

SCHOOLS WEEK

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



Feature: Inside the first education hackathon

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People, place and possibility – tackling the recruitment crisis



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Academy trust warnings are back with a vengeance

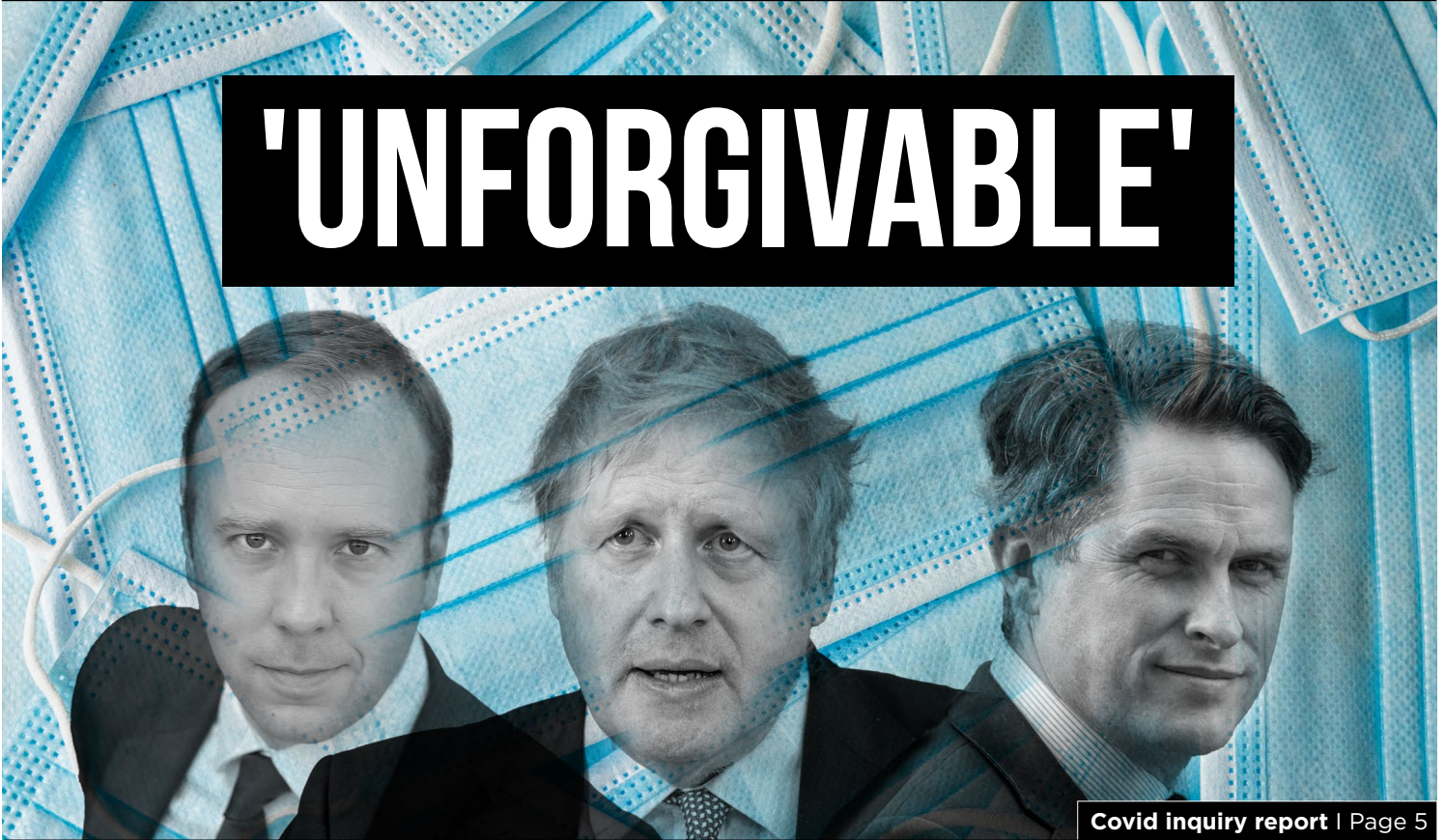


Back to basics. The 3Rs every leader needs to know



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'UNFORGIVABLE'



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School shut over 'unsafe' staffing was told to save £150k by DfE cost-cutter

- School resource management adviser told special school to cut staff spend
- Academy was closed a month later as 'lack of staff left pupils at risk of harm'
- Despite pupils being left to go hungry, DfE absolves itself of any blame

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

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SCHOOLS WEEK

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education week jobs

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Politics before people was unforgivable

The evidence from the Covid public inquiry is horrifying. The people in charge of our country, at the time we needed them the most, fell horrendously short of what was required.

This was all too clear in education. School staff were among the public servants who were on the frontline throughout the Covid pandemic.

Some have lost family, friends or colleagues to the virus.

To hear this week that Sir Gavin Williamson opposed the introduction of face masks in schools because of a petty political vendetta against the unions is atrocious.

Many were already questioning how the former education secretary was later given a knighthood. This well and truly cements what a sham our honours system is.

It also seems Boris Johnson was more bothered about deciding rules for hunting and football than for pregnant women who were key workers.

Politicians failed schools time and time again during Covid, be it on masks, free

school meals, or the dreadful handling of the January 2021 school closures.

At a time when we needed serious people at the heart of government, we were ruled by a sorry bunch of lightweights. This must never happen again.

Elsewhere in this week's edition, our investigation on page 4 about a government cost-cutter's visit to a school shortly before it had to close because vulnerable pupils were put at risk by staff shortages poses some important questions.

While the school resource management adviser scheme has lots of positives and has helped schools to become more efficient, we must also ensure a one-size-fits-all approach isn't applied haphazardly.

Meanwhile, calls for Ofsted reform have been a feature of the education debate for a long time now.

But it's imperative such calls are based on solid evidence – not campaigning dressed up as independent (see page 11). This will only harm the important push to get the inspectorate to be more open with its research and data.

Most read online this week:

- 1 [**£289m wraparound childcare scheme: what schools need to know**](#)
- 2 [**Key findings from the DfE's EYFS reform evaluation report**](#)
- 3 [**The problems \(and solutions\) for teacher recruitment and retention**](#)
- 4 [**School pension contributions to rise – but government will fund \(for now\)**](#)
- 5 [**School support staff unions accept £1,925 pay deal**](#)

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INVESTIGATION: SAFEGUARDING

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK**'Unsafe' school had been told to slash staff by cost-cutter**

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

EXCLUSIVE

A government cost-cutter recommended a special school for severely disabled pupils slash £150,000 from its staffing spend just months before it was shut because it was unsafe.

A Schools Week investigation previously exposed how pupils with profound disabilities were left to go hungry and "contained" in classrooms at Harlow Academy in Nottinghamshire.

Ofsted found "disturbing" levels of neglect as the "lack of staff leaves pupils at imminent risk of harm". The school was immediately closed after the inspection in January last year.

We can now reveal the government sent one of its school resource management advisers (SRMA) to work with the Evolve Trust, which ran the school at the time, between October and December 2021.

A draft report seen by Schools Week shows the cost-cutter recommended Harlow reduce its spend on educational support staff by £150,000 – the equivalent of 5.5 full time workers.

The adviser said its "current spend is very high when benchmarked against comparator schools".

However Warren Carratt, chief executive of the Nexus Multi-Academy Trust, which now runs the school, said it was "woefully over-simplistic to define the school as spending too much money on staffing".

The SRMA highlighted the school was spending more than all its income on staff.

Departing staff had contributed to "correcting this overspend", however, and more were expected to leave in the next few months.

But Carratt said that when his trust took over, it found some pupils required additional funding from the council – meaning the school "wasn't getting the level of funding" needed.

SRMAs also apply the integrated curriculum and financial planning tool to schools they visit, which tests whether schools are overspending based on what is considered an adequate staffing level.

However Carratt said it was "heavily mainstream-focused" and was "never going to provide the necessary lens



Warren Carratt



of scrutiny the trust should have been subjected to". Special schools have a lower staff-to-pupil ratio than mainstream schools.

A DfE spokesperson said it "does not comment on leaks or speculation. However, SRMAs are independent advisers who have significant experience of school or academy trust business management. Feedback shows that school and trust leaders find SRMA's free help supports their decision-making".

They said recommendations were "a starting point" for a trust to consider if it was making the best use of resources.

Officials wanted the adviser to check the trust was following the appropriate processes and policies.

Schools Week also obtained the Department for Education's "lessons learned" review of the case.

This proposed introducing a safeguarding review six months after an academy transfer or conversion where Ofsted had rated safeguarding inadequate, something officials are now considering.

But the DfE concluded while this and other data sharing changes would have improved the regulation of academies, it "would not have affected the outcome of this case".

This is despite a separate local safeguarding review earlier this year finding Ofsted should have inspected Harlow three months earlier than it did. Health staff had sounded the alarm 20 times and

parents had flagged concerns for months.

The safeguarding review said parents and carers complained in September 2021 that "staffing levels were very poor as more staff left".

The DfE review said the first safeguarding complaint over pupil safety was lodged on November 3. This related to staff shortages, "rapid" departures of staff and "pupils consequently left at risk of harm".

The trust responded to the allegation by stating "the reduced staffing would not impact the health and safety of pupils, as ...the school was 'over-staffed'".

The Education and Skills Funding Agency "investigated the allegations as far as possible" but the anonymous complaint could not be taken further.

It added that throughout the pandemic, there were "challenges" for regional directors and the ESFA "receiving timely information regarding complaints received" by councils and Ofsted.

The review also revealed how an external review of governance, recommended by the government in July, did not take place.

When asked if the safeguarding changes were still under consideration, the DfE said: "Following an internal review, internal changes to ensure a proportionate, risk-based approach to handling safeguarding cases have been implemented."

Harlow reopened under Nexus in 2022. Carratt said pupils were "now thriving and the school is going from strength to strength".

'Williamson threw schools under the bus'

AMY WALKER

@AMYRWALKER

An education leader says he "will never forgive" Sir Gavin Williamson after it emerged the former education secretary opposed face masks in schools because he didn't want to "surrender" to unions.

Vic Goddard, the co-principal of Passmores Academy in Essex, lost his site manager of 20 years during the pandemic.

"Literally every day [I think], 'could I have done more?' That [Williamson] was willing to throw us under the bus is just not good enough. It doesn't get much lower," he said. "I will never forgive him."

The independent Covid inquiry – set up to examine the UK's response to the virus – heard several explosive claims this week that shed more light into political decision-making relating to schools.

Dominic Cummings, a former chief adviser to Boris Johnson, had asked the country's top civil servant Simon Case on August 26, 2020 "the true reason" for a U-turn on masks in schools.

After mounting pressure, masks were recommended for staff and older pupils when they returned to school.

Case replied that civil servants had told Johnson "weeks ago" that he should back "permissive guidance" around masks "because we could foresee it was going to be a drama" in September.

Williamson discussed the move at a Covid meeting, but because "it was unions pressing for masks (no science back-up), Gavin was in 'no surrender' mode and didn't want to give an inch to the unions, so said we should hold firm".

This was despite early research suggesting "some evidence" masks reduced transmission "particularly in poorly ventilated and crowded indoor spaces".

Goddard said many leaders in education wanted to "do the right thing, and then you hear that's the regard they gave us. It's heartbreaking."

Alan Simpson, Passmores Academy's site manager, died from Covid in March 2021 aged 54.



Sir Gavin Williamson

While the school was unable to mark his death at the time, it later renamed a hall after him. Goddard also walked Simpson's daughter down the aisle about a month after his death.

A written statement to the inquiry from Lee Cain, a former No 10 director of communications, also revealed Boris Johnson "said we needed to draw a line in the sand on public spending commitments" in relation to funding school meals for pupils not in school.

Cain said this was a "huge blunder" and "clearly not the place to draw that line – something the PM was told by his senior team".

Meanwhile Helen MacNamara, a former deputy secretary of the Cabinet, had to flag a "lack of guidance for women who might be pregnant or were pregnant, and what those who were key workers should do" during the pandemic.

She said this was "particularly significant" in education, given the demographic of its workforce.

Michelle Kelly, a former head who is medically retired because of long Covid and who set up a support group for education staff with the condition, said the disregard for teaching staff and children was unbelievable.

"How could they do that without actually thinking about anybody else? They didn't care."

Tina Sparrow, an assistant head at

Passmores, said she was "astounded at the ridiculousness and single-mindedness of [Williamson's] comments. It made me really angry."

Long covid had forced her to switch from 10-hour days "running around the school" to remote administrative work with reduced hours.

"It's completely ruined my professional and personal life."

She was now unable to walk for long distances, could not drive and suffered from days of fatigue.

Data from the Office for National Statistics shows 139 teaching and educational professionals aged 20 to 64 died from Covid-related illness between March and December 2020.

But it stopped recording the data in January 2021, while Covid deaths were still widespread.

Kate Bell, assistant general secretary at the TUC union, said: "Parents, pupils, school staff and the public will be horrified to learn that lives were put at risk because ministers were pursuing a petty political vendetta. This can never happen again."



Michelle Kelly, 52, a special school head who medically retired after long Covid exacerbated a pre-existing condition

NEWS: ACADEMY REGULATION

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Surge in academy warning notices prompts calls for rethink

JACK DYSON

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EXCLUSIVE

A surge in termination warning notices to underperforming academies has led leaders to question whether the policy is still appropriate as schools “live with the long tail of Covid”.

Department for Education figures show regional directors have sent 157 warning letters (TWNs) – which tell trusts they face losing an academy – since the start of last year.

The number issued in 2022 (89) is a 493 per cent rise on the 12 months before and is more than at any point since 2016.

The introduction of “coasting” powers, intervention in schools with successive ‘requires improvement’ ratings, and the return of inspections after the pandemic are likely key factors.

