unhelpful.

There is a reminder of the importance of remembering our journey when Caroline King speaks of "the difference I have made to the communities I have served". Jay Barber advises setting our own standards, which are "higher than any appraisal or external accountability".

I certainly identify with the advice to "judge your professional self, your decisions and behaviours, against your own highest virtues". Overall, there is a balance between encouragement of accountability and self-reflection which is honest and acknowledges success, at the same time as bringing critique.

The book speaks to aspiring black leaders – the next generation on a journey. But it also informs those of us who are not aspiring black leaders of the barriers they face.

As is widely acknowledged, senior leadership at school and trust levels has a major representation problem. Today's senior leaders are responsible for encouraging, developing and ultimately selecting the next generation from a broader pool.

This book informs those people of the difficulties faced disproportionately by black colleagues seeking progression. For any leaders who are reflective and can identify the part that their recruitment decisions play in the quest to see more representative school leadership, this book offers powerful professional learning.

It is my deep sense that all headteachers, executive headteachers, CEOs, governors, trustees and those in similar positions should read this book to help them better understand the barriers and ceilings (glass or concrete)

BOOK

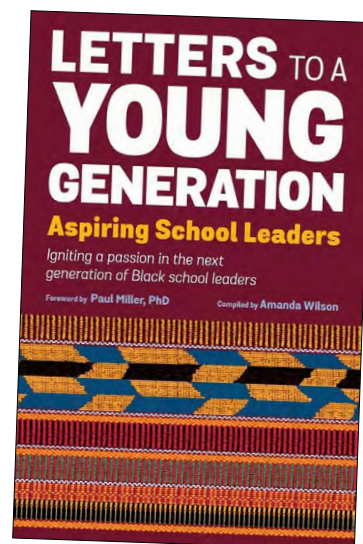
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which exist within our education system. By knowing more, those who do not experience these hurdles can develop a deeper understanding of what they might unwittingly perpetuate.

We understand the power of a person who inspires us and to whom we can relate. Each of the people who have taken time to write here are inspiring. The impact of seeing someone who looks like us, either physically or in relation to values, can support aspiration and give a foundation for real hope.

We know that our black children deserve to see teachers who can inspire them in a variety of ways. For me, this book provides that inspiration, that direct connection, for those in the teaching profession who are called to the responsibility and privilege of school leadership.

Overall, I am left wanting to buy this book as a gift for so many young(er) black colleagues. Its messages, separate and yet together a cohesive whole, are powerful. In places the writing is raw, and throughout it is motivating.



Rating



A MONTH OF SEEN DAYS

The run-up to the first half-term break is always a tiring one, and this year's seems to be more exhausting than ever.

But, if the first month merely felt like a year, the second arguably is. October is evidently the month of choice for a variety of awareness-raising days, weeks and months. Indeed, there are more awareness days than actual days.

I initially counted 42 separate celebrations, and missed out T Levels week (during which they were cancelled), and Colleges Week (which started this week and, strangely, runs for a fortnight).

Of course, it is Black History Month, which started as a response to the need for greater recognition of the black community's history and contributions. The first official UK **#BlackHistoryMonth** was celebrated in 1987, following the initiative of Ghanaian analyst Akyaaaba Addai-Sebo, who worked to establish **#BHM UK** as an annual event. It has grown in significance since then.

But many other causes use October to increase awareness such as **#BreastCancerAwarenessMonth**, **#WorldMentalHealthDay** and



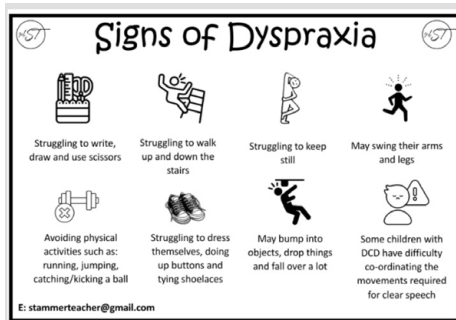
#LGBT+HistoryMonth, all of which are relevant to our pupils and to education. And that is not to mention **#ADHDAwarenessMonth**, **#InternationalDayofNonViolence**, **#WorldTeachersDay**, **#NationalPoetryDay**, **#DayOfTheGirl**, Developmental Language Disorder Day (**#DLDDAY**) and **#KinshipCareWeek**.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

Schools do their best to promote and raise awareness of a range of different causes but, if you wanted to give them all equal coverage, (maybe not **#WorldTripeDay**) you would be looking at two or three days – per day! That would make for a lot of assemblies and not much of anything else.

