



Has Nick Gibb won the education argument?

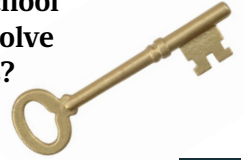


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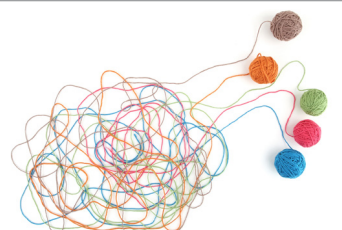
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Does a secure school hold the key to solve our prison crisis?



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The story we're not allowed to tell



SCHOOLS
WEEK

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Silenced by legal intimidation

As we've written many times, the system that oversees the education of children with special needs is broken.

The government itself has admitted that, and it's why ministers are introducing major reforms to improve things for our most vulnerable children and their families.

Too many are let down. Currently, we have parents raiding their own savings, battling local authorities tooth and nail in court for the support they are legally entitled to.

Rising need has surpassed what many councils say they can afford. Many have huge, multi-million pound deficits.

So the amount of taxpayer money the government is paying consultants to roll out reforms, to improve a system on the verge of bankruptcy, is hugely important.

We obtained the day rates being paid to consultants after the government failed to redact their contract.

We planned to run the story, but PA

Consulting – which has a £7.6 million contract to run the SEND reform programme – said the information was confidential. If we published, they would pursue an injunction and seek recovery of legal costs if they won.

Confidential information can be published if it is in the public interest, but the bar is very high.

The legal costs associated with injunctions are extortionate. We strongly believe the information is in the public interest. But as a small publisher, we could not take the financial risk.

Unfortunately, we have been silenced by legal intimidation.

But by reporting details of the case, we have been able to raise an important point – publishing public interest journalism is getting harder and more expensive. Press freedom is being slowly chipped away.

Our core mission is to publish the full facts for our readers. We have failed this time. For that we apologise.

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How we were stopped from revealing SEND consultants' pay...

FREDDIE WHITTAKER & SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SCHOOLSWEEK

EXCLUSIVE

Schools Week has been “gagged” from publishing details of the day rates paid to consultants who will test proposed reforms of the SEND system.

PA Consulting, which has a £7.6 million government contract to oversee a pilot of the changes, threatened to take out an injunction if we published the information, warning it would seek recovery of legal costs “likely run to tens of thousands of pounds”.

The information came to light last month after the DfE accidentally published unredacted documents relating to its contract with the company, one of the country's biggest consultancy firms, which posted a revenue of nearly £800 million last year.

It removed the documents when it realised its mistake, but the papers uploaded in their place were not properly redacted and still revealed the rates.

Schools Week planned to publish this information, but backed down after the legal threat.

Shane Mann, the managing director of Schools Week's publisher LSECT, said: “While we could have challenged the injunction, the stark reality is that we are a small business up against a giant.

“We must carefully choose our battles, mindful of the substantial resources required to wage such a fight.”

He added: “Our core mission is to deliver the complete facts to our readers. Unfortunately, in this case we've been silenced by legal intimidation.”

Funding for the pilot makes up more than 10 per cent of the £70 million currently pledged to implement the reforms, which were announced earlier this year.

Matt Keer, a SEND specialist at the Special Needs Jungle website, said the changes were “supposed to make the SEND system more transparent and less adversarial. It's hard to see how gagging journalists will help that happen”.

“Hard-pressed families and schools are both struggling to secure the support their children need. They need reassurance that consultants are not charging obscene rates.”

The government itself has admitted there are “significant issues” with the SEND system.



Currently, many families must fight in the courts just to access support their children are legally entitled to.

Steven Wright, a single parent of two children with SEND, has spent up to £15,000 on tribunals.

He said parents had to fight “tooth and nail” for low-cost help – “the things that cost hardly anything, and yet the government is spending millions on consultants”.

Campaigners for transparency are also critical of the legal threat.

“At a time when there is considerable public concern over the availability of provisions for children with SEND and their families, it is beyond comprehension that the media ... cannot publish information that is freely available on a government website,” said Dawn Alford, the executive director of the Society of Editors.

Nik Williams, the policy and campaigns officer at Index on Censorship, said he was “increasingly concerned that injunctions can prevent public watchdogs from holding power to account”.

Despite the decision not to publish the rates, we can reveal that the £7.6 million is due to be paid to PA and the consortium it is working with. This includes iMPower, the Council for Disabled Children and Olive Academies.

The payment is for the time of 20 consultants. If each consultant was charged out for the same amount of time and at the same rate, it would work out as £380,000 per consultant over a two-year period. In practice, though, rates will vary, as

will the amount of days worked.

OpenDemocracy reported in May that PA Consulting consultants were paid up to £2,500 a day to provide NHS England with support for its Covid vaccination programme.

A spokesperson for PA Consulting said the contract “was awarded under a competitive tender” and the rates for the consortium members “were benchmarked via the government procurement process to ensure they were competitive”.

In a legal letter from PA's law firm, Baker Botts (UK) LLP, Schools Week was told the day rate information was “highly commercially sensitive and is confidential”.

The publication of this information “would in all likelihood bring the information to the attention of PA's competitors and would, accordingly, place PA at a very serious competitive disadvantage in the marketplace in relation to future tenders worth many millions of pounds”.

The firm demanded a guarantee we would not publish the day rates, otherwise “we will have no option but to approach the courts for an urgent injunction to restrain publication”.

The costs of obtaining such an injunction “would likely run to tens of thousands of pounds and PA will request that the court make the usual order that those costs be paid by you”.

A DfE spokesperson said the unredacted documents were uploaded due to “human error”. They have reported the data breach.

NEWS: CURRICULUM

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Publishers get go-ahead for judicial review of Oak

SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER

@SCHOOLSWEEK

Bodies representing edtech and publishing firms have been granted permission by a high court judge to proceed with their judicial review of the Oak National Academy.

The British Educational Suppliers Association and the Publishers Association launched judicial review proceedings in November.

They said establishing Oak as an arms-length government curriculum body would pose an “existential risk” to their sector.

The claimants say the academy amounts to an “unlawful state subsidy”.

In the High Court order, the judge Rory Dunlop KC said the argument over whether Oak “is an economic actor” was an “arguable point of law suitable for a substantive hearing”.

In a statement, the claimants said a judicial review had “always been a route of last resort”, but claimed the government was “disregarding the concerns of authors, edtech innovators, publishers, schools, teachers, unions, and many others across the school sector”.

“We are left with no other option to protect the autonomy of teachers, the experiences of learners, and the UK’s world-class education resources’ sector.”

High Court papers state the Publishers Association estimates Oak’s impact on their members will amount to a more than £60 million hit across English, maths and science resources alone.

The claimants also told the court that “major” investment levels of “well over” £100 million were at risk of being “undermined”.

The government’s plans for Oak were “an unprecedented and unevidenced intervention that risks causing irreparable damage to the school sector as we know it”.

Oak was handed £43 million funding for three years. It will also get up to another £2 million to build AI lesson planning tools.

This was “soaking up” public money that could “otherwise be given to schools directly,” the publishers said. “It creates a one-size-fits-all state publisher that promotes a single curriculum, controlled by the ministers of the day.

“No existing provider can compete fairly with this. It will undo decades of work by publishers,



tech innovators and others whose expert workforce have created our existing rich range of world-leading resources.”

The National Education Union was originally an interested party in the case, but appears to have withdrawn.

Documents submitted to the high court state the full business case for turning Oak into an arms-length body developed “during the decision-making process”.

That means neither the claimants nor court can “be sure” they have the available documents on which the decision to approve the quango was made.

The Department for Education had recognised there may be “some negative impacts” on commercial providers.

But the claimants said this was problematic because the conclusion was based on the impact Oak had on the commercial edtech sector during 2020 to 2022 – before it became a quango. During that time, funding averaged £1 million a school term, compared with £4.8 million now.

The impact analysis also did not take into account the “constrained public finances” post 2022.

The DfE has disputed the claims that Oak was an “economic actor”, arguing it provided a “public service, free of charge, by a public body”.

The claimants pointed to a case in 2003 when the government proposed spending £150 million of licence fee funds on creating BBC Digital Curriculum.

After an investigation, the European Commission ruled the free service did amount to “economic activity” and “comprised state aid”.

A spokesperson for Oak said it remained “totally focused on serving the needs of teachers, pupils and schools. They greatly value the support of Oak.

“Our independent evaluation shows that exploring evidence-informed curriculum models, and having high-quality resources alongside them, reduces teacher workload and improves expertise, wellbeing and retention.”

An evaluation last month found far fewer teachers now used the online lessons, with most saying it had not cut their workload.

However, those using the website did report working fewer hours than those who did not.

The Oak spokesperson added it wanted to continue to see a thriving market, “and we work with a range of commercial providers to develop and improve our resources.

“Our research has found teachers don’t use Oak exclusively – instead mixing with other providers – and our resources will always be entirely optional.”

NEWS: ADMISSIONS

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Brighton hopes admissions change will 'lessen inequality'

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

Plans for schools in Brighton to prioritise places for the poorest children will boost social mobility by weakening the link between geography and admissions, sector leaders say.

Brighton & Hove City Council is consulting on proposals to give secondary school admissions priority to pupils on free school meals (FSM), after looked-after children. Both groups would get precedence over prospective pupils within a catchment area.

It would apply to all local authority schools, but there would be a cap based on the average number of disadvantaged pupils across the area.

Council chiefs believe the move will help to lessen "stubborn levels of inequality".

Academies and any voluntary-aided schools are exempt.

Louis Hodge, the associate director for school system and performance of the Education Policy Institute, said the move "could give such pupils access to highly sought after schools they may not otherwise have had. It would also help weaken the link between geography and admissions that can often be a barrier to social mobility."

Council papers show only looked-after children and those with "compelling medical or other exceptional reasons for attending the school" will have a higher level of priority.

University of Bristol professor Simon Burgess said having FSM so high up the list would give the changes "bite" and make them "effective".

A study he led earlier this year found just 170, or 5 per cent of the roughly 3,250 secondaries in England, prioritised disadvantaged pupils, although schools have been allowed to do so since 2014. Many of those using the criteria are grammars, whose admissions also hinge on passing the 11-plus.

Burgess's report said this meant only 42 schools "meaningfully" used the criteria.

Brighton is thought to be the first to make such changes council-wide.

Councillors voted to launch a public



consultation on the changes earlier this week. It will take place over the next six weeks, with a meeting to consider the results scheduled for the new year.

Cllr Jacob Taylor, co-chair of Brighton's children, families and schools committee, said the plans "could be a big step forward in terms of creating a more fair and equal city".

"Brighton and Hove prides itself on being an inclusive city – but there are huge and stubborn levels of inequality. We believe our proposals would improve outcomes across the city as a whole."

If approved, the plans will take effect in September 2025.

The FSM average across Brighton and Hove stands at 25 per cent, but is expected to rise to 28 per cent in 2025.

But council officials have warned that the move could mean schools with high numbers of disadvantaged children could get a big pupil premium funding hit.

But they said that the risk of children from within catchment areas of an oversubscribed school being refused a place was "low" as pupil numbers fell, following national trends.

Authority documents noted if the proportion of FSM pupils applying for a place was higher than the city-wide average, and the school was oversubscribed, the council would use "random allocation as a tie-



**Brighton & Hove
City Council**

breaker" to determine who got in.

The proportion of FSM pupils at Brighton's community schools ranges from 16 to 36 per cent.

Rachelle Otulakowski, the head of Longhill High, which has the highest rate, said she was not concerned about the potential drop in funding.

"With a free school meals child comes money, but that money is to be spent on that child, so if I didn't have that child, I wouldn't need that money."

"Most of my families whose choices may be broadened are likely to choose my school anyway."

She was more concerned that if the proposal did not go through "some of the most vulnerable families in Brighton will be left yet again with no choice at all".

Hodge added that the new system will also still "rely on families submitting preferences to those schools. Providing information to parents and changing behaviours will be key."

NEWS

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Unions demand £1.7bn extra cash for schools

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Unions have demanded that the chancellor pump at least £1.7 billion extra into schools at the autumn statement.

