

SCHOOLS WEEK

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



SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK | @SCHOOLSWEEK

FRIDAY, DEC 1, 2023 | EDITION 341

'We need NHS-style campaign to stop parent abuse'



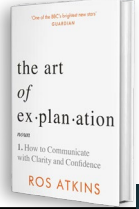
P6

5 free school lessons for policymakers



P22

What teachers can learn from journos (No, really!)



P28

10 KEEGAN'S 'ABDICATION' PUTS STRIKES HEADACHE ON SCHOOLS' DOORSTEP



Pages 4-5

Top trust faces £70k libel claim over 'toxic' school probe

SCHOOLS WEEK

Meet the news team



John Dickens
EDITOR

@JOHNDICKENSSW
JOHN.DICKENS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



Freddie Whittaker
DEPUTY EDITOR

@FCDWHITTAKER
FREDDIE.WHITTAKER@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



Samantha Booth
CHIEF REPORTER

@SAMANTHAJBOTH
SAMANTHA.BOOTH@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



Amy Walker
SENIOR REPORTER

@AMYRWALKER
AMY.WALKER@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



Jack Dyson
SENIOR REPORTER

@JACKYDYS
JACK.DYSON@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



JL Dutaut
COMMISSIONING EDITOR

@DUTAUT
JEAN-LOUISDUTAUT@LSECT.COM



Jessica Hill
INVESTIGATIONS AND FEATURES REPORTER

@JESSJANEHILL
JESSICA.HILL@LSECT.COM



Nicky Phillips
HEAD DESIGNER

@GELVETICA
NICKY.PHILLIPS@FEWEEK.CO.UK



Shane Mann
MANAGING DIRECTOR

@SHANERMANN
SHANE.MANN@LSECT.COM

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

education week jobs

FEATURED JOBS

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



WOODLAND ACADEMY TRUST - CHIEF FINANCE AND OPERATIONS OFFICER - £63,027 - £73,755

[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/WOODLAND-SW341-P2](https://tinyurl.com/woodland-sw341-p2)



CO-OP ACADEMIES TRUST - SENIOR SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPIST - £44,000 TO £50,000 + BENEFITS

[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/CO-OP-SW339-P2](https://tinyurl.com/co-op-sw339-p2)



THE CAM ACADEMY TRUST - CHIEF EXECUTIVE - £146,438 TO £194,363

[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/CAM-ACADEMY-TRUST-CO-SW340-P2](https://tinyurl.com/cam-academy-trust-co-sw340-p2)



TO ADVERTISE YOUR VACANCY WITH EDUCATION WEEK JOBS PLEASE CALL 020 81234 778 OR EMAIL | [ADVERTISING@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:advertising@schoolsweek.co.uk)

SUBSCRIBE

From as little as
£1.65
Per edition

[CLICK FOR INFO](#)



Proposed strike laws are reprehensible political stunt

Imagine the scene.

It's post September 2024, the Conservative's new minimum service levels strike laws have been passed, and teachers are on strike again.

The Conservative education secretary of the day is questioned by journalists about whether their government is doing enough to halt the strikes and end mass disruption for children and their parents.

"Absolutely – we are doing all we can and that's why we introduced tough new powers enabling schools to stay open and minimise disruption."

It's not hard to imagine what could come next ... "If schools are choosing not to use these new powers then that is on them – we've done all we can."

Now, with an election looming next year and the Conservatives tanking in the polls – the above is unlikely. But it exposes how this week's proposals for minimum service levels in schools to thwart strikes are just a brazen and reprehensible political move that throws schools under the bus.

It is an abdication of responsibility from a government in its final throes, and one that

would put schools in an impossible position.

Is it best to issue work notices to minimise disruption for children and parents, but curtail their staff's rights to strike against the government of the day's record on education?

Or, should they honour the rights of their staff and instead allow more education to be disrupted for children still not fully caught up from Covid closures?

The MSL proposals are a new *power* for schools to make use of. There is no new *duty* on schools to use them, and no plans to enforce it. So, this is exactly the awful dilemma schools across the country would be in.

Thankfully, it's unlikely to happen.

The Conservatives look set for election annihilation. And even if they didn't, the proposed laws would almost certainly be challenged in the courts.

And, even then, it's likely many schools would just refuse to make use of the new laws (page 4).

But, it's still important to call this out for what it is: cynical electioneering that puts the interests of a political party above that of the sector.

Most read online this week:

- 1 [Schools improving, SEND failings and AP 'misuse': 9 Ofsted annual report findings](#)
- 2 [Thousands more kids leaving school without GCSE grades 'new norm'](#)
- 3 [Minimum service level proposals: Everything schools need to know](#)
- 4 [Revealed: The 2023 Pearson Teaching Awards winners](#)
- 5 [Spielman claims head's death used 'to try and discredit' Ofsted](#)

[CLICK LINKS TO READ STORIES](#)

Disclaimer:

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

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

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

Please address any complaints to the editor.

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

SCHOOLS WEEK IS PROUD TO BE A MEMBER OF



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

ADVERTISE WITH US

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

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



Leaders vow to shun new strike law as unions mull legal action

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@FCDWHITTAKER

School leaders have vowed not to enact ministers' controversial "minimum service levels" during strike action, as unions consider legal action against the government.

The Department for Education this week announced it would legislate to create a power for schools, trusts and councils to order staff back to work so they can remain open for certain groups of pupils.

But, it will be "at the discretion" of individual employers whether or not to issue "work notices" to deliver minimum service levels (MSL). The government's consultation makes no reference to any form of enforcement of the policy.

Officials refused to say if schools would face any action if they did not uphold minimum service levels.

Government 'abdicating responsibility'

Andrew O'Neill, headteacher at All Saints Catholic College in west London, told Schools Week he would not issue work notices if the legislation passes.

But he added: "It's a classic thing of government of saying, this is the legislation, and then abdicating the true operational responsibility for it, and putting that on to school leaders, who will potentially take the fall and come under that day-to-day slack and criticism."

The government has put forward two proposals, one of which would include all primary pupils being included in the MSL (see full proposals on page 5).

Sarah Shirras, executive headteacher of St William's Primary School and Brundall Primary School in Norfolk, said it "would basically mean no right to strike in primary schools".

"I'm not choosing which staff can strike and who can't. I'm also not willing to ask other union members to cover for striking colleagues."

Robin Bevan, headteacher of Southend High School for Boys and a former president of the National Education Union, added he had "no intention" of issuing any work notices "and, indeed, if directed, I would refuse".

"This is not a matter of managerial convenience



Gillian Keegan

in averting temporary disruptions, but an issue in which deeper values and longer-term principled considerations apply."

Unions consider legal action

Education secretary Gillian Keegan said the new legislation would "help us protect children and young people's education whilst balancing an individual's right to strike".

The consultation was launched after ministers pulled out of talks to agree a "voluntary" plan with unions, who say the laws are a "fundamental attack on the democratic freedoms and rights of school staff".

The Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) too has "serious concerns" the anti-strike legislation breaks international law and is "failing to meet human rights obligations".

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the ASCL leaders' union, said his organisation was "considering taking legal action ... [on a] direct assault on the rights of our members".

Leaders were "particularly badly affected" as they would "almost certainly be included in any work notices issued under minimum service level requirements because of the posts they hold".

"In effect, minimum service levels remove their right to strike completely." Any legal action would "likely" be taken by several unions "working together", he added.

Both the National Education Union and NASUWT teaching union confirmed they were considering "all options". NAHT was "ruling nothing out".

Consultation slammed

The government claimed its minimum service

levels will bring England in line with other European nations, such as France, Spain and Italy. But other countries' approaches differ, according to Full Fact analysis.

In Spain, for example, the minimum service levels must be "proportionate" and balance the needs of the community with the fundamental right to strike.

But in 2012, it was reported that four in five Spanish teachers went on strike – suggesting the country does not enforce the rules.

The DfE was also forced this week to withdraw its initial consultation on the measures just over five hours after it was first published. Schools Week had revealed a litany of issues, including tiny character limits, and a requirement that participants pick a preferred proposal.

The department said submissions to the original consultation would still be considered, and that it had extended character limits and added a "no preference" response option for some questions.

The government's consultation proposes that minimum service levels would apply to all state-funded schools, including special schools. Because all pupils in special schools receive some level of SEND support, they would likely need to fully open during strikes under the proposal.

Simon Knight, joint headteacher of Frank Wise special school in Oxfordshire, said it was "unacceptable to prioritise all of our pupils and then place school leaders in the position of deciding who remains in school and which of their staff gets to enact the right to take strike action. This is extraordinarily divisive for both the workforce and wider school communities."

Minimum service levels: How they would work

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

**How will the minimum service levels work?
Here's your trusty Schools Week explainer ...**

Two MSL options considered

Ministers are considering two minimum service level options.

Proposal one would involve prioritising attendance for “specific groups of children and young people” in keeping with the DfE’s strike guidance.

These would include vulnerable children and young people, such as looked-after children or those with SEND, pupils due to take public exams and formal assessments, and the children of critical workers.

Proposal 2 would involve the same approach as the first for secondary pupils, but would include “all” primary pupils. This would amount to three in four pupils expected to be in school during strikes.

However, ministers believe leaders should have “flexibility to determine the appropriate staffing levels which are reasonably necessary to deliver an MSL in their setting”.

Heads are “best placed to understand the needs of” their staff and pupils, the consultation adds.

Schools to issue ‘work notices’ ...

The new law will give a power to employers to issue “work notices” to ensure they can deliver the MSL. Unions will then be obliged to take “reasonable steps to ensure compliance”.

However, the decision whether to issue a notice will lie with the employer – in this case schools, academy trusts or councils.

Employers must decide “which and how many workers are identified in a work notice to deliver the MSL, rather than government setting specific ratios or percentages”.

They must be issued a “minimum of seven days prior to the strike day but can be varied by the employer up to four days before (unless a later time is agreed with the union)”.

... and looks like no enforcement

As this is an additional as opposed to new



power for schools, it’s not clear what would happen in heads refused to issue work notices.

The consultation does not mention of any kind of enforcement.

“This legislation is intended to provide new tools to reduce any disproportionate impacts during strikes, not to prevent unions or individuals from taking industrial action,” the consultation says.

But as heads have pointed out (page 4), this just moves the firing line from ministers to schools.

Which schools and workers would this affect?

The DfE wants academies, maintained schools, 16 to 19 academies, FE settings and sixth-form colleges in scope. Other institutions, such as private schools, are not included.

The government “expects” those named in a work notice “could” include headteachers, principals, teachers, SENCOs, teaching assistants, teaching and learning support staff, designated safeguarding leads, administration staff and other non-teachers such as caretakers, technicians, cleaners and kitchen staff.

Which exam years are affected?

Pupils sitting exams or national assessments such as:

- Year 6 pupils undertaking end of key stage 2 assessments; and
- Pupils participating in statutory key stage 2 trials, such as the anchor trial
- Pupils taking GCSEs, AS and A-levels and vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs), including T-levels, and other national qualifications
- Year 11 pupils participating in the National Reference Test.

The consultation document asked respondents if they should prioritise those with assessments within a month of a strike, or within the same academic year.

Who are critical workers?

The DfE wants to redefine its list of critical workers to those specified in the legislation that passed earlier this year.

That covers...

- Those in health services, fire and rescue services, education services, transport services, border security and the decommissioning of nuclear installations; and
- Those unable to strike, such as police officers, members of the armed forces and prison officers.

However, both parents would have to be critical workers with children “not old enough to look after themselves”.

There is no legal threshold for this, but the DfE said children “up to and including year 7 should be in scope”.

DfE ‘expects’ other pupils to get remote education

For pupils not prioritised for attendance on a strike day under either proposal, the DfE said it would “expect every effort to be made by schools to put in place appropriate arrangements for remote education”.

However, rotas could also be used for longer strikes.

The consultation runs until January 30.
If approved, it would come into effect in
September

YOU CAN FILL IN THE CONSULTATION HERE



Schools demand national campaign against abusive parents

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

A network of schools has demanded an NHS-style national campaign against parents who abuse staff, as data shows reports of bad behaviour at the school gates has risen by more than a quarter since 2020.

Schools North East said its members faced an “increase in irrational, confrontational, unreasonable behaviour and expectations” from parents and carers, leading to “rising vexatious complaints”.

Data from Teacher Tapp shows the proportion of school staff who reported verbal abuse from parents or carers has risen from 28 per cent in 2020 to 36 per cent this year.

Headteachers were more likely to report abuse (75 per cent) than other senior leaders (53 per cent) and classroom teachers (30 per cent).

Schools North East described a “seismic shift in attitudes” during and since the pandemic.

While most interactions with parents were positive, there were small groups of parents “willing to be abusive towards school staff” – including complaints straight to external government agencies.

These bodies, such as Ofsted, the Department for Education and the Education and Skills Funding Agency “should only get involved once the school has completed their complaints procedure”.

“Schools would like to see a campaign against abuse, to promote greater respect for the teaching profession.”

