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- Investigation finds 32 unresolved TRA cases referred over five years ago
- Teachers in limbo reveal 'psychological damage' and 'humiliation fear'
- 'Teacher regulation agency is not just failing, it is putting people at risk'

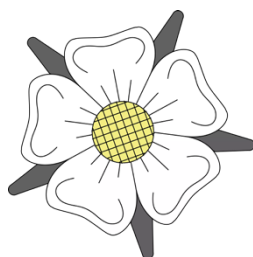
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SCHOOLS
WEEK

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The crumbly concrete crisis has had its day on the front pages – but for affected schools, the crisis is far from over.

Our superb feature this week shows why we can't forget about them.

Pupils at St Andrew's Junior School, in Essex, are still stuck in temporary classrooms. And while they may have been promised brand new buildings – that could be another six years away.

Funding for school building repairs is already too scant.

As we reveal on page 8, the government is doing all it can to stealthily squeeze schools for more cash to ensure the capital funding pot it has goes further.

Learning in temporary classrooms, with dodgy toilets and beams holding up the kitchen, will disrupt pupils' learning.

But the toll on leaders – who with Covid have now been in crisis mode for the best part of four years – is not sustainable.

As the education select committee makes clear this week (page 4), the job is already tough enough.

But its recommendations – mostly to reintroduce slashed recruitment schemes – are a damp squib compared to what is needed.

Unfortunately, the likely next government doesn't have much of a plan at the minute, either (page 7).

While the pledge to recruit 6,500 more secondary teachers has made the cut to feature on Labour's new 'first steps' card, there's still zero details on the party will actually deliver them.

Sadly for Labour, recruitment will be just one of many big ticket issues that the sector will be looking to them to solve.

Attention on those issues will mean many smaller problems will continue to be ignored.

One of those is the scandalous wait for teachers accused of misconduct to see their cases concluded (page 11).

Like many other parts of the wider justice system, it is utterly failing – and as well as victims, that includes those accused.

Most read online this week:

- 1** [Trust plans for accountancy-style career path for teaching assistants](#)
- 2** [Alternative provision: Let disrupted pupils repeat year 11, says de Souza](#)
- 3** [Five key findings on teacher recruitment and retention](#)
- 4** [Ofsted grades keep getting better after Oliver takes helm](#)
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NEWS: RECRUITMENT

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Monitor schools' workload reduction efforts, MPs tell ministers

LUCAS CUMISKEY

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Ministers must monitor how workload-reduction initiatives are performing in schools, axe "short-sighted" cuts to recruitment and training, and collect data on why teachers quit, MPs have said.

Publishing a parliamentary education committee report on its teacher recruitment and retention inquiry, chair Robin Walker said the government must "use all the tools in the box" to resolve problems.

He added it is "essential we have a teaching workforce that feels respected and rewarded, or else the shortfalls in key subjects will deepen".

But Daniel Kebede, National Education Union general secretary, said the proposals were "insufficient and too piecemeal to meet the challenge of teacher recruitment and retention".

Here is a breakdown of the committee report findings:

1. Monitor workload reduction efforts

The government has pledged to cut the average working week by five hours. It has promised to ditch performance-related pay and published a list of administrative tasks teachers shouldn't have to do.

Further recommendations from the Department for Education's workload reduction taskforce are expected soon.

The education committee said the DfE should "put measures in place to monitor the implementation of strategies and solutions across schools and trusts".

It told Schools Week this was so the DfE could "learn lessons" from its own initiatives and how



well they land with schools.

The taskforce's proposals should be implemented as a "matter of urgency", with the DfE reviewing progress in spring 2025, MPs added.

2. Collect data on why teachers leave

MPs said the DfE should "collect and publish data on the attrition of teachers by subject, particularly those in their first five years of teaching".

Data should also be collected on the reason teachers are leaving, to "improve understanding of why particular subjects are experiencing higher attrition than others and to help target retention strategies as effectively as possible".

