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THE CHANGING WORLD OF HOME EDUCATION



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DfE eyes scrapping Gove's Russell Group league table measure

- Review underway after Lords' concern at vocational courses disincentive
- 'Too many students think it's a quality kitemark, rather than mission group'

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SCHOOLS WEEK

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education week jobs

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Birmingham proves why schools need help to solve stubborn post-Covid issues

The drastic cuts at bankrupt Birmingham Council outlined this week (page 11) are a depressing reminder of just how severe the collapse in support services to schools has been.

Mental health services overwhelmed, rising need after early intervention services were hollowed out, soaring foodbank use and more social workers now leaving the profession than joining.

Birmingham council is proposing £300 million of cuts – of which £63 million will come from the children’s and families budget.

This includes: £2.2 million from youth services such as preventing knife crime, £9 million from school transport costs and £8.4 million from early intervention services.

The council has told local colleges to deliver more courses online so it can save on travel costs.

Nottingham is going through a similar process, and more councils are on the brink of having to follow the same path.

As well as funding, this impacts hugely on the post-Covid issues that just won’t improve:

attendance, increasing educational need, and challenging behaviour.

It’s also a big factor in our important investigation this week which reveals the profile of pupils in home education is changing (page 5 and 6).

It’s no longer dominated by parents choosing to take their children out of the classroom for ideological reasons, more say they are being forced to because of unmet need.

And this appears to be happening disproportionately in poorer areas. While introducing a long-promised out-of-school register might help, it won’t solve these wider problems.

It is unlikely many solutions will be proposed until an election is held.

Giving an indication of the scale of ambition the current government has, it announced for a third time the mobile phone “ban” (page 13), is threatening teachers with sanctions if they don’t report abuse (page 16), and is looking at tinkering with school performance measures again (page 15).

Most read online this week:

- 1 [Rate of pupils leaving for home education doubles](#)
- 2 [School mobile phone ‘ban’ guidance: What you need to know](#)
- 3 [Ex-education secretary to chair OCR curriculum and exams review](#)
- 4 [DfE brings in minimum teaching hours for GCSE English and maths resits](#)
- 5 [Unions express ‘frustration and disquiet’ after DfE pay evidence delayed](#)

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See story, page 12

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NEWS: FUNDING

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK**'Severe hardship' as thousands of schools get just 0.5 per cent rise**

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

Thousands of schools face "severe financial hardship" because of a technical funding change made "without warning" which meant that they got a measly 0.5 per cent per-pupil increase.

Minimum per-pupil funding levels (MPPFLs), which guarantee trusts and councils a certain amount of cash for each child they teach, usually rise at the same rate as school funding increases each year.

Since 2018, the rates have risen by between 3 and 7 per cent. But this year, the government only increased MPPFLs by 0.5 per cent, despite school funding rising overall by 1.9 per cent.

In its submission to the Treasury ahead of next months' budget, the Confederation of School Trusts (CST) warned the change was made with "no warning".

Trusts with schools funded at the minimum faced "severe financial hardship right now", they added, calling for emergency funding for those in difficulty.

Analysis by *Schools Week* of funding allocations identified 4,337 schools slated to receive only a 0.5 per cent rise in per-pupil funding this year.

As well as being below the average funding rise, it is well short of the 4 per cent inflation level recorded in December.

Minimum levels are due to go back to rising in line with overall funding again next year, so will increase by 1.4 per cent. But, as each year's funding becomes the baseline for the next year's rise, the 0.5 per cent increase is now baked in.

The "one-off change in policy will have a lasting effect on baseline funding", the CST warned.

Oasis Community Learning has 20 affected schools. Chief executive John Barneby said "the reality is that it is incredibly tough".

Leaders "continue to do everything possible to mitigate against the impact of these challenges, with a real focus on retaining and recruiting the staff fundamental to the delivery of a high-quality education for every young person", he said.

David Boyle, chief executive of Dunraven



Educational Trust, which has two affected schools, has established joint finance working groups to "look at all options to minimise the impact in the classroom". This includes things like upping trading income through lettings.

But the government "needs to be aware that there will come a point when sustainability, safeguarding and security become challenged if not compromised for a significant number of schools".

"This is untenable clearly, but we can't keep doing more with less," Boyle said.

Funding specialist Julia Harnden said minimum levels "historically... delivered protection to per-pupil allocations in real terms", but that has "not been maintained".

The change comes at a time of severe financial pressure on schools, trusts and councils.

Last year, the CST's poll of chief executives found just 46 per cent reported feeling very or quite confident about the financial sustainability of their trust. This was down from 77 per cent in the previous year.

Sutton Trust polling released last year also showed the proportion of teachers reporting

cuts to school trips had risen from 21 to 50 per cent. Two-thirds of heads said they had had to cut the number of teaching assistants, up from 42 per cent.

The government said money for schools funded at the

minimum would actually rise by more than 0.5 per cent because of an additional grant they received to cover this year's teacher pay rises. However, this was cash that was effectively already spent on covering the increased teacher costs.

The CST also said that, while additional funding was available from the Education and Skills Funding Agency, this was "designed for those that have mismanaged their finances".

MPPFLs were introduced as a transitional measure as the sector gradually moved to direct funding under the national funding formula. It was introduced in 2018 to level up historic unfairness in funding.

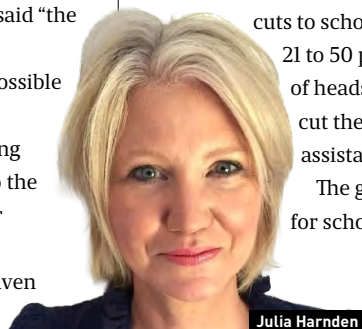
However, the full formula has not been fully implemented yet, and cash still goes to councils who can apply their own formula.

The DfE wants to move to direct funding by 2027 but has not announced how and when transitional measures will be removed.

The CST warned that minimum levels "remain an anomalous element of the NFF, with no clear policy intention and distributional inconsistency".

It called for a "plan and timeline for the development of an NFF that does not require the prop of MPPFLs".

A DfE spokesperson said schools on minimum per-pupil levels had "benefited from above-average increases in per-pupil funding compared with other schools, having increased on average by 6 per cent and 4.4 per cent per year between 2018-19 and 2023-24".



Julia Harnden

INVESTIGATION: ATTENDANCE

'Failing' school system blamed for soaring home education statistics

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
 @FCDWHITTAKER **EXCLUSIVE**

The rate at which children left the classroom for home education doubled last year, with big increases in some of the country's most deprived areas, a Schools Week investigation suggests.

And, while home education used to be seen as a lifestyle choice, parents are increasingly withdrawing children because they feel the school system has failed them.

Analysis of Freedom of Information data from around two-thirds of councils suggests that 140,000 pupils were home-educated at some point in 2022-23, a rise of 12 per cent on the 125,000 the year before. The pupil population grew by just 0.8 per cent over the same period.

The increase is double the 6 per cent rise from 2020-21 to 2021-22. The number of children now in home education is 80 per cent higher than in pre-pandemic 2018-19.

Heather Sandy chairs the education policy committee of the Association of Directors of Children's Services. She said councils were seeing "more children who are less engaged with an education system which does not meet the needs of all learners".

Poorer areas see larger rises

Of the 15 areas with the largest increases in home education, six are ranked in the highest quintile for child poverty. Nine have above-average rates of free school meals eligibility.

They include Hartlepool, where 37 per cent of children are eligible for free school meals. Numbers in home education doubled last year to 189.

A spokesperson said the council was "very concerned". It worked with parents who indicated their wish to home educate and encouraged a "two-week reflection period" before removal.

In Knowsley, four in 10 pupils are eligible for free school meals. The number of home-educated pupils jumped 54 per cent, from 154 in 2021-22 to 237 in 2022-23.

A spokesperson said the pandemic had "brought greater awareness of home schooling as an option, and an increase in online support for parents making this choice". But some parents were choosing home education "where their child has persistent absence from school".



The council runs home education "pilots", which allow schools, improvement teams and parents to "work together to discuss EHE [elective home education] in more detail before a final decision is made".

Research by the children's commissioner found the 13,120 children who began home education between spring 2022 and spring 2023 were "disproportionately more likely to have special educational needs or to come from disadvantaged areas".

Dame Rachel de Souza's report found 82 per cent of children who left state education for home education had been either persistently or severely absent the previous year. She made a series of recommendations for a more "inclusive" school system (see box).

'Unmet need' becomes key driver

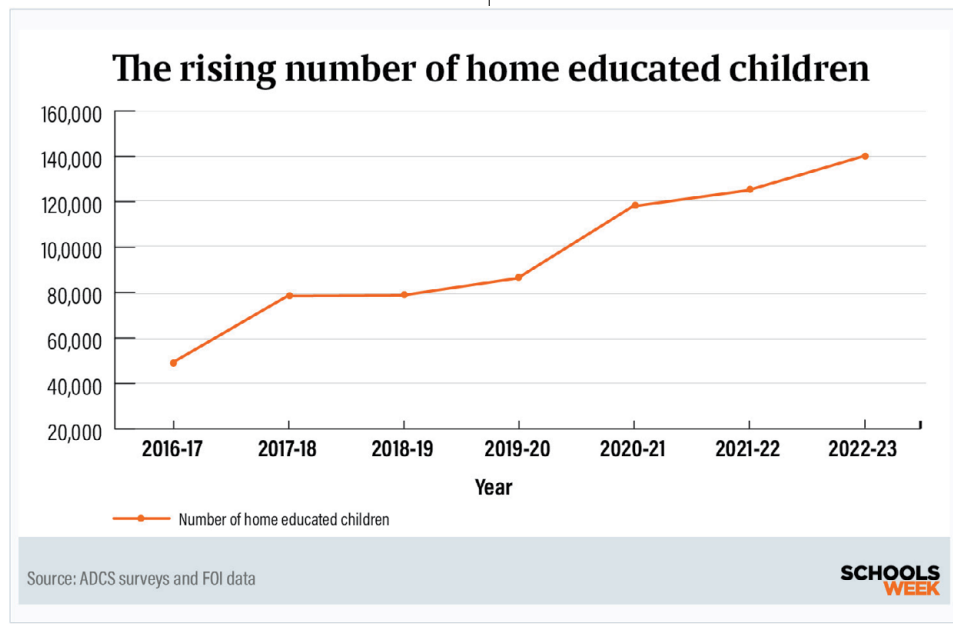
The charity Education Otherwise said its survey of 473 new home educating parents revealed that almost 54 per cent cited "some form of unmet need".

Thirty-seven per cent said school was not meeting their child's mental health needs, while 13 per cent pointed to unmet SEND needs.

Other reasons given included "general dissatisfaction with the school system" (24 per cent), home education being better than school (13 per cent) and the curriculum being neither "suitable nor relevant" (9 per cent).

Wendy Charles-Warner, from the charity, said "lifestyle choice was once the primary driver for home education".

She added: "Now, overall, we have seen a very significant increase in parents coming to home



Continued on next page

INVESTIGATION: ATTENDANCE

education who do not want to make that choice but who feel that the school system is failing their child.”

Complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman reveal reports from parents that they felt forced to home educate their children.

The watchdog upheld a complaint that authorities in Lancashire failed to review education, health and care plans or secure a school place for one pupil, leaving his parent feeling “he did not have a choice but to home educate”.

In Leicestershire, the ombudsman found that, as of July 31, 2022, “there were 35 delayed annual reviews for children registered as electively home educated”.

Meanwhile, a third of children educated at home on census day in October 2022 were in years 10 or 11. Just 3 per cent were in year 1.

Asked for the main reason for withdrawal, 16 per cent cited philosophical or preferential reasons, 9 per cent cited mental health and 6 per cent reported general “dissatisfaction with the school”.

Katie Cox’s autistic daughter started secondary school last September, after being unable to attend primary school for two years due to anxiety that developed as she entered key stage 2.

“We had a feeling this was going to be a hurdle to overcome, but unfortunately after a few days she was not coping very well at all,” she said.

Cox said her daughter was not given flexibility over her uniform, which she needed because of sensory processing issues, and attempts to create a part-time timetable broke down.

The school showed a “lack of understanding” of her daughter’s needs, and she felt “forced” to withdraw her, adding that her daughter was now “thriving”.

‘Need to protect most vulnerable’

Professor Becky Allen, chief analyst at Teacher Tapp, told Schools Week that England was in a “relatively unusual situation” in being “pretty liberal” in its approach to home education.

“I can see, down the track, we will have to make some tough decisions. And some of them will feel pretty illiberal,” Allen said. “That’s the thing that the home education groups quite rightly worry about. But we do illiberal things in society because we are trying to protect the most vulnerable children.

“And it will become a pressing concern if we just see very large numbers of children from backgrounds where the family don’t have the

The areas with the biggest increases in home education

Council name	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Change since last year
Hartlepool	16	32	55	92	189	105.43%
North East Lincolnshire	177	195	266	312	545	74.68%
Torbay	369	346	382	440	725	64.77%
Kingston	105	178	179	213	342	60.56%
Blackburn	101	145	291	245	392	60.00%
Knowsley	10*	18*	118	154	237	53.90%
Richmond	156	161	148	182	274	50.55%
Bexley	328	263	281	349	492	40.97%
Calderdale	164	206	329	440	607	37.95%
Bury	71	100	154	120	162	35.00%

* Knowsley said its records for these years were incomplete
Source: Freedom of information data from councils



resources to support independent education sitting at home all day”

In Torbay, the number of children in home education has almost doubled in five years. Most of that increase came last year, when the figure increased from 440 to 725, a rise of 65 per cent.