But Steve Chalke, the founder of the 54-school Oasis trust, said the letters were an “unhealthy practice” that ignored the “wider, bigger, deeper and more complex” picture.

“Every school is living with the long tail of Covid, the mental health crisis and lack of funding,” he said.

“If you terminate a trust’s licence to run a school, the issues don’t go away, they’re just passed to someone else.”

The DfE issued a termination warning notice (TWN) to Oasis Academy Isle of Sheppey in Kent last year. Chalke said secondary education in the area “has struggled for more than 50 years”, as the “socioeconomic issues on that island are huge and long term”.

Fifteen warning notices were sent out in 2021. The figure then leapt by almost five times to 89, outstripping the 4.5 per cent rise in academies that year. A further 65 notices have been issued so far this year.

DfE guidance states notices can be given if a “trust has breached the provisions of its funding agreement”, when the “safety of pupils or staff is threatened” or if there has been a breakdown in management.

A “policy presumption” in favour of a notice is in place if Ofsted has rated an academy ‘inadequate’. The power to issue notices to “coasting” schools was introduced in September last year.

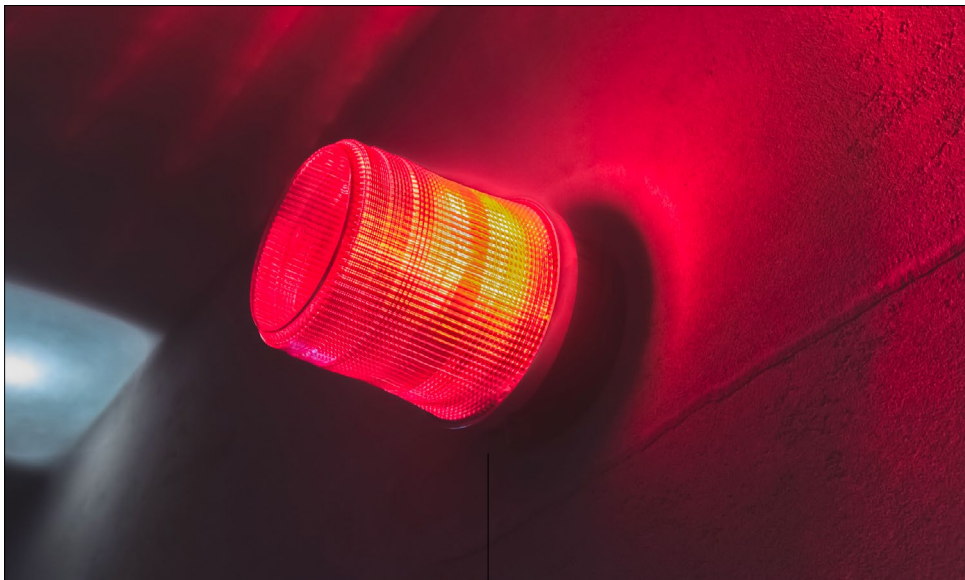
Last month,



Steve Chalke



Paul Tarn



Dixons Academies Trust – one of the country’s most successful turnaround trusts – was issued a notice over Dixons Unity Academy in Leeds.

Ofsted rated the school ‘inadequate’ in June after finding low attendance rates and a high number of suspensions.

A Dixons spokesperson said the trust believed in the principle of accountability – “it is vital there is a standard procedure so that the DfE can be sure that the right plans are in place to improve schools”.

But they said the inspection was “flawed”, adding the secondary was progressing “very positively...[and] our plan will ensure that this improvement is sustained”.

Paul Tarn, the chief executive of Delta Academies Trust, said it was “encouraging news that TWNs are up” as “the number of schools in need of intervention is much higher”.

But he warned that “if the Ofsted framework isn’t going to relay outcomes for children to the inspection judgment, there will continue to be trusts that get dreadful outcomes”.

The chief executive of another large MAT, who did not want to be named, said notices did “more harm than good” because they conflated inspection grades with a judgment of a trust’s capacity to turn a school around.

They said there could be months, “even years”, between Ofsted visits, the

issuing of notices and the agreement of follow-up actions that might include re-brokerage.

“During this period, the level of instability, stress and anxiety caused to schools, school leaders and trusts has the opposite effect of that sought,” they said.

“A school with a TWN is a school in limbo. It is hard to recruit excellent leaders and other staff with the job insecurity created; it is difficult to convince staff of the urgency of school improvement when a new trust may lead the school on a different path; and it creates instability for communities.”

The DfE has been approached for comment.

The rise of academy warning notices

Year	Termination warning notices
2016	4
2017	12
2018	16
2019	26
2020	27
2021	15
2022	89
2023 so far	65

Source: Department for Education statistics

SCHOOLS WEEK

ANALYSIS: FUNDING

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Hardship funding barely dents school deficits

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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EXCLUSIVE

Hardship funding to help struggling schools deal with rising pay costs represents as little as a tenth of total school deficits in some areas, new analysis shows.

In one instance, the allocation for a whole county is less than the deficit of just one of its special schools.

The Department for Education confirmed last week that half of a £40 million fund to help the worst-hit schools afford this year's teacher pay rise would go to 35 councils with the biggest school deficits.

But maintained schools had a combined deficit of £237 million in 2020-21, the latest year for which data is available. The government hardship funding of £20 million for LA schools represents just 8.4 per cent of that total.

The £406,000 handed to Wiltshire represents just 18 per cent of the £2.2 million deficit shared between 12 of its schools.

"Whilst this funding is welcomed, it will have limited impact on the overall position for all 12 schools with deficit balances," said Laura Mayes, its Cabinet member for education and skills.

She said "all Wiltshire schools" faced increased cost pressures and "the increase has fallen below both inflationary and cost-of-living increases".

North Tyneside is due to receive almost £1.9 millions. But 14 of its schools are in deficit to the tune of £14.8 million, meaning it is receiving just 12.6 per cent of what it needs to plug the gaps.

Steven Philips, the area's Cabinet member for education, said the allocation to North Tyneside reflected the challenging position several schools were facing financially.

The Department for Education said the cash had been "targeted" at local authorities with aggregated school-level deficits that totalled more than 1 per cent of their schools' income – meaning the majority of authorities get no cash at all.

The government wants council chiefs to use the funding to "best support their schools in the individual circumstances in which they find themselves". They will be given "significant flexibility over how this funding can be used".

But the guidance added: "This does not mean that every school with a deficit within that local authority should be given additional funding.

"We expect funding to be allocated on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the severity of the school's position and prioritising those in greatest



need."

Worcestershire will get £1.6 million, but 25 of its schools have deficits totalling £11.6 million, meaning just 13.5 per cent is covered.

Tracey Onslow, its Cabinet member for education, said Worcestershire schools were in the bottom quartile of funding per pupil in the country. "It is pleasing that this has been recognised, albeit on a one-off basis."

In North Yorkshire, 21 schools have deficits totalling £4.8 million. But the council will only receive about £970,000, a fifth of what is needed.

Annabel Wilkinson, the council's executive member for education, also welcomed the funding, but warned the council remained "particularly concerned over funding for small secondary schools that serve sparsely populated and rural areas".

The cost of pay increases are a particular concern for special schools, which need more specialist teachers and employ higher numbers of support staff – whose pay rises average 8 per cent this year.

In 2020-21, maintained special schools nationally had a combined deficit of £27.5 million, more than the £20 million hardship fund for all councils combined.

Oxfordshire has been promised £330,000 to help struggling schools across the whole county. Simon Knight, head of the Frank Wise special school, said he had an in-year deficit of £370,000, driven by a £250,000 increase in staffing costs.

"It is essential that the government gets to grips with the financial crisis engulfing the specialist sector before more schools find themselves in an impossible position of being legally required to provide an education that they cannot afford."

In its guidance, the DfE stressed the allocations were "not solely intended to cover schools which are in deficit as a result of the 2023 teachers' pay award".

The government "has no plans" to hand out similar funding in the next financial year, although councils can roll forward funding from the £20 million that is not used this year.

The other £20 million will be available to academies who can apply to the Education and Skills Funding Agency if they need support.

School deficits dwarf hardship funding

Council	School deficits total *	Extra funding allocation	Extra funding as % of deficits
North Tyneside	£14,826,000	£1,868,147.92	12.6%
Worcestershire	£11,600,000	£1,563,479.89	13.5%
Lambeth	£8,095,000	£959,277.21	11.9%
North Yorkshire	£4,846,420	£972,188.39	20.1%
Southwark	£3,300,000	£516,380.60	15.7%
Wirral	£2,800,000	£296,310.10	10.6%
Bristol	£2,600,000	£675,992.45	26.0%
Wiltshire	£2,210,000	£405,502.97	18.4%
Reading	£1,900,000	£218,584.70	11.5%
Gateshead	£1,400,000	£179,028.20	12.8%
Windsor and Maidenhead	£896,000	£222,129.63	24.8%

Source: Schools Week analysis, council documents, Department for Education

* End-of-year predicted total for all schools in deficit, based on most recent available figures

SCHOOLS WEEK

NEWS: FUNDING

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Unions accept pay offer for support staff

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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Unions representing school support staff across England have accepted a pay rise worth at least £1,925, putting to bed a long-running dispute.

Unison and the GMB confirmed this week they had backed the offer from councils, worth 3.88 per cent for the highest earners and 9.42 per cent for those at the bottom of the pay scale.

The rise will be backdated to April – and according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) works out as an 8 per cent average rise.

The Department for Education said earlier this year that every percentage point increase in support staff pay would cost schools £130 million, which suggests this year's deal will cost just over £1 billion.

The IFS factored such a rise into its recent school funding analysis, which concluded that funding would grow by 8 per cent in cash terms in 2023–24, while costs, including support staff pay rises, would increase by 7.2 per cent.

“This is clearly a large rise in cash terms, but is only just above the overall growth in costs. The picture in 2023–24 therefore remains tight for schools,” said report author Luke Sibieta.

Both unions had balloted members for strikes over the offer, and said they had won ballots in some schools across England. But both decided not to take action.

Sharon Wilde, a GMB national officer, said the message was clear – “while members are angry and strike mandates were achieved in hundreds of workplaces, the majority are struggling financially and need the money paid into pay



packets now”.

Mike Short, Unison's head of local government, said the rise would be “suitably adjusted for part-time and term-time workers. The priority now is to get the money into everyone's pay packets.”

The deal automatically applies to support staff employed by councils. Academy trusts don't have to honour the deal, but in practice many do.

Staff covered by the deal include teaching assistants, caretakers and caterers, but also school business leaders.

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the NAHT school leaders' union, said while confirmation of the award would “provide schools with some additional clarity, it will likely further exacerbate the funding pressures that so many face”.

He also said that it left school business leaders, who were likely to be at the top of pay scales, “facing one of the lowest pay awards across the sector”.

“This further underscores the need for a new national pay framework for these senior roles, which better recognises the expertise and experience they hold, and which is aligned to the pay of other senior leaders in schools.”

The IFS also warned that the timing of pay announcements and agreements needed to be improved. The original offer was made in February.

Support staff salaries “have often been agreed part way through the year in which they are meant to be paid”, Sibieta warned.

“This has real consequences for schools. It creates huge amounts of uncertainty and concern about what they can afford.”

Last year's pay award was also agreed in November.

Sibieta added the process for agreeing support staff pay “needs to be brought forward significantly, which would require better coordination between central government, local government and relevant trade unions”.

SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER | @SCHOOLSWEEK

Pension costs for schools rise 20 per cent

Contributions that schools pay towards teachers' pensions will rise by more than 20 per cent from April.

The government has committed to funding the rise for state schools and colleges for one year, with any further commitments to be decided at future spending reviews.

But private schools will have to soak up the extra costs themselves.

Employer contributions under the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) will rise from 23.6 per cent to 28.6 per cent after a valuation to “ensure the scheme continues to meet present and future obligations”.

It comes alongside the commitment from Labour to impose VAT on private schools should it form the next government.

Julie Robinson, the chief executive of the Independent Schools Council, said both changes meant “difficult decisions will have to be made to ensure schools remain financially viable”.

A statement from the TPS said it “hoped” sharing news about the likely change earlier in the year would help “planning for the change”.

More than 300 private schools have pulled out of the TPS since 2018, according to

analysis this month.

The National Education Union said it anticipated more would follow.

Daniel Kebede, the union's general secretary, said it was “unacceptable” that teachers in private schools faced the threat of losing a decent pension.

“The NEU is not prepared to sit back while our members see their contracts of employment ripped up and their pensions snatched away. The NEU will robustly support our members to take all necessary action to defend their terms and conditions.”

FEATURE: AI

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Inside the first 'education hackathon'

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EXCLUSIVE

Gillian Keegan is determined artificial intelligence has its place in education. A 'hackathon' in London tried it out...

ChatGPT helped teachers and data scientists this week to write school behaviour policies, produce newsletters for parents – and even explore how it might tailor revision based on a pupil's answer to mock exam questions.

But it wasn't for real. The scenarios were part of a government-sponsored "hackathon" in London.

Tech experts and school leaders discussed how large-language AI models could use education, health and care plan data to generate worksheets based on a pupil's needs, and act as a personal assistant for language students.

Schools Week joined education secretary Gillian Keegan and academies minister Baroness Barran at the event, held at the London headquarters of Faculty AI, to hear about potential solutions to teacher workload.

AI: A Christmas miracle?

Keegan believes models such as ChatGPT could save teachers from the pain of mock exam-marking and tailor revision work for individual or groups of pupils.

She said teachers had complained that the timing and volume of autumn mock exams left them with "virtually no time" to mark and then set revision for the Christmas holidays.

The hackathon explored whether through AI "we could get these marks and we could personalise for each child...what they still need to brush up on". Pupils could then use their holiday to "really focus their learning on the bits that are going to help them get a better grade".

