

Ditch one-word
Ofsted grades?
Think again ...



P5

£40k Teslas for MAT's central team



P7

Why we don't
have the inclusive
system we all want



P23

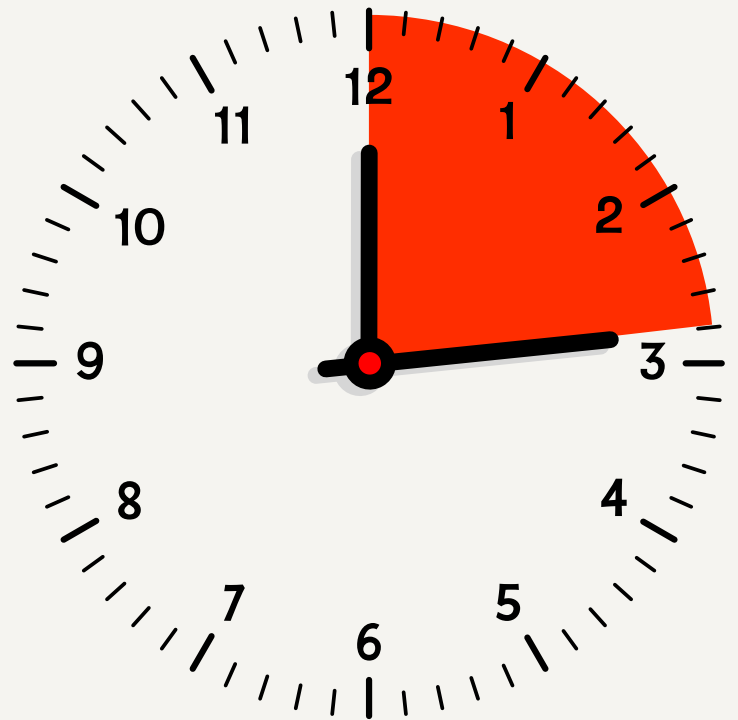
'Help us solve
education's
motherhood
penalty'



P25

THE BAD BEHAVIOUR PENALTY

Schools lose a quarter of lesson
time as disruption worsens



Page 4

Teach First signals shift away from elite graduates

- More than one in three recruits now career changers or support staff
- Boss of country's biggest graduate recruiter explains its new strategy
- 'It's not just about top graduates', says chief executive Russell Hobby

SCHOOLS
WEEK

Meet the news team

**John Dickens**
EDITOR@JOHNDICKENSSW
JOHN.DICKENS@SCHOOLSWEEEK.CO.UK**Freddie Whittaker**
DEPUTY EDITOR@FCDWHITTAKER
FREDDIE.WHITTAKER@SCHOOLSWEEEK.CO.UK**Samantha Booth**
CHIEF REPORTER@SAMANTHAJBOTH
SAMANTHA.BOOTH@SCHOOLSWEEEK.CO.UK**Jack Dyson**
SENIOR REPORTER@JACKYDYS
JACK.DYSON@SCHOOLSWEEEK.CO.UK**Lucas Cumiskey**
SENIOR REPORTER@LUCAS_CUMISKEY
LUCAS.CUMISKEY@SCHOOLSWEEEK.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
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Teach First has been an integral part of the education system since it was founded more than 20 years ago.

It has recruited some of the best and brightest into teaching, those who otherwise would not have considered the profession.

That has always been its USP. It's why it gets more money for recruitment than any other teacher trainer.

But given pay for top graduates has soared, and the political waters are changing – the move towards diversifying its intake (page 10 and 11) is understandable and pragmatic.

However, the further it moves away from those high-flyers, the more questions will be asked about its value for money.

Another question we pose this week is that of trust leader benefits. More MATs are overseeing income similar to large private firms, but does that mean their employment benefits should also follow suit?

One trust has provided £40,000 Tesla company cars for six of its central team (page 7).

It's a bit of a grey area for trusts. Many have steered away from such schemes because of the bad public perception.

Others have fallen foul of funding rules, which ask for government approval for "contentious" spending that could "cause criticism of the trust by parliament, the public or media".

So is this a sign of the increasing professionalisation of MATs, or an example of spending freedoms being taken advantage of?

The latter has always been a tricky path to navigate, as our latest story on trust GAG pooling shows (page 15). While pooling income has lots of benefits, it is relatively new to the sector – and has zero transparency.

If school staff feel that either the proportion taken by a trust to fund its central services is not fair, or the benefits of such an approach are not communicated clearly enough – this will understandably cause problems.

The case should act as a warning to the trust sector about why it is better to over, rather than under, communicate on issues such as this.

Most read online this week:

- 1 **Teaching assistants cut in 75% of primary schools**
- 2 **No school progress measure for next two years**
- 3 **School loses court battle over Ofsted downgrade to 'good'**
- 4 **Keegan: 'Hard to guarantee' we'll fully fund teacher pay rise**
- 5 **Primaries fail to opt out of SATs – but say they won't be testing**

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2 WHITECHAPEL ROAD, LONDON E1 1EW
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See story, page 5

NEWS

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Nine weeks lost a year as bad behaviour gets worse

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Schools are losing almost a quarter of lesson time to poor behaviour, a government report suggests, as leaders warn of worsening issues and a growing impact on their wellbeing.

The Department for Education has published the findings of its second national behaviour survey, which asked school leaders, teachers and pupils for their views on behaviour in their schools in both March and May 2023.

The survey found that leaders and teachers reported losing an average of seven minutes per half hour of lesson time to misbehaviour.

This equates to almost nine weeks if extrapolated across a school year, up from 6.3 minutes, or just shy of eight weeks, reported in the previous year's survey.

Dr Patrick Roach, general secretary of the NASUWT teaching union, said the DfE's latest report "confirms the scale and depth of the behaviour crisis that exists in our schools and that is happening on this government's watch".

He added: "Ministers need to do much more than collate facts and figures about the problem – they need to take the action needed to ensure all schools are safe for both staff and pupils."

In May 2023, 76 per cent of teachers reported that misbehaviour "stopped or interrupted teaching" in at least some lessons in the past week, up from 64 per cent in June 2022.

The proportion of teachers reporting that more than 10 minutes of teaching time per half hour of lessons was lost to misbehaviour rose from 10 per cent in 2022 to 25 per cent last May. Losing 10 minutes of teaching time is equivalent to more than 12 weeks of the year.

Sixty-four per cent of leaders and 74 per cent of teachers reported last May that pupil misbehaviour had had a negative impact on their health and wellbeing in the past week, up from 47 and



62 per cent respectively in June 2022.

Tom Bennett, the government's behaviour tsar, said the data was "sobering but not surprising to those of us working with schools nationally".

He attributed the rise to "decades-old problems of failing to face up to the need to focus on behaviour, human nature to test boundaries and the enormous impact of Covid, lockdowns and the mental health crisis".

In May last year, 82 per cent of leaders reported that behaviour was either "very good" or "good" in the week before they took part in the survey, compared with 55 per cent of teachers. This is down from 90 and 64 per cent respectively the year before.

Leaders were also less likely in May last year to report that their school had been calm or orderly every day or most days in the previous week (84 per cent, down from 92 per cent). For teachers the drop was from 70 to 59 per cent.

Pepe Di'Iasio, general secretary of the ASCL leaders' union, said the "increase in poor behaviour among a minority of pupils is posing a challenge for school leaders and teachers".

He added: "A lack of support from some parents – many of whom are facing challenges themselves – in dealing with behavioural issues only adds to the scale of the challenge."

The survey showed the proportion of leaders and teachers reporting

that parents were not supportive of their behaviour rules rose from 15 to 20 per cent.

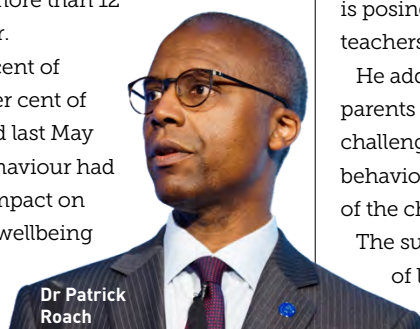
Meanwhile, the proportion of leaders who reported being "very confident" in personally managing behaviour fell from 80 to 66 per cent between March and May 2023. For teachers, the drop was from 47 to 35 per cent.

But pupils also reported issues. Twenty-six per cent said they had been bullied at some point in the previous 12 months, up from 22 per cent. And only 39 per cent said they had felt safe at school every day in the past week, down from 41 per cent in June 2022.

Di'Iasio said: "Budget constraints have severely limited the amount of pastoral support schools are able to provide, and the fact that so many teachers and leaders surveyed report not being able to access timely external support services is particularly worrying."

Roach added: "Cuts to vital support, school budget cuts and the loss of specialist staff have contributed significantly to escalating the difficulties that teachers and headteachers are having to deal with on a daily basis."

A DfE spokesperson said: "Good behaviour in schools is key to raising standards which is why we are taking decisive action to ensure all schools are calm, safe, and supportive environments and are providing school leaders and teachers with the tools to improve behaviour."



Dr Patrick Roach



Pepe Di'Iasio

NEWS: OFSTED

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One-word Ofsted judgments 'stop people drawing own conclusions'

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Scrapping single-phrase Ofsted judgments would lead to civil servants, politicians and the media "drawing their own conclusions" about schools from the narrative in reports, the government has warned.

The Department for Education this week rejected calls from the Parliamentary education committee for the four overall effectiveness judgments to be scrapped.

MPs said in January that a more "nuanced" alternative to the "totemic" judgments should be developed as a "priority", following the death of headteacher Ruth Perry.

In its formal response to the committee, the DfE said that "the government will continue to listen to views and look at alternative systems, including the various approaches taken internationally".

But it added that "there are significant benefits from having an Ofsted overall effectiveness grade".

"In our view the priority is to look for ways to improve the current system rather than developing an alternative to it."

This includes looking at how grades and findings are "presented" to "highlight some of the detail sitting under the summary".

'Consider risks' of scrapping grades

It was "important to consider the risks of a system without an overall effectiveness grade", the DfE added.

Views and decisions about schools and their performance "would continue to be made, and there would continue to be consequences to inspection".

"The government's view is that it is preferable to have those views, decisions and consequences linked directly to the independent inspectorate's overall findings rather than the interpretations by civil servants, politicians and the media looking through the narrative of reports and drawing their own conclusions."

The department said the overall effectiveness judgment was an "important feature" of reports, with "strong parental awareness".

It also "enables us to look across inspection outcomes around the country and observe



overall changes in the national position".

"For example, we are able to say that 9 in 10 schools in England have been assessed by Ofsted to be providing a good or outstanding education for their pupils.

"We are able to recognise the hard work and professionalism of school leaders, teachers and staff, and to celebrate that achievement."

The response drew criticism from the sector.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the NAHT leaders' union, said the defence of "discredited, simplistic and reductive single-word or phrase judgments simply perpetuates an inhumane and unreliable inspection system that is driving a mental health and wellbeing crisis across England's schools".

Perry's sister Julia Walters told The Guardian that it was "very difficult for me and my family to see the government refer to my sister by name, and then so clearly fail to respond to the many important lessons from her death, that the coroner and the education committee have raised.

"Having initially gone to great lengths to be seen to be listening, Gillian Keegan and her department have now made it clear that they either have not heard what our concerns actually are, or are unwilling or unable to act on them."

Responses kick can down road

MPs also called on the DfE to work with Ofsted to "enable the inspectorate to reduce the frequency of inspections to approximately five to six years for 'good' and 'outstanding' schools and three to four years for schools judged 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate'".

But the DfE said it "does not agree that it would be right to reduce the frequency of Ofsted school inspections at this time, and especially in cases when schools have been judged to require improvement or to be inadequate".

"Independent inspection is a vital mechanism to give parents the assurance that the necessary steps are being taken to bring about rapid improvement where it is needed for the benefit of pupils' education and safety."

But many of its responses also kicked decisions on whether to enact certain reforms down the road, as they await the outcome of Ofsted's "Big Listen" consultation.

This included a recommendation to increase the notice period for inspections, assess the "coasting" school intervention and set up an independent body to investigate inspection judgments.

The government said it was also "actively considering" how to "strengthen the link" between accountability and autonomy for MATs. MPs called for Ofsted to inspect them.

MPs also called for a consultation on the best approach to increasing safeguarding inspections through a "less intensive compliance audit".

The DfE said it was currently building evidence around quality assurance on safeguarding which could be a pre-cursor to any future consultation.



Ruth Perry

NEWS: FUNDING

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Keegan refuses to guarantee full pay rise funding

SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER

@SCHOOLSWEEK

It will be “hard to guarantee” that the government will fully fund a teacher pay rise, despite schools struggling with budget squeezes, Gillian Keegan has said.

The education secretary was asked about pay and school funding during a Q&A webinar on Wednesday amid concerns that schools do not have enough money to cover even this year's rise.