The council said its “particular concern is the significant increase in elected home education numbers in years 3,7 and 9”.

Calderdale’s numbers have increased by 38 per cent. Julie Jenkins, its director of children’s services, said the council’s “primary interest lies in the suitability of parents’ education provision and not their reason for doing so”.

It is not just poorer areas that have seen large rises, however. The London boroughs of Kingston upon Thames and Richmond reported increases of 60 and 50 per cent respectively last year.

Parents “seem to be far more aware of the option to EHE than they were prior to

2019 and we are seeing a slight increase in parents commissioning tutoring with online providers”, a spokesperson for Kingston said.

Ministers back MP’s not-in-school register

Sandy warned that home education figures were “simply estimates” as councils do not have powers to compel parents to tell them they are educating their children at home.

This week, after years of delays, the government pledged to “work with” Conservative MP Flick Drummond, who is trying to introduce legislation for a register of children not in school.

Allen added that England was “entering this world where different kinds of patchworks of education are possible, but the vast majority are still going to school”.

A DfE spokesperson said: “We support the right of parents to educate their children at home, but all children should receive a suitable education regardless of where they are educated.”



Seven recommendations for a more ‘inclusive’ school system

- A register of alternative provision and guidance for schools on creating internal AP.
- Family liaison officers for all schools, and make counsellors available to all settings.
- Better training for all teachers in mental health and SEND.
- Give LAs and MATs greater powers to open special schools.
- Beef up Ofsted inspections to look at deregistration and attendance.
- Make LAs the admissions authority for all schools.
- Ban home education for looked-after children identified as at risk of harm in the home.

Schools warned over online community £500 'possible subscription 'trap'

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

EXCLUSIVE

Councils are warning over a "possible subscription trap" by a firm that calls itself a social network for schools after teachers got stung by bills of nearly £500 and legal threats having signed up for a free trial.

Headteachers have complained of unwittingly entering an annual subscription contract with The Big Classroom costing £480 after applying for a free pilot.

On its school noticeboard in November, Birmingham council said that the marketing material was "very lengthy", with information about subscription charges "left to the very end".

But bosses of the Blackpool-based firm insist it is "very clear" what schools are registering for, with those signing up informed of the potential payment details on three occasions.

A Birmingham council spokesperson said its trading standards team was nevertheless "making enquiries" about the company. "When Birmingham City Council was alerted to the issue, our audit team immediately alerted schools, but unfortunately received contact from two schools ... who already had signed up to the subscription," the spokesperson said.

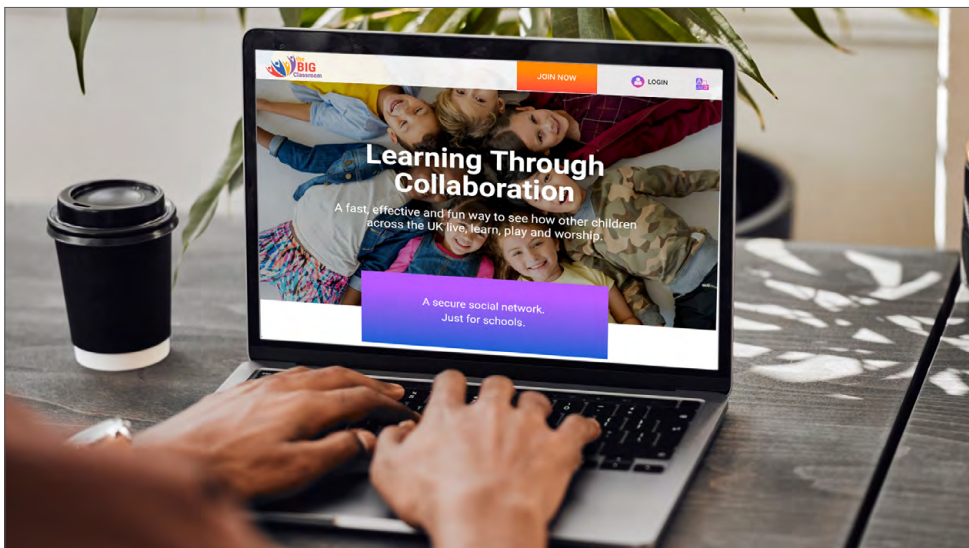
The council said in November that a company called Machtech Media Limited had been "contacting schools across the West Midlands, encouraging them to sign up to a free trial of their education resource The Big Classroom".

Schools in London had "reportedly fallen for the subscription trap and have suffered regular and sustained demands for payment and ultimately threats of court action", the authority added.

It also said the firm had "reportedly been misleading schools by suggesting that others within their area have already signed up, which is not necessarily the case". The Big Classroom denies the allegations.

Birmingham said it had contacted trading standards in Lancashire, where the company is based, and will "update all schools with any further advice in due course".

Schools Week has discovered that five councils have issued warnings to their schools about the firm over the past four years.



Telford and Wrekin, posting on its education noticeboard in December, labelled the free trial offer "misleading", adding that "schools end up being signed up to a paid service, following which demands for payment are issued". The post was titled "Big Classroom' Potential Scam".

Meanwhile last February, Northumberland County Council's education website Northumberland Education wrote that "a few schools" had been "caught out" by the offer, "resulting in an invoice for £480".

The Big Classroom describes itself as "an online community of thousands of schools" who are linked with "contrasting schools to promote tolerance, challenge stereotypes and celebrate our unique identities".

It has a rating of 1.2 stars out of five on review website Trustpilot. Ninety-three per cent of the 110 users who left a rating awarded it a score of one star.

The latest review on the site, posted last month, noted the teacher had tried to cancel their trial late while their school was in the process of "closing due to financial unsustainability".

"It was not clear we would be charged at the end of the trial, or that we therefore had to cancel it," the poster alleged. "The sheer quantity of reviews saying the same speaks for itself."

In a response to the review, The Big Classroom said it had made it "very clear what you were signing up for" and that the school "must have known" when it registered that it "was

scheduled to close".

"As you say, you cancelled late. Surely, you must bear the responsibility for this. Why do you expect a small company to bear the cost for your decision?"

Helen Evans, The Big Classroom's marketing manager, stated that anyone who signs up for the service has to complete a two-page form online which makes "it very clear what they are registering for".

Emails are sent out two weeks before the end of the trial, with the subject line "Don't Forget", setting out that a subscription will automatically start within 14 days of the message if not cancelled.

"The cost and auto renewal are made clear in writing on three occasions. It is not hidden in the small print or T&Cs, it is front and centre on the registration page, confirmation email and reminder email," she continued.

Evans said the firm had taken schools to court "on a handful of occasions" due to comments made online, but won every case, adding: "I can assure you we are not scamming schools."

The Big Classroom has not been contacted by any of the councils that issued warnings. The company has worked with "thousands of schools over the past nine years", some who have been subscribers for seven years, she added.

"Unfortunately, a small percentage get extremely angry with us and make what we believe to be spurious claims about us because they are not prepared to take responsibility for their actions."

Supply teachers plan Post Office-style legal action over pay

LUCAS CUMISKEY

@LUCAS_CUMISKEY

EXCLUSIVE

Supply teachers are exploring “Post Office-style” group litigation to take on umbrella companies over unlawful deductions from their salaries and missing holiday pay.

The National Supply Teachers Network (NSTN) is in talks with legal firm Contractors for Justice (C4J) with a view to taking supply agencies to the High Court.

Some agencies use umbrella firms to employ temporary workers, meaning they do not have responsibility for employment costs such as pension contributions and sick pay. But unions have long objected to a plethora of issues with such arrangements.

According to the Trades Union Congress, problems include “misleading” deductions from workers’ pay, “widespread” breaches of holiday pay and some workers even becoming “unwittingly embroiled in tax evasion schemes”.

Rising illness levels since Covid have seen demand for supply teachers soar. Local authority-maintained schools spent about £698 million on supply costs last year, up 12 per cent.

But Niall Bradley, chair of the NSTN, said: “Supply teachers are being paid so little they can almost do any other job and make more money. They are leaving teaching because it’s just not paying enough to continue.”

Those in England are on average paid 40 per cent less than full-time teachers, Bradley said. But umbrella companies can slice another 20 per cent from their pay, he added.

The group litigation order (GLO) would see supply teachers with similar claims band together in an attempt to reclaim deductions from their wages and withheld holiday pay.

It is the same type of action taken by the 555 postmasters against the Post Office over the Horizon IT scandal in 2017.

Susan Pash, C4J’s chief executive, said that, while they would need around 500 supply teachers to make the case “viable”, she expects more than a thousand to sign up. But it could take up to a year to build the case.

A survey last year by the National Education Union of 2,700 members found 22 per cent were paid through an umbrella or offshore payroll company. This is down from a high of nearly half



ITV drama of the 555 postmasters who won group litigation order against Post Office. Picture: ITV

of respondents in 2015.

HM Revenue & Customs recently consulted on umbrella firm crackdown plans. It estimates the number of people working in such arrangements across all sectors is now at half a million.

In 2016, the NASUWT union raised concerns about the “way supply teachers are trapped into working for agencies that force them to join an umbrella company to get work”.

The NSTN wants agencies to stop using umbrella arrangements and “routinely pay teachers tax-efficient, accrued holiday pay during the school holidays”.

C4J is offering to work for the supply teachers on a “no win, no fee” basis, but would take a 35 per cent cut of any potential compensation won.

Class action specialist David Greene, a senior partner for Edwin Coe LLP, cited a Supreme Court decision in October in which Northern Ireland police officers won a holiday pay case against their employer.

According to Greene, it seems that C4J has established in law that someone in the supply chain has liability, but that will be a matter on which the court must rule.

Anne Dooley, who worked as a supply teacher from 2015 to 2022 before leaving the profession to work as a tutor, intends to join the GLO.

She worked for eight agencies in total and was paid via at least two umbrella companies. Payslips from 2016 show one company took a £16 margin fee plus employers’ national insurance

contributions in excess of £60.

But in 2017, she was hit with a £1,046 tax bill from HMRC. She said an umbrella firm was culpable, but she had to pay it back over three years.

This left her feeling “deflated, despondent, in despair but, most horrifically in dire debt due to poor pay and conditions”.

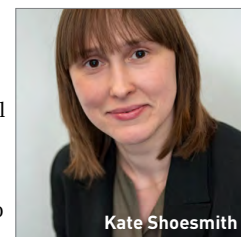
HMRC declined to comment on individual cases but said it will respond “soon” to the consultation on how to better regulate umbrella firms.

Kate Shoesmith, deputy chief executive at the Recruitment and Employment Confederation, backed regulation, adding: “HMRC needs to do far more with the powers it already has.”

But she said the growth of umbrella firms was driven by supply teachers and agency choice. “Many agencies do not work with umbrella companies and this leaves supply teacher contractors with options,” she added.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said supply teachers “deserve to be properly and fairly remunerated”.

He added: “In the midst of a retention and recruitment crisis, supply teachers play a more important role in our schools and colleges than ever.”



Kate Shoesmith

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ANALYSIS: MATS

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Trust top slicing is on the up (but do schools get better deal?)

JACK DYSON

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EXCLUSIVE

Two of England's largest academy trusts now top-slice almost 10 per cent from their schools' budgets to fund beefed-up central teams.

But trust chiefs say running more services – like estates management and IT – in house frees up time for headteachers, as well as providing more cash for their schools.

In all, 13 (26 per cent) of the 50 biggest MATs increased their top-slice charges, analysis of annual accounts for 2022-23 shows. Only two cut their fees, while 21 held them at the same level as the previous year.

Top-slice charges pay for the central services provided by academy trusts.

National Education Union general secretary Daniel Kebede said that “academisation was sold as schools... [having] more money and freedom. The reality is the opposite.

“Worse still, schools in MATs have no say over how their money is spent and no way of challenging the level of top-slice.”

'It makes us more efficient'

Greenwood Academies Trust increased its top slice last year from 5.5 per cent to 9.25 per cent. Chief executive Wayne Norrie said this was to manage finance and site management teams from the centre, meaning schools aren't actually paying more.

“Instead of having a traditional site manager... we've got 24-hour coverage. It will save schools money in the long term by being more efficient, but it will also release leaders to concentrate on teaching and learning more.”

The Unity Schools Partnership lifted its top-slice from 7.25 per cent to 9.5 per cent so that it could “bring together all IT hardware spend”. It also centralised tech support, putting an end to schools having to buy it in “from a variety of sources”.

The Co-operative Academies Trust raised its top-slice from a 4.5 per cent flat rate



Wayne Norrie



Daniel Kebede



to up to 8 per cent for its largest schools. CEO Chris Tomlinson said this was to introduce a trust-wide IT system and an increase in central contracts.

But he added: “I reckon, for a one-form primary, we save them between £40,000 and £60,000 because they are no longer having to pay for things like ICT and HR.”

The Kreston accountancy group annual report found the average top-slice among large trusts stood at 5.4 per cent. Small chains, meanwhile, tended to slice 7.4 per cent, suggesting that “synergies are being achieved” as chains grow.