The general secretaries of the National Education Union, NASUWT teaching union and the NAHT and ASCL school leaders' unions warned that without additional cash, schools "may not be able to recruit or retain teachers, and will begin to cut essential provision to survive".

In a letter to Jeremy Hunt, the leaders point out that school budgets are due to grow by just 1.9 per cent in 2024-25.

But if pay rises for school staff match those awarded this year, schools will face a 5.8 per cent increase in their costs.

This "will require an increase in school funding of at least £1.7 billion in 2024-25 in order to recruit and retain teachers and protect schools and colleges from having to make further cuts in provision".

The autumn statement will be delivered on November 22. Last year's statement included an announcement of an extra £2 billion for schools last year and in the current financial year.

The leaders' letter follows the revelation



Jeremy Hunt

that school budgets will grow by less than predicted in July following a mistake in the government's calculations.

Indicative allocations data published by the Department for Education suggested budgets would increase by 2.7 per cent overall. The mistake would have inflated the total schools budget by £370 million.

Schools 'can only afford 1 per cent pay rise'

The unions said they were "deeply concerned that following the correction of an accounting error, mainstream schools'

funding via the national funding formula will only rise by an average 1.9 per cent per pupil next year".

"This is well below the current rate of inflation and will place even greater pressure on already over-stretched school budgets. Currently schools will only be able to afford a staff pay rise of 1 per cent in September 2024.

"We welcome your decision to substantially increase the level of the national minimum wage in April 2024; however, schools will not be able to afford this without an increase in school funding."

The unions pointed to School Teachers' Review Body advice that investment was needed "to proactively manage the worsening recruitment position and declining competitiveness of teacher pay".

"It will be more cost-effective to act sooner rather than later. The cost of failure is high: it affects teaching quality and adversely impacts on children's education."

They also pointed to comments from Rishi Sunak, who said last month education was his "main funding priority".

The unions said there was "no more important time" to ensure investment in schools, colleges and the education workforce.

AMY WALKER | @AMYRWALKER

Keegan to get her own camera person (on £50k a year)

The Department for Education is recruiting a videographer to film regular content of the education secretary for her social media channels.

An advert for a senior digital videographer on an annual salary of nearly £50,000 went live earlier this week. The "social media native" would "primarily work" with Gillian Keegan to capture "high-profile engagements across the country", as well as in the department's own studio.

They will "lead" on videography for Keegan's social media channels and capture "high-quality and engaging" content. This will help develop "a regular drumbeat" of videos for channels such as X - formerly known as Twitter.

Pay is advertised at £48,701 a year, although the role is for six months.

The education secretary is a keen user of social media, regularly posting face-to-camera videos. One of her special advisers is also a social media expert who previously produced content for Matt Hancock and Rishi Sunak's leadership campaign.

The recruit would join the department's social media team and work with ministers and special advisers, the advert states.

Other departments have advertised for similar roles, although they were not specifically for a secretary of state.

Last November, The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities advertised a senior videographer role in London on £40,390 a year.

A Ministry of Justice social media videographer job, which closed in February, was advertised with a London salary range of



Gillian Keegan

between £35,405 to £39,000.

A DfE spokesperson said: "This is an existing post in the department's social media team, with responsibility to deliver communications in line with the department's priorities, helping us communicate and inform people about key policies that impact their daily lives."

IN PARLIAMENT: OFSTED

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I didn't do it my way, says Spielman

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Amanda Spielman, who will step down as chief inspector next month, this week gave evidence to the Commons education committee in what could be her last appearance. Here's what you need to know ...

'Coasting' school 'pressure coming through' ...

The government last year started intervening in schools twice rated 'requires improvement'. Spielman acknowledged this had "clearly raised the stakes for schools and for MATs. We do feel and see that pressure coming through into inspections."

Ofsted had already warned last year that the new powers would be "unnecessary and potentially damaging" for improving schools and risked encouraging "quick fixes".

... and schools 'pushing for exemption'

Spielman said in the wake of the pandemic "there's a sense among schools that it's unfair to be held to account publicly when they're working so hard with such difficult issues".

But she said there was "really nothing that Ofsted does that is in the slightest bit unusual in that context".

"I'm not a policymaker, it's for government to decide if it wants to change that whole framework of public accountability, but I think we're feeling a bit of a push from the school sector for exemption from that framework."

Spielman's predecessor Sir Michael Wilshaw recently criticised Ofsted's approach during her tenure.

But she told MPs she "arrived as chief inspector at a time when the sector was in revolt. It was very clear that the incentives of inspection were operating in some very undesirable ways on schools."

Ofsted's current framework, launched in 2019, was "for the first time...a framework that was truly built off the evidence".

She said the unlike her predecessors she "did not make the inspection framework about my particular interests and preferences".

Reports already give 'rounded picture' ...

In the face of calls to remove single-phrase judgments, Spielman insisted current reports "absolutely do give a rounded picture of a school".



Amanda Spielman

"There's no question that the world pays too much attention to the overall effectiveness judgment relative to the pieces underneath.

"But I do have to constantly remind people that there's already a scorecard built into the inspection framework and the set of judgments that we use."

... and change would just bring new 'extreme pressure'

A single-phrase judgment "has such weight in the system" because it was the "thing on which those interventions are hung".

She had suggested an "alternative formulation of inadequate to the headteacher unions", but they "recognised that the consequence [of the judgment] thing was the real point at issue".

Ditching the judgments would mean "the regulatory system would hang on something else. And that would become the new extreme pressure."

The Ofsted chief also claimed it was "a bit of a myth" that leaders working as Ofsted inspectors unfairly benefited from access to training materials.

The watchdog published a lot of material, but some people wanted "specific materials that are used in our interactive training sessions".

"If we simply dumped those slides out, we would get the consulting industry picking them up and ramping up the mocksted industry even further.

"And we would get some terrible bastardisations of people using stuff that they weren't trained for."

Some 'outstanding' schools 'detached from rest of world'

Spielman said many previously 'outstanding' schools had become "a bit detached from what the

rest of the world has been learning and seeing and recognising".

"The whole debate and growth in knowledge about curriculum, about pedagogy, about assessment has passed them by."

Inspectors hired for their 'bedside manner'

The chief inspector was also asked about calls for Ofsted to have a "duty of care".

She said inspectors were hired "for their bedside manner as well as for their knowledge and experience" and that Ofsted got "extremely positive feedback".

She also shot down a suggestion that the post-inspection surveys were conducted while inspections took place.

"The link goes out with the final inspection report. This is a myth that is being circulated to try and discredit that survey."

Teachers fed a 'great deal of negativity'

Spielman also took aim at the National Education Union.

"The biggest teaching union has been committed to abolishing accountability and inspection for over a decade and relentlessly pushes its members to be hostile to inspection.

"I don't think it would make a blind bit of difference what we did.

"If we did things in different ways, it's likely that that absolute opposition would remain. A great deal of negativity is pushed out at teachers from when they start, and that is a really difficult thing to counteract."

IN PARLIAMENT: OFSTED

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Simply the best time to become a teacher, says Gibb

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

The prospects for a “well-rewarded” career in teaching are “greater now than they have ever been”, says Nick Gibb, the minister for schools.

Gibb appeared in front of Commons education committee this week as part of its inquiry into Ofsted’s work with schools.

Here’s what we learned.

1. Prospects for rewarding teaching career ‘never better’

Gibb paid tribute to the “brilliant teaching workforce and a brilliant headteacher workforce”, and claimed pay levels “have increased significantly at all levels, but particularly, I would say, at senior levels”.

He said it was a “good time to be a leader” because medium and large academy trusts could “afford to promote the fairly young to head of school, because they’ve got that infrastructure above them”.

“If you’ve been a head of school you can then become an executive principal, an executive head and so on.

“There is scope to beyond head of school now, so the opportunities for ambitious, able people to come into teaching have never been better. The prospects for a well-rewarded and interesting and demanding professional career are greater now than they have ever been.”

Gibb was questioned about retention rates, following record numbers of teachers leaving last year for reasons other than retirement.

Headteacher turnover rates are well up on before Covid, with a Teacher Tapp survey showing the number of leaders saying they were “burnt-out” had doubled since 2019.

2. Conservatives have ‘liberated the profession’

Gibb also said one he was “quite proud” that the Conservatives had

“allowed teachers to have their own practice, which you could never do really unless you were in a private school”.

“Now there are over 600 free schools, most of which were set up by groups of teachers, and if you look at the top of the performance table, it’s dominated by free schools. This is what real professional autonomy is about.

“We have liberated the profession to do this. So it is an exciting time to come into teaching.”



Nick Gibb

3. Small schools ‘not engaged in big debates’

Gibb’s evidence followed that of Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman, who talked about how many schools not inspected for some time had become “a bit detached from what the rest of the world has been learning and seeing and recognising”.

“The whole debate and growth in knowledge about curriculum, about pedagogy, about assessment has passed them by,” she said.

Gibb told MPs that “some schools are, particularly a small primary school, not engaged in the big debates.

“The involvement of Ofsted periodically helps them to do that. And then we have a whole raft of support that can come in, on the curriculum if that’s the issue, on behaviour if that’s the issue, on safeguarding if that’s the issue, to help that school improve.”

4. Wilshaw wrong on single-phrase judgments

Last month, Sir Michael Wilshaw, the former chief inspector, told MPs the days of single-phrase judgments were “coming to an end”.

Gibb said he did not agree.

“Certainly I think it should be kept simple and clear.

And behind that one word, as I said, there are four different judgments and behind those four different judgments there’s a whole raft of evidence.

“Ofsted continues to look at its systems and inspection approaches, about how it can improve its processes, and that will continue. It’s continued under Amanda. And I’m sure that Sir Martyn will want to build on that.”

5. Wellbeing support should be ‘commonplace’

Gibb was quizzed about the impact of inspection on the wellbeing of headteachers, and pointed to the government’s funding of Education Support’s provision for leaders.

He said that support was “important”, adding: “If you go into the private sector, senior leaders in the big industries...this is commonplace, this sort of counselling that chief executives of big major companies have.

“It’s important we have the same facilities available for the leaders of our school system. It’s a very pressured job. It’s an important job. And this counselling is proving very effective.”



Sir Michael Wilshaw

NEWS: ACADEMIES

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ESFA reviews academy investigation policy (as cases stack up)

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

The Education and Skills Funding Agency has committed to keep publishing investigations into academy trusts, despite the policy being reviewed as several reports gather dust.

The government last published an academy trust investigation in November last year. But a freedom of information request to the Department for Education shows 11 trusts are “subject to ongoing investigation activity by the ESFA”.

Major investigations into three scandal-hit academy chains – Bright Tribe, Lilac Sky and SchoolsCompany that were stripped of their schools between 2016 and 2019 – still haven’t been published.

It has now emerged the government has withdrawn its academy trust publication policy, pending a review.

The most recent copy of the publishing policy said the government made a commitment to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) to release “investigation reports into academy trusts within two months of completing its work”.

It will aim to publish the documents “as soon as possible” following their completion, with officials “taking account of any representations made by the institution or individuals”.

Trusts and identifiable individuals who are criticised in the report, but who have moved on, are given “10 working days’ notice of the publication date”.

Dame Meg Hillier, the chair of the PAC, said she would read “the ESFA’s updated investigation policy with great interest”, given the promises previously made.

When asked at what stage each of the ongoing 11 investigations was at, the ESFA said in the FOI that the cases were listed as “live until such point as they are closed”.

There was “no formal classification of investigation stage”. It also noted that it was “very difficult to predict when reports will be published when investigations are ongoing”.

Officials stressed no documents “are published until all investigation, enforcement, and regulatory actions have been completed”.

Education professor Anne West of the London School of Economics described the reports as a



“crucially important accountability mechanism”.

“Without such reports there is a real risk that there will be no lessons learned with more taxpayers’ money being lost.”

Schools Week previously revealed Bright Tribe, Lilac Sky and SchoolsCompany all faced a review over payments to companies linked to them or their founders. The cases fuelled wider controversy over academisation.

