

# SCHOOLS WEEK

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

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# SCHOOLS WEEK

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# Well-meaning changes are afoot – will they have the desired impact?

Ofsted has today published its detailed response on inspection changes after the death of headteacher Ruth Perry (pages 4 and 5).

As we wrote last week, Sir Martyn Oliver has made a welcome start. Further proposals today are also sensible and are likely to improve inspections.

But, again, will it suffice without a change to the one-word judgement?

Our piece with the school leaders who were the first to encounter the new rapid revisit policy suggests the answer might be no (page 6): two dedicated teachers have resigned because of their “traumatic” experience.

As the Confederation of School Trusts also points out, while reform of Ofsted is right, what about the wider accountability system?

What we ask of schools has shifted monumentally post-Covid. But the level of accountability they face hasn’t budged.

Schools are struggling to get pupils back into schools, mostly due to issues not in their gift to resolve. They are lacking support from critical services such as for mental health issues.

The impact of soaring costs and rising

pay are also now really hitting, exposing a worrying vulnerability, particularly around primary schools (page 7) who are also battling with falling pupil numbers.

We are seeing a huge demographic shift and we need a systematic approach to dealing with this. Currently, there isn’t one.

Instead, many trusts are raiding their secondary school surpluses, or reserves, to maintain the status quo – but this won’t last.

The primary school viability issue has also surfaced this week in the early recommendations from the government’s workload taskforce (15).

As leaders of smaller schools point out, the funding they get is just not enough to take tasks such as photocopying and decorating classrooms away from teachers (page 14).

There is also an important point about academisation: three-fifths of primaries are still maintained, and under councils which have their own issues with financial stability.

Ministers may also want to think about the adequacy of their response to RAAC – with a devastating report revealing just how different school has been for pupils in affected schools (page 10).

## Most read online this week:

- 1 **Performance-related pay in schools to be scrapped from September**
- 2 **DfE’s workload reduction taskforce: the ‘early’ recommendations in full**
- 3 **Schools offered £3k to appoint ‘maths champions’**
- 4 **Michaela school taken to High Court over prayer ban**
- 5 **Ruth Perry’s sister ‘deeply concerned’ over inspection resumption**

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# Ofsted reforms to ensure 'no more tragedies'

LUCAS CUMISKEY

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Ofsted will look at “decoupling” safeguarding from judgements, publish reports quicker, and appoint a sector expert to lead an independent inquiry into how it responded to the death of Ruth Perry.

Today Sir Martyn Oliver, the chief inspector, accepted all of the senior coroner Heidi Connor's recommendations as he issued a heartfelt apology for the watchdog's role in the death of the Caversham Primary School headteacher.

Both Ofsted and the Department for Education have published their response to Connor's prevention of future deaths report (see the full list of changes on page 5).

Oliver “apologised sincerely for the part our inspection of her school played in [Ruth's] death” and said: “As the new HMCI, I will do everything in my power to help ensure that inspections are carried out with professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect and with consideration for staff welfare.

“Such tragedies should never happen again, and no one should feel as Ruth did.”

## The Ofsted changes

The inspectorate will run a formal, internal review of how safeguarding fits with individual inspection judgements, including whether it should be “decoupled” from the leadership grade and have its own judgement entirely.

An independent, expert-led learning review is to be commissioned into Ofsted's response to Perry's death. The inspectorate will review its “quality assurance processes” with a view to slashing “the time between inspection and publication of the report.”

An “expert reference group” will also be created to “provide constructive challenge to Ofsted,” focusing on “aspects of training and where well-being might be incorporated more explicitly across the education inspection framework.”

Connor last month ruled an Ofsted inspection in November 2022 contributed to Perry's suicide in January last year.

This will come alongside the “Big Listen” consultation and further mental health training that has been already promised.

Ofsted also admitted that there had “previously



Sir Martyn Oliver

Ruth Perry

been no clear, written policy for pausing inspections.”

During Perry's inquest, Connor said it was “suggested by Ofsted witnesses that it is an option to pause an ongoing inspection because of reasons of teacher distress.”

As revealed last week by Schools Week, a new pause policy will be established. The inspection handbook is set to be updated today.

## The DfE's response

The government's response had fewer clear-cut changes. The DfE has reviewed how it communicates with schools facing intervention to ensure contact is “undertaken sensitively and with full consideration of the possible impact on school leaders.”

Training on how to pick up on distress and adequately respond has been delivered to all officials in the DfE's regions group. It is being rolled out to relevant staff at the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

Future work on “tone and style” of communications is planned, including on termination warning notices.

The DfE will also launch a call for evidence on whether further changes to safeguarding guidance are needed. This will run alongside Ofsted's “Big Listen,” with small clarifications from September and “any fundamental changes made in 2025.”

Where schools face an adverse judgement, DfE officials will ask their responsible bodies to “ensure that appropriate support is in place to

support the headteacher and broader school's workforce”.

Speaking earlier this week, education secretary Gillian Keegan said when appointing Oliver she “was making sure that we got somebody who recognised that we needed to have a different culture, a different approach, a more supportive approach to inspection as well.”

## The sector response

Professor Julia Waters, Perry's sister, said Ofsted's “new direction is encouraging. Had these reforms been in place just over a year ago, perhaps my beautiful sister Ruth might still be with us today.”

“Much work now needs to be done to bring about the radical overhaul to the culture of school inspections, so that a tragedy like Ruth's cannot happen again,” she added.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said Ofsted's response showed “positive steps in the right direction”, but “does not address all the problems with the inspection system.”

Inspections are due to restart on Monday, when all lead inspectors should have completed new mental health awareness training.

But the school leaders' union NAHT had earlier this week called for Ofsted to temporarily switch to a model of ungraded inspections and boost notice periods for schools.

Leora Cruddas, chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, also highlighted that further reforms should “consider the wider accountability system, not just inspection.”



## EXPLAINER: OFSTED

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# Ruth Perry report response: need to know

Here is your trusty *Schools Week* speed read on what inspection changes Ofsted has promised today (and a reminder of what changes have already been implemented).

**1. Coroner's concern: The schools with serious safeguarding concerns and those with issues that can be fixed quickly receive the same overall grade.**

#### What Ofsted plans to do:

- Conduct a formal internal review of where safeguarding fits with individual inspection judgments
- Explore having safeguarding as a standalone judgement, "decoupled" from the leadership and management grade
- Examine whether further changes can provide more time for improvement for schools with ineffective safeguarding but judged "good" or better in other areas
- Hold a comprehensive listening exercise called "The Big Listen" between March and June
- "Where appropriate," changes will come in immediately. Ofsted will consult by September on more major changes, and introduce them in the 2024-25 academic year

**2. An 'almost complete absence' of training or policy on spotting and dealing with distress and pausing inspections**

- Publish a new policy today on pausing inspections of state schools where a serious issue has been identified requiring "substantial action"
- Develop a long-term programme of training for inspectors on mental health and supporting leaders' wellbeing, with a roadmap due this spring
- Form an expert reference group to provide "constructive challenge" and look at "aspects of training and where well-being might be incorporated more explicitly across the education inspection framework"
- DfE regions group will proactively notify responsible bodies when a provider receives an adverse inspection outcome

**3. Absence of a clear path to raise concerns during an inspection if these cannot be resolved directly with the lead inspector**

- Work with sector bodies to make sure "roles, responsibilities and process for raising and responding to concerns about leaders welfare" are understood clearly by the inspection team and the responsible body
- Clarify in handbooks, guidance, code of conduct and complaints procedures how providers can raise concerns about inspectors' behaviour. Process to be complete by the end of March

**4. Changes to the confidentiality requirement after an inspection have not yet been written into policy, meaning some leaders may fear discussing outcomes**

- Communicate the message that leaders can share provisional outcomes and the draft report with those they deem appropriate, including partners, health professionals and those providing personal support

**5. Timescales for report publication**

- Review, in the first half of 2024, quality assurance processes to "see if we can make further changes to reduce the amount of time between an inspection and the publication of a report"
- Findings will feed into the "Big Listen" and will be part of the proposals put to the sector and parents for their views
- Where reports do take longer to be published, "we will endeavour to explain why"

**6. No learning review of these matters was conducted by Ofsted. There is no policy requiring this to be done**

- By March, appoint a "recognised expert from the education sector to lead an independent learning review of Ofsted's response" to Perry's death
- The independent expert will consider "whether Ofsted's internal policies and

processes for responding to tragic incidents need to be revised"

- Define clearly the "circumstances in which a learning review will be commissioned, who will conduct it, how it will be carried out and arrangements for publishing and disseminating the lessons learned"
- 7. Ofsted was not able to say what additional support government was providing for leaders**
- Ensure inspectors are "conversant with this support and ready to remind leaders that it is available"
  - Through training, "reinforce the expectation that they share this information with leaders at the beginning of an inspection"

#### Refresher: What Ofsted has already done



- Updated handbooks to make clear that schools can fix minor administrative issues during inspections
- Introduced policy of revisiting schools with safeguarding issues but that are otherwise "good" within three months
- Depersonalised language in reports to refer to schools rather than individuals
- Introduced a national safeguarding duty desk that inspectors can call if evidence points to ineffective safeguarding
- Changed its handbook to allow heads and teachers to have a colleague join discussions with inspectors
- Introduced a helpline for managing concerns about the inspection process
- All lead inspectors are now required to request contact details of the person responsible for leaders' wellbeing
- All lead inspectors are given mental health awareness training. All remaining inspectors to be trained by end of March
- Proposed a new complaints process allowing schools to contact Ofsted the day after an inspection and for direct escalation to an independent body

# Leaders at first rapid revisit school resign over 'traumatic' inspections

LUCAS CUMISKEY

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EXCLUSIVE

The headteacher and deputy at the first school revisited under Ofsted's rapid re-inspection system – introduced after Ruth Perry's death – have resigned, saying the process was still too "traumatic".

The watchdog announced in June that all schools graded "inadequate" due to ineffective safeguarding, but where all other judgments were "good" or better, would be revisited within three months of their report's publication.

The policy was introduced after the death of Perry, who had been headteacher at Caversham Primary in Berkshire. Ofsted said it would "allow the school to put matters right and have its grade swiftly changed."

Previously, another graded inspection for such schools could take up to two-and-a-half years.

Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, in Leeds, was rated "good" in a report published earlier this month after a rapid reinspection in November.

The school had previously been rated "inadequate." While the report, published in September, highlighted "weaknesses in safeguarding practice," it was "good" in all other areas.

But headteacher Joseph Masley and his deputy Kate Bates said the "unfair" inspection last summer result had a "profound" impact on them.

They have worked at the school for 12 and 10 years respectively, but handed in their notices after the last inspection result was published, even despite the better rating.

Masley said the "inadequate" was down to "the way that we recorded some actions on our safeguarding system" which was "rectified" the day after it was flagged as a problem.

"No child was ever at any risk," he said, adding the current system "isn't fit for purpose."

"The impact on us from that June inspection was profound and you can actually reflect on the situation Ruth Perry found herself in and understand it," he said.

"The fact we were able to support one another was crucial because it was a very tough time, unnecessary and traumatic."

He claimed the inspector told the team in June: "You're really good in all other areas, you're an outstanding leadership team, but this has to



happen."

Ofsted "didn't get it back to us before our summer holiday, so Kate and I went off on our summer holiday wondering what on earth this report is going to say."

"Then they came back in November and suddenly everything was great, and they kept asking us about our wellbeing."

Masley added they got "two days warning" before the re-inspection, and "extra day" than normal, "which was a positive."

Bates welcomed the reinspection within 12 weeks as "much better than two years." Massey also got "regular phone calls from the lead inspector, which is welcome" after the revisit.

But Bates said the revisit was "exceptionally intense" as it "had to ensure that the judgments made that were 'good' in June were still sound."

While it started as a monitoring inspection looking at safeguarding, it was upgraded to a full, section five inspection, "where we had to revisit all the other areas that were judged 'good' only 10 weeks ago ... we found it nonsensical," Masley said. Bates questioned why this was needed.

