

SCHOOLS WEEK

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

SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK | @SCHOOLSWEEK

FRIDAY, MAR 29, 2024 | EDITION 354

The (secretive) world of academy cash pooling

P6

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE AFTER ONLINE HARASSMENT



Pages 22-24

SOLUTIONS: FROM MAT GROWING PAINS TO GAINS



Pages 11-12

GIVE UNREGISTERED AP A FAIR HEARING



Page 28

WHY EVERY MAT NEEDS A STAKEHOLDER REPORT



Page 26

SEND CRISIS: HOW IT ALL WENT WRONG CAN WE FIX IT?



SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOTH

SPECIAL FEATURE | Pages 15-18

SCHOOLS WEEK

Meet the news team



John Dickens
EDITOR

@JOHNDICKENSSW
JOHN.DICKENS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



Freddie Whittaker
DEPUTY EDITOR

@FCDWHITTAKER
FREDDIE.WHITTAKER@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



Samantha Booth
CHIEF REPORTER

@SAMANTHAJBOTH
SAMANTHA.BOOTH@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



Jack Dyson
SENIOR REPORTER

@JACKYDYS
JACK.DYSON@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



Lucas Cumiskey
SENIOR REPORTER

@LUCAS_CUMISKEY
LUCAS.CUMISKEY@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



JL Dutaut
COMMISSIONING EDITOR

@DUTAUT
JEAN-LOUISDUTAUT@EDUCATIONSCAPE.COM



Jessica Hill
INVESTIGATIONS AND FEATURES REPORTER

@JESSJANEHILL
JESSICA.HILL@EDUCATIONSCAPE.COM



Nicky Phillips
HEAD DESIGNER

@GELVETICA
NICKY.PHILLIPS@FEWEEK.CO.UK



Shane Mann
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

@SHANERMANN
SHANE.MANN@EDUCATIONSCAPE.COM

THE TEAM

Senior Designer: Simon Kay | Classifieds Manager: Clare Halliday | Sales Executive: Tony Hudson |
Operations and Finance Director: Victoria Boyle | Event Manager: Frances Ogefere Dell |
Senior Administrator: Evie Hayes | Finance Assistant and PA to CEO: Zoe Tuffin |

education week jobs

FEATURED JOBS

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

TO ADVERTISE YOUR VACANCY WITH EDUCATION WEEK JOBS PLEASE CALL 020 81234 778 OR EMAIL | ADVERTISING@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



PENROSE LEARNING TRUST - DEPUTY CEO - L31-37

[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/PENROSE-SW353-P2](https://tinyurl.com/penrose-sw353-p2)



AQUINAS CHURCH OF ENGLAND EDUCATION TRUST - DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION - £65,629 - £75,47

[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/AQUINAS-SW353-P2](https://tinyurl.com/aquinas-sw353-p2)



THE CHARTER SCHOOLS EDUCATIONAL TRUST - CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER - COMPETITIVE AND NEGOTIABLE

[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/TCSET-SW353-P2](https://tinyurl.com/tcset-sw353-p2)



BROMLEY PENSNETT PRIMARY SCHOOL - HEADTEACHER - L15 - L21 (£66,628 - £77,195)

[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/DRB-IGNITE-SW351-P2](https://tinyurl.com/dr-ignite-sw351-p2)

No easy answer to education's 'Big Nasties'

Badged as "The Big Nasties", the state of the school estate and the SEND crisis have been named by public accounts committee chair Dame Meg Hillier among the issues where "essential spending" cannot be put off any longer.

The government's £11.4 billion estimate in 2021 of the cost of bringing the school estate up to scratch is almost certainly out of date. RAAC remediation and rising building costs will likely see it revised up significantly.

Meanwhile, high needs deficits have been rapidly rising in recent years. Recent figures show they sit at nearly £1.6 billion and likely rising. Waits for an education, health and care plan are getting longer.

Hillier warns that if the SEND system is not fixed then children and families will remain in the "postcode lottery" not receiving the same quality of education as their peers.

As Hillier sets out, this is down to not enough long-term planning from the current government. That's patently obvious in SEND,

which has had seven ministers in charge since the review just a few years ago.

Labour has said that it would wait until after the election – a date we don't know yet – until it sets out its full plan to tackle the crisis.

Calls are getting louder for the government to write-off all deficits – but what then?

Are we looking at wholesale reform again? Or just tweaking the existing SEND implementation plan?

It's a hugely important decision for the next government to make, and one we explore in detail in our long read on pages 15 to 18.

One major factor will be the scale of other challenges that need to be addressed: recruitment, building back support services, teacher pay, improving behaviour in classrooms.

And that's just in education, never mind the country's other problems. Plus – there is no money.

It is a scarily huge task and, unfortunately, one that might take years to resolve.

Most read online this week:

- 1 **Rise in £200k academy trust CEOs as pay 'stagnation' ends**
- 2 **Cuts start to bite as DfE faces £1.5bn budget blackhole**
- 3 **Five policies to improve retention (while we await funding)**
- 4 **SATs: 2023 reading test harder, but 'met its purpose'**
- 5 **Revealed: The trusts to run 30 new special free schools**

[CLICK LINKS TO READ STORIES](#) 

Disclaimer:

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

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

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

Please address any complaints to the editor.

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

SCHOOLS WEEK IS PROUD TO BE A MEMBER OF



EDUCATIONSCAPE LTD
C/O RUNWAY EAST, THE HICKMAN,
2 WHITECHAPEL ROAD, LONDON E1 1EW
T: 020 8123 4778
E: NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

ADVERTISE WITH US

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

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



See story on page 10

School chiefs warn of shortfall in pension rise funding

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

Some schools will be short-changed in grant allocations to cover the rise in employer contributions to teachers' pensions, leaders fear, despite a government pledge to fully fund it.

Last year, the government announced employer contributions to the teachers' pension scheme would rise by more than 20 per cent this April from 23.6 to 28.6 per cent. Ministers said they would cover the rise for state schools with £1.1 billion in additional funding.

Full school-level allocations for 2024–25 have not yet been published, but the Department for Education has provided a calculator tool online for schools and trusts to work out what they will receive. The data is based on allocations data, as funding has not yet been issued.

The grant is calculated based on funding rates for pupils of different ages, with an extra £65 to £100 for each pupil eligible for free school meals. Leaders believe it is this weighting on free school meals that is skewing the allocations in favour of more deprived schools.

Benedicte Yue, chief financial officer at the River Learning Trust, said schools had been "told by the DfE that the increase in the teacher pension contribution rate would be fully covered". But "in our 28 schools, the teacher pension grant is only covering 89 per cent of the additional cost", leaving them with "another £250,000 shortfall that we need to cover".

Julia Harnden, funding specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders union, said she had received feedback suggesting schools with high FSM rates "are receiving just about the right amount of funding and those with a lower proportion of FSM-eligible children are less likely to get what they need".

"The 16-19 funding rates have not yet been published so we do not have a full picture, but the initial indications, based on what we know so far, are that there is



not enough money going into the system to afford the cost of the pension contributions in some, and possibly many, schools."

She added that it was "frustrating that one of the government's primary responsibilities with education is to distribute the money effectively and fairly, and that they seem to be having so many difficulties doing this".

Last year, the DfE was forced to re-issue school-level funding allocations data after a mistake that meant it overstated the total schools budget by £370 million.

And just this week the department was forced to delay publishing pupil premium allocations data until May following a "problem" identifying eligible reception pupils.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary at school leaders' union NAHT, said it was "difficult to understand" how the pupil premium issue had only just emerged "when the data used is from October's school census. This does represent the continuation of a concerning trend of delays when it comes to the Department for Education announcing funding allocations, and this seems to be getting worse every

year." He warned that leaders still did not have school-level allocations for 2024–25 for several income streams, such as the

teachers' pay grant and universal infant free school meals.

"School leaders shouldn't have to guess how much funding they're going to get, and this adds unnecessary stress and workload," Whiteman added.

The news comes after *Schools Week* revealed how thousands of schools faced "severe financial hardship" because a technical funding change meant that they got a measly 0.5 per cent per-pupil funding increase.

Simon Beamish, chief executive of the Leigh Academies Trust, this week wrote to local MPs to warn funding for his schools would rise by just 0.89 per cent across the trust's primaries and 1.47 per cent for secondaries, with some individual schools even losing cash.

"I am exceptionally concerned about how we will make ends meet given inflation, salary pressures and the rising cost of energy," he added.

A DfE spokesperson said "just like the teachers pay additional grant (TPAG) and the national funding formula (NFF), we have allocated additional pensions funding in a way that benefits all schools while providing the most to schools with the greatest need".

"Schools have autonomy over their spending, including decisions around staffing structures, so funding will never exactly match a school's precise costs."



Benedicte Yue



Paul Whiteman

SEND waiting list backlogs at risk of being 'normalised'

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Long waits for SEND and mental health support risk being "normalised", experts have said, as areas where pupils reach "crisis point before their needs are met" escape government intervention.

Several areas inspected by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission were given the middle rating of "inconsistent" – and some the top "positive" rating – for special needs services, despite evidence of substantial delays for services.

Areas rated "inconsistent" are re-inspected quicker than those with positive ratings, but do not trigger formal action. This is saved for those found to have "widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns".

In Gloucestershire, inspectors found "systems that are too reactive, and, in some cases, this results in children, young people and families reaching crisis point before their needs are met".

They warned that young people were not meeting the criteria for mental health assessment, even when health services backed their applications. For some, "hospital admission was the trigger for support".

A "significant number" of parents described feeling "desperate and many practitioners say they are battling to be heard by local area leaders".

However, inspectors only said the area's work led to "inconsistent experiences" – rather than the worst rating under the new Ofsted framework, which began in January 2023.

Matt Keer, SEND specialist at the Special Needs Jungle website, warned there was a "clear risk that the delays and lack of support that are currently endemic to the SEND system end up being normalised".

Parents involved in the new SEND inspections "like the focus on outcomes for children and young people". But they "also cannot understand why inspectors aren't treating serious service failures as significant concerns that trigger priority action".

In Gloucestershire, inspectors did find an "improving picture" in children's early help and social care, and support measures for children waiting for child and adolescent mental health services.



Philip Robinson, the council's education lead, said he was "pleased inspectors have seen the improvements" but recognise that not everybody's experience "has been as they would have wished".

In Surrey, the latest government data for 2022 shows that just one in four new education, health and care plans (EHCPs) were completed on time. The national average is about half.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman found Surrey had a 1,000-strong backlog of EHCP needs assessments awaiting an educational psychologist (EP) appointment. Its core EP staffing was at 50 per cent.

Ofsted inspectors pointed out the "poor" timeliness of assessments for secondary school pupils, with "too many" youngsters waiting too long.

But Surrey was again only rated "inconsistent" in September. Clare Curran, Surrey's children lead, said they considered Ofsted's findings to be a "fair reflection" and that they are on-track to clear the backlog by June.

There was a similar picture in West Sussex, where "too many" EHCP needs assessments "are not completed within the statutory timescales". It was rated as "inconsistent" in November.

But schools forum papers from January revealed that only 3.1 per cent of new plans were completed within the 20-week statutory timeframe last year. Plans were taking 42.6 weeks on average to finalise.

A council spokesperson said teams "work hard" to ensure children get support "at the right time".

Some areas with the top grade – meaning services "typically

lead to positive experiences" – also had systemic issues.

Richmond was given this grade, with inspectors praising the speech and language therapy (SALT) team for offering training and advice to both education settings and parent and carers.

But two months later, a council report on its high-needs deficit said the growth in EHCPs "has led to a 50 per cent reduction" in support for children without a plan for SALT from September. "There is no capacity for existing commissioned therapy services to absorb any new specialist provision going forward within the current contract."

Keer said it was "concerning" that SEND partnerships could score "a top grade in these inspections without providing an outstanding service".

"It's doubly concerning when inspectors haven't demanded priority action in cases where young people have been avoidably hospitalised because their needs haven't been met, where assessment backlogs are huge and where EHCP processes have almost entirely broken down."

Under the new framework, nine areas have received the worst rating, 11 have been judged "inconsistent" and seven were "typically positive".

Ofsted added that inspections "consider a wide range of evidence and outcomes are not based on any single issue. We know there are longstanding issues across the SEND system, including delays to EHCP assessment, and this is frequently cited in our inspection reports.

"However, we also look at how local areas are working to minimise the impact of these delays and provide support to children and young people while they wait for assessment."



Matt Keer

INVESTIGATION: FUNDING

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

GAG pooling transparency calls as trust takes 20% from schools

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

EXCLUSIVE

Trusts that pool their schools' funding to pay for central services should be more transparent, leaders have said, after it emerged one was taking around 20 per cent from some of its academies.

Latest accounts for the University of Brighton Academies Trust suggest just over 13 per cent of pooled school income is retained to pay for services such as attendance support and estates teams.

However, *Schools Week* understands that one of its schools is effectively having around 20 per cent of its cash retained centrally, while for another it's 17 per cent.

Trusts have two methods to fund central services. Most top slice a percentage from their schools' budgets. But, a growing number are now instead pooling all their schools' general annual grant (GAG) funding first, before deciding how much cash should be allocated to schools based on their own formula.

Unlike top slicing, there is much less transparency about how much GAG pooling trusts are taking from their schools.

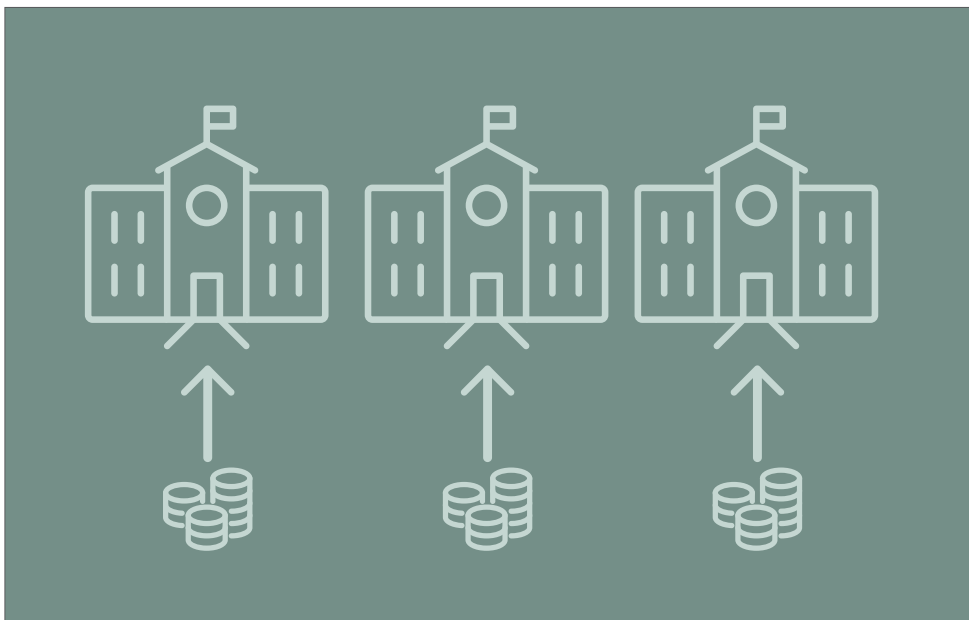
A member of staff at the Brighton MAT – who asked to remain anonymous – branded the arrangement unfair, with some schools left “understaffed and struggling”.

“It overrides the [Department for Education's] funding formula. Schools within the trust are having significant amounts of income retained centrally... and being forced to make constant cuts year after year whilst central teams get bigger.”

The case highlights how sensitive the issue of funding in MATs can be. Earlier this month, an academy head resigned publicly over “significant concerns” about the “high amount” his trust was top-slicing from his school's budget.

Large trusts, on average, top slice 5.4 per cent. Some now take 10 per cent – but say this is because they provide more services centrally, and it actually means their schools save money.

A spokesperson for the Brighton trust said its model has “ensured resource allocation and economies of scale, contributing to overall



operational efficiency as well as consistency of quality standards”.

