

SCHOOLS WEEK

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

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Leaders must be able to openly discuss attendance challenges



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- Watchdog launches Big Listen: 'Every voice will be heard. Nothing off table'
- Oliver promises to put disadvantaged children 'at the heart of future reforms'

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How to better articulate positives of MAT central funding?

A headteacher very publicly criticising a small trust's funding model in a resignation letter to parents is an important reminder that how central management teams are paid for can be a sensitive and delicate issue (page 16).

The model is still quite new – trusts provide different services, charge different amounts and some choose to top slice while others pool all their schools' funds instead. This means it's not well understood by all.

Providing services centrally is proven to be more efficient. Trusts that do it well get their schools more bang for their buck.

As funding gets tighter, more schools will provide services centrally. More will move to general annual grant funding – no matter how difficult it might be – because it makes more financial sense.

Trust leaders will no doubt spend a huge

amount of time and thought on getting these processes right.

Transparency must be a central value. They should also not shy away from communicating clearly the positives – particularly to headteachers – or it will lead to more difficult situations that can cause wider harm.

Elsewhere this week, Ofsted has launched its Big Listen consultation. While most aspects are looking for views on wider statements and values, there are some interesting and potentially important policies proposed (see pages 4 and 5).

As expected, the budget produced little of note for schools – and likely caused leaders more headaches over how they are supposed to meet commitments to provide long-term budget forecasts without even knowing what cash they'll be getting next year (page 7).

Most read online this week:

- 1 [Keegan calls for return to 'more sustainable' teacher pay rises](#)
- 2 [Give teachers and leaders 'double digit' pay rise, says NAHT](#)
- 3 [The 10 new attendance rules schools need to know about](#)
- 4 [Budget 2024: £105m for 15 special free schools, and nothing else](#)
- 5 [Ofsted: Six key findings from its English subject report](#)

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Big Listen: Ofsted explores 'withholding' reports where 'good' schools fail on safeguarding

LUCAS CUMISKEY

@LUCAS_CUMISKEY

Ofsted is considering whether it should “withhold” reports for three months where schools fail on safeguarding but are otherwise ‘good’ so they have a chance to fix issues before publication.

The watchdog will launch its ‘Big Listen’ this morning, a 12-week consultation on further inspection changes following the death of headteacher Ruth Perry.

Chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver will vow to listen to criticism and ideas for “big reforms”, reiterating “nothing is off the table” (see full list of proposals on page 5).

Many of the questions ask for wider feedback including on issues like inclusion and whether Ofsted incentivises off-rolling and exclusions.

But there are some potential policy changes outlined.

Withholding reports plan

Following an internal review, the inspectorate is “considering” a change in approach so “where safeguarding arrangements are ineffective but the school is good or better in all other areas” it could “withhold finalising a judgement for three months”, delaying the report.

Ofsted would then reinspect safeguarding at the school and if the issues were fixed, rate it ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’.

This suggests should the school improve, its previous failing would not be reported, but Ofsted said no further details have been worked out yet and it is open to views.

In December, a coroner ruled that an Ofsted inspection at Caversham Primary School contributed to Perry’s suicide. The school had failed on safeguarding, but was otherwise deemed to be performing well.

‘Every voice will be heard’

Speaking at the ASCL union conference in Liverpool this morning, Oliver will say: “We need to listen to feedback. To criticism. To ideas for small changes and for big reforms... Every voice will be heard, and nothing, nothing, is off the table.”

The consultation is based on four “priorities”: how Ofsted reports on findings, how it carries out



Sir Martyn Oliver a parent

inspections, the impact inspection has and the culture of the organisation itself.

School staff, education organisations and parents are urged to complete an online survey. Views are sought on areas including how Ofsted inspects schools, safeguarding, SEND and teaching training.

Ofsted will also commission a series of focus groups with “parents and professionals to gather views on Ofsted’s future direction”.

The watchdog will also seek views on whether to create a safeguarding judgement that is separate from leadership and management – something Labour has suggested it would take forward if elected.

But there is no specific proposal on axing single-word judgments, which would require a change in government policy. However, a free text box in the section of the consultation on reporting can be used for feedback on this issue.

Disadvantaged children ‘at heart of reforms’

Oliver has pledged to “champion high standards for all children, especially the most disadvantaged and vulnerable”. Ofsted said poorer pupils will be “at the heart of future reforms”.

Views are sought on the importance of reports making clear how disadvantaged pupils are supported, as well as whether an “unintended consequence” of inspections is that mainstream schools exclude, suspend or

off-roll pupils, or become less inclusive.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said the consultation was an “important step in resetting the broken relationship between Ofsted and schools”.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary at school leaders’ union NAHT said it is “hopeful this consultation will build on our early conversations about the fundamental reform which is so desperately needed”.

But Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the National Education Union, said: “We are a long way away from Ofsted fixing its reputation.

“Only root and branch reform will end the tyranny of the inspection regime and the climate of fear it creates.” Steve Rollett, deputy chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, welcomed the consultation, but added “improving the accountability system depends not only on Ofsted’s actions but also those of government”.

Perry’s sister Julia Waters encouraged people to do the survey, adding: “Listening to the concerns of teachers, parents and others is a good start, but for a genuine reset to happen Ofsted will need to do more than just listen.

“Sir Martyn will need to move from a big listen to a big change pretty quickly, or this exercise will be a big waste of time.”

The consultation will close on May 31. Findings will be published “later this year”.



Daniel Kebede

EXPLAINER: OFSTED

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The Ofsted Big Listen: What leaders need to know

Ofsted's "big listen" consultation for school staff, education organisations and parents will ask for views on schools, safeguarding, SEND, teacher training, social care and further education.

The consultation is based on four "priorities": how Ofsted reports on findings, carries out inspections, the impact inspection has and the organisation's culture. Here's what you need to know...

Reporting: Disadvantaged pupil push

Ofsted's question sets out the "aims that we believe every report should cover", and asks for views on how important they are.

They include making "clear how inspectors have considered pupils' outcomes", and how well the "most disadvantaged pupils learn, achieve and are supported".

The question also asks if respondents think it is important for reports to cover the "performance of the wider group (such as the multi-academy trust, diocese or chain of independent schools) – but points out Ofsted "does not have authority to do this currently".

There is no specific question on whether single-phrase judgments should be scrapped, but there is a free text box which can be used to give views on that issue.

Inspection: Consider school's local area

This question states that inspection should "not be a process to 'get through'" and should be an "opportunity for schools to showcase good practice and understand where they can improve".

It states Ofsted's "ambitions" for what inspections should do and again asks for a rating for importance.

These include inspections being carried out in a way that's "consistent" from place to place, across phases of education and different types of schools.

Other ambitions are for inspections to be "long enough" to reach "accurate judgments" and for a "short but appropriate" notice period, and that they "consider the context of the school's local area".

Impact: Off-rolling 'unintended consequence'

This question states that Ofsted wants to "ensure our inspections do not have unintended consequences".

This includes "unintentionally leading to schools

to exclude pupils too readily, putting children at risk by not using their exclusion powers, or placing children off site in unsuitable alternative provision".

It asks if respondents agree with a set of statements including that Ofsted has "equal impact on the performance of schools, regardless of size, location or type".

Another says: "An unintended consequence of Ofsted's inspection process is that schools exclude, suspend, 'off-roll' or place pupils off site."

Culture: Openness and feedback

Ofsted asks for comments about its "openness and how easy it is to provide feedback to help us improve". Similar questions are included in the sections on SEND and teacher training.

Safeguarding: Ofsted 'could withhold' reports

Ofsted is asking respondents to state whether they think safeguarding should be a separate judgement from the leadership and management judgement.

They are also asking whether, given the "importance" of safeguarding, it should be inspected "more regularly than other areas".

Ofsted already made a change to inspections last year, allowing schools that failed on "minor" safeguarding issues alone to be reinspected within three months to give them time to put matters right.

But Ofsted is "considering changing" its approach again to "withhold finalising a judgement for three months to allow the school to fix the issues". This would apply only to schools where safeguarding was ineffective, but the school was 'good' or better in other areas.

The school would then be reinspected after three months with a report then published. There is no further detail.

SEND: Do inspections make schools less inclusive?

Ofsted has a section of its consultation dedicated to SEND and AP inspections.

Respondents are asked to rate the importance of looking at "how well the provider or service is performing in relation to the quality of local SEND or support services" and "how effectively the provider or service works with partners to address the needs of children with SEND in the local area".

It also asks respondents to rate ambitions for inspection practice, including using outcomes data to "understand whether the school, AP, service or wider local area partnership is offering them a positive experience that will improve their future outcomes".

It asks again if an "unintended" consequence of inspections is that mainstream schools "exclude, suspend, off-roll or place off-site pupils in SEND", or they become less inclusive.

They are also asked if Ofsted should have an oversight role for "smaller unregulated settings such as unregistered AP".

Teacher training: Combined inspections?

Views are sought on whether Ofsted should "consolidate our inspection practices where possible". It gives the example of a provider doing multiple teacher training, early career framework and national professional qualifications courses, and whether we should "inspect all of them at the same time".



Another £1m in tutor cash saved as mentor scheme axed early

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

EXCLUSIVE

A flagship arm of the National Tutoring Programme set up to help poorer pupils with pandemic lost learning was axed six months early due to low demand, saving ministers £1 million.

The academic mentors programme was set up by Teach First during the first year of the major Covid catch-up scheme.

It trained the mentors and placed them in schools serving disadvantaged communities.

But since the contract changed hands, demand has dropped for mentors with only a fifth of the target reached last year, *Schools Week* can reveal.

A Freedom of Information request by *Schools Week* shows ministers decided in November to end the £6.8 million contract with firm Cognition Education by March – six months earlier than planned.

The Department for Education said this will save £1 million and “offset other financial pressures”. But schools can continue to use mentors already recruited.

‘Tutoring will plummet’

The DfE confirmed this week it will end funding as planned for the billion-pound NTP in August, with schools expected to use pupil premium cash to continue tutoring.

Nick Brook, chair of the strategic tutoring advisory board, said it “brought the curtain crashing down on the only response of merit from [the government’s] woeful post-covid education recovery plan”.

“Schools will undoubtedly do their utmost to maintain levels of support for their most disadvantaged pupils. But with dwindling resources, it is abundantly clear that this decision will result in the volume of tutoring plummeting.”

Labour has only said it would “explore how tailored support” can help pupils.

Ben Gadsby, head of policy and research at Impetus, an NTP founding partner, added: “We can only hope that when the dust settles after the next election, whoever is in power uses the lessons from the NTP to come up with a better plan to ensuring high quality tutoring is available to all schools who need it.”



Nick Brook



Teach First placed 1,124 mentors in 2020-21, exceeding its 1,000 target under a £6.4 million contract.

Dutch HR firm Randstad missed its 3,600 mentor target, but the scheme was split into three contracts, with money going directly to schools as opposed to providers.

‘No obvious incentive’

Cognition Education’s got the contract to recruit and deploy academic mentors to schools.

Last year, the firm had a target of 1,500 mentors, but as of August only 297 had been deployed.

In its first year, DfE paid all of the mentor’s salary, dropping to 95 per cent in the second year. But last year, just 60 per cent of the tutoring hours completed was funded, dropping to 50 per cent this year.

Mentors’ maximum £21,000 salary has not changed since 2022.

Brook said once mentor funding was “rolled into the general tutoring pot, there was no obvious incentive for any school to appoint an academic mentor, over a school-led tutor”.

While it was the “right decision” to cancel the contract early, it would have been “surely better to have not awarded it in the first place, given the anticipated lack of demand and interest”.

Gadsby said “elements of the scheme like academic mentors and tuition partners that were built on good evidence have ultimately been sacrificed

in order to reach the

largest possible number of pupils in a way that prioritises ease for schools rather than impact on pupils.”

DfE said the route was “less popular”. Schools were given six weeks’ notice before it closed to new applications in January.

A Cognition Education spokesperson said the DfE had run “extensive demand generation campaigns”. Any mentors requested were “placed quickly and efficiently. These schools reported that choosing the route significantly benefitted their pupils.”

Will Chitty, principal at Crewe Engineering and Design UTC, said their academic mentor Sarah has enabled their aged 14 to 19 pupils with primary school reading ages to make 18 months progress within 12 weeks.

The school will fund her role next year, but Chitty is seeking sponsorship for after then.

NTP end is nigh

DfE said it has “been clear from the outset” that the NTP funding would run out this summer.

It was backed by £1 billion investment over four years, but hundreds of millions of pounds of unused funding was clawed back.

Professor Becky Francis, chief executive of the Education Endowment Foundation which ran the first year of tuition partners, said the move was “disappointing”.

But the NTP has brought “tutoring to every postcode in the country for the first time – a significant milestone”.



Professor Becky Francis

Budget: Post-election spending review leaves schools in funding dark

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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Schools face having to submit their three-year budget forecasts this summer without knowing what their funding level will be from next March.

It comes after the government confirmed its next spending review will take place after the general election.

This week's Budget did not include any extra day-to-day funding for schools for the 2024-25 financial year, leaving schools with an average headroom of just 1.2 per cent. Current inflation is four per cent.

The last spending review, in 2021, set out proposed school spending for each financial year up until the end of March 2025.

In the Budget, the Treasury said that beyond 2024-25, only "planned departmental day-to-day-spending will grow at one per cent a year on average in real terms".

However, it is not clear what this would translate to at school budget level.

Documents also confirmed that the next spending review won't be held until after the next general election, which is expected in the autumn.

