

SCHOOLS WEEK

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



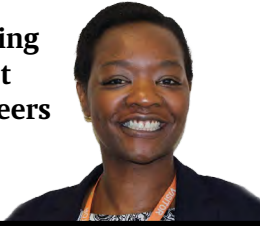
Movers and Shakers is back!

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- Five MATs working on plans with government's own state free school contractor
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SCHOOLS WEEK

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New Ofsted chief starts his delicate balancing act

The new year has brought a new approach from embattled Ofsted. Sir Martyn Oliver, who started as chief inspector last week, has backed up his words with action so far, even winning the support of previously hostile unions.

But as we report (page 7), it is a delicate balancing act. And next week's response to the critical coroner's report into the death of headteacher Ruth Perry will be the real proof in the pudding.

Ofsted has committed to respond in detail to the seven concerns raised, including outlining more changes. One of these will be a commitment to record when inspections are paused due to headteacher distress (page 6). It's likely this will include a published policy on pausing inspections more generally.

All this is positive. But one-word grades won't be dropped anytime soon – and it remains to be seen if lesser changes will pacify those demanding reform.

Education secretary Gillian Keegan – the one person with the ability to change grade names – sought this week to again boost national awareness over school absence,

declaring it her "number one priority".

However, the actual support being offered to schools does not match (pages 8 and 9).

Shadow education secretary Bridget Phillipson also made the issue a centrepiece of her party's education campaigning this week. While she offered little new policy-wise, Labour is starting to flesh out a coherent plan that looks to address some of the root causes of why pupils are turning their backs on the classroom.

One little-talked-about potential solution is the quiet rise of online schools to get school-refusers back in the classroom, which we explore in depth this week (pages 18 to 21).

Elsewhere, we have more concerning developments relating to the broken SEND system. While academy trusts are taking it upon themselves to solve the places crisis (page 4), the ticking timebomb of council high needs deficits has again reared its head. One council is unbelievably looking to raid 11 per cent from its mainstream school budgets to fill shortfalls (page 5).

The situation is untenable. And, currently, neither party has a proper plan to solve it.

Most read online this week:

- 1 **Ofsted 'didn't bother' recording headteacher distress inspection pauses**
- 2 **Ofsted inspections to restart on January 22**
- 3 **Ofsted will review absence during safeguarding checks, says Labour**
- 4 **Inspections won't restart next week as new Ofsted boss launches inquiry**
- 5 **18 new attendance hubs to help 2,000 schools cut absence**

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Trust plan their own private SEND schools amid places crisis

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Academy trusts are drawing-up plans to open their own private special schools to solve the SEND places crisis, including tapping-up wealthy donors to foot building costs.

Five trusts are working with consultants Premier Advisory Group, the government's free-school support contractor, on the proposals aimed at "driving down prices" in the costly for-profit sector.

Last month, *Schools Week* exposed how firms backed by private equity investors were making millions of pounds in profit from private special schools as the government failed to open enough state school to meet soaring demand.

"The heart of this is to get a better deal for children and parents by disrupting a market that is not functioning for the good of the sector or those it needs to serve," said Tom Legge, PAG's managing director.

He said previous SEND free-school application waves showed a "significant gap between areas requiring additional specialist provision, and the ability for local and central government to fully meet this need".

The government approved fewer than half of the 85 applications from councils to open SEND free schools in 2022.

Around a year ago, outside of its government contract, PAG began a "proof-of-concept" project on plugging the gap with private schools. But rather than being run by firms, they would be run by a multi-academy trust.

Legge said the multi-academy trusts (MATs) involved wanted to remain anonymous at this stage, but they tend to be "high-performing", with senior executives who are "committed to the sector and so desperate to try and do something".

Trusts cannot borrow on the open market and it is highly unlikely they have enough spare cash themselves to fund the capital costs of opening such schools. However, Legge said one MAT has secured an initial donation from a wealthy philanthropist to assist with build costs. Its project is at an "advanced" stage.

Discussions have also been held with "ethical social investment funds" to gauge interest "as there is



huge return for society and relatively low risk to investment considering the nature of the projects". High-net-worth individuals are also interested, Legge added. He is "agnostic" about funding "as long as it is ethical, helps reduce costs and disrupts the market".

The MATs would run the private schools through their own trading subsidiaries, which are used already by some to generate income through commercial activities such as letting out school facilities.

Legge said private schools could be set up as either charitable organisations or private companies underpinned by public law principles, meaning "the lion share of any profits generated went back into the education system and not into shareholders' pockets".

Council spend on independent and non-maintained special schools (NMSS) in 2021–22 more than doubled over six years to £1.3 billion. The average cost of these places can be more than double that of a state special school. Legge said the aim is to "bring those prices down while making sure the quality stays up". Trusts are used to "needing to cut cloth, to seek efficiencies and economies of scale" to keep their costs down, he added.

Another issue with state schools is some can take many years to open. Ben McCarthy, managing director of AMR Consult, which is also working on the project, said the new route could slash up to nine months off the average state free school open time. Schools would

also be built to current government standards. He added PAG is also working with individuals and "education-adjacent" organisations who want to deliver high-quality SEND services at a lower rate than the larger firms running private schools.

Susan Douglas, chief executive of the specialist Eden Academy Trust, said "looking at solutions in a timely and efficient way would be good". Two new schools approved in 2017 for her trust have yet to open.

But Warren Carratt, chief executive of Nexus Academy Trust, warned it is "one to watch with cautious interest", adding: "There are so few examples of 'Magwitchian' philanthropy to give me confidence this won't bring anything other than more high-cost independent provision at a time when there is such a stark and unjustifiable difference to the state sector."

Ministers' SEND and alternative provision implementation plan, published in March, pledged to "re-examine the state's relationship with independent special schools to ensure we set comparable expectations for all state-funded specialist providers".

Legge said PAG made the DfE aware of its plans and will be looking to engage further as projects unfold.

The Department for Education said conversations with PAG are commercially sensitive. A spokesperson said: "We are already working to open high-quality special free schools, with 40 new special free schools announced in 2023, in addition to 106 that have already opened."



Susan Douglas



Warren Carratt

Schools sound alarm over 'frightening' 11% budget raid

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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EXCLUSIVE

Schools would be left in a "perilous and untenable" position if council plans to raid 11 per cent of their budgets to fill a £28.9 million high needs funding gap go ahead.

But Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) council said it would have to declare effective bankruptcy this year if its soaring dedicated schools grant (DSG) blackhole is not resolved.

It is one of five new councils in talks with the government over agreeing a "safety valve" bailout to help bring down their deficit – which is now expected to reach a cumulative £63.4 million by March this year.

Launched in 2021, the £1 billion programme sees 34 councils make sweeping reforms in exchange for government bailouts. However, they come with strict cost-saving measures attached.

But BCP said one of the proposals risks an "inability to deliver all aspects of the plan due to legality" – essentially meaning it would be forced to break its legal duties for provision relating to SEND children to cut costs.

The council has instead put forward its own plan to bring down the deficit over 15 years, as opposed to the usual five required by government.

One of the proposals includes the council transferring 11 per cent from its mainstream schools' budgets into the high needs pot, which would require ministerial approval.

The figure could rise to 16 per cent in some schools and is due to be discussed by the council's schools forum on Monday. However, a spokesperson for the BCP primary headteachers group told Schools Week the proposals "are simply frightening". The transfer would leave schools "in a perilous and in some cases untenable position, with most requiring redundancies of key staff".

They added this was "all at a time when being asked to support ever-increasing numbers of children with complex needs" and statutory education, health and care plans (EHCPs). "Far from being a 'safety valve', it currently seems to headteachers that this proposal poses a serious risk to the short- and long-term future of BCP



schools and to, most importantly, the young people they serve."

Another proposal would include a "rapid" rebalancing of the deficit over five-years, but this would mean 90 per cent of new EHCPs for children with SEND had to be for mainstream schools, up from 70 per cent. However, even the Department for Education's SEND adviser agreed the plan was "unrealistic", council documents state.

SEND campaigner Adam Sofianos, who attended the meeting last week, described it as a "disturbing insight" that "confirms so many fears about this project". A second "potentially deliverable but very challenging" plan would see the in-year deficit maintained at £27.5 million – but this would result in an accumulated deficit of £198 million by 2028–29. Under this plan, the number of EHCPs issued each month would have to fall from 30 to 24 by 2030–31.

The council's 15-year plan is based on this second scenario. But Cllr Richard Burton, BCP education lead, said this is "very unlikely to be acceptable" to the DfE, which is due to respond to the proposals this month.

BCP has been part of the delivering better value in SEND programme for the past year – a government scheme where councils with less severe deficits get expert support to make savings.

But a September council report said: "Consultants working with us have been unable to establish how an in-year balance of the

high needs block can be achieved."

The council, controlled by a Liberal Democrat-led alliance since May, has also warned when the so-called "statutory override" ends in March 2026, it may have to effectively declare bankruptcy.

Since 2020, the government has allowed DSG deficits to sit off council books.

Schools Week revealed last year that nearly a dozen councils would have had to issue section 114 notices if the override ended as planned in 2022. Instead, it was extended until 2026. But a BCP council report stated it expects to issue a bankruptcy notice in December this year if the override is not extended again.

Bracknell Forest and Cheshire East, also in safety valve negotiations, have both said similar.

Last month, local government minister Simon Hoare told MPs his department, DfE and the Treasury are "working together to prepare for the end of the ring fence, to avoid jeopardising local authorities' financial viability". But he added "some local authorities can and should be doing more to manage their systems well and sustainably".

Sir David Davis, Conservative MP, warned MPs in the Commons yesterday that, when the override expires, "many councils will be bankrupted overnight, with huge implications not just for education but for all local services". He said the £40 council group said it is "a sword of Damocles hanging over the entire sector".

Cllr Alex Dale, £40 spokesperson, called for the override to be extended, followed by extra funding and resources.

Labour's shadow education secretary Bridget Phillipson told Schools Week they have "an election to win before they can take any decision... I think we do need to look afresh at the whole landscape and make sure that children with SEND are getting the support that they need."

A DfE spokesperson said they are supporting councils "to effectively and sustainably manage their high needs systems".

Devon and Wiltshire are also in 'safety valve' talks.



Sir David Davis

Ofsted promises to start recording inspection pauses in new era

LUCAS CUMISKEY

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EXCLUSIVE

Ofsted will start recording when inspections are paused after admitting it could not back-up claims made under oath that inspectors had halted visits due to headteacher distress.

A coroner last month ruled an Ofsted inspection in November 2022 contributed to the death by suicide of headteacher Ruth Perry in January last year. The watchdog gave evidence at the inquest that it had previously paused inspections due to headteacher distress.

Chris Russell, Ofsted's then-national director for education, said while there was no written guidance on modifying inspections where heads were under "high levels of stress", this was a "core value" of inspector training.

But Ofsted has since admitted "we do not hold a central record of the number of inspections that have been paused, or the reasons why".

"We are therefore unable to supply accurate data on the number of school inspections paused due to headteacher distress in each of the last three years," former chief inspector Amanda Spielman added in a letter last month, seen by Schools Week.

However, she claimed: "We are aware from anecdotal evidence from our regional teams that inspections have been paused for various reasons, including headteacher distress."

Spielman was responding to a parliamentary question from Gareth Thomas, Labour MP for Harrow West.

He told Schools Week: "I think it is symptomatic of the way Ofsted has run inspections recently that they did not bother to record when headteachers and other staff were distressed by the way inspections were being run."

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said the "high-stakes nature of inspection can have a devastating impact on the wellbeing of school and college leaders and teachers".

"Not only has Ofsted failed to act upon this major issue, but it appears that it has barely been taken note of," he added. "Major reform is required to produce an inspection system that is fairer and less punitive."

Ofsted chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver has halted inspections while new mental health



Sir Martyn Oliver

training is rolled out, but they are due to resume on January 22. He has also launched an inquiry into how Ofsted handled Perry's death.

Thomas added he hoped Oliver would "correct this as a matter of urgency. How else will we be able to tell if there really is a more effective, less brutal and more thoughtful inspection regime in place?"

A spokesperson for the inspectorate told Schools Week this week: "We can confirm that we intend to record details of inspection pauses."

Schools Week understands the inspectorate is also working on plans to devise and publish a policy on when inspections are paused. This is likely to be included in the watchdog's response to the coroner's "regulation 28" report aimed at preventing future deaths.

Ofsted said it will respond to the coroner next Friday. It is understood the response will include details of new actions and those already taken for

each of the seven areas of concerns raised in the report.

On pauses, the coroner's report said there is "an almost complete absence of Ofsted training or published policy" in signs of distress during an inspection, practical steps to deal with this and pausing an inspection for this reason.

During Perry's inquest at Berkshire Coroners' Court in November, senior coroner Heidi Connor said it was "suggested by Ofsted witnesses that it is an option to pause an ongoing inspection because of reasons of teacher distress".

However, she concluded it was "something of a mythical creature", adding she heard "no direct evidence" and neither the school nor council were aware of the possibility.

Ofsted pointed Schools Week to Oliver's previous comments when he halted inspections so the watchdog can fully respond to the coroner's concerns.