The department should collect and publish data on regional subject shortages in teacher supply. Currently data is collected only for those "out of service", or who retire or die.

3. Boost financial incentives

MPs said teacher pay "must keep pace year-on-year with other comparable sectors" to make the profession competitive and boost recruitment and retention, despite budget pressures.

Lower-valued bursaries should be introduced

or increased for other shortage subjects, MPs said.

Government should also "expand the levelling-up premium and early career payments according to subject and regional demand" and roll them out nationally "if they continue to be a success".

The Department should monitor the attrition of those who receive these payments. This would "improve understanding of whether there is a 'postponement effect' amongst recipients, where they leave the profession once these payments stop".

4. Improve alternative routes into teaching

The DfE should "urgently rethink" axing funding for Now Teach, a recruitment programme aimed at persuading high-flying professionals to change career.

Government should also introduce more paid routes into teaching and bursaries specifically for those making a career change and for former teachers returning to the profession, MPs added.

MPs urged the DfE to review its decision to cut back the £10,000 teacher relocation payment scheme to attract staff from overseas.

5. Reinstate other axed schemes, too

The committee also urged the DfE to "reinstate funding" subject knowledge enhancement courses in primary school maths, DT, English, biology and RE, after funding for teacher training top-up courses was slashed.

Funding for national professional qualifications should also be "reinstated for all teachers to be able to benefit". But no cost analysis was provided alongside the recommendations.

LUCAS CUMISKEY | @LUCAS_CUMISKEY

Less work will ease teacher pay pressure, says report

Cutting teacher workload could have the same effect as a 3 per cent pay rise on staff recruitment and retention, a report has revealed.

But a failure to offer teachers a salary increase that tops the national average would be "unthinkable" and send recruitment into freefall, the National Foundation for Educational Research said.

The educational research charity calculated the costs and potential impact of various

remuneration strategies on medium-term recruitment and retention.

The government aims to reduce teacher workload by five hours per week over three years.

The report claimed workload cuts and a 3 per cent pay rise would both result in a 1 per cent improvement in teacher retention.

The NFER also said if teacher pay rises were just 2 per cent this year, in line with other sectors, the government would miss its

secondary recruitment target by 44 per cent.

The report found it would take a 4 per cent rise to ensure "adequate" primary recruitment, while even a 5 per cent increase would not be enough to meet staff demand for subjects such as physics, music and design technology.

A rise of 4 per cent would cost £2.6 billion, while a 5 per cent pay deal would total £4 billion.

Is ‘inappropriate’ sex ed ‘widespread’? Keegan has no idea

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Gillian Keegan has admitted she does not know how widespread the use of “inappropriate” relationships and sex education resources is in schools.

As she unveiled her reforms to sex education this week, the education secretary repeated a claim to the media that pupils were being taught there are 72 genders.

But the gender reference is understood to relate to a news story that emerged last year about a school in the Isle of Man, which is not in England, and to which the new guidance would not apply. She repeated the claim on GB News, and in an article for *The Sun* newspaper.

In its reforms the government plans to introduce age limits to some “sensitive content” and ban schools from teaching about gender identity (see full round-up below).

The proposals have prompted warnings that schools will be unable to provide the “preventative education” needed to safeguard children.

Keegan was repeatedly pressed during



broadcast interviews on Thursday on the evidence backing up her claim that some schools are teaching inappropriate content.

She referred to pupils being taught that gender is a “spectrum” or “fluid”, and the idea “you can have different genders on different days or... there’s 72 of them”.

Asked whether these were examples of content actually taught in the classroom, she said: “We’ve received evidence with those slides to say that they’ve been taught in classrooms.”

But she added: “I don’t think it’s widespread. I mean, I don’t know. Because, you know, it’s not something that we’ve gone and done a particular survey of.”

The government has also been criticised for failing to consult with school leaders before releasing the draft guidance.