Six of the most liked questions were about school funding.

One attendee said they had worked in school finance for 25 years and “never known us to be this short of funding before”.

“Can you assure us that the next round of teacher and support staff pay increases will be fully funded?” Keegan was asked.

Having taken the job in October 2022, Keegan said she had faced two pay “challenges” – funding rises of 5.4 per cent for the 2022-23 academic year and 6.5 per cent for this year.



Gillian Keegan

“Both of those challenges were put to me then and I got the additional funding to make sure that schools are fully funded for those pay rises.

“The difficulty in answering the question right now is, obviously I need to be given the challenge first, which is what [the School Teachers' Review Body] will come back with. And then we need to figure out what that is and how we can fund that.

“I guess what I would say is I have a track record. But it's hard to guarantee because I don't know what they are going to come back with.”

But “one thing I do know is to fund it last time,

we really had to look into the department's budget”, Keegan said.

“We didn't get additional funding from the Treasury because of all the other difficulties they had. We did the year before – we got an additional £2 billion.

“But this last year, we had to find it within the department. So we prioritised some things and, you know, moved some capital into revenue that we thought we wouldn't utilise. But once you've done that, it's difficult to do it again.”

However, Keegan added: “I will take on the challenge as I have done the last few years.”

Schools Week has revealed how the department faces finding at least £1 billion from its budget to fund both this and next year's pay rises. Several government schemes have already been axed or scaled back.

Meanwhile, schools are experiencing a funding squeeze. A Schools Week investigation in February found that many were reporting “severe hardship” this year.

Another report found that three-quarters of primaries had cut teaching assistants.

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBBOOTH

£10k special schools funding under review

The government is “actively looking” at reforming the £10,000 per place funding that special schools receive for each child, which has not risen once since being introduced 10 years ago.

Tom Goldman, deputy director at the Department for Education funding policy unit, told the National Network of Special Schools conference this week that funding should “probably” change over time.

Special schools receive £10,000 for each commissioned place and then top-up funding from their council, based on the child's needs.

Special school business leaders told Goldman and David Withey, chief executive at the Education and Skills Funding Agency, that their budgets were stretched or in deficit.

On the logic behind place funding, Goldman said it was thought to give “a position of certainty” compared to “variable and volatile” top-up funding.

But he said the failure to increase the £10,000 with inflation has “shifted the balance away from the certainty” for budgets.

“Should the £10,000 change over time? Probably,” he said.

While increasing it might create “further complexities” around how top-up funding is set, he added: “It does create the very odd situation of £10,000 having been chosen back in 2013 and not changing, so that is something we are actively looking at at the moment.”

The DfE has previously said that the £10,000 funding is “not intended to reflect schools' cost increases”, which instead should fall to increased top-up rates.

But analysis by Special Needs Jungle revealed top-up funding levels had remained stagnant in a third of councils between 2018 and last year.

They estimated the static £10,000 funding means schools have faced an estimated real-terms cut of £1.3 billion.

Goldman said some had proposed to the DfE the “more radical step” of removing place funding, and instead using the national funding formula “and you build on that obviously because that's not going to be adequate for these

children”.

“That is something again we will think about going forward. We need to think about that in the context of the wider SEND policy reforms.

“I don't want to design a funding system which might be a better fit for today and introduce it at a time when it's not a better fit for the system that's actually coming into place.”

The DfE plans to introduce a national approach to delivering funding bands and tariffs for more “consistent funding” across the country after 2025 as part of its SEND and alternative provision improvement plan.

Several councils have issued section 114 notices – declaring effective bankruptcy – in recent years. While none of these relates to high needs deficits now, Goldman said they could in future – “and our aim obviously is to avoid that happening”.

Thirty-eight councils currently have safety valve deals with the government, whereby they agreed sweeping reforms in exchange for bailouts.

NEWS: MATS

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Academy trust defends £40k Teslas for central team staff

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

EXCLUSIVE

A 16-school academy trust has defended the decision to provide six of its central team staff with £40,000 Tesla company cars.

Aspirations Academies Trust has paid around £90,000 over three years for the leased vehicles, putting the issue of MAT benefits back under the spotlight.

A former staff member, who did not want to be named, said “eyebrows were raised by headteachers about central team staff arriving in the cars and whether it was appropriate with so many conversations about money and budgets”.

Despite being commonplace in the private sector, company cars are rare among schools who are “aware of the negative public perception and keen to avoid that”, Sharon O’Ryan, boss of benefits adviser firm Pay in Education, said.

Teslas ‘raised eyebrows’

A freedom of information request showed Aspirations, which runs schools across the south of England, spent £87,000 on company cars between 2021 and 2023.

Last year, the trust used a total of 12 vehicles. But six of them – four Teslas and two Volkswagen Golfs – appear to have been replaced by Tesla Model 3 saloons, with 2022 registrations. New prices for the car range between £39,990 and £49,990.

They have a top speed of 145mph and come equipped with lane departure warning systems, heated seats and ambient interior lighting.

Aspirations’ company car policy states that Teslas are supplied to staff who drive more than 20,000 miles for work, or “employees at specified status levels”.

A trust spokesperson refused to say which staff get Teslas but added that they complete more than 25,000 business miles per annum.

The decision was “based around the significant financial saving versus mileage claims from those employees”, they added, but did not provide the savings figure.

A Google search suggest few trusts have such policies.

The Thinking Schools Academy Trust provides cars to three staff members. Eligibility includes those travelling more than 8,000 miles per year

for work, where a car is an “indispensable part of their jobs” or as a “benefit” to the role.

The trust refused to say which cars are used.

Trusts wary of ‘reputational risk’

The policy was introduced after a review “concluded leased cars would be better value than using hire cars for any member of staff expected to claim significant ... business mileage”.

Travel between the trust’s schools – covering Plymouth, Portsmouth, Medway and Essex – was “essential” for some senior staff.

Just one of the 10 largest MATs told Schools Week they offered company cars. However, Ormiston Academies Trust said it was a “legacy” policy and the few staff with them will not have their leases renewed.

Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, which operates 47 academies across the North-East, plans to approach Nissan about potential sponsorship options for company cars.

But CEO Nick Hurn said he would “have to be convinced” it was “better for the public purse”.

His 20 central team members claim up to 40,000 miles a year in travel costs.

Rob Tarn, who heads up Northern Education Trust, said using company cars “comes up about once a year”.

“There are obvious advantages... it can save on mileage claims. But there’s a reputational risk associated with taxpayers’ money being used to fund brand-new vehicles.”

Delta Academies Trust has a Fiat 500, called “Bob”, which staff at one of its schools use to go out knocking on doors to boost attendance. It is also one of many trusts signed up to salary sacrifice schemes that allow staff to lease cars, with the costs deducted from their pre-tax wages.

Ormiston now uses this scheme too. Kemnal Academies Trust said it “has not ever had the demand nor felt the need for them”.

Trusts in hot water before

School finance expert Micon Metcalfe believes many leaders will



have, in part, decided against company cars due to worries over how they could be viewed by the Education Skills and Funding Agency.

Academy rules show that novel and contentious transactions – those that “might cause criticism of the trust by Parliament, the public or the media” – need ESFA approval.

Metcalfe said that, while providing cars “could be seen as something that’s quite ambitious and attract people into your trust – you have to balance it against the ‘Daily Mail test’”.

A Dispatches investigation into academy expenses in 2016 found the Academy Transformation Trust paid to lease a luxury Jaguar for Ian Cleland, its £180,000-a-year chief executive.

The following year, Swale Academies Trust scrapped its policy of providing leaders with BMWs after public criticism.

In 2021, the Learning Link Multi-Academy Trust breached funding rules after handing its chief executive “significant” extra benefits without board approval, including a £38,000 car allowance.

Aspirations would not say if the scheme was approved by its trustees. Documents state that only expenditure of more than £50,000 per item needs approval.

Chris Kirk, from education consultancy CJK Associates, said many medium-sized companies now have company cars or an allowance. He added: “If it’s value for money, then of course it should be considered, but if it’s an extravagant luxury, then it absolutely should not.”



Micon Metcalfe



Tesla Model 3, electric car

Credit: Alamy

NEWS: MATS

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Trust collapse details remain secret as founder drops ban appeal

JOHN DICKENS

@JOHNDICKENSSW

EXCLUSIVE

The full story behind one of the biggest academy trust collapses will remain secret after its founder dropped a legal challenge because allegations would have been made public.

Last year the government barred Trevor Averre-Beeson from managing schools citing "inappropriate conduct".

The Lilac Sky Schools Trust he set up was shut down in 2016. Its nine schools were re-brokered amid a government investigation into allegations of financial "impropriety".

Government troubleshooters parachuted into the trust found "inappropriate" spending on luxury alcohol, council grants paid straight into Averre-Beeson's consultancy bank account and severance paid to staff who were then hired as consultants the next day, annual accounts stated.

But the government is refusing to publish its report, claiming the investigation is still ongoing eight years later.

'Dozens of pages' of evidence

Appealing against the decision to ban him this week, Averre-Beeson said a lot of the Department for Education's evidence was a "broad character assassination". Some of it was "not accurate" and other elements were "hearsay", he claimed.

The court heard that his ban was based on five allegations, with evidence from the government's witness in an "enormous file" that had "dozens of pages".

Averre-Beeson was advised by tribunal judge Siobhan Goodrich that the appeal would not look "afresh" at the case. Instead, it would be for Averre-Beeson to prove that the government's decision was flawed.

The judge also explained that the government's allegations would be scrutinised "in detail". An application from Averre-Beeson for the hearing to be held in private was thrown out.

Despite withdrawing his appeal, he maintained that the ban was "unfair on me and my family and our ability to earn a living".

But going through "in detail" the contents of the evidence bundle "would be very challenging and create more stress for myself and my family".

Judge Goodrich said it was an "appropriate and sensible" decision.

**'Conduct of serious nature'**

Alex Line, representing the education secretary, said Averre-Beeson's "conduct is of a serious nature and the [banning] decision was absolutely justified. The withdrawal of the appeal gives credence to that."

He also raised "real concerns" about the trust founder's conduct during the legal proceedings. It was "naïve" to think there would not be a presumption in favour of open justice, he added.

The government agreed not to pursue Averre-Beeson to pay its legal costs, but this was "an action that has not been taken lightly".

Under section 128 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the education secretary can ban "unsuitable" people from managing schools.

The route is separate to that of the Teacher Regulation Agency, where an independent panel can ban teachers from working in schools altogether.

Since 2015, 33 people have been barred under section 128. Most (20) followed convictions for offences including running an illegal school and terrorism.

Undermining British values, safeguarding failures relating to terrorism incidents and one case of racist comments towards Jewish people were other reasons.

Four people involved in academy trust collapses have been banned. They include Christopher Bowler, who was chief executive of Lilac Sky after Beeson stepped down.

Judge asked for tribunal direction

Government guidance published in 2021 set out more details about the power. It said that staff in

scope included those in management positions, but also those who could be appointed in future, including deputy heads or principals. Governors and chief finance officers were also in scope.

Reasons could include the breaking of academy funding rules or being involved in "reckless" spending.

The only other case to go to an appeal trial, which is held by the Care Standard Tribunal, was that of Tahir Alam.

The former chair of governors at a Birmingham school was banned in 2015 for his role in the "Trojan horse" affair. His ban was upheld on appeal.

Judge Goodrich said Averre-Beeson's case was "very different" and that case law had "developed" since Alam's appeal.

Line said evidence that was not available to the secretary of state at the time of the ban should not be considered. Averre-Beeson wanted to submit witness statements from his wife and accountant.

The case was described as "akin to a review rather than a rehearing".

As the case has been withdrawn, Line requested that the point of law comments should be "dealt with" in the judge's final report as they "could be of assistance in cases going forward".

Transparency campaigner Andy Jolley said the government's "secrecy over the Lilac Sky case" was "scandalous".

He added: "It's not just that the families of pupils who saw their education disrupted should have answers. It's also unfair on those accused to keep the evidence that ministers say supports their ban from scrutiny."

The DfE and Averre-Beeson declined to comment.

NEWS: MUSIC

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Quarter of schools missing one-hour music target

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Almost a quarter of secondary schools are not meeting a new government expectation for key stage 3 pupils to be taught an hour of classroom music a week, new survey data suggests.

The expectation was introduced in September as part of the government's national plan for music, which promised to help "unleash the creativity of children" with a "renewed emphasis on opportunities for all".

A similar expectation was also introduced for key stages 1 and 2.

But a Teacher Tapp survey of 1,256 senior leaders in state secondary schools this month found that 16 per cent were teaching for less than an hour a week, with 2 per cent not teaching it at all.

A further 5 per cent used a "carousel" system, which usually means teaching pupils for only part of the year.