RISE IN INSPECTOR CONDUCT COMPLAINTS

Ofsted provided data on complaints relating to inspector conduct.

In the 2020–2021 financial year, 39 complaints from 2,585 inspections related to concerns over the conduct of inspections (1.5 per cent). The number of inspections this year was lower than normal amid Covid-19.

In the 2022–2023 financial year, Ofsted received 171 complaints raising conduct concerns out of a total of 7,615 inspections (2.24 per cent).

Gareth Thomas, Labour MP for Harrow West, said he was "very concerned by reports of aggressive and overzealous inspectors".

Perry's sister 'deeply concerned' over inspection resumption

LUCAS CUMISKEY

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Ruth Perry's sister said it is "reckless and far too hasty" for Ofsted inspections to resume later this month, as she revealed plans for headteachers with "uncannily similar" ordeals to meet the chief inspector and share their stories.

Julia Waters met Sir Martyn Oliver, the watchdog's new chief inspector, on Thursday last week – his first on the job as he sought to start repairing Ofsted's tarnished reputation in the wake of Perry's inquest.

Senior coroner Heidi Connor last month ruled an Ofsted inspection in November 2022 contributed to the Caversham Primary School headteacher's suicide in January last year. Her damning 'prevention of future deaths' report, which Ofsted has vowed to respond to by January 19, states: "Ruth's mental health deteriorated significantly during and after the inspection ... Ruth had no relevant past mental health history."

After meeting Waters, Oliver announced on Friday that inspections, which he earlier halted so inspector mental health awareness training could be rolled out, would resume on January 22.

While the meeting with Waters was said to be "constructive", she told *Schools Week* she does not "condone" this "reckless and far too hasty" move.

"School inspections have been proven in the inquest to pose a threat to life, and I'm deeply concerned the plan is to resume them before sufficient changes have been introduced to prevent future deaths," she said.

Waters said "a bit of training isn't enough" and questioned "why the unions have agreed to that resumption".

Despite favourable quotes provided alongside Ofsted's announcement,



Ruth Perry

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the NAHT union, said this week "it is not correct to suggest that we agreed" to the decision to recommence inspections.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders union, said the pause "gives a breathing space to agree a robust and reassuring plan in response to the coroner's concerns, and we're currently in discussion with Ofsted about what that plan should look like."

"If we don't think it goes far enough, we'll ask for a further pause until suitable action is in place," he added.

In her meeting with Oliver, Waters said inspections "should be paused until significant reform has been made to the Ofsted inspection system to make it safe".

However, she said Oliver told her "there are wider changes that will be announced before they resume".

Ofsted plans to publish its response to the critical coroner report – which will include further measures to address the concerns – on Friday next week.

Waters hopes the Department for Education and Ofsted will work together on the "broader systemic

changes" needed, including "the removal of those misleading and dangerously simplistic one- and two-word judgments". She also wants "the almost automatic forced academisation of schools that receive an inadequate or two consecutive requires-improvement judgments" to be removed. Both are unlikely under the current government. But Labour has promised to ditch one-word grades in favour of a scorecard report.

Ofsted referred *Schools Week* to a press release issued last Friday, which said by January 22 "all lead inspectors working in schools and further education will have completed both sessions" of the new training. The spokesperson said they had acted "with the backing of the unions".

Both the unions and Leora Cruddas, chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts body, will be involved in the watchdog's response to the coroner's report.

More generally, Waters said Oliver has "made lots of positive sounds about reform and seems genuinely committed to change". She is "cautiously optimistic", but he now has to "prove it".

She added he was "was very receptive to the idea that we have a meeting – quite soon, I hope – with some of the headteachers who've contacted me who understand only too well how Ruth felt after an Ofsted inspection". It is important Oliver "sees first-hand how dangerous Ofsted inspections can be", she added.

After speaking at the NAHT conference in April, Waters said she was contacted by "headteachers who said I'd saved their lives by speaking out". She added: "Three headteachers whose experiences are strikingly similar, uncannily similar to Ruth's... are feeling strong enough to meet Sir Martyn."

Others are not yet ready to share their "harrowing" ordeals.

Inspectors held a minute's silence during the mental health wellbeing awareness training on Monday to mark the first anniversary of Perry's death. About 2,000 inspectors could not access the live training because of a tech glitch. However, a video of the training was published later that day.



Sir Martyn Oliver

NEWS: ATTENDANCE

School absences become a political battleground

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@FCDWHITTAKER

More action is needed to tackle stubbornly high absence rates, school leaders warned this week, as both the government and Labour set out their plans to improve attendance.

Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, this week made attendance her “number one priority”, while her opposite number, Bridget Phillipson, pledged to rebuild trust between schools, families and government.

Analysis by FFT Education Datalab this week found rates of persistent absence were “still stubbornly high”, with a quarter of secondary pupils missing more than ten per cent of sessions in the autumn term. However, this is down from 28.8 per cent in the autumn term of 2022–23. And while overall absence at the end of last year did rise – it was “much less dramatic” than the spike seen in 2022.

Statistician Katie Beynon said the reduction in absence for primary pupils “is so large in fact, that average absence is now only around a percentage point higher than pre-pandemic”.

Across the whole term, primary pupils missed an average of 5.6 per cent of sessions compared with 6.7 per cent last year. Secondary pupils missed 8.7 per cent, compared with 9.3 per cent on the year before.

Benyon added: “It remains to be seen whether this will hold as the year progresses, particularly as there’s still two months of winter to get

through.”

Secondary absence remains 3.1 percentage points higher than pre-pandemic.

The analysis comes as a Centre for Social Justice poll found more than one in four parents now say Covid-19 has shown it is not essential for children attend school every day. The think tank called for a review into the effectiveness of pupil absence fines, a National Parental Participation Strategy and for every child to have access to at least five hours per week of extracurricular activities.

This week, the government announced it would expand its attendance hubs scheme to a further 18 schools. Thirty-two hubs (see map) will now provide support to drive down absence at 2,000 schools – fewer than one in 10. A national marketing campaign will also encourage parents to send their children in.

As revealed by *Schools Week* last year, ministers will also spend £15 million expanding an attendance mentoring scheme to reach more than 10,000 persistently absent pupils. The scheme has been piloted by children’s charity Barnardo’s in Middlesbrough with 350 pupils since September 2022, and with hundreds more in Salford, Doncaster, Knowsley, and Stoke-on-Trent since September 2023.

No formal evaluation of the pilot so far has been published, but *Schools Week* analysis of government attendance data shows absences in the five areas rose less sharply than the national average over the course of last term.

The 18 new attendance hubs



Source: Department for Education

SCHOOLS WEEK

1. Ark Priory Primary Academy (Ark Schools)
2. Galliard Primary School (Children First Academy Trust)
3. Noel Park Primary School (Academies Enterprise Trust)
4. Tidemill Academy (REACH2 Academy Trust)
5. Forest Academy (Inspire Partnership Academy Trust)
6. Drayton Manor High School (Drayton Manor High School Academy Trust)
7. Mulberry Academy Shoreditch (Mulberry Schools Trust)
8. St Paul’s Way Trust School
9. The Hurlingham Academy (United Learning Trust)
10. The Beacon Church of England Primary School (Liverpool Diocesan Schools Trust)
11. St Bede’s Catholic Academy (Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust)
12. Ashington Academy (North East Learning Trust)
13. Bedford Free School (Advantage Schools)
14. Bluecoat Wollaton Academy (Archway Learning Trust)
15. Denbigh High School (Chiltern Learning Trust)
16. Landau Forte College (Landau Forte Charitable Trust)
17. The Khalsa Academy Wolverhampton (The Khalsa Academies Trust Limited)
18. Wright Robinson College (Flagship Learning Trust)

Continued on next page

NEWS: ATTENDANCE

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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What they've pledged this week...

Gillian Keegan,
education secretary

- 18 new attendance hubs, taking total to 3, which will support 2,000 schools
- £15 million expansion of the attendance mentoring pilot to help 10,000 pupils
- A national marketing campaign aimed at parents, dubbed 'Moments matter, attendance counts'



Bridget Phillipson,
shadow education secretary

- Annual safeguarding reviews will look at absences
- AI will be used to spot trends in attendance data
- Breakfast clubs for all primary pupils
- Improved mental health support
- A register of children not in school



Absence levels always increase during the autumn term as winter illnesses bite. In England, primary absences rose 58 per cent and secondary by 51 per cent between September and December 2023.

But in Middlesbrough, primary absences rose by around 30 per cent. In Doncaster, primary absences rose by 41 per cent and secondary by 34 per cent. In Stoke, primary absences rose 32 per cent and secondary by 42 per cent.

Keegan said this week she wanted "all our children to have the best start in life because we know that attending school is vital to a child's wellbeing, development, and attainment as well as impact future career success".

But Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders union, called for "greater investment in the wider infrastructure of family and children's support services that have been eroded over the past 14 years. Schools cannot fight this battle on their own."

Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the National Education Union, added the government's proposals were "too little too late for many children and young people".

And the NAHT's Paul Whiteman said: "When it comes to improving attendance, we need to remember that the focus cannot be on schools alone and the answers to the complex causes will not be found through the accountability system."

Labour also took up the attendance

mantle this week, though Phillipson's keynote speech at the CSJ mostly rehashed old policies such as a register of children not in school, improved mental health support and breakfast clubs.

However, two new policies emerged. Labour pledged last year to pilot the expansion of a "children's number" – an identifier like the NHS number that would stay with pupils throughout their childhoods – to address the "disconnect" between information provided to different services. This week, the party said this would allow it to use artificial intelligence

to "spot trends in absence" and "improve coordination between education, social care and the wider services that support families, while busting bureaucracy for parents".

Labour has also announced plans to scrap Ofsted grades and replace them with "report cards" on schools, with annual safeguarding "spot checks". These checks would "empower" Ofsted to review absences, the party said this week.

In her speech, Phillipson said absence rates were "not just an urgent problem the government needs to tackle ... but an index of failure, long years of failure".

Gove-in as Phillipson praises political rival

Bridget Phillipson invoked the zeal of ex-education secretary Michael Gove's reforms this week as she set out the need for "urgent" changes to education in England.

But the shadow education secretary's speech – billed as her chance to set out a "long-term plan for our schools" – was light on new policy detail.

Phillipson told the Centre for Social Justice think tank that the "days when Michael Gove, for all our disagreements, brought a fresh eye, high expectations, new focus, are now the distant past".

"Today I want to set out how in 2024, as a generation earlier, change is urgent, change is pressing, and Labour is ready to deliver the change we need," she added, later telling journalists that Gove brought "a sense of

energy and drive and determination about education being central to national life".

Watched by an audience including Gove allies Sir Michael Wilshaw and Lord Nash, a former academies minister, Phillipson said in the years after 2010, there was a "generation of children growing up who'd had years benefitting from Labour's investment".

"But under a new government, as time ticked on, the Conservatives hacked away at the schools themselves, at the services and society that supported them to succeed, until at last the figures started to slip towards the ones we see today."

The shadow minister also criticised the government over the recent PISA international education rankings, in which England's standing improved in maths, but its



Michael Gove

overall scores fell. Phillipson said it was "no use claiming a personal best for a worse time than last week, to be content with a higher place finish simply because others have got worse faster".

Ministers spent £20k covering up £13k influencer spend

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Ministers “squandered” £20,000 on legal fees trying to hide how much it paid influencers to promote a back-to-school campaign – which is more than the celebrities were paid.

After a two-and-a-half-year transparency battle with Schools Week, the Cabinet Office revealed last year it paid a total of £13,000 to TV presenter Kirsty Gallacher and celebrity GP Dr Philippa Kaye to support the government’s post-lockdown push to get pupils back in classrooms.

The department was in the process of taking court action over our freedom of information (FOI) request, but dropped the case at the last minute and handed over the information.

Now, a new FOI request has revealed the Cabinet Office spent £19,683 on legal fees to fight publication of the information.

This includes £12,883 on government legal department costs and £3,520 on legal counsel’s fees, as well as VAT.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders union, said spending a larger sum “attempting to cover up the amount they paid originally just adds insult to injury. It is important the public money is used wisely and transparently. Neither has happened in this instance.

“All credit to Schools Week for their tenacity but, frankly, at a time of brewing budget cuts in schools and colleges, it’s pretty dispiriting that the government thinks it can get away with squandering public money in this way.”

The Information Commissioner’s Office had ordered the Cabinet Office to disclose the influencer pay, but ministers decided to challenge the decision in the first-tier tribunal. However, they pulled out of the case after various legal documents had been prepared and submitted by both parties.

Maurice Frankel, director at Campaign for FOI, said: “Appealing to the tribunal against the ICO decision was unnecessary and the fact that the legal costs dwarfed the actual

payments speaks for itself.”

The Cabinet Office has previously spent at least £300,000 blocking similar information requests in court, *The Times* reported in 2022. MPs on the public administration and constitutional affairs committee previously found there had been a “slide away from transparency” on some FOIs.