Supporters of GAG pooling argue that it allows trusts to redistribute cash where it is most needed.

But the EDSK think tank called for a ban. A January report said its “opacity” makes it impossible to hold leaders “accountable for the way in which they spend public money”.

Schools Week analysis suggests that eight of England's 50 largest MATs also GAG pool. Just one of them appeared to have published breakdowns of central team allocations in their accounts.

The Enquire Learning Trust was the only one that provided a cost breakdown of its GAG pooling arrangements in annual accounts.

It stated funds were allocated to academies “based on a standard age-weighted pupil unit rate”.

About 4.5 per cent of the allocations were retained by the trust to pay for HR and payroll and financial services, among other things.

The seven other MATs did not respond when asked by *Schools Week* if they would provide details of how their GAG pooling worked.

Former NEU general secretary Mary Bousted said trusts should ensure information is published in accounts or public documents.

“There may be good reasons why trusts redistribute money [the way do] – but you need

to be transparent about it. It's even more important [at a time] when schools are having such funding difficulties.”

A survey of more than 150 MATs by IMP Software finance advisers found about 20 per cent pool their GAG. But a further 38 per cent wanted to start doing it.

Co-founder Will Jordan, of IMP Software, said there isn't information on the average level of income retained by those trusts.

“What is spent within the centre, and what is sent to the school varies with every single trust.

“I'm not saying there aren't things that can't be changed, but where do you draw the line? Because transparency ultimately creates additional work.”

A University of Brighton Academies Trust spokesperson added the chain has GAG pooled since 2018, with budgets developed “by principals in collaboration with our school improvement, people, and finance teams”.

This allows it to “manage the allocation of resources according to the needs of individual academies and to invest in comprehensive school improvement and safeguarding”.

“The trust has a centralised operating model meaning that a substantial proportion of direct costs are consolidated centrally rather than distributed across individual academies.”

NEWS: RECRUITMENT

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

Schools promised 'financial incentives' for teacher apprentices

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@FCDWHITTAKER

Schools piloting the new teacher degree apprenticeship will be given "financial incentives" to cover trainees' salaries while they train off the job.

The Department for Education this week named eight teacher trainers that will receive grant funding to cover the training of "up to" 150 maths teacher apprentices.

Ministers announced last month that a long-awaited degree apprenticeship will launch next year.

The four-year course, which would see apprentices achieve both a degree and qualified teacher status, will be piloted with "up to" 150 trainee maths teachers from September 2025, before a wider rollout.

Apprentices will spend about 40 per cent of their time studying and the rest of the time in the classroom. Ministers want to see teaching assistants trained via the route.

Education secretary Gillian Keegan said the pilot was a "vital step and will help to recruit and

develop great teachers, and I'm delighted that these providers have been selected to help us to deliver this".

Under the pilot, the government will provide grants to cover the training. In the wider rollout, training costs will be covered by the apprenticeship levy. Schools that employ trainees as part of the funding pilot will receive "financial incentives to support with trainee salary costs to cover the proportion of time trainees will spend off-the-job, studying towards their qualifications", the DfE said.

Schools and teacher trainers are free to "design and deliver" teacher degree apprenticeships across all primary and secondary subjects "within the same timeframes as the funding pilot and in future years".

However, those doing so would not receive grant funding or financial incentives to cover part of the apprentices' salary.

The DfE said evidence from the funding pilot "will be used to inform considerations on any future expansions of funding grants for the teacher degree apprenticeship".

The announcement comes after Schools Week

reported last week how proponents of the route believe it presents a "glorious" opportunity for those without a degree to train to teach, will help bring under-represented groups into the profession and give schools a much-needed option to spend levy funding.

But they face an uphill battle to convince sceptics about the quality of the route, as unions warn it must not erode teachers' pay and conditions.

The providers

- Nottingham Trent University
- Staffordshire University, in partnership with the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Teacher Education Collective (SSTEC)
- University College London (UCL)
- University of Brighton
- University of Huddersfield
- University of Nottingham
- University of Wolverhampton
- Xavier Teach Southeast, in partnership with the University of Sussex

EXCLUSIVE

LUCAS CUMISKEY | @LUCAS_CUMISKEY

Teacher recruitment campaign gets animated to boost interest

Wannabe teachers can get a "taster" of the job through an "innovative" classroom-based simulation tool that the government hopes will boost recruitment.

The Department for Education has awarded a £15,000 year-long contract to Teacher Success Platform, a University of York spin-out company, to provide "access to realistic job preview tools". The animated videos present a series of "realistic" classroom scenarios to prospective trainees, who can watch a classroom situation unfold before a teaching dilemma is presented in which they must react to.

Examples include a pupil using their phone in class, a student acting up in a way that is unusual for them and how to "deal with tricky parents". The user gets feedback on their responses and a message about whether their decisions indicate they are a good fit for teaching.

The contract was awarded after a nine-month pilot of the software last year, in which 900

aspiring trainee teachers took part.

Rob Klassen, the firm's founder and director, and a professor of Education at University of Oxford, said: "We think it's innovative and probably unique to the DfE in using this for recruitment. They're looking for solutions to a real problem. And we think that this is one of the myriad of kind-of-useful directions to go in."

Links via email were sent to those applying for and gaining acceptance into initial teacher training programmes, and those reapplying after being rejected.

Klassen hopes using the tool will help win over people who are unsure teaching "is right for them" by showing them what the job entails and that they can do it. He also hopes it makes the teacher recruitment process more "informative, interactive, engaging".

"We also know that a lot of people aren't going to be able to go try teaching in a taster session because it's really hard to scale up to large numbers," he added. "This is a way of

making something that's pretty engaging and interactive, and also pretty scalable."

Those engaging are more likely to follow through with their application and not drop out during what can be a "lengthy wait before training actually begins", he said.

The tool is based on responses from hundreds of teachers collected from 2015 to 2021, funded via a European Research Council grant. The teachers helped generate "accurate and realistic and believable" scenarios, and the "most appropriate responses".

A survey of those who took part in the trial found four in five agreed they were more interested in exploring teaching as a career. This is based on about 900 responses.

A University of York study, running until 2025, aims to test how "online 'persuasive games' and online 'realistic job previews'" can boost teacher recruitment.

The DfE was approached for comment.

'A race to the bottom': Building repair grants fall as project costs rise

JACK DYSON & LUCAS CUMISKEY
@SCHOOLSWEEK

A school whose heating system was condemned after "flames shot out", plunging classroom temperatures to 8°C, is among those that have had bids for emergency maintenance funding rejected.

Just 826 projects at 733 schools have been allocated money through the Department for Education's £450 million Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) this year. The figures represent an almost 60 per cent fall in approved bids since 2020–21, when ministers gave 2,104 projects more than £563 million through the scheme. Bids from 1,283 schools were rejected this year.

The CIF pot is available to standalone academies or trusts with fewer than five schools wanting to keep a building "safe and in good working order".

Farmor's School in Fairford, Gloucestershire, bid for about £1.4 million to replace the heating system that operates across around two thirds of its site.

Issues with boilers, radiators and pipework have included regular breakdowns and leaks, and classroom temperatures ranging from "boiling hot" to "freezing cold", according to head Matthew Evans.

In October, two boilers were deemed unsafe by engineers after they emitted flames during a check-up and were found to pose a carbon monoxide risk. He stressed the issues were addressed before pupils were put at risk.

The situation resulted in classrooms getting "as cold as 8°C" during the winter, forcing the school to lease boilers that cost "tens of thousands" of pounds.

Government regulations do not specify the minimum temperatures for classrooms in schools but the National Education Union has said they should be "at least 18°C".

Evans said it was "really frustrating. What I don't understand is the school literally doesn't have a functioning heating system. It concerns me that the funding that has been allocated to capital projects in schools can't even cover keeping a heating system going."



Meanwhile, almost 22 per cent of greenlit applications came from schools willing to stump up large sums towards the overall cost of the project. Schools can only get full marks on the funding section of their bid if they pledge to pay more than 30 per cent of the work either out of their own pocket or via a loan, rather than relying fully on grant funding.

The average cost of a project rose, from £440,000 in the last round to £489,000, which suggests repairs have become larger and more expensive.

"[CIF] is supposed to assess the bids on the merit of their need, but clearly, if you've got money to invest, you're going to pick up some marks," said academy funding consultant Tim Warneford.

"It's a race to the bottom. Only the schools with most urgent need are going to be funded."

This month, *Schools Week* revealed the DfE raided capital coffers for £250 million to cover part of this year's teacher pay grant. It is understood that at least part of the underspend resulted from a slower-than-anticipated start to the school rebuilding programme, whose end date has now been pushed back two years to 2032 after its launch was impacted by Covid-19. This funding pot is separate to CIF.

The Public Accounts

Committee said this week that school buildings are now one of the "big nasties" – the big spending problems that a future government must solve because of the "lack of forward thinking" of the current government. It claimed the DfE had "failed to consider long-term value for money in school maintenance decisions. Problems with RAAC and asbestos have shown that, without a long-term plan, there is a huge impact when a problem crystallises."

It also noted 700,000 pupils were learning in schools that need major refurbishment and that 38 per cent of school buildings are beyond their initial design life.

Under the CIF scheme, special schools were most likely to be snubbed, as just 22 per cent of those that applied for cash were given the go-ahead. This compares to 34 per cent of primary bids and 43 per cent of secondary bids.

Only 29 per cent of eligible special schools lodged CIF bids – the lowest proportion of any school type.

Schools in the north east and south west were most likely to be snubbed.

Education Secretary Gillian Keegan said the government was "continuing to invest in the school estate, so all children are taught in the best classrooms for generations to come".



Gillian Keegan

'Consultation not referendum': Oliver defends 'Big Listen'

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

Ofsted's "Big Listen" is a "consultation" not a "referendum", chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver has said, as he defended the exercise following criticism from unions.

In a letter to National Association of Head Teachers general secretary Paul Whiteman, Oliver said he wanted to "dispel" the concern that data from the consultation "will be interpreted by Ofsted as a mandate to avoid change".

Ofsted launched the "Big Listen" – a 12-week consultation on further inspection changes following the death of headteacher Ruth Perry – earlier this month.

Whiteman wrote to Oliver on Thursday to express "significant concerns". The primary issue being "many of the aspects of the current approach to inspection that our members are most concerned about are not addressed through the sections of the survey that will produce quantitative data". The "most obvious example" is the lack of a "direct or clear question" about the use of single-phrase judgments to describe school performance.

"While there are free text boxes provided, our concern is this will only provide qualitative information, which could get easily lost or overlooked in comparison with the far easier to present results derived from the multiple-choice questions."



Sir Martyn Oliver

Oliver acknowledged Ofsted had received "significant challenge on whether we were right or not to have a question on single-word judgments". In a letter that again shows the watchdog has moved on from its previous closed-shop approach, he added: "The absence of a specific question in the consultation does not mean we are not listening to feedback from your members – and others – on the issue of single-word judgments.

"One respondent is so determined to use the available text boxes to ensure we hear the message that they have included 'get rid of the one-word judgments' as their gender, sexuality and religion, for example."

Oliver added that he interpreted "that there is a concern that data from the consultation, for example general support for giving a clear

judgment on the quality of education, will be interpreted by Ofsted as a mandate to avoid change".

"I want to categorically dispel that view. The consultation ... is a starting point for real action and improvement at Ofsted."

In his letter, Whiteman also described other "missed opportunities to really understand what respondents think about key issues relating to inspection".

For example, the questions on notice periods "have been drafted in an extremely vague manner, whereas there was an opportunity to directly ask something far more precise such as 'how much notice should a school/setting be given before an inspection is carried out?'"

The NAHT has "significant concerns about the way some questions have been designed and framed", and feels questions are "leading".

But Oliver insisted that the Big Listen is "first and foremost a listening exercise".

"I don't want to give the impression that we are conducting a referendum instead of a consultation. We are not naïve about the likely sample of respondents to our consultation.

"We know any 'vote' would not be representative of the views of all those we want to hear from. That said, we genuinely want to gather views on all matters relating to our work, from a broad church of respondents, which is why having an open consultation is so important."

LUCAS CUMISKEY | @LUCAS_CUMISKEY

Ofsted to publish LA school 'inadequates' during purdah

Ofsted will publish 'inadequate' inspection reports for local authority schools in the run up to the local elections, in a change to the rules.

However the inspectorate said it would hold back any individual report if needed, which "may be necessary where a particular inspection has been the focus of significant local political campaigning".

Elections are taking place in 107 local authorities across England on May 2. Voters in the capital will also elect the mayor of London and London Assembly members, while another nine directly-elected metro mayors will be picked.

The period of time immediately before elections is known as purdah. During that

time, public bodies are required to act in a politically neutral manner. It starts four weeks before local elections and applies only in areas where polls are taking place.

In the run up to the 2019 local elections, Ofsted said it would withhold from publishing 'inadequate' inspections of LA schools until after the polls.

But a guidance update this week revealed the watchdog will no longer do so.

Ofsted said it had "consolidated and simplified what we do and don't publish during pre-election silence to ensure that parents and professionals are getting inspection outcomes as quickly as possible and that we are only withholding reports where they might have a material impact on

the local or national election".

But for both general and council elections, Ofsted will "pause the publication of reports that make LA-wide judgements".

For the general election, due to be held later this year, it will not publish research and thematic reports which comment on government policy.

Previous DfE pre-election guidance for schools stated they "should be mindful to avoid activity within the school that could be construed as promoting a particular partisan political view and should take reasonable steps to ensure pupils are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views as part of these activities".

NEWS IN BRIEF

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

SATs reading test deemed OK by Ofqual

Last year's key stage 2 SATs reading test was harder than those set in recent years, but Ofqual found "no evidence" that it "failed to meet its stated purpose".

The exams regulator has published analysis of the test, which last year prompted complaints from parents and teachers that it left pupils in tears.

The score threshold for this year's test was 24, "indicating that its difficulty falls between the 2016 test and the tests administered since".

The threshold in 2016, when the test was found to be "unduly hard", was 21, and it has ranged between 26 and 29 since then.



The evidence also "suggests that lower attaining pupils, in particular, were likely to have experienced the 2023 test as more difficult than tests in the years after 2016".

But the analysis "found no evidence that the test failed to meet its stated purpose of ascertaining what pupils have achieved in relation to the attainment targets outlined in

the 2014 national curriculum".

The report added that "outcome data provided by STA suggests that the test was effective in differentiating across the ability range".

Ofqual's report also concluded that the overall delivery of SATs was "successful" last year, despite a week-long delay to the start of marking and problems accessing the results portal online.

But a survey of markers found 40 per cent felt their workload was not realistic, while more than 65 per cent said their pay was not satisfactory.

[Full story here](#)

Councils should check on 'managed moves' pupils

Councils should monitor outcomes for pupils who experience "managed moves" out of schools and involve an "independent" representative of children's best interest in their administration.

Education Policy Institute research found tens of thousands of pupils have "unexplained" moves out of school each year, with disadvantaged pupils "disproportionately" affected.

At least some of these "unexplained" exits are managed moves. These are allowed when agreed between heads, parents and pupils, but constitute off-rolling if not in a pupil's best interests.

Of pupils finishing year 11 in 2019, around 34,000, or six per cent, experienced around

37,000 unexplained moves at some point during their five years of secondary school.

Among the 2,959,950 pupils registered in a secondary school, the report found around 30,600, or about one per cent, experienced unexplained moves in 2018-19.

While data "does not tell us whether these moves would all meet the definition of a managed move", this second figure "provides an upper bound estimate of the number of managed moves occurring in secondary schools across the country in 2018-19".

However, data was only obtained from 66 councils. This means the lower estimate of managed moves in secondary schools was just over 5,300.

[Full story here](#)

Halfon resigns



Robert Halfon has resigned as skills minister and plans to stand down as an MP.

His decision comes ahead of this year's expected general election. Halfon, the MP for Harlow in Essex, became skills minister for the first time in 2016 but was sacked a year later by then-prime minister Theresa May.