Bright Tribe allegedly claimed hundreds of thousands of pounds for incomplete works, while Schools Week revealed claims of safeguarding breaches and unsafe premises at SchoolsCompany sites.

Problems at Lilac Sky – which shut in 2017 – included staff being rehired the day after receiving large severance payments.

Accounts, published in the summer, for SchoolsCompany stated that the trust’s “intention” was for it to be wound up “as soon as this becomes feasible”, but “this is pending while...[lit] attempts to recover public funds”.

Former trustees are being pursued through the high court in an attempt to recover up to £2.8 million of “lost public funds”.

Papers for Bright Tribe said it “is in the process of finalising

outstanding matters in relation to the previous operation of the trust before closing the trust down”.

In its notice online, the ESFA said it would update its investigation policy shortly.

However, councils are also patchy on transparency. For instance, Lambeth Council in south London has refused to publish its investigation into former superhead Sir Craig Tunstall, first launched in 2017.

Councils now have to publish more financial information about their schools after Lord Agnew, the former academies minister, moved to bring them more in line with requirements on academies.

The DfE said the review would not consider changing the publication policy. Instead it will make the policy “more transparent and up to date”. The new policy could be published next week.

However it did not “comment on ongoing investigations”, but stressed that “each case is dealt with robustly and as swiftly as possible, although the length of each...can vary” depending on its complexity.

The department also insisted current policy applied until it was updated.



Dame Meg Hillier



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Has Nick Gibb won the education battle?

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Schools with traditional education methods dominated the top of last month's league tables, prompting a piece in *The Times* declaring that "stricter schools get better results". So has Nick Gibb, a staunch proponent of such approaches, won the education war? *Schools Week* investigates ...

"Academisation and free schools work," wrote Mark Leahy last month, the former special adviser who soon after returned to the fold with the education secretary. "More rigorous curriculums and exams work. Explicit approaches to behaviour and teaching work."

The comment echoed many from proponents of traditional approaches after the publication of last year's Progress 8 league tables, where some of the highest-flyers were schools with strong traditionalist values.

So does it stack up?

Schools Week has established that at least 10 of the top 20 schools are "traditional", although it could be higher as it is essentially a subjective judgment.

But some of the best-performing schools are clearly in this category.

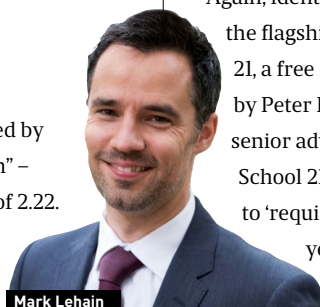
Michaela Community School in west London topped the Progress 8 tables with a score of 2.37 (which means pupils achieve more than two grades better per subject than pupils with similar prior attainment at the end of primary school).

Led by Katharine Birbalsingh, often labelled "Britain's strictest headteacher", the school is renowned for its silent corridors, no SEND labels and detentions for failing to have a pen.

'We're doing the best we can for children'

Mercia School in Sheffield – dubbed by some as the "Michaela of the north" – came third with a Progress score of 2.22.

The school day runs until 5pm



Mark Leahy



Nick Gibb

'We are doing the best by children. It changes lives'

Dean Webster

every day except Friday, when pupils finish at 3.45pm.

Dean Webster, its head, describes its approach as "warm-strict", but added there was often a "stigma" around traditional schools.

"Ultimately all we are ever doing is doing the best by children and we are achieving that. It changes lives and the grades that they get is the passport for the next phase of their life."

Leahy, in a blog last month for the online newspaper CapX, said the results were "yet more vindication" of the Conservative's education reforms.

He also said "many of the schools who have explicitly and publicly rejected these traditional approaches in favour of progressive ones are doing far worse than average".

Again, identifying a list is difficult. But one of the flagship progressive schools is School 21, a free school in east London co-founded by Peter Hyman, Keir Starmer's current senior adviser.

School 21, downgraded from 'outstanding' to 'requires improvement' earlier this year, had a Progress score of -0.32,

which is classed as "average".

The school did not comment. But its website states it "operates with the conviction that schools need to ensure a focus on head (academic success), heart (character and well-being) and hand (generating ideas, problem-solving, making a difference)".

Two Doncaster secondary schools at XP School Trust, also well-known for its progressive approach, had "well below average" scores of -0.64 at XP East and -0.58 at XP School.

Its website states the trust "believes that our children deserve a three-dimensional education focused on academic performance, character growth and beautiful work". The trust declined to comment.

Progress scores favour certain cohorts

But there is a big caveat: schools with certain pupil cohorts tend to do better in Progress

Jo Hutchinson, the director for SEND at the Education Policy



Jo Hutchinson

LONG READ: PROGRESS 8

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Institute (EPI), said these “limitations” meant results varied “considerably by a range of factors that are outside the school’s control”.

For instance, the average score for pupils with English as an additional language was 0.51, compared with -0.12 for non-EAL.

Out of the top 50 Progress 8 schools, 36 had above-average levels of EAL pupils.

Michaela and Tauheedul Islam Girls’ High School in Blackburn, the two highest-performing Progress schools in the country, had just shy of 70 per cent of EAL youngsters. The national average is 18.1 per cent.

FFT Datalab said some pupils would have recently arrived in the country when they took their SATs in year 6, so their results “may not have been a fair reflection of their attainment” at the time.

If you exclude these pupils, the differences are actually down to ethnicity. For instance, there is a wide Progress gap between black Caribbean EAL and non-EAL pupils, while there is no gap for Chinese students in both groups.

Faith schools were also a factor, Hutchinson said. The EPI researchers found in 2016 that faith schools had more pupils achieving five A*s to C than non-faith schools. The same applies to Progress 8.

Results seem to back this up. Faith schools make up 34 of the top 50 Progress 8 schools, despite accounting for just one in five secondary schools nationally.

In fact, just three of the top 10 schools are non-faith based. That includes Mercia. “You could argue ... that if you are a family that has faith then the values of schools like ours, that are traditional, fit with those family values and the offer is attractive,” said Webster.

Top schools have fewer SEND pupils

EPI researchers put the difference down to faith schools tending to have fewer disadvantaged children and pupils with SEND.

Traditional schools also face this criticism. Their strict approaches to behaviour are sometimes not inclusive for children with additional needs and can result in them moving to other schools, critics say.

Eleven of the top 50 Progress schools are grammars, which



Michaela Community School

have far fewer disadvantaged pupils than average. But even excluding these, 24 of the remaining 39 schools have below average numbers of poorer children.

Michaela is one of the few that has more (31.1 per cent across the school compared to a 27.1 per cent England average).

But Dave Thomson, chief statistician at FFT Datalab, said Progress 8 scores in some schools were “so high that even if you take into account that they are girls’ schools or that some groups of pupils, such as EAL pupils, perform slightly better, the differences are so great it’s not just down to that.”

“It could be down to teaching and learning. But it could also be down to other external factors such as parental support and tutoring.”

Calls for ‘informed accountability’

In 2019, researchers at the University of Bristol created an “adjusted” Progress 8 to re-weight a pupil’s score according to factors such as their ethnicity, free school eligibility and gender.

In their alternate performance tables, 41 per cent of schools deemed to be underperforming or “well below average” moved out of that category.

Researcher professor George Leckie said they would re-run the measure next year. He expected a “greater reordering of schools now than pre-pandemic, because schools in harsher circumstances have fallen further behind.

“It’s not that the quality of teaching has worsened, it’s the multiple challenges and struggles of the student body. There’s a greater need.”

Becks Boomer-Clark, the chief executive of the Academies Enterprise Trust, asked “how to overlay” factors such as SEND, disadvantage and location on top of Progress 8 to get a “more nuanced and accurate understanding of the added value that a school is providing”.

Jonny Uttley, the chief executive officer at The Education Alliance, said a single measure allows people to “obsess about it” and “try and score political points”.

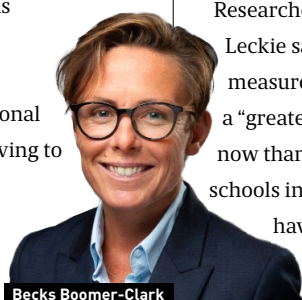
He said a “balanced scorecard”, which included contextual data alongside Progress 8, would be more suitable.

Rob Tarn, the chief executive at the Northern Education Trust, cautioned contextualising could lead to “lower expectations in more vulnerable schools”. But he supported the idea of a dashboard of various measures.

“What we need is a more grown-up, broader view of school performance.”

Labour did not respond to comment on whether it would add more context into Progress 8. But the party has announced plans to hold schools to account for performance in at least one creative or vocational subject.

The DfE said there were “no current plans” to include a new contextual value-added measure. Progress 8 was designed to “encourage schools to offer a broad and balanced curriculum, with a strong focus on an academic core”.



Becks Boomer-Clark



Jonny Uttley

SOLUTIONS: PROGRESS 8

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How schools with the poorest intakes boosted progress

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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EXCLUSIVE

Schools with large numbers of poorer pupils say they have boosted progress scores by installing new leadership, tighter behaviour rules and reaching beyond the school gates.

Data consultant Ed Cadwallader looked at schools with above-average proportions of disadvantaged pupils in exam years to see which schools have improved the most since 2019. In some schools, up to 74 per cent of pupils were disadvantaged. The national average is 27 per cent.

The top 10 schools include eight academies, one foundation school and a free school. So how did they do it?

New management

Several schools had new leadership pre-pandemic. Terry Conway became headteacher at Norham High School, in north Tyneside in September 2019 when the school was in a "really rocky position" with just 295 pupils.

Nearly three quarters of its exam cohort this year was disadvantaged – but its Progress score moved from -1.26 in 2019, to 0.38 in 2023. This is the largest jump among the 10 schools.

Conway scrapped underperforming subjects such as GCSE physical education and design and technology. He added GCSE drama, which didn't exist even at key stage 3, and increased the lesson time in maths, English and science.

"From my appointment I made it clear what had to change and how it would change," he said. "I had non-negotiables, but these were wrapped up in care and understanding. It has been a real team effort."

Natasha Carman, principal of Moor End Academy in Kirklees, helped lift the school out of a "really bad place" of poor behaviour and high staff turnover in 2017-18. Last year, 44 per cent of its year 11s were disadvantaged, but Progress moved from -0.21 pre-pandemic to 0.77.

She said the curriculum "wasn't right for the vast majority of pupils", with almost the whole cohort entered for the full English Baccalaureate.

Many pupils lacked specialist teaching in modern foreign languages in key stage 2, meaning



their starting points were "variable".

Just under a quarter entered EBacc last year, compared to an average of 39 per cent.

Citizenship is now a core part of the curriculum in key stage 3 and every child does GCSE history or geography.

Matt Tate took over in 2016 at Hartsdown Academy in Kent, where some children start the school with an average reading age of seven.

Pupils in key stage 3 are now taught by two main teachers for 20 hours a week, one teaching literacy-based subjects and one teaching numeracy-based. In the remaining five hours they access the rest of the curriculum.

The schools Progress 8 has climbed from -1.45 to -0.4. The school has 68 per cent disadvantaged pupils.

Behaviour overhauls

Many schools also say new behaviour policies have improved classroom learning.

The Halley Academy in south London brought in a centralised behaviour policy to become a "warm, strict school", with, said headteacher Ben Russell, "real buy-in and support from students and parents".

"It's about disruption free learning and creating a climate of excellence for all children, irrespective of their starting point."

Moor End has a new planner-led system where if children receive eight "comments" in a week for bad behaviour, it can lead to a

day in seclusion and learning through live-stream lessons.

Carman said this "supports pupils in self-regulating their behaviour".

Sue Jones, the executive principal at Charles Read Academy in Lincolnshire said the "biggest thing" was ensuring disruption-free learning.

The school's Progress 8 score has risen from -0.43 to 0.6.

Going beyond the school gates

But Jones said because it was a non-selective school in a selective area, some pupils lacked confidence. "It's so important to build up their self-esteem that they are worthy and can do as well as others".

Schools Week has widely reported how schools are stepping into a public services void, providing basic items for struggling families.

Norham's Conway said it provided food technology ingredients free. The school uniform was also "poverty proofed" with an embroidery-free £27 blazer.