Masley added the 'inadequate' grade is also "not going away. That's always the case and because of that, and for a number of other reasons, both my deputy and I have handed our notice in so we will be leaving in the summer."

Other reasons include "disillusionment with the system: we can't trust what happened to us. If we were an 'inadequate' school then fair enough, but we're not."

Bates added that "going forward, for us, one-



word judgements cannot be used to sum up such a complex organisation as a school".

"And that word 'inadequate' is wholly inappropriate and dreadful to use. The impact of that word on me and Joe has been really big," she added.

The inquest into Perry's death heard she thought the 'inadequate' grade her school received over safeguarding issues "was the end of her career".

Caversham was reinspected in June last year and deemed 'good' after "weaknesses in safeguarding arrangements" had been addressed.

Bates said her disillusionment included "the level of pressure" from both Ofsted and the government.

"It just reinforced my distrust in the system. It made me feel this job, in the current form and current system, is not worth it," Masley said.

The pair do not have other jobs lined up. Bates said "at the minute I haven't got the resilience to be able to do the job".

Masley added: "I'm not ruling out being a head in another school at another time, but it is traumatic and it is wearing – so it will be a break. We have taken a big step. It's a ballsy decision."



# Closing trust exposes 'vulnerability' of primaries amid double funding hit

**JACK DYSON**

@JACKYDYS

**EXCLUSIVE**

A 15-school trust will shut after the government decided to strip it of its only secondary, further revealing the "vulnerability" of primary schools amid the double whammy of rising costs and falling rolls.

The Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust (DBAT) will hand over its schools to new trusts after the Deanery School, its secondary in Swindon, was rated "inadequate."

Ministers decided the secondary should be rebrokered, leaving the trust facing a fundamental restructure of its central team if it were to continue operating, said DBAT's CEO Stephen Mitchell.

He said: "We decided that in the medium term there were other trusts that could have run our schools with more capacity without going through the pain of a restructure. It was a very mature governance discussion that took place."

But Mitchell added: "Where you have trusts with a lot of primary schools and a small number of secondaries, their model is based around reliance on the secondary schools' size. That's a vulnerability."

Newly published accounts show DBAT's reserves plummeted from £2.2 million to little over £940,000 in 2022-23.

The deficit was caused, in part, by pay hikes and rising agency staff costs. The trust struggled to fill vacancies and find cover for sick teachers amid a spike in absences.

"To be a well-run trust, according to the models put around by the Department for Education, you're looking for somewhere between 75 and 80 per cent of your funding going out to staffing costs," said Mitchell, who was only appointed CEO in April.

"We weren't significantly over 80 per cent, which shows how vulnerable you can be."

The increased need for one-to-one support for SEND children not covered by education, health and care plans (EHCPs)



also played a part, according to Mitchell.

He said he hopes the closure – which has not yet been given the go-ahead by the DfE – will be completed by the end of 2024. Alternative homes for the primaries have not yet been agreed.

*Schools Week* analyses of 22 academy trust accounts for 2022-23 reveal ten dipped into their reserves last year to meet rising costs.

Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust saw levels more than halve over the period, from £2.7 million to £1.3 million.

CEO Dan Morrow attributed this to £890,000 energy bill hikes along with falling primary rolls. Fourteen of his trust's 18 academies are "small, rural" schools.

He said: "There is a profound demographic shift. In rural, small schools in particular, as well as one-form-entry schools nationally, we haven't got a systemic approach to this nor a funding response which will help maintain and drive standards."

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.

The Elliot Foundation, a 36-school primary-only trust, recorded a £1.5

million in-year deficit.

Hugh Greenway, its chief executive, said: "Were we to start the Elliot Foundation now, we would not be primary only."

Meanwhile, Our Lady of Lourdes, and Enquire Learning Trust – which run 68 schools between them – racked up in-year deficits of £3.1 million and £1.1 million respectively.

Both partly blamed general inflationary pressures and increases to teacher and support staff pay for the issue.

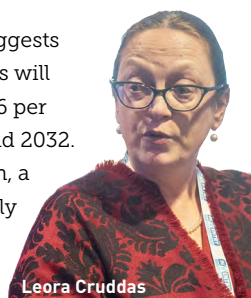
Kevin Connor, head of academies for auditors Bishop Fleming, said his firm has witnessed a "downward trend in the financial health of trusts," but added the picture "could have been far worse."

"Trusts have largely managed to balance the books this year. In the medium term however, if things carry on as they are, we will see many more in deficit and having to reach into their reserves."

The Confederation of School Trusts' national survey last year found almost one-fifth (19 per cent) of chief executives "were not very or not at all confident" in their organisation's financial sustainability.

Leora Cruddas, the sector body's CEO, argued that "schools need to get fair and sustainable funding from the government to deliver the education that pupils deserve."

The DfE has been approached for comment.



Leora Cruddas



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# Pupil takes school to court after prayer rituals banned

LUCAS CUMISKEY

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A west London free school has said banning prayer rituals helped to quell rising tensions, the result of which led to a “bomb hoax” and pupils and staff feeling “intimidated” amid an “unprecedented outbreak of poor behaviour.”

A two-day High Court judicial review hearing against Michaela Community School in Brent was brought by one of its Muslim pupils, who cannot be named for legal reasons.

Her lawyers argue the ban breached equality laws and the pupil's freedom of religion, claiming it disproportionately impacts Muslim students.

But the school, often dubbed “Britain's strictest,” said the move was needed to restore “calm and order” and to promote cohesion.

Headteacher Katharine Birbalsingh, the former government social mobility commissioner, implemented a temporary ban in March last year. It was later made permanent by governors.

## ‘Unacceptable segregation’ fears

On Wednesday, Jason Coppel KC, representing the school, said pupils had started praying in the playground in March. The number “grew very quickly” from three to 30 in a few days.

After they were spotted, the school received threats – including a bomb hoax. Birbalsingh said staff “were fearing for their lives,” the court heard.

In a statement, she added the decision was made amid “violence, intimidation and appalling racial harassment of our teachers.”

Coppel said staff also grew concerned at alleged “peer pressure” on some Muslim pupils, said to have been “intimidated into greater observance” by their peers with fears over “unacceptable segregation or division.”

They also led to an “unprecedented outbreak of poor behaviour among the children,” Coppel added.

Detailing one alleged incident, he said a teacher asked pupils to put away prayer mats as they had not been permitted.

“What would usually happen at this point is that they would comply,” he added. Instead, the response was described by the teacher as “entitled behaviour because they felt they were praying... they felt that prayer somehow overrode the regime at the school.”



Michaela Community School

## ‘Integration central to Michaela success’

Prayer rituals were not previously prohibited at the school, although no prayer room was provided. The school building “has limited space” and “narrow corridors.”

Birbalsingh feared “a large majority of Muslim pupils” would want to pray inside if permitted, leading to lots of pupils “trailing around the school at lunch time,” Coppel added.

He said this would create “difficulties with supervision.” But pupils were under constant supervision in the playground.

The lawyer said the school is in a “deprived and highly diverse area” and is committed to “maximising social cohesion between the children.”

Birbalsingh is intent on “aggressively promoting integration between different faiths, cultures and ethnic backgrounds” and regards this as “central to the success of the school,” he said.

The school's “family lunch” policy is one such way she “promotes integration between pupils,” alongside “guided socialisation and supervision in the school yard,” he explained.

This includes “pupils being given a particular topic that they are permitted to talk about, reciting poetry, standing up... and saying one or

two things they're particularly grateful for on that day, really unique practices.”

## ‘We're defending the Michaela ethos’

Coppel said it was “an important part of the school's case” that lunch break is “not free time in the usual sense” but is instead “an integral part of the education regime” and “just as important as time spent in lessons.”

“The claimant says that she regards herself as on a break during that period... that is not the school's view.”

In a statement on social media, Birbalsingh said “we are in court to defend the culture and ethos of Michaela.”

She said the decision “restored calm and order to the school” and added the “restrictive building combined with our strict ethos that does not allow children wander around the school unsupervised” means it “cannot have a prayer room.”

Birbalsingh went on: “We believe it is wrong to separate children according to religion or race, and that it is our duty to protect all of our children and provide them with an environment which is free from bullying, intimidation and harassment.”

She said “all religions make sacrifices so that we can maintain a safe secular community”. For example, Jehovah's Witness families have objected to Macbeth as a GCSE text, and Hindu families have objected to dinner plates touching eggs.

Sarah Hannett KC, for the claimant, said the prayer ban “has the particular effect of only preventing Muslims” from praying. Their prayers have a “ritualistic quality” and no alternative was considered, she said.

The way the girl was treated “fundamentally changed how she feels as a Muslim in this country,” Hannett added.

Exclusions given to the pupil are also being challenged.

Michaela regularly tops the national league tables for exam results.

Former home secretary Suella Braverman was founding chair of the free school, which opened in 2014.

The judge's decision is expected to be handed down at a later date.



Katharine Birbalsingh

# Schools demand more help as RAAC disruption revealed

**JACK DYSON**

@JACKYDYS

Pupils at a school affected by RAAC concrete had to learn in classes of 120, a report revealing the potential impact of the crumbly concrete has revealed.

The children also had no access to hot food and have seen their attainment fall behind by a full grade.

Meanwhile, an Ofsted inspection at a separate school has signalled how RAAC has hampered improvement efforts and has been “unsettling” for staff and pupils, affecting behaviour.

Nick Hurn, the boss of Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, expects to write to education secretary Gillian Keegan next week to demand allowances for GCSE and A-level pupils at St Leonard’s School in County Durham.

“If we get no response ... then we’ll have to look at our other options, see if there’s a legal route we could take, because we can’t do nothing and allow our children to be disadvantaged,” he told *Schools Week*.

A report commissioned by the trust concluded that the academy’s youngsters are “around a grade lower than expected” in English and maths, having been moved to classes of 120.

Hurn said he believes schools have experienced “above and beyond what you’d reasonably expect to happen to a school”.

He added: “What’s currently in place isn’t adequate. This is a massive disruption to around 300 students over an extensive period – it’s been 17 weeks now.”

In a bid to convince exam boards, Hurn commissioned Durham University professors Stephen Gorard and Nadia Siddiqui to examine the extent of the disruption.

The study, published on Thursday, calculated that timetable changes have “resulted in a 20-minute reduction in the curriculum time for each subject”.

Some students were reported to have not attended school at all due to a lack of space. Others were found to be three weeks behind in certain subjects.

The report said: “For half of the [autumn] term there was no hot food. Many rooms had no desks, and some had temperatures as high as 27C.

“In English and maths ... pupils

Nick Hurn



were taught in groups of 120 for seven weeks, with no access to specialist texts for the full first half-term.

“In recent internal assessments, students are reported by the school to have achieved an average of around a grade lower than expected.”

Teacher fatigue has allegedly increased, with leaders reporting “a noticeable increase in staff absences, which have been covered by supply teachers, not always satisfactorily.”

Current guidance for special considerations for exams suggests an inflation of five per cent of marks, the report added.

It went on: “Given the length and depth of the disruption described above, the inflation could be greater (perhaps 10 per cent), and dependent to some extent on the nature of disruption for each subject.”

In October, Hurn enquired about reintroducing lockdown-style teacher assessed grades for impacted children, who, he argued, shouldn’t be “disadvantaged through this unprecedented situation”.

Bosses of Scalby High School in Scarborough – which sealed off two-thirds of its site following the discovery of the dangerous material – added to calls for a return to pandemic marking two months later.

In a letter to the government, seen by *Schools Week*, its headteacher, Christopher Robinson, said it would be “extremely unfair” for his pupils “to have their life chances removed through no fault of their own.”

Stowupland High School,

in Suffolk, was last week rated as requiring improvement. The report cited issues with RAAC.

Inspectors found more needed to be done “to stabilise the staff body” and this was “not helped by the school’s buildings containing” the concrete.