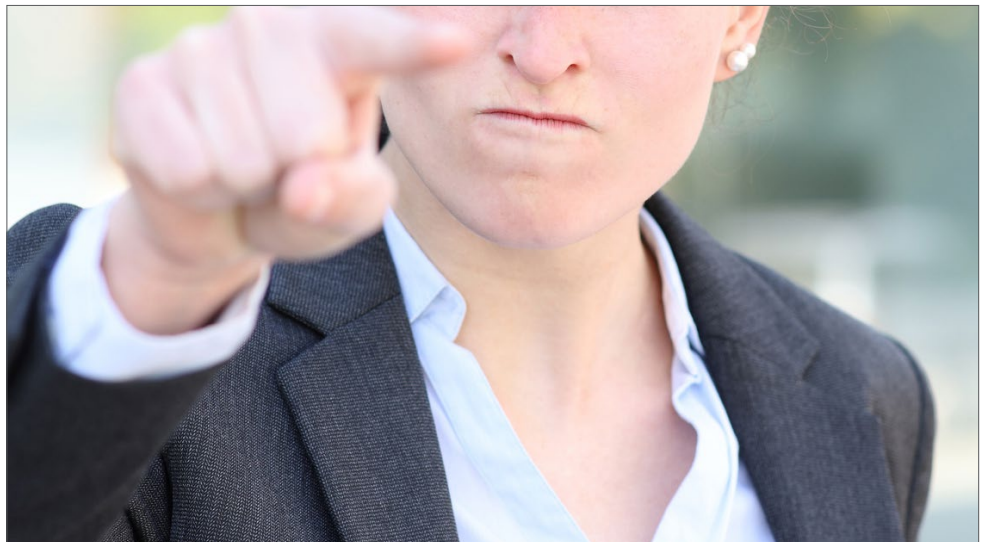
The network pointed to similar campaigns in the NHS.

In 2018, the government announced the first NHS “violence reduction strategy”, which NHS England followed up in 2021 with a new violence prevention and reduction standard. Many NHS trusts have also run their own campaigns and initiatives.

Chris Zarraga, a director of Schools North East, said some parents held schools responsible for what happened outside classroom hours.

A survey of more than 200 schools found two thirds reported “increased challenges in relationships with parents”.

“One primary school has seen 69



complaints (including vexatious complaints) this term, compared with 102 for the entirety of the last academic year.”

Ofsted received 14,900 complaints about schools last academic year, almost a quarter more than the previous year. But less than 1 per cent led to follow-up inspections.

Some school leaders have resorted to pleading with parents to improve their behaviour.

In a letter to parents this term, the Berkshire Association of Secondary Headteachers warned of an “unfortunate increase in inappropriate, confrontational and aggressive communications directed at staff from some parents and carers, whether by email, over the phone or in person”.

“In some extreme cases, staff have even been verbally abused. Quite simply, such behaviour is not acceptable in any workplace.”

Earlier this year, Christine Stansfield, the chief executive of Mowbray Education Trust, told parents she would lose talented staff if they did not stop “personally abusive” and “sometimes threatening” communications.

Stansfield said her letter had been “met with an overwhelmingly positive response and has since forged the path for a new and transparent way of working together”.

Polling of more than 3,000 school staff by YouGov for the charity Education Support found 31 per cent had witnessed and 45 per cent had experienced verbal abuse in 2022, while 48 per

cent had seen and 44 per cent had experienced undermining behaviour.

Even more worryingly, 18 per cent said they had seen and 10 per cent had experienced physical abuse from parents, while 8 per cent said they had witnessed and 4 per cent had experienced hate crimes.

Four per cent had seen and 2 per cent had experienced sexual abuse of staff.

Sinéad Mc Brearty, the chief executive of Education Support, said that as a parent she understood how upsetting and frustrating it could be when things “aren’t going well for your child at school”.

“But how we do that has a huge effect on teachers and school leaders and is contributing to the growing staffing crisis in schools.

“Aggression, abusive behaviour, undermining the school’s authority – ultimately these approaches erode the strength of the school and reduce the quality of education for everyone.”

Jason Elsom, the chief executive of Parentkind, said there was “never an excuse for abusing school staff”, who were “over-stretched and under more pressure than ever before”.

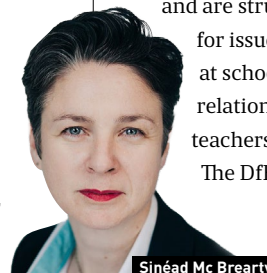
But parents were “also feeling under pressure”. “Parents tell us they often don’t feel listened to and are struggling to get the right support

for issues like bullying, both online and at school... We can do more to build relationships between parents and teachers, but abuse is never the answer.”

The DfE was approached for comment.



Chris Zarraga



Sinéad Mc Brearty

Headteacher felt 'inadequate' was 'end of her career', inquest hears

AMY WALKER
@AMYRWALKER

Ruth Perry thought the 'inadequate' grade Ofsted gave her school "was the end of her job and her career", an inquest into the Reading headteacher's death heard this week.

It came during emotional testimony from her husband Jonathan, who in a written statement read out by senior coroner Heidi Connor, said his wife "loved her job".

He added that while it "could be stressful... Ruth was very resilient".

The inquest at Berkshire Coroner's Court also heard that high levels of stress during inspections had become "normalised" for headteachers, while the lead inspector had suggested to the chair of governors during the visit that the school's grade could improve.

After receiving a pre-inspection call from Alan Derry, Perry – the head of Caversham primary – was "understandably anxious", her husband said, but seemed happy to promote the school's "many strengths".

Derry, the lead inspector, told the court that Perry had been "very confident" during the call, but her demeanour was "different" during the inspection.

Safeguarding issues were uncovered on the first morning, and when Perry came home she was "distracted" and felt Derry was a "bully", said Jonathan. He had never seen his wife "so deflated and humiliated".

Nicola Leroy, Caversham's school business manager, told the hearing she saw Ruth "extremely distressed" after a meeting with the inspector.

Derry told the inquest Ruth's mental state had been a "concern" for him and he was "mindful of [her] heightened state of anxiety".

At other points in the visit, she presented as "someone who was an active part of the inspection process".

In a witness statement Clare Jones-King, the school's deputy head, described Derry's behaviour during another meeting as "very mocking and unpleasant". He also "sniggered loudly".

Derry said he did not "recognise that as how the meeting was", but said later he would alter his behaviour if a head became upset during a



future inspection "knowing what I now know happened".

In a separate meeting with the school's governing body midway through the inspection, Derry said the school's safeguarding culture was "robust" and that pupils "felt safe", Neil Walne, Caversham's chair of governors, told the inquest.

When he asked what the school could do to get a better outcome, Walne said Derry "effectively" suggested that its safeguarding records "could be complete".

In a final meeting at the end of the visit, the chair said he "reminded" Derry of the points he'd made.

"I wanted to know from Mr Derry how he'd got to that conclusion, given our previous conversation," said Walne. "I felt it was unfair."

In his witness statement, Walne said Derry told the meeting he had "been told off" by a senior for his previous comments. "He said...I shouldn't have said that or I was wrong. It was words to that effect."

In response to Connor asking if he felt the inspection had "contributed" to Ruth's mental health "deterioration" and death, Walne said "in my opinion yes".

Earlier in the week Chris Russell, Ofsted's national director for education, admitted that inspectors were not given written guidance on modifying inspections in which headteachers were under "high levels of stress".

But he said minimising pressure on staff was "a core value" of how it trained inspectors.

Russell added that responsibility for the welfare of headteachers at maintained schools sat with governors and the local council.

Leroy said the week after the inspection, Perry told both her and the school's deputy head she had "thought about taking her own life".

The pair advised her to phone her GP and contacted a representative from Reading Borough Council, as well as the school's chair of governors.

Another Ofsted inspector who was at Caversham said he perceived Perry's behaviour during the inspection to be "normal".

"I would say that there are tears more times than there are not," said Gavin Evans, adding that sometimes this was because of positive outcomes.

Alice Boon, the strategic lead for school effectiveness at Brighter Futures for Children, which is contracted to Reading Borough Council, said in her witness statement that in the hours after the inspection, Perry was distressed "in the way I'd seen others".

It had "become normalised" that heads experienced stress because of the inspection process, which could lead to them "not sleeping" and "not eating".

Samaritans are available 365 days a year.
Call 116 123, email jo@samaritans.org or visit
www.samaritans.org

Education Support runs a confidential
helpline for education staff and teachers on
08000 562 561

United Learning sued for defamation over investigation report

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

A former senior staff member at Holland Park School is suing the country's largest trust for up to £70,000, claiming an investigation into the academy's alleged "toxic" culture defamed him.

Nicholas Robson, a former associate headteacher at the west London secondary, has filed the claim at the High Court, show documents seen by *Schools Week*.

He alleges the independent investigation, which uncovered sexism, racism and the public humiliation of pupils, is libellous.

The investigation was carried out by governors parachuted in by the government after claims from Holland Park pupils of a "toxic" environment at the school, once dubbed the "socialist Eton".

It was published on Holland Park's website in May last year while it was still a single-academy trust. United Learning took over the school seven months later following an 'inadequate' Ofsted rating.

But Robson, whose legal costs are covered by the National Education Union, wants an injunction stopping the 85-school trust "from permitting to be published" the "defamatory" statements.

A spokesperson for United Learning said it would be "inappropriate to comment" because of the "ongoing nature of this case... But, suffice to say, we will be contesting it in full and are confident of our position."

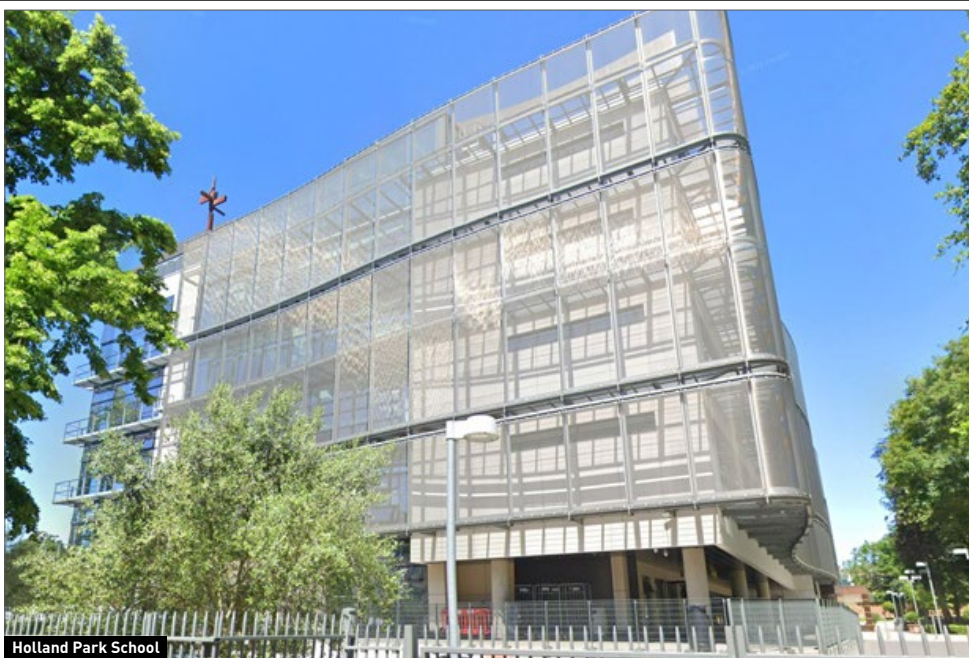
The investigation found safeguarding failures at the secondary, including the "inappropriate" handling of a teacher's relationship with a pupil.

Meanwhile, Ofsted officials were said to have been "misled", with staff questionnaires relating to a visit in January 2020 "destroyed at the instigation of some senior leaders". Certain children were also taken offsite during inspections.

Jessica Joels, who carried out the inquiry, said there was "overt" sexism, Islamophobia and racism at the school, with a "culture of fear, favouritism and inequality".

The investigation covered events dating back as far as 2004, at which point the school was under local authority control.

Instead of publishing the 554-page report in full, Holland Park opted to release a summary of its findings "to protect the identities of staff and



students who gave evidence". It also released a statement from its board of governors.

The releases – which both still sit on the school's website – are at the centre of Robson's claim.

Papers submitted to the High Court show he had demanded "damages, including aggravated damages, for libel arising" from them.

He also argued private information had been "processed" and misused in the reports, neither of which name him. His submission claim form said this was a breach of his privacy under the European Convention on Human Rights.

If the court rules in his favour, United will also be made to publish "a summary of the final [court] judgment".

There are four main defences to defamation: truth, honest opinion, publication of a matter of public interest and privilege.

Defamation expert Daniel Jennings, a partner at Shakespeare Martineau, said qualified privilege could be a successful defence in such investigation report cases if "a duty to publish" the information could be demonstrated.

"You then have to look at what's the underlying subject matter – is it serious enough to warrant overriding the individual's interest? And the publication can't be excessive [in terms who they were publishing it to]."

