

SCHOOLS WEEK

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



P20-22

SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK | @SCHOOLSWEEK

FRIDAY, OCT 20, 2023 | EDITION 336

ATTENDANCE CRISIS: WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?



Page 26

WHY TAKING PUPILS OFF SITE IS KEY TO GETTING THEM ON SITE



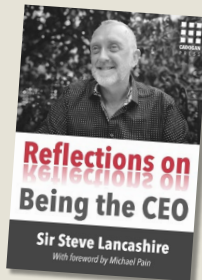
Page 27

THE SCHOOLS GOING GREEN, AND WHAT'S STOPPING THEM



Pages 14-15

'A TROVE OF INSIGHTS FROM A NATIONAL TREASURE'



Page 31

INSIDE KNOWLEDGE: Schools who employ inspectors get better grades



EXCLUSIVE | Pages 4-5

The Randstad effect: Some tutoring may have harmed pupils' results

- School tutoring boosted progress by one month, study of NTP in 2021-22 found
- But routes run by HR firm 'consistently associated with negative effects'
- Call to learn lessons from study that shows impact of 'scale over quality'

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOTH | FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Page 6



The 14th annual
FESTIVAL OF EDUCATION
at Wellington College | 4-5 July 2024

TICKETS ON SALE NOW

HEADLINE PARTNER
AQA
Questions matter

SEE PAGE 19

SCHOOLS WEEK

Meet the news team



John Dickens
EDITOR

@JOHNDICKENSSW
JOHN.DICKENS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



Freddie Whittaker
DEPUTY EDITOR

@FCDWHITTAKER
FREDDIE.WHITTAKER@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



Samantha Booth
CHIEF REPORTER

@SAMANTHAJBOTH
SAMANTHA.BOOTH@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



Amy Walker
SENIOR REPORTER

@AMYWALKER
AMY.WALKER@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



Jack Dyson
SENIOR REPORTER

@JACKYDYS
JACK.DYSON@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



JL Dutaut
COMMISSIONING EDITOR

@DUTAUT
JEAN-LOUISDUTAUT@LSECT.COM



Jessica Hill
INVESTIGATIONS AND FEATURES REPORTER

@JESSJANEHILL
JESSICA.HILL@LSECT.COM



Nicky Phillips
HEAD DESIGNER

@GELVETICA
NICKY.PHILLIPS@FEWEEK.CO.UK



Shane Mann
MANAGING DIRECTOR

@SHANERMANN
SHANE.MANN@LSECT.COM

THE TEAM

Senior designer: Simon Kay | Classifieds Manager: Clare Halliday | Sales Executive: Tony Hudson | Operations and Finance Manager: Victoria Boyle | Event Manager: Frances Ogefere Dell | Senior Administrator: Evie Hayes | Office Administrator: Zoe Tuffin | Office Administrator - Apprentice: Sanchez Nandi

education week jobs

FEATURED JOBS

THIS WEEK'S TOP AVAILABLE JOBS IN THE SCHOOLS SECTOR. TO FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION PLEASE TURN TO THE BACK PAGES OF SCHOOLS WEEK OR VISIT THE WEB ADDRESS LISTED

TO ADVERTISE YOUR VACANCY WITH EDUCATION WEEK JOBS PLEASE CALL 020 81234 778 OR EMAIL ADVERTISING@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



OVA EDUCATION TRUST - HEADTEACHER - £85,000.00 - £100,000.00 PER ANNUM

[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/NOVA-SW334-P2](https://tinyurl.com/nova-sw334-p2)



BROOK GREEN CENTRE FOR LEARNING - HEADTEACHER - L20 - L27

[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/BROOK-SW334](https://tinyurl.com/brook-sw334)

We shouldn't lose faith in potential of tutoring

The government has been playing its own catch-up on catch-up ever since it ignored Sir Kevan Collins' plan to help school pupils recover lost learning.

The National Tutoring Programme, while ambitious, was the least that was required. However, its overly-bureaucratic implementation has hindered its potential success.

This week's evaluation of the scheme's second year is disappointing, but perhaps unsurprising given the incredible decision to appoint an HR firm to run it rather than the charities who set it all up (page 6).

The Education Endowment Foundation says small group tutoring can boost pupil attainment by four months. But evaluators found tutoring in 2021-22, when the scheme was run by Randstad, delivered at best just one month's progress.

And this was only in the tutoring run by schools. Tutoring in the other routes – quite spectacularly – could actually have harmed pupil progress.

While this is likely to be the result of scaling up an intervention, it is also a consequence of watering down standards. But there are big

caveats with the findings.

Poor levels of improvement are more likely to be down to bad data and rushed implementation. They should not be seen as evidence that tutoring is ineffective, and we should not rush to judgment.

Elsewhere, our coverage of an important study this week into Ofsted inspectors and the insider knowledge they have (page 4 and 5) raises some important questions for the watchdog – most notably, could it be more transparent about its work?

We had to appeal to the information commissioner just to get Ofsted to hand over a simple spreadsheet of where its hundreds of contracted inspectors work.

While inspections will never be 100 per cent reliable, the watchdog does not provide enough data for others to interrogate whether they are reliable enough to warrant the high stakes involved.

Meanwhile, RAAC is back in the news after the government finally released a new list of affected schools (page 9). But, as we report this week, there is another school building problem where ministers are slipping behind in their pledge to get a grip (page 7).

Most read online this week:

- 1 **Best headteachers add two GCSE grades, landmark study finds**
- 2 **School funding: Unions want £370m back as heads cut 'nice-to-haves'**
- 3 **Prominent accountant to review £370m school funding gaffe**
- 4 **Degree apprenticeships key to increasing and diversifying recruitment**
- 5 **School improvement role for Ofsted risks 'mission creep', MPs warned**

[CLICK LINKS TO READ STORIES](#) 

Disclaimer:

Schools Week is owned and published by Lsect Ltd. The views expressed within the publication are those of the authors named, and are not necessarily those of Schools Week, Lsect Ltd or any of its employees. While we try to ensure that the information we provide is correct, mistakes do occur and we cannot guarantee the accuracy of our material.

The design of the digital newspaper and of the website is copyright of Lsect Ltd and material from the newspaper should not be reproduced without prior permission. If you wish to reproduce an article from either the digital paper or the website, both the article's author and Schools Week must be referenced (to not do so, would be an infringement on copyright).

Lsect Ltd is not responsible for the content of any external internet sites linked to.

Please address any complaints to the editor.

Email: John.Dickens@Schoolsweek.co.uk with Error/Concern in the subject line. Please include the page number and story headline, and explain what the problem is.

SCHOOLS WEEK IS PROUD TO BE A MEMBER OF



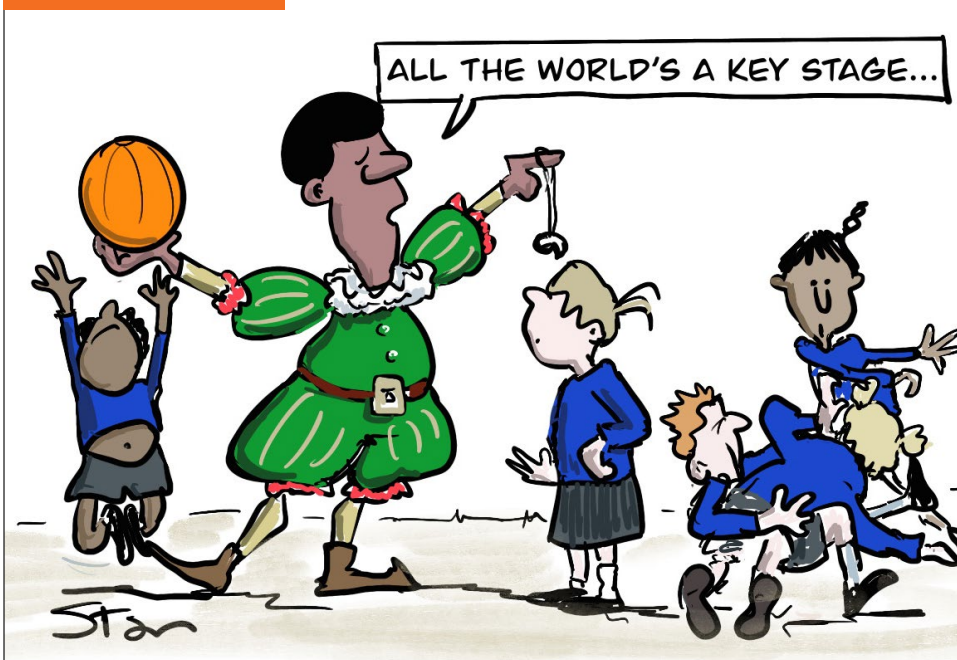
LEARNING & SKILLS EVENTS, CONSULTANCY AND TRAINING LTD
C/O RUNWAY EAST, THE HICKMAN,
2 WHITECHAPEL ROAD, LONDON E1 1EW
T: 020 8123 4778
E: NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

ADVERTISE WITH US

If you are interested in placing a product or job advert in a future edition please click on the 'advertise' link at the top of the page on schoolsweek.co.uk or contact:

E: advertising@schoolsweek.co.uk
T: 020 81234 778 or click here

See story, page 11



ANALYSIS: OFSTED

'Insider knowledge' helps schools get better grades, say academics

AMY WALKER
@AMYWALKER

EXCLUSIVE

Schools with leaders who also work as part-time Ofsted inspectors get better inspection grades, suggests the first study to investigate the impact of "insider knowledge".

Researchers say the "significant advantage" raises questions over the "equity and fairness" of inspections, with renewed calls for secret inspector training materials to be published.

It also comes after Sir Martyn Oliver, who becomes chief inspector in January, signalled his intention to boost the number of school leaders working as inspectors.

Ian Hartwright, head of policy for the school leaders' union NAHT, said inspection "should be a level playing field. Allowing some schools access to inside information necessarily disadvantages other schools, and further undermines school leaders' confidence in Ofsted."

What did the study find?

Researchers linked data of where Ofsted inspectors (OIs) work, obtained by Schools Week under a freedom of information inquiry, to inspection outcomes in the 2022-23 academic year.

The academics, from UCL's Institute of Education and the University of Southampton, found 150 inspections (2.4 per cent) were conducted at a school where at least one member of staff was a serving OI.

Alongside its 300 full-time schools inspectors (HMIs), Ofsted has about 900 contracted staff who inspect part-time alongside their day job.

The watchdog pays contracted inspectors up to £535 a day, but for many serving leaders the cash goes to their school

The study found schools employing contracted inspectors were far more likely to get 'outstanding' (20 per cent versus 7 per cent of schools without an OI). They were also much less likely to be rated 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' (8 per cent compared with 24 per cent).

But schools with a prior 'outstanding' were more likely to employ OIs, which is unsurprising given Ofsted says it wants inspectors ideally from 'good' or better schools.



Sir Martyn Oliver



Researchers controlled for these differences, alongside other measures including school phase, deprivation levels and exam results.

'Significant advantage of inside knowledge'

While it led to the difference in 'outstanding' grades being "greatly reduced", schools with inspectors were far more likely to achieve a 'good' (82 per cent versus 70) and were still way less likely to be rated below 'good' (see table).

The study also found schools with inspectors were more than twice as likely to be improving

towards 'outstanding' during short inspections.

Researchers said the findings – the first into this issue and funded by the Nuffield Foundation – show a "significant advantage" amongst schools with an inspector, which they call "inside knowledge".

While they said any advantage only benefited very few schools, it was "likely to become an increasingly important issue in the coming years" if Oliver followed through on his pledge.

An Ofsted spokesperson said OIs brought "valuable knowledge and experience to

Schools who have contracted Ofsted inspectors get better grades

Predicted probability of inspection judgement awarded to schools in 2022-23 (when controlling for characteristics)

Graded inspections	Does not employ an OI	Does employ an OI
Outstanding	7%	10%
Good	70%	82%
RI or Inadequate	23%	8%
Observations	3,100	83

Ungraded inspections	Does not employ an OI	Does employ an OI
Potential improvement	6%	15%
Unchanged - remains good	80%	77%
Concerns	14%	9%
Observations	2,470	47

Source: Jerrim, Bokhove and Sims analysis of Schools Week Ofsted employment data obtained under FOI

ANALYSIS: OFSTED

inspections” and working as an inspector had “many benefits”.

But it was “misleading to suggest that OIs provide these schools with “insider knowledge’ and better inspection outcomes”. This was because a casual link had not been established, they added.

Leaders may know ‘what hoops to jump through’

The academics, John Jerrim, Christian Bokhove and Sam Sims, put forward four potential reasons for the better grades.

Working as an inspector was “one of the best professional developments a teacher or school leader ever receives”, producing better leaders” who “introduce more effective practices within their own school”.

Another “less starry-eyed” possibility was that training gave leaders a “better understanding of what inspectors ‘look for’ during inspections” so they could “tick the right boxes”.

“They get to know what ‘looks good’ – and what hoops schools need to jump through – to get a top inspection grade”.

Another “unlikely” theory was that inspectors in the same area might know each other, so a “professional network effect” could be boosting grades.

The fourth explanation was that Ofsted only employed the best and most effective leaders, but research suggested this unlikely too.

Watchdog considers sharing more data

While the difference in results was “likely driven by some combination” of the four, academics said they could only “get to the bottom of such issues” if Ofsted was more open with its data.

Ofsted originally refused to provide the OI employment data under FOI, but was ordered to hand it over by the Information Commissioner’s Office after we appealed.

Academics said the case “illustrates the challenges researchers currently face”.

They want the watchdog to publish a database in the Office for National Statistics Integrated Data Service for researchers with information linking inspectors and their characteristics to inspection outcomes.

It is understood Ofsted is now looking into this.