They said: “As a result, important sections of the site are closed. Leaders and staff have shown determination and considerable effort to keep the school open to all pupils.

“However, the disruption has been unsettling for staff and pupils. This has affected behaviour.”

Stowupland was first visited by inspectors in January 2023, prior to the discovery of the dangerous material eight months later, but it was deemed more evidence was needed to come to a judgement, so they returned in December.

A spokesperson for the John Milton Academy Trust, which runs Stowupland, said “huge efforts” have been made “to limit any disruption to pupils”. The trust “has reviewed the way it supports the school and will be putting into action our plans for improvement”.

Responding to Hurn, the Department for Education said special consideration is only used when something happens at the time of an assessment. It is “not possible” to make other changes “to address the impact of variable disruption to teaching for some groups of pupils”.

But exam boards have been asked to agree “longer extensions for coursework and non-examined assessment” for affected pupils.



# SEND shoots up political agenda as MPs reveal woes

**SAMANTHA BOOTH**

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

Ministers have been accused of failing children with special needs as dozens of cross-party MPs stood in the House of Commons demanding change to a broken system.

Conservative MP Sir David Davis secured a debate on SEND provision and funding where he called for an updated formula and increased capital.

Nearly 30 MPs warned of problems in their constituencies, showing how issues relating to SEND have climbed the political agenda.

Davis highlighted research on the lowest funded councils by the F40 group, a group of local authorities, which said the high needs block requires an additional £4.6 billion a year.

The impact of these pressures “is clear for all to see”, Davis said, with pupils being sent to schools far away while families “struggle to get appropriate support”.

While the 2014 reforms were “well-intentioned”, he added, they “failed to provide resilience in the system to deal with future changes to demand for services”.

Helen Hayes, Labour’s shadow children’s minister, said the current system is “failing children and their families” and is “beyond breaking point”.



Sir David Davis



Helen Hayes



Munira Wilson

She said: “It is an increasingly prominent factor in the number of councils issuing section 114 notices—in effect, declaring bankruptcy—because they can no longer balance their budget.”

Labour is yet to set out in detail how her party would change the system, but Hayes said it would “work to make mainstream schools inclusive,” mirroring the government’s current policy.

Labour MP Ian Lavery said one of the government’s “most glaring failures is the failure to provide the necessary funding.”

He claimed this year “the Northumberland schools high needs block will overspend” for the first time.

Several MPs highlighted their own experiences. Conservative MP Sir Jake Berry spoke of “the struggles of my wife and I as we try to navigate the system” for their six-year-old, non-verbal son.

He urged ministers to help councils “fast-track” education, health and care plans.

A *Schools Week* investigation last month exposed how companies, backed by private equity investors and running private SEND schools, have made millions in profits amid a state capacity crisis.

Munira Wilson, Liberal Democrat’s education spokesperson, said there is “profiteering, often by private equity

companies” in the independent school sector that is putting “huge pressure on local authority budgets”.

Gareth Thomas, Labour and Co-op, said four special schools in Harrow “face serious financial difficulties” and the council has a “much greater reliance on private SEN schools than the national average”.

He said the Department for Education has turned down Harrow’s application for a special school three times, “even though the department accepts that it was an effective bid and worthy of funding”.

Responding to the debate, children’s minister David Johnston said the SEND issue was “already in the top two items in my casework and surgery appointments”.

He said: “We know the system is not delivering consistent support and outcomes and that there are significant financial pressures on it, despite considerable Government investment.”

“The system needs reform, which is why we published our SEND and alternative provision improvement plan last year.”

Education secretary Gillian Keegan again admitted the system was failing this week.

“We’re aware of the problems ... we’re working on them,” she said. “There is an improvement plan.”

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

## Council bids to take free school build into own hands

A council wants to take the construction of a new special free school into its own hands to gain more “certainty” that it opens on time.

Ministers approved a 100-place, all-through school in Bracknell Forest last year, but although a site has been approved, building work is unconfirmed.

The council wants to “take responsibility for construction itself to enable certainty around the timescale,” council documents state.

*Schools Week* investigations have revealed the sluggish opening-rate of such schools, despite a capacity crisis. In 2022, just one of 37 new free schools announced in 2020 had opened in its permanent home.

Normally, the government oversees new

school projects.

Stuart McKellar, the council’s executive director of resources, said “this is a complex process which understandably takes time,” but the council is “fortunate to have the in-house expertise”.

He added: “We are therefore making a case for it to be self-delivered, which will enable us to have certainty on the timing of its opening.”

The council is finalising a self-delivery case to submit to the Department for Education.

Tom Legge, director of Premier Advisory Group, which supports free school applications, said the move is “not common” but also “not unique”.

Some large multi-academy trusts (MATs) have self-delivered free schools.

In 2019, Essex County Council was approved to deliver two special free schools. Its infrastructure and delivery team had a “strong track record of construction of new school buildings, delivering on time and within budget,” council documents state.

“It’s understandable that, with the myriad challenges facing DfE capital teams, local authorities that feel they have the capacity, capability and supply chains feel well placed to deliver these projects,” Legge added.

But he said the “increase in complexity” can lead to “a new set of challenges”.

# Secret settlement in £370k superhead's legal row with council

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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EXCLUSIVE



Sir Craig Tunstall

A teacher who earned £367,000 a year has agreed a secret settlement with a council to end a legal row about his controversial dismissal – leaving the community “not knowing what really happened” after a six-year saga.

Sir Craig Tunstall, formerly England’s best-paid primary headteacher, was dismissed from the council-maintained Gypsy Hill Federation in 2018 for “gross misconduct.”

Lambeth Council refused to reveal an investigation report into the case. But Tunstall launched a high court case against Lambeth and the federation for damages of more than £200,000 over claims of negligence and breach of contract.

But the council launched a counterclaim attempting to recover damages of potentially £500,000 from Tunstall.

Documents submitted to the court alleged Tunstall received unauthorised additional salary payments of nearly £300,000 that plunged the federation into deficit.

It was alleged the former head “caused

or permitted” the council to pay him the additional salary without the approval of the governing body.

Tunstall’s representatives previously said no allegations of fraud or dishonesty are made against him and that it is not alleged that he was aware he was receiving unauthorised payments.

A judge was due to hold a trial on the case later this year, but a court order this month confirmed the case had been settled.

A council spokesperson said the details of the settlement, “which resolves” both Tunstall’s and the council’s claims, “are confidential to both parties”.

The council did not answer questions on how much it had spent on legal fees this week.

The Liberal Democrat councillor Matthew Bryant, deputy opposition leader in Lambeth, said the settlement “leaves numerous questions unanswered, particularly about the governance arrangements in the council at the time.”

“Ultimately Lambeth council taxpayers may never know how much this has cost them.”

George Turner, who helped found investigative think tank TaxWatch and has reported on Tunstall’s pay previously, said: “Many people who were part of the community are now not allowed to understand what really happened in their own school.

“No matter what happened, that in itself, is pretty outrageous.”

Tunstall did not respond to a request for comment.

A close friend of Tunstall said “no amount of money will give him back his health, career or reputation” after “six long years of him fighting for the truth and fairness”.

“It’s particularly appalling how silencing people through these settlement agreements is allowed, which is why he isn’t able to say anything himself.”

EXCLUSIVE

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## ... while governors at his old federation resign en-masse

The governing board at one of the country’s largest federations has resigned amid a finances row related to the falling number of pupils.

Governors at the Gypsy Hill Federation (GHF) in London said recent challenges have been “insurmountable without the necessary support” from Lambeth Council.

The six-school federation came into the spotlight in 2017 after the dismissal of Sir Craig Tunstall, formerly England’s best paid primary headteacher on £367,000 a year.

Council schools forum documents reveal four of its schools have a forecast deficit of £2.42 million.

In October, GHF was issued a warning notice by the council over “concerns that governance and leadership do not have adequate financial control and that financial compliance is not adhered to.”

Potential actions include de-federation, de-delegation of budgets, and the installation of an interim executive board.

Governors said prior “financial and operational mismanagement” and deficits had been compounded by the decreased demand for school places across London.

Chair Alex Cambouris told parents that the place planning strategy in Lambeth “forces schools to absorb the costs of excess places further straining budgets.”

The number of pupils at the federation’s schools has fallen by a fifth in four years.

Governors had developed a deficit restructure plan which was “affirmed” by a Department for Education adviser, as well as plans to partner with other schools.

But they said the “lack of good faith support” from Lambeth has “resulted in a diversion of governor time and school resources toward activities that have no bearing on improving the quality of education in our schools and are now frustrating our efforts to address these challenges effectively.

“The situation came to a head when, following months of work on a restructuring

proposal, Lambeth abruptly changed course and demanded governors dissolve the federation in under two months.”

Cambouris said while governors are not opposed to considering the option, Lambeth “answered none of our questions on how this could be accomplished in the time frame they set out without leaving the schools more vulnerable.”

They added governors are “not prepared to make such a significant decision in the absence of clear evidence ... [it] would be right for each individual school and a clear plan to accomplish it successfully.”

Lambeth Council said it supports the decision after the “significant financial gap in their accounts and its overall management of its schools over a number of years.”

Federations are a group of maintained schools under one governing body. The largest is The Lighthouse Federation, comprising nine schools in Walsall.



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# Teachers in small schools dub new admin list 'unrealistic'

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

An attempt by the government to reduce teacher workload with a revamped and reduced list of tasks has been described by small schools as "unrealistic" without "extra funding."

The Department for Education's workforce taskforce has published early recommendations from its work to help ministers cut teachers' average working week by five hours (see full list below).

Ministers accepted a recommendation to scrap the "bureaucratic requirement" of performance-related pay in schools, but snubbed calls for an additional workload-focused INSET day.

The taskforce said a revised list of administrative tasks that "teachers should not be required to carry out" be reinserted into the school teachers' pay and conditions document



(STPCD). This was accepted by the government.

Examples include collecting money from pupils and parents, decorating classrooms, managing cover for absent teachers, bulk photocopying, and investigating pupil absence.

### 'Sadly laughable'

But Liz Harros, executive head of The Wolds Federation, formed of three small church schools

in the East Riding of Yorkshire, said the idea her schools would find other staff to pick up the tasks set out was "sadly laughable."

"I think if I could have three caretakers on site all the time, if I could have at least another full time teaching assistant, plus an admin person in each school, I think we would be onto a winner, but we're struggling already to do the things that we're doing.

"I can't tell you how many times last term I had to collect the meals, deliver the meals, serve the meals and wash up. And I'm the executive headteacher."

Matthew Herbert, head of Reedness Primary School in Goole, also in Yorkshire, said a part-time teacher, cleaner, caretaker, and lunchtime supervisor "are all the same person."

"The whole point of a small school is that you're all a team together and you all chip in. If you're taking these from teachers, I don't know who

Continued on next page

## Workload taskforce: The early recommendations in full

- Scrap performance-related pay (PRP) as it "works poorly in practice", with a replacement in September
- The Department for Education, together with schools, should "consider the merits of promoting a named leader responsible for wellbeing and workload"
- DfE might "want to consider having a designated governor as a wellbeing champion"
- DfE should "consider remitting the STRB to include an additional INSET day at the earliest opportunity". Government rejected this
- A revised list of administrative tasks teachers should not be required to do should be reinserted in the school teachers' pay and conditions document (STPCD). See full list on next page
- All school and trust governance bodies should publicly commit to and actively promote the recommendations of the workload review and advisory groups
- The department should "amend guidance to governors and trustees so that the core function of strategic leadership includes consideration of staff workload and wellbeing"
- Ofsted's "clarification for schools" should be updated and republished as a separate document, re-emphasising "what is not required around marking, planning and data"
- DfE should "spread awareness" of the School Workload Reduction Toolkit and make it more accessible
- DfE should explore how to "celebrate and recognise" schools that commit to its wellbeing charter, including by publishing positive case studies
- The DfE, and the original expert advisory group on wellbeing members, should commit to reviewing the content of the charter by 2025 – with a task and finish group established in 2024 – to ensure that it "remains fit for purpose"
- DfE, schools, trusts, local authorities, and teaching and leadership unions should "promote the value of union health and safety representatives and workplace health and safety committees in improving wellbeing, facilitating charter sign-up, and ensuring the benefits of signing up are felt across the workforce"
- DfE should develop "additional case studies on effective flexible working solutions that schools and trusts have implemented"
- DfE should provide communications and guidance to parents on what the review group recommends relating to marking and feedback
- All schools should be "reminded of the importance" of the recommendations from the 2016 independent workload review groups and 2018 workload advisory group
- DfE should "continue to embed" the review and advisory groups' recommendations throughout initial teacher training (ITT), the early career framework (ECF), and the national professional qualifications (NPQs)
- DfE and Ofsted should publish a joint update on their "success in maintaining the commitments they made to accept and implement the recommendations"



NEWS: WORKLOAD

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you're going to give them to."