Press Gazette reported last week that UK public bodies granted just 34 per cent of FOI requests between April to June last year. This is down from 41 per cent granted in 2020 – which was then labelled the “worst on record for government secrecy”.

A Cabinet Office spokesperson said they have a “strong commitment to transparency”.

“Despite receiving thousands of FOI requests every month, the vast majority are responded to on time. We also proactively publish more information outside of the Freedom of Information Act than ever before.”



Geoff Barton



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NEWS

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DfE swerves coroner calls for trans pupil support clarity

LUCAS CUMISKEY

@LUCAS_CUMISKEY

The Department for Education has insisted it is up to schools to provide the appropriate support for transgender pupils experiencing mental health issues, despite a coroner's call for "clarity" over counselling provision after a 13-year-old died.

Outwood Academy Shafton pupil Alex Dews fell from a bridge in Barnsley in July 2022. Coroner Abigail Combes concluded it was "not clear" if he intended to end his life.

Alex had received six weeks' counselling after telling school staff he wanted to kill himself in March of that year. He had previously been placed on a waiting list for the school's counselling service, iSpace.

But Alex's grandmother Susan Dews, 64, of Wakefield, believes he needed more "specialist" support and claims he "fell through the cracks".

Combes raised concerns to the DfE, the academy and the Department for Health and Social Care in a 'prevention of future deaths' report in October.

She told the DfE that "there is a lack of clarity around what should be in place in school in terms of counselling for those who may be transgender or questioning their identity or whether this is solely a role for children and adolescent mental health services".

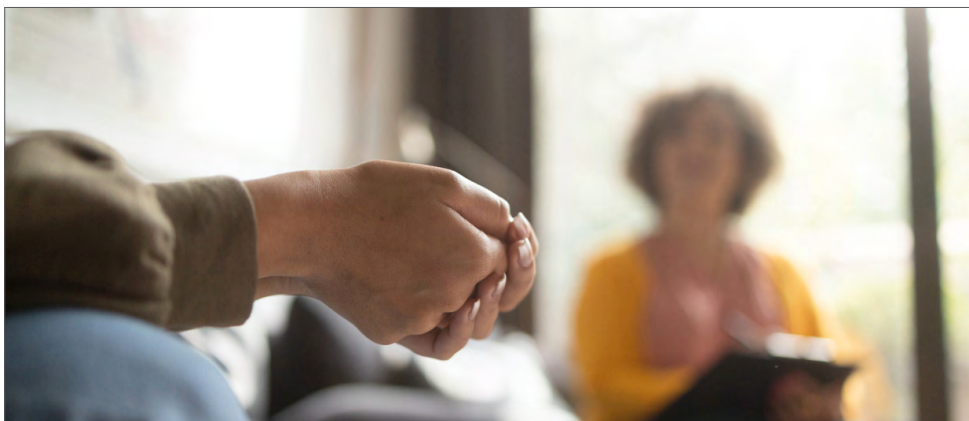
Combes said: "The provision of support services in school is not clear and consistent." Additionally, Alex's school "had to put in place their own provision as the local procurement was delayed".

Alex was born female but in "his teenage years he identified as male". His mother notified the school of a change of name at his request, Combes noted.

On the coroner's call for "clarity" from the DfE, Susan Dews told *Schools Week*: "It does need to be clearer who and what is provided, and who provides the funding, and that it shouldn't have to necessarily come out of the school budget.

"It's good that the school did put that in place because otherwise there would have been nothing for Alex, but it wasn't enough, more was needed.

"I think there needs to be probably some speciality there... I don't think they even looked at the transgender side of it because Alex didn't feel comfortable enough with the counsellor because



he wasn't there long enough."

In its response to the coroner, published last week, the DfE said it is "not prescriptive in what support services schools can use – that authority is delegated to school leaders to ensure that the support is tailored for children by those who know them best".

"Schools have delegated budgets to make those decisions and should escalate cases to children's social care or to child and adolescent mental health services when there is cause for concern over and above the support that a school puts in place."

The department "seeks to give school leaders as much flexibility as possible in deciding appropriate support managed within the school... governed by a statutory safeguarding framework that operates inside a much broader safeguarding system," the letter said.

Long-awaited draft transgender guidance, published last month, is now out for consultation. It sets out how schools should respond to gender-questioning pupils, but does not mention counselling provision.

However, *Schools Week* revealed last month how the DfE's own lawyers had warned several elements of the guidance would leave schools at high risk of facing a legal challenge and losing.

Outwood Grange Academies Trust, which runs Alex's school, highlighted the-then lack of DfE trans guidance for schools in its response to the coroner.

"It is felt that this guidance is long overdue and that schools are trying hard to piece together best practice in the absence of any official stance or response," it said.

Dews said delays to the to the guidance being published made her "really angry".

"I lost a grandson because they dithered," she added. "I'm not saying it would have solved the problem, but it might have helped."

She said Alex was "so bright" and "special" with "a lot of potential".

Paul Whiteman, general secretary at school leaders' union NAHT, called for the government to "accelerate the roll-out" of mental health support in all schools after the "desperately sad tragedy".

When asked about mental health support for transgender pupils this week, Bridget Phillipson, the shadow education secretary, said: "We need to focus on children's wellbeing as being our starting point."

She also criticised the "culture wars" narrative surrounding the issue "when this is about children's life chances".

An Outwood Grange Academies Trust spokesperson said: "Our thoughts remain with Alex's family, as well as other young people and families in need of support."

A DfE spokesperson said the "safety and wellbeing of all children will always be our primary concern".

Mental health lead training will be offered to all schools by 2025 and new support teams will cover at least half of pupils by the end of March next year.

Samaritans are available 365 days a year.
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www.samaritans.org

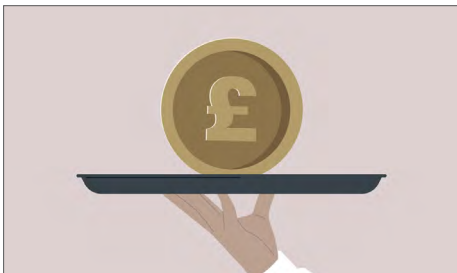
Education Support runs a confidential
helpline for education staff and teachers on
08000 562 561

Trust cuts primary top slice amid pupil shortfall

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE



A large academy trust has slashed its central services charge on primary schools in a bid to support those hit by plunging rolls – increasing the burden on its secondaries instead.

Northern Education Trust has decided not to collect a percentage top slice of its primary academies' budgets this year, instead opting to charge a £20,000 flat-rate. Almost two-fifths of places are unfilled at one of its primaries.

Experts say more trusts are now reviewing their top slice arrangements amid grim forecasts that places will plummet by hundreds of thousands over the next eight years.

Rob Tarn, NET's CEO, said: "Based on a top slice, primaries on average might have to pay £40,000, £50,000 to a MAT [multi-academy trust]. If you're at a small rural primary school that could be a significant proportion of their budget. We can do it because we have a large number of schools generating surpluses."

Two of his primaries have been impacted by the issue, with the worst-affected being The Oak Tree Academy, in Stockton-on-Tees, where 172 (39 per cent) of its 431 places have been left empty.

Tarn added that NET's changes are also part of

attempts "to get ahead" of the issue in "other areas where we see the demographic trends falling".

His secondaries – which have "rapidly rising" numbers of pupils – were charged 6 per cent of their budget, or general annual grant (GAG) funding, in the past financial year. This is up from 5 per cent in the previous year.

Tarn said: "You need multi-academy trusts to say, 'when you sponsor that massive secondary school that's generating £1 million, what you need to do is go and sponsor that rural primary school that's on its own and struggling'."

He also thinks the move will convince smaller local authority-maintained schools "that they can join [the trust] and it'll be affordable to them".

Headteachers have been struggling to fill reception classrooms in the wake of a national birth-rate dip of 13 per cent since 2015.

Government data suggests primary pupil numbers will tumble by 760,747 (16.6 per cent) between 2022

and 2032. In London – which has been rocked by a double-whammy of falling births and the housing crisis – some areas are expected to witness drops of up to 15 per cent by 2027.

Harris Federation has merged two of its inner-city primaries, while two more are set to cut their admission numbers. CEO Sir Dan Moynihan said he has cut top slices and even waived them completely for some primaries. There have also been cases where the trust has covered 50 per cent of academy deficits, the largest of which was £150,000.

Moynihan said: "In others we've been cross subsidising from secondary to primary. Where schools are downsizing, we want to cushion that."

As well as top slicing, trusts can fund their central services by GAG pooling – where they collect all their schools' budgets first before dishing out funds based on their own formula, which doesn't have to be published.

The 2023 Academies Benchmark Report revealed that nearly 25 per cent of more than 300 trusts GAG pool, compared with 14 per cent in the previous year.

Kimberley Foulkes, an audit manager at Kreston Reeves, has seen a growing trend of MATs reviewing their top slicing policies "particularly now with increasing cost pressures and some falling pupils on the roll".

JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS

Talks begin to help tourist hotspot school hit by housing crisis

An academy trust is in talks to secure extra cash for a secondary school in a Cornish beauty spot where tourists have "displaced" families.

Truro and Penwith Academy Trust has launched "special case" funding discussions with the Department for Education to boost Cape Cornwall School's viability, after it racked up a £332,000 deficit last year.

CEO Jenny Blunden said the school, the only secondary in St Just, needs "a longer-term, more sustainable [arrangement]... it can't be a one-year quick fix".

"When you have families that are displaced out of the area, it's really hard for children to travel back into Cape Cornwall or any of the primary schools. [With] the increased costs of overheads... the cost of staff has gone up

and the increased cost of utilities, we're just struggling to make the books balance with ever declining numbers."

Blunden added that similar pressures are being felt in two more trust schools in Cornish villages Pendeen and Sennen. The trust runs 34 schools in Cornwall.

Elsewhere, town councillors in Southwold, East Suffolk, warned two years ago that the proliferation of holiday lets in the area could leave its only primary "highly under-utilised and at risk of being financially unsustainable".

Consortium Trust CEO Andrew Aalders-Dunthorne, whose chain is responsible for Southwold Primary, said: "There is no doubt that the amount of second homes ... restrict the number of families and, therefore, local children." He has "taken a number

of measures that have reduced overheads and costs", while "maintaining a four-class structure ... that provides a quality education".

In Whitby, MP Sir Robert Goodwill, a former children's minister, believes the problem – along with a growing pensioner population – has contributed to pupil number drops in the area as well. One of the town's secondaries, Eskdale School, is set to merge with nearby Caedmon College amid child and cash shortages.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders union, said: "There needs to be a much better system of financial support available for schools with falling rolls, either as a result of general demographic changes or specific local issues."

NEWS

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Old misconduct decisions to be wiped from DfE's website

JACK DYSON
@JACKDYDS

Scores of misconduct notices will be scrubbed from the government's website following a campaign to overturn an "irrational anomaly" in the publication of Teaching Regulation Agency decisions.

Since 2012, the Department for Education has posted documents online detailing all findings of wrongdoing indefinitely. However, in cases where teachers were banned from the profession for a finite period, they could have decisions removed if they were allowed to work in schools after the prohibition lapsed.

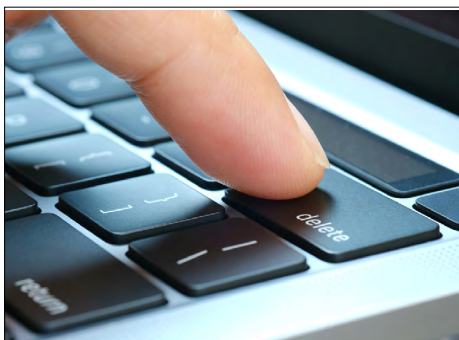
Despite this, those guilty of misconduct for less serious misdemeanours – where panels have been persuaded there is no risk of repeat offending – and not barred from classrooms could not apply to have the verdicts removed from the public domain.

'Victory for common sense'

However, this week the government announced that officials will take down these types of decisions over the next week if they are more than two years old.

Colin Henderson, of Lawyers for Teachers, argued the removal of the "irrational anomaly... is a major victory for common sense".

"[It] was clearly unjustifiable, and we and the



teaching unions had said so for years."

The issue was raised formally in October as part of a legal challenge in the case of a member of school leaders' union NAHT. Henderson said the TRA's lawyers "quickly conceded the point and agreed that the decision would be published for only two years. And now they have applied that to all decisions and all teachers."

Andrew Faux, who works with Henderson at Lawyers for Teachers, estimated that his firm has been involved in as many as 40 such TRA cases in the past 12 years.

Old misconduct policy 'strange'

Branding the previous arrangements "strange", NAHT general secretary Paul Whiteman stated: "There is no need for cases of less serious misconduct to be public for longer than two years."

"It can only cause reputational damage to the teacher concerned and negatively affect their

employability for longer than is proportionate or reasonable."

Faux added that the teacher regulation authority in Wales, the Education Workforce Council, publishes one-page disciplinary order notices for six months only. In Scotland, they are removed after three months after the date of publication.

According to the DfE, the TRA "reviewed the policy which underpins how we publish information related to teacher misconduct cases" last year. It promised to finish removing the decisions by Thursday, January 18. This is why some "may still be visible on Gov.uk during this period".