Julia Harnden, funding specialist at leadership union ASCL, said the lack of information beyond next March was "already a problem" for schools' financial planning.

Schools "have to submit three-year budget forecasts this summer, and the current spending period ends [in] March 2025".

Harnden said there would "have to be some sort of fiscal statement to set out settlements for April 2025 to March 2026, but this could be a holding one-year settlement and could be done in the autumn pre-election. And then a multi-year spending review could follow post-election".

ASCL has "long asked for a rolling three-year settlement for schools and colleges to mitigate some of the planning risks associated with such defined spending review periods".

15 new special schools (but not for years)

The only funding announcement for schools was £105 million in capital funding to open 15 new special schools.

Locations will be announced by May this year. The Treasury said the Department for Education



Jeremy Hunt

will then run a competition to find trusts to run the schools, adding "once trusts have been appointed, we expect to open schools in three to four years".

This likely will not cover the shortage of SEND places in many areas and free schools are often delayed.

DfE confirms 20 new AP schools

The location of 20 alternative provision free schools, which were originally announced as part of a £2.6 billion capital investment at the 2021 spending review, were also confirmed.

Delta Academies Trust has secured all four free schools it applied for, but others such as Unity Schools Partnership, in Suffolk, have been snubbed.

All three bids in Nottinghamshire and both in Sefton were rejected. Just 20 schools out of 43 applications were approved.

Nottinghamshire council was "very disappointed". The number of AP placements is "very limited" in the region.

[You can see the full list online here.](#)

Household support extension

The household support fund, which has been used by some councils to provide school uniform support or holiday meals, will be extended from April to September at a cost of £500 million.

The government will also spend £75 million over three years from 2025 to expand the violence reduction unit model across England and Wales.

These units enable health boards, schools and

police leaders to coordinate joint strategies to tackle violence among young people.

Mysterious 'productivity plan'

The Chancellor Jeremy Hunt unveiled proposals for a "public sector productivity plan", starting with the NHS and also including education, but there are few details.

Budget documents state that "relevant departments will develop detailed productivity plans, building on their work to date and the funding announced at the spring Budget".

It also name checks the government's cost-cutter programme, but has no new information.

NAHT general secretary Paul Whiteman said leaders would be "concerned to hear the Chancellor talking about the need for greater efficiencies in education, and many will be left wondering where they will be found when budgets have already been cut to the bone".

£700m capital underspend

The government has revised down its estimated spend on capital projects this academic year by £700 million.

Last year's documents stated the government planned to spend £7 billion on capital – most of which is school building and maintenance – but the latest papers show a planned spend of £6.3 billion.

Schools Week revealed last week how £250 million from capital budgets had been moved to cover part of this year's teacher pay rise.

The Treasury would not say where the remaining £450 million underspend would go.

Council faces legal challenge over controversial safety valve deal

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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EXCLUSIVE

A council in negotiations with ministers for a bailout to cover its £64 million high needs funding blackhole is now facing legal action from parents over the controversial deal's "shameful secrecy".

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole is one of at least five councils in talks with the government over agreeing a "safety valve" bailout in return for sweeping reforms to get SEND spend back under control.

Deals are normally agreed between officials behind closed doors. But BCP was rare in debating details of the deal in public at a council hearing.

The council is pushing for a 15-year plan to get their budget under control, saying if they did it any quicker they may face breaching their legal duties to vulnerable children. Most of the other 34 deals with councils are between five and seven years.

Lawyers have now issued a pre-action judicial review letter to the council over its refusal to publish the full details of its plan submitted to the Department for Education.

While a summary of the proposal was released, the full 15-year plan was exempt from publication at a January council meeting.

The council claimed this was because it contained "information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person".

But in their legal letter seen by Schools Week, lawyers from Sinclairslaw warn this "cannot rationally be interpreted to include the affairs" of the council.

They added the level of public interest was "considerable" and have given the council one week to provide the plan.

It is thought to be the first legal case taken forward by parents relating to the safety valve scheme.

A spokesperson for the BCP alliance for children and schools, which is bringing the action, said it was "critical" councils are "transparent if they want families and schools to work with them".

"The secrecy surrounding these agreements is shameful, and we feel we have no other option at this stage," they added.

Minutes from a council meeting earlier this year, where the deal was discussed, revealed one of the proposals on the table risks an "inability to



deliver all aspects of the plan due to legality".

The council had originally suggested transferring 11 per cent from its mainstream schools' budgets into the high needs pot under one of the proposals. But it is now proposing to top slice 0.5 per cent instead from the schools.

"Our goal is purely to ensure that the public and those who represent us fully understand the strings attached to this funding, the risks of further cuts to services, and how this will impact our most vulnerable," the spokesperson added.

Last year, SEND charity IPSEA wrote to all safety valve councils asking them to confirm they would fulfil all legal duties to children.

The letter also states a judicial review could be pursued over any final safety valve plan. Earlier this week, BCP was still waiting to hear from ministers on its agreement.

They claimed other councils' deals for saving money "contain controversial wording", prompting concerns within SEND communities.

The legal letter added: "We sincerely hope common-sense will prevail to enable transparent disclosure and a full and proper explanation to be given to the public in relation to the LA's conduct."

A BCP spokesperson said: "As this relates to the commencement of legal proceedings, it would not be appropriate to comment at this time."

Concern over 'secret' Bristol bailout deal

Meanwhile, it was revealed this week Bristol council had been invited by DfE in July to submit a safety valve proposal.

It only came to light when documents were published before a cabinet meeting this week, taking residents by surprise.

The city's mayor Marvin Rees claimed the council wasn't allowed to publish details of the programme sooner, BristolLive reported.

But the DfE said that councils are free to disclose their participation in the programme and their submitted proposals publicly.

A cabinet report about the programme said the plan had been consulted on with councillors on the audit committee, as well

as a schools forum meeting.

The documents reveal the bailout would be £53 million if signed off.

Jaime Breitnauer, trustee at charity Incredible Kids, criticised the "secret" deal. Publishing the report a day before a cabinet meeting was "neither transparent nor democratic", they said.

"The safety valve report needs to be deferred so a proper consultation and co-creation can take place with stakeholders. Anything less is dictatorial and disrespectful to the people of Bristol."

Bristol City Council was approached for comment.

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INTERVIEW: LEADERSHIP

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Another strike? The new general secretary wants to start on a more optimistic note

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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Pepe Di'Iasio wants to kick off his tenure as ASCL general secretary on an optimistic note.

But when your own school has buckets under leaking ceilings and a £500,000 SEND funding black hole, it's tricky to remain upbeat.

The head of Wales High School in Rotherham will take over from Geoff Barton next month – and he's got his work cut out.

The government has signalled teachers will get a miserly pay rise in September and two teaching unions are already holding preliminary strike ballots.

Could Di'Iasio, who himself voted to strike in last year's historic ballot, envisage ASCL calling another vote?

'The signs are not good'

"I'd really hope not. But the signs are not good, are they?" he says.

"Strike action is the very last thing we'd want to do. But when you've got a workforce that is unable to recruit and retain the staff that it needs, and when you add all the cuts that are going to need to take place in order to make ends meet, it's hard to see how members will feel positive looking at the year ahead."

He adds: "What we want is a fair and reasonable settlement. But if that isn't there, there's a democratic process that would come into play."

Last week, in evidence to the School Teachers'



Review Body, the Department for Education called for a "more sustainable" rise than those seen in the last two years.

And government analysis suggests schools only have enough headroom in budgets next year to cover a two per cent increase.

Di'Iasio read the evidence with "disappointment". He says: "I think given the way the country is right now and the cost of living right now, it would be a strange situation for the government to suggest that the teaching profession should take a pay cut next year."

Leaders doing 'bloody good job'

Despite a desperate situation on funding and pay, Di'Iasio remains "optimistic about the future" and

wants heads, who have an "awful lot to be proud of", to take greater credit for their hard work.

He pointed to ministers' boasts about last year's PISA results and the improving Ofsted grade profile of schools. Leaders, he says, "need to accept – and sometimes we're not always good [at accepting] – that we're doing a bloody good job".

He takes the reins at a critical moment. ASCL's membership has grown by almost a third to 22,400 since Barton took office in 2017. Covid, and last year's strike ballot – the first in ASCL's history – raised the union's profile.

We meet in his office at Wales, a sprawling 1970s-built secondary which caters for more than 1,800 pupils. A West Wing box-set adorns his

Continued on next page

Union boss urges for better relationships between schools and parents

A "change of tone" in the national conversation about education is needed, ASCL's president will warn later today, as almost half of leaders reported they had seen pupil absence because of disputes with parents.

John Camp, the chief executive of the Compass Partnership of Schools, will describe the findings as an "extreme – but apparently common – example of the fracturing of [the] unwritten social contract" between schools and families.

Teacher Tapp polling for the leadership union found 32 per cent of teachers and

leaders reported absence where the reason was that parents or carers were "in dispute with school". This rose to 48 per cent when just leaders were asked.

Schools Week investigations have revealed staff are receiving more abuse, with trusts introducing codes of conduct, writing letters to parents about their "personally abusive" complaints, and calls for a national campaign to prevent it.

Other common reasons cited by leaders included families wanting to take term-time holidays (95 per cent), attending family events (88 per cent), and pupils being "too anxious

about school" (76 per cent).

In his speech to ASCL's conference in Liverpool, Camp is to warn it "often seems like some politicians and commentators are far too quick to take potshots at schools".

"Whether that's by leaping on important and sensitive issues – like sex education and trans or gender-questioning pupils – to generate a cheap headline.

"Or banning mobile phones – when most schools have already done this or whether the school day should be five minutes longer. It sometimes feels like death by press release."

INTERVIEW: LEADERSHIP

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windowsill, and a model of the Tardis from Doctor Who – a student DT project – sits by his desk.

He jokes about Barton's upcoming "regeneration" and pays tribute to his predecessor's "incredible job" leading the organisation for the past seven years.

Di'Iasio says it would be "easy to focus on the lack of funding and lack of investment" in schools.

"Actually, there are things now happening in the country that make me think this is a moment where the stars are aligning. This has the potential to be a new era for education. And I'm incredibly optimistic about that."

'Things are getting better'

He welcomed the appointment of new Ofsted chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver and the "tone he is setting" in response to the death of headteacher Ruth Perry. Oliver will launch a "big listen" consultation at ASCL's conference today.

"I think the profession can move forward with some confidence that things are going to get better," Di'Iasio says.

Education secretary Gillian Keegan and schools minister Damian Hinds have also signalled they want to "work with schools", while opposition parties are "listening".

He has also met civil servants, who he says "understand the challenges we're facing", notably in relation to provision for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.

"I think we've gone from a period where perhaps, sometimes we've heard about green papers, white papers that have felt like they've been done to the profession.

"And what we're moving into, I think, is a period in which there is an openness [and] an opportunity for people to consult and to give their views."

But despite his optimism, the school funding crisis, crumbling buildings and recruitment and retention challenges are brought up frequently.

A day before our interview, he admits his own school had buckets out to catch leaks from ceilings. A planned £60 million rebuild "can't come soon enough".

He adds: "I heard [Sunak] speak about education being the closest thing we have to a silver bullet. Can you imagine how good that bullet would be if it was funded appropriately?"

And he says the failure of chancellor Jeremy Hunt to announce more school funding in this week's budget "shows a lack of understanding of the pressures on public services right now".

**Ofsted within 29 days**

Born in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, Di'Iasio's father - an Italian immigrant - and mother met in the restaurant trade. He grew up in "very difficult circumstances", with the family surviving on tips.

His parents "made sure I took education seriously" and he passed the 11-plus, attending grammar school and sixth form. A keen footballer, he was working as a lifeguard when a friend suggested he become a PE teacher.

He trained at what was then Leeds Polytechnic and worked in schools in Doncaster before becoming head of Wales in 2012.

Just 29 days into his headship, Ofsted called. The school was rated 'requires improvement', with poor maths results to blame.

Di'Iasio had cut his teeth in some "very tough schools" in Doncaster, "so the thought of an RI didn't worry me at all".

"We rolled our sleeves up and the staff here pulled together, worked our socks off." The school was declared 'good' within 18 months.

Last October, Ofsted called again, this time while Di'Iasio was in a packed event at the Labour Party conference in Liverpool to discuss school accountability.

He was back at his desk in Rotherham after lunch. The school retained its 'good' rating and was praised as "friendly and vibrant" with an "ambitious curriculum" and "skilful support" of pupils with SEND.

Di'Iasio then praised the "exemplary" inspection team, adding he was "impressed with the whole culture and the way in which they approached the inspection".

"I'd have loved them to have recognised the school as 'outstanding'. But the issue that we face, not dissimilar to many schools in the country, is

that our vulnerable students, our pupil premium children, haven't made the progress that we'd want them to."

Vulnerable children will be 'key theme'

Di'Iasio says a lack of support for the most vulnerable children would be a "key theme" while general secretary.

His own school faces difficult decisions. Its large on-site special school provision, which specialises in autistic spectrum disorder, runs at a deficit of £500,000 a year.

Although ministers' proposed SEND reforms "resonate with what professionals are looking for", he is critical of the "speed at which we're getting there".

Di'Iasio, who was seconded between 2018 and 2020 to Rotherham council as assistant director of education, slams the "bureaucracy" involved in obtaining care plans and voices fears for councils' budgets.

Safety valve bailouts, meant for "extraordinary situations", are becoming commonplace. Parents have to "fight tooth and nail" to get support, which heads can't provide "because they haven't got the funds, or the resources, or the specialist staff".