In its consultation, the DfE said “over 50 organisations, including teaching unions, faith groups, parent groups, academics and RSHE providers, have contributed their expertise” to the review.

They also drew on findings from a national evaluation of RSHE teaching in schools, to be published later this year. Further insights came from the independent expert panel, appointed by Keegan.

Jonathan Baggaley, chief executive of the PSHE Association, warned age restrictions “could restrict teachers’ ability to respond to the learning needs of the children in front of them. Preventative education must occur before risks are encountered.”

He said the new guidance was “also based on a false premise of ‘activist teachers’ and claims of widespread use of problematic materials and poor practice – a picture neither we nor the unions recognise, and between us we work with every school in the country”.

“There seems to be too much credence given to fringe views and contested reports, designed to stoke division,” he added.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer said yesterday he would “look at whether” what’s mentioned in the guidance is “far removed from what’s happening” in schools.

Guidance takes gender identity off the curriculum

The government has published its long-awaited draft guidance update on relationships, sex and health education, setting age limits on “sensitive” topics and ordering schools not to teach about gender identity.

The consultation, details of which were leaked to national newspapers several days ago, has already proved controversial, with ministers accused of stirring up a “culture war” in the run-up to the election.

Schools have until July 11 to respond. If approved, the statutory guidance will replace guidance issued in 2019.

The government said it aimed to publish a response in autumn, but there are no details about when the changes will be implemented.

1. Age limits on ‘sensitive’ topics

The Department for Education said it was introducing age limits on certain topics “to ensure that, as content is presented to prepare

young people to stay safe and keep others safe, children are not introduced too early to concepts that they may not have the maturity to grasp, or which may be distressing”.

The guidance states the limits are for RSHE, not other subjects. See the boxout for the full list.

2. Primary sex ed should draw on science

The consultation says that where primary schools teach sex education, its “purpose is not to prepare pupils for sexual activity in later life, but to focus on giving pupils the information they need to understand human reproduction and for their own safety”.

It “continues to recommend that primary schools have a sex education programme, but restricts this to no earlier than years 5 or 6”.

It is also “clear that if a primary school teaches sex education, it should draw on the knowledge pupils are developing about the

human life cycle, as set out in the national curriculum for science”.

3. Schools have some ‘flexibility’

Despite the age restrictions, the DfE said it would still allow schools a “degree of flexibility” to allow leaders to “respond promptly to issues which pose an imminent safeguarding risk to their pupils” – and providing that is “limited to the essential facts, without going into unnecessary details”.

For example, if a primary school finds pupils sharing porn, it will be allowed to “address this appropriately with younger pupils without going into details of the sexual acts viewed”.

4. ‘Do not teach about gender identity’

Pupils should be “taught the law” about gender reassignment, and “be clear” that individuals must be 18 “before they can legally reassign their gender”.

NEWS: SEX EDUCATION

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Schools “should not teach about the broader concept of gender identity”, which the DfE said was “a highly contested and complex subject”.

The guidance described gender identity as “a sense a person may have of their own gender, whether male, female or a number of other categories”.

“This may or may not be the same as their biological sex. Many people do not consider that they or others have a separate gender identity.”

5. ‘Teach the facts about biological sex’

If asked about gender identity, schools should “teach the facts about biological sex and not use any materials that present contested views as fact, including the view that gender is a spectrum”.

Material suggesting that gender is determined by interests or clothing choices “should not be used as it risks leading pupils who do not comply with sex stereotypes to question their gender when they might not have done so otherwise”.

Where schools decide to use external resources, “they should avoid materials that use cartoons or diagrams that oversimplify this complex concept or that could be interpreted as

being aimed at younger children”.

Schools should also “consult parents on the content of external resources on this topic in advance and make all materials available to them on request”.

6. Share materials with parents

The consultation says there is a “strong public interest in parents being able to see all materials used to teach RSHE, if they would like to”.