The study follows research in February into how Ofsted results are impacted by inspector

characteristics, which found female OIs hand out harsher grades.

The academics said it would be

unreasonable to expect inspections to be 100 per cent reliable. But “what they need to be is reliable enough for the purpose that they are used and the stakes involved. At the moment, we really don’t know enough about this important issue”.

They highlighted Oliver’s job application in which he said he “often hear[s] how good the inspector training is”. It would be “entirely sensible that this professional development of serving leaders should not only support inspections but also be used to raise standards in those leaders’ institutions”.

But the study warned, depending on the reason why inspectors’ schools got better results, “such approach could end up doing more harm than good”.

‘More transparency would rebuild trust’

Tom Richmond, a former government adviser who runs the EDSK think tank, said making Ofsted “more open and transparent” was “one of the most important goals” for Oliver.

Researchers also added their voice to unions and sector bodies calling for training materials to be

made public.

Richmond said this would show the watchdog was “genuinely intent on rebuilding trust” with the profession.

It would also allow external organisations to “construct a better understanding of the variables that influence inspection outcomes” that can be “debated and discussed in public, not kept behind closed doors”.

But the Ofsted spokesperson reiterated it would not publish materials “specifically designed to support inspection activity. Without the context of our wider training programme, they are incomplete and do not work as guidance for schools”.

Researchers also suggested that schools with an inspector be “inspected by teams from other parts of the country”.

Ofsted said it “always” aimed to be “transparent” in how it inspected, and drew on “a wide range of evidence to come to our judgments”. It had “rigorous” conflict of interest processes for all inspectors.

[Read Christian Bokhove’s piece on page 23](#)

Grammar schools most likely to have school leaders working as inspectors

The percentage of schools inspected in 2022-23 with a serving Ofsted inspector on their books

		Does not employ an OI	Does employ an OI
School type	PRU	99%	1%
	Primary	99%	1%
	Secondary	94%	6%
	Selective secondary	85%	15%
	Special school	96%	4%
IDACI quintile (1 most deprived, 5 least deprived)	Q1	97%	3%
	Q2	98%	2%
	Q3	97%	3%
	Q4	98%	2%
	Q5	97%	3%
Previous rating	Outstanding	94%	6%
	Good	98%	2%
	Requires improvement	99%	1%
	Inadequate	99%	1%

Source: Jerrim, Bokhove and Sims analysis of Schools Week Ofsted employment data obtained under FOI



School tutoring delivers 'small' boost, but axed Randstad routes flounder

SAMANTHA BOOTH & FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@SCHOOLSWEEK

Some tutoring under the government's flagship catch-up scheme may have harmed pupils' outcomes, while tuition organised by schools directly probably led to only "small" boosts for pupils, an evaluation has found.

The independent study focused on the 2021-22 academic year of the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) when it was run by Randstad, the HR firm later axed amid widespread criticism.

However, the evaluation is heavily caveated, so much so that the report even cautions against over-interpreting results "because of the complexities" involved in the analysis.

Sir Peter Lampl, chairman of the Sutton Trust which helped to form the NTP, said the evaluation most likely "reflects the impact that the drive for scale over quality had" in its second year.

He added: "It's important that we learn lessons from those initial delivery challenges to build a sustainable NTP for the future."

School tutoring led to 'small' boost

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) report found school-led tutoring was associated with improvements in maths at key stages 2 and 4 equivalent to roughly one month's additional progress.

It also found "very small positive effects" on English outcomes. But these effects "equated to less than one month's additional progress, so may not reflect meaningful changes for pupils".

The majority of tutoring – 81 per cent of courses that year – was done through this route.

The scheme also offered tutoring through tuition partners and academic mentors over which Randstad had more control. But evidence for these routes suggested participation was "consistently associated with negative effects" on English outcomes.

In key stage 4 maths, using tuition partners was also associated with "small negative effects".

Geoff Barton, general secretary of heads' union ASCL, said "it should come as no surprise that tutoring is at its most effective when it is delivered by the people who know the pupils best – teachers and leaders".



Doesn't mean tutoring is 'ineffective'

However, the NFER said the difference in tutoring route results "may be due to differences in implementation".

The Education Endowment Foundation, one of the charities which ran the NTP in its inaugural year, previously found that the average impact of small group tutoring was four months of additional progress.

The NFER suggested the difference was down to the "evaluation design and available data", as well as the "limitations of the analysis" and "implementing the NTP at scale, rather than tutoring being ineffective as an approach".

The evaluation also stated that "no data about the subject in which tutoring was received was available" for school-led tutoring, meaning the results may underestimate the "true effect".

Susannah Hardyman, CEO of one of the tuition providers Action Tutoring, said her organisation had "raised serious concerns about the reliability and accuracy of data collection as part of this study with the DfE back in early 2022".

She added: "It isn't much of a surprise to us that the evaluation is littered with caveats, producing a somewhat inconclusive result."

She said Action Tutoring data shows

"excellent progress compared to their disadvantaged peers".

Ed Marsh, CEO at Tutor Trust, said schools had to complete "a number of burdensome administrative procedures" to use tuition

partners (TP) under Randstad.

During year two, standards were also watered down, with schools that used TP told they could do 1:6 group sizes – up from 1:3.

Professor Becky Francis, EEF chief executive, said the NFER report "should not be confused with an overall measure of tutoring's potential to support learning".

Low take-up among poorer year 11 pupils

The evaluation pointed out the "key aim of the NTP was to help reduce the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils".

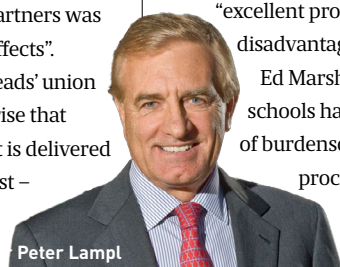
It did find that school-led tutoring was associated with "small positive impacts" on English and maths outcomes for pupil premium pupils.

DfE take-up figures show that just 50.5 per cent of tutored students were eligible for pupil premium that year. But only 35 per cent of year 11 pupils – one of the target groups for catch-up – were from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The NFER has urged ministers to reintroduce a pupil premium target, which was controversially scrapped.

Since Randstad was axed, schools have been given all their tutoring money directly. Three contractors now oversee quality assurance and training – but the NTP subsidy is due to end this year.

Schools minister Nick Gibb claimed the report "shows the positive impact" of the NTP. It had "levelled the playing field", he added.



Peter Lampl



Professor Becky Francis

Checks of 'deteriorating' school blocks yet to start

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Ministers are set to miss their own targets to inspect hundreds of post-war school buildings that ministers rank alongside RAAC as a top safety concern.

The government signed off on a £2 million scheme last year for invasive structural assessments at 200 schools with "system-built" classroom blocks to "better understand" the safety risks.

There are 3,600 of these blocks, quickly built after the second world war, that the government says are "more susceptible to deterioration" and "could lead to a higher risk of hidden structural defects".

Six have already had to close due to "structural instability".

The Department for Education aimed to carry out 100 assessments this year, but appears not to have yet appointed specialists to do the work.

Munira Wilson, the education spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats, said ministers should start the visits "urgently and as safely as possible".

"If they had set themselves these targets and they are way off missing them, what does that say to parents and school staff up and down the country?"

'Taking longer than expected'

System-built blocks are made from concrete, steel and timber, rather than traditional brick and stone. They were put up between 1940 and 1980 with an initial design life of just 30 to 40 years.

One of DfE's own "key risks", as listed in its latest annual report, are buildings constructed post-1945 that "could be subject to defects that increase the risk of collapse".

Alongside asbestos and reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, it is the third structural issue that the DfE says "may generate safety risks".

A report by the National Audit Office (NAO) in June found these builds could usually be used beyond their initial design life if they were adequately maintained – although that could be expensive.

The DfE identified more than 13,000 system-built blocks, but had the greatest concerns about 3,600 that used



concrete or timber frames.

Two types that could have structural issues have already been identified – Laingspan and Intergrid. However, affected schools have secured new blocks under the latest school rebuilding programme.

In September last year, the department pledged to focus on concrete and timber-framed system-built blocks in 200 schools.

It aimed to look at 100 this year and a further 100 in 2024. However, the NAO said the DfE was yet to procure specialists for the work.

Auditors even urged the department to consider whether its research plan remained "the best approach to provide an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the nature and the scale of the risks associated with the blocks, and therefore how best to mitigate these risks".

Pressed by MPs in July, Jane Cunliffe, the DfE's chief operating officer, said the scheme had "taken a little longer than expected, partly because of the need to manage the asbestos while even doing those invasive surveys".

She also said a lot of the work might have to be done during school holidays.

Asked whether that meant summer next year, Cunliffe said: "There are other holidays, so it might be that we could do it in those."

Last month, Baroness Barran, the academies minister, said the research would be started "later this year".



Jane Cunliffe

When asked for an update last week, the DfE would only say it was "following standard commercial procedures and further updates will be published in due course".

With just over two months left of the year, it suggests this year's target will be missed.

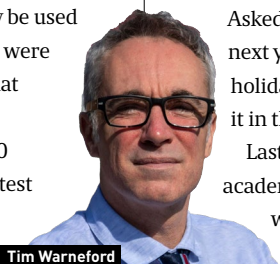
'Redouble efforts'

Tim Warneford, a school building consultant, said the RAAC crisis had put pressure on "limited" surveyor resources. "But surely it's incumbent on them to redouble efforts to get the [system-built] research done as quickly as possible."

Hampshire County Council has said 40 per cent of its school estate had SCOLA – a type of system-build – that was "well beyond" its estimated initial design life.

It installed safety catches to prevent parts of windows falling down as a short-term fix.

James Bowen, the assistant general secretary of the school leaders' union NAHT, said the RAAC fallout must not let other school building issues "build up to crisis point".



Tim Warneford

Surge in school staff waiting two months for DBS checks

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

Thousands of school workers waited two months or longer for criminal record checks last year as staff shortages and rising demand overwhelmed police forces.

Freedom of information data shows 10,447 Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks for workers in English schools, 2.59 per cent of those submitted in the 2022-23 academic year, took more than 60 days to complete.

This is more than triple the rate in 2021-22, when 0.69 per cent of checks, or 2,673, took more than 60 days to complete. In 2020-21, 0.28 per cent of checks (913) took more than two months.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the ASCL school leaders' union, warned that lengthy "unnecessary" delays to recruitment would result in more schools having to use supply staff and non-subject specialists.

"It all adds to the pressure that school leaders and teachers are under and the sense that there has been widespread underinvestment in public services"

Police forces have a service-level agreement with the DBS to complete all checks within 60 days. However, it is non-statutory, so can be breached.

The DBS said "some applications in a small number of counties" took longer because of "extra demand for checks and police resource shortages".

But they said 84 per cent of enhanced checks for the education sector were completed within 14 days last year. The target is 80 per cent.

In Kent and North Yorkshire, about one in ten school workers waited more than two months for their check last academic year.

Monthly data obtained by Schools Week also shows the wait was longer at certain points in the year in some areas.

In January, three in ten checks for school workers in Northumbria took more than than 60 days.

'Unprecedented' vacancies

In West Yorkshire, about one in 20 checks took longer than two months. The police force said it had an "unprecedented level of vacancies".

"Roles within the DBS team are specialist, with training taking nine to 12 months. This had an impact on the ability to meet service level

agreement measures set out by DBS and the Home Office."

It is now meeting all its targets and only has 0.9 per cent of cases taking more than 60 days.

There were 403,289 applications from school workers last academic year, up 4.4 per cent on the 386,365 applications in 2021-22, and 34 per cent higher than the 300,474 in 2019-20.

In Derbyshire, where one in 12 checks took more than 60 days last year, the police force said it received "9,320 more applications than the predictions suggested" in 2022 and 2023, "leaving a shortfall in funding for staffing."

The force now has funding for three temporary staff, "but it is expected to take around six months for them to be recruited, vetted, fully trained and in post".

Schools Week revealed last month how delays to checks also held up the start dates of school staff this term. One supply teacher who waited 11 weeks said they finally got the all-clear in late September.

Extra funding to 'help forces cope'

Niall Bradley, the chair of the National Supply Teachers Network, said the delays left members unable to work.

Neil Carberry, from the Recruitment and

Employment Confederation, said ongoing regional variability "is a particular source of frustration", with some staff waiting as long as 14 weeks.

"The challenge for agencies is we can't tell either the teacher or the school with any certainty how long it's going to be. We've definitely got examples of people missing out on work because of it."

The National Police Chiefs' Council said "a small number of forces" were having difficulties in meeting their target times for enhanced checks.

This was "primarily due to extra demand for DBS checks and the number of vacancies within some force disclosure units which they are in the process of filling".

They added it was "important from a safeguarding perspective that we allow all police forces the time to make the correct decisions and go through such diligence".

A spokesperson for the DBS said "neither Ofsted nor the Department for Education, who we closely engage with, have raised any concerns with us about delays in education sector recruitment".

They said the statistics provided to Schools Week "clearly show that during the most recent school year period, on average 84 per cent of DBS enhanced checks issued to the education sector were completed within 14 days".

The areas waiting longest for DBS checks

Police force area	2022-23		2021-22	
	% taking over 60 days	Number taking over 60 days	% taking over 60 days	Number taking over 60 days
Kent	9.75%	1,506	0.26%	37
North Yorkshire	9.51%	441	0.62%	28
Northumbria	8.85%	685	8.47%	594
Derbyshire	7.78%	513	1.13%	71
South Yorkshire	7.46%	695	0.26%	23
Humberside	6.75%	379	1.85%	102
West Yorkshire	6.15%	1,055	0.96%	148
Sussex	4.71%	500	0.67%	69
Hampshire	4.63%	595	0.35%	43
Avon And Somerset	4.55%	512	0.19%	21
National	2.59%	10,447	0.69%	2,673

Source: Schools Week analysis of DBS data

NEWS IN BRIEF

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

RAAC confirmed in 214 schools



The potentially dangerous reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) has been confirmed in 214 schools.