However, he said it might be "slightly more difficult" to extend this defence to the governors' statement. "A commentary on the report is one step away from [the material] they had to publish."

Antony Power, a partner at PHP Law, said issues around publishing material of this kind was "something we wrestle with clients [about] all the time".

The "safest option" was to keep [investigation documents] internally.

The case is also an interesting example of the liabilities that trusts inherit when taking over schools. But Power added that proving United Learning had "responsibility for the claim" might be a "significant hurdle to clear".

Before Joels' investigation, the government told Holland Park to rein in the salaries of its leaders.

Colin Hall, the former head, was at the time the fourth best-paid academy boss in the country, despite running one school. His wages were at least £280,000 in 2022 – a rise of £100,000 since 2013-14.

Robson appears to be listed as third-in-command on the former trust's annual accounts. The third highest salary listed in the 2022 accounts was at least £160,000.

The NEU said it was "awaiting the formal written defence of the other side. We will not be commenting at this stage."

It said covering the legal costs was "in line with our arrangements when we act in legal cases for our members".

The union also backed a failed high court bid by Holland Park parents to stop the school joining United Learning after Ofsted rated it 'inadequate'.

Bursary change shuts out 200 maths teachers

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Reducing bursaries for maths teachers in favour of retention payments in their early careers likely resulted in a net loss of almost 200 specialist staff, an evaluation has found.

The Department for Education piloted its “phased maths bursary” scheme in 2018.

Previously, bursaries for trainees ranged between £25,000 and £27,500 and were paid upfront.

However, under the pilot, this initial payment fell to between £20,000 and £22,000 and payments of between £5,000 and £7,500 in the third and fifth year of teaching were introduced.

A formal evaluation by CFE Research and FFT Education Datalab compared the recruitment of maths teachers at the time of the pilot with recruitment in other subjects.

It said the results suggested that reducing the initial bursary “reduced recruitment on to maths

initial teacher training by 10 to 15 per cent”.

This is an “estimated 275 fewer maths teachers entering state schools in the 2019-20 academic year”.

There was also “no consistent statistical evidence” that introducing additional funds for maths teachers later in their careers influenced recruitment.

However, the results did suggest the pilot reduced the attrition of teachers by 37 per cent in the year the first £5,000 payment was made. This equated to 47 maths teachers who would have otherwise left teaching.

The higher payments of £7,500, which were paid in certain areas of the country, reduced attrition by 58 per cent. However, the “sample used to estimate this value is small, so caution is needed interpreting the results”.

The third payment is due in this year. Assuming the effect is the same as the second payment, the analysis predicts just 94 teachers will have stayed in the classroom.

This is way below the 275 estimated fewer teachers entering the profession, meaning the pilot “is therefore likely to result in a net reduction of teachers within the 2018-19 cohort by the end of the policy period”.

So while the early career payments “did retain teachers”, the reduced bursary “reduced the supply of first-year maths teachers markedly”, the report concluded.

The government has subsequently introduced more generous schemes of bursary and retention payments for some subjects.

A newer scheme, the levelling-up premium, offers maths, physics, chemistry and computing teachers up to £3,000 annually in the first five years of their careers, on top of existing initial bursaries.

Labour has proposed a £2,400 teacher retention bonus for all those who complete the two-year early career framework, but says it will review other incentive payments.

[READ THE FULL REPORT HERE](#)



**EdCon
2024**

**Browne
Jacobson**

The power of people

Live online Monday 29 January - Thursday 1 February 2024

Explore this virtual event for inspirational ideas and practical guidance on the challenges facing the sector.

- Keynotes on trust leadership and measuring success.
- Workshops on managing staff sickness, safeguarding and exclusions.
- Live Q&A on using AI to streamline school workload and processes.
- Top tips on de-escalating complaints, SEN admissions, data breaches, TUPE, teachers' pay and more!

Register for your free place now:
brownejacobson.com/edcon2024



#EdCon2024 | twitter.com/BrowneJEdu | linkedin.com/company/brownej



Teacher trainers deluged by unsuitable international applicants

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

The government is trying to stay "on the front foot" to help teacher trainers deal with a huge influx of international applications, a senior official has said.

International applicants can now only apply for roles that offer visa sponsorship, with the Department for Education planning to "rapid test" further improvements.

Recruitment figures show a 323 per cent increase in applications from outside the United Kingdom and the European Economic Area so far this year. However, the number deemed suitable for an offer has increased just 61 per cent.

Last year, the DfE introduced an international relocation payment and made non-UK nationals eligible for physics and MFL bursaries.

James Noble-Rogers, the executive director of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), said the rise was placing "unsustainable pressure" on providers.

"Most of the extra people applying will not translate into actual recruits. This is because they do not hold the necessary entry qualifications, they misunderstand the nature of the courses they are applying for, or they already have teaching qualifications."

Stacey Singleton, the DfE's deputy director for ITT reform, said the department had tried to "be on the front foot" supporting providers as it recognised international applications took longer to process.

She told the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT) conference this week that a technical change meant "international candidates are only able to apply to courses that can offer visa sponsorship".

A small panel of providers would "rapid test" any other improvements "to minimise any extra burdens there might be on ITT providers".

In August 2022 the department added a function on its website to filter the courses that offered visa sponsorship. Last year 4,489 applications were rejected because the course was not suitable.

Emma Hollis, the executive director at the NASBTT, said the international applications were creating an



"increased administrative burden" for SCITTs that could not sponsor student visas, but the website change had "eased" this "considerably".

There were 4,705 international applications as of November for the 2024-25 academic year, up from 1,111 in the same time last year.

Last year, the DfE's top civil servant told trainers to stop turning away so many applicants.

A NASBTT survey of 102 members found 35 per cent said recruitment was better at this stage of the year compared with last year. Only 7 per cent said it was worse.

This week's data also showed that offers and accepted applications had risen by 6 and 3 per cent. Jack Worth, an economist at the National Foundation for Education Research, said this was encouraging "but early days yet in terms of what that means for recruitment this year."

Ofsted handbook changes

Delegates at the conference also heard that Ofsted is making "small tweaks" to its inspection handbook for next September, when ministers' ITT reforms kick in. It hopes to publish by April.

"We will want to meet with the person who has constructed and designed the mentor curriculum," said Helen Matthews, senior HMI for teacher development.

But there would be no "extra hurdles" to jump through.

Guidance on intensive training and practice, one of the key reforms, is slightly delayed but due in December.

Last academic year, just 179 of around 240 providers made it through re-accreditation. NASBTT estimates 32 accredited providers are either closing or merging. Nine may have closed entirely.

New flexible working network

The government has been exploring the use – and risks – of artificial intelligence in education. Hollis told the conference one of her members' key questions was about the use of AI in personal statements.

Duncan Brown, the DfE's principal software engineer, said it was creating guidance "on the usage of AI for writing personal statements", similar to advice from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS).

Brown said it would advise students using AI to be "conscious it's about you and not about the structure of your sentences".

The DfE has also launched a "flexible ITT delivery network" to help providers share best practice on flexible working in teacher training.

Molly Bland, a policy designer at the department, said there would be a series of talks on how flexibility could promote recruitment and retention.



Emma Hollis

NEWS

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

Report reveals how top trusts closed ethnicity attainment gap

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Schools that diversified their curriculum and celebrated cultural diversity closed attainment gaps between pupils from different ethnic groups, a government study has found.

The “small-scale, exploratory” research report that looked at multi-academy trust’s most successful strategies to bridging gaps was commissioned in response to the Sewell report on race and ethnic disparities.

Researchers at Isos Partnership interviewed leaders at nine MATs and one local authority school. These included United Learning, The Harris Federation and Academies Enterprise Trust.

They found leaders stated “consistently” that while they used data showing the breakdown of ethnic groups, “they did not use ethnicity as a factor to identify pupils who needed intervention to close attainment gaps”.

Some leaders said it would be “invidious and tantamount to stereotyping” to do so.

Instead, interventions were based on the educational needs of individual pupils, such as literacy and reading.

Diversifying curriculum

But the trusts fostered “a sense of belonging among



pupils”, with practices that had a “deliberate focus” on ethnicity as well as other characteristics such as religion, nationality and broader experiences linked to socio-economic status.

All the trusts had reviewed their curriculum in the past three years to “ensure it was more representative and inclusive”.

One trust chief executive argued “that there was no trade-off between having a

knowledge-rich, rigorous and stretching curriculum and ensuring that it gave opportunities for everyone to see themselves and to see others reflected in the curriculum”.

The trusts sought to build leadership and staff teams that “reflected the diversity” of their school.

They used proactive approaches to building strong relationships with parents and the wider community, strengthened the pupil voice and

made celebrating cultural identities “a core part of the life of the school”.

An “ethos of high expectations” was coupled with “swift identification of need and intervention to address barriers to learning”. Strong systems for analysing pupil-level data were also used.

Researchers said the findings should “inform the direction of any future research”.

But they said practical lessons on narrowing gaps were “not specific to different ethnic groups” but related to the “basics” of effective school improvement, such as high-quality teaching and strong leadership.

More research needed

Broad approaches” should be adapted to reflect the local context and community.

“While there are approaches to school improvement and closing gaps that can be systematised and applied in different contexts, sensitivity and adaptation to each context is prime among the practical lessons gleaned from this research.”

Interviews of a broader range of people, such as parents and staff, would “provide a more rounded pictures of practices”.

The government’s response to the Sewell report also pledged a model history curriculum by 2024 and a recommendation that schools collect and publish data on the diversity of its governing board.

[READ THE FULL REPORT HERE](#)

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Reception pupils’ development improves on pandemic levels

The development of reception pupils has improved since last year, potentially showing increased familiarity with new assessments and recovery from Covid disruption.

But some children – including boys, summer-born pupils and disadvantaged pupils – remain far behind their peers.

Results from the early years foundation stage (EYFS) profile show that 67.2 per cent of children had a “good level of development” last year, up from 65.2 per cent in 2021-22.

The proportion at the expected level across all early learning goals has also increased, from 63.4 per cent in 2021-22, to 65.6 per cent last year.

These are lower than pre-pandemic 2019,

but the assessment framework changed substantially in 2021, so there can be no direct comparisons.

Every year, teachers assess reception pupils’ development against 17 early learning goals across seven areas of learning. Last year, the average number of early learning goals at the expected level remained static at 14.1.

The Department for Education said the boost “may be attributable to gradual recovery” from Covid disruption, pointing to rises in the most recent phonics and key stage 1 results.

But it also may be down to schools “having greater familiarisation with the new assessment framework”.

It pointed to a “sharp rise in assessment

outcomes” between 2012-13 and 2013-14 when the EYFS profile was last revised.

Of the seven areas of learning, physical development remains the area with the highest proportion of children at the expected level (85.2 per cent), while literacy is the lowest (69.7 per cent).

Of the 17 goals, gross motor skills had the highest percentage of children at the expected level (92.1 per cent), whilst writing was still the lowest (71.0 per cent).

This pattern is the same as the previous year.

Girls continue to outperform boys, but the gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers has narrowed slightly.

[READ THE FULL REPORT HERE](#)

NEWS: EXCLUSIONS

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

Ban on legal aid for parents challenged

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

A landmark case challenging the lack of legal aid for parents who question permanent exclusions could be “transformative in holding schools to account”, lawyers claim.

But it could also lead to a rise in challenges and leave schools feeling the need to pay for their own legal counsel.

High Court judges have granted permission for a test case arguing parents should get access to public funding to challenge exclusions that are potentially discriminatory.

At present parents cannot claim legal aid for independent review panel (IRP) hearings, which consider a governing board’s decision not to reinstate an excluded pupil.

Stephanie Harrison KC from Garden Court Chambers, lead counsel for the claimant, said “access to justice” could be “transformative in holding schools to account and in addressing the systemic discrimination in exclusions”.

She argues the legal aid “safety net”, called exceptional case funding (ECF), must apply in appeals where a discriminatory school exclusion is alleged.

The case is supported by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

The High Court will consider whether two articles of the European Convention on Human Rights – the right to a fair hearing and the right to a private and family life – are engaged in such cases.

If so, these rights could be breached if the parent does not have ECF to seek legal advice and



representation at the hearing, the claimant says.

Legal aid was previously available for advice and assistance but not representation in school exclusion cases, Coram Children’s Legal Centre said, but this was removed in 2012.

Parents can request a special educational needs (SEN) expert be present to give impartial advice to the panel.

Garden Court Chambers said frontline organisations estimate that 75 to 80 per cent of children it represents pro-bono have special educational needs and disabilities.

They also highlight that children from black Caribbean backgrounds were nearly twice as likely to be excluded compared with their white British peers in 2021-22, according to government data.



Margaret Mulholland

In the 453 IRP hearings that year, 58 per cent of exclusions were upheld.

Sabrina Simpson, an instructing solicitor at Coram, said pro-bono support for exclusion appeals “far outstrips supply”.

