

SCHOOLS WEEK

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

An 'anti-maths mindset' is not our real problem



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FRIDAY, NOV 17, 2023 | EDITION 339

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- Three schools shut over crumbly concrete after council does second check
- Stockport called in engineers as 'precaution' after DfE escalated policy
- Fresh concerns that hidden RAAC will have been missed across sector

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SCHOOLS WEEK

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Hindsight might be helpful for DfE

The news of school minister Nick Gibb's departure on Monday (page 6) came as somewhat of a shock. It wasn't ideal: he'd been brought back in to provide some stability to a department that had been treated as a ministerial merry-go-round.

But the appointment of Damian Hinds as his successor – in the short period until the next election at least – seems like one of the least bad options.

He already knows the department having led it as education secretary back in 2018 to 2019. He'll be tasked with reviewing the relationships and sex education curriculum and the recruitment and retention strategy – both initiatives he signed off on.

He will already have relationships with some in the sector. And he wasn't unnecessarily combative to the unions, unlike some of his successors, which may be productive given the relaunch of the School Cuts campaign (page 12).

But there will be new issues he needs to quickly get a grip of. That includes the National Tutoring Programme and what to do next with a scheme that without associated funding is likely to die out (a process that is already starting, see page 9).


There's also the issue of school buildings – which is likely to be a major focal point for Labour during next year's election.

As we reveal this week, the RAAC crisis is far from over (page 5). And then there's the wider problem of our crumbling school estate, which our investigation (page 14) again shows – the current pot of cash to keep buildings in good nick is just inadequate.

There's also the handover of Ofsted chief inspectors in January, which our analysis (page 10 and 11) provides some food for thought on whether lofty promises made back in 2019 have been followed through.

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- 1 [Working in schools 'unsustainably demanding' as teacher wellbeing hits five-year low](#)
- 2 [Schools invited to apply for free King Charles portrait](#)
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- 4 [Keegan to get her own camera person \(on £50k a year\)](#)
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GCSE exam aids in place for another year

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Pupils taking GCSE maths, physics and combined science are set to be given exam aids for a final year following the pandemic disruption – but leaders say the permission has come too late.

This comes despite former schools minister Nick Gibb saying in August there was an “expectation” that formula and equation sheets would not be offered for 2024 tests.

However, a two-week consultation, announced on Thursday, said this support should continue for exams next summer “in view of the disruption this cohort of students may have experienced”.

Ofqual said there was “strong support” for the aids in 2022 and 2023, which had had “a positive impact” on pupil confidence.

The regulator’s review of those assessments “indicates that there is no evidence that the functioning of the assessment was compromised”.

But the DfE said exams would run as normal in 2025.

This reflects “that those pupils will have had the opportunity to benefit from more time in secondary school with support from teachers and interventions such as the National Tutoring Programme, compared with pupils from the previous



Gillian Keegan

two cohorts”.

Sarah Hannafin, head of policy at the NAHT, the school leaders’ union, welcomed the plans, but said it was “disappointing” the decision had been made almost a full term into teaching.

“Many year 11 students will have their mock exams in December and schools need to know whether to allow the use of formulae and equation sheets in the mocks or not.”

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said exam aids should be handed out “on a permanent basis”.

Dr Jo Saxton, Ofqual chief regulator, previously confirmed there would be no grading protection in 2024.

This summer’s exams marked the end of a two-year plan to remove pandemic

inflation.

Returning to pre-pandemic standards meant “people know what that benchmark is and what students need to know, understand and do to achieve a certain grade”, Saxton said.

Asked whether it was fair to have no protections next year, she said while the pandemic had “cast a long shadow” it was “further and further in the past”.

Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, said youngsters taking GCSEs next year would be the last who “experienced two years of national closures during secondary school. It’s right that we recognise that with some additional support.

“GCSEs are young people’s passport to their next stage of education and we must ensure students have the opportunity to show what they know and can do, and ultimately meet their potential.”

The consultation will run until 11.45pm on November 30.

Meanwhile, more detailed A-level results data published on Thursday showed the attainment gap between poorer pupils and their more-advantaged peers this year was 4.88.

This is smaller than the gap of 5.08 last year – the widest since records began – and the same as pre-pandemic 2019.

[READ THE CONSULTATION HERE](#)

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Schools doing ‘all they can’ on attendance won’t get marked down

Schools with high absences that can demonstrate they are doing “all they reasonably can” to raise attendance will be judged “favourably” during inspections, Ofsted has said.

The watchdog has published a blog that aims to clarify its position on attendance, as higher levels persist post-pandemic.

Government data shows 22.3 per cent of pupils missed more than one in ten sessions last year. The overall absence was 7.2 per cent in the week-starting October 16, much higher than pre-pandemic norms.

Ofsted said it remained “very concerned about the effect this will have on children”.

The inspectorate said schools “have a vital role in improving attendance but not all factors influencing attendance are in their control”.

Because of this, “there cannot be an arbitrary attendance percentage that all schools need to reach”.

But it added that many factors were within schools’ powers, “and it is right to expect them to do all they reasonably can to achieve the highest possible attendance”.

“If a school can demonstrate they are doing this, we will judge it favourably, even if its attendance numbers are lower than previously.”

Schools would “need to demonstrate they are moving towards pre-pandemic levels of

attendance or higher, even if they remain a distance away from their overall ambition”.

“However, if a school is not doing all that can reasonably be expected, we may still have concerns.”

Ofsted also pointed out that the highest attendance rates were linked with the best outcomes at all key stages.

“Even missing small amounts of education can mean a child misses important sections of the curriculum and may therefore struggle to learn concepts that are built on what they missed.

“It’s not just about the academic opportunities. There’s value in the whole school experience.”

Schools shut after extra inspections find hidden crumbly concrete

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

EXCLUSIVE

Three schools given clean bills of health following RAAC inspections have now been told they have the crumbly concrete.

The cases have reignited concerns more primaries and secondaries will be at risk of collapse. Early inspections only required visual checks.

Stockport Council closed two schools in the past three weeks after commissioning an external expert to conduct in-depth surveys of its estate “as an additional precaution”.

The local authority hired the engineers after the Department for Education ramped up its RAAC policy towards the end of the summer, despite having already carried out inspections itself.

In the wake of the closures, Cheadle Hulme High, an academy also in Stockport, called in experts who found a block of the material hidden under several layers of paint.

When asked if more schools could have undetected RAAC, Matt Byatt, the president of the Institution of Structural Surveyors, said: “There’s probably a more than even chance. It’s all about what [responsible bodies] instructed someone to look at.”

Byatt stressed it was “quite probable and possible” that anything covered up would not be seen during a visual check.

The DfE escalated its RAAC policy by ordering 104 schools to partially or fully close days before the start of the new academic year. This came after three collapses “without warning” in buildings considered non-critical.

Stockport Council stressed it had already undertaken RAAC checks “in line with DfE guidance and requests since 2019”.

But following the government announcement at the end of August, it asked engineers to “carry out visual and intrusive inspections where required of all school buildings at risk of containing” the material. The authority said this was done “as an additional precaution”.



St Thomas' C of E Primary closed for two days at the end of October following a visit from surveyors. Pupils in years 1 to 6 have since been moved to nearby Woodford Primary School.

Youngsters in nursery and reception are learning “in the one area” of St Thomas’ “which does not have RAAC in the ceiling”.

Bramhall High shut last Friday. It reopened to years 10 and 11, as well as to vulnerable pupils on Tuesday, while the rest of the school learned remotely for the rest of the week.

From Monday one additional year group a day will be brought in on a rotation. A council spokesperson said the school intended “to increase this capacity over the next few weeks”.

Cheadle Hulme subsequently conducted further checks of its site on Monday. Staff were concerned about a small part of a ceiling in a space not used for teaching.

Surveyors brought in the next day concluded RAAC was only in the “10 x 6m” area, according to an academy spokesperson.

“Essentially, over many years, a significant number of layers of paint had been applied so that it looked smooth and solid.

“Given that the rest of the school was found to be RAAC-free, the school opened the

following day for all year groups.”

In March 2022, responsible bodies of state-funded schools were invited to complete a survey to give ministers a clearer picture on the prevalence of RAAC.

Guidance published later that year said “initial assessments” – which included a visual inspection – could be “undertaken by someone who has responsibility for building or estate management as well as the day-to-day running of the site”.

The DfE advised that once the concrete was “suspected or identified, a specialist structural engineering consultant should be appointed”.

The guidance was updated in September to say experts should be hired if the material was suspected or if estates managers were “unsure”.

Latest government figures, published last month, confirmed the presence of RAAC at 214 schools.

A Stockport Council spokesperson said work was taking place so children could “return as soon as it is safe to do so”.

The authority is also continuing “to carry out inspections across the borough so we can be assured about the condition of the roof material”.

The red box king makes way for the comeback kid

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Former education secretary Damian Hinds has returned to the Department for Education as schools minister after the resignation of Nick Gibb in Rishi Sunak's Monday reshuffle.

Many MPs due to stand down at the next election used the shake-up as a chance to prepare for life outside Parliament.

Gibb, the former schools minister who dominated Conservative education policymaking for almost two decades, but divided opinion, was one of them.

He served at the DfE for 10 of the past 13 years in three separate stints. He was widely expected to stay in post until the election, having only returned to the department last autumn from his second spell on the backbenches.

But on Monday he announced that he had been "discussing taking up a diplomatic role after the general election". As a result he had asked the prime minister if he could step down from the government at the reshuffle "and he has agreed". He will also stand down as an MP.

The big national story was the unexpected return of the former prime minister David (now Lord) Cameron as foreign secretary. But education had its own comeback kid moment as Hinds returned to the department he ran between January 2018 and July 2019.

He becomes one of the few secretaries of state to return to their department as a junior minister, becoming the sixth schools minister in 18 months.

Gillian Keegan, who remains in post as education secretary, said she was "delighted" to welcome Hinds back.

"He is a hugely experienced and capable minister who I know will continue to build on Nick Gibb's fantastic record of driving up standards."

Hinds said he was "so pleased" to be joining the team and "looking forward to working with the inspiring teachers and leaders in our schools, and all at [the DfE]."

During Hinds's tenure as education secretary, the government completed its reforms to relationships, sex and health



education and published the recruitment and retention strategy.

His new role means he is likely to preside over the current review of both.

Coasting and floor standards for schools were scrapped on his watch, while efforts to hold academy trusts to account were stepped up.

But a new coasting schools measure was introduced last year, allowing greater intervention in schools rated less than 'good' at two inspections in a row.

Gibb posted on X that it had been a "privilege to serve as schools minister for four prime ministers" and he remained an "enthusiastic supporter" of Sunak.

"I am proud that over my 10 years as a minister, standards in schools have risen. England is fourth in the world in reading as a result of the phonics reforms and we are rising internationally for maths and English. We have transformed the curriculum so that it is knowledge rich."

In his resignation letter, he added:

"My passion for ensuring that every child gets the best possible education will remain with me until my dying day."

"I shall miss so much of my

work, both as a minister who (oddly I am told) loves the incessant demands of policy papers that fill the red boxes and as a member of parliament and the constituents who I have enjoyed serving."

The education secretary paid tribute to her departing colleague. In a letter she said he had "dedicated more than a decade of your life as minister for schools and the reform you've brought in have changed millions of children's lives for the better".

"Your time in office, working with school leaders and teachers, has transformed the entire school system with a relentless drive to improve standards and outcomes for the next generation."

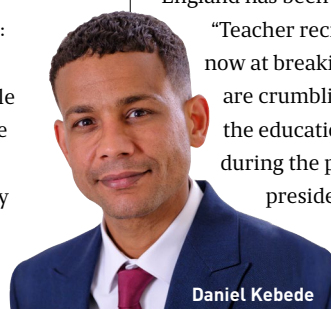
Keegan added that many teachers would be sad to see him go.

But Daniel Kebede, the leader of the National Education Union, said Gibb had been at the DfE at a time "in which the education system in England has been battered from pillar to post".

"Teacher recruitment and retention are now at breaking point. School buildings are crumbling. All the problems facing the educational system have deepened during the period in which Gibb has presided over schools."



