



## THE SECTOR'S MANIFESTO



Central control has gone too far



Page 23

## REVEALED: THE RISING COST OF REGIONAL DIRECTORS



Pages 10-11

## PROFILE: THE REBEL CEO WITH A COMMUNITY CAUSE



Pages 20-22

## CAN LABOUR LOOK BEYOND DATA TO FIX OUR SCHOOLS?



Page 25

# INSIDE THE LANDMARK ACADEMY SCANDAL COURT CASE



Trust sues ex-bosses over global business trips and holiday cottages – and wants wages back

Pages 10 and 11

## Progress 8 on pause: Heads call for wider review

- No progress performance measure for two years 'least bad option'
- But heads fear return of GCSE passes as 'king of accountability'

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOTH

Page 4

# 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 JOB

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



Penrose Learning Trust

**PENROSE LEARNING TRUST - DEPUTY CEO - L31-37**

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

TO ADVERTISE YOUR VACANCY WITH EDUCATION WEEK JOBS PLEASE CALL 020 81234 778 OR EMAIL | [ADVERTISING@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:ADVERTISING@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK)



## SUBSCRIBE

Subscribe to Schools Week for Unmatched Education Journalism.

From as little as  
**£1.65**  
Per edition



CLICK FOR INFO



# Ideal time to make accountability progress

One of the big bits of work being undertaken by Labour – in preparation for it forming a government – is how school accountability should look.

Performance measures are big part of this. Labour has already pledged to “update” progress 8 to include at least one creative or vocational subject.

As we report on page 4, the two year break from progress measures gives the new government a bit of breathing space to change things.

Many trust leaders are urging politicians take the opportunity to oversee a wider review of accountability.

Progress 8 was a huge improvement on five A\*s to C. But what is the next evolution?

Steve Rollet, from the Confederation of School Trusts, says the shift should be to an “intelligent and compassionate” approach – a

view held by many.

It is encouraging that, like Michael Gove pre-2010, the current shadow education team is doing the serious thinking and canvassing now.

Another area ripe for some thought is the growing team of civil servants that oversee the academy system. There has long been concerns from the sector about the consistency and transparency of the decisions regional directors make.

But is the wider system working? And how will it work if more schools become academies? As we report on page 10 and 11, the teams have already swelled at a time when many other areas under the Department for Education are under pressure to make big savings.

Unlike accountability, it's perhaps something Labour is less likely to see as a priority.

## Most read online this week:

- 1** [Scouting for teachers: DfE's latest recruitment plan revealed](#)
- 2** [DfE ends funding for teaching school hubs sector body](#)
- 3** [Capita loses £180m SATs contract to exam board Pearson](#)
- 4** [No school progress measure for next two years](#)
- 5** [Big MATs have highest teacher turnover, EPI finds](#)

[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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://schoolsweek.co.uk) or contact:

E: [advertising@schoolsweek.co.uk](mailto:advertising@schoolsweek.co.uk)  
T: 020 81234 778 or click here



See story, page 10

# Call to 'rethink' performance tables in Progress 8 hiatus

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

A two-year hiatus from Progress 8 should be used to "rethink performance tables", school leaders have said.

But some warned we could now see the creep back to GCSE pass grades being the "king of accountability".

Officials had been exploring alternative progress options due to the lack of SATs data for the cohorts taking their GCSEs next year and in 2025-26.

However, on Thursday they concluded there was "no replacement". Remaining headline attainment measures, such as English baccalaureate entries, attainment 8 and grade 5 passes in English and maths, will be published.

A time-series of three years of data will also return.

## 'Improving schools hard done by'

Tom Middlehurst, qualifications specialist at ASCL school leaders' union, said going without a progress measure was "far from ideal" and "means we are stuck with schools being judged in performance tables on exam attainment regardless of context".

"Schools where progress is improving will feel particularly hard done by," he said.

However, he added it was the "least-bad" approach.

Government was also "right not to rush to create an interim measure that has not been properly tested", added Steve Rollett, deputy chief executive at the Confederation of School Trusts.

Michael Gosling, chief executive at Trinity MAT, is concerned about the unintended consequences of grade 4s and 5s becoming "the King and Queen [again]. And we are going to lose that push where all students are involved, all grades are important and there's much more of a wider perspective about pupil outcomes".

Progress 8 was introduced to move away from the previous 5 A\*-C including English and maths, seen by many as a "cliff-edge" measure.

In roundtable discussions with officials, Gosling had



proposed using a three-year average of the most recent key stage 2 data as a baseline.

He said a cap could have been added for schools where their cohorts' demographics have changed overtime.

## Trusts look at own progress measure

His trust will now look at whether this model could be used to measure progress.

Dan Moynihan, chief executive at Harris Federation, said the remaining "absolute" measures will be "tough for schools in disadvantaged circumstances".

One solution he pointed to was grouping schools by similar characteristics, as done under the London Challenge, as a "potentially fairer way" to present results.

Harris will "do some experimenting" with data to see if they can find its own progress measure, but "the problem is you can't benchmark it easily against a wider pool," Moynihan said.

Greenshaw Learning Trust proposed four solutions, one of which schools in the trust may use to calculate progress.

Joe Ambrose, school improvement leader, said the absence of such a measure "could make it increasingly challenging for schools

to show how much they add to pupils' lives".

Government added Ofsted will continue to consider a range of data provided in the inspection data summary report, including about the

school's cohort. There is "no single piece of data will determine the outcome of any Ofsted judgement".

Calls for wider review

The Department for Education said it intends for Progress 8 to return in 2026-17, when it will again have key stage 2 test data – which acts as a baseline for progress scores.

But this will likely be a decision for a new government. Labour has already pledged to "update" the progress measure to hold schools to account for at least one creative or vocational subject, with a wider curriculum and assessment review.

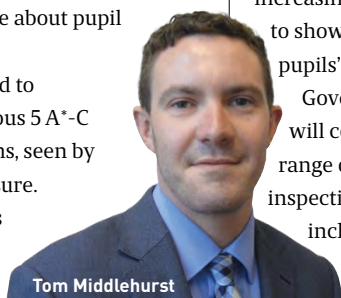
Several leading academy trust chief executives and sector leaders have said the hiatus should prompt a review of the measure, first introduced in 2016.

Wayne Norrie, chief executive at Greenwood Academies Trust, said the sector and DfE should now "work together to see if there is a better and fairer way to measure" progress and attainment.

While John Barneby, Oasis chief executive, said there needs to be an "overhaul of how school performance is measured and which successes we celebrate".

Middlehurst said going back to Progress 8 would be "a missed opportunity to rethink performance tables".

Rollett added: "These metrics need to be part of an intelligent and compassionate approach to accountability, and be carefully designed to avoid penalising schools for doing the best thing for their pupils."



Tom Middlehurst



Dan Moynihan



# We need recruitment schemes that will make a difference, says ASCL chief

LUCAS CUMISKEY

@LUCAS\_CUMISKEY

Ministers have been urged to focus on schemes that will shift the dial in the recruitment crisis – rather than on “pitifully small” projects that do not “begin to scratch the surface”.

The broadside from Pepe Di'Iasio, the new general secretary of the ASCL school leaders' union, comes after DfE spending on various smaller recruitment drives raised eyebrows.

One such venture will see the Scouts develop “teaching skills” as part of attaining their badges under a scheme to boost flagging recruitment by “inspiring the next generation of teachers”.

As first reported by *Schools Week*, the Scout Association has won a contract worth up to £129,000 over three years to provide 40,000 “explorers” – those aged 14 to 18 – with the “skills and knowledge they need to consider pursuing a career in teaching”.

The Department for Education will work with the Scouts to “create age-appropriate activities that inspire young people to consider a career in teaching by linking to relevant badges and awards”. But it has clarified that there are currently no plans for a teaching badge.

## 'Need to get on propaganda parade'

The new partnership was scoffed at during a Westminster Education Forum webinar on the “next steps” for initial teacher training in England on Monday.

Sir Andrew Carter, chief executive at South Farnham Educational Trust and author of the 2015 review of ITT, said the initiative “sounds a bit ridiculous”.

However, he added: “I do think we need to go on a little bit of a propaganda parade to tell everybody [teaching] is a great job.

“Let's get onto the television, onto the radios, put up some banners about how great it is. Not talk about workload all the time. We must talk about workload, but let's not wash all our linen in



Pepe Di'Iasio



public.”

Meanwhile, a freedom of information request by *Schools Week* revealed that another government scheme, to recruit armed forces veterans, has tanked.

The £40,000 bursaries were rolled out from September 2018 in a bid to entice ex-service personnel to retrain as teachers.

The bursaries replaced the Troops to Teachers undergraduate teacher training programme and are available to veterans who enrol on an eligible undergraduate ITT course.

At the time, former education secretary Gavin Williamson claimed that “our incredible troops have unrivalled life experiences and world-class skills that will motivate and inspire a generation of children in classrooms across the county”.

However, just 12 veterans received the bursaries since 2019, at a cost of £420,000 if they all complete their courses.

## 'Pitiful schemes don't scratch surface'

Di'Iasio said: “It's right that attention is given to recruiting teachers from other careers and backgrounds, but pitifully small schemes such as this do not even begin to scratch the surface of what is required.”

He highlighted that just half of the required number of trainee secondary teachers were recruited last year, amid “huge shortages of teachers in many different subject areas”.

He added: “Only by taking major steps to improve pay and reduce workload can teaching be brought more into line with other graduate professions and staff recruited in the numbers required by schools and colleges.

“Parents might rightly be asking what we are: where on earth is the urgency from government on teacher recruitment and retention?”

The DfE is planning to update its 2019 recruitment and retention strategy.

A department spokesperson said the Scouts initiative would “raise awareness of teaching as a potential career choice for young people, helping to build a pipeline of future candidates for initial teaching training”.

They added that they were “proud” of the veteran scheme, saying the FOI response does not “tell the full story” as it only includes those taking the undergraduate route.

The spokesperson said: “Graduate veterans can also complete postgraduate ITT routes and access postgraduate bursaries and scholarships of up to £30,000, meaning the actual number of veterans in the teacher workforce is likely to be significantly higher.”

## INVESTIGATION: MATS

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

# Trust sues ex-bosses over global business trips, holiday cottages – and wants wages back

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

An academy trust is suing former bosses for damages over business trips around the world, thousands spent on consultants and holiday cottages – and even wants them to repay their salaries.

“Excessive” expense claims, luxury hotel stays and a £380 bill for a meal in an upmarket steak restaurant are also among 120 “losses” set out by the SchoolsCompany Trust in its claim against former trustees. It is a landmark case, as previously government has just written off such costs.

The trust, which gave up its four schools in 2018 amid allegations of financial mismanagement, is seeking damages of almost £2.8 million – the amount it owes back to the government.

But, three years after the Department for Education gave the legal bid its financial backing, the case is in chaos, with an estimated £900,000 in costs racked up so far and a trial unlikely to happen until next year at the earliest (see page 7).

For years, details of the case remained under wraps. But public documents were finally made available this month after *Schools Week* appealed directly to the presiding judge, Master Dagnall.

## Four-star hotels and flights to China

SchoolsCompany was set up in 2012 and, in March 2015, became the sponsor of AP schools Central Devon Academy, North Devon Academy and South and West Devon Academy.

It sponsored a secondary, Goodwin Academy in Kent, from July 2016.

Documents prepared by the trust claim the organisation had an operational deficit of £6.4 million by August 2018. This would have been £9.3 million, but the trust received £2.9 million in non-repayable grants from the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

Around £3 million was transferred as liability to the schools' new sponsors, while around £750,000 was working capital funding, leaving £2.8 million which is still owed to the ESFA.

The trust said the loss had been caused by “numerous breaches” of the defendants’ duties.

These included “their poor governance of the trust, the design and implementation of



inadequate financial systems, failure to institute proper internal controls and to ensure that the trust board was properly constituted with appropriate and sufficient oversight of the claimant”.

As a result of the “multiple financial and governance failures”, the defendants “collectively failed to achieve a balanced budget contrary to their duty to do so”.

A spreadsheet filed in court by the trust details the “losses” it has calculated so far. Notable items include £1,766 in flights to China in 2017, as well as a stay at the four-star Jin Lun Hotel Beijing, costing £163.19. It is not clear who the travel was for.

The trust’s case is against former CEO Elias Achilleos, his company SchoolsCompany Limited and Everton Wilson, the trust’s former finance director.

Claims against one former trustee, Heinrich Zimmermann, have been “stayed”, while Patrick Eames, another ex-director, settled for an undisclosed sum earlier this year.

Achilleos is accused of pursuing “domestic and international business projects” while employed at the trust. These allegedly included “investment opportunities in Ghana” and the “exploration of other projects in South Africa, the UK, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe”.

But a defence filed on Achilleos’s behalf stated this was based on “speculative” notes.

## Middle East business trips

He is also accused of taking trips abroad “in

pursuance of his commercial activities which were not for the benefit of the claimant”, including travel to the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and the Netherlands.

His defence admitted that the trips took place, but said that many were for the benefit of the trust, and that those that were not were paid for by his private school improvement company.

Also included in the trust’s claims is a receipt for £383.28 spent at Gaucho Broadgate, a steak restaurant in the City of London, as well as receipts for various hotels including the four-star Rougemont Manor Brentwood.

One receipt for £636 is marked “Dorchester Hotel”. It is unclear if this refers to the five-star London hotel, or a hotel in the town of Dorchester, Dorset.

The trust also alleges losses of tens of thousands of pounds relating to payments to staff working as consultants rather than employees, resulting in “larger expenses being made to consultants than would have been if they had been employed”.

But Achilleos’s defence argued that “had the consultants been employed by the claimant, the claimant would have been liable to pay a higher starting salary plus on costs and relocation costs”.