Schools “should not agree to contractual restrictions which prevent this”, and existing clauses are “void”, given the “public interest” in parents being able to see material.

But schools must comply with copyright law when sharing materials. It is “best practice to share materials via a ‘parent portal’ or, if this is not possible, through a presentation”.

7. New content on sexual harassment...

The government has added a section on “addressing prejudice, harassment and sexual violence and harmful sexual behaviours” in light of evidence of the “prevalence of sexual harassment in some schools”.

New content addresses “harmful behaviours

that pupils may be exposed to, including online, which may normalise harmful or violent sexual behaviours – for example, by giving pupils the opportunity to identify positive male role models”.

There is also new content about sexual harassment and sexual violence, including about fixated and obsessive behaviours, such as stalking.

8. ... and on suicide prevention

The government has also added a section on suicide prevention, which explains that “in teaching about mental health and wellbeing within the RSHE curriculum, schools may wish to talk to young people about the prevention of suicide, including how to identify warning signs and where and how to seek help”.

“The guidance says that if addressing suicide directly, teaching should focus on equipping pupils to recognise when they, or someone they know, needs support and where they can seek help if they have concerns.”

Given the sensitivity and complexity of content on suicide prevention, “direct references to suicide should not be made before year 8”.

Age limits: The full list

Not before year 3

- The risks relating to online gaming, video game monetisation, scams, fraud and other financial harms, and that gaming can become addictive
- Why social media, some apps, computer games and online gaming, including gambling sites, are age restricted

Not before year 4

- Growth, change and the changing adolescent body. This topic should include the human lifecycle
- Puberty should be mentioned as a stage in this process, including the key facts about the menstrual cycle, including physical and emotional changes

Not before year 5

- Sex education topics taught in primary, which should be in line with what pupils learn about conception and birth as part of the national curriculum for science

Not before year 7

- What constitutes harmful sexual behaviour, including sexual harassment and the concepts and laws relating to it, including revenge porn, upskirting and taking intimate sexual photos without consent, public sexual harassment, and unsolicited sexual language / attention / touching
- The concepts and laws relating to sexual exploitation and abuse, grooming, stalking, and forced marriage
- Circulating images and information and how to safely report to trusted adults the non-consensual creation or distribution of an intimate image
- The risks of inappropriate online content, including pornographic content, without discussing the details of sexual acts

**Not before year 9**

- Discussing the details of sexually explicit materials, in the context of learning about the risks of inappropriate online content, including pornographic content
- Discussing the explicit details of violent abuse, including the detail of topics such as rape, sexual assault, female genital mutilation (FGM), virginity testing and hymenoplasty
- Discussing the explicit details of violent abuse when discussing the concepts and laws relating to domestic abuse including coercive control, emotional, sexual, economic or physical abuse, and violent or threatening behaviour
- Explicit discussion of the details of sexual acts, in the context of teaching about intimate and sexual relationships, including in relation to contraception and STIs

Oliver keen on chartered status for inspectors

LUCAS CUMISKEY
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Sir Martyn Oliver has said he is open to a chartered status scheme for Ofsted inspectors – copying the system run for teachers, *Schools Week* understands.

The chief inspector of education touched on the fledgling idea during a question and answer session with the Chartered College of Teaching (CCT) on Wednesday.

The online session was only open to college members, but *Schools Week* understands Oliver praised the sense of professionalism that comes with being chartered.

He indicated he would reflect on how he could achieve something similar for the inspectorate.

Chartered status is a professional learning and accreditation pathway for career development.

CCT chief executive Dame Alison Peacock said that Oliver “thought it would be advantageous if inspectors became chartered inspectors”.

She added: “He really likes the idea of the chartered teacher route that the college is

establishing because it's about building knowledge and prestige, and he liked the idea of considering whether we should have chartered inspectors.

“And he was just saying, ‘well, it's like chartered accountants, why wouldn't we want to have chartered inspectors?’”