It marks a rise of 41, or 24 per cent, on the last list published by the Department for Education on September 19, when 173 schools were named.

The data also shows that 99.9 per cent of schools with buildings in the target era for RAAC have completed the government's questionnaire, which suggests about 15 are yet to respond.

Essex remains the worst-affected area, with 62 schools with confirmed RAAC, followed by Kent with eight, Suffolk and Hertfordshire with seven and Birmingham and Surrey with six.

The DfE list also includes three – Brandhall Primary in Sandwell, Cockermonth School in Cumberland and The Appleton School in Essex – where suspected RAAC was “not present after initial tests”.

To see the full list, visit the *Schools Week* website: [Click here](#)



GCSE attainment gap widens

The gap in GCSE attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their better-off peers has widened to its highest level for more than a decade.

Key stage 4 data published on Thursday shows the gap, which is based on average GCSE English and maths attainment nationally, widened from 3.84 last year to 3.95 this year. It has grown every year since 2020 and is at its widest since 2011.

The proportion of top GCSE grades in England dropped by 17 per cent, falling to near the same level as pre-pandemic 2019.

The DfE said the widening of the disadvantage gap “may reflect the difficult circumstances that many pupils will have experienced over the last few academic years”.

But it was widening before Covid, after narrowing to its joint lowest level in 2017.

The attainment gap between disadvantaged primary pupils and their better-off peers has stopped growing, but still remains far above pre-pandemic levels.

This week's data also shows a slight increase in the proportion of pupils entering the whole suite of five EBacc subject areas.

This year, 39.3 per cent of pupils entered the full EBacc, up 0.6 percentage points on 2022, but still lower than the 40 per cent seen in pre-pandemic 2019.

But as usual, low uptake of languages is holding back progress in boosting EBacc entries. Ministers want 90 per cent of pupils to enter the EBacc by 2025.

This year, 86.3 per cent entered four or more components, but 88.9 per cent of those who did so were missing the languages component, while 10.8 per cent were missing the humanities component.

Average attainment 8, the performance measure calculated across eight subject “buckets”, has also decreased to 46.2 this year, down 2.6 points on last year and 0.5 points lower than in 2019.

Interim Ofqual boss faces a year-long tenure

Ofqual's interim top boss will be in post for a year after Dr Jo Saxton leaves in December for the University and Colleges Admission Service.

Saxton is joining UCAS after just two years at the regulator.

In a letter to the education committee, published this week, Gillian Keegan said she intended to appoint an interim chief regulator on an “exceptional basis” for 12 months from January.

Keegan said this “takes account of the challenge of recruiting an experience suitable candidate to such a high profile and a challenging role on a short-term basis”.

She intends to carry out a full, public appointments process for a permanent successor as soon as possible.

Ofqual will have had five

chief regulators in four years, including two other interims.

Sally Collier resigned in August 2020 over that year's grading fiasco. She was replaced on an interim basis by Dame Glenys Stacey, who was also her predecessor.

Simon Lebus replaced Stacey, again on an interim basis, in January 2021, and then Saxton took over in September of that year.

Keegan also asked the committee of cross-party MPs how it “would like to engage” with appointing the interim official.

Permanent appointees are quizzed by the MPs in pre-appointment hearings.

Keegan said Saxton's leadership has been “invaluable in stabilising Ofqual following a challenging few years”, but the next 12 months “will be a challenging period ... which will require continuity and stability of leadership”.



Dr Jo Saxton

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



NATIONAL CEREMONY
27 February 2024
ICC, Birmingham

FE WEEK & AELP
AAC APPRENTICESHIP AWARDS 2024

A celebration of excellence in apprenticeship delivery



NOMINATE TODAY!

Nominate before end of 31st October 2023

For more information visit AACAPPRENTICESHIPAWARDS.COM

AWARD SPONSORS INCLUDE

Catering & Hospitality Sponsor



Creative & Design Sponsor



Construction Sponsor



Widening Participation Sponsor



Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Sponsor



Engineering & Manufacturing Sponsor



Recruitment agencies find a new role for actors

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

Actors are being offered as little as £77 a day to work as teaching assistants in London schools.

One recruitment agency advert said actors could “build a strong rapport” within classrooms while another pointed to opportunities to support a school’s drama department.

Experience working with children was a “bonus” as was confidence and “a positive can-do attitude”.

It comes amid widespread reports of teaching assistants leaving classrooms to get better paid jobs, such as in retail and hospitality.

Rachel Harrison, a national secretary at the support staff union GMB, said it “would be funny if it wasn’t so tragic”.

“Underfunded schools won’t pay lower level teaching assistants more – so they go after unemployed actors to plug the gaps.

“Teaching assistants do a difficult, skilful, caring job. It’s not something you can just pick up in between acting gigs and it’s a job that should be paid properly.”

Mike Short, head of education at Unison, which also represents support staff, said “sparse funding” forced schools to “rely heavily on supply workers”.

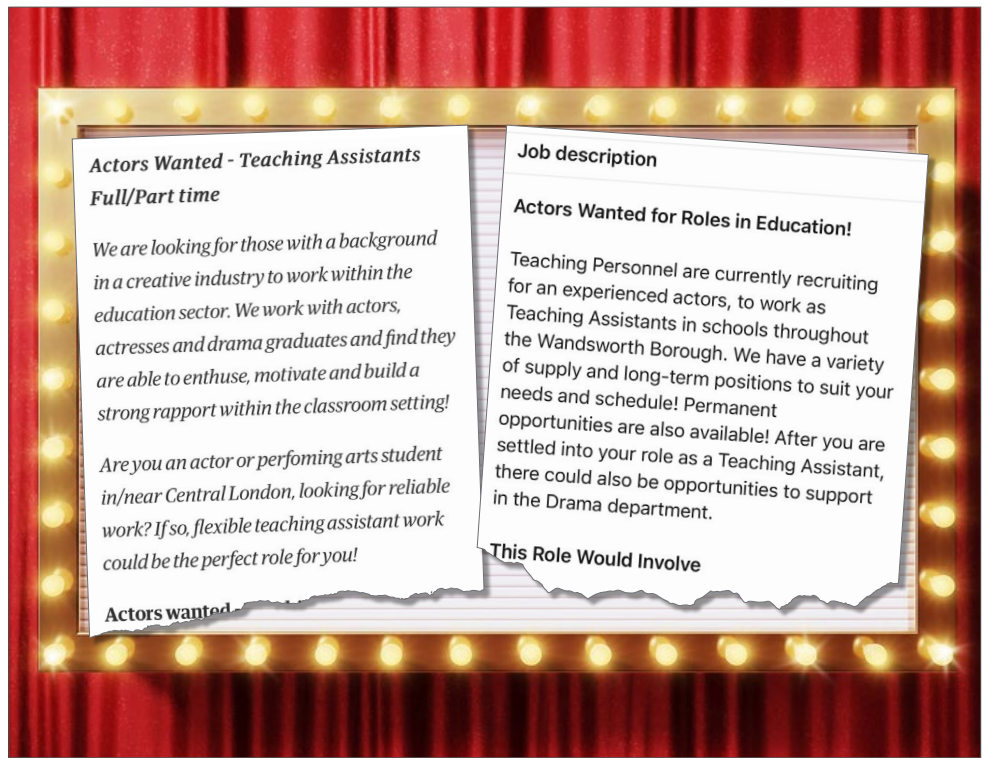
“This might be a good quick fix but is hugely expensive.

“Pupils benefit most when staff come from the widest variety of backgrounds and have the broadest range of work experience. But if wages aren’t high enough, schools will keep losing staff to employers able to offer more.”

Under a title of “Actors wanted for roles in education”, Teaching Personnel said it was recruiting “experienced actors” to work as TAs in Wandsworth, south London, for for £77 to £90 a day.

“We have a variety of supply and long-term positions to suit your needs and schedule! Permanent opportunities are also available!

“After you are settled into your role as a teaching assistant, there could also be



opportunities to support in the drama department.”

Applicants needed to be a “positive role model to inspire and encourage the child to make positive life choices and behaviours”.

The company offered a range of training opportunities and said it would undertake safeguarding checks.

According to LinkedIn, 14 applications were submitted in two days. The company did not respond to requests for comment.

In a separate job advert, Academics Ltd said it was looking “for those with a background in a creative industry to work within the education sector” in London for between £80 and £100 a day. This could include performing arts students.

It said it worked with “actors, actresses and drama graduates and find they are able to enthuse, motivate and build a strong rapport within the classroom setting”.

The recruit would have the opportunity to work with children aged 4 to 18 and “be providing general/special needs” TA help.

They should be “confident” and have a “a positive attitude and a real eagerness to contribute to the education of those within a school environment”.

It adds: “Experience working with children in some capacity is a bonus; this can be in the form of workshops with young people, direct school experience or other means.”

But it went on to say the “minimum level of experience is working with young people within some capacity”.

The company declined to comment.

A report by the National Foundation for Educational Research last month said ministers should widen the scope of their recruitment and retention strategy for support staff.

Researchers found that more than seven in 10 senior leaders reported TAs leaving their school because they could earn more elsewhere, such as in retail and hospitality. Last year, TA starting salaries were just over £20,000.

Nearly half of secondary school leaders reported low salaries were the single biggest barrier to recruiting TAs.

The demand for staff is also impacting teaching recruits. A *Schools Week* investigation in June found hundreds of recruitment agency adverts for unqualified teachers to run classrooms.

NEWS: FALLING ROLLS

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

Falling rolls could give academy drive unexpected boost

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

Plunging pupil numbers could give the government's ailing academisation drive an unexpected boost, experts say, after two primaries unveiled plans to join a MAT as rolls continue to fall.

Primaries have been struggling to fill reception classrooms in the wake of a birthrate dip of 13 per cent since 2015.

Brighton and Hove council chiefs greenlit plans in January to slash more than 90 spaces across three maintained schools in the next academic year.

But Benfield Primary and Hangleton Primary, both in the authority area, have now launched a bid to join EKO Trust, saying falling rolls on the coast means "the capacity to maintain and develop staff is reducing as the schools shrink".

Academisation would allow the schools to run more efficiently by "accessing services and resources managed and commissioned across an organisation with funding of more than £22 million".

It would also increase professional development and career opportunities.

But the authority's Labour administration oppose the proposal, arguing that academisation "will not solve" plunging pupil numbers and only "fragment" the system.

Hackney council in east London is facing legal action from parents who say it is not fair it is planning to close maintained schools only. Councils



have no admission powers over academies.

Tom Richmond, of the EDSK think tank, said it was becoming "increasingly unsustainable" for councils to "retain the statutory duty to provide enough school places without being able to influence the opening and closing" of academies in their area.

In consultation documents, Benfield and Hangleton said the local authority, "through no fault of its own...has less funding and resources, which it has to target at the weakest schools".

But the papers added: "We need to retain, develop and recruit the very best staff team to achieve the best outcomes for the children."

Brighton and Hove officials warned in January that schools without enough pupils or those with "fluctuating numbers" might not be able to operate in a financially efficient way and risked entering a budget deficit. Forecasts

suggest there will be more than 690 surplus places in the area by 2026.

But Lucy Helliwell, who chairs the children, families and schools committee, said a more "fragmented system with more schools outside" the local authority made it harder to co-ordinate city-wide place planning.

Richmond said the imbalance between central and local government would become "more fraught" as maintained schools converted to academies.

Islington in north London wanted to close Pooles Park Primary to cut surplus places in the borough.

The school – in which 56 per cent of reception spaces are said to be unused – has also been issued with an academy order – after Ofsted rated it 'inadequate' in November.

Shortly after a consultation on the closure plans ended in June, Claire Burton, the regional director for London, gave the go-ahead for the school to be absorbed by the Bridge Trust.

Advisory board minutes said the civil servant "stated she was mindful of the [council's] concerns about surplus places". But she noted that "government policy is to seek a sponsor for any 'inadequate' school and to proceed with conversion where there is an appropriate match".

Sam Freedman, a former adviser to the Department for Education, previously told Schools Week the split between local authorities and trusts "creates an incentive to academise".

"If you're a maintained school, you'll think getting into a trust will make you safe. This will only accelerate the problem."



Tom Richmond

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Primary pupil forecast revised up, but still big drop

The government has revised its pupil number projections after this year's school census found more primary children than previously forecast.

Last year's pupil number projections forecast the state school population was due to fall by 12 per cent to 6,915,000 by 2032.

Figures published on Thursday revise that estimate up by 214,000, although numbers are predicted to shrink to 7,129,000 by 2032, a drop of about 10 per cent from this year's 7,931,000.

Primary numbers have been falling for

several years as a result of a decline in the birth rate following a boom in the 2000s. That population bulge has now moved into secondary schools, where numbers will peak next year before falling.

The Department for Education said population estimates from 2012 had been updated to take account of the 2021 census, making it "harder than usual to identify specific reasons for the difference between these two projection models".

But one reason "could be the results of the 2023 school census, which showed

higher numbers in primary school than had previously been forecast".

Falling pupil numbers are already creating problems for primary schools, especially in London where Brexit and rising housing costs are driving families out of the capital.

The DfE expects the primary school population to fall from 4,567,448 this year to 3,990,359 in 2032 (a 13 per cent fall).

The secondary population is due to rise from 3,193,260 this year to 3,244,230 next year, before falling to 2,975,475 in 2032 (a 7 per cent fall on this year's numbers).

London borough's £800 exercise results in £1.2m school funding boost

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

Schools in a London borough will be £1.2 million better-off next year after their council trialled an "opt-out" exercise for free school meals that it estimates cost just £800.