"We've got to move from the model [of] looking at what we can provide with the amount of money we've got, to a model that is actually [about] the amount of money we need to do what is right, and what is legally and statutorily appropriate," he says.

Funding for 16 to 19 education is also a "key area" of concern.

This week's ASCL conference may be Barton's swansong, but Di'Iasio will interview the education secretary today, and he hopes she will "recognise the great work of leaders".

ANALYSIS: ACADEMIES

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Trust development statements boost decline of SATs

JACK DYSON

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EXCLUSIVE

Leaders fear smaller trusts “aren’t being allowed to grow” in England’s left-behind areas as MATs bulge in size and standalone academies tumble.

Since the government unveiled its blueprint to expand, merge or create multi-academy trusts in 55 priority areas, single-trust declines in these towns and counties have outstripped national falls, Schools Week analysis shows.

Some leaders have argued the push for larger academy chains has helped protect the most “vulnerable” schools from financial peril.

But others worry smaller MATs have been side-lined over England’s largest trusts instead of expanding into new areas.

DfE plan turbo boosts fall of SATs

Last March, ministers published plans – dubbed “trust development statements” – to expand or launch new MATs in 55 “education investment areas”, which have the nation’s weakest results.

At the time, the government said the documents “clearly signpost” the types of “growth project we want to encourage” to improve outcomes in each EIA.

Schools Week analysis of government data shows the number of SATs in the EIAs has dropped by 13 per cent over the last year.

National drops stood at eight per cent over the same period.

Of all the EIAs, Rotherham witnessed the largest fall, with its stock of standalones falling from eight to just one.

Looking at regional data, the West Midlands and South East were the only ones not to see a fall in the number of SATs, with numbers remaining the same.

Dr Jenny Blunden, who sits on the regional director’s advisory board for the south-west, attributed the region’s 10 per cent fall in SATs to the fact many are already working with local MATs.

“Trying to bring together more vulnerable trusts to make larger, stronger trusts is a key driver, particularly in a region



Dr Jenny Blunden



that’s perhaps more highly academised than other areas,” added Blunden, who also runs 34-school chain Truro and Penwith Academy Trust.

“Much of this is common sense – it’s not particularly radical. Any schools standing alone [in the southwest] have been encouraged, I think, by regional groups to consider working within a group of schools.”

‘Signs of greater consistency’

Trust leaders have long had concerns about secrecy and variability in academy commissioning decisions. But it appears the statements are providing some more logic.

Minutes from a north-west advisory board meeting in September detail how proposals for St Aidan’s CofE Academy, in Darlington, to be absorbed by a MAT were “in line with the strategic plan outlined” in the statements.

The board “discussed the ongoing challenges” the secondary faces “as a standalone”. The merger would help “support the school and make the necessary improvements”.

Confederation of School Trusts chief Leora Cruddas said the statements were an “attempt to bring greater transparency and



Leora Cruddas

consistency on how decisions are made. We are seeing some signs of that, but the picture is not perfect.”

In the long term, CST wants an “independent national schools regulator making these types of decisions, to ensure independence, impartiality, and transparency of regulation”.

Trusts get bigger

Our figures also reveal that the average size of a trust operating in EIAs has grown by more than 11 per cent, from 6.5 schools to 7.2, since the government released the statements. The national figure rose by 9 per cent, from 4.2 schools to 4.6.

Improvement areas in Yorkshire and the Humber recorded the highest rise (15.8 per cent), while those in the west Midlands had the lowest (6 per cent).

Matt Crawford, CEO of the 19-school Embark Federation in Derbyshire, said interest from schools considering moving into his trust has been “higher than ever” over the last 12 months. There are now 16 schools hoping to join.

He believes his organisation’s growth strategy, which will see it populate all six regions of Derbyshire with up to 10 academies, will further the DfE’s aim of “building capacity near the northern and western borders” of the county.

During a meeting last summer, the north-east advisory board threw its weight behind plans

Continued on next page

ANALYSIS: ACADEMIES

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for Eden Learning Trust, which now has eight schools, to take on the Kepier Academy in Sunderland.

Members said the application was “in line with the aspirations” of the development statements, which wanted the city to have “fewer, larger” chains.

To aid Eden Learning with its “next stage of growth”, members supported regional director Katherine Cowell’s “recommendation for the CEO and chair to undertake some peer mentoring from experienced colleagues of a larger trust”.

‘Opportunities all go to big MATs’

The statements also outlined the DfE’s desire to see “high-quality trusts” move into some EIAs if they were already operating in neighbouring local authority areas.

Rob Tarn, CEO of the 26-school Northern Education Trust, said his team has been in discussions with the government to “work in more priority areas in greater Manchester”, including Bury and Salford.

“This will increase the number of trust schools in the area from two to eight and we believe this is a good example of strategic decision making to introduce strong trusts into areas where performance needs to improve.”

Oasis founder Steve Chalke, whose MAT runs 53 academies, stated he is in talks to take on more schools in seven EIAs.

“What happens in reality is a school trust grows through relationships. We began discussions with a local authority – they didn’t refer to this list [of EIAs] – it was simply them saying ‘look, we have a situation we think you’ll be able to help us with.’”

But one advisory board member, who wanted to remain anonymous, said there is “some tension” between small trusts wanting to grow and the government’s strategic wish to engage large MATs in EIAs.

They explained there’s a feeling “they’re not allowed to grow as all the opportunities are going to the big ones”.

The CEO of a smaller trust claimed the department has “a very clear view over where they want all” investment area primaries and secondaries to go.

How each region is performing

Those in the North West recorded the highest proportion rise in

Impact of DfE’s trust statements: in numbers

	Number of SATs in EIAs		Average trust size operating in EIA areas	
	Jan-24	Mar-23	Jan-24	Mar-23
East Midlands	56	64	9.7	8.7
East of England	54	58	7.9	7.4
North East	26	31	7.6	6.7
North West	58	63	6.4	5.9
South East	8	8	13.2	12.5
South West	46	52	10.1	8.9
West Midlands	19	19	9.4	8.9
Yorkshire and the Humber	26	40	10.3	8.9
EIAs	293	335	7.2	6.5
Nationwide	1136	1241	4.6	4.28.9
EIAs	293	335	7.2	6.5
Nationwide	1136	1241	4.6	4.2

Source: Department for Education

*NERD NOTE: The averages for the trust size by region do not tally to national numbers because large trusts operate over several areas – so they only appear in the national data once. Our analysis is based on the government’s open academies data. SAT numbers include trusts listed as ‘MATs’ but with only one school.



schools in MATs (12.8 per cent) and academy growth (10.5 per cent), while levels in the east of England stood at just 2.6 and 2 per cent respectively.

However, the north west has the fewer proportion of academies nationally, while the east of England has among the most.

At six per cent, Yorkshire and the Humber EIAs witnessed the largest fall in trust numbers, while West Midlands EIAs registered the largest increase (3.6 per cent).

Epworth Education Trust CEO Julie-Ann Hewitt, who runs seven academies across five investment areas, thinks there is “a real lack of consistency” from councils.

While some are keen to collaborate with trusts, she has faced some “resistance”.

Hewitt said: “Such barriers mean that it can feel like we are going through the motions of doing the things that are being asked of us, but it doesn’t then reach the desired successful or effective conclusion.”

Former national school commissioner Sir David Carter believes the government’s push

could be driving “many of the conversations” around trust mergers.

He gave the example of Lincolnshire, one of the 55 areas, where “those who have resisted very vocally joining a trust in the past are now thinking more strategically to join the trust that is right for them. That has to be a good thing moving forward.”

DfE: Early signs ‘promising’

The Department for Education said it is “still considering the impact of the statements, but the early signs are promising and local partners have welcomed the clarity they have brought”.

It knows “that trusts can benefit from growing at scale”, with larger MATs “able to generate greater economies of scale that can be reinvested in school improvement”.

To help deliver on the aims of the statements, the department has also provided “an enhanced package of support ... particularly in EIAs” across the latest rounds of the trust capacity, establishment and growth funds.

“Strong academy trusts can transform schools that are underperforming, and it is widely recognised that there are clear benefits to being part of a high-quality trust,” a spokesperson added.



Steve Chalke

Sir David Carter

Julie-Ann Hewitt

Headteacher unfairly sacked after 'tapping' her son's hand

LUCAS CUMISKEY

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A headteacher accused of smacking her three-year-old pupil and son in her office after school was unfairly sacked after she "tapped" his hand, an employment judge has ruled.

Shelly-Ann Malabver-Goulbourne was head at Northwold Primary School in east London, part of Arbor Academy Trust, when the incident unfolded at about 6.20pm on January 17 2022.

Following an employment tribunal, a judge ruled in November she was unfairly dismissed and is entitled to compensation. Full details of the case were only published on Tuesday.

The trust has called it a "complex and relatively unique case that questions the balance between the rights of a parent, HR laws and the safeguarding rules".

The tribunal heard that the headteacher's son, who attended the school, was in her office, picked up hand sanitiser and "squirted some to the floor".

She took it off him and explained he should not be playing with it, Judge Jones said.

The boy "turned his face away from her and she tapped him with two fingers on the back of his hand to get his attention," Jones added.

This was witnessed by Serrantha Bhagwandas, the school's safeguarding lead, who later reported it as a "smack" to the trust's CEO.

Police investigated but decided Malabver-Goulbourne's actions amounted to "reasonable chastisement".

The trust called in an external HR representative, who advised it would be "appropriate" to suspend her amid investigations, which it did before later dismissing her.

Child protection social worker Nick Pratt investigated for the trust to see if she "assaulted a pupil on school premises".

He recommended the head had a disciplinary case to answer, suggesting she breached the trust's 'staff code of conduct for child protection policy'.

In England, parents who smack their children can have a "reasonable punishment" legal defence if accused of assault. Then-education secretary Nadhim Zahawi rejected calls for a parental smacking ban in April 2022.

However, the trust's code of conduct



advises employers "not to make unnecessary physical contact with pupils". Staff should also "immediately" report any incident if they feel their "actions have been...misconstrued".

The Teachers' Standards 2012 state teachers should safeguard children's wellbeing, according to DfE statutory schools guidance cited during the tribunal.

Bhagwandas argued the head had breached behaviour and safeguarding policies.

But the head insisted her "actions were designed to get her son's attention and not to hurt him" and that "as the parent, she does have sanctions available to her".

She said she had acted to "explain the danger of playing with hand sanitiser".

In May 2022, a disciplinary panel outlined the reason for sacking the head in a letter.

It found "the trust expressly forbids any physical chastisement or contact of any kind. Therefore, whether a tap or otherwise, this was unnecessary physical contact with a pupil, which constitutes an assault, and therefore a breach of policies and statutory guidance".

But Jones said the code of conduct "does not prohibit any physical contact whatsoever", as it might be "necessary to protect the child, others or property from harm".

It would also be "difficult" for her to abide by a ban on touching her own children, they said.

There was "no consideration" of whether the head's actions could come within exemptions of trust policies, Jones added.

They ruled she is "entitled to a remedy for her unfair dismissal", to be reduced by 20 per cent to

"reflect her contribution to the situation".

A remedy hearing was due to take place in January, details have not yet been published.

Lawyers said the payout could be as much as £100,000.

Esther Maxwell, partner at Shakespeare Martineau, added the case "underlines how important it is for schools to ensure that those tasked with making disciplinary decisions take all the evidence into account when making those decisions.

"In particular, it is important that the entirety of the guidance in their policies as well as relevant statutory guidance is considered."

A spokesperson for Arbor Academy Trust said its "priority always has to be the health and happiness of our children".

"Safeguarding is our most important role, and that is why external reviews of this incident by educationalists recommended that this was a disciplinary matter," they added.

"We acted on these recommendations with good faith and ensured that there was a fair and transparent process."

But they respect the judge's decision and the "school continues to make sound progress under its current leadership in raising standards".

Clive Romain, head of legal strategy at the National Education Union which supported Malabver-Goulbourne, said she was a "skilled and dedicated headteacher" who was "dismissed on the basis of a false allegation. She was treated very unfairly indeed. She is pleased that the tribunal recognised this and upheld her unfair dismissal claim."

Academy body wants reforms to stem 'unsustainable' complaints rise

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

The government should set up a "single front door" for parental complaints to ensure they are not investigated multiple times, the body representing England's academy trusts has said.

The Confederation of School Trusts told members a rise in complaints is "not sustainable" and putting "significant pressure on school leaders".

It is pushing for three policy changes:

- Complaints by the Department for Education and its agencies into complaints must only be launched if they have already been investigated by schools or the trust
- DfE should set up a "single front door" to "triage" complaints and decide where each goes so they are "investigated once and not multiple times"
- The Teacher Regulation Agency should only be able to accept referrals from an employer or the police, not members of the public

"We are in no way suggesting that parents



do not have a right to complain," the email to members sent on Wednesday, seen by Schools Week, stated.

"Public services learn all the time from complaints. But the volume of complaints we are seeing is not sustainable in our schools and it will have an impact on our ability to retain our leaders.

"This is why we have been raising a series of issues with the DfE about the processes regarding parental complaints and have included changes to the process in our election tasks."

A report from the charity Education Support

last year revealed senior leaders had noticed a shift in public attitudes since Covid, with one noting that "it's like people have got angrier".

This had coincided with schools having to deal more with children's complex needs, while juggling parents' expectations and often being "blamed" for problems in the community.

Teacher Tapp surveys in 2023 also showed 10 per cent of school staff were threatened or abused on social media last year, up from six per cent in 2019.

Schools Week revealed in July there had been a rise in parents complaining to Ofsted post-Covid.