Centralised trusts spend more on kids

Data confirms that centralised trusts get more bang for their buck. Kreston revealed that such trusts spend £7,289 on total costs per pupil, compared with £7,159 for non-centralised trusts – £130 more per pupil. They also have higher average free reserves.

The study found 61 per cent of trusts have “fully” centralised functions – such as HR and finance and estates management – across their schools. This compares with 55 per cent the year before.

Kevin Connor, head of academies at chartered accountants Bishop Fleming and one of the Kreston report's authors, believes the search for “every extra percentage of efficiency” has “got to be a consequence of the current financial position”.

But Sir David

Carter, the former national schools commissioner, said “building a robust operating model is the way to survive these challenges and to build for the future”.

United Learning Trust CEO Jon Coles, whose 89-school MAT is England's largest, saw his top-slice return to 2018-19 levels in cash terms last year. The trust charges schools based on a per-pupil amount. But, after accounting for inflation, the trust said that income spent at the centre has dropped from 3.7 per cent to 3.1 per cent.

“We actually do more at the centre now than we did then,” Coles said. “The reason for that is growth. As we've grown, we've been able to do things more efficiently.”

“For example, we pay teachers more. The scale we do [back-office functions] at means we're able to save money.”

'Schools aren't excluded from decisions'

Confederation of School Trusts chief executive Leora Cruddas added that running services centrally also did not mean “schools, principals or other leaders are excluded from decisions in these areas, but more often that they are supported by experts who work across the trust”.

As well as top-slicing, trusts can fund their central services by GAG pooling – where they collect all their schools' budgets first before dishing out funds based on their own formula, which does not have to be published. Seven of the 50 biggest MATs employ this method, but more are considering it.

Councils also top-slice schools to fund their central services but up-to-date figures are hard to come by. The services provided are also likely to be less substantial.

However local authorities now have additional powers to top-slice school budgets to cover the shortfall created by the government scrapping the £50 million school improvement grant. In 2018-19, we revealed that 36 LAs had top-sliced more than £22.4 million alone.



Leora Cruddas

NEWS

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Schools face struggle to plug the gaps in 'bankrupt' Birmingham

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

Cuts to children's services at "bankrupt" Birmingham council will leave already stretched schools "plugging the gaps", teachers have warned.

Birmingham has proposed £300 million of cuts after issuing a section 114 notice last year, meaning it is unable to set a balanced budget. Council documents this week revealed £63 million of savings over two years from its children's and families budget.

This includes a review to save £2.2 million from careers and youth services, such as preventing knife crime, and hiking trading services fees for schools by 10 per cent.

Nearly £2 million will be saved from reviewing transport for school children and post-16 transport packages will be reduced to save £7 million.

The Labour-run council will end a £8.4 million early help contract with Birmingham Children's Trust, which also runs its children's services.

The trust said it will continue to fund early help such as family support teams – but to do so would have to make its own savings and can only maintain about half of the funding for voluntary organisations.

Schools Week analysis shows the spending gap between early and late intervention services by



councils in England widened to more than £77 billion last year – up from £3.9 billion in cash terms in 2015-16.

While spend on early help had risen by £2 million, expenditure on late intervention had ballooned by £9.9 billion.

Research commissioned by the National Children's Bureau (NCB) last year found that late intervention services – such as youth justice and safeguarding – accounted for more than 81 per cent of all children's services spending in 2021-22, up from 58 per cent in 2010-11.

The NCB added in its report last year: "The implications are clear: children are receiving help after issues escalate, rather than preventing them."

David Room, Birmingham's National Education Union secretary, said that while cuts would not impact school budgets directly, "there is no doubt that the loss of the wraparound support that so many children and young people rely on will have a negative impact on their ability to learn, be happy and healthy and in some cases even attend

school at all.

"Schools in the city will do their best to "plug the gaps", but with school budgets under significant pressure this will be very difficult to achieve indeed."

A Schools Week investigation last year revealed how schools have been forced to fill the public services void, with demand for several services including mental health, food banks and additional educational support soaring since the Conservatives took office.

Geoff Barton, general secretary for the ASCL school leaders' union, said schools had become the "fourth emergency service" with under-resourced schools "doing their best" to provide support in-school.

"Where local authorities are in a position of having to make major cuts to children's services, it's a sign that something is badly wrong," he said.

Cllr John Cotton, the Birmingham council leader, apologised "unreservedly for both the significant spending reductions".

He added: "We have no alternative than to face these challenges head on. And we will do whatever is necessary to put the council back on a sound financial footing"

Meanwhile, councillors in Nottingham are due to vote next month on plans to shave £1.2 million from their education budget. The local authority effectively declared itself bankrupt last year.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

'Sizeable minority' of trusts could be 'vulnerable' as pupil numbers fall

A "sizeable minority" of academy trusts may be vulnerable to funding issues because of falling primary pupil numbers, according to new analysis.

Research by FFT Education Datalab found hundreds of trusts that are either primary-only or have few secondary schools. The analysis suggests that the latter could be in a "vulnerable position" if they lose their secondary schools,

Schools Week reported last month that the 15-school Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust would hand over all of its schools to new trusts after ministers decided to rebroker Deanery School in Swindon, its sole secondary.

It prompted warnings from chief executive Stephen Mitchell that "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".

The analysis by Dave Thomson identified 386 primary-only MATs, 78 of which have 10 or more schools. He identified a further 46 trusts with 10 or more schools overall but "just one or two secondary schools, so [they] could be in a vulnerable position if those schools were to close or leave the trust".

Since they have fewer schools overall, smaller MATs "are of course much more likely to have just one or two secondary schools than larger MATs".

But smaller MATs "are already under increasing pressure to expand or merge. While losing a secondary school might place them in a more vulnerable position, arguably so would losing any school."

Overall, a third of multi-academy trusts were

primary only, while 45 per cent were a mix of primary, secondary and other mainstream schools.

Larger MATs are more likely to include a mix of phases or types, but "even so more than a quarter are primary only".

Thomson said the number, size and composition of MATs is "constantly evolving". "Pre-pandemic, there were just over 150 large MATs with 10 or more schools. In the data we used for this piece, there were nearly 300," he added.

"But this snapshot of their composition shows that a sizeable minority of MATs either consist entirely of primary schools or include just one or two secondary schools. And these MATs may be more vulnerable to funding issues as primary numbers fall."

ANALYSIS: POST-16

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Zero-tolerance resit rule could cost schools £10m

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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EXCLUSIVE

Fining sixth forms for pupils not doing resits and introducing minimum teaching hours will disadvantage all students and could see nearly £10 million seized from budgets. The warning comes from head teachers who say “out-of-the-blue” changes are “simply unrealistic”.

Last week, the government announced that sixth forms will have to teach pupils who failed their English and maths GCSE for a minimum of three to four hours a week or risk losing funding. This would be pro-rata for those studying part-time.

Under the “condition of funding” policy, the Department for Education will claw back funding for any eligible pupils who have not enrolled to do resits from 2027.

Currently, clawback only kicks in when more than 5 per cent of students without a grade 4 pass in English and maths do not enrol for resits.

Schools Week understands that the DfE drew up the plans after becoming concerned at consistently high rates of pupils not enrolling for resits. Ministers were also worried that schools and colleges had moved away from in-person teaching hours after the pandemic.

But Sacha Corcoran, principal at Big Creative Academy in Waltham Forest, said it was “simply unrealistic to think that those students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, with sometimes complex lives, will all engage with the retake program – despite our best efforts”.

The 16 to 19 free school had nearly £59,000 clawed back for 2021-22, with 53 students not meeting the funding condition.

“To be financially penalised when we are still providing all of the resources necessary to deliver the GCSE retake program simply disadvantages the other students,” Corcoran added.

“With an increase in mental health concerns, keeping students engaged is so important. For some young people who may have failed the GCSE twice before, using funding as a weapon to force them into these classes is not the answer.”

Schools Week analysis shows how 125 schools, sixth-form colleges and university technical colleges (about 6 per cent) were fined in 2021-22.

If the new “zero tolerance” rule had been applied that year, nearly half (1,004) of schools would have been fined. The claw back would have amounted to £9.3 million.

It also comes despite the amount being clawed back falling dramatically by 77 per cent since 2014-15.

The Association of Colleges said the 5 per cent tolerance gives providers “some flexibility” to ensure students with high levels of anxiety or those with special educational needs “can stay in college, benefiting from the wider skills which are the main purpose of college”.

Chief executive Russ Lawrance estimated that Haringey Sixth Form College would take a £40,000 to £60,000 budget hit under the new zero tolerance rule.

“That’s money we can’t use to support students’ education, but we are still having to educate them... It’s a cumulative negative effect in an already massively challenging aspect of our provision.”

The tolerance will fall to 2.5 per cent for pupils starting in September next year, then drop to zero for those enrolling in 2026. However, money would not be clawed back until two years later.

James Kewin, deputy chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association, said there “should always be a tolerance to allow institutions to make professional decisions about individual students.”

But he added: “If there is a problem with how the tolerance is being used, publish the evidence and focus on those sixth forms

with a very high level of non-compliance.”

On the minimum hours, Kewin said it will require “more maths teachers, more space and re-timetabling”, adding: “Where is the evidence base for this? Both are last minute measures that came out of the blue.”

Lawrance would need to recruit an additional teacher and find teaching space for 15 classes per week to meet the new minimum hours requirement, but with “no significant increase in funding”.

A report on Thursday by the Education Policy Institute found a “very high level of policy churn” in the UK’s post-16 education and training which has been “detrimental”, including to staff morale.

Kewin added: “Ministers should engage with the sector on the resit policy rather than simply introducing even more red tape.”

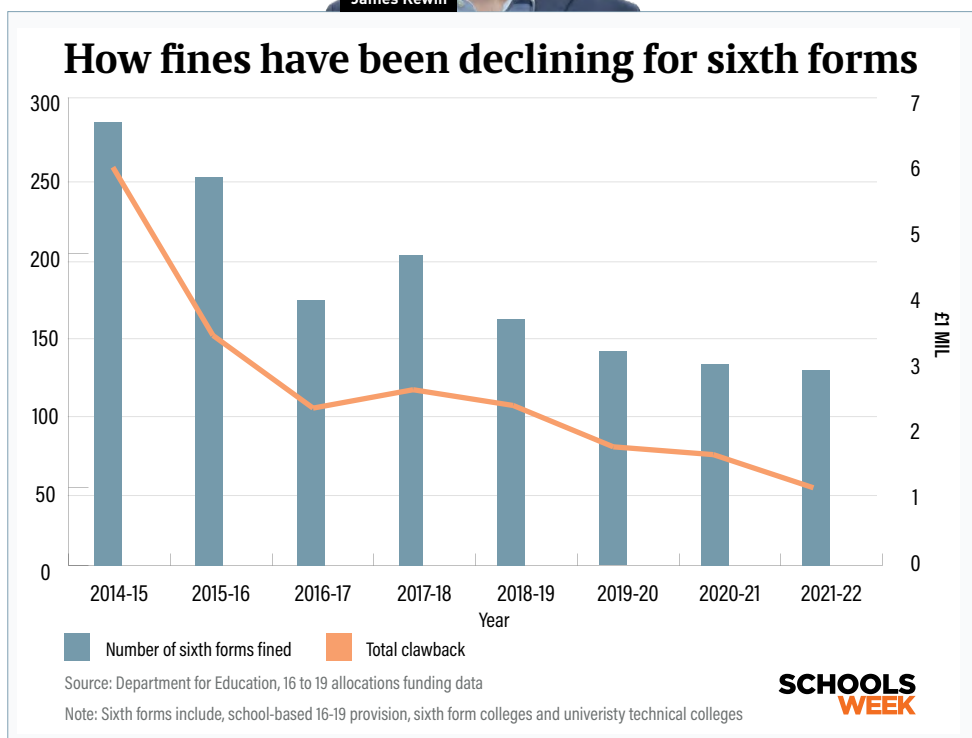
The department said minimum classroom teaching hours “reflect the established practice noted across institutions pre-pandemic”.

It added: “We know that many settings are already meeting the minimum hours or are on a journey back towards this. Our amendments will ensure that this progress is consistent across the country, so that all students receive a standard number of taught hours.”

Removing the tolerance would help “as many students as possible” to achieve English and maths qualifications.



James Kewin



All you need to know about mobile phones in schools

The government has published new guidance for schools on managing the use of mobile phones. Here's what you need to know ...

1. Ban phones for the whole school day

Schools should “develop a mobile phone policy that prohibits the use of mobile phones and other smart technology with similar functionality to mobile phones”.

This should be in place “throughout the school day, including during lessons, the time between lessons, breaktimes and lunchtime”.

These policies on mobile phones should be published and “can be included within the school's behaviour policy or be its own standalone document”.

Eighty per cent of schools already have some sort of policy restricting the use of mobiles.

Education secretary Gillian Keegan said the guidance gives “hard-working teachers the tools to take action to help improve behaviour” and would promote a “consistent approach” across all schools.

However, the guidance is not statutory, meaning schools can ignore it.

2. DfE gives four example approaches

Mobile phone policies should reflect a school's “individual contexts and needs”, with four examples given:

1. No mobile phones on the school premises, meaning they must be left at home. This “provides a very simple boundary, which is straightforward to enforce”

2. Mobile phones handed in on arrival, meaning phones are collected by staff and held until the end of the school day.

3. Mobile phones kept in a secure location. Examples include “bag-free” days where possessions are kept in lockers.

4. Pupils keeping possession of their phones with the condition they are not used, seen or heard in schools. It is “important that schools enforce this policy vigorously, consistently and visibly, to the effect that mobile phone use is prohibited throughout the school day”.