Reedness, which has a deficit of around 10 per cent of its total budget, would need "at least one more full-time person" to take the list of tasks away from teachers.

"I get where the government is coming from. I just think it's a little bit unrealistic. There's no extra money in the system."

The government said the list was only illustrative and said it is likely it would be added to the STPCD for next year.

**'Schools need proper funding'**

James Bowen, assistant general secretary at school leaders' union NAHT, said there was an "important wider point here about the funding and capacity schools have."

He said: "For this to work schools need to be properly funded so they have the necessary support and admin staff in place. That is particularly true for smaller schools where staffing levels and capacity are often much tighter."

But larger schools also face issues with the list of tasks. Clare Skinner, business leader at Kings Norton Girls' School in Birmingham, said most of the tasks were already done by support staff.

She said some tasks "popped out" at her as they currently require teacher involvement. For example, teachers are involved in planning school trips that fit with the curriculum.



James Bowen



Ordering supplies is another task that needs teacher input," Skinner explained. If they were not involved, the school would need somebody "maintaining inventories, giving stock takes on a regular basis, distributing resources out to various parts of the school."

"All school leaders would say yes, we'd love to take every single piece of admin away from teachers so they can focus on their teaching and learning. But in some settings, I can't see how that's going to work without investment in more people."

A damning report leaked to Schools Week last year showed classroom teachers' average working week has reduced by less than an hour in three years. Leaders work longer on average than they did in 2019.

On performance-related pay, the government is expected to do a "rapid"

review to come up with a replacement system that is "less bureaucratic way to manage performance fairly and transparently".

Changes would be communicated in spring and introduced in September. Many schools have already ditched the practice.

**What happens next?**

The group will now look at themes including the impact and unintended consequences of accountability on workload, which will include school inspections.

Also under the microscope will be contractual provisions in the STPCD, technological solutions, the impact of pressures on wider public services on schools, parental expectations and complaints, and culture across the education system.

Final recommendations will be put to ministers and the sector before the end of March.

**The full list of administrative tasks teachers shouldn't have to do**

- Managing and transferring data about pupils into school management systems or printing electronic records for paper filing
- Reformatting data or re-entering it into multiple systems
- Producing photographic evidence of practical lessons
- Creating or copying files perceived to be required in anticipation of inspection
- Administration or data analysis relating to wraparound care and preparation of meals
- Administration of public and internal examinations
- Collating pupil reports, such as of pupil examination results

- Producing and collating analyses of attendance figures, or investigating a pupil's absence
- Responsibility for producing, copying, uploading and distributing bulk communications to parents and pupils
- Administration relating to school visits, trips and residentials and of work experience
- Organisation, decoration and assembly of the physical classroom space
- Ordering, setting up and maintaining ICT equipment, software, and virtual learning environments
- Ordering supplies and equipment
- Cataloguing, preparing, issuing,

- stocktaking, and maintaining materials and equipment, or logging the absence of such
- Collecting money from pupils and parents
- Administration of cover for absent teachers
- Co-ordinating and submitting bids (for funding, school status and similar)
- Administration of medical consent forms and administering of medication on a routine or daily basis
- Taking, copying, distributing or typing up notes or producing formal minutes
- Producing class lists or physical copies of context sheets
- Keeping and filing paper
- Bulk photocopying

NEWS: COUNCILS

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# Flagship free school meal council's firm posts £1.4m loss

**FREDDIE WHITTAKER**

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

The catering arm of a London council that led the charge for universal free school meals has posted a £1.4 million loss amid soaring costs.

Accounts for Juniper Ventures Limited, set up by Newham Council in 2017, declare the borough's meal service the "front-running example of a high impact primary school meals 'ecosystem'".

The borough has had a universal free school meals offer since 2011, but new figures reveal how "rocketing inflation in the supply chain" drove the company from a £38,000 profit in 2021-22 to a £1.4 million loss last year.

The loss would have been more than £1.6 million but was offset by a profit made by Juniper Pursuits Limited, a subsidiary of Juniper Ventures.

School food campaigner Andy Jolley said the "really worrying figures highlight two things: the threat posed to catering firms by the chronic underfunding of school meals; and the profligacy of Newham Council in pushing ahead with a supposedly flagship policy without properly considering the practicalities".

Spiralling food, staffing and energy costs in recent years have prompted repeated warnings from the catering industry that funding for school meals is not keeping pace with actual costs.

Central government funding for universal infant free school meals and means-tested lunches for



older pupils sits at £2.53. Funding for Sadiq Khan's extension of free meals to junior pupils in London is £2.65, rising to £3 from September.

Meals in Newham, meanwhile, cost the council £3 each, and this will rise again next year as a 10 per cent living wage increase takes hold.

"This organisation has and continues to lobby the government for an ongoing inflationary review of this amount and contributed to a paper recommending the meal price be raised in line with inflation which would bring it today to £2.97 as a minimum," accounts state.

Data from the Office for National Statistics shows average food prices have risen by 27 per cent in the last two years.

A council report from last year warned food costs exceeded forecasts by £409,000 in the 2022 calendar year. Juniper's wage costs were also "significantly affected by the need to use agency cover to manage sickness". This resulted in an overspend of £622,000 in 2022.

Inflation caused "huge issues" in 2022-23, and although rates stabilised and then began to reduce, "food inflation remains high, with the impact on the cost of raw materials continuing to be a challenge."

Accounts show that although Juniper's turnover increased by 0.4 per cent last year, cost of sales rose 5.9 per cent and admin expenses increased by 33.6 per cent.

Because it is wholly owned by Newham Council, funding from the borough keeps Juniper afloat where commercial providers might have gone bust.

Councillors also approved a deal last year which converted an existing £4 million capital loan it made to the company into shares. This can be used to balance the books.

The company is now forecasting a "major change in direction for the business with growing profitability".

A statement said: "The losses made in 22-23 are anticipated to be reduced by over 50 per cent in 23-24 with further improvements leading to profitability and sustainability over the following two years."

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## DfE to collect data on children with Down syndrome

Schools will be required to report how many children with Down syndrome they educate as part of a government commitment to improve opportunities.

Sir Liam Fox, Conservative MP, previously urged ministers to add it as a separate category to the school census.

There are currently 13 categories for SEND on the census, such as "moderate" or "severe" learning difficulties, but there isn't one for Down syndrome specifically.

From January 2025, schools will be able to select the condition from the list.

Fox's Down syndrome private members' bill became law last year. He said it "makes sense

to have specific data with which to interpret the success of its implementation."

He told MPs in March there was currently "no Down syndrome specific school data available, including numbers, location or educational settings.

"Down syndrome is not a subset of other conditions or of learning disabilities, although on a Venn diagram there will be a huge overlap; it is a specific condition and we must regard it as such."

The Department for Education announced the change today (Friday) as part of its

commitment "to improving the life outcomes and opportunities for people with Down syndrome, to identify good practice and shape long term services."

Children's minister David Johnston said the move will "shape future services."

But Carol Boys, chief executive of Down's Syndrome Association, said while they welcome greater data collection, "it is the long-term, systematic problems identified within the SEND system that will continue to present the most significant barriers to their success."



Sir Liam Fox



# Charity offers schools £3k to appoint 'maths champions'

**FREDDIE WHITTAKER**

**@FCDWHITTAKER**

A charity will offer hundreds of secondary schools almost £3,000 to fund a new "maths champion" in a bid to make it the "SAS of subjects."

It comes after an ex-government adviser warned 30,000 promising pupils are "lost" by year 11.

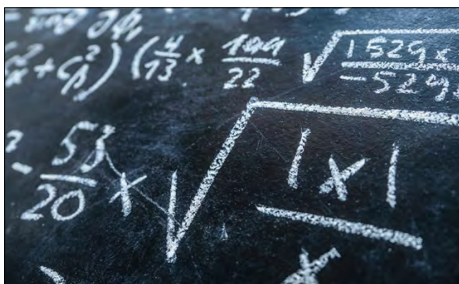
The Mathematics Education for Social Mobility and Excellence charity (MESME), set up by the Russian-born billionaire philanthropist Alex Gerko, this week rebranded as Axiom Maths.

Headed up by former Department for Education adviser David Thomas, the scheme will hand schools money to fund "maths champions" who will work to keep high-attainers interested in the subject.

Thomas said he wanted to "change the national perception of maths from being treated as a subject people 'celebrate' being bad at to being seen as the SAS of subjects... opening up opportunities in AI and the jobs of the future".

Axiom warned of a "significant decline in interest and attainment, particularly during the transition to secondary school".

The charity's analysis of research by the University of Nottingham estimated that around 30,000 pupils who achieved top maths results in their key stage 2 SATs do



not get a grade 7 or above in the subject at GCSE level.

Axiom said its analysis found this figure was almost double the number of vacancies for STEM-related jobs in England, which currently stands at 16,000.

The situation is worse for disadvantaged pupils, with almost half of those with top SATs grades not getting grade 7 at GCSE.

Thomas said there was a "crucial window of opportunity to stop young talent slipping through the net in years 7 and 8."

"We're finding and nurturing these young people, providing a like-minded social group and an exciting experience of maths," he said.

"The aim is to make them feel special and valued at an uneasy time of transition, exciting them about the boundless places their talent can take them."

The maths champion money – initially £2,700 per participating school – will be used to either fund teaching and learning responsibility (TLR) payments to participating teachers or a timetable

reduction for them.

These champions will then work with Axiom to "implement a package of support for high-attainers, including weekly maths circles."

In these maths circles, a "small group of students will come together regularly with a mentor to grapple with intriguing questions, explore exciting ideas, and learn to think like mathematicians."

Axiom has not said exactly how much money is on offer overall, but said it wants to help "hundreds" of schools. The amount of funding on offer to each school may rise depending on future inflation.

The charity has also published the results of a survey it commissioned of 2,000 pupils in years 6 to 9.

It found that when high-attaining primary pupils transitioned to secondary school, they became 25 per cent less likely to say maths was fun, 40 per cent more likely to say it was not challenging enough, and twice as likely to describe it as boring.

Thomas said they needed to be "straight with young people – maths isn't always easy but it is hugely rewarding for those who persist".

Schools interested in the scheme, set to run from September, can sign up online at [axiommaths.com](http://axiommaths.com)

**JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS**

## Government admits 'scale of challenge' as net-zero school plans scrutinised

The government has vowed to publish its roadmap for ensuring the education estate becomes net-zero after admitting its school rebuilding programme alone won't be enough to hit targets.

The environmental audit committee warned in November that the Department for Education is not moving quickly enough to deliver its goals of slashing emissions by three-quarters by 2037, and achieving net zero by 2050.

Academies minister Baroness Barran said on Tuesday that MPs were "right to acknowledge the scale of the challenge".

Pointing to the rebuilding scheme, she added that while new schools are now "net-zero ready...this alone will not enable the education estate, which is managed by more than 3,000 responsible bodies, to meet net-zero targets by 2037."

Barran appeared before the committee in October as MPs examined the DfE's eco targets.