Overall, two-thirds said they met the weekly commitment of one hour, with 7 per cent saying that they taught for more than an hour.

Experts have pointed to the recruitment crisis, accountability pressures and funding as reasons behind the gap.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary at the NAHT school leaders' union, said the plan's aims were "not backed with sufficient funding or resources to make them a reality".

He added: "In addition, the time for teaching and learning is finite and the government consistently imposes additions, including non-statutory expectations, without creating the extra time needed in the curriculum."

Paddy Russell, headteacher at Ladybridge High School in Bolton, said that, while his school met the commitment, the pool of music teachers was now "very small".

Just 27 per cent of the required number of music teachers were recruited last year, down from 80 per cent in 2019-20.

The government has missed the target for nine of the past 10 years, and is on track to miss it again this year.

Pepe Di'Iasio, general secretary at the ASCL school leaders' union, said it was "disadvantaged pupils who are the worst affected because they are often at schools where teacher recruitment



is most difficult and their families cannot afford the cost of private lessons outside school time as many better-off families do".

Nearly 30 per cent of private schools said they taught music for more than an hour a week, compared to just 7 per cent of state schools.

An Ofsted subject report on music last year found there was "considerable variation" in the amount of music curriculum time in key stage 3.

In just under half of the schools visited, leaders had not made sure that pupils "had enough time to learn the full breadth of the national curriculum".

The hourly pledge formed part of a request for schools to revise or create a school music development plan by September last year "at the latest".

The plan should set out how it would provide access to lessons, develop a school choir, space for rehearsals and a termly school performance.

The Department for Education admitted it would "take time to realise" the hourly pledge in schools. It said it would continue to monitor teaching time, including through school leader panel surveys.

But Stuart Drake, the Independent Society of Musicians' legal services director, said the plan's ambitions "are going to struggle to be realised" with the current English Baccaleraute accountability

measure, which does not include music.

He warned that "too many students" were missing out and also called for increased funding and a reform of progress 8.

The DfE said its national network of music hubs would continue to provide support for schools.

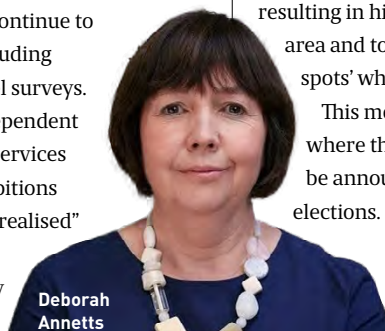
But last year, the ISM warned against plans to slash the number of music hubs from 118 to 43 from September.

Deborah Annetts, ISM chief executive, said in November that "no evidence" had been "forthcoming" from the government about how reducing hub numbers would benefit schools.

This month, schools minister Damian Hinds said the hubs would work across a "wider set of music education partnerships" to bring "significant benefits to children, young people and schools".

The hubs will "be able to be more strategic, building stronger partnerships with schools, academy trusts, local authorities and others, resulting in high quality support in every local area and to ensure there are no local 'cold spots' where access to provision is limited".

This month, Arts Council England decided where the new hubs would be. They will be announced in early May, after the local elections.



Deborah Annetts

INTERVIEW: RECRUITMENT

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'It's not just about top graduates': Teach First reveals new strategy

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

More than one in three Teach First recruits are now either career changers or school support staff nominated to join the scheme, as the charity shifts its focus away from targeting elite university graduates.

The teacher trainer's new strategy, seen by *Schools Week*, also outlines a push into professional development to help its alumni into school leadership.

Set up in 2003, Teach First was tasked by the government with recruiting "exceptional graduates with high academic ability" who might not have considered a teaching career to work in schools serving the most disadvantaged communities.

Speaking to *Schools Week*, CEO Russell Hobby says that recruiting "the top talent in the country who maybe are not convinced of a career in teaching" is still Teach First's unique selling point. Narrowing the attainment gap remains its core mission.

But "it's not just about top graduates", Hobby insists.

Rise of the Teach First career-changer

While the new strategy document setting Teach First's direction for the next six years continues to refer to recruiting "high potential future teachers", it makes no reference of graduate recruitment.

The previous strategy talked of recruiting "large numbers of new and recent graduates".

Almost a quarter of the latest cohort were career-changers, up from 21 per cent last year. More than one in 10 were teaching assistants or others known to schools who were nominated to join the scheme.

The shift comes as Teach First aims to reduce reliance on its hefty government contract, worth around £39 million per cohort, or £22,000 a teacher.

Five years ago, it was responsible for over two-thirds of its income. Now it forms less than half.



But some ambassadors privately fear that the new direction – and broader definition of "high potential" teachers – will dilute its justification for the higher level of government funding it gets compared with other teacher trainers.

The charity has also faced criticism for elitism over focusing on "high potential" applicants from top universities such as Oxford and Cambridge.

But Hobby says: "I don't think you can reliably say that a first-class degree from Oxbridge is a cast-iron predictor that that person will be an absolutely stunning teacher down the line.

"I've got nothing against people with first-class degrees from Oxbridge universities, I'm one of them.

"But you've got to know that that's just a proxy for what you are looking for – which is smart, energetic, dedicated, believing in that subject area. You can find that in all sorts of places as well."

He adds that "academic knowledge and subject specialism is a key foundation of being a great teacher", but said it was a "mistake to believe that you can only find those [attributes] in top grads from elite universities".

But there are still "plenty" of top graduates in recent Teach First cohorts. Those recruited



Russell Hobby

directly from university still make up the majority. The proportion with first or 2:1 degrees has remained constant at between 95 and 97 per cent since 2008.

'It's healthy not to be complacent'

But withdrawal of the contract is "always a possibility", Hobby says, adding that it is "quite healthy as an organisation to accept that possibility and not be complacent around it, too".

"I think there are some really unique things that we bring to bear as an organisation. That brand on campus, that knowledge.

"People join Teach First. They don't apply to the 'high potential ITT' programme. That has been built up over 20 years of investment. I think that's very powerful."

Since launch, Teach First has trained 16,000 teachers. Alumni include charity founders, senior civil servants and even MPs.

Continued on next page

INTERVIEW: RECRUITMENT

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Hobby believes there will “always be a need for what we do. It's up to us to demonstrate that we are the right people to do it.”

He adds: “We would hope we always have a relationship with the government on what we're doing here. But there are many ways of preparing people to teach.”

When Hobby, a former general secretary of the NAHT school leaders' union, joined Teach First, he took the controversial decision to slim down the organisation's focus to concentrate on teacher training.

It closed the widening participation schemes Futures and Oxbridge, and cut loose organisations it had previously “incubated”, such as the Fair Education Alliance and its Innovation Unit.

He believes this was “absolutely the right thing to do”.

“Take the FEA... It's thriving now. We don't have to do everything.”

Changes to the organisation have continued. Last year, *Schools Week* revealed that the charity had made half of its eight-strong executive team redundant. In February it began consulting on a second round of redundancies.

The organisation said at the time that it had “grown rapidly” to offer things like NPQs and the ECF, and “to consolidate this growth, and prepare for the future, we are proposing changes to how we operate”.

New leadership push

Despite cutting its cloth, strategy documents reveal some big targets. On top of its recruits via the “high potential” route, the charity aims to recruit 4,000 teachers by 2030 through its new, school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) programme, which opens in September.

But Hobby does not believe Teach First “will ever be a standard teacher training provider because we're just not needed for that. There are good teacher training organisations out there.”

It also wants to swell its ambassador population to 38,000, with 6,000 in school leadership positions, and to grow its network to include 6,000 schools.

“We want to focus more on leadership, and how we help our people on that journey through both into school leadership positions and into other positions of influence in society as well,” Hobby adds.

THE OUTCOMES WE WANT TO SEE

Supporting the transformation of schools in disadvantaged communities

Systemic and policy changes to benefit disadvantaged children and their schools

A more diverse education system which reflects the communities it serves

People working together to transform society to benefit disadvantaged children and their schools

THE PILLARS AND INPUTS OF OUR 2030 STRATEGY

GREAT TEACHERS

Develop and deliver our transformational training programme to create 10,000 new teachers

Ensure there is a supply of teachers across the country by launching and scaling our SCITT to create a further 4,000 teachers

Develop nearly 25,000 early career teachers both directly and in partnership to support our reach and impact

BRILLIANT LEADERS

Deliver 35,000 NPQs to specialist teachers and leaders across our schools

Coach and support nearly 400 whole school leadership teams to support sustainable improvement

Support 3,500 in-school careers leaders to create and embed successful careers strategies for their pupils

POWERFUL MOVEMENT

We will reach a total ambassador population of 38,000

More than 6,000 ambassadors will be in school leadership positions

We will grow to a network of 6,000 schools and 80 delivery partners

STRONG POLICY

Influence a significant increase in funding for schools in low-income areas

Push the needs of pupils and teachers in these schools up the political agenda through media and campaign activity

Support our community of ambassadors and teachers to engage with campaigns so that policy reflects the needs of pupils growing up in poverty

Teach First's 2030 strategy plan

The charity is delivering the full suite of national professional qualifications (NPQs) for leaders and is also designing its own development programmes using increased charitable donations from partners.

These include Leading Together, a two-year development programme that is free for schools.

It plans to deliver 35,000 NPQs and coach and support nearly 400 school leadership teams by 2030.

Hobby says the greater emphasis on professional development is not a return to the “breadth” of its past offer. “I'm talking about depth. This growth is stacking up on top of itself rather than diversifying out in that sense of it.”

Like the sector more widely, Teach First faces recruitment issues. This year it recruited 1,335 trainees, missing its government target by more than a fifth. However, recruitment on all routes into teaching was 38 per cent short of the target.

It has done things like trialling £2,000 cost-of-living grants for trainees. It also intends to offer the government's new teaching apprenticeship for non-graduates to widen its recruitment pool.

More widely, Hobby sees Teach First's mission as a “pillar” which “begins with great teaching”, then moves on to leadership in schools, with its ambassadors becoming a “community that works together” both inside and outside education to

influence policy.

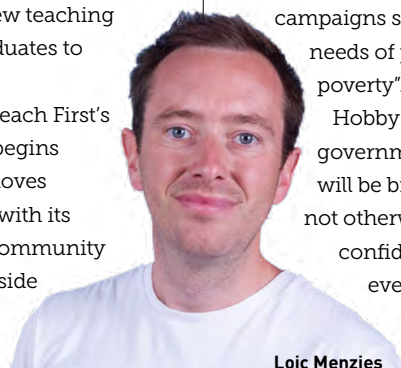
“Those are the four strands of what we do and I think they are all built on top of each other, because it's the teacher who becomes the leader who joins the community – and it's the community that influences the system.”

While many ambassadors did not want to speak about the strategy, Loic Menzies believes the strands of impact are a “welcome acknowledgement that Teach First can't deliver on its mission around educational equity solely through classroom teaching”.

“Now that the charity has reduced its dependence on its core government contract, it should have a bit more room for manoeuvre in pursuing those priorities – as well as some more freedom to speak truth to power,” he says.

Teach First's strategy gives a nod to that. The charity wants to influence a “significant increase” in funding for schools in low-income areas, “push the needs” of pupils and teachers in these schools and support ambassadors and teachers to “engage with campaigns so that policy reflects the needs of pupils growing up in poverty”.

Hobby adds: “What the government wants is people who will be brilliant teachers who would not otherwise teach. I am pretty confident that, if it gets them, everybody will be happy.”



Loic Menzies

NEWS

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Small trust chair sounds warning over asking for government advice

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

Small trusts have been warned against asking for government-backed reviews after one chair said the results were used against them to force a merger.

Nurture Academies Trust chair Pam Smith called in school resource management advisers (SRMAs) and governance professionals to help her bed into the role two years ago.

She believes the MAT was pushed towards a merger by the Department for Education after checks threw up concerns later cited by officials among the reasons for it to make the switch.

"The finance and governance reviews were a request from me to find out where things were needed, so I could do the job I was supposed to do," Smith told Schools Week.

"They gave me the support I asked for, but then the DfE used that to say certain things weren't right ... they didn't give me the time to do what was needed."

Minutes from a meeting with officials in November 2022 show that Smith and Nurture's CEO Wahid Zaman were told the department "had to deploy multiple support programmes urgently ... due to issues" at the trust.

The DfE praised the MAT's "willingness to accept support but stated that these external experts are highlighting serious weaknesses".

However, the minutes show officials said that, "even without the concerns", conversations "about the trust's future strategic direction" would probably have been held.

Officials pointed to the aim in the since-scrapped schools white paper for trusts to be on a trajectory to serve at least 10 schools or 7,500 pupils.

The meeting notes show that Smith and Zaman told the department of their frustration that "requesting/accepting support had resulted in this situation".

"The tone was very intimidating and threatening. It felt as though the chair of the trust and I were being bullied," Zaman said.