"That was just a very practical [solution] that nobody came here thinking about, but the fact you've got teachers, the fact you've got computer scientists, you've got researchers and experts all together, and they've actually created examples of it right here that could be utilised. It's quite astonishing."

In one breakout session, school leaders worked with data scientists to discuss whether AI could run question-level analysis of mock



Education secretary Gillian Keegan discusses potential uses of AI in education with pupils and data scientists

'AI has huge potential'

exams, identify which pupils or groups of pupils struggled with specific topics, and then suggest interventions.

Enass Al-Ali, the executive principal of Small Heath Leadership Academy in Birmingham, told Schools Week it had "huge potential".

"Take an exam paper. Mathematics for example. It may have 22 questions, and as a teacher, you want to know which of the questions students were able to answer well, but which questions they couldn't answer very well.

"We would hope AI would help us to then analyse that for the teachers and create resources ... [for] the learners who couldn't answer those questions."

ChatGPT on its best behaviour

Schools have to publish swathes of written policies on their websites, ranging from their approach to behaviour and uniform to curriculum and how they support SEND pupils.

At the hackathon, leaders and experts explored how AI could draft and review those policies.

"What the AI was able to do was to be fed examples of existing best practice policies to learn from, and then tailor to the school context," said Tom Nixon, head of government practice at Faculty.

"And that potentially shortens the time it takes school leadership to create policies, but also reviews, checks quality, checks for adherence to best practice or legislation. So I think that's really exciting."

Models such as ChatGPT could also help schools keep staff up-to-date on their policies, according to Melanie Renowden, chief executive of the National Institute of Teaching.

She said it did a "pretty good job" of writing the policies themselves. Delegates then asked it to create "low-stakes quizzing" on the policies to aid with staff training, and presented scenarios to ask how policies should be applied.

"It starts to become a sort of policy digital assistant."

Breaking news?

Parent communication is another possible admin task that could be slimmed down for

FEATURE: AI

teachers. Renowden said after “some refined instructions” to ChatGPT it quickly produced “some really beautiful newsletters” that teachers felt pretty confident about using (after a quick quality-assurance).

Nixon said he saw examples outside education of generative AI “being very powerful for creating marketing content, for creating communications content.

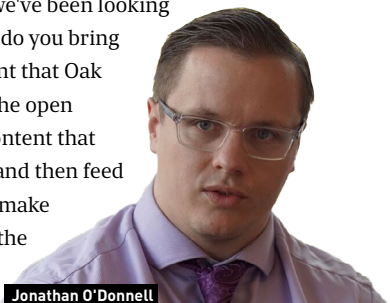
“And the ability to use that and translate some of that, those ideas, means that schools can more quickly, more easily communicate with parents, [and] share what’s happening in the school.”

AI needs help with lesson planning

During the hackathon, pupils from Eden Girls’ School Waltham Forest and Harris Academy Wimbledon discussed with data scientists how AI could help language learning, while leaders worked on developing lesson plans.

John Roberts, the product and engineering director at the Oak National Academy, said it had found “you can only go so far with the underlying models”, which needed to be trained to ensure content is in keeping with the national curriculum and exam specifications.

“What we’ve been looking at is, how do you bring the content that Oak has, and the open licence content that we have, and then feed that in to make sure that the



Jonathan O'Donnell



Academies minister Baroness Barran meets school leaders and tech experts

outputs are really aligned to that curriculum. That’s going to be really beneficial I think for others in the sector.”

Jonathan O’Donnell, a computing consultant at the Harris Federation, said he had been working with data scientists to train AI to help with lesson planning.

ChatGPT initially “wasn’t producing the outputs that we were hoping for”. For example, it generated plans based on A-level resources when they wanted it to focus on GCSE.

“So we’re feeding it even more information. But what that really highlighted for us was the fact that we need these models to be trained in subject disciplines for each individual use case scenario for each individual academy.

“That could have potentially a great amount of impact on teacher planning time, adapting lessons for each individual student.”

Better support for SEND

Keegan wants the development of AI in education to help close the attainment gap, and the hackathon explored how this could be achieved for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.

O’Donnell said Harris had worked on uploading transcripts of lessons to create “personalised home worksheets” for pupils “based upon their needs”.

It was also investigating how it could feed models such as ChatGPT non-identifying elements from pupils’ EHCPs to personalise work.

But schools needed to be “very, very careful” not to feed models “sensitive information” about pupils.

“The teacher will know the students and the needs of their students, so they don’t need to put in [identifying information] for that person.”

JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS

Oak gets £2m to develop AI-powered tools

Oak National Academy has been handed £2 million as part of a pledge to provide every teacher with a personalised artificial intelligence (AI) lesson-planning assistant.

The cash will help the online school to expand its AI-powered quiz builder and lesson planner, which were first developed last month.

Edtech companies experimenting with AI will also have free access to Oak’s lessons, allowing them to “innovate and create their

own products”.

The government said it is the first step towards “providing every teacher with a personalised AI lesson-planning assistant”.

Caroline Wright, the director general of the British Educational Suppliers Association, said that awarding a contract with “no tender or



Caroline Wright

any evidence that [Oak’s AI] works” goes against “one of Oak’s ‘guiding principles’” of being evidence-informed.

“The government has handed the stage, not to the UK’s world leading edtech companies ... but instead to a department with a dismal back catalogue of project delivery and procurement.”

'Independent' inquiry's critical Ofsted poll mostly NEU members

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

The National Education Union has been accused of pushing an anti-Ofsted agenda through a supposedly “independent inquiry” after it published a biased survey heavily critical of the inspectorate.

The poll, published by the Beyond Ofsted inquiry on Wednesday, said 92 per cent of teachers agreed Ofsted was not a “reliable and trusted arbiter of standards”.

It attracted national press coverage, with journalists told the research was conducted by the UCL Institute of Education.

However, when asked by *Schools Week*, the inquiry – which was set up and is funded by the union – admitted the survey was self-selecting. This is considered a common type of research bias because respondents choose to take part, making it unrepresentative.

Emails from the union, which wants to abolish Ofsted, urged members to complete the survey. Social media posts encouraging participation also included the tag #replaceOfsted

Seventy-nine per cent of the 6,708 survey respondents identified as National Education Union (NEU) members.

Stuart Lock, the chief executive officer at Advantage Schools, said self-selecting samples made by campaigning groups “dressed up as independent” muddied the waters and did not help the sector or Ofsted to improve, “and hence don’t help colleagues in schools or their pupils”.

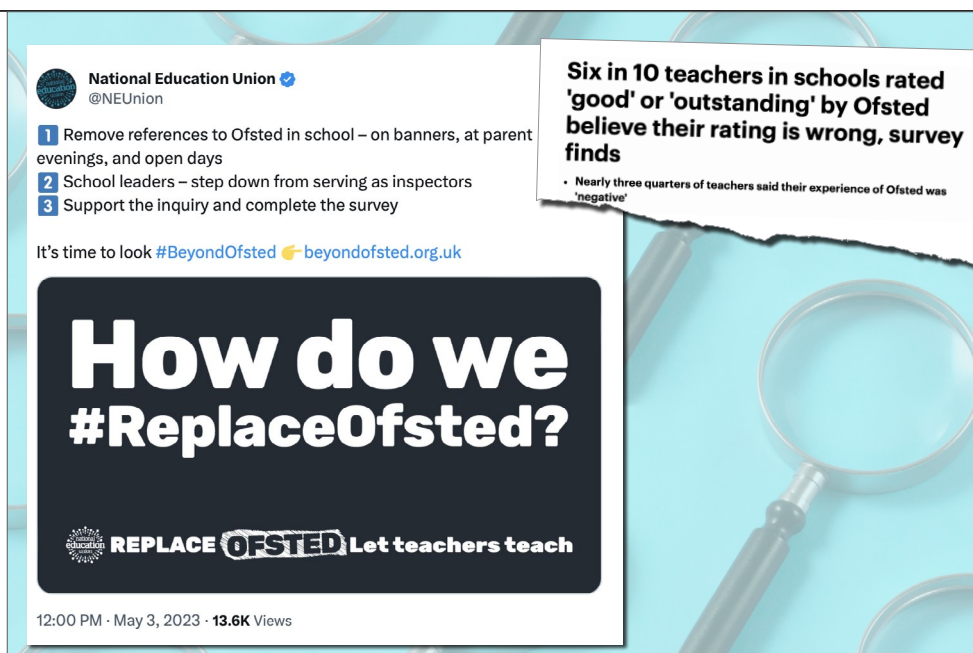
Beyond Ofsted launched in April to “consider input from a wide range of well-informed voices” to “develop a set of principles for underpinning a better inspection system and proposals for an alternative approach”. Its website states it is sponsored by the union.

It is chaired by Lord Jim Knight, a former schools minister, with a board of 16 – several of whom are vocal Ofsted critics.

The survey findings were released on Wednesday as a preview to the full report, due later this month.

It found 62 per cent of teachers did not think their most recent inspection accurately reflected their school, including a majority of those in ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ schools.

While not the same question, 91 per cent



of leaders responding to Ofsted’s own post-inspection survey data stated judgments made by inspectors were justified.

In the Beyond Ofsted survey, almost 75 per cent of respondents described their experience with the watchdog as negative.

But Ofsted’s own survey found just 16 per cent of state-funded schools disagreed the benefit of inspection outweighed any negative aspects.

Steve Caldwell, the deputy head of Helsby Hillside Primary School in Cheshire, said it was “all too easy to fall into the trap of agreeing with the inquiry’s findings because of our own negative views about Ofsted.

“Ofsted does need reform, but desperately clinging to headlines from poorly designed surveys is not the way to do it. It makes our arguments look weak, and makes us easier to dismiss and ignore. We need a much more robust approach than this.”

An NEU social media post in May called for school leaders to step down from serving as inspectors and remove references to Ofsted in school.

The same post said “support the inquiry and complete the survey. It’s time to look #BeyondOfsted”, alongside an anti-Ofsted slogan asking “how do we #replaceOfsted?”

Schools Week found examples of the inquiry’s researchers sending survey links to people who posted critical Ofsted comments on social media.

Professor Kathy Rastle, from Royal Holloway, University of London, said independence was hard to establish “given that the survey was hosted on a website that argues that Ofsted has ‘lost trust’” with staff and pupils.

“Inquiries of this nature are most valuable when they are independent. That means that they come at the problem in an unbiased way and take steps to ensure a representative set of views.”

Professor John Jerrim, of the UCL Institute of Education (IOE), added such examples “stop Ofsted doing more research into the key issue of inspection reliability or consistency.

“Why make data, etc, that could be used for this purpose available to researchers, when the dice are going to be loaded against them?”

However a spokesperson for the inquiry said they were “satisfied with the integrity of the research and are confident that will be evident when the full report is published”.

They added that researchers Professors Jane Perryman and Alice Bradbury made efforts to ensure the survey was distributed as widely as possible. Results from both NEU and non-NEU members were “broadly similar”, they said.

Knight told *Schools Week* there was no way he would be an NEU “stooge”.

A union spokesperson said it was a “serious research exercise conducted by established academics” and that the findings were independent of the union

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ANALYSIS: WELLBEING

Holiday week missives breach DfE's wellbeing pledge

JACK DYSON
@JACKYDYS
EXCLUSIVE

The government broke its own wellbeing pledge four times during last week's half term when it sent letters about sex education and guidance on two new policies.

Further Schools Week analysis found the Department for Education has published 31 updates online over holiday periods since pledging to only release content for education workers in office hours.

Exceptions to the promise, made when ministers published their education staff wellbeing charter in May 2021, include occasions where "there is a significant user need not to do so" or "a legislative requirement".

Our analysis found nine instances where it was clear a caveat did apply – such as communicating important updates relating to Covid or RAAC.

That left 22 occasions where the government appears to have broken its own wellbeing pledge.

However, the DfE contested this and said "most cases cited" in our analysis had applicable exceptions.

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the National Association of Headteachers, accused ministers of "repeatedly riding roughshod over its own commitments", leaving the profession "feeling like it is being treated with contempt".

"The vast majority of these are not urgent and there is no great user-demand for them. It shows a government in chaos, scrambling for headlines, but not listening or engaging properly with the profession to actually make the improvements that are so desperately needed."

The 22 updates that appear to have flouted the wellbeing commitment include the unveiling in April last year of the department's sustainability and climate change strategy, and the launch two months later of a review into how the government works with academy trusts.

Some of the announcements were press releases, while the rest were either newly released or updated policy papers, guidance and consultations.

A report detailing the findings of a consultation on the national plan for music education was published in August 2021. It had concluded 17 months before.

In the middle of this year's February half term, a three-month call for evidence on the use of



reasonable force and restrictive practices in schools was published.

The most recent examples came last week, when, according to Teacher Tapp, 72 per cent of staff were on half term.

On Thursday, October 26, the government named the 35 local authorities in line to receive a share of its "hardship fund" to help pay for 6.5 per cent teacher pay rises.

A handbook outlining the DfE's national wraparound childcare programme was released the following day. While "primarily for local authorities", the document stated "it may also be of interest" to schools and trusts.

These came after Gillian Keegan announced last Monday that primaries and secondaries "should have the confidence to share" RSHE materials with parents.

She then wrote an open letter to schools the next day stating contractual clauses with curriculum providers that "seek to prevent" headteachers from "sharing resources with parents...are void and unenforceable".

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the school leaders' union ASCL, said the findings showed the DfE had "driven a coach and horses through its commitment in the staff wellbeing charter".

He said Keegan attempted to counter her half-term RSHE letter by saying there was "no need to take action until school resumes".

"But by that logic, the DfE could send out

anything at any time with the same message attached."

When the charter was first published, Nick Gibb, the schools minister, said it was "more important than ever" that wellbeing and mental health were at the forefront of education policy.

Responding to our findings, a DfE spokesperson stressed the "the charter is clear that there are some instances where the department will need to publish content outside of term time".