And a second council has raised £84,000, prompting fresh calls for a system of auto-enrolment for all eligible pupils.

Lewisham in south London identified more than 500 eligible families through data analysis across its education, IT, revenues, benefits and communications teams.

It then informed parents it would apply on their behalf unless they opted out.

The onus is usually on families to apply to their local authority. Although schools and councils often encourage parents to enrol, they do not have access to full eligibility data.

Lewisham will now receive a massive £1.2 million extra pupil premium funding in 2024-25.

Pinaki Ghoshal, the council's executive director for children and young people, said it was a "fantastic outcome for not just our schools but hundreds of families in the borough".

"This extra £1.2 million will provide not only a healthy nutritious meal for hundreds more children every day, but will also help fund extra staffing, equipment and support in the schools that support those families."

The Local Government Association has repeatedly called for auto-enrolment, which it said would benefit 215,000 extra pupils. This would likely amount to at least £268 million in extra funding for schools.

At the time, Shaun Davies, chair of the LGA's resources board, said that "streamlining and removing the red tape in the applications process, so that councils get given the information they need, is vital if we are to ensure no child misses out on a healthy meal".



Automatic enrolment was also recommended by Henry Dimbleby in the national food strategy.

It stated that the government "has data on which families receive benefits that qualify them for FSMs, but this is not shared with schools".

The government had said auto-enrolment was "unviable for reasons of data protection". But the Dimbleby report added: "It cannot be right to let paperwork stand between a child and a hot meal."

Lewisham's scheme was in-part prompted by fears eligible families would not apply because of the extension of universal free school meals to all primary children in London.

Officials feared eligible families "would not understand the need" to apply if their child already received free meals via the expansion scheme.

The opt-out scheme, which a spokesperson said had been a "huge success", will now be extended to other services.

The council estimated the exercise cost £800 for postage parents, although this did exclude "indirect" staff costs that have not been calculated.

Based on the postage costs alone, the council said it achieved a cost benefit of £1,500 for every £1 spent.

Lewisham said several other councils had run similar schemes, and that it was encouraging other town halls to follow suit.

"It requires some collaborative teamwork and, of course, the extra workload across a number of services. But the results speak for themselves."

As part of its wider school food strategy, Wandsworth found 67 children who were eligible for but not claiming meals.

Schools will get an extra £84,000 a year in pupil premium funding as a result. Pupils also got an extra £8,040 of summer food vouchers and £3,500 of help with uniforms.

Wandsworth said the process was "lengthy and involves a number of teams", but was an "incredibly worthwhile piece of work".

The council will now promote the approach to London and national administrations, and recommended government set an "ambitious timeline and process for the introduction of a new national auto-enrolment system by 2025".

Ministers should also work to agree how benefits data could be accessed and used by councils for opt-out mechanisms, and commission an "up-to-date FSM registration rates dataset so that a current assessment of under registration rates can be reviewed".



Pinaki Ghoshal

FEATURE: CLIMATE CHANGE

The schools trying to go green, and what's stopping them

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

Two years ago the government promised to make the education sector a “world leader” in environmental sustainability.

But the National Audit Office (NAO) says the policies won't “make a contribution towards achieving government's overall goal” of slashing emissions by three-quarters by 2037, before net zero in 2050.

In a damning report published in June, the spending watchdog called for changes to be “rolled out at a much larger scale, and relatively soon”.

So what's going on? *Schools Week* investigates...

Are schools cutting emissions?

Government guidance states large MATs that consume more than 40,000 kilowatt-hours of energy in a year must include their carbon emission readings in annual accounts.

The bosses of smaller organisations don't have to report their energy use. Councils must, but it's not possible to extract the energy use for schools only.

Schools Week analysis of the 30 biggest trusts shows per-pupil carbon emissions fell by 2.9 per cent between 2019-20 and 2021-22.

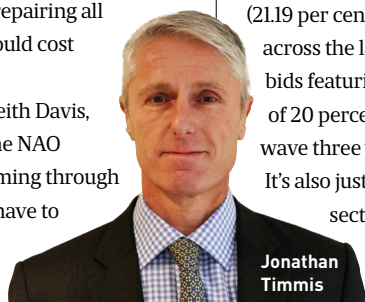
Covid is likely skewing the findings, with school closures temporarily compressing figures. However, later keeping windows open to thwart the virus' spread probably halted progress.

Nick Hurn, the chief executive of the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, which has cut per-pupil emissions by 42 per cent since 2019, said it was “difficult” to have environmentally friendly estates when buildings were old and dilapidated.

The NAO report said 24,000 primary and secondary buildings – 38 per cent of the school estate – were beyond their “initial design life”.

The government estimates repairing all England's school buildings would cost £11.4 billion.

Speaking to *Schools Week*, Keith Davis, the director responsible for the NAO report, said that if “water's coming through the roof, leaders are going to have to address that first”.



Jonathan Timmis



‘Net zero...you'll have to knock the buildings down’

But the NAO report found a £2 billion yearly shortfall in capital funding for schools, meaning emergency repairs take precedence over routine maintenance.

Jonathan Timmis, the chief operations officer of Astrea Academy Trust, said: “If you want to get to net zero, you'll have to knock the buildings down.”

MPs sitting on the environment audit committee examined the DfE's eco targets on Wednesday. Conservative Philip Dunne, who chaired the hearing, is urging ministers to use the RAAC emergency as an opportunity to address green concerns.

Decarbonisation scheme cash drops

The £2.3 billion public sector decarbonisation scheme (PSDS) was launched by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) in 2020 to offer grants to the likes of schools and hospitals for efficiency upgrades.

Schools Week analysis suggests £270 million (21.19 per cent) of the £1.27 billion handed out across the last two phases of the project went to bids featuring schools. This represents a drop of 20 percentage points since the first funding wave three years ago.

It's also just below the 24 per cent of public sector emissions that state schools

produce.

The proportion of cash going to schools is likely to be lower, too, as council applications do not state how much funding is for schools, as opposed to wider services.

The government last year introduced “sector caps” to ensure that funding “broadly matches” emission numbers. Schools, alongside colleges and universities, now get between 30 and 35 per cent of the pot.

Results from a Freedom of Information request show Harris Federation was the second-largest recipient of PSDS grants from the education sector.

It's been allocated £17.2 million since 2020, which is £2.7 million less than Cranfield University in Bedfordshire got.

Big trusts ‘better off’

At Harris, the money has gone towards new heating systems in seven academies, solar panels and 10,000 new LED fittings, among other things. A spokesperson said so far the trust had “achieved a 95 per cent aggregated carbon saving across the 11 schools benefiting from this funding”.

The trust, one of the country's largest with 52 schools, “put together credible [funding] bids quickly” as it had appointed a company to support it with energy-efficiency work two years before PSDS began.

But Paul Edmond, the chair of the UK Schools

FEATURE: CLIMATE CHANGE

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

Sustainability Network (UKSSN), said it was “a challenge” for smaller organisations to put bids together.

Our analysis shows trusts that lodged successful PSDS applications had, on average, 22 schools. The average-sized MAT in 2022 had seven schools, according to Education Datalab.

England’s biggest trust, United Learning, received the go-ahead for five separate bids totalling £5.7 million.

Speaking to MPs on Wednesday, Dr Jonathan Dewsbury, the DfE’s director of capital operations and net zero, said PSDS was “consistently oversubscribed”.

Officials recognised it was a “challenge for particularly small schools or SATs to access it”, but were working with the DESNZ to change the next phase of funding to fix this.

Baroness Barran, the academies minister, also acknowledged the “first past-the-post system [for applications] isn’t working very well for schools”.

Schools take initiative

Despite a lack of funding, more schools are prioritising going green.

A National Governance Association survey this year found nearly 66 per cent of respondents said leaders had taken “practical action in their school or trust on environmental sustainability”.

Larger trusts are using their own cash to fund changes.

E-ACT will fork out £8 million – drawn from reserves and capital grants – to install solar panels in each of its 28 academies.

Chris Wiseman, its deputy chief executive, said the scheme was “central to reducing our reliance on mains services where possible”.

Astrea spent £1.1 million – half of which came from its reserves – on solar panels and LED lights.

Delta Academies Trust, which runs 53 schools, launched an “environmental strategy group” 18 months ago.

Paul Tarn, its chief executive, said classroom projectors had been replaced with LED screens and the chain was committed to installing solar panels whenever a roof was refurbished.

Oasis Community Learning trust, which has 54 schools, appointed a new national environmental and sustainability manager role in January.

Energy costs make measures affordable

Sam Freedman, a former DfE adviser, said while largest trusts would be



able to afford facilities teams with “capability and knowledge” of green issues, this “wouldn’t make [financial] sense for an average MAT”, which would instead have to “contract out”.

But the surge in energy costs have pushed many to act.

Mark Greatrex, the boss of the 10-school chain Bellevue Place, said after energy bills leapt from £16,000 to £60,000 in two years at one of his schools, he would review whether it was “sustainable to have someone to do this because the savings could pay for their role. It’s something that...wasn’t as financially attractive before.”

To reduce costs, some eco-minded chains, such as Oasis, have signed up to long-term contracts with companies that fit solar panels for no initial cost. In return, the schools pay the companies a lower-than-market rate for each unit of electricity generated by the panels.

Under the deal, North Star Community Trust pays 16p per unit. From national grid suppliers, a unit is worth about 34p. Marino Charalambous, its chief executive, said he chose this option as he could not afford to buy the panels outright.

“It’s a no-brainer – as long as you go with the right companies.”

Essex County Council officials aim to retrofit their schools “with energy-efficiency measures by 2030”. Funding for capital works – such as replacing old gas boilers with air-source heat pumps – is coming from the authority’s

maintenance budget.

In Kent, council chiefs have installed about 3,000 solar panels across the county’s schools in the past 13 years. The authority has also purchased a solar farm.

Net zero ‘accelerator’ plan

The DfE launched its own sustainability and climate change unit (SCCU) in April 2021. But the delivery plan is already rated “amber-red”.

Barran revealed on Wednesday that seven of the 143 commitments that its agencies must commit to are “off track”, although she called the rating “a bit harsh”.

Among them are promises to ensure all new school buildings are net zero by the end of this year and to develop standards for retrofit and repair by 2025.

Ministers intend on rebuilding 500 primaries and secondaries (about 2 per cent of the school estate) by 2030, costing £1 billion a year.

Barran also said the government has a target of retrofitting 650 schools to get them “net zero but without a rebuild”.

Meanwhile, the government-owned LocatED is working on a “net zero accelerator”. Documents say the scheme will “finance and deliver practical improvements to the education estate”.

This will help councils and trusts assess the condition of their schools and advise “what building works they need to do, and the order in which to do them”.

It will “also seek to aggregate participating schools to harness their collective buying power” to create “greater value-for-money”.

But NAO found cash for the DfE’s resilient schools programme – which is testing retrofitting options for primaries and secondaries – had been quietly cut from £90.5 million to just £4.6 million in August 2022.

‘Who’s going to tell me off for not going green?’

But Edmond, of UKSSN, said there’s “no real accountability to make schools green. Who’s going to tell me off if I don’t do it?”

Ministers estimate that at the current rate of progress, 80 per cent of the existing [education] estate won’t be retrofitted by 2050, while the NAO has branded current sustainability schemes “fairly small-scale”.

Davis said the DfE now must “set an emissions target and get its decarbonisation plan in place. There’s been no substantive progress on this.”



Baroness Barran



Sam Freedman

It's official: the difference that a head can make

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Effective headteachers boost pupil progress by an extra grade in two GCSE subjects, a landmark new study has found.

Research by the Education Policy Institute also found a larger boost in outcomes in schools with more experienced leaders and in those where heads stayed for several years.

The study used national data on all pupils and heads in England between 2004 and 2019 to follow 22,300 primary and 5,400 secondary heads and track their impact on metrics such as pupil progress, teacher turnover and teacher absences.

An "effective" head is in the 84th percentile of effectiveness in terms of their impact on school results. An average is at the median and a "less effective" head is at the 16th percentile.

The findings have prompted calls to encourage more high-quality heads to work outside London, for governors and Ofsted to recognise the "cost of losing experienced leaders" and for trusts and councils to encourage their best leaders to work in the most challenging schools.

Here is your Schools Week round-up of the key findings:

1. Most effective heads add two GCSE grades

The study found that a secondary school that replaced a less-effective head with an average leader could expect pupil progress to improve by a month on average, or an extra grade in one GCSE subject.

For primary schools, the impact was the equivalent of about two months of extra progress.

A secondary school that replaced a less-effective head with an effective head could expect average improvement equivalent to an extra grade in two GCSE subjects.

According to the report, the importance of heads for pupils "has never been quantified in England", making it "hard for policymakers and school governors to make informed decisions about budget allocation between leadership and other school resources".

Trusts and councils should now "consider how they can encourage their most-effective school leaders into the most-challenging schools".



2. Experience and tenure boost progress

The effects on pupil progress "seem to be stronger for headteachers that remain in the school for several years".

For example, the effect of switching from an average to an effective head jumps from one month's additional progress to two.

Heads' effectiveness also does not depend on the "match" between them and their school, suggesting "good headteachers are equally effective in all schools we observe them in".

The study also found experienced heads tended to be better.

In both phases, having five more years of experience is associated with an extra two months of progress, or an increase of 1.25 GCSE grades for secondary school pupils.

The report said school governors and Ofsted inspectors should "acknowledge that it may take years to realise the full improvement in results from switching headteachers and support new headteachers accordingly".

They should "also recognise that the cost of losing experienced leaders is high and focus on supporting them to remain in the profession".

3. Best heads also reduce teacher turnover

Those who are most effective at improving attainment also seem to reduce "both annual teacher turnover and four-year cumulative teacher turnover".