He moved on to become chair of the education select committee, serving for five years, before returning to the skills brief in October 2022.

Luke Hall has since been appointed as his replacement.

Halfon has become well-known for his "ladder of opportunity" catchphrase and has presided over policies such as T-levels, the government's review of level 3 qualifications, careers education and 16 to 19 education funding.

Halfon signed off his resignation post with a quote from the Lord of the Rings, when Gandalf says to Frodo Baggins after the defeat of Sauron: "I am with you at present...but soon I shall not be. I am not coming to the Shire... My time is over: it is no longer my task to set things to rights, nor to help folk to do so."

[Full story here](#)

Oak National Academy reveals new curriculum partners

Oak National Academy has named new curriculum partners who successfully bid for a slice of £7 million to help create free lesson materials for eight more subjects.

The government quango's 14 new partners will create resources covering art and design, citizenship, computing, design and technology, modern foreign languages, PE, religious education and RSHE.

Contracts have also been awarded for primary music and secondary geography, after no supplier previously met its quality standards for these phases in its first procurement round.

Three of these were won by schools, with Ormiston Academies Trust selected for secondary RE and The Cam Academy Trust picked to develop MFL resources.

Most of the other lots went to an array of subject associations (See full list online).

Matt Hood, chief executive of Oak, said they were "drawing on every part of the education sector in this collaboration, meaning teachers will have access to some of the best curriculum thinking and resource design available".

[Full story here](#)

SOLUTIONS: MATS

MATs: From growing pains to gains

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

Academy conversions are on the rise and trusts are getting bigger. The average MAT now has more than eight schools on its books, up from six in 2019.

So as more leaders consider growth, what do we know about how to do this well?

Schools Week spoke to leaders who have helped right the ship after their trusts got growth wrong, and what they learned as they now set sights on expanding again.

Pause and take a breath

John Murphy, Oasis Community Learning Trust's former CEO, told an event earlier this month he was "irresponsible enough to take on 29 schools in special measures" between 2014 and 2016.

Rebecca Boomer-Clark, AET's chief executive, said there were "plenty of high-profile examples of MATs that simply grew too fast" at the start of the academy movement.

There were several other "near misses", she added, with trusts having "stretched their organisational capacity and bandwidth to the limit, and sometimes took several years to return to a steady state".

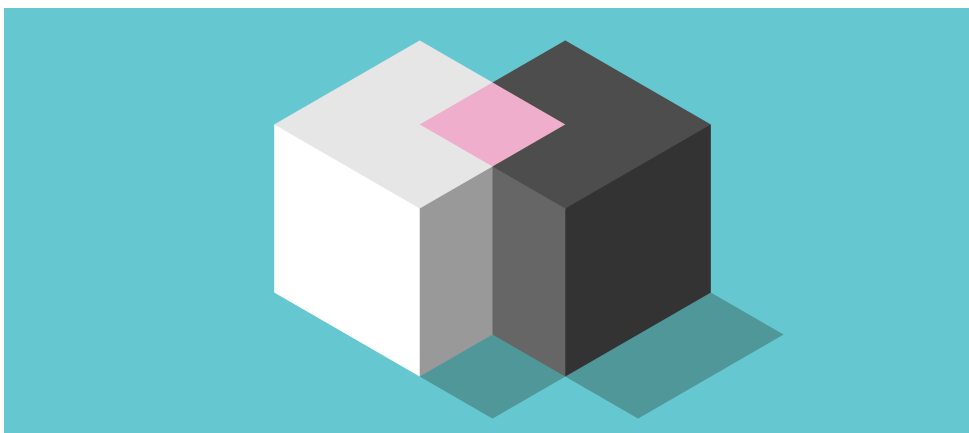
In 2013, AET was placed on a pause list by government, meaning it could not grow for four years.

"It would be irresponsible for us not to heed the lessons of the past," she added.

In 2018, Murphy paused Oasis's growth after realising "we can't keep on doing [it]. We had lots of successes ... we managed to get schools out of special measures, managed to raise results in a number of schools. But it was chaotic ... because we weren't systemising what we were doing."



John Murphy



He pointed to how youngsters across Oasis's schools would have a "a totally different education" to each other, despite being part of "the same organisation".

A batch inspection of 10 of the trust's academies in 2015 had concluded a "legacy of weak challenge and insufficiently systematic or rigorous improvement work" had "resulted in slow or little improvement for nearly half" of them.

Beware isolation

In 2016, then Ofsted chief Sir Michael Wilshaw published a scathing letter after several such "focused inspections", naming and shaming trusts for "serious weaknesses that were contributing to poor progress and outcomes for too many pupils".

Paul Tarn was appointed to lead one of them, the School Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA), the month before.

"They had schools in special measures, lots of RI schools and the finance was absolutely broken," Tarn recalled. "The trust also had a projected £8.6 million in-year deficit in 2016-17. It was a complete and utter mess."

East Midlands and the Humber regional schools commissioner Jennifer Bexon-Smith decided to strip the trust, since renamed Delta Academies Trust, of three "isolated" schools in Nottinghamshire.

A lesson was to not take on the odd school that is "geographically isolated" from others. Doing so would be "silly" as they "wouldn't be able to share resources – it would just be a vanity project".

The Department for Education pledged two years ago to focus more on giving chains clusters of schools.

Tarn has now set his sights on launching a "southern group", having taken on a pair of schools in Nottingham and Lincolnshire.



Rebecca Boomer-Clark

But "we think we might have a couple of others interested. We're looking for groups or clusters. If it's one school, [we look at] if it's large enough to put a cluster around it."

Growing in hubs

Tom Campbell, chief executive of E-ACT, which was also named in Wilshaw's letter, said the "clustering model ... adds resilience and infrastructure".

After being banned from expanding back in 2014, the trust is now expected to have 10 more schools on its book by the end of this year.

"If you go back to the beginning, you'd go 'why would you have schools in the northwest, southwest, London?'" he said. But he added: "We've now been there so long that we're embedded there and building around that."

In these areas, the trust has tried to add secondary provision where there is none and primaries in parts of the country where these are lacking. Campbell has looked to take on special schools "where we've got high needs in terms of SEND".

It ensures his trust maintains "operational capacity" as "all of that is already there", while enhancing his ability to maintain school

Continued on next page

SOLUTIONS: MATS

improvement. However, he fears other CEOs with an eye on growth may not be considering these aspects.

“If you look at advisory board minutes, you’ll see examples of small trusts with two or three schools suddenly becoming seven or eight overnight,” he said.

“You’re thinking, ‘Have they considered the impact on operational capacity, what their tools are around school improvement?’”

Among those joining E-ACT is a school that acts as a feeder to the trust’s only secondary in Daventry, west Northamptonshire. Campbell said the addition means “we [now] provide most of the education for the town”.

It is also due to subsume The Venturers Trust, an eight-school chain in Bristol, over the summer. Campbell runs six schools in the area, also used as a base for central team members.

“It’s thought through – it’s not scattergun,” Campbell continued. “We wanted to work where we were already working because we have the operational infrastructure there ... it meant that any growth could focus on school improvement.”

Making trusts ‘a family’

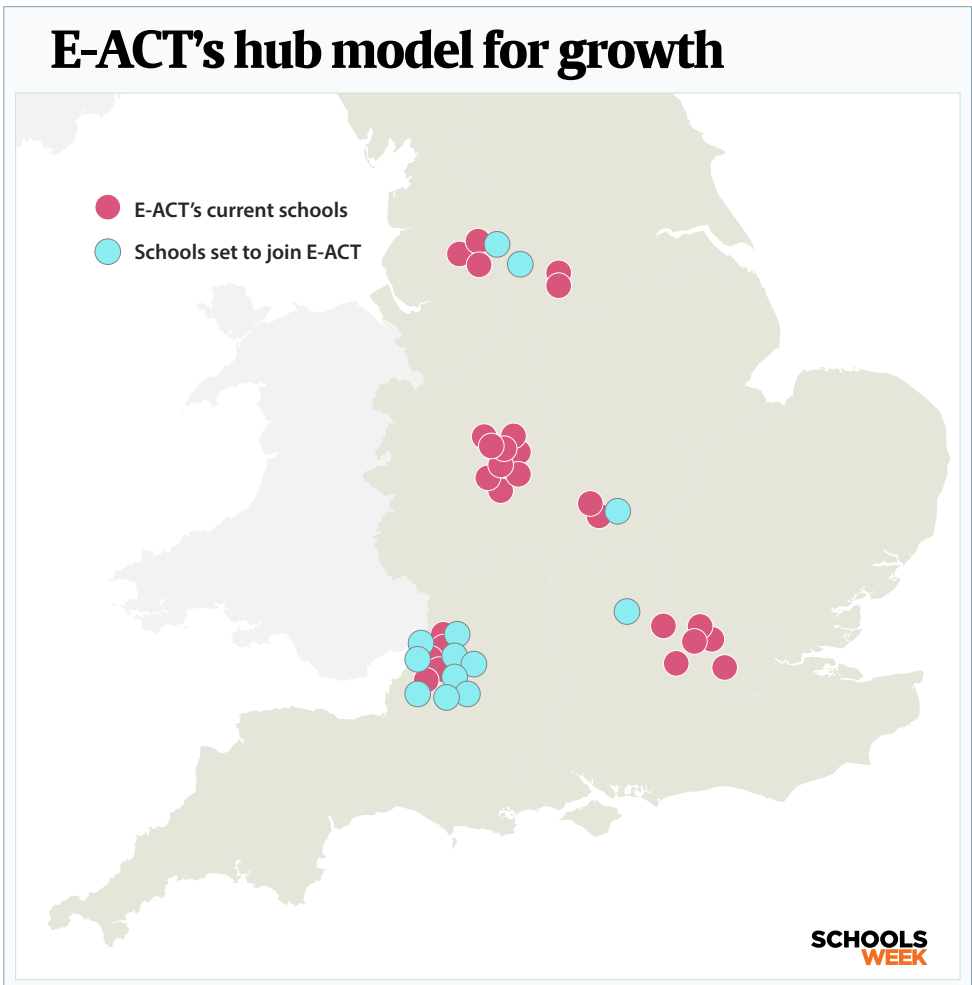
Wilshaw’s letter suggested that some trusts were not providing “robust oversight, challenge and support to ensure that pupils in all their academies receive a good quality of education”.

Both Tarn and Murphy said some of their issues stemmed from schools not working and teaching in a similar manner.

When Tarn took over SPTA he found teachers across his academies had not been able to collaborate “on high-quality resources and share the workload”. Instead, they were working in “small silos”. In history, there were “about 16 different specifications”. To solve this, he introduced shared curriculum plans. Subject specialists were then appointed to work across the academies.

“Today we have common assessments, gap analysis that helps children, resources that go with that and we deploy staff where we see things aren’t going well. It doesn’t mean everybody’s doing the right thing – it means you’ve got a common spine that runs through the trust.”

At the point, Murphy brought his expansion to a halt, he realised his trust was not acting as “one family... I had 52 schools doing 48 different curriculums.” To aid this, his team devised an “Oasis curriculum”. Statements of intent were drawn up and shared along with “schemes of work in lesson plans”. Every academy was given



“an individual plan that was then differentiated according to that school’s stage and journey”.

“What I was doing was going through a process of having individual academies with shared aims, shared processes and creating that sense of organisational synergy,” Murphy added.

Campbell noted that across his clusters of schools, in the likes of Birmingham and Bristol, he now has “hundreds” of maths teachers.

This means the trust has “to learn how to unlock that capacity, connect the best teachers, share the best practice, or accelerate school improvement”.

Delta shares “all” its “data with everyone in the trust”, allowing heads to compare notes on performance. Regular network meetings are held with leaders and the trust’s core team.

“When you put systems in place and everybody pulls in the same direction, rather than against each other,” Tarn added, “it’s likely you’ll make rapid progress.”

Sharing lessons learned

Righting the ships has put these trusts in an ideal position to share wider lessons with others.

Through its Project H, AET is sharing the work



because it wants to “celebrate our successes”, but also “believe in the power of learning from setbacks and embracing failure”.

Campbell added it is “incumbent on larger trusts to make their resources available for others”. E-ACT has started to run “ideas conferences “where we invite staff from outside the trust to benefit from our training, events, speakers.

“We did growth in system leadership capacity, so before we took on more schools we said ‘are there trusts or other projects we can support?’

“We’re not hiding that capacity – we’re going ‘we’ve got some great stuff. It’s working in our schools – would it work in yours?’”

Lack of 'capacity-giver' schools forces small trust into merger

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

EXCLUSIVE

A six-school trust is set to join one of England's biggest MATs after it found all nearby "capacity-giver" schools had already been academised.

Coast and Vale Learning Trust decided merging was its only option after being told by the Department for Education it would not be allowed to take on any more schools in deficit. The trust will now join 57-school Delta Academies Trust.

Trust mergers are on the up and sector leaders say the dwindling stock of local authority secondary schools will lead more to join forces.

Confederation of School Trusts CEO Leora Cruddas said: "Given the challenges the school system is facing now, and will continue to face, we believe that those leading our schools and trusts should ensure that they are part of a strong and sustainable group of schools, working together in a single legal entity to secure good outcomes for children."

However, she warned of the importance of finding the "right match".

Coast and Vale director of education Michael McCluskie said the trust has two schools on its books that are carrying a combined deficit of about £1 million. But in discussions with the regional director, bosses learned they would not be given the greenlight to absorb any others running at a loss.

McCluskie said the "DfE didn't rule out growth" and that it was "open to conversations" about taking on primary schools rated 'good' by Ofsted and with "some money in the bank". But they would not "bring in as much money" as secondaries.

"[Capacity-giver] schools locally were already in a trust or had already made applications to join another trust, so we were limited in terms of the schools we could actually approach. We still had plenty of cash in the bank, but in terms of taking on more schools – which is what the DfE wanted us to do – it would have presented us with an unacceptable risk."

When it later advertised for a new CEO, the brief for the role stated it would be "an interim post", with the new chief expected "to manage a merger ... within the next two years", McCluskie added.



Coast and Vale
WHERE LEARNERS AND STAFF THRIVE

After seeing the notice, the trust was approached by Paul Tarn, the CEO of Delta Academies Trust. He proposed stepping into the interim role and "if you like what you see, you take a decision at a later stage over whether you'd like to formally join us".

From April 1, Tarn will be Coast and Vale's chief executive and accounting officer. He said trustees have come to an "in-principle agreement" to join Delta.

Both sets of trustees must carry out due diligence and the regional director will have to give the proposals the green light before it becomes official.

"If we were in a position where we can't grow and influence the educational agenda on the Yorkshire coast, that would really thwart what the trust was set up to do," McCluskie added. "Joining a bigger partner and becoming a hub for Delta would help us to realise that."

All of Coast and Vale's schools are based in North Yorkshire, which is one of 55 education investment areas earmarked for multi-academy trust expansions by the DfE.

Trust development statements setting out its vision for schools across the local authority state government would welcome "growth proposals from existing trusts operating in the area". It also encourages "proposals from existing MATs based outside North Yorkshire to increase capacity and choice for maintained schools and SATs".

Mark Greatrex, who leads a 10-academy MAT and has advised others on their structures, believes there will be "a lot more" mergers as the sector "matures". He, too, is eyeing potential mergers as he bids to grow his trust to 24 schools.

"It's the way things are going to go. Growing one by one is challenging and not sustainable. [I'm] willing for any organisation with a vacancy to think about working with another organisation, as well as considering whether they replace their CEO."

The government has said it expects that "most trusts will be on a trajectory to either serve a minimum of 7,500 pupils or run at least 10 schools" by 2030.

Cruddas noted, though, that there are "lots of different approaches to trust size, with some successful and viable trusts at all levels".

For her, "the important thing is not the size of a trust but whether the organisation is focused on building educational excellence and resilience".



Leora Cruddas

NEWS: SOCIAL COHESION

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

Social cohesion review: what schools need to know

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Ministers should legislate for a 150-metre “buffer zone” to prevent protests directly outside schools and better support leaders facing “flashpoints”, the government-commissioned Khan review has said.