Misconduct decision links could still be on Google

The department also confirmed the "details of these no prohibition order cases will no longer be accessible to employers when completing their safer recruitment checks".

Schools Week has seen that Google still displays the link to one case that has been taken down.

The DfE explained: "Links to the documents from search-engine results are not under the control of the TRA. Individuals are able to contact search engines directly to request their name is removed from their search results."

It expects to remove about 200 decisions that were first published between May 2012 and January 2022.

LUCAS CUMISKEY | @LUCAS_CUMISKEY

Trust headteachers to get £100k in CPD

Headteachers at one of the largest academy trusts in the country can access £100,000 worth of investment in continuing professional development (CPD) each over five years under a new scheme to boost retention.

Academies Enterprise Trust principals can also take a one-term professional sabbatical after five years in post and be offered up to 100 hours of CPD per year under the £5.7 million initiative.

Becks Boomer-Clark (pictured), chief executive of AET, said: "Too often, school leadership can feel isolating, lonely and difficult. We want to change that.

"Of course leading a school is hard, but it's also one of the most incredible and rewarding things



you will ever do. We want to bring the joy back into the role, by giving our headteachers exceptional development and support so they can stay fresh and energised – and feel invested in."

Department for Education data shows 2,341 headteachers left the profession in 2021–22, at the highest rate since 2016–17.

Retention rates improved immediately after Covid-19, with concerns the higher rate now could be pent-up demand for people moving jobs. However, *Schools Week* reported in October that headteacher turnover remained 14 per cent higher than before the pandemic, which suggested departures were no longer associated with a Covid backlog but with the increased demands of the job.

Each head at AET will get their own individual development account, which they can use to fund CPD.

The trust also wanted to "match the focus of learning and development that you see in places like Singapore, where 100 hours of professional development is standard practice".

"We want our leaders to have agency, confidence and choice. This starts by giving them permission to prioritise their own development," Boomer-Clark added.

AET said the sabbatical would be paid-for if it was linked to work – for instance, to do research that would benefit the school and the trust. A sabbatical to have time away – such as travelling with family – would not be funded.

NEWS: INCLUSION

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Disadvantaged pupils less likely to go to top secondary schools

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Poorer pupils are less likely to attend top-performing comprehensive schools even if they live in their catchment areas, a new report suggests, prompting calls for a review of the school admissions code.

A study by the Sutton Trust found 155 secondary comprehensives in England that are more “socially selective” than the average grammar school.

The 500 comprehensive schools with the highest progress scores had a lower proportion of disadvantaged pupils (17.1 per cent) than those with lower results (22 per cent), the research found. Schools with the highest attainment scores admitted even fewer free school meals (FSM) children (13.3 per cent).

The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in schools with top progress 8 scores was 4.3 percentage points lower than the proportion across their catchment areas, and 5.8 percentage points lower for schools with top attainment 8 scores.

The Sutton Trust said a third of the gap was attributable to the schools’ location in affluent areas. However, living near a top school was “not enough”. Two-thirds of the gap was explained by “unequal access within local areas”, researchers found.

“These schools have 30 per cent fewer pupils eligible for FSM than live in the catchment areas they draw



Sir Peter Lampl

from, due to a combination of factors including parent choices and schools’ often complicated admissions criteria,” a statement from The Sutton Trust said.

The Sutton Trust said the government should review admissions code policies to “require inclusion of pupil premium eligibility in schools’ oversubscription criteria, as well as including an assessment of fair access in Ofsted inspections.

Sir Peter Lampl, the charity’s founder, added: “The levels of social segregation across the school system are unacceptable.

“The poorest parts of the country are hit by a double whammy of having the fewest top comprehensive schools, which are also the most socially selective. This is deeply concerning. We need to urgently address this problem to create a more balanced system and raise the quality of all schools.”

The research found grammar schools had average free school meals rates 9.2 percentage points lower than their catchment areas. This shows how disadvantaged pupils are “systematically excluded from many of the highest attaining schools in the country”.

However, the Sutton Trust said it was “also notable that more than 150 comprehensive schools have a negative FSM gap greater than -9.2 which means that they are less representative of their catchment areas than the average grammar school”.

The research also found that schools that choose to become academies tend to be more socially selective than those forced to convert. It found converter academies –

those that opt to join a trust – had an average free school meals rate 2.6 percentage points below that of their catchment area.

The same was true to a lesser extent for voluntary-aided and foundation schools (2.1 percentage points), free schools (1.7 percentage points) and community and voluntary controlled schools (1 percentage point).

On the other hand, sponsored academies, which are forced to convert after being rated ‘inadequate’ by Ofsted, had an average FSM rate 3 percentage points higher than the areas they served.

Religious schools also remain less inclusive, with an FSM rate 4.3 percentage points below that of their catchments, compared to 0.3 percentage points among non-religious schools.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders union, warned fairer access “is not just about admissions practices. It is also about ensuring that all schools have the support and resources they need to provide a high-quality education, wherever they are and whatever their context.”

3 recommendations for government

- Make pupil premium eligibility mandatory as part of schools’ admissions oversubscription criteria
- Hold schools to account for their admission policies, which could be policed by Ofsted
- Review eligibility for free school transport so it does not become a hidden barrier

Re-sit rates for Maths GCSEs lower than before Covid-19

The proportion of students passing GCSE re-sits in maths has fallen again this year and remains lower than pre-pandemic 2019.

November entry results published on Thursday by the Joint Council for Qualifications show 22.2 per cent of 17- to 19-year-old maths re-sit entrants achieved a grade 4 or above in England, seen by the government as a standard pass. This is a decrease of 8 per cent on last year, when 24.2 per cent achieved at least a standard pass, and down 16 per cent on pre-pandemic 2019, when the pass rate was 26.4 per cent.

However, the JCQ warned that “due to changing entry patterns and different assessment and grading arrangements over the last few years because of the pandemic, it is not possible to make meaningful comparisons between results this year and previous examination series”.

The results come after prime minister Rishi Sunak announced plans to replace A-levels with a new Advanced British Standard qualification that would require all pupils to study maths until 18. At present, pupils who do not achieve a pass at GCSE already have

to continue studying the subject at post-16. The re-take requirement is also in place for English, but pass rates have been rising.

In 2023, 40.3 per cent of entrants achieved a grade 4, a 7 per cent increase on 2022 and a 24 per cent increase on 2019.

Entries for re-sits rose sharply in both subjects this year.

There were 57,773 school-age maths entries, up 23 per cent on 2022, and 53,688 entries in English, up 37 per cent – likely down to grade standards returning to their pre-pandemic norm.

NEWS IN BRIEF

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More money for free school meals

The mayor of London Sadiq Khan (pictured) has extended funding for universal primary free school meals into the next academic year.

While schools will receive 35p extra per meal next year, taking the total to £3 a meal, the lower rate will continue to be paid for the rest of this academic year..

Last year, Khan announced he would spend £135 million providing free school meals to junior pupils in the 2023-24 academic year. Infants already receive free meals under a central government scheme.

But *Schools Week* analysis found funding was potentially £33 million short of what is needed because actual meal costs outstrip the cash provided.

This week's announcement that the support will be extended into 2024-25 appears to acknowledge increasing costs, raising the per-meal funding rate from £2.65 to £3 and the total funding allocated to £140 million.



However, in 2022, the National Education Union estimated the true cost to a school of providing a hot meal for a primary pupil – once rising costs are factored-in – was £3.30.

[Full story here](#)



Keegan reveals LocatED head

The education secretary has appointed a former Conservative MP and minister as chair of government property company LocatED.

Former business and housing minister Mark Prisk (pictured) took up the three-year role at LocatED earlier this month, after getting the nod from Gillian Keegan.

The arms-length body is responsible for buying and managing school sites on behalf of the Department for Education.

Prisk, who represented Hertford and Stortford from 2001 to 2019, will earn £1,000 a day for an estimated 25 days a year at LocatED, the DfE said.

He replaces outgoing chair Michael Strong, who has held the post since the organisation's creation in 2017.

In a press release, LocatED said Prisk "brings a wealth of experience having worked across the real estate, housing and construction markets both in the UK and internationally".

Prisk is a strategic adviser to Handley House, an international group of architects and designers, and is the independent chair of Saltaire Housing Ltd.

He also chairs the Joint Group for Non-Standardised Construction Products "which is seeking to improve the regulation in the construction sector".

[Full story here](#)

£4,000 for RAAC surveys available

Schools can claim back up to £4,000 for RAAC surveys, but only if they were completed during a two-month period last year.

The Department for Education has announced responsible bodies – usually councils and academy trusts – will be able to claw back the cash for checks to identify the dangerous concrete carried out between August 30 and November 1, 2023.

Leaders will only be eligible for the money if the DfE had not already funded or carried out a RAAC survey at the site.

The surveys must have been conducted by an "appropriately qualified building surveyor or structural engineer", with the results reported "via the RAAC questionnaire" shortly afterwards, it added.



Leaders will be able to receive funding for up to £4,000, including VAT, per setting.

To file a claim, responsible bodies should complete a RAAC survey claim form and email their establishment's name, its "RAAC status" and invoice to RAAC.Awareness@education.gov.uk

by February 1.

[Full story here](#)

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

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Movers & Shakers

Your fortnightly guide to who's new and who's leaving



Michael McCarthy

CEO, Consilium Academies

Start date: Last week
Previous Job: CEO of The Priestley Academy Trust

Interesting fact: A Newcastle United season ticket holder since 1991, he's one of nine inaugural members of the NUFC fans advisory board who work with the club's Saudi Arabian owners. He's watched the Toon Army at 86 different football stadiums.



Anna Trethewey

Executive director, corporate affairs and strategy at AQA

Start date: Monday
Previous Jobs: Deputy director for cross remit education, Ofsted, and prior to that head of change management at AET

Interesting fact: As a child, Anna was in Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat in the West End, starring as none other than 'choir member'.



Edward Vitalis

CEO, Invictus Education Trust

Start date: Last week
Previous job: Deputy CEO of Bright Futures Educational Trust

Interesting fact: Edward is a talented athlete and used to train alongside Olympic gold medallist Linford Christie.



Tracey Greenough

Deputy CEO, Endeavour Learning Trust

Start date: Last week
Previous job: Deputy CEO at Consilium Academies

Interesting fact: Tracey was a keen sports player in her youth and represented the North of England playing hockey. She also once hugged the rock star Jon Bon Jovi.



Lisa Fathers

Deputy CEO, Bright Futures Educational Trust

Start date: : Last week
Previous role: Director of education and partnerships, BFET

Interesting fact: Lisa teaches an indoor cycling spin class on a Saturday morning to high-energy dance music.

Free school founder joins Ormiston

FEATURED



Ed Vainker, the founder of leading free school Reach Feltham, has joined one of the country's biggest academy trusts

on secondment as national director of transformation.

Vainker, also the chief executive of the Reach Foundation which runs the Hounslow school, has joined Ormiston Academies Trust (OAT) in a part-time role until the end of this academic year.

Vainker will be tasked with improving "our support for schools and teachers in the short term, whilst developing OAT's longer-term strategy," OAT said in a statement.



Natasha Rancins has also been appointed national director of secondary education at the trust, a new role focused on creating a school improvement strategy to deliver "an ambitious and transformative education" for the 32,000 pupils in the trust's 32 secondaries.

Rancins has been at OAT since 2022 as the trust's education director for the west. Tom Rees, who joined the 42-school trust as chief executive in September, said the pair will help OAT "achieve even more together in service of children".

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- ✓ Easy to navigate with pathways for all



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The Inner Game of Learning

Professor John Hattie

World Headliners

20th March – 13.00 GMT

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Michael Bungay Stanier

World Headliners

19th March – 17.00 GMT

The Power of Collective Teacher Efficacy

Bridge Schools Trust

Cool Schools

20th March – 10.00 GMT

Pioneers of Equity and Equality

Diana Osagie and Special Guests

Legacy Stage

18th March – 11.00 GMT

Responding to Global Trends: The importance of creating school cultures of belonging

Leora Cruddas CBE

Brave Leaders

19th March – 08.00 GMT

A CEO Lens on Impact

John Murphy and Cris Beswick

Brave Leaders

The Future of Assessment

Tuesday 19th March

Delve into the future of assessment; unpacking the fashions, phobias and evidence. Explore learning theories and pedagogical strategies for effective assessment.

Hosted by Tim Oates CBE

Global Amphitheatre

WomenEd

Wednesday 20th March

Don't miss this series of sessions by WomenEd, covering topics such as inclusive leadership and gender disparities in education. You will leave with valuable insights and strategies to enhance equality.

Hosted by Vivienne Porritt OBE

Paradigm Shifters

Living Legends

Monday 18th March

Living Legends of education discuss the three concepts or pieces of work that they think have had the greatest impact on education.

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Long read

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL

Photo credit: Chris Pascoe

TCES Student Makers

Can online schools solve the post-Covid attendance crisis?

Supporters say virtual classrooms offer a second chance for children who can't cope in a traditional setting – but others fear they are just pushing vulnerable learners further out of sight. Jessica Hill investigates ...