Other alleged losses include “excessive” mileage claims and gifts, such as hampers and flowers, and money spent on renting several properties for senior staff who did not live near the schools where they worked.

This included bills of thousands to rent properties called “The Annexe” and “Blacksmiths

Continued on next page



INVESTIGATION: MATS

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

Cottage” as part of a “rent and relocation” package.

They also pointed to more than £10,000 in rent for a property at Lower Tideford Farm, which hosts holiday cottages, and another bill of more than £10,000 for a flat in Bideford, north Devon.

Achilleos has also admitted claiming £511 for new tyres and a service for his Mercedes car, but said he charged it “in the knowledge that [he] was owed substantial monies from unclaimed mileage”.

**Finances open to ‘widespread abuse’**

The trust alleged that the defendants “exercised decision-making powers without recourse to the trust board, a system facilitated by the inherent lack of separation between delivery and oversight, and did so without minuting and/or documenting the reasons for their decisions.

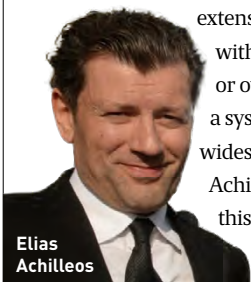
“The financial system by which [the defendants] were able to spend public funds, resulting in the substantial misapplication and disproportionate use of the same, was further facilitated by the lack of internal controls adopted by those charity trustees.”

But Achilleos’s defence said that “no funds were misapplied and/or disproportionately used. There was no lack of internal controls. The claimant has



not set out any such substantial misapplication and/or how funds were disproportionately used.”

The position “was one in which [Achilleos and Wilson], in breach of their duties as directors and charity trustees of the claimant, exercised extensive financial control without any scrutiny and/or oversight resulting in a system that was open to widespread abuse”.



Elias Achilleos

Achilleos’s defence denied this and said that “all such expenditure was open to

the appropriate individuals to have sight of”.

The trust is seeking “damages and/or equitable compensation” relating to the losses it has identified, an order that the defendants repay what they were paid when employed by the trust.

A defence filed on Wilson’s behalf said allegations of fraud and dishonesty “should be struck out due to the absence of reasonably credible material which establishes an arguable case of fraud against him”.

The particulars of the trust’s claim had “become imprecise and overloaded with allegations that do not give rise to causes of action”.

The trust announced earlier this year that Eames had settled for an undisclosed amount and had “volunteered to assist SchoolsCompany Trust with its claim against the other defendants”.

A defence on Eames’s behalf, filed before the settlement, said the allegations were “unjustified, improper and not supported by the evidence”.

It added: “This is not to say that [Eames] does not, with the benefit of hindsight, recognise that he made errors in his work for the claimant. Those errors largely arose from the trust [Eames] placed in [Achilleos] and others to whom certain responsibilities had been delegated.”

£900k, three years ... and still no final claims

The first government-backed lawsuit against an academy trust’s former directors has already racked up “scandalous” costs of £900,000 – with its final claims “still not in order” nearly three years on, a court has heard.

The Department for Education agreed in 2021 to bankroll the SchoolsCompany Trust’s bid to sue some of its former trustees after it collapsed amid accusations of financial mismanagement. But a full trial is still on the distant horizon amid complaints about the trust’s “convoluted” allegations.

This week, the High Court heard an application on behalf of Everton Wilson, one of the three remaining defendants in the long-running case, to strike out allegations that he conspired to defraud the trust of money.

John Meredith-Hardy, acting for Wilson, argued his client could not be held responsible for losses made after April 12, 2017, when he was suspended from work. “He cannot be providing any oversight or scrutiny when he is sitting at home. He is not playing any part in the running of the business.”

He added that “as far as [Wilson] is concerned there is not a single item he has been alleged to

have taken for his own benefit.

“There is no instance where it is alleged that he has put money in his pocket when he shouldn’t have.”

In court, the trust agreed to withdraw all but one allegation of conspiracy to defraud – which related to payments to a consultant.

But Meredith-Hardy also took aim at the trust’s wider case, set out in a document called a “particulars of claim”.

The law states that these should be “a concise statement of the facts on which the claimant relies”. The actual document runs to 83 pages.

Last July, the presiding judge, Master Dagnall, ordered the trust to provide more detail on the exact damages sought from each defendant. Meredith-Hardy said the trust had not done so.

“They have incurred almost £900,000 worth of costs so far. Their pleadings are still not in order. It’s scandalous, it’s public money.”

A defence filed on behalf of Patrick Eames, who has since settled for an undisclosed sum, said the trust’s claim was “exceptionally long, convoluted and, at times, difficult to understand”.

The trust’s main claim for around £2.8 million to cover its remaining deficit owed to the

government is based on an allegation that the defendants failed in their duty to set a balanced budget.

But Meredith-Hardy said there were “very substantial numbers” of academies that incurred deficits at the same time as SchoolsCompany. “The notion that there’s a hard and fixed rule here is self-evidently not the reality.”

But Rachel Sleeman, for the claimant, said the case “does not represent how the majority of academy trusts are being managed by their directors and trustees”.

She added: “These are quite extraordinary facts and that is why it is appropriate to bring this claim.”

The court ran out of time and did not hear the claimant’s response. The hearing was adjourned to July at the earliest but may not be heard until November.

A spokesperson for SchoolsCompany said: “This week the court has heard only from counsel representing one of the defendants. Our response will follow. While action continues, we cannot comment further.”

The DfE refused to comment.

# Trusts struggling to close 'unacceptable' gender pay gap

LUCAS CUMISKEY

@LUCAS\_CUMISKEY

EXCLUSIVE



The gender pay gap at the country's biggest trusts has hardly closed despite the roll-out of schemes such as "unconscious gender bias" training, enhanced maternity leave and the appointment of "diversity champions".

The average pay gap at the 20 largest trusts was 32.3 per cent last year (meaning women are paid 67.7p to every £1 for men). It constitutes little progress on the 32.5 per cent gap in 2022 and 33 per cent in 2021.

Of the 100 public bodies with the largest pay gaps, 97 were trusts, analysis by The Guardian has found. This is in part because most of the lower-paid and often part-time roles in schools are done by women, as opposed to men in the same role as men simply being paid less.

Schools Week analysis found the gap did narrow at 12 of the 20 trusts. But Vivienne Porritt, co-founder of WomenEd, said the pay gulfs were "not acceptable in a profession that professes to be equitable as part of its core values".

Employers with 250 or more staff have had to publish median male and female pay per hour since 2018.

Ormiston Academies Trust improved the most year-on-year, with its gap decreasing from 37.2 per cent to 24 per cent. The trust said its policies include identifying and supporting "champions of diversity".

Schools Week also looked at the trusts' pay gaps over a longer period to find those showing sustained improvement.

Outwood Grange Academies Trust, which has improved the most since 2021, said all its senior and middle leaders now get recruitment training, which includes "recognising and challenging unconscious gender bias". Courses include "best practice guidance for shortlisting and interviews".

Staff now qualify for enhanced maternity leave from day one, rather than having to work at the trust for a year to qualify. It also has a long-running "women into leadership" programme.

The Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust has seen its gender gap grow the most since 2021. Women at the trust are now paid 52p for every £1 men earn – the second-worst overall this year.

But chief executive Oliver Burwood expects it to improve given that the last nine heads appointed were all women.

Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust had the

second-biggest increase in its median hourly pay gap since 2021-2022, a jump from 23.3 per cent to 31.1 per cent.

A spokesperson said it was a meritocratic organisation, led by a female CEO. They stressed it was a "fair employer, with a flexible working policy and commitment to national pay frameworks" and claimed the median pay gap is "misleading".

Ark, with the smallest gap of 13.6 per cent, said it had launched an "inclusive hiring plan" and published guidance and training on the menopause, among other measures.

Harris Federation has the second-lowest gap, despite it increasing from 13.7 to 17.1 year-on-year.

Chief executive Sir Dan Moynihan said the trust funds coaching for all teaching staff via The

Maternity Teacher/Paternity Teacher Project, which offers return to work workshops and support for pregnant staff. It also encourages women into leadership schemes.

Moynihan added: "One of the key issues is that women are more likely to return to work part time and sometimes, when they come back part time, there is a feeling that maybe they can't take on responsibility.

"But, actually, that's a question of creating an environment where people feel that they can and that they are supported too."

The United Learning Trust has the third-smallest gap. Sir Jon Coles, its CEO, said the trust has been "trying to promote men into teaching assistant and primary teaching roles" to drive the gap down.

The Nicholas Postgate Catholic Academy Trust has the biggest gap, at 53.7 per cent, but insists it is "an equal opportunities employer that pays all staff in line with national terms and conditions".

Most of its executive leadership team and headteachers are women, a spokesperson added.

In November, WomenEd analysis found the gulf between female and male secondary heads was the largest in 12 years, with women earning £3,908 less on average.

## 2023-2024 gender pay gap data based on median hourly earnings

Employer	Women's hourly earnings for every £1 men earn	More or less than previous year
Nicholas Postgate Catholic Academy Trust	46p	2p more
The Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust	52p	6p less
Delta Academies Trust	55p	4p more
The Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust	56p	24p less
Aspire Academy Trust	57p	2p more
Greenwood Academies Trust	57p	5p more
GLF Schools	61p	3p more
Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust	69p	9p less
Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust	65p	1p less
NASUWT	66p	1p more
REAch2 Academy Trust	68p	2p more
Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust	69p	3p more
The Kemnal Academies Trust	70p	The same
Outwood Grange Academies Trust	71p	8p more
Academies Enterprise Trust	75p	1p more
Ormiston Academies Trust	76p	13p more
Oasis Community Learning	77p	5p more
The Bath and Wells Diocesan Academies Trust	79p	2p more
United Learning Trust	80p	The same
Harris Federation	83p	3p less
Ark Schools	86p	1p less
Ofqual	86p	The same
NEU	93p	The same
Department for Education	96p	1p more
Teach First	99p	1p less
Ofsted	£1	0.01p less



NEWS: SATS

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

# Primaries fail to opt out of SATs – but say they won't be testing

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Fewer than one in 10 primary schools opted out of receiving key stage 1 SATs papers this year, renewing calls for the government to “put an end to this unnecessary cost and waste” from leaders.

A recent poll found that about 60 per cent of primary teachers expect their school to do the tests for year 2 pupils this year – suggesting many papers could just be thrown away.

The Standards and Testing Agency required schools to opt out of receiving the optional SATs materials for seven-year-olds, despite the tests becoming non-statutory this year.

Schools that did not want to receive physical papers had to opt out by mid-November.

Data from a Freedom of Information request by Schools Week revealed that, of 16,033 eligible schools, just 1,073 declined the papers – about 7 per cent.

A Teacher Tapp survey last week found that about 60 per cent of 377 primary teachers said they would continue with key stage 1 SATs this year.

Tes reported that 33 per cent said they would be assessing in May and a further 28 per cent said they would run the tests at a different point in the academic year.

Fifteen per cent would be using their own assessment, while 12 per cent said they would not be running the tests at all.

Sarah Hannafin, head of policy at school leaders' union NAHT, said it previously warned the government that “they risked wasting money with this ill-conceived approach of requiring schools to opt out of these tests.

“These figures indicate that we were right to be worried, and these unnecessary costs will stick in the craw of school leaders who are struggling to make budgets add up in many cases and who have been told repeatedly by the government to find efficiency savings.”

Dawn Kimpton, headteacher at Shaw Primary Academy in Thurrock, said the school opted out as “it made no sense to order papers for something that we have never really agreed with in the first place.

“We have always undertaken regular formative assessment and termly

summative checks, which are different to the SATs tests and more accessible to our children.”

But Jamie Barry, headteacher at Yewtree Primary School in Sandwell, said the opt-out decision was an example of the DfE “potentially trying to reduce workload”.

He added: “If you had to opt in, it's just one more thing to do for schools, and it's something that could be forgotten.” His school is using the papers to test in June, rather than May.

The DfE said it provided the papers for schools “to use to support them in understanding pupil attainment and if pupils are on track to meet the expected standard at the end of KS2, to inform classroom practice accordingly.”

There is no requirement to report the results to councils or parents and data will not be collected on whether schools did use the papers.

Hannafin urged the government to offer papers under an “opt in”, model to “put an end to this unnecessary cost and waste”.

Arrangements for next year will be confirmed “in due course”. The cost of supplying the papers will not be available until later this year.



Sarah Hannafin

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

## Pearson beats Capita to win £180m SATs contract

Outsourcing giant Capita will no longer manage SATs tests after exam board Pearson won the contract worth up to £180m.

A government review had found that Capita's first year overseeing the tests, in 2022, caused “significant frustration and inconvenience” to schools.

Exams regulator Ofqual had to step in after thousands of tests went missing, wrong marks were awarded and the helpline went into meltdown.

But, in correspondence sent to schools on Tuesday and seen by *Schools Week*, the Standards and Testing Agency (STA) said Pearson had been selected as the preferred supplier from September 2025.

A previous tender document said the contract could be worth up to £180 million over seven years.

Capital will manage SATS this year and next year.

The STA said “all parties concerned will work hard to make this a positive experience for schools and local authorities”.

Last year, Capita also lost its contract to administer the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) after 27 years to Indian IT company Tata Consultancy Services. It also withdrew from delivering the flagship early career framework.

In an end of year report, Capita said losing the TPS and SATs contracts would “have a dampening impact on revenue growth”. It said both were “lost on price”.

Capita won the £107 million contract in 2018, but Covid meant its first exams series was not run until 2022.

*Schools Week* investigations revealed problems that year including thousands of papers going missing, excessive helpline waiting times and markers locked out of online training. The outsourcer's fee was slashed by £1.3 million as a result.

An Ofqual report for the 2023 series also found technical issues with marking and results, but they were much less severe than previously.