Peacock said the CCT would be “very happy” to engage with the Ofsted chief further on this and to “carry on the conversation”.

Ofsted said Oliver was “sketching out some thoughts and suggestions” and that there was nothing further to add at this stage.

The former Outwood Grange Academies Trust boss has previously talked about how he wants to get more serving practitioners to become inspectors.

He said he wants being an inspector to “become part of the golden thread” of teacher training and wants inspection to feel like “a peer-review system”.

The CCT is the professional body for teachers. According to its website it has 629 chartered teachers. Those who achieve the status get to use ‘CTeach’

after their name.

Chartered teachers are recognised for “evidence-informed, high-quality teaching practice, benefiting their school and the children and young people they teach”, CCT’s website states.

They must be reaccruited every three years to “demonstrate they continue to uphold the highest standards”.

Peacock added that such a route for inspectors could help “build expertise, ensuring that the inspectorate is both informed but also able to understand the importance of checking the veracity of evidence, understanding data”.

She added: “These are all really important factors, which would improve the consistency, would improve the quality, would improve the overall professionalism of the workforce.

“Ultimately, the end game would be that we don't need to be scared of inspection because it's a conversation. That, OK, it's holding us to account, but we're pleased to share the things that we're doing in a professional environment, rather than waiting to be judged.”



Sir Martyn Oliver

Labour recruitment pledge now ‘key step’

Labour has made recruiting 6,500 extra teachers one of its six “first steps for change” if it wins the general election – but has again failed to provide details about how this would be done.

The pledge states there will be “new teachers in key subjects to set children up for life, work and the future” – and paid for by ending tax breaks for private schools.

The pledge is not new and has been on Labour’s agenda since 2021.

Speaking yesterday, party leader Sir Keir Starmer (pictured) said not having enough expert teachers was

“shocking”.

In 2022 the government missed its recruitment target by more than 9,000 teachers. That rose to a 13,600 teacher gap last year.

Shadow education secretary Bridget Phillipson said the “future we want to build” was one with “qualified, supported, expert teachers in every classroom”.



Support staff pay offer agreed

Teaching assistants and other school support staff employed by councils have been offered a pay increase of at least £1,290 – which unions said “falls short”.

The deal for the 2024-25 financial year, which began in April, is lower than the almost £2,000 offer accepted in both 2022-23 and 2023-24. It equates to a 5.77 per cent rise for the lowest-paid workers.

Unions wanted an increase of either £3,000 or 10 per cent, whichever was higher.

Pay for council-employed

school support staff is negotiated between local authorities – referred to as the “national employers”, and unions. The resulting rises apply to LA-maintained schools, but many academy trusts mirror the deals reached.

The councils said the offer was “fair to employees, given the wider economic backdrop”.

But Unison head of local government Mike Short said “many workers will feel let down because household bills continue to rise”.

NEWS: BUILDINGS

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Capital funding pot increasingly 'preserve of the rich'

JACK DYSON

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EXCLUSIVE

Schools are stealthily being encouraged to stump up more of their own cash to access funding for building repairs, it has been claimed.

Schools Week analysis shows half of academies that offered to cough up higher amounts were awarded money through the Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) this year.

This is up from just 35 per cent the year before, and is higher than the one in five schools that applied saying they could only contribute a minimal amount.

"This system undoubtedly favours those schools with greater financial wherewithal," funding consultant Tim Warneford said.

"It's a stealthy way of doing it because they are never going to make the claim [that] the chances of you being successful are increased by the level of your financial contribution."

CIF guidance states the Department for Education's priority in administering the fund "is to address significant condition needs" to keep "buildings safe and in good working order".

But access to the fund – aimed at single-academy trusts or those with fewer than five schools – is highly competitive. Of the 4,363 eligible schools, just under half applied for cash. However, just 866 projects from 3,033 applications were approved with £450 million awarded.