Speaking at the Confederation of School Trusts annual conference in Birmingham in October, then Ofsted boss Amanda Spielman revealed she was pushing the government to create a "coherent model", given people "often spray complaints" at multiple organisations.

Staff are also receiving more abuse, Schools Week investigations have revealed, with trusts introducing codes of conduct, writing letters to parents about their "personally abusive" complaints, and calling for a national campaign to crackdown on abuse.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Exam board to launch free digital maths test to help struggling students

England's largest exam board will launch a free digital maths test to help teachers work out why students are struggling, but has delayed plans to introduce on-screen exams.

Developed by AQA over the past 18 months, the test is aimed at students in the first few years of secondary school or those preparing to study towards a maths GCSE resit.

The on-screen test is powered by "adaptive technology" that reacts to the answers a student gives. It will be available to all schools, regardless of whether they use AQA qualifications.

The exam board said it would allow teachers to "pinpoint gaps in a student's conceptual knowledge - saving the teacher time and empowering students who then know what they need to do to improve".

AQA is also working on "how this test data can be used at a large scale so that, for example, multi-academy trusts can see mathematical

concepts students are struggling with across a wide number of schools".

But a move towards on-screen GCSE exams has been pushed back by the board.

Last year, AQA said it aimed to launch its first digital mock exams for GCSE Italian and Polish reading and listening components in 2025.

They would then move to live exams the following year, subject to Ofqual approval.

More would follow until bigger subjects were partly digitally assessed in 2030 - meaning hundreds of thousands of on-screen exams.

But AQA said it was "continuing to talk to the regulator [Ofqual], school leaders, teachers and exams officers, and now plans to introduce digital Italian and Polish GCSE later".

A spokesperson told *Schools Week* the board recognised they "must get this right and maintain public confidence in our exam system, as well as give schools and colleges proper notice before making changes".

"We will update when we can on a revised date for implementing these exams."

It is understood the 2030 target has not changed.

The new digital maths test will involve each student being asked 30 to 40 questions from a bank of around 150. The test will analyse responses and offer the next question suited to their learning needs - dubbed a "Goldilocks approach".

This will avoid questions "that are either too hard or too easy, and quickly establishes a young person's level of conceptual knowledge".

AQA CEO Colin Hughes said: "We know that many students struggle in GCSE maths because they don't have a firm understanding of its fundamental concepts.

"Students have told us that they find the new test engaging, since it offers rapid feedback that tells them what they need to work on."

Trust rejects claims from headteacher who resigned over 'high' top slice

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

An academy headteacher has told parents he is resigning over "significant concerns" about the "high amount" his trust is top-slicing from school budgets.

The case highlights the sometimes delicate process of how trusts fund their central operations and the potential for it to cause issues if heads are not aligned to plans.

Hinchingbrooke School principal Mark Patterson said in a resignation letter to parents he was "leaving because I have raised significant concerns" with the ACES trust board, which runs his school, about "how the trust operates at its top levels".

He also said concerns were raised over the "high amount that the trust takes from the ACES schools' budgets.

"The trust top-slices around three-quarters of a million pounds each year from Hinchingbrooke School's budget," he added.

The trust said it rejects his accusations.

Patterson's letter stressed that he was "not retiring" and did "not have another job to go to". If "things were different", he would be "staying, and gladly".

He said: "The trustees have said that they do not share my concerns and they are not prepared to act on any of them. My concerns are shared in the other schools in the ACES trust".

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

ACES Academies Trust does not appear to have published accounts for 2022-23. But documents for 2021-22 show it sliced four per cent off Hinchingbrooke's budget that year.

This equated to more than £770,000, up from £383,206 the previous year. The documents stated the cash went towards central HR, financial and education support services.

The trust's three other academies – all of which are primaries – were charged a 6 per cent top-slice.

The Kreston accountancy group annual report, published last month, found the average top-slice among large trusts stood at 5.4 per cent.

However, smaller trusts – like ACES – tended to



slice 7.4 per cent.

Patterson claimed last summer heads of all the schools co-wrote a statement outlining concerns.

But a spokesperson for the trust said it "firmly rejects" the "serious accusations" about its funding structures.

The trust is "run with a focus on our pupils and their education with value for money, robust oversight and accountability as key priorities".

They added Patterson's decision came after a disagreement over growth plans.

It is not the first case of trusts becoming embroiled in public spats over their central charges.

Unions called for greater scrutiny over top-slicing in 2019 after the University of Wolverhampton Multi-Academy Trust charged £376,000 to a school that was £1 million in the red – before it was later transferred to another chain.

Plans for England's largest primary-only multi-academy trust REAch2 to centralise school reserves and funding – a method called GAG pooling – were put on ice last year following opposition over the potential job losses.

Last month, National Education Union general secretary Daniel Kebede claimed schools were left worse off by joining a trust, after it was revealed two large MATs now top-slice almost 10 per cent from budgets.

However trusts refuted this – saying pooling expenditure centrally makes spending more efficient and saves schools money.

ACES said it can achieve "greater efficiencies" thanks to "increased buying power". Schools get school improvement, IT, HR, finance and estates

management services.

At Hinchingbrooke, they wanted to fund estates from the central budget because it has a Grade I listed building and outsourcing the cost of upkeep would be more expensive.

The academies handbook states either directing or pooling funds centrally can be "integral to a trust's successful financial operating model".

For trusts that pool their funding, rules state they must "consider funding needs" of each school and have an appeals mechanism, which can be escalated to the Education and Skills Funding Agency. The ESFA's ruling would be final and can result in "pooling provisions being dis-applied".

The ESFA told Schools Week after a freedom of information request it could not find any record of a complaint being lodged with them.

East Midlands Academy Trust CEO Joshua Coleman, whose seven-school chain GAG pools, said "top-slicing and management fees are [now] a fact of life".

He added: "In terms of how you work with headteachers, I sit down with them and talk about how we want to deliver the education, what we're trying to achieve and how we best achieve that ... [and] assess what we need.

"It has to be done sensitively, professionally and it has to be managed."

Brian Lightman, former general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, added changes to top-slices are "certainly something that needs to be consulted on and that it works for the schools".

Schools Week approached Patterson for comment.

NEWS

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Financial education curriculum win ‘self-defeating’ as schools lack resources

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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Getting financial education onto the national curriculum was a “pyrrhic victory” and “self-defeating” because schools lack the resources and capacity to deliver it, the journalist and campaigner Martin Lewis has admitted.

The Money Saving Expert founder also revealed to MPs that his charity paid more than £500,000 to publish a textbook on financial numeracy because former schools minister Nick Gibb told him the state would not pay for it, in what he dubbed a “political failing”.

The national curriculum was beefed up in 2014 to include more elements of financial literacy, particularly in maths. Lewis was one of the leading advocates for the move.

But quizzed by the Parliamentary education committee on Tuesday, he said it was “in many ways... a pyrrhic victory”.

Lewis said: “In some ways it was counter-productive. Beforehand you had volunteer



Martin Lewis

groups and other people funding and providing support in schools, to go into there and teach financial education.

“We got it on the national curriculum in England. And at that point a lot of the resources were pulled from those who had been volunteering and the private sector”

This was compounded by the expansion of academies, which do not have to follow the national curriculum, he added.

“So the holy grail of trying to get it taught on a compulsory basis in every school, which is what getting it on the curriculum was about, became

self-defeating,” said Lewis.

The financial expert also warned the amount of resources put into the subject by the government since then had been “completely flaccid and to a detrimental level”.

In 2021, Lewis and the advocacy group Young Money [do you mean Young Enterprise?] published *Your Money Matters*, a textbook on financial numeracy that has since been sent to all secondary schools in England for free.

This week, Lewis explained why he spent £500,000 of the charity’s money on the resources: “I funded this textbook because the state wouldn’t and told me it had to be funded by an individual.

“That is a political failing. I could have put bias into this textbook. We need proper textbooks, digital resources, and teachers to be trained.”

Quizzed about the state of financial education, Hinds said he was “content with where we are on the maths curriculum”.

He said: “I do think there’s a further opportunity, as I say, with simplifying the process of a teacher finding the best materials to support some of these areas of teaching”.

LUCAS CUMISKEY | @LUCAS_CUMISKEY

Teaching hub claims government ‘favours larger trusts’ after losing designation

One of three teaching school hubs that has lost their designation claimed the government now favours larger trusts.

The Department for Education last week announced successful applicants to become TSHs from September until August 2028.

Eighty-seven hubs were established in 2021, but applicants had to bid last year to continue when their funding runs out in August.

Hubs are “centres of excellence in professional development” led by schools and trusts.

The hubs cover geographical patches, offer training and development for teachers and play a role in delivering school-based initial teacher training, national professional qualifications and the early career framework.

Three of the original hubs lost out. Alpha Teaching School Hub (TSH), and its lead school Colchester County High School for Girls, has helped more than 200 schools across Babergh, Colchester, Ipswich and Tendring.

It lost out to Unity Schools Partnerships and its lead school Churchill Special Free School.

In a statement, Alpha TSH claimed this was “part of a rationalisation of provision, [with] larger trusts now taking the lead”.

It went on: “This appears to be part of a wider government strategy to reduce costs through economies of scale and streamline the processes of accountability.”

But the Department for Education said this was “categorically untrue”. Each bid was “evaluated fairly based on criteria set out in the bidding documentation – the criteria did not include, nor was there any overriding objective of, either a consolidation of TSHs or a move to ensure hubs operate as a part of larger trusts”.

The “open competition” allowed “high-performing eligible institutions the opportunity to bid to deliver” a TSH.

Harris Federation’s Harris Academy Chobham was named TSH for Haringey, Redbridge and

Waltham Forest, with the North East London Teaching School Hub, based at Walthamstow School for Girls, losing out. The outgoing hub declined to comment.

Star Academies’ Eden Boys’ School will replace the Ark Teaching School Hub for south Birmingham after its lead school Ark St Alban’s Academy was graded ‘requires improvement’ in February 2022.

TSHs must be rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’.

Ark said it was “awaiting an Ofsted reinspection”.

Amy McJennett, director of professional development at the trust, added: “Naturally, we are disappointed with the outcome, but obviously it will be business as usual for the rest of this academic year.”

The government’s hub model had replaced the previous network of 750 teaching schools and saved £25 million.

Ofsted: Six key findings from its English subject report

Debating should be encouraged to boost pupils' oracy, while steps should be taken to ensure exam preparation does not "distort" the English curriculum, Ofsted has said.

The findings form part of the inspectorate's latest subject report which evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of how English is taught in schools across the country.

The watchdog visited 50 schools in England to inform the report and said its evidence for early reading was from trips to 25 schools as part of "routine inspection activities".

Here's what you need to know...

1. Reading teaching 'improved markedly'

Schools prioritise reading, ensure the curriculum develops this skill and have invested in phonics programmes and training so teachers can teach pupils to read, Ofsted found.

But they are "less clear about how to build fluency and comprehension" once pupils read accurately, and some secondaries don't do enough to help "weaker readers catch up".

Ofsted recommended schools do more to "help pupils who enter key stages 2 or 3 unable to read fluently to catch up quickly" such as by filling "specific gaps" in phonics knowledge.

In secondary schools, "staff who support the weakest readers" must know how to identify whether they need help with decoding or reading fluency, and act on it".

2. But writing curriculum 'less effective'

The writing curriculum often introduces tricky tasks too soon and primary pupils are not given enough teaching and practice to become "fluent with transcription early enough".

In primary schools, grammar, sentence structure and punctuation was taught "explicitly" but pupils did "not always get enough practice to secure this knowledge".

Most primaries visited did not give pupils "enough teaching and practice to gain high degrees of fluency in spelling and handwriting". In many schools, pupils were "expected to carry out extended writing tasks before they have the required knowledge and skills".

Schools are "often unsure how to help pupils who arrive at secondary school unable to read and write fluently" and "sometimes activities given to pupils mask, rather than address, skills they need to improve and practise".

3. Pupils need support to 'become competent speakers'

Schools "often do not consider spoken language well in their English curriculum", Ofsted said.

It found schools were "not always clear about how to teach the conventions of spoken language that enable pupils to speak competently in a range of contexts".

Teachers often put a pupil's weakness in speaking down to a "lack of confidence" rather than realising they have not been taught enough to "articulate worthwhile contributions".

Ofsted recommended schools "make sure the national curriculum requirements for spoken language are translated into practice", so "pupils learn how to become competent speakers".

"This should include opportunities to teach the conventions of spoken language, for example how to present, to debate and to explain their thinking."

4. English as a subject in its own right

English is "not always seen as a valued subject in its own right" and schools "sometimes focus on its supporting role", leading to a "weaker and less coherent curriculum".

Ofsted said primary schools "too often" chose texts to study in English lessons based on their link to other curriculum areas, "rather than on how they might advance pupils' knowledge of English language and understanding of literature".

Despite schools allocating "significant time to the subject...this time is not always used productively" and "pupils carry out time-filling activities that lack purpose and do not help them to make progress in English".

5. Exams 'unhelpfully shape the curriculum'

Schools "expect pupils to repeatedly attempt complex tasks that replicate national curriculum tests and exams".

This comes "at the expense of first making sure that pupils are taught, and securely know, the underlying knowledge they need".

In some schools, "completing national curriculum tests and exam-style questions is the main, extremely limited method of improving pupils' reading fluency and comprehension", Ofsted noted, and added that preparation for external assessments distorted the curriculum.

For example, at key stage 3, schools often encourage excessive practice of a narrow range of writing structures to prepare pupils for GCSEs".