Capita said it was disappointed following a strong performance in 2023, when it had met or

exceeded its targets. The firm said it put forward a “compelling, competitive” bid.

Pearson previously marked SATs papers before Capita took over the contract, which also included services such as printing and distributing the tests.

*Schools Week* revealed the STA paid £3 million to Pearson to settle a legal dispute over the contract changing hands.

Pearson said it will deliver the optional end of key stage 1 SATs, key stage 2 SATs, teacher assessments in English writing and science and the phonics screening check.

This includes printing, distributing and marking papers and running the school helpline.

Sharon Hague, Pearson's school qualifications managing director, added that the company has a “proven track record of delivering high-volume, quality assessment”.

The DfE said Pearson was selected as it scored best against the published criteria and demonstrated its capacity to deliver a high-quality service and value for money.

ANALYSIS: ACADEMIES

# Academy commissioner costs soar by 40% after restructure

**JACK DYSON**

@JACKYDYS

INVESTIGATES

The cost of expanding academy commissioner teams has rocketed by 40 per cent in just 12 months. They now cost more than £3,000 for each of England's academies.

Union bosses are demanding a review of the effectiveness of the regional director teams. Dubbed the new "middle tier", these civil servants decide on new free schools, trust mergers and intervene in underperforming primaries and secondaries.

But sector leaders warn that the teams may need to grow even further to keep pace as more schools become academies. *Schools Week* investigates ...

**Spend up to £34m**

The cost of the teams leapt by almost 40 per cent from £24.35 million in 2021-22 to £33.9 million last year.

A restructure in 2022 saw the eight regions



expanded into nine and a new "broader remit" introduced that includes the delivery of SEND provision and children's social care improvement.

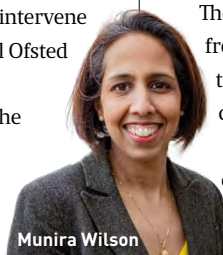
They were also given new powers to intervene where schools have been given several Ofsted grades that are less than 'good'.

As of February, the expected cost of the teams was £32.7 million, with 571 staff employed – an average of £3,041 for each of England's academies.

However, there is big regional variation, from £2,521 per academy in the east of England to £4,413 in the north-west.

The overall costs have also risen sharply, from just over £19 million in 2016-17 when the teams were known as regional school commissioners.










Munira Wilson, the Liberal Democrats education spokesperson, said: "Schools are



Munira Wilson

Continued on next page

## 2024 regional director team costs breakdown

Region	Regional director	Cost	FTE staff	Cost per academy
North West	 Vicky Beer	£4.36m	80	£4,413
London	 Claire Burton	£3.68m	56.3	£3,608
North East	 Katherine Cowell	£2.09m	33.2	£3,376
Yorkshire and Humber	 Alison Wilson	£3.89m	71.7	£3,095
West Midlands	 Andrew Warren	£3.91m	70.7	£2,947
South East	 Dame Kate Dethridge	£3.93m	61.2	£2,764
South West	 Lucy Livings	£4.13m	78.5	£2,739
East Midlands	 Carol Gray	£3.11m	54.6	£2,624
East of England	 Jonathan Duff	£3.58m	65.5	£2,521
<b>Total</b>		<b>£32.68m</b>	<b>571.7</b>	<b>£3,041</b>

Source: DfE data obtained under FOI, as of February 2024



ANALYSIS: ACADEMIES

in crisis, but this Conservative government has chosen to spend more money on regional group teams rather than spending it on pupils. They have failed our children.”

However, a Department for Education spokesperson said the academy average analysis was “completely misleading” as the groups now work across wider areas.

“The regions group resources its regional teams relative to the share of our operations work they carry, so cost per academy is not a fair reflection of all of its work.”

**Rise despite growth cap**

EDSK think tank boss Tom Richmond, a former DfE adviser, said it is no surprise that the government is footing an increasing bill “given the scale of the tasks regional directors and their teams are expected to deliver”.

However, the DfE is also cutting spending to make expected savings of £1 billion-plus to fund its contribution to teacher pay increases.

Ministers are also exerting pressure on departments to “modernise” and “reduce the size of the state”. In October, Chancellor Jeremy Hunt announced a cap on civil service headcounts.

The number of full-time equivalent staff in the regional director teams has risen by 40 per cent since 2016-17, from 402.6 to 571.7.

Our analysis suggests there were 21 senior civil servants – the highest-ranking Whitehall grade, paid at least £75,000 – working across the teams last year. A further 175 officials were grades 6 or 7, the rank below, with a salary of at least £58,000.

Julie McCulloch, director of policy for school leaders’ union ASCL, said: “At a time when school and college leaders are dealing with very tight budgets, we would expect the [DfE] to also be scrutinising its own spending just as closely.”

The DfE said reorganisations of the teams meant that costs are not directly comparable.

**‘Logjam’ of decisions**

Trust leaders have also raised concerns over perceived overlaps between the roles of regional groups and local authorities. Both now have responsibilities relating to SEND and children’s social care, for instance.

The CEO of one MAT, who did not want to be named, gave the example of getting letters from both the regions group and local authority after a parent lodged a safeguarding



Julie McCulloch



Leora Cruddas

complaint.

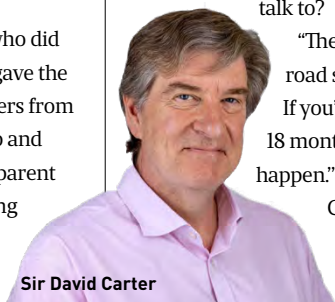
Despite the bigger teams, there is wider discontent in the sector over the consistency of decision-making.

Speaking on a recent EDSK podcast, former national schools commissioner Sir David Carter said there was currently a “logjam”, as “everything has to go back through DfE for decision-making, for funding, for approval”.

He added: “You have a general dissatisfaction both, I think, from the DfE thinking ‘we’ve lost our grip a bit on this’ to schools saying ‘who do I talk to?”

“There’s a school down the road saying they want to join us. If you’re saying it’s going to take 18 months, then it’s not going to happen.”

Confederation of School



Sir David Carter

Trusts CEO Leora Cruddas, whose organisation is the sector body for academies, said her members wanted to see “decisions being made quickly, robustly and consistently”.

**‘We’ve reached an impasse’**

McCulloch has demanded a review of the regions group structure to ensure they are providing support “in an effective – and cost-effective – way”.

Both CST and EDSK have called for the teams to be spun off into a new independent regulator. Richmond said doing this would allow the sector “to agree on [the regulator’s] responsibilities [and] set a budget for their work”.

But Carter thinks such a regulator would have to be split across about “30 sub-regions to make it work”. Without this, there would be “an enormous workload and you will never get to the heart of the challenges”.

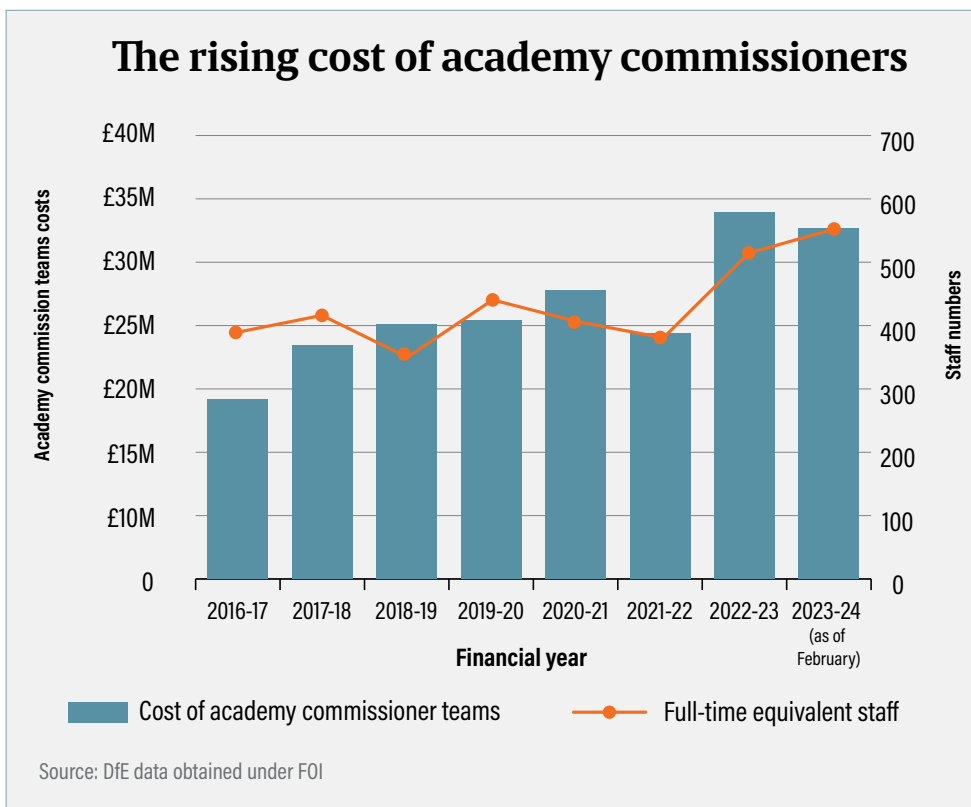
Even if regional teams did get more cash, it would not “solve the underlying problem that they are too close to ministers and too detached from local communities”, Richmond added.

EDSK has proposed having public hearing and local consultations on academy decisions to improve this.

Carter added: “I think we’ve reached an impasse where there’s an important decision for a government to take later this year about how that middle tier of support has worked.”



Tom Richmond



# Judge upholds prayer ban in ‘victory for all schools’

LUCAS CUMISKEY

@LUCAS\_CUMISKEY

A High Court judge has ruled that any disadvantage to Muslim pupils caused by a prayer ban at Michaela Community School was “outweighed by the aims it seeks to promote in the interests of the school community as a whole”.

Katharine Birbalsingh, head of “Britain’s strictest school” in Wembley, said the decision was a “victory for all schools”. Education secretary Gillan Keegan said it “gives all school leaders the confidence to make the right decisions for their pupils”.

On Tuesday, Mr Justice Linden dismissed a Muslim pupil’s legal challenge to the prayer policy on all key grounds, upholding one lesser allegation of “acting unfairly” when excluding the pupil.

“The disadvantage to Muslim pupils at the school caused by the PRP (prayer ritual policy) was outweighed by the aims which it seeks to promote in the interests of the school community as a whole, including Muslim pupils,” the judge said.

The decision follows a two-day judicial review in January, when lawyers for the pupil, who cannot be named for legal reasons, argued that the ban breached equality laws and her freedom of religion, claiming it disproportionately impacted Muslim students.

Birbalsingh, the former government social mobility commissioner, told the court that the policy was needed to restore “calm and order” and promote cohesion, after the school received threats, including a “bomb hoax”.

The judge ruled the policy did not “interfere” with the pupil’s religious freedoms because she had chosen Michaela knowing it was strict and could have moved to a different school or prayed later in the day.

Birbalsingh implemented a temporary moratorium in March last year and it was made permanent with the backing of the school’s governing body the following month.

It came after pupils started praying in the playground in March 2023 and used blazers to kneel on after they were “prohibited” from using prayer mats.

This sparking an outcry when they were spotted by passers-by, which led to an online petition signed by at least 4,000 people and school staff



Katharine Birbalsingh

being threatened, the court heard.

Muslim pupils praying in an area of the playground during lunch were “undermining the school’s culture of all races and religions mixing and being friends with each other”.

Governing board minutes from the time said

the “ethos of the school [was] that the school community takes precedence over the individual”.

In January, the court heard how the school building had “limited space”. Birbalsingh feared “a large majority of Muslim pupils” would want to pray inside if permitted. Around half of the 700 pupils at the school are Muslim.

The judge noted the school was housed in a seven-storey office block with “narrow” corridors and “cramped” classrooms. He added the school was “entitled to say that... the cost in terms of use of the school’s resources would be such that it would not be proportionate” to facilitate this.

He added: “The evidence is that, since the PRP was introduced, good relations within the school community have been restored.”

Birbalsingh said: “A school should be free to do what is right for the pupils it serves.”

The pupil said she did not agree that it “would be too hard to accommodate pupils who wished to pray in the lunchbreak”.

Humanists UK has called for new guidance on the question of religious practices in schools.

## What are the implications for other schools?

*Alistair Wood, from teachers’ union alternative Edapt writes ...*

The judgment should provide some guidance to schools over policies which are made in the interests of and in line with the aims of the school community.

Where these are challenged by individuals, this particular case will provide a precedent for justification of actions, especially with regard to religious freedoms within secular schools.

However, there are some useful practices that helped to support the Michaela School case which other schools might want to consider:

- **Communicate and share key policies with pupils and families:** Many schools already do this routinely online, but the sharing and educating of stakeholders in key policies such as behaviour can be seen as good practice.

- **Upskill governing bodies and school leaders:** As policies are reviewed and ratified, it is important that leaders are aware of legal duties such as the PSED. With schools subject to a number of pieces of key legislation including the Equality Act 2010, this may require specific training and professional development.
- **Provide clear justification for policies:** As seen in this case, schools are able to breach legislation but must provide a clear justification as to why that is the case. Recording these justifications in the policies themselves may assist in helping to provide a more robust defence and also be a useful process for evaluating the merits of such policies as they are formed.

NEWS

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

# Ministers eye new 'spot checks' to monitor playing field sell offs

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

EXCLUSIVE

Government "spot checks" on deals to sell school playing fields could be introduced in a bid to tighten up its monitoring of academy trust land sales.

The measure is being considered by officials as they weigh up how best to check if conditions set by the Department for Education for land disposals have been met.

As part of this, they are also assessing whether to contact leaders directly to ensure they have observed the terms of their sales.

In response to a written parliamentary question last month, schools minister Damian Hinds said: "[We are] considering measures to monitor compliance of conditions by academy trusts and other responsible bodies.