Dame Sara Khan’s report on social cohesion warned “numerous intimidatory protests outside schools” had left “teaching staff and pupils frightened”.

Schools faced a lack of guidance on how to teach contentious issues, prompting fears teachers will “shy away” from some topics.

Levelling-up secretary Michael Gove said Khan was “right about the need for new government architecture to protect our democracy and tackle threats to cohesion. Rapid work is currently underway that will do just that.

“I will publish the government’s full response to the Khan Review before Parliament rises for the summer break”

The review found a “widespread phenomenon of extreme forms of harassment leading individuals into silence, self-censoring, or abandoning their democratic rights”.

Khan dubbed this “freedom-restricting harassment”, which “involves but is not limited to, acts of doxing, inciting hatred and violence against individuals and their families, sending death and rape threats, and other forms of



Dame Sara Khan

threatening behaviour”. This form of harassment and resultant censorship “is creating a ‘chilling impact’ on freedom of expression and other democratic freedoms”, the report said.

The review warned victims of such harassment suffered “devastating impacts yet are often not treated as victims or offered the support they need”. It added there had been “numerous intimidatory protests outside schools which have left teaching staff and pupils frightened”. Many protests were “exploited by Muslim fundamentalist and extremist actors”.

Khan said ministers should legislate for a 150-metre buffer zone to prevent protests immediately outside schools, with the “possible exception of pickets relating to industrial action by school staff”.

The review said the Department for Education should establish a Cohesion and Conflict Unit

that brings together existing advice to schools “such as the teaching of fundamental British values, dealing with political impartiality and others”. It would provide “clearer guidance and resources on other areas of conflict including when protected characteristics conflict and other controversial issues”.

The unit should provide “better support and care for schools and teachers who find themselves being threatened and harassed”. This should include “immediate support for those schools and teachers who are having to deal with flashpoint incidents”.

The review heard the “growing targeting of teachers and the teaching of controversial subjects beyond blasphemy is being increasingly viewed as too high risk”.

For example, witnesses said there was “little national guidance on teaching controversial issues often found in RS and personal, social, health and economic lessons”. They expressed concerns teachers would “shy away from such topics”.

This is “made worse by the lack of guidance on what should or should not be taught, what is optional and what is not”.

Brendan Cox, husband of the murdered Labour MP Jo Cox, said the review “reveals the chronic neglect of social cohesion policy in our country. Its recommendations mirror many of those in previous reviews. It’s not that we don’t know what to do to – we are simply failing to act.”

LUCAS CUMISKEY | @LUCAS_CUMISKEY

Teacher who showed pupils Muhammad cartoon was ‘utterly failed’

A teacher driven into hiding by a blasphemy lesson row was “totally and utterly failed” by his employer and local agencies, a government adviser has said.

Dame Sara Khan’s damning report on social cohesion accused Batley Multi Academy Trust, Kirklees Council and West Yorkshire Police of failings relating to the high-profile case at Batley Grammar School, in Kirklees, in March 2021.

It saw protests erupt outside the school gates after the religious studies teacher showed year nine pupils “a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad wearing a turban containing a cartoon bomb” as part of a religious studies lesson.

He was subjected to a “campaign of

intimidation and abuse”, including “incitement to violence against both him and his family”, who feared for their lives. They had to move into temporary accommodation, with his children sleeping on mattresses and missing months of school.

The trust suspended the teacher and apologised for the offence caused amid the furore, but an independent probe later cleared him of any wrongdoing.

“In failing to understand the seriousness of the incident, he was let down by all the agencies involved,” Khan said, adding it is “vital that lessons are learnt to help improve support and guidance for schools”. On Sunday, she said he had been “totally and utterly failed”.

However, the trust cited “factual inaccuracies” in the review, saying it does not “recognise much of what is in it, its description of the events, nor the characterisation of our school and community”.

It said government was informed of the issues prior to publication, but none were corrected. The trust did not respond to several requests to explain which information was incorrect.

A Kirklees Council spokesperson said it will “look carefully at the recommendations and any lessons to be learned”.

A West Yorkshire Police spokesperson added it has noted “the recommendations, which we will be reviewing with our partner agencies”.

LONG READ: SEND

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

SEND reforms a decade on: how it all went wrong, and how to fix it

SAMANTHA BOOTH
@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

Ten years ago, the “biggest education reforms in a generation” for youngsters with special needs gained royal assent under the Children and Families Act.

Billed as a “landmark moment” to improve SEND education, then children’s minister Edward Timpson said the reforms would “put children and parents at the heart of the system”.

Fast-forward to today, and the system is in crisis. Councils are on the verge of bankruptcy. Parents have to battle in court for promised support. Vulnerable children are waiting years for help.

Schools Week interviewed more than a dozen experts, including key decision-makers, to unpick what went wrong, and how we can fix it...

Parents promised more as austerity bites

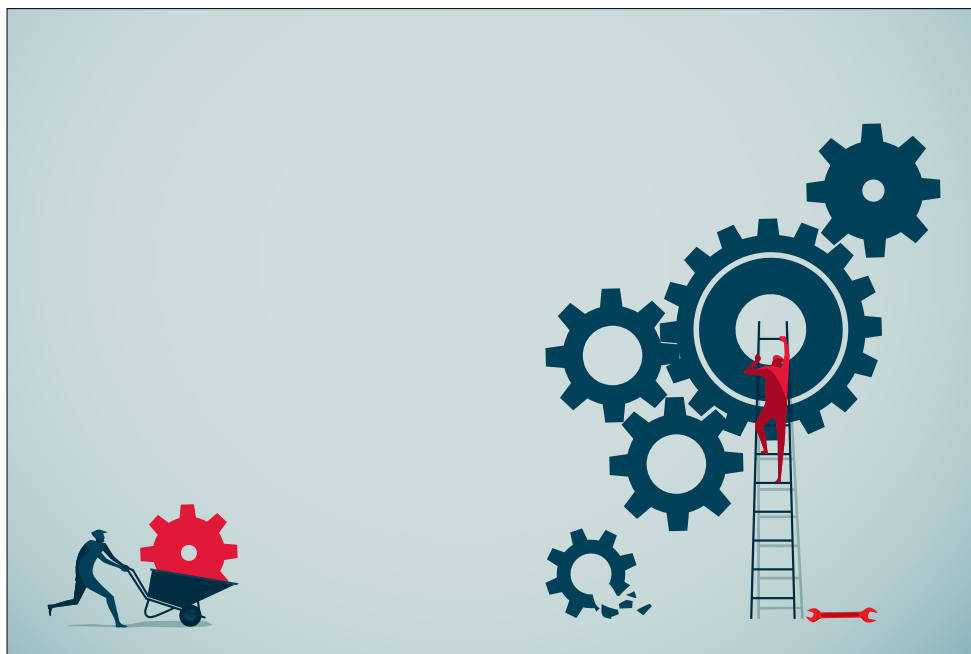
The reforms replaced statements of SEND with education, health and care plans (EHCPs).

EHCPs put more emphasis on personal goals. They also clearly describe the support pupils will receive to meet those ambitions. And they were extended to 16 to 25-year-olds.

The number of EHCPs across all ages has risen 115 per cent to 517,049 since 2015. There has only been a 6 per cent rise in school-aged pupils over that time.

Some of the main drivers include greater awareness of SEND, more complex needs and the extended age range. But some experts point to an austerity-driven decline in the ability of mainstream schools to provide general special-needs support. This has pushed more families into securing help via a plan.

The government’s 2022 SEND green



paper admitted early years and mainstream schools were “ill-equipped” to identify and support pupil’s needs.

Brian Lamb, whose review influenced the 2014 reforms, said while there was an “understandable focus” on getting EHCPs right, there wasn’t “an equally balanced focus” on enhancing the “ordinarily available provision”.

The number of EHCP has risen more sharply than overall SEND identification in schools. This suggests families and schools felt plans were needed to guarantee help.

“You can see after about four or five years that, as people lost faith in many areas in what was available under ordinarily available provision, you start to get the real push for EHCPs.”

Support on offer under the new EHCPs became a legal requirement. Plans had to be issued by councils within 20 weeks and then reviewed every 12 months.

Hollowed out by their own austerity cuts, councils are unable to cope. Last year, just 49.2 per cent of plans were issued within the



Stephen Kingdom



Brian Lamb

20-week legal limit – the lowest ever. The figure is as low as three per cent at some councils.

Laura McInerney, co-founder of Teacher Tapp – who covered the issues while editor of *Schools Week* – said: “The good intentions of EHCPs destigmatised diagnosis and incentivised labels via a promise of support.

“Sadly, it came at the same time as local authorities (LAs) were made responsible for 19- to 25-year-olds, yet forced to make huge cuts. So, you’ve ended up with an open cheque book approach – but no open bank vault.”

Continued on next page

LONG READ: SEND

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

The funding doom loop

Anne Longfield, former children’s commissioner, added that the “biting impact” of austerity meant wider support services, such as mental health, “have seen higher thresholds, less ability and capacity to be able to work in partnership outside their box, and a push away from early intervention and towards more costly intervention [for] much more acute provision”.

The gap between council spending on early and late intervention services in England widened to more than £7.7 billion last year. This is up from £3.9 billion in cash terms in 2015–16.

Unaddressed needs normally worsen down the line and costs everyone more. Councils have a combined deficit in their high-needs budgets – funding for children with SEND – of nearly £1.6 billion. More than half are now reliant on government intervention.

The government has committed to bailouts of more than £1 billion for the worst-affected councils under its “safety valve” scheme. However, councils can only get the cash if they slash their own provision. One council recently refused a deal because the expected cuts would mean it would break the law.

High-needs deficits have sat off councils’ balance sheets for years. This measure was recently extended until 2026, after concerns removing it would bankrupt 10 councils.

Government has committed cash. Annual high-needs funding now sits at £10.5 billion – a rise of 60 per cent in just five years. But councils say it still doesn’t meet demand. Many are using the cash to fill black holes, rather than passing it on to schools as intended.

A third of councils did not increase top-up funding – additional school funding for



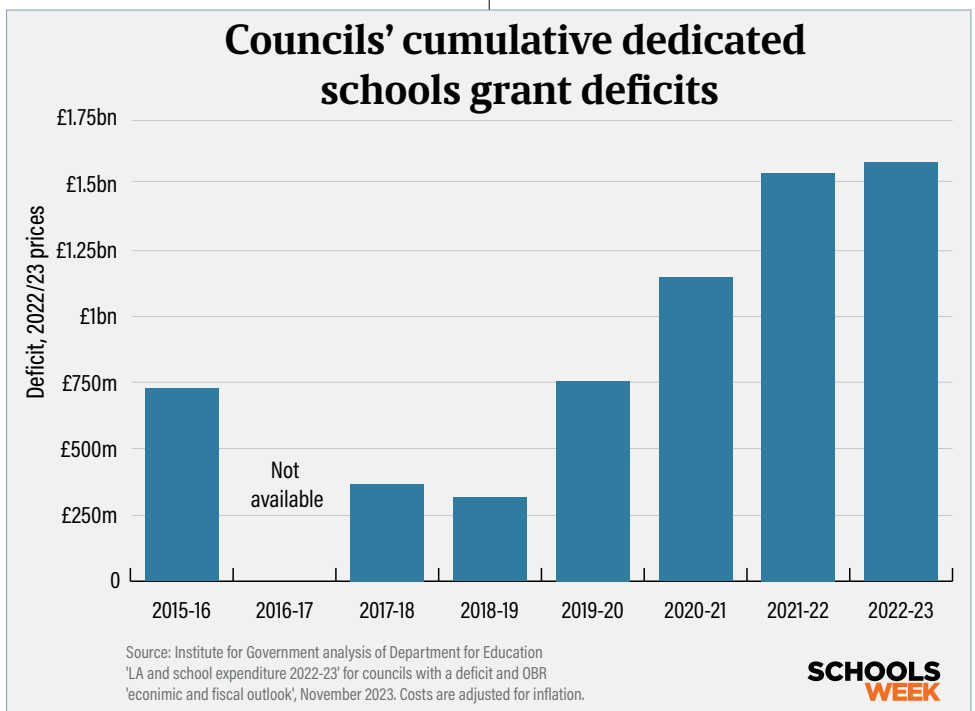
“ Very rarely do you get a window of opportunity to get legislation – you’ve got to grab it

pupils with high needs – between 2018 and last year. The £10,000 per-place funding special schools get for every child has remained static since 2014.

Funding constraints mean mainstream schools are less able to cope with rising

and worsening additional needs. At least two-thirds of special schools are now at, or over, capacity. Some are converting therapy spaces and cupboards into classrooms.

This has forced councils to use the more expensive private sector to meet demand.



Continued on next page

LONG READ: SEND

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

Their spend on independent special schools soared from £576 million in 2015-16, to £1.3 billion in 2021-22.

The 2010 academies act “neutered” councils from opening their own schools, said Warren Carratt, chief executive of Nexus MAT. This meant they were reliant on sluggish central government.

Ministers have committed £2.6 billion to expand specialist state provision between 2022 and 2025. But it’s coming too late, and many previously promised new free schools are still not open.

Timpson admitted “the way the system is funded has perhaps made it more difficult for schools to be able to respond and flex to individual children’s needs”.

He said it is not as “simplistic” as blaming austerity. But it “would be churlish to not admit” that having less money “can make it difficult to push the money that’s available into upstream services”.

Not enough workforce capacity building

Another big problem was implementation. Anne Heavey, a teacher at the time of the reforms, received just one afternoon of training on the new code of practice from her local council.

“We knew it was going to be difficult because we knew it was being rolled out in a difficult environment where there was massive reform in the school system,” said Stephen Kingdom, deputy director of SEND at the DfE in 2014.

Reforms at the time included exams, the new Progress 8 accountability measure and academy expansion.

Timpson “wished we had done more capacity building in the system before the legislation... the transition could have been slowed down a little. But I still strongly believe the overall legal framework that the act created is the right one.”

“Very rarely do you get a window of opportunity to get legislation and even less so on things like children’s social care or SEND – so you’ve got to grab it.”

Timpson lost his seat in the 2017 election, meaning new ministers took charge of the reforms. He said he fought “really hard” to get extra Treasury cash for educational psychologist training. But “it always feels like we are playing catch-up”.

There are wider workforce challenges.



“ How do you do reform in an environment where money is so tight?

Last July, the vacancy rate for speech and language therapists (SALT) in England’s children’s services was 23 per cent, according to a survey by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists.

Recent ombudsman investigations revealed nearly 20 councils have, in part, blamed delays on EHCPs on a shortage of educational psychologists (EPs), who play a key role in needs assessments. Analysis suggests there are 381 fewer EPs in 2022-23 compared to 2010.

A damning 2019 report by the education select committee found that health and social care services were still not “equal partners” in the EHCP process, as promised.

Kingdom said the implementation focused “too much on the mechanics” of moving from statements to EHCPs.

“We did stuff on SENCO training and educational psychologists, but I don’t think we did enough on the workforce really at that time. We also lost a lot of expertise in local authorities.”

No enforcement means ‘endemic law breaking’

The education select committee also said the distance between young people’s lived experiences and

ministers’ desks “is just too far”. Government had “failed to heed warnings” of the problems.

Ed Duff, education lawyer at HCB solicitors, said the “cooperation” required of local authorities under the reforms was “supposed to be this legal magic wand where ‘everyone’s got to behave nicely now because we told you too’. But it’s nonsense and meaningless without any enforcement or sanction.”

Families’ only appeal route against LAs breaching their EHCP duties is through first-tier tribunals. Appeals have more than quadrupled to 13,600 a year since the reforms came in. Tribunals now side with families in 98.3 per cent of appeals.

Between 2016 and 2022, 55 per cent of areas failed Ofsted SEND inspections. Since January 2023, under a new framework, a third have “widespread and/or systemic failings”.

Catriona Moore, policy manager at SEND charity IPSEA, said “non-compliance with the law is endemic” without “any real consequences for local authorities”.