Gillian Keegan



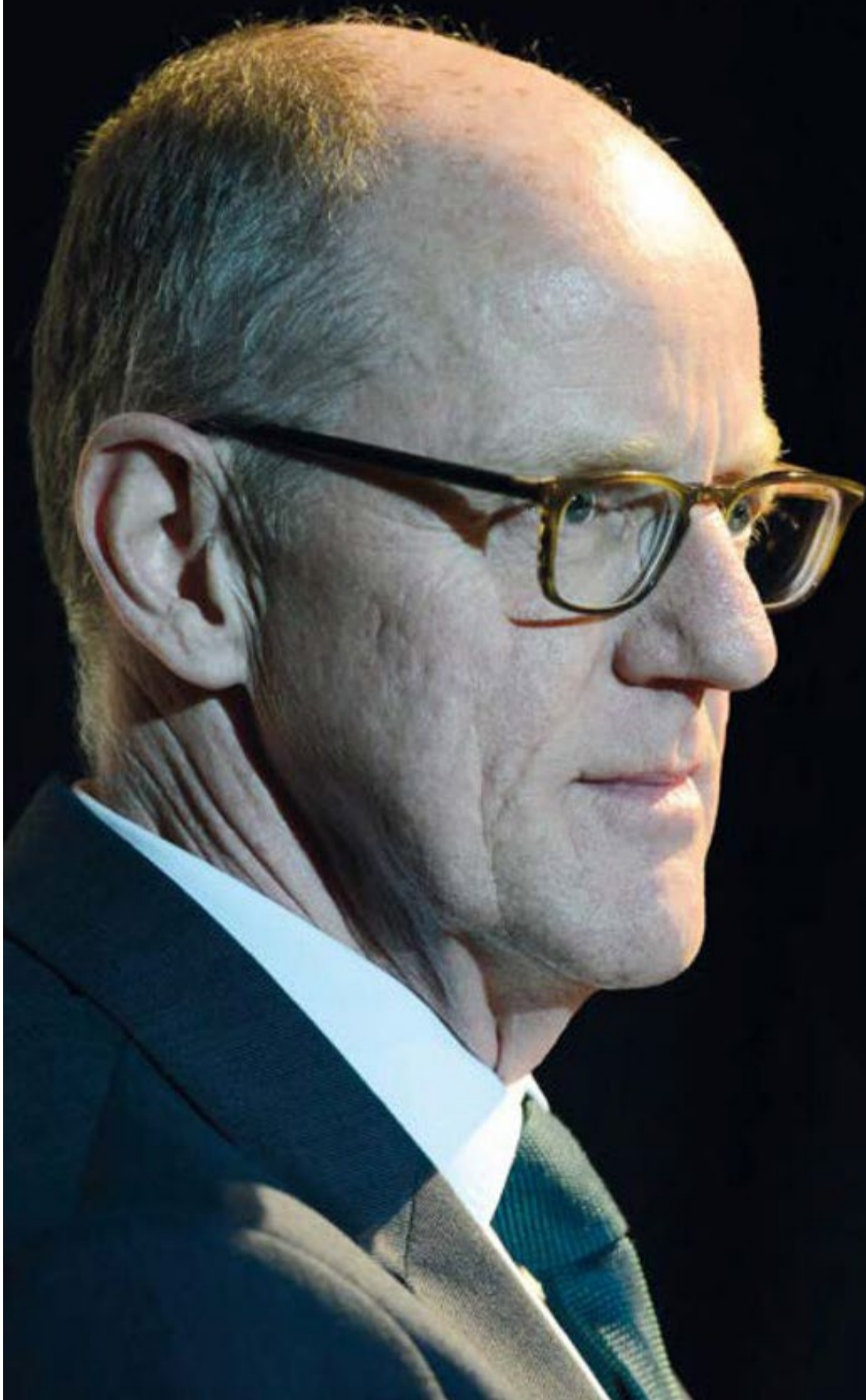
Daniel Kebede

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• THE FINAL EDITION •

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10 YEARS
6 SECRETARIES OF STATE
3 ELECTIONS
1 REFERENDUM

The only thing that was

**STRONG
AND STABLE**
was the immovable

NICK GIBB

The education secretaries he's outlasted (while in post)



Cut out and keep



Special school rejected at council criticised for 'significant' shortages

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Ministers rejected plans for a new special school in an area that Ofsted later exposed as having "significant" numbers of children forced into home education because of a places shortage.

Inspectors said Hertfordshire had "widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns" about children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) said leaders had "not acted with the necessary urgency to address longstanding, systemic and significant weaknesses".

It is the fifth council to get the lowest possible rating since new SEND inspections were introduced in January.

In the Hertfordshire report, published last week, inspectors found a "significant" number of parents who felt they had no alternative but to educate their child at home while they waited for a special school place or to have their children's needs assessed. Some parents had left their jobs to support their children.

Special school turned down, others delayed

Inspectors said leaders had "recognised" the shortage and had taken action to commission and plan for additional special school places.

But at the point of the inspection in July, a "substantial proportion" of these extra places were not available.

School forum documents from September reveal the government this year turned down a bid from the council for a free special school.

Hertfordshire submitted an application to open the school for children with severe learning difficulties in 2022.

Another special free school, James Marks Academy, proposed in 2019 only opened this September in temporary accommodation after a "plethora of delays", the school's website said.

It opened with 20 pupils for this year in Hemel Hempstead before it moves to a new building in Welwyn next September.

A third 60-place free special school, in Potters Bar, was proposed last year and was due to open



in September. But it has now been pushed back a year.

More than 2,000 pupils were electively home-educated in the county in spring last year, with 50 parents listing "dissatisfaction with SEND" as the reason. Two hundred said it was because of mental health, according to government data.

Schools Week investigations have exposed a special school places crisis that has forced leaders to cram vulnerable pupils into converted therapy spaces and staffrooms.

The council said it was investing £91 million to create 1,000 new SEND school places in specialist and mainstream schools. Some specialist resources provisions attached to mainstream schools had already opened.

Unlike some councils that have huge SEND funding blackholes, Hertfordshire had a dedicated schools grant surplus of £12.6 million.

EHCPs are 'of poor quality'

Inspectors said a significant proportion of pupils with education, health and care plans (EHCPs) were attending mainstream school part-time while waiting for a special school place.

Ofsted and the CQC said that many EHCPs were "poor quality" and "lack precision and clarity". The exclusion rate amongst pupils with plans was a "concern".

The report said families were "frustrated" at having to follow up "delays or errors" to EHCPs and did not feel listened to. Some felt

they had "no option but to pursue legal routes".

The SEND National Crisis Hertfordshire group said parents "have had enough", adding: "We have witnessed first-hand the devastating impact of the failings outlined in this report."

Richard Roberts, the council leader, said it had "struggled to keep up" with the 185 per cent increase in children with statutory plans since 2015.

The council would draw up an improvement action plan, overseen by Dame Christine Lenehan, the former director of the Council of Disabled Children.

Hertfordshire was due to take part in the government's SEND reforms pilot, but decided not to participate to "remain focused on addressing our local challenges", a spokesperson said.

Three other councils – Plymouth, Oldham and Oxfordshire – have been handed improvement notices this month.

A DfE spokesperson said councils were responsible for providing the right support for children in their areas "but we know there is more to do".

The council is still working on plans for a new special school and hope to be "well positioned" for any future free school bidding rounds, if they are unable to find alternative sources of funding. But 2027 is the earliest the school could open.



Richard Roberts



Dame Christine Lenehan

1 in 5 schools face handing back all their tutoring cash

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Up to one in five schools face having their catch-up cash clawed back this year because they did not provide details of how it was spent.

Schools had until last month to submit their mandatory "year-end statement" on how they spent their National Tutoring Programme (NTP) grant in 2022-23, even if they didn't use the money.

If the form is not submitted, the Education and Skills Funding Agency recovers all of a school's allocation.

About 4,200 schools (20 per cent) had not completed the form at the closing date on October 12, the DfE said in response to a Freedom of Information (FOI) request.

Schools have been given a final chance to submit the form this month, so that figure may change.

But the number is still significantly above the 850 who had not completed the document by October 21 last year for 2021-22.

Schools had to contribute 40 per cent of catch-up costs last year to access their funding.

Julia Harnden, a funding specialist at the school leaders' union ASCL, said it suggested "the strings attached" to the NTP "deterred" some schools from accessing the grant.

"The need to supplement the grant with increasing amounts from school budgets and complete a burdensome year-end statement is clearly having an impact on the scheme's viability.

"The future of the NTP lies in schools being given the funding and flexibility to make tutoring work in their setting, not in ever-decreasing amounts of funding that schools must jump through hoops to access and that will be clawed back if they put a toe out of line."

School leaders originally had until September 29 to fill in the form, but this was extended by two weeks after



technical issues.

The DfE said it had "carried out a range of activities" to support schools to complete the statement, including written guidance, webinars and email and telephone calls.

It was "continuing the activity to increase responses and verify information" provided by schools.

Schools were emailed on November 6 detailing the amount DfE would recover.

The FOI showed that 17,200 schools (80 per cent) had completed the statement last month.

DfE data shows that as of May, 76 per cent of schools had used the NTP last year. Updated figures are due next month.

In 2021-22, 12.6 per cent of schools did not use the NTP at all.

Ministers also clawed back £114 million of unspent cash from nearly half of the country's schools who did not use all their catch-up allocation that year.

The catch-up subsidy dropped to 50 per cent this year and, as it stands, the flagship scheme will end in August. Any schools wanting to continue tutoring will have to pay for all of it.

Nick Brook, the chair of the DfE strategic tutoring advisory group, said the volume of tutoring delivered was "highly sensitive to the level of

subsidy provided".

"This will come as little surprise to many but should ring alarm bells in the DfE as to the likely consequence of removing tutoring subsidy altogether next year."

Labour has signalled it will look into "effective [tutoring] interventions", but that money could be tight if it wins the next election.

Bridget Phillipson, the shadow education secretary, told an event on Tuesday she was "really interested" in the University of Exeter's work using undergraduates as tutors.

"I think [it] is showing some initial promise in terms of improved outcomes, but also how that might then be a route to support young people into thinking that teaching is a really brilliant place to be.

"It's about making the case in terms of the evidence for why interventions are effective.

"If we win the election there will not be lots of money kicking around. But looking at places where you can make the biggest difference with often quite limited resources is a really important starting point."

A DfE spokesperson said all eligible schools had several opportunities to submit their year-end statement.

"Any that missed the initial window at the start of term can submit at the end of this month, by following the instructions we have provided."



Nick Brook



Bridget Phillipson

ANALYSIS: OFSTED

Are schools in poorer areas now getting better grades? It's complicated ...

AMY WALKER

@AMYRWALKER

EXCLUSIVE

Schools in the poorest areas are getting better Ofsted grades, but there is still a huge gap with their wealthier counterparts, new analysis suggests.

Experts also point out it is not possible to say how much of the rise is simply because of more 'good' grades now being issued – and poorer schools are now actually less likely to get 'outstanding'.

Chief inspector Amanda Spielman pledged at the start of her tenure that the 2019 inspection framework would “reward schools in challenging circumstances that are raising standards through strong curricula”.

She had said the old framework, which focused more on results, had made it “harder to get a good or outstanding grade if your test scores are low” as a result of a “challenging or deprived intake”.

As Spielman nears her final month in office, Schools Week looks at whether she's followed through on that promise ...

'Tentative signs' of change ...

In a December 2019 blog, Ofsted admitted schools with more deprived intakes were less likely to be rated 'good' – despite the inspection changes.

But has it changed since? Schools Week replicated the analysis, which compared grades issued to schools broken down by their income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI) quintile.

In 2018-19, there was a 17 percentage point difference between the proportion of the most and least deprived schools deemed 'good'. But last year, the gap was just four percentage points.

But IDACI is based on the postcode in which children live, which might not necessarily reflect their disadvantage levels.

However, analysis of Ofsted grades versus the percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals also shows a similar trend.

John Jerrim, professor of education and social statistics at UCL's Institute of Education, said the analysis showed “tentative signs that the link between Ofsted judgments and disadvantage may be weakening”.



John Jerrim



... but all grades are improving

But he urged caution on drawing any firm conclusions.

One complication is that 'outstanding' schools have only recently started being inspected again – meaning the cohort of schools visited by inspectors last year is different to 2018-19.

In autumn 2021, when inspections resumed post-Covid, Spielman said halving the number of outstanding schools to one in ten was a “more realistic starting point for the system”.

However, when we re-ran the analysis with previously 'outstanding' schools omitted, the gap between schools with poorer and wealthier pupils still shrank.