"Measures under consideration include carrying out spot checks on cases, contacting academy trusts directly for confirmation that the conditions have been met and asking trusts to notify the department once they have been met."



Before a deal to sell playing fields can go through, education secretary Gillian Keegan must give it the green light. Her consent will usually be subject to a condition stating that the capital receipt should be reinvested to improve sports provision at the affected school or local primaries and secondaries, Hinds said.

The department also requires trust accounting officers to sign and return a letter confirming that they will comply with all terms of consent. Failure to do so could be a breach of the trust's funding agreement.

Officials do not check if the terms have been met in any other way.

The DfE stressed that the changes are being looked at "as officials consider it is good practice to monitor compliance of conditions, rather than in response to a known issue with non-compliance".

Prior to any new measures being implemented, the department "will need to establish the most effective practice for monitoring and recording compliance", it added.

The new measures to monitor compliance will be in addition to the requirement to sign and return the acknowledgement letter.

Fifteen agreements were struck last year to dispose of playing field land. In November, Lancashire County Council was given the go-ahead to sell Glenburn Sports College to make way for housing. The entire receipt will be spent on capital projects to address condition issues in other local schools.

Analysis shows that 285 playing field sales have been signed off under the Conservatives since 2010.



The 14th annual  
**FESTIVAL OF  
EDUCATION**  
at Wellington College | 4-5 July 2024



HEADLINE PARTNER  
**AQA**  
Questions matter



# HAVE YOU GOT YOUR TICKET YET?

Where those who inspire  
find their own inspiration

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



FOUNDED BY  
  
WELLINGTON  
COLLEGE

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



# CST sets out plan for fairer funding system

**JACK DYSON**

@JACKYDYS

The government must revamp the national funding formula (NFF) to allow schools to provide the education that “society expects”, the body representing England’s academy trusts has said.

The recommendations were made by the Confederation of School Trusts as part of a report to deliver a fairer and more transparent funding system.

Leora Cruddas, the CST’s CEO, said money needs to be distributed “in a way that reflects actuals costs and ways of operating in schools and trusts today”.

She added: “If the English state school system is going to be the best system in the world at getting better, it needs funding that enables it to flourish, and that is what our proposals are aimed at delivering.”

Here are the four key policy recommendations...

## 1. Merge pupil premium into NFF ...

The government currently hands out cash to local authorities based on its NFF.

The money is then given to schools based on each council’s local formula, although more are moving towards mirroring the actual NFF. However, there is no end date to make all councils follow the national funding formula.

The CST said leaders will “find strategic financial planning very challenging” if they are not given clarity. A “transparent and informed annual settlement, uprated as necessary to reflect changes to workforce pay and pensions”, would



“reduce the impact of uncertainty”.

The body said the government should also integrate “long-standing additional funding [channels] such as pupil premium” and the PE premium into the NFF.

It said the real costs of running a school could be identified by looking at those MATs that pool funding and have carried out integrated curriculum and financial planning.

## 2. ... roll in SEND cash too (with minimum funding level)

The government should “actively explore” rolling core funding for special school and AP into the NFF. This should be a “protected, minimum level of funding”, the CST said.

The funding is currently based on place funding fixed at £10,000 for more than a decade.

To help inform this, ministers should draw on evidence from the safety valve programme, which helps councils to tackle SEND overspending.

A vulnerable children impact assessment should also be run to “act as a reference framework for policy decisions – including funding”.

This would be the “starting point” for decisions

to consider effects on disadvantaged youngsters as well as those with SEND.

SEND funding bands should also relate to agreed provision, not a statement of need.

## 3. ‘Major national maintenance programme’

The CST called for a “national maintenance and rebuilding programme”. The government estimates that £11.4 billion is needed to repair England’s schools buildings.

Money could be raised by ringfencing a “small percentage” of corporation tax income to raise £16 billion over two years, but this would need “significant political will”.

Or ministers could establish a new private sector finance programme that “does not result in long-lasting expensive contracts which trap schools” in the way that PFI deals did.

Another suggestion is letting schools and trusts access developer contributions from housing schemes.

## 4. New policy premium

Any other, time-limited funding should come through a new “policy premium”. This would mean the premium mechanism “becomes the only funding stream outside of the NFF ... related to delivering provision”.

In 2010, a process was created that required all government departments to assess and fully fund any new burdens on councils from things such as policy proposals, new duties and changes in guidance.

A similar initiative for schools would be “reasonable”, the CST said.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

## Tory donor linked to far-right posts steps down as Ark chair

Conservative donor and media mogul Sir Paul Marshall (pictured) has stepped down as chair and trustee of Ark Schools after he was accused of liking and sharing far-right extremist posts and conspiracy theories on social media.

Ark, one of England’s largest academy trusts, said Marshall had “indicated earlier in the year his intention to step down ... to focus on other philanthropic and business commitments”.

The trust claimed this comment was made during a confidential board discussion at the end of last year.

The News Agents podcast and Hope Not Hate, a charity opposing far-right extremism, reported in February that Marshall had retweeted and

liked content “which is on the most extreme end of political opinion about Islam” from a private account on X, formerly known as Twitter.

At the time, Ark stood by its co-founder, saying the trust was a “diverse organisation which exists to serve communities of all faiths and cultures”.

It added that Marshall had “made clear” in a statement “that he shares those values, as is evidenced by his decades of charitable work, including with Ark”.

News website Education Uncovered also reported last month that members of the National Education Union working for the trust had launched a petition

arguing that Marshall was “no longer a fit and proper person to be associated with Ark Schools in any capacity”.

But the trust told the union it had taken advice and was “satisfied that he continues to be a fit and proper person to be a trustee”.

However Ark said on Monday that Marshall has been replaced by Tina Alexandrou, a current board member who has been vice-chair and the safeguarding and inclusion lead.

Marshall, who also co-founded GB News, said Ark was “an amazing organisation” and he would “continue to support” the trust. He remains a trustee of Ark’s parent charity, Absolute Return for Kids.



NEWS IN BRIEF

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

# Oak CEO hunt surpasses a year

A permanent boss at the government's curriculum quango has yet to be appointed, a year after the recruitment process began.

Applications to head up Oak National Academy closed on April 6 last year.

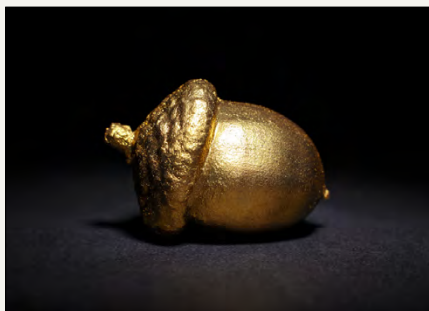
Interviews were scheduled for June but no announcement has been made.

Matt Hood, Oak co-founder, has acted as interim chief executive since it controversially became an arms-length public body in 2022. Hood has applied for the permanent role.

The Department for Education, which is running the recruitment round, said this week that a chief executive would be announced shortly, but did not comment on why it was taking so long.

An Oak spokesperson said: "We appreciate the process takes time and are optimistic the appointment will be made very soon."

In the job advert, education secretary Gillian Keegan said the government was looking for an "outstanding individual with senior leadership experience and education sector



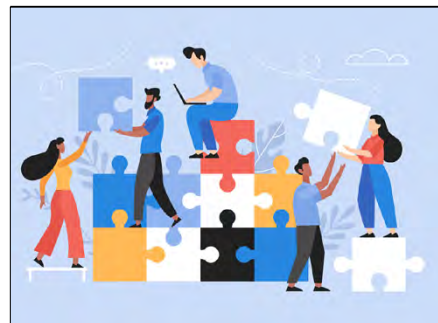
expertise".

They must demonstrate their "expertise in designing and delivering an evidence-informed, knowledge-rich curriculum" and "the ability to navigate the political landscape skilfully".

The salary is £120,000.

Sir Ian Bauckham, Oak chair, Jenny Oldroyd, the DfE's curriculum and general qualifications director, and Clare Wagner, head of The Henrietta Barnett School, were advising ministers on the appointment.

# MATs should have 'SEND director' role



Multi-academy trusts should create a "director of SEND" role to improve inclusion, a new report has recommended. The full potential of trusts to support pupils with additional needs has "still to be unlocked", it added.

Interviews with 19 MATs by the National Foundation of Education Research found that trust SEND leaders play a "pivotal role" by centralising work and providing support to individual schools.

The NFER said these leaders tend not to mandate particular approaches but provide a framework across the trust's schools and help SEND co-ordinators (SENCOs), who warned of soaring workloads.

Researchers recommended "where feasible" that MATs should consider creating a director of SEND role, or similar, to take "responsibility for providing strategic direction and to facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing".

Some limitations, such as geographical distribution of schools and workload, did mean that the "full potential of the MAT model for SEND provision is still to be unlocked".

However, researchers found MATs were "ultimately constrained" by "what many regard as chronic underfunding" of the system, urging policymakers to find more cash. Support from councils also needs to be improved.

Matt Walker, NFER senior research manager, said MAT leaders were "playing a crucial role in consolidating SEND initiatives, fostering collaboration and offering skills and assistance to individual schools as the sector navigates this crisis."

# Ofsted criticises 'poor' RE lessons

A "notable" number of schools are still not meeting the legal requirement to teach religious education to all pupils, Ofsted has said. It urged the government to "urgently" update guidance.

The watchdog published its latest subject report on Wednesday, looking at the strengths and weaknesses of how RE is taught in English schools.

The "superficially broad" curriculum often lacked depth and "sufficient substance to prepare pupils to live in a complex world", Ofsted said.

In most cases, "where the curriculum tried to cover many religions, like equal slices of a pie, pupils generally remembered very little". By contrast, "where the curriculum prioritised depth of study,

pupils learned much more".

In secondary schools, Ofsted said "most statutory non-examined RE was limited and of a poor quality". Ministers should update guidance for schools on the statutory expectations to ensure "appropriate clarity".

"Problems and challenges facing RE persist" 10 years on from Ofsted's last report, the watchdog added.

Sir Martyn Oliver, Ofsted's chief inspector, said a "strong RE curriculum is not only important for pupils' cultural development, it is a requirement of law and too many schools are not meeting that obligation".

The report is based on Ofsted's findings from visits to 50 schools in England between September 2021 and April 2023.



Sir Martyn Oliver

[Full story here](#)

[Full story here](#)

# Teaching assistants cut in 75% of primary schools

**SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER**  
**@SCHOOLSWEEK**

Three-quarters of primary school heads have had to cut teaching assistants numbers, despite the continued rise in pupils with special educational needs.

The annual Sutton Trust school funding survey reveals a worsening picture for school finances. As well as staff cuts, activities are also being chopped.

Sir Peter Lampl, the Sutton Trust founder, said the “erosion of schools funding coupled with rising costs is having a major impact on the ability of schools to provide the support that low-income students need.

“It is disgraceful that increasing numbers of school leaders are having to cut essential staff and essential co-curricular activities.”

The proportion of senior leaders reporting cuts in teaching staff (32 per cent), teaching assistants (69 per cent) and support staff (46 per cent) has risen this year.

At primary, 74 per cent of leaders said they have reduced the number of teaching assistants.



This is up from 47 per cent in 2021.

Teaching assistants often provide support to pupils with additional needs.

Lampl added: “The situation for primary schools in particular is one of rapid deterioration, with half of them having to use funding to plug gaps that should be used for poorer pupils.”

In secondary schools, 38 per cent of leaders have cut teaching staff.

Schools in the north-east were the most likely to have reduced teaching staff (45 per cent), compared to between 16 and 36 per cent in other regions.

The proportion of schools cutting spending on trips and outings (50 per cent), alongside sports

and other extracurricular activities (27 per cent) is the highest since the Sutton Trust’s polling began in 2017.

Around half of schools were not using pupil premium funding to plug gaps, according to the survey of 1,282 teachers by the National Foundation for Educational Research.

The government has promised to bring school funding back to 2010 levels. The Institute for Fiscal Studies said it was on track to meet the promise after recent increases meant school funding would reach £60 billion in 2024-25.

However, increased cost pressures are threatening to derail this.

The IFS has estimated that the government would have to provide £3.2 billion in extra funding to make up for the loss in the purchasing power of school budgets since 2010.

Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the National Education Union, said: “Successive surveys have shown that schools across the country are having to drop resources and cut staffing to the bone in order to survive. This repeatedly falls on deaf ears, however, and the government allows it not only to continue but to worsen.”

A DfE spokesperson said school funding is “the highest level ever in real terms per pupil, to support school leaders meet their costs”.

**EXCLUSIVE**

SAMANTHA BOOTH & LUCAS CUMISKEY | @SCHOOLSWEEK

## DfE ends funding for teaching school hubs sector body

The government has ended funding for the sector body set up to oversee the teaching schools hub network.

The Department for Education said it would be “re-purposing” the cash for the Teaching Schools Hub Council and its central team from September.

The council, made up of 13 school leaders, supports the national network of 87 hubs, including facilitating networking and collaboration to “enable the sharing of development of best practice”.

A central team of four employed staff also help build capacity and growth.

However, the government made clear that funding for teaching school hubs will “continue as planned”.

After a re-accreditation process, DfE confirmed last month which teaching school hubs would continue to run from September.

But Chris Armstrong-Stacey, deputy director for developing teachers and leaders, said in a

letter to hubs it was now “right to reflect on that strong progress and the strength and maturity” of the network.

“We are extremely grateful to both the council and central team for their hard work and significant contribution to establishing such an effective network of teaching school hubs during the first designation period,” the letter added.

He praised the council’s “careful stewardship” and “excellent support” in helping increase the delivery of “high-quality professional development to teachers and school leaders”.

Officials will now work with the council on a transition plan. Hubs were told they will “continue to receive support” from the DfE’s delivery team, who will also continue to “facilitate regional forums” and share updates.