This is a near-60 per cent fall on projects since 2020-21, when ministers gave 2,104 schemes more than £563 million through the scheme.

Applications can get an extra six points based on the amount of cash they commit towards the cost of the project. Although marks given are up to 100, experts have said it can make a big difference given the competitiveness.

Of the 381 bids given top marks for contributing 30 per cent of the bill, 190 (49.9 per cent) were given the green light, figures obtained through a Freedom of Information request suggest.

The approval rate for applications awarded six marks rose by more than two-fifths, from 35 per cent, since the last funding round.

Meanwhile, just under 21 per cent of schools paying less than 5 per cent of the bill – which are awarded zero points – were given the go-ahead. This represents a fall of about a quarter in 12



months.

Those given a funding score of six also accounted for more successful applications overall this year (22 per cent) than any other banding. Last year the figure stood at 13 per cent.

Warneford added this year's figures had been inflated by the uptick in approvals for schools paying more.

"That £450 million would only have gone so far [without school contributions]. The only other way to artificially keep the number of projects up would be to just fund the lower-cost programmes.

"As the number of awards gets less and less, then it makes it even more vital for schools if they can afford [to put money in], then they really ought to."

Island Learning Trust chief finance officer Phil Reynolds, whose multi-academy trust runs three schools, said it was not fair if schools with "severe" need were missing out.

But he added trusts with "significant reserves" should be asked to use that money on their estates because "rather than it sitting in a bank account, it will be used".

The DfE also said its intention was to "fund applicants with the highest priority and most pressing need, but only where the proposed project is appropriately planned and presents best value for money".

Each bid is "assessed by two different assessors from two different external companies, with around a

third undergoing moderation", it explained.

Applications "are not prioritised" based on the amount of cash stumped up by schools, it added, as financial contributions represent "only a maximum of six out of the total 100 points available".

Of the 100 points, 60 are available under project need, 15 for project planning and 25 for project cost.

"Points gained or lost through evidence of urgency of need, risk of school closure, cost certainty and project deliverability will have a much greater impact on an application's overall score," a spokesperson said.

Despite this, schools and trusts have complained that vital work is not getting funded.

The funding policy has also driven some trusts to merge, including the Compass Academy Trust which has four schools in Bromley. Trusts with more than five schools automatically get capital funding through the school condition allowance.

Trust chief executive Stuart Ellis said with "guaranteed funding, you know what you're playing with and that seems a much more strategic way to run a business".

Compass had all five of its bids – which received funding scores of zero and one – for CIF cash rejected this year.

Ellis added: "It's an inequitable system as not all trusts can generate the income or reserves to support [high] contribution levels."



Stuart Ellis

ANALYSIS: ATTENDANCE

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Barran reveals the 'big prize' behind new attendance push

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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EXCLUSIVE

Boosting the attendance of pupils who miss the "odd day" is the "really big prize" for teaching, academies minister Baroness Diana Barran has told Schools Week.

Following a breakdown of Department for Education school attendance figures, Barran's team discovered 31 per cent of children missed five to 15 per cent of school in the last academic year, up from 21 per cent before the pandemic.

The number equates to 1 million secondary pupils and 1.1 million children at primary schools.

A new attendance tool allows schools to reveal absence trends across year groups and pupil characteristics. It also breaks data down into five per cent bandings for more effective analysis.

Previously, absence reporting has focused on government categories of persistent absentees (those missing 10 per cent of lessons) and severe (those missing half or more).

Barran said honing in on the pupils who miss five to 15 per cent of classes – those "those typically missing odd days" would be "the really big prize".

She added: "I think schools can absolutely be forgiven for focusing on the 10 per cent barrier, because that's what we talk about with persistent absence.

"The 'five to 15' came out of a conversation that we had with the team where we said 'but hang on a minute, 10.1 per cent persistent absence is very different to 49.9 per cent persistent absence, maybe we better break it down and see what the bandings are'.