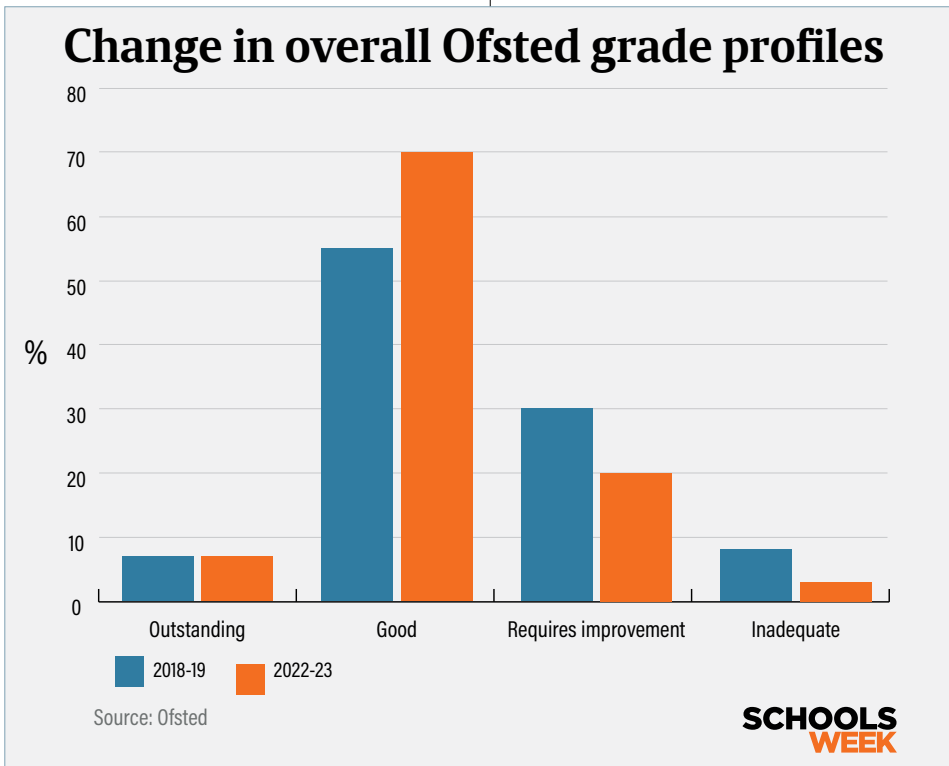
Dave Thomson, the chief statistician at FFT Education Datalab, said this supported the finding that schools in poorer areas were getting better grades.

But another issue is the different profile of grades handed out under the current framework compared with pre-2019.

For instance, across all inspections in 2018-19, just 55 per cent of schools were rated 'good' and 38 per cent were below 'good'.

But last year, 70 per cent of schools were rated 'good' and just 23 per cent were less than 'good'.

Thomson said this meant we won't know if “the schools that were judged 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' in the past would have fared any



ANALYSIS: OFSTED

better had they been inspected under the current framework.

“In other words, has the standard Ofsted expects changed?”

And ‘outstanding’ gap gets bigger

But while more ‘good’ grades are given out, far fewer ‘outstanding’ grades are now awarded.

This has resulted in a growing gap in the top grade between schools with the poorest and wealthiest pupils.

Our analysis shows 14 per cent of the schools with the least free school meal pupils got ‘outstanding’ last year, compared with 5 per cent of those with the most.

This is a much wider gap than in 2018-19 (10 per cent versus 6 per cent respectively).

Jerrim said this finding was “worrying”. When broken down by phases, the change at primary is minimal.

But at secondary level, the gap has ballooned. In 2018-19, just 2 per cent of secondaries with the poorest pupils got ‘outstanding’, compared with 17 per cent with the fewest.

Last year, this had changed to 5 per cent and 36 per cent, respectively.

What does it mean for deprived schools?

Paul Tarn, the chief executive at Delta Academies Trust, suggested that “middle-class cohort[s]” were still “much better placed” to gain the top grades because they were “better able to articulate their learning” to inspectors.

Tom Campbell, the chief executive of E-ACT, said he was concerned inspectors were still failing to “understand the impact a school is making despite the



Chris Zarraga

challenges”, which included acute recruitment issues.

Chris Zarraga, the director of Schools North East, said most leaders in the region thought the framework was “an improvement”.

“However, the persistence of the gap is a reminder that the impact of long-term deprivation, which the north east has higher rates of, is not adequately being taken into account.”

In response to our analysis, an Ofsted

spokesperson said it “always” took a “school’s circumstances into account on inspection, including its deprivation level”.

“In 2019, our new education inspection framework put greater emphasis on the substance of education – the curriculum.

“Many schools are now more focused on providing their pupils with a broad and rich curriculum, and this is reflected in recent positive inspection outcomes.”

The spread of grades by free school meal eligibility

2022-23

FSM quintile	Outstanding	Good	RI	Inadequate
1	14%	71%	13%	2%
2	7%	75%	16%	3%
3	5%	69%	23%	3%
4	5%	68%	24%	3%
5	5%	69%	21%	5%

2018-19

FSM quintile	Outstanding	Good	RI	Inadequate
1	10%	67%	17%	5%
2	9%	61%	25%	5%
3	8%	54%	33%	5%
4	5%	51%	33%	10%
5	6%	49%	35%	10%

Source: Ofsted management data. Quintile 1 is schools with the fewest FSM pupils; quintile 5 those with the most



AMY WALKER | @AMYWALKER

Keegan’s Ofsted grade boast is ‘cynical’, says academic

Gillian Keegan’s claim that a rise in Ofsted grades since 2010 shows the Conservatives are “relentlessly driving up standards” is “a complete red-herring”, says a London academic.

As of August 31, 89 per cent of schools were rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’, a one percentage increase on the year before.

On social media, Keegan highlighted that “only” 68 per cent of schools were rated ‘good’ or better under Labour in 2010, when the Conservatives came to power.

“This progress is thanks to the dedication of our hard-working teachers and the reforms that we have introduced since 2010 that

have made a lasting impact on the quality of education received by young people,” a spokesperson said.

But John Jerrim, professor of education and social statistics at UCL’s Institute of Education, described the education secretary’s claim as “a complete red-herring and pretty cynical”.

Schools rated as ‘outstanding’ were exempt from inspection for eight years until 2020, meaning the proportion of top-rated schools “couldn’t decline – it could only stay still or go up”, he said.

Four in five previously ‘outstanding’ schools have lost their top grade in the past two years.

The introduction of ungraded inspections for ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ schools in 2015 had “made it quite hard for a school rated as good to be downgraded”, Jerrim said.

“Hence, again, this has driven the [percentage of] good and outstanding to increase.”

Ofsted data up to August shows that 2 per cent of ungraded inspections of ‘good’ schools end up being converted into graded inspections, where the outcome may change.

The proportion of ‘good’ schools in Ofsted’s analysis has risen from 66 per cent in August 2019 to 73 per cent last year.

Unions launch revamped funding campaign

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

The relaunch of a school funding campaign has put unions on a collision course with ministers ahead of next year's election.

Announcing its revamped School Cuts campaign and website, the National Education Union, NAHT and ASCL leaders' unions and ParentKind warned that 92 per cent of mainstream schools would be "unable to cope" with cost increases in 2024-25.

They predicted 99 per cent of secondary schools and 91 per cent of primaries would "have to make cuts to survive".

However, the analysis is based on hypothetical spending and pay awards not yet made by government.

The unions want the chancellor to commit at next week's autumn statement to an extra £1.7 billion in funding to allow schools to cover the cost of large pay rises. They will lobby MPs as part of the campaign.

In a recent letter to Jeremy Hunt, leaders pointed out school budgets were due to grow by just 1.9 per cent in 2024-25, but school costs would lift 5.8 per cent if pay rises matched this year's settlement.

Paul Whiteman, who leads the NAHT, said Rishi Sunak had pledged to make education his main funding priority.

"The upcoming autumn statement is the prime minister's opportunity to honour his promise to his party and to the country."

The unions' analysis assumes teachers will get another 6.5 per cent pay rise next year with no extra funding to cover the costs.

In its methodology document, School Cuts said it believed it was reasonable "to assume it [pay] will increase by the same amount in 2024-25 given the scale of the teacher recruitment crisis".

But in recent years, the government has provided funding to either fully or partially cover larger pay rises.

Luke Sibieta, a research fellow at the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), said although such high pay rises "could turn out to be necessary given difficulties recruiting and retaining both teachers



and support staff...I strongly suspect that if the government did agree to such rises, it would provide extra funding to cover the associated costs".

IFS analysis also suggested schools could "probably afford a pay rise of 3 per cent next year based on existing funding".

The School Cuts campaign was boosted in the run-up to the 2017 general election in which education became the third biggest issue for voters behind Brexit and health.

A poll after the election, in which the Conservatives lost their majority, suggested 750,000 people changed their vote because of concerns about school funding.

The website was relaunched last autumn with a call for £2 billion extra funding, which was subsequently awarded at the autumn statement. Now it has been updated with next year's funding figures.

Geoff Barton, ASCL's general secretary, said the School Cuts data was "stark and the conclusion inescapable – educational provision and standards are at risk because of the inadequacy of government funding".

But Conservative MPs have been highly critical of the website.

It was also criticised in 2019 by the UK Statistics Authority, which concluded a claim that 91 per cent of schools

were facing funding cuts gave a "misleading impression".

The DfE declined to comment when Schools Week approached it to ask if it contested any of the figures presented on the relaunched site.

Instead, its spokesperson said school funding was "rising by £3.5 billion this year compared to 2022-23, reaching the highest level in history, in real terms per pupil, by 2024-25".

Daniel Kebede, the general secretary of the National Education Union, said the government "which has insisted for too long on schools doing more with less, has now run out of road".

"This is an overwhelming case for action on school funding."

In a letter to the prime minister and education secretary Gillian Keegan, Stephen Morales, the chief executive of the Institute of School Business Leadership, said professionals had "spent well over two decades trying to plaster over the cracks of funding insufficiency".

Current capital investment meant it would take 400 years to rebuild every school. He

also called for an end to "the reactive and piecemeal approach to funding announcements" that resulted in pay announcements coming after budget-setting in schools had begun.



Paul Whiteman



Luke Sibieta

Trusts lack building data despite DfE survey, cost-cutters find

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

A government scheme that sent qualified capital advisers into 70 academy trusts found four in five did not have sufficient data on the condition of their buildings.

This is despite the government having conducted a survey of every school in the country between 2017 and 2019 and shared those reports with schools, trusts and councils.

An evaluation of the pilot and first phase of the government's "capital advisers programme" also found most trusts lacked asset management plans and estates strategies.

But the scheme received positive feedback from trusts, with 12 chains reporting estimated savings of £600,000 between them. The programme will now expand to a further 70 trusts.

It comes after the Department for Education admitted that repairing or replacing all defects in England's schools will cost £11.4 billion, with the average secondary school needing £1.6 million worth of work.

Based on the school resource management advisers model, the government sent qualified advisers into 70 trusts between March 2021 and March 2023, making recommendations for better estate management.

Advisers then revisited the 20 pilot phase trusts and sent follow-up questionnaires to all 70 to check on progress.

Most trusts told to commission surveys

During visits to the first 20 trusts, four in five were told to commission condition surveys, and just under half remained non-compliant when revisited.

In the second phase, 78 per cent of the 50 trusts visited were told their data was insufficient.

This is despite the government having completed its condition data collection, a survey of every school in the country, in 2019. The reports were sent to schools' responsible bodies, including academy trusts. A second nationwide



survey is underway.

Government guidance on good estate management for schools states that responsible bodies should have both an asset management plan and an estate strategy.

But the report, published Wednesday, showed 90 per cent of the 20 pilot trusts and 78 per cent of those in the second phase did not have an asset management plan, while 90 per cent and 70 per cent respectively were told to create an estate strategy.

Leaders thought they were doing better

During the pilot, advisers found a "contrast between the trust's perception of their compliance [with estates management guidance] in comparison to the advisers' assessment".

There was also a disconnect in the first phase, with trusts on average believing they were operating in line with good practice in 70 per cent of areas. Advisers' findings suggested this was closer to 45 per cent.

Eighty-five per cent of trusts said they were aware of the government guidance, but just 44 per cent said they were "actively" using it.

"Almost all" trusts said they were "unaware of the need for suitability and sufficiency surveys or placed them as a low priority in their action plan of improvements".

12 trusts estimate £600,000 savings

But the involvement of advisers did have an impact, the evaluation concluded.

Revisits to pilot trusts found they had implemented 148 out of 385 recommendations, enabling a "25 percentage point improvement in aligning with good estate management practices".

The first phase also received "positive feedback from almost all academy trusts". Of 50 participating trusts, 40 said they expected to be able to reduce energy use and save money as a result of the recommendations.

Only 12 trusts provided estimates of financial savings. They predicted they would save £600,000 annually between them.

This included one trust that said it would save £60,000 through "improved project delivery" and another that would save £16,000 in the "operation and maintenance" of their estate.

Following the evaluation, the programme will be expanded this academic year. Advisers will be sent to 70 more trusts, selected in the same way as those in phase one – based on condition need, geography, challenges and school characteristics.

[Read the report here](#)

INVESTIGATION: SCHOOL BUILDINGS

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Serious building defects wait (and wait) for funding

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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EXCLUSIVE

Defects in school buildings given the worst-possible rating by government surveyors remain unaddressed for years, a *Schools Week* investigation has revealed.

Trust and council leaders say they have had to prioritise only the most serious issues that threaten pupils' safety and education, with capital cash from the government static in the face of soaring maintenance costs.

The government's condition data collection (CDC), conducted between 2017 and 2019, rated schools' fixtures and fittings from grades A to D.