However, while effective heads were found to reduce teacher absenteeism in secondary schools, "no consistent effect was discovered in primary schools".

4. London has more effective leaders

Researchers found headteacher effectiveness

varied "little" by school characteristics – effective heads were equally distributed across academies and LA schools, and between more and less affluent schools.

However, headteacher effectiveness was greatest in London, where primary heads improved progress by a month more than the average head nationally.

The north east "also appears to have slightly more effective primary headteachers, though that effect is not replicated in secondary schools".

To close the attainment gap, the government should encourage "more high-quality headteachers to work in the most disadvantaged schools and in areas outside London".

5. Best heads don't earn much more

More effective heads earned more, but not by much. Highly effective leaders averaged £61,700 at primary and £91,800 at secondary, compared with £59,300 and £86,400 for less effective heads.

"This is a relatively small pay premium when compared with the large benefit that a more-effective headteacher brings to a school," said the report.

Nerd note

The EPI said it ranked headteachers as effective based on whether they improved their school's test and exam results. It then checked how schools with leaders at different points in that ranking fared in terms of metrics such as pupil progress, teacher retention and absenteeism.

NEWS

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

SEND system is 'lose, lose, lose', admits Keegan

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

The current system for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is "lose, lose, lose", costing a "fortune" and not providing the "right service", the education secretary has admitted.

Gillian Keegan also said parents were using tribunals to get their children into "very expensive independent schools", which drove up costs and created a "tale of two outcomes".

During a Q&A at the Schools North East conference on Thursday, the minister said SEND diagnoses were not happening "early enough", and that government reforms would explore "different pathways to do that" through "multi-agency" work.

"SEND's very interesting, because we're spending a fortune. So the Treasury are not happy, the local authorities are not happy. But then nobody's happy with the service.

"So it's like a lose, lose, lose. We haven't got the right service."

It comes as fellow Conservative MP Gary Streeter led calls for at least £4.6 billion in extra high-needs funding.

Writing for *Schools Week* this week, Streeter, who is vice-chair of the f40 school

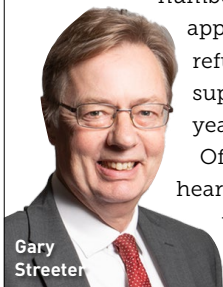


Gillian Keegan

funding campaign group, said it was "very clear that demand and expectation are far outweighing available funding and capacity in the system".

Keegan also criticised what she described as the "tribunal factor".

Schools Week reported last year how the number of parents launching appeals over a council's refusal to provide SEND support passed 10,000 in a year for the first time.



Gary Streeter

Of the 5,600 that went to a hearing, 5,393 (96 per cent) tribunals sided with families either in whole

or in part.

Ministry of Justice data shows 27 per cent of appeals were against a council's refusal to secure an assessment for a plan, while 54 per cent were against the council's choice of a school or college.

Keegan said the tribunal factor was "basically...lots of parents taking councils to tribunal to get to a particular school, normally an independent school, normally very expensive independent schools".

"And what that's done is not only put the costs up, but it's a tale of two outcomes. Some people are getting this service with a great school, and some are not getting hardly anything, hardly any support."

JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS

Overworked leaders can't find time for support scheme

Overworked school leaders struggled to find time to take part in free, government-funded mental health support sessions, an evaluation of the scheme found.

Education Support has been offering six free supervision sessions for staff in assistant headteacher roles and above as part of a £1 million scheme.

A report evaluating the service, published on Thursday, urged the DfE to consider "how the culture around expectations for leaders accessing support could be changed".

It said this could include "setting clear expectations (and associated time/funding) for school leaders to access supervision or support for mental health and wellbeing", after a number spoke of "how isolating the role can be".

"Barriers [to engaging with the support]

are related to ... workload and expectations around school leaders accessing support."

The programme offers "peer support" sessions to provide leaders "with an opportunity to discuss the challenges they face within a group of others".

Supervision was also offered to "leaders in need of or preferring one-to-one support". The sessions consisted of "confidential conversations about the work they do and how the challenges they face impact them as professionals".

To the end of April, 314 (26 per cent) applicants had completed all six sessions, while 102 (8 per cent) "stopped engaging" before the last of their appointments.

Meanwhile, almost a fifth (19 per cent) of the 1,221 eligible applicants to the scheme – launched in 2021 – came from people who

did not start the programme after they were offered a slot.

The study noted that some had "feelings of guilt around taking time for support and prioritising their own needs", while others identified stigmas "around seeking help".

Meanwhile, those working on the project said some leaders found it difficult to "find an hour/hour-and-a-half within the working week to participate".

A further 264 (22 per cent) applicants "were awaiting contact about their first session or had been placed on a waiting list".

Those who benefited from the support said they had "reduced stress and anxiety, improved management of workload and wellbeing, and greater clarity of thinking".

The government is looking to extend the scheme.

NEWS: EXAMS

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

Exam board lays out timetable for digital exams

SAMANTHA BOOTH
@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

England's largest exam board has set out a timetable to move some of its exams on-screen – with a large-entry subject such as English going digital by 2030.

AQA published proposals on Tuesday that include parts of GCSE Italian and Polish, sat by about 10,000 pupils, to be assessed digitally by 2026.

More will follow until bigger subjects are partly digitally assessed in 2030 – meaning hundreds of thousands of exams will be on-screen.

Pupils' devices will be offline during the test to stop them searching for information on the net or accessing artificial intelligence tools.

The board will now consult the sector before announcing more detailed plans next year. However, proposals will also need regulatory approval from Ofqual.

Colin Hughes, AQA's chief executive, said: "Technology and change are two constants in education... Moving to digital exams is the next step of this evolution."

AQA said that while some boards already use on-screen tests for a small number of subjects, such as

Question: Maths Q3
Test: Sample questions for digital exams

03 A (0, 2) and B (6, 5) are points on the straight line ABCD.
AB = BC = CD

Work out the coordinates of D. **Sample maths question**

computer science, this is the first time any has set out a timetable for moving a high-volume GCSE to a digital test.

The board has also launched an online demo of its digital exams.

In 2025, it will launch its first digital mock exams for the GCSE Italian and Polish reading and listening components before moving to live exams the following year.

The exams will take a "paper behind glass approach", which means the existing exam paper will be replicated on-screen. But in the longer term

there is "much potential for more innovative and interactive assessment".

This year, 7,000 students sat the board's Polish exam, with 3,000 for Italian.

A pilot of digital science exams shows 52 per cent of students were positive about their experience of taking GCSE science digitally. Just 12 per cent felt negative.

The pilot's findings have been published in the board's "Making it click: the case for digital examinations in England" report.

Middle-class pupils were more likely to say they prefer pen and paper (24 per cent) compared with working-class pupils (19 per cent). But youngsters were more comfortable using a computer for longer as opposed to pen and paper.

AQA-commissioned research also found an estimated 9 per cent reduction in carbon emissions per exam.

But there are "legitimate concerns". Four in five teachers told AQA digital infrastructures – computers and laptops – are an issue. They are also worried disadvantaged pupils may be negatively impacted by a lack of technology at home.

The government is running a feasibility study on "what it would take" to make GCSEs and A-level exams "fully digital".

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

'Irresponsible' to restore the £370m, says Gibb

Restoring the £370 million mistakenly added to school budgets after a funding gaffe would be "irresponsible", the schools minister has said.

Labour called ministers to the Commons on Tuesday to answer an urgent question after the Department for Education admitted it had inflated the 2024-25 school budget by 0.62 per cent after miscalculating pupil numbers.

A review into the error will be led by Peter Wyman, a prominent accountant and former chair of the Care Quality Commission. Schools have since been reissued with new initial budget allocations for next year.

Bridget Phillipson, the shadow education secretary, said the gaffe was not a "one off" and was "part of a much bigger pattern of Conservative mismanagement" over 13 years.

But Nick Gibb, the schools minister, said "what would be irresponsible would be to increase funding for schools by the 0.62 per

cent solely as a result of an error by officials.

"That is not how government spending systems work. It has to go through the proper value for money procedures and that's how we always conduct our allocation of taxpayers' money."

He had earlier dismissed union calls to restore the cash.

Funding for next year remains the same, at £59.6 billion. But the increase in per-pupil funding is 1.9 per cent rather than the 2.7 per cent schools were originally told.

The error was first identified in September but it was not announced until 5pm on Friday, October 6 – two days after the Conservative party conference finished.

Gibb was pressed by MPs on why it took a month to tell schools.

He when he was told about the issue his instinct was "to find out what the

error is and rectify it as quickly as possible, which took about four weeks compared to the normal six weeks in calculating the NFF [national funding formula], and then publish those figures as rapidly as possible."

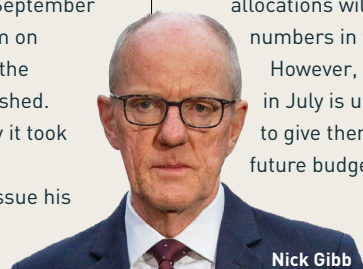
"This is an error by officials: they've owned up to it and we've corrected it."

He did not answer questions from Phillipson over the timeline for the review and how it would be reported to MPs.

Schools have so far only been told initial allocations for their funding next year. Actual allocations will be based on pupil

numbers in the October school census.

However, allocations data published in July is used by schools and councils to give themselves an idea of their future budgets.





The 14th annual

FESTIVAL OF EDUCATION

at Wellington College | 4-5 July 2024

HEADLINE PARTNER

AQA
Questions matter

EARLY BIRD OFFER

Save at least **20%** on all tickets until the end of January 2024.



APPLY TO SPEAK

We are now accepting applications to speak at next year's Festival of Education.

Deadline Extended - apply before the end of October.



Visit [educationfest.co.uk](https://www.educationfest.co.uk) for further information and to book tickets

FOUNDED BY



WELLINGTON COLLEGE

Profile

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL



‘You know you’ve lost when it turns into a slanging match’

Nick Brook was the first in his Coventry comprehensive year group to go to university. Which is one of the reasons he’s determined to close the opportunity gap for other disadvantaged youngsters

There are moments as Nick Brook talks about narrowing the opportunity gap for disadvantaged youngsters when he becomes so animated it’s as though he’s delivering a rousing speech to union delegates.

This infectious passion served him well as deputy general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) – a role he held for seven years before joining the social mobility charity Speakers for Schools as its chief executive in March.

But it was not a quality his bosses appreciated during his ten years in the civil service.

After two hours of psychometric tests for the Home Office, Brook was told the results were

“broadly in line” with expectations of a senior civil servant. However he “appeared to seek excitement” more than they would expect.

“I should have seen the warning signs,” he says.

Gaining ‘real power’

Brook believes his ability to “do good and influence” was “so much greater” at the NAHT than while leading the Home Office’s anti-social behaviour and crime prevention unit or as programme director of Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary a few years later.

His union job gave him a “seat at every table” and “real power” to his words, which wasn’t the case then. “There was so little scope to actually move

things in a positive direction. You’re always at the whim of the minister.”

He says the union is “interested in finding solutions to problems rather than just shout at walls”, as opposed to others who are “all about the soundbite”.

“Then they think themselves successful because they’ve got the column inches the next day.” (When asked which unions, he says it’s not a criticism of any in particular, more a reflection on “how easy it is to poke holes rather than try fix them”.)

Brook’s civil service experience gave him an appreciation of the hard work that goes into shaping policy. It was “better to be close” to those in government, “assuming you’re on the same side and then able to take the edges off bad policy, than on the

Profile: Nick Brook

outside shouting at them. You know you've lost when it starts turning into a slanging match."

He pushed the government hard on its response to reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete after picking up concerns about the true scale of the problem late last year.

The fear inside government was "not necessarily the concrete falling on your head", but that any collapse could "release a plume of asbestos fumes... so if the concrete doesn't kill you, the asbestos will get you".

He raised the issue with MPs at the time, but was confused at the lack of interest.

"Everyone just wanted to talk about 'is this enough money to see off strike action'? They completely underestimated the significance."

Speaking at schools

During his 20 years of leadership positions in education, Brook has got used to being "the only one in the room" who didn't attend a private school or Russell Group university.

Levelling the playing field is a key reason he joined Speakers for Schools. Founded in 2010 by journalist Robert Peston, the charity gets leaders from sectors such as business, politics and the arts to deliver inspirational talks in state schools.

It now has 1,600 speakers and 120 staff, with a remit that's expanded more recently into finding work experience for pupils at the 2,300 secondary schools and colleges it works with.

Funding comes primarily from the Law Family Charitable Foundation, run by hedge fund manager Andrew Law, and is topped up through donations.

Peston's journalistic connections have helped bag speakers that include politicians David Cameron, Nick Clegg and Ed Miliband, *Dragons'* Den business guru Deborah Meaden and chef Tom Kerridge.

When Microsoft founder Bill Gates visited a school in a deprived part of London, some parents were "in tears because they said 'people like that don't come to places like this'. His visit showed them, 'you do matter,'" says Brook.



'We are none the wiser on what makes good tutoring'

Student pretence

Brook can resonate with the experiences of the disadvantaged pupils he talks to. He attended an "awful" Coventry comprehensive where "despondency hung in the air".

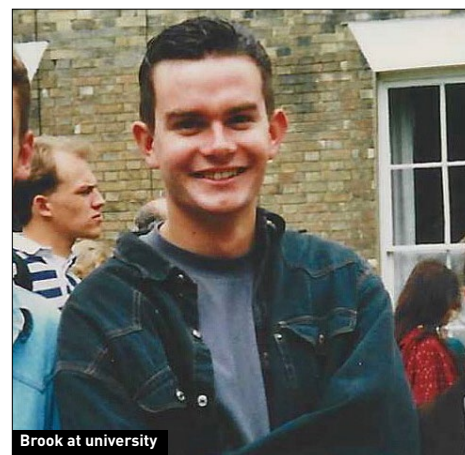
He was the only pupil in his year – and the first in his family – to go to university.