But Kingdom said the DfE was “worried that if we got really hard on accountability from day one, we



Warren Carratt

LONG READ: SEND

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

just break local authorities. We wanted to support them to change.”
The school system has fragmented since 2014, with the number of academies nearly doubling to more than 10,000.
Barney Angliss, SEND adviser, said this meant “local authorities have lost the close involvement with a lot of schools”.

What is being done to solve it?

The government has a plan. Its SEND reforms aim to shift towards more inclusive mainstream schools.

But only £70 million in extra funding accompanies the plan. National rollout is not expected until 2025 at the earliest.
Wider work is ongoing to better train teachers on SEND, including a bigger focus in the new teacher training framework.
Former children’s minister Claire Coutinho said it was “important that we consult and take time to get it right” – showing lessons have been learned”.

But change has been slow, with seven ministers since the SEND review launched in 2019. It’s likely a new government will have to finish the job.

Timpson admitted there has “just not been the political backdrop for the necessary ongoing and systematic focus”.

Labour said it will wait until after the election to set out its plan to tackle the “enormous” challenge facing the SEND system.

Meg Hillier, Labour chair of the public accounts committee, warned that SEND had now become one of the government’s “big nasties” requiring “essential spending which cannot be put off”.

Sam Freedman, an ex-DfE policy adviser, said Labour would have no choice but to clear councils’ deficits.

“The question is do they just do that and try and reset the system? Or do they take the opportunity to try and do a bigger reform?”

If they choose the latter, the issue is “how do you do that reform in an environment where money is so tight and where there’s so much emotion and frustration”

The Local Government Association and County Councils Network have commissioned Isos Partnership to look at what a “financially sustainable”



Meg Hillier

SEND system looks like.

Researchers have proposed “fundamental reform” of mainstream education, such as “national expectations of inclusion” and strengthening SEN support – for children without an EHCP.

They also suggest reform of the independent market with stronger regulation and a “national framework on rates to avoid fee inflation”.

Timpson also warned the cash that councils get from government to spend on schools and children – “was – and remains – inflexible. It may not be spent on other local government functions.”

A “more pragmatic approach would have enabled the funding to be deployed to greater effect”.

Moore said inclusivity in mainstream schools was made harder because support for pupils with SEND but without EHCPs is not defined in law. This means “a lack of clarity” on

what good support looks like.

Making this statutory, by inserting a new section in the Children’s and Families Act, would “focus minds in education settings” to provide what children need. But again, leaders say this requires extra funding to rebuild the services cut via austerity.

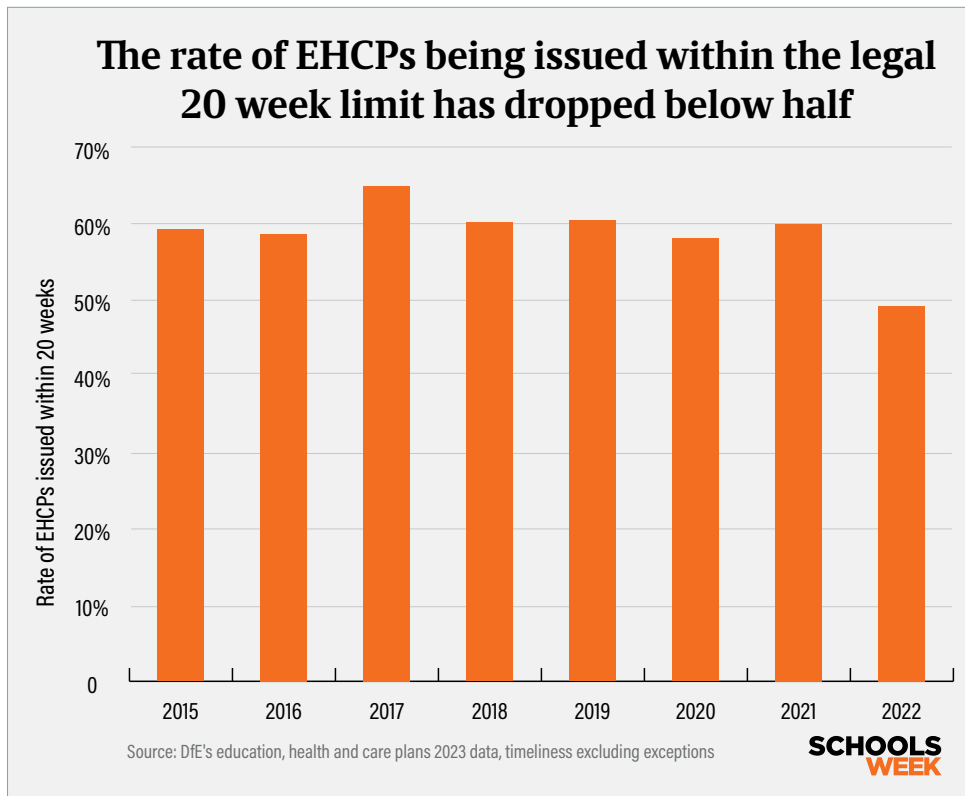
This week, children’s commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza recommended that an Ofsted and Care Quality Commission inspection should be triggered by council failures exposed during the tribunal process.

Either way, Kingdom says a “culture change” is essential. Last month, three councillors at Warwickshire County Council were removed from a committee after questioning whether some SEND children “were just really badly behaved” and “needed a form of strict correction”.

“Do we have a system that is really about achieving the best for all children?” he added. “If we change that culture and attitude, then we can get in earlier and provide that support.”



Dame Rachel de Souza



Barran: Labour's private school VAT plan could push up EHCP rates

SAMANTHA BOOTH & FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@SCHOOLSWEEK

Labour's plan to charge private schools VAT could pile pressure on councils as more parents are "pushed" into seeking statutory SEND support plans, the academies minister has said.

If it wins the next election, Labour plans to end the VAT exemption for independent schools.

According to reports, pupils with education, health and care plans (EHCPs), issued by councils, will be exempt.

Labour refused to confirm to *Schools Week* what the exact exemption is, despite multiple requests for clarification. However, a Labour spokesman told the *Telegraph*: "Places that are funded by EHCPs for children with special educational needs will not have a higher cost as a result of VAT."

According to an Independent Schools Council survey of its members, about 100,000 private school pupils have special educational needs or disabilities. Just 7,100 have an EHCP.

In the Lords last week, academies minister Baroness Barran claimed the exemption would



Helen Hayes

"push those parents into seeking an EHCP, with all the knock-on effects on local authority finances that we can see around the country".

Nearly two-thirds of councils had cumulative deficits in their dedicated schools grants as of March last year. Some cash-strapped councils claim the rise in EHCPs is putting pressure on their finances.

Tom Richmond, director at the EDSK think tank, said while the exemption is "well intentioned", it could "create a perverse incentive for independent school parents to pursue" an EHCP.

Parents have the right to request a certain school for their child to attend if they have an EHCP and councils can only refuse this in limited

circumstances.

There is also the issue of how the plan would impact private special schools, increasingly used by councils as state special schools are full.

Most of the pupils in these schools have EHCPs, so would be exempt. But *Schools Week* analysis of government data suggests about 1,600 pupils across a third of those schools still do not have plans.

In a Westminster Hall debate last month, Labour's shadow children's minister Helen Hayes said the reasons for not exempting all children at the schools was to "avoid a loophole whereby any school can claim that it is a special school" and "evade the policy".

Some of these schools told the *Telegraph* children had attended these schools because the state sector could not meet their needs and family members were taking on second jobs to pay the fees.

Last year, shadow education secretary Bridget Phillipson said private schools should "reflect on where they could be making savings" so they can cover the VAT on fees for parents.

Julia Robinson, ISC chief executive, said they are "deeply concerned" about the "potential disruption" to children with SEND's education.

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

Trusts selected to run 30 new special free schools

Twenty-five academy trusts have been selected to run 30 new special free schools – but the process to find trusts for three schools will have to be re-run.

Wellspring Academy Trust will run three of the schools in Birmingham, North East Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire.

Ethos Academy Trust, Ascendancy Partnership Trust and MacIntyre Academies Trust will run two each (see full list online).

However, two areas are not on the Department for Education's successful applicants list – including two schools in Cheshire East and one on the Isle of Wight.

The DfE said it was not able to appoint a trust to run these schools so they will "shortly be re-running a process to find a high-quality trust for these schools".

It said it is committed to "only appointing the strongest trusts to run new free schools, whose

applications show that their proposed school will provide the best outcomes for the children attending".

Last year, the DfE confirmed the 33 areas that were successful in their bid for a new special free school. Since then, organisations have been applying to run them, before they enter the pre-opening phase. But special free schools can take years to open and some have been beset with delays.

All but one of the council areas are part of the government's high deficit intervention programmes.

Schools Week investigations have exposed the special school capacity crisis. Last week, the first government data on the issue found that two thirds were full or over capacity.

Susan Douglas, chief executive of the Eden Academy Trust, which will run a special school in Hillingdon, said: "We know the life-changing

impact that a successful special school can have on pupils and families and we are proud to work with the DfE and local authorities to expand places where we can so that more pupils are in the right setting."

The DfE has also confirmed council allocations for the £850 million to create new places for youngsters with SEND. This is part of the £2.6 billion investment between 2022 and 2025.

DfE said that there will be 60,000 new specialist places. Two-thirds of these will be from capital investment, while the free schools programme will create over 21,000 places.

Education secretary Gillian Keegan said: "All too often I hear from parents with children who have special educational needs having to fight to get the right support.

"That's why this government has a plan to deliver 60,000 more places that meet the needs of these pupils and their families."

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

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

Movers & Shakers

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



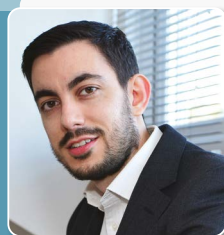
Richard Reeve

Headteacher, Rockwood Academy, CORE Education Trust

Start date: Friday, March 22

Previous/current job: Headteacher, Buile Hill Academy, Manchester

Interesting fact: Richard's love of literature has led to a collection of more than 1,500 books, including rare editions.



David Weston

AI lead, Purposeful Ventures

Start date: Monday, April 1

Previous/current job: Co-chief executive, Teacher Development Trust

Interesting fact: David once taught ballroom dancing on a cruise ship, going by the name 'Alex' while on board. The crew bar is zero tax and everyone parties very hard...



Amanda Parry

Chief executive, HISP Multi Academy Trust

Start date: Monday, April 1

Previous/current job: Deputy chief executive, HISP

Interesting fact: While growing up, Amanda aspired to be a spy. But settling for education, she has worked for the past 20 years mostly focusing on school improvement and partnerships (made an OBE in 2022)



Lee Wilson

Chief executive, Outwood Grange Academies Trust

Start date: March

Previous/current job: Interim chief executive, OGAT

Interesting fact: Lee is an adventurous and avid traveller, and spent last summer trekking in Indonesia. He got married at Christmas.



Anneliese Yafai

Trust lead practitioner for languages, CORE Education Trust

Start date: April

Previous/current job: Director of languages and NCLE MFL hub lead, CORE

Interesting fact: Anneliese featured in a CBBC fly-on-the-wall-style school documentary series. She has never been able to live down some of her famous sayings since.

Dr Mary Bosted appointed an honorary professor at UCL

FEATURED

Former National Education Union general secretary Dr Mary Bosted has been appointed an honorary professor at UCL's Institute of Education.

The trade unionist, who also led the Association of Teachers and Lecturers from 2003 until its merger with the National Union of Teachers in 2017, has joined the IOE's Centre for Teachers and Teaching Research.

She has joined to "continue her work on teacher professionalism, the causes of the teaching crisis, and possible solutions to

the issue", the university said.

Bosted will "contribute to the centre's research on professional learning and practice to support the development of teaching as an agentive profession, with the aim of enhancing educators' capacity to impact inequalities".

A former English teacher, Bosted studied at the IOE for a Master's degree in language and literature in education. After teaching, she led teacher education programmes at Edge Hill University and Kingston University.



Dr Mary Bosted

SCHOOLS WEEK



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

Did you know about the Schools Week Daily Bell?

Schools Week also publishes a daily email delivering the top education stories straight into your inbox at 5.30pm. And it's free!

You can sign up here



Profile

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL

Looking to the Future after online harassment

Lawrence Foley went from school refuser to doctor in modernist literature – but his career almost came to a crashing halt after a vicious online campaign

Lawrence Foley was sitting in a park with his wife Sonia when his phone rang. It was the Metropolitan Police. A social media campaign, accusing Foley of being a racist for excluding three children – one of whom had punched a teacher – was spiralling. It had reached the inbox of ministers. The officer told Foley death threats against him meant they were putting a marker on his phone. If he called 999, armed police would be dispatched immediately – for his own safety.

His wife asked if it was “time to call a day” on the profession he loved. Several sleepless nights later, Foley (luckily) decided to stick it out.

Now chief executive of the 10-school Future Academies trust, Foley tells his story in the week a government review found a breakdown in social cohesion is increasingly putting the safety of school staff at risk.

It’s a dark chapter in what is a colourful life, where a teenage school refuser became a financial trader and doctor in modernist literature, before rising through the ranks of school leadership.

Dickens by night

Foley comes from Irish Catholic stock in Stratford. He attended a secondary school in Newham so “appalling” (the English and maths GCSE pass rate was nine per cent) that his parents (a teaching assistant and kitchen sales manager) pulled him out aged 11 and sent him to school 90 minutes away in Epping.

He initially found it “difficult to make friends” at St John’s Church of England School, where “parents were dropping kids off in Land Rovers”. It felt a world apart from multicultural Newham. He “hated” it. Foley skipped school 40 per cent of the time, but turned a corner in year nine upon discovering the joy of playing rugby.

He feels “really lucky” now that his “really supportive family and peer group” put him back on the straight and narrow.

“Nowadays, that peer group is whoever kids interact with on social media. The challenge for schools is to have a stronger culture than that one they’re experiencing out there in the ether.”

After getting “pretty average” GCSEs, Foley followed in the footsteps of his uncles and quit

school to work in construction. But after a year he found it “knackered” and enrolled at sixth form instead.

Foley later joined KPMG’s accountancy trainee programme, assuming it would be “glamorous”. The reality was “grim hotels in Luton, doing spreadsheets of VAT receipts”.

He spent evenings commiserating with books by Charles Dickens and Ernest Hemingway, picked up from charity shops. He indulged his growing love of literature with an English degree at Queen Mary University, while continuing to work in finance.

He then worked as a trader for IG Index. Fortunately when the 2008 credit crunch hit, a generous voluntary redundancy package enabled him to do an English literature Masters at UCL without having to work while studying.

False impressions

Foley’s attentions turned to school education upon spotting an ad for trainee teachers at Future’s Pimlico Academy. He was put on an in-house scheme funded by the trust’s sponsor, former

Profile: Lawrence Foley

academies minister Lord Nash.

Foley is keen to challenge what he says are false perceptions over the trust, including the involvement of Lord Nash and his wife in its work. “The reality is that you see them very little,” he says.

But the Nashes do still donate around £1 million to Future’s schools (£100,000 each) every year, and Foley works with them on how to spend it. He wants Future to be somewhere that “people from backgrounds like mine want to train”, and much of the funding goes on trainee teacher scholarships.

But having public backing from such a prominent Tory peer has drawn the trust into political debates around education. Its branding mirrors that of elite private schools – for example, its website’s prominent Latin motto is ‘libertas per cultum’ (which translates as ‘freedom through education’).

Foley concedes that the trust has been “perceived to be quite elitist in the past”, but he claims “the perception from the outside doesn’t reflect the reality in schools”.

He puts the misconception down to Future’s “unequivocal devotion to providing kids with an academic curriculum. It’s patronizing to assume that kids from backgrounds like mine can’t access that curriculum.”

Thinking back, Foley said his teaching at Pimlico gave him a “direct, tangible impact in a way that I couldn’t when I was working in finance”.

But he had his heart set on a PhD. He recalls “wanting the ground to swallow me up” during a social event in which he was the only non-Oxbridge graduate, when he made a faux pas by not knowing there were two versions of the play Doctor Faustus.