Schools Week approached responsible bodies for schools that had 10 or more fittings rated 100 per cent grade D, meaning they needed to be immediately replaced.

At Weavers Academy in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, parts of its roof, some windows and doors, heating system and a staircase got a 100 per cent D rating.

Jon Ward, director of estates and facilities at the Creative Education Trust, said although it had put mitigations in place, "we know that we'll never have enough money to do what we need to do to the buildings". They were "largely beyond life and deteriorating in many areas".

A flood from a water tank in 2021 closed 12 classrooms for 15 months. The DfE last year rejected the school's bid for a rebuild.

The trust estimated it needed £77 million for condition improvements and corrections over the next 10 years. It receives just £3.1 million a year in capital funding.

Ward said the trust "won't leave things in an unsafe condition and have to ensure we can teach and feed children".

"However, if it's something major, like a roof, or the structure of the building, then that's when it starts to become more problematic. Do we want to invest heavily in something that may be rebuilt in the future?"

Smaller trusts and standalone schools apply for cash for specific maintenance projects from the condition improvement fund (CIF).

Councils, dioceses and trusts with more than 3,000 pupils receive annual school condition allocation (SCA) funding.

Total SCA funding has risen by less than 1 per



cent in two years to £1.586 billion. Building costs inflation peaked at 15.3 per cent last year.

Marden Lodge Primary School in Caterham, Surrey, was warned parts of its flooring, stairs, walls and mechanical and electrical services were at the end of their life.

Nick Murza, estates director at the school's sponsor GLF Schools, said government funding was "wholly insufficient to deal with the backlog of basic condition needs for the buildings we have inherited, and there is no allowance at all for replacement or upgrading of facilities".

"We have to heavily prioritise the funds we do have to address what we believe are the most pressing risks – safety issues and school closure – but there isn't enough funding to guarantee even that."

The trust completed a heating project shortly after the survey, and the school's CDC2 report did not show any items in the D category, but this "may as much be down to the judgment of the surveyor on the day rather than an improvement".

Tim Warneford, an academy funding consultant, said he advised some trusts approaching the SCA threshold to postpone expansion and "get everything we can out of CIF".

"There's a big, big risk of rushing into the SCA world...so only go when you've dealt with the big capital issues because your SCA is frankly only

good for maintenance."

Rotherham Aspire, a pupil referral unit, had 29 fixtures that were rated grade D in 2019. This included parts of its roof, floors, stairs, external walls and mechanical and electrical services.

Some "essential" works have been carried out, but roof repairs won't happen until next summer.

Rob Mahon, the council's assistant director of finance, said funding constraints forced the council to focus on "absolutely essential" maintenance.

At St George's Primary School in Wirral, most of the grade D issues were addressed but one remains outstanding. The council said demand "will always outstrip supply for projects but at the moment we are able to meet our most urgent needs".

The government said 95 per cent of fixtures were rated A or B, and just 0.3 per cent were given the worst possible rating. However, because of the size of the survey, this still accounts for thousands of fixtures in hundreds of schools.

A spokesperson said early indications from the DfE's second CDC, which is ongoing, showed that in "almost every case where a grade D component was identified in CDC1 it has now been addressed". But they would not provide the actual figure.

Jeremy on the Hunt for apprenticeship controls

BILLY CAMDEN

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EXCLUSIVE

The chancellor has drawn up plans to restrict the use of levy funding for degree-level apprenticeships, prompting warnings about the viability of schemes for public sector workers like teachers.

Multiple sources said Jeremy Hunt was concerned about the affordability of the levy. It comes amid a huge rise in the number of costly level 6 and 7 apprenticeships handed to older employees while spending on lower levels and young people falls.

Officials have now floated the idea of limiting the use of levy cash on higher apprenticeships, but the Department for Education is understood to be resisting ahead of next week's autumn statement.

Proposals include removing some apprenticeships – like the popular but controversial level 7 senior leader standard – from the scope of levy funding, introducing age restrictions, and demanding larger employer contributions.

Networks of training providers and universities contacted the Treasury this week to plead with the chancellor to not cut access to the courses, claiming the move is “political posturing” to appeal to certain parts of the electorate.

The Chartered Management Institute has also warned the majority of level 6 and 7 management apprentices are in public services and “critical for the productivity agenda and fiscal sustainability”.

Restricting funding for degree-level apprenticeships would jeopardise plans for an undergraduate teaching apprenticeship, which are being drawn up under Gillian Keegan's leadership.

Ministers have come under increasing pressure to create a route for non-graduates since the creation of the levy, which must be paid by all employers with a pay bill of over £3 million, including schools, trusts and councils.

Given so much of schools' spending is on teachers, the lack of an undergraduate route leaves limited options for leaders to spend their levy.



Robert Halfon and Jeremy Hunt

Since the levy was introduced, spending on level 6 and 7 apprenticeships had risen from £44 million in 2017-18 to £506 million in 2021-22. It now accounts for over a fifth of England's annual apprenticeship budget.

Spending on level 2 apprenticeships dropped by a third over that period, from £622 million to £421 million.

The second most popular degree-level apprenticeship is the level 7 senior leader standard, which has had 25,200 starts in total since 2017-18.

In 2020, it emerged that school leaders were taking advantage of the so-called MBA apprenticeship.

The National College of Education, which offers programmes for those working in schools, had the highest number of people starting the course out of all training providers in the first quarter of 2019-20.

However, starts for this particular apprenticeship have started to drop nationally since the government removed its controversial MBA component from the scope of levy funding. Starts fell almost 40 per cent from 8,050 in 2020-21 to 4,880 in 2021-22.

Business schools and universities can continue to offer the MBA as an optional extra, but the cost of it must be funded by their employer.

Experts have called on the government to increase the apprenticeships budget in line with the level of levy receipts the tax

brings in.

The government was accused of short-changing employers in September after analysis by sister title FE Week found the Treasury failed to distribute around £415 million paid into the levy by employers in the 2022-23 financial year.

Ciaran Roche, public affairs manager at the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, said he understood the government wanted more levy funds spent on level 2 to 5 courses.

But the “best way to do this would be to increase the apprenticeship programme budget to match the increased apprenticeship levy take”.

Skills minister Robert Halfon batted away concerns about the affordability of the budget earlier this year in an interview with FE Week, insisting that there were no talks about imposing controls on levy spending.

Levy spending on those aged 25 and over more than doubled between 2017-18 and 2021-22, growing from £460 million to £934 million. At the same time spending on apprenticeships for young people aged 16 to 19 fell by £60 million, or a tenth, from £686 million to £626 million.

A final decision on whether to restrict levy funding for degree-level apprenticeships could come as soon as next week, it is understood.

The DfE and Treasury declined to comment.

ON LOCATION



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Psychologists on strike: 'It's all crumbling'

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Educational psychologists say the “constant cycle of not being able to do enough” amid spiralling workloads and funding shortfalls leaves schools without support and leads to unnecessary exclusions.

Members of the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) went on strike for the first time in decades on Wednesday after voting in favour of industrial action over last year's pay offer, a rise of £1,925 that averaged 3 per cent.

Psychologists play a fundamental role in assessing the needs of children with SEND. But their numbers are falling as the requests for education, health and care plan (EHCP) assessments soar, up 77.3 per cent since 2017.

Schools Week analysis of local authority data estimates there are 360 fewer full-time EPs compared with 2010.

'It's all just going to crumble'

Speaking at a rally in London, Susan Moore, an EP in south London, said her practice had “definitely been compromised. Instead of maybe spending hours with a child, family and school staff, I'm trying to squeeze it in... that leaves me feeling uncomfortable.”

Moore said EPs were “spread thinly” and were called in at “crisis point” after children had been excluded or were refusing to attend school.

“One school gets eight visits a year from me ... six years ago that was probably more like 20. But it means the school is trying to prioritise who gets seen. One boy was showing early signs, with some emotional dysregulation, but he was nowhere near the top of the list”

He was sent to a pupil referral unit, then permanently excluded after making “unsafe choices. We don't know what his pathway now is at all,” she said.

“It's just the constant cycle of not being able to do enough or not being able to do it well, but getting more to do. That gap just gets bigger. At some point it's going to crumble. I see colleagues in tears, overwhelmed, asking for reductions in workloads. It's endless.”

Grazielle Carvalho Gomes, an EP in north London, told of a similar case where a child wasn't prioritised because the school could not



The rally in London



EPs from Essex at the rally



Laurence Berridge and Grazielle Carvalho Gomes

afford the hours.

“So that child ended up having a permanent exclusion and was seen in the PRU when things had become quite complex.

“If you had picked up that case and done early intervention, you would have been so much more impactful and could have prevented that exclusion.”

James Redburn, an EP in north London, said a school asked him to meet with a boy who had been excluded.

“I went to his house, listened ... and tried to understand his perspective. The family told me afterwards that was the first time anybody had ever done that.

“Schools may think it's all down to poor behaviour and not understand that they've got a learning or communication need.”

'We're just firefighting'

Ministers hope their SEND reforms will allow early intervention. But EPs told Schools Week they were simply “firefighting”.

Jean Carnochan, an EP in Wiltshire, said: “There's a huge backlog of EHCP assessments and that's

dominating our work. It means we can't do any of the preventive work that we'd really like to do.”

A government research report on the work of EPs found them locked in a “vicious cycle” with soaring demand for EHCPs preventing early intervention.

An improved pay offer was put forward by the Local Government Association (LGA) in September, equating to a pay increase of between 5 to 9 per cent. But it was withdrawn weeks later. The union wants a 9 per cent rise.

Cath Lowther, the general secretary of the AEP, said the recruitment crisis had led to “spiralling workloads and long wait times for children, young people and families who need support”.

Many EPs left their local authority workforce or moved to locum or private work.

A spokesperson for the employers' side of the Soulbury Committee, administered by the LGA, said financial challenges made it impossible to agree to all of the AEP's pay demands.

“Nevertheless, the national employers have committed to continuing dialogue with the Soulbury unions to reach an affordable resolution to this dispute as soon as possible.”

Trusts can hold on to surplus cash, says DfE

SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER

@SCHOOLSWEEK

Academy trusts with large reserves will not have to spend the cash, nor face having it clawed back.

However, government officials warned those sitting on reserves worth a fifth or more of their income that they will be asked to show they have "sufficient plans" in place for the cash to "meet pupils' needs".

New government advice also suggested trusts could invest spare cash to bring in extra income.

The DfE published a "good practice guide" on academy trust reserves on Tuesday.

It comes after the National Audit Office (NAO) ordered officials to investigate trusts building up "substantial reserves".

The government's spending watchdog found 22 per cent of trusts had reserves amounting to one-fifth or more of their annual income in 2019-20.

But trusts said reserves had built up because of Covid-delayed building projects or to help them stay afloat as costs soared.

The new guidance stated the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) "does not set a required level of reserves" – this was up to trustees to decide.

But trusts did need to "strike the right balance between holding sufficient reserves to ensure the financial health of their schools and the ability to fund significant future investment, without holding back



too much that could otherwise be used to benefit pupils."

For those "choosing to hold high levels of reserves [20 per cent or more of income], trustees should have a plan and be clear on the purpose for these funds, and how they will improve the education for pupils".

There was no "set limit to the level of reserves a trust can build, provided the trust has clear plans" for it.

But it would be "unusual and potentially hard for a trust to justify the decision to hold significant reserves at this level for general contingency, given this funding could be used sooner for the benefit of pupils".

Trusts have said they hold large reserves to fund upcoming capital projects, planning to grow or to cover academy transfers.

They are now asked as part of their July budget forecast return how they would use large reserves, alongside planned project costs and timings.

The guidance added: "ESFA will not require trusts to spend reserves, nor will the agency look to take back reserves just because reserves are at a high level, but it will ask trusts to make sure that they are compliant with the ATH [academy trust handbook] and have sufficient plans in place for these funds to meet pupils' needs."

The handbook stated trust boards must set a policy for holding reserves and explain this in its annual report. Trusts found in breach of academy rules can face government intervention.

When setting their reserves policy, trusts boards are also advised to consider how any spare reserves could be "invested to generate some extra income for the trust".

Where trusts have "low, or persistently declining levels of reserves heading towards a forecast of low reserves", the ESFA will contact the trust to "understand its position and discuss any potential support that may be appropriate".

The threshold has been for reserves of 5 per cent of total income or less. About 90 per cent of trusts hold reserves of at least this level.

The ESFA pledged to "engage" with such trusts to "understand their circumstances".

A report from accountancy firm Kreston earlier this year found only 11 per cent of the trusts they worked with had reserves over 20 per cent of income.