Richard Gill, TSH council chair, said their work should help “ensure that there is resilience across the network so that the momentum will be maintained”.

It is understood the council will decide its future at a meeting later this term.

In 2021, more than 80 hub schools replaced the previous 750 teaching schools – with government saving £25 million.

Armstrong-Stacey added that government is “confident that the capacity and expertise in the Teaching School Hub network means you will continue to excel, so thousands more teachers can benefit from high-quality training and support”.

It is the latest in a series of cuts of school-related schemes as DfE faces up to a potential £1.5 billion budget black hole to fund teacher pay rises.

A DfE spokesperson said the council has “done a great job building a strong and mature hubs programme – driving up teaching excellence and best practice”.

“We will continue to develop and support hubs to build on our successes to ensure every child receives a world-class education.”



NEWS IN BRIEF

Had a total switch off over the Easter break and need to catch up with the most important stories you missed? Fear not, *Schools Week* has you covered ...

## Falling rolls: Schools face £1bn hit

School funding could plunge by more than £1 billion in five years as the falling rolls crisis bites – prompting warnings that more budget cuts would be “catastrophic” to the sector.

As school funding is closely linked to pupil numbers, the demographic change presents “imminent challenges to the education system and the financial health of schools”, the Education Policy Institute said.

A report published last week has urged government to commit to maintaining

funding levels in cash terms. This means they could “reinvest” the excess cash to boost per-pupil funding rates.

Projections suggest pupil numbers will fall by 818,000 between 2022-23 and 2032-33, following a national birth-rate slump.

It is not known to what extent school funding may rise in future years. But EPI said even if government increased per-pupil rates annually by 0.5 per cent, then the overall school funding pot would still fall by £1 billion.



## Ofsted picks ex-boss to lead review

Ofsted has named former chief inspector Dame Christine Gilbert to lead the independent inquiry into its response to headteacher Ruth Perry’s death.

Gilbert, who served as Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector from 2006 until 2011 and now chairs the Education Endowment Foundation, said she “intends to take a very detailed and thorough look at all areas of Ofsted’s work”.

This includes the watchdog’s communications, information-sharing and support offered to staff after Perry’s death.

She will not re-examine the judgement made



of Perry’s school, Caversham Primary.

Paul Whiteman, NAHT union boss, said it was “important to confront head-on the concern that some might express about a former chief inspector reviewing the work of Ofsted”.

“It is therefore crucial that the review demonstrates a robust level of independence and impartiality.”

Gilbert’s findings will be published alongside the ‘Big Listen’ consultation results in Autumn.

Recommendations will focus on action the watchdog can take to improve policies.

[Full story here](#)

## Inspector ‘punch’ jibe ‘light-hearted’



The education secretary said her comments about punching Ofsted inspectors were “off-the-cuff remarks made in a light-hearted manner”, as she swerved a trade union’s call to publicly retract the statement.

Gillian Keegan said she would have “probably punched” disrespectful Ofsted inspectors, during a question-and-answer session at the ASCL school leaders’ union conference in Liverpool last month.

The FDA union asked her to retract the “unacceptable” and “inflammatory language”.

But Keegan said the comments were “off-the-cuff remarks, made in a light-hearted manner in a very particular context, and in the spirit of expressing support for headteachers and teachers in the audience.”

“Clearly, I would not be punching anyone, or advocating anyone else do so, and to imply otherwise would be completely wrong.”

She added she was a “strong advocate and staunch defender of Ofsted”.

But FDA boss Dave Penman said her response was “disappointing” and “could have gone further to rebuild trust with inspectors”.

[Full story here](#)

## Lead NPQ provider drops out

One of the government’s lead providers of national professional qualifications (NPQs) will drop out of the scheme.

Education Development Trust reached the “regrettable conclusion” after the Department for Education announced its offer of free NPQs for all schools will be significantly scaled back.

Under the Covid recovery plan, all schools could access free NPQs. But from Autumn, only those in the top half of schools with the biggest pupil premium cohorts will be eligible for funding.

EDT said it will ensure current cohorts are “fully supported” until the end of their programmes.

In February, EDT had 3,110 NPQ participants and worked with 18 delivery partners including teacher school hubs and academy trusts.

Natalie Dixon, executive director for ECF and NPQ Programmes at Ambition Institute, another lead provider, said: “The most important thing now is to ensure there are no cold spots of NPQ provision next year.”

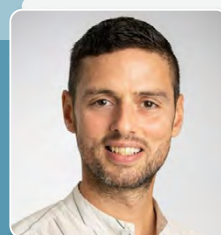
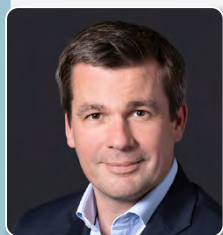
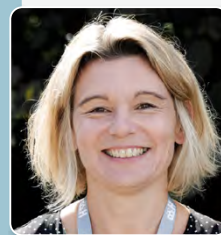
[Full story here](#)

## MOVERS AND SHAKERS

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK**Mark  
McCandless**CEO, Areté  
Learning Trust**Start date:** April 1**Previous/current role:** CEO, Ryedale  
Learning Trust**Interesting fact:** Mark once appeared on the television series [ITALS]'Springtime on the Farm' due to his hobby and passion (outside of education) for keeping and breeding domestic animals and poultry native to Shetland.

# Movers & Shakers

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

**Louis  
Coiffait-Gunn**CEO, CILIP:  
the library and  
information  
association**Start date:** May 8**Previous/current role:** Director of policy  
and public affairs, Publishers Association**Interesting fact:** Louis loves being up in the hills and mountains, on foot, bike or board, and thanks his lucky stars he's still able to after breaking his back in three places snowboarding in 2012.**Nick  
MacKenzie**Head of education,  
Browne Jacobson**Start date:** May**Previous/current role:** Partner,  
education team, Browne Jacobson**Interesting fact:** Nick is a part-time podcaster and, despite suffering from claustrophobia, recently took up scuba diving with his (enthusiastic) son.**Jonny  
Uttley**Visiting fellow,  
Centre for Young  
Lives**Start date:** April**Concurrent job:** Chief executive of The  
Education Alliance**Interesting fact:** I once went running with Bill Clinton when I was at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, and was an unpaid volunteer on his presidential campaign.**Kelly  
Robinson**Chief financial  
officer, HISP  
multi-academy trust**Start date:** April 1**Previous/current role:** Head of finance,  
HISP**Interesting fact:** My great, great grandad was a famous English jockey, who rode his last race at the age of 78, died at 105 and had 32 children!

## Journo to chair exam board

FEATURED



A former national newspaper editor has been appointed as chair of trustees at exam board AQA.

Anne Spackman joined the charity earlier this month, taking over from Justin van Wijngaarden.

Spackman worked in senior journalism roles, including at the *Financial Times* and *The Times*. More recently, she has held trustee roles for a range of charities. She's also chair of the Greenshaw Learning Trust.

The board of trustees is responsible for overall strategy, policy and steering AQA to fulfil its educational and charitable objective.

**Interesting fact:** When property correspondent at the *Financial Times*, Anne had lunch at Claridge's with Donald Trump. He ordered steak and potatoes and asked the waiter to go heavy on the potatoes.



# 10 INSPIRING YEARS 2014-2024

Join the **10th Inspiring Leadership Conference**  
13 – 14 June 2024, ICC, Birmingham

Celebrating its tenth anniversary, Inspiring Leadership 2024 promises another unique lineup of internationally renowned speakers each sharing their leadership stories and experiences.

An opportunity for you to reflect on your own leadership style, network with likeminded school leaders and to listen to stories and learn from experiences from the world of business, sport, the arts and education.



Use code **SCHOOLSWEEK** to receive 10% off your conference ticket price. To secure your place today, scan the QR code or visit [www.inspiringleadership.org](http://www.inspiringleadership.org)



#ilconf24

Brought to you by





## Profile

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL



# The rebel CEO with a community cause

**Wayne Norrie is a MAT chief determined to always put children's needs first, even if that means clashing with others in the education establishment**

Wayne Norrie says he's not accountable to the Department for Education or Ofsted.

The chief executive of Greenwood Academies Trust (GAT) says he's only accountable to the parents and children of his 37 schools, serving the most deprived communities in the East Midlands.

Norrie comes across as a proud maverick. He says he isn't often invited to sit on sector forums or groups, jokingly deriding himself as a "poor relation" to some CEOs who "appear to have the ear of the DfE" and "take on new schools" like "collecting football stickers".

He says his leadership ethos – which involves giving his heads some autonomy to shape

their school culture, without having to follow standardised curriculums – has led to a false perception that GAT is a "free-for-all".

But he doesn't "want heads of school or teachers who can deliver scripts... We don't make kids stand behind chairs at 9am and chant 'The Greenwood Way' or any of that bloody cobbler's."

Shortly after Norrie took over at GAT in 2016, a damning Ofsted MAT review labelled the trust, in his view, the "worst in the country".

"This is a large, underperforming trust that has let down pupils over a number of years and across a number of schools," the report's first finding declared.

The trust's own data showed its schools had a 'significantly below-average' combined progress eight score of -0.6.

But now, Norrie says it's -0.1 percent, the national average. Meanwhile, the proportion of 'good' and 'outstanding' schools has risen from 57 to 84 per cent (though some of these judgments have yet to be published).

Norrie puts it down to knowing "what makes kids tick" in the areas where the trust works.

Born in Bulwell, in Nottingham – where GAT now has three schools – he says he was "was born to be in GAT".

The former mining town has fallen on hard times, like others where the trust is based.

## Profile: Wayne Norrie

### Skegness memories

We meet for fish and chips in Skegness, where GAT has seven schools and is the town's biggest employer after Butlins.

Norrie has "a soft spot" for the community. He gestures to the campsite where he enjoyed family holidays as a kid, frowns at the pub where you can buy drugs and recollects "traffic jams of madge-mobiles" (mobility scooters) on the seafront in summer.

"This town was like utopia. Now, it's a really run-down place that's in desperate need of investment."

We visit Ingoldmells Academy, near to Skegness's sprawling caravan parks.

Because so many parents rely on seasonal work, some of its pupils live in caravans nine months a year and bed and breakfasts the other three (as caravan parks are not open year-round).

School staff pick them up from their accommodation themselves in those three months. "Otherwise they might not come back," Norrie adds.

Norrie's own mum was a pit wagers' clerk. His dad and grandad were both miners, who they never spoke to each other again after the latter chose not to strike.

After the pits closed, their world "crumbled around them".

"I know what it's like to wake up and see your own breath, and for your mum to start buying tinned food in September, so you could have a half-decent Christmas".

He "slipped through the net" and left primary school without being able to read or write. But he casts no blame on his parents – or those of GAT's kids facing similar challenges.

"Parents do the best job they know how."

### Second chance at school

At 14, Norrie was caught joyriding by a Copper, who drank in the same miner's welfare club as his dad. He took Norrie home, but such was his dad's fury that Norrie "wished he'd put me in a cell".

When he failed all his GCSEs, his dad had a "stroke of genius" by getting him a gruelling job as a hod carrier, carrying bricks up and down



## 'We don't make kids chant 'The Greenwood Way' or any of that bloody cobblers'

scaffolding.

"It knocked all the cockiness out of me. I begged him to send me back to school."

He retook his exams, and while doing community volunteering at Bulwell's Rufford Junior School, "caught the teaching bug".

Despite failing GCSE maths three times, he now runs a trust with a £150 million budget. It's behind his belief that you can run an academy trust without having taught.

"You need to surround yourself by people who have, whom you trust".

After teacher training in Scarborough, he taught at primaries in former mining communities.

In 2004, Norrie was made head of Rufford Junior School, where he'd had his first taste of teaching, on his home turf of the Bulwell estate.

Known locally as "Rough Hard", it was in special measures and had been through seven heads in two years.

On his first day, Norrie had to have a difficult conversation with the father of a boy caught throwing bricks off the school roof.

Although he dealt with it diplomatically, a false rumour spread that he'd "grabbed and pulled" the

dad out of the pub where he'd been drinking. The tale conveniently gave Norrie a tough reputation with local families.

He expected to stay for six weeks, but remained for three years.

While later working as a school improvement advisor for the DfE, providing support programmes to 'hard-to-shift' schools ("a really horrible term"), he learnt any school can be turned around with "the right people".

Teaching is "quite a simple concept. We've created this culture of metacognition and disciplinary knowledge, but we're making it too complex."

### Off-sted

Norrie's growing reputation for getting schools out of special measures caught the eye of Ofsted, which headhunted him to work as a senior HMI in 2013.

He says he took up the challenge after telling then-chief inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw there was "no consistency" in its inspections, which were "predicated on the inspector you get".

Wilshaw asked him to "come help me change it".



## Profile: Wayne Norrie

Norrie was one of three HMIs who found the first Muslim faith free school, Al-Madinah in Derby, in 2013, had not conducted CRB checks and lacked qualified teachers.

The flagship free school was later closed amid a “massive furore”.

Norrie made headlines himself after advising a primary headteacher during one inspection to focus on teaching his pupils to read, rather than rehearsing for the school nativity play in October.

He says that the head wrote to parents blaming Norrie for banning the play. A tabloid newspaper ran the story under the headline: “Xmas is Off-sted”.

After being hauled into Wilshaw’s office, Norrie feared the worst. But he says Wilshaw instead took him down the pub to celebrate.

But Norrie fell from favour and was moved on from Ofsted after a disagreement over ‘focused inspections’ into a number of schools in the same local authority area.

### ‘Soppy prats’

Soon after, Norrie joined Greenwood, which had opened in 2009. At the time of the Ofsted inspection, it was the country’s 11th biggest trust.

Norrie says it had “grown too quickly without any real foundations” and had become a “victim of its own success”.