He puts academic success down to regularly taking two buses to the University of Warwick and "hiding out in the library reading books, pretending to be a student".

After completing a PGCE at the University of Sussex, he became a primary teacher in Eastbourne.

Although he loved teaching, he was seconded to become a council teacher recruitment manager and never returned to the classroom. He "failed abysmally" in his initial recruitment remit – encouraging more men into primary teaching – but later set up a successful teacher training programme in Hastings.

In 2002 he moved to The Training and Development Agency for Schools, a now defunct teacher training quango, where he led on teacher recruitment with sentimental TV campaigns such



Brook at university

as "No one forgets a good teacher".

After stints at the Home Office and police inspectorate, Brook returned to education in 2011 with Ofsted, leading on thematic and subject inspections under Sir Michael Wilshaw. The plan was for "visits from a local HMI who would know their schools, have a cup of tea with the head and walk around. Any HMI worth their salt could very



Aged 16

Profile: Nick Brook



Brook, right with brother

quickly determine if they should call in their team for a proper inspection”.

But Wilshaw was “very rapidly told” that “an inspectorate...needs to go in and inspect”.

They ended up rolling out “short inspections”, which “didn’t lower the stakes anything like it should. One of the most frustrating things about Michael Wilshaw is that a lot of the time, his instincts were great.”

Reaching for the stars

Brook has been critical of Ofsted since. Just last month he wrote for Schools Week about how the inspectorate needed to get its house in order.

Careers education in schools also needs a fix, which is why Speakers for Schools has “reorientated” itself in the past five years to meet an ambition that by 2028 every youngster in state education will get access to high-quality work experience.

Brook says school career leads “lack capacity”, while employers are beset by competing work placement requests for T-level students and apprentices.

He wants pupils to reach for the stars, a nod to his own quirky side story of being an acting extra – something he plans to return to after he retires.

After challenging himself to appear in a film (he has “no acting skills whatsoever”), he nabbed a role as a tie fighter in Solo: A Star Wars Story. It was a “blink and you’d miss it” scene, but scooped dad-kudos because a Lego model was made of his character.

‘We’ve got a race on our hands’

Brook is also passionate about improving



Brook’s first teaching job Motcombe infant school, Eastbourne - year 2 teacher in 1996

‘Michael Wilshaw’s instincts were great a lot of the time’

tutoring. He now leads the government’s tutoring advisory group to ensure the National Tutoring Programme has a lasting legacy in schools.

He says the government is “obsessive” about delivering its promise of six million tutoring programmes, but with “no conversation whatsoever about the impact. It was at risk of

hitting its target, but missing the point.”

With a year of the programme left and almost four million programmes delivered, “we are none the wiser” on what makes good tutoring.

“We’ve got a race on our hands to get as much learning out of it now as possible.”

If tutoring can narrow the attainment gap and work experience the opportunity gap – then Brook believes more youngsters will be able to climb the social ladder, as he did.

“It was not lack of talent in my school year that meant I was the only one who went to university. It was lack of opportunity.”

CV

1990-1993	History degree, University of Kent
1993-1994	Primary PGCE, University of Sussex
1999-2001	Recruitment strategy manager, East Sussex County Council
2002-2008	Head of teacher recruitment, then director of remodelling for the Training and Development Agency for Schools
2008-2009	Head of the anti-social behaviour and crime prevention unit, Home Office
2009-2011	Programme director, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary
2011-2015	Head of group, Ofsted
2016-2023	Deputy general secretary, NAHT
2022	Chair of the DfE strategic tutoring advisory group
March 2023-now	Chief executive, Speakers for Schools

Opinion

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



CHRISTIAN BOKHOVE

Professor in mathematics education, University of Southampton

This evidence must inform the inquiry into Ofsted's reliability

A new paper suggests Ofsted should make its training material more widely available, explain its authors

There was something of a social media storm when some of Ofsted's training material recently leaked online. Teachers and school leaders were able to see for the first-time what Ofsted really thinks – albeit partially and out of context – and many felt accessing such materials would help them to navigate inspection.

This demonstrates widespread demand for inside knowledge about what inspectors look for when they judge a school. Of course, the individuals with the greatest knowledge are the inspectors themselves. And due to Ofsted's model of employing school leaders as inspectors ("OIs"), some schools are privy to more inside information than others.

Powerful knowledge

But does this actually give the schools in which OIs work an advantage? Until today's release of our new academic paper as part of our project funded by the Nuffield Foundation, there was no evidence on this issue. So, we worked with

Schools Week on data it obtained from Ofsted via a Freedom of Information request.

The data shows that schools with an OI on their books do better in their inspections. In particular, schools that employ an OI are less likely to be downgraded to 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' and more likely to be judged as potentially improving towards 'outstanding' during short inspections of 'good' schools.

This only affects a small amount of Ofsted's work; about 2 per cent of schools inspected in 2022-23 employed an OI. However, the new chief inspector wants Ofsted to

employ more inspectors who are also working in schools.

Possible explanations

One fairly benign explanation of our findings is that Ofsted simply employs the best school leaders as inspectors or provide them with genuinely valuable training. This would make it unsurprising that their schools do slightly better in inspections. We can't rule this out.

However, our findings hold even when we compare schools with similar prior exam results, absence rates and Ofsted grades. This makes the "best leaders" hypothesis a less likely explanation.

Other explanations are more controversial. Perhaps OIs get access to "insider knowledge"; the sort of information that other school leaders can only access when it is leaked. As the new chief inspector Martyn Oliver has noted, it is not uncommon for multi-academy trusts to advertise for former HMIs to join them.

An even more controversial explanation relates to networks. Ofsted operates a regional model

and most OIs inspect within the region in which they are based. This means that an OI could be familiar with the inspector who comes to judge their school, which could colour the latter's judgment.

Our data doesn't help us to distinguish between the potential explanations, which is why we are calling on Ofsted to make data about inspectors and inspections available to qualified researchers in a secure setting. It shouldn't be necessary to make a Freedom of Information request to get such data.

Likewise, it seems obvious that if Ofsted provides training to some school leaders, then a version of this training at least should be accessible to all school leaders.

The bigger picture

This work builds on our previous research into inspection consistency and reliability, where we have found that permanent members of Ofsted staff (HMIs) award more lenient judgments than contracted inspectors (OIs), even where the school have similar exam results and pupil intakes.

Any process with human judgment at its core will have fundamental limitations. As we noted in our recent submission to the education select committee, school inspections will never be 100 per cent reliable; it would be unreasonable to expect them to be.

But what they need to be is reliable enough. And at the moment, we really can't come to a judgment about that.

This article was co-authored with Professor John Jerrim and Sam Sims, both of IOE, UCL's faculty of education and society

“ Schools with an inspector on their books do better



Opinion

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



FRANK NORRIS

Education and skills adviser,
Northern Powerhouse
Partnership

Only local and independent oversight can deliver inclusion

Frank Norris makes the case for an independent middle tier of system leadership to coordinate local efforts to drive inclusion and improvement

Various governments have been hesitant to grant greater control to local areas, such as through the mayors of the combined authorities. But there is growing recognition that this limits responses to what are predominantly local issues and challenges, and not least because it prevents a range of budget holders from merging their funding streams to tackle them more effectively.

These challenges are substantial and growing. They include SEND provision, attendance and wellbeing, as well as falling rolls in primary schools, improving the education estate and ensuring the local offer meets the needs of the community and employers.

New forms of area partnerships meet some of these challenges, perhaps encouraged by a pandemic response that proved the power of mutual support. Yet our highly centralised model hampers locally elected mayors' efforts to interact effectively with local authorities, MATS, teaching school hubs and individual schools. It also inhibits schools, who fear this will translate to yet more accountability

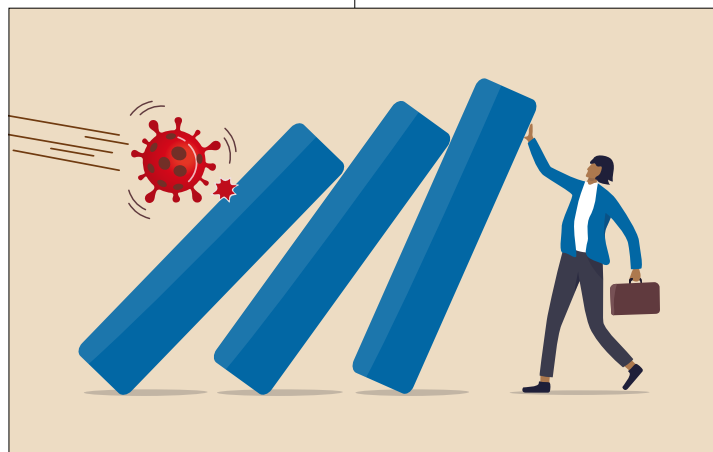
measures.

Professor Mel Ainscow recently reviewed the effectiveness of strategies developed to improve equity, arguing that teachers, especially those in senior positions, must see themselves as having a wider responsibility for all children and young people, not just those in their own schools.

For schools, this means aligning their efforts with those of other local players around a coherent strategy. And for those who administer local systems, it means adjusting their priorities and practices in response to improvement efforts led from within their schools.

Ainscow's paper identifies a "middle tier" that exists in four higher-performing national school systems and lacking in England. All four have district-level structures that demonstrate that local coordination and accountability are effective levers for equity and excellence. Our system has untapped potential to improve itself through networking and collaboration, but a lack of a locally appointed education leader with a remit to drive school improvement for the benefit of all restricts its possible effectiveness.

In early July, the DfE published details of how it proposes to use existing structures, including the department's regions group



“ Our system has untapped potential to improve itself

under the leadership of the regional director, to focus on the "creation, consolidation and growth of academy trusts". Crucially, control will continue to rest with government-appointed officials.

Meanwhile, its trust quality descriptors are based on a narrow view of inclusion and do little to address the obvious tension between a school's interest and that of the community. Increased devolution could ease this tension. In fact, some areas appear to be ahead of others in this regard.

Some local authorities and forward-thinking schools and trusts have appointed "independent chairs" to oversee cross-school developments and to sustain focus on locally agreed priorities. Formalising this role in every local area could ensure that:

- system leaders across an area can identify what good practice looks like and who can lead on its development
- networking and collaboration put community interest over self-interest
- locally sourced data and evidence is shared fairly and transparently

- evaluations determine whether provision meets local need
- evidence – including statistical data and targeted inspection activity – is used to establish whether improvement is happening
- education is playing its role in driving economic regeneration and business development.

Finding the right people is not easy. It requires individuals with broad experience at a senior level, a level of political independence and an ability to speak openly to those with more power.

And appointments should be codified. Competitive interview for a fixed-term post, with regional mayors and school leaders making up the appointment panel and undertaking annual reviews, would be minimum expectations.

But these complications aside, the role of an independent chair of local partnerships has considerable merit and could play an important part in securing more local control and oversight – a key facet of delivering a more inclusive and equitable education system.

Opinion

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



EVELYN FORDE

Immediate past president, ASCL and Trustee, Education Support

I'm a retention statistic – but I haven't given up on the job

Why does a successful head leave at the top of her game? Evelyn Forde explains why she did and what she's doing now

As I write this at the end of the first half term since leaving headship, I can well imagine how tired my former colleagues are. For my part, I am only beginning to process what the job really meant to me. But I have had time to breathe, and I have used that time to advocate for school staff to get the same opportunity without having to take the step that I have.

After 24 years in the profession, 15 of those in leadership and the last eight as a head, I left this summer without another job to go to. My former school is in a good place. I was ASCL president. A few years ago, I won a national award for headteacher of the year. My departure has caused consternation among some and suspicion among others. "Something must be wrong," many think. And they're right, but perhaps not in the way they imagine.

I just realised that 24 years into my career and with my youngest

going off to university, I could take some much-needed time to actually think about what's right for me. It's hard to do that when you are immersed in a job.

I left school with no qualifications and started teaching driven to protect young people (including my three daughters) from experiences

like mine. It had been all too easy for me to jump the fence. Few cared. I became a NEET and lived up to the stereotype of the PP kid from the local estate who would never achieve.

It was a lecturer on a night course in childcare who got me back on track. I went on to get a history degree and the rest is, well, history. I have lived and loved the job since. In fact, I never saw it as a job. It has been an honour and pleasure.

But the reality is that for many of the past 24 years, and especially in the past seven as head at Copthall girls' school in north London, when people asked me how my girls were I would automatically assume they were asking about my pupils rather than my daughters.

I may have felt differently had the pandemic not happened. I am proud of what we achieved – and I think we will collectively look

back one day and marvel at what an astonishing time that was. Sadly, there is no time for such reflection now, at least not from within the job.

The post-pandemic pressure is off the scale. What schools needed was support, funding, understanding, care and a huge dose of humanity. Instead, they were left alone to pick up the pieces. Sir Kevan Collins's recovery plan was dismissed, expectations continued to rise relentlessly and Ofsted judgment remained just a phone call away. Meanwhile, the social, emotional and mental health impact on our pupils is played out in classrooms every day.

Teacher recruitment and retention unsurprisingly fell off a cliff, adding to the pressure. There were days when my cover list ran into double digits. I was getting tired. I didn't have the answers. Worst, I felt guilty because the reason I came into teaching was increasingly unachievable. I wasn't able to put a qualified teacher in front of pupils. I wasn't able to find the CAHMS support many needed. And I knew six weeks in the summer would not be enough to recover.

I've since become a trustee of Education Support, and chaired its commission on retention. It seems clear that unless ministers wake up, more teachers will burnout, more staff will leave and the number of people wanting to join will continue to slide.