[READ THE CONSULTATION HERE](#)

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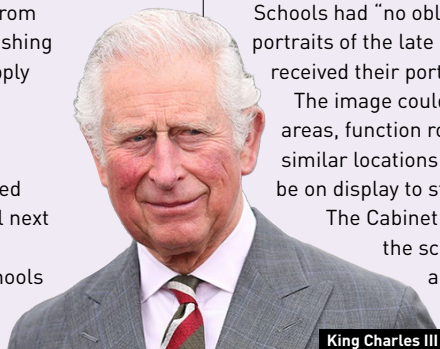
King Charles portrait for schools under £8m scheme

Schools have been invited to request a free portrait of the King under a government scheme costing £8 million.

An invite sent to schools from the DfE states that those wishing to take up the offer must apply before February 2.

The image of the King in "ceremonial dress with decorations" will be delivered between February and April next year.

FAQs also shared with schools stated the photo will be A3,



King Charles III

printed on "high-quality paper" and double mounted in a "glazed frame of FSC-certified oak".

Schools had "no obligation" to take down portraits of the late Queen once they received their portraits of King Charles.

The image could be hung in "reception areas, function rooms, boardrooms and similar locations where the portrait may be on display to staff and visitors".

The Cabinet Office first announced the scheme in April, with all public bodies able to apply for a framed

portrait "as part of a scheme to celebrate the new reign".

Councils, courts, police forces and fire and rescue services are among the other organisations able to participate.

But schools will not be able to see the portrait before they submit their requests, with the photo due to be formally released by the royal household in December.

In April, Oliver Dowden, the deputy prime minister, said the new portraits "will serve as a visible reminder in buildings up and down the country of the nation's ultimate public servant".

Working at home 'masks' heavy workload

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

The education committee heard from recruitment and retention experts this week. Here's what you need to know ...

1. 'The job is not manageable'

Workload is currently "hidden, it's masked, it's being done at home", according to Professor Becky Allen, the chief analyst at Teacher Tapp.

"Until we move towards fixed working hours for teachers, we won't uncover and therefore resolve the nature of the workload difficulty," she told MPs.

She favoured fixed hours of "say, 8am until 4.30pm every day, and an expectation that they should go home and there is no work that a headteacher should be asking them to do".

"Then we'll find the job is not manageable – and then we will have a public debate about what we do about it. Until then, we pretend that we're trying to fix a problem, but ultimately it's masked inside teachers' homes."

2. Most leaders shun workload toolkit

In 2018, the DfE published a school workload reduction toolkit. But it has not been well-read.

Teacher Tapp data shows about 33 per cent of senior leaders hadn't heard of it, another 33 per cent had not read it and 23 per cent had read it but did not find it useful. Only 9 per cent found it useful.

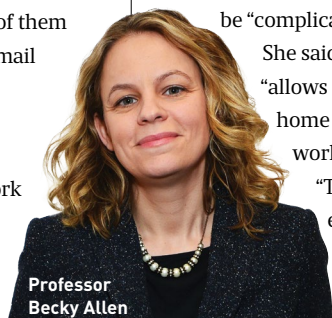
"You need to invest about 100 hours of senior leadership time in really working through it," Allen said.

Teacher Tapp data also shows low take-up of the 2021 staff wellbeing charter and this year's flexible working toolkit.

Allen added: "Do you know how many emails you get if you're a senior leader? The only way you deal with your job is through mass deletion of emails every day. And one of them, unfortunately, would have been the email about the flexible working toolkit."

3. Teachers can't cut their hours

The government has stepped up its work to encourage schools to offer flexible working.



Professor
Becky Allen



But although about four in 10 teachers say they are interested, Allen warns that flexible working would reduce their hours and "we would have to find some more teachers from somewhere".

"We have to focus on the bits of workload that we can solve, which is keeping the school day as short as possible for teachers, getting them out at the end of the day and home and on with their lives.

"Any alternative strategy involves existing teachers working fewer hours, and at the moment we don't have any other teachers to plug the gap."

4. Late starts and early finishes boost wellbeing

Teacher Tapp data shows the proportion of teachers reporting at least some feelings of burnout increased from 51 per cent in October 2018 to 70 per cent last month.

Sinéad Mc Brearty, the chief executive of Education Support, warned MPs that the culture in education "prioritises performance over wellbeing".

But flexible working strategies did not need to be "complicated and terribly difficult"

She said Northampton Academy "allows staff to come in late or go home early one day a week. They worked that into the timetable".

"This doesn't seem to me an extraordinarily difficult or onerous thing to do, but for

them it's been transformative for how staff feel they're being treated."

Other "upsides" included reduced attrition and the need for supply staff "because you find improvements in sickness".

5. 'We wring the purpose out of teachers'

Mc Brearty said schools had a workforce that was "deeply connected to its purpose".

"Somehow we manage to wring that out of people along the way. And there's a really huge lost opportunity in it. Other industries would give their left arm for the level of purpose that we see in the workforce in education."

She said teachers who felt they could make a difference to pupils' lives had their sense of purpose "met".

"But if you think 'I can't make a difference, the sense of purpose I brought here isn't being met', it's a pretty rational decision to decide 'I'm going to go and do something else'."

6. Teachers get 'stuck' at top of pay scale

Luke Sibieta, from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, told MPs that pay for early-career teachers for most subjects in England "compares relatively well" with other industries.

But the pay of older, more experienced staff left teaching not looking "as good anymore". They reached a ceiling where they could not go much further without becoming a deputy head or a head.

Wellbeing plummets (again), survey shows

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Teacher wellbeing has reached its lowest level in five years, with levels of stress, insomnia and burn-out all rising.

Education Support's 2023 teacher wellbeing index found rates for teachers at their lowest levels since 2019 and now below that of senior leaders.

The overall wellbeing score was 43.44, a 0.47 decrease from 2022 and well below the national average of 51.40.

Education Support, a teacher wellbeing charity, said scores between 41 and 45 should be considered "at high risk of psychological distress and increased risk of depression".

The annual survey also found 78 per cent of 3,000 school staff across the UK were stressed, rising to 95 per cent among headteachers. Teachers had the highest increase in stress, up six percentage points from 2022.

More than a third (36 per cent) reported burn-out, up nine percentage points on last year. Half of staff experienced insomnia or difficulty sleeping, up six percentage points.

The report also found that 75 per cent of staff in England thought Ofsted inspections were not fit for purpose, while 73 per cent said it impacted negatively on their mental health.

Sinéad Mc Brearty, the charity's chief executive, said the workforce was "stressed and unhappy. Working in schools and colleges is unsustainably demanding and not improved by the level of mistrust the profession has in the inspection process."

Teachers are more stressed

Education Support uses the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) to determine a wellbeing score.

Teachers' score rose slightly last year to 43.90 but is now 42.87. Senior leaders' wellbeing has risen slightly in the past year, from 43.27 to 43.62. Both are below pre-pandemic levels.

Support staff scores are slightly above pre-pandemic at 44.62. However, these are all still below the national average.

Across the UK, 78 per cent of



Sinéad Mc Brearty

education staff reported being stressed, up three percentage points on last year.

Thirty-nine per cent experienced a mental health issue in the past academic year, the highest since the question was first asked in 2018.

More than half (55 per cent) said their institution's organisational culture has had a negative effect on their wellbeing, a rise of 13 percentage points. For teachers alone, it rose 16 percentage points to 59 per cent.

However, more staff (47 per cent, up from 41 per cent) felt they were well supported by their organisation. Staff in the north east, West Midlands and north west felt least supported.

Fifteen per cent of education staff always or often felt lonely at work, twice the national average.

The charity said it was "deeply concerned" about the 5 per cent of staff that experienced acute stress, burn-out and loneliness, factors that pointed to an "elevated mental health risk", which included "an indicative elevated suicidal risk factor".

They said suicide prevention must be prioritised with

"urgent work" to reduce the risk factors.

Education Support also called for investment in "soft leadership skills" to support leaders' development of social, emotional and behavioural skills "that matter so much for organisational cultures".

Ofsted 'not fit for purpose'

For the first time, Education Support asked staff about the impact of inspections on their mental health.

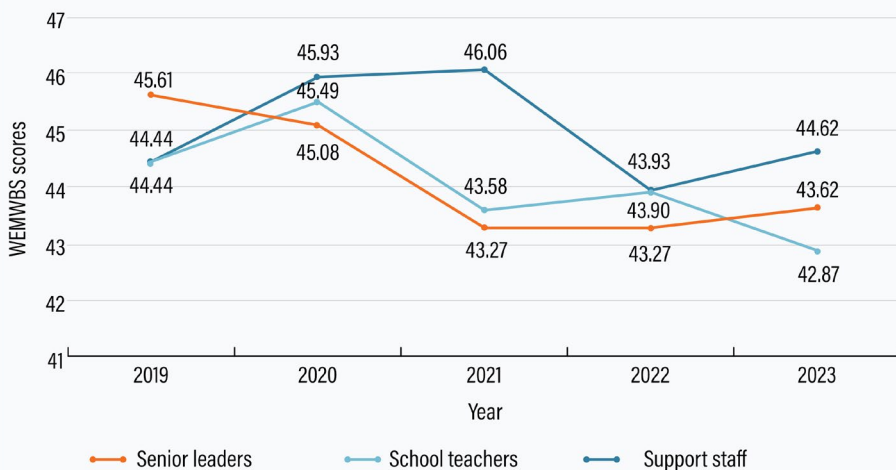
They found 73 per cent disagreed with the statement that inspections improved student achievement and 59 per cent did not believe the visits viewed teachers positively.

Ofsted has come under fierce pressure following headteacher Ruth Perry's death last year. The watchdog has since made a series of changes to its inspection programme.

Education Support called for an "overhaul" to improve "trust, legitimacy and the perceived fairness" of inspections.

Inspectors should be "trained and supported to understand the relationship between professional identity, stress, burn-out and mental health and equipped to handle inspection with due care and empathy".

How teachers' wellbeing has dropped since the pandemic



Source: Teacher wellbeing index survey using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) for England



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Profile

JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS

From sink to success: how a trust's leader transformed his schools

Once a humble design technology teacher in Sunderland, Nick Hurn reveals the truth of his schools' growth and development

Nick Hurn has become somewhat of a rallying voice for leaders with RAAC-affected schools – appearing across the national media demanding his pupils get a better deal. Four of his 47 academies at the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust have been found to have the dangerous, crumbly material that is deemed at risk of collapse. The chief executive has enquired about potentially reintroducing lockdown-style teacher assessed grades for those pupils, who he believes shouldn't

be “disadvantaged through this unprecedented situation”. His question has fallen on deaf ears.

But in a bid to convince exam boards, the 62-year-old has commissioned Durham University academics to examine the extent to which his pupils' education has been rocked by the disruption. “They will make a prediction on what outcomes will be,” Hurn says. “I don't want to be coming back in September saying ‘we were right all along but nothing was done about it.’”

‘Well, you're a DT teacher’

Hurn's academy trust is one of England's largest. But more than 40 years ago a career in education hadn't crossed his mind. He wanted to make jewellery. Following a six-month stint working as a binman, he gained a design technology and silversmithing degree in Manchester. It was only on the advice of friends that he decided to secure teaching qualifications “just in case” a path into his dream job didn't emerge.

Now, perched on a chair inside his office, Hurn

Profile: Nick Hurn

quips he's "still waiting" to become a jeweller.

The trust boss runs his schools from a room that stands at the end of a corridor lined with glass walls.

The rest of the building, located on a Sunderland business park, is filled with his 48-strong central team and meeting rooms containing 100-inch TVs. Hurn's surrounds are a far cry from those he was in when he started teaching.

His first role came as a design technology teacher in Sunderland. He later moved to another high school in the area, where he was made head of DT. But he says "it wasn't easy to break into the senior leadership" team.

"They [DT teachers] are down the pecking order behind maths, science and English. It was said to me unofficially 'well, you're a DT teacher'. I had loads of rejections for deputy head jobs."

Hurn finally made the leap into leadership in 1999 when he arrived at St Edmund Campion in Gateshead. However, he believes he was only given an interview "because the competition wasn't very strong – it was a sink school, and nobody wanted to go there".

It only took on 100 pupils a year. The building was "dilapidated" and riddled with asbestos. Metal fences lined the site's perimeter to prevent thugs from entering. To cap things off, at the end of each day, members of staff stationed outside the school gates would be pelted with eggs.

"The local jobs used to meet in the shop just outside and when we went out for gate duty, they'd throw eggs at the staff. We used to get the police down regularly to manage them. It was really intimidating."

After his boss left in 2002, Hurn was drafted into the role of acting headteacher. St Edmund Campion then joined forces with Sir Thomas More Catholic School, also in Gateshead, to launch a federation. Hurn was placed under the wing of experienced leader Mike Zaragga – who moved into an executive headteacher position.

"I learned so much from him as he turned the Edmund Campion around, got the discipline right, teaching right. I learned how to run a school [and] manage unions and awkward staff [from him]."