She said "most" of the content cited in our analysis "was not primarily aimed at educators nor required any action to be taken".

Nerd note

The DfE's specific pledge is: "We will publish GOV.UK content aimed at education staff only during working hours (unless, for specific guidance documents, there is a significant user need not to do so, or there is a legislative requirement).

A decision on whether an update has broken the pledge is sometimes a matter of opinion (and the DfE has disagreed with us). But our threshold is: is this a published update (which includes press releases), does it apply to any school staff, and is it a substantive update?

Opinion: RSHE



MARCUS COLLINS

Partner, Irwin Mitchell LLP

Sharing copyright RSHE resources with parents

Is Gillian Keegan right that copyright is 'void and unenforceable' when it comes to parental access to RSHE resources? Marcus Collins explains

Gillian Keegan recently wrote to schools advising them that parents and carers must be given access to RSHE teaching materials. She said that sharing RSHE materials subject to third-party copyright with parents is allowed, and that any contractual term to the contrary between the materials' provider and the school is "void and unenforceable".

This is potentially controversial. The government is expressing a strong policy view. Schools are concerned about traversing a perceived legal minefield. Providers of RSHE materials will be anxious not to have their intellectual property weakened.

And parents and carers will want to know whether they can participate in this part of their children's education on an informed basis.

Primarily, the matter concerns avoidance of copyright infringement and breach of contract. As in all legal matters, the circumstances of each case may be nuanced so it is always worth seeking advice.

“The circumstances of each case may be nuanced

But is the education secretary right? RSHE materials will likely attract various forms of copyright protection, whether as literary or artistic works, as films or recordings. Unless a defence applies, copying without permission is an infringement. This may be through copying the whole or a substantial

part of a work, performing the work in public or communicating it by electronic means to the public. To avoid liability, the consent of the copyright owner is required or there must be a suitable, legal defence.

Additionally, a contractual term where a school promises to share materials in a certain way could potentially be breached if not complied with – and could lead to it having to pay compensation to the provider.

Happily, a considerable amount of material may already be covered by blanket copyright licences. Where not already covered, the law does allow proportionate copying and communication of works by educational establishments; however, access must be restricted so that it is not available to those not entitled to it.

Statute provides that acts otherwise

limiting or preventing this is deemed unenforceable under statute.

A further form of fair dealing is use by an educational establishment for giving or receiving instruction. Gaining parental input arguably might be considered a required approval process as part of giving instruction. This might be a defence to infringement and again cannot be contracted out of.

Keegan suggests that sharing RSHE materials with parents is in the public interest. In particular circumstances, copyright can be infringed if necessary to raise an important matter of public interest. However, the interests of an owner of intellectual property rights have to be balanced with that. There may be a difference between government policy and public interest.

Ambiguity could perhaps be removed by making the proportionate and acknowledged sharing of RSHE materials with parents a mandatory part of the secretary of state's guidance so that it could be enforced as a statutory duty. (At present, giving such guidance is mandatory but not all the guidance given is compulsory – though school governors must have strong regard to it.) If a statutory duty, then there would be a further statutory defence to copyright infringement and any contractual term attempting to override the duty would likely be void.

Key considerations for schools

- Check whether you already have a licence covering the material and allowing sharing with parents.
- Give the copyright owner sufficient acknowledgment.
- Copy only what is necessary.
- If access must be electronic, make it on demand via a secure platform only for the parents of children concerned, rather than posting on a website or platform with wider public access. Prevent downloading.
- Avoid agreeing contract terms that deny sharing with parents.
- Try, if possible, to share material in person with parents without copying it or communicating it electronically.

Key considerations for providers

Make access to parents a positive, commercial upside of your product – the commercial impact of parents accessing what a child is using is likely low in terms of lost profits. If a child does not get to use the material, the parent has no interest in seeing it. Allowing controlled access by parents could encourage schools to use your materials.

Draft contractual terms so that materials can be shared with parents provided that: you are acknowledged as the copyright owner; the access is proportionate, perhaps controlled by way of a restricted access platform not allowing downloading.

NEWS: RAAC

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Early RAAC work ‘financially penalises’ council

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

Sheffield council bosses fear they will be financially penalised for putting “children’s safety first” and repairing a RAAC school before the government committed to reimbursing costs.

Sheffield City Council began a £620,000 project to replace reinforced aerated autoclaved concrete (RAAC) planks from Abbey Lane Primary’s roof in July.

About two months later, the government ordered schools with the crumbly concrete to close with chancellor Jeremy Hunt promising to “spend what it takes” to remove the material.

But Sheffield education chiefs believe they may not be reimbursed, having used cash from the £3.5 million for capital projects they receive each year from the Department for Education.

“We asked the DfE for retrospective funding, but at this stage there are no retrospective reimbursements for affected schools where RAAC has been removed or replaced and paid for out of existing condition funding,” a council spokesperson said.

“If we don’t receive reimbursement...we will



have been financially penalised for acting ... at an early stage. We were putting our children’s safety first before it became a critical national issue.”

The spokesperson added that work at other schools had to be delayed.

She estimated inflation and the rising cost of materials would force the authority to fork out an extra £130,000 when it did begin the deferred schemes.

A tender for the work at Abbey Lane, published in June, said a temporary cooking area and

classroom would be built, before the RAAC was removed. Contractors are expected to finish at the start of December.

The DfE escalated its RAAC policy at the end of August by ordering 104 schools to partially or fully close days before the start of the new academic year. The decision was triggered by three cases of the concrete collapsing “without warning”, despite being considered non-critical.

Afterwards, Hunt told the BBC’s Laura Kuenssberg the government would “spend what it takes to make sure children can go to school safely”. Treasury officials confirmed the funding would have to come from within the DfE’s existing budget.

DfE guidance states it will fund refurbishment or rebuilding projects “where these are needed to rectify RAAC in schools and colleges for the long term”.

It will also bankroll “emergency mitigation work needed to make buildings safe, including the installation of alternative classroom space where necessary”. The cash will be in addition to separate school condition funding.

The department has been approached for comment.

Repair work stalls transfer plans

Plans for the country’s largest trust to absorb four secondaries have stalled after the government deferred proposals to hand the chain capital cash.

United Learning asked the Department for Education for the money after checks found investment was needed at one of the schools, Nuneaton Academy in Warwickshire.

But a DfE spokesperson said it was “prioritising removing RAAC, which means other work may be slightly delayed”.



Marion Plant, the chief executive of the Midland Academies Trust, which currently runs the schools, said it would not meet the November 1 conversion date.

“However, we have been reassured that Nuneaton Academy remains a top priority for the department while the work to identify and address RAAC in schools is ongoing.”

Plant added the matter was expected to “be finalised soon”, with a “new transfer date [due to be set] over the coming weeks”.

Let us know the impact, says UCAS

Teachers are being advised to tell universities in UCAS applications how RAAC impacted their schools and pupils.

Nick Hurn, the chief executive of the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, last month argued for centre-assessed grades to be awarded to youngsters in secondaries with the concrete.

His calls fell on deaf ears as exams regulator Ofqual said special consideration was only offered if there were a problem at the time of the exam.

But now UCAS has confirmed it is telling teachers to flag the impact of RAAC in university references, rather than in personal statements.

Courteney Sheppard, the admission service’s interim director, said that latest guidance “asks advisers to enter any relevant information about the schools and colleges and also to note any extenuating circumstances that have impacted the applicant’s education and achievement”.

Durham University also said that it recognised the education of some sixth-formers would be “adversely affected by RAAC disruption”.

NEWS

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KS1 test papers 'a waste of money', says union

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

Plans to send key stage 1 SATs papers to schools unless they opt out have been branded a "breathtaking waste of money".

Leaders have demanded an explanation after the Standards and Testing Agency (STA) said it would continue to produce and send schools "optional" SATs materials for seven-year-olds, despite the tests becoming non-statutory this year.

Schools that don't want to receive them have to opt out by November 17.

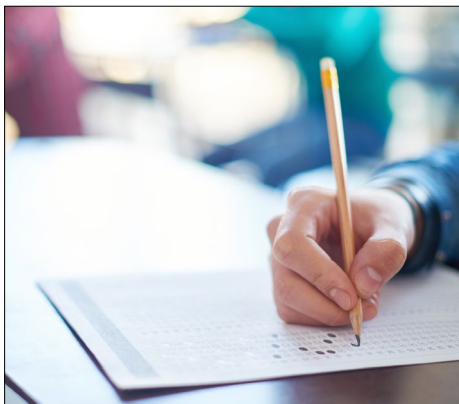
Sarah Hannafin, the head of policy at the school leaders' union NAHT, told *Schools Week* the approach was "a breathtaking waste of money from a government that has so often told schools to make efficiency savings.

"It's cash that would be much better directly spent on children's education by providing much-needed financial support to schools still struggling to make ends meet after a decade of government under-investment."

Annual accounts for the STA do not provide costs broken down by test series.

The agency is also responsible for key stage 2 SATs, the reception baseline assessment, phonics screening check and times tables test.

Overall, the agency spent £5.5 million on print, logistics and system maintenance, £21.7



million on test delivery and £5.2 million on test research and development last year. SATs and the phonics check are currently delivered by outsourcing giant Capita under an £18 million-a-year contract.

This suggests the cost of continuing to develop and send out key stage 1 materials could run into the millions.

Hannafin said sending the papers would "also have a completely unnecessary environmental impact".

"We urge the government to explain why it has taken this decision and set out how much it is costing"

A Department for Education spokesperson said it had committed to "continue to make key stage 1 tests available for use by schools on an optional basis to support classroom practice".

But the department refused to say how much it expected the initiative to cost.

In an email to schools, the STA said it would send standard versions of reading, grammar, punctuation and spelling and maths tests unless they opted out.

The aim was "to give schools access to test papers to assist the measurement of pupil achievement and to help identify where pupils need additional support as they transition into key stage 2".

The government "encourages schools to administer the optional tests and teacher assessments", but the results do not have to be reported to their council, the government or parents.

Schools that do not use the optional tests and teacher assessments also "do not have to report this to STA".

Quantities will be based on census data, and schools can order modified papers by November 17.

Schools will receive the papers between April 22 and 26 next year, and can decide when after that to administer them, though the DfE is recommending they take place in May.

Schools will not be able to "decline individual subjects". But those that decline physical test papers will still be able to download materials, with mark schemes from the government gateway from May 1.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Funding mistake fails to rip up reward voucher scheme

A school funding blunder will not affect a reward voucher scheme for civil servants, the Department for Education has said.

A spokesperson said it would be "unfair to penalise junior staff from across the department, who are most often the recipients of non-cash rewards" for an error that shaved £370 million off indicative school budgets for 2024-25.

Ministers recently confirmed the DfE paid out £445,000 in non-cash vouchers to employees in 2022-23. It prompted questions about whether the scheme would continue this year after the revelation that funding allocations data sent out in July was incorrect.

The department admitted last month that it had made a pupil

number calculation error that would have inflated the total schools budget by 0.62 per cent. As a result, it revised down the expected school funding increase for next year from 2.7 to 1.9 per cent.

Based on these figures, the average secondary school will be £57,970 worse-off than predicted in July, and the average primary £12,420.

A DfE spokesperson said non-cash vouchers were "standard practice across the private sector and in government, and it's right that we recognise staff who go above and beyond".

Susan Acland-Hood, the department's permanent secretary, "has taken full responsibility for the NFF

technical error", they added.

"It would be unfair to penalise junior staff ... for this mistake that has not changed the total schools' budget for 2024-25 or impacted on current school funding for 2023-24."

The amount handed to DfE staff in the form of vouchers has increased in recent years. Between 2017 and 2019, amounts ranged from £289,000 to £353,000, but £753,000 was issued in 2020-21.

That rise "was due to a new HR system being launched in the department, with an increase made to the instant reward budget".

"This was to enable rewards to continue during a wider payroll freeze and a corresponding reduction in other reward budgets."

The DfE paid out £469,000 in 2021-22.



Susan Acland-Hood

More workload strategies means happier staff..

AMY WALKER
@AMYRWALKER

Teachers are happier in schools with strategies that crack down on workload, new research into recruitment and retention strategies shows.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) this week published three reports that cover teacher workload, flexible working and school leadership. Here's what you need to know.

1. Managing workload leads to happier staff ...

The first report was a review of managing teacher workloads based on an National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) survey of 1,326 teachers and school leaders.

Most schools had multiple strategies in place, with more than half of respondents reporting that they were using seven of nine identified tactics.

Providing time for planning, preparation and assessment was the most commonly reported strategy (97 per cent). This was followed by access to adaptable schemes of work and associated lesson plans (91 per cent).

Teachers from schools with more strategies were more likely to say they had a manageable workload and were satisfied in their job (see table below).

But 99 per cent said there were barriers to implementation, most commonly funding and staff capacity (76 per cent of respondents), external accountability such as Ofsted (58 per cent), and lack of specialist support for specific pupil needs such as SEND (54 per cent).

2. ... but better support services needed

More than four in five (85 per cent) respondents said increases to staffing and/or funding would help to reduce workload.

More than half (63 per cent) reported that increased support from outside agencies for specific pupil needs would help, while 29 per cent backed a central source of "high-quality" curriculum materials to reduce planning time.

The report notes that Oak National Academy's existence "perhaps" indicated that central



resources were not perceived to be of high enough quality.

Behaviour and pastoral care were more likely to be identified as priority areas in the most disadvantaged schools (55 per cent of respondents) compared with the least (38 per cent).

3. Flexible working: Slow progress, more evidence needed

In the second report, the NFER did a rapid evidence assessment (REA) of research published between 2019 and April this year. The research body said there was "limited robust causal evidence" on the impact of flexible working on recruitment and retention.

Census data showed "modest" increases in the proportion of teachers working part-time. In 2010, 16.5 per cent of secondary teachers worked part-time compared with 19.4 per cent in 2022.