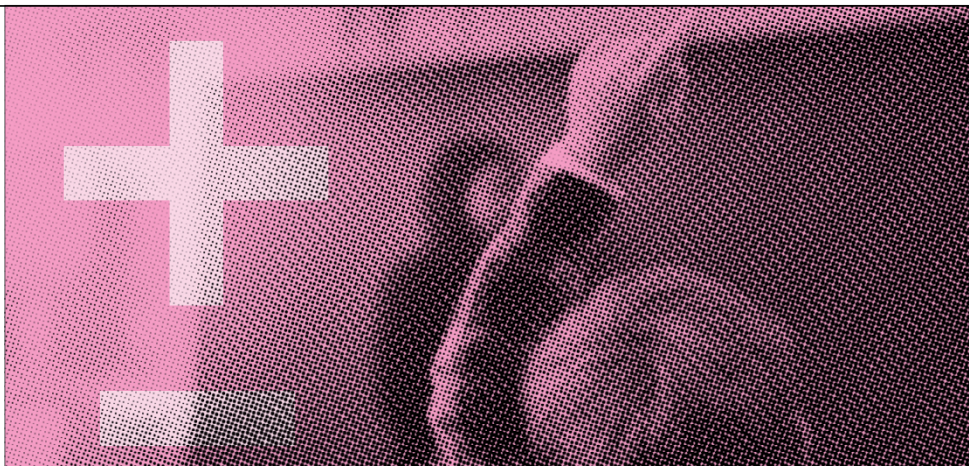
"It hit us in the face when we started to break it down."

Which children are missing the 'odd day'?

Analysis by FFT Education Datalab of its 10,000 attendance tracker schools showed around a third of pupils missed five to 15 per cent of school time in autumn and spring this year.

Those pupils are more likely to have special educational needs and be disadvantaged than those who missed less than 5 per cent.

The DfE believes this absence is "often linked to in-school barriers", whereas severe absence tends to "have more out-of-school drivers" and requires a



multi-agency response.

Kate Richardson, education director at Cabot Learning Foundation which runs a DfE-backed attendance hub, said an example of a child in the "odd day" group is one who doesn't like Thursdays "because they have double PE, and then you dig a bit deeper into that".

She added the core reason for missing classes is sometimes not obvious and conversations are needed with pupils and their families to "really unpick why it is that they're within that band".

'Praise kids for attending'

Barran also urged schools to focus on "positive reinforcement" to praise children on good attendance, and perhaps ringing up parents to say "it was fantastic to see" their child in school today.

She said: "It's really striking [that] the schools that go from almost military discipline on how they analyse the data each day, and then how that translates into this totally personal response."

Barran called for schools to have "especially strong" curriculum and extra-curricular offers on Fridays when attendance is typically poorest.

The DfE is also asking for "continued support" for pupils transitioning between the first and second year of secondary school – dubbed the "second transition" year.

Barran said maintaining the relatively strong attendance of year 7 pupils was crucial to get attendance back to pre-pandemic levels.

Figures show the number of year 7 pupils attending for more than 95 per cent of school time was 11 percentage points higher than the current year 11. Meanwhile, DfE officials are

DfE's new attendance focus

- Focus on pupils with five to 15 per cent absence
- Support for the 'second transition' between year 7 and 8
- Continued focus on severe absence
- Focus on disadvantaged pupils
- Focus on key stage 4 pupils
- Focus specifically on year 11 girls

looking at how to make the attendance tool more useful for school governors and trustees.

Austerity undermines attendance efforts

While education unions have praised the tool, they said a decade of government austerity means schools' efforts are undermined by collapsing public services and families struggling to cope.

Persistent absence sits at 20 per cent this year so far, below last year's 21.2 per cent figure. That compares to 10.9 per cent in 2018-19.