“I didn’t have the broader cultural capital. In a way, I was motivated to do a PhD out of resentment – to prove myself”.

His loved his PhD (in modernist writers’ interpretations of bullfighting), but disliked lecturing Queen Mary’s high-achieving students because he couldn’t have the same impact on them as he’d had at Pimlico.

Back to the Future

This drove him to apply for Teach First, which placed him at Bishop Challoner in Tower Hamlets – a school his cousin had been expelled from.

He recalls waking up at 4am for three hours of PhD thesis corrections, before teaching six lessons.



‘Parents know schools have very limited powers around non-attendance’

He spent exhausted evenings “falling asleep with the phone on my chest” after texting his future wife (whom he met on Teach First).

Foley later returned to Pimlico to lead Future’s teacher training programme. Overseeing its curriculum centre of in-house materials (set up by Daisy Christodoulou) was a “weird side-step”, as Foley was “directing senior leaders having not been a head myself”.

He missed “the daily life of a school”, and these days tries to combat this sense of disconnection by sending Future’s central staff out to schools regularly. He spends three days a week in schools doing “gate duties and running line-ups”.

Being offered the executive principal job at David Ross Education Trust (DRET’s) new Bobby Moore Academy, on his home turf of Stratford, in 2018 was a “dream come true”. But the trust was struggling with a near £5 million deficit and its budgets were slashed.

Foley claims as DRET’s only London school, Bobby Moore “lost out” from its gag pooling policy because its funding “was much bigger” than its 33 other schools.

“The school was growing year on year, so you never had enough capacity to do the things you wanted”.

When Foley complained that his new school library had no books, he was told to ask parents to contribute to a library fund. But given the school was in Newham, “one of the most deprived boroughs in the country”, Foley felt he couldn’t.

“There was a real disconnect. I wasn’t aligned with the vision,” he added.

Petition and turmoil

He quit to become executive principal at Harris Tottenham, part of the Harris Federation, three months after his son was born in May 2020. Six weeks into the role, Foley was cycling home on his Brompton bike over Tottenham marches when he was held at knifepoint for half an hour by four men with zombie knives and balaclavas.

They stabbed him in the leg.

Foley recalls thinking that he might never see his son again. He took a month off, but he’s still unable to ride a bike – which meant getting taxis for six months until he learned to drive.

Upon his return to school, things got even more challenging.

In April, a Harris Tottenham teacher instigated a petition calling for Foley to resign after three black year 11 students had been excluded in his first month.

The petition accused Foley of introducing a “zero tolerance behaviour policy that disproportionately affects BAME and SEN students”. He believes the campaign was part of a “very particular intense cultural moment”.

Although Harris Tottenham was ostensibly ‘outstanding’, it had not been inspected since 2017 and Foley says its staff had been “losing morale because behaviour was so poor”.

He claims that pupils were texted a link to the

Profile: Lawrence Foley

petition in the playground, and told he was a racist.

The campaign “went wild” on social media after being shared by certain influencers, with “people from America posting on this petition without any possession of the facts”.

Over 6,700 people signed it. One comment claimed the school was ‘run by white people ... who don’t understand the children’ while another compared its policies to ‘Putin’s Russia’. After death threats, the police reached out to him.

Foley has welcomed the cohesion report this week, which called for a new conflict unit to better support schools, government to collect figures on teacher harassment, and to legislate for a “buffer zone” to prevent protests directly outside of school.

The racism accusation is particularly jarring for Foley because his wife is of Indian descent. His mother-in-law was left feeling “confused”. He questions how his mixed heritage children will feel one day when they google their dad and see the accusations.

Thankfully, “things got better” and three weeks after he left in January 2023 to lead Future, the school was inspected and retained its outstanding rating.

Future pride

These days, Foley is particularly proud of Future’s SCITT. Started ten years ago, it now has 130 alumni working in its schools and is “probably the main driver of our school improvement”.

As big trusts become the “main vehicle for teacher training over the next ten years”, he worries that small SCITTs like his, which has “something really special”, are in “quite a vulnerable position”.

However, he pulled out of Future’s “advanced” discussions with the National Institute of Teaching about becoming an associate training college because “we’d lose our identity if we bought into this behemoth”.

But he also criticises Future for not being “outward facing” compared to Harris, which “really invests time shaping those perceptions”. Future is now embarking on more public engagement.

Sellotaped to the door of Pimlico Primary – which is just a 20-minute walk from Buckingham Palace, but “serves a great deal of poverty” – is a poster asking parents to share their experiences of



‘I was motivated to do a PhD out of resentment, to prove myself’

community life.

Falling rolls means Future is also consulting to merge two of its three London primaries, which, as a devoted Londoner, Foley finds “really sad”. But reflecting migratory trends out of London, half of Future’s four schools in Hertfordshire are growing their capacity.

Weaponising attendance

But attendance has been a particular problem in the area, where “large demographics of white working-class parents oftentimes have really complex relationships with the state”.

A lot has changed since the days when Foley was skiving off. He believes that outside London, attendance is “increasingly being used as a weapon against schools. Parents know that schools are under pressure to increase attendance rates ... as soon as there’s a disagreement, the answer will be, ‘I’m not sending my child back to school until this is sorted’.

“Parents have seen that the emperor has no clothes, because schools have very limited powers around what they can do.”

Meanwhile, as someone who struggled with

the transition to secondary school himself, he’s instigated joint working between Pimlico’s primary and secondary schools to ease that transition.

He’s using Reach’s ‘cradle to career’ framework, through which schools engage with local stakeholders around ages 0 to 21. He plans to roll the model out to other schools.

“We’re ostensibly working with the same families and tackling the same problems. It’s mad that you have all this institutional and local knowledge in public institutions so close to you, yet there’s never sharing of information and good practice.”

Exclusions are also a contentious issue. The mayor of London’s violence reduction unit is determined to lower exclusions. But he believes the solution to acute behavioural problems lies in “more money for schools” rather than “siloes units at the mayor’s office”.

He says if Future had money for its own suspension unit, “we would do that in a heartbeat because we know that they’re safe when they’re with us”.

And Foley knows too well what being unsafe feels like.

Reflecting on his time at Harris Tottenham, he adds: “It’s quite a frightening thing, because it could have been the end of my career.

“But we turned that school around. I’m really proud of the job that I did in very difficult circumstances.”

Opinion

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

Awaiting top-down reform of our top-down system is a missed opportunity to take control and show the full breadth of school improvement work

There seems little doubt that accountability, and the role of Ofsted in particular, will feature in the general election manifestos when they arrive. Until the election, it is hard to see what national reform and change will ultimately look like.

All of this could leave trust and school leaders feeling rather powerless and frustrated. Ofsted's 'Big Listen' may help mitigate that and must surely be welcomed, but Forum Strategy has been arguing for some time for a broader discussion around accountability.

We need to untap greater system leadership and professional reflection on the purpose and nature of accountability more generally, taking our thinking beyond Ofsted and inspections and staying mindful of what is within leaders' control, and what isn't.

There are two main reasons why these concepts matter.

First, top-down accountability will always exist and there is some freedom to be had in accepting this point. Ofsted undoubtedly needs significant reform, but change will always depend on political will and decision makers. That is the nature of a national inspectorate. The same goes for the ESFA and the DfE's regulatory oversight.

Second, some trust and school leaders have not yet fully realised the opportunity to shape a more formative, profound accountability culture that goes beyond these national discussions – at a local level, through what we describe as 'pure accountability'.

Doing so will create a more balanced accountability culture and reflects a growing onus placed upon directors across sectors to consider the interests of wider stakeholders and the organisation's impact on communities and the environment.

MICHAEL PAIN

Founder,
Forum Strategy



ALICE GREGSON

CEO, Forum Strategy



Leaders have the power now to re-balance accountability

In our recent 'In Practice Guide' for Forum Strategy members, we defined pure accountability as: 'formative accountability at a local level, that puts the end user and the communities we serve in the driving seat of holding our organisations to account; empowering those we serve and work alongside to provide feedback and insights that contribute to the strategic direction, ongoing improvement and responsiveness of our organisations over time'.

This is not an alternative to 'top-down' accountability from regulators and inspectorates, but a balance to it – a rich and well-informed source of intelligence and insight that can generate high-quality strategy,

improvement, and better partnerships over time.

Ultimately, it's a cultural nudge.

Pure accountability manifests in different forms, and some trusts are really moving forward on it. It could be a commitment to a regular cross-trust pupil survey, similar to or indeed aligned with the Children's Society's Good Childhood Report, which identifies pupils' sense of life satisfaction, confidence and wellbeing.

Or it could be an annual staff satisfaction survey that identifies progress around mitigating workload and/or improving wellbeing. In each case, balancing qualitative and quantitative data and benchmarking

across similar organisations as well as the wider economy can provide valuable direction for improvement activity.

Many such examples exist where trusts can benchmark themselves against key 'employer of choice' metrics. It could be a commitment to publish carbon reduction ambitions and set interim targets across the next decade.

Or the annual publication of measures such as staff absence, parental satisfaction or destination data for pupils five years after leaving the trust's schools.

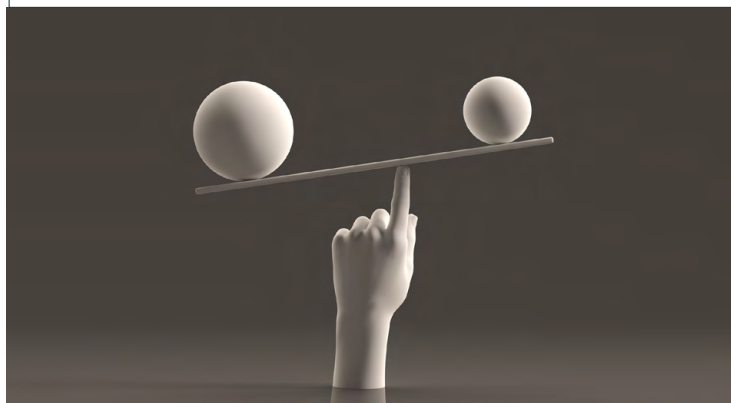
If pure accountability is to really work and generate trust and commitment, it should be formative in purpose, informing ongoing improvement work, not new forms of judgment or labels. It must, however, be board-led and sufficiently visible to end users so they can engage with it and determine progress.

Let's be frank. This is challenging. Accountability already feels all-pervading for many. Adding more into the mix is bound to cause apprehension. But to resist it is to resign ourselves to an accountability that is only ever 'done to' the sector.

Instead, we can generate more formative, community-focused and locally-owned priorities and shape a different relationship with accountability. We can give stakeholders a sense of control, not least those who feel remote and disconnected from public institutions. And in the process, we can untap a treasure trove of real-time, place-based insights into the breadth of work involved in school improvement.

Simply awaiting national reform of our top-down accountability systems is to miss this potential. Boards and leaders have the power now to demonstrate what else is possible.

“This is challenging. Accountability already feels all-pervading”



Opinion

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



PAUL HARRIS

CEO and executive headteacher,
The Tapscott Learning Trust

Why every MAT needs a stakeholder report

What began as part of our communication strategy has grown to be fundamental to how we foster belonging and accountability to our communities, writes Paul Harris

At the Tapscott Learning Trust (TTLT), we firmly believe that we are central to the communities we serve and accountable to them. We do not operate a one-size-fits-all approach to our policies and practices because the diversity of our schools – even in a relatively small geographical area – is significant.

We always want to ensure that we have excellent relationships with all our stakeholders and offer them a fantastic provision that works in partnership with all to allow our children to be healthy, happy and successful.

We believe that good communication is essential in developing and maintaining organisations and relationships therein. Our aim is therefore to ensure that we have effective ways in which to communicate.

We first discussed the idea of a stakeholder report that would be accessible to everyone at our trust's very inception. However, we couldn't find any examples in the sector, so we had to start from

scratch.

Most of the information we put into the report can be found on our websites, reports or in the trustees' annual report and accounts.

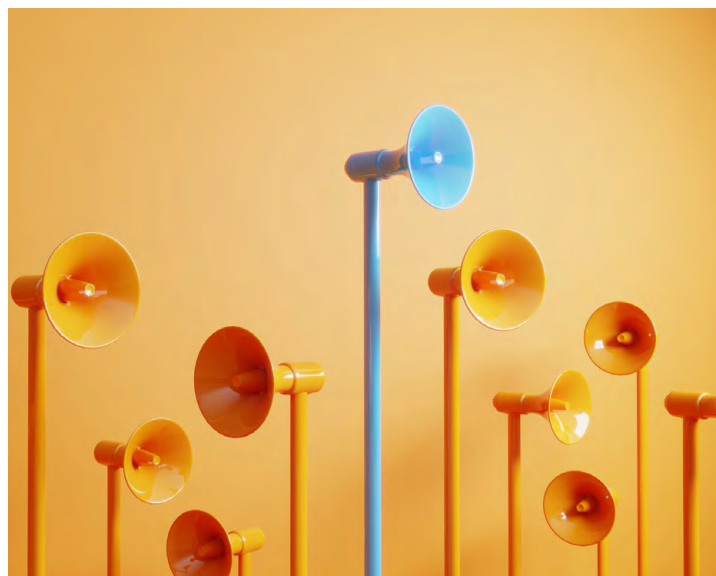
However, we wanted to bring the key information into one place and ensure it was accessible to all stakeholders.

For example, we knew they felt the trustee's report to be very technical, not engaging or easy to access. It was obvious that we could not just rely on this to inform our wider audience, especially our parents, children, and wider communities.

The consensus was to create a visual and engaging snapshot of our activity, so after consultation, we identified some key areas to focus on. When it came to the trust, stakeholders wanted to know about our vision, values and aims, the role and structure of governance, our operations and performance.

They also wanted information about each of our schools, including their key achievements and what they offer to their communities.

The response to the first report was hugely successful. In fact, it was even recognised by the then-national schools commissioner, Sir David Carter as "one of the best I have seen". We also received a lot of interest from others across the sector, keen to emulate the model.



“ We thought it could be beneficial. We now believe it's essential

The annual report has allowed us to communicate and react to key events and ensure that our responses are transparent. This was especially useful during the Covid pandemic.

And over the years since, we have tweaked and developed it and how we share it with everyone. We've made it more focused and aligned with our vision, values and aims, and feedback has helped us to develop its contents by focusing on the specific aspects of our provision stakeholders care about, including, for example our equality, diversity and inclusion work.

The chief impact of this work has been to create an increased sense of belonging and feeling part of the trust for all. The launch of our report is an annual event and feedback from our stakeholders confirms that they find it incredibly useful.

Where we once thought this work could be beneficial, we now believe it to be essential, especially

in the wake of the landmark study regarding parental attitudes to school absence. Our stakeholder report has played a significant role in ensuring continued, effective relationships and also communicating the importance and impact of coming to school.

It holds us to account too. It compares the provision in our schools and celebrates their successes. And most importantly, our children tell us that they feel very proud of being not only part of their school but also the trust.

There can be no doubt that the report has been wide-reaching and contributed to many of our successes. In a survey last year, 94 per cent of parents stated that they would recommend the school their child attends to other parents. Meanwhile, our staff retention rate is 98 per cent.

Our stakeholder report is central to driving the activity that delivers these results. Like Sir David Carter, I believe every trust should have one.

Opinion

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



STEVE
BLADON

Former headteacher, Associate,
Square Peg

We're getting reduced timetables wrong. Here's how to get it right

Interpretation of the DfE's attendance guidance too often puts the school's needs first, and fails to deliver what anxious pupils really need, says Steve Bladon

When children are unwell and struggling to attend school due to anxiety, one of the approaches schools often take is to put them on a part-time timetable, for example as part of an Emotionally-based school avoidance pathway or within a pastoral plan. Sadly, many of these arrangements aren't successful.

Too often, a part-time timetable doesn't lead to the pupil's return to full-time education in their original setting. More significantly still, rather than reduce the child's anxiety level, it often increases it, worsens their symptoms, and leads to traumatic consequences. This is because we're still asking children to step into the fire. It's less fire, but it's fire nevertheless.