I didn't ever want to become a retention statistic. I hope I'll return one day. In the meantime, I can breathe again and with that privilege I will do everything I can to ensure my former colleagues get that chance too.

“The post-pandemic pressure is off the scale”



Solutions

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



BEENA SISODIA

National director of attendance, behaviour and safeguarding, E-ACT

How to drive attendance up in your school or trust

Beena Sisodia explains how her trust has begun to make inroads on attendance

I have been in education for 23 years and leading on attendance for 15 of those across schools of every type.

Leadership of attendance has never been more complex – and we could debate at length what has led to a sense that school is no longer mandatory.

We need to pool our collective experiences to share what works. At E-ACT we've managed to reduce our persistent absenteeism by ten percentage points compared with this time last year. So, for what it's worth, here's what works for us.

Talk about it. Write about it. Shout about it

Raise the profile of attendance at every level of the organisation from the board (as a standing agenda item) through to parents and carers. Communication is key to ensuring the importance of good attendance is woven through the culture of each academy.

Know your context inside out

Leaders need to understand context, barriers and challenges. For us, this is about valuing diversity and celebrating the strengths of individual academies. This ranges

from building relationships with families through our community hubs where financial, mental health and employment support is available, to drop-in sessions where families can speak to staff about the challenges they face.

Inclusion for all is a priority of our "Opening Minds, Opening Doors" strategy. By engaging families and establishing strong relationships, some of our academies have reduced persistent absence by eight percentage points.

Data, data, data

Without data you are flying blind. We have developed key performance indicators that monitor attendance session by session, day by day, so that we can identify sub-groups and intervene early.

More broadly, our weekly attendance reports are copied to all leaders. These look at data forensically, breaking it down and comparing with local authority and national trends. We don't set a uniform expectation, but we do use target setting intelligently.

Being digital is a key enabler. This ranges from ensuring systems are joined up and information readily available to using AI and other technologies to identify and predict patterns.



“ Without data you are flying blind

Networks of advocates

Our trust ethos is that collaboration leads to the best outcomes. We learn from each other through our specialist networks and assurance boards. Our attendance network brings attendance leads from all over the country together to address contextual barriers and shape policy and practice.

This is priceless. A common attendance scrip that we co-created is tailored according to context, but helps all our staff in all our academies respond to the most common reasons for absence, ensuring a consistent approach based on the most effective practices.

Tighten the thresholds

We have a robust policy and a trust-wide graduated response that engages families through a supportive approach. But when I first focused on these, I felt the triggers were too late in the process; the actions were right, but not timely enough. We have since tightened thresholds to trigger intervention sooner.

This does mean schools need more capacity to deal with casework, but if it really matters, then it really matters. You make it work. And of course, intervening early can reduce workload downstream.

Each threshold is linked to a supportive action that involves the voices of child, family and school. Our academies put appropriate support in place and monitor the child's attendance, providing further personalised support if required.

Our challenges are no different from those any school faces. Some of our schools have had to implement a real step-change in how they address absenteeism. We have re-engineered the support we give them accordingly, and we're starting to see the fruits of our efforts.

The strategic role I play is one example of how academy trusts can prioritise this issue. We now need the same strategic leadership at a national level to make attendance not only compulsory but desirable again.

Opinion special: Cultural capital and crisis



ABID BUTT

Headteacher, Lyndon School,
Summit Learning Trust

Don't overlook the importance of trips to improve attendance

Opportunities outside the classroom are vital to engaging pupils in school. They are an essential – not optional – part of our offer, says Abid Butt

Attendance is one of the hottest topics in education. In 2021-22 the overall absence rate was 7.6 per cent, up from 4 to 5 per cent before the pandemic. In its report into persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils, the education select committee concluded that Covid and its aftermath has had a damaging effect on school attendance. This is especially worrying for children who already had a significant chunk of their learning disrupted by lockdowns.

Our attendance levels are higher than the national average for all learners. The Fischer Family Trust has just given us a National School Attendance Award for being in the top 10 per cent of similar schools in England for attendance.

These outcomes are down to the varied and collective approaches that my staff use, including our learning culture, behaviour expectations and focused attendance clinics. There is no

panacea when it comes to solving the attendance crisis. However, I believe the value of learning experiences outside the traditional classroom are being overlooked.

From getting out of the habit to a more cautious culture after Covid, and from rising costs to squeezed budgets, there are many reasons why schools have backed away from school trips. Indeed, NFER research for the Sutton Trust finds that 50 per cent of heads (21 per cent last year) say funding has forced them to cut back.

However, embracing all the learning opportunities off site is an important tool to motivate young people to attend school. They do not come to school to sit in one place for endless rote learning. It is our job to make what they need to learn exciting and memorable. External visits and inviting opportunities into school are key to this. By linking cultural experiences to the curriculum, we can complement and supplement teaching in all subjects.

The classic theatre trip is one all schools should be running. We recently went to watch *The Lion King*, on tour from the West End, making sure to widen the participation so that our disadvantaged children could



“ Regular trips make pupils look forward to coming to school

benefit. It was the first theatre visit for some of them.

As part of our computer science curriculum, we visit the Enigma machine at Bletchley Park. This allows pupils to fully appreciate the scope and ramifications of what they are learning in the context of history and prompts them to reflect more widely on the subject.

Our teachers have commented that young people are more engaged in what they are learning when it is connected to a real life out of classroom experience and that they continue to talk about the trips they have been on. Our learners all say that regular trips make them look forward to coming to school as they do not want to miss out on anything.

The education select committee noted that it heard compelling

evidence about the positive impact of local sports-based interventions on attendance. It recommended that the DfE commission research to test the link between these and improved attendance.

I would like to see the government research the link between school trips and attendance, especially as the report also highlighted concerns about a decline in enrichment activities, such as arts, drama and music.

Children need to attend school every day to fully benefit from a well thought-out curriculum and develop a lifelong passion for learning. I hope other schools will refocus on the cultural capital accrued by trips. I am convinced that it is one of the most important ways to make sure young people keep coming to school.

Opinion special: Cultural capital and crisis

WAYNE
CLAYTON

Headteacher, Springhead
Park Primary School,
Gravesend, Kent



ANN-MARIE
BOLTON

Headteacher, Lessness
Heath Primary School,
Belvedere, Kent



Prioritising green spaces has helped improve pupil wellbeing

Two primary heads explain how they have greened their school sites and the impact it has had on their pupils' mental health

The mental health crisis in our schools weighs heavily on the minds of all heads and their staff. With NHS figures revealing that one in six school-aged children has a probable mental health disorder, schools have become central to combating this crisis.

While schools have limited resources and are not medical professionals, we can positively support children's mental health and wellbeing by offering life-enhancing opportunities. Importantly, the *British Medical Journal (BMJ)* found during the pandemic that outdoor recreation in green spaces was crucial to easing distress. That is why our two schools, and The Primary First Trust more widely, have looked to community organisations to help us to develop and transform our outdoor spaces into natural havens that will enhance our pupils' learning and wellbeing.

An experiential curriculum is fundamental. Our newly regenerated green spaces can be used in science, food tech,

geography and art lessons. Pupils can experience the growing process from planning to seeding, planting, and maintaining the plant itself. Lessness Heath's successful early years setting showed that pupils learn best when they have access to outdoor environments. Their wellbeing is also improved, often driven by their happiness at learning outside and discovering the natural world as part of their school life.

Embedding green spaces into the curriculum is also key to our approach to teaching pupils about sustainability. The DfE's sustainability and climate change strategy reinforced the important role that schools and children's services can play in building a more sustainable future by "greening" our sites, embedding sustainability into the curriculum and driving towards net zero.

Providing our pupils with the tools to understand the world around them empowers them and can help tackle climate anxiety – a significant cause of mental ill health among young people. Getting in touch with nature and learning through experiencing builds children's understanding of the curriculum while instilling a more positive and curious attitude, which boosts their self-esteem and



“ For some pupils, this enrichment is crucial

self-confidence.

Lessness Heath rejuvenated its school grounds over the summer holidays, in particular its "Science Garden", following a connection between one of its school governors and a local gardener, Neil Moakes, who became the garden project lead.

Neil connected with the Bexley allotment community, the Men in Sheds and the West Kent Masonic Community, who donated their time and expertise to revamp the outdoor area with new flowerbeds and plants, a place for pupils to sit together and a "bug hotel" that stores materials to attract wildlife.

Meanwhile, Springhead Park received a donation from Ebbsfleet Development Corporation to renovate its grounds. The school knew its pupils had to be at the heart of decisions about how the money was to be spent, so the school council canvassed pupils and found that they wanted to

enhance the natural space and create a wild sanctuary for animals.

School councillors met with architects and contractors and the pupils themselves planted the trees that will become the forest school. A local garden centre has also donated a pond with marine life, an orchard has been planted and a rewilded area has bloomed with a variety of plants and flowers. Allowing pupils to be central to any decisions has helped their sense of ownership and responsibility in the space.

Access to wildlife and green spaces at school broadens pupils' understanding of the world, improves their wellbeing and cultivates a more holistic understanding of their learning. This is important enrichment for all our pupils. And for some, not least those without gardens and few opportunities to spend time in nature, it is crucial.

Solutions: Cultural capital and crisis



MARTIN SMITH

Senior adviser for academic resilience, Greenwood Academies Trust

How to deliver residentials for all by staying at home

Residentials are vital to enhance academic understanding and nurture essential skills, says Martin Smith. But their increasing costs make a bit of DIY essential

Family holidays can be the first thing sacrificed as families are forced to tighten their belts. Likewise, many schools are cutting back on trips and residentials. However, we must not underestimate their importance in providing a holistic and well-rounded education for young people.

For many pupils, school-led residentials are their only chance to access such enriching experiences. Their impact on pupils' learning outcomes and socio-emotional development cannot be overstated. According to a survey by Learning Away, a staggering 82 per cent of key stage 2 pupils reported that residentials enhanced their learning. Furthermore, 78 per cent expressed increased confidence in trying new things, and 71 per cent felt they could connect better with their classmates.

Residentials not only enhance academic understanding but also nurture essential skills, promoting better interaction with peers, teachers and the community while boosting confidence and fostering

meaningful bonds.

In an effort to continue to offer such opportunities in a low-cost way, our leadership team embarked on a mission to provide these transformative experiences ourselves. After careful consideration, we decided to host camps on two of our school grounds, with our main site conveniently located near the sea.

We accommodated more than 350 pupils from six schools across nine intakes. Each group spent a night under the stars, camping in tents, exploring the local area, and, of course, singing around the campfire.

Pupils on our main campsite also had the chance to visit the beach – the first time many had seen the sea. Such residentials are always hard work but they were a resounding success thanks to key strategies that will hopefully provide a helpful blueprint for other schools.

A comprehensive logistics plan

One of our biggest challenges was procuring and organising camping equipment. We were able to draw on in-house experience; having access to an experienced outdoor education adviser can be a huge help.

We opted for “blackout” tents, for example, which helped to ensure pupils and staff got a good night's sleep. Ordering well in advance and purchasing a container to store



“ Many pupils saw the sea for the first time

equipment on site also proved invaluable.

Prioritise safeguarding

Safety was key. Thorough planning and risk management meant we could deal with a range of issues. In turn, this work informed a comprehensive handbook for staff, laying down clear procedures for the camps. It was also reassuring to know that school staff at both sites were supportive of the initiative and could provide additional support if necessary.

Staff training

It was crucial that every staff member knew his or her role and responsibilities, so an extensive staff training day covered procedures, activities and emergency protocols. It was essential that staff understood the profound value of residentials in shaping our pupils' experiences, motivating them to create lasting memories for each child.

Keep the pupils engaged and well-fed

Young people often have boundless energy, so keeping them occupied

and well-fed is key. We designed a range of activities from making campfire s'mores to exploring the beach, a sandcastle competition, completing a quiz on local town features, learning about the moon and tides, and enjoying beach and field games. We also partnered with a nearby fish and chips shop, which delighted the pupils and made mealtime hassle-free for our staff.

Ultimately, the challenges of offering enriching yet affordable residentials for pupils can be overcome with careful planning, comprehensive training, and engaging activities. These experiences not only enhance learning but also nurture essential life skills, making them an invaluable part of a well-rounded education.

We are proud to have provided our pupils with these opportunities to grow, learn and create lasting memories – and all for much less than a commercial residential might cost.

Better still, we're equipped and prepared to do it again for even less.

AAC 2024

Annual Apprenticeship conference



26 - 27 FEBRUARY 2024



ICC, BIRMINGHAM

The flagship national apprenticeship conference for employers & providers

FEWEEKAAC.COM



HEADLINE PARTNER



BOOK NOW EARLY BIRD OFFER!

Save at least 20% on tickets and additional discounts for group bookings.

OFFER ENDS 06/01/2024

SAVE 20%

CONFERENCE SPONSORS



EXHIBITION SPONSOR



REGISTRATION SPONSOR



CONFERENCE PARTNER



STRATEGIC PARTNER



BROUGHT TO YOU BY



THE REVIEW

REFLECTIONS ON BEING THE CEO

Author: Sir Steve Lancashire

Publisher: Cadogan Press

Publication date: 21 August 2023

ISBN: 1838007350

Reviewer: Dan Morrow, CEO, Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust

Sir Steve Lancashire is as close to national treasure status as any educator gets. They say never to meet your heroes, but having met him a number of times I already knew that his writing would be compelling. I wasn't disappointed. I was completely engrossed within a few pages, amused by his tone and nodding away at his reflections. I read it cover-to-cover the first time, and have managed three reads in one week. It is THAT good.

On the surface, *Reflections on Being the CEO* builds on Michael Pain's key pillars of *Being the CEO*. It comprises a series of blogs, articles and stories that weave the professional maturation of the MAT landscape over a decade with the personal thoughts and views of one of the country's pioneer chief executives.