“We are hopeful that we can establish a precedent that will mean that legal aid practitioners can take on these cases, which could increase access to justice for children and young people who desperately need legal representation.”

Margaret Mulholland, a SEND and inclusion specialist at ASCL, the leaders’ union, said this case could lead to a small increase in the number of appeals heard by the IRP.

“It’s important to remember that no school leader ever wants to exclude a pupil and it is an action taken as a last resort.”

Laura Berman, a partner at Stone King, said there would “inevitably” be more challenges, but it was unlikely “to open the floodgates”.

“If you have public funding to engage a lawyer, obviously it’s going to put you in a better position and give you confidence.”

Barney Angliss, a SEND specialist, said if ECF was made available, there was “no doubt” that schools would also seek legal representation because governors would support their school’s leadership and staff by presenting their case “as firmly as they can”.

Schools’ legal representation would have to be funded from their budgets at a time when many were close to returning a deficit.

The Ministry of Justice was approached for comment.

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOTH

Regional directors ‘should focus on exclusions’

The government’s regional directors should “adopt a priority focus on tackling and minimising exclusions”, say council education bosses.

An Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) policy paper says academy reforms have resulted in an “increasingly fragmented education system”. Councils’ role in education has been “partly eroded”, while still having to meet statutory duties.

Councils have to find solutions for excluded children. But a recent *Schools Week* investigation revealed that pupils in a third of areas were stuck on waiting lists for specialist

provision, with exclusions seemingly rising faster than councils could keep up with.

The ADCS called for the Department for Education’s nine regions groups to “play a greater role”.

They should focus on tackling and minimising exclusions, in partnership with local authorities, to find “local resolutions”.

The ADCS also called for “inclusion profiles” in any future school inspection frameworks “to ensure schools are held to account for how accurately they reflect their local child population and therefore meet the needs of their local community”.

However, Leora Cruddas, the chief executive at the Confederation of School Trusts, said it was not clear “what the ADCS is advocating”.

“The responsibility for exclusion in all schools rests with the headteacher as the person best placed to safeguard the welfare of all pupils and staff. Ofsted do already monitor exclusions and can take action if they believe it is being used inappropriately.”

The association also claimed the government “has not put in place strong, formal processes” to hold academy trusts to account. But Cruddas said trusts were “the most regulated and accountable school group”.

ANALYSIS: ACADEMIES

Why is conversion suddenly so attractive?

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

Scaled-back council support services, financial woes and headteachers' fears that they could be forced into a trust they don't want to join are some of the main drivers behind a spike in schools wanting to convert into academies.

Speaking at the Westminster Education Forum earlier this month, Hannah Woodhouse, the regional director for the south west, said the Department for Education has seen "the biggest interest [in conversion] since 2018".

She didn't mention figures. But Schools Week analysis reveals there are now 608 schools using the voluntary converter route to move out of local authority control.

The figure is almost double that recorded this time last year (373) and is the highest since 2018 (732).

'Financial fragility'

Woodhouse said one of the reasons for the rise was "a lot of financial fragility and questions around the viability of small primaries".

Schools Week analysed regional director advisory board minutes since September to get an idea why schools were choosing to convert. All conversions must be approved by regional directors, and many include brief details of why.

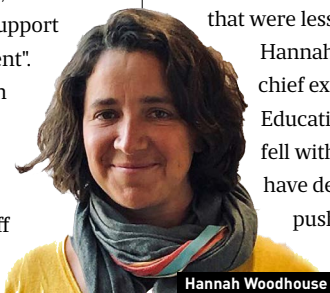
Almost a fifth (18.8 per cent) cited money and "stability" concerns.

Currently, 500 primaries are listed on the government's "converter pipeline", their budgets badly hit as they struggle to fill reception classrooms in the wake of a birth-rate dip of 13 per cent since 2015.

Advisory board minutes show two village schools in North Yorkshire, Wykeham and Hackness C of E primaries, saying their conversion would give them "additional financial stability and security".

The schools, which share a federated budget and are rated 'requires improvement', also recognised "the need for additional support from a MAT to accelerate improvement".

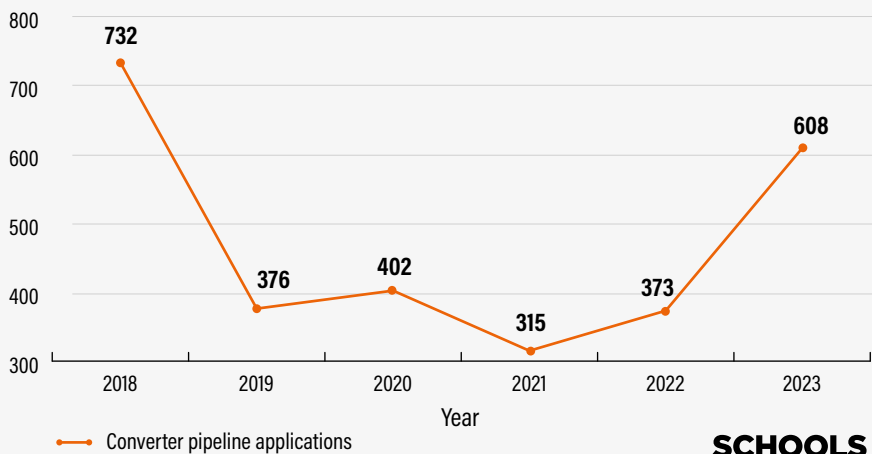
In Brighton, Benfield and Hangleton Primaries launched a bid to join EKO Trust earlier this term, saying falling rolls on the coast meant "the capacity to maintain and develop staff is reducing as the schools shrink".



Hannah Woodhouse



Voluntary conversions hit five-year high



Source: Department for Education

SCHOOLS WEEK

Since September, "coasting powers" have allowed regional directors to academise schools with two or more consecutive Ofsted inspections that were less than 'good'.

Hannah Woodhouse, Rob Tarn the chief executive of the Northern Education Trust, said that some that fell within the scope for intervention have decided to jump before being pushed.

Tarn, who also sits on the

North-east advisory board, said Hetton Academy in Sunderland decided to join his trust last year – before the coasting powers were introduced – after receiving its second 'requires improvement' in a row.

"The governors felt 'if we're forced to academise, we won't be able to choose who we join, so we might as well do it while it's in our gift to decide,'" he said.

Our analysis found the most common factor for voluntary conversions (37 per cent) was

ANALYSIS: ACADEMIES

relating to school's values aligning with those of the trust, or that it was joining a family of similar academies.

Woodhouse added trusts were "making a case that it is in the interest of schools to join, certainly for staff development and outcomes for children".

Lack of council support

Sector leaders have also argued that reduced local authority support has pushed many into the arms of MATs.

Our analysis of advisory board minutes found 34 per cent of schools wanted to academise because they were either already working with a MAT or wanted more support.

Simon Kidwell, the president of the National Association of Headteachers, said council funding had been cut significantly "so they don't have the funds to do some of the core activities around school improvement that they used to have".

Kidwell, the principal of the council-run primary Hartford Manor in Cheshire, said his school forked out almost £2,500 for school improvement support from the local authority last year.

Bryn Thomas, the head of Wolverley C of E Secondary in Worcestershire, said councils



Rob Tarn

had reached a "critical mass".

He either sourced specialist school improvement support from his network of colleagues or bought it in from trusts. He admitted he was "interested in what options are available to us in terms of academisation".

"[Local authorities] just don't have the people anymore. The only way to get that support guaranteed is through the academy system."

The Collective Learning Partnership, which has six primaries in Bury, told parents it felt it needed to academise partly because of the authority's "diminishing" services and provision.

In Staffordshire, Dove Bank Primary is set to join The Learning Partnership, which has 14 schools, in January.

Sally Dakin, Dove Bank's head, said when she first took on headship, she asked the council to "quality assure my initial evaluation of standards, but it had limited capacity to do this and instead encouraged me to explore joining a trust.

"We don't officially join until January, but already our access to expert teachers and leaders has generated rapid improvement – for instance, thanks to high-quality support and CPD, we now have a better EYFS environment, curriculum and quality of teaching."

Schools now pay for LA help

Shrinking local authority support has prompted a number of primaries to band together to launch trusts.

In consultation documents sent to parents, the 13 schools looking to launch The Leaf Trust in South Gloucestershire noted the council "is significantly reduced in its capacity".

Dan Thomas, the chief executive of The Learning Partnership, said schools "simply can't access this much tailored support through [councils] or on their own, so it makes sense to join a trust which makes this possible".

This comes after the £50 million-a-year government grant for council school improvement activities was scrapped this year. Authorities are expected to top-slice school budgets instead to fund such work.

The Local Government Association (LGA) said the cuts have prompted authorities to "move to a traded services model and ask schools to buy in support that was previously delivered free".

Despite this, analysis of figures obtained through Freedom of Information shows school central team numbers dropped in just nine of 31 councils between 2019 and 2023 – with large increases in many.

The LGA said this could be because "the traded services are proving popular" or as a result of "new duties...around attendance that have required bigger teams".

JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS

'Good' school with £3m deficit can't convert

Bosses of a school saddled with a £3 million deficit fear its aim to become an academy is highly unlikely as few trusts will want to take on their debt.

Wolverley Church of England Secondary, in Worcestershire, is currently expected to pay off the amount in 100 years' time through annual instalments of £30,000.

Headteacher Bryn Thomas said the issue first arose 10 years ago, when the school was the "least popular" in the area and recruited just 50 per cent of its pupil admission number.

Now one of just two council-run secondaries remaining in the area, the leader believes the only path towards academisation would be if the school was to be rated 'inadequate' by Ofsted.

Government guidance states the deficits of sponsored academies stay with the council, but

for converter academies the deficit follows the school.

"We are stuck," said Thomas. "I've raised that with the regional director, but they don't have any answers.

"The only reason to academise is if we fail. If you're inadequate, then that's the law.

"The school was requires improvement [10 years ago]. Unusually, we managed to pull the school from the brink. Over the last 10 years we've gone from the least popular secondary in Worcestershire to the most."

Meanwhile in Bolton, Ladybridge High launched a bid last year to join Rochdale-based chain the Watergrove Trust.

Consultation documents released at the time noted that "there has been an inevitability that, at some point, the school will" academise and

that it wanted to do so "on its own terms".

But the plans fell through. Headteacher Paddy Russell suspects the reason for this is because trust development statements for Bolton show the government wants expansion proposals to come from "high-quality" chains already operating in the area.

He added that he still wants to secure the "stability" of the school by converting, as the "ultimate threat remains being forced [into] academised".

"There is an acceptance from school leaders to join a trust on your own terms, so you've got that home for the future.

"What we're still looking to do is to join or form a trust where we can collaborate as a group...where each school has a high degree of autonomy."

NEWS: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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

How a trust turned around an island school

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

How do you turn around a school on four sites separated by water, where all special educational needs must be supported in-house and where everyday costs are 20 per cent higher than anywhere else in the country?

The leadership team at Five Islands Academy, the only school on the Isles of Scilly, appear to have found the answer after a gruelling seven-year improvement journey. Freddie Whittaker reports

Five Islands was rated 'inadequate' in 2016, prompting an academy order and a tricky search for a sponsor.

Ministers' preference is for schools in trusts to be an hour's drive from each other. So who would take on a school that is a 2hr 45min ferry trip from the mainland? (In this case, Penzance in Cornwall.)

But in 2019, following what the chair describes as the "most complex academy conversion the DfE had ever done", the school joined with Mounts Bay Academy in Penzance to form the Leading Edge Academies Partnership.

Huge senior staff turnover followed, as did wide-ranging professional development for middle leaders who stepped up to senior roles. Staff were also seconded from its new sister school.

Inspectors returned in October, rating it 'good' with 'outstanding' pupil development.

Ofsted praised the "remarkable range of cultural experiences for pupils", who "develop a powerful sense of community". The school's curriculum now "helps pupils to gain the knowledge and skills they need to be successful".

Getting the islanders on board

Jackie Eason, a governance consultant drafted in as chair of an interim executive board to oversee the academisation, remains Leading Edge's chair.

She says they had to deal with a "lot of mistrust, a lot of wariness from the island community...they didn't want to lose their individuality".

For example, parents feared they would lose



Pupils of the Five Islands Academy, Isles of Scilly

SCHOOLS WEEK

Home > All news

News

Isles of Scilly's only secondary school placed in special measures – what now?

provision on St Agnes, one of four island bases, where the school's roll was due to fall to a single pupil.

"They needed to know that the trust they were joining understood why you have to keep the school open, even with just one child. Is it a sound economic decision? Absolutely not. But you can't transfer primary school children from that island daily."

Islanders also worried that the school's boarding provision, rated 'inadequate' in 2013 for pupil safety, and leadership and management, would be closed. Instead, it was taken on and improved, rated 'good' in 2019 and again this year.

'Ethos and culture change'



Eason says the "whole culture and ethos" at the school had to change. Middle leaders had to step up and receive intensive CPD, because a lack of housing on the islands would have made recruiting a whole new team impossible.