"The menace of, 'if you merge voluntarily, you may have the choice of a partner otherwise one will be imposed upon you' was palpable."

Pam Smith



Smith added that she "would not recommend anybody to go to the DfE for any help or support" as this would be used to "push them into big trusts".

The minutes added that the Education and Skills Funding Agency had considered issuing Nurture with a notice to improve over prior financial concerns. A warning letter was sent instead as "the trust has been working with us and are trying to resolve issues".

Smith insisted that Nurture "didn't have any problems in terms of financial viability – it was the process and procedures involved that required improvement".

At the time, one of the trust's academies, Victoria Primary in Leeds, West Yorkshire, was rated 'requires improvement' by Ofsted.

Because it had been given the same grade before converting, it met the government's criteria for re-brokerage as part of its crackdown on "coasting" schools.

Zaman claimed officials were "insistent" that Victoria and another of the trust's academies were unlikely to receive improved marks at a later visit.

"The fact that both schools did secure 'good' judgments in Ofsted inspections in autumn term 2023 ... calls in to question the way in which the regional group conducted itself.

"It was evident that the regional group was working to an agenda other than school improvement."

Unveiled in March 2022, the

schools white paper set out the vision of then-education secretary Nadhim Zahawi. Among its 42 main policy proposals were targets for all schools to be in a MAT by 2030.

Zahawi also wanted most trusts to work towards serving at least 10 schools, or 7,500 pupils. Both plans were ditched the following year.

Despite this, Nurture opted to go ahead with a merger by joining another Yorkshire-based chain, Northern Star Academies Trust.

Zaman stressed that the decision was made after seeing the economies of scale and bolstered school improvement that a merger would bring. The switch is expected to take place next month.

"Trustees and I remain optimistic that the trust we are merging with will bring positive benefits and strong moral purpose," Zaman continued.

"It is a shame that the unique vision of [Nurture] ... is not valued by the DfE, but I am hopeful that this will be continued in the Northern Star."

The DfE said it has not received any formal complaints from the trust. Trustees are "voluntarily transferring the academies to a trust of their choosing".

The department said its "role as regulator of academy trusts is to hold them to account... all decisions are made for the benefit of pupils".

However, Confederation of School Trusts deputy chief executive Steve Rollett has previously said that, even when regional directors engage "constructively" with leaders, conversations "can feel ... very high stakes".

NEWS: OFSTED

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'Inadequate' judgment was mystifying, school tells court

LUCAS CUMISKEY

@LUCAS_CUMISKEY

Lawyers for a school which has taken Ofsted to court have criticised its "mystifying refusal" to provide more detailed explanations for why it was rated 'inadequate'.

All Saints Academy Dunstable, in Bedfordshire, claims it was not provided with sufficient evidence, explanations or reasons for the Ofsted report published in July.

But the inspectorate argues that the process was "not unfair in law" and accused the school's legal team of making "policy, not legal arguments", during a High Court hearing on Thursday.

An initial two-day inspection of the school in November 2022 failed Ofsted's quality assurance and moderation processes. A one-day "gathering additional evidence" (GAE) visit took place in January 2023, the judicial review heard.

During the first visit, Ofsted indicated the provisional gradings would be 'good' for quality of education, sixth form, personal development and leadership and management; but 'requires improvement' for behaviour and attitudes, and in the overall assessment.

But, in the final report, the school was rated 'inadequate' overall after being given the lowest grade for leadership and management and behaviour and attitudes.

Report did not provide 'adequate reasons'

Barrister Paul Greateorex, for the school, said Ofsted reports change lives and "trigger statutory power to have schools taken over or closed down".

Ofsted reports can cause people to "lose their jobs" and "in the tragic case of Ruth Perry, their lives", he added, claiming that Ofsted had "lost its way".

The school previously failed in an attempt to prevent publication of the report while it pursued legal action.

"Ultimately this court is going to be the arbiter of whether those two pages of reasons are sufficient in law for those one-word judgments, given the agreed consequences of them, and given what is also agreed about their being two different inspections, with differences between the provisional judgment and the final judgment," Greateorex told the court.



He said the report issued to the school did not provide "adequate reasons for those very serious judgments which have very serious consequences".

For the "vast majority of Ofsted reports, there is going to be no need or requirement or even demand to know more than what is said, but in certain cases there clearly is".

However, Toby Fisher, the barrister representing Ofsted, said: "The draft report alone was sufficient to enable cogent representation on the adverse findings and judgments.

"This was not a school saying, 'we don't understand the basis for your conclusions'. They understood what they meant and provided evidence to contest those."

'Helpful for schools to have more detail'

Greateorex suggested that the inspectorate could provide a more detailed follow-up report, the final feedback in writing or "some limited disclosure of the evidence base", in such cases.

"There is something from our perspective both mystifying and frustrating about the steadfast refusal of Ofsted to tell schools more and explain in more detail the findings that they make," he added.

He said Ofsted reports only provide an "executive summary" and "it might be immensely helpful for the school to have more detail".

But Fisher accused Greateorex of "inviting the court to stray into essentially a policy or political argument".

Ofsted's case is that "what was provided in the report was sufficient to comply with both statutory and common law duties".

The report at the centre of the row states that "too many pupils do not feel safe" and a "significant number do not feel happy, and many parents and staff have concerns".

Greateorex said Ofsted should have quantified what it meant by these statements and have guidelines to "give some indication of what is considered to be acceptable".

Fisher countered that the inspectors referenced multiple data points – including two separate surveys – and then used their professional judgments to reach the conclusions.

The process was 'not unfair in law'

Ofsted states that, as a "deliberate policy choice" and since 2019, its inspection reports have been "written in this concise and digestible format".

In written arguments, Fisher said the school's case was "misconceived".

The school was in the "unusual, but not unique, situation where the provisional judgments" from inspectors failed the quality assurance process. This engaged Ofsted's "gathering additional evidence protocol", with a second visit arranged.

He said "that process and outcome was undoubtedly disappointing for the school and Ofsted apologised for not having got the first visit right. But it was not unfair in law."

A judgment will be handed down at a later date.

NEWS: OFSTED

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Downgraded school loses Ofsted appeal over suspensions row

LUCAS CUMISKEY

@LUCAS_CUMISKEY

EXCLUSIVE

A school must pay Ofsted tens of thousands of pounds after losing a High Court battle over its 'outstanding' downgrading. A judge ruled that leaders had effectively "masked suspensions in all but in name".

The watchdog was "neither irrational nor unreasonable" when it downgraded Thomas Telford School, in Shropshire, to 'good' over wrongly-recorded suspensions, the court found.

The school claimed the December 2022 inspection was mired with "errors". An injunction attempt to block publication of the report was thrown out last year.

But High Court judge Mary Stacey threw out the city technology college's (CTC) judicial review on Tuesday. It must now pay Ofsted's legal costs of £42,000.

Absence coding 'masked suspensions'

She said that "errors in the coding of student absences did mean that the records were not accurate and did have the effect of masking what were suspensions in all but name".

The school was downgraded from 'outstanding' to 'good' because of its "method of the recording of non-attendances and absences with the consequent lack of transparency and oversight from unclear data".

"Cooling off periods" for pupils were registered as a leave of absence, as opposed to suspensions. While this would be breaking the law for most schools, CTCs are not bound by the same statutory guidance on exclusions.

Inspectors initially wrongly thought that the school was bound by this guidance, but Ofsted said these "early misunderstandings about the unique status of CTCs were corrected during the inspection process" and before its team reached its provisional judgments.

'Lessons to be learned' for Ofsted

However, the judge did conclude the "poor bedside manner" from inspectors during the visit meant that Ofsted had "lessons to be learned".

CTCs were the forerunner of academies in the 1990s, where private companies were encouraged to invest and help set up schools. Just two remain.



Stacey said it was "disappointing that the inspectors were not aware of the special status of CTCs prior to the start of their inspection and initially made two fairly basic errors".

This showed a "lack of preparation and precision" and "naturally made [the school] more anxious and defensive".

It was "right" for the lead inspector to raise the issue "so that the school could correct him, which they did".

But the judge said "the evidence is however consistent with the school's experience of it being raised in a heavy-handed manner, exacerbating the understandable anxieties already engendered by the advent of an Ofsted inspection in a school, particularly given the seriousness of such allegations".

The lead inspector "appeared to the school to be insensitive and thoughtless of the impact of the statements he made to the headteacher", she added.

Stacey said the school's "indignation was understandable", adding that it "must have been a bruising experience".

"It reinforced their perception that the inspection was looking for fault and to find problems. The inspection report itself however is full of praise and adopts a very different tone to the school's experience of the manner of inspection visit."

She said it was the "inspection report that falls to be judged. Although a poor bedside manner is not obviously a ground of legal challenge,

there are lessons to be learned for Ofsted and its inspectors from this inspection".

Ofsted's suspension concerns 'legitimate'

But Stacey said that, "behind the noise of the inspection and the school's understandable fury at the way it was conducted, Ofsted had two legitimate concerns with the school's approach that were not predicated on the misunderstandings" of the lead inspector.

She said "it was not possible to ascertain which students were absent for misbehaviour" under its behaviour policy because of "the mis-coding of absences", and this policy "did not reflect the actual practice in some cases".

"Whether a student is sent home as a 'suspension' or for a 'cooling off' period is a semantic distinction: either way they are being asked to leave the school premises for a temporary period."

She said that "ultimately, the errors over the legal requirements applicable to CTCs were not relevant to the criticisms found in the absence reporting process."

"It was neither irrational nor unreasonable for Ofsted to conclude that it represented 'good' rather than 'outstanding' practice," she added.

An Ofsted spokesperson said: "We have always been confident that our inspection was fair and lawful, and that the correct gradings were awarded."

The school refused to comment. It is not known how much it spent on its own legal costs.

NEWS: MATS

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Academy staff could strike over 'excessive' GAG pooling

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

Staff at an East Sussex secondary school are preparing to ballot for strike action over a trust's "absolutely excessive" pooling of academy cash.

National Education Union members at the Hastings Academy are expected to vote on proposed walkouts, after they were reportedly informed that they will be losing agency support staff next month.

Jenny Sutton, the NEU's district secretary, blames the charging arrangements set by the University of Brighton Academies Trust (UoBAT), which runs the school, for impacting finances.

Schools Week revealed last month that one of the MAT's academies is effectively having around 20 per cent of its cash retained to pay for central services, such as attendance support and estates teams.

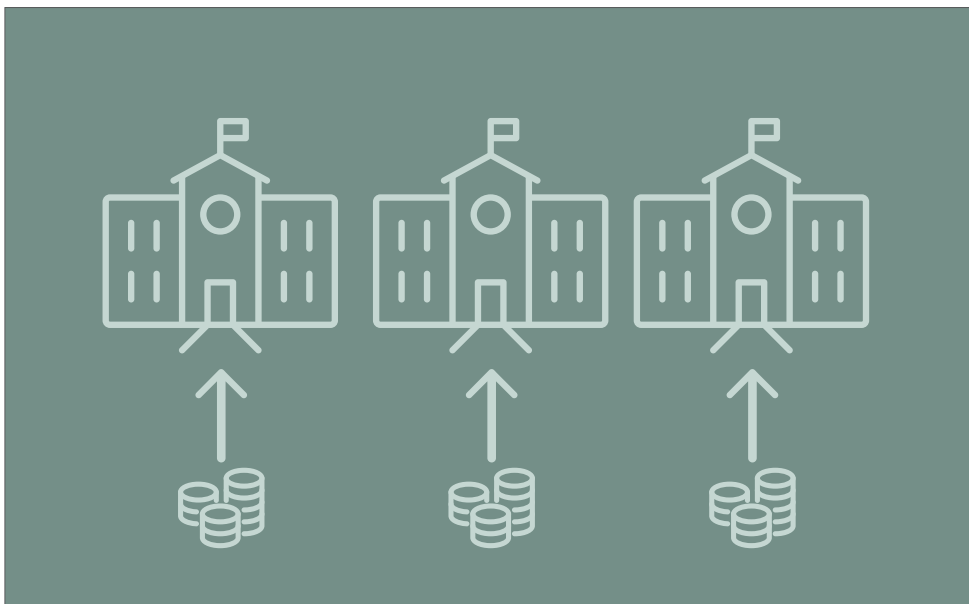
The trust uses a process whereby it pools its academies' general annual grant (GAG), before deciding how much cash should be allocated to schools based on their own formula.

School business leader Hilary Goldsmith believes the case should act as a warning to the sector.

"There should be real, genuine transparency [between staff and MATs] about what GAG pooling is for, why and how it leads to school improvement. It's about ensuring staff fully understand the value and agree with the numbers," she said.

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

But a growing number are choosing



to GAG pool, which has much less transparency but allows them to distribute funding more evenly across their schools.