Ark Free School Greenwich in south London provides free music lessons and Duke of Edinburgh places for children receiving pupil premium. They are also prioritised for parents' evening as part of their "pupil premium first" strategy. The school's Progress rose from 0.18 to 1.11.

Rhys Spiers, its principal, said: "Our process isn't rocket science, there's no silver bullet here but it's delivered with precision.

"What we are seeing anecdotally is pupil premium [children] who are happy and confident and they've experienced a really broad and balanced education."



Natasha Carman

FEATURE: SECURE SCHOOLS

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'There are no bars, no big steel doors'

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

The prison system is creaking. With jails overflowing, the government plans to release offenders early and suspend short-term sentences to ease the strain. The long-awaited "school with security", run by the Oasis Charitable Trust and due to open this spring, hopes to provide ministers with a template to cut reoffending and empty prisons. Jack Dyson reports...

Teenaged killers, sex offenders and drug-dealers are set to be welcomed at England's first secure school – almost four years behind schedule.

The Oasis Charitable Trust, the sponsor of large academy chain Oasis Community Learning, is preparing to finally launch Oasis Restore in Medway, Kent, in the spring.

Delays have ballooned the cost of the Ministry of Justice-funded project by 645 per cent, from an expected £4.9 million to £36.5 million.

As its opening date nears, bosses believe the school – registered as both a 16 to 19 academy and secure children's home (see box out) – will eventually help to ease the strain on the creaking prison system.

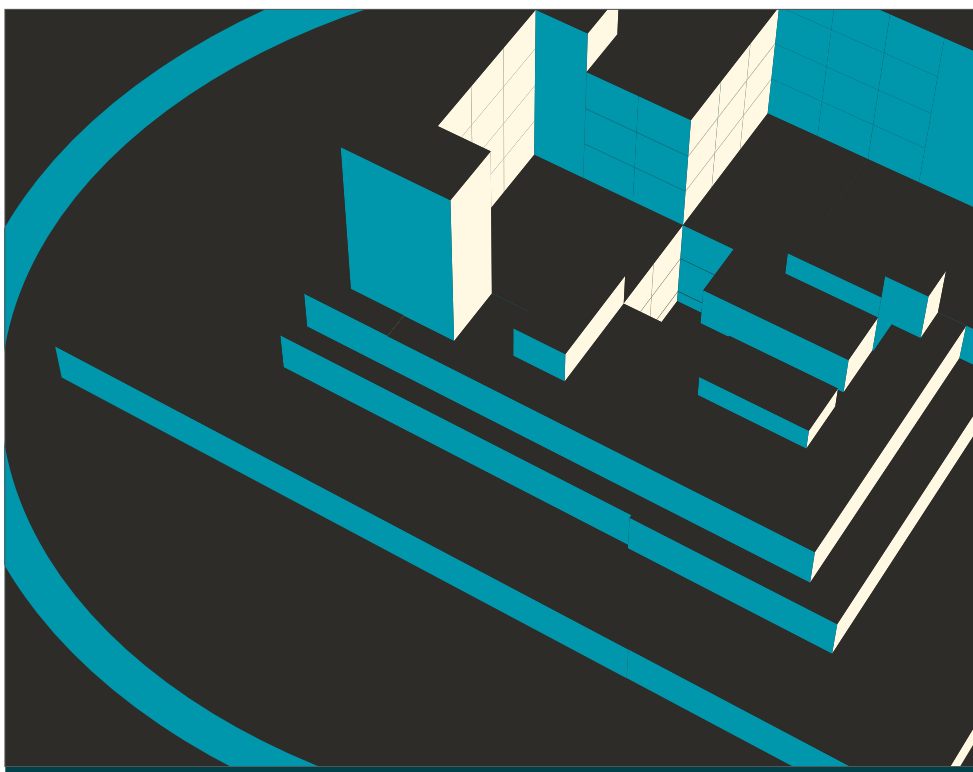
Government figures show there are now almost 88,000 people serving prison sentences – with just 1,200 spaces left over across the entire estate.

Just last month, ministers announced that in a move to ease the crisis, prisoners will be allowed out on licence up to 18 days before their automatic release date and that sentences of less than 12 months will be suspended.

A chance to change

Dr Celia Sadie, Oasis Restore's director of care and wellbeing, says the secure school's intention is "to help children on a pathway out of custody" by "addressing the problem way upstream".

"We know around 70 per cent of children reoffend within about a year of leaving youth custody. We know that



'The school will employ 250 staff, 15 of them teachers'

within 10 years about 97 per cent are in adult custody.

"We have this opportunity to divert them into a whole other way of life, which in the long term should ease the pressure on prisons. That's our hope."

Secure schools were first recommended in the 2016 Taylor review, which called for education to be central to dealing with children in custody.

The government defines the facilities as "schools with security", rather than "prisons with education". The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) initially pledged to open two, but Oasis Restore is the only one in development.

In the long term, the government's vision is for secure schools and similar smaller units to replace secure training centres and young offender institutions.

Sadie says Oasis Restore will not be "wholly in charge" of admissions. Children will be sent to the site shortly after sentencing – sometimes within two hours of court hearings.

An offender will only be turned away if there is not enough capacity. "We want to be as inclusive as possible. This is a proof-of-concept project, so there hasn't been a secure school before. We want to show it can work for everyone," Sadie said.

"They have to be pretty severe [offences] for a child to have been sentenced or remanded in custody – usually violent crimes from bodily harm to murder. They can be sexual offences, they can be offences to do with supplying drugs. There's a whole range."

Dr Celia Sadie

Cara Beckett

FEATURE: SECURE SCHOOLS

Double Ofsted inspections

Its dual status will mean the school will be the subject of two lots of Ofsted inspections – one as a school and another as a secure children's home. Care Quality Commission assessors will also visit.

Cara Beckett, Oasis Restore's director of learning and enrichment, confirms the secure school will not follow the curriculum used in Oasis Community Learning's 54 academies.

Instead, it will shape bespoke plans for each of the 49 children, aged between 12 and 19, during initial three-month inductions.

It will focus on English, maths, PE and computing, while giving young offenders the opportunity to move down 10 vocational pathways.

"We are delivering everything from entry-level functional skills [to] GCSE [and] A-level for our core subjects. For our vocational pathways, we are looking to transition into T-levels at some point."

Children will live on the site all-year round, with school terms lasting up to seven weeks.

Time will also be allowed for afternoons with family members in "really comfortable rooms...where they can come and make dinner together". Beckett says the get-togethers will be supervised "only if it needs to be" for safeguarding reasons.

Steve Chalke, the founder of Oasis, stresses the facility will "first and foremost be a home" to offenders. "We've done away with wings and cells...there are no bars, big steel doors. It's all very secure, but therapeutic."

The secure school will employ 250 staff, 15 of them teachers. Recruitment has begun, with nine teachers already employed.

The rest of the workforce will be made up of residential practitioners, teaching assistants, social workers, a senior leadership team, facilities staff and an NHS-commissioned healthcare team, including therapists and primary care professionals.

'It can be really distressing'

Sadie also revealed that teachers will have regular one-to-one sessions with a "trained therapeutic member of staff".

"We're aware that working in settings like this ... is going to mean staff will find the role really rewarding, but also really challenging.

"The information about what the children have done...can be really distressing. The learning [that we've taken] from the settings where this is done really well is that staff enormously benefit from clinical supervision."



The Medway secure training centre

The school, on the site of a former secure training centre in Medway was supposed to open in autumn 2020 and cost £4.9 million. A National Audit Office (NAO) investigation last year found its estimated cost rose to £36.5 million.

This is still less than the £59 million estimated cost of building a secure school from scratch, but the spending watchdog warns the final full costs "will not be known until the advanced site

designs are complete". The facility is expected to have an annual budget of £10.5 million, based on a cost of between £186,000 and £212,000 per place per year.

The NAO says officials partly attribute "the delay to the assumptions made about the timescale at the start of the project".

Changes to meet Ofsted's certification for a secure children's home, and work to develop the basis on which the school can have charitable status also have had an impact.



Steve Chalke

How will the school work? The legal Ts and Cs

- Oasis Restore will be a 16 to 19 academy, but does not have to follow usual academy rules. For example, the government will draw up a new secure schools financial handbook, assurance handbook and governance handbook. When amendments are made to the documents, Oasis must ensure that it complies with the updated requirements within three months "or by such other date as the secretary of state may reasonably require".
- Admissions. Oasis, which will run the school through a new secure academy trust, "shall use its best endeavours to accept all children and young people referred to it by the youth custody service". If it considers a referral to be "inappropriate and/or in contradiction" with its statement of purpose, the charity "shall promptly notify the youth custody service" and they will "collaborate in good faith to determine whether the referral shall be withdrawn".
- Funding will be "calculated and agreed with the secure academy trust", which will get an "annual letter of funding or equivalent, sent before the relevant financial year begins".

NEWS

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Raising training bursaries has more impact than pay

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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Teacher training bursaries are a cost-effective way to boost teacher supply – and increasing them would have more impact than raising pay, a new analysis suggests.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) also found that staff recruited off the back of bursaries were more likely to teach in schools that often struggle to fill vacancies.

Postgraduate trainees are eligible to claim tax-free bursaries ranging from £10,000 in subjects that include English and art to £28,000 in chemistry, computing, maths and physics.

Researchers examined the potential impact of spending more on different incentives on a hypothetical cohort of 100 teachers.

They found that, based on current bursaries, 66 of 100 entrants into would go on to work in the state sector. Forty-one would remain after five years.



Jack Worth

Introducing a £5,000 bursary in a subject without one would result in 115 teachers entering the profession, 75 going on to work in the state sector and 47 remaining beyond five years.

These teachers are “also more likely to teach in schools that tend to struggle most with filling vacancies, such as schools in London and schools serving disadvantaged communities”.

The government has faced criticism in recent years for a reduction in bursaries following a shortlived increase in recruitment during the pandemic.

The DfE missed its secondary recruitment target by about 40 per cent last year, and is expected to miss it by more this year.

The NFER report found that bursary increases “are not strongly associated with progression and retention”, but teachers who signed up because of a bursary “would be just as likely as teachers recruited without a bursary in place to enter and stay in teaching”.

This implied that “increasing bursaries leads to a larger cohort of teachers in the long term”.

However, the research also compared

the impact of bursaries with early-career retention payments (ECPs).

It found both “lead to similar numbers of additional teachers in teaching, for the same cost”. But ECPs “lead to a slightly greater number of teachers staying after their fifth year compared to bursaries”.

Increasing pay at a flat rate across all pay points “has the lowest overall impact”.

Jack Worth, the school workforce lead at NFER and co-author of the report, said the findings showed bursaries were “one of a range” of effective financial tools to tackle recruitment and retention.

Becky Francis, the chief executive of the Education Endowment Foundation, said recruitment and retention were complex and “likely to require a multi-pronged solution”.

Ian Hartwright, head of policy at school leaders’ union NAHT, called for the government to “create a compelling a sustainable career proposition that will encourage high-quality graduates to commit to a decades-long career in teaching”.



Becky Francis

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

Heads 'isolated' in multi-agency work

Ofsted has criticised “weak” joint working between social care, police, health services and schools, as heads report they are “too often working in isolation” to keep children safe.

The inspectorate has published new research based on joint inspections in five areas of the multi-agency response to children and families who need help, in particular targeted early help.

It warned that a sample of inspections in Bedford, Sunderland, Surrey, Wirral and Harrow was not “nationally representative”.

Ofsted found local safeguarding partnerships needed to ensure “greater engagement and strategic consensus” with partner agencies, “particularly schools”.

The research found that “join-up between schools or other education providers and partner agencies was weak”.

This was despite schools having a critical role, with the watchdog adding that “more needs to be done so that agencies see them as a key partner”.

Social care reforms should therefore “remain responsive” to a “lack of multi-agency working, particularly with schools”.

Official data shows that last year, schools were the second most common source of referrals to children’s social care.

They have been in the top three sources of referral every year since at least 2014.

Ofsted said schools were “well-placed to spot the earliest signs of a family in need of help” and could provide “appropriate help in a non-intrusive way”.