He thought GAT’s “one-size-fits-all” model didn’t suit the diverse range of communities it serves. Instead, he enabled his schools to roll out curriculums “built out from the needs of their community. It takes much longer to do that, but we do it properly.”

He says inclusion is “at the heart” of GAT’s ethos. He points to one area where the trust runs schools, saying it has “too many MATs stirring the pot” and claiming some “won’t play ball around fair access”. It leaves “soppy prats like me” taking on a greater share of children with challenging needs.

To prevent off-rolling, Norrie believes schools should be made to “carry a proportion” of excluded pupils’ eventual grades.

Norrie says more than half of GAT’s pupils are on free school meals, which is a huge rise on the 34 per cent last year.



## ‘I know what it's like to wake up and see your own breath’

### Camping with kids

GAT has built its own secure campsite in the grounds of Mabelthorpe Primary in Skegness.

Complete with Portaloos, £15,000 of tents and a deal with the local chippie, it provides holidays for “kids who’ve never seen the sea”.

The trust also has a campsite near Sherwood Forest. He plans to open them up to parents at weekends and wants every new member of staff to “spend the night with the kids under canvas.”

To pay for the “nice” extras, GAT runs an IT company, Our Learning Cloud Limited, providing managed services to its own schools and those of other trusts. Any profits are divided among its principals.

Norrie also helps “struggling” MATs. He was parachuted in by the DfE as the interim chief executive of the four-school Evolve trust in 2022 after Ofsted found special needs pupils at its Harlow Academy, in Nottinghamshire, were “at imminent risk of harm”.

The “horrific” accounts of the abuse brought Norrie to tears. He invited the parents in so he

could read them the ‘inadequate’ Ofsted report before it was published, but advised them “never to read it again”.

He had to pacify an angry father whose daughter had been left to “lie in soiled nappies all day”.

He invited the parents in so he could read them the ‘inadequate’ Ofsted report before it was published, but advised them “never to read it again”.

He commits to spending three days a week in GAT’s schools, arguing it is “very easy as a CEO to get detached from those children you serve”.

He’s proud of having gotten the Confederation of School Trusts’ chief executive Leora Cruddas “actually in the sand and water tray” on a recent school visit. “If you join the kids, you join the kids.”

Meanwhile, he tells his own heads his job is to “stand in front of you to protect you, stand beside you to support you and kick you up the backside when it ain’t good enough for our kids”.

The first part was put to the test last year after two children at Mabelthorpe primary in Skegness were killed in a car crash.

He “took all the flak from parents” for his decision not to allow flowers or teddy bears to be laid there. “We didn’t want the children having to walk past a shrine every day.”

He compares being a MAT chief to “changing a car engine while going at 90mph down the M1. We have to keep these schools running, but at the same time, things are so broken in so many communities.”



# Opinion

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

## The sector's manifesto



SIR JON COLES

Chief executive, United Learning

### Three core principles to make better education policy

**Whatever their specific aims, the next government will need a strategy to put the profession on a stronger footing to deliver them, writes Jon Coles**

There are no policy magic bullets and it's better, anyway, to have a good overall strategy than lots of specific policies. Here are some suggestions, based on my experience, for the next government to develop a good strategy to deliver educational improvement.

**Decentralise**

The extraordinary growth of central control over schools in the past 35 years has gone too far. A more devolved system would work better: *Take back control from Number 10 and the Treasury.*

Good organisations delegate responsibility and hold to account for results. By contrast, DfE has little freedom of action and is crippled by requirements for approval, which never used to exist. When we were setting up Oak during the pandemic, a grant worth 0.001 percent of DfE's budget required approval from Treasury and Number 10. This is not a way to run anything.

*Make clear that the government won't decide everything.*

Many decisions are better made locally by people who understand the situation, than by central

government. When I first worked there, DfE consistently made clear that it wouldn't get involved in matters within the remit of headteachers, governors or local authorities. That was a good principle.

*Build institutional capability outside government.*

In most sectors, professional matters are determined according to the evidence outside the political process – but we don't have equivalents of, for example, NICE or the Royal Colleges. We need to build strong, independent professional institutions: establishing EEF and the Chartered College of Teaching were first steps, but there is more to do.

*Expect trusts to do a bigger job.*

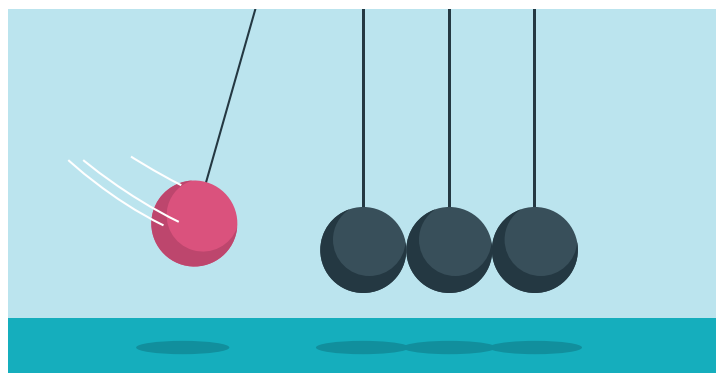
Government sets expectations of the trust role and capability, which are too low and then over-regulates process because it isn't confident of having capable, properly-run institutions. Ministers can get out of this vicious circle by articulating higher expectations and requiring trusts to meet them.

**Renew a sense of purpose**

Government has key roles in defining a vision and ensuring the system is well-designed to achieve it:

*Build a national movement for higher standards.*

In 1997 David Blunkett galvanised the education system with a strong sense of a mission for higher



**“ In a well-functioning system, government can accelerate change**

standards, equity and collaboration. A secretary of state can, and should, set this tone.

*Rebuild a high challenge, high support infrastructure for school improvement.*

Arms-length accountability, (and intervention when it all goes wrong), is insufficient. Good trusts, the best local authorities and organisations like Challenge Partners all make sure that schools get sharp challenges and meaningful support from leaders, who are seen by the school as 'on our side' and understand it well. Every school should have this.

*Avoid damaging pendulum swings.*

There are problems to solve, but it is easy to over-correct. Governments like to pull 'big levers' like curriculum, assessment, accountability, structures or the funding system and claim 'transformational change'. This costs schools time and energy and always has unintended consequences. We need effective policy for continuous improvement.

**Get behind schools**

In a well-functioning system, which it isn't micro-managing, government can accelerate change:

*Build meaningful relationships focused on action and solutions.*

One reason school leaders and others look back fondly on London

Challenge is that they were at the table and had a voice. That is also one reason why London Challenge had impact.

*Grow the top and spread the impact of effective practice.*

Another London Challenge lesson: nurturing and growing the best practitioners to take a wider role works. Again, trusts can be one mechanism, but aren't the only one.

*Mind your language.*

Political expediency or just the desire to show you're on parents' side can lead to language which teachers find critical, demotivating or annoying. This slows or blocks improvement. Estelle Morris's language always showed teachers she understood them. Michael Gove could have taken many more with him by not sounding like he was running against the profession.

*Resource for success.*

Public finances are tight and we cannot expect riches, but shrinking resources would scupper reform as leaders focus on keeping the show on the road. Even limited real-terms growth would enable heads to think more creatively about change.

A strategy based on these principles would create a very different relationship between schools and central government and new impetus for improvement.

## Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UKPAULINE  
AITCHISONDeputy director, Schools North  
East and Chair, NNossSpecial school funding is in crisis  
– but does Westminster get it?

**The chancellor's investment in more places is not a sufficient response to the scale of need across the sector, writes Pauline Aitchison**

All schools are facing a range of financial pressures, but these pressures are particularly acute in the special and alternative provision sector. This comes at a time when there is increased demand for special school places, with the majority of schools in the sector working at, or over, capacity.

Place funding for special and AP schools has been static for more than a decade, at £10,000. And there are no signs of real financial growth for the sector over the coming years, as schools deal with increasing demand on specialist provision.

As well as increased demand and a lack of increased funding, there is also a great deal of uncertainty around what funding schools will receive. Schools are constantly having to battle to access a range of funding pots and grants. And funding changes and information from central government is often not delivered in a timely manner, making it difficult for schools to budget properly.

At the local authority level, there is a great deal of variety in funding arrangements. Banding arrangements between LAs lack

consistency, and schools spoke of the need to move towards a more homogenised system. It isn't always clear what funding will reach schools from the LAs, with future uncertainty over the minimum funding guarantee (MFG).

In a survey of the National Network of Special Schools for School Business Professionals (NNoss) in February, the unfunded support staff pay award is, for many schools, a key pressure on budgets. Of the more than 100 special and AP schools represented in the survey, more than 90 per cent said they expected additional financial struggles as a result of support staff pay increases.

Support staff and teaching assistants play a central role in special and AP schools, ensuring students are ready to learn, and that teachers are able to teach. The staff pay award then is deserved. It is also necessary to recruit and retain the right staff, and maintain the high staff-student ratios to keep students safe and special schools operational.

However, without additional funding for the staff pay awards, there is a risk it will have a serious impact on what schools can provide. While schools will have to make budget cuts, there are only so many staffing cuts that can safely be made.

In our survey, while two-thirds of schools said they were not in a



“Funding at the school level is not the only concern

deficit for the 2022/23 academic year, more than half are projecting a deficit either this academic year or next. The special schools' MFG for 2023 to 2024 was set at 3 per cent, but more than 80 per cent of respondents said that, if the MFG returned to 0 per cent in 2024/25, their provision would struggle financially.

The commitment in the Spring Budget of £105 million towards the building of 15 special schools, creating more than 2,000 places, is of course welcome, but it is not clear that this will meet the full scale of the challenge the special sector faces.

Concerns were raised in our survey about the lack of capital investment for existing special schools. Many are relying on past reserves, which are now becoming depleted, as they struggle to meet higher site costs, including maintenance of specialist facilities and repairing damage done to buildings when students are dysregulated.

Funding at the school level is not the only concern. With students needing multi-agency support, it is important to think about the

role health and social care play, and the funding pots they have. Schools are trying to meet need in a cost-effective manner, and this also needs to be done across different agencies and departments. A much clearer picture is needed of where need is being met, and how provision can best be delivered.

It is clear that reviewing arrangements for SEND funding is now past urgent. However, it is unclear if this is fully appreciated or understood by DfE and central government. This crisis in the special sector primarily relates to funding, with financial pressures having a wide impact on their decisions.

Without adequate funding and clarity on funding arrangements, schools cannot effectively set budgets. Too much is done retrospectively, which inhibits strategic planning and school improvement.

Education policy needs to consider how to better deliver support for SEND students in both mainstream and special schools, and what is expected of schools and other agencies that support children and young people.

## Opinion

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

## CHRIS BAGLEY

Director, Square Peg

## Labour's accountability solutions are just more of the same

**The party's proposals do little to challenge the surveillance culture that's at the root of many of the sector's problems, writes Chris Bagley**

Last month, the UN issued a global alert over teacher shortages. We are apparently in need of 44 million teachers by 2030, and we're at dire risk of missing that target. England is practically a case study in the problem, with a report this month warning that teachers need to be compensated for lack of certain flexibilities, like working from home, to slow the record number of them leaving the profession.

The impact on children is real. A report this month showed children in the western world are becoming increasingly unhappy and are "really struggling". Parents and families also keep raising the alarm about the same issue.

What is going on? As an educational psychologist, who has spent a decade working in schools, pupil referral units and child prisons, following children from the moment they enter schools to when they leave, a big part of my answer is: culture. More specifically, a culture of hyper-surveillance.

First off, there are deep contradictions in the way schools are held to account. They are required to ensure 'standards' and 'excellence', measured by test

results. At the same time, Ofsted requires that schools teach a 'broad and balanced' curriculum - which promotes the opposite of the exam result focus.

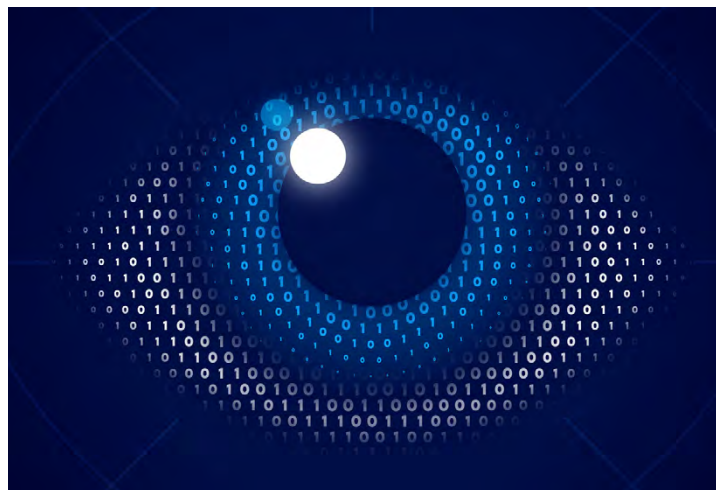
It is a tough task to do both, without a hyper-intensive work environment. Many teachers live inside this paradox, in constant fear of poor results and Ofsted inspections. This creates an internalised experience of hyper-surveillance.

Schools are also increasingly held accountable for attendance. This has led to the implementation of punitive policies that exacerbate tensions between schools and families. Well-meaning teachers are effectively coerced into themselves coercing rather than supporting families, passing the culture of hyper-surveillance onto them. Parents face the threat of fines, prosecution and even criminalisation.

The impact can be devastating. They are told to drag their kids out of bed regardless of how distressed they are, to make home uncomfortable to encourage them into school, even if they find school impossibly stressful.

It clearly isn't working. And Labour's answer? More surveillance, with the creation of a unique identification number to link school and health records.

Meanwhile, children are subjected to constant monitoring and scrutiny



**“ We must move away from hyper-surveillance**

through attainment tracking, behaviour charts and attendance profiles, none of which they have consented to. They are positioned as academic commodities, with success and attendance prioritised above all else, regardless of the toll on their mental health.