When a part-time arrangement doesn't work, anxious children often end up being withdrawn from school altogether. This typically happens in desperation rather than as a parental preference for 'elective' home education – an outcome with huge implications for the whole family: relationships, jobs and financial security.

The current DfE guidance document, Working Together to Improve School Attendance, states that part-time timetables should be "in place for the shortest time necessary".

Following this guidance, schools tend to devise reduced timetables which last for six to eight weeks. Some settings overtly state that a reduction can last no longer than that. Sometimes, parents are told early on what will happen if the child isn't back in school full time by a particular date.

Time, rather than the child's needs, is too often the priority.

With a different approach, we could use reduced timetables much more effectively to support recovery, and save families a lot of suffering and despair along the way. They can work and have been an important part of my daughter's phased return to school as she has been recovering from the anxiety disorder that consumed her a year ago.

Here are three important considerations to make them work:

Give it time

Time limits and short deadlines are unhelpful – even counter-productive. Current guidance leads to arrangements which are far too short. There are no quick fixes with mental health, and we must take a



“ Time – rather than the child's needs – is too often the priority

much longer-term approach.

“The shortest time necessary” doesn't have to mean six weeks. There is scope for interpreting this phrase in a way which benefits everyone. The concept of flexi-schooling deserves an article of its own, but the term is enough to convey the sort of disposition we might adopt.

Progress is not linear

Schools often appear to expect that attendance or engagement will increase in a linear way. Such plans might be well-intentioned, but they make the arbitrary assumption that after an hour a day for one week, a child is ready and able to cope with two hours a day the following. This still makes time the main driver, rather than experience and the child's sense of safety.

Look beyond timetables

It sounds obvious but part-time timetables aren't in themselves a solution to the underlying factors behind a child's anxiety. Sometimes, this truth gets a little lost. Professional assessments and support for the underlying causes of a child's anxiety might be months or

even years away.

There's no reason for schools to be accountable for backlogs in other services – or to make those the source of more anxiety.

My daughter is now thankfully healthier, physically and mentally. She still has anxious moments but she's learning how to manage these feelings and she's better able to cope in the world.

As she has recovered, her engagement with learning and her attendance at school have increased. She's progressed from attending a gardening club last April to a single art lesson in September, to fifteen lessons over four days this week.

It's not been just about increasing lessons though. We've slowly and cautiously reintroduced assemblies, breaktimes, clubs, trips and tutorials – the wider school experience.

It's been a team effort. We've had professional support and ongoing help from our local EBSA team. We work very closely with her school to review progress and plan next steps. Sadly, our journey and success are untypical of families in our situation.

It doesn't have to be like this. We can do things differently – and we should.

Opinion

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



DR ALEXANDRA GRAY

Co-Founder, ALIGN and Managing Director, LearnTrek

Would-be reformers must give 'unregistered' AP a fair hearing

There is a real risk that in bringing 'unregistered' AP into the Ofsted fold we will lose some of its excellent practice for vulnerable children, writes Alex Gray

Much has been made in recent months in *Schools Week* and elsewhere about the dangers of 'unregistered' alternative provisions (APs). Few would disagree that these have too little oversight. However, sensationalist coverage belies the rather uncomfortable truth that many very good specialised education settings operate outside the Ofsted framework.

The government has committed to publishing a set of national standards applicable to all AP settings by the end of 2025. Given a looming general election could result in a change of government by the end of 2024, we might be easily forgiven for wondering whether this target is likely to be met.

Last month's *Thematic Review of Alternative Provision in Local Areas in England* certainly makes for uncomfortable reading. However, as a former senior leader in AP with experience in maintained and non-maintained parts of the sector, headlines that emphasise the (admittedly, very real) dangers of poorly run provisions or illegal schools usually cause me some

frustration.

There is excellent work being done by staff and leaders in many extraordinarily good 'unregistered' APs to support some of society's most vulnerable children and young people. Usually, these pupils have been excluded from all other settings. Their time in AP may be their last chance to get an education that prepares them for adult life.

Given government estimates the lifetime cost of truancy at £72,000 per pupil, the value of this work cannot be overstated. So, the narrative that 'unregistered' AP is more dangerous and less effective than maintained provision runs a number of risks.

It leaves the unregistered/specialised part of the sector with somewhat of an inferiority complex, but more importantly it leaves certain questions unanswered. For example, how do we avoid losing the flexibility and innovation that makes AP so successful if we are forced to move further and further towards a school model? And how can we keep what specialised APs do so well while bringing them in line with a national framework for best practice?

Working outside of the maintained part of the education landscape can be incredibly isolating. This isolation is a source of creativity for leaders who find themselves unfettered by the constraints facing schools.



“ Sensationalist coverage belies an uncomfortable truth

However, settings are at risk from insular ways of working.

Professional networks could help to mitigate the risk, but these are few. Specialised APS rarely if ever access funded CPD or other resources from local authorities or central government. And since no two settings operate the exact same way, it can be really tempting to consider oneself too unique to benefit from visiting or learning from other settings. In any case, the sheer volume of complex intervention work they do often makes CPD seem an unaffordable luxury.

'Unregistered' APs can offer a bespoke curriculum, often marrying vocational or functional qualifications with social-emotional learning to provide a lifeline for their students. I have seen ingenious curriculum design and amazing teaching in these settings. However, the same flexibility can create a curriculum offer that is too diffuse, too esoteric, too hard to track, or doesn't allow pupils to access next destinations.

The recent publication of the findings from the *Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforces*

pilot highlights the positive potential of hubs located within alternative provisions to draw on a multidisciplinary team to work with pupils and their families.

The report emphasises the benefits of collaboration in the AP context, and reinforces that AP leaders need to look outwards as well as inwards.

Sadly, the pilot is not a model that specialised education settings can access funding to deliver. But it does provide a potential blueprint for staffing the specialist provisions of the future given that 'unregistered' APs do not need to adhere to the same staffing structures or norms as their maintained counterparts.

I share concerns about 'unregistered' APs operating illegally or dangerously. There are clearly gaps in governance made worse by a desperate lack of places for excluded pupils, and bringing them under the eye of Ofsted may be part of the solution.

Whatever happens though, there is a lot to learn about best practice from these settings. Let's make sure we don't throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Solutions

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



LISA PIGG

SENDCO, DDSL and EAL lead,
Sir Alexander Fleming Primary
School

Five ways to increase attendance at primary school

Solutions to the attendance crisis are a matter of supporting children and families through policies and practices, writes Lisa Pigg

When we reviewed our school attendance figures at the end of 2021/22, we knew something had to change. Our whole-school attendance was 93.85 per cent and attendance for SEND was 95.1 per cent, both below national attendance of 96.4 per cent.

We needed a plan, and we needed it fast

Our efforts since have seen us consistently increase the number of children walking through our gates, and their access to learning, and they resulted in our school being named 'Primary provision of the year' at the latest nasen awards.

Our plan wasn't a complicated one but one based on continuous communication, monitoring and connecting with families. We drew on our full-time education welfare officer (EWO), whose job it is to make sure our children attend school on time.

Daily monitoring

Our first step was to implement daily meetings between our EWO, SENDCO and headteacher to analyse which children were absent, alongside dedicated weekly

meetings to review attendance.

A new policy announced that a third day of absence would trigger a home visit and welfare phone calls.

All this happened, at the time, against a backdrop of public health warnings including scarlet fever and strep A. Despite our new practices, all groups took a dip in attendance – however we kept to our robust systems.

Persistent absentees

Our action plan for Spring 2023 focused around identifying persistently absent children. Our weekly data allowed us to give class teachers a list of children who were severely, persistently or at risk of persistent absence.

Our approach was not to sanction or chastise but to support these children and their parents with a friendly and encouraging attitude whenever we saw them.

Adapting policy

To match that disposition, we reviewed and adapted our attendance policy to make it more family friendly, too.

We introduced a 'soft' attendance letter before issuing any local authority attendance letters and we invited parents and carers to discuss attendance issues. We also sent out visual communication to show, for example, how a holiday



“ We made our attendance policy more family-friendly

booked in the middle of term could have a detrimental effect on learning.

We also arranged attendance training for all teachers and governors.

Accommodating pupils with SEND

As SENDCO, I attend home visits with our EWO, to identify any reasonable adjustments pupils might need. This might include offering alternative entrances to school or giving children at risk of becoming school refusers a job, such as a morning fruit monitor.

Access to our school dogs, Bella and Honey, has proven to be a big winner. They have supported more than a few children back into school and class!

Supporting parents and carers During the summer term, and with support from the local authority, we set up a walking bus and morning minibus service for children living out of area.

This helped parents who had to get children to different schools at the same time greatly, as well as those families who were experiencing mental health

difficulties. Our £1-a-day-per-child bus service was initially for our vulnerable groups but has only grown in popularity.

Reaping the rewards

By the end of the 2022/23 academic year, our whole-school attendance had risen to 96.82 per cent against the backdrop of a growing attendance crisis. Our SEND attendance was the highest it has been at 96.22 per cent – still slightly lower than the national average, but a great leap forward in a single year.

Our efforts have continued into this academic year, and a marker of the success of our efforts is that our greater focus has now shifted onto persistent lateness.

Many column inches have been dedicated to the attendance crisis.

We have done as the children's commissioner suggested and 'obsessed' over attendance, and it has made a huge difference. Higher fines may or may not make a difference nationally, but in our experience the best way to raise attendance at primary is with a helping hand and a welcoming smile.



The 14th annual

FESTIVAL OF EDUCATION

at Wellington College | 4-5 July 2024

HEADLINE PARTNER

AQA
Questions matter

HAVE YOU GOT YOUR TICKET YET?

Tickets are now on sale for the most inspiring education event of the year

Where those who inspire
find their own inspiration

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



FOUNDED BY



WELLINGTON
COLLEGE

THE REVIEW

BOOK
TV
FILM
RADIO
EVENT
RESOURCE

AS WE BEGIN

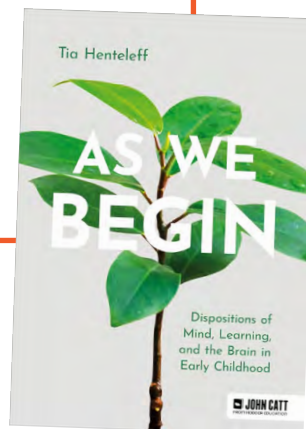
Author: Tia Henteleff

Publisher: John Catt Educational

Publication date: 15 December 2023

ISBN: 1398369438

Reviewer: Emma Cate Stokes



Tia Henteleff's *As We Begin* embarks on an ambitious journey, proposing a vision where research-driven education and child-centric learning coalesce.

The book explores young learners' cognitive and emotional development, underscored by educators' pivotal role as facilitators and researchers. However, while it champions an idealistic educational framework, the book occasionally overlooks the pragmatic constraints that educators routinely navigate.

At the heart of Henteleff's work is an emphasis on positioning the child as the central figure in the learning process. This child-centric approach aligns with widely recognised best practices in early years education, advocating for environments that nurture curiosity, autonomy and emotional well-being.

Beyond this, the book ambitiously encourages educators to don the hats of both practitioners and researchers, engaging in continuous inquiry into their teaching methodologies.

Although the book's ideological underpinnings are solid, it can struggle in places to provide a clear and practical path from theory to practice. The multifaceted realities of teaching – spanning budget constraints, administrative duties, safeguarding responsibilities and the sheer workload – present formidable barriers to educators' adoption of an active research role.

While Henteleff acknowledges the importance of teacher wellbeing, the discussion of mitigating burnout and practical strategies for balancing research activities with other professional obligations remains relatively superficial. This oversight may leave readers looking for more tangible guidance on navigating the complexities of teaching while pursuing research endeavours.

Henteleff nods to these issues but stops short of delving into actionable strategies teachers might employ to balance the massive task of

conducting research within the classroom amid their many, many responsibilities.

While the text illuminates the rich, theoretical underpinnings of early childhood education and the huge potential of research-driven teaching, its treatment of the real-world implications for educators' day-to-day lives, particularly concerning their wellbeing, is a missed opportunity.

Where the book really shines is in its capacity to provoke introspection. The thoughtfully crafted reflective inquiry questions concluding each chapter prompt readers to delve into their pedagogical practices and philosophical underpinnings. This reflective exercise is undoubtedly a strength of the work, developing the idea of continuous personal and professional growth among educators.

The book's reflective nature also underscores the importance of agency in professional development. It empowers educators to take control of their learning journey, identifying areas for improvement and recognising their strengths.

So, while the book champions the concept of educators as researchers and underscores the centrality of the child in the learning process, its real contribution is in how it facilitates educators to think critically about their own practice.

For educators seeking to deepen their understanding of early childhood education and to refine their approaches through introspection, *As We Begin* offers valuable insights. Yet certain theoretical propositions in the book may raise eyebrows when viewed through the lens of practical applicability. For example, Henteleff recounts an anecdote involving a child's somersaults in the classroom as an act of self-regulation.

While the narrative champions autonomy and individualised learning paths, it inadvertently brushes aside the logistical and safety considerations inherent in classroom management.

This example, though illustrative of the author's educational philosophy, underscores the gap between theoretical ideals and the constraints of real-world teaching environments. It may be more challenging to facilitate 30 children choosing to perform gymnastics in the classroom.

The book's American-centric perspective further complicates its universal applicability. Cultural nuances in teaching practices and educational systems mean that not all insights and recommendations will resonate with or be directly transferable to educators operating within different contexts, such as the British educational landscape.

Henteleff offers moments of clarity and enlightenment, particularly through illustrations depicting brain activity in early development. These visual aids enrich the text, rendering complex neuroscientific concepts accessible.

All in all, *As We Begin* champions a commendable vision of research-driven, child-centric education. However, educators seeking practical, actionable strategies for immediate classroom application may find the book's lofty ideals somewhat disconnected from the trenches of daily teaching life.

For those intrigued by the philosophical discourse on embedding research into educational practice, Henteleff's work is a refreshing read. Educators searching for a pragmatic toolkit for classroom management and instructional strategies might need to look elsewhere.



Rating

THE CONVERSATION
LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM

Sarah Gallagher
Headteacher, Snape Primary School and PGCE tutor, University of Cambridge

TO SET OR NOT TO SET

This week's 'Teach Sleep Repeat' podcast features an interesting discussion about whether to set groups by ability or not. Dylan Price and Hayden Stevens discuss current research around this area with some 'oft-quoted' responses around the damaging nature of setting.



Some of the debate is only applicable if you work in a setting where you have choices. Working in a village school

with mixed year groups and part-time teachers puts in its own restrictions, yet small schools have the privilege of getting to know individuals so much more.

However, what was apparent from listening in was the importance of maintaining a 'fluid' approach. Even if you set, you still need to use assessment for learning to determine who does what the next day. Whatever your groupings, that fluidity is fundamental to enabling children to progress.

I remember the days of laminated cards with group names on. Once laminated, it is difficult to change! Nothing to do with learning, and sadly much more to do with aesthetics and maintaining perfect stationery. Thank goodness we left that practice in the 'I'm working in a group' literacy stamp era.

WORKLOAD VS PAY



Marking, workload vs pay and shorter lunch breaks

The latest blog from Teacher Tapp summarises the polling and research organisations' latest findings on workload, pay and time. These manage to be in equal parts depressing and unsurprising for anyone in a school with an ear to the ground.

Results triangulate with many other current discussions. Teachers would prefer more funding for more staff (teachers or TAs) over an increase in their wages. Lots – regardless of subjects – spend their weekends planning and working for school. And behaviour is generally becoming much more challenging.

Although predictable, this is surely a clear steer in terms of what needs to happen for the teaching profession. I've just marked PGCE assignments which focus on researching pupils' perspectives. For 10 years now, all the essays discuss the many positive impacts of taking this into account. I can't help thinking it is high time we did the same for teachers' views.