3. Consider 'risks' of travelling without phones

But schools “should consider the impact on children travelling to and from school where not having a mobile phone poses a risk or the perception of a risk”.

Schools are “encouraged to consult with parents to develop such a policy, considering ways to mitigate specific concerns and build support for this approach”.

If parents need to contact their child during the school day, they “should be directed to the school office, where staff should be aware of the school's policy on relaying messages and facilitating contact”.

4. Don't let sixth form use phones in front of other pupils...

Schools should “consider whether pupils in the sixth form should be permitted access to their mobile phone at certain and limited times and locations, reflecting this period of education as one of increased independence and responsibility”.

This should not “[compromise] the school's policy on the use of mobile phones for other pupils”.

This should include “prohibiting the use of mobile phones by sixth-form pupils in front of younger pupils, for example limiting use to a sixth-form common room”.

5. ... and nor should staff

Staff should also “not use their own mobile phone for personal reasons in front of pupils throughout the school day”.

The DfE did acknowledge that there “may be occasions where it is appropriate for a teacher to use a mobile phone or similar device, for instance

to issue homework, issue rewards and sanctions or use multi-factor authentication”.

6. Schools can confiscate phones...

Schools “can use a range of sanctions” for breaching phone bans, “including confiscation and detentions”. It is for heads to decide how long it is “proportionate” to confiscate phones.

Schools already have this power, and are protected from liability for loss or damage of items if they are confiscated lawfully.

7. ...and search pupils for them

Heads also have the power to search pupils or their possessions “where they have reasonable grounds to suspect that the pupil is in possession of a prohibited item as set out in legislation or any item identified in the school rules as an item that may be searched for”.

Headteachers “can and should identify mobile phones and similar devices as something that may be searched for in their school behaviour policy”.

Again, this is not a new power.

8. But some pupils may need flexibility

The DfE warned that there “may be other exceptional circumstances where schools should consider making adaptations to their policy for specific pupils”.

For example, allowing a disabled pupil access to a phone where necessary “may be considered a reasonable adjustment and a failure to do so may be a breach of the school's duty”.

Another example is pupils with medical conditions like diabetes, who “might use continuous glucose monitoring with a sensor linked to their mobile phone to monitor blood sugar levels” or for young carers who “depend” on phone access.

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Ministers consider ditching Gove's Russell Group success metric

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Ministers are considering ditching a league table metric introduced by Michael Gove that measures school performance based on how many students go on to study at Russell Group universities.

The controversial measure was first introduced in 2012, alongside a metric showing how many pupils get into Oxford or Cambridge. This was to give parents "even greater information" to choose the "right school or college" for their child.

However, a House of Lords committee report into secondary education this week called for this to be adjusted or ditched to ensure "performance incentives" are "coherent" across key stages 4 and 5. The committee had heard the measure was driving schools to disincentivise pupils from taking technical or vocational courses.

The Russell Group includes 24 self-selecting "elite" universities. The Department for Education said the term Russell Group was used because it is "generally understood as a reference to high-tariff universities".

But it is now reviewing whether it is "still required". One of the main reasons is because the government also reports the proportion of students progressing to the top third of universities, measured by the high grades of their intake.

'Odd thing to do in public policy'

Welcoming the review, Mary Curnock Cook, former UCAS chief executive, said a "clustering of applications to Russell Group universities means disappointment for too many university applicants who think that 'Russell Group' is a quality kitemark rather than a mission group".

Nick Hillman, director at think tank Higher Education Policy Institute, added measuring schools by how many pupils got into a self-selecting group of universities was "quite an odd thing to do in public policy".

He said school prospectuses often report how many students go onto Russell Group universities.

While removing the measure would not prevent this, schools are likely "doing it because schools are influenced by government policy".

"It would send a signal to schools about what people in power most value," he added. The latest DfE data for 18-year-olds, from 2019-20, showed 17.7 per cent progressed to a Russell Group university.

Andrew O'Neill, headteacher at All Saints Catholic College in west London, said the measure "seems quite elitist - it's not very fair. It's like having a Premier League where no one can get relegated or promoted to."

Daniel Kebede, general secretary at National Education Union, added the current performance measures

"are inspired by the Conservative imaginations of Michael Gove and Nick Gibb, not by serious thought about how a broad and inclusive school experience can be encouraged".

In 2013, the Times Higher Education newspaper reported how Gove's former top civil servant had called the decision to publish Russell Group data "narrow and naive".

Sir David Bell, who served as DfE permanent secretary until 2012, said at the time: "I don't think [the data] serve the cause of opening up higher education to a wider group of students.

"Not every student will want to follow a course in a Russell Group university, and not every Russell Group university offers excellent courses across all its suite of subjects."

Bell, also a former chief inspector at Ofsted, is now leading a review of early years education for the Labour Party.

The Russell Group declined to comment.

In May 2019, the Russell Group scrapped its use a list of so-called "facilitating subjects", which included the EBacc subjects of maths, English, the sciences, languages, history and geography.

It followed criticism that top universities don't place enough weight on arts or technical subjects.

As a result, the government ditched a statement on its website stating that the country's top universities believe the EBacc subjects "open more doors to more degrees".



Michael Gove

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Employers lack skills to help SEND pupils on work experience, Ofsted says

Some employers lack the "knowledge or confidence" to offer learners with SEND high-quality work experience, an Ofsted review has found.

The watchdog was tasked by the Department for Education with reviewing careers advice in specialist settings. It visited five special schools, three pupil referral units and four independent specialist colleges.

Ofsted also interviewed inspectors and local authority staff, held focus groups with "key stakeholders and employers" and reviewed a sample of inspection evidence.

Its "overall sample size was small, and we need to be cautious in treating our findings as representative of specialist settings nationally", the report warned.

But it found that a young person's own voice

was "central to good careers guidance in specialist settings".

Where staff develop a close and trusting relationship with learners and their families, "career plans are practical and ambitious".

The review continued: "All of the providers visited by inspectors had a highly personalised approach to careers guidance, with the curriculum tailored to meet learners' individual needs."

Leaders "prioritised work experience and many were building relationships with employers".

But the results were "mixed", with some employers "lacking the knowledge or confidence to offer learners with SEND high-quality work experience".

Ofsted said parents and carers of children

attending specialist settings were "often anxious about their future".

Good providers "make efforts to reduce that anxiety through well-established communication tools, such as newsletters, phone calls and events that link parent evenings with career events".

Chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver said that "good careers guidance can help address social inequality by teaching children and young people with SEND about the full range of options available". Children attending these schools "deserve the kind of high-quality advice that opens the doors to ambitious and interesting experiences".

A review of careers advice in mainstream settings last year found that some schools were still biased towards academic routes.

Report sex abuse or face ban, teachers told

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Teachers will be legally required to report child sexual abuse if they know about it – or face sanctions such as being banned from the profession.

The new requirement will make mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse apply to anyone working in a regulated activity relating to children in England – which suggests it would apply to all school staff. However, a list of roles has not yet been published.

Under the plans, those who fail to do so will be barred from working with young people. Any staff intentionally blocking reporting could go to prison for seven years.

The new duty will be introduced as an amendment at the report stage of the Criminal Justice Bill in the House of Commons and will apply in England and Wales. The Home Office would only say that this will happen “shortly”.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse recommended that the government make it a legal requirement for certain people to report child sexual abuse. The Home Office published a call for evidence on how to implement the proposal last summer and ran a consultation on the proposals in November.

The consultation contained further details on the proposals, however the Home Office was unable to confirm whether all these would now



be enacted.

The consultation said teachers must make a report to the council or police when “they receive a disclosure of child sexual abuse from a child or perpetrator; or personally witness a child being sexually abused”.

However, the consultation’s proposals said that a report “will not need to be made under the duty if those involved are between 13 and 16 years old, the relationship between them is consensual and there is no risk of harm present”.

In the call for evidence, “many respondents expressed concern around the potential negative impacts of implementing a new duty, from overburdening public services, lowering the quality of



James Cleverly

referrals to safeguarding agencies and reducing the amount of ‘safe spaces’ available to children and young people who may wish to discuss sexual abuse in confidence”.

It added at the time that “detailed guidance on the implementation and operation of the mandatory reporting duty” would be published. But the Home Office was unable to say when such details would be confirmed.

The statutory Working Together to Safeguard Children, Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance already makes clear that professionals should report child sexual abuse. The consultation stated that the proposed duty “seeks to introduce appropriate sanctions to secure better compliance with these expectations”.

The seven-year Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) found many sexual abuse victims had made disclosures to a responsible adult but no action was taken.

A “common reason for these failures was the prioritisation of protecting an individual or institution from reputational damage over the safety and wellbeing of children”, the inquiry found.

But Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the school leaders’ union NAHT, said it was “vital” for the government to provide “sufficient funding” to ensure services such as children’s social care “can cope with demand and are not forced to raise thresholds for intervention”.

Home Secretary James Cleverly added: “There is no excuse for turning a blind eye to a child’s pain.”

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Police halt enquiry into AQA cyber attack

Police investigating a cyber attack at exam board AQA during last summer’s exams said there were “no further positive lines of enquiry” to pursue.

Surrey Police arrested an 18-year-old man from London and a 24-year-old woman from Birmingham on suspicion of computer misuse and fraud offences last year. This followed a data breach at AQA, which is based at the University of Surrey, in June.

This week, Surrey Police said that, following a “thorough investigation, the current position

is that there are no further positive lines of enquiry and no further evidence available to link the two people who were arrested to the allegation”.

A spokesperson added: “Should any new lines of enquiry come to light, these will be reviewed and investigated if appropriate.”

Both people had been stood down from bail and no further action will be taken against them at this time.

A separate investigation by Cambridgeshire Police into cyber attacks at exam boards OCR

and Pearson is continuing. A 16-year-old boy was arrested on suspicion of theft, fraud and computer misuse. He has been released under investigation.

The Joint Council for Qualifications, which represents exam boards, previously said that “every year, awarding organisations investigate potential breaches of security”.

It added: “When investigations are complete, sanctions – which may be severe – are taken against any individuals found to be involved”.

IN PARLIAMENT

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Ministers explain reasons for rejecting wider Lords reforms

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Ministers have rejected calls by a House of Lords committee to reform GCSEs and secondary education, but they have revealed some new details of their thinking on the issue.

The Lords committee on education for 11-16 year olds proposed a series of changes, including scrapping the English baccalaureate (EBacc).

The Department for Education (DfE) said it has “no plans for wholesale reform” of GCSEs. But it has set out some more details.

1. Optional reading ‘short course’ for teachers

The committee urged ministers to work out why about a third of pupils do not achieve a grade 4 or above in GCSE English and maths each year and to publish its findings.

The DfE said it had “taken action” to raise standards and is developing a “short course on reading for all secondary teachers”, likely to be released in September 2024.

This would support teachers with the implementation of the reading framework, published last year.

Asked for more detail, the DfE said the optional 40-minute online course would “upskill secondary school teachers, regardless of their subject specialism, on the basics of reading development and teaching”.

2. DfE ‘analysing’ language teacher supply

The government did accept the committee’s



recommendation to explore “innovative ways” to encourage schools to promote language learning and to address barriers such as the “limited supply of suitably qualified teachers”.

The DfE is “analysing” the supply of language teachers in England to identify the factors that make someone more likely to succeed as a languages applicant, to support target-ed interventions.

For 2023-24, just 33 per cent of the required modern foreign language teachers were recruited.

3. ‘Barriers’ to digital skills

The committee urged the government to explore introducing a “basic digital literacy qualification” at key stage 4. This would “ensure that all pupils have an opportunity to develop the basic digital skills needed to participate effectively in post-16 education and training, employment and wider life”.

Ministers are “not convinced that a digital literacy qualification would address any potential

issues around the teaching of digital skills”, There would be “limited incentive for schools to offer such a qualification” at key stage 4.

But there are “barriers to teaching digital skills” through the computing curriculum at GCSE, including available teaching time, the DfE said.

The department is now working with the computing education sector to “better understand what digital skills are taught through the computing curriculum” at key stage 3, where it might be “better suited”.

The DfE later said it was working with experts to “understand the value of digital skills, what is needed and at what age they should be acquired for employment and further study”.

But officials are not looking at a new key stage 3 qualification, as that falls outside of the scope of current regulations.

4. Cannot commit to ‘long term’ move to onscreen tests

The committee wanted ministers to lead on the transition to on-screen assessments (OSAs) at GCSE. Several exam boards have already set out timescales for digital exams, but they do require sign-off from exams regulator Ofqual.

However, the government said it was still researching the evidence base for on-screen tests for pupils with Ofqual so it “currently cannot commit to moving to OSAs in the long term”.

It added: “We agree that moving high-stakes qualifications onscreen has the potential to bring considerable opportunities and risks, and therefore it is vital that we ensure any transition to OSA is managed effectively and fairly”.

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Commissioner wants ‘clear picture’ of mobile phone use in every school

The children’s commissioner wants to use her statutory powers to “check every school in the country” to see who is and is not banning mobile phones.