UoBAT's accounts show that, overall, just over 13 per cent of the chain's pooled school income is retained.

Sally-Ann Hart, MP for Hastings and Rye, lodged a freedom of information request with the trust for two schools in her patch.

The FOI response showed Hastings Academy received £5.64 million of the £6.75 million it was allocated by the government this year, suggesting 16 per cent was not passed on.

The St Leonard's Academy, also in East Sussex, received £8.17 million of the just over £11 million allocated by the government. This suggests 26 per cent was not passed to the school.

Hart, who posted the figures in a video on her Facebook page, has launched a petition urging the trust to "hand over control" of both schools to an alternative chain.

Sutton described the pooling as "absolutely excessive".

However, a spokesperson for the trust accused Hart of "disseminating



Sally-Ann Hart

misinformation and misinterpreting information disclosed" through the FOI. The trust said the percentages presented in the video were "incorrect".

But a staff member who did not want to be named said they wanted the trust to "tell us precisely how money is spent, [and] if money needs to be diverted, tell us why".

An "indicative ballot" has already been held at Hastings Academy. A date for a "formal" vote is yet to be set, Sutton added.

The trust said it "remains committed to working constructively with our trade unions".

NEWS IN BRIEF

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Deprived schools lose out in progress 8

Schools with the poorest intakes are more likely to have seen their progress 8 scores drop over the past eight years, a study suggests.

FFT Education Datalab analysed progress 8 scores by school type, region and demographics between 2016 and 2023.

The results come after the government announced that it will not be implementing alternative progress measures in the next two academic years. The next two GCSE cohorts do not have key stage 2 SATs results because of the Covid pandemic.

This, coupled with Labour's pledge to reform the measure, means "it is possible that 2024 will be the last time we see progress 8 in its current form", Datalab's Katie Beynon said.

The organisation took public progress 8 data and divided schools into five equal "quintiles" based on the proportion of year 11 pupils who had been eligible for free school meals at some point in the past six years.

Beynon said that "broadly, schools with the

least disadvantaged cohorts saw the biggest increases in progress 8 scores, while those with the most disadvantaged cohorts saw the biggest falls".

Between 2016 and 2023, the highest quintile schools – those with the fewest poorer pupils – experienced an average increase of around 0.15, from +0.21 to +0.37. Schools in the lowest quintile saw an average fall of 0.08, from -0.17 to -0.25.

One explanation is that more London schools – which typically have higher progress scores – have become less disadvantaged over time, changing the quintile profiles.

Meanwhile, schools that became sponsored academies – those forced to convert because of poor performance – "tended to improve their scores a little, albeit from a relatively low base".

Converter academies – those that opted to convert – "tended to see their scores drop a little, apart from those which changed from being voluntary aided".

[Full story here](#)

Covid: Results will suffer 'well into 2030s'

The impact of the "educational damage" of Covid on GCSE results will continue "well into the 2030s", a new study has warned.

The paper said successive pupil cohorts were set for the biggest declines in GCSE results in "at least two decades".

Researchers predicted fewer than four in 10 pupils in England in 2030 will achieve a grade 5 or above in English and mathematics GCSEs – lower than the 45.3 per cent who did so in 2022-23.

It also forecasted an "unprecedented widening of the socio-economic gap in GCSE prospects", in a post-Covid "double whammy".

Academics from the University of Exeter, the London School of Economics and the University of Strathclyde conducted the research, funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

The University of Exeter said the study was the first to chart how school closures during Covid hindered children's socio-emotional

and cognitive skills at age five, 11 and 14, and predict how these will impact on GCSE

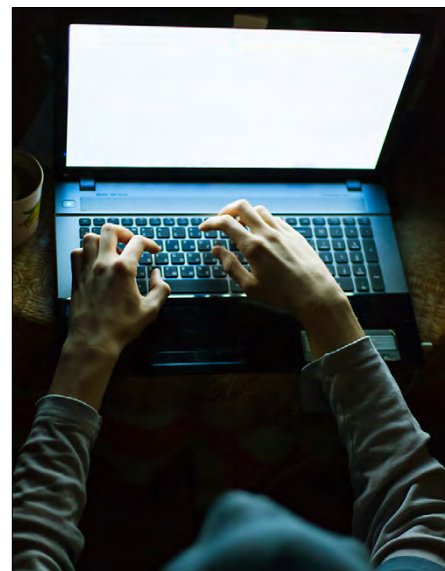
prospects and later life outcomes.

"Low-cost" policy proposals to "level the playing field" included calls for a national programme of trained undergraduate tutors and "rebalancing" Ofsted inspections to "consider disadvantage".

Professor Lee Elliot Major, of the University of Exeter, said: "Without a raft of equalising policies, the damaging legacy from Covid school closures will be felt by generations of pupils well into the next decade."

[Full story here](#)


Hacking homework for exam breach suspect



A 16-year-old boy has been cautioned and must go on a programme to educate them about hacking after being arrested in connection with an exam board cyber attack.

Cambridgeshire Police arrested the teenager on suspicion of theft, fraud and computer misuse after a "data breach" at exam boards Pearson and OCR last summer.

In an update this week, the force said the boy had been given a conditional caution. The conditions included engaging with the cyber choices early intervention program, which aims to educate people about offences under the Computer Misuse Act.

Co-ordinated by the National Crime Agency, the programme has been designed for 12 to 17-year-olds to help them "find ways to develop their cyber skills and make sure they know how to do so without breaking the law".

No other arrests have been made and the investigation is now closed, the force added.

A separate investigation by Surrey Police of a data breach at AQA exam board has been halted. Two people arrested were stood down from bail earlier this year. No one has been charged over the alleged attack.

T-level content under review in bid to boost 'very low' take-up

SHANE CHOWEN

@SHANECHOWEN

Government officials are now undertaking a "route-by-route" review of T-level content and assessment in a bid to boost recruitment and retention on the flagship qualifications.

Just 16,000 young people started a T-level in the fourth year of their rollout, according to new government data that also confirms a "worrying" dropout rate, a new action plan published on Thursday shows.

Pupil numbers for the qualifications, designed as the new technical equivalent to A-levels, grew by 58 per cent from 10,200 in September 2022.

Close to £1.8 billion has been spent on the qualifications to date, yet they have reached less than 3 per cent of the 16-to-19 pupil population.

Government officials are now taking steps to make T-levels "more commercially attractive" to exam boards by introducing higher entry fees for providers if numbers are low.

Despite the low recruitment, the government is ploughing ahead with controversial plans to remove funding for competing level-3 applied general qualifications from August.

James Kewin, deputy chief executive of the



Sixth Form Colleges Association, said "very low" take-up of T-levels leaves "plans to scrap applied general qualifications like BTECs dead in the water".

According to Kewin, who leads the Protect Student Choice campaign, around 280,000 students are studying applied general qualifications, compared to around 26,000 studying a T-level.

"Even if the plan to replace the former with the latter was the right one, the numbers simply do not stack up (particularly as BTECs will start to be scrapped from next year) and will leave an enormous qualifications gap that tens of thousands of students will fall through."

Both the Labour Party and Liberal Democrats have made a commitment to pause and review the plan to scrap most BTECs if either wins the next general election.

Figures released alongside the action plan

confirm that one in three T-level students in wave two dropped out. These students enrolled on a T-level in 2021 and were due to complete in 2023.

Of the 5,321 students in the cohort, 3,510 – 66 per cent – completed the course and assessment. But 1,086 dropped T-levels for another course and a further 682 withdrew from education altogether.

Anne Murdoch, senior adviser in college leadership at the Association of School and College Leaders, said T-level retention was "worrying low".

Every T-level will be reviewed by DfE agencies over the next 12 months following complaints from providers over "volume of content" and "unduly burdensome" assessment.

The DfE said "breadth of content" and "burden of assessment" could be changed as a result of the reviews, but "without compromising the rigour" of T-levels. The government will also explore allowing awarding organisations to plan for core exams to be taken at different times over the two years.

As well as input from the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education and Ofqual, new "curriculum reference groups" made up of T-level teachers and industry experts will "suggest improvements" to the qualifications and provide feedback on proposed changes.

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

Inspectors to get AI training to help improve decisions

Ofsted will train inspectors in the use of artificial intelligence and explore how the technology can help the school watchdog to make "better decisions".

Meanwhile, Ofqual has promised to create new AI-specific categories for exam boards to report malpractice.

The government asked regulators and agencies to set out their strategic approach to AI by the end of April.

In its response, published on Wednesday, Ofsted said it already used AI, including in its risk assessment of 'good' schools, to help decide whether to carry out full graded inspections or short ungraded visits.

But the watchdog is "also exploring how AI can help us to make better decisions based

on the information we hold", to work "more efficiently" and "further improve" how it inspects and regulates.

The biggest benefits from AI could include assessing risk, working more efficiently through automation and making best use of the data – particularly text.

It will also "develop inspectors' knowledge" about the technology so they "have the knowledge and skills to consider AI and its different uses".

Ofsted said it supported the use of AI by schools where it improves the care and education of children.

When inspecting, it will "consider a provider's use" of AI "by the effect it has on the criteria set out" in its existing inspection frameworks.

But leaders are "responsible for ensuring that the use of AI does not have a detrimental effect on those outcomes, the quality of their provision or decisions they take".

Ofsted warned that the effect of the new technology on children is still "poorly understood", so it will try to better understand the use of AI by providers and research on the impact.

Exams regulator Ofqual said there had been "modest numbers" of AI malpractice cases in coursework, with some leading to sanctions against students.

In its evidence, also published Wednesday, the regulator said it would add AI-specific categories for exam boards to report malpractice.



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Profile

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL

A portrait of Oli de Botton, a man with curly grey hair and a beard, wearing a dark blue jacket over a white shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile.

The former head speaking up for better careers guidance

After putting oracy at the heart of a counter-cultural school that has shaped Labour's election offer, Oli de Botton is on a mission to transform careers education

At a recent parent's evening, Oli de Botton was told his son's Year 3 class would be studying oracy this term.

He began to well up. And he recalls his first thought was 'Gosh this is actually happening'.

De Botton has spent much of his career championing oracy – the ability to communicate effectively through speech.

As co-founder, curriculum lead and later head of School 21, one of the country's most renowned progressive free schools, he revived the concept by putting speaking skills at the heart of its curriculum.

Last year, the Labour party – looking increasingly likely to form the next government – said it would “weave oracy into lessons throughout school”.

De Botton says he has always tried to “provide a provocative challenge to how we do things”. Setting up a progressive school in a traditionalist-dominated world of education reform attests to that.

It's an approach he is now taking to his current project: revamping careers education as chief executive of the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC).

The leftish streak

This way of working goes far back. As a school pupil in Year 5, de Botton remembers writing to his local MP for Finchley about the unfairness of new satellite TV firms buying up football rights. It meant some matches would be restricted to those who could afford subscriptions.

De Botton says his mother was a “social justice warrior”, instilling in him a “leftish streak”. He attended the primary school where she taught and was later headteacher.

His grandfather, who hailed from the East End,

Profile: Oli de Botton

was an orchestral cellist and a communist who “to the end would defend the USSR”.

Meanwhile, his father’s family came to London as refugees from Egypt. His dad “never recovered” from the ordeal of fleeing their homeland in the 1950s and the racism he suffered here.

De Botton’s public speaking abilities were moulded at University College School, a private school in Hampstead (although he admits doing “homework even when it wasn’t set... probably didn’t make me the most socially successful character”).

He also spent time as a carer for a close family member, which was “incredibly character forming”.

Picking history, Latin and Greek at A-level, he said “being transported into an ancient world was just a safe and happy place for me. I wish I could hide that, but it’s true”.

He doesn’t recall what careers advice he was given, but believes that “you work out later in life why you’ve ended up taking that route”.

School encouraged him to apply to King’s College, Cambridge – a “pretty left-wing” institution – where he studied classics and found his feet leading its student union.

Balancing radicalism with boundaries

De Botton joined the inaugural cohort of Teach First, the education charity that recruits top graduates to teach in deprived communities, in 2003.

He taught at Albany School, (which during his time there became Oasis Academy Hadley) in Enfield, when “education was on the move”, including with the launch of the London Challenge school improvement programme.

But he found teaching English 25 hours a week “sapping and all-consuming”. He made “all sorts of shockers”, recalling telling one unruly pupil to “stay behind at the end”. When his back was turned, the boy escaped down a drainpipe.

He learned over time to “balance radicalism” with “reinforcing boundaries”.

De Botton became head of sixth form, but felt “pretty burnt out” and left. He spent 18 months



‘We were trying to be the best of the new, and the best of the old’

as a consultant with PwC, before embarking on international projects for charity the Education Development Trust (then called CfBT).