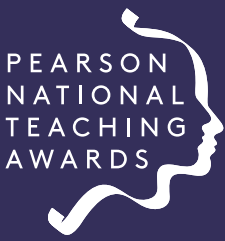
Following the hearing, its chair, Philip Dunne, told education secretary Gillian Keegan "it is not clear to us that the progress currently being made is at a pace which will allow the department to achieve" its targets.

He said the work needed to reach net zero would "result in a significant charge on the public purse". Forecasts suggest it could cost £2 billion per annum to revamp 650 schools every year.

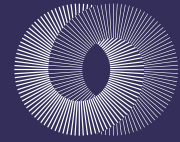
Current plans would "see only 20 per cent of the schools estate in England net zero compliant by 2050".

Dunne urged the government to "establish and publish a realistic and fully costed plan... as a matter of urgency".

Barran said the government aims to publish a "detailed roadmap" by autumn 2024.



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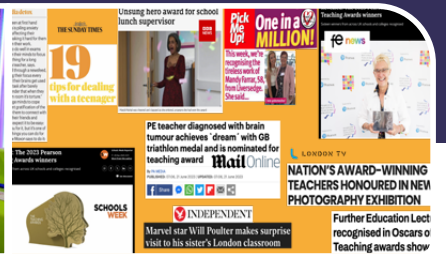
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*The Pearson Teaching Awards are an unbelievable recognition and very humbling when you know that so many other schools that are so much more worthy. The ceremony was overwhelming, to be sitting in a room with hundreds of inspiring educators and supporters of education was an honour.*



**Paddy McCabe**

Headteacher, St Oliver Plunkett Primary School





# ‘We need more people willing to tell us how it is’

**Tim Leunig was a Downing Street, Treasury and DfE advisor with the furlough scheme and ABS qualification to his name. Like his friend Dominic Cummings, he is happy to ruffle a few feathers**

Tim Leunig is the brains behind some of the biggest education policies of the past decade. He also came up with the furlough scheme, which helped to stop thousands of businesses collapsing during Covid.

We meet at Westminster Abbey, where Leunig arrives in a high-vis vest (although he didn't cycle here). It fits his reputation as the archetypal “weirdo and misfit” that Dominic Cummings, the government's former chief adviser, said Westminster needed more of.

The setting enables Leunig to indulge his love of history and politics as we tour memorials to the people who created ripples on the tide of British history, before turning to the ripples of Leunig's own making.

## The weirdo and misfits

In 12 years as a civil servant, Leunig advised Number 10, the Treasury and Department for Education, among others. He is a close ally of Michael Gove, Nick Gibb and Cummings. Ed Davey, leader of the Liberal Democrats, is an “old friend” and neighbour.

He agrees with Cummings' infamous remark about weirdos and misfits. “We need more people willing to tell us how it is.”

Also, like Cummings, he is not afraid to cause offence. He railed against the regeneration of northern cities more than 15 years ago, saying the North is “less desirable” for business and calling for more housebuilding instead down South.

Four years ago, he created a storm by suggesting the UK does not need farmers.

He tells me that any teacher who does not

believe in the phonics approach is “not a professional, any more than a doctor who says don't believe in antibiotics, or that smoking doesn't kill you”.

Leunig says he will “tell you what I think is true, and I will change my mind when my understanding of the facts changes”.

He says working on the furlough scheme while economic adviser at the Treasury was “the greatest privilege of my life”.

He took the idea from a scheme in Germany to protect workers when certain industries face problems. He is adamant that UK unemployment would have hit four million without it.

He left the Treasury as ministers slashed the civil servant headcount in 2022. Cummings said his departure was “another sign this Downing Street is pointless”, praising Leunig's “honest advice

## Profile: Tim Leunig

without any of normal courtier dynamics so ubiquitous and poisonous" in Westminster.

Leunig took up a few short-term advisory roles across other departments, including the DfE last year, then after joining consultancy Public First as a director in May he spent September and October as the prime minister's education adviser. He recently started as the Onward think-tank's chief economist.

### 'Conquering maths'

While he has many policy legacies, the most immediate is the controversial Advanced British Standard (ABS). Under the Baccalaureate-style qualification, students will study at least five subjects at either "major" or "minor" levels, including maths and English.

But, given the current government is likely to be on its way out, and there are much more pressing issues than qualification reform, why now?

"Why not now?" he says. "You have to start somewhere, sometime."

He believes maths will be essential in the future AI economy as it teaches a "way of thinking that is structured and not intuitive".

"Maths is hard. When you've conquered maths, you've gained a skill and a sense of logic that lasts you a lifetime."

He thinks too many people are having to retake the subject after they leave school, and backs Labour's plan to focus on maths in primary schools.

But how to recruit the teachers? Essentially, pay them more and "out compete other employers".

The problem is that England has "lots of careers" for maths graduates, unlike Finland, for instance. "Of course they want to be teachers – what else can you do there?"

He says there was "virtually nothing" in terms of maths policy proposals that he did not "put a big smiley face and a double tick on" when they came across his desk.

Although he left Oxford University in 1996 with a PhD and multiple accolades under his belt, he was not a standout maths student at school. He got a C in his further maths A-level at Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School, a boy's



## 'I will change my mind when my understanding of the facts changes'

grammar school in Rochester.

Leunig had a relatively modest upbringing in Kent. His father left soon after he started primary school, his mother did shop work. His "rather posh" accent comes from being taught to overpronounce syllables to cure a speech impediment.

### 'The aim of good government is social mobility'

Leunig's time at the DfE ran from 2012, as then-schools minister David Law's adviser, to 2017, as the department's chief scientific adviser.

He waxes lyrical about Gove, who introduced the pupil premium – despite it uplifting funding for "kids from families who disproportionately vote Labour".

He fondly recalls Gove writing on his office whiteboard "the aim of any good government is social mobility", something that Leunig believes passionately in. Leunig devised the national funding formula in 2014 (although it took another four years to get "political buy-in").

His belief in fair funding stems from his own schooling. He recalls how books – which said "Kent County Council" on the back – "used to run

out every year. The school would ring the council and beg for more exercise books. It didn't have a budget to buy books itself."

While academisation gave schools that financial control, the "unfairness was [still] baked in".

Leunig says the new formula – which has still to be rolled out fully – will mean it is "no longer possible for a school to claim that an individual child would be better funded at another school, or that funding is the reason that the child is doing badly in their school".

He is "profoundly proud" of replacing the "utterly pernicious" system of five A to C GCSEs, which Leunig believes incentivised schools to try to game the system, with the progress 8 accountability measure.

While some schools have narrowed the number of subjects taken since, he puts this down to making GCSEs "broader and more substantive".

Leunig's own school exam results included a B at history A-level. He says he was "unlucky" but, like history exams, Ofsted inspections are "valid but not reliable". He highlights how having three of your best teachers ill when inspectors visit could substantially change the outcome.



## Profile: Tim Leunig

“Ofsted is supposed to be a value judgment, but that comes at the expense of reliability. So, the question is, what do you do with that judgment?”

Leunig adds, though, that he has “a lot of time and sympathy” for former Ofsted chief inspector Amanda Spielman, who he has known for 20 years.

### ‘Closing schools next big challenge’

His biggest regret is not rolling out a randomised control trial before introducing virtual school heads in 2014 to oversee the education of looked-after children in local authorities. These children are “so vulnerable that we really need to know” if virtual heads work.

“They are probably a very good idea. But [without a randomised control trial] it’s really hard to work [that] out. Which means you are vulnerable to the next minister’s bright idea.”

Leunig is also “surprised” he was never informed about reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC), especially by local authorities that employ structural engineers.

“Heads at the time complained to me about the building schools for the future programme, which they found very expensive, and PFI schools – never about RAAC.”

He thinks the “the biggest challenge facing the next government is going to be closing schools” due to falling birth-rates.

“Think about all the schools we’ve rebuilt in the last decade that we’re now going to throw away because the number of kids is going down,” he says.

“If only 10 years ago we’d expanded schools with Portacabins, we could now move them to secondary schools as the bulge moves through. Then, when the bulge goes altogether, sell them off or demolish them.”

Education secretary Gillian Keegan was derided for saying that pupils prefer portable classrooms amid the RAAC crisis. But Leunig says “they’re great – relatively cheap, much more flexible and well insulated”.

“Who cares” that they are relatively unattractive? “Paint the outsides!”

Unsurprisingly, he has got other bold ideas, too.

In 2011, he claimed there was “good evidence that teaching assistants do not work” because



## ‘When you’ve conquered maths, you’ve gained a skill and sense of logic that lasts a lifetime’

classrooms with TAs “do not have better results”.

While he supports TAs as a way into teaching, he has “more scepticism” about “a dinner lady with no qualifications” taking on the role. There is a danger of kids’ confidence being impacted by “nice lady syndrome”.

“The teacher can avoid [dealing with] a kid because the TA’s looking after them. They then become isolated from their friends.”

### ‘We don’t try enough things’

He thinks further financial savings could be made by stopping the “huge cross subsidies” some schools make to their sixth forms and suggests ringfencing the budget for 11 to 16-year-olds.

“A lot of academies now create sixth forms because it impresses parents. It makes it easier to recruit teachers ... but many of them are very small and inefficient.”

Leunig, who recalls being in a class of 40 as a pupil at St Michael’s Roman Catholic Primary School in Medway, says there is “precious little evidence” that class size makes any difference –

“at least until you get to 12 per class”.

He also suggests that every head should become a governor at another local school.

What about their workload pressures? Heads have “got to get better at delegating”.

One issue heads might all agree with Leunig on is his concern over the deteriorating mental health of teenage girls. The “standard argument” that “boys fall out, punch each other, hug and get on with life” while girls are “catty and backstabbing” has “always been true, but now social media has taken them to another level”.

Nonetheless, he does not mind advocating for more screen time for some children – in the form of full-time online schooling. The approach “could benefit children in rural settings”.

He adds: “If we have people of calibre running online schools, I’m willing to take a punt on it. My general principle is that we don’t try enough things.”

**Leunig will be writing a regular column for Schools Week on all things education policy**



# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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ANDREW OTTY

Head of policy and partnerships,  
National Youth Agency

## The dangerous policy blind spot that's driving workload

**Policy makers have become so school-centric they cannot see the willing army of support under their noses, says Andrew Otty. I know. I missed them too**

It is a worn-thin joke that every policy initiative relating to young people should be delivered through schools. Whether that is the popular desire for more extra-curricular activities and “life skills” seen in Public First’s recent report, the same organisation’s sensible call for wellbeing supervisors, or the more niche – from gardening and litter patrols to meditation and “sleeping skills”.

This snowballing list is directly in tension with teacher recruitment and efforts to avoid driving the existing workforce over the brink.

It is as though policy folk can’t imagine any provision for young people that is not a school, or anyone skilled at working with children who is not a teacher. Thanks to the billion-pound real-terms cut to annual spending on youth services since 2010, the nation’s rich array of youth groups and services and its downsized-but-heroic army of professional youth workers are frequently sidelined.

To my shame, I have suffered from the same school-centric mindset. I was formerly a policy lead in the Department for Education. In 2021, I was working on the team

supporting Sir Kevan Collins with post-Covid education recovery plans, including the longer school day.

The idea that this would look like a wraparound extra-curricular and wellbeing offer was generally welcomed by parents and schools, even if alarmist visions of 5pm Latin classes were rattling the commentators. The difficulty was in finding the additional workforce to deliver it so as not to stretch over-worked teachers any further.

There were certainly some novel ideas (and some simply naïve ones) but I cannot claim to have made the connection that, in retrospect, I realise everyone was missing: youth workers are experienced and expert in this space and have been standing ready to meet young people’s needs for pastoral support, broader skills and adventure while austerity has cut deep into their funding and esteem.

In one generation, local authority spending on youth services has been cut by 73 per cent across England and an increasing number of local authorities now have no youth offer whatsoever. We have lost 4,500 qualified youth workers from the front line.