Dame Rachel de Souza, a former headteacher, said there is not currently a “clear picture” on how many schools already stop pupils using their devices, but her gut feeling was “that most do restrict mobile phone use”.

The Department for Education published non-statutory guidance on managing the use of mobile phones on Monday.

The children’s commissioner’s powers allow her to request data from authorities. For example, she asked for data from police

forces on strip searches of children following the child Q case.

De Souza told the education committee on Tuesday: “I think the best contribution I can make is to actually find out whether there are any schools that actually don’t ban mobile phones and to understand that.”

She welcomed the guidance as it “really gives more power to the elbow of heads to be able to go the whole hog and deal with this” issue.

Teacher Tapp data from January last year showed that 80 per cent of schools surveyed had some sort of mobile phone banning policy, up from around two-thirds in June 2018.

De Souza also told MPs we need to “lean in” to a proper relationships, sex and health education curriculum. The DfE is currently reviewing this.

With sexually transmitted infection rates rising, she said “that to me speaks of kids getting their sex education from TikTok and not being taught by the trusted adults at school in a proper way and by their families”.

De Souza added: “Heads say to me, ‘I’m not sure what the guidance is’, and we need to be giving them the really strong supportive guidance to be doing this work. Those figures are absolutely shocking.”



Dame Rachel de Souza

Lambeth spent £230k on legal fees over superhead departure

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EXCLUSIVE

A council spent £230,000 on legal fees and investigations into England's former best-paid primary headteacher in a case that has ended in a secret settlement.

Last month, *Schools Week* revealed how Lambeth council and Sir Craig Tunstall had reached a settlement to end a legal row over his controversial dismissal from the council-maintained Gipsy Hill Federation in 2018.

Residents said it left the community "not knowing what really happened" after the six-year saga.

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 local authority made a counterclaim attempting to recover damages of potentially £500,000 from Tunstall.

A Freedom of Information request has revealed that the council spent £234,000 on



Sir Craig Tunstall

the case. This includes nearly £160,000 on solicitor and barrister fees and £20,000 on court fees.

An additional £51,000 was spent on the original disciplinary investigation and £2,900 on a council's fraud probe. This does not include any settlement figure.

The costs are close to the £288,000 that Tunstall was accused of receiving without authorisation, which the council alleged in its court documents.

A council spokesperson said they "received external legal advice on this matter and for reasons which remain confidential between the parties" they were unable to comment further.

Simon Morrow, coordinator of community action group Peoples' Audit, said: "Only Lambeth council and Sir Craig Tunstall know what has happened in this case.

"All we know is that, as council taxpayers, more than £230,000 of our money that could have been spent on cash-strapped services has ended up being paid to lawyers, seemingly to no end."

Tunstall told *Schools Week* that the "astronomical amount" spent on legal fees was "rightly concerning", adding: "If Lambeth's processes and investigation were sufficiently rigorous and reliable, I fail to understand these costs and the ultimate outcome."

He said he was prevented from discussing his settlement figure due to a non-disclosure agreement.

SCHOOLS WEEK

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Patrick Walker, Turnbull High School
Silver Winner of Teacher of the year in a Secondary School

Profile

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL



‘The esteem teachers were held in during Covid has disappeared’

Teacher training guru Lynne McKenna talks about working 70-hour weeks, making the profession more accessible and why we now need ‘drastic’ recruitment solutions

Lynne McKenna, Dean of Education and Society at the University of Sunderland, has a formidable work ethic. She “easily” puts in 70 hours a week (she’s been up for four hours already by the time I’ve crawled out of bed for our breakfast meeting).

It shows, too. She’s been instrumental in helping to steer government policies aimed at boosting teacher numbers.

She received an MBE last year for services to education, which she said came as a “surprise” given she’s also never held back from criticising the Department for Education over policies she disagrees with (but more of that later).

Blocked from teaching

When McKenna told her vice chancellor she planned to retire this August, she said: “I was very

pleased to see him put his head in his hands.” Knowing she’ll be “difficult to replace”, she gave a year’s notice.

Much of her drive is attributed to a love of the profession and removing the kinds of barriers to becoming a teacher that she once faced.

As a little girl she would force her friends to play ‘schools’ and was “always the teacher”. But at 15, her hopes of becoming one were crushed when

Profile: Lynne McKenna

her school careers advisor pointed out she lacked the required maths GCE to do so.

She “wasn’t even put in for” maths at her secondary modern school in Jarrow, South Tyneside, because “it was felt I wouldn’t pass”. The advisor suggested to McKenna’s receptionist mum and engineer dad that their daughter train to be a nursery and primary classroom assistant instead.

“The next thing I knew I was sitting an entrance exam to become a nursery nurse – without even knowing what one was.”

But McKenna’s teaching skills didn’t go unnoticed at the schools she worked for. “Every headteacher would ask, why aren’t you a teacher?”

After four years, she began studying three evenings a week at South Tyneside College for her GCE maths and a higher education access course while working full-time. But she said: “If someone had helped me at 15, I could’ve done it then. To have been limited by one tiny qualification was such a shame.”

Going global

She became “the archetypal swot”. After qualifying as a teacher from the University of Sunderland, on her first day primary teaching in South Shields she applied for a Master’s degree in education at Newcastle University.

Years later, on her first day as senior lecturer at Northumbria University, she started a part-time doctorate at Durham University.

During the same period, she worked as an advisory teacher, a family numeracy co-ordinator, and then as a curriculum development officer for South Tyneside Council.

McKenna joined Sunderland in 2015 as head of the school of education, and was made dean in 2018.

She’s used her communication line to the DfE to help remove unnecessary barriers to teaching for others ever since. “My whole life has been dedicated to that cause,” she says.

Trainees previously had to pass skills tests to prove maths and English competency for qualified teacher status (QTS), which “seemed nonsensical” to McKenna at a time of rising teacher shortages.

She pushed DfE on the issue, and shared with



‘My whole life has been dedicated the cause of removing barriers’

officials the work her university had done showing how even some trainees with maths degrees were “finding it difficult” to pass the tests, partly “because of the time factor involved”.

They were scrapped shortly after in 2019.

McKenna also set her sights on facilitating wannabe teachers living overseas to train, too, through what became known as the International Qualified Teacher Status programme (IQTS).

On a 2016 visit to PGCE programmes her university was running in partnership with international schools in Dubai and Hong Kong, she noted how most trainees were the educated wives of expat bankers and oil company managers.

These ladies were helpers in their children’s schools who in many cases were “doing the job of teacher”, but without being able to get QTS.

Last year, Sunderland became one of the first five providers piloting IQTS, to “export [England’s] excellence in initial teacher training” across the globe. The university trained over half (41) the 80 teachers enrolled on the course.

Sunderland’s programme follows its campus-based PGCE, the difference being that learning

happens online. The students, from Asia, the Middle East and increasingly Europe, get support from a Sunderland academic and a school-based mentor. And in-country tutors are employed to oversee these mentors.

Another 19 providers have signed up to the scheme since the pilot, and McKenna believes there could be more than 25 in the market by the end of this year.

“To have that impact globally is huge,” she added. “It’s very dear to me.”

Review mayhem

But McKenna has rebelled, too. She was one of many to challenge the initial teacher training market review, which compelled every provider to apply for reaccreditation based on new standards. It followed a government report rallying against those peddling “folk pedagogies” and “neuromyths”, which was widely seen as another attack on ‘the blob’ of left-leaning educationalists (including universities).

She tried in vain to persuade school leaders to speak up against the proposals. They were

Profile: Lynne McKenna

“absolutely on their knees” after the pandemic, and lacked the time.

She believes the review was “very badly timed” given “the recruitment crisis was evident as soon as we emerged from the pandemic”, and that the policy has made the crisis worse.

Entrants to initial teacher training dropped from 36,159 in 2021-22 to 26,955 in 2023-24. Around 60 of the 240 providers did not get re-accredited in 2022. Nearly four in five of those not accredited were rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted at the time.

McKenna finds it “baffling” that these providers were “not accredited because they hadn’t fulfilled criteria in a paper exercise”.

One of those was Durham University, which had been a teacher training provider since the early nineteenth century and was rated ‘outstanding’. While some snubbed providers formed partnerships with other universities to continue providing training (Durham for instance joined with Newcastle), McKenna claims many “just pulled out” altogether.

She also fed back to DfE the time it took her team to provide the documentation for reaccreditation, which “instead could’ve been spent on teacher recruitment activity, going out to sixth forms and colleges ... we’ve not been able to do that.”

Mentor woes

Mentoring is now crucial to training up the next pipeline of teachers, but the exodus from the profession is making it harder to find those mentors. McKenna is seeing some schools “doubling up” classes with “50 children in a hall”.

“A lot” of secondaries have told McKenna’s team, “we haven’t enough teachers to teach our children. How can we release them for your mentoring?”

The lack of specialist teachers now working in schools is also a barrier. Some are making do with non-specialists, such as PE teachers teaching maths.

“We’ve got very little chance of recruiting to business, physics, modern foreign languages, design and technology and RE, because in some



McKenna graduation 1991 UG

‘If we can’t recruit primary teachers, that’s a sign the profession itself isn’t seen as attractive’

cases there’s nobody in schools with that expertise to mentor those trainees.”

To “get trainees into schools”, the university has started sending its own staff in to provide mentoring. “It’s a cost we’re having to bear.”

A drastic solution

Sunderland has the largest cohort of teacher trainees in the North East, with 879 last year. It had 1,033 in 2021.

McKenna has told the DfE in “a million plus meetings”, and shadow education secretary Bridget Philipson (a Sunderland MP), to “be brave” and abolish tuition fees for teacher trainees.

“At this point, we need a drastic solution.”

For the last two years Sunderland has also been “20 or 30 below where we normally are” for primary recruits, which was “unheard of” pre Covid.

“That’s a worrying trend. If we can’t recruit primary teachers, that’s a sign the profession itself isn’t seen as attractive.”

It was a different story when McKenna qualified as a teacher. Her grandmother “couldn’t believe we had a school mistress in the family. It was seen as this huge achievement”.

Bad news stories over strikes and teacher pay have not helped, and McKenna believes the “esteem teachers were held in during the pandemic seems to have disappeared”.

“It’s quite a helpless feeling when you’ve got teachers in their early 50s taking early retirement. We’re seeing a lot of that.”

McKenna is retiring at 60, but not because she has any less love for her job. It’s because she has Myasthenia gravis, which is “exacerbated by stress and fatigue”. The condition, which prevents some brain messages getting to her muscles, means sometimes she is prone to losing her voice.

“As somebody who speaks a lot, I found that really difficult.” But she looks back at her 33-year education career without regrets.

“I’ve loved every second. It’s such a privilege to work in education.”

Opinion

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The sector's manifesto



SIR HAMID PATEL

CEO, Star Academies

Five policies to make AI-enabled learning safe and equitable

AI's potential to transform education must be matched by ambitious policies to ensure its benefits are shared and its risks mitigated, writes Hamid Patel

Artificial Intelligence (AI) brings the most seismic disruption to our lives since the industrial revolution and the invention of the internet. It has the power to change our lives for the better but also risks dislocating so much of the connective tissue that binds our social fabric.

AI offers unparalleled, rapidly evolving opportunities to improve learning and achievement for all our young people, reduce workload meaningfully for our teachers and leaders, and transform how we address issues such as poor attendance and behaviour.

I asked ChatGPT how an incoming UK government should create policies to support the use of AI in education. You can read its answer – generated in less than a minute – [here](#). In addition, the government recently published a report on *Generative AI in education*, outlining the views of experts, teachers and leaders about the technology which will empower – or overwhelm – us.

For me, five key policy decisions emerge.

First, policymakers should clearly outline the ethical parameters for use of AI in schools. There needs

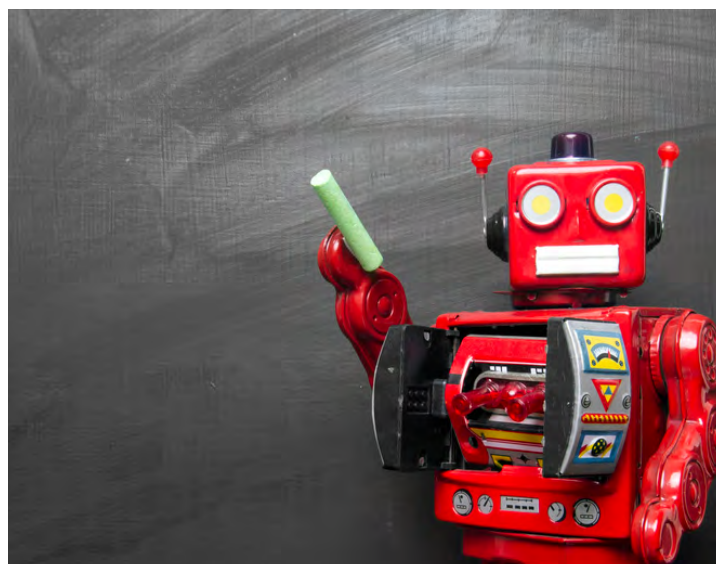
to be transparency and a common, informed understanding – among pupils, parents, teachers and regulators – of what is permitted and what is proscribed.

This isn't just about coursework plagiarism; it's also about how we use AI to make decisions, share and analyse data, generate learning and assessment materials, and evaluate everything that a school does. The government is best placed to determine the universal expectations that ensure fair and equitable use of AI.