‘Good practice’ in schools

Inspectors saw “good practice” by schools and evidence of positive outcomes for children.

But school leaders told inspectors that they were “too often” working in isolation to keep vulnerable children safe.

Communication with children’s social care, health services or police were “not consistent or that strategic connections were missing”.



Ofsted also found a lack of knowledge about Operation Encompass, a cross-partnership information-sharing programme that enables police to inform schools about domestic abuse incidents.

In a few cases the system was not being implemented “effectively” and oversight groups had “not identified” this issue.

One area did not know that not all schools had signed up to the scheme.

In its conclusion, the report noted that there needed to be a “shared understanding” of what early help was among all relevant professionals and partners, “including schools”.

NEWS: OFSTED

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Ofsted grades again match performance outcomes

AMY WALKER

@AMYRWALKER

About two-thirds of school inspection grades now match performance outcomes, after alignment dipped during the pandemic.

New research from Ofsted comes after Schools Week reported on the broken link between exam results and Ofsted ratings while inspectors were results-blind during Covid.

Sir Martyn Oliver, the incoming chief inspector, has also raised concerns over “consistency” between inspections and outcomes, while Sir Michael Wilshaw, a former HMCI, has warned the inspectorate has “moved too far away” from using data in inspections.

The analysis shows that of inspections that took place in 2022-23, 68 per cent of primary and 64 per cent of secondary school results corresponded to overall effectiveness grades, based on either key stage 2 or Progress 8 scores from the previous year.

Results ‘similar to pre-2019’

Ofsted said there was a “similar level of alignment” in 2018-19, before the new framework – which focused more on curriculum and less on results – was introduced.

In 2018-19, 65 per cent of primary inspections and 67 of secondary inspections had Ofsted grades that aligned with outcome data.

Ofsted also found that when looking at 2022-23 performances in comparison with inspection outcomes for the same year, 68 per cent of primary and 64 per cent of secondary Ofsted grades aligned.

“This suggests that inspectors are identifying the quality of education in schools, even when outcomes data lags behind what is actually happening at the school at the time of the inspection,” the report said.

But Dave Thomson, the chief statistician at FFT Education Datalab, said he was “unsure” that the analysis showed a “good degree of alignment” – pointing out 76 per cent of primary schools were judged ‘good’.

“So on the basis of no information at all, you would be able to guess the outcome of a primary school inspection correctly just by saying they were all ‘good’.



“In that context, an alignment rate of 68 per cent doesn’t seem particularly high.”

Ofsted: ‘Good reason’ for outliers

Earlier this year, Schools Week found that alignment dipped when the cancellation of exams left inspectors without access to performance data.

In 2018-19, under the old framework, the correlation “coefficient” between Progress 8 scores and inspection outcomes was 0.59 (1 indicates a perfect link, and 0 indicates no link).

Ofsted’s annual report shows this fell to just 0.46 across the 2021-22 academic year when there were no national results.

We also found a growing trend of “outliers”. Between 2017 and March 2018, just 1 per cent of schools rated ‘good’ had Progress 8 scores of below -0.5.

Between September 2019 and March 2020 – after the introduction of the new framework – the figure grew to 8 per cent, and early data for 2022-23 suggested it had risen again to 10 per cent.

Ofsted’s analysis found more than 90 per cent of schools with grades and results that did not align were only one inspection grade out.

Fewer than 100 were more than one inspection judgment away from their data band.

There were “good reasons” behind the differences, said the inspectorate.

For instance, outcomes could “lag behind changes” in a school, or weak SEND provision could pull down quality of education judgments,

even if other pupils were “generally doing well”.

Schools with higher levels of disadvantage were also more likely to have lower performance data.

Also, 72 per cent of secondaries graded lower than their data band had a behaviour and attitudes judgment that was also lower. The comparative proportion at primary level was 39 per cent.

Small schools were more likely to have different inspection grades to their data band because results were a less reliable indicator of underlying quality.

This “volatility” also applied to a “small number” of secondary schools, which were rated ‘good’ despite having among the lowest results.

However, half of these were university technical colleges that “often give a good technical education” that was “not always well reflected” in Progress 8 scores.

John Jerrim, the professor of education and social statistics at UCL’s Institute of Education, said more insight was needed into the “black box of how inspectors reach their decisions” – including the role of background data and how much inspectors’ views were formed “before they set foot in the school”.

OFSTED APPOINTS NEW NATIONAL DIRECTOR

Lee Owston (pictured) has been named as the next national director for education at Ofsted.

The current deputy director for schools

and education will take over when Chris Russell retires at the end of the year.

Russell will retire after 17 years at Ofsted.

Owston, who has worked at the watchdog since 2013, temporarily served as national director of education for “several months” earlier this year. He previously worked in senior leadership roles in schools.



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Profile

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Trimble with his 'mini monster' truck

'If people realised the size of the cracks we're papering over, they'd be shocked'

Christopher Tribble on how both he, and the school he leads, are now acting as a fourth emergency service

With public services diminishing, schools are being described as the fourth emergency service. But for headteacher Christopher Tribble, that's true in a literal sense.

It is not only his school, Honiton primary on the edge of Dartmoor, that's going above and beyond to provide services for the community, but he and his "mini-monster truck".

Aside from running the maintained 420-pupil primary, 'Mr T' as his pupils know him, comes to

the rescue in his Toyota truck as a volunteer for the charity Devon and Cornwall 4x4 Response when the police "can't handle the roads in North Devon" due to flash flooding and snow.

But last year, Tribble also needed to reach out for help himself – both physically and mentally – after a traumatic injury left him unable to work for six months. He now receives regular one-on-one counselling from Devon Schools Leadership Services, a support service for heads provided by the local authority.

'Outstanding, but crumbling inside'

Tribble's favourite mantra is "if not me, then who?" He uses it when discussing not only his rescue missions, but also his decision to take on the headship of Honiton in 2018. Tribble, who was previously assistant head of Hazeldown Primary in Teignmouth, claims Honiton had "outstanding" on the door, but was absolutely crumbling inside". It had not been inspected since 2013.

There had been safeguarding concerns and attendance was low ("in the high 80s/low 90s"). A

Profile: Christopher Tribble



Honiton Primary School

14-foot-high fence around the school, keeping out the wolves and wild boars that live in a nearby country estate, as well as human strangers, didn't make parents feel welcomed. On his first day, one told him the school "feels like a prison and we're locked out".

Tribble believes there are fewer "brave young heads" prepared to take on struggling 'outstanding' schools uninspected for many years and knows "loads who've baulked it" as "career suicide".

It took Ofsted another three years after Tribble joined to inspect Honiton – and even then only after he requested it for his staff's "mental health" so they "wouldn't have the spectre of Ofsted hanging over them". Tribble says the watchdog told him they "don't really do requests", but came anyway. The head told his team to be "really proud" of the 'requires improvement' judgment, which said, under Tribble's leadership, Honiton was "recovering well after a significant dip in its performance" and that his "trajectory of improvement is impressive".

"That's all we needed," he said. But that's not to say the visit went well. He claimed inspectors were "negative" from the outset, with one incident causing him to advocate recording conversations with inspectors now – something he claims to know of other heads doing.

Left to our own devices

Tribble sees it as a further "failing of Ofsted" that Honiton has now been waiting over two years for a monitoring visit, even though RI schools are meant to be re-inspected within two years and provided with monitoring/guidance visits in the meantime. Honiton has had no such input.

"They come and condemn but offer no support



Christopher Tribble

'They'd come in like Stormtroopers if it was all going the wrong way'

or avenues to success," he says. "This adds to the high stakes, high accountability culture, which is seeing leaders leaving in droves and retiring far earlier with no-one keen to step into the grinder. Why would they?"

He wonders if Honiton has been "left to its own devices" because it is "above national in all benchmarks" for "the first time in a decade".

"But that doesn't make it OK," he adds. "They'd come in like Stormtroopers if it was all going the wrong way. Where's the checking-in that the leader is alright? The impression is they're just there to kick people."

Tribble also has a "moral problem" with Ofsted sending in serving assistant heads as lead inspectors, which he claims has happened to other schools in Devon.

"If you've never sat in that main seat, you've never had the legal or safeguarding accountability," he says. "You wouldn't send a major to review a general's performance management."

Military ambitions

Given Tribble's habit of using military terminology, it's no surprise that his childhood dream was to "see the world" as a navy warfare officer. Growing up in Devon with a dad who was a police officer, Tribble appreciated the "strict disciplined" approach of the civil forces.

But the officer interviewing him for the navy told him he could earn "an awful lot more" if he first went off and got a degree. Because his father was recovering from a hip replacement, Tribble opted to study education at the nearby University of Plymouth to help his mother care for him.

Being a "keen amateur boxer", he chose to specialise in teaching PE, later teaching fifth grade (year six) pupils for 16 weeks in the US under a State University of New York (SUNY) programme.

Meeting a girl "put the kibosh" on ambitions of "fighting wars" and although that relationship ended, his new career path did lead him to love. At the end of his NQT year, his assistant head sent

Profile: Christopher Tribble

a text: "Now you're leaving, how about a date?" He and the message sender, Catherine, now live together and have two sons.

'Beacon of hope'

Tribble turned to volunteer rescuing after Catherine, then eight months pregnant, found her car stuck in heavy snow on a hill. She made it safely out, but Tribble "never wanted someone else's wife to be stuck, terrified and thinking no one's coming". He's since driven a sergeant doing missing-person checks, a kidney specialist doing dialysis, and nurses to and from hospital.

His Toyota truck became "a beacon of hope" during lockdowns when driving was restricted. "I'd bring it into the car park and the children would cheer, 'the beast is here!' It was like this signal of safety," Tribble says.

It's hard to see how Tribble can find time for volunteering, as he "quite regularly" puts in 60–70 hours a week with the day job. That includes taking a call from a multi-agency safeguarding team while halfway up a French mountain on holiday last summer.

Meanwhile, Catherine teaches at Drake's CofE Primary in their village of East Budleigh, which only has 70 children. Tribble "often arrive[s] home to find half the village in our garden" playing with their sons.

He recalls her whole school dancing around the maypole and kids playing hook a duck in the brook during village fetes as "quintessential British life", which sometimes seems a "world apart from my school".

Withering on the vine

Tribble "couldn't function" without his pastoral manager and designated safeguarding lead, Mrs Fyffe, who as a trained councillor sees some of his staff for their mental health and has helped parents "who attempted to take their lives". Because "if the parents aren't right, the children have no chance of being right." Mrs Fyffe also helps parents with tasks such as paying utility bills and debt management, which Tribble believes helps boost attendance – currently at "nearly 96 per cent".



Tribble's truck in the ice

'Writing it saved my life. If it helps someone else, then brilliant'

During a recent budgeting meeting with the council, an officer "pointed at a spreadsheet" and asked Tribble whether her post was a "luxury" because she "doesn't work with children directly".

"I'm thinking, 'if only you knew'. Without her, I'd just be doing safeguarding concerns all day. If people realised the size of the cracks we're papering over, they'd be shocked."

Tribble believes maintained schools like his are "withering on the vine". School services that councils used to provide are now opened to the marketplace, which "undermines" the local authorities' position.

"The MAT agenda is not a tiger hiding in the long grass, it's quite blatant," he says. "[They're] stalking councils. As they weaken and wither, one day they'll come and pounce."

From crisis to authorship

While most of us don't exercise enough, Tribble suffered the consequences of working out too hard.

Lifting heavy weights on the bench press early



Tribble's injury

last year led his chest to "rip off" and rendered his left arm "useless", strapped to him for 92 days straight. The damage was "akin to being shot", doctors told him.

During the six months he was off work, the outpouring of community support was "incredibly humbling" after all those moments in which he had been there to rescue others in crisis. But he "hit some really low points", which he says led him to write a book: *Mr T's alphabet of interesting insights: top tips through A-Z towards health, wealth and happiness*. He initially kept it "quiet" from staff. But occasionally he wraps a copy in brown paper with a colleague's name on it and leaves it on their chair after a meeting.

"Writing it saved my life," Tribble says. "If it helps someone else, then brilliant."