"Can you imagine working as a teacher in that school when you've been judged inadequate, but you've still got to see all the parents every day down the Co-op, in the pub. You can't escape."

Secondary pupils board at the school's site on St Mary's, while primary children are taught in mixed-age classes at three other island bases. Key stage 2 children travel to the main site on a Friday, but "sometimes that is disrupted due to weather and tides".

A weather warning on a Thursday or Friday can mean boarding secondary pupils have to go home early to other islands. They sometimes have to learn from home, but every one has an iPad.

£60,000 on boating in one year

Its location also means the school has an "eye-watering" boating budget, with transport an

NEWS: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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

“expensive aspect of our life here”.

Although the local authority foots the bill for home-to-school transport, all other travel is funded by the school.

Rachel Gibb, the school’s head, spent £60,000 on boating last year “and I can’t afford to do that again”.

As a remote school, it does receive enhanced funding, but still faces huge pressures. The need to ship everything over adds 20 per cent to costs.

But the “beauty” of the islands has its benefits. Post-Covid, the school has had “much more interest” in jobs from people “looking for a complete change”.

“The biggest issue that I have is accommodation,” says Gibb. The housing crisis caused by holiday rentals in Cornwall is “compounded even further” on Scilly.

“When I recruit, at the back of my mind is always ‘where are they going to live.’”

So the trust keeps “a number of rolling tenancies” which it sub-lets to staff. The school could not do that without the trust’s support, she says.

Varying class sizes and multi-skilled teachers

With just 248 children on roll, “it looks on paper like it should run like clockwork. And to be fair, most of the time, it really does. But then there’s all of the peripheral stuff”.

The school has huge variations in class sizes. Its current year 2 has 14 children. Year 4 has 38.

Teachers have to be multi-skilled. The geography teacher also teaches PSHE. Its French teacher teaches food technology.

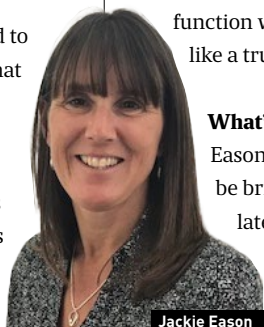
Staff participate in “research circles” with others from the trust, and lead practitioners from Five Islands support the other schools in the trust, and vice-versa. Its RE lead recently contributed to a new curriculum for the whole of Cornwall.

The school also has to be fully-inclusive. There is no alternative or specialist provision on the islands “so we have to do everything, and that obviously can be really demanding of our budgets”, Eason says.

“There has never been a permanent exclusion. We just don’t, because we need to cater to the needs of all the children in that community.”

Staff stayed through the horrible times

Gibb, who joined the school in 2020, says one of the factors in its improvement has been the “significant number of staff



Jackie Eason



‘It’s about that quietness of someone truly just letting students talk’

that stayed ... through that really horrible, tricky, turbulent time”.

Since her arrival the school has reviewed its behaviour policy with a “commitment to a restorative approach”. It has strengthened the “bridge” between years 6 and 7. Capacity in middle leadership has increased and she has learnt the name of “every child and adult in the school, on each island”.

School ‘wouldn’t function’ without trust

Although the trust was heavily involved in the “very robust” school improvement process, it also trusted the school’s leadership to run things “in the way that we think is appropriate”.

The remote location meant that Gibb was not there for the latest Ofsted inspection – the call came while she was leading a trip to London.

“I was getting on a boat in Greenwich. And I got the phone call from my colleagues to say Ofsted called. I thought they were joking.”

At that point the trust’s central team “leapt into action”. Its chief operating officer flew to the isles to take Gibb’s place. Theodore wasn’t enough time for her to get back so she moved into an AirBnb in the capital to participate in the inspection remotely.

“I cannot see how a school like this would function without the support of something like a trust.”

What’s next?

Eason’s involvement was supposed to be brief. But she is still there, six years later. Her next priority is boosting SEND provision.

“I was hoping to go in, help



Rachel Gibb, headteacher of Five Islands Academy

them solve the problems and then leave. But you can’t leave because it’s just such an inspiring, challenging, fabulous role.”

The school improvement journey is also not over. Ofsted said teaching was “not adapted consistently in the light of potential barriers to pupils’ learning”.

Pupils with insecure basic skills, such as those who lack fluency in reading and maths, “struggle to keep up with their peers when learning new content”.

“The trust should ensure that the school helps teachers to identify pupils who are likely to require new content further broken down.”

In a letter to parents, Gibb said the areas of improvement were “no surprise and already included in our academy improvement plan”.

“You’ve been alongside us all the way, and we’re grateful for your ongoing support and challenge which has helped to shape our school to be an organisation that we’re proud and privileged to be part of.”

INVESTIGATION

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

Leaders leave after trust uncovered £379k spend on linked supply agency

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

Three senior staff left an academy trust after investigators found an "undisclosed conflict of interest" over £379,000 paid to a supply teacher agency run by a relative.

The Lime Trust, which runs eight special and primary schools in London and Cambridgeshire, hired supply teachers from ChoSEN Teacher Recruitment during the 2021-22 academic year.

However, an internal audit "discovered that there had been an undisclosed conflict of interest".

The trust called in an external investigator and said "it became evident [the conflict of interest] was intentional and the trust immediately suspended all dealings with the company and individuals involved".

The Education and Skills Funding Agency and regional schools directors at the DfE were informed "and those individuals no longer work for the trust".

Trusts have to declare any related-party transactions. This applies to people deemed to have control or significant influence over the academy trust, such as trustees or the chief executive. The three staff members were leaders at school level.

However, academy rules state that trusts must ensure "propriety in the use of public funds, including in relation to any actual or perceived conflicts of interest".

A spokesperson for the trust said that the ESFA was "satisfied with the decisive and appropriate action taken and assured that the trust operates with the highest standards of probity and transparency".

Lime's accounts for last year, published in January, said an external investigator carried out a "detailed investigation" after the trust "identified a conflict of interest with the supplier".

They added that the trust and investigator did not identify "any loss of



funds or any failure to achieve value for money".

"However, benefit could have arisen from the preferential use of the supplier and therefore the academy trust has taken appropriate action in response to the incident including reviewing its controls in this area."

The spokesperson added the incident was "prior to the arrival" of the current chief executive.

Accounts show the trust had an operational deficit of £161,000 in the year to last August. However, this was down from £972,000 the year before.

Schools Week has established that the three staff who left are brothers Ben, Billy and James Hawes. They held senior leadership positions in 2021 and 2022.

Ben was headteacher of Lime Academy Hornbeam between September 2021 and December 2022. Billy was the school's deputy head. James also served in Lime's leadership team from January 2021 to December 2022. He was at one point deputy head of Lime Academy Forest Approach.

Schools Week approached the three for comment, but received no response.

Schools Week has also established through searches of national records that Jacqueline

Neville, the sole director of ChoSEN Teacher Recruitment, is related to the brothers. The company, which is being wound up, did not respond to a request for comment.

In its accounts, the trust said it was now "reviewing school spend on supply cover, reducing the use of agency staff and negotiating better daily rates with a range of suppliers. During the next reporting period, the trust will be using the DfE framework agreement to get even better prices."

Accounts show the trust's agency staff costs grew from £502,000 in 2021 to £863,000 in 2022.

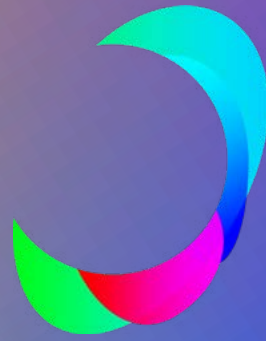
A government spokesperson said the "primary responsibility for the oversight of trusts rests with the trustees themselves, supported by clear financial management and governance requirements set by the department".

The ESFA was "made aware of this case regarding Lime Trust and is satisfied that the trust has taken actions to address the issues and to prevent this from happening in future."

The department "expects academy trustees to deliver strong governance and monitor the financial health of their trust or school and ensure it remains a going concern".

In partnership with

FE WEEK
SCHOOLS
WEEK



World Education Summit

18 – 21 March 2024

Powered by

OSIRIS
Educational

**Learn with the very best in education.
Online: live and on-demand.**



Inspirational keynotes
and practical training
from global headliners,
educators and leaders.



Access and unpack
throughout the year as
part of your professional
learning.



Big ideas, proven
strategies and
practical resources
at the click of a button.

“A stimulus for improvement and a catalyst for change.”

Together, we will shape the future of education.



World Headliners – Global Amphitheatre – Paradigm Shifters – Brave Leaders – Passionate Practitioners
Cool Schools – Training Stage – Legacy Stage – Living Books – Research Bites – Podcast Corner – Spotlight On

12

Stages

400+

Speakers

365

Days of Access

100k

Participants
since 2021

Join us and thousands of other educators from around the world:

www.WorldEdSummit.com





Profile
JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL

‘If you enjoy your job, it isn't a job. That's how I still feel about teaching’

Things are now tougher in schools than ever before, says Sarah Finch, head of the Marches Academy Trust. But her love for the profession and colleagues lives on

Sarah Finch is used to going beyond the job description in her education career. The chief executive of the Marches Academy Trust, which has 11 schools in Shropshire, remembers being sent door knocking while at Frank F Harrison School in the 1990s to “sell the school to the local community”.

The school – now Bloxwich Academy – was in a deprived part of her hometown, Walsall, and had falling numbers of pupils. She described the area as having “gun battles and God knows what

going on”.

But it offered a “fascinating” insight into “the conditions these families were living in”.

The walls of one home she was invited to, where a little girl who would later turn out to be in her form group lived, were awash with “dirt and grime”. She sat on the edge of the sofa to avoid dirty patches.

“There was no nice space to study, or for the family to eat together. I later understood why this girl sometimes came into school looking

bedraggled, and why it was more difficult for her to do homework.”

But she believes things are now tougher in schools than ever before, as they are expected to step into the void left by other stretched services. She cites a social worker asking a teacher to go to see a child for them. One of the trust’s heads paid a taxi fare for a mother with a large cut on her arm who couldn’t afford to get to hospital.

“Those things are not on the job description,” she says. “We’re being asked to help parents – that’s

Profile: Sarah Finch



Finch with her sister as children

been happening for some time. But for me, that's not education."

Sisterly impressions

Finch is, however, a great believer in inclusive education, which stems from the experiences of her autistic sister Jane, who is five years her junior.

Their parents had the option for Jane to attend a mainstream or special school, but chose the latter.

Finch described the specialist provision as "like a protective cocoon", but added she "should have gone to mainstream, because her resilience and socialization wasn't there. She came out of there saying she was special. That was a big barrier."

This "coloured" Finch's "experience" of SEND schools and "changed the way I did things". For instance, when she took on headship of the Marches School in 2019, it had a separate unit for SEND children. In the "small local community" of Oswestry in Shropshire, the children sent there were "labelled as being in the unit long after they had left".

So, Finch "took measures to reintegrate the children". She "changed the concept of inclusion", something she's also doing at a trust-wide level

The trust now has a 'One Voice' student body, made up of ten representatives from each school on a "mission to lead change" with wellbeing and sustainability projects.

The trust's social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) school, Woodlands, is "very much" included in this initiative. Its pupils were "really nervous" about the prospect of seeing their former peers from other schools when they attended a recent conference of student representatives.

"But we had acceptance there of all pupils. We're



Finch with her sister

'It's about that quietness of someone truly just letting parents talk'

getting them to challenge in the right way, and collaborate together."

Each school in the trust is also creating a student-led safeguarding board to "challenge poor behaviour and language". This September, Marches took on 'inadequate'-rated Idsall School, in Shifnal. Ofsted had found some pupils experienced "frequent sexual harassment" from their peers.

"An awful lot of work" has been done since then by Idsall's school community, including its safeguarding board, to create "culture change". "We're all going to have differences. But listening to each other is important."

Bank blues

Finch refined her own listening skills by taking an MA in coaching and mentoring at Birmingham University. This taught her how to "get the best out of people by deeper listening", and has proven particularly helpful when dealing with tricky parents.

"The frustration is just seeping out of them sometimes. You might not have the answer, but it's

about that quietness of someone truly just letting them talk."

Many years before that, she graduated in history from Birmingham before embarking on what she hoped would be a "glamorous" career in marketing in London. But the three years she spent working for a bank were a "greying experience" and the culture was "quite cutthroat". It was a blessing in disguise when her entire street was burgled, as she spent the insurance money taking Jane on holiday to Cancun.

"That was the first time I got to spend time, just me and her, and to understand who she really was." The pair were on the beach when Finch had the epiphany to go into teaching, and returned to Birmingham for her PGCE. She "loved it from the get-go", enthusiastically staying up until 3am preparing lesson plans.

The innovative maverick

Finch started her teaching career at Riddlesdown High School (now Riddlesdown Collegiate) in Croydon, one of the country's first grant-

Profile: Sarah Finch

maintained schools, before moving to Frank F. Harrison School.