In total, 22.3 per cent of pupils missed more than one in 10 sessions in the last academic year, roughly double the proportion in 2018-19. Of disadvantaged pupils, nearly two in five are now classed as “persistently absent”.

A Centre for Social Justice report this week concluded that Covid has well and truly shattered the “contract of trust” between schools and parents. But it's not just pupils bunking off a few more lessons.

In 2021-22, nearly 100,000 children were “missing education”, those not registered at school or not receiving a suitable education outside of school. Data shows another 86,200 pupils were home educated this spring – up 50 per cent on pre-pandemic.

Councils have a duty to provide education for pupils missing from mainstream education.

While they have been wary of using online schools in these circumstances for all but the very occasional stopgap, a new government accreditation scheme launched in March last year is changing things.

Two providers have been accredited so far after they were inspected and approved by Ofsted. They now appear on Get Information About Schools, and have their own school unique reference number. At least two more are preparing for upcoming Ofsted preapproval visits.

The scheme is viewed as a “gamechanger” for online school operators, who see it as a path to not just being more widely used, but also to becoming a more permanent solution for school-refusing children.

Providers of “full-time” education – which isn't

legally defined, but equates to roughly more than 18 hours a week – to five or more pupils have to be registered with Ofsted.

Under the accreditation scheme, as well as Ofsted's pre-approval check, providers will also undergo routine Ofsted inspections with the same 12-notice period and rigorous class observation of traditional schools.

The Department for Education sets the accreditation standards based on the independent schools inspection framework – only without the onerous physical requirements such as sink-to-toilet ratios.

Councils sign up to online schools

The first full-time online school to get Ofsted's approval last month, Sophia High School, currently only has three students fully-funded

Long read: Online schools

by local authorities, through education, health and care plans.

But the online school says it has now signed contracts with Northumberland, Sheffield and Surrey Councils to take on board a number of their school refusing and excluded children. Sophia will appear on Sheffield and Surrey's official list of alternative providers – a recommendation to schools that they can place children there.

Councils are “sharing [that] their demands for online provision are skyrocketing,” said Sophia chief executive Melissa McBride. From January, around a third (50) of Sophia's learners will be UK-based. The councils working with Sophia refused multiple requests for comment.

Minerva Virtual Academy, which claims to be the UK's fastest growing online school, is preparing for Ofsted's inspection this month as part of its accreditation bid.

So far, only 15 of its 500 learners are funded by the state, through what its chief executive Hugh Viney describes as a “collaboration with forward thinking state schools who realise their kids are not getting on, and appreciate us as an alternative”.

In these instances, the pupil is normally still enrolled at their mainstream school and the provision is paid for by councils and schools in ten week “temporary” blocks.

But Viney believes it can be “the perfect” long-term solution for some children too – and accreditation is the “game changer” that means “councils can more freely recommend us”.

Essex council is looking for a new provider to run an online school which acts as a “safety net” to ensure children awaiting a school place are getting education. However, it will be expanded to cover all pupils awaiting placements, and the new provider must be accredited.

But Sheffield South East MP Clive Betts said he was “worried” the move meant schools “virtually next door to each other have very different attitudes to exclusion” and that online schools would give high-excluding schools an “easy way out”.

“Instead of having to provide an education,



‘Sometimes we make this assumption that school is making them stressed. However, schools have been around in the same format for over 100 years’

they can just say ‘oh well, they’re studying online.’”

Not-in-school pupils push demand

All three of the councils signed up with Sophia High have soaring numbers of children not in school. In Northumberland, for example, the number of permanently excluded pupils in alternative provision (AP) in September 2023 was 144, double the number in 2021.

Last year, the council failed to meet its legal duty to secure full-time “suitable provision” by day six of their exclusion for one in four of the youngsters. With many councils harbouring huge ‘high needs’ funding deficits, the cost benefits are also likely to be attractive.

Viney says not having a physical building and the associated overheads means his school is a “cost effective model”.

Its fees are £7,500 a year, which is not much



Clive Betts

lower than the £8,000 the Institute for Fiscal Studies says state schools got last year from government to educate a pupil. However, they are much lower than the £56,000 average cost of private special and AP schools.

A placement at TCES National Online School,

Long read: Online schools



TCES Student Daniel and his mum Louise

Photo credit: Chris Pascoe

which caters for pupils with special needs and recently become the second accredited online provider, is just over £25,000.

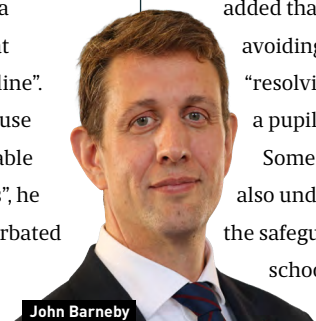
The online school has 37 pupils with placements lasting an average of 28 weeks, all funded by councils. But it is aiming for 100 by the end of the school year.

But John Barneby, chief executive of Oasis Community Learning, warned online schools “can’t become a way of off-rolling the most challenging students, or be just about reducing costs”.

‘They’re still hidden from sight’

Covid lockdowns gave most families and schools their first real taste of remote education. Viney says while most “hated” it, for a minority it led to an “awakening” that “their child was happier learning online”.

Half of Minerva’s pupils use it because “their previous school has not been able to support their mental health needs”, he said, adding this is something “exacerbated by social media”.



John Barneby

‘Being in school is how signs of hunger, poverty, abuse, and poor mental health are picked up and dealt with’

But education commentator Ben Newmark said the decline in youngsters’ mental health seems to correlate with increased screen time, questioning whether more screen time was the answer.

“Sometimes we make this assumption that school is making them stressed,” he added. “However, schools have been around in the same format for over 100 years.”

Education consultant Charlotte Davies added that “studying at home is also just avoiding the school system” rather than “resolving the underlying issues” of why a pupil might be refusing school.

Some senior Ofsted inspectors are also understood to be concerned about the safeguarding implications of online school learners not having their

cameras turned on during lessons.

Minerva pupils require “special dispensation” to have their cameras off. But Viney admits it’s “very hard to police cameras on” especially with “self-conscious teens”.

Janet Doherty, headteacher of Manchester Hospital School, said “even though somebody is still marking them present on a register ... those pupils are [still] hidden from sight.”

Barneby added that: “Sadly for many, being in school is how signs of hunger, poverty, abuse, and poor mental health are picked up and dealt with.”

Minerva also only offers four hours of live lessons a day, with three hours for self-study where pupils are left to their own devices.

“The danger is that those young people who actually need more support, more intervention,

Long read: Online schools

and more guidance may be forced out of mainstream schools and further towards the edges of society," Barneby added.

However, McBride claims learners who were "broken with anxiety" when they first enrolled have "gained the confidence" to return to their mainstream school months later.

William was enrolled by his mum Susan Ballantyne in Minerva two years ago when he was in year eight. He had been "badly bullied" and missed six months of schooling. She paid the fees herself.

But after complaining to the local government ombudsman over how no AP had been offered for her son, Plymouth council was ordered to pay her back the £14,800.

William remains dual registered with his mainstream school, part of Westcountry Schools Trust, which carries out "laid back and friendly" termly home visits. William's EHCP is still being finalised, but Plymouth has already agreed that Minerva will be his education provider until he is 16.

A council spokesperson said it only commissions online schools "in extremely exceptional situations where this is required".

Sarah Martin-Denham, associate professor of Care and Education at Sunderland University, said there is "no reason not to offer" online schooling "if [it] works" for those families and is "good quality ... For some, it could be a pathway back into a school."

'Schools are more than just for learning'

But Newmark said expansion of online learning should only be "in response to genuine pupil need, and not at moments of crisis or because parents are unhappy with a particular aspect of their child's school".

He is concerned that sending out the "unconscious message that if your child is not finding school easy, there is another option" will result in the current school system "continuing to be impoverished".

"Schools are more than just places where learning happens – they have an important



Rosanne Barron

'There is no reason not to offer online schooling if it works for some families. For some, it could be a pathway back into a school'

social and community focus too, and children who do not attend do not benefit from this," he added, saying they are "potentially very dangerous" and should "remain second best to school instruction".

Online schools run student newspapers, assemblies and after school clubs to try and nurture that sense of community. Viney runs Minerva's weekly young entrepreneurs club himself.

But online schools also struggle with the more nuts and bolts elements of learning. While they must provide a "full curriculum or represent a child's main or only source of education" to get accreditation, Newmark questioned how effectively sex education, sports, music and practical subjects requiring specialist equipment can be taught remotely.

Rosanne Barron, an online science and maths teacher for British Online School and Oxford Education Online admits science experiments can be "tricky". She uses "virtual laboratories" or teaches simplified versions of experiments which can be done at home.

However, assessment has been her "biggest challenge... You can't just print off and hand out a work sheet and then take it in again".

One workaround could be hybrid schools. Pupils would attend in-person at least one day a week for practical subjects and sporting and social activities, while learning remotely on other days.

But education consultant Charlotte Davies says online learning is "inappropriate" until the age of eight because "the child is not capable of abstract thought".

Sophia Online takes pupils from age four. Kings Interhigh, another online school, accepts pupils aged seven.

While most online school providers are small companies, Kings Interhigh's parent company is Interhigh International, which is based in Bahrain and also runs a chain of traditional schools across 24 countries. Its profits rose from £1.7 million in 2021 to £2.4 million in 2022.

Where next?

The DfE says 21 out of 25 eligible online school providers have applied for accreditation, which it says "will give greater confidence to parents, carers and pupils accessing education through this route".

However government guidance still makes clear schools should only consider remote education "as a last resort" and when attendance is "not possible". Any "exceptional cases" for online learning, such as being affected by a SEND or mental health issue, should also include a "plan to reintegrate [the pupil] back to school".

For McBride, the accreditation focus and related market changes are a "major signal for the future of education".



Melissa McBride

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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TEACHER

Events in Israel and Gaza are the biggest challenge of my career

Lack of political and sector leadership on the Middle East unrest is leaving teachers exposed amid disinformation, disillusionment and discord, says one anonymous teacher

When I woke up on 8 October 2023, I messaged my senior team: "Is this something our student body are likely to engage in, and will staff need some guidance?"

What a naive question. I knew the answer. Yes, absolutely, yes. But nobody truly knows how to support and guide fully without abandoning their own identity.

Evidently, this includes our government. Ministers were quick to announce their support for Israel, so we knew that direction was on its way. We also knew that in the meantime we would need to navigate a careful path between teaching our pupils to think critically and maintaining political impartiality.

What we wanted was advice and guidance. What we needed were resources and suggestions for supporting our students. What we got was a letter, ten days later, outlining what the government was doing for the Jewish community (rightly, as we are seeing record numbers of hate crimes against Jews).

However, it offered no word

of support for Muslim students (the most targeted faith group in religiously motivated hate crimes, as reported last March).

By the time the letter was published, young people were already engrossed in news from the region, (social and mainstream), distrust for news outlets and the government had already brewed and misinformation and disinformation had already become entrenched. Students as young as 11 (and I can only speak for the secondary phase) were sharing videos of mothers clutching their dead babies, children crying over the corpses of their families and lying in mounds of rubble they had once called home.

To many young people in British schools, the notion that the world simply does not care about the suffering of Muslim children is now a deep-rooted belief. And so, it became incumbent upon us to find our own ways to respond to the situation in our schools.

Yes, there is guidance on political impartiality. Depending on your subject specialism, some of the pedagogy needed to address this may even feel somewhat intuitive. But spending evenings and weekends trying to keep up with what young people are witnessing through their screens wasn't on anyone's PGCE.

Even the rapidly growing sector



“Never has working in education felt so lonely

of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) consultancy with its focus on anti-racism has been greatly silent on this issue. Many teachers' social media streams are full of stories from the warzone, sadness at the lack of action from the education world, and anger at being left to their own devices to get this right in the classroom.

Never has working in education felt so lonely, pandemic included. Of all the challenging moments in my career, this has required the most support – practically and emotionally. After seven weeks of supporting students, reviewing curriculum, guiding staff, and having discussions with parents, I am utterly exhausted.

Equally, the amount of political impartiality left in me is incredibly limited. The injustices I've witnessed – from political powers and from many corners of the education world – have bestowed a weight like no other.

We all remember where we were when 9/11 happened and what we learned in the aftermath about our neighbours, friends and colleagues when hate against Muslims became

part of everyday life. Likewise, our pupils will never forget how the adults in their school lives lived up to their duty to protect, guide, support and care for them as they watched Gaza burn.

I implore staff in schools, consultants, the DfE, parents, mainstream media and social media influencers to remember this as they consider what to do next.

Schools need an informed approach on this issue. Organisations, reading and resources should be signposted to them. Teachers need training, not judging.

Sadly, I have little faith that the DfE can (let alone has the will) to do this. It's another reminder of how removed they are from the lives of young people and the teachers charged with their care. Little wonder both groups grow more upset and disillusioned.