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LEE ELLIOT MAJOR

Professor of social mobility,
University of Exeter

We need to find better language than talking about disadvantage

Lee Elliot Major explains why a change of language could be crucial in shaping the conversation on poverty and other barriers to success

In my latest book *Equity in Education*, written with teacher Emily Briant, we argue for a new language to replace words that I've been using all my professional life. I've spent decades working to address the stark divides that scar our education system. However, I now believe the terms we use to define these efforts label and harm the very children we hope to help.

Our use of the word "equity" signals the need to provide additional support for pupils who need it most, amid increasing societal divides outside the school gates. Our book focuses on tackling the multitude of cultural and material barriers children face inside and outside the classroom. It complements other important inclusion work on race, ethnicity, gender and other characteristics of pupils.

Our reason for replacing the term "disadvantaged pupils" with 'children from under-resourced backgrounds' is to avoid the trap of deficit thinking. The deficit approach frames certain children as somehow inferior, in need of conversion (or education) to fit

the middle-class norms of the classroom. It places more value on certain roles in society.

My own life story is an example of this narrative: Having lived alone as a teenager and once served as a bin-man, I have subsequently become the country's first professor of social mobility. I might well have become a middle-class clone, but my story should not be used to denigrate the important job that bin-men do.

The term "disadvantaged pupil" focuses our minds on individuals, when facing hardship is about the circumstances individuals find themselves in. In the world of deficit thinking, education efforts feel like a very one-sided negotiation: we want you to come into our world, change who you are, fit into our culture and play by our (unwritten) rules.

We can, of course, use clearly defined words to describe disadvantage when reporting differences across pupil populations. The problem comes when these slip into generalisations applied to individual pupils in the classroom.

This brings us to another problem with terming a child as "disadvantaged": it suggests a binary classification between who is or who is not "advantaged", which can lead us into superficial



“ We must avoid the trap of deficit thinking

two-dimensional thinking. For example, pupil premium funding is allocated to schools based on whether children qualify for free school meals and studies find that teachers are prone to unconscious biases that limit pupils labelled in this way.

Instead, "under-resourced" highlights the range of assets that some children may miss out on – not just wealth and money but the cultural and educational resources provided by parents and their social networks, as well as basics such as food, healthcare and clothing. Indeed, the term resonates with the concept of cultural capital as it was first developed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.

But what finally convinced me of the need for new language was the views of young people themselves. You may not be surprised to learn that they don't want to be defined as "disadvantaged".

Not everyone is convinced. Some suggest our argument is a middle-class sidestep rather than working-class straight talking, or that softening the way we describe

disadvantage stops people feeling uncomfortable with the reality.

All I can say is I see things differently now. We need new approaches and words to level the education playing field. That includes cutting out hackneyed phrases such as "realising children's potential", which assumes we know what a young person's future capabilities may be or that they are somehow fixed. Emily and I talk about parent partnerships rather than parental engagement – an emphasis on making decisions with families, not for them. And we don't posit families but ourselves as the ones who are 'hard to reach'.

This won't be the last word on this topic. Indeed, there is likely a wealth of common words and phrases in schools and academia that remains to be challenged. We can disagree on whether to change them and what to replace them with, but just having the conversation will help ensure the language of well-meaning professionals like me doesn't blindly damage the very cause we deploy it in aid of.

Opinion

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CHRISTINA JONES

CEO, River Tees MAT and member of the executive group for APSEND National Network for CEOs

Specialist provisions are over-subscribed but under-utilised

Alternative provisions, pupil referral units and special schools can and should be some much more than a place for children to go when their mainstream placement has failed, says Christina Jones

Reading Chris Zarraga's article in these pages last week detailing the scale of the challenge in meeting need for students in the north east left me with a certain sense of despair. Our most vulnerable learners are being put at risk by a system that needs change.

But there is hope too, notably in the recognition (in the article and across the system more broadly) that the solutions aren't all to be found in specialist settings – that every school has a part to play in developing their practices to make the system more inclusive.

Yes, finding the right school place can and does make a world of difference. We see time and again how a setting where a pupil fits in – where their needs are recognised and met, and where they can build positive relationships – leads to strong progress, good qualifications and preparation for adulthood.

Some will make it back to

mainstream schools armed with a better understanding of their needs and how to manage their emotions. Most will make a successful transition into education, employment or training at 16. And their families will feel better supported and more able to work together with schools to help their children succeed too.

The alternative provision and SEND sector is characterised by highly trained staff dedicated to working with the most vulnerable learners. This expertise is invaluable to mainstream settings and, in the

best examples of joined-up thinking, these specialists deliver training and support to mainstream colleagues. This equips them to access mental health specialists, better manage behaviour, use adaptive teaching techniques, and identify underlying SEND and other drivers of behaviour.

As a specialist multi-academy trust, this is some of our most important work. We invest heavily in building and retaining positive relationships with our commissioning local authorities. We work closely with them to find innovative solutions to meet the level of need within local areas. Our independence from any single local authority allows us to work creatively, and to share resources and solutions that have the potential to change lives. Networks such as those facilitated by Schools North East and the AP SEND CEO Network facilitate this important work.

First and foremost, our focus is on changing the narrative that learners who have SEND or who are permanently excluded from school do not or cannot achieve in line with expectations. There are

often very good reasons for this, and interruptions to consistent and adaptive schooling do not help. Every pupil referral unit, AP setting, independent school and special school can draw on multiple examples to disprove that narrative. In most cases, the success for these learners who would not have been achieved within less specialist settings – but this doesn't have to be the case.

The sector has broadly welcomed the national reforms to AP and SEND and see a focus on inclusion in mainstream schools as a positive. This, along with adequate funding within all settings, must be part of the solution. But this will be most effective when specialist provisions can help and support inclusion through training and outreach, as well as providing much-needed intervention places.

The challenge is to get enough capacity within the specialist sector to enable it to effectively deliver this upstream work. That so many provisions are already full is a seriously limiting factor and this is the cycle that we must break.

Perhaps it has been too easy for mainstream schools and local authorities to rely on specialist provisions to deliver places for learners. Our expertise is too seldom sought pre-emptively, before a move is considered necessary.

These are difficult times and we must look after the wellbeing of our workforce who are our greatest resource. But this is a sector that routinely goes the extra mile to help the most vulnerable learners. I am in no doubt that, called upon at the right time, we can help more of them stay in mainstream settings.

“ Our expertise is too seldom sought pre-emptively



Opinion

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CALLUM ROBERTSON

Policy officer, Liberal Democrat
Education Association

Why reactivation is as crucial as recruitment and retention

Solving the recruitment and retention crisis is incredibly straightforward if we put evidence above political quick fixes, says Callum Robertson

To say that teaching is in crisis is not a hyperbolic statement but a sadly accurate one. And yet the solutions on offer from the two main parties are little more than palliatives. However, if we start by honestly recognising the scale of the challenge and agreeing that every student should be consistently in front of an expert, it isn't beyond us to fix the problem.

The evidence is clear: fixing the crisis will improve outcomes for millions. And yet, as Teacher Tapp report, schools are increasingly having to appoint out of a desperation to fill a gap rather than choosing from a list of suitably qualified professionals.

The Liberal Democrat solutions are as grounded in evidence as they are incredibly straightforward. We must look at economics of teaching: why people won't train, why they don't stay and why those who leave don't come back. To recruitment and retention, we must add a third 'R' – reactivation.

Recruitment

According to Department for Education data, most subjects have

a recruitment shortage of varying severity. The evidence for this variability is a matter of cause and effect. The higher the bursary, the more likely the DfE are to hit their target.

When it comes to recruitment at least, money is a good motivator. So our solution is to pay trainee teachers, not a bursary but an actual salary to train. The evidence of demand for Teach First outstripping its capacity to supply indicates that this will work.

Retention

Having trained and invested in our national education workforce, it is important that we protect them from burnout-inducing workloads and motivate them to stay through fair financial reward.

Schools Week readers will be aware of the damning statistic that one in three teachers quits within five years. The government's solution is to spread the incentives to train over a longer period, effectively dangling the carrot for longer. But what we need is to give teachers a positive reason to stay – a loyalty bonus for working in a key sector.

That's why we are committed to looking at student loan forgiveness as a tool for increasing teacher pay and improving retention. Evidence from Teacher Tapp suggests that up to 70 per cent of teachers would

“ The expertise is here, but they see no reason to come back



accept an increase in teaching hours for extra money.

While it is a tough call to invest this money given the severe fiscal constraints placed on the economy by inflation levels and sluggish growth, there is a compelling case to give our key workers a well-deserved break. Student loan forgiveness for teachers with six years' service would be the equivalent of a £1,260 pay rise for teachers on M6 outside of London – a tangible and transformative reward for long-serving teachers who are so crucial to their communities.

This policy would also disproportionately benefit teachers from working-class backgrounds who could not rely on parental support through their higher-education journey. The effect would be a greatly diversified teacher workforce, putting thousands of role models with similar life experiences in front of our nation's most disadvantaged students.

Reactivation

Welcoming the tens of thousands of qualified teachers who have left

the sector back into the classroom would save tens of millions to the public purse compared with continually training new ones. The expertise is here, but they see no reason to come back.

One key reason is that teaching can't compete with the increasingly flexible offer in the wider job market. And yet, published last week, the National Foundation for Educational Research's research commissioned by the Education Endowment Foundation shows that flexible working can be a good way to improve not only recruitment and retention but workforce stability. Some great practice is already taking place across the sector on this front, but schools will greatly benefit from guidance to build on that, normalise its use and broaden its impact.

Taken together, policies to improve recruitment, retention and reactivation offer a full solution to the crisis in teaching rather than another sticking plaster. Our pupils and the profession that serves them deserve nothing less.

Opinion

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COP28: Sustainability in education 2023



LUCIA
GLYNN

Partner – schools and academies,
Rider Levett Bucknall

A roadmap to offset climate change's predictable outcomes

With the countdown to meet decarbonisation targets still running, Lucia Glynn explores how schools can manage this against other pressing priorities

Rishi Sunak's announcement of a slowdown on net zero targets may have taken the pressure off some, but for others the clock still ticks. Challenges continue to rise and funding shows no signs of increasing.

Public-sector buildings including schools are still expected to decarbonise their estate by 2030. Looking at the biblical weather of the past few months, we can all see how important this is and why reducing emissions needs to be high on every school leader's agenda.

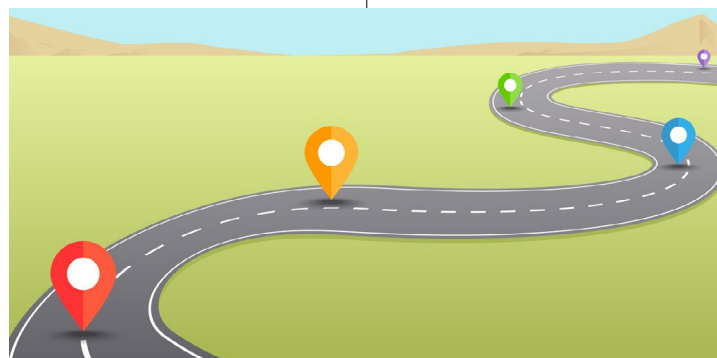
Meanwhile, the condition of the school estate has hit national headlines. Asbestos is found in four out of five schools, which only made it harder to identify problems with RAAC. In addition, more severe weather will inevitably mean that we need differently designed and more resilient school buildings. No surprise then that school leaders are increasingly concerned about planning strategically and forecasting their budget spends.

A roadmap for the unexpected

A key tool for all school and trust leaders is to have a road map for their estate portfolio. This is a strategic plan that maps out the current condition of the buildings, identifies risks and issues, indicates costs of any remedial or replacement works, and sets out the priorities over the short, medium and long term. Linked to a capital budget plan over five to ten years, the strategic plan will set out how the priorities will be funded. The majority will be from central government funding, but a roadmap can also highlight where applications for charitable grant or other funding streams could be made and facilitate this process.

Having a road map means that when the unforeseen happens there is a basis for discussions on what elements must be brought forward, what can be postponed, and what can be dropped until funding and capacity are available. It is critical in providing a strong reminder to retain longer-term priorities when short-term challenges threaten to distract.