So, it is impossible to give every cause equal support, but it does mean equality, diversity and inclusion leads and others have plenty to choose from.

Often, their efforts are guided by a personal attachment to the cause. For example, Abed Ahmed, who stammers himself and now teaches at the school he once attended and helps young stammerers, has created resources for both **#InternationalStammeringAwarenessDay** and **#DyspraxiaAwarenessWeek**.



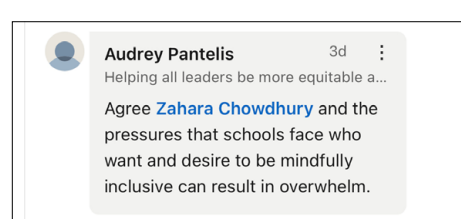
'STEEL BANDS, SARIS AND SAMOSAS'

But there are genuine concerns too. I shared my findings on the number of awareness days on LinkedIn and, amid many insightful points about EDI work around awareness raising, a blog by Penny Rabiger struck me as particularly poignant. In it, she questions what our expectations are when we hold multicultural events, and how we position British culture within that.

Others were more light-hearted. Michele Gregson, the general secretary of the National Society for Education in Art & Design (NSEAD) quipped that she hoped **#NationalBlackCatDay** wouldn't overlap

with **#FeedTheBirdsDay**. Bethlyn Killey proposed an "Awareness Day Awareness Day" and Jane Green called for a "No Awareness Day".

But all make a serious point, perhaps best captured by Audrey Pantelis



much more effective if we do it through existing systems such as curriculum, policies, HR and people work".

And podcaster and former teacher and EDI lead Zahara Chowdhury warned against EDI becoming about awareness days and nothing more. They may satisfy what she calls the "event-based culture" of schools, but they are unlikely to make a genuine difference – especially not when the pressure is always on to move to the next one.

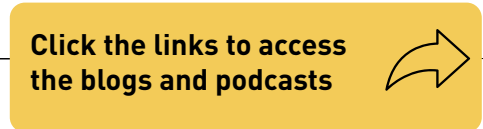
GETTING IT RIGHT

Inspired by the discussion, Chowdhury went on to write a blog on the matter with some useful tips for school leaders everywhere on getting the most out of awareness days and ensuring they have an impact.

Not that anyone is seriously suggesting turning your next INSET into an "Awareness Day Awareness Day", but we do have to be careful with them.

The causes we choose to focus on and see as relevant to our school communities cannot just be based on the lens we see through, and they must be more than a tokenistic gesture towards complex issues affecting often vulnerable and marginalised groups.

So, flag the plants for **#WorldVegetarianDay**. Be game for **#NationalRoastPheasantDay** and explore **#WorldFoodDay** without limits. Go back to brassicas on **#NationalKaleDay**. But, after all that, make good use of **#CoffeeWeek** to help **#Unblocktober** your thinking. With any luck, you will have a clear vision for your school's EDI by **#WorldSightDay**.



The Knowledge

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



How oracy supports vocabulary development

Kathleen McBride, Learning design lead, Voice 21

Research suggests that the impact of the breadth of a child's vocabulary is particularly apparent as they move into secondary school, where they frequently encounter unfamiliar academic vocabulary. Two years ago, we set out to understand how high-quality oracy education could support vocabulary development at the primary-secondary transition.

Since then, we have worked alongside three secondary schools and their feeder primary schools in Leicester, Pendle and the Black Country to develop an oracy-led, cross-phase approach to vocabulary development which supports students to understand and deploy new academic vocabulary and instils in them an enduring linguistic curiosity.

It was our sense that, while oral language is recognised as the most effective vehicle for learning new words, the value and importance of oracy education as a means to grow students' vocabularies had been underplayed in the recent focus on vocabulary in schools.

Through our Voicing Vocabulary project, we have empowered over 30 teachers in 12 schools to cultivate language-rich classrooms. Voicing Vocabulary has supported over 1,530 students to interact with a wide-ranging, diverse and complex spread of vocabulary through spoken language and listening.

The impact has been striking, establishing oracy education as an essential part of any discussion on how to improve vocabulary teaching in schools.

Year 6 and year 7 students in participating schools made accelerated progress in reading. At the start of the project, the proportion of students in Voicing Vocabulary schools with an above-average reading score was 19 per cent – four percentage points below the national average. By the end of the project, we saw an increase of nine percentage points to 28 per cent, meaning that students in Voicing Vocabulary schools are now more likely to have an above-average reading score than their peers nationally.