We must move away from hyper-surveillance measures that force teachers to act in ways that compromise their values. We need more humane school evaluation approaches. Labour has rightly identified the problem of basing school accountability on poor data, but their proposed scorecard approach merely brings in more surveillance – this will not achieve the desired aims.

Human beings are not data. We need evaluation approaches built on trust and collaboration.

Nobody knows schools better than school communities themselves. Hence schools, in collaboration with children, young people, and families, should decide what constitutes educational success.

In other nations, accountability involves self-evaluation in partnership with other schools,

who cooperate rather than compete with one another.

In Estonia, for example, there is no separate, external inspectorate. School evaluation is 'flexible'. Schools are trusted and a collaborative rather than judgemental approach is the norm. As one official puts it: "If there is a problem... everybody helps."

Evaluation in Norway is designed in dialogue with schools. They focus on specific themes, questions or criteria that are tailored to the specific educational context. Expert panels of officials, educators and students co-construct evaluation together. Unlike in England, the aim is not to 'investigate compliance' but to identify 'key challenges and good practice' as a team.

In both cases school evaluation is about support and collaboration, not surveillance and judgement.

More supportive approaches are not a pipe dream, they are business-as-usual in many places. If we fail to follow suit, schooling will not be responsive to the diverse students that walk through the door and teachers, parents and young people will continue to suffer through the contradictions.



# Opinion

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



EMILY  
PREECE

Director, CORE Hello

## How trusts can pioneer a better model of EAL provision

**Our specialist EAL provision is delivering great results and supporting students' rapid integration into school and community life, explains Emily Preece**

CORE Education Trust's school communities include students from many nationalities, including a number of refugee and migrant children. This brings cultural richness, but also significant responsibility.

With approximately 20 per cent of students nationally (and 50 per cent of CORE students), learning English as an additional language this is something many other trusts are facing too, yet finding the best approach to supporting EAL students remains challenging. In 2021, we launched CORE Hello, a pioneering intervention programme of curricular and extra-curricular activities to address this challenge. Here's how it works.

### An immersive approach

Before launch, a key consideration was whether to create a central resource base to support targeted sessions or to create an immersive experience. Based on research evidence, we opted for a 12-week immersive programme.

We've found this cycle long enough to give students essential learning support, while giving us the opportunity to identify and address

any wider learning needs, which may be masked by poor English.

### Developing the content

Aligned with the Bell Foundation's *Five principles to guide EAL pedagogy*, our curriculum is designed to stimulate language acquisition in reading, writing, speaking and listening. Students focus on spelling, punctuation, grammar daily, and the key vocabulary and subject terminology needed to unlock academic success.

We then make use of technologies for translation and interpretation, (as well as more traditional tools like the bilingual dictionary), to support students to access an adapted core curriculum in maths, science, humanities and arts. This helps them settle back into mainstream provision when they leave the programme. And of course, all of these subjects include listening, speaking, reading and writing in English too.

### Identifying a base

There has been historical criticism that language centres might contribute to isolation, so we gave CORE Hello a home within one of our schools. Spending lunch and break times with other students and joining in other whole-school and community events has allowed friendships to form and a sense of belonging to develop.

To avoid confusion and additional



“ It has been a major investment, but one with great returns

transport costs for families, we bus students to CORE Hello from their home schools ourselves. This has become a learning experience in itself, with staff encouraging them to sing and chat to improve their English while they travel.

### A holistic response

While communication is essential to academic progress, it is also critical to addressing emotional needs. With limited English, understanding what they have experienced and any underlying trauma is hard.

When they join, we ask each student to create their journey wheel, a pictorial narrative of what has brought them to Birmingham. It's a great ice-breaker and way to assess their language skill, but it also provides an important way in to assess wider support needs, which we can quickly bring in specialist help to address.

As well as a rich academic programme, CORE Hello provides plenty of opportunity for students to continue their learning and social integration outside the school walls. Regular trips to community destinations – including the local library and theatre - provide meaningful opportunities to use their newly acquired language and begin to feel at home.

### EAL teachers

Any trust looking to embark on a specialist EAL provision is likely to find staffing an issue. Trained EAL teachers are rare, yet their skills are essential. In addition, many of them won't necessarily have experience of teaching school-aged children.

To ensure we have staff with the right skills and approach, we have found a 'grow-your-own' method to be effective, providing an excellent progression route for talented teaching assistants.

CORE Hello has been a major investment, but one with great returns. In just over two years, the programme has helped 118 students. Seventy per cent have made at least one level of progress in language proficiency during their 12-week programme. Some 10 per cent have made two. By contrast, research for the Bell Foundation found two-thirds of students new to English may take six years to gain full proficiency.

But it's comments like this one from a recent Syrian student that make it all worthwhile: "If I had not gone to CORE Hello, I would have been very sad and lonely, and I would have struggled with my school work."

We are keen to keep building our own experience, as well as to encourage a professional network to flourish across the sector. If you'd like to get involved, please get in touch.

# Solutions

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

LUKE  
ELLMERS

University admissions specialist



MAJA  
TRACHONITIS

Assistant head (Wellbeing), Sutton Valence School

## How to harness predictability to support school leavers

Two former heads of sixth form share a thematic approach to supporting school leavers to thrive once they leave the familiar trappings of school life

New research from Speakers for Schools finds that a decline in work experience is negatively impacting students' chances of getting into the top universities in spite of their school's results. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this is disproportionately affecting those from under-resourced backgrounds.

But work experience isn't the whole story. It's part of a bigger problem: an ever-widening gap between school life and the outside world. What work experience delivers is a certain amount of predictability about what comes next, but there are other ways to build the strength and resilience that students derive from it.

Our approach emphasises the importance of acknowledging the inevitability of change throughout each student's sixth form journey. Our work to intentionally prepare students for their next steps is guided by three themes:

### Students need to know what to expect

By raising awareness, teachers can help to bridge the 'expectation-reality' gap typically experienced by school leavers. Our top three recommendations are:

“ Teachers can help to bridge the 'expectation-reality' gap

Embrace opportunities to teach real-world implications

Cultivate accountability to minimise the gap between students' familiar space of pastoral care and an environment with comparatively fewer support structures. Seize opportunities to teach lessons about the potential consequences of negligence in the outside world.

Encourage students to reflect on their relationships and support network

Manage the 'friendship gap' by highlighting the intentional effort required to construct a social network. Emphasise how school connections developed over time. Encourage students to identify their new support network and signpost services that offer free and confidential 24/7 support.

Prepare students for readjustment to university or the workplace

Allow university-bound students to experience undergraduate-style teaching. Introduce undergraduate assessment methods and address the 'achievement standard gap' between A level and university. Familiarise students with academic referencing and TurnItIn before their first summative assignment at university.

For those headed into jobs

or work-based learning, teach workplace etiquette through scenario-based learning, highlight the essentials of employment contracts and outline the financial responsibilities of employment and self-employment.

### Students need to know how to respond

As students begin to manage their expectations, practical strategies are more likely to stick. Our top three

strategies are to:

Teach the three pillars of wellbeing:

- Eat: Encourage a balanced diet and highlight the nutritional value of different foods. Promote water tracker apps to foster healthy hydration.
- Move: Set daily activity challenges within form groups to reverse the trend of declining physical activity post-school. Self-defence exercises are doubly useful here.
- Sleep: Recommend grey-scale mode on devices and promote good sleep hygiene.

Signpost channels of academic support

Encourage pre-visits or virtual tours to familiarise students with the higher education environment. Promote apps and AI tools for workload management, interactive learning and time management.

Empower students for the modern workplace.

In an age of hybridisation, digital transformation and reskilling, school leavers need practical training in managing remote working arrangements, dedicated sessions to self-advocacy in the workplace and signposted continuous learning opportunities.



### Students need to know their intentions.

With uncertainties unveiled and strategies signposted, students need to think intentionally about how they might behave in their new environments. Our top three suggestions are to:

Promote a self-regulated and intentional approach to wellbeing

Encourage self-reflection according to established wellbeing frameworks and introduce Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky's Person-Fit-Activity diagnostic tool to discover personalised wellbeing strategies.

Help students to identify the strengths and gaps in their own skill set

Consider holistic skill alignment exercises to identify how students' skill sets meet the expectations of their new environment. Are they prepared for collaborative working or independent research? Devise a plan to develop any additional skills needed for success.

Work with students to establish realistic goals for year one

Engage students in purposeful goal setting, self-reflection practices and personal value exploration. Explore who they want to be after they leave school, and be sure that goals are manageable.

The gap between school life and the adult world will never cease to daunt school leavers and parents. But if we empower students to recognise the realities of post-school life, we can arm them with strategies to thrive – whatever their next steps.

# 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





# THE REVIEW

## READING LESSONS

BOOK  
TV  
FILM  
RADIO  
EVENT  
RESOURCE

**Author:** Carol Atherton

**Publisher:** Fig Tree

**Publication date:** 4 April 2024

**ISBN:** 0241629489

**Reviewer:** Dr Haili Hughes, Senior lecturer, University of Sunderland and Director of education, IRIS Connect

Over the past ten years, there has been an explosion of teachers writing books, shedding light on how they use research in their own classrooms or sharing great ideas for strategies. I have read hundreds of these and come away with practical tips and tricks I could implement in my classroom. What *Reading Lessons* gave me, however, is much richer.

Carol Atherton has penned a glorious exploration of one of the most important things in my life: books. She has also woven a rich tapestry about English teaching, which not only made me proud to have served in the classroom for more than fifteen years, but made me long to return.

I read *Reading Lessons* on a long flight to the US to speak at a conference. As a nervous flyer, I was looking for something to take my mind off the bumps and whirrs of the plane engine. Luckily, this beautiful book had me hooked from the start – a sort of paean to books and how they help to open up a window to the world for readers.

It took me back to my own childhood, where books were sparse and reading stories like *A Secret Garden* or *Little Women* transported me away from my council house, with no central heating. Atherton's descriptions of the books in her classroom stock cupboard were so vivid that I could almost hear the scraping of the chairs in my own classroom. It brought me almost to tears.

This book is personal. Each chapter focuses on a book which has made an impact on the author, and an issue which lies within its pages. Literature shapes lives and *Reading Lessons*

highlights how books influence our beliefs. Atherton skilfully brings to life the books she teaches through recalling her classroom interactions and approaches, but she also weaves in contextual discussions and reveals her own personal struggles, all of which bring the texts she is writing about to life.

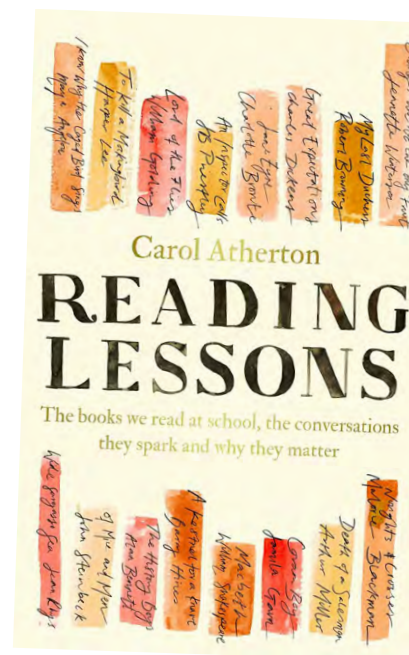
Atherton has a stunning way of using books to make connections between the present and the past, demonstrating their unique role in binding us all generationally as well as the universality and relevance of literature's themes through the ages.

Yet it isn't all sepia-tinted nostalgia. The book doesn't shy away from the debates and complexity of English teaching and, quite rightly, there are discussions about race in *Of Mice and Men* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which acknowledge that English teachers have a profound responsibility to get their text choices right.

Perhaps what affected me most about this book was how similar the author's life has been to mine. We grew up in the same area, both felt like misfits and wanted to escape and then later in life, both suffered from infertility.

As mentioned in *Reading Lessons*, in *The History Boys*, Hector talks about coming across something in a book which you had thought special or peculiar to you and the feeling, on seeing these things put down by somebody you'd never met, as being almost like their 'hand has come out and taken yours'. This is how this book made me feel, as if I was seeing myself reflected in its pages.

I have been out of the classroom for three

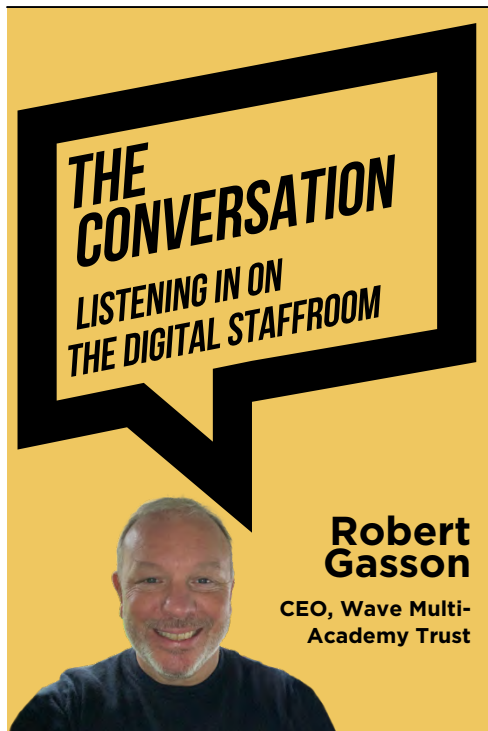


years now and *Reading Lessons* evoked memories of the amazing students I met and the real differences we make as teachers. Books can't change the world alone, but those who they inspire can and that is why English teachers really matter. They are future makers, who help to inspire students to make a difference to the world. What a wonderful teacher Atherton must be; her passion, commitment, and her love for the books she teaches are writ large on every page.