Managing school budgets means balancing the rising capital, maintenance and revenue expenditure associated with school buildings, with the costs of resourcing and delivering



“Reducing emissions needs to be high on every leader's agenda

the curriculum, including staff recruitment and retention. Uncertainty around increases to existing funding for school buildings prevails, both for those in receipt of school condition allocation and for those bidding into the condition improvement fund. Managing this uncertainty can be made easier by investing in up-to-date building condition surveys, fire safety surveys and heat decarbonisation plans.

This portfolio of information sharpens focus on where spend may be needed, preventing closures and costly works arising where an earlier, cheaper and less disruptive fix might have been possible. Undertaking these surveys on a regular cycle will keep schools on the front foot for any funding streams that come forward, providing the robust evidence required to support bids – for example, for the public-sector decarbonisation fund. It will also facilitate medium- to longer-term sustainability goals.

Agility for what's predictable

Asset optimisation – using data from condition surveys, net capacity surveys and other information – is key in setting the strategy for how spaces within schools are used and developed. With school rolls falling

across the country in the primary phase but increases in PAN expected in the secondary estate, one way of responding to short-term funding issues is to look at mothballing or repurposing under-used spaces in our schools.

Offering under-utilised spaces to nurseries, wrap-around providers or even healthcare providers can reduce cost pressures while facilitating a holistic community approach for the delivery of integrated services.

Finally, school leaders should keep an eye on estates revenue expenditure, which can easily spiral. Across the system, there is a mix of centralised and devolved estates revenue budgets. Centrally procured services confer economies of scale and other benefits. But procuring local contractors also has advantages, including keeping businesses within school communities afloat. Schools and trusts should explore both models to see where cost and operational efficiencies are possible.

By preparing for the unexpected and remaining agile, the sector can go a long way to meeting its 2030 decarbonisation target and help to alleviate at least some of the predictable impacts of climate change.

Opinion

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COP28: Sustainability in education 2023



PAUL
EDMOND

Chief operating officer, Heart
Academies Trust

Bridging workforce divides for effective climate action

Overcoming barriers to sustainable impact relies on teachers and operations staff working together as equal partners in this shared mission, writes Paul Edmond

Schools have a unique role to play in shaping a sustainable future. However, for effective climate action to take root it is imperative that school operations teams work hand-in-hand with teachers and leaders, not in separate silos.

Collaboration will be crucial in overcoming barriers to positive sustainable impact: from planning renewable energy to enhancing outdoor learning spaces; from resource procurement to carbon footprint reduction; and from building the next generation's knowledge to giving them a sense of hope.

There are some clear areas where this collaboration can take place to contextualise learning.

Planning renewable energy

School operations teams are generally keen to expedite the transition to renewable energy sources. To truly embed sustainability into the culture and fabric of the school, the opportunity to involve

students in the design process should not be missed.

Not only is there a chance to impart a sense of ownership, but engagement can bring sustainability to life, turn abstract concepts into tangible, real-world applications and influence students to be agents of change in their communities. Curriculum links can be made in many subjects, including maths and physics.

Grounds improvement and outdoor learning

Transforming outdoor spaces into vibrant, diverse educational environments requires a concerted effort between operations and teachers. Operations teams will likely plant and maintain these spaces, but their approach can contribute to ensuring teachers feel a sense of ownership and empowerment to integrate the outdoors into their lessons. The prize: dynamic, experiential learning, which fosters a deeper connection between pupils and the natural world.

Resource procurement

Procurement of resources is often a complex balancing act. Finance departments may advocate for reduced spend for budgetary control, operations may be concerned

“Teams must work together, not in separate silos

with waste management, and sustainability leads – should they exist – will likely prioritise fewer resources for environmental reasons. In contrast, teachers need effective resources to deliver lessons that inspire students to make positive contributions to society.

Resolving these inherent tensions necessitates relationships, open dialogue and a collaborative approach to resource allocation. The problem solving and analytic skills of students are developed as well as the awareness of the need for action around sustainability.

School trips and emissions

Reconciling carbon-footprint reduction with providing enriching cultural experiences through school trips is another task fraught with conflict. Operations teams tasked with determining sustainable travel options must work closely with teachers as they seek to maximise the educational value of each trip. Thoughtful planning and creative problem-solving skills are required to strike a balance that enriches students' cultural capital without unduly burdening the environment.

The climate impact of food

The impact of food choices on our climate is well-documented and a topic often felt very personally. Production methods, plant-based diets, and the cost of food waste to people and planet are topics children and young people benefit from understanding.

Teachers can convey the facts, and school catering teams are in a great place to make knowledge

relevant and actionable. By working together, teachers and caterers can develop initiatives that instil a sense of responsibility for sustainable food practices.

Consistency between actions and message

Consistency between the messages children hear and the actions they observe is important in delivering strong educational outcomes. Conversely, inconsistency creates confusion, anxiety and apathy. For genuine sustainability efforts to succeed, schools must prioritise aligning their messages with their actions. A unified front, with operations and teachers working together to model sustainable behaviours and attitudes, is imperative for success.

A much-touted benefit of multi-academy trusts has been creating highly efficient, professional and centralised support services. However, we must recognise the risk of unintentionally separating and isolating teachers from operations teams. Left unchecked, this will lead to missed opportunities to advance sustainability initiatives.

To mitigate the risk, it is imperative we foster a culture of collaboration, ensuring that teachers and operations staff are equal partners in the shared mission of creating sustainable learning environments. Purposefully forging stronger partnerships between them is key to effective climate action, inspiring the next generation of environmental stewards and shaping a society that thrives in harmony with our planet.

Solutions

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MUBINA ASARIA

Online safeguarding consultant,
LGfL - The National Grid for Learning

Educating parents about online safety

Amid startling new data on parents' attitudes to social media, Mubina Asaria explains why and how schools must work with families to keep children safe

Some startling facts about online safety to fix your attention:

- A quarter of the 17 per cent of three- to four-year-olds who have their own mobile phone use WhatsApp
- Children aged three to seven typically use WhatsApp and FaceTime for sending messages or making calls
- The majority of eight-to-11-year-olds have profiles on TikTok, followed by WhatsApp, YouTube and Snapchat
- By 11 to 12 years old, 97 per cent of children have their own social media profile, with almost universal rates of mobile phone ownership as children transition to secondary school.

Keeping children safe online is a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week concern. Engaging with parents about online safety has never been so crucial, but many parents would prefer to leave it to the experts.

School mobile phone bans may or may not be part of the solution, but they can only be the start of one. With seven-to-16-year-olds spending

an average of four hours a day online, parents are key to keeping their children safe, while schools are key to informing parents and carers about the latest risks and harms.

Ultimately, empowering parents to keep their children safe online comes down to communication.

Ofcom's *Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes 2023* report provides some alarming statistics. For example, parents may be familiar with the apps their children are using but many are unaware of the time spent on them. The report reveals that although 84 per cent of parents know about age restrictions, only 37 per cent realise the minimum age to access social media is 13.

Most parents believe that apps such as Snapchat are just fun, but as with all apps – especially those with disappearing messages – there can be a far darker more dangerous side, as highlighted in Revealing Reality's latest report, *Anti-social media: What some vulnerable children are seeing on SnapChat*.

Figures show parental supervision typically declines as children get older, but this is when they are at greater risk of online harm. Less than half of parents directly supervise their child's activity between the ages of five and seven, with this figure declining as they reach transition.



“ **The best way is to adopt a ‘drip-feed’ approach** ”

Online safety is already on the curriculum, but it's crucial given these numbers that parents are empowered to play an active role in keeping their children safe. Key to this is providing them with clear information, strategies and easily accessible resources that will complement what children are learning.

The best way is to avoid information overwhelm and to adopt a drip-feed approach – run pupil-led presentations, provide online safety tips in newsletters or creatively piggy-back off other events such as parent evenings or coffee mornings to share reminders and updates.

Highlighting the importance of parental controls and settings can help them make informed decisions about what their children can access. And with Ofcom reporting that only 14 per cent of children have used the flagging function to report threatening or inappropriate material, remind parents to talk to their children about the reporting channels available to them, whether online, by talking to them or approaching a trusted adult in school.

Children talk and are most likely

to talk to their parents. Working collaboratively and creatively to engage parents as part of a whole-school approach will help protect and empower young people so they can benefit from the opportunities afforded by technology safely.

LGfL's Parentsafe site is designed to support staff-led presentations and for signposting to parents. It features videos, the latest statistics and activities such as story-time ideas, a digital family agreement, conversation starters and tips to reinforce safety messages and establish shared expectations.

Based on the Ofcom report, My child's life online – parent discussion activities using Ofcom statistics is a ready-to-use PowerPoint tailored for parent information sessions and online safety workshops. Other useful links and resources can be found on CEOP Education, Common Sense Media, Internet Matters and the NSPCC.

With a mental health crisis affecting so many children, access to social media is a growing concern. Working with families to avoid its potential harms must be a key plank in our efforts to improve children's wellbeing.



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THE REVIEW

VISUALISING PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

BOOK
TV
FILM
RADIO
EVENT
RESOURCE

Author: Luke Tayler

Publisher: Routledge

Publication date: 29 September 2023

ISBN: 1032301058

Reviewer: Dr Ben King, teacher of geography, Churston Ferrers Grammar School

Focusing on how and why to use diagrams to teach physical geography in the secondary classroom, this book has really got me thinking about how I can improve my own explanations of physical processes and features.

As an experienced teacher of 25 years, I have gradually learned to refine the drawings I create on the whiteboard at the front of my classroom. When I encounter a concept I haven't explained in the past, I often use YouTube clips to enhance my lesson. But if I had read a book like Luke Tayler's *Visualising Physical Geography* back in the 1990s, I am in no doubt my own drawings would have been clearer and much more effective earlier in my teaching career. Seeing the book's front cover alone was enough to make me reassess how I could better communicate the concept of aquifers and the water table. Tayler is unquestionably skilled in communicating complex ideas succinctly through diagrams.

Following my own environmental science degree course in the early 1990s, I realised I had developed an ability to "read" landscapes. This is fundamental to the success of a physical-geography teacher. In the book's first chapter, Tayler uses an essay to explain how diagrams can assist students in "seeing the unseeable" in photographs or in the landscape around them.

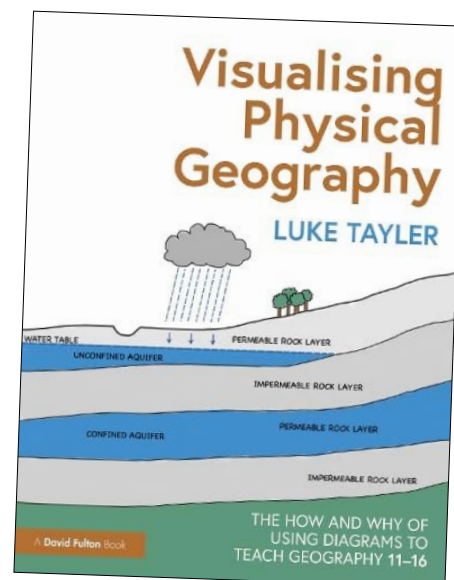
Metacognition among our students has grown significantly over the past decade and even younger children in our secondary classrooms understand the importance of dual coding (Tayler refers to this as the cognitive theory of multimedia learning) rather than relying on

verbal or textual explanations alone. In chapter two, Tayler provides a clear explanation of dual-coding theory to powerfully justify the need for his new book. In chapter three, he takes us through how to create and refine individual lessons and series of lessons.

So much for starters. The book's main course focuses on specific approaches towards communicating the complex and interrelated topics associated with the discipline of physical geography. In each section, the author identifies the prior knowledge that we would expect our students to have (for example, that water freezes and expands at temperatures below zero degrees Celsius) and suggests questions to ask of students after using the associated diagrams to check for their understanding. Providing the latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates of specific case-study examples for referencing on Google Earth is a nice touch.