Until someone steps up to the leadership plate, articles like this one will keep being written and educators like this one will keep wanting to quit.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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AKINDESEND adviser
and neurodiversity championWhistleblowers deserve better
than being ignored and victimised

Frances Akinde reflects on the consequences of choosing to speak out about malpractice and calls for genuine transparency and accountability

What do you do when you know something is wrong but nobody appears interested in doing anything about it? What do you do when you raise concerns and are told to 'forget it' or 'let it go'? I found myself in this situation in 2022. But rather than getting the support I needed, I became part of the 36 per cent of educators facing dismissal or feeling compelled to resign.

Whistleblowing in education, exposing wrongdoing or unethical practices, is crucial for upholding accountability and safeguarding students' wellbeing. However, recent findings by the charity Protect reveal that 72 per cent of whistleblowers working in education say they faced some form of detriment or harm after whistleblowing. "Too many whistleblowers working in schools are ignored and victimised for raising public interest concerns," the report states.

Termination agreements often follow. These agreements include provisions that outline the terms of separation, typically non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) and other

conditions that restrict the employee from disclosing certain information about their employment, including any wrongdoing or misconduct they may have witnessed.

NDAs were originally designed to protect trade secrets, proprietary information and confidential business or technical information. So why are they being used in education? Why would we not want our schools to be fully transparent and open to outside scrutiny to ensure that our students and their welfare are at the centre of everything we do?

You might expect that union members would find some protection, but this is not always the case. In fact, unions often advise employees to 'just get out' as the process of fighting can cause long-term stress and trauma.

But by preventing employees from speaking out about their experiences, these agreements are impeding efforts to address problems and hindering long-overdue and necessary reforms. No one in public services should be legally allowed to silence those trying to call out harmful practices – a case recently made in parliament by Maria Miller MP.

Many schools are run like businesses; businesses have reputations, goals and KPIs that do not always fit within a child-centred



“Rather than speaking up, many are forced to hide

approach. I strongly believe that this is a huge part of what is causing the many crises in education: exclusion rates are rising, cost is being prioritised over care and children are not being protected, sometimes even leading to avoidable deaths.

Yet rather than speaking up about it, many are forced to hide. Speaking out and admitting we could be doing better might jeopardise our Ofsted grading or affect our pupil numbers. Employees speaking out might bring reputational damage or negative attention that would force organisations to look within and change.

So many school leaders, current and former, have contacted me to share that if they didn't take an NDA, they would no longer be working in education. Others did speak out and have suffered that exact fate. Many are so mentally scarred from the gaslighting that followed that they are not working at all.

I am sure that each of us would rather an honest and transparent education system that worked collaboratively to meet the needs of every child. The problem is that none of us wants to go first.

Every incentive encourages us to put the short-term needs of our organisations before those of children and the long-term betterment of the system as a whole.

We must realign education from business and marketing principles to an ethical, values-driven service with the wellbeing of children at its heart.

No one should be forced to compromise their integrity when advocating for children. It might feel like realism to accept this as a norm, but it is a realism of a deeply cynical kind. NDAs for proprietary lesson plans and resources might be appropriate, but NDAs to hide malfeasance and harm to children or staff never are.

Speaking out is one of the most difficult things I've ever done. It has left me alone, emotionally and financially exposed, and facing an uncertain career future. But I'm convinced the lifelong harm I'd have suffered from remaining silent would have been far worse.

It's time to do away with NDAs – and if we can't, then better protection should at least be in place for those who are brave enough to speak out.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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**JOHN
COSGROVE**
Author and former headteacher

One year after Ruth's death, one month to detoxify Ofsted

Authorities now have a month to prevent future deaths by removing the toxic stress from our accountability system. But how?

Last month, Heidi Connor, Berkshire's senior coroner who presided over the inquest into Ruth Perry's death, sent a Regulation 28 Report To Prevent Future Deaths to His Majesty's chief inspector of schools (HMCI), the secretary of state for education and the chief executive of Reading borough council.

"In my opinion," Ms Connor told all three, "action should be taken to prevent future deaths and I believe you (and/or your organisation) have the power to take such action."

Those named have until 7 February to respond in writing, and while Ofsted will not be swept away as a result, we should expect significant changes to make the inspection process less stressful. Ms Connor insists the responses "must contain details of action taken or proposed to be taken, setting out the timetable for action".

A quarter of a century ago, I researched toxic stress and its effects on teachers and schools for my book *Breakdown: The Facts About Teacher Stress*. What I discovered then is backed up by Ms Connor's findings set out in

her report, as well as by 218 pieces of written evidence published by the education select committee's enquiry into Ofsted's work with schools.

These submissions, from organisations, parents, pupils, governors, academics, as well as serving and former teachers and school leaders make it very clear how and why Ofsted causes hugely toxic stress.

So, what should be in the three written responses? How can inspections be made less stressful so that the risk of future tragedies is minimised?

First, the secretary of state, Gillian Keegan needs to abolish one-word judgements, stop the practice of sacking headteachers for a single Ofsted failure and institute a better, more effective way of monitoring safeguarding, taking it away from the inspection of teaching and learning.

Incoming HMCI, Sir Martyn Oliver, has already stated his first priority will be his written response to the inquest findings. He should commit to ensuring all inspections are fair and transparent. Ofsted employees must always behave with courtesy, respect and honesty, and any found to have lied or manufactured evidence should be sacked.

Timings also need shaking up: the interminable waiting leading



“Planning for fundamental reform should also start now”

up to an inspection and afterwards for the publication of the report heap needless stress on school leaders. In addition, we need a fair, independent and effective appeals process.

Most important of all is that inconsistency and subjectivity must end. A whole industry has flourished on trying to second guess "what Ofsted wants": 'mocksteds' rack up the pressure on schools; senior leaders become inspectors for the inside knowledge; goalposts shift with frightening frequency.

All too often, headteachers and governors quite literally do not know what they must do to be sure of achieving a good outcome, particularly those in schools serving deprived areas. This is a huge source of stress and it is simply not good enough.

One consequence of the present inconsistency is that local authorities have 'link inspectors' who give them an inside track. The inquest heard that Reading Borough Council (RBC) abandoned Ruth in her hour of need. It believed the judgement on Caversham Primary

was unfair, yet withdrew Ruth's appeal against the verdict, choosing to prioritise its relationship with the lead inspector who was also its Ofsted link inspector. (It did this, let's be fair, imagining that in this way it could better serve its other schools).

RBC's written response to the coroner should be a model for local authorities and multi-academy trusts across the country. It needs to state baldly and simply that it will support its employees.

If the highest stakes are removed by Gillian Keegan while Sir Martyn ensures inspections are fair, transparent and consistent, there should be no need of link inspectors. In any case, RBC (like all LAs and MATs) are providers of schools; they need to remove themselves entirely from the policing.

These plans are for immediate implementation. They don't replace proper, fundamental reform of school inspection, planning for which should also start now. They are interim measures, but as first steps they signal a vital promise: never again.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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MUNIRA WILSON

Education spokesperson,
Liberal Democrats

Tutoring should be a permanent feature of our education system

Dedicated funding in the spirit of pupil premium would ensure tutoring's benefits don't return to being the preserve of those who can afford it, writes Munira Wilson

What is a good tutor worth? The answer depends on who you ask. Many families around the country who can afford a tutor will be able to give you an hourly rate – maybe even recommend a good one. But for hundreds of thousands of their disadvantaged counterparts, it's a moot point; tutoring is a long way out of their financial means.

Tutoring is one of the best, if not the best, educational intervention we can deploy (outside of the classroom) and yet in too many places it is restricted to only those who can afford it.

Hence, we must act if we are to right this injustice.

After all, this is an area in which Liberal Democrats have a track record of delivery. In 2011, the coalition brought the Pupil Premium – from the front page of the Liberal Democrat 2010 manifesto – into law. It allowed us to address the attainment gap in really tangible ways, and ensure that disadvantaged children could access some of the benefits that better off students get.

Tutoring represents a chance to recapture this mission; the belief that every child should be supported to reach their full potential.

The past few years have been tumultuous for children and young people. The pandemic exposed and exacerbated existing disparities, hitting the most vulnerable communities the hardest and throwing into stark relief differences in access to resources outside the classroom.

Some pupils spent lockdown e-learning on their own laptop in a quiet home office, others did their schoolwork late into the night in a shared room, having waited to access the family computer. Some did not have access to a laptop at all. One way we can start to bridge this gap is with dedicated funding for tutoring, which offers vital academic support to those who need it most.

That tutoring works is indisputable. I have visited tutoring provision at Southwark College and seen the impact first hand, and evaluation from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has shown an average impact of four months' additional progress over the course of a year.

Tutoring's benefit goes beyond academic improvement. On some of the greatest challenges we are seeing in schools – attendance,



“The government seem set to simply give up

confidence, and mental health – recent evidence shows tutoring having a positive impact. Some 85 per cent of parents said tutoring had positively impacted their child's confidence, with 68 per cent saying it had improved attendance. It is not a panacea; more can be done. But tutoring offers a proven, evidence-backed step in the right direction.

Unsurprisingly, tutoring is popular across the school system. It is liked by pupils, parents and teachers. However, despite its popularity, we know that money is tight for many schools and colleges, and thus cost is a barrier to access. Half of schools are not able to access the National Tutoring Programme in its final year because of funding issues. Of those that are using it, 40 per cent say they will not be able to continue after funding ends in 2024.

In practical terms, this will have one clear outcome: tutoring will vanish from many schools, who will simply not be able to fund the intervention themselves.

Killing off the idea of having dedicated funding for it at this stage would carry long-term risk:

losing the valuable infrastructure that has been built to provide tutoring to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to help them succeed.

The government pledged that tutoring would be the cornerstone of building back after Covid, which was a laudable statement of intent. But rather than putting in the funding and thought required to make tutoring a world-leading feature of our education system, they seem set to simply give up.

Tutoring will return to being the preserve of those who can afford it, and the most disadvantaged students will lose out.

So, what is a good tutor worth? For disadvantaged pupils, a tutor is worth the difference between reaching their potential and not. The difference between having the confidence to speak up in class or not. The difference between four months of progress or falling behind.

Tutoring is a truly valuable intervention. I am proud to support it. Only time will tell if the government agrees.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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ROB WILSON
Deputy Chair, Social Mobility Commission

Social mobility demands we learn more about no-excuses schools

Critics of no-excuses schools need more evidence for their criticisms, while policy makers should look more closely at what makes them successful, writes Rob Wilson

For many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, a good education can be the key that unlocks career, income and social mobility. Sadly, the already large attainment gap between disadvantaged students and their peers at Key Stage 2 has widened since the pandemic, increasing by 11 per cent between the school years 2018 to 2019 and 2021 to 2022.

Furthermore, in 2021/22, 43 per cent of students eligible for free school meals met the expected standard for reading and maths, compared to 66 per cent of other pupils.

Doing everything we can to get education policy right is therefore a priority and a moral imperative. Looking at what is successful elsewhere could help us understand what might also work here.

US charter schools have been the topic of much debate since their introduction in the early 1990s. They are publicly funded but privately managed and were set up to offer more options for schooling, particularly by promoting innovative teaching and learning methods.

Some emphasise STEM, others focus on arts. 'No-excuses' charter

schools centre their educational philosophy around high expectations.

Although there is no clear consensus on what exactly constitutes 'no excuses', most believe in high behavioural expectations, additional parental involvement, and a relentless focus on the academic achievement of all students, irrespective of background.

A typical charter school in the US is no more effective at increasing test scores than a typical public (state) school. However, when it comes to no-excuses charter schools, some evidence suggests they yield stronger academic results in maths and literacy – particularly for disadvantaged students in urban areas.

There are similar free schools in the UK that yield very strong academic results in challenging areas. However, they are not to everyone's taste.

Critics here as well as in the US are concerned that they over-emphasise academic learning and strict disciplinary standards to the detriment of some students' socioemotional growth and wellbeing – particularly for pupils with SEN.

It has also been suggested that 'difficult' students are off-rolled in the interest of the school, against what's best for the student. Some also claim that significant additional funding (largely amassed from philanthropists) could go further to



“The successes and outcomes of these schools are stark

explain their successes than their teaching methods and ethos.

However, it would require more evidence in support of these criticisms before any firm conclusions could be drawn. Meanwhile, it's easy to see how chaotic classrooms make teaching and learning difficult.

In evaluations of no-excuses schools, the evidence suggests that strictness on behaviour embeds self-control, self-reliance and self-esteem, which in turn inspire enduring confidence, belonging and good behaviour.

Some research also suggests that the following five good practices often found in no-excuses charter schools work well in supporting pupil attainment: frequent teacher-to-student feedback, data-driven instruction, regular high-quality tutoring, increased class time, and high expectations of students.

Another aspect shown to make a difference is that in comparison to regular US public (state) schools, charter schools have greater jurisdiction to manage their own budgets, implement and design the curriculum, and hire and train teachers.

This is consistent with the push to give academy schools greater freedoms, although there is little evidence that providing schools with

additional freedom alone boosts student achievement.

So, while we should not assume that what works in one country can necessarily easily transfer to another, we should look closely at the successes of no-excuses charter schools. Obtaining a well-rounded view of education policy elsewhere could be key to transforming the educational outcomes of disadvantaged students here – and help to narrow our attainment gap.