Ofsted recommended schools "ensure that statutory tests and exams do not disproportionately influence decisions about curriculum and pedagogy".

6. Teachers need 'high-quality' professional development

Some teachers have "a disjointed and narrow understanding of the subject" due to their CPD focusing "mainly on assessment and moderation practices".

And "beyond phonics, there is little training for primary teachers to build their professional knowledge about English literature and language".

Schools should also "ensure teachers have high-quality professional development in English literature and language with time to develop subject knowledge beyond exam specifications".





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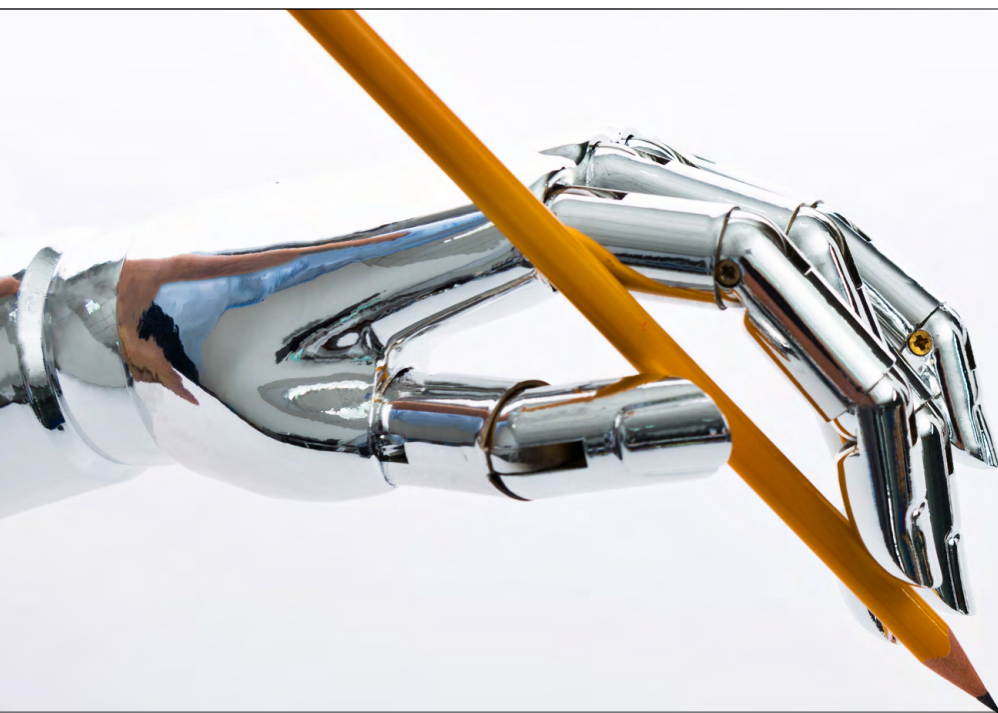
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Feature

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL



AI cheating: just how much is going on in schools?

An explosion in artificial intelligence 'study aids' has armed pupils with the means to cheat their way through assignments. But how much is this happening in schools, and what's being done to stop it? Jessica Hill investigates ...

Alex Kirkbride, the principal of Honiton College, in Devon, recalls a recent conversation with a year 7 pupil who had answered open-ended homework questions using My AI, a chatbot available to users of the social media app Snapchat. "Look sir, we don't need to do homework anymore," said the youngster.

Powered by Open AI's ChatGPT language model, the chatbot is customised with human features to appear as a friend. It tells users to "ask [me] questions about anything".

An Ofcom survey last year found My AI was now used by 72 per cent of 13- to 17-year-olds. Nearly a third of 7- to 12-year-olds also said they use it, despite its 13-plus age restriction. It's one of several third-party AI tools that have sprung up off the back of ChatGPT.

Daisy Christodoulou, director of education for No More Marking, said pupils she recently spoke to had "never heard of ChatGPT or large language models (LLMs) – but they told me, 'if you ask Snapchat nicely it will do your homework for you'".

Over on TikTok – another popular social media

app for youngsters – influencers are endorsing AI tools, purportedly as a study aid but sometimes more blatantly for cheating. Toby Rezio, an American Tiktoker with 91.8 million video likes, admitted to cheating using My AI (see pic), which launched in April last year.

Schools Week also found TikTok videos of students talking about cheating using ChatGPT itself, several of which have racked up millions of views. We've also seen several Snapchat posts in the last six months which appear to be by British secondary school-age children revealing how they use My AI for help with their homework.

One boy asked it to write him a 600-word essay on Vikings culture, commenting: "This new Snapchat AI is about to save my life".

A Snapchat spokesperson said they monitor how the tool is being used and parents can turn the function off.

AI arms race

Last month, the Joint Council for Qualifications refreshed its AI use in assessments guidance to include an expanded list of detection tools.

But StealthGPT, which claims to be "the first AI-powered tool dedicated to generating undetectable AI content", advertises how it can not only "elude the discerning eyes" of one particular detection tool but also "enhances the writer's voice, ensuring that the work reflects their unique style and intellect".

In one video ad for an account named Tutorly.ai, so far viewed 16,400 times, a student complains how they "just got caught using ChatGPT for my essay and now I have to write double the length". A narrator responds: "Tutorly can write plagiarism free essays in just a few seconds ... this is ChatGPT on crack!"

Schools Week analysis found most of the "potential indicators of AI misuse" cited by the JCQ, such as default use of American spelling and a lack of direct quotations, can also easily be overcome by using further chatbot prompts to write in specific styles.

Harald Koch, the author of a book about AI cheating, said: "Before an AI checker has been rolled out in a meaningful way, the next level ... of AI has already been released".

Feature: AI cheating

A recent international study of 14 widely used detection tools found them to be “not accurate or reliable enough to use in practice”. Even OpenAI (the company behind ChatGPT) shut down its own AI detector tool in July due to its “low rate of accuracy”.

Christodoulou believes AI is being used for cheating far more than most educators realise. When No More Marking ran an assessment of 50,000 eight-year-olds last year, it snuck in eight essays written by ChatGPT.

The teachers marking, who were incentivised with prizes for spotting the AI, were “more likely to flag human writing” as AI-generated than the essays from ChatGPT. They awarded one ChatGPT essay with the highest marks.

“If you spot one AI-generated essay, there’s probably another 10 you haven’t,” Christodoulou added.

Caught in the act

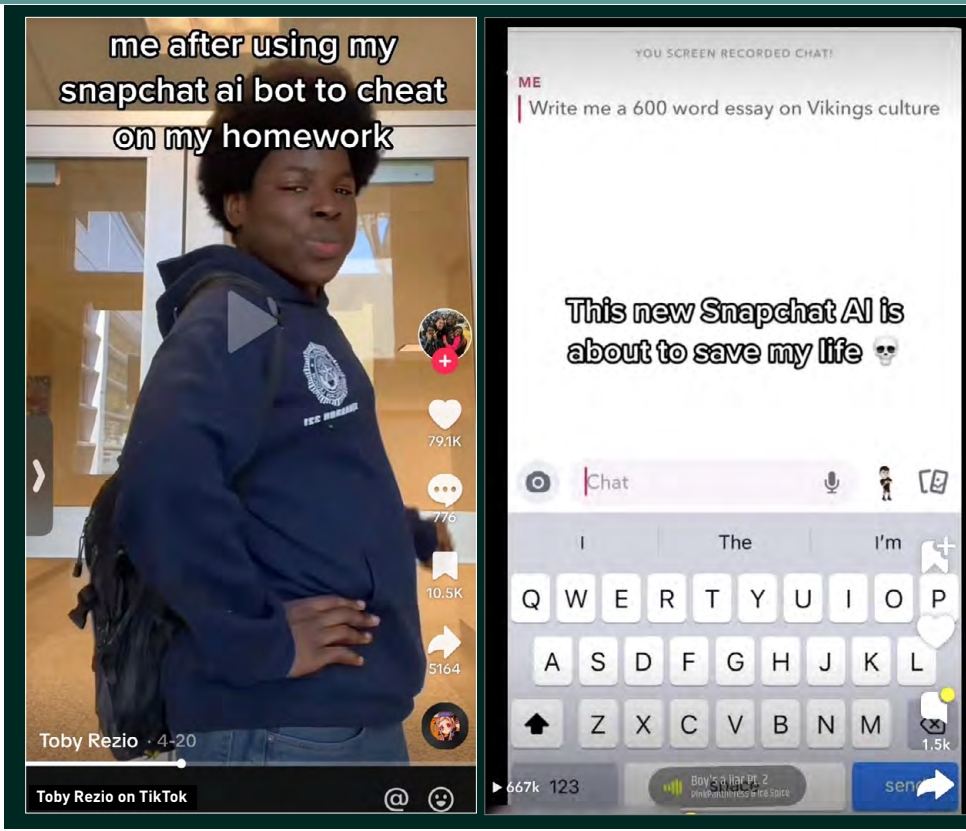
ChatGPT was first released in November 2022. Two thirds of 500 secondary teachers polled last year by RM Technologies believe they’re regularly receiving work written by AI.

JCQ states pupils accused of submitting AI generated assignments “may attract severe sanctions”, including disqualification and being barred from exams. Teachers with “doubts” about authenticity who do not “investigate and take appropriate action” can also “attract sanctions”.

Exam malpractice cases relating to tech devices that resulted in penalties jumped by almost a fifth from 1,825 in 2022, to 2,180 in 2023 – although malpractice cases overall rose by the same rate.

JCQ has highlighted examples of students caught misusing AI on their coursework, including two AQA A-level history students, one of whom was disqualified. Another two students on the OCR’s Cambridge Nationals Enterprise and Marketing qualification confessed to cheating and received zero marks.

And a GCSE religious studies candidate lost marks for using AI in an exam undertaken on a word processor, which they denied doing. But detection software found “multiple components



‘Pupils need to be taught to critically question the results of AI’

[of their assessments] were affected”.

Hasmonean High School for Girls, in London, said in comments submitted to the Department for Education’s call for evidence on Generative AI in Education that malpractice in assessed coursework had been “a challenge to manage”. Teachers reported a “sudden change in students’ essay styles, indicating plagiarism.”

The school is developing training to support appropriate pupil use of GenAI tools, and investing in plagiarism software to detect malpractice. Koch believes the solution lies in educators using “more oral performance reviews instead of written homework”.

JCQ advises educators to use more than one detection tool and to consider “all available information” when trying to detect use of AI.

They also suggested schools make students do some coursework

“in class under direct supervision” to prevent AI misuse. Reza Schwitzer, head of external affairs at AQA, says doing work in “exam conditions is more important than ever”.

Meanwhile, Christodoulou wants a “pause” on all assessed coursework. “If a pupil knows that their friend is using AI and getting away with it, that’s really destructive for the values you want to nurture.”

A US study of seven AI detectors found they wrongly flagged writing by non-native speakers as AI-generated 61 per cent of the time, compared to 20 per cent of human-written essays overall.

In New Zealand last year, AI plagiarism detectors are believed to have falsely accused two high school students of cheating. One parent described the use of AI detection tools as playing “Russian roulette”.



Alex Kirkbride



Harald Koch

Feature: AI cheating

Age restrictions of the generative AI models kids are using online

Producer	Developer	Year launched	Minimum age	Description
ChatGPT	OpenAI	2023	13 (children aged 13 to 18 must obtain parental consent)	Chatbot designed to generate human-like language
Bing chat	Microsoft	2023	13	Built-in feature for Microsoft Bing and Microsoft Edge
Gemini (previously Bard)	Google	2023	18+ (no age assurance in place, links to a user's Google account)	Chatbot developed by Google
Replika	Luka, Inc	2017	18 (no age assurance in place)	Chatbot trained on users answering questions about themselves
My AI	Snap Inc	2023	13	Chatbot created as built in feature for Snapchat
Billie	Meta	2023	13	Instagram chatbot with likeness of celebrities such as Kendall Jenner and Tom Brady

Source: Internet Matters

The regulatory gap

Speaking at a Westminster Education Forum last week, the DfE's deputy director of digital Bridie Tooher admitted "things are moving so fast that ... the tech will always overtake the regulations".

Educators raised concerns to DfE in its AI consultation about developers being "often opaque" about how they use the data put into their platforms, including pupils' identity, grades or behaviour.

Thea Wiltshire, the Department for Business and Trade's edtech specialist, said schools "allowing generative AI to learn from it is an abuse of [pupils'] intellectual property."

AI governance expert Kay Firth-Butterfield warns schools using open-source models will also be feeding pupils' information into the "global data lake". She points out that in the US, early adopters of AI in the business world are now having to "claw back what they've been doing because they didn't put a good governance structure around AI in at the beginning".

Another key concern is around schools and young people not adhering to the age



Daisy Christodoulou

'If you spot one AI-generated essay, there's probably another 10 you haven't'

restrictions of AI platforms. An Ofcom report last year found that 40 per cent of 7- to 12-year-olds reported they'd used ChatGPT, My AI, Midjourney or DALL-E. These are all prohibited for their age.

Even for 13- to 18-year-olds, parental consent is required for ChatGPT.

A secondary school's digital lead, who did not want to be named, said despite selling the software, big firms were delegating to schools the safeguarding responsibility.

Christina Jones, chief executive at the River Tees Multi Academy Trust, said "teachers being responsible for identifying use of AI" puts a "huge pressure" on them and wants "a wider debate about how teachers can be supported with that."

AI inequalities

The AI rise could also exacerbate existing equalities.