What could be rather dry if it were posited within the policy world is instead brought to life by the wit and charm of the writing; in every line there is a sense of "sparkle", as Sir Steve would say. This is not your usual leadership book and it is infinitely better as a result. Part love letter to the sector, part leadership manual, part promise to the future, it is the ultimate tonic for a profession in much need of hope and optimism.

The book charts Sir Steve's own leadership journey through the formation of Reach2 and the "wild west" days of early academisation. It interweaves social commentary on the political and educational context he worked within and provides honest and open insight into the

seismic sector shifts of the past 15 years and more.

The book begins with chapters looking at the CEO role, how it is evolving and what that means for a new generation of leaders. Sir Steve makes a clear case for the importance of public service, of checking and removing ego and of building on strong foundations. The current inflection point, he argues, is an opportunity to carve out a stronger, more impactful, more fulfilling role than ever.

He then navigates through aspects of working with boards, comparing the chief executive-chair relationship to marriage and urging us to have clear pre-nups, before moving on to attitudes towards growth, arguing that size truly matters but that quality is the ultimate marker.

His views on culture are clear: it drives the "why" of what we do. In this as in everything else, his approach is founded on his fundamental belief in people, and enjoyment in seeing them flourish. Accordingly, he really develops the need for intentionality and fidelity to our stakeholders. No complex metric dashboard can replace the simple act of watching, listening and learning.

For someone as connected as Sir Steve, it is unsurprising that he goes on to dedicate considerable time to the importance of networks. These are given significance in terms of his own experiences, but also more widely in terms of breaking down barriers of competition and promoting collaboration. But it isn't

BOOK

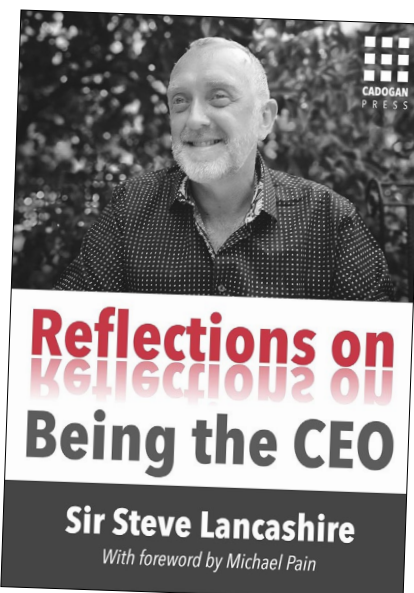
TV

FILM

RADIO

EVENT

RESOURCE



without a note of caution. Recognising that time is at a premium, he notes that external engagement must bring tangible benefits.

Chapter 10, "Me being me, you being you", is the most personal and perhaps also the most resonant. It centres on authenticity and charts his experience as an LGBT educator through the days of section 28 and beyond. It is a poignant warning to us all that our progress is recent, fragile and requires us to keep EDI work at the front of our minds.

This is a unique offering in what is a crowded leadership book market. Witty, irreverent, laser-sharp, and informed by unparalleled insight into how our sector has evolved, it is essential reading. Indeed a treasure.

I have no doubt that getting to know Sir Steve a little better will help you to know yourself better too. That could very well be his greatest service yet.



Rating



Fiona Atherton
CEO, Wave Multi Academy Trust

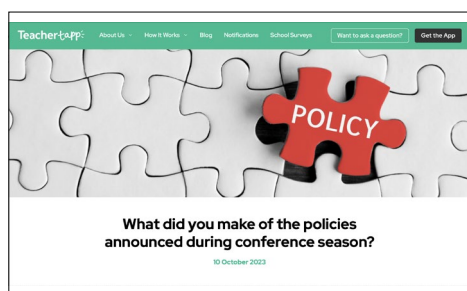
A CRISIS WITH NO SOLUTIONS

In my last column before the summer break, I wished for better news for us all in the autumn term. So much for that.

Teacher morale is already at a low. Record numbers left again last year, and the government's answer seems to lie in the age-old bribe of bursaries for new teachers, tweaked to encourage more of them to stay for five years – not quite the “long-term decisions” of the Conservative party's slogan.

The policy may boost the number of trainees and provide much-needed new blood in the classroom, but it doesn't address the fact that we are losing experienced teachers. They simply don't feel appreciated, and paying their younger colleagues more is unlikely to change that.

When Teacher Tapp sounded the profession for its response to the idea of paying new teachers up to £30,000 over five years, not a single subject came out with a majority in favour. No wonder. We've all experienced trainees who take the DfE's shilling and never make it into the



classroom.

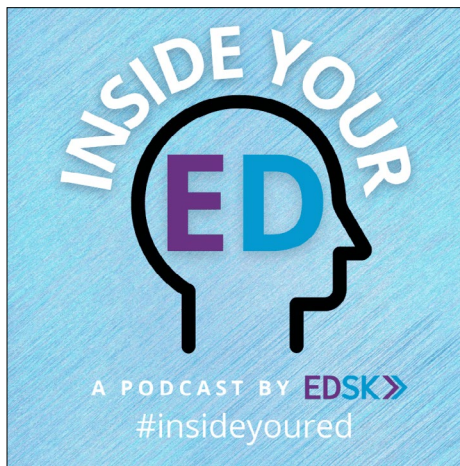
Shortages are already such that bursaries for trainee secondary science and maths teachers are rising to £27,000. Meanwhile, there are no bursaries for primary PGCE trainees who are getting harder to recruit year on year.

These incentives may be causing as many problems as they solve, or worse. Many want to remain in the classroom for their entire career (and we need those experienced teachers), but they quite rightly feel aggrieved when they see that their salaries are restricted, in some cases for many years. Might I suggest sabbaticals for long service as an incentive?

SOLUTIONS FOR THE WRONG CRISES

For an excellent round-up and analysis of all the main policies on offer at the recent political party conferences, I found this conversation between *Inside your Ed* podcast host, Tom Richmond and his guests, David Thomas and Joe Moore, particularly useful.

For me the biggest conversation to come out of Labour's Liverpool event was around



the early years, on early health intervention and early maths skills. Many will welcome this, especially with the struggles some schools are facing with younger pupils, and particularly those with special educational needs. More children are entering school still in nappies or not fully potty-trained, and they are the very children who, because of Covid, missed out on Stay and Play and other early interventions.

More controversially, the party also put forward schools teaching and monitoring

tooth-brushing. The idea is backed by dentists, paediatricians and other health professionals but understandably received mixed reviews in schools and with the teaching unions.

Some feel that it is yet another element of parental responsibility placed on schools, and others that it is necessary to reduce strain on the NHS. I'm somewhere in the middle. More access to school nurses or health visitors might be an answer, but if schools pick up the responsibility I worry we'll end up held accountable somewhere down the line for tooth decay as well as everything else.

Meanwhile, we still don't know how the party proposes to recruit the 6,500 extra teachers it has promised – and that number is already outstripped by the growing staffing crisis. And that's just one of many. There's a funding disaster at the DfE (maths to 18, ha!), insufficient SEND provision, low attendance, growing mental health issues and a hundred other ringing alarm bells. Labour had precious little to offer these.

A COPING MECHANISM

So as we crawl through exhaustion to half-term, I'd like to draw your attention to the words of another fabulous Brummie, Claire Stoneman, who encourages school leaders to slow down.

“Slowness nourishes attention and fends off distraction,” she says, reminding us that we are not expected to be available to everyone, every minute of every day. I particularly liked her suggestion that we should find a balance between being visible and making time to think.

I'll be taking a leaf out of her book. Perhaps our politicians should too.



Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts

The Knowledge

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



What is driving absence in your setting?

**Owen Carter, director,
ImpactEd Group**

Attendance is at the top of most school leaders' list, yet we hear every day how sticky this challenge is.

The schools we speak to across ImpactEd Group tell us the approaches they used pre-pandemic simply no longer work. The data across England would seem to bear this out: persistent absence in summer 2023 was 24.3 per cent, compared with 21 per cent in the spring term and 24.9 per cent in autumn.

Studies from the Education Endowment Foundation, Public First, the Centre for Social Justice and others have made welcome contributions to the evidence base, but there is much work to do.

Understanding attendance

ImpactEd Group, which works with schools and social purpose organisations, has launched the Understanding Attendance project to equip teachers and school leaders with meaningful data into the drivers of pupil absence in their setting.

Recognising that the factors behind attendance are complex and often context-dependent, the project does not aim to offer one-size-fits-all solutions; much of our focus is on helping school leaders understand the underlying influences of attendance in their setting. But with more than 200 schools participating, early themes are emerging.

Belonging as much as behaviour

Perhaps the most striking early insight is the importance of pupil belonging. Using established surveys to measure factors such as sense of school involvement, we find notable correlations.

For example, there is a statistically significant association between pupils' sense of belonging to a school and their actual likelihood of attending school. Small differences are associated with very different trends: the gap between pupils in the top 20 per cent of school attendance and those in the bottom 20 was a nine-percentage point difference on this belonging scale.

The questions behind this are revealing. On



'The importance of pupil belonging is striking'

a five-point scale, pupils in the bottom 20 per cent of school attendance scored 2.88 in response to the question "I feel like a real part of the school". By contrast, those same pupils scored 4.25 out of 5 in response to "There are consequences if I skip lessons". This would seem to indicate that the barrier is not awareness of sanctions as much as more fundamental questions about pupils feeling part of their school.

Different drivers for different groups

Another important feature of our research is our ability to link back to granular data from schools on pupil characteristics. For example, we find that for pupils in years 9, 10 and 11, the correlation between school engagement and attendance is much higher than it is for younger year groups. Comments from our school partners suggest this may be associated with increased demands of curriculum content as exams approach.

Gender differences are also pronounced. Perhaps unsurprisingly, feeling safe at school was much more strongly associated with

attendance for girls than boys. This trend was continued for questions on making friends and dealing with bullying. By contrast, reporting that their school or teacher cared when they missed school was much more associated with attendance for males than females.

Getting beneath the surface

These are early findings based on summer term 2022-23; our findings will evolve as the number of schools involved grows. For example, we can't yet say definitively whether sense of belonging drives attendance, or school absenteeism means a lower sense of belonging. The more schools that collaborate, the clearer the picture will become.

One message resonates above all, however: attendance is a challenge everyone needs to come together to address. Achieving a shift will be a result of nationally and locally co-ordinated efforts – not one policy change.

Better tools to provide insight into what those efforts are one part of the jigsaw. We will share more findings over the coming months as our project progresses.

Week in

Westminster

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

SATURDAY

Despite the controversy he causes in some quarters, a question we often get asked is: Why has Nick Gibb not been made education secretary?

His fans say he has long experience in the education brief – and he's seen by many as a competent minister.

Gibb answered the question himself at the weekend when he appeared on the *Political Thinking* podcast, and it turns out it's a question he often asks himself too.

After the schools minister joked that it was "outrageous" he had been sacked (and reappointed) twice – and that his story was one of "always the bridesmaid never the bride" – he did speculate about why he has so far not made it into the Cabinet.

"Part of it is the fact that I'm not a great socialiser."

He said his relationship with husband Michael Simmonds, who he married in 2015, had been "very private" until that point and "that means that you don't go to dinner parties".

"And actually, in politics, socialising, getting to know one another. Prime ministers getting to know you. That is an important part of the political process.

"I think that the fact I haven't done that... and you know I don't get invited because we don't go as a couple or, if I am invited on my own, I don't want to go because I'd rather be with Michael back at home."

MONDAY

"Kids say the funniest things," goes the old adage. But this week it was more like "kids say the most politically convenient things" for Gillian Keegan.



The education secretary posted a video in which she asked year 5 and 6 pupils at a school on the Isle of Wight what they would do if they were in charge of education.

The children replied they would have "more school time", "more maths lessons", and would "ban vaping".

What a coincidence! Those are three government education policies! Who would have thought it!

Up next week: Bridget Phillipson hears from six-year-olds who really want to slap tax on those dastardly private schools ...

Since announcing far-fetched plans to replace A-levels and their flagship T-levels with a new single "Advanced British Standard" (or Advanced BS for short), the government has been keen to point out that T-levels are actually quite good.

The prime minister's announcement that the qualifications would be scrapped (and this was during T-levels Week, which was supposed to celebrate their success) was an own goal.

But since then damage control has been left up to the DfE, whose ministers

insisted in a statement to Parliament this week that "students preparing to take A-level and T-level exams over the coming years should not doubt the value of their qualifications and be confident that high-quality pathways remain open to them".

"T-levels will be integral to the vocational route within the Advanced British Standard and more T-level courses will be rolled out."

So that's all right then!

TUESDAY

With Keegan busy tapping up primary school kids for policy ideas, it was left to Nick Gibb to defend the government in the Commons over its £370 million school funding gaffe.

Summoned by an urgent question from Labour, Gibb read a written statement he had already made to Parliament, and then took cover as MPs took aim.

One particularly spirited intervention came from former education committee chair and Labour veteran Barry Sheerman, who said he had seen a tweet arguing that "one man's error is another man's total cock-up".

"The fact of the matter is that he is the longest-serving minister in any department in any government for many years, and on his watch we have seen the demoralisation of the education sector in our country, with good people leaving.

"It is the Gibb factor. Why does he not resign and talk to people?" he added, in what Gibb dubbed an "extraordinary outburst", before going on to insist the government had handled the situation very well and very quickly.



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.



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](#) →

education week jobs

In association with **SCHOOLS FE WEEK**



As a Schools Week subscriber, your organisation receives a **20% DISCOUNT** on recruitment advertising.

Online listings, classified advertising, and package options available.



I have always found Schools Week very helpful. They reach a large audience and support with many of our vacancies. I am very satisfied with their service and would recommend them highly.

The Shared Learning Trust



[Click here](#) to contact our team