A random sample of 500 schools found 193 were currently advertising roles. But just 14 (3 per cent) had a flexible working policy published on their website, while only 27 per cent of the job adverts mentioned flexible working.

Its REA of 27 studies – quantitative, qualitative and longitudinal – found that previous research presented "perceptual evidence" that flexible

working contributed positively to teacher outcomes.

This included enhancing wellbeing and job satisfaction, attendance and teacher capacity, as well as improving career progression.

But there was also "perceptual" evidence from leaders that flexible working increased costs, and could have negative impacts on pupils "as a result of reduced consistency of teaching".

While researchers suggested such challenges could be overcome with tactics that included "attitudinal and cultural changes", as well as creative timetabling, more research was needed.

This included a large-scale survey that could measure teacher recruitment and retention in relation to the extent of schools' flexible working.

4. 'Robust' CPD for leaders

For the third report, researchers at Durham and Warwick universities conducted an REA of 399 previous studies over the past 13 years that discussed school leadership, culture, climate or structure to support teacher retention.

It highlighted several "evidence-based practices" that leaders could employ to boost retention.

These included providing teachers with instructional support, offering professional development opportunities, cultivating leadership potential, demonstrating individual consideration, promoting collegiality in schools and developing a "positive climate" of school discipline.

But while academics said that such practices appeared to be "common sense", they recommended that leaders be supported with a "robust" six to 12-month CPD programme.

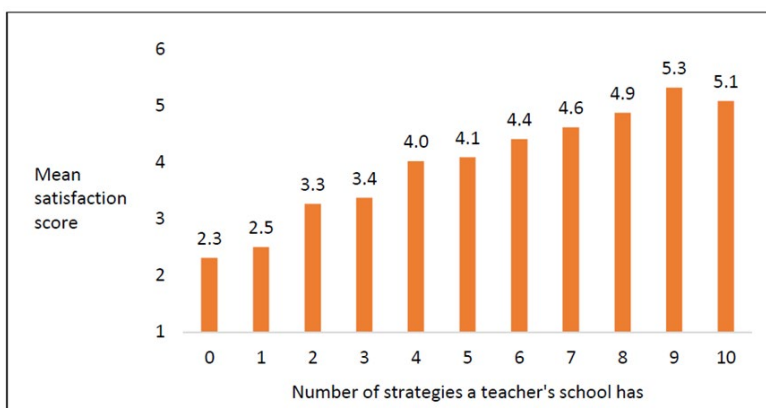
This could help them to "contextualise" the implementation of such approaches, address

"competing" demands and "evaluate the effects" to "inform any necessary adjustments".

The review also suggested piloting "creative workload configurations" in disadvantaged schools, including reducing classroom time and offering more devoted time to lesson planning.

The report also recommended longitudinal and experimental studies on the impact of school leadership practices on teacher retention.

Figure 3: Relationship between the number of strategies in place and teachers' job satisfaction



NEWS: MOVERS AND SHAKERS

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Bauckham to take over at exams watchdog

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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Sir Ian Bauckham will become the interim chief regulator of Ofqual from January.

The academy trust boss, who currently chairs the watchdog, will take over for 12 months after Dr Jo Saxton leaves to become head of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.

He will stand down as Ofqual chair and chief executive of the Tenax Schools Academy Trust, which he has led since 2015.

He will stay on as chair of the Oak National Academy.

Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, said she wanted an interim chief because of "the challenge of recruiting an experienced suitable candidate to such a high profile and a challenging role on a short-term basis".

The public appointments process "will commence shortly".

Saxton's September announcement that she was standing down after just over two



Sir Ian Bauckham

years left limited time for a full recruitment process.

Bauckham said his "entire career to date has been devoted to advancing education".

"It is an honour, therefore, to be invited to serve as chief regulator of qualifications by the secretary of state at such an important time.

"Qualifications, supported by regulation, open doors and transform life chances. I will be pleased to build on the existing working

relationships I have with colleagues, both within Ofqual and across the sector in this new capacity."

He looked "forward to continuing Jo's good work, and am fully committed to using Ofqual's powers to regulate on behalf of students and apprentices".

Bauckham will be Ofqual's fifth chief regulator in four years. Sally Collier resigned in 2020 over that year's grading fiasco, and 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, before Saxton took over in September of that year.

Keegan said Bauckham's experience would be invaluable as Ofqual "continues to ensure our current qualifications work effectively, alongside playing a vital role in the development of our new Advanced British Standard".

"I'd like to thank Jo for guiding Ofqual through the challenges that followed the pandemic and ultimately overseeing a smooth return to exams and normal grading."

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Marshall and Nash step down from EPI

Two prominent Tory donors are to leave the board of the Education Policy Institute think tank.

Hedge fund boss Sir Paul Marshall, EPI's co-founder and chair, and Lord Nash, a former academies minister, will step down as trustees on December 31.

David Laws, the former Lib Dem schools minister, will also step down as executive chair of the think tank, but will move into Marshall's role as chair of trustees.

The changes come ahead of an anticipated Labour win at the next general election, which must be held by January 2025 but is likely to be either in the spring or the autumn next year.

The EPI was formed in 2016 when CentreForum, a Liberal Democrat-aligned think tank, was repurposed to focus on education policy.

Laws became its first executive chair with Natalie Perera, a former senior government adviser, as its executive director. Perera



Sir Paul Marshall and Lord Nash

remains as chief executive.

The think tank said it was "delighted" that Laws would continue to have "a pivotal role in the oversight and governance of EPI".

It was also "truly grateful for the support, generosity and commitment that Paul [Marshall] has shown to EPI since its inception", as well as Lord Nash.

Further board appointments will be made in the new year.

The departure of Marshall – once a prominent Lib Dem supporter – follows his switch to the Conservatives after the 2016 Brexit referendum.

He gave more than £170,000 in cash and non-cash donations to the Lib Dems and politicians, including Laws, Sir Menzies Campbell and Nick Clegg, between 2003 and 2015.

Unlike the Lib Dems, Marshall went on to back Brexit, giving £200,000 to Vote Leave.

He then donated thousands to Michael Gove's Conservative leadership bid before donating £500,000 to the party in 2019.

Marshall is now a major shareholder in GB News and served briefly as its interim chair. He also owns the news website UnHerd and has been touted as a potential future owner of *The Telegraph* newspapers.

He is a trustee of the Ark academies trust and was lead non-executive director at the Department for Education.

Nash, who was academies minister between 2013 and 2017 and founded Future Academies, and his wife Caroline donated more than £250,000 to the Conservatives and its politicians between 2006 and 2016.

Schools 'central' to wraparound childcare

SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER

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The government published guidance on Friday providing more information for its £289 million wraparound childcare policy. The scheme will launch in September next year. More guidance is promised for January.

Here's what you need to know ...

Different ambition

In the March budget, Chancellor Jeremy Hunt revealed his "ambition" for all primaries to provide wraparound childcare, enabled by £289 million in "start up" funding over two years.

The guidance sets out a different "ambition": by 2026 "all parents and carers of primary school-aged children who need it will be able to access term time childcare in their local area from 8am-6pm".

About 60 per cent of primary schools across England currently offer wraparound care, before and after school.

Schools 'central' to the programme ...

The guidance says schools are "central to the delivery of the programme as they operate at the heart of the community, understand the needs of local families, and are usually the first port of call for parents for wraparound childcare".

Provision should be set up "around the needs of schools", as it will take place directly before and after school hours.

Most parents are expected to access childcare either through provision on a school site (although this may be run by a private provider) or through schools signposting them to other providers.

... but not all will provide childcare

The guidance makes clear "not all schools will provide wraparound childcare directly" – for instance if it's not financially viable.

But either way, schools are expected to work with councils to ensure parents are signposted to appropriate provision.

This includes local authorities supporting schools to "understand the availability of wraparound childcare in their area", including providing a list of all local providers. Schools should also report any unmet childcare requests to the council.



Encourage expansion, engage with trusts

After funding allocations this month, councils are expected to set up new or scale-up existing provision.

But councils have been told to "in particular .. engage closely with schools and providers who are already delivering wraparound childcare, to explore their potential to expand, either in terms of hours or in terms of places available".

Local authorities will need to "ensure they are engaging with school trusts that operate in their area and consider the specific role that they could play in setting up provision across several schools".

Trusts are told to "determine roles and responsibilities in relation to the wraparound programme" and "work closely with local authorities and other providers of wraparound to meet local need".

How was the funding worked out?

Officials used school census data on the availability of childcare in primary schools as a proxy to estimate any "gap" in provision.

Although schools are used as a proxy to determine need, it doesn't mean councils have to fund provision at those specific schools.

Councils can decide where to prioritise the cash. Funding is tapered with more cash in the 2024-25 financial year than in 2025-26.

What can schools spend the money on?

The funding will help councils build their own capacity to run the scheme, but most will go to providers to set up or expand provision.

Funding can cover staffing, training and

transport, such as minibus hire – as well as contributing to running costs while demand builds.

Providers can use capacity funding of £100 million, which will be given to councils separately, to "establish inclusive spaces and buy inclusive equipment and resources".

They money cannot be used for subsidising the cost of places, which should be paid by parents.

What happens when funding runs out?

As Schools Week reported, schools will be expected to charge parents for places – and the aim is that from 2026 onwards (when funding runs out), the "substantial majority of new/expanded provision" will be "self-sustaining".

Another aim is to test the best ways of providing childcare, which, the guidance adds, "inevitably involves some financial risk".

"We accept that it will not be possible for 100 per cent of new or expanded provision to prove sustainable: the programme is designed to test new models of provision and generate additional demand where it is not currently guaranteed, including through over-supplying places to test if this helps to build demand".

What about special schools?

The guidance says that all schools should be factored into council calculations, although traditional models "may not be feasible outside mainstream settings", given additional staff requirements and potential cost implications.

But where demand is identified, councils should work with specialist schools to establish provision "where possible".

NEWS IN BRIEF

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Attendance warning

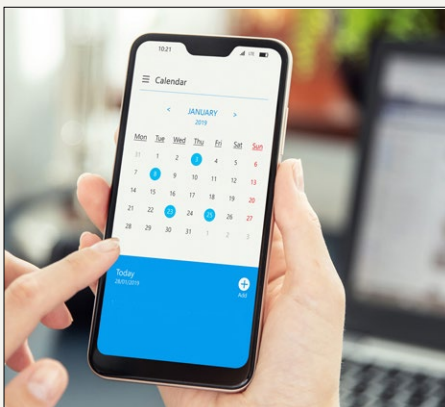
Just one in 20 pupils who are severely absent during exam years get at least five good GCSEs, analysis on the link between post-pandemic outcomes and attendance shows.

Children's commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza has repeated calls for an extension of the attendance hub network and for dedicated school leaders to manage attendance policies.

She also called for specific measures to hold councils "accountable for their efforts to reduce absenteeism".

Her report showed just 5 per cent of children who missed more than half of school days in 2020-21 and 2021-22 went on to get a grade 4 or above in five GCSEs, including English and maths.

In comparison, just 36 per cent of pupils who were persistently absent – meaning they missed 10 per cent or more sessions – in both years got at least five good GCSEs. And 78 per cent of those who were rarely absent



got five good GCSEs.

Just over 33 per cent of all pupils across the years hit the threshold for persistent or severe absenteeism in years 10 or 11.

But the report also found that pupils whose absence improved in year 11 achieved better GCSEs than pupils whose absence didn't improve.

But the report warned that the figures were "descriptive only" and did not "prove that poor attendance causes poor attainment".

[Full story here](#)



Leaders turn back on NTP

Only one in six leaders definitely plans to continue offering tutoring once direct government funding runs out next year.

An evaluation by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) also found more than quarter of heads plans to ditch it from 2024, despite the majority saying the scheme had a positive impact. Nearly half were unsure if they would continue.

It comes as a separate report by Ofsted warned most school leaders surveyed "said they would be cutting or reducing their tutoring programmes next year due to the reductions in National Tutoring Programme (NTP) funding and increasing school costs".

Ofsted was also critical of tutoring that focused on "exam success", saying it failed to secure the knowledge pupils needed to progress and access their school's curriculum.

The watchdog said some of the "weakest" tutoring was provided remotely, while there was a "clear difference" between using qualified teachers and teaching assistants.

Both reports focus on the third year of the NTP, 2022-23, when all the funding went directly to schools. Leaders said this was more flexible and easier to manage.

Staff also told Ofsted that the benefits of tutoring for pupils justified the extra workload.

The NFER recommended that the DfE "explore how financial support can be sustained to allow tutoring to become a permanent fixture in schools".

[Full story here](#)

EYFS reforms 'positive'

Most schools said reforms to the early years foundation stage framework (EYFS) have or will have a positive effect on education, an evaluation report has found.

But school staff are concerned whether the reforms "catered sufficiently" for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This issue could "be the focus of future policy development", researchers said.

EYFS reforms were rolled out in September 2021 in a bid to improve outcomes by focusing on key areas such as maths, language development and literacy, and reduce "unnecessary" assessment paperwork for staff.

The report, published on Friday, found the most common way leaders had changed their curriculum was by putting less focus on

observation and tracking, and instead spending more time with children.

Most said the quality of teaching had improved after the reforms.

However, just 38 per cent of reception leaders said the reforms had delivered a positive impact on transitions to year 1, with 21 per cent saying they made no or little difference.

Leaders in reception were generally either "ambivalent or positive" about the removal of local authority statutory moderation from the EYFS profile.

But half of councils thought the removal had a negative impact on the quality of early years education, with a further 32 per cent reporting that it was too early to tell.