Many GCSEs taught in state schools no longer include assessed coursework. But Christodoulou highlights how private schools mostly do the English IGCSE, for instance, which can include up to 50 per cent of non-examined assessment. This has tasks "ChatGPT is so good at".

If any cheating is not picked up, this could further widen the attainment gap between the schools.

In a recent poll by the International Baccalaureate (IB) of 2,000 UK students, 86 per cent attending UK independent schools used a chatbot and 71 per cent of state school students.

AQA also warned that "without centralised planning or at least a central fund, schools that have the money will benefit the most [from AI] as they will be able to afford the most advanced systems, with schools with less money left behind".

But Fiona Aubrey-Smith, a researcher on AI use in schools, says the AI "gap" is "now closing as groups of schools come together to support each other". She's part of a new AI research project exploring the system leadership implications of AI,

Feature: AI cheating

involving 23 MATs and looking at issues including data and security, governance and ethics, and educational vision.

Many think chatbots have the potential to level the academic playing field by widening access to personalised systems of learning, previously only available to families who could afford tutoring.

But Michael Webb, technology director at digital education agency JISC, estimates it costs a student around £80 a month for all the AI tools required to do well academically, giving those students “a significant advantage ... there’s no easy answer to that.”

Writing for Schools Week, chief executive of Star Academies Sir Hamid Patel said every child should have an AI tutor from the age of five “by the end of this decade”. Making such tools “free-of-charge” could “help eradicate educational inequality far more effectively than several decades of policy and funding,” he added.

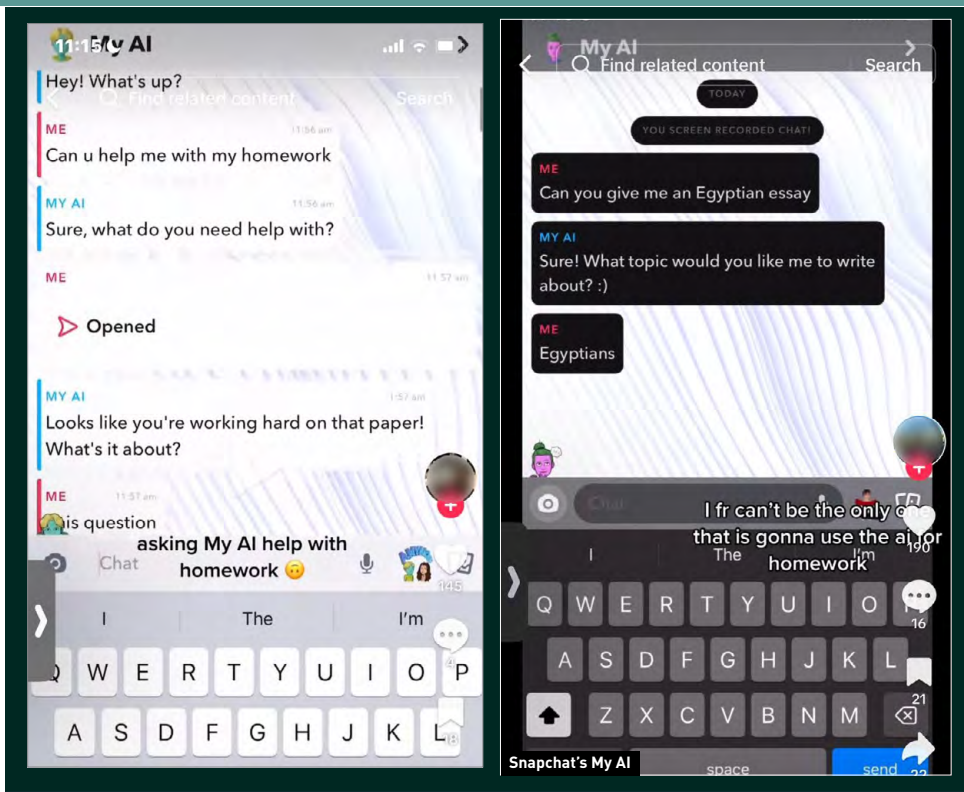
What are schools doing?

A January report by the government’s own open innovation team concluded a long-term strategy for the use of AI in schools was needed. That included guidance and support for teachers to ensure the “digital divide” isn’t exacerbated – highlighting the emerging difference between state and private schools’ use of the technology.

Toohar admits that “there does need to be some support from government. We’ve still got primary schools in England without access to gigabit broadband. How do make sure that ... some schools are not left behind.”

Three in five of the 2,000 parents responding to a poll for Internet Matters last month said they had not been told if their child’s school planned to use AI for teaching or spoken to about children using the tool for homework. This “questions whether some schools are considering the impact of AI at all”, they said.

Alleyn’s School, a private school in London, has abandoned traditional homework essays in favour of in-depth research. RGS Worcester independent school has trained its own AI model, which Wiltshire suggests that schools “with the time” should do to “restrict the data that [the LLM]



‘The AI inequality gap is ‘now closing as groups of schools support each other’

is drawing on”.

Computer science teacher Charles Edwards is leading a working party on AI at Simon Langton Girls’ Grammar School to draw up policies. He said the school was “aware of chatbots being used for homework” and is responding by “placing new schemes of work in place ready for next year to combat how it is used and the ethics of how to use this as a tool in and out of school”.

Kirkbride says his pupils are “now regularly briefed around appropriate use of chatbots, including referencing sources of materials where courses include coursework”.

But at the same time as worrying about cheating, schools are being encouraged to embrace AI to generate lesson plans, crunch data and help mark assignments. Education secretary Gillian Keegan has said teachers’ day-to-day work could be “transformed” by it.

Aubrey-Smith recently met a

year nine pupil who “saw it as the most immense injustice” that their teacher had been using AI to create lesson resources when their pupils were “not allowed to use AI for their work”.

Making stuff up

As the sector gets to grips with the challenge, Christodoulou provides a note of caution.

Chatbots just “repeat the kinds of misconceptions and misinformation that are out there already on the internet”, including “basic maths errors” and “inventing completely new and plausible ‘facts’ that are totally incorrect.”

There are also deeper philosophical considerations about the impact of AI on young people’s faith in democratic systems, and how AI will influence their curiosity for learning.

Koch believes that “to protect against manipulation”, pupils need to be taught to

“critically question the results of AI and to establish this as a normal process”.



Sir Hamid Patel

Opinion

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The sector's manifesto



SIR DAN MOYNIHAN
CEO, The Harris Federation

Five policy priorities for closing disadvantage gaps

Dan Moynihan sets out five policies to restart the virtuous cycle between educational outcomes and economic prosperity

Recently I met a retired politician, a household name, and asked him why, when poverty is such a glaring cause of problems and unfairness, no political party seemed willing to put it front and centre of their strategy for government.

His answer was telling: "Because it's too difficult".

Well, I disagree; we just need braver politicians. And here are some policies I think they should introduce.

A new 'Treasury orthodoxy'

The gap between rich and poor students remains unacceptably wide. Social class, the random accident of birth, reduces the educational outcomes for lower-income children. Differences in attainment inevitably become differences in future quality of life.

Schools cannot properly educate children who are hungry or cold, who live in inadequate housing or whose families cannot access timely medical care. Any government seriously wanting to fix educational inequality must tackle wider societal ills.

This requires the replacement of inadequate or non-existent

social housing and a rethink in the Treasury away from seeing such capital expenditure as a cost rather than investment.

A focus on the early years

Around 40 per cent of the disadvantage gap in education is apparent by age 5. Closing that gap before it opens wide would be powerful in cutting inequality. The current disarray in early years education is inexcusable, and a promise of up to 30 funded hours a week during term-time is insufficient to allow most parents to return to full-time work or training.

Targeted interventions

The pupil premium was a good idea. For a while it worked. But to become more than just a top-up for overstretched budgets, it needs to be substantially increased and coupled with a renewed focus on the outcomes of low-income children. And we need full funding for a national tutoring service for these children.

There are over half a million surplus primary places and numbers are falling; a determined government would keep total school funding constant to fund a rise in the pupil premium and a targeted national tutoring scheme.

Attendance and mental health

We all know that attendance issues are the long tail of Covid. Every



“ We need braver politicians

school in disadvantaged areas needs funding for one or more attendance officers, trained to chase down absence and put families in contact with services including mental health and housing.

The government scheme to provide a mental health lead in each school and more mental health support teams is fine, but the target to cover half of children by March 2025 simply lacks ambition. At Harris we fundraised for a team of five mental health advisers. They do valuable work, but can only scratch the surface in a MAT with 43,000 students.

Accelerated government funding along with the ambition to reach all pupils within a year is needed, rolled out in disadvantaged areas first where the problems are greatest.

Fairer funding and admissions

The National Funding Formula led to additional funding being targeted towards schools with historically less funding. Unfortunately, these tend to be in better-off communities. All schools need more funding, but making a relative allocation away from disadvantaged pupils only makes entrenched problems much, much worse.

Schools in advantaged areas tend to have better Progress 8 scores and Ofsted outcomes. Why then do they also admit so few disadvantaged students? Should it not be intuitively obvious that the neediest children should have a greater chance of going to the best schools? Admissions policies need to be changed so that high-performing schools admit at least the national average of low-income students.

If VAT goes on school fees, parents priced out of private education will seek places in grammar schools, which on average already admit proportionately few disadvantaged children. No grammar should be allowed to retain its selective status unless it changes this.

There are good economic reasons why this can't all be funded immediately.

But the next government must make an early start on kickstarting a virtuous cycle: a joined up anti-poverty strategy and more public spending will improve educational outcomes, and better educational outcomes are key to growth and productivity, which in turn means the strategy will pay for itself. That doesn't seem so difficult to me.

Opinion

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DAVID SCALES

Principal, Astrea Academy Woodfields

Home visits are part of a strong attendance policy

We must have the difficult conversation about parents who don't play by the rules if we're going to change the game on attendance, writes David Scales

It's fair to say that my social media post sharing our video newsletter for parents caused a fair flurry of commentary last week. In it, I raised the issue of parents who are choosing to take their children out of school without good reason.

Attendance is an alarming national problem. Politicians, officials and school leaders are all grappling with it. At my school in Doncaster, between 2022 and 2023, more than half the students were persistently absent and 16.5 per cent were severely absent.

In the year to date, our attendance is 85.6 per cent, up five percentage points. We've got persistent absence down to 37.1 per cent, with severe absence hovering just above the 10 per cent mark. We've made significant inroads, but there is still a lot more to do.

There has been a well-documented shift in societal attitudes towards mandatory school attendance. As a sector, we need to be able to openly discuss the challenges this presents.

The improvement we are seeing tells us that more children want to attend school. I strongly believe this is because we have made clear that we are here for them and that we want the best for them and their future.

We have really strong partnerships with the vast majority of families. They understand the importance of attending school every day. For another group of parents, attendance is really challenging because of wider issues. We know these issues have become more acute as wider funding for support services has fallen away and we do everything we can to support them. But there's another group of parents who are choosing to keep their children out of school and not telling us why, or giving us misleading reasons. Some claim their child is ill when they are not.

Fundamentally, our mission is to ensure children are safe. If we've not seen a child for a few days, we have a responsibility to check they are okay. What we're doing is not unique - it's simply us checking to make sure our students are well and finding ways to get them back into school as quickly as possible.

The significant majority of our attendance challenges relate to these unauthorised absences. We've been very open with our



“As difficult as it is, we need to openly discuss these behaviours”

families that as well as celebrating good attendance, we will call poor attendance out.

Our attendance team, like other such teams up and down the country, routinely make home visits as a core part of their work. In the course of this important work, they notice things like whether there is any activity in the house and around the house.

We do this because we care passionately about our students. We want them to be in school, not just because keeping them on track with their learning is crucial, but because keeping them safe is vital. School is too often a child's only safe place. When that falls away without a proper reason, it's right that our staff look into it.

We've had parents impersonating a doctor's surgery, going as far as falsifying text messages purporting to be from a medical practice. Often, parents will say that they'll bring the evidence the next day, and then fail to do so. This is unauthorised

absence and often it is the same children being removed multiple times.

As difficult as it is to raise these issues, if we are really serious about the extent of the challenge then we need to make clear that this is simply not acceptable.

And it does seem to be making a difference. Social media commentary aside, talking about this publicly alongside our wider focus on attendance means previously persistent absentees are increasingly back in school.

More generally, our attendance is improving. Our roll for September looks set to be the largest the school has ever seen. These are positive signs about a school that is making progress in tackling tough challenges that are all too commonplace in communities like ours.

But we need to build on that - and that includes having difficult conversations about what needs to change.

Opinion

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DAVID SCOTT

Former headteacher and current primary governor

History's repetitions offer hope over pay and conditions

As the acrimonious cycle of pay dispute restarts, teachers should draw inspiration from the events of 50 years ago, explains David Scott, who was there

History repeats itself with unwavering predictability these days, and it seems to be doing it at a faster rate than ever. It's only a year since the arguments over pay were last rehearsed, and here we are again with Gillian Keegan seemingly hell-bent on a collision course with unions.

Perhaps taking a longer view would help us find a more sustainable settlement.

To start, let's be clear. We are beyond crisis. Significant numbers of teachers are leaving the job they love. Of the ones I'm aware of across several schools and authorities, career choices range from driving instructors on £30/hour to a growing trend of applying to become teaching assistants (albeit the most important of roles) – relinquishing professional status to reclaim some sort of work/life balance.

Given this, a crass two per cent salary increase can only fuel more discontent and strikes. Just as predictably, Keegan will then blame teachers and unions for lost learning days.

"Won't someone think of the children?" she will ask, pointing to

the effects of the pandemic they have already suffered and the disruptions caused by last year's strikes.