St Edmund Campion's fortunes improved



'There needs to be some sort of acknowledgement of the impact of RAAC'

further when it relocated to a newly built complex a quarter of a mile away – removing the housing estates problem – and rebadged as Cardinal Hume Catholic School. It soon saw an uptick in pupil numbers. Its decrepit former home, meanwhile, was flattened.

'People looked at the worst examples'

Nine years later, Cardinal Hume became one of the founding members of the Trinity Trust, which consisted of six other academies. Hurn juggled the roles of headteacher and CEO following the conversion.

In his spare time, he was sitting on the northeast headteacher board. His appointment to the group in 2014 gave him an up-close view of Michael Gove's turbocharged academy revolution, which had kickstarted four years earlier. He was "involved in lots of decisions" surrounding the formation of trusts and rubbed shoulders with the chief executives of numerous large chains.

The experience stood him in good stead for what was to come. In 2019, the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle unveiled plans for its schools to convert to academy status.

They were to join one of four newly formed trusts, of which Bishop Wilkinson was one, "whether people wanted it or not". Any pre-existing academy chains in the diocese were to be dissolved.

The naysayers "looked at the worst examples of trusts and thought that's what it'd be like for them" and that "all their autonomy would be wiped out". A target of making 156 schools take the plunge by 2022 was set.

Documents released by the diocese argued that its model would ensure every one of its primaries and secondaries "has its place" and will not "be left isolated or vulnerable". Their "uniqueness... is celebrated and the unique contribution of each is recognised and appreciated".

Hurn believes the size of his central team –

Profile: Nick Hurn

'We've got to focus our efforts on the schools that need help, and we have been doing that'

which he describes as "larger than most" – aided the trust's rapid expansion. The "difficulty" he had "was matching the required expansion of our services and team with the income".

Because academisation had been dictated to them by the diocese, CEOs did not "have a choice to say 'we're not taking you'". This meant Hurn took over the reins of "financially stable [schools] as well as the ones that aren't".

"Taking so many on in such a short space of time meant we couldn't do in-depth due diligence at every school. We're doing that now as we go along, [so] we're finding things out now and doing things retrospectively," he continues. We've got to focus our efforts on the schools that need help – and we have been doing that."

One of the main issues the trust has encountered has been from small primary schools – generally with fewer than 100 pupils on roll – whose "staff costs are just far too high". Hurn is considering "reallocating" surplus employees to parts of the trust "where there are gaps".

"We can have, say, a SENCO who works across six small schools, rather than one in every school. You're not actually making them redundant then, you're getting them to do the same job on the same money."

Bishop Wilkinson's accounts show it funds its central services by collecting between 0 and 5 per cent of each of its schools' budgets. Hurn says this flexibility allows the trust to make sure it does not take a top slice from schools in financial difficulty "until we are able to stabilise them, which can take a year or two".

Heads have agreed that reserves can be pooled and used by the trust "if or when necessary" to support an ailing academy. "That's an informal agreement, but do we need to make something more formal further down the line. Possibly."



Hurn's offices

There is just one school left to join the trust. This has allowed Hurn to "beef up" his standards and school improvement teams by employing "some real experts in [primary] maths and literacy" along with two former HMIs.

His secondaries have decided "they'll work together on a shared maths approach". An "all-through languages plan" for his academies is also in development.

Hurn says this means "if a school does French in a [feeder] primary, then the secondary will also do French". Similar programmes are being worked on for his academies' English, geography and maths curriculums.

"One of the benefits of our model is we have every single primary feeder school in our trust," Hurn says. "You're starting at a real advantage, and you can do an all-through plan that's going to be effective and efficient."

However, since the government ramped up its RAAC policy at the end of August, much of Hurn's attention has been on mitigating the problem. For his three worst-affected schools, alternative accommodation has been found "for all of the children" – ending a "long, drawn-out, painful" process which has taken weeks to finalise.

One primary is holding lessons in an old community centre, while another has moved classes to a former business centre. At St Leonard's



Parents staged a demonstration outside St Leonard's when Baroness Barran visited the site in September

Catholic School in Durham, pupils have been provided rooms by a local college. Others have been using eight makeshift classes in the school's sports hall.

Hurn hopes temporary structures built on St Leonard's playing fields will be ready to use in the new year, allowing all his youngsters to return to the site. The Durham academics are expected to publish their findings by the new year, after conducting interviews with pupils and teachers, calculating missed lesson time and analysing key stage 4 and 5 mock exam grades.

"If the research comes back and says nothing's been that badly affected, so be it – I'll just get on with it and suck it up. But I suspect it won't. There needs to be some sort of acknowledgement [impact RAAC has had] and action taken.

"These children have one chance to get their results – in five years' time no one's going to be saying 'oh well, your results aren't that good, but you were affected by RAAC, weren't you?'. It will all be forgotten about."

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Opinion

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STEVE
CHALKE

Founder, Oasis Charitable Trust

Schools cannot look away from Israel and Palestine

We have a duty to help children and young people make sense of the horror unfolding in the Middle East, writes Steve Chalke

All of us have seen the pictures and heard the stories of the horrendous violence in Israel and Gaza. Even as adults it can be difficult to comprehend the harm, the suffering and the pain that we are witnessing.

As the founder of a MAT with over 30,000 students from very diverse backgrounds, I know how confusing and upsetting the present conflict is for many young people. What happens in the Middle East has repercussions for many of our children here – at home, at school and in our communities.

Many of our students are seeing graphic images of violence and destruction on television and on social media (where extreme content often goes unfiltered) while also trying to navigate their way through online disinformation.

Some children will have experienced bullying or hurtful remarks which target their ethnicity or religion. Others will be anxious or upset because they feel helpless or scared. Many will be frightened for the safety of other

children, and for themselves and their families.

Some may even suffer long-term trauma.

A curriculum that ignores these issues and leaves children and young people reliant on picking up random messages from different media and adult conversation for information is one that leaves them marooned.

Our duty as school leaders is not to brush under the carpet what is happening, but to be there to help children and their parents and caregivers to navigate the overwhelming task of responding to fears and worries about war.

That means being proactive: finding out what children know and how they feel, listening and giving them the space to talk, encouraging them to say what they think and to ask questions. It means answering their questions honestly, in an age-appropriate way, while watching their reactions and being sensitive to their level of anxiety.

Younger children may not distinguish between images on screen and their own personal reality. They may believe they're in immediate danger. Older children might have seen worrying images or messages on social media and be scared about how events might escalate. Younger children may be



“ A curriculum that ignores this leaves children marooned

satisfied just by understanding that sometimes countries fight. Older children will need more details.

It is important that all children in our schools feel supported, not judged, and that their concerns are not dismissed. We know that though anxiety is crippling, given the opportunity for open and honest conversations about what upsets them, the stress that children feel can be greatly relieved.

We should also remind our students that none of this is their problem to solve. Adults all over the world are working hard to try and fix this. Children shouldn't feel guilty playing, seeing their friends and doing the things that make them happy.

Conflict can bring prejudice and discrimination, whether against a people or country. It's our task to encourage compassion, just as we do for all families who have been forced to flee their homes or who have lost loved ones.

The sense of doing something, no matter how small, can also bring great comfort: starting a fundraiser, taking part in an assembly,

composing a poem or writing a letter to local or national decision-makers. In my experience, children who have the chance to contribute can feel like they are part of the solution instead of feeling helpless.

We can also talk with older children about the dead end of violence. As Martin Luther King said, the ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it.

It is always for us to do everything we can to end the cycle of hate and violence. To grieve for every life lost, to pray for a world where every person's life is safe and sacred, to break the cycle of retaliation and to work for peace by creating security not only for the people of Israel and Palestine, but for everyone, everywhere.

To quote Martin Luther King again, "Hate will never drive out hate; only love will do that."

This is surely the message we must embrace and repeat in our schools as we help and support our children through these troubled and uncertain times.

Opinion

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EMMA SHEPPARD

Founder, The MTPT Project

Mothers are key to a more stable teacher workforce

Politicians must face up to the motherhood penalty to solve the recruitment crisis, and have any chance of delivering on their promises, writes Emma Sheppard

As we build towards a general election, parties and unions are refining the detail on their plans for the education sector. But are they missing a trick when it comes to the workforce strategy needed to deliver on their promises?

Where these manifestos do refer to the teacher workforce, they focus on the recruitment and retention of our ECTs.

Labour's fifth 'mission' refers to the 'crisis in recruitment and retention of school staff' and notes the 'important role of mid-career teachers'. However, concrete commitments emphasise plans to attract 6,500 new teachers with 'money raised from ending private school tax breaks' and 'a new Early Career Framework retention payment'.

The Conservatives take a similar approach, promising an increase in salaries 'for new teachers' and then jumping all the way to the end of the line with 'increased contributions into the Teachers' Pension Scheme'

In a September 2023 policy motion, the Liberal Democrats called for properly funded teacher training and 'high quality professional development for all teachers'. Callum Robertson's article in these pages last week encouragingly emphasised reactivating teachers who have left and retaining more of the teachers we have by improving flexible working in schools.

Officially though, the party's emphasis remains on recruitment and short-term retention, rather than teaching as a lifelong career.

In sum, all parties (and unions

too) appear to be missing or shying away from a vital piece of the puzzle. None of their other ambitions for the sector are achievable without a robust and stable workforce, and a single demographic is key to delivering it: women aged 30 to 39.

Making up one-quarter of our workforce, these women represent our biggest group of teachers – a group so large that it even outnumbers our total population of male teachers across all age brackets. They are the experienced subject specialists who can deliver on politicians' curriculum promises, the mentors who support those precious entrants to the profession, and the new and developing leaders who bear the responsibility when Ofsted comes calling.

They also make up the largest group of leavers, with 8,965 of them quitting the profession in 2022. This is more than both genders in the 24- to 29-year-old bracket – the ECT demographic who form the central point of Labour and the Conservatives' workforce strategy.

With the motherhood penalty well documented in other industries, does

it come as any surprise that over half of these women are mothers and leaving because of the motherhood penalty in education?

Some unions have made a good start in using this knowledge. ASCL, NAHT and NASUWT are all calling for improved flexible working practices and support for colleagues who fall under a protected characteristic. Flexible working on its own, however, is not the silver bullet to save our teacher workforce. Neither is referring to all of the protected characteristics as a homogenous group, implying that they all have the same needs.

Instead, a full eco-system of support is required for the cornerstone demographic of our profession. Our mother-teachers need financial support to afford childcare and an overhauled system to increase accessibility around the logistical demands of their roles.

They need equal parental leave and pay to enable them to share their parenting responsibilities from the get-go, and to attract more fathers into the profession. They need the DfE to recognise that professional development and progression are impacted by parenthood and invest as much into support over this period as they have done into the new ECF and NPQ offers.

Labour speaks about re-establishing 'teaching as a profession, that is respected and valued'. It is these benefits that will transform teaching into an attractive and lifelong career.

If the current or any future secretary of state wants to build a stronger, healthier system for our children and young people, they simply must notice, understand and explicitly serve the needs of our mother-teachers.

Without them, all aspects of our education sector will remain broken.

“ Flexible working alone is not the silver bullet



Opinion

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HELEN
MCGLINCHEY

Director of Children and Young People Services, Northpoint

Local collaboration is driving better mental health support

West Yorkshire provides a perfect example of how a joined-up local response can beat the postcode lottery of mental health support, explains Helen McGlinchey

The mental health crisis affecting young people has been on a steep upward trajectory and shows no signs of slowing down. The combination of a global pandemic, climate worries, cultural shifts and political changes have made an already challenging situation even more complex.

Data outlined by Young Minds reveals that the number of children in mental health crisis has reached record levels. Year-on-year reflections tell a sobering story: in the 12 months to March 2023, there were 21,555 urgent referrals to mental health crisis teams, up 46 per cent on the previous year.

These shocking statistics are also reflected at a regional level, with West Yorkshire seeing sharp rises in young people accessing mental health support. However, the region has paved the way in tackling this crisis by working collaboratively with local partners to develop a whole-system approach.

The THRIVE Elaborated model has been a cornerstone of the regional mental healthcare framework. Services across West Yorkshire are

committed to this model, which conceptualises need into five categories: thriving, getting advice, getting help, getting more help, and getting risk support.

Not only is this model person-centred and needs-led, but it allows for a more integrated approach to delivering mental health services for children, young people and families.

Although some services are responding within one category, this multi-agency approach enables services and providers to offer onward referrals, identifying clear referral pathways so that young people get the appropriate help and support.

This model is being delivered across the region in many ways. One is the Leeds MindMate Single Point of Access (SPA). Commissioned by the NHS, this service offers a partnership approach for young people seeking mental health and emotional wellbeing support.