She got her first leadership role, assistant head at Haywood High school (now Hereford Academy), working under “innovative maverick” John Sheppard. The school was in a poorer area of town and the “community felt isolated ... everything that was good in Hereford was over the bridge”.

But after getting PE status, the school applied to become one of the country’s first academies – getting the go-ahead in 2008 as then prime minister Gordon Brown restarted the academisation drive.

A year later, Finch was appointed headteacher at Marches School – where she had worked previously as a teacher. Finch describes the next few years as “phenomenal” after it gained ‘outstanding’ ratings and she became a national leader of education to help underperforming schools improve.

Planets colliding

In 2011, Marches became a converter academy. She said the school was “massively underfunded” and making the academisation leap in the “first tranche” meant they got additional funding. It was used to hire two more teachers.

Parents frustrated their children were having to travel almost an hour to the nearest sixth form college when they finished their GCSEs, agreed to the academisation on the condition that the school opened its own sixth form.

While the school had failed in previous attempts to do so, “the planets collided” when the retirement home next door went up for sale.

The site was secured and the sixth form built for less than £1 million, which Finch says was a “massive achievement” that made pupils “more aspirational”. The sixth form is now “just shy” of the 250 pupils it requires to make it financially sustainable.

Finch moved to executive head and then chief executive of the Marches academy trust in 2014. Like many trusts, Marches is battling with teacher recruitment and retention amid “the disillusionment of all teachers”, with many “really



Finch with her mum

‘Listening to each other is so important’

good teachers” leaving in the last year.

Because Shropshire “isn’t funded as well as other local authorities”, she is “very prudent” and staffing ratios “aren’t as generous” as elsewhere. About 82 per cent of its budget is spent on teaching staff.

Some classes have had to be doubled up at times due to staff shortages, with teachers having to “dig deep when that’s happening”. In response to feedback over “just how tired staff were”, Finch introduced a two-week October half term holiday in 2020-21 to “make the term more manageable”, and claims pupils’ are more resilient that term as a result. It’s something other trusts and Shropshire Council is also consulting on.

Last year trust-wide collaboration days were launched on top of inset days, in which “staff work together on how to develop their learning”.

“Children are at home for the day, but with the



Family dinner



Finch with her dad

understanding we’re going to make a difference in the classroom. It’s giving people that headspace to get on top of things.”

Finch recently covered for a staff member off on long term sickness (despite being “told off by everybody” for doing so), and discovered she hasn’t lost her love for the profession.

“If you enjoy your job, it isn’t a job. That’s how I still feel about teaching.”

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UKDAVID
ROSSFounder, David Ross
Education Trust

Thirteen years of free schools: Five lessons for policymakers

Policymakers on all sides must learn the lessons of the free schools programme, and commit to its innovative approach for the long term, urges David Ross

Fourteen years ago, the New Schools Network was founded, conceived as a charity dedicated to a new idea: free schools. That local people and communities should be empowered to establish their own schools and educate their own children, free from local authority control.

Our dream was to bring the opportunities afforded by the independence available to private schools far and wide, to all communities — but especially the most disadvantaged.

Thirteen years after the first free school opened, success is plain to see. Some 701 free schools are now open, with 150 more due in the near future. They provide over 373,000 school places, and 25 per cent of them are rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted — compared to just 16 per cent of schools as a whole.

On almost every conceivable metric, at every measurable stage in the schooling cycle, the education provided by free schools has better results than elsewhere in the state system. Just take key stage 1, where 87 per cent of children attending free schools reach the required standard for phonics,

compared to 82 per cent elsewhere.

So, what lessons can policymakers take from this success?

Trust school leaders to lead

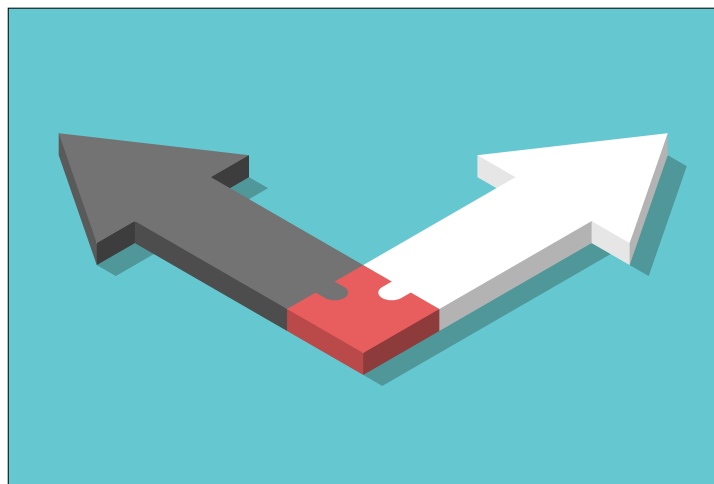
The first lesson is simple: we must trust school leaders working with strong teams to lead. Proven results show that schools free of central or local government control deliver for children, parents and communities. Teachers are able to offer a distinct ethos that parents can choose to buy into, and provide a unique, high-quality education. We must give greater autonomy to those running public services and put our faith in them to deliver.

At the New Schools Network, we helped over two-thirds of free schools to open. We know the value of capable leadership. But capable leadership is not a one-size-fits-all exercise.

Urgent innovation

Speedy innovation is at the core of our success. One of the great opportunities for free schools is the opportunity to innovate, which is why the New Schools Network is launching our Innovation Fund.

We will provide grants of between £5,000 and £50,000 to free schools with innovative ideas in education, targeted at those that help the most disadvantaged. If we want to succeed, we must be brave enough to back reformers working on the ground rather than simply



“ One of the worst qualities of our overbearing state is an aversion to risk

listen to vested interests. And we must do so with a sense of urgency that is at times sorely missing in the state sector.

Don't be afraid to fail

Another key lesson from the past 13 years is that leaders need to be free to fail. One of the worst qualities of our overbearing state is an aversion to risk. This only stifles success. Accepting teething problems and transition issues opens the door to the greatest opportunities and allows us to escape the gentle stagnation of our traditional policy landscape.

Community-led approaches work best

We also now know that we have to provide our communities with the social capital and civic confidence to take leaps forward.

It was only with the support of independent organisations like the New Schools Network that so many free schools were able to be founded. Community-led approaches need community-based organisations to drive them forward. They provide like-minded leaders with forums to network

and support one another — essential when you are breaking the mould.

Commitment for the long-term

It is clear above all else that policymakers urgently need to commit for the long-term, and keep up the pace. Hundreds of thousands of pupils have benefitted from free schools, and hundreds of thousands more deserve the opportunity to share in those benefits.

This agenda is at its lowest ebb since 2010, but those of us who have been involved in this movement have a lot to be proud of and, crucially, an awful lot to fight for. School reform has disappeared down the list of government priorities; without bold, urgent action we risk going backwards. The importance of school reform cannot be forgotten; without it we risk letting down communities across the country, including the most disadvantaged.

Government and opposition alike must make clear that free schools are here to stay, and encourage more providers up and down the country to open them. It's what all of our pupils deserve.

Opinion

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

CARLY MITCHELL

Director of Academies,
AIM Academies Trust



HILARY SPENCER

CEO, Ambition
Institute



Free schools proved the power of innovation. We need more of it

The greatest impact of the free schools programme was embodying the spirit of innovation that the system needs more of, say Hilary Spencer and Carly Mitchell

Last week, the New Schools Network published a report looking at the impact of the free school programme. A flash of nostalgia took us back ten years to the policy debates of the time and our own roles in helping to set up a new school.

One of the core tensions of the policy has always been how to get the right balance between meeting the 'basic need' for school places, and creating space for innovation.

The argument for having enough funded places for children to be able to go to a school of their choosing is straightforward. Of course, as a system we must be able to ensure every child can attend school. If not, we are failing their basic rights.

The argument for innovation seems equally clear. Without space for people to innovate, how else can we move forward as a sector?

Given the current, tight financial circumstances, the question of where best to spend money and resources is even more important. Declining pupil numbers and falling rolls are affecting more and more primary schools. Many children are still held back by disadvantage,

and how we support children with SEND or other challenges is crucial. This means we need to make good choices in the years ahead about how to offer high-quality provision that is financially sustainable.

No one would claim that the free schools programme was perfect; it was a complex and different type of intervention with the explicit aim of changing how things could be done. But it created opportunities to do things differently, in schools, communities, and in government.

Some really successful schools and innovations have come from the programme, as well as some that didn't work as well as people hoped. We can and should learn from both.

One of the policy's strengths was the sense of explicit encouragement and license to try new things: arrangements for the school day, deployment of teachers, new curriculum models and new partnership models. In an education culture which can often feel high-stakes and resource-constrained, these signals about the importance and value of innovation are crucial.

Back in the day, the DfE had an innovation unit. It established a new 'power to innovate', which allowed schools to apply for a temporary exemption from legal constraints which stopped them doing something they wanted to try.

Interestingly, the vast majority of applications were for things schools



“ There's something energising about feeling you can

actually had the power to do anyway. They didn't need the DfE to grant them the power to innovate: they had it already.

So perceptions of what schools can and can't do differently within the existing rules and frameworks aren't always clear. And for us that speaks to the need for explicit space, time, encouragement and funding to do something new.

There's also something energising about feeling you can innovate. We've both got vivid memories of the excitement from teachers, students and parents about the new things we were trying in our school, and that sense of possibility of finding new solutions to long-standing challenges.

Obviously, we can't gamble recklessly with children's education, particularly when so much education time has been disrupted in recent years, but thoughtful, evidence-based innovation is key to system-wide improvement.

Innovation isn't necessarily about doing something technologically whizzy, and never about introducing gimmicky projects. Often the most

successful school improvement strategies are iterations of simple policies, systems or routines, implemented consistently and well: a new curriculum of reflection in internal exclusion, compulsory enrichment time or extra-curricular activities, or quizzing in a consistent manner. There are many areas we could innovate to improve pupils' experiences.

Doing the same things we've always done isn't a realistic way to achieve better outcomes. Neither is tokenism. But meaningful innovation is a powerful driver of improvement and motivation.

That's why we remain excited about innovation's improvement – from literacy to workforce strategies – and why we support the establishment of the New Schools Network's new fund to support innovation and help the most disadvantaged.

Meanwhile, politicians and leaders can do more to create genuine opportunities to support and foster high quality innovation – not least by ensuring schools know (and really feel) they can.

Opinion

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

SHAUN BROWN

Programmes director,
The Difference

How small changes can make a big impact on attendance

Focusing on the interactions every student experiences could transform how the most persistently absent feel about school, says Shaun Brown

If you're as old as me, you'll remember the time when there were certain films everyone watched. My childhood started with *ET*, and graduated to *Top Gun*, *Forest Gump*, *Groundhog Day*, and *The Truman Show*. As we grew up together, they became iconic reference points in the collective psyche.

Sliding Doors was one of these.

A 25-year-old Gwyneth Paltrow played out two parallel lives: one as a frazzled, pigtailed waitress with a cheating scumbag of a boyfriend, the other as a successful entrepreneur with a confident pixie cut, wooed by a hilarious-yet-deeply-sensitive John Hannah.

These two divergent realities hinge on a single moment: one version of Helen catches the train (and consequently her cheating boyfriend), the other misses it.

Forget the rom-com plot for a second and think a little deeper – because that's what this film made you do. It transported the audience to a mesmeric state, reflecting on all those 'what if' moments where the most insignificant action could have switched you into a different

future.

Through our work with over 300 schools, we have seen that often it's the little things that make a big difference. Take Jodie.

On our inclusive leadership course, we ask leaders to choose one thing about their school to focus on as a project. Jodie Cawte, co-headteacher at Invicta Primary school, chose attendance.

She decided to ask the question: for children who are persistently missing school, what small behavioral changes might we be able to make that would make them more likely to attend?

Like many schools, Invicta had a good system for monitoring attendance, based on a ladder of consequences. At The Difference, we are interested in the practice that sits in between the rungs of that ladder and allows a system to achieve its ends. (To state the obvious, the end goal of an attendance system is to get pupils attending school – not to escalate them up the ladder!)

Questions Jodie asked her staff were, "What is the first interaction a child has with each member of staff when they return to school after an absence? What does it make them feel like, and how would we want it to make them feel?"

Off the back of that question,

Gwyneth Paltrow, *Sliding Doors*, 1998

“ These interactions merit attention, precisely because they are small

school leaders set about designing a scripted practice for all staff from the receptionist to the headteacher to deliberately make children feel a sense of belonging from their very first interactions with an adult on returning to school.

They tried it across a whole cohort for a half term of the school year.

Staff were so impressed with the impact of this small change on making children feel safe in school that they started to use the practice successfully in different interactions, such as returning to a classroom after being sent out, or after an intervention.

As a result of this work, persistent absence figures improved significantly (from 20 per cent to 13.6 per cent) in a year when national rates were rising steeply (from 19.5 per cent to 24.2 per cent). Overall attendance also saw a small improvement, while dropping by two percentage points nationally.