De Botton was seconded as an adviser to David Miliband during his failed Labour leadership campaign in 2010. He “thought really highly” of Milliband, despite admitting he was “challenging to work for because he was very smart”.

That same year, de Botton was elected as a Labour councillor for Hackney and the coalition government introduced free schools.

Despite the Labour link, he was successful in winning approval to open a new free school.

Alongside Peter Hyman – Tony Blair’s former speech writer and now a key aide to Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer – and former theatrical producer and kids’ TV actor Ed Fido, he clinched an existing school site in Stratford.

De Botton says he brought a “passion for alleviating disadvantage”, Fido an “innovation mindset” and Hyman “a bit of both”.

Its curriculum, which de Botton led on, incorporated lots of oracy and drama. He says: “We were trying to be the best of the new, and the

best of the old.”

The founders agreed that “speaking was an underdone thing” in both the “medium, and the message that every young person has a voice to advocate for themselves”. Assemblies included pupils sat in a circle talking.

De Botton became head in 2015, the year after the school was rated ‘outstanding’.

Reinventing work experience

One of his key successes was reinventing work experience so Year 10s did a half-day each week instead of the typical “two-week hit of making the tea”.

The Careers & Enterprise Company, the quango formed in 2014 to improve careers education, recruited him to lead it in 2021.

De Botton is now implementing a new work placement model, building up exposure to careers from Year 7 onwards. While that youngest cohort might do day trips to “inspire them”, by Year 10 “you’re trying to find a real pathway”.

The proportion of schools meeting the Gatsby benchmarks – which define what good careers

Profile: Oli de Botton

education looks like – has more than doubled in the past five years.

Ninety-six per cent of secondary pupils received at least one employer encounter last year, while youngsters are twice as likely to report awareness of apprenticeships.

But since the government ditched compulsory school-age work experience in 2012, it's been hard to wrestle that focus back. On average, schools still only meet 5.5 of the 8 Gatsby benchmarks. Fewer than one in five schools meet them all.

Last June, the CEC board raised concerns that careers education delivery could be suffering the impact of “challenges created by the current capacity within schools”, with funding squeezes and teacher shortages.

But de Botton is finding new ways to bring skills to life.

Last year, a pilot programme took 1,000 subject teachers into industry to experience the apprenticeships system. De Botton and five biology teachers were shown around cell and gene therapy company Oxford Biomedica. The teachers “saw it as valuable CPD... and took it back to their schools”.

CEC also worked with Pinewood Studios and the Academies Enterprise Trust to “reinvent” its Year 8 maths curriculum, with pupils learning about ratio and proportion by seeing how scenes were created for 2016 film *Alice in Wonderland: Through the Looking Glass*.

The projects are another “demonstration of what I've always tried to do” in challenging the norm, de Botton adds.

Return to politics?

With a promise to become self-sufficient dropped years ago, CEC received nearly £30 million in government funding last year alone. And despite the Department for Education cutting its own cloth, CEC's November board minutes state “good progress” on agreeing a grant for 2024-25.

The government's 2021 skills white paper said the current mixture of organisations responsible for careers education was “confusing, fragmented and unclear”.



‘Gosh, this is really happening!’

While schools and colleges are responsible for providing advice and guidance, overseen by CEC, responsibility also sits with the National Careers Service and the Department for Work and Pensions and its agencies.

Government has committed to updating statutory careers guidance, including mandating schools to report progress at least once a year. Its ambition is to create an “all-age careers system, unified under a single strategic framework”.

Meanwhile, Labour has promised to train more than 1,000 new careers advisers and ensure every secondary youngster gets two weeks of high-quality work experience.

Talking of Labour, de Botton recently authored a paper on ‘building a modern curriculum’ for think tank Labour Together, which includes a proposal to “broaden experiences for young people by making space for enriching activities like performance, ‘maths circles’ and independent research”.

The think tank is credited with being influential in shaping policy under Starmer. Nearly all the MPs who set it up have shadow cabinet roles, including one Bridget Phillipson.

So does this signal a return to politics? De Botton says he is “not very political these days” and isn't advising Labour's shadow cabinet.

Either way, he laughs nervously when I suggest dinner conversations with his wife, Amber de Botton, who was the prime minister's director of communications for 10 months last year, must be interesting.

Meanwhile, positive momentum around School 21 seems to have waned. Last year it was judged ‘requires improvement’.

De Botton regrets they didn't plan more for the future during that first phase.

“We invested everything in our first cohort. Did we think about what year seven would look like? Probably not. But it comes up on you fast.”

But the Ofsted report did credit its focus on oracy for how pupils “present themselves confidently”. And despite the rating, it's clear oracy is here to stay.

“I feel in a small way I've contributed to that,” de Botton says.

Can he repeat the feat on careers education, too?

Opinion

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DAVID
JOHNSTON

Minister for children,
families and wellbeing

The new NPQ for SEND is key to a more inclusive system

Launching the new qualification for special needs coordinators, David Johnston explains how it fits in with a programme of reforms to drive up inclusion

This government is delivering high and rising standards across our schools and last year we set out a number of much-needed reforms in our SEND and AP Improvement Plan.

Among them was championing the role of special educational needs co-ordinators, or SENCOs – among the unsung heroes in our schools.

They do an incredible job providing children and young people who have a variety of learning needs with support and encouragement, and we want to see them given the same kind of excellent training and development that we are making available to all our teachers.

As part of our mission to give every single child a world-class education, we're consistently refining the qualifications and frameworks in place for our teacher workforce. NPQs are accredited qualifications, designed to support professional development and help those who want to increase expertise in their teaching practice.

We are now moving forward with a new leadership-level NPQ for SENCOs. It is designed to equip these vital staff and leaders with the knowledge and skills to give pupils with SEND even better support, helping to foster the kind of inclusive school culture and leadership that enables pupils to thrive in mainstream schools alongside their peers.

The new NPQ will replace the National Award for SEN Coordination (NASENCO) as the mandatory qualification for SENCO from September 2024.

It will be available from autumn this year and the first cohort will be fully funded, allowing SENCOs to take the qualification for free. We know that teachers already have lots on their plates, so the flexible, 18-month course has been carefully designed to fit around existing commitments.

The qualification covers a range of key areas, such as enhancing school culture and enacting statutory guidance, which will help SENCOs to introduce policies which encourage best practice that creates a more inclusive learning environment for all.

As minister for children, families and wellbeing this is something I care passionately about. The NPQ is based on the latest and best evidence of what works, with



“ Every teacher is a teacher of SEND ”

greater quality assurance from the department. I'm confident that the qualification will have a positive impact on our schools, teachers and pupils.

While there are many valuable specialists supporting pupils, it's important to recognise that every teacher is a teacher of SEND, which is why we are also making sure that all those in the wider teaching workforce have the necessary training and support.

The Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework and Early Career Framework were recently combined and updated to ensure all our teachers can give every single pupil the best start in life. The updated framework, ITTECF, includes content on supporting pupils with SEND and children's mental health.

When I recently visited Beaumont Hill Academy in Darlington, the teachers were motivating and used

a range of encouraging learning techniques, making it clear how valuable the Initial Teacher Training support model had been.

I'm incredibly proud too that we're also training up to 7,000 new early years special educational needs coordinators, which will make a massive difference in helping to ensure children's needs are identified and addressed at the earliest opportunity before they escalate.

This government's aim is to make sure there's a level playing field which enables everyone to have the same kind of opportunities to lead a happy and fulfilling life. I am very proud that this new NPQ for our much-valued SENCOs is going to help deliver that. Make sure you sign up!

Applications for this autumn's first cohort of fully-funded NPQs for SEND are now open [here](#).

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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**JONNY
UTTLEY**

CEO, The Education Alliance
Multi-Academy Trust

Together, we can build the inclusive system we all want

The evidence is clear that our system is far from inclusive. It's time we did something about it, says Jonny Uttley

We all want a high-quality, inclusive education system, right?

The DfE's mission statement is to "enable children and learners to thrive, by protecting the vulnerable and ensuring the delivery of excellent standards of education, training and care".

Every school and trust leader I talk to agrees; every politician I hear does too. The prime minister even said at his last party conference: "My main funding priority in every spending review from now on will be education."

"Why? Because it is the closest thing we have to a silver bullet. It is the best economic policy, the best social policy, the best moral policy."

So, if everyone agrees, why don't we have it?

Ninety thousand children are in elective home education. There has been a 39 per cent increase in suspensions since before the pandemic. And the Centre for Social Justice recently identified ongoing "spikes" in year 11 pupils moving off rolls before the all-important January census.

Moreover, the Education Policy Institute has raised concerns about

"unexplained exits". Provision for children with SEND is in crisis right across the country.

Some schools and trusts continue to educate remarkably low proportions of children with EHCPs compared to their neighbours. And too many parents still hear the phrase "we can't meet need".

The evidence is abundant.

We face complex and interconnected problems, with a backdrop of harsh funding cuts to services that have left schools and parents with less support. But every intelligent attempt to find solutions is drowned out by shrill voices claiming to hold the one pure truth and engaging in binary slanging matches.

The Centre for Young Lives was launched in February by former children's commissioner Anne Longfield. The independent think tank's aim is for Britain to be the best place in the world to grow up and bring up children.

I am delighted to be one of its visiting fellows. In that role, I have this week launched a call for evidence on developing an aspirational vision for inclusive education and a plan for delivery based on the collective experience and wisdom of people who work with and care about young people.

We believe that inclusion is about all young people being of equal value and receiving high-quality education



“ We must look beyond our failed, zero-sum accountability

and appropriate support, regardless of background or need.

For too many young people, this is not what they experience; we have created a system of accountability so perverse that some schools see some young people as more valuable to them, and others as too difficult to deal with.

A lack of imagination, fragmentation of the school ecosystem and inadequate funding mean that, even where schools do their absolute best, some young people fall through the cracks.

We must identify the barriers to an inclusive system clearly and honestly. Then we must develop policies that remove those barriers and deliver success and equity for all.

We do not accept, as some imply, that inclusion is somehow soft or divorced from high academic and behavioural standards. We believe that every young person deserves the very best in terms of outcomes, destinations, quality of teaching, school experience and extra-curricular opportunities.

Our most vulnerable young people need schools that are calm, where behaviour is good and that are full of committed, highly-skilled teachers. To achieve this, we must look beyond a failed, zero-sum accountability system that lauds those that offer this only to some children as "high-performing", and labels those who welcome the most vulnerable as "ineffective".

This is just one view, though, and we want to hear many more. By bringing together the collective experience, knowledge, wisdom and compassion that exists across the system, we can build something much better.

With schools and education at the heart of the inclusive society we should aspire to be, everyone can have a chance to succeed and be supported to do so. Isn't that what we all want?

Anyone can contribute to the Centre for Young Lives call for evidence by visiting our website: www.centreforyounglives.org.uk/

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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LEEKExecutive director, Suffolk
Primary Headteachers'
AssociationThe sector must engage
with ratios on executive pay

Annie Besant would be appalled by education's latest gender pay-gap data, says Rebecca Leek. It's time the sector took some responsibility

I ran past the Bryant & May factory in Bow in the Easter Holidays. It was day two of a 46-mile personal pilgrimage, so I was very happy to stop for a breather under The Match Girls' Strike blue plaque and offer up a prayer to the women in whose footsteps we still follow, 140 years on.

Only a day or two later, the 2023/24 gender pay gap data started emerging. What would pioneering educationalist Annie Besant think of it, I wondered.

Contrary to popular belief, the gender pay gap is not about a woman doing the same job as a man for less pay, or vice versa. (Though it happens and I've lived it.) It's actually a measure of what men and women earn across the piece. Are women on average earning less than men, and by how much?

The answer is yes. Last year, women earned 91p for every pound men made. The divide is closing, albeit quite slowly, but men essentially earn more per hour than women.

You might think that our sector, with its predominantly female

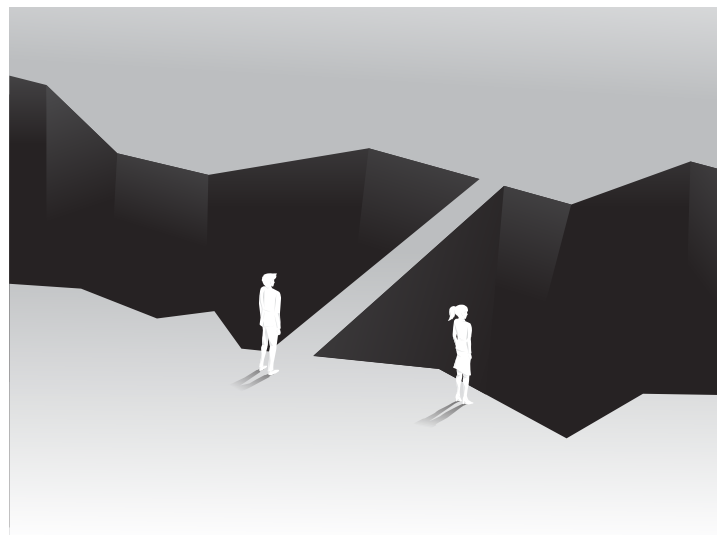
workforce, would buck the trend. Think again.