Young people, their parents and carers as well as professionals and schools can all make a referral which is then triaged by a practitioner. This is where we see this multi-agency approach come to life, as Leeds MindMate SPA works with many services, schools and providers across the city to identify the most appropriate route of care and support. These integrated approaches support early intervention, aiming



“ A multi-agency offer can lead to more accessible services

to give young people effective and timely support.

To be successful in tackling youth mental health issues, we must first uncover their root causes and implement prevention measures. The impact that trauma can have on children's, young people's and families' mental health is immense – which is why Leeds has identified trauma as a key priority for its Future in Mind strategy.

Leading with a trauma-informed approach, the city's clinical commissioning groups and local authorities have joined forces to support this approach across services for children and families. A steering group involving partners and service users from across West Yorkshire was developed to drive this forward. Thanks to this collaborative work, a trauma-informed approach has been implemented in Leeds which harnesses knowledge, experience and expertise within the city, allowing partners to work together to best support the city's population.

An early help strategy further promotes this partnership approach, recognising the needs of young

people and their families as early as possible. The offer sees many local agencies working together with families to identify and meet their needs. The development and implementation of these multi-agency offers can lead to more streamlined and accessible services, ensuring that children and families in need can have the right conversation with the right people at the right time.

Our lack of universal provision at a national level means that many children and young people are unwillingly entered into a postcode lottery, resulting in inequality of access and outcomes. This puts the onus on regions to meet local needs.

Mental health support differs from region to region, and there is still work to be done in West Yorkshire to address increasing need, but we are setting the example for taking collective local action in the interests of young people.

Regardless of each area's starting point, a system-wide, multi-agency focus on the needs of young people is essential to early prevention and timely intervention.

Opinion

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COP28: Sustainability in education 2023



MARK WILSON

CEO, Wellspring Academy Trust

How to connect to the outdoors when it's just a concrete patch

Mark Wilson explains how Wellspring Academy Trust has used art to bring learning outdoors, in spite of austere and challenging contexts

With the growing agenda around sustainability and climate change education and the launch of the National Education Nature Park, there is a drive for children and young people to have experiences beyond the classroom that have perhaps not been emphasised so much previously. But what is a school to do when its only outdoor area is a patch of concrete?

The resources produced as part of the National Education Nature Park through the Natural History Museum's collaboration with many stakeholders in the education space are welcome, but several of them demand access to digital devices and spaces that might prove challenging for some schools and settings.

At Wellspring Academies Trust, we have engaged with a project which pre-empted these challenges and set about overcoming the hurdles of spaces which are not green or particularly expansive.

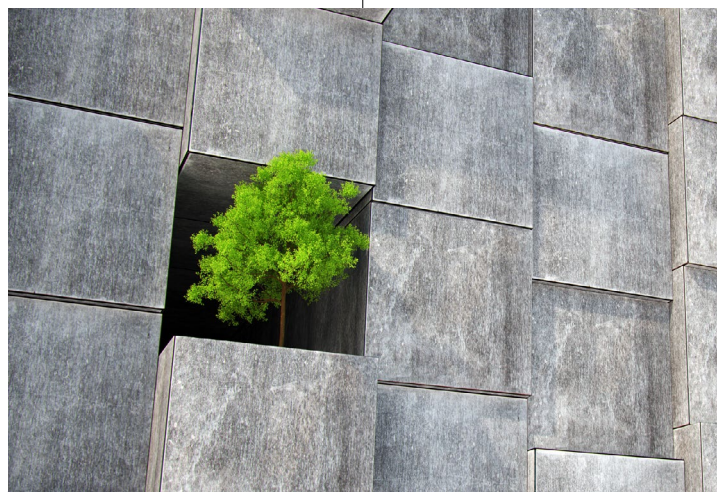
The Communicolour Project has been running for four years and has resulted in nurturing a relationship between young people

and the outdoors that previously didn't exist. Some of our schools are old, imposing buildings in areas where there are high levels of social disadvantage.

The schools are not seen as welcoming spaces by the community and with the lack of green space, the outdoors had little appeal for the children. The Communicolour Project has transformed the concrete spaces at 18 of our primary schools through collaboration between local artists, the children and school leaders.

Following a pilot in a small number of schools, we drew upon pupil and staff voice evaluations to establish any benefits before rolling this out across the trust. A small-scale qualitative research project was designed in collaboration with Professor Leigh Hoath from Leeds Trinity University.

The children and teachers both expressed that the spaces outside were more engaging, they wanted to be outside and that there was now something for them to do. The teachers reported children who had previously been disengaged and isolated now playing games they had co-created with other pupils using the artwork as their basis. In short, the project had humanised a space that previously discouraged activity.



“ The transformation has been profound

The staff have talked about the spaces being transformed from 'dull, boring, grey and with nothing to do' to seeing 'brighter, happier, smiling faces with children happy to be outside'.

In special provision, the artworks have provided additional learning opportunities with the children engaging through pointing and speaking about shapes and colours independently. With some schools, the transformation has been so profound that local residents have commented that 'it used to look like a prison' and now 'as I walk past it I can't stop looking at it because it makes me happier'.

Through the installation of further Communicolour artworks, there has been a consistent message of positivity and engagement with the outdoor space in a way that didn't exist before. The increased number of discussions held between pupils and staff in the outdoor setting saw an improvement in self-regulation and what we strongly perceive as an increased layer of psychological safety through the interactions with the artwork.

The learning we have taken

from these early stages is that the co-creation of the work between the children and the artist further empowers the sense of belonging children feel in the outdoor space. The installations are bespoke to each school setting, reflecting this co-creation and the unique identity each school holds within the trust. In other words, this is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

We recognise that if the children in our schools are to develop as custodians of the planet and be the agents of change required to address the sustainability and climate crises we face, then they need to start with a love of the outdoor space. This project has enabled that to happen despite the challenges of the school grounds and the environment in which some schools exist.

Through art, colour and imaginative play, we have given the children an opportunity to develop a respectful and interactive relationship with the outdoors that they would not otherwise have. The results speak for themselves, and the project's reach into our wider communities reveals just how powerful this work can be.

Solutions

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CARRIE ANNE PHILBIN

Computing teacher and director of learning, Institute of Imagination

Three ways to bridge the digital divide

Every school and every pupil can keep pace with rapid technological progress, regardless of their finances or starting points, explains Carrie Anne Philbin

The pace of technological revolution has been increasing exponentially in recent years. The effect this is having on the parity of education our young people receive is already palpable. Many are being left behind by this digital transformation.

Nominet's 2022 Digital Youth Index found that one-quarter of young people do not have access to a laptop. According to Ofcom, three per cent of homes with children still do not have access to the internet.

In the face of such structural challenges, educators are faced with difficult questions as to how they can support their students to develop vital digital skills. However, some steps can ensure all students access an enriching, forward-facing education while empowering teaching staff to be digital leaders in their own rights.

Avoid tech for tech's sake

Given the increasing importance accorded to technology and digital skills, pressure can mount to pour resources into acquiring the latest and "best" tech resources. Being intentional with your use of

technology is crucial; more is not necessarily better.

Costs can ramp up quickly, not just in terms of the investment into hardware assets but also when considering purchasing and renewing software licenses. Staying mindful of the purpose behind integrating digital skills into the curriculum is key to ensuring precious time and resources are not wasted.

Equally, it is critical to remain mindful of what staff are being asked to use. Teacher workloads are precariously stacked at best. Asking them to use more technology isn't necessarily the magic bullet in delivering much-needed relief from this burden.

Where technology is being integrated in schools, effective training and continuous professional

development (CPD) is absolutely crucial. Investing time into initial on-boarding for any device or edtech programme will go a long way towards ensuring parity of experience between classrooms, while supporting the career development of staff and boosting their confidence. Often, edtech providers offer comprehensive training information packs, walk-throughs and even live workshops to support teachers in rolling their service out and getting the most from it.

Make the most of free resources

There is a treasure trove of support available for free. However, these free resources can be challenging to find. They may not be promoted as heavily as paid-for equivalents, and lack of expertise can make it hard to assess their quality.

By and large, the best quick fix is to rely on reputable charities, organisations and educational bodies. However, the better solution is to tap into a network of colleagues who can elicit invaluable recommendations and testimonies.

Networks – whether through trust relationships, local authority partnerships, or other similar structures – can be a great way to share more than teaching materials too.

Technology is extremely scalable, and by sharing physical resources through computing hubs or bulk-buying software licenses, learning communities can reduce the burden of cost while providing their pupils with up-to-date hardware and software. Community spaces such as libraries and digital hubs are also vastly underappreciated resources, offering internet access, shared devices and support from knowledgeable experts.

Embed digital across the curriculum

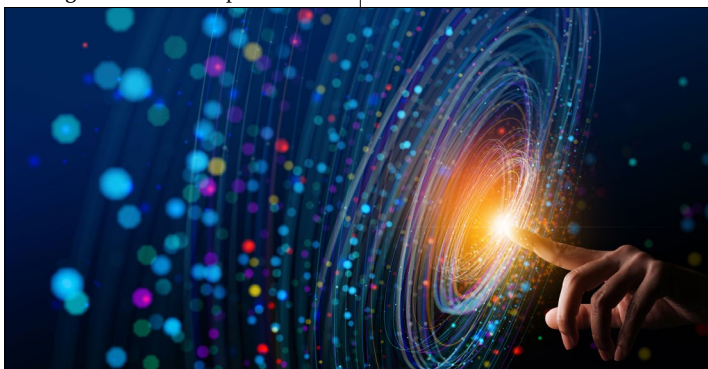
Preparing children for a technologically driven future is about so much more than delivering the statutory requirements for computing lessons. But working out how to apply and use technologies in various subjects involves imagination, creative thinking and the freedom to think outside the box.

Thinking creatively about how digital skills are incorporated into a school's curriculum can yield numerous benefits, and can boost pastoral provision just as well as subject teaching.

Pupils can code, for example, as a way to express how they feel or build how emotions might look, bringing a fun, creative element to emotional self-regulation as well as teaching early game development.

Using edtech in this way creates important opportunities to make cross-curricular links. More importantly, it can ensure students have positive perceptions about their own potential to have tech-based careers.

We've come a long way towards tackling the digital divide since the pandemic, but there's a way to go. The speed of change can make the task daunting, but thoughtful, well-supported and creative implementation can ensure every school and every pupil keeps pace.



“ Be intentional; more is not necessarily better ”



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THE REVIEW

ALL ABOUT SEMH: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR PRIMARY/SECONDARY TEACHERS

Author: Sarah Johnson

Publisher: Routledge

Publication date: 5 September 2023

ISBN: 1032225653 / 1032225688

Reviewer: Matt Morris, Director of education and achievement, Team Education Trust

As a teacher and leader who has worked across mainstream, hospital education and alternative provision, Sarah Johnson understands the importance of child-centric approaches. Having dedicated most of her career to inclusion, mental health and behaviour, she has established herself as both a champion of pupils who are most in need and an expert in the complex work of supporting them.

A follow-up to *Behaving Together in the Classroom* (as Sarah Dove), Johnson's latest outing, *All About SEMH* – which is actually two books, one for primary and one for secondary – tackles the complexity of social, emotional and mental health needs. Here, she provides a balance of contextual information regarding the different internal and external behaviours exhibited by pupils alongside practical strategies and conversational prompts.

The result is an accessible toolkit with something for everyone regardless of experience or longevity. Initially intended for teachers and other adults providing support in the classroom, the books are just as relevant to leaders, for whom SEMH poses a growing systemic challenge.

Underlying the practical application, there is a warmth to these books. Johnson's conversational style reflects her own practice as a teacher and leader. She is equally honest about the classroom challenges and the how our education system often aggravates these. She notes, for example, that her own teacher training and that of many since (including yours truly), was blinkered upon lesson planning and delivery for most pupils, lacking the forensic focus needed to meet a range of needs.

Fittingly then, when I first thumbed through *All About SEMH*, I was surprised by the number of strategies I was able to quickly pick up, use or adapt that I had neither been given when I trained nor had developed through honing my practice.

While Johnson draws on her rich experience, she also makes reference to the latest research evidence. This allows readers to add to their theoretical understanding of this aspect of SEND as well as their contextual practice.

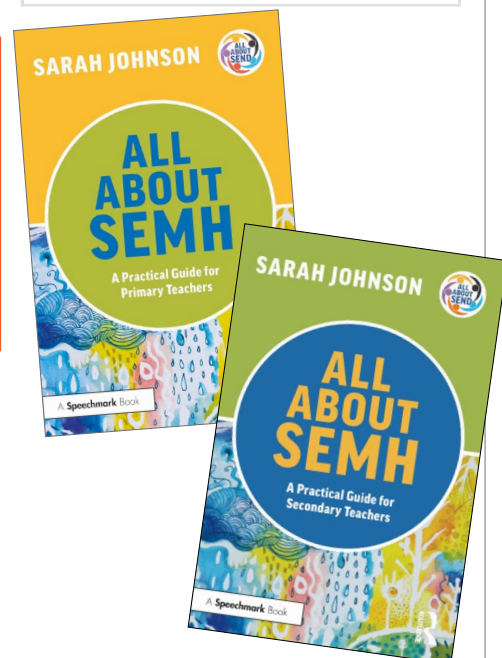
However, it's the views of parents and pupils that punctuate the books which really stand out. They bring to light the real struggles families experience within our education system. Johnson does not present them to pass judgement but to remind us of our core purpose as educators, always returning to the individual need of the child.