Through a deliberate and explicit approach to developing oracy, students in Voicing Vocabulary schools also gained the confidence to engage in class. At the end of the project, students in



participating primary and secondary schools reported feeling more confident to speak in front of an audience and to discuss ideas in small groups.

Teachers also noticed that students with speech, language and communication difficulties and those with English as an additional language felt better supported to participate in classroom talk.

It is an approach that can be replicated anywhere. Using insights from the project, we have identified five active ingredients of an oracy-centred approach to vocabulary development:

A shared understanding of oracy

In oracy-rich classrooms, talk is at the forefront of teaching and learning. To use talk for vocabulary learning across a school, teachers first need a shared understanding of high-quality oracy practice.

Prioritise vocabulary in planning

Discussion and decision-making around which vocabulary to teach is vital within and across subjects and phases. Voicing Vocabulary teachers became more aware of which words were most useful to teach and why, leading to changes in their practice.

Collaborate across phases

One of the key ways in which this happened was working with and planning alongside

teachers from different key stages. Teachers in the project reported that doing so improved continuity of practice and increased understanding of language expectations across phases.

Contextualise new vocabulary

Carefully planned and scaffolded exploratory talk for learning provides students with multiple, low-stakes opportunities to hear and practise using new vocabulary in context, deepening students' word knowledge and promoting "word ownership".

Monitor ownership of new vocabulary

Talk is an effective vehicle for assessing students' mastery of new language. Voicing Vocabulary participants reported that they now have more awareness of the words that their students do not know and which they might need to teach.

Talk is one of most powerful tools – if not *the* most powerful tool – at every teacher's disposal to develop literacy and fluency across the curriculum. The results of the project demonstrate not only the clear impact of an oracy-centred approach on vocabulary development, but crucially how to implement effective oracy teaching in schools and classrooms everywhere.

We are in no doubt: a planned and holistic approach to purposeful talking in class can be transformative.

Week in

Westminster

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

FRIDAY

Lord Harris, the founder and chair of the Harris Federation, addressed staff at a private conference today, apparently asking the academies minister Baroness Barran – also in attendance – to give the trust more schools.

A millionaire businessman using his special access to ask a minister behind closed doors for more schools – it's like the early academy heyday all over again! Ah, how we miss those good old days...

MONDAY

One of Michael Gove's first acts as education secretary was to slim down his department's name. The Department for Children, Schools and Families became the Department for Education, and the rainbow logo that had adorned the building was gone.

But will Bridget Phillipson bring back the rainbow if her party wins? Labour isn't that "complacent" about next year's election, she told former children's commissioner Anne Longfield at the Labour party conference in Liverpool, but insisted there would be a "wider focus" on children and families. Graphic designers, stand by...

During a panel at the conference, NASUWT boss Patrick Roach was interrupted by his mobile phone. "I'm going to give myself a stern telling off for that," he told the audience.

Maybe we need Gillian Keegan to roll out her mobile "ban" to stop phone disruption spreading to politics?

The DfE became very excited today when announcing an education "hackathon" to explore how artificial intelligence could solve lots of problems for schools.

But the press release had to be updated to "correct a typo". Perhaps it should use the one of the many AI platforms that run spell-checks?

TUESDAY

Dame Rachel de Souza's very public pivot away from the Conservatives continued this week. After hitting out at Ofsted last week, today she had a pop at Rishi Sunak's "eat out to help out" scheme during Covid, saying it should have been "play out to help out"!

WEDNESDAY

Claire Coutinho is no longer the minister for SEND, but she still clearly wields lots of power.

A post on her Instagram page today said she had recently met with Surrey council's SEND team to discuss issues raised by constituents, including parents struggling to get updates on their child's education, health and care plans.

While she humbled about the reforms she oversaw, she also highlighted some "short-term" procedural changes that she had secured to "smooth things over" for families.

So what were these game-changing measures? Ensuring that council caseworkers "have their out-of-office replies turned on" and they provide updates "even where there is no progress".

LOL

Phillipson's turn to take to the big stage at Labour's conference. Unlike Sir Keir, there was no glitter. But that's OK, we'd gladly take a few more details about the party's new pledge to create a "phonics for maths" in primary schools.

Alas, like most other things Labour has announced (toothbrushing lessons), they've said bugger all about how it would actually work.