And yet, it is teachers who have been working so hard to compensate for all the pernicious effects of lockdowns and years of school underfunding. The fact that our crumbling schools are functioning effectively at all is down to their dedication, integrity and professionalism.

Strikes aren't some selfish self-enrichment racket. They are a desperate plea to protect pupils from the profession caused by low pay and overwhelming workloads. Predictably enough, unions will make that point when they are attacked for representing their members' interests.

For those of us who started teaching half a century ago, there is déjà vu on a bigger scale here. Happily, it offers a glimmer of hope.

The year 1974 saw the first major pay disputes in the teaching profession; schools were in chaos and Scotland's teachers were on strike. Angry exchanges in parliament included the following criticism of the Secretary of State by an MP: "The handling of this matter and stubbornness in relation to the teachers is the single greatest obstacle to getting the teachers back to work. Instead of putting the blame on the teachers will he



“ There is déjà vu on a bigger scale here

consider his own position and stand down and make way for someone who can command the respect and confidence of the teaching profession.'

Sound familiar?

Fortunately, the Secretary of State for Education and Science in England, Reg Prentice, sought a solution by joint commissioning with Scotland an inquiry into the pay of teachers in schools and colleges. The Houghton Committee was the first independent review of teachers' pay in Great Britain as a whole. It was also one of the first national responses to the plight of underpaid teachers.

Despite the government's need to cut public spending, the committee's recommendations were accepted and teachers' paltry salaries were increased by around 30 per cent. This defining moment resolved the growing unrest and averted a major recruitment and retention crisis. Stability returned and crisis was avoided.

The words Prentice used when presenting the Houghton Report's findings in 1975 were as significant as the outcome. Their warmth and respect may surprise teachers today.

'[...] the pay, the status, the training and the morale of the teaching profession are the most important factors in education. I believe that the pay settlement is a recognition of the contribution which teachers make to society. [...] The report provides new opportunities for the teaching profession and should also encourage greater and much needed stability in staffing.'

Allowing for inflation and the fact that teachers work on average 50 hours per week, many are worse off financially today than they were pre-Houghton.

As in the mid-70s, an increasing number are pursuing supplementary incomes or alternative employment in pursuit of financial security, better prospects, conditions and a better work/life balance.

History repeats itself, and the outcome is clear: only a complete reevaluation of teaching and schools will sustainably get us out of the hole education finds itself in. Government should skip all the unnecessary steps on the road to that destination – "or stand down and make way for someone who can".

Opinion

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The inspectorate's data-blind approach treats disadvantage as a homogenous category and hampers efforts to close attainment gaps

Thirteen years after additional funding was targeted for improving educational outcomes for 'disadvantaged pupils' (namely those eligible for free school meals as well as looked-after children), a regression in outcomes suggests the strategy is failing.

And the reason for that may be the bluntness of our notion of disadvantage.

At a policy level, one can't deny that significant gaps in achievement between 'disadvantaged pupils' and their peers are widening year on year. However, stark disparities persist around disadvantaged 'sub-groups'.

By the end of secondary school, Chinese pupils and Indian pupils are one to two years ahead of White British and White and Black Caribbean pupils, while Gypsy Roma pupils are over 2.5 years behind.

In addition, there are major local and regional differences in the gaps between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils. The local authorities of Kingston-upon-Hull, Torbay and Blackpool have the biggest gaps across school phases, while Newham and Slough consistently achieve the smallest at the end of primary and secondary.

London and the West Midlands stand out as regions with the smallest disadvantage gaps across all school phases.

Meanwhile, pupils eligible for free school meals straddle multiple sub-groups, including ethnicity, special educational needs, gender and even 'more able'. In effect, the umbrella term 'disadvantaged' is so broad as to be meaningless. And while schools grapple with matching children to labels, Ofsted's definition of 'disadvantaged pupils' is wider still,

MEENA KUMARI WOOD

Honorary fellow of education leadership academy, University of Birmingham

JULIE PRICE-GRIMSHAW

Consultant, JPG Education



Ofsted and DfE must open their eyes to the realities of 'disadvantage'

including pupils with SEND.

Given these obvious anomalies in vital educational outcomes, why has Ofsted, since 2019, clumped all 'disadvantaged' pupils into a single homogenous category – especially as it warned against this very approach in 2015? In education just as in economics, there are clear limitations and caveats to the idea that a rising tide lifts all boats.

The Children's Commissioner recently reported an exponential rise in vulnerable pupils 'with some form of unmet need' exiting the state school system. Many of these, undoubtedly tagged as 'disadvantaged', have now morphed into 'invisible' children. Arguably, they were already invisible

to us when we looked through the lens of disadvantage.

The current inspection framework makes limited use of the nuanced information available on pupil groups and regional differences.

Apart from resulting in judgements that may or may not be truly representative of a school context, this 'data blind' approach to inspection has led to erroneous claims by individual schools and trusts who cite that disadvantaged pupils need a specific approach to succeed.

Some advocate for specific policies, pedagogies and practices. Some make unfounded assumptions about low-income families, including

about levels of parental support, engagement and aspiration.

We've seen poorly-evidenced claims that schools where behaviour standards are high see disadvantaged children do disproportionately well. We've also noted increased use of the term 'deprived' as a synonym for disadvantaged – a term that is at best patronising with reference to anything other than financial deprivation.

Making generalised assumptions about and labelling children, whether they do or don't attend school, leads to stereotypes and glass ceilings, lowers aspirations, and does nothing to change educational outcomes and life chances.

Through Ofsted and whatever other means at its disposal, the DfE should instead investigate the trend in pupils voting with their feet to leave state education. To get a true understanding of the crisis facing our schools, we must be open to all the factors driving poor attainment, attendance, and wellbeing. These include low expectations, bias in assessment, inappropriate curriculum, punitive behaviour management, and loss of parental engagement.

To that end, Ofsted should revert to scrutinising data on disadvantage, exclusions, destinations and outcomes, cross-referencing this against the school's self-evaluation. In addition, Ofsted should conduct an in-depth survey that identifies why some subgroups and geographical locations achieve better outcomes.

School leaders have it in their gift to implement inclusive strategies and to raise achievement for all pupils regardless of their starting points or socio-economic backgrounds. But they can't do it with their eyes shut to the nuances of disadvantage by a data-blind accountability system.

“The umbrella term is so broad as to be meaningless”



Solutions

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UKDEBORAH
MACLARENManaging director,
LoveReading4Kids

Six strategies to encourage reading for pleasure

Marking World Book Day, Deborah Maclaren draws on her experience of schools around the country that make reading for fun a strategic priority

We know that reading is fundamental to the development of children. Countless studies highlight the links between strong reading skills from an early age and future success regardless of background, and there is a strong correlation between reading for pleasure and mental well-being.

Reading also improves our empathy and can help to reduce loneliness. And let's not forget that reading unlocks the rest of the curriculum. Excellence, happiness, and success: sold, right?

Yet so often in schools we are focused on the technical aspects of reading, on reading instruction, at the detriment of reading for pleasure. But it is proven that academically, socially and emotionally, reading for pleasure rocks. As Teresa Cremin of OURfP would say: the will influences the skill.

To ensure reading for pleasure is a strategic priority in your school, here are a few tips to make sure that a rich, robust, rigorous and rewarding reading culture becomes a reality rather than a statement on your SDP.

Every day is World Book Day

A reading culture won't be built in a day, it's about shining a light on books all year round. Yes, it's important to embrace this annual celebration but love books, shout about books, and celebrate authors and illustrators week in, week out. You will see your school sparkle with book love.

Recruit reading role models

Teachers sharing enthusiasm for reading is proven to enhance children's engagement with books. But you need a core group of reading champions, from the SLT, teachers, support staff, student reading ambassadors, junior librarians who work together to make reading come alive in your setting. From writing book reviews, sharing the books they've loved, pressing books they've loved into the hands of others. It works.

Support children's desire to read

The will influences the skill and vice versa. Every child is different and isn't inspired or influenced by the same things. We must support the children in finding the right book for them. Delivering tailored book recommendations for each child whilst still enabling choice. Self-selection is critical. Choice is everything. Choice empowers students and valuing student choices values the student. Choice leads to real and meaningful



“ The will influences the skill and vice versa

conversations. Choice helps establish and deepen relationships. Choice leads to independence.

Broaden your range

Build a diverse, inclusive and contemporary catalogue of literature. Is your book selection all-embracing enough to cultivate your whole community as readers? Using texts as mirrors is a powerful practice that can harness children's identities, enhance engagement, develop literacy skills, and engage the whole community. It is proven that teachers tend to draw on a narrow range of well-known authors with common characteristics, shaped by longer publishing careers, a high volume of titles, childhood affiliation with popular characters and marketing.

We need to provide access to a wide range of books to help students discover authors they will enjoy and that inspire them to read more. It's important that children see themselves in books, for all children to feel connected, to feel inspired by people like them, and to see names like theirs on the book covers.

Fiction, non-fiction, inspirational information titles, poetry, graphic novels. A rich range of reading

including magazines and comics. Magazines have been shown to engage and influence the wider reading choices of students and motivate them to read on in new forms.

Make reading social

We need to give our young readers the chance to share their interests, preferences and recommendations with their peers. Social spaces are critical to enable students to talk about books. Read aloud. Read in silence. Read together. Gone should be the day of being told to shush in a library. Provide multiple forums for children to chat about books, to share their reading experiences. The informal and social act of reading works. Engages. Impacts.

Love your library

Invest in your library. Invest in your library staff. Update your book stock. Our school libraries are places of magic. Feed them. Water them. Nurture them. And they will flourish.

Here's to raising a generation of readers. Because reading matters. And books change lives. This week for World Book Day, and every week.

THE REVIEW

TEACHING CLASSROOM CONTROVERSIES

BOOK
TV
FILM
RADIO
EVENT
RESOURCE

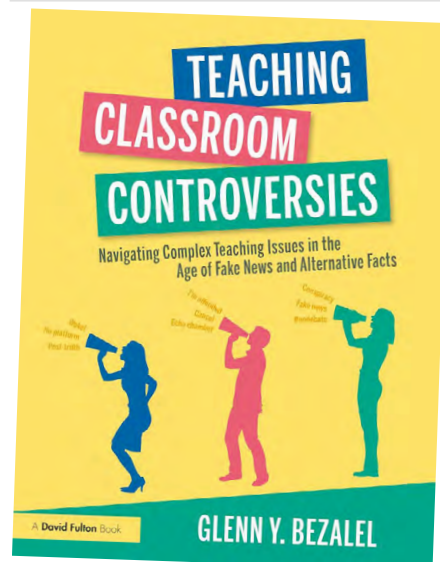
Author: Glenn Bezalel

Publisher: Routledge

Publication date: 18 December 2023

ISBN: 1032287330

Reviewer: Matt Beckett, Teacher of philosophy and RS, Churston Ferrers Grammar School



As teachers, it's something that could be fear-inducing, but with Glenn Bezalel's guidance it becomes apparent that controversy (CONtroversy or conTROversy?) actually presents an exciting opportunity for us and our students alike.

Thoughtfully and practically split into two standalone parts (one on theory and one on practice), *Teaching Classroom Controversies* presents a thorough, detailed discussion of the nature of this particular beast before supplying the reader with valuable, practical guides to how to deal with specific examples.

With sections on debating conspiracy theories, transgenderism, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and free speech, this book is a much-needed, up-to-date guide to navigating the opportunities, challenges, and pitfalls of teaching in the 21st century.

Part One, 'Controversy in theory', is a thoughtful exploration of the nature of controversy and the various pedagogical approaches at our disposal to meet them. To begin with, Bezalel addresses how to define controversy, offering competing criteria and informing the practitioner on how to spot and identify issues of controversy in the curriculum.

Something I loved in this section was Bezalel's thorough, thoughtful use of some of the key players in the discussion of liberal thought and controversy such as Popper, Mill and Arendt. Though I loved this, the amount of references could be overwhelming to a non-specialist who has been asked to teach the subject for the first time.

Following this, once one is comfortable with identifying opportunities to facilitate engagement in controversy, Bezalel proposes potential approaches for how to teach a

controversial issue. This section provides solid advice relating to cancel culture and #nodebate that may otherwise intimidate the novice teacher (or indeed an experienced teacher who feels left behind).

Part Two, 'Controversy in practice', is thoughtfully written as a standalone section explicitly aimed at the busy teacher. This ideal of a standalone section is achieved here, without too many callbacks but with enough prompts to advise that more lies within the earlier half.

Part Two is full of comprehensive guides to discussing issues on climate change, 'wokeness', families and same-sex marriage that will leave the reader feeling confident in addressing such controversies in their lessons. This section gives some very useful tips to both burgeoning and more experienced practitioners on how to spot issues of controversy, how to approach them and how to plan lessons where students are empowered and informed enough to engage, while maintaining a safe classroom environment.

Though admittedly far from Bezalel's control, one is left feeling that the issue of how to teach and promote discussion on controversy for the large class sizes many of us face is unresolved. Bezalel suggests a circle of chairs or the Harkness method, but this is not feasible in many classrooms nationwide.

With classroom numbers reaching (and often exceeding) 30 in many schools in the UK, the practicalities of holding a debate that will be meaningful for the whole cohort is something left largely unaddressed here. This dampens some of the excitement generated by the book's motivating and stimulating subject matter.

Despite this, as stated above, there are many key strengths to Bezalel's book. *Teaching*

Classroom Controversies is bursting with tips and tricks, lesson ideas, suggested timeframes and thought-provoking activities that fill the reader with excitement at the prospect of applying them in their own setting.