The case studies throughout each book are carefully chosen to highlight a given aspect or need related to SEMH, and to reconnoitre the nuances faced by individual young people. They add a refreshing realism, which help connect the strategies she provides to the child and the situation.

And it's in Johnson's strategies where the strength of the book lies. For each situation, she presents a range of different techniques and conversation for starters to try, with options that the reader can consider or adapt. The key to all of these is that she recognises that her reader knows the challenge and the child, and is best able to choose the strategy that fits their situation.

What is clear throughout is that the *All About SEMH* books are not there to serve as manuals or diktats but as an additional resource to

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give confidence to educators. They foreground the needs of young people who often struggle to deal with the most basic situations and emotions, but never forget the needs of the other learners in the classroom.

As Johnson herself asserts at the start, teaching is hard. Amid the strain of curriculum planning, assessment, understanding and preparing to meet the needs of young people, and external stakeholder pressure squeezing the time of teachers, the solutions in *All About SEMH* give us all a 'bit of a leg up'.

While the books could be taken in isolation and educators might be drawn to the one of their chosen sector, I would urge you to consider both as a comprehensive tour of SEMH. There is learning to be found across phases, of course. But perhaps more importantly, as Johnson herself makes clear, pupils' individual needs are not defined by age, stage or setting. Neither should our practices.

★★★★★
Rating

THE CONVERSATION
LISTENING IN ON
THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM

Sarah Gallagher
Headteacher,
Snape Primary
School and PGCE
tutor, University of
Cambridge

PRACTICE MAKES MINDSET

This week's guest on the School Behaviour Secrets podcast is Kate Parish, a primary teacher who also specialises in neuroscience (among many other talents).

The conversation offers up a refreshing take on growth mindsets, which I will be putting into practice myself and with pupils. Parish makes the point that, though many schools use growth mindset terminology, there's little evidence to measure impact. This is unsurprising; having posters up and talking about something doesn't add up to practical application.

But practical application is where Parish shines. Using correct terms for our brain (which even younger children are quite capable of remembering), she talks through a process which enables us to take control of our thoughts rather than let them take control of our actions.

I guarantee you'll want to hear about the 'grab, look and bin' method, which has

Transforming Mindsets: Cultivating Resilience In Students

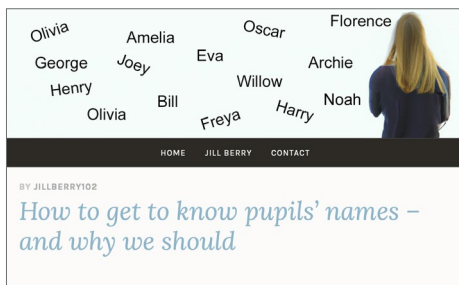
SCHOOL BEHAVIOUR SECRETS

EPISODE 161
TRANSFORMING MINDSETS: CULTIVATING RESILIENCE IN STUDENTS
WITH KATE PARISH

had success with children to regulate their emotions and develop their self-esteem. With techniques like this, we can genuinely start to train our children to adopt a growth mindset and take back control over their learning powers rather than deploying so many empty words, too often after the fact.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

'How silly,' I thought when I saw the theme of former headteacher and leadership consultant, Jill Berry's new blog. 'Of course we need to know children's names.' However, empowered by my podcast listen, I resisted this thought process, tamed my amygdala and went on to read it open-mindedly. After all, a secondary school setting is a different thing altogether.



But still, how crushing for a young person to attend a school and not feel seen. This is what motivates Berry to write, and just like Kate Parish she is not satisfied with mere words. Armed with some useful tips on how to go about remembering lots of them, every teacher can play their part in creating a culture of belonging regardless of setting.

RESULTS BEGET RESULTS

Speaking of the differences between big and small schools, this schools commentary on the Ofsted blog appears to be an attempt to reassure the sector about the return of data at the heart of inspections now that we have two years of IDSR data to go on.

The analysis reiterates that Ofsted takes a holistic view and doesn't just look at test and exam results, but nevertheless makes clear that it is uncommon for the two to be out of kilter.

As always, there are some caveats, including one that interests me. Small schools have very 'noisy' data which can be heavily skewed due to small cohorts. Indeed,

the IDSR for small schools displays greyed out sections due to unviable statistics.

Can Ofsted claim to be giving parents a full picture of a school if a summary judgment is ostensibly informed by aberrant data? To me, this seems like another good reason for one-word judgments to go. Until then, this article's assurances don't feel very reassuring – at least for small schools.

PROGRESSIVE AMNESIA

Finally this week, Walk Thru co-creators, Tom Sherrington and Oliver Caviglioli appeared in the first episode of season 3 of Zack Groshell's Progressively Incorrect podcast to serve up a timely reminder that if we are to expect professional dialogue and practice we need to make time for them.

I can hardly believe I'm writing this, but I am one of the 'old teachers' referred to in this conversation – the ones who are heard to mutter 'I used to do that' when presented with some of the authors' teaching techniques. But there's no judgment here. Caviglioli calls this 'continual professional amnesia'; teachers are kept so busy they often can't remember what works.

The programme's focus is on instructional coaching. As a primary PGCE tutor, I'm proud of the work we do in this regard to build classroom confidence and demystify practice, and I agree with Sherrington and Caviglioli that we need to do this for teachers at all career stages.

I was also pleased to hear them emphasise the importance of context and working with what you've got. More reassuring than Ofsted, for sure.

I've grabbed. I've looked. I'll let you guess what's going in the bin this week.

EDUCATION RICKSHAW

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The Knowledge

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



What is maths anxiety, and how can teachers reduce it?

Dr C. Rashaad Shabab, Reader in economics, University of Sussex

Learning mathematics can be hard. Teaching mathematics – and teaching it well – can be harder still. My latest research paper, *Understanding mathematics anxiety: Loss-aversion and student engagement*, uses behavioural economics to help teachers understand maths anxiety and come up with practical ways to help students overcome it.

In the paper, I explore how loss-aversion, a pervasive bias in human behaviour, is likely to affect student engagement with mathematical content in a wide range of subjects, such as business, chemistry, economics, engineering, finance and physics.

Loss-aversion is a psychological phenomenon where losses hurt about twice as much as the gains can make us feel good. If students perceive failure to correctly complete a maths exercise as psychologically, socially or emotionally costly, then loss-aversion is likely to bias their study decisions towards disengagement in behaviour that is consistent with maths anxiety.

The paper uses these insights to construct a model of student engagement which shows that students with low maths preparedness are at heightened risk of falling into a vicious cycle of low attainment and disengagement due to maths anxiety.

But what can teachers do to help students overcome maths anxiety? A wealth of research in behavioural economics suggests that positive framing can be a powerful tool to counteract the effects of loss-aversion.

In keeping with these findings, the theory of maths anxiety developed in the paper finds that pedagogic interventions to improve negative associations with the threat of failure are likely to help students overcome maths anxiety.

In contrast, interventions that rely on negative framing, such as reminding students of the consequences of failure, reprimanding students for failure and punishing students in a way that is visible to their peers are likely to worsen anxiety and disengagement.

Steps to 'gain-frame' the threat of failure in the classroom have the potential to improve



'Positive framing can be a powerful tool'

engagement among anxious students. This includes casting home- and class-work exercises as a 'safe space' for trial and error.

In my own experience teaching cohorts of 900 business school students mathematical content in an introductory economics module, I found it very helpful to reassure students that making mistakes is just a part of learning mathematical tasks. Such measures can rehabilitate the sensitivities of students for whom the threat of failure looms large.

The theory developed in the paper helps understand why positive pedagogies informed by 'achievement goal theory' and the related 'growth mindset theory' can be successful in improving student engagement.

In achievement goal theory, ego-oriented goals measure performance relative to a peer group, whereas task-oriented goals focus on improving one's own performance over time. As a result, with task-oriented goals, failure represents an opportunity to improve and so might not trigger negative associations.

Growth mindset theory distinguishes between learners with fixed mindsets and those with growth mindsets. With a fixed mindset, mathematical ability is viewed as an unchanging

endowment and so failure can only be perceived negatively. This is not so under a growth mindset where the experience of failure is framed as an input to learning and a way to track growth. Thus, actively encouraging task-oriented goals and a growth mindset can help students overcome mathematics anxiety.

The paper identifies an important role for adaptive learning technologies to help students overcome mathematics anxiety. Dynamic difficulty adjustment, a technique from video game design that is used to increase engagement, has the potential to allow the development of programmes which adjust the difficulty of mathematical exercises in real time to match student ability. This would permit problems to be kept difficult enough to foster learning, but not so difficult as to trigger anxiety and disengagement.

It might seem reasonable for an educator to surmise that chronic disengagement in a student is indicative of chronic apathy. My research on maths anxiety suggests otherwise. Some students might disengage because they are overly concerned by the threat of failure. The positive pedagogies outlined above might help such students to reengage.

Week in

Westminster

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

FRIDAY

Hello Dominic, our old friend. He's come to talk to us again.

Cummings – Michael Gove's special adviser while education secretary before his rise to fame leading the campaign for Brexit and advising Boris Johnson – is back moving in education circles. Or to be precise, maths circles.

He's "helping some experts" build maths circles for primary pupils. A Russian export, maths circles are free, out-of-class clubs aimed to boost young people's mathematical thinking and curiosity.

Cummings is on the lookout for books and other resources that best support children to learn maths and "learn to think' as well as they can" – which is *not at all* the same as "follow the national curriculum" or "succeed on government-controlled tests?"

He is also trying to find out why the "system generate[s] huge numbers of rubbish material and suppress[es] good material, so much so that many great books are hard to find (and whose judgment should you trust?) and have vanished from teacher training and institutional memories?"

He also managed to have a pop at both the main parties. The current Conservative-written national curriculum (which he helped to write) "is bad for both those children more or less able than the media".

Meanwhile, Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer's plan to rewrite the national curriculum "will almost certainly make it worse, at best it's just pointlessly disruptive, and is another reason to opt out and have your children orientated to other things".

We await the fireworks.

MONDAY

A quiet start to the week with a big government reshuffle in which Forever Schools Minister Nick Gibb resigned for a yet-to-be-announced role in the diplomatic service.

But, in just as big a shock, Damian Hinds steps into the vacant post – one of the few secretaries of state who appears to have returned to their department as a junior minister!

Good timing for Hinds too. He has experience of dealing with school funding campaigns in the run-up to an election, and will get to update the recruitment and retention strategy that he wrote.

PS. In a heart-warming sign for social mobility, all the four holders of what are described as the great office of state went to private school. Woop.

TUESDAY

HOLD THE FRONT PAGE: Education secretary Gillian Keegan revealed today ... she did an apprenticeship! She also had a career in business! More as we get it ...

While we're on the topic of Keegan's Twitter feed, it's good to know that despite the merry-go-round of education secretaries and ministers, they are all consistent in spinning a good stat.

Keegz whipped out a new graphic today on how 89 per cent of schools are now 'good' and 'outstanding', compared with 68 per cent under Labour (alongside a picture of Bridget Phillipson, despite it relating to 13 years ago).

Anyway, as many *Schools Week* readers know – and as the government's own statistics watchdog has made clear – this is

misleading. Until recently if a school got 'outstanding' then it didn't get inspected again (which, unsurprisingly, inflated the numbers).

We're now on our third inspections framework since 2010. One of those changes is the introduction of short and ungraded inspections, which also make it harder to lose a 'good' rating.

But apart from all that, bang on Keegz! And good on you for taking all the credit, without any word for the teachers and leaders driving any supposed improvement.

WEDNESDAY

Shadow children's minister Helen Hayes told parliament she would vote for a Middle East ceasefire, in defiance of the Labour whip – which meant she faced being booted out of her role. A ceasefire is "surely the minimum we should be demanding in the face of such horrific suffering", she said.

But she abstained when the vote was put to parliament, allowing her to cling on to the job!

THURSDAY

Gibb has only been out of the door for a few days and the government is already renegeing on his wishes.

Speaking to *The Telegraph* a few months ago, Gibbster said the "expectation" was that exam aids brought in to help pupils after Covid would not be provided for exams next summer.

But a consultation today said they *will* be provided, leading to one commentator, even more cynical than Week in Westminster, to suggest this could be a ploy by the Conservatives to give next year's grades a little boost before a general election.





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**

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

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