These interactions merit attention, precisely because they

are small changes that require very little training and no additional expertise. It's understandable that our attention will be drawn to the children already at the top of the ladder, and to the most challenging of behaviours. But by focusing on those lower down, we can enlist all staff – not just specialists – to shift the course of a child's trajectory.

I have a love-hate relationship with the ending of *Sliding Doors*, which intimates that Helen and James were fated to meet, whatever path she took. But its underlying message of hope is what stuck with me – especially through all the years I've worked in schools.

Of course, there's not only one moment that counts; staff have multiple opportunities for low-key interactions that could ultimately change the course of a child's life.

My question to school leaders is this: are you willing to develop whole-school relational practices to help all children feel safe and happy in school?

Alamy

Opinion

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

COP28: Sustainability in education 2023



PETER ADDISON-CHILD

Chief Operating Officer, Northern Star Academies Trust (NSAT)

A school food revolution for pupils starts with us

Students have ants in their pants about sustainability – and there’s plenty we can do on food before putting ants in their stomachs, says Peter Addison-Child

One aspect of the climate change agenda that is often discussed is the sustainability of food resources and demand. Within a school and trust, there are decisions leadership can make which model to the pupils what differences a considered approach to diet can make.

The first step, of course, is to make it a priority. If contracting out, make it part of your specification and if in-house, make it part of your core mission. In any area of activity, sustainability should not be a bolt-on but a way of thinking and working.

To do that, sustainable thinking needs to be woven into the way a service is designed and delivered from the start. For a contracted-out service, that means making it part of the procurement process from the outset, so that suppliers are obliged to offer sustainable solutions as a key commercial consideration. That means linking it to contract KPIs to follow through and monitor performance.

In our trust’s case, we expressed

this through our own ethical food charter, drawn up with students and included in the trust specification for the selection of a catering partner. For in-house services, the mechanism may be different, but the principle is the same: build sustainability into the mission of the catering service from the start.

The second step is to make food sustainability consumer-driven. The fiercest advocates for sustainable approaches to food production are children and young people themselves.

They care passionately about this agenda and, as consumers, they vote with their feet when they see something which offends this core principle, be that unnecessary use of single-use plastics, excessive food miles or needless waste. And if voting with their feet means falling uptake of school meals, caterers must take heed.

The way to drive forward the sustainability agenda, therefore, is to create channels for their voices to be heard. This could include regular student forums with meal providers, for example, or collaboration with school eco-clubs where they exist.

Within our trust, we are fortunate that we are also able to make connections with other student-led environmental activism in school.



“Aligning sustainability with other drivers is imperative”

Our staff work with gardening clubs to use school-grown vegetables in catering projects, bringing to life the concept of food provenance in school.

Of course, it would be naïve to pretend finances are irrelevant in these decisions. Aligning sustainability with other drivers – especially cost – is imperative for any school or trust. Ultimately, there is no denying that catering services must pay their way, and currently these are difficult times for the school catering sector.

The wider cost-of-living crisis means that parents and families are facing a squeeze on household budgets, so it’s important to keep meal prices as low as possible. Simultaneously, the same economic pressures have driven up costs, not least in food prices themselves.

Food inflation for some ingredients has been over 20 per cent. Keeping meals affordable in this context is hard, but sustainability doesn’t have to mean extra expense. In fact, quite the opposite.

The most effective response is to find spaces where these agendas

cross over. For example, additional meat-free days can make for cheaper options, hitting two targets in one. But it requires imagination too. In our case, we are lucky to have access to development chefs who explore ways to make greater use of plant-based ingredients which are often inherently more sustainable, offer excellent nutritional value, and are cheaper.

Our trustee, Leigh Hoath recently presented us with another option. Some schools in Wales have begun exploring and evaluating insect protein as their meat alternative. A study identified the barriers students faced in adopting such an approach, none of them insurmountable.

We haven’t yet gone down that road, but the most encouraging aspect of that study is the willingness of children and young people to engage and to challenge their assumptions about food.

So whether it’s insect protein or any other measure, the keys to sustainable food in schools are clear: educating young people, and giving them the tools to lead change.

Solutions

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



DR LEANNE JOHNSON

Consultant clinical psychologist, Head of trauma-informed practice and standards, Outcomes First Group

Top tips for inclusive and trauma-informed language

Careful language choices can make all the difference for children whose behaviours are influenced by prior trauma, explains Leanne Johnson

Nothing about us, without us' is our guiding principle in the development of inclusive trauma informed practice (TIP) to support neurodiverse pupils and those with social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs. Listening to the voices of those who have lived experience of trauma is pivotal to effective inclusive and informed policy, procedure and strategy.

Behaviour is communication, but behaviour is just the tip of the iceberg. When you are witnessing behaviour you find challenging, what is it actually saying? It might be testing whether the environment is safe, and the child feels loved and important within it. It might be expressing an unmet physical need – for food, sleep or comfort. And it might simply be that this child cannot communicate any other way.

Taking the time to understand how children have learned to manage and survive early trauma gives us clues to their underlying needs. Asking the question 'why' about a behaviour can enable us to delve deeper and see the rest of the iceberg below the surface.

Seeing is not believing

Language has the power to place

blame on individuals and further reinforce a negative self-concept – 'I'm bad and unlovable' – as opposed to thinking about the wider context to find solutions.

When we see behaviour we may think of as 'vile', could this child have learned that this was their only way to get their needs met? When a young person is 'kicking off again', could it be that they are in survival mode – needing us to see, hear and respond to them? When we think behaviour is 'attention-seeking', could we be seeing someone in fight/flight/freeze mode, distressed, overwhelmed and unable to manage?

TIP top tips for language use

The following top tips were created with the direct participation of our Lived Experience Expert Board (LEE Board):

Use person-first language

A child's experience of trauma is only one part of their identity and does not define them. Place the individual before their trauma – 'a person who has experienced trauma' rather than 'a trauma survivor'.

Avoid blame

Focus on empathy and support. Rather than saying, 'What's wrong with you?', ask 'How can I help you?' This validates their feelings and experiences, while emphasising your willingness to support them.

Separate the problem from the child

Use descriptors to externalise the problem, such as 'the bad feeling'. This reduces shame and encourages reflection and exploration of new perspectives: 'When do you notice the bad feeling?' 'Tell me more about the bad feeling.'

Provide choice

Trauma experiences can feel very unpredictable and out of control. Presenting options empowers the child and promotes a sense of agency by allowing them to choose what feels most comfortable for them.

Non-verbal communication

Research suggests that 70 per cent or more of the impact of communication can be attributed

to non-verbal cues. Those with lived experience of trauma are even more astute to possible signs of danger, so it's crucial to be attuned to body language, facial expressions, and gesture.

To help create a sense of safety, maintain an open and non-threatening body posture, be aware of physical distance and boundaries, and adopt a kind facial expression. Using 'PACE' (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy) and ensuring individuals feel heard are key.

Using the 'right' words and language is not straightforward. Even if we mean well, we can say words that might be experienced as insensitive or even offensive. Language and terminology are always evolving in response to experience, culture and society. Below are some suggestions for important strengths-based language changes from previous 'labels' that have negative connotations:

- **Attention seeking:** needing comfort/attachment; connection seeking; need to feel seen.
- **Defiant/oppositional:** finding it hard to trust others; needing to be in control.
- **Challenging behaviour/ dysregulation/negative behaviour:** behaviour as communication; behaviour adults find challenging to support; or describe the specific behaviour exhibited.
- **Manipulative/controlling others:** needing to be in control to feel safe; fearful of relationships. It is important to remember this is also a trauma response.
- **Liar/lying:** protecting themselves from shame; fearful of telling the truth.

And remember, working with trauma also impacts us on numerous levels.





The 14th annual

FESTIVAL OF EDUCATION

at Wellington College | 4-5 July 2024

HEADLINE PARTNER

AQA
Questions matter

EARLY BIRD OFFER

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



Where those who inspire
find their own inspiration

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

FOUNDED BY



WELLINGTON
COLLEGE

THE REVIEW

THE ART OF EXPLANATION

Author: Ros Atkins**Publisher:** Wildfire**Publication date:** 14 September 2023**ISBN:** 1472298411**Reviewer:** Gavin Simpson, Head of economics,
Dame Alice Owen's SchoolBOOK
TV
FILM
RADIO
EVENT
RESOURCE

A key skill of being an excellent teacher is the ability to explain things expertly with great efficiency. This is also true for journalists, and among them Ros Atkins has gained a considerable reputation for his.

In *The art of explanation*, he sets out to teach the rest of us how to do it. For teachers, the result is an invaluable source of reflection about classroom delivery, not to mention other important aspects of the job, such as delivering assemblies, writing references, and communicating via email.

Most uncomfortably, perhaps, Atkins contends that to get better at explaining you have to watch yourself. Every teacher I've known to do this has said watching it back was one of the best things they have done to improve their teaching. I'm not there yet, but I'll keep watching Atkins's explainers in the meantime.

Next, echoing a key insight from cognitive science in education, Atkins explains throughout the book how you can reduce cognitive load by using short sentences or by thinking carefully about the images you include to support your explanation or even what you are doing with your hands. I'm aware that wasn't a short sentence. This one is.

Another interesting parallel is in the importance of helping our audiences to connect the dots to prior knowledge to embed new knowledge. Choosing what previous knowledge to link to is the skill of a good teacher, and a good journalist. Atkins offers

plenty of advice as to how to do this efficiently, and even gives you nice sentence starters.

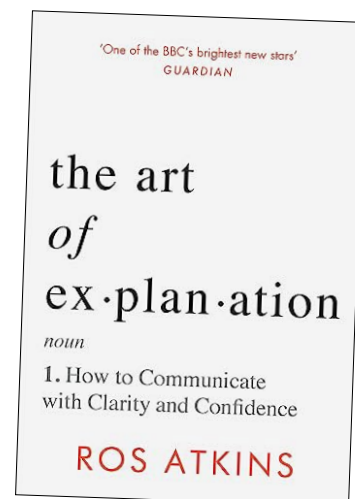
The art of storytelling as a pedagogical tool is undergoing something of a renaissance in education circles. For journalists, it never went away. Here, Atkins offers up numerous ways of organising this, including the 'big question' approach, which I observed used to great effect in a history lesson recently.

Atkins, it turns out, read history at Cambridge and writes with affection of his old history teacher, but the approach is one I am using more in economics and I'm sure it can be used in other subjects as well. Besides, there are plenty of ways to skin this cat, many of which Atkins also covers.

In an educational world of scripted lessons, finding the sweet spot between the script and being authentic can be a challenge. Here again, Atkins's advice on the importance of finding your own voice is insightful and complemented with useful, practical tips to achieve it.

And if you need any further proof that this book is relevant to you, there's even a section on email etiquette. Atkins draws on research to label long and/or incorrectly addressed emails as an 'unkind tax', then goes on to show how you can send messages that will actually be read and, crucially, acted upon. Talk about a workload-reduction strategy!

But this is a book that could be just as useful to students, too. The tips on writing efficiently to a word count should be read by all sixth formers. (Though writing this review shows



I could do with going over them again myself!) His advice to visit a new place to familiarise yourself with it before doing an activity there is also handy. How often do students go into imposing exam rooms without having seen them? And how much anxiety could be reduced before university interviews or EPQ presentations by following Atkins's advice?

Sadly, for all the wisdom therein the book somewhat overwhelms with advice. The section on the 'Seven-Step Dynamic Explanation', for example, could have been saved for a follow-up book. It contains interesting information on topics like memorisation, but it feels unduly repetitive.

It is often books from outside of educational publishing that have helped me most as a teacher. Different insights and perspectives from other professions offer something more than the same old content from the same old authors. *The art of explanation* is no exception, and I heartily recommend it to any teacher who wants to raise their game.

★★★★☆
Rating



THE CONVERSATION
LISTENING IN ON
THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM



Fiona Atherton
Headteacher,
Ladypool
Primary School

Every time I sit down to write my column, I look out for the good news stories. In all honesty, it is becoming quite difficult to find them. SEND and 'the right provision for pupils' seem to be dominating this week, permeating even those conversations that seem to be about something else.

THE SOUND OF SILENCE

Take for example, [the debate about silent corridors that started last week](#) and has rumbled on since. Usually a hot topic for the inevitable school holiday edu-Twitter rumble (Someone should really study this phenomenon!), this time it seems to have taken on a life of its own.

Some liken the practice to cruelty. Some maintain they would never send their child to a school with such practices. Others admire and defend the approach.

Some argue that it is particularly good for pupils with SEND, who benefit from order, predictability, and low-stimulus environments. Others counter that the practice is inherently exclusionary. I find that working in primary, the whole issue seems much less important than it evidently is for secondary colleagues.

I understand that we are talking about much larger numbers of older pupils and more regular movement around the building, but in primary schools most teachers I know would simply expect children to move quietly around school without debate.



Emma Williams's blog offers an interesting take. Her contention is that the different views on this issue are shaped by people's own experiences of school. Her final words implore us to remember that we have more in common than that which separates us: "We all want children to be safe, supported and happy in school, and for them to receive the best possible free education. What we differ on is how to achieve this."