Through his diagrams and associated explanatory text, Tayler explains the complexity of teaching physical geography to secondary school students and yet manages to guide his reader deftly through how to effectively deliver this valuable work. The section on ridge push and slab pull when explaining plate tectonics is a particular highlight, and Tayler notes how much easier it was in the past to explain the commonly misunderstood concept of convection currents in the mantle.

At times guilty of not pre-rehearsing how I will draw an explanatory diagram on my whiteboard during a lesson, with Tayler's book I can now access digital versions of his diagrams to



insert into my existing lesson slideshows and handouts.

There is much to learn from this book, even for the most experienced geography teacher. And for those in the geography teaching community who feel best-suited to teaching human geography topics, the step-by-step guides and associated analogies are a particular strength.

Being an experienced geography teacher myself, I have worked out some of the techniques described in the book throughout my career. However, not once had I previously been guided in this practice. With a wealth of such diagrams available for free online (including on the author's own X timeline), I'm not sure busy teachers will want to make the time to learn the art. But for those who do – and I can vouch that it is a rewarding one – I would heartily recommend *Visualising Physical Geography* to them to 'leapfrog' their development.

★★★★★
Rating

THE CONVERSATION

LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM



Jess Mahdavi-Gladwell

Deputy head, Robson House, Camden

ANTI-BULLYING WEEK

This week, I led assembly for the first time since joining my new school. It reminded me of [Frances Akinde's entry for this column just before half term](#) on October's surfeit of awareness days. Over the coming days, we will be thinking about Bonfire Night, Remembrance Day, anti-bullying week and Children in Need. October may be over, but the awareness calendar is still full.

Anti-bullying week is particularly close to my heart, as a teacher and as someone who spent several years carrying out research in the area. For others who may not see its importance so readily, this resource could make a useful addition to the staffroom display board or briefing slides.

These are sobering statistics. We all



know that bullying is unpleasant to experience, but its long-term impact is no less frightening. For example, adults who experienced bullying as children are

more likely to experience mental health difficulties. There's enough here to arm any inured colleague with a renewed determination to notice bullying and work to reduce it every day.

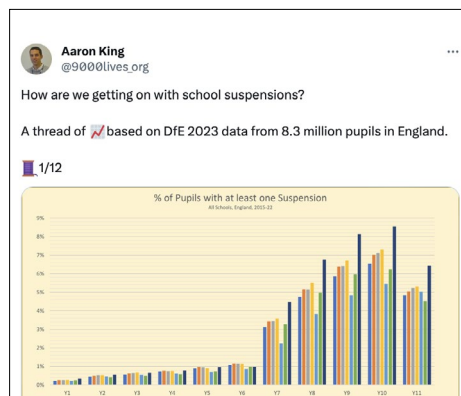
LANGUAGE MATTERS

Oasis Restore is a project by the group that created the Oasis Community Learning Multi-Academy Trust, working in partnership with the Ministry of Justice to create the country's first secure school for young people in custody. The latest blog by Oasis Restore's SENDCo, Danielle Dunlop, reflects on the impact of serving children who have often been under-served.

Learners in such settings need a reflective, restorative approach, and Dunlop's commentary on the use of language when working to support children who display 'behaviours that challenge' shows a clear focus on understanding the reasons behind these behaviours in order to equip young people with the tools to manage themselves. In what is a short post, Dunlop also manages to acknowledge and address the needs of those who work with these children too. The value of psychological safety for all is clear.

DISBELIEF OF SUSPENSION

While we're reflecting on the needs of children outside of mainstream, it makes sense to dwell on those of children who are still within it. This X thread by Aaron King, director of SEND consultancy 9,000 Lives highlights some distressing patterns in relation to suspensions. These include a large increase in suspensions between years 6 and 7 and patterns indicative of positive correlations between suspension and SEND, ethnicity and eligibility for free school meals.



King makes a point I have emphasised more times than I care to remember: if sanctions such as suspensions worked as deterrents, there wouldn't be many in year 11. And yet, the charts show nearly as many in year 11 as in year 8.

Encouragingly, there may be a shift in teachers' willingness to accept such systems, with reports this week that teachers are preparing to strike in opposition to new rules brought in by their school's leadership, ostensibly to support students and teachers. The policies, relating to student behaviour and monitoring of teachers' performance, are described as "draconian" as well as "damaging".

TIME TO CARE

In stark contrast, Keven Bartle's post about the need for reflective supervision speaks to my values. I feel the impact of a truly supportive supervisory relationship and I remember the times it was absent when I needed it.

For leaders to prioritise the wellbeing of their staff team, we must be able to identify what wellbeing means for us. Appraisal and therapy have their places and fill important roles, but effective, reflective supervision brings something additional and different to the table.

More than that, we must make the time for it, and Helen Tarokh's article describing the problems being busy can cause for those around us – something I am sure we are all guilty of at times – is a reminder to zoom out, see the bigger picture and understand the experiences of those who are in the classroom. She touches on professional vulnerability; the value she places on coaching chimes with Bartle's thinking on supervision.

Whatever model is most appropriate for settings or individuals, school leaders must be confident that they can locate their own oxygen masks so that they can support their staff and create environments where they, in turn, can support our learners.

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts



COP28: Sustainability in education 2023

The Knowledge

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



What teachers think of teaching climate and sustainability

Christine Özden, Global director for climate education, Cambridge University Press & Assessment

OCR and its parent organisation, Cambridge University Press & Assessment, take every opportunity to embed knowledge of the natural world in the curriculum, and give young people the skills and understanding they need to tackle one of the world's biggest challenges – climate change.

But we wanted to find out more about how prepared schools and teachers feel about providing lessons on sustainability. We were interested in what must change to make teaching as effective as possible and to create a more inclusive, transformative and green education system with student wellbeing at its heart.

So, in partnership with Reboot the Future, we surveyed 7,000 teachers across the country to find out. What we learned is that there are some clear signs of optimism among the profession.

By 2025, all 24,442 education settings in England are expected to have nominated a sustainability lead, which represents 5 per cent of the teacher pool. Pleasingly, 15 per cent of teachers reported that they were either already in the role or would happily put themselves forward for it. Clearly there is willingness among school staff to drive the environmental agenda forward.

There was similar enthusiasm inside the classroom. More than two-thirds of teachers are engaging their pupils in topics related to sustainability. This was more common in primary schools than secondaries, but in both sectors, teachers were more likely than not to have taught lessons on the environment in the past year.

However, there are discrepancies across the curriculum. Ninety-eight per cent of humanities teachers surveyed had taught lessons on sustainability in the past 12 months, whereas maths teachers were least likely to have done so.

Nevertheless, there was clear enthusiasm for incorporating environmental issues across the school, both in lessons across the curriculum and through initiatives outside the classroom. Research shows that the latter can improve



'The survey revealed enthusiasm – but some real concerns'

motivation and wellbeing, and we know that pupils are keen to learn more about nature and the world around them.

We believe young people must be central to climate education strategies. That's why OCR is engaging with students through organisations such as Teach The Future and Mock COP, as well as directly with students in schools and through social media.

Four in five teachers surveyed told us that the climate and ecological emergency is the biggest challenge young people face, but the survey also revealed some real concerns.

Fifty-six per cent of teachers surveyed could not see a way in which the UK becomes a "world leader in sustainable education by 2030", as set out in the DfE's climate change strategy, regardless of potential reform. Only 1 per cent believe the department's vision is achievable if we carry on as we are. However, younger teachers are more positive about reaching this landmark than teachers in their fifties and older.

Overall, 69 per cent of respondents agreed that the curriculum should be altered to make sustainability more prominent. We're reviewing

our offer to identify where we can do this across subjects.

However, if we expect staff to teach environmental issues, we must ensure they have the tools to do so properly. Two-thirds of our respondents said they don't get enough training on teaching sustainability-related topics. Any new qualifications, including our own GCSE in natural history and Cambridge National in Sustainability, will therefore depend for their success on teachers having the right professional development and resources to teach with confidence.

Next month, I will attend the COP28 summit to talk about teaching climate literacy in India and other parts of the world. I am fortunate to be able to build bridges with climate educators and to share examples of good practice.

Many individual teachers in the UK are doing an amazing job to engage their students on sustainability, but this report shows that schools need more support, and potentially even substantial changes to the curriculum, if they are to help pupils properly prepare for a changing climate.

Week in

Westminster

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

MONDAY

Readers of last week's WiW will remember we've been noticing the size of Gillian Keegan's entourage.

It appears it will get even bigger, with the Department for Education seeking a *personal videographer*.

For a starting salary of £48,701, the "senior digital videographer" will "primarily work directly with the secretary of state, as well as ministers and special advisers, capturing high-profile engagements across the country and in our studio through high-quality video and photography".

They will "play a pivotal role in helping the team to identify opportunities, plan and create content that will connect to our audiences". The successful candidate "will be able to confidently shoot and edit content, and be comfortable directing, giving advice and best practice in the moment".

So not only does Keegan have a special adviser in charge of social media, soon she will have her own camera crew too!

TUESDAY

If anyone was playing Keegan bingo over the past week, it's been a BIG ONE.

For the uninitiated, Keegan bingo is like Nick Gibb bingo, except instead of marking your ticket each time he mentions E.D. Hirsch or phonics or times-tables tests, you get your pen ready every time Keegan mentions she used to be an apprentice, worked in business or is from Knowsley.

On Friday she was addressing her followers on X, formerly known as Twitter, in a video about how she had seen technological advancements during

her career in banking. On Tuesday she was expressing her joy "as a former apprentice" at the King's Speech.

Either the ed sec is running out of things to say, or is deliberately trolling us all!

WEDNESDAY

Everyone who knows Nick Gibb knows that his sojourn on the back benches between September 2021 and October 2022 were tough for the long-serving schools minister.

He feared that in his absence, his legacy, carefully constructed over almost 20 years at the forefront of Conservative education policy, would be dismantled.

But he didn't just sit on his hands. Gibb told MPs today about how he served as a trustee of the David Ross Education Trust.

He even managed to pass comment on his enforced exile – "that short period of outrage" – prompting laughter in the education committee room.

During his testimony, Gibb warned it was the wrong time for multi-academy trust inspections because the concept was "relatively new and evolving".

"The danger of Ofsted going in and saying, 'You should have this, this and this,' is that it may not be inspecting against best practice.

"We should be nurturing what is in the back office and providing advice to multi-academy trusts about what you should have: a director of primary, a director of secondary, compliance, a really good finance director—all those things. Also, it all depends on the size of the MAT."

Ofsted boss Amanda Spielman was also on fighting form as she also faced the

education committee, using one of her last appearances in front of MPs to dispel myths about inspection.

She dismissed concerns about leaders who work as inspectors having an unfair advantage because of their training, and even slapped down former schools minister Robin Walker for suggesting that post-inspection surveys were conducted during inspections.

The Ofsted chief also took aim at her predecessors and criticised the National Education Union. Few were spared.

The gloves are off!

THURSDAY

We don't want to keep going on about Keegz, but we just saw another job advert to join her blossoming team. This time she's after a speechwriter.

The ad states: "This role will require directly working with the Secretary of State for Education, crafting clear, interesting speeches that reflect her priorities and passions."

The screenshot shows a job advertisement on the GOV.UK website. The job title is "Senior Digital Videographer (Secretary of State for Education)" within the "Department for Education". It includes a reference number (324140), salary (£48,701), and job grade (Senior Executive Officer / Senior Information Officer). A "Contents" section lists links for Location, About the job, Benefits, Things you need to know, and Apply and further information. The application deadline is 11:55 pm on Monday 20th November 2023.

Brush up on your knowledge of business, apprenticeships and Knowsley and you've practically got the job.



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.

We are looking to appoint a Director of Finance to join our Trust. Reporting to the CEO you will work closely with other members of the Executive. This role is crucial to us and presents an opportunity to gain maximum value for money and have a direct impact on children's education.

As Director of Finance, you will be one of the most senior Directors in the Trust and someone whose leadership within the Central Team will be critical. You will work closely with the CEO in leading on Trust strategic priorities more generally, as well as overseeing the financial management, capital projects and risk management of the Trust. You will also act as company secretary.

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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- An established name, which you can be proud to work for.
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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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