Cross-sector, integrated working is much diminished. And we find ourselves in a crisis of absenteeism, exclusions and exploitation.

This crisis was avoidable. New



“This crisis was avoidable – and it is reversible

research from the University of Warwick demonstrates a link between youth centres closing and permanent exclusions in an area increasing by an incredible 20 per cent. Young people spend 85 per cent of their waking hours outside of school, so failing to invest in that time has had entirely foreseeable consequences.

It was avoidable – and it is reversible. The National Youth Agency’s *Better Together: Youth Work With Schools* report highlights case studies where schools and youth services are already collaborating successfully to improve the lives of young people. One example is The Mix, a youth organisation that works with its local schools to provide coaching, wellbeing groups and crisis support for their students, stepping in for those who are struggling most and helping them to keep studying.

We’re seeing some small but encouraging changes. Updated government guidance for *Working Together to Safeguard Children* now includes youth workers as partners in supporting referrals, assessments and strategy discussions. Youth

work is also described as a supportive service and associate for multi-agency arrangements.

We know that youth workers are able to contribute wider contextual insights, so this is a positive recognition of their value among allied professionals. At the same time, the revised guidance increases the ask of schools, so this undoubtedly feels like the moment for our allied sectors to renew their partnerships.

Youth workers are uniquely able to bridge the gap between a school and its local communities and to tackle barriers towards engagement with learning. They do this through building a trusting, voluntary relationship with young people that is focussed on their wellbeing and giving them a voice, freeing capacity for teachers and improving the long-term outcomes of the young people we all serve.

The task ahead of teachers after Covid of pulling academic engagement and performance out of their noses is challenging enough. The key to supporting them in that effort is to pull youth services funding out of its own freefall.

## Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## BEN JANE

Senior deputy headteacher,  
Oak Wood School, Hillingdon

## Attendance: Easy policy solutions are no longer enough

**Our attendance woes won't be solved by doing more of the same in the hope of returning to the 'old normal', writes Ben Jane**

Nationally, more than 140,000 pupils currently have attendance levels below 50 per cent and over 86,000 families are electively home-educating their children. One in four pupils is now regularly missing school, and school leaders are desperate for proven strategies to help them improve attendance. But is it time to start again and rethink our whole approach?

The government's approach is clearly not helping, but the Labour Party's plan looks equally lacklustre. Most schools already run breakfast clubs. Ofsted already reports on attendance. All schools have robust attendance systems and policies, developed over years, that include clear communication with families, clear expectations and actions, thorough data, an intimate understanding of context and collaboration with other schools and leaders.

These actions, coupled with a relentless focus from the school, can have a positive impact – but they are plainly not enough.

Our whole-school attendance has been a challenge for as long as I can

remember. With targeted care and support, we have had success with our SEN Support cohort, whose attendance is above national average in all key stage 3 year groups, and our pupils with EHCPs, whose attendance is above national average in all year groups (and 11.3 per cent above in Year 9). But, despite the best efforts of our dedicated teams, our attendance still sits just below the national average.

We have high numbers of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. For some, especially the most vulnerable, the pandemic experience has certainly played a part in their lack of social development and the rise in mental health problems among them. However, the list of other factors impacting on attendance seems endless: parental unemployment, embedded behaviours from primary school, lack of aspirations at home – not to mention the introduction of the ULEZ charge.

Last week, a year 7 pupil arrived two minutes after our 8.30am start. She had left home at 6.15am and walked 12 minutes before catching two buses from near Heathrow airport. Traffic aside, one bus had broken down and another had driven past her. And there I was reminding her about the importance of good punctuality.

She is not alone. Many of our pupils



“Maybe, just maybe it's time to start again with attendance”

live 20 minutes or more away from the school by public transport – in part a legacy of our previously poor reputation. Often, the one parent who lives at home is already at work when the pupil wakes up.

This young person has all the characteristics you might wish for from a pupil: kindness, care and thoughtfulness, respect, safe and sensible behaviour, an independent and resilient personality – as well as a clear understanding of the importance of attendance and punctuality.

And yet here I was challenging her for arriving late and, as per the school policy, recording the minutes for her end-of-term report. Had she been 20 minutes later, this would have impacted her attendance and potentially triggered a meeting with home.

Before anyone attacks me, I made sure she was looked after and ate breakfast. I also informed her parent and got her into assembly just behind everyone else.

Of the 30 pupils with the lowest attendance at Oak Wood, four have a child protection plan, three have a key worker, 18 have a SEND

diagnosis, 24 are disadvantaged and more than half come from single-parent families. Every single one deserves our support, not punishment.

So maybe it isn't the pandemic that has caused this sudden desire for everyone to stay at home. Maybe, just maybe, we have all forgotten the collective role we play in ensuring that every child attends school: not just schools and families but the local authority, the bus company and ministers too.

And maybe, just maybe it is time to start again with how we approach the problem.

Can we move away from the six-week summer break and spread this out across the year? 45 days without seeing our most vulnerable pupils troubles me every summer.

What about a four-day school week? Could a more flexible approach to working in schools and how schools themselves operate mean families could afford holidays without impacting attendance?

None of this would be easy to deliver, but the easy policy solutions are not hitting the spot.

## Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UKDR SAM  
PARRETTCEO, London South East  
Academies Trust

## Balanced MAT expansion is all about striking the right chords

**MATs must avoid an opportunistic 'popcorn' approach to expansion to build resilient and transformational civic institutions, says Sam Parrett**

With budget pressures weighing down hard on schools, an increase in pupils with SEND and a recruitment crisis, we are all operating in a challenging context. For those of us running schools and trusts in such turbulent, uncertain times and often in spite of policy, developing and implementing a viable growth plan is crucial to long-term sustainability.

To increase their resilience, as the CST/Edurio research suggests, smaller organisations are likely to aim for "safety in numbers". This will mean a sharp focus for many on growing the number of schools in their networks.

But the success of such a strategy is hugely dependent on achieving the right balance between provisions rather than linear growth alone. And, in our experience, building an autonomous, high-trust and accountable culture is fundamental.

Our growth journey over the past ten years has been a slow expansion of our network of schools. As a unique, college-sponsored MAT

providing many progression pathways, we took on our first school in 2014 (a failing LA-run AP), and our tenth academy (an outstanding mainstream primary school) has just come on board.

This contrast of provision types is reflective of our mixed-economy approach, growing a diverse profile of schools including AP, SEMH, ASD and PLMD alongside mainstream primary.

Some of our schools joined us with academy orders, while others were good or outstanding. Each is now rated good or better except one, which is awaiting its first Ofsted visit since conversion.

We also took on a music service which was at risk of closure. Two years on, Bexley Music is thriving, offering people of all ages the chance to benefit from music education. This success is the result of dedicated staff, plus a genuine synergy in terms of the trust's aims and values.

While some incoming schools will help to build capacity, others will take it. In that sense, being a MAT CEO is not unlike being a conductor of one of our many orchestras: not making too much noise ourselves but ensuring equilibrium between all the parts to generate as much power as effectively as possible. And, much like growing an ensemble into an orchestra, MAT growth needs



“ While some schools help to build capacity, others take it

to be planned and designed rather than opportunistic.

We faced a dilemma as to whether to take a "popcorn" approach (ie going for opportunities as they arose) or to stick to the things we were doing well and finding more opportunities to do these things. We went for the latter, recognising that a range of different provisions – both capacity givers and capacity takers – can be a real strength and ensuring that we properly assessed risk and opportunity in every new expansion.

Guiding that decision, in the end, is your sense of authenticity. No person or organisation can be all things to all people – and not every school to come along will be the right fit.

We ask leaders of prospective schools to visit our current ones to gain a transparent and honest view from our heads, and we ask them to take the same critical view about whether we share the same values, aims and ambitions.

Relationships with local authorities and the DfE are also key.

Little will matter more than proving yourself a trustworthy partner who is committed to working collaboratively for the system as a whole.

Our focus is now on developing hubs of different provision types across specific geographic areas. This is not just about expanding but raising standards and diversifying educational choice through collaboration. It is also about growing roots that will weather any storm, and spreading our expertise as well as the risk.

With so many external challenges, the sector needs a more sustainable approach to mergers, delivering economies of scale to smaller trusts to positively impact the quality of education being delivered.

Diversification of an offer rather than simple expansion will help to develop partnerships and expand reach. This is working for us and supporting our mission to build a truly transformational civic institution in our local communities. And this, I believe, must be the ultimate aim of every trust.



# Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## CAROLYN ROBERTS

Headteacher, The Thomas Tallis School and Co-director, The PTI

### Think underwear, not handcuffs, to entice teachers to stay

Teachers need confidence-building and support to flourish – not tying down in questionable environments, says Carolyn Roberts

We cannot recruit our way out of this crisis. I don't need to rehearse the figures. Secondary recruitment is at best 71 per cent of target. There were 93 per cent more vacancies advertised last year than before Covid.

As well as recruiting, we have to retain. We need to keep the 92 per cent of the 15,000-20,000 teachers who leave for reasons other than retirement, every year. We have to value, keep and build up the teachers we have.

There are two inextricably linked ways of doing this: one is quality CPD, the other is a quality workplace.

The PTI was set up by the former Prince of Wales 21 years ago. We support teachers in hundreds of schools every year at all stages of their career.

Our focus is specific and simple: subject expertise and subject teaching. Using academics, public experts, practitioners and experts we enable thousands of teachers every year to rediscover and reinforce their passion.

The link between good CPD and teacher retention is well established,

from Education Support's 2023 report on workload to Ofsted's review of teacher professional development in schools to the Welcome Trust's 2022 CPD Challenge recommendation that government should embed an entitlement to high-quality CPD for all teachers.

The PTI commissioned the ProBono Economics 2022 report *Learning to Save* to specify the investment needed. Their detailed findings said a 35-hour annual entitlement to teacher CPD could retain 12,000 more teachers a year - neatly matching the number of new teachers we will need in secondary next year.

So what is quality CPD? Ofsted says it shares insights, sets goals, teaches techniques, embeds practice, focuses on outcomes, evidence and expertise and makes teachers more expert. That is some workload in itself – and surprisingly easy to do badly.

Whose insights? What goals? Which techniques? What outcomes and evidence? To what end?

Perhaps that is why so many teachers told the workload report that they try to do other things during training: planning, marking – anything rather than sink beneath shifting, impenetrable jargon.

Quality training is a bit like top-notch underwear. It holds and supports teachers and gives them



“No amount of quick fixes can rescue our profession”

confidence to face the world. It is not jerry-built on short-term goals to big up the school and it is not shackled to someone else's Ofsted agenda. It is authentic, deep and meaningful.

Quality training makes you want to rush back to school to try it out and tell everyone about it. It helps you to make sense of your world and reconnects you with your deepest purpose and motivations for being a teacher.

Last year, the PTI hosted a virtual event emphasising the crucial role of CPD in enhancing educational standards. Professor Becky Francis CBE, CEO of the Education Endowment Foundation, highlighted the importance of quality teaching for significant impact on learning, underscoring the need for effective professional development.

This kind of training has to be specific to be useful, deeply rooted in the signature pedagogies of subjects, their rhythms and integrities. Leaders have to trust teachers to dig deeply into their shared knowledge and expertise: it can't be done generically. Maths teachers need maths, geographers, geography.

Experienced teachers are revitalised in this way and – the

PTI knows – are more likely to stay for the long term. Meanwhile, new teachers are encouraged by their vocation and feel equally valued as whole professionals embarking on career-long thinking, collaboration, planning and evaluation.

But this kind of quality professional development can only be fully effective in a quality workplace, one that places high trust in teachers. Viviane Robinson says that leaders need courage, integrity, respect and honesty. The Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education goes further.

We need selflessness, trust, wisdom and openness too to support teachers in their collaborative professionalism and set them free to nourish themselves as experts.

No amount of quick-fix bursaries, workload hacks or divisive pay differentials can rescue our profession. Five-year golden handcuffs are still handcuffs. Who wouldn't run for the hills when they are taken off?