Recent Progress 8 scores show that some schools adopting similar approaches in the UK are performing extremely well academically and that they typically operate in challenging areas with diverse intakes.

The questions for policymakers are therefore whether these practices will work in a range of different communities and whether more schools should adopt them, giving more parents access to their model.

The successes and outcomes of these schools are stark, so we should consider why these practices work. We can't afford not to explore whether they could be an integral part of the solution to the attainment gap.

The latest social mobility commission podcast explores US charter schools in more detail. [Listen here.](#)

INTRODUCING...



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THE HOME OF

THE REVIEW

OUTSTANDING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Author: Peter Hughes

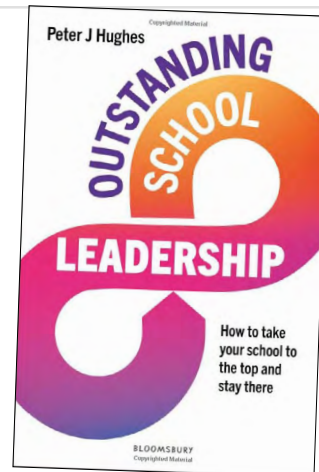
Publisher: Bloomsbury

ISBN: 1801993297

Publication date: 7 December 2023

Reviewer: Dr Jeffery Quaye, National director of education and standards, Aspirations Academies Trust

BOOK
TV
FILM
RADIO
EVENT
RESOURCE



Many school leaders work relentlessly to provide at least a good standard of education for the pupils in their care in terms of outcomes and opportunities.

Nonetheless, only a few schools are truly outstanding when considering the quality of education they provide and the outcomes their pupils achieve in national assessments or examinations.

With this book and through the lens of his experience as CEO of a multi-academy trust serving a community with high levels of deprivation and social challenges, Peter Hughes tries to answer the question: 'what does outstanding look like in education, and why are most schools not?'

Hughes draws on his experience of education, his own challenging background, and his drive for social justice to set out key pillars, values and practices of school leadership that he has learned on his journey from Australia to England and from teacher to CEO.

The book's structure is set out in nine main sections which each provide a case study offering a narrative of leadership through storytelling – in which Hughes draws on his Australian vernacular to refer to as the yarn.

The book draws on literature (albeit in a limited way) to advance debate, and each section concludes with top tips.

One of the book's key insights is that the role of principal and CEO are fundamentally different. Yet, the first generation of MAT CEOs are largely drawn from school leadership and, like Hughes, had to follow a steep learning curve. Not all were prepared for that shift, nor for the tribulations of

building a new multi-academy trust from scratch.

The new DfE multi-academy trust leadership development programme is expressly aimed at filling that gap for the next generation of trust leaders, and this book would make a fantastic accompaniment for anyone who is on that journey.

It's remarkable, in the absence of such training, that we have so many high-performing MATs. But the road to 'outstanding' is certainly made easier by getting the fundamentals right at the start.

For Mossbourne Federation, the key was to focus on a clearly defined mission: 'we are changing children's lives for the better by creating an environment where learning is the norm'. The MAT's policies and practices, structures and values were then all aligned to that aim.

Filling the shoes of his famously hard-nosed and highly successful predecessor, Sir Michael Wilshaw, can't have been an easy thing to do, and Hughes talks about the pressure associated with that. But it's also evident that Wilshaw's influence has brought many benefits.

Hughes follows his point about the value of being mission-centric with this: "Quite simply, if an initiative, idea, or strategy doesn't fit the mission, why are we doing it?"

Having personally received some coaching from Sir Michael, I can honestly say that it's a sentence either of these men might have written. But that doesn't mean outstanding leadership is formed in a rigid mould.

Far from it. It is clear throughout the book that Hughes has sustained educational excellence at a growing Mossbourne Federation through his own authentic leadership approach, grounded in

his working-class background and disruptive school experience from early childhood.

Where the book is a little weaker is in the application of theoretical elements. For example, Hughes draws on the notion of 'wicked problems', but it is not entirely clear to me whether this relates to school improvement or to scaling the success of Mossbourne Academy across the trust.

But the practical aspects more than make up for this. From recruitment to attainment, and from teaching and learning to developing talent, it provides a crystal-clear example of what it means to develop an exceptional school and to sustain an outstanding education.

More than that, it's all founded on a positive and empowering view of human nature. "Most people," Hughes posits, "have an inherent desire to belong and be an important part of something greater than themselves".

The secret of outstanding leadership may very well be to tap into that, and for that insight alone it's an essential read for all leaders in education – particularly those with interest in multi-academy trust leadership.

★★★★☆
Rating

THE CONVERSATION
LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM

Shekeila Scarlett
Chair of governors,
Stoke Newington
School and
Sixth Form

NEW YEAR. NEW COVENANT?

Jeremy Barnes, better known on social media as The Bald Headteacher, rounded off 2023 with a blog that left me deeply pensive. In it, he makes a passionate call to action for 2024: to move from the contractual approach that characterises our educational system and towards a more collaborative and compassionate covenant, working together to meet the diverse needs of students.

Drawing on his own experience as parent and headteacher, he highlights the continuous challenges faced every day by educators, from attendance to behaviour and more.

All, Barnes argues, are evidence of an unsustainable system and of the need for a new way of framing relationships, not just with staff, children and families but between schools too. For example, he talks about the impact that pooling resources, knowledge, and expertise can have on individual settings.

From a governance point of view, it all makes a lot of sense. I've often asked myself, while sat in meetings, why we are only talking to ourselves. The whole sector is facing similar issues, and as they say, a problem shared is a problem halved.

With the possibility of a new government in 2024, Barnes's blog fosters a sense of hope and optimism for change that is just what the sector needs after another challenging year. Timely, thought-provoking and on point: Let's make this the year we to ditch operating in silos.

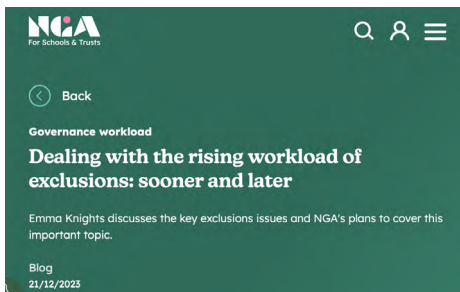


GOVERNOR EXCLUSION

When I read the NGA's November report, Taking stock of governance workload, it was with a deep sense of feeling seen. With it, the NGA posed some tangible proposals for the school sector and DfE to implement to manage increasingly unsustainable governance workloads. In her latest blog, the organisation's co-CEO, Emma Knights, reflects on the report's high levels of engagement – evidence that it 'clearly hit a nerve'.

Here though, Knights zeroes in on a particular aspect of this growing workload problem: exclusions. More than that, she endorses the complete removal of exclusion review panels from governors' responsibilities, advocating for a qualified and experienced independent reviewer to take on the responsibility, as recommended by the legal reform charity, JUSTICE.

I agree, and not just because I've personally found this work highly time-consuming and intricately challenging. In fact, I've sat on both sides of this table.



Going from being a young person who was subject of a pupil disciplinary committee to being a governor and chairing exclusion panels has truly been eye-opening. For more about that, you can hear me discussing the experience on The Governors' Podcast. In the meantime, suffice to say I'm glad the

NGA is garnering support to change the involvement of governors in this process.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Finally this week, I'm sure we would all agree that we would feel 2024 had been successful if it was the year the rising tide of families using food banks finally turned. Sadly, that's unlikely to be the case, and in that context this podcast with UCL professor of sociology, Alice Bradbury is of particular importance.

The podcast hears of the findings of research conducted into the use of food banks in schools and the impact this has on children's learning and engagement.

Conducted in six schools across England and with insights from teachers and senior leaders, the research found that having food and other items available to families makes a difference to concentration, attendance and participation of students within the school eco-system.

This will be of little surprise to *Schools Week* readers, but nevertheless useful to have evidenced.

What was perhaps more enlightening was the podcast's exploration of what prevents food bank use and why school food banks are so important. Most food banks tend to be in religious buildings, which can pose an obvious restriction when you stop to think about it.

Schools, on the other hand, are open to all – and not just open, but physically accessible. While it seems quite clear now, I hadn't really acknowledged how much schools, outside of education, are truly a hub for everything and everyone.

As a governor, I will definitely be campaigning for the government to increase support to schools in this space.

What impact do food banks in schools have on children's learning?

Alice Bradbury
Professor of Sociology of Education
Co-Director, Helen Hamlyn Centre for Pedagogy

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Research for the Real World

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts

The Knowledge

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



How can we engage more primary pupils in science?

Marianne Cutler, Director of policy and curriculum innovation, Association for Science Education

While it's not always the easiest to teach, the recent PISA results show the need to enhance science performance in UK schools. On the surface, the subject may not appeal to every pupil. However, maximising engagement with, and curiosity about, its positive role in shaping today's society is important to uncover individual interests. But how?

John Hattie suggests that "the most important factor for improving achievement is when teachers increase the range of their styles of teaching, thus encouraging dialogue".

Therefore, considering a more conversational approach, facilitating discussion and debate in the classroom could be key to helping pupils more actively participate in science learning, develop key subject skills including communication and critical thinking and, importantly, enjoy the subject.

The idea is not new. A 2017 study by Sheffield Hallam for the EEF found that the use of dialogic teaching approaches in English, science and maths resulted in approximately two months of additional progress in the subjects.

One key challenge for teachers is that more abstract or complex scientific concepts can be daunting or appear inaccessible when first introduced, particularly for pupils not naturally drawn to the subject or those with low prior attainment. If a topic is more difficult to grasp, pupils can often disengage and even become disillusioned.

Incidentally, the same applies to attempts to improve girls' participation in STEM; they face lower academic confidence brought on by harmful stereotypes from an early age, which manifests in their attitudes to these subjects throughout their schooling.

Dialogic teaching challenges this by encouraging pupils to dig deeper into topics, share ideas and question concepts rather than absorbing and regurgitating facts.

Recently endorsed within the EEF's Improving Primary Science report (based on a systemic



review of approaches to primary science teaching), the second of its six recommendations for improving primary science centres on improving science learning by capitalising on the power of dialogue, creating a collaborative learning environment, and cultivating reason and justification.

This way of teaching and learning not only promotes active participation but can also be useful in exploring potentially contentious topics and promoting their expression of informed opinions.

For example, when learning about vaccinations teachers can spark debate and discussion linked to science, history and modern-day impacts. Students can be challenged to consider the differences between the ethics and scientific processes used in historical clinical trials, such as the work of Dr Jenner to produce the smallpox vaccine, compared to a modern equivalent like the development of the coronavirus jab.

The prevalence of non-specialist science teachers in primary schools means many may find putting this theory into practice challenging.

However, there are a range of professional development, free training opportunities and resources, including those from ASE, to elevate classroom learning and equip teachers with the knowledge and confidence to implement the dialogic approach.

Here are a few considerations:

- Reframe "mistakes" as a learning opportunity rather than a failing by creating a supportive atmosphere, where children aren't afraid of trying
- Make space for children who may be shy or quiet by empowering them to voice their thoughts to the group
- Consider the physical environment of the classroom, including the layout of tables and chairs, to facilitate open discussion
- Give adequate time for children to think about their opinions and formulate answers in their own time; don't intervene too soon in group discussions

By focusing learning through the lens of discussion, pupils are more inclined to actively participate in discussions, preventing any child from disengaging or sitting quietly while more interested peers participate more animatedly.

They are encouraged to formulate and voice their own opinions and thoughts, which can help bolster self-confidence and reinforce the belief that every child can 'do' science.

By participating in discussions that value different perspectives and interpretations, all pupils – including girls and those who may have historically struggled more with the subject – can feel more invested in science, more comfortable to share their thoughts and, in turn, more fully engaged in their learning.

Week in

Westminster

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

FRIDAY

We spotted this week that Nadhim Zahawi (remember him?) appears to have turned his hand to acting.

But which role did the Conservative former education secretary take up in the recent ITV series *Mr Bates vs The Post Office*? Himself!

The MP dutifully re-enacted his line of questioning to post office bosses during a House of Commons committee inquiry in the Horizon computer system. We are reminded of Michael Fabricant's cameo in the BBC classic *House of Cards*.

Zahawi has been very vocal recently about the scandal. Maybe the MP, who was sacked as Tory party chair last year over his tax affairs, is hoping for a redemption arc?

Coming up next week, Gavin Williamson plays himself in a reboot of the classic show *Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em*.

Gillian Keegan's grand plan to tackle school absences with a marketing campaign and a few new attendance hubs is characteristically underwhelming, but it's also caused deep frustrations among SEND campaigners.

They've rightly pointed out that a one-size-fits-all approach to getting kids back to school ignores the real struggles faced by some pupils, who will need much better support.

And so, campaigners such as Square Peg and Not Fine in School have launched their own campaign, with the tagline 'HM Government – Underfunding and

uncaring since 2010'.

Retweets for the various social media posts already dwarf those for Keegan's initial tweet.

TUESDAY

In another sign that dyed-in-the-wool Conservatives don't much fancy their chances at the next election, a former academies minister has taken to lobbying the opposition on matters close to his heart.