Perhaps it's time for a period of quiet reflection.

BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER

This damning blog could make a good stimulus for that. Here, 'Blog Standard Parent' Daniel gives his thoughts on [a news report based on whistleblower testimony](#) that schools are permanently excluding pupils with special educational needs to protect their places in league tables. The whistleblower, a senior member of a local authority education team says: "The system's falling apart."

The story itself is saddening, but to read here that so many parents believe schools don't understand the needs of their children, and to be confronted with how long and how hard they have to fight to get their children the support and entitlement they deserve makes for a very difficult – and for the most part – an extremely negative read.

However, I have seen both sides of the

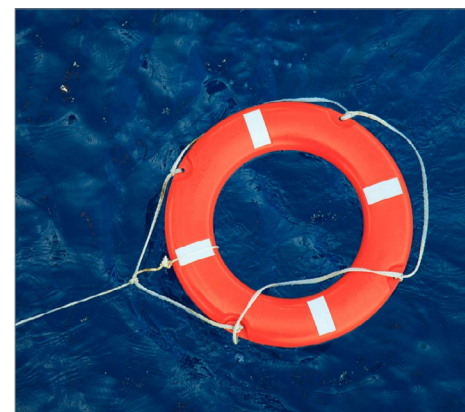


coin: some happy parents and some unhappy; some with whom agreement can be found and others who will never agree. After all, we are talking about the most precious parts of a parent's life. While it can be incredibly difficult to keep the customer satisfied, I still believe most teachers and leaders are aiming for the best for every pupil.

Years of underfunding (and, for the same reason, shrinking support from local authority teams), make the job of providing adequate support for increasing numbers of pupils with additional needs arriving in our classrooms ever more challenging.

I AM A ROCK

And speaking of challenge, the latest episode of the Headteacher Update podcast is dedicated to survival advice for primary school leader. Headteachers, Helen Frostick, Paul Ainsworth, Kulvarn Atwal and Rachel Jones draw on their considerable collective expertise to offer their top tips for making it as a headteacher in these challenging times.



Wellbeing is a huge part of the discussion, but in the sense of managing your own wellbeing and making time and space for yourself. Sometimes, a little bit of 'selfishness' can go a long way.

I was lucky enough to see the fabulous Diana Osagie at a conference recently and one of the things she said really sat with me. It was so simple, but she reminded me to always remember my purpose as an educator. We all have different ideas about that, but whatever drives us we need to be at our best to do it well.

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts



The Knowledge

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



How has children's mental health changed in the past year?

Whitney Crenna-Jennings,
Associate director for mental health, wellbeing and inclusion, EPI

Allen Joseph, Researcher in mental health, wellbeing and inclusion, EPI

It has been over two years since children returned to in-person education after the last national lockdown, yet children's mental health problems persist. Despite various government initiatives and funding commitments, the incidence remains stubbornly unchanged since 2020. The latest figures paint a troubling picture: one in five are suffering from a mental health problem.

Young people have been hit by a perfect storm of negative conditions. These include disruption to their education and life routines, social isolation, higher parental stress levels and an increase in uncertainty about the future.

School absence, which can be an indicator of deteriorating mental health, also remains high, as EPI have previously explored. The latest data reveals that young people with a mental illness are six times more likely to have missed more than 15 days of school.

Stark inequalities

The data also shows that teenage girls are acutely struggling with their mental health. Although the rates of mental health problems between boys and girls are similar in childhood, the transition to adolescence presents unique challenges that particularly affect teenage girls.

By the time they are 17, twice as many girls as boys have a mental health condition and, by early adulthood, many have self-harmed at some point in their lives. Scientists have speculated various mechanisms underpinning this gender gap – including the role of social media – but there is not yet a consensus on the causes.

Eating disorders skyrocket

Other difficulties girls face include eating disorders, the occurrence of which has skyrocketed. The latest figures show an alarming 1,200 per cent increase rise amongst teenage girls. Meanwhile, the NHS has failed to meet its waiting time standards for eating disorder services for children and young people,



'Government plans to address the treatment gap have yet to be updated'

underscoring the need for continued support to the sector to tackle post-pandemic challenges.

Given eating disorders have a high mortality rate, it is clear the government urgently needs to re-double efforts to ensure young people receive timely, evidence-based treatment.

A persistent treatment gap

The government's approach to addressing these concerns has historically been offered through specialist mental health services provided by NHS trusts. However, the sharp rise in mental health problems since the pandemic has led to a 50 per cent increase in referrals to these services. This has resulted in a gap between the number of young people who need mental health support and the number of young people able to access specialist mental health services.

The system was struggling to meet young people's needs even before the pandemic with only one-third of those with mental health problems accessing treatment. Due to the rising prevalence of mental health problems, overall access to support remains low; estimates suggest that as little as one-quarter of young people with a mental health problem are having their needs met.

In the past, government policy focused on

treating mental health problems rather than preventing them from developing. However, in 2017 the government published a green paper which recognised the role of schools in early intervention. This laid out the government's plans to roll out mental health support teams across England to "provide extra capacity for early intervention and ongoing help".

Currently, these mental health support teams cover just 35 per cent of pupils in schools and colleges. Although school and college leaders have welcomed the additional support, some leaders have expressed concerns that the remit of the mental health support teams has been too narrowly focused on 'mild-to-moderate' mental health issues as pupils in their school with more severe needs face long waiting times – sometimes months – for specialist services.

Despite the government being 'on track' to deliver its policy commitment to cover one-quarter of the country by 2023/24, it is clear the projections must be updated and ambitions must be stronger to reflect heightened post-pandemic demand.

Given that many lifelong mental illnesses develop in this early period of life, there is a strong case for ambitious action and investment focused on children and young people.

Week in

Westminster

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

TUESDAY

Not many would associate Ofsted with a superhero. But that's how a senior Ofsted bod introduced their talk to the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT) today, with a big picture of Buzz Lightyear from *Toy Story* alongside the tagline: "Ofsted: to 2024 and beyond!".

Perhaps "someone's poisoned the waterhole" might be more apt?

WEDNESDAY

Important clarification on Conservative policy today.

You'd be forgiven for thinking that Tories believe European countries and their pesky "international laws" are the enemy. For instance, when we want to make our own, world-beating policies – such as shipping all the poor souls that want asylum here to a country with a terrible record on human rights.

But it turns out that these European countries (with their excellent laws on industrial action) are who we should, actually, be emulating.

Introducing legislation to force unions to ensure schools are well-enough staffed to stay open during strikes, education secretary Gillian Keegan said the new law "brings us in line with countries like France, Italy and Spain where public services reliably continue in times of industrial action".

We await the damning front pages from the right-leaning newspapers such as the *Daily Express* and *The Telegraph*, slamming Keegan for sidling closer to Europe and renegeing on our hard-won Brexit rights to do things our own way. Oh, wait.

PS. Keegan later appeared on a broadcast round to wade in on the Elgin Marbles row. She said they are "protected under law and under that law they have to stay in the British Museum".

Cool. So laws in fact *can't* be changed. All

clear Keegz!

A helpful bit of continuing professional development from the DfE today: "How not to run a consultation".

Not happy pissing off teachers by curtailing their ability to strike, the DfE went a step further by limiting responses in the consultation to 150 characters (one section even limited the response to two characters) and forced respondents to agree with one of the proposals – or they could not continue.

Plus, school staff had to fill in a whole section related specifically to universities!

Hours after *Schools Week* revealed the issues, the DfE hauled it down and made amendments before republishing later in the evening. Respondents who had already filled in the "sham" consultation were told they could fill it in again, if they wanted.

After sneakily slipping out that their policy over publishing academy investigations was under review (don't fear, we sniffed it out and published a story), DfE officials have now published the new policy.

Alas, not much has changed. The slimmed-down policy includes that publishing investigations will "support the education sector to learn lessons and take preventative action to ensure public money is used as parliament intends".

The policy will also apply to "other education providers".

But no news on when reports might surface for the 11 trusts that are "subject to ongoing investigation activity by the ESFA" – some which have been that way for several years...

THURSDAY

We were still laughing this morning after shadow schools minister Cat McKinnell provided another load of waffle when asked for Labour's plan to recruit 6,500 teachers.

Speaking at the NASBTT conference, she

repeated the same nothingness uttered by her boss Bridget Phillipson about how a "shift in attitude" will miraculously start a teacher training stampede.

You might have thought this does nothing to assure the sector that Labour has a solid plan to solve the recruitment crisis.

Fear not! McKinnell told us she was "heartened" after speaking at the Schools and Academies Show last week when a teacher "came up to me afterwards to thank me for what I'd said".

The teacher (allegedly) said he had "been thinking about leaving the profession and had pretty much resolved to do so. But after listening to me had decided to hang on. And that gave me hope, that with the right approach, with the right ideas, by working together, we can truly deliver a transformational education to every child."

Hurrah. Vague platitudes for the win!

We won't even attempt to satirise the DfE's latest social media post "Education wrapped" – just take a look at the nonsense yourself (see image).





Chief Finance and Operations Officer

We are seeking to appoint a Chief Finance and Operations Officer (CFOO) as part of the Central Trust Executive Team who will work in close collaboration with the Chief Executive Officer and Director of Education. The CFOO will provide financial and operational leadership, strategy, guidance and oversight to the Board of Trustees, Headteachers and other central Trust teams.

This is an ideal opportunity for a candidate who is committed to systems leadership and developing and empowering others with a logical and evidence-based approach.

The ideal candidate will have experience of leading at a senior level, overseeing a range of teams and areas. This is an exciting opportunity for a values based leader to use their expertise to make a real difference across our school communities.

Application Closing Date: 17th December 2023

education
week jobs

In association with
SCHOOLS FE WEEK
WEEK

DID YOU KNOW?

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

Online listings, classified advertising, and package options available.



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

The Shared Learning Trust

[Click here](#) to contact our team



Academies Trust

Senior Speech and Language Therapist

Location: One based in West Yorkshire and the other in The Northwest or Staffordshire

Salary: £44,000 to £50,000 + benefits

Contract: Permanent, 37 hrs per week, term time only or full time all year round.

Are you an experienced Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) with the enthusiasm and motivation to work with children with a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities, including autism?

These unique and brand new opportunities allow you to work alongside committed school staff in a range of schools across the Trust in all the communities we serve. We aim to deliver an outstanding school experience to children with special educational needs and disabilities and their families. Many of our communities are the most deprived in the North of England.

The majority of your role will be focusing on pupils in our Primary schools but there would also be some support needed at Secondary level in the lower years. Your core responsibility will be to offer assessment and therapy work but also develop our staff to improve pupil experiences for children with a range of additional special

educational needs. This would mean working alongside the NHS Speech and Language intervention when required to ensure we maximise capacity that already happens in our schools. We want you to support the ongoing daily work, building capacity and expertise with your input within assessment and therapy strategies. We want our provision for SEN pupils to improve across the Trust developing into outstanding experiences and both appointments will help greatly with this key target.

We can offer the right candidate continued access to high quality professional development opportunities within a vibrant, friendly and dedicated school community.

If you would like an informal discussion about the post, please contact our lead for SEN across the Trust Dominic Wall Executive Headteacher dominic.wall@coopacademies.co.uk

[Click here to find out more](#)

CHIEF EXECUTIVE



The Cam Academy Trust is seeking to appoint an outstanding leader to the post of Chief Executive. The Trust consists of four secondary schools, seven primary/infant schools and one associate primary school across South Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire. It also has four special units for children on the autism spectrum and runs both a Maths Hub and a SCITT. Founded in 2011, the trust has grown in size and reputation over the past 12 years and is in a sound financial position. It is entering its next phase of development and is looking for an inspirational and people-led individual to lead its continuing commitment to quality and school improvement, as well as a comprehensive development agenda. The successful applicant will be an innovator and excellent communicator, with a track record of change and people management.

The Trust has a very clear philosophy at its heart. It strives for 'Excellence for All' through a set of values-led principles, and these

will be at the heart of ongoing development and growth. A core principle focuses on the communities which the Trust's schools serve. There is a strong emphasis on people: not just staff and students but also local families. The Trust empowers decision makers at every level to make appropriate choices in the context they know best. The successful applicant will therefore be a collegiate, inclusive and consultative individual, with an unwavering commitment to the founding principles of the Trust.

The Trust anticipates that the successful candidate will have significant leadership experience, quite probably in a MAT environment; perhaps as CEO, Deputy CEO or Director of Education. The Trust hopes to make the appointment in late Spring / Summer of 2024.

For information on how to apply for this position, please follow the link - [Chief Executive, The Cam Academy Trust](#) and submit your application by the closing date of 9am on 5th January 2024.

education week jobs

Empowering education professionals to find their dream job

Organise your recruitment advertising for the year with an annual package. Providing unlimited listings, covering all vacancies including leadership roles.

From as little as £3000 + VAT

Prices for Multi Academy Trusts can be provided