Explore the quartiles data of multi-academy trust gender pay gap reports and a very clear pattern emerges. While significantly more women work in our schools, men are disproportionately represented in the top two quartiles. It is pretty standard for more than one-third of those working in the top half to be men and around 90 per cent of those in the bottom quartile to be women.

These gender pay gap reports are pretty limp in how they address the matter, too. E-ACT's median gender pay gap is nearly 28 per cent, yet its Gender Pay Gap 2023 report runs to less than a page. It says little more than that the trust is an equal opportunities employer, that 27 per cent of its workforce are men, and that it uses national pay scales to determine salaries.

If the obligation to publish a gender pay gap report was intended to pull organisations towards actually doing something about it, I'm not sure it's working.

Shifting the trend at the bottom end would no doubt enrich our schools. How great would it be if more men chose to work as support staff, taking on part-time jobs to fit around childcare, helping five-year-olds eat their lunch and supporting

“ Gender pay-gap reports
are pretty limp

with reading groups?

But it's at the top end where the numbers really tip the balance. Just like in the match girls' day, the men at the top (nine in 10 are men) earn astronomically more than the women at the bottom (nine in 10 are women). *The Guardian* reports that, “of the worst-performing 100 public bodies with the largest gender pay gap, all but three were academy trusts”. This is in great part due to how stratospheric some CEO salaries are.

CEO pay has never been subject to pay scales. There have been attempts to pull these salaries back to earth slightly. However, the shift is minimal.

I think it is time the sector engaged more determinedly with ratio setting. If someone at the bottom is paid £20,000 FTE, pay for the person at the top would be constrained by what the earnings ratio specified (e.g. £200,000 if the ratio was set at 1:10).

The National Governance Association mentions ratios in its guidance on chief executive pay. I'd like to hear more people pushing this: unions, the Confederation of School Trusts, the Education and Skills Funding Agency. As a Quaker, I like the look of 1:4.7, the ratio Quakers in Britain have set themselves. This differs hugely with the current state of affairs, where some CEOs are paid over £400,000, but I like to be ambitious.

Let's remember there are pay committees across the country supposedly reviewing, scrutinising and setting pay. What is happening around these tables? Can a trust that pays its lowest-paid workers one-twentieth of what their CEO earns really claim to be tackling disadvantage? Is it true to the values it no doubt loudly announces to its communities?

I think Annie Besant would be truly saddened. We have many more miles to go.

Opinion

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ANNA
MC SHANE

Director, The New Britain Project

Together, let's shape a more inclusive profession for women

Two new surveys aim to inform a recruitment and retention strategy that targets a particularly vulnerable group of teachers, explains Anna McShane

Like many women, I left teaching when I had children. At that time, reconciling the demands of being a senior leader in a school serving one of the most disadvantaged communities in the country with the responsibilities of motherhood seemed impossible. I think it was the guilt that did it for me in the end; I felt unable to do justice to either role.

I'd always known that if I could I'd want to try for more than one child. Yet I couldn't get over how my school would cope with my temporary absence, potentially multiplied. The thought of the disruption to students and the extra workload placed upon my colleagues felt selfish. A clean break, I decided, was in everyone's best interests. Is this sense of guilt as acute in any other profession?

When I eventually returned to the workforce (though not as a teacher), I realised that I had underestimated the seismic shift that starting a family would cause in my life, which at the time I felt validated my decision.

Any parent who has relied on

nurseries knows the turmoil of those first few months: children suddenly falling ill, urgent pick-ups required followed often by two-day exclusions from childcare... it seemed never-ending. Work and life became a perpetual negotiation and juggle between my husband, myself and (when lucky) my mum over who could do what and when.

Working from home offered a work-around for many of these issues, making the chaos slightly more manageable. I had only a few essential in-person commitments each week. Yet I wondered if such flexibility could ever integrate into the more rigid structure of classroom teaching, where each lesson feels critical and the strain of arranging cover falls heavily on already over-stretched colleagues. To me it would have felt unfair to ask.

But in hindsight, perhaps I misjudged. The intense early stages of parenting do eventually stabilise and life settles into a calmer stream. Perhaps with role models, mentorship and a supportive framework during and after maternity leave, I might have continued teaching. Moreover, had flexible working arrangements been more commonplace, I might have remained in the profession.

And so while my story is mine alone, I am eager to understand



“ Last year, nearly 9,000 women aged 30 to 39 exited the profession

the experiences of others. Women aged 30 to 39 represent the largest demographic leaving the teaching profession annually. Last year alone, nearly 9,000 women in this age group exited the profession. Many of them held over a decade of experience in middle or senior leadership roles.

This significant loss of talent is not being offset by new recruits, with teacher recruitment targets consistently unmet. Addressing the challenges of recruitment and retention is critical and should be a priority for future educational policy. A key element of any strategy to respond to this challenge should be to understand and better support this key demographic.

That's why as director of The New Britain Project I have teamed up with another former teacher, Emma Sheppard at The Maternity Teacher/Paternity Teacher Project. Building on MTPT's foundational research from 2018, our goal is to investigate the ongoing crisis of

attrition and identify policies and support mechanisms that could enable more women aged in their 30s to sustain their careers in schools.

If you are a woman who left teaching in a UK state school between the ages of 30 and 39, we would appreciate it if you could spend a few minutes sharing your experience through [this survey](#).

Additionally, if you are a female teacher currently working in a UK state school and fall within the same age range, your insights are equally valuable. There's a survey for you [here](#).

Teaching should be both sustainable and fulfilling. Unfortunately, for too many women, it is neither. By listening to those who have left and those who have stayed, we aim to foster changes that make teaching a viable long-term career.

Please, share your story and help us shape the future of the profession.

Solutions

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GARY AUBIN

SEND consultant,
Whole Education

How to harness culture and hang on to good SENDCOs

The best way to incentivise SENDCOs to stay in this demanding job is to ensure everyone values what they do and what they stand for, explains Gary Aubin

School A and School B are similar mainstream schools, desperate to hang on to their SENDCO.

They both give their SENDCO adequate time to do the role, pay them respectably for the responsibility, and provide them with a number of teaching assistants for support. They both make them part of the school's senior leadership team and even offer some flexible working opportunities for their wellbeing.

School A's SENDCO stays in post, thriving in the role and driving outcomes for pupils with SEND.

School B's SENDCO leaves, setting the school's provision back and setting off a lengthy recruitment process.

The difference? A recent experience sheds light on the answer.

Understanding SENDCO retention

In a recent continuing professional development day for multi-academy trust SEND leaders organised by Whole Education, 40 such colleagues were asked: Which are the most important factors that support SENDCO retention?

The respondents chose from the

following options, also adding some of their own: Salary, time, seniority, relationship with the local authority, workload, professional growth and development opportunities, number of teaching assistants, quality of line-management support, school culture around inclusion and flexible working.

Everyone in the room had been a SENDCO and either still was, or was working closely with SENDCOs in their day-to-day practice. The trusts they worked in covered around 600 schools, including some of the largest.

Each colleague had five votes which they could use flexibly, for example by putting multiple votes against one factor if they felt strongly about it.

One factor attracted almost three times as many votes as any other: The school culture around inclusion, including from the head.

It's a small dataset, but it suggests an interesting hypothesis with consequences that go far beyond the reach of a SENDCO.

A whole-school culture of inclusion

It's about what happens across the school. A headteacher can give a SENDCO time and pay them well. But if the staff member doesn't feel listened to they are much more likely to leave. Your SENDCO can join the senior leadership team, but if they don't feel they can effect change you won't hang on to them. And



“ It's about what happens across the school

no matter how many TAs support them, if wider staff mindsets aren't inclusive it's a poor investment.

Schools that work well for pupils with SEND are about much more than the experience, expertise or effectiveness of the SENDCO. Inclusive schools live and breathe a culture in which everyone (particularly every leader, but everyone) considers the needs of pupils with SEND with each decision they make.

When a school leader reflects on the effectiveness of the school behaviour policy, when a teacher considers how they will teach an upcoming lesson or when a teaching assistant plans well for an intervention, they think about those pupils. When the designated safeguarding lead reviews cases, when the midday supervisors serve lunches or when the history lead prepares curriculum materials, they think about those pupils.

And as with so much school practice, that is most effective when it's driven by the headteacher.

Holding on to a good SENDCO

Three years ago, a National Association for Special Education

survey found 12 per cent of SENDCOs left their role each year and only 40 per cent planned to be working as a SENDCO five years later. Meanwhile, SEND registers increase in size year-on-year and more pupils with more complex needs are attending mainstream schools. A shortage of SENDCOs is something education can ill afford.

It's true some will leave the SENDCO role for promotion – to a senior leadership post, headship, a MAT or local authority SEND leader or adviser role. But it's also clear that many are finding the SENDCO role at best challenging, or at worst unmanageable.

The hundreds of SENDCO vacancies published on teaching websites attest to the fact we still have much to do to ensure the SENDCO role is desirable in the first place, let alone one someone might want to stay in.

Perhaps that's because it's not valued highly enough and perhaps it's just innately too hard. But pay isn't the only way to signify value, and if everyone around a SENDCO embraced what the job represents, then perhaps we'll find we had the solution all along.

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THE REVIEW

THE MAGICAL PLACE WE CALL SCHOOL

Authors: Dr Kathleen Corley with Glenn Plaskin

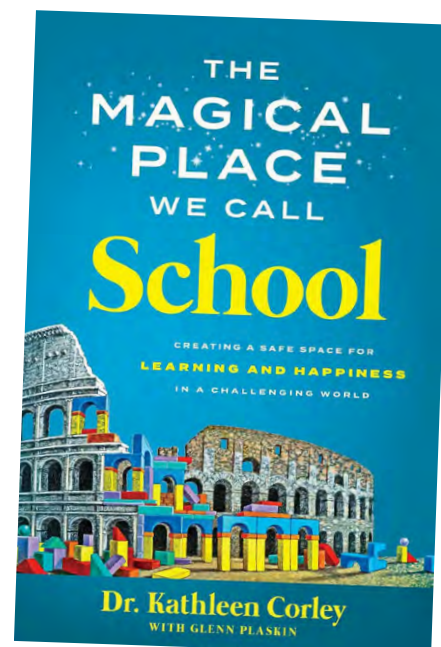
Publisher: Forefront Books

Publication date: out now

ISBN: 163763224X

Reviewer: Stephen Lockyer, primary teacher

BOOK
TV
FILM
RADIO
EVENT
RESOURCE



Howdy pardner! Afore you mosey on past this here ree-view, how'dya like a slice of ma Meemaw's apple pie while I tell yer all about *The Magical Place We Call School*?

Too much? If you're the kind who wants to claw their own ears off when a group of American tourists (collective noun: a trump) get all excited about heading to Lie-sess-terh-shy-ehr Square on the London subway, then give this book a HARD avoid. I was only allowed a glimpse of the digital copy, but even that, when sliced, bled red, white and blue in a weirdly patriotic smear.

If you can get past this – and I did manage to by chapter two – what we have here is a heartfelt and impassioned love letter to teaching and education. Despite the Trumpification of society, where we can only have one point of view and anyone who dares sit in a different camp is an enemy, this book shows that there is a middle ground – a magical land where you don't need to beat your pedagogical drum louder than others to be heard, where both firm boundaries and an understanding of individual children matter.

Dr Kathleen Corley has worked for more than four decades in the US education system – a system that quite frankly makes our own appear vanilla by comparison – and it is clear throughout this book that she is devoted to her students and the profession.

This is obviously a dangerous path for some. Witness the burned out and broken staff sitting in the dust bowls along the same road. Devotion to one's career comes at a huge, often untold, expense to mental health, marriage, social lives

and the lives of your offspring if not carefully managed.

When someone survives such a journey with optimism enough at the end to refer to school as a 'magical place', it behooves (sic) us to listen. There is a wisdom that comes from longevity, which we can now christen Corley's Law: The longer you spend in education, the more accurate you can be in saying exactly what does work in the classroom.

Accordingly, the book is heavily led by anecdotes, but these are teachable moments as much as anything. They exemplify the wisdom Corley wants to impart, and as such the book works relatively well.

In the olden days of teaching, a lot of teacher training used to happen in hotel conference rooms. You'd get wildly excited about wearing your own clothes on a weekday and the free buffet lunch. Zoom was how you would leave after filling in the evaluation form and, despite many of these expert-led courses being brilliant, the best thing about them was the chance to chat to colleagues, picking up ideas, advice and expertise from those older and often wiser than you.