Second, the government should develop quality training materials, accessible online for teachers and leaders on how to make safe and effective use of AI to support learning, reduce workload and manage data. Such training would be mandatory, would set a minimum standard for professional practice in our schools, and would require speedy and consistent adoption.

Third, government should work urgently with Oak National Academy, school groups and examination boards to create safe and effective tools for personalised tutoring so that no young person leaves school illiterate or innumerate.

Too many children, disproportionately from the most deprived communities, lack access to consistently good quality



“ Every child should have an AI tutor from the age of five

teaching during their time at school. AI could generate a curriculum that teaches our children how to read, write and do arithmetic delivered in a way that is tailored to address the precise gaps in their learning and at a pace that suits individual needs. A child could draft a story and the AI Tutor could show them within seconds how to improve it.

By the end of this decade, every child should have an AI tutor from the age of five. Making such tools available free-of-charge to families across the country could help eradicate educational inequality far more effectively than several decades of policy and funding. (I am emphatically not advocating that AI supersedes human interaction or that home education is the default model for the future.)

Fourth, for all of our children to use AI effectively, benefit from the opportunities it affords and not succumb to its risks, we must ensure their digital literacy. AI will sort out the mechanics of coding for us, but all our young people need to leave school knowing how AI can be

used to improve their life chances.

The most successful future citizens will possess a core body of knowledge – cultural capital – coupled with the digital, creative and social skills to make use of the technological opportunities that present themselves. We need to design and deliver curricula in all our schools to equip these future leaders.

Finally, AI needs to be for everyone.

Legislation must ensure that all AI tools are as inclusive as possible so that learners and teachers with disabilities, sensory and cognitive needs can benefit from transformational technology in an equitable manner. AI tools must also reflect the richness and diversity of our society and jettison its prejudices and biases.

If we are to ensure that AI is the force for good that we all wish for it to be, it is essential to anticipate and prevent flaws rather than try to minimise collateral damage after the cyber genie is released from the bottle.

Opinion

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CATHERINE MCKINNELL

Shadow schools minister, Labour

Persistent absence is the first barrier Labour will seek to break

The Conservative government has broken the relationships that underpin school attendance. Labour will rebuild the ladder to success, says Catherine McKinnell

One of the brilliant parts of being Shadow schools minister is being able to travel the length and breadth of the country, hearing from students, teachers, and parents about their experiences in our schools, sharing in the positives and listening to what needs to change.

Last month, I spoke to Schools North East Academies Conference about Labour's vision for our schools, part of our plan for a mission-driven government that will drive high and rising standards for every child, and reset the broken relationship between government, families and schools.

That relationship is crucial to children's life chances. The unwritten rule is that families, schools and government all have responsibilities and will all play their part in supporting children to thrive at school and throughout life.

Fourteen years of Conservative governments have broken that relationship, seen in soaring pupil absence. In my own local authority, Newcastle, the number of children missing half of their lessons skyrocketed by 282 per cent between

2016 and 2022, and this story is reflected by teachers and schools across the country.

Recent research from the Centre for Social Justice has revealed that one in four parents think sending their children to school every day doesn't matter, at a time when one in four children are on track to miss school regularly by 2025. Rebuilding this relationship must be a top priority.

Because if children aren't in school, it doesn't matter how effective or well-supported teaching and learning is, we will not see better outcomes for young people. That holds back our society, widens social and economic divides, and leaves us all worse off.

That's why Labour brought forward, and voted for, a bill to allow us to introduce a register of children not in school. This would have created a proper record of where children are being educated, because Labour's view is clear: excellence is for everyone.

Last summer, Keir Starmer set out Labour's mission to break down the barriers to opportunity, not for some of our children but for all of them. That means knowing where they are being educated. It means knowing that the education they are receiving is setting every child up with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to go on to thrive throughout their lives. It means rebuilding relationships



“ **The Conservatives don't share our vision or sense of purpose** ”

and working with families, schools, and local authorities to deliver this change.

The Conservatives don't share our vision or sense of purpose. Despite successive Conservative education secretaries and schools ministers supporting a home school register, they voted down our bill, again showing that our children, their lives and life chances are not a priority.

This has been the case for far too long. We see it in the way education has been sidelined and treated as a peripheral issue. We saw it in the education secretary's belated claim that reducing absence is her 'number one priority' – just as with crumbling schools, only acting once the problem has spiralled out of control.

If Labour is fortunate enough to form the next government, we will bring the urgency needed to tackle this problem. Legislating for a register of children not in school will form part of our long-term plan to tackle persistent absence.

We will roll out breakfast clubs for every primary school, proven to boost attendance and attainment.

We'll pay for this by ending the non-dom tax status, which allows the global super-rich to avoid paying their fair share.

We'll ensure pupils are able to access mental health support both inside and outside the school gates, with counsellors in schools and hubs in the community, paid for by ending private schools' tax breaks.

We'll reform Ofsted and allow it to review absence as part of annual school checks.

We'll join-up records of children with a new number used across education, social care, and wider children's services, using AI to highlight trends in absence, spot issues early and nip problems in the bud.

We'll deliver a reformed curriculum and assessment system to engage every child, building from the firm foundations of knowledge and delivering greater opportunities for enrichment in music, art, sport and drama.

It will be Labour's mission to break down the barriers to opportunity for every child. Persistent absence will be the first barrier we seek to break.

Opinion

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ALAN WOOD

Former president, Association of Directors of Children's Services

Why Ofsted should not inspect safeguarding (and who should)

The foundations of a more comprehensive and effective safeguarding system than Ofsted's narrow approach already exist, explains Alan Wood

The tragic death of Ruth Perry following Ofsted's inspection of her school posed questions about Ofsted's ability to effectively judge safeguarding in schools.

Reading Ofsted's assessments of safeguarding in schools' inspection reports shows that the process it follows is disproportionately focused on policies and procedures. These in themselves do not protect children.

Too much time is spent on checking DBS records, and too little is spent speaking to children and families. Ofsted's approach is narrow in focus. It fails to cover the experience of the range of children in scope to safeguarding.

It lacks information on multi-agency aspects of safeguarding, offers no advice or support to ensure schools can improve and worse, omits any assessment on reporting the risks of significant harm.

To be effective, any assessment of safeguarding needs to be proportionate, focused, involve the school and allow for external,

objective, expert assessment and feedback. Thankfully, there is already a model for this – one schools are familiar with, and on which a more comprehensive system could be built to replace Ofsted's inadequate approach.

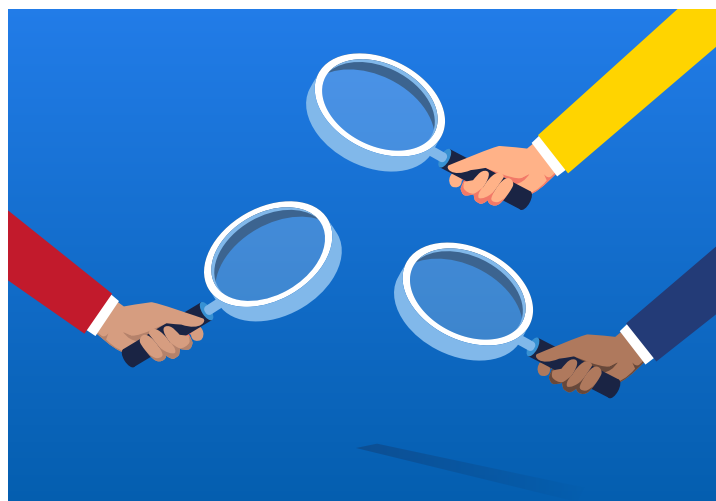
The Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) is a statutory multi-agency body. It is led by the three statutory safeguarding partners: the Chief Constable for the area, the Chief Executive of the local NHS board and the Chief Executive of the local authority.

They have a statutory "equal and joint" responsibility for safeguarding in their area and access to a significant range of data about children and education.

This includes rates of absence, exclusions, social care referrals, the number of children in need, looked-after children, children on a child protection plan, health data (not available to Ofsted) and young people at risk of, or involved in, criminality – all the factors which impact on safeguarding and child protection.

Crucially, they know their schools and communities and the challenges they face.

The Education Act 2002 places a legal duty on schools to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of students. As part of these arrangements,



“Ofsted disproportionately focuses on procedures

governing bodies are to conduct safeguarding audits to assess the effectiveness of their policies and procedures, providing information to the local authority on how these duties have been discharged.

LSCPs assess these audits. Best practice is then for the partnership to feed back its opinion of the audit to each school. Often, the LSCP will arrange to visit a school to offer guidance and support. If an audit is of poor quality, this is taken up with the chair of governors and the headteacher.

With minor tweaks to Working Together to Keep Children Safe in Education, the audits and their assessment could be given a higher status. For example, it could require the LSCP to provide formal feedback to schools with recommendations.

The key issues to be covered in the audit and any visit could be set out in statutory guidance, with a framework of the key areas to be covered. In addition, schools would receive a regular safeguarding MOT, and earlier intervention if there are indications of serious weaknesses.

A key factor in the audits and visits could be genuine gathering and use of student voice, rather than Ofsted's tokenistic approach.

The visit would be carried out by a small, trained team of LSCP practice leaders and focus on helping the school to share its best practice and strengthen areas found to be less than good. Following a visit, the headteacher and chair of governors would receive a formal report, which would be available to parents online.

LSCPs could be required to provide their assessment of their area's strengths and challenges annually to the DfE and Ofsted.

In this model, other than if they identified a concern during their visit, Ofsted inspectors could focus their efforts on going into more depth on the quality of education, taking pressure off them and the schools they inspect.

Importantly, we could do all this and in fact improve safeguarding for children and young people. So what's holding us back?

Opinion

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MOHSEN OJJA

CEO, Anthem Schools Trust

Young governors show we won't pay lip service to student voice

One bold student encounter persuaded me we needed to do much more to truly value students' views and ideas, explains Mohsen Ojja

Call me maverick, but I believe that the students' voice should be heard just as clearly in the boardroom as it is in the classroom.

As educators our primary concern is holding the attention of the class, keeping students engaged in their learning, while observing and listening to their needs. Why should it be any different at academy trust level?

I was starkly reminded of the importance of listening to the voices of our most important stakeholders – the students themselves – when introduced to Timi, a year 10 student at St Mark's Academy in Mitcham, shortly after starting as CEO at Anthem Schools Trust last year.

On hearing me speak about the importance of listening to our students, Timi boldly asked why, if that was so vital, weren't any students represented on the governing bodies themselves. I had no answer.

Timi's remarks acted as a catalyst for change. I was taken by his direct, open and honest approach and how

he was able to clearly articulate the need for Anthem to consider his and other students' voices.

As a direct result of that conversation, the senior team and the board of trustees took the decision to appoint two students to all of our 16 local governing bodies, including those at our 11 primary schools. These student associates are aptly named 'Timi Champions'. Every decision made within our trust will be enriched by the insights and perspectives of our Timi Champions, selected by their peers to represent their respective student body. They will serve as ambassadors of change, ensuring that student voices are not only heard but acted upon in every aspect of our operations.

No, the students won't sit on panels and make decisions about exclusions and address staff grievances, but in every other respect they will be full members of their local school governing councils, called Anthem Community Councils (ACCs).

They will attend each termly meeting and come prepared with a record capturing their peers' achievements, questions, concerns, and suggestions for improvements. Each pair of Timi Champions is supported by a teacher at their



Timi, Year 10 at St Mark's Academy

“Every decision made within our trust will be enriched

school.

The local layer of governance is a conduit for everyone in the trust to listen, hear and act on the voices of our wider community. The role of the Timi Champion is central to this approach, with a specific focus on capturing the lived experiences of all students across our family of schools.

This way we can ensure that they are heard by Anthem's national team and trustees, allowing us to address issues and share in celebrations and lessons learned across the trust for the benefit of all.

But this new initiative, launching this month, is not without its challenges. It will require a concerted effort from all stakeholders to ensure its success: teachers, community council members, students and parents. We must create a supportive environment where students feel empowered to voice their opinions without fear of judgment or reprisal, staying true to our culture of open

dialogue and mutual respect, where diverse perspectives are welcomed and valued.

I like to be reminded of Timi's words of encouragement to those wanting to follow in his footsteps: "Don't hold back your opinions. You've become a Timi Champion so that your opinions can be heard and so that you can make changes for the greater good of your school".

I intend to heed his call to action, because this initiative is more than just symbolic; it represents a fundamental shift in our organisational culture. It acknowledges that students are not passive recipients of education but active participants in their own learning journey.

It is essential that our students' voices are captured, listened to and considered as an integral part of the framework of how we operate. By embedding Timi Champions at the core of our governance structure, students are not just seen but valued as partners in the education process.

Solutions

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**MIRA
SHAH**
Business manager,
St Mary's CE Primary School

Three creative ways to boost your school's fundraising

With rising costs comes a need to rethink how schools raise funds. Mira Shah offers some easy-to-implement ideas to maximise revenue streams

With research from the National Education Union showing that 92 per cent of mainstream schools predict they will not be able to cope with cost increases in 2024, fundraising has never been more important.

To navigate rising costs, schools need to innovate and broaden their approach to generating income.