Another key strength is Bezalel's commitment to a balance between traditional and progressive approaches to education; he is careful to strike an equilibrium between the pursuit of truth and of character when educating our students. In particular, the book contains lots of useful guidance for teachers of PSHE and religious studies, including same-sex relationships and families. It also provides useful hints as to how to approach our commitment to SMSC through teaching controversy.

I really enjoyed reading this book. It left me itching to put some of his suggestions to the test, challenged my own preconceptions, gave me fresh perspectives on my own practice and made the prospect of teaching controversial issues (CONtroversial or controVERsial?) genuinely exciting.

★★★★☆
Rating



Shekeila Scarlett

Chair of governors,
Stoke Newington
School and
Sixth Form

NOTES ON A SCANDAL

In her latest **blog**, Children's Commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza reports on the alarming rise in children missing education and labels the newest DfE figures a scandal. No *Schools Week* reader will be surprised by the range of negative consequences de Souza highlights, from a lack of qualifications to a susceptibility to crime.

It's clear that a significant reason for the increases in home education and in children missing school is the lack of local authority resources to keep children in or support them to return to the classroom. It's also clear that children with special educational needs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds are disproportionately affected by this. Without the necessary support, children are ostracised and end up stuck in a cycle of inaccessibility that is all too familiar.

However, it's worth exploring whether there are other reasons why children are missing from education, beyond this lack of support? Does the traditional education system cater to the needs of a post-COVID society? Does our digital world reinforce the notion that education is losing its importance? Or are we seeing a generational shift where the standard 'one-size-fits-all' classroom setting is no longer effective?

It seems to me that we need a deeper analysis of the reasons



Dame Rachel de Souza

children are out of education and parents lack the will to send them in. After all, you can't effectively address a problem without truly understanding its root causes. Without that, Labour's widely reported proposal for schools to send daily registers to the DfE and LA seems like a good way to drive up accountability without really boosting attendance.

CREWING OVER THE CS

Having said that, some encouraging thinking is happening on the left in terms of improving pupils' experience of school. As a school link governor and advocate for student voice, I was invigorated this week by Dr Brian Lighthill's blog for The Fabians about the holistic pastoral care approach at XP School in Doncaster. The focus is on 'Crew Time', a daily meeting for students to



prepare for the day, reflect and participate in team-building activities.

The school promotes an egalitarian approach, valuing everyone equally and the approach provides a safe space for students to express themselves and seek support, fostering a sense of belonging. This is evident through the students' engagement with 'Crew Time', which serves as a core support function during their time at school.

Lighthill also discusses how the school encourages students to develop key skills known as the school's 4Cs: communication, collaboration, creativity and critical reflection. These 4Cs aim to nurture well-rounded individuals and, ultimately, improve academic performance.

While considering the success of the Crew Time concept, another set of 4Cs came to my mind: care, consideration, consistency and connection. Just imagine how much easier it would be for children to demonstrate the first

four if we adults could provide them with the second.

HOME AND AWAY

Meanwhile, it would be beneficial for policymakers and the sector to gain better understanding of what exactly homeschooling involves. Conveniently, the newest episode of the Teacher Talk Radio podcast, hosted by Tom Rogers, provides this insight.

Tom chats with Katie Finlayson, who has homeschooled her children for over 14 years and shares some of their journey. The conversation delves into topics such as curriculum, socialisation and homeschooling regulation. Trust me, the insight offered was perspective-changing.

Though, from listening to Katie, what struck



me most was how much homeschooling practices and experiences mirror the post-Covid workforce culture: flexible hours, less stringent working environments and improved time management skills.

Listening to the conversation prompted me to consider again (as I did earlier) whether the traditional education system is suited to our modern-day world.

One thing is certain: this podcast challenged some preconceived notions I had about homeschooling, so I encourage you to listen and see if it does the same for you.

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts

The Knowledge

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



How can schools in poor areas attract more teachers?

Professor Sin Wang Chong, Head of evidence synthesis, National Institute of Teaching

The National Institute of Teaching has been working to research different recruitment and retention strategies that schools are using to attract teachers. To do this, we analysed more than 500 job adverts in socio-economically challenging areas and ran a questionnaire with a small sample of teachers.

We found five broad strategies that schools in Education Investment Areas (EIAs) use to attract and retain teaching talents: working environment, career development, staff welfare, financial incentives, and work-life balance. Working environment was most frequently mentioned in the job advertisements, focusing on positive ethos and school cultures that support teacher wellbeing.

This research – commissioned by the Education Endowment Foundation – helps us to better understand the recruitment strategies these schools are using as an important first step towards finding ways to improve them.

Trust and school leaders can use these findings to inform their own recruitment activity, and consider how they might prioritise the practices that are most effective in recruiting and retaining staff.

Over two-thirds of the job advertisements underscored the supportive school community that potential candidates would be a part of. Teachers indicated that they preferred to work in schools where they are respected for their professional judgement and there is recognition for their teaching performance.

This finding supports earlier studies such as the Teaching and Learning International Survey in England that found that the relationship aspect of working environment is crucial in teacher recruitment and retention.

Our study found contrasting views with regards to financial incentives. The analysis of job advertisements suggested that just under one-third (30.6 per cent) mentioned financial incentives, mostly in the forms of free or discounted goods and services (e.g.



‘Financial incentives alone may be insufficient’

healthcare and childcare) instead of lump sum and cash bonuses or rewards (e.g. government bursaries).

While cash-related rewards linked to teaching performance and retention bonuses were perceived by some teachers who completed the online questionnaire as important for recruitment and retention, a larger proportion of teachers had other non-financial considerations as their top priorities. These include features such as work culture of the school and the effectiveness of the school's leadership.

The findings suggest that, in socio-economically challenging areas, financial incentives alone may be insufficient in attracting and retaining teachers in the long term. Teachers are more willing to work in these schools when there are flexible working conditions, opportunities for career progression, and continuous professional development (CPD).

In particular, teachers appreciated more informal CPD opportunities such as the chance to work with other teams across the school and having some kind of training before they start the new role.

Moreover, the questionnaire data suggested that strategies that are successful in attracting potential candidates to schools are often the

same as those influencing teachers' decisions to remain in the profession.

The open responses in the questionnaire shed preliminary light on teacher recruitment and retention strategies not mentioned in previous research, suggesting that these strategies may be specific to schools serving the socio-economically deprived communities. These include better preparation of new teachers, job security, ways to handle violence in schools, protected time for planning, preparation and assessment (PPA), teachers' own sense of purpose, and smaller class sizes.

Based on the indicative findings from this relatively small-scale study, we encourage researchers to further evaluate how best to recruit and retain teachers in socio-economically challenging regions. Potential areas for future research include the effectiveness of financial incentives, the influence of leadership, and colleague support and flexible working arrangements.

Most importantly, it seems clear that we need a more nuanced understanding of the (mis)match between research evidence, the perceptions of school leaders, and those of teachers when it comes to what is valued in teacher recruitment and retention.

Week in

Westminster

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

FRIDAY

HUGE NEWS: The government has extended the deadline to request a free portrait of His Maj King Charles!

In a blatant sign that demand has been lower than forecast, the scheme is "now being extended with a second phase to include town, parish and community councils and Ministry of Defence-sponsored cadet forces".

The deadline for orders is now March 28.

MONDAY

Exams regulator Ofqual is launching its first ever graduate scheme! Successful applicants will be taken "on a journey to learn about all areas of regulatory practice and how qualifications, at all levels, are regulated".

That's about as education-nerdy as one can get!

The Department for Education is quick to rap trusts that submit their financial information late. Those not delivering their accounts on time even get named and shamed.

If only the department practised what it preached. It was told off today by the Information Commissioner's Office watchdog over its "declining responses to requests for information" since 2019.

The department missed the deadline to respond to freedom of information requests in a quarter of cases and has been told to buck up its act.

Warren Seddon, ICO director of freedom of information and transparency, said transparency was "fundamental to our democracy. Information delayed is information denied".

TUESDAY

Tour-de-force money-saving-expert Martin Lewis revealed at today's education committee that his charity had to pay £500k to fund a financial education textbook because the government wouldn't.

Lewis did not give himself editorial control but noted that a private individual funding the project "could have used it as a piece of propaganda...[which] doesn't seem right to me".

Quite. But at least this wasn't a wider problem like, for instance, how the early academies programme worked – getting a load of wealthy businessmen to fund schools and giving them unchecked power. Thankfully the sector has moved on from those heady days (just about).

Later on in the committee, laid-back schools minister Damian Hinds aged himself by a decade after saying he believes he's the same age as committee veteran Ian Mearns (Hinds is 54, Mearns 66).

Say what you like about former apprentice Gillian Keegan (also education secretary), but she's not (so far) libelled somebody, which is more than can be said of Michelle Donelan, who can now add it to her prestigious portfolio that includes having the shortest ever reign of any education secretary (a total of just 35 hours).

The taxpayer had to pay £15,000 on Donelan's behalf after she wrongly accused an academic of supporting Hamas.

When questioned about whether this was a good use of public funds, sword-carrying Tory MP Penny Mordaunt said it was in fact absolutely fine because Donelan had so selflessly handed back the £16k redundancy she was entitled to for her education stint.

"I think that speaks volumes about the

honourable lady's character and how much she values it's taxpayer's money [that] we're talking about," Mordaunt added.

WEDNESDAY

Feck all for schools in today's budget, though chancellor Jeremy Hunt did want to point out that Keegz was doing "an effing good job".

The comment harks back to the controversy when she was caught on-mic complaining nobody thanked her for the sterling job she was doing by closing schools with RAAC (years after the problem surfaced).

So, no funding to pay for crumbling buildings, boost ravaged budgets or tutoring for pupils still suffering with pandemic learning loss – but we did get a really shit joke.

The one thing announced for schools in the budget was the promise of 15 new special free schools – which are likely to be a drop in the ocean in resolving the SEND places crisis and actually open in about five years' time.

Announcing the schools, Hunt said SEND provision "can be excellent when outsources ... but also expensive".

Good to know he's been reading his *Schools Week*, which has regularly highlighted such issues – including our investigation showing how private investors are making millions from the bankrupt SEND system.

However, it turns out the Department for Education (DfE) is less forthcoming about what its ministers are reading.

When asked by Pat McFadden about which newspapers and magazines the department pays for and how much it spends, Hinds could only say they don't "specifically hold data for these types of publications". Boo!





VANDYKE UPPER SCHOOL

HEADTEACHER

September 2024

This is an exciting opportunity for an outstanding leader to lead our vibrant and thriving school community. Vandyke Upper School is a highly successful and oversubscribed school, with a talented and supportive staff who provide students with excellent teaching and pastoral care. Our retiring Headteacher leaves a wonderful legacy of shared values, inclusive culture and collaborative practice. This creates a distinctive atmosphere around school which enables students to achieve their very best. Our new Headteacher will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of the school, whilst building on these strong foundations and bringing new energy and ideas to our learning journey. The governors would welcome interest from both experienced Headteachers looking for a new challenge, or strong candidates who are looking for their first Headship.

Vandyke Upper School is a very popular school with 1520 students on roll including 436 in the sixth form. This is due to its continued success, with a solidly good OFSTED judgement. Students achieve very well, through high quality teaching and learning, and the delivery of a broad and ambitious curriculum which is well planned to meet students' needs. The school holds the Sportsmark award, complementing an extensive extra-curricular programme.

The Governors are seeking a Headteacher who:

- Provides consistently high-quality professional leadership for the school
- Can inspire and motivate staff, students, parents and governors to work towards and achieve the vision, values and aims of the school.
- Creates a culture of continuous improvement based on mutual respect and high expectations.
- Creates a productive, caring and inclusive learning environment
- Upholds ambitious educational standards for all students
- Is approachable and leads by example
- Has proven capacity for strategic leadership, demonstrating financial acumen and the capacity to maximise opportunities for the school
- Has the ability to forge constructive relationships beyond the school to ensure that Vandyke Upper School continues to be outward-facing

In return, we will provide you with:

- The opportunity to make a good school even better
- Excellent facilities and resources, coupled with sound finances
- A strong school team that enjoys working together to a common purpose
- Students who are self-disciplined, engaged in their learning and who participate fully in the life of the school
- A highly motivated and capable Governing Board
- An opportunity to influence the local educational landscape

[CLICK HERE TO APPLY](#)





Headteacher

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

This is an exciting and unique opportunity for a highly effective and inspiring school leader to move this school forward and improve outcomes for all pupils. The recruitment of dynamic, committed, and inspirational staff is at the heart of our Trust's vision.

At our Trust, we believe that every child is a special individual, capable of extraordinary things. All schools support and challenge every child to do what they think they cannot, to persist, to work hard and to be their best. We are looking for a Headteacher who shares our values and has the vision, drive, and resilience to lead The Bromley Pensnett Primary School,

securing rapid improvement whilst also bringing leadership capacity that supports other Trust schools to learn from each other and beyond. We prioritise staff wellbeing and are deeply committed to investing in staff at every level of our organisation through clear professional development pathways and opportunities.

Interested candidates are encouraged to contact James Hill, Executive Director of School Improvement to discuss the opportunity in more detail.

Email jhill@drbignitemat.org

To apply for this role, please download an application form from the Jobs Section on the drb Ignite Multi Academy Trust website:

www.drbignitemat.org.



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

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.](#)



ENGLISH DEPUTY STRATEGY LEAD - FULL TIME

Location: The Kemnal 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 Kemnal 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

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