[Full story here](#)



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Profile

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL

Redefining the very concept of alternative provision

Eugene Dwaah's chance for a trial at Arsenal changed his life – now he's changing the lives of countless youngsters with his sporting endeavours

Catching staff from alternative provision (AP) settings smoking weed alongside the young people they were responsible for was a seminal moment for Eugene Dwaah, in what he admits has been a “strange career”: “Staff became their friends, which I suppose [they thought] made it easier to manage their behaviour, as opposed to keeping their boundaries, which I felt young people still needed in their chaotic lives,” he reflects.

Dwaah was head of behaviour and engagement at Skinner's Academy in Hackney at the time, a role he had for five years up to 2017. He had donned “civilian clothes” for unannounced visits to the AP the school's pupils were sent.

At the time, Skinners was making headlines for

its hardline behaviour policies. But those excluded were sometimes sent to AP “more like youth clubs than educational institutions”, he said, with some losing their lives to gang-related crime. It also included “portacabins” and “huts” with “no play areas ... with kids screaming at the walls”, as well as weed-smoking staff.

He realised he could do much better.

Football fanatic

Dwaah also oversaw football training at Skinner's, and was the perfect role model for boys with a sporting passion but struggling to keep on the straight and narrow. Although his own family were relatively affluent – his father a journalist and mum a teacher – he'd been affected by the

“really traumatic” passing of his mum in his O Levels year.

However, his PE teacher at St Mary's and St John's CofE, in Hendon, Mr Mihill, changed his life by taking him along to trials for Arsenal. The club put Dwaah on their youth apprenticeship scheme. “A member of staff showing you they care has a massive impact. I'm paying it back now,” he said.

He went on to play for Fulham for four years before joining teams in Thailand and Canada. But his playing career ended abruptly aged 28 following a “devastating” knee injury.

Dwaah started coaching kids for Chelsea, many of whom had been excluded from inner city schools. But “because they were budding footballers, we kind of didn't care. There wasn't that holistic care for them.”

Profile: Eugene Dwaah

However, the culture started shifting around welfare and education in clubs. The FA created academies so children could spend longer in training – if clubs supplemented their education.

Dwaah joined the newly formed welfare team liaising between the club and schools, finding he “loved the teaching aspect”. After six years as head of recruitment for Fulham football club, he made the move into teaching and joined Skinner’s.

Buying sports centre

After five years at the school, and prompted by what he had seen in the AP sector, Dwaah quit to buy a sports centre in a rundown part of Wembley with an old footballing friend.

In the evenings it was a hive of activity, but Dwaah wanted to provide a sports education programme for pupils at risk of exclusion during the day, when it was quiet. A pilot programme with Brent Council in 2017 went “really well” and Evolution Sports Group was born.

Dwaah was still on the lookout for potential future football stars, but his aim was for kids with a love of the game to get “recognised qualifications, so their choices were heightened by spending time with us”.

He set up similar independent alternative provision last year at a rugby club in Dagenham, wanting to make the most of the club’s “beautiful grounds” which were empty during schooldays. Such facilities are not the norm in AP: Leeds Beckett University research last year found 57 per cent lacked access to dedicated outdoor PE space.

Dwaah headhunted staff for his provision in Dagenham, named 100% Sports and Education Centre, willing to “go the extra mile” and who had played sports at “quite an elite level”. Pupils are assigned a staff mentor, and if that relationship isn’t working, they can pick another.

The provision is for key stage four pupils with a sporting interest but behavioural issues, including bringing weapons into school and county lines involvement. There were 468 knife crimes in Barking and Dagenham in the year up to March 2023, up 42 per cent on the previous year. At one time, half of Dwaah’s learners were known to police.



‘We aren’t interested in what happened in school, they can reinvent themselves with us’

Whereas in Brent most of his pupils were black boys, in Dagenham most are white males. He believes that “if there’s lack of opportunity and aspiration, the problem is the same regardless of race”.

Nike support

The curriculum, which he says “kids really engage in”, is made up of level 1 and 2 vocational qualifications in football coaching, first aid, health and safety, food and nutrition, sports leaders and PE skills, as well as Maths and English GCSEs/functional skills.

Learners also take the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award and The Prince’s Trust achieve programme which includes units in gang culture and managing money. It gives them credits towards a qualification in ‘Personal Development and Employability Skills’, equivalent to two GCSEs.

Nike sponsor uniforms, but kids have to “earn” the clothing by passing a two-week probation.

This makes them “feel a sense of ‘I’m in a special place’, rather than ‘school don’t want me anymore.’”

The 100% Sports and Education Centre expanded



from 24 to 48 students this year and moved to a bigger site, Dagenham’s Future Youth Zone, boasting facilities for music and dance as well as sports.

The remit has also widened to include short-term respite placements for key stage three pupils and those without a sporting interest, with courses now also offered in hairdressing, art, food tech and drama. These ‘recovery’ placements, which have fixed start and end dates, place a strong emphasis on English, Maths and developing independent learning and work-related skills.

Whereas Dwaah recalls referring kids to AP from Skinner’s as being “a paper pushing exercise” which “didn’t feel like a human being”, he ensures his staff visit schools and meet parents first.

Pupils are also offered a one-day visit, “to see our

Profile: Eugene Dwaah

expectations. We explain the school aren't kicking them out, they're looking really hard at something to suit their needs better. We aren't interested in what happened in school, they can reinvent themselves with us. That personal conversation really works."

Tackling gangs

Six in 10 Barking and Dagenham households are deprived – the highest rate in the country – and many of Dwaah's "really bright" pupils come from homes with alcohol and drug abuse.

Dwaah realised much of their gang activity was related to "poverty and making money", and that "a lot of parents would turn a blind eye to it because it was bringing income into their household".

"You've got to be real about the circumstances of who you're working with," he added.

He tries overcoming this by providing pupils with well-paid work experience at a nearby gym.

Dwaah "breaks bread with parents" through initial home visits. It's an example of how with smaller pupil numbers than mainstream schools, "we can do things more innovatively".

He tries to ensure staff give ten positive comments for every one negative when communicating with parents, to counteract the fact that many "spent their child's whole school life just getting negative calls". He says the strategy meant "parents would be more helpful" when that negative call had to be made.

Dwaah also connected with local colleges to offer parents functional skills and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) training. His provision hosts health clinics for families, and signposts them to housing support. It seems to be working.

Before joining, many kids were "school refusers" while others were "homeschooled inappropriately" with "just a few hours a week online provision". The national attendance rate for AP is 61.2 per cent, but Dwaah's last year was around 98 per cent.

He says the team need "quick wins", so he ensures pupils can get some form of accreditation within six weeks "to feel pride in passing something". Lessons are "very pacey", so "kids aren't sitting there idle, looking for opportunities to get



'Kids aren't sitting there idle, looking for opportunities to get themselves into trouble'

themselves into trouble". Lunchtime is only half an hour.

Structure

The provision gets safeguarding and compliance support from the council, and is governed by the local pru, Mayesbrook Park. This "builds confidence in what we're doing". Dwaah's academic teachers are linked with the pru's departmental heads to "moderate and quality assure good practice". This helps staff "feel part of a bigger team".

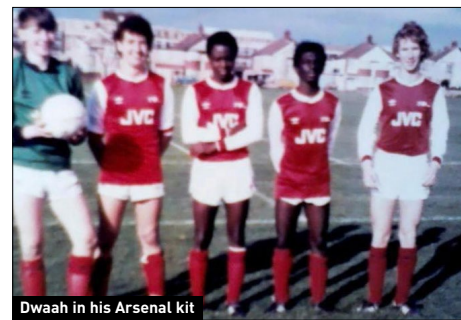
When Ofsted recently visited Dwaah's provision as part of its thematic review of AP, he claims it found their systems "really impactful".

He's been asked to expand provision into post-16, primary and those with specific mental health challenges, but is wary about "spreading myself too thin". Councils are increasingly struggling to tackle soaring demand for AP amid rising exclusions, and Dwaah was "inundated" with requests to visit areas after speaking at the Local Government Association conference this summer.

He's turned down some opportunities to expand, but is considering proposals to open similar



Dwaah coaching



Dwaah in his Arsenal kit

provision at other youth zones run by the charity OnSide.

"The outcomes are my interest, rather than paying me an extra £200,000 a year. I've been incredibly fortunate in my life – I don't need the money."

When he compares his provision to that of the AP he visited a decade ago with Skinner's, he feels "incredibly lucky".

"I was given a blank canvas, and realised we could be so creative. I hope you see my passion."

Opinion

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DONNA TANDY
CEO, Palladian Academy Trust

Thriving local trusts are a strong part of our system's offering

The varied sector of locality-based trusts provides a form of collective strength that should not be neglected, says Donna Tandy

Palladian Academy Trust originally formed as a response to a local authority directive for its maintained schools to join trusts. Upon joining as CEO, my first observation was that (unlike my previous trust, which was spread over 100 miles) Palladian was not culturally close. For all their geographical closeness, there were several invisible walls – between the schools themselves, and between the trust and its schools' communities.

And yet, geographical closeness brings distinct advantages.

Demonstrating collective efficacy from the top

Much of the trust's fragmentation seemed to hinge on a misunderstanding about the function of Multi-Academy Trusts, or MATs. The situation was framed as 'us and them', neglecting both the value and commitment that come from being part of one. My first goal was to encourage everyone to see themselves as members of a family of schools.

To make progress we had to demonstrate this as a trust leadership team first. So, we built the team's capacity, honing their

individual specialisms and drawing on their experience and regional knowledge. Together, we developed our inclusive vision: to provide excellent and equitable opportunities so everyone can flourish.

Shared openness

For us, creating a successful trust culture has meant openly sharing our data, development plans and audit outcomes with our whole extended leadership team (ELT). Doing so exposes our wider vulnerabilities, but it also ensures we can offer the appropriate level of support or intervention where it is needed most.

None of this was easy or natural to the trust at first, but it was critical to creating a sense that every school's problem is for the whole family to solve.

Shared endeavour

This is reinforced by running six ELT network sessions per year which focus on development of trust culture, leadership culture and the shared voice of leaders in shaping strategic direction. Affording opportunity for visible governance, trustees are invited to join these sessions for shared evaluation of the trust development plan and to hear first-hand from school leaders.

And it is further reinforced by our high quality 'all through, all role' CPD offer, led by experts within the trust



“ We have advantages over geographically challenged trusts

or facilitated externally if required. We have invested in coaching development and moved away from a 'performance management' to a 'personal development' approach with personalised success criteria and a shared single objective 'to flourish in my role' for every colleague.

In addition, ELT members have a 'broader impact' success criterion to evaluate their contribution to the trust or the sector more widely – from trust-wide residentials to leading and delivering NPQs to cohorts beyond the trust.

Shared resource

Considered centralisation has fast-tracked our collective causes. Our central team of experts support our directors with a 'partner layer' of teaching and learning, HR and finance. They work directly in schools and help us to know our school teams better so we can utilise strengths and expertise across the trust.

We've centralised IT services and invested in key specialist roles including leads on SEND, safeguarding, church schools and CPD. But centralisation should support – not replace – local knowledge and expertise. To that end, our local governor committees

have direct access to a governance lead and each school has a governance professional to provide advice and clerking.

Shared community

We have advantages over geographically challenged trusts. We are using those advantages to establish ourselves as community hubs with a commitment to all pupils, staff, families and communities and focusing on common challenges such as attendance, SEND and mental health.

That work goes beyond our own schools. We assist local schools who are not in our trust, for example by providing headteacher capacity to an 'inadequate' maintained school, working alongside maintained schools in the Wiltshire cluster, and opening our leadership and CPD offers to these schools at no cost.

Beyond collective efficacy

With localism and community at the heart of our offer, we provide so much more than mere collective efficacy. There is, across the system, a collective effervescence in trusts like ours. In the national effort to define what a strong trust is or might be, we should not reduce our criteria in a way that excludes many thriving or indeed flourishing ones.

Opinion

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LEILA MACTAVISH

Head of teacher training,
Ark Schools

Diversity is key to tackling the recruitment crisis

Who we recruit, how we equip them and the routes towards qualification must all be broadened to attract and retain the workforce we need, explains Leila MacTavish

Training teachers has never been easy, but with one-third of new recruits now leaving the profession within five years despite the introduction of the early career framework (ECF), it can feel like the sector is still missing a trick with regards to how it treats its newest talent.

Ark Teacher Training was established in 2013 and has been a part of the rise of school-based training models. We have grown significantly, not just in terms of the number of recruits we can train (up from 50 to 200 per year), but also in the areas we work too. Initially, our trainees were based in Ark's 39 schools in London, Birmingham, Portsmouth and Hastings.

Now, we partner with other trusts and schools. In recent years, our hybrid training has been delivered to trainees in schools across the country, including the Isle of Wight, Torquay, Birmingham, Bradford and Middlesbrough. In fact, this year we are working with as many schools outside the Ark network as within it.

We have also been part of the movement to get the best evidence-

informed practice into schools. Our team of 24 subject and phase specialist tutors, many of whom are former senior leaders and headteachers, are passionate about equipping trainees with the most effective practice from day one. We continue to work to build the evidence base around what effective initial teacher training (ITT) looks like.

This year, all our ATT trainees have the exciting opportunity to get involved in teacher training research with Ambition Institute. The project, led by Dr Sam Sims, will look at the importance of feedback in the ITT curriculum and behaviour management.

At heart we are a group of teachers, so we never rest on our laurels. We know we must work harder to get the right people into the classroom and help them stay there. We are pushing to reflect the changes we want to see in the makeup of the wider teaching population.

This year is our most diverse cohort yet, with 38 per cent of trainees coming from ethnic backgrounds traditionally under-represented in classrooms. Thirty-one percent of trainees have additional needs, neurodiversity or disabilities. We are also delighted that eight former Ark students are training with us this year.