So with this book. Don't expect it to revolutionise your career, but do enjoy the chance to sit by the fire and chew the fat with an experienced principal. It's reassuring and comforting, like those conversations you'd've had with brilliant teachers on training days way back when.

I'd also recommend this book to aspiring and aspirational heads. I'm too little a fan of Excel and meetings to want to be a headteacher, but

the advice Corley gives out seems to be the sort which would really stick with me if that was my career path.

Here's one I highlighted and thought about for longer than a TikTok: "Take care of problems before they take care of you." I'm consistently bemused at the number of times I've seen leaders suffer because they've either kicked the problem can down the corridor or (alas, more commonly) buried their head in the sandpit completely. Every time, the problem comes back to bite them in the ass, as our cousins over the pond might say.

Like a bucking bronco, headship is an unforgiving and unwieldy beast. Sometimes you need to hear campfire stories from someone who's had their fair share of rodeos. With four decades of rustling kids and an enduring love for them, Corley has plenty of those.

If you can get past the twang.

★★★★☆
Rating

THE CONVERSATION LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM

Fiona Atherton

Headteacher,
Ladypool
Primary School

PRAY FOR SUNSHINE

We have made it to the summer term in what seems to be the year that the sunshine forgot. But what's been making the social media weather this week is the rumbling story of the Michaela School trial over its prayer ban. And what do the British like more than to talk about the weather?



Zillur Rahman
@ZillRah7

Follow

The Michaela School case, here are my thoughts/comments. First & foremost, I must express my praise & to say how proud I am of the student who brought this claim - she has shown immense courage and conviction in her beliefs. She has shown that age is no barrier for standing up

07:50 · 23/04/2024 From Earth · 9.1K Views

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I've been a quiet observer of the two sides of this debate for some time, and my personal conclusion is that this was not a good decision for the family, the school or education as a whole. This social media thread on X, from employment lawyer Zillur Rahman, best sums up my concerns.

Many non-faith schools manage to provide a quiet space for children or young adults to pray and reflect. I suspect they will continue to do so. You have to admire Katharine Birbalsingh's dogged determination, but

sometimes leadership needs to be about humility, service and kindness to the community you serve – doing what's right rather than being right.

Article 14 of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (freedom of thought, belief and religion) states: "Every child has the right to think and believe what they choose and also to practise their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights. Governments must respect the rights and responsibilities of parents to guide their child as they grow up."

That's a succinct expression of where I stand as a school leader.

THE KINDNESS OF LEADERS

Speaking of kindness, I read a blog this week that really warmed my heart. It reminded me that although we seem to hear and read only about the controversial leaders, more often than not the vast and usually silent majority are out there doing good and changing children's lives for the better.

Ian Frost's post really got to the heart of the type of leader I most admire and strive to be. He gives five reasons for including kindness in your leadership approach, and for each one he also cites a book that supports this idea. So, if you are someone who likes to do the research, there is a ready-made book list for you.

For me, the most pertinent point was based around the thought that 'kindness is not niceness'. I suspect Ms Birbalsingh would agree with the sentiment. However, Frost's injunction is not for us to dispense with niceness but to go beyond it to support those we lead. It certainly made me think about the leadership actions I spend my time on.



AN INSPECTOR DOESN'T CALL



One of the topics that has dominated my conversations with colleagues this week is Ofsted: the infamous 'window' right down to the days and weeks inspectors might call, whether it is right or not to celebrate top ratings, and now even whether those one-word judgments will continue. (The *Sunday Times* said no. On Monday, *Schools Week* said yes. You have to wonder whether this is an intentional briefing strategy.)

So many of our fantastic schools in Birmingham (particularly in areas deemed most deprived) are doing an amazing job, and it seems that work is now being noted by Ofsted after many years of being overlooked. So it is with a sense of irony that I admit to feeling somewhat similar to the author of this blog when I was awaiting the call last year.

As a school leader, it is incredibly difficult to compartmentalise the upcoming Ofsted inspection even while acknowledging that it is fundamentally flawed in its current form. When they reward schools that you admire, it becomes even harder.

Add to that the growing fight for school numbers as the birth rate in Birmingham falls and the fact that parents use the inspection as a decision-making tool, it becomes like a maelstrom in your mind.

The range of emotions every week when you are waiting for them to call, along with the disappointment you feel when you are ready and they don't, can leave you feeling tempest-tossed.

Here's to a change in the weather.

Click the links to access
the blogs and podcasts



The Knowledge

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



Work experience: the missing ingredient for social mobility

Dr Elnaz Kashefpakdel, Director of policy, research and impact, Speakers for Schools

The harsh reality in the UK today is that privilege still matters when it comes to higher education. We are privileged to be home to some of the highest-ranking universities in the world, but every year the race for university spots at top institutions (and therefore the highly-regarded and lucrative careers they open up) gets fiercer and more pupils from already under-served communities get left behind.

The number of successful offers from Russell Group universities dropped from 60 per cent in 2021 to 55 per cent in 2022. Meanwhile, students from wealthy backgrounds are six times more likely to secure a spot than their less-privileged peers.

With a general election looming, it is incumbent on all parties to ensure fair access to top universities is at the heart of their offer for improving social mobility. Our new report sheds light on how that might be done.

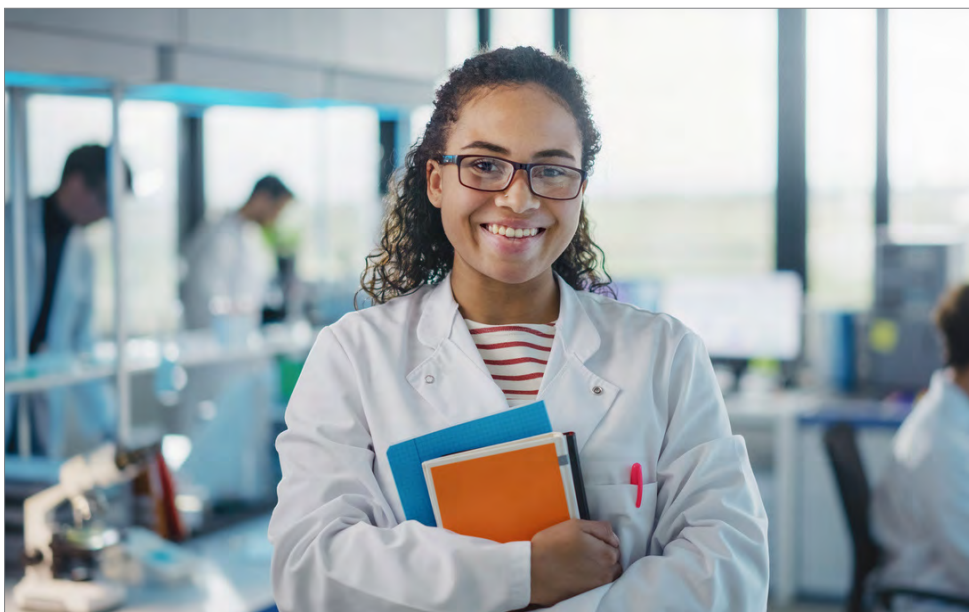
More than grades

The attainment gap between the least and most advantaged is greater now than at any point in the past 10 years. This undeniably creates a major obstacle for disadvantaged young people to reach Russell Group universities. But our latest report from Speakers for Schools shows that getting in isn't just about grades.

Entitled Double Disadvantage, it finds that work experience and participation in enrichment activities really does increase the chance of success in university applications. UCAS research also tells us that at least one-third of the time, evidence of these activities in personal statements showcases passion, interest and preparedness that will affect an admission officer's decision.

Equal access to opportunity

Work experience clearly adds value. For some courses, such as medicine or veterinary science, it is listed as an essential/desirable requirement. Yet 50 per cent of young people in state education don't have access to work



experience. For those who do, we know little about the quality of these placements.

Speakers for Schools has previously shown that access to work experience unfairly favours those from a privileged background, whether through personal connections or attending schools with the capacity to provide a high-quality career education.

If young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are not informed about submitting a successful application to a prestigious university and don't have the means to access opportunities that showcase their interests and achievements, the challenge can become unsurmountable.

Transparency about admissions

Admissions are a bit of a mystery too. Even though universities check personal statements for work experience, they don't always spell out exactly what they're looking for. That's a problem, especially for aspiring students with the right grades who don't know where to look to find information about what top universities want.

We need to democratise access to privileged information about successful applications. This needs to be at the heart of fair access and opportunity-for-all policies. Universities, through their outreach programmes, need to

step forward and offer insight about successful applications.

Lack of early access to insights and information about the ingredients of successful applications undermines existing efforts to widen participation.

What needs to happen?

Russell Group universities serve as a pipeline to many top jobs. Admissions processes must be sophisticated enough to recognise talent and potential wherever it resides. However, it is also incumbent on the wider education system to ensure that we provide young people with the opportunities they need to demonstrate their potential beyond academic study.

It is promising to see the reinstatement of two weeks' work experience in the Labour Party manifesto already; our work so far has shown that work experience has the potential to impact young people's outcomes and, eventually, social mobility.

However, it is essential to ensure that the quality of these experiences is nothing short of the absolute best so young people from state education can compete on a level playing field.

Whichever government we see next, they need to provide a ring-fenced budget so schools and colleges can provide universal access to meaningful opportunities.

Week in

Westminster

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

TUESDAY

Government plans to spend £75 billion on defence over the next six years have set alarm bells ringing in the schools community.

Public funding is incredibly tight, with the DfE already having had to cut some schools-related programmes to part-fund this year's pay rise.

Pepe Di'Iasio, the new general secretary of the ASCL school leaders' union, acknowledged "the need for defence in an uncertain world".

But he said he was "deeply concerned about how the government is going to pay for this without further detriment to education and other public services on which families depend".

"When the prime minister talks about 'record investment in our schools', what has actually happened is a decade of cuts followed by a more recent – but still inadequate – improvement in spending," he said,

With a general election inching closer, it seems clearer than ever that the government risks a repeat of 2017, when school funding became a top priority for voters. That time they just lost their majority. Now they face oblivion.

WEDNESDAY

Gillian Keegan hosted another of her infamous webinars this week, aimed at welcoming schools back after the Easter holidays.

Others may remember awkward previous video addresses – such as one in which the DfE permanent secretary Susan Acland-Hood had to crouch awkwardly to get into shot when called on to answer a question.

This week's guest of honour was Rob Tarn, the government's new attendance

tsar. They talked about the absences crisis, the SEND crisis, the school funding crisis and the RAAC crisis.

Keegan remarked that RAAC would be "something I will be known for for a long time, certainly if you look at TikTok".

We suspect the education secretary was referring to her "hot mic" moment last year, when she was caught on camera accusing others of having "sat on their arse" over the crisis and expressed frustration at the lack of gratitude when she had been doing a "f***ing good job".

The questions put to Keegan and Tarn were also revealing. The six most-liked contributions were about funding, and most mentioned SEND. It seems both are at the forefront of leaders' minds at the moment.

Sector experts frequently despair at the "alphabet soup" of acronyms often deployed. Whether it's knowing the difference between your ASCL and your NAHT, or your TRA and NGA, it can get confusing when there are so many flying around.

Even Keegan was flummoxed during the webinar when she was asked a question about the "SRMA programme" until Tarn spelled it out: "School resource management advisers".

"The acronyms... one too many," said Keegan. ROFL.

The month is September 2022, we are in the midst of several prime ministers and education secretaries and the government launches a critical consultation on the use of unregistered alternative provision. Fast-forward 18 months and the response is still to be published.

Elizabeth Franey, a DfE deputy director, reassured Westminster Education Forum attendees that this work "isn't sitting on

a shelf somewhere" and the team have been "working really, really actively on it". Really?

It has also had plenty of interest from ministers and is a "really high priority" for Keegan, "which is great, but it does mean things take a little longer when there's such ministerial interest".

Franey was "really optimistic that you'll be hearing from us on it soon". Really?

THURSDAY

The British Educational Suppliers Association, or BESA if you've got the bandwidth for more acronyms, is among other things a representative of edtech companies that supply schools.

It was therefore a little ironic that they accidentally sent *Schools Week* journalists a mysterious email asking, "are you part of a BESA special interest group?". A follow-up email blamed "technical oversight".

"Please rest assured that your email address was included in this communication in error, and no further action is required from you."

The DfE is still claiming that its "advanced British standard" qualification doesn't involve scrapping T-levels (spoiler alert: it does).

A report on T-levels this week stated that the government's "commitment to world-class technical education and the work being done to implement and embed T-levels in the sector continues with the introduction of the Advanced British Standard (ABS) qualification framework".

"The ABS will take the best of T-levels and A-levels and bring them together into a single, unified structure, ensuring technical and academic education are placed on an equal footing."

Whatever...





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