This is not just a book for English teachers, or even just for teachers. It is an ode to the incomparable power of literature. Anyone who ever read a book – in class or anywhere else – and was profoundly changed by the experience will relish it. As such, it is one of the few education books which should break through to the mainstream.



Rating



**Robert Gasson**

CEO, Wave Multi-Academy Trust


### RUMBLE IN THE SPECIAL NEEDS JUNGLE

Reports that can produce a startling headline often land with a splash. So it has proved with Chance UK's recent *Too Young to Leave Behind*. The children's mentoring charity, in partnership with FFT Education Datalab, boldly proclaims that "over 90 per cent of children excluded at primary school don't pass GCSE English and maths (a pass being a grade 4 or above)".

It caused quite the stir. This comprehensive and in-depth report looked at data on 3.2 million children, 4867 (0.15 per cent) of whom were permanently excluded, and came up with what some may see as shocking statistics: 97 per cent of those excluded from primary had SEND, and 67 per cent of those with an exclusion or suspension from primary were in receipt of free school meals.

"Exclusions start a devastating never-ending cycle of difficulties for the child," states the report.

Cue: behaviour tsar, Tom Bennett's response:



**Tom Bennett OBE** ✓  
@tombennett71 Follow

In other news: kids who tell their teachers to f\*\*\* off all the time 'tend not to do as well as they could.' Eye-watering stupid activism from this organisation. Grateful to @SkyNews for allowing me to provide a reality check. So many of these stories rely on one-sided self-reported accounts of the students who disrupt lessons or terrorise their peers. What about the victims of this behaviour?

On this occasion, I find myself agreeing with him: Exclusions aren't the start of this process. However, without doubt they are a significant marker that needs are not being met.

I also have a lot of sympathy for former children's commissioner, Anne Longfield's take:



**Anne Longfield**  
@annelongfield Follow

An imp report today @ChanceUK. The future of every child matters. No education system should be writing off the life chances of any child with special educational needs, development problems, or vulnerable home lives before they've even got going.



Charity warns of rise in primary school exclusions and suspensions...  
itv.com

We absolutely should be putting more effective multi-agency support in place for these children and their families. However, to suggest, as Longfield has done, that we should ban primary school exclusions is to go too far.

We were recently referred a key stage 1 child, who had broken the eye socket of his teacher. With current levels of funding and support, what else could reasonably be done for a pupil responsible for that but exclude them?

### GETTING THE BIG CALLS... RIGHT?

The Easter break also saw the release of a new episode of Rachel Johnson's *Difficult Women* podcast featuring Amanda Spielman. After a gallop through her life prior to becoming a regulator, the podcast canters through the growing number of contentious issues putting pressure on schools, taking Michaela School's prayer ban as an example, before a fine display of dressage around the legacy of Ruth Perry's death.

I would describe Spielman's approach throughout as 'to the right', but, oh how ironic, to hear her lament the pressure put on headteachers by so many issues, none of which include Ofsted! Her narrative is that you can't make all of the people happy all of the time, and tough messages need to be given. If she'd ever actually led a school through an inspection, she might have a better understanding of why people are still feeling so emotive about this subject.

This podcast was lambasted by many:



**James Taylor**  
@Teaching\_Mr\_T Follow

Amanda Spielman still doesn't understand. It's not about having 'tough conversations', it's about the way they're delivered. Compassion and empathy aren't even mentioned. #edchat #Educacion #edu #edutwitter



**Difficult conversations becoming impossible in UK, says ex-Ofsted chief**  
Amanda Spielman insists watchdog must be able to give 'tough messages' to schools — and said too often the focus was on 'being nice' to teachers rather than concern for pupils

Emotion aside, I thought it was actually more nuanced than you might pick up from the social media response. Either way, I would recommend a listen.

### ANCHORS AWEIGH

Confederation of School Trusts CEO, Leora Cruddas is always worth a listen, and she is joined here by Reach Foundation CEO, Ed Vainker to discuss MATs as anchor institutions. These are described as large employers and charitable organisations, who are stewards of public resources.

Cruddas takes us through her view of civic leadership, where trust leaders work with others across the community for purposeful collaboration, particularly focussed on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. Vainker meanwhile describes how his trust has worked on this, perhaps delivering the best line of the piece:

"A great school is necessary, but not sufficient if we want all children to thrive."

This podcast not only sets out a vision for this work, but also how it could be done, given the ongoing debate about behaviour and the failure of the state for those experiencing disadvantage (see above). Given all the political quick fixes that we'll be bombarded with this election year, here is a refreshing look at how to achieve better outcomes with a longer-term strategic view of how to improve communities anchored by trusts.

It is an interesting and informative insight into how the whole system could look, if all MATs took the view that they should meet the needs of all the pupils in their communities.

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts



# The Knowledge

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



## How multi-academy trusts are supporting pupils with SEND

**Lillian Flemons, Research Manager, NFER**

When the Secretary for Education herself describes the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system as 'lose, lose, lose', no one can deny it is in a bad way.

Concerns around attendance, behaviour and mental health in the wake of the pandemic coupled with a decline in real-terms funding have left schools facing an increasingly challenging context for supporting all pupils, especially those with SEND.

Yet while the SEND and AP Improvement Plan published last year calls for a 'united workforce' around the child, it does not identify collaborative school groups such as multi-academy trusts (MATs) as among the key system stakeholders.

Today, NFER publishes a new report that looks to address this gap by providing insights into how some MATs are looking to better support their pupils with SEND, and what lessons school groups of all kinds may draw from this.

Over the recent autumn and spring terms, we interviewed 49 trust leaders and school SENCOs across 19 MATs that had been identified as demonstrating potential for promising practice in relation to SEND. Below, we outline three of the main ways these MATs reported they were supporting SEND provision.

### Supporting, not stipulating

Rather than mandating particular approaches, these MAT leaders instead tended to provide a vision or framework to align schools in terms of culture and standards. A designated SEND leader within the MAT leadership team was seen to be particularly valuable for providing specialised and strategic support, and for understanding the nature of the challenges SENCOs were facing.

Internal SEND inspections were likewise reported by both MAT leaders and SENCOs to be positive, constructive experiences that focused on the school's strengths and areas for development. All interviewees emphasised the importance of schools within the trust having agency over the nature of their provision as



school staff are best-placed to understand the needs and context of their pupils.

### Resources, resources, resources

Schools are facing lengthy waiting lists to access the specialist services required for pupils with SEND. Some MATs, however, reported bringing these services in-house as a resource for their schools to draw on. Interviewees also highlighted that the economies of scale afforded by acting as a school group enabled access at reduced rates to training opportunities, interventions and needs assessment resources for their schools.

Sharing additional resources such as templates, toolkits and guidance also helps to reduce SENCO workload. While, financial resources from central MAT teams were mentioned, these tended to consist of a small amount of additional funding for discrete ambitions, as well as support to access and optimise funding from other sources.

### Communities of practice

Being a SENCO can be an isolating role. Often, they are the only staff member with their specialism, and even their line manager may not have a full picture of the day-to-day responsibilities and challenges of the job.

The SENCOs we spoke to unanimously

appreciated opportunities for collaboration and communication with other SENDCOs (and with the MAT SEND leader where available). They say this is beneficial not just in terms of knowledge exchange, but also moral support.

SENCOs reported interacting through regular cross-trust SENCO meetings, instant-messaging groups, school visits and/or local buddy systems. Collaboration with special schools within the trust (where applicable) was likewise seen to be valuable in providing access to specialist SEND expertise.

Our research findings shed initial insights on the ways in which MATs and other school groups might best support pupils with SEND. However, we need more evidence on how these practices may or may not influence pupils' outcomes.

Moreover, while school groups can do more to better support their staff and pupils in relation to SEND, they alone cannot overcome the challenges of an overloaded and underfunded SEND system.

It is therefore critical that fixing the SEND system remains a top government priority. This means addressing staffing challenges, providing adequate resources for schools and local authorities to facilitate aligned partnership working, and supporting effective provision for pupils with SEND.



Week in

## Westminster

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

## TUESDAY

Lots of important actions for leaders to take were set out in the regular heads email today from the Department for Education. This included, for instance, taking part in a safeguarding call for evidence, reviewing cyber security before exams and new workload and wellbeing tools.

But only one got the special "priority item" treatment. So what was this \*super\* important action?

"Action for all settings: sign up for the secretary of state's April start-of-term live event."

Forget stopping Russian hackers, improving safeguarding policies and getting a grip of workload – Keegz has some stuff to say!

## WEDNESDAY

Displaying a much wider problem about how policymaking is broken by central government overreach, Ofqual's board minutes today showed it had to get "exceptional cabinet office" approval to ... pay for a social media campaign.

The regulator ran two campaigns explaining the grading process for last year. Minutes from an October board meeting state they were "critical in helping retain public confidence".

And for those who still complained? Well, Ofqual "noted that there are always commentators that seek to speculate on results and their impacts for students".

Meanwhile, it's not just teacher pay rises that are stretching budgets. Ofqual started the last financial year with an "additional £1m in unforeseen costs" because of an extra one per cent increase on the pay rise it had budgeted for, and a one-off payment to all staff.



"Ofqual's ability to bear these additional costs, with only a relatively small forecast overspend still to be managed, has been largely due to re-prioritisation by all departments in the allocation of resources."

\*\*\*

Intrigue today as statistics revealing how much tutoring cash went unspent last year have been delayed.

A government update stated this was to "allow for sufficient time for quality assurance of the statistics".

A new date will be "announced in due course".

Last year, we reported that a whopping £114 million of tutoring funding given to schools went unspent and had to be seized back.

However, avid *Schools Week* readers will remember how last year several heads who said they'd used all their cash were told by government officials they hadn't – and they had to pay it back.

Perhaps DfE had heard similar concerns again, and has instead taken the decision this time round to get its stats in order before doing any naming and shaming schools?

## THURSDAY

The Department for Education has a new parliamentary private secretary in Stafford MP Theo Clarke.

She said education has always been one of her top local priorities in her constituency and will continue to raise the importance of increasing SEND provision (join the queue!) in her new role.

Meanwhile, politicians get a tough time for being seen to talk a good game, rather than actually doing anything.

In unrelated news, education secretary Gillian Keegan sat at a table with deputy prime minister Oliver Dowden to talk about edtech with sector leaders.

Hosting a roundtable is fine. But the government sent this out as a "news story", to boast about how they talked about some things.

But fear not, it led to this quite groundbreaking outcome: "The session reinforced the importance of government, technology experts, teachers and education leaders working together to safely transform education in a way that puts students first."

And as Keegan talks the talk, new statistics show that the government's attendance push is not making much of a difference – with absence rates for last term up on the previous year.

Meanwhile, the rise in pupils being suspended has continued – suggesting pupil behaviour in schools is becoming an even bigger problem.



## 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](http://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.

education  
week jobs

In association with

SCHOOLS FE WEEK  
WEEK

# DID YOU KNOW?

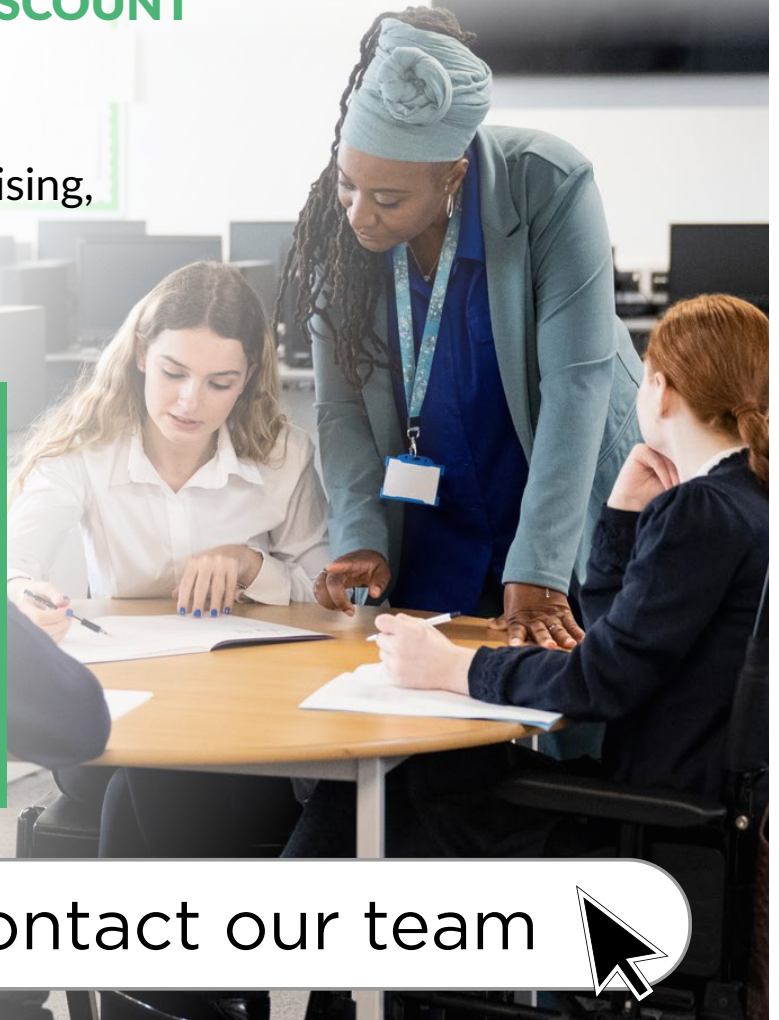
As a Schools Week subscriber, your organisation receives a **20% DISCOUNT** on recruitment advertising.

Online listings, classified advertising, and package options available.

“

I have always found Schools Week very helpful. They reach a large audience and support with many of our vacancies. I am very satisfied with their service and would recommend them highly.

The Shared Learning Trust



[Click here](#) to contact our team