CPD FOR TAS

Having read the Teacher Tapp research, I then came across this blog where, among other things, Daisy Cave talks about how TAs can advocate for learners with SEND. It is well documented that schools are desperate for better funding with which to source the right and proper support for children. The stress on SEND provision is enormous and the lack

CPD: FREE CPD Webinar for TAs
Enhancing Support: Collaborative Strategies and Practical Solutions for TAs and SLT
With Daisy Cave, Twinkl SLT
TeachMeet: meet, share, learn

of school places and wider SEND support only adds to the plight.

So reminding ourselves of the invaluable resource TAs represent while we bang the drum for change is certainly timely. However, the key quote for me here is: "Start where you are, use what you have, and do what you can". I agree that we must. I also can't help but wonder whether breaking our backs to do it doesn't in fact mask the lack of support we get from above.

TALKING ABOUT CONSENT

And finally, T and Teaching podcast hosts Arthur Moore and Amy Cutler provide a

powerful and worthwhile listen here as they interview Monica Bhogel. Bhogel is the director of the Schools Consent Project, which



aims to stimulate discussion about what consent means, its legal parameters, and how young people can develop positive and nurturing relationships.

As Cutler explains and Teacher Tapp reveals, teachers already feel they are required to cover so much these days. She is an English teacher but also uses tutor time to discuss PSHE.

By no means an expert, hers and Moore's points about how tricky it is to have these conversations with young people is well made: it can be embarrassing for the pupils but also awkward for teachers.

Bhogel, for her part, is unerringly positive about supporting teachers to start these difficult discussions with confidence. Her focus on the legal definition, which centers around choice, freedom and capacity, creates an accessible in-road to these conversations which are so pertinent amid the flood of online misogyny young people encounter.

It's clearly not just students who need this. I urge all teachers to listen in.

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts

The Knowledge

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



What do we really know about 'managed moves'?

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

High rates of permanent exclusions gather much media attention and research funding, which rightly focus on their impact on attainment, and labour market and health outcomes. Yet many more pupils leave school through alternatives to permanent exclusion known as managed moves.

These are, in theory, agreements negotiated between headteachers, parents and pupils to move the pupil to a new school for a 'fresh start'. The problem is we know little to nothing about them.

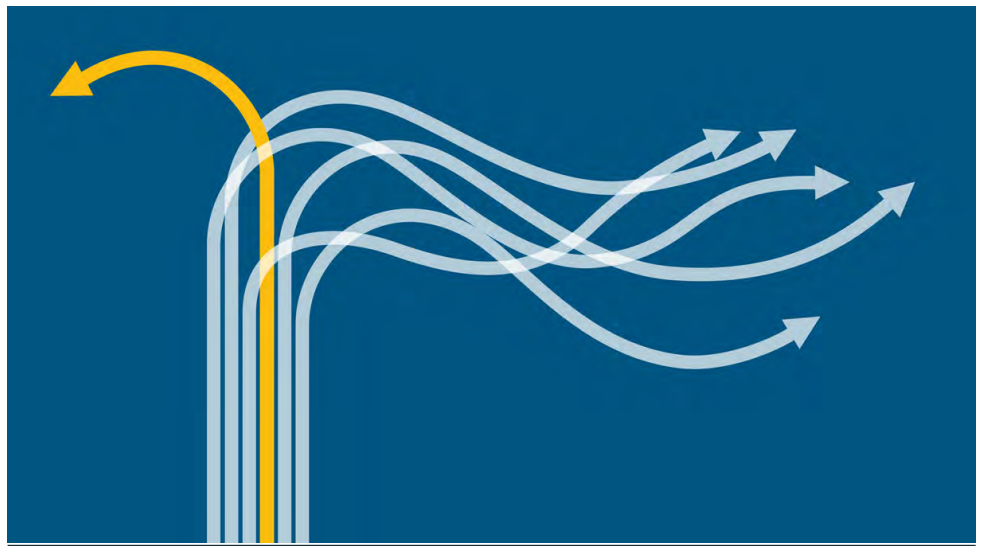
Schools are not required to record the reasons pupils leave, so we don't know how many moves occur. Nor do we know how such agreements are arrived at, or the extent to which parents and pupils have any say in it. (Government guidance says parents must give consent, but there is no way to know if this is freely given or if permanent exclusion is implicitly or explicitly threatened.)

We know certain groups are more likely to be permanently excluded, but we don't know if the same is true for managed moves. Conversely, we don't know if managed moves deliver better wellbeing and educational outcomes than permanent exclusions.

Our new report sheds some light on these questions. It finds that, before the pandemic, more than 30,000 pupils in secondary school moved schools for reasons seemingly unrelated to family choice or circumstance. According to the minority of local authorities that held data, at least 5,000 managed moves were recorded in the same year. The real number lies somewhere between these two figures.

We analysed all local authority policies surrounding managed moves and found that approaches vary hugely. One-fifth of LAs did not appear to have any guidance for schools. In many areas, LAs were not involved in the process and moves may or may not have been reported to them.

In a handful, it was clear that a pupil could be excluded if the managed move did not work out. More worryingly, a pupil could be excluded if they did not agree to one, which could constitute an illegal exclusion.



'The agency of many vulnerable young people and their parents has been eroded'

Pupil and parental preference or needs were factored into decisions in only a minority of areas. Trial periods, during which a pupil remains registered at the home school but is educated in a new setting, range from a few weeks to six months, raising questions about impact on pupils' sense of belonging.

We found evidence that many managed moves do not lead to a stable placement in a new school but begin a process of exclusion from mainstream education. This could include more managed moves, a permanent exclusion or a move into alternative provision. About 10 per cent of pupils who experienced an apparent school-driven move in secondary finished year 11 in alternative provision. Another 10 per cent were not on a state school roll.

Moreover, many more young people with additional needs or existing vulnerabilities are likely to transfer schools. This was the case for one in five pupils with a social, emotional or mental health issue, compared to one in 17 of all secondary pupils who finished year 11.

These findings suggest that, in a system meant to centre on school choice, the agency of many

vulnerable young people and their parents has been eroded.

It is clear – and has been for some time – that better data and oversight is urgently needed. The scrapped 2022 Schools Bill included a register for children not in school, which would have gone some way toward this, although the extent to which parents and carers could be compelled to provide this data remains a question.

We urgently need a central data reporting system that captures pupil exits from school and the reasons for them – something that could easily be added to the list of data items schools report.

At the local level, we need measures to ensure all parties act in the best interests of children. This could include fair access panel involvement, monitoring of moves (and outcomes for pupils who experience them), as well as an independent representative of pupils' interests in decision-making.

Regulatory neglect of these young people is an ongoing safeguarding failure, one only national government can remedy through new legislation to enable proper local oversight.

Week in

Westminster

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

MONDAY

Everyone knows public finances are under pressure, so the Department for Education has resorted to recycling old announcements to make it look like they're pumping more money into the school system.

None of the cash in this week's "announcement" about new special free schools was new, and in fact formed part of a £2.6 billion pot announced years ago.

Maintenance funding for schools had also been allocated at the last spending review, and in fact, analysis shows fewer projects now getting money to keep their buildings up and running.

But the DfE left a crucial new detail out of its press release – the fact it has failed to find trusts for three of the promised special schools, and will now need to re-run the process.

Nothing to see here!

TUESDAY

As the election inches closer (we hope), the mudslinging between Labour and the Tories on social media is getting dirtier.

This week, Gillian Keegan was asked in a broadcast interview whether £100,000 was a "huge salary". It follows comments from the chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, about high earners struggling in his own Surrey constituency.

The education secretary told her interviewer it "depends where you are. I mean, the average headteacher... secondary headteacher now will earn more than £100,000".

In response, shadow education secretary Bridget Phillipson tweeted that the "education secretary is out of touch and out of ideas".

"Her own figures show she has no idea what headteachers earn."

But Phillipson linked to government statistics for *all* headteachers, which show they earn, on average, about £70,000.

However, the average for secondary heads is actually just over £97,000.

While Keegan wasn't quite right, she wasn't far off, and Phillipson seems to have got the wrong end of the stick.

WEDNESDAY

Schools Week recently revealed how the DfE has 40 civil servants working on the colloquially termed "Advanced BS" qualification, which is unlikely to see the light of day.

Well, now the DfE intends to spaff another hundred grand on Rishi Sunak's pie-in-the-sky policy. The department is seeking a company to analyse responses to its consultation. We can't begin to imagine what a thankless task this will be, with most sector people believing the exercise is a huge waste of time.

But the winning bidder – York Consulting LLP – will get a cool £99,947 for carrying out the work. Nice work if you can get it, which consulting firms frequently do.

THURSDAY

Transparency publications about government special advisers also offer a glimpse into the inner workings of government.

Alongside any free jollies and gifts they receive, SpAds must declare meetings with "senior media figures".

So who did media SpAd Lawrence Abel meet between October and December last year? Records show only one meeting – with two GB News producers – to "update on the Department for Education's priorities and minimum service levels".

Week in Westminster's invitation probably got lost in the post.

Keegan penned an end-of-term thank you email to school staff across England. In it she marvelled at the "innovative ways that schools are helping to tackle the attendance problem".

She spoke of visiting a primary school in Speke, near Liverpool (who had mentioning Merseyside in Keegan bingo this week?).

At the school, "each class gained a body part of a Mr Potato Head for high levels of class attendance. The class with the highest attendance received a treat. This might sound trivial to us, but to the kids it was inspirational and many of them even knew how many lessons they'd miss for every day they weren't in school."

We look forward to the inevitable DfE announcement of a free Mr Potato Head for every school in England, akin to the free portrait of the King.

Meanwhile, Keegz plans to hold another of her video addresses on April 24 to mark the "start of term".

"I hope to see as many of you as possible to update you on my focus for the coming term, hear about your priorities and answer your questions on a range of topics."

We can't wait.

Ofsted has batted away concerns about its Big Listen – saying there's plenty of options for respondents to make their thoughts clear on the one-word judgment despite it not having its own question.

They give this as an example in case: "One respondent is so determined to use the available text boxes to ensure we hear the message that they have included 'GET RID OF THE ONE WORD JUDGMENTS' as their gender, sexuality and religion, for example."





Deputy CEO – Education

Salary range: £80,533 to £97,985 per annum FTE

The Diocese of Coventry Multi Academy Trust was formed by the Diocese of Coventry in 2013, and is now one of 2,500 Multi Academy Trusts in England. Now home to twenty-two academies spread across the Diocese of Coventry, we are one of the 100 largest Multi Academy Trusts in the country.

The role of Deputy CEO – Education was created to reflect the critical importance of a strong academy effectiveness offer. As a member of the Trust Leadership Team, the role requires building effective collaborative relationships with our key stakeholders.

The successful candidate will be a highly credible school leader, with a supportive and collaborative approach to working with our Headteachers, delivering alongside and being highly visible to them.

Closing date: 15 April 2024

Interviews: Week commencing 22 April 2024

Full details of this opportunity can be found on www.covmat.org



CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER FULL-TIME, PERMANENT

Salary: LCC Grade 17 (£80,175 - £91,134) dependent on successful applicant's experience and skills

To start from June 2024 (earlier if possible)

We are delighted to be appointing a Chief Financial Officer for Mowbray Education Trust. The Trust consists of eight schools and growing! Our vision is to deliver first-class teaching and learning with integrity. Our values of integrity, collaboration and transparency underpin all that we do.

The CFO will play a crucial role by providing strategic leadership in all aspects of finance, ensuring the development and implementation of the financial and commercial strategies. They will effectively manage, record and report the Trust's finances, including budget planning, monitoring, control and ensuring the Trust meets its legal, financial and regulatory obligations.



All roles are subject to full pre-employment safeguarding checks, including an Enhanced DBS with Barred List check.

For more information, please visit our careers portal.

DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

Full Time Salary Range: £65,629 - £75,478

Are you a strong secondary practitioner and experienced leader looking for your next move into executive leadership? Have you considered a career path within education that runs adjacent to school based leadership?

Aquinas, a trust committed to life transforming learning, is looking for a full-time Deputy Education Director to join their central education team. This role will see you working with the primary and secondary Education Directors. You will be instrumental in the delivery of our whole-trust secondary strategy, leading on the transformation of curriculum, standards and transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, and leading the work of the firmly established trust curriculum networks.

This is a newly created role as part of the executive team which demands a high calibre candidate. You must have a proven track record of excellent leadership which has resulted in high quality outcomes in more than one phase or school. As Deputy Director of Education,

you will need to lead by example, building on your proven track record across a range of schools, both primary and secondary.

This post has been developed to add capacity to an already outstanding executive team in a trust that is ready to grow. As a team aligned to the trust vision, you will be pivotal in enabling us to achieve our mission of life transforming learning.

Experience of leadership (whole school or trust) is essential for this role, and the successful candidate will be able to use their passion for school improvement to build productive and purposeful relationships with headteachers across both phases of education.

Closing Date: 16th April 2024 - midday





Penrose Learning Trust

Deputy CEO

Required September 2024

Salary L31-37

This is a career defining opportunity to join our central improvement team at our successful Trust. The Deputy CEO will support the CEO in taking responsibility for the performance and outcomes of all Schools within the Trust, leading on the strategic direction whilst specialising in the secondary phase and working with the Director of Primary to support outcomes across all phases.

If you are looking for a strategic leadership role in school improvement, collaborating with a successful team that strives for every pupil and member of staff to be the very best version of themselves, I am confident that this is an opportunity you will have been waiting for.

The successful candidate will have:

- experience of headship and leading a large team
- an ability in setting and delivering strategy
- a strong understanding of school improvement and change management
- excellent communication skills, both written and verbal
- strong organisational and planning skills

Our Trust was established in 2017 and we rebranded to become Penrose Learning Trust in 2023. The Trust has had recent growth and continually builds on the excellent work of all the schools and their shared belief that the

young people in our care should have access to excellent educational provision. Working within and beyond the Trust, we aim to provide support and drive improvement in all of our schools. Currently comprising four high schools and five primary schools the Trust is growing, through a carefully managed approach.

The central team, based at East Bergholt High School, and is made up of teams in School Improvement, Finance, HR, Estates and IT. These central teams work as a unit to support schools and Headteachers to deliver the best possible education. We pride ourselves on our positive, hardworking ethos and collegiate atmosphere.

Further details about the post and how to apply are available on our Trust website www.penroselearningtrust.uk

Closing date: 9.00am, 22nd April 2024

Interview date: Wednesday 1st May & Thursday 2nd May

Penrose Learning Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. Successful candidates will be required to provide references, undergo employment checks and an enhanced disclosure via the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Join our team:

Chief Financial Officer

Drive Financial Excellence in Education and help us build better futures for children and young people

We seek a qualified accountant with experience in education or a regulated sector who thrives on responsibility and enjoys shaping successful organisations. You should demonstrate the agility to navigate between high-level strategic decisions and hands-on problem-solving while showcasing successful team management skills.

Join the dynamic team at The Charter Schools Educational Trust, where excellence in our schools is matched with a commitment to leading partners that make a difference across South London and beyond. As a respected family of schools in South London, we pride ourselves on delivering high-quality education while fostering innovation and collaboration. We are expanding, with eight schools (soon to be nine), over 700 dedicated employees, and a combined DFE-funded budget of £47m.

As our Chief Financial Officer (CFO), you will spearhead the financial development and sustainability of The Charter Schools Educational Trust. Reporting directly to the CEO, you will oversee the financial integrity of our multi-academy trust and, provide strategic insight to drive our growth and help our schools comfortably respond to the needs of the communities they serve.

The Charter Schools Educational Trust

Salary: Competitive and negotiable**Contract:** Full-time, permanent (DFE flexible working ambassador)**Location:** Dulwich, London, with travel across Charter academies**Closing Date:** April 15th, 2024, 12:00 pm**Apply:** www.tcset.org.uk**Application Details:**

Submit by April 15th, 2024. Interviews week of April 22nd. Contact Belinda Barrett, HR Director, for an informal discussion at: bbarrett@tcset.org.uk

Shape the future of education in South London with us.

Charter.

tcset.org.uk

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.