THURSDAY

Last week's Conservative party conference was beset with nonsense from the cranks who seem to be getting a louder voice in the dying days of its government.

But even the more moderate and sensible politicians like our own Gillian are also at it now.

We pointed out last week that her mobile phone "ban" was not a ban (it's advice

for schools). That has now

been confirmed by Elon Musk's misinformation-riddled X, which has slapped a "context" warning on Keeg's tweet, saying: "Despite claiming to have banned phones in schools this is misleading and inaccurate."

ZING!





Nottingham University Samworth Academy is delighted to invite applications for this exciting opportunity to lead a school committed to providing transformational education for its pupils and its wider community. We welcome applications from experienced head teachers or senior leaders who have an unwavering passion for making a real difference to the lives of children and young people who are committed to 'writing their own life story'. This is a truly unique opportunity to lead a school community committed to excellence and inclusivity built on an ethos of care, collaboration and unashamedly high expectations for all.

Our dedicated staff are committed and driven to do all they can for our school community. We know and understand that school is more than just examination outcomes. We work hard to ensure that our pupils leave

school as good citizens, are 'rounded and grounded' and who make positive contributions to society. The school celebrates diversity; our recent survey of pupils told us that pupils at NUSA feel safe and supported. There is a rich and harmonious diverse community at NUSA and our pupils have a deep and developed sense of belonging that strengthens the excellent relationships that exist between staff, students and parents. NUSA truly is a wonderful community in which to work and learn.



DEPUTY HEADTEACHER - PASTORAL

EDGAR WOOD academy

Full Time

Salary: Schools Leadership Pay Scale, L20 - L24, currently £70,733 to £78,010

The Trust and local governing body are looking for an exceptional individual who can strategically lead the school in the areas of student attendance, behaviour, and attitudes and contribute to the creation of a kind, calm, and safe learning environment.

Edgar Wood Academy is a secondary school which welcomed the first year 7 students in September 2021 under wave 13 of the free schools' programme. Our brand-new building opened in September 2022. The school has already established a strong reputation in the local community and was significantly over-subscribed for 2023-24, a trend which is likely to continue given this reputation and the considerable demographic growth in the area; indeed, it is highly likely that the school may need to expand its PAN to accommodate future need.

ALTUS
EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP



Head of Specialist Unit and Assistant Headteacher

Salary L3 to L7 plus SEN Allowance

An amazing opportunity to join our team at Blackthorn Primary as the lead of our specialist provision (Treetops). We are seeking an experienced leader who will be able to continue to develop our specialist provision from the strong foundations already in place. Treetops is a 16 place SU with 7 staff, specifically built and designed to support children with SEMH as the primary area of need on their EHCP.

Please return your application form to:
samchambers@blackthornprimary.net or by post to
Mrs Sam Chambers, Blackthorn Primary School, Waingrove, Northampton, NN3 8EP

Telephone number: 01604 407254

Start date: 1 January 2024

Closing date: 12 noon, Monday 16 October 2023

Interview date: Wednesday 18 October 2023



Headteacher

SALARY: L20 - L27

Brook Green is a Special School for young people aged 11 – 16 years who have cognition and learning difficulties along with associated SEMH. We are a happy, thriving and aspirational learning community where preparing students for the next stage of their education, employment and adult life is central to all that we do.

Due to the upcoming retirement of our Headteacher we are seeking to appoint a dedicated, highly motivated and inspirational practitioner to the post. This is an excellent opportunity for a highly skilled professional to work closely with the Senior Leadership Team in leading the school in striving for continual improvement.

Brook Green is a truly unique place to learn and to work and if you feel you would like to join our thriving and happy school community, we would really like to hear from you. Visits to the school are welcome.

[Click here to apply](#) →



The Oval School:

Assistant Headteacher for Inclusion

Salary: L6 - L10 (£50,838 - £56,150)

We are looking for an Assistant Headteacher for Inclusion who shares our values and has the drive to strategically develop inclusion at The Oval School.

This is an exciting and unique opportunity for a highly effective and inspiring senior leader to move this school forwards and improve outcomes for all pupils.

The information pack below has been developed to provide you with a summary of all of the information you need to learn about the role and our Trust, and we hope it will inspire you to submit an application for this exciting role. Interested candidates are encouraged to contact the Headteacher to discuss the opportunity in more detail.

Closing date: Monday 16th October 2023, 12pm

Interviews: w/c Monday 23rd October 2023



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