Here are three creative ways schools boost their fundraising in the new year:

Get creative about monetising space

One of the most underutilised assets within schools is undoubtedly space. Renting out your halls, classrooms and even meeting rooms is one of the easiest ways to generate income. But unfortunately, many schools are missing out on maximising earning potential here because it requires so much admin.

Advertising, communicating with bookers and handling payments can be incredibly time-consuming. The key is to streamline this as much as possible. Listing your school on an 'Airbnb-style' platform can make it

easier to monetise your space and reach new audiences.

We use one called Sharesy which is made especially for community organisations and to date has helped London schools and community centres collectively raise over £1.3 million.

Think about how you could rent your spaces out to new audiences, too. Go beyond the classic birthday parties and dance classes. For example, reach out to local production companies to let them know your school is available for any filming or photography opportunities. It's also a good idea to build rapport with local activity providers, like school holiday programmes and community clubs, so you're on their radar for bookings too.

And don't overlook your outdoor areas, like car parks and sports fields. You would be surprised how in demand they are, particularly if you live near a sporting ground or music venue. Make them available to rent by listing them on low-cost platforms like YourParkingSpace.

Embrace tech in new ways

Traditionally, schools have been slow to embrace new tech and this has often held them back. Tech can save you a huge amount of time and money, so it should play a crucial role in your fundraising efforts.



“ Breaking with tradition can breathe new life into fundraising

There are many free or low-cost platforms that you can tap into to help you get further.

If you're hosting an event, pop it up on Eventbrite or Facebook to make it super 'sharable' among your community. This also gives you a place to share any updates, build excitement and engage with the community. If you're crowdfunding for new technology or a playground upgrade, do it through GoFundMe so everyone can talk about their donations, keep up to date with how much you've raised, and share the URL with their friends.

We've also had success with affiliate link programmes, EasyFundRaising, which allows us to earn a commission on parents' everyday purchases at no extra cost to them. It's a smart way of discovering small extra income streams that benefit everyone.

Start new traditions

If you're hosting events yourself, breaking away from tradition can breathe new life into fundraising

efforts. Don't be afraid to branch out and try something fresh, especially if you're finding relying on the same old events each year is no longer working.

Think about your community and what they are likely to want to get involved in. A Burns Night supper makes for a great January event. Clothes swaps and boot sales are trendy right now and will appeal to those who are environmentally aware and cost-conscious. Board game nights, meditation classes or hobby groups will attract entirely new audiences to your school.

Rapidly rising costs and budget cuts are hitting schools hard across the board, making creative fundraising a must. While it can feel daunting to try something new, there are several simple, easy-to-introduce initiatives you can explore.

In the long run, they could make a huge difference in boosting your earnings and giving your students the best possible learning experience.

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THE REVIEW

TEACHERS AND TEACHING POST-COVID

Authors: Katy Marsh-Davies and Cathy Burnett

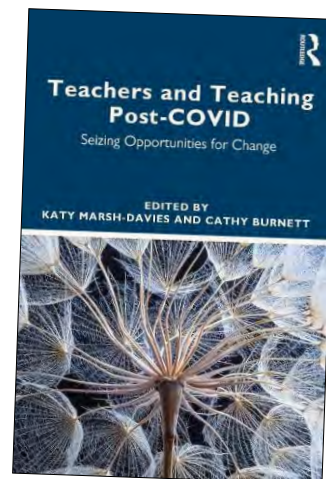
Publisher: Routledge

ISBN: 103239949X

Publication date: 23 November 2023

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

BOOK
TV
FILM
RADIO
EVENT
RESOURCE



The impact of Covid on the education of pupils continues to occupy the minds of educators and policymakers. Central to this is the focus on returning to pre-Covid standards while providing equitable and inclusive access to education.

But before one starts to imagine what education should provide post-Covid, the concern of how the pandemic has worsened existing inequalities in terms of health, employment and education cannot be overlooked.

The significant disruption in schooling across the globe has resulted in a long-term negative consequence for young people's chances. Yet even under this dark shadow, educators are attempting to leverage the positives to improve teaching and learning.

In *Teachers and Teaching Post-COVID: Seizing Opportunities for Change*, Katy Marsh-Davies and Cathy Burnett feature a wide range of international perspectives and academic research relating to the important lessons of the pandemic and the many leverage points for improvement.

The book is divided into four main themes relating to and learning in a post-Covid world. The first focuses on the challenges and opportunities for teachers' professional identity and agency amid uncertainty and complexity.

The second examines the pedagogic implications for curriculum, assessment, and digital technologies, and fostering meaningful and inclusive learning for all. Third, the book investigates the emotional and relational dimensions of teaching and learning and how teachers can support their pupils' wellbeing as well as their own. The fourth discusses the possibilities and limitations of collaboration and innovation in the post-Covid era.

The tragedies of the pandemic prompt the

book's contributors to reimagine education in a post-Covid world and what the implications for professional learning could be for the sector. Reading it, I recalled participating in the RSA's 'rethinking education' debate on new approaches to curriculum and assessment and whether a fundamental shift is needed in curriculum and assessment to build a more equitable and inclusive education. No consensus arose from that debate, and the same could be argued about this book.

Nevertheless, it was pleasing to read the extensive research and varied practitioner voices here examining very pertinent issues from early years to higher education and setting our struggles within a global context.

The authors argue that within 'neoliberal marketised education systems', the development and nurturing of teachers' professional autonomy and the cultivation of a culture of care and empathy have been overlooked in recent years. They note that "we have witnessed, globally, high rates of teacher attrition, poor teacher mental health, low job satisfaction, and burnout".

Perhaps some of these issues are already being addressed here through the work resulting from the Department for Education's teacher recruitment and retention strategy, which was rolled out in 2019. Either way, the message of teacher resilience and creativity during the pandemic gleams throughout.

But what you won't find here is a clear path forward. For example, the authors suggest that "the inflexibility of pre- and post-Covid teaching presents a barrier to women accessing reasonable workplace adjustments to manage menopause symptoms".

But in the later chapter about 'teaching through menopause', I was surprised to read that

"teachers are significantly more likely to find flexible work arrangements unsuitable since they make them feel disconnected from the workplace". Is this a problem with the education system?

The pandemic has created momentum behind developing new working practices in education. Like every other sector however, it's on us as leaders to ensure these opportunities don't result in teachers feeling hindered by them – in their professional or personal lives.

The main limitation of this book relates to some sections of that utilise research methodology with a small and unrepresentative sample size of the teaching workforce. This means that some findings would be difficult to generalise.

The book concludes with a reflection on the future of teaching and learning and the implications for policy and practices. The authors propose that we explore "how Covid has changed the social role of a teacher, and individual teachers find consonance with this".

I don't doubt for a minute that we all are. And if this book doesn't offer a roadmap with a clear destination, it's at least a comprehensive look at the lay of the land.

★★★★☆
Rating



Fiona Atherton
Headteacher,
Ladypool
Primary School

THE FLOWERS OF SPRING

It's the start of a new half term and we are beginning to see a little more of the sun which always makes things seem a little brighter and more positive. Spring 2 is one of my favourite times of the school year, but this year the five week half term means there is an awful lot to squeeze including World Book Day, Mothers' Day and Easter celebrations, along with the start of Ramadan.

Adding to the excitement, the DfE kicked off its half-term by publishing its 'long-awaited' mobile phone guidance from the government (just kidding!).



Tom Bennett OBE @tombennett71

New guidance on Mobile phones in schools drops today. I had some input onto this, and I think it's really solid advice and direction. I go to a lot of schools, and phones are a really big problem in lots of them.

Mobile phones in schools gov.uk

It doesn't really have much of an impact on primary schools as far as I'm aware, but it has been a huge talking point this week and it has certainly divided opinion on X. A **blistering tweet from Andy Calvert** described it as a 'dead cat' piece of guidance – 'political

and theatrical spin on a non topic'.

Some think the contrary, voicing belief that the guidance will be a useful back-up for headteachers who are struggling to implement the ban in their school.

For me, the controversy should really stem from the fact that many, many schools have already dealt with this issue. As usual, it's too late from the DfE to be of any use, and it just draws attention to the fact that there are so many much larger issues government should be focused on, such as SEND funding.

ASSESSMENT, NOT ASSUMPTION

On the topic of SEND and funding, this insightful post by Unity Schools Partnership's pupil premium adviser Marc Rowland makes an unarguable case for looking beyond labels to support all children to thrive.

The blog is divided into two parts. The first quickly unpicks the dangers of using labels such as SEND and PPG to make sense of under-achievement. Chiefly, he says, this can lead to disempowering teachers, limiting our expectations, and making generalised assumptions rather than specific assessments. He then sets out ten detailed principles for ensuring every child can thrive.

The second part of the blog looks at students with SEND who are also disadvantaged.



Rowland adopts an intersectional lens and sets out four thinking traps to be avoided in our attempts to support these pupils. "Multiple challenges mean multiple complexities," says Rowland, but "where possible, it's vital to avoid an overly complicated response."

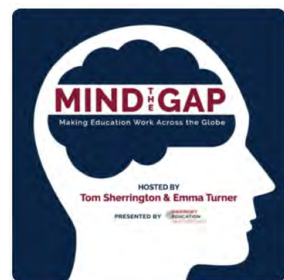
Broadly, Rowland's argument is that these labels – whether a child falls into one or more

of these groups – are useful only for thinking about the link between circumstances and educational outcomes at the policy/population level. They rightly determine where funding is directed, but tell us nothing useful about how to support the children in our classrooms.

One sentence from this blog particularly struck me: "What this group is more vulnerable to is holding less status within our school system". If pupil premium and SEND funding (for what it's worth) are for anything, it is surely to reverse that link rather than strengthen it.

ELEVATING BLACK LEADERS

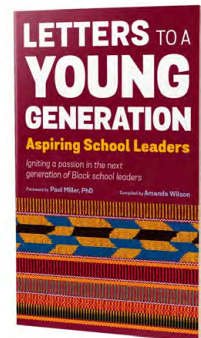
And for my final thought this week, I managed to catch an episode of the Mind the Gap podcast with Amanda Wilson as the special guest.




Wilson is the author of *Letters to a Young Generation: Aspiring School Leaders*. Her book is written from a Black British perspective, and it is her third book of letters. She talks about how important it is for a light to be shone on some of the few Black headteachers in the UK.

This book came about off the back of the statistics from the government that indicated how few Black headteachers there are in the UK and how young Black and other teachers of colour can be encouraged to try and take the next steps in their journeys if leadership is something that they aspire to.

I love the idea of "sending the elevator back down". I highly recommend you have a listen. Maybe on your phone.



Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts 

The Knowledge

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



How are trusts navigating centralisation?

Chris Kirk, Director of CJK Associates
Will Jordan, Co-founder of IMP Software

Five years ago, GAG pooling was described by Lord Agnew as “one of the greatest freedoms a multi-academy trust has”. Every year since, the sector has debated the pros and cons of pooling schools’ funds into a central pot.

In the past year, the definition of GAG pooling in the Academy Trust Handbook has changed significantly, indicating the growing sentiment from authorities that GAG pooling can be a powerful force to ensure resources are efficiently allocated.

Published this month, Kreston UK’s 2024 Academies Benchmark Report highlights a growing trend: 32 per cent of trusts pooled GAG and reserves in 2022/23 compared with 23 per cent the previous year. This jump in popularity is evident in both small and large MATs; over 40 per cent of the latter now pool.

Our own survey, conducted in November and December last year, and to be published in our new report next month, explores how MATs are evolving their approaches to pooling and centralisation and also points to an upward trajectory. We find that 50 per cent of trusts are already pooling GAG and reserves. Within this, 20 per cent are specifically pooling GAG, and a further 38 per cent say they would like to adopt GAG pooling in the future.

A total of 155 MAT representatives covering trusts of all sizes responded to our survey. For those already GAG pooling, 94 per cent reported that looking after financially weaker schools or targeting additional resource was the main benefit of their approach. Interestingly, for those intending to GAG pool in the future, driving operational efficiencies was cited by 97 per cent as the primary expected benefit.

GAG pooling is not for everyone. IMP Software’s 2023 research reported that, of the 67.5 per cent of MATs which did not currently GAG pool, half were not considering it due to the negative impact it could have on schools joining their trust. This is backed up in our latest survey, which finds that the main reasons for not GAG pooling are the perceived impact on school autonomy and colleagues feeling that funds should be allocated specifically to students at



their own school.

We firmly believe that there is no single right answer and no one-size-fits-all approach. But there is an evident need to move beyond the “Rob Peter to pay Paul” view of GAG pooling.

MATs and schools need good information to decide what is right for them. And, as evidenced by our research, there are, in fact, many forms of GAG pooling.

The needs-based model is by far the most common approach to funding allocation. Significantly perhaps, around 80 per cent of those who do this rate their likelihood of recommending it as 8 out of 10 or higher.

Then there is the top-slice MAT: a continuance of local budgets but with a high degree of pooling for central services, contingency and reserves. Kreston’s report shows that the average top slice is 7.4 per cent for small MATs, 6.3 per cent for medium MATs and 5.4 per cent for large MATs.

And the bottom-slice MAT: all funding is centrally managed and released for local requirements; revised funding models provide longer-term certainty and even out geographical differences.

And finally, bespoke pooling: For example, 47 per cent of MATs pool reserves centrally

and a further 29 per cent would like to do so. Meanwhile, some adopt “general” pooling, where other non-GAG/non-reserves income streams are pooled by trusts and shared out among schools.