No, the key to retention is in the hands of all of us: collaborative expertise and professional trust. Give teachers their 35 hours, and make them good.

# Solutions

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## SUZIE JABARIAN

Senior lecturer in initial teacher education for English, Swansea University

### Five simple strategies to boost vocabulary learning

**Suzie Jabarian sets out five sure-fire ways to ensure students explore, understand and retain more new vocab**

A teacher is reading enthusiastically to his Year 8 class. He comes across an interesting word. He pauses, lifts his head and proudly asks, as he always has done: “Can anyone tell me what that word means?”

A pupil raises her hand and offers a brief explanation. Satisfied, the teacher continues reading and the interesting word disappears from the page, never to be seen or spoken again.

Despite decades of research on what makes vocabulary learning effective, this is a common classroom scenario. Vocabulary learning is, of course, often hidden or implicit – meaning that many students will acquire vocabulary from reading – but this is not always the case, especially for struggling readers.

Teachers can, however, ensure that more students meaningfully explore, understand and retain new vocabulary simply by making vocabulary learning more visible.

Here are five simple strategies to try:

#### 1. Pre-teach

Select a small number of words to introduce to students before they read a text. Word selection is a

matter of professional judgment, but thinking about the words or concepts you want your students to confidently understand is a useful starting point.

Pre-teaching a small number of words will reduce the number of times you need to disrupt the flow of a text by stopping to explain. It will also help to prime students’ knowledge.

When students meet the word in the text, they will be instantly provided with a contextualised example and any ensuing whole-class discussions will be more purposeful as a result.

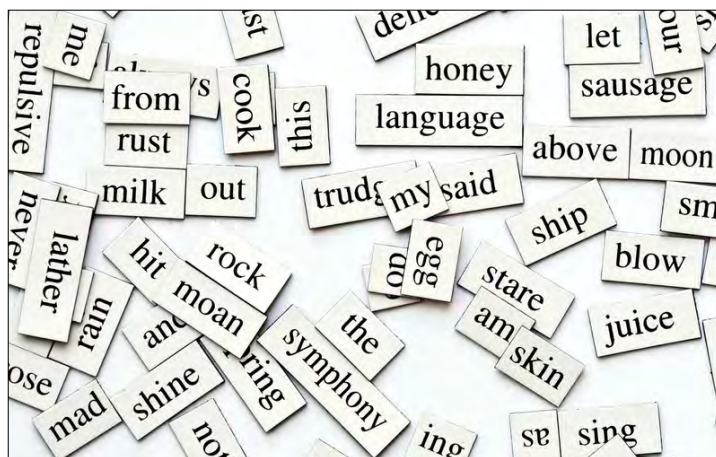
#### 2. Deliberately define

Provide a student-friendly definition up front. If pupils spend time guessing meanings, it is possible that they will cling onto and recall incorrect meanings later. But providing definitions from the outset means you can focus on getting them to spend more time on what really matters: deep processing.

The authors of *Bringing Words to Life* offer two basic principles for developing student-friendly definitions: capture the essence of the word and how it is used in the relevant context and use everyday language.

#### 3. Promote deep processing

It is important not to see vocabulary learning as a “one and done” activity. Word knowledge exists as a rich



“ Vocabulary learning is often hidden or implicit

network of information, so prompt students to interact with the word in different contexts.

Encourage students to associate newly introduced words with their prior experiences or with other words and concepts. There are many efficient classroom activities which can provide deep processing experiences for students: ask them to contrast word meanings; get them to consider when a word would and would not apply; spend a little time teasing out nuances between pairs of closely related words; ask them to consider words along a continuum. The opportunities are endless.

#### 4. Expose more to embed

It is important to consider that students seldom learn a word after one encounter. Word learning increases in small steps over time, so providing multiple exposures is key. Revisiting words briefly in new contexts will help to ensure better integration into students’ vocabulary repertoire.

Time-intensive activities are not needed either. Simply prompt students through questioning to consider how previously learned words apply to new contexts and situations.

Try asking students to keep a vocabulary log. For younger children, perhaps add new words to a wall display as you progress through a scheme of learning – but remember to refer back to it frequently.

#### 5. Activate interest

For me, this is probably the most important change. Attempt to ignite students’ interest in all kinds of words.

Utilise interesting etymologies where appropriate, because sometimes the weird and wonderful origins of words can spark interest. Draw students’ attention to prefixes and suffixes; help them to see the sometimes puzzling yet fascinating connections within and between words.

Lastly and importantly, it is a common misconception that teachers must know everything. In fact, it can be powerful for students to know that this is not the case when it comes to language.

Let your students in on the secret that language is complex, confusing and ever evolving, so what really matters is a willingness to embark on exploring it. And never stop exploring it yourself!



# THE REVIEW

## INITIUM

**Author:** Emma Turner

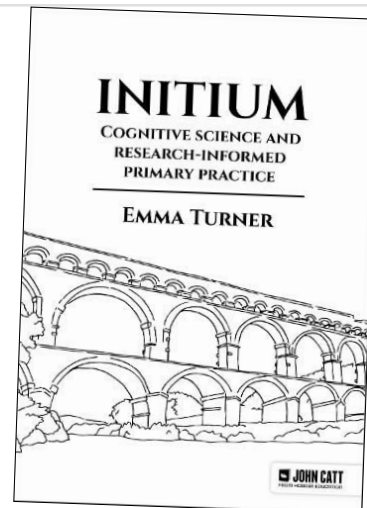
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**Publication date:** 29 September 2023

**ISBN:** 1398389749

**Reviewer:** Sonia Thompson, Headteacher,  
St Matthew's C of E Primary School

BOOK  
TV  
FILM  
RADIO  
EVENT  
RESOURCE



At St Matthew's, we strive to be suited, booted and rooted in all things "science of learning". As a research school, evidence-informed practice is the way we support educators to realise the EEF mission – to break the link between income and attainment.

So I was excited to read Emma Turner's latest book. The roll call of experts offering praise for *Initium* is a veritable who's who, which itself says a lot about its credentials.

*Initium* is the third book in Turner's series focused on the primary curriculum. I loved the other two (*Simplicitus* and *Simplictus Altium*) and it felt to me as if she had covered all the key principles of primary curriculum design.

So it was interesting to see her tackle one of the most under-researched yet currently most influential areas for primary leaders: cognitive science.

And tackle it she does! Turner is a seasoned primary practitioner and within each chapter there is a real sense that the work has been done and the questions have been asked. What emerges is a concise compendium of cognitive science as it applies specifically (but not exclusively) to primary schools.

In many ways, little in this book is new. If you have read any cognitive science-themed book or been to a ResearchEd conference, you will have read/heard much of the content. However, this is not cog-sci lite!

What makes *Initium* stand out is its absolute laser focus on the nuances of the principles of cognitive sciences as they apply to younger students. Turner eloquently exposes the unique

principles and practices required to deploy these techniques with children whose brains are still developing.

From the start, Turner articulates the powerful possibilities that knowing more about "the wonders of science" offers to educators. From the preface onwards, the book is permeated with a sense of purpose and "privilege" involved in growing our "understanding of the learning business for younger children".

Turner begins by locating Geary's "biologically primary and secondary knowledge" at the heart of the practice for primary provision. She lays out the points and then asks the reader to consider their own settings and edicts, in light of the evidence, particularly for their youngest learners. As she states, "understanding this knowledge is fundamental to understanding cognitive load".

The subsequent chapters – inevitably laced with Latin – lay out cognitive concepts and interpret them in light of what we know about a child's brain. Turner uses each concept to cement her certainty that the uniqueness of primary can and must be preserved, no matter what.

Nowhere is this clearer than in Chapter 10, "Play, playfulness and primary pedagogy". The science of play is unpicked and positioned as absolutely necessary "to develop the cognitive, we must therefore be cognisant and conversant in how to harness the power of play and playful pedagogy". It is a thought-provoking read for any knowledge-rich die-hard.

Make no mistake, there is no compromise on the fiercely primary thread that runs through Turner's trilogy of books. It is summed up in her

section on Task Design and Assessment: "When we plan progression models for subjects with a similar fidelity and singular level of detail to those of a secondary subject department, we can run the risk of fragmenting the beauty of the interconnected primary offer."

To this end, Turner extends her celebration of primary practice in her conclusion. She begins by writing that "teaching is legacy. Legacy is therefore duty... what we ensure is not forgotten will help shape the world...".

She goes on to consider the position of education in some children's lives. She challenges the reader to consider their part in the "legacy and beyond".

Will it be merely to "sculpt a brain", or will it be to play a part in the "celebration of craftsmanship, human endeavour and beauty" that research-informed approaches afford us, within the backdrop of the unique primary preserve we inhabit?

After reading *Initium*, I am certain that I and many others will continue to work on our evidence-informed "legacy and beyond" with a newly re-focused "primary-rich" lens.

★★★★☆  
Rating



**THE CONVERSATION**  
LISTENING IN ON  
THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM



**Jess Mahdavi-Gladwell**  
Deputy head, Robson House, Camden

**COMMON CAUSE?**

The sense of joy at returning to school has made January’s dark mornings and cold weather easily bearable. Within this sits an awareness that this is not the case for all, particularly those anticipating a visit from Ofsted. But perhaps they can find some reassurance in what appears to be a rapprochement between the inspectorate and unions.



First, in a recent webinar on mental health training for all Ofsted inspectors (posted on YouTube for anyone who might wish to watch it), the new chief inspector, Sir Martyn Oliver, shares his belief that staff and unions seek to prioritise the needs of children. I agree, as I am sure that many of you will.

Then, in his latest blog, Geoff Barton responds to the recently announced pause to Ofsted inspections, sharing criticism from those who feel the pause is wrong as well as those who think it is not enough.

Just over a year after the death of Ruth Perry, Barton states that, by 22 January, there can be in place a “clear mechanism for

safeguarding the welfare of leaders and staff during inspections when things go wrong” and that the “fear factor” that can grow in the run-up to an inspection can be reduced.

I sincerely hope he is right on both counts.

**TEACHING THROUGH THE POLYCRISIS**

The term “polycrisis” is new to me. I am more familiar with “omnishambles” or its ruder form, the delightfully named “clusterfuck”. Whatever we call it though, the effects of environmental degradation, economic and social disparities, conflicts and population displacement are in plain sight.



Here, Shaeffer and Santiago write of different impacts of this polycrisis – one of which is “increased developmental and learning delays” for young children. They raise two key points: that curriculum reform is fundamentally insufficient to prepare children for the future that certainly awaits them, and that consideration of very young children is mostly absent from this discourse.

It is a very blunt article, which faces up to reality in a way few do. It left me wondering how those who work in education can take steps towards addressing the polycrisis – and the extent to which we are actually able to.

Perhaps a change in our focus could impact the focus of those who write not just education policy but our national response to these events. In other words, where do we draw the line between education and activism?

**GROUNDING POLICY**

How do we balance the drive towards evidence-informed teaching with teachers’ sense of individuality? Here, Tom Sherrington tries to walk that tightrope.

His praise for each teacher’s uniqueness had me reminiscing about present and former colleagues and just how innovative they have often been. Describing teacher development as a process where each teacher moves closer to being the best



version of themselves, he goes on to promote the idea of guiding principles rather than non-negotiables with regard to methods and reminds us of the value of working to effect genuine change (rather than “surface, performative, compliance-check change”).

With links to further reading, the enduring image of school communities staffed by teachers who bring their unique selves to the job leaves a lingering smile.

**THE PROFESSIONAL IS PERSONAL**


Ruth Swailes’ reflections on a year since her husband passed away are personal and deeply human. However, I have found myself drawing some professional lessons from them too.

One point was related to one of their daughters worrying, every time an adult walked into her classroom, that they were coming with bad news. Few of us are likely to be teaching a child experiencing this particular dread, but some of us are, and many more are teaching children who are worrying about some other news we may deliver.