Lord Nash, once a key ally of Michael Gove and the founder of the Future Academies chain, joined the Labour shadow education team in the front row for a speech by Bridget Phillipson at the Centre for Social Justice think tank this week.

But he wasn't there as a silent witness. When questions from stakeholders were invited, he was first in line, backing Labour's pledge to legislate for a register of children not in school and calling for a clampdown on home education.

"I'd be surprised if more than 20,000 [families] are really competent to do so. It's essentially an unregulated area. Local authorities have very small powers of inspection and there are concerns about serious safeguarding issues.

"Given this is such a difficult area, is this something you would please, when you bring forward legislation on the register, also look at tightening up [in terms of] the inspection and regulation regime?"

He's clearly given up asking his own party, who have been pledging a home education register for years to no avail.

WEDNESDAY

The government is inviting suggestions

for names for a new service aimed at helping school business professionals and leaders find information, guidance and services provided by the Department for Education.

A survey circulated by the department states they would "like to get your feedback on potential names" for the new service.

The survey suggests some, including 'My school gateway', 'DfE connect', 'Get help with school management', 'Education link' and 'View my school actions'.

Team Week in Westminster will definitely not be spending its Friday afternoon mailing in silly suggestions... Hubby McHubface anyone?

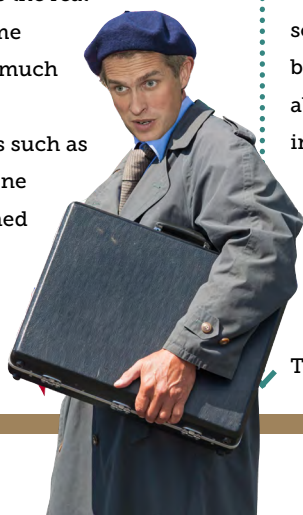
THURSDAY

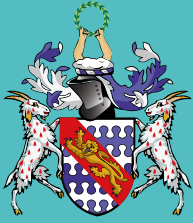
IT firm Fujitsu has rightly come under severe criticism for its role in the Post Office scandal and its continuing work on government contracts has made many squeamish.

As fellow education journalist Chris Parr points out on X, the most recent DfE spending report shows it recently spent £88,500 with Fujitsu Services Ltd for "customer experience & digital" services, and almost £400,000 on apprenticeship and skills bootcamps. Awks.

While the Conservative government has finally acted to exonerate the convictions of hundreds of sub-postmasters, the scandal is causing growing problems for our Gill. Her husband, Michael Keegan, served as Fujitsu's UK CEO from 2014 to 2015.

His name even came up as journalists put questions to Phillipson this week. The shadow education secretary said it was "right the public inquiry considers all of these questions".





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Calling all tenacious leaders



Start your school leadership journey

Title: Principal

Start date: September 2024, or earlier

We are looking for the next generation of school leaders who are determined to eradicate disadvantage and reduce the extensive variation in English schools.

AET exists to be the proof of concept that it is possible to deliver an **entitlement to excellence** for **every child**, regardless of where they live, what school they go to, or their family circumstances. We want to be a network of schools which outperform their context and to do that we need exceptional leaders.

National leadership recruitment campaign

We believe that leaders are made, not born and want to transform what it means to support, develop and champion school principals. When we say we take talent development seriously, we mean it.

We're looking for the next generation of school leaders who are seriously ambitious for children and communities; people who know that no work is more important or significant in terms of human impact than building excellent schools.

This work takes time and commitment; it takes at least five years to embed excellence across every dimension of school life.

So, we have designed a leadership development framework to significantly invest in our Principals: providing them with the support of a national network, a region of schools, and a dedicated package for learning and improvement.

If you want to serve young people, and especially those who experience disadvantage - those who aren't yet getting what they deserve - we'd love to hear from you.

Application timeline

We're looking for the next generation of tenacious, high-potential school leaders.

We are open to all who are eligible to work in England and who think they might be ready to be a principal. We will work with all candidates to determine readiness, provide support to be ready and keep in touch about opportunities that we have in the future.

We are recruiting for roles in every region at AET and will match successful candidates to schools.

Find out more and register your interest by 22nd January:

www.AETLeaders.org

We will give you the space and agency to champion your own development. If successful, you will receive:

- An individual development account of up to £100,000 over five years
- Experiential learning, including study tours
- High support and high challenge from a Regional Education Director
- One to one executive coaching
- Evidence informed practice
- A year long induction programme
- And the option of a professional sabbatical after 5 years.

We're looking for candidates who are:

- Self aware: Those who thrive in a high challenge and high support environment, who want the space and agency to develop their leadership skills
- Network minded: Those who believe that the job is not done unless all schools in our network and beyond are serving their communities well
- Intellectually curious: Those who have the confidence to work in an evidence informed approach, with an unrelenting drive to be the best leader they can be.

Whether you're an existing or aspiring principal, bring your drive to serve young people, your determination to be the best leader, and your dedication to create lasting change for communities across the country.

We have opportunities in every region across England and will match successful candidates to schools.



Head of Secondary and Sixth Form Education

JOB DETAILS

- **Salary:** £115k
- **Hours:** Full-time (37 hours)
- **Contract Type:** Permanent
- **Reporting to:** CEO
- **Responsible for:** Providing strategic oversight of the quality of provision in the Trust's secondary and sixth form academies.

OVERVIEW

Altus Education Partnership is an ethical and values-driven multi-academy trust, deeply rooted in the borough of Rochdale. We have a simple, but noble, mission: to advance education in the area and enable young people to lead happy and fulfilling lives while making positive differences to their communities and society.

We aim to fulfil our mission by intelligently sequencing learning from early years all the way through to 18. We are in a unique position to be able to achieve this, with four academies across the primary, secondary and tertiary phases. Additionally, Altus is on the cusp of significant growth with another seven schools currently working with us in a Trust Partnership Agreement. This means that while we currently serve around 4,500 students and 450 staff in four academies, within three years this could easily increase to around 10,000 students, 1,000 staff and ten or more institutions.

YOUR ROLE AS HEAD OF SECONDARY AND SIXTH FORM EDUCATION

We are seeking a highly

experienced and effective leader who can demonstrate that they have had a positive, significant, and sustained impact on education and the lives of young people. It is crucial too that the successful candidate has an ethical, nuanced, and evidence-based approach to their work and fully subscribes to our vision, mission, and values. As our Head of Secondary and Sixth form Education, you will be at the heart of Altus' strategic leadership team dedicated to improving the education and lives of young people in the borough. You will also line manage the headteachers of Kingsway Park High School and Edgar Wood Academy as well as the principal of Rochdale Sixth Form College. The role is a critical one for the next stage of the Trust's development, and key responsibilities include:

- Providing consistently motivational leadership to academy leaders.
- Critically evaluating and reporting on the performance of the secondary schools and the sixth form college.
- Driving improvement in the secondary and post-16 phases of the Trust
- Collaborating with the Head of Primary Education to improve curriculum sequencing between the different phases of education
- Leading and participating in Trust professional development to help us meet our strategic objectives.

WHY ALTUS EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP?

- **Diverse Academies:** Join a

vibrant community that includes award-winning institutions like Rochdale Sixth Form College, recognised nationally as the Sixth Form College of the Year 2021.

- **Educational Excellence:** Altus is committed to providing high-quality education, and you will be instrumental in driving operational efficiency and organisational development to support this commitment.
- **Community Impact:** Born from the desire to enhance education in Rochdale, Altus Education Partnership positively impacts the local community through its academies.

HOW TO APPLY

Ready to be a part of Altus Education Partnership's transformative journey? Complete the application form and email it to recruitment@altusep.com. Visit www.altusep.com for more information.

APPLICATION DEADLINE

22nd January

INTERVIEWS

Expected to take place in the week commencing 29th January.

Altus Education Partnership is an equal opportunity employer committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people, and vulnerable adults. Enhanced DBS check required.

Join us in making a difference! Altus Education Partnership - Transforming Lives Through Education.

→ [Click here to find out more](#)

HEADTEACHER

Calling all passionate and innovative leaders!



Are you seeking to make a real difference in the lives of young people with social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs? Do you have a proven track record of success in creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment? If so, we're excited to announce an exciting opportunity to lead North Star 240°, a SEMH secondary school in Bristol.

As our Headteacher, you will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of NS240° and its students.

You will be responsible for:

- Overseeing the overall academic and pastoral care of the school
- Developing and implementing a vision for the school that prioritizes the needs of all learners
- Leading a team of dedicated staff and fostering a culture of collaboration
- Nurturing a positive and supportive learning environment for all students
- Building strong partnerships with families, the community, and external agencies

We are seeking an experienced and inspiring leader with a deep understanding of SEMH needs. You should be a compassionate and empathetic individual with a strong commitment to equity and social justice. You should also possess excellent communication and interpersonal skills, as well as the ability to build relationships with students, staff, parents, and the wider community. Leading an SEMH school can be challenging, we are looking for an experienced individual who is resilient and adaptable.

You will be part of:

- An exciting and innovative development of a Primary and Secondary learning community
- A dedicated team of staff who strive for excellence
- A caring and inclusive ethos
- A school which has supportive Governors and Parents with high expectations of the school

In return, we offer a competitive salary, pension, a supportive team, training and development and the potential for career progression to the right person.



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Academy



Join us to make a lasting difference to our coastal community

Looking for teachers and leaders in subject areas including
English, mathematics, modern foreign languages, science and sociology



Located in the heart of Hastings, Ark Alexandra Academy is a large, two-campus secondary school and sixth form. Our aim is to provide students with academic excellence and life skills. Under bold new leadership already having rapid impact, now is an exciting time for dedicated teachers to join our close-knit team on the next stage of our journey.

Ark Alexandra is part of Ark, one of the country's most successful academy trusts. We are committed to investing in our teachers' professional development through collaboration across our extensive school network. By prioritising staff support and progression, we open doors for impactful careers focused on student growth.

We are currently looking for teachers and leaders in subject areas including English, mathematics, modern foreign languages, science and sociology.

We offer salaries that are 2.5% higher than main pay scale, twice as many training days, weekly staff training tailored to school needs, coaching for every teacher, protected co-planning time and access to high-quality professional development and qualifications like NPQML and NPQSL. As part of the Ark network, you will also benefit from opportunities to collaborate across our 39 schools and network-wide events with leading minds in education.

Interested in a new challenge? Hastings boasts a thriving cultural scene, an extensive seafront and excellent transport links to London and Brighton. We can offer relocation packages up to £5,000 to support you with the process.

We're looking for great teachers to join us and make a difference where it matters most.

Please click here to view all roles at Ark Alexandra Academy.



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School Adviser: Primary Leadership - £56,752 PA + Benefits

We invite you to apply to join our team as a Primary School Adviser in the Diocese of Leeds.

Did you choose a career in education to make a difference? Are you passionate about transforming the lives of young people and their communities? Then why not unlock your potential and commit to a fresh start in 2024?

We offer:

- The chance to work as part of a mutually supportive advisory team. All ex-headteachers, committed to the power of education to transform lives and communities.
- Induction and ongoing support and training. For example, all of our advisers have been supported to become serving SIAMS inspectors.
- The opportunity to access a different way of working. Although, like headship, the role still involves challenge, hard work, commitment and variety- every day is definitely different!

Apply now, make a fresh start and be a catalyst for positive change in education!

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Trust

Seeking Success for All

CEO

Salary From £135,000 dependent upon experience

Compass Education Trust seek a committed and passionate CEO to take forward our Vision, Values and Ethos. The ideal candidate will provide inspirational, strategic, and professional leadership to ensure the continuing development and success of the Trust and its academies.

Responsible for the improvement of educational standards, equality of access and achievement for all, as well as effective use of resources, the CEO should seek to develop the vision and aims of the Trust to create a platform for high standards of learning in all aspects.

An informal conversation with Trustees and outgoing CEO is welcomed and can be arranged by contacting Natalie Efreme, Clerk to Trust Board, via natalie.efreme@compasstrust.org.

Full details can be found on our website <https://www.compasstrust.org/>

Date Required: September 2024 or as soon as reasonably possible

Closing Date: 19 January 2024

Interview Date: 29 January 2024 and 5 February 2024



A creative, aspirational headteacher is required to lead the happy and successful Preston Primary School

Key dates: Closing date Monday 19th February 2024, September start.
Contract: Full time, permanent
Salary: L16-L21 depending on skills, experience and performance.

A brief context of the school

Preston is a popular primary school, with an integrated provision for children with ASC, overlooking the sea in Torbay. Following a routine inspection in July 2023, Ofsted wrote a very positive report, maintaining the Good judgement. The website has further details about everything they do.

Key Requirements & Duties

- To provide high quality strategic leadership in all aspects of leading a school and inspire skilled and committed staff to deliver excellent outcomes for children
- Excellent leadership, people and teaching skills, using your knowledge of evidence-based research and current successful education strategies
- A good knowledge of SEND, commitment to inclusive education for children of all abilities and backgrounds.

www.preston.torbay.sch.uk

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The Shared Learning Trust

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