As part of our research, we also invited MAT leaders to outline the key steps that they have taken to introduce revenue pooling, spanning consultation, piloting and implementation. Our full report summarises these, together with case studies, to further inform sector-wide developments around building a strong financial and operations strategy.

School groups that are already pooling GAG focus on fostering equality between schools, providing consistent support and efficiently allocating resources to meet the diverse needs of all students across the trust. The decision not to pool funds often revolves around trust in existing mechanisms, desire for local control, concerns about bureaucracy and considerations related to the size and context of the trust.

The debate continues, but practice is definitely evolving.

GAG Pooling and Centralisation in MATs: 2024 Update will be published on 5 March. To register for the webinar, [please visit here](#)

Week in

Westminster

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

MONDAY

It was hard not to feel a sense of déjà vu over your cornflakes on Monday, as the government prattled on about its mobile phone "ban" for the 475th time.

The non-statutory ban-that-isn't-actually-a-ban was only announced in the first place because the PM hogged the advanced BS announcement for himself at the Tory conference, and ed sec Gillian Keegan needed *something* to announce to a room of about four people.

Helpfully, ASCL general secretary Geoff Barton was at hand to remind anyone listening that we've heard it all before. He's "lost count of the number of times that ministers have now announced a crackdown on mobile phones in schools. It is a non-policy for a non-problem".

That didn't spoil the fun for our esteemed prime minister, however. Rishi Sunak made a right tit of himself



as he tweeted a cringeworthy video skit in which his mobile "rings" repeatedly, disrupting his monologue about the importance of ridding classrooms of "distracting" phones.



As one post on X put it: "One of the biggest issues I deal with is cringing at you so hard I crack a tooth".

Meanwhile, on the same day, MPs were snapped glued to their phones in the House of Commons chamber. Another opportunity for a (non) ban?

WEDNESDAY

In a move that will shock precisely no-one, the government has missed the School Teachers' Review Body's deadline to submit its own evidence for the pay-setting process.

It comes after they also waited until just days before Christmas to issue the STRB's remit letter, kick-starting the pay setting process for 2024 late.

This is despite a deal with unions to end the pay dispute last year that involved a pledge by government for a timelier outcome.

As a result, furious union leaders told the STRB they "do not give permission" for their own evidence to be published or shared "until government has made its

own submission".

In a letter, the bosses of the NEU, NAHT, ASCL and Community said: "We need an assurance that our evidence would only be shared with other parties who had submitted evidence by the original deadline."

While acknowledging the issue is "not of the STRB's making", leaders warned the "fact remains that this is not a satisfactory way to conduct the pay review process".

"In practice it means that statutory consultees are expected to adhere to a deadline that government has chosen to ignore. This may lead teachers and school leaders to question the fairness of the process."

They warned that representative bodies "will be disadvantaged by their evidence being shared before government has published its own".

It means government can "read and respond to the other consultees' evidence at the main submission stage, but the reverse is not true".

Government's "persistent annual failure to meet the deadlines set by the STRB is further evidence that it seeks to fetter the review body's work and independence".

"The government promised a timelier outcome on the STRB report as part of its response to last year's pay dispute, but has again delayed its evidence."

They also warned that representative bodies "will be disadvantaged by their evidence being shared before government has published its own", meaning government can "read and respond to the other consultees' evidence at the main submission stage, but the reverse is not true".



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Join our team: Director of Secondary Education

This is a terrific role for an ambitious education professional. With three secondaries, two with sixth forms and all improving from strong positions as good or better schools, you will lead and support their talented headteachers and their teams.

The next step in our development is building cohesion around our approach to secondary education, as all our schools are different. Naturally, although our foundations are strong. We also want to improve our outcomes further.

Our new director will be surrounded by a talented central team who achieve results collaboratively and with integrity, based on evidence of what works.

We also expect our new director to be outward facing so we can learn and grow further alongside schools and trusts in our region and beyond.

If you share our mission to deliver better futures for children and young people, particularly those from social and economic disadvantage, please apply through our website: www.chartertrust.org.uk

Closing date is 4 March 2024 at 5pm, with interviews planned for week commencing 11th March 2024.

Find out more here:



LOUGHBOROUGH
PRIMARY SCHOOL

Headteacher

Loughborough Primary School in Lambeth is seeking to appoint an exceptional headteacher, with a vision for outstanding learning. We always go 'above and beyond' for the children and our community and are about to embark on the next phase by joining The Charter Schools Educational Trust (from June 2024).

Our school, at its heart, has a strong moral purpose and desire to achieve social justice for all pupils. We have a pre-school provision for 2-year olds and an on-site Nursery. We are moving to one form of entry. Ofsted noted (March 2023), 'the school could be judged outstanding now in a graded inspection.'

Our values are:

- Try your best
- Show resilience
- Collaborate
- Respect yourselves and others

Through innovative practice we strive for excellence, enabling pupils to achieve their highest potential. We develop great thinkers who demonstrate curiosity, resilience and embrace challenge, becoming global citizens, fully prepared for life in modern Britain.

Our next headteacher will have an ambitious vision, that puts the Brixton community at the heart of everything, someone equipped with the knowledge and experience to foster a culture where our staff and children can continue to thrive. The successful candidate will demonstrate expertise in curriculum and assessment, behaviour management, and organisational leadership. We seek a leader who is not only confident and motivated but also eager to develop our diverse and talented staff through evidence-informed practices and collaboration within the wider Trust. We think this is the perfect first headship or perhaps an opportunity to take on a different context if you are an experienced headteacher.

The closing date for applications is: Friday 8th March 2024 by 12:00pm

Interviews will be held: Monday 25th and Tuesday 26th March 2024



A member of the
Laidlaw
SCHOOLS TRUST



Principal

Academy 360 , Sunderland
L24 – L39 £83,081 – £118,732

Academy 360 is Sunderland's first purpose-built all through school, offering transformative education in a community that has experienced long term disadvantage and challenge. The Academy is a proud member of Laidlaw Schools Trust, an inclusive multi academy trust which specialises in raising aspirations in disadvantaged communities in the North East of England. Whilst the Trust shares common values and some aspects of aligned practice/ approach across its academies, each is a distinctive institution serving their unique community.

The Trustees are seeking to appoint an inspirational, values led individual as the new Principal to start September 2024 or earlier if possible. This full-time role is an exciting opportunity to lead this inclusive Academy into the next stage of its development as an inclusive, cross phase provider in Sunderland.

Academy 360 is a coeducational, 4-16 Academy which joined Laidlaw Schools Trust in 2018. The Academy was judged as Good in all areas by Ofsted in 2020. We have increasing applications for the academy in Reception and Year 7 and our Hub or pupils with Special Educational Needs is always very popular.

The successful candidate will possess the vision, knowledge, experience and tenacity to enable the entire Academy community to move forward together. They will be skilled in engaging staff, children, parents and carers in your vision for the academy.

They will be a leader with high expectations, a deep commitment to inclusion and community connection and an in- depth knowledge and understanding of current educational priorities in all key stages.

An innovative leader with the highest standards of professionalism, the successful candidate will have a proven record of effective school leadership experience gained as a Principal or Vice Principal, preferably in more than one school. They will possess the interpersonal skills to inspire and develop individuals and teams, and the ability to raise educational standards in all aspects of school life. Our new Principal will have the ability to work with governors and other stakeholders, undertake strategic planning, resource management and curriculum development.

Benefits of working for Laidlaw Schools Trust

We want to reward our staff through benefits that are mentally, physically and financially rewarding. As a Principal you will benefit from the following:

- Bespoke induction, leadership and professional development overseen by our Directors of Improvement
- Close working with skilled and experienced Principals in both phases from across the Trust
- Close working with our central Secondary School Improvement Team
- Opportunities via the Trust's Digital Strategy and rapidly expanding Inclusion provision
- HSF Healthcare Cash Plan - claim back up to 50% of health expenses
- HSF Assist - free 24/7 GP Advice Line, Virtual Doctor, Counselling, Medical Information and Legal Advice.
- Employee Discount Scheme via Perkbox
- Generous Teachers Pension Scheme
- Cycle to Work Scheme
- Salary sacrifice car lease scheme via NHS Fleet Solutions
- Laidlaw Foundation Funding – Additional funding from the Laidlaw Foundation means that teachers are recognised and financially rewarded for going above and beyond. Every child has access to a digital device so that you can use EdTech to enrich your teaching and reduce your marking time, and you can propose new and innovative teaching and learning ideas and apply to have them funded

Key dates

The closing date for applications is noon Monday 4th March, 2024.

Interviews will be held on Wednesday 13th and Thursday 14th March 2024

[Click here for more information](#)

Bexleyheath Academy

Bexleyheath Academy is part of Academies Enterprise Trust, one of five schools in the London region serving over 5000 pupils. We have a well-established reputation and are proud to be a non-selective school in the grammar heartland of Kent. We have excellent attainment and progress outcomes and will stop at nothing to ensure our students have the very best opportunities.

Our core mission has always been to close the educational gap between young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers. Our ambition is one where every student in the academy, no matter their background, has equal access to high quality education, giving them the same opportunities and potential to succeed.

For a full list
of vacancies,
[click here.](#)



**Bexleyheath
Academy**
Find your remarkable

JULY 2021



About the Trust

Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) is a national family of schools comprising 57 primary, secondary and special schools in England supporting each other to deliver our mission of providing an **excellent education to every child, in every classroom, every day.**

We employ over 4,000 people across the country, each committed to ensuring that every child receives their entitlement to a high level education. We have a dedicated recruitment team to place teachers and support staff within schools they will thrive in and encourage career development opportunities.

Every decision we make is with students' learning and interests at the forefront of our minds. Our schools dedicate focused time on formal academic learning with plenty of support for students' wellbeing - as well as making sure there is time for some fun, too!

Benefits

- Career development and training
- Great pension
- Healthcare cashback and helpline
- Employee assistance programme
- Free financial advice
- Salary advances
- Affordable loan scheme
- Electric car and bike schemes
- Lifestyle savings
- Discounted gym membership
- Travel and leisure scheme

For a full list of benefits, please visit our [website.](#)

Headteacher

L21 - L27 (£77,195 - £83,081)

Due to the retirement of our longstanding Headteacher, the governors seek to appoint a talented and exceptional individual who can lead our school into the future.

This is the start of a new era for the school, and you will be pivotal in our path to continuous improvement and outcomes, as we continue to drive a strong education for our children.

Blakesley Hall Primary School is a thriving, inclusive primary school in east Birmingham, with two forms of entry in Reception and Key stage 1 and three forms of entry in Key Stage 2.

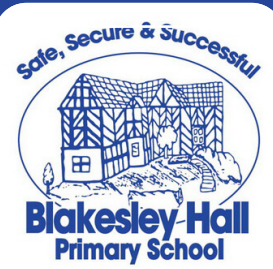
Our vision is to enable every child to be: Safe, Secure and Successful. We are dedicated to ensuring our children feel fully supported in all that they do and learning radiates well beyond the classroom, with a vast array of extra-curricular activities, trips and educational visits taking place each term.

The incoming Headteacher will benefit from the support of drb Ignite Multi Academy Trust, collaborating closely with our experienced central team and the working relationships with Trust colleagues.

The successful applicant will:

- drive the school vision forwards and ensure all pupils achieve the highest standard of educational outcomes, regardless of circumstance or background
- approach the role with resilience and flexibility, using a creative and solution driven approach to improving our school
- inspire, lead and support a highly committed team of teaching and associate staff
- build positive relationships with the school's pupils, staff, parents, governors and the wider community
- engage all our pupils in a broad, balanced, creative and challenging curriculum so that they are happy and achieve their potential within a caring and inclusive community
- work closely and openly to collaborate with other schools in the Trust

[Click here to apply](#)



ENGLISH DEPUTY STRATEGY LEAD - FULL TIME

Location: The Kennal Academies Trust (Kent and Essex area) | Salary: £74,550 plus travel expenses

Are you a strong secondary English practitioner and experienced leader looking for a role where you can have wider impact?

The Kennal Academies Trust is currently looking for a full-time Deputy Strategy Lead for secondary English to join part of our school development team across the Trust. This role will see you working with the Strategy Lead to set whole-trust secondary strategy, coordinate the work of English Lead Practitioners, and provide support in-school to develop English department provision.

Your key responsibilities will be:

- To work alongside the Strategy Lead and other colleagues with the English Team to develop a whole-trust strategy for improving outcomes in English
- To ensure that the quality of teaching in English is strong and results in improved student outcomes
- To work with the Strategy Lead and English Team to coordinate development meetings for English Heads of Faculty across the Trust
- To work with the Strategy Lead and English Team to further develop the TKAT Common English Curriculum to ensure it leads to strong outcomes across the Trust
- To work with the Strategy Lead and English Team to further develop the Trust's assessments for KS3 & 4 English for all secondary schools and ensure assessments are carried out appropriately
- To analyse the data following KS3, 4 & 5 assessments, identifying gaps and reporting the findings to the Senior Director of Education and Directors of Education
- To organise, facilitate and quality assure the moderation of all standardised assessments within English for all secondary schools
- To support Heads of Department with assessment and grading issues as they arise

Closing date: Midday Monday 11th March 2024

Interview date: Monday 18th March 2024

Start date: 1st September 2024