We cannot remove worries or prevent children experiencing loss. But we can be aware that something as simple as entering a room can cause distress – and consider how to attenuate this.

Ever the motivator, Swailes encourages us to “be bold, be yourself unashamedly, and live your very best life”. As I pull on my gloves for another cold playground duty, I can think of no better way to make common cause, chip away at the polycrisis and effect real change.



Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts 



# The Knowledge

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



## How do some schools manage to close disadvantage gaps?

**Mark Wrangles, Director,  
Close the Gaps**

Across the UK, when it comes to poverty, the picture is stark. 3.9 million of our children are living in poverty. One million children live in households that are categorised as destitute, not able to meet the basic need to stay warm, dry, clean and fed. That means that, in the average class in our schools, nine pupils are living in poverty and two of these are destitute.

These figures manifest themselves in the experience of our teachers, children arriving at school hungry, dirty and tired, and understandably struggling to learn. Against this backdrop the education system has found the gap between these pupils and their peers stubbornly large and difficult to shift. But that is not true for every school; there are some bright spots in our education system. So what can we learn from them?

The recent report from Close the Gaps used the Pupil Premium statements published by each school, alongside GCSE data to analyse the strategies used with the schools that had "closed the gap" across 2021-23. It compared this cohort with schools who were the least successful.

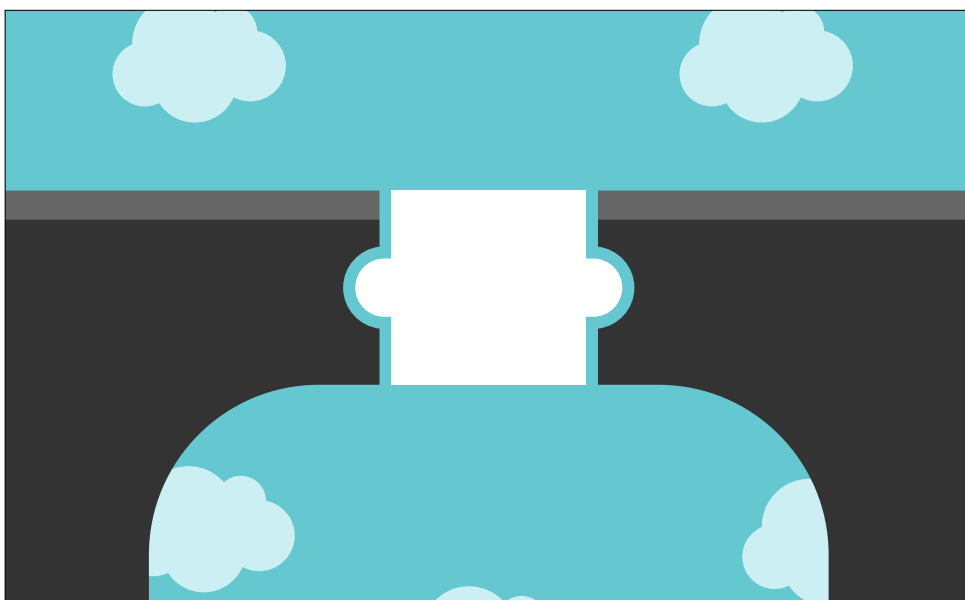
The study used schools achieving progress in line or above national averages, with at least 25 per cent of pupils eligible for free school meals. All the schools researched were rated 'good' or above by Ofsted. The aim of the report was to promote ideas, discussion and to create further questions, driving forward our ability to close the gaps.

### Characteristics of schools that 'close the gap'

The cohort of successful schools had some clear differences when compared with the average school across the country. They were all found in large cities or the Southeast, all had higher-than-average numbers of students on FSM and higher-than-average numbers of students with English as a second language. They were also more likely to be a faith or single-sex school.

### School spending

The pupil premium statements are broken down into three funding areas: teaching, targeted



academic intervention and wider strategies. While total funding across our cohorts of schools was similar, the main difference between the most and least successful groups of schools was found in the balance of spending.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, those schools that closed the gap spent a greater proportion of their funds on the teaching strand, specifically on CPD and increasing the capacity of their teaching workforce.

### Strategies for success

While the success of a strategy is often down to the way that it is implemented, there were some interesting commonalities between the successful schools. There were some areas that appeared across most successful schools: investment in reading and literacy, pastoral and mental health support, explicit cultural capital and enrichment programmes, and a suite of practical support for pupils. They also used intervention outside school hours rather than within the school day.

Interestingly, schools in the successful cohort invested less in behaviour strategies. Not because behaviour is not important in the success of disadvantaged pupils, but possibly because the successful schools were investing in the right systems to enable good behaviour: mental health, pastoral care and regulating

activities like sport.

There was also a noticeable difference in investment in leadership. Very few successful schools invested in leadership across any area, while this was much more common with those with large gaps in progress. This could be evidence that this form of investment yields little improvement in outcomes, or it could be a mark of disparity in leadership capacity, which one group is trying to put right. More research is needed.

The report also outlines a range of other differences between the school groups: for example, successful schools fund school counsellors, SEND support and sports more than the others.

Finally, the report also includes some suggested strategies for reducing the barriers for disadvantaged young people. It includes a list of the schools involved, and a fruitful next step could be to visit one that matches your context to understand their practice more deeply.

Schools cannot solve poverty alone, but it is surely key that any funding available to them is spent where it is most likely to lower barriers, close gaps and improve life chances.

Download the report at  
[www.closesthegaps.co.uk](http://www.closesthegaps.co.uk)

Week in

# Westminster

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

## MONDAY

The Department for Education published its "progress" on the commitments made in the Education Staff Wellbeing Charter, which came out in 2021.

One of the commitments was to stop sending .gov.uk alerts to staff outside of working hours. Progress included new "principles for effective guidance" and plans to streamline the volume of communications.

There was no word, though, on why the government broke its commitment several times – including on four occasions in a single week last year – as previously revealed by *Schools Week*.

Elsewhere, just a few paragraphs were submitted by Ofsted as part of its own progress update.

The watchdog started its submission by saying: "Ofsted continues to place staff wellbeing at the forefront of its thinking". Hmm.

\*\*\*

A new YouGov poll – predicting a "landslide majority akin to 1997" for the Labour party at this year's general election – had some uncomfortable findings for education ministers.

It said education secretary Gillian Keegan and children's minister David Johnston face narrowly losing their seats to the Lib Dems, while skills minister Rob Halfon faces losing out to the Opposition.

## TUESDAY

The £8 million portrait of King Charles set for the walls of public buildings, including schools, has been unveiled.

We're told it's a traditional and formal portrait of the King in an Admiral of the Fleet uniform, with official medals on display.

Deputy prime minister Oliver Dowden



said "displaying this new portrait will serve as a reminder to us all of the example set by our ultimate public servant and I hope as many eligible organisations as possible will wish to continue this proud British tradition and honour our King's reign."

*Schools Week* asked the cabinet office, under the freedom of information laws, how many schools had applied, but they refused and said the information will be released in due course.

Schools still have until February 2 to apply. Don't all rush at once!

\*\*\*

Keegs appeared on the "Leading" podcast with Alistair Campbell and Rory Stewart this week. She was one of the handful of Tory MPs who backed Stewart for his short-lived leadership bid a few years back.

One of the more interesting insights was that she has her great grandmother's life-long membership to the Labour party – signed personally by Eric Ogden – hanging in her office.

And she regrets swearing in the infamous comment on RAAC that she was doing a "fucking good job." Apparently her mum wasn't very happy.

\*\*\*

Video calls with politicians and civil servants are often quite an awkward affair, but the awkwardness was dialled up when a webinar Q&A with Keegan had to be relocated to her Parliamentary office due

to what she deemed "controversial" votes (aka the Rwanda deal).

The ed sec and head of DfE regions group John Edwards were perched on plush armchairs, and at one point permanent secretary Susan Acland-Hood literally knelt beside them to provide some extra details on a policy. Cosy!

## WEDNESDAY

Keegan went to Watford to visit local MP Dean Russell, where she trotted out a local spin on the dodgy Ofsted improvement statistic that ministers have been continually criticised for using.

The education secretary praised the "phenomenal shift" in the area's inspection results, up from 80 per cent in 2010 to 96 per cent now (without mentioning that for most of that time "outstanding" schools have not been inspected and \*way\* more schools now get good under the new framework).

Anyway, don't let facts get in the way!

Coming soon to a constituency near you: Keegan's misinformation show!

## THURSDAY

Children's minister David Johnston claimed in a press release today that the government is "going further than ever to reform" the SEND system with its SEND and AP improvement plan. We highly doubt the parents who have been waiting for six months for an EHCP, for instance, believe that's the case.

Also, those whose child has been out of classrooms for a year because there's no special school places probably wouldn't agree.

Also, all those who waited three years for the delayed SEND plan to be actually published would probably disagree.

You get the point.





## Senior Leadership opportunity at Ark

Ark is a network of 39 schools, reaching 30,000 students in our primary, secondary and all-throughs in Birmingham, Hastings, London & Portsmouth. Our schools are fully comprehensive and we are proud of our diversity, with over 40% of our students eligible for FSMs. Our 2023 results saw our KS2 students achieve 16 percentage points above the national average and at GCSE, 64% of students achieved grades 9-4 in English and Maths.

As we continue to strengthen the Ark network at every level, we are interested in hearing from strong existing or aspiring Assistant & Vice Principals who want to learn more about our opportunities and organisation.

We understand the importance of developing our leaders and know that our schools are only as good as our staff. Our Assistant and Vice Principals work with some of the best Principals and leaders nationally and have access to exceptional training, including qualifications such as NPQSL & NPQH.

### By joining Ark, you can expect:

- Salaries 2.5% higher than main the pay scale & a generous pension scheme
- Double the amount of training time and additional INSET days for bespoke training
- Full access to an Employee Assistance Programme which provides free, confidential counselling, financial and legal advice
- Gym discounts of up to 40% off
- Access to Ark Rewards – a scheme offering savings from over 3,000 major retailers
- Interest-free loans of up to £5,000 for season tickets or to buy a bicycle.

We are committed to building a diverse workforce where everyone can deliver their best work and achieve their full potential. We want our SLTs to reflect the diverse perspectives of our students because we know that in doing so, we will be stronger and more effective.

To learn more about senior leadership opportunities at Ark, please **register your interest**



## Head of Science

Tamworth Enterprise College

Salary : Negotiable + AET Wellbeing Cash Plan + Pension Scheme (TPS) + Additional AET Benefits

Are you a dynamic and highly motivated classroom practitioner, and an excellent Scientist with a proven record of raising attainment?

This role offers an excellent opportunity for a knowledgeable, thoughtful and reflective teacher to lead a successful Science Department. You must be able to demonstrate talent, interpersonal skills and a range of teaching strategies required to motivate pupils and other colleagues in the Department.

Closing Date : 2nd Feb 2024



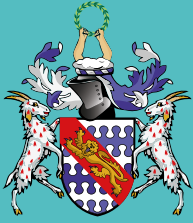
## Executive Director of People and Culture

Salary from £75,000

Mowbray Education Trust is a successful and growing MAT which is expected to be at least three clusters of schools within Leicestershire. Across the Trust, we have 535 staff in total, 201 of whom are teachers, and over 3300 pupils.

We're seeking to appoint an Executive Lead for People and Culture to lead our recruitment and retention strategy, striving to achieve our ambition of first class in every class. The role is crucial in embedding strategies to support our people to be well and work well. You will be responsible for nurturing a culture of continuous improvement, ensuring that all staff have access to appropriate development opportunities of the highest standard. The successful applicant will ensure our Headteachers and Leaders have access to HR support that guides and supports them to deliver first-class education.

Closing date: 5th February 2024, 9:00 am



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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](http://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](mailto:recruitment@altusep.com). Visit [www.altusep.com](http://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](#)



## Ark Alexandra 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!**

[Click here to find out more →](#)



**Compass Education 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](mailto: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