In 2020, Ark Teacher Training set a goal to ground our trainee curriculum in anti-bias practices. Our curriculum includes sessions about unconscious bias and its impact on high expectations, teacher radar and interactions with parents and caregivers. Resources tackle deficit-based thinking and prompts for how to create more inclusive classroom resources. We also strive to implement structures, policies and practices with inclusive

methods for ourselves and our trainees.

We know that being an adaptive teacher is part of being a great practitioner, so we have changed our teacher evaluation framework to reflect this. We place trainees in special education as well as mainstream settings, giving them invaluable experience that will develop their practice in all schools.

This year, we are thrilled to be liaising more closely with special education experts, designing workshops aligned with our areas of intensive training, and working with children with specific needs. This will support trainees to further reflect on how to be adaptive practitioners as their knowledge and skills develop.

Importantly, we must also work to remove financial barriers to joining the profession. We know there are people who would love to become teachers but simply can't afford to train. Recent changes to funding and a preference for the apprenticeship route have not been without their challenges.

We have been pleased to diversify entrance routes, but we have concerns. The funding imbalance for apprentices, the additional costs for assessment, and the apprenticeship regulations create additional burdens and barriers for both the apprentice provider and the participant.

That said, we are determined to find new ways that work for schools and trainees to fund and deliver training.

There's much still to do, but the progress we have made in the past ten years makes me hopeful about the future. If we can continue to attract and equip a diverse group of committed recruits into the profession, the sector will be in safe hands.

“ 38 per cent of trainees come from under-represented backgrounds ”



Opinion

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BUKKY YUSUF

Senior leader and science lead, Edith Kay School

Aspiring leaders should be taught the 3 Rs of inner work

Too much focus on operational skill neglects inner work that is fundamental to succeeding (and remaining) in leadership, says Bukky Yusuf

I was already in my first senior role before I realised that preparing for leadership is as much (or more) about inner work as it is about what you do. From conversations with others since then, it seems to me that every school leader comes to understand the importance of inner narrative, and yet it isn't in any of the training we offer to prospective leaders.

This critical insight only became apparent to me when my former headteacher answered a question I asked about my new role with her own question: "How do you see yourself as a leader?"

Our model for leadership preparation focuses almost entirely on the practical aspects of whole-school responsibility. We ask candidates about experience. We give 'in-tray' exercises at interview. But do we ask them who they are as leaders? And do we prepare them to answer that question?

Unless we squarely and regularly confront that question, we simply revert to default behaviours and attitudes whenever we are under pressure (which is almost always). Doing the 'inner work' of leadership helps us to understand the factors

that shape these repeating patterns – and to move beyond them.

Of the many ways to frame our thinking about our thinking about ourselves as leaders, the three most fruitful lines of enquiry I've found are in respect of readiness, resilience, and reflection.

Readiness and mindset

There are external limitations to our work, but much of what holds us back is in our own minds. This can be a barrier we've raised because of past experience, a self-limiting belief we've internalised from those around us, or simply a lack of knowledge about the problem we are facing.

Recognising these self-imposed limitations is the first step to overcoming them. How well we do this is down to leadership mindset. It starts with recognising emotions in yourself and others, and then finding ways to move past those positively.

For example, fear of failure can be a powerful motivator, but not necessarily towards the right solution. A far safer bet is to be clear about your abilities and current limitations, and to draw on expertise from your teams and networks. This is not failure. Your teams and networks are as much your strengths as your own knowledge and capability.



“ Much of what holds us back is in our own minds

Ask yourself:

- What am I feeling and why?
- What is the problem I am trying to solve and who can help me?
- What will the right kind of solution look and feel like to me?

Resilience and overcoming obstacles

It's easy to get bogged down in operational matters. Resilience depends on reframing your thinking to make sense of what a particular situation is telling you – about your previous decisions, your approach or the nature of the challenge. Only then can you work out what to do differently.

Inspired by Andrew Gibbons, I keep a learning reflection log which has helped me to move past difficult feelings clouding my thoughts and actions. Getting emotions down on paper is cathartic, especially when you feel you can't talk to anyone about a situation you're dealing with. It then frees your mind up to look at alternatives more objectively.

Ask yourself:

- How has this situation come about and how have I contributed?
- What is stopping us from moving

forward and am I in the way?

- What will the right kind of solution look and feel like to others?

Reflection and impact

The previous two steps will help you to solve problems, but on their own they won't help you to improve. Reflecting upon our leadership impact is vital to helping you meet future challenges, but perhaps most importantly for your own wellbeing.

Ask yourself:

- What challenges have I met and what have I learned?
- What have my team achieved and learned?
- Are we empowering each other and are we ready for the next challenge?

There are other ways to succeed in school leadership that involve none of this inner work, but none are as sustainable, compassionate or inclusive as turning up as your genuine and best self. We do a disservice to all new leaders when we ask them to step into the role without understanding that.

Opinion

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



CHRIS ZARRAGA

Director, Schools North East

Specialist settings can't solve all of mainstream's problems

The north east's schools are bearing the brunt of a national crisis of unmet needs and insufficient support, explains Chris Zarraga

Schools in the north east, and across other parts of the country, are seeing significant increases in children and young people with profound additional needs. Adding to an already large backlog, this need is increasingly going unmet, hampering educational outcomes for students.

Often, this unmet need is leading to rising rates of permanent exclusions. In 2021/22, the north east had the highest rates of permanent exclusions. Every north east local authority had a permanent exclusion rate above the national rate of 0.08. Redcar and Cleveland had the highest rate in the country at 0.31.

To solve this crisis, we need strategic solutions that understand our local context and that confront the underlying issues that impact so heavily on areas like ours.

Our sector is dealing with pre-existing problems that have been hugely exacerbated by Covid and the cost-of-living crisis – problems that will continue to accelerate until we get proper support. They include attendance, behaviour, readiness for stage, and teacher recruitment and

retention. And then there's mental health, made worse by the collapse of services around schools, leaving staff desperately trying to deliver beyond their remit and expertise amid ever-more stretched budgets.

These issues hit our most disadvantaged communities the hardest. This adds fuel to the fire when looking at the behaviour and complex needs of pupils in both mainstream and alternative provision (AP) schools.

An overcrowded system

As we reach the halfway point of the autumn term, the system is already working at capacity. APs are

reporting a lack of places – a situation that would normally only be reached in the spring term.

Far too often, APs are being treated as specialist provision, being named on education, health, and care plans (EHCPs). But these schools are designed to provide temporary places to prepare students to return to mainstream settings. With resources stretched, it is becoming increasingly difficult for them to fulfil that aim.

Instead, a lack of places in special schools and inadequate resources and support available to mainstream schools means they are being expected to provide permanent places, without the necessary expertise to support referred students.

This is a national problem, often highlighted in efforts by the National Network of Special Schools (NNoSS). But it's a problem that's particularly bad here. Between the academic years of 2012/13 and 2021/22, there was a 145.43 per cent increase in SEND students with an EHCP or statement being suspended from school in our region.

It's a devastating statistic, but it should come as no surprise when

we have been offered little by way of a long term, strategic solution to prevent the structure from complete collapse.

A road paved with good intentions

These challenges are only likely to increase as more children and young people are not able to access the support they need in the right settings. The whole SEND system urgently needs a strategic plan to address the increased need since the pandemic, as well as the rising expectations of schools that predate Covid.

Now, we only have strategic intentions. Without a plan ensuring joined-up thinking across the different sectors that support children and young people, it will become increasingly difficult if not impossible to ensure students have real pathways to success.

However, the solution cannot simply be larger specialist settings. The system should ensure students, where possible, return to mainstream settings and prevent students needing to be referred to special and AP schools in the first place.

Mainstream schools can learn a lot from APs, but without a long-term, calculated plan for either we can expect more and more stress on a system that's already close to breaking point. We need a holistic approach that works to halt the rise in exclusions and supports the rising number of pupils with complex needs.

The answer to a mainstream school's problems can't always be found in an AP setting. The sooner this is understood, the better it will be for the whole sector.

However, we can't reach this conclusion on intention alone. Mainstream, specialist and AP schools all require more resources and expertise to deliver that ambition.

“ Six weeks in, the system is already working at capacity ”



Solutions

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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RACHEL BOSTWICK

Senior consultant, Carnegie Centre of Excellence for Mental Health in Schools, Leeds Beckett University

Five tips for emotionally based school avoidance

A child-centred approach is key to reducing EBSA, says Rachel Bostwick

Asha is a Year 7 pupil whose school attendance has become increasingly sporadic. She often complains of headaches on Sunday nights and by Monday she's in tears insisting she stays at home. Asha's parents have tried everything to encourage her to go to school, with little success.

Asha is a fictional pupil, but the experience of emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) is very real and it's one important reason why the rate of persistent absence in schools has doubled since before the pandemic.

The challenge for schools

The issues behind EBSA can vary hugely, from a child struggling with schoolwork to changing family circumstances, bullying or even complicated journeys to school. Its complexity makes it much more challenging for schools to address. While whole-school strategies for supporting pupils' mental health and wellbeing remain a significant priority, reducing EBSA requires a more tailored approach.

Here are five key steps schools can take to help pupils like Asha get back into the classroom more regularly.

Be pupil-centred

Children who've been persistently absent can become more anxious over time about missed learning or re-engaging with friends. So, the sooner a back-to-school plan can be put in place, the better the outcome.

Involving the child is key. Encourage them to talk about how they feel and share their thoughts and concerns about being in school. With more clarity on the barriers, schools can shape personalised plans to give children a sense of control over what's happening and what's coming next.

Allow for soft landings

Small steps can reduce anxiety in the long term, so allow pupils to explore different options for starting the school day. Rather than launching straight back into the busy classroom, they might prefer to arrive in a quiet room and complete activities for their favourite subjects first with a familiar adult present.

Once they're comfortable with a routine, build resilience by placing children into small groups, changing the room or encouraging them to start the day working on different subjects.

Reassure

Knowing they will see a friendly face when they get to school can really



“ EBSA's complexity makes it challenging to address

help children struggling with EBSA to feel happier about coming in. Find out if they have a particularly good relationship with a teacher, TA or someone in the school office. Where possible, arrange for the staff member to spend time with the child in the morning or during breaks.

Being able to chat openly with a trusted adult about how they are feeling or what's happening for them could ease their anxiety and smooth the transition between home and school.

Be flexible

Being more flexible about when a child comes to school can improve attendance over time.

A child concerned about the busy school day may feel less anxious coming in later or earlier when the playground is quieter, or to attend a morning or afternoon session instead of the whole day.

If timetabling allows, create the environment where children feel happier and more confident about spending more time in school. It's the first step to longer days.

Support parents

Parental support is critical to getting children back into school so assess what help families might need too.

A regular workshop could help parents better understand the impact of absence on their child's emotional and academic development. The chance to chat with other families reduces isolation and helps parents to find effective ways to encourage their children into school.

Schools can invite parents to spend time in school too, familiarising them with daily routines so they can better support their child from home.

With child-centred strategies in place, schools, parents and pupils can work together to reduce EBSA, improve attendance and give children such as Asha the academic, social and emotional support they need to succeed.

For more information, download your free copy of *How to tackle student anxiety* [here](#)

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THE REVIEW

EQUITY IN EDUCATION: LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD OF LEARNING

Author: Lee Elliot Major and Emily Briant

Publisher: John Catt

Publication date: 6 October 2023

ISBN: 1398387444

Reviewer: Sammy Wright, Head of school, Southmoor Academy

As a teacher, the phrase that has haunted my dreams is 'making a difference'. I say haunted, because the horror of it is how dispiritingly robust the inequalities in education are. The 'disadvantage gap' is persistent and durable throughout decades of educational reform – and throughout the myriad variations of educational policy the world over.

One of the many sharp vignettes in this excellent book is the grim inability of Nicola Sturgeon's SNP to shift the dial in Scottish education, and the sharp decline in rhetoric from wishing to "eradicate" the gap as part of a "defining mission" in 2015 to the concession eight years later that this was in fact "exceptionally difficult, if not impossible".

But to state the starkness of the problem is not the same as admitting defeat. The joy of teaching is that you do sometimes win out. We all hold those victories close: those students who made it against the odds, those moments where possibility opens up in new and exciting ways.

And in *Equity in Education*, Lee Elliot-Major and Emily Briant have written a bold statement of the need to make that battle for equity central to our practice, in the classroom, as well as in the way we lead and manage our schools and trusts.

Central to this is the way that Elliot Major (a key figure in the study and promotion of equality of opportunity in education both through leading the Sutton Trust and in his role as professor of social mobility at Exeter university) and Briant (a teacher, educational researcher and leader on sociocultural and

economic disadvantage in school) make a persuasive case for steering a middle course between two unhelpful but understandable positions.

At one extreme, there are those who say that schools cannot possibly compensate for the impact of wider society on children, while at the other end we are told that any accounting for the impact of deprivation on education is simply "the soft bigotry of low expectations".

Quite rightly though, the authors plant their flag in the "messier in-between". They don't claim to have a magic bullet, but as they point out, the way disadvantage was magnified by the period of education disrupted by pandemic lockdowns illustrates perfectly the difference between imperfectly battling for equity within school and surrendering children entirely to the vast differentials of the home environment.

So what do we do?

The book is helpfully broken down into an introductory overview, followed by two more practical sections containing specific advice. One is aimed at the classroom teacher and the other at school leaders. That in itself is a marker of the authors' thoughtful approach. The theoretical and the practical are held in well-judged balance, and the attention to what you can do at all stages of your career is refreshing.

Elliot Major has form in writing concise and well-directed practical advice garnered from a detailed understanding of the research. After all, he was a co-author (with Steve Higgins) of the *Teaching and Learning Toolkit*, which he followed up with *What Works*. Like those,

BOOK

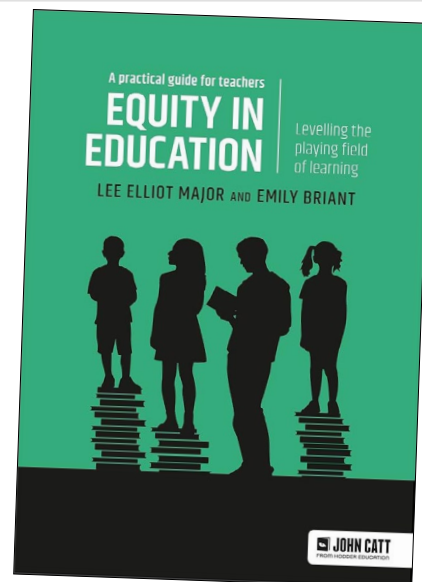
TV

FILM

RADIO

EVENT

RESOURCE



Equity in Education comes with neatly digested tips and a central basic thread of four principles: equity not equality, capacity not deficit thinking, deep not shallow relationships, and multiple not singular talents.

Briant's classroom experience also comes through strongly, particularly in her description of the daunting first years of a teacher's working life and her positive assertions of the impact you can have as an early-career teacher.

The final section, looking beyond the UK to some of the approaches across the world, is an immensely useful brief guide to the deep complexity of the challenge. It alerts us to the ways in which time and again what seems like an answer proves to be contingent upon the circumstances of the society that surround it.

But we cannot give up, because in an imperfect world any shift towards equity in education is a major victory – and the best possible way of making a difference.



Rating



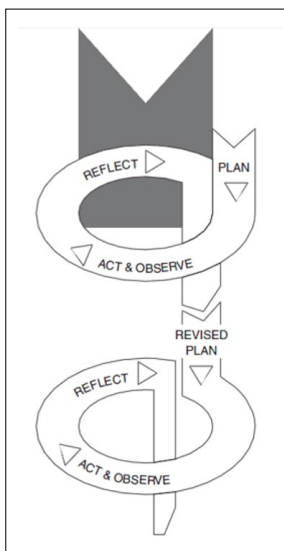
Dan Morrow
CEO, Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust

This week has been one of revelations – and not just that many colleagues seem to be have had a two-week half term.

The Covid Inquiry has confirmed what most of us suspected: ego and hubris dominated the approach to schools, ambition exceeded ability, and what we all felt was the lash of a whip placed in the wrong hands. The disclosure of private messages and their explosive content has reignited the feelings of anger, disbelief and incredulity felt by many in education during and after the lockdowns.

RESPECTFUL SCEPTICISM

As the reporters who were in charge of holding the government to account all wring their hands at the revelations of their failure to do their job, this glorious blog by Claire Harley introduces the concept of respectful scepticism – something they probably should have displayed more of.



But this is no blog about politics. Grounded in the classroom, Harley (inspired by discussion with the inimitable Carly Waterman) posits the need to temper our professional curiosity.

I have often seen this in posts on X (OK, I give in) where people will use the “scout not soldier” phrase to show this form of engagement. Reflecting on educational research’s potential and limitations, Harley offers practical and real-life examples of how tweaks are needed to accommodate context. While addressing the “niggly bits” may not be the glamorous, conference-bookng way to edu-celebrity status, she argues that it will be what makes the real difference for the children we serve.

In the weary-worn debate of autonomy versus standardisation, she makes the clear and compelling case for agency: we follow the best bets but we tailor them based on our individual and collective professional expertise. I loved it.

POSTCODE PRIVILEGE

Speaking of agency, this excellent blog from the Sutton Trust is a call for us all to look at our admissions system. Detailed research shows that the 500 highest-performing comprehensive schools had a lower-than-national-average proportion of children eligible for free school meals – lower than the average for their catchment areas too.

Partly this is explained by the 2017 research that showed that a typical house in the catchment area of a top-500 school cost £45,700 more than the average house in the same local authority. I have no doubt that will have widened since, representing a significant barrier to lower-income catchment schools’ ability to offer the same opportunities.

Perhaps more worrying is the failure of these “top” schools to see that the social selection that garners them this advantage is not merely reflecting inequity, but driving it. The blog does offer a way through, which depends upon casting a critical eye on admissions, genuinely committing to equity, and focusing on social justice as well as social mobility.



Admissions policies can’t be there to allow the few to climb the ladder when so many can’t even get on the first rung.

ACCEPTING THE UNACCEPTABLE

And on the theme of structural injustice, this deeply personal and powerful blog by John Tomsett in response to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report, *Destitution in the UK 2023*, rightly asks why we have become comfortable with so many people not having enough. Nearly 4 million people, including 1 million children, experienced destitution in the UK in 2022.

John recounts his mother’s walk of shame to put shopping back on the shelf, an experience that resonates with my own upbringing. We seem to believe that poverty is the result of some form of moral lack or fecklessness. Perhaps it’s easier to dismiss destitution from a position of privilege if we can view the distasteful as wasteful.

“They can afford to have their nails done.” “He smokes.” “She has an iPhone.” There has historically been, and appears to pervade, a snidy and sneering approach to the poor as if it weren’t a moral stain on our collective conscience, living as we do in one of the richest countries in the world. Tomsett isn’t just writing here: he is organising, coordinating and using his voice, mind and hands to be part of the difference for his community. Are you?



Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts

The Knowledge

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



Why is reducing teacher workload so hard?

**Kerry Martin, Research Manager,
NFER**

The government made workload reduction a priority in its 2019 Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy, and has since produced practical resources for schools – such as the school workload reduction toolkit. In spite of this, high workload continues to be the main factor causing teachers to consider leaving the profession in England.

In response, the government also recently announced a new workload reduction taskforce to support its ambition to knock five hours from the current average of 48.7 hours per week for teachers within three years.

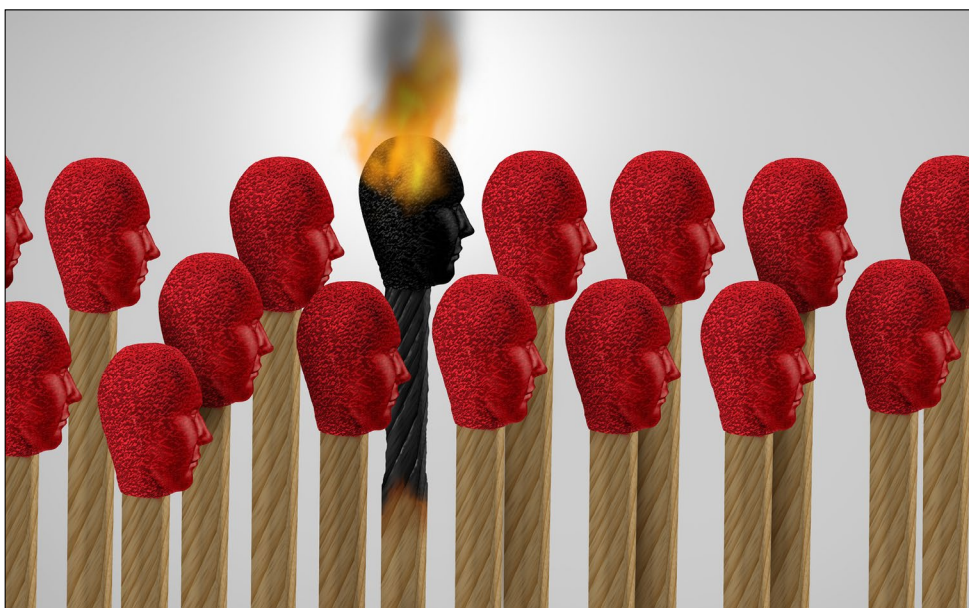
We have seen some recent improvement in reducing teacher workload, yet teacher working hours remain higher than their peers outside of teaching and this does not seem to be for want of effort from school leaders.

Our new study, commissioned by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and published today, finds that most schools are already using a wide range of approaches to tackle the problem, to the extent that there are very few strategies in the workload reduction toolkit that many schools have not already implemented.

Most commonly, this involves giving teachers at least the statutory time for planning and marking, providing access to existing schemes of work and lesson plans, using efficient methods of marking and feedback, and encouraging collaborative lesson planning.

Although many schools are using technology and software solutions for a range of administrative tasks, we didn't find much evidence that they're using Artificial Intelligence (AI) for workload reduction – at least not yet. There is therefore some potential here, as identified by the secretary of state recently, and which the government has backed this week with a £2 million investment in Oak National Academy.

In many ways, schools' efforts are paying off. We found a positive connection between schools that have more workload reduction strategies



and the teachers' views of their workload manageability, autonomy and job satisfaction. However, while many schools seem to be doing a great deal to reduce teacher workload, teachers told us some of the main drivers of increased workload come from outside the school – primarily from the government and Ofsted – which they have little power to influence.

Teachers also said that workload pressures are being exacerbated by an increase in behavioural incidents and a decline in external support services available to schools (especially for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities). Perhaps unsurprisingly, schools identified insufficient funding/staff capacity as the top barrier to workload reduction.

The workload reduction taskforce will make recommendations to government, Ofsted and school and trust leaders in spring 2024. In developing their recommendations, we hope the taskforce members will consider some of the challenges highlighted in this research with regards to tackling this pernicious problem.

First, any new workload reduction interventions may in fact add to teacher workload, at least in the short term. This is because implementing new strategies takes time. Guidance on which strategies

are more likely to be impactful would help schools prioritise and allocate their resources effectively.

Second, there are particular aspects of teachers' work which they don't want to give up. They consider these to be integral to the quality of teaching and learning. Key examples of this include the time teachers spend planning lessons and communicating with parents.

Finally, school leadership is key to setting the culture of making workload manageable. Teachers gave us examples of leaders either adding to or reducing the intensity of external workload pressures. They also mentioned the importance of flexibility for managing their work. Even small examples were appreciated, such as being allowed to do some administrative tasks at home or leaving school early to attend their own child's sports day.

While the new taskforce gets stuck into these issues, we will continue to provide evidence on the areas of teachers' work they would most like to see made more manageable. We encourage school leaders to make further inroads and keep an eye on promising developments in areas such as AI.

However, tackling external pressures on schools so that teachers can focus on the job of teaching must be a government priority.

Week in

Westminster

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

MONDAY

Week in Westminster's curiosity was piqued last month when Gillian Keegan said she was going to "ban" mobile phones in schools* a year after her government concluded such a ban was unnecessary because most schools already had policies in place.

Keegz told LBC radio the change of heart was down to "requests from the sector, people saying it's helpful to have government say this is a universal approach".

When pressed again she said "a number" had said "it would be a helpful thing to bite the bullet now".

We asked the DfE for the evidence and was told Keegz "visited several schools and held regular, informal conversations with school leaders, trust executives, teachers, and pupils" during the summer term.

"During the course of these visits and conversations, the subject of mobile phones has been raised and discussed."

In September, she also hosted a roundtable discussion with experts to discuss the impact of mobiles in schools.

However, the DfE told us: "In order to ensure that participants were able to openly discuss ongoing research, prior notice was given that no formal minutes would be taken."

How handy!

*In reality, non-statutory guidance was updated suggesting schools ban mobiles.

The government today announced a £2 million investment in producing AI tools to help cut teacher workload. Obviously ministers chose the country's best edtech



organisations that have been at the forefront of leading developments in AI...

Err, doesn't appear so. It chucked the cash (as part of a grant, so without an open tender) to the arms-length body Oak National Academy which, according to emails we've seen, launched its experimental AI tools ... 29 days ago.

TUESDAY:

Not only have RAAC-affected schools had to deal with pupils learning at home (again) or bussed to other schools, the government now admits that installing portable classrooms to get kids back to school will mean "some temporary loss of playing fields may be unavoidable".

New guidance published today explains planning laws have been relaxed for two years so schools in this situation

don't need to get approval to install temporary classrooms.

Other useful advice includes that portable classrooms "that blend reasonably well into their surroundings, due to careful consideration of size and colour schemes, will have less visual impact ... and may be more acceptable to local communities".

BRB, just setting up a camouflage portable classroom company.

We know from Keegan's social media feeds that she loves a good promo photo or video about #TeamKeegan. But after an invitation to today's education "hackathon", we got to see just how big the Keegz Entourage has become.

She rocked up at the offices of Faculty AI, in east London, with multiple press officers, bag-carriers, special advisers – and her own photographer. It probably cost the taxpayer a couple of quid, but look at the lovely results (see image).

PPS: Did you know Keegan used to work in business?!

WEDNESDAY:

Forever Schools Minister Nick Gibb was on top form at a House of Lords reception to celebrate the work of the Talent Foundry, a charity set up to connect youngsters to employers and higher education opportunities.

When introducing the new organisations that have signed up to support the charity, he welcomed the "ever exciting" Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales "of which I am a fellow". Lots of chuckles from the assembled onlookers.



Haberdashers' Academies Trust South



Director of Finance

Haberdashers' Academies Trust South London

- **Job Type Permanent**
- **Salary/Remuneration £100,000 - £110,000 per annum**
- **Closing Date Monday 20th November 2023**

Haberdashers' Academies Trust South is a multi-academy trust with five primary and four secondary schools in and around south-east London. Our mission is for all of our children and young people to be successful at school so that they flourish in their lives. We will only be able to achieve this ambition if we are a great employer who can attract, retain and develop great staff.

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We are seeking a Director of Finance with vision, experience and strategic insight. Someone who understands the need for maximum impact, whilst remaining in budget, and who remains focused on achieving our strategic priorities. These ensure success for every child and young person in our care. You will be joining Haberdashers' Academies Trust South, an organisation deeply committed to excellence. Working alongside our other senior leaders, you will be an integral part of the Trust Executive. We will in turn offer you the resources and support you need in order to be successful.

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To arrange an informal conversation about the role, contact our advising consultants at GatenbySanderson by email: habsdirectoroffinance@gatenbysanderson.com



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Closing date: Sunday 5th November 2023

Short Listing: Monday 6th November 2023

Interview: w/c TBC



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