Association of Schools and College Leaders general secretary Pepe Di'Iasio said: "The government focuses far too much on the symptoms rather than the causes of pupil absence."

But Barran said "we can't put all children in the austerity bucket. We also want to focus on those children where the pattern of their absence suggests that it's not to do with austerity or mental health, and that there are other things going on.

"We want to focus on the areas where schools themselves can really make a difference."



Baroness Barran



Kate Richardson

Advertorial

INSPIRING EDUCATION LEADERS FOR 10 YEARS

The 10th Inspiring Leadership Conference is to be held on 13 and 14 June 2024 at the ICC in Birmingham.

Supported by headline sponsor, National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) and media partner, Schools Week, the conference continues to be the only event of its type that is organised specifically for UK school education leaders.

Attended by more than 10,000 senior leaders since it was first held in 2014, the conference has become a 'must attend' event in the UK's educational calendar and attracts high profile speakers from the fields of education, business, sport, politics and the arts. Past speakers include Lords' Sebastian Coe and William Hague, Dame Katherine Grainger, Lyse Doucet and Fatima Bhutto.

Each keynote speaker is selected not just for the inspiring lessons of leadership that they bring to the conference but also for the new ideas, different ways of thinking and moments of reflection that they share with the audience.

This year's keynotes will cover a diverse range of topics including advice on how to create more empathetic, inclusive and courageous cultures, leadership lessons we can learn from the natural world, team motivation and insight into the



improvements which could be made in education through the use of AI.

To mark its tenth year, the conference will also include a discussion panel hosted by Professor Steve Munby, and Schools Week's 'Meet The Leader' theatre where journalists will host debates and discussions with key influencers and leaders from the world of education.

Delegates also get the opportunity to network with fellow attendees throughout the event, to attend the conference's official dinner and to talk with a range of organisations which support the education sector in a dedicated exhibitor area.

Individual or group bookings (which also

provide free access to on-site meeting rooms) available.

Join 1,000 education leaders and use the code SCHOOLSWEEK to obtain a 10% discount off your conference ticket price.



SCAN ME

Book today by scanning the QR code or visiting www.inspiringleadership.org

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

Day 1 - Thursday 13 June 2024

09.30	Conference Registration and exhibition viewing	16.30	Plenary 5 - Giles Duley
10.30	Conference opening and welcome	17.30	Networking drinks reception with entertainment, wine and canapes
10.40	Plenary 1 - Dr Shola Mos-Shogbamimu	19.30	Conference dinner
11.30	Plenary 2 - The Future of School Leadership - a panel discussion chaired by Professor Steve Munby		
12.30	Lunch and exhibition viewing		
14.00	Plenary 3 - Belinda Parmar OBE		
15.00	Plenary 4 - Darren Coxon - The Future of AI in Schools		
15.45	Refreshments and exhibition viewing		

Day 2 - Friday 14 June 2024

08.00	Registration and exhibition viewing
09.00	Plenary 6 - Russell Hobby CBE
10.00	Plenary 7 - Lucy Cooke
11.00	Refreshments and exhibition viewing
12.00	Plenary 8 - Amar Latif OBE
13.00	Plenary 9 - Sir Andrew Strauss OBE
14.00	Conference close and takeaway lunch

SCHOOLS WEEK 'MEET THE LEADER' THEATRE

Day 1 - Thursday 13 June 2024

12.30 Rebecca Black, Head of one of the worst affected RAAC schools



13:00 Nicole McCartney, Director of Education, Creative Education Trust



13:30 Samira Sadeghi, Director of Governance, Confederation of School Trusts

Day 2 - Friday 14 June 2024

11.00 Dr Mary Bousted, British trade unionist



11:30 Sir David Carter, former National Schools Commissioner

INVESTIGATION: TEACHER MISCONDUCT

Misconduct hearings delayed for up to eight years

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

Two teachers have been waiting more than eight years for their misconduct cases to conclude, with the “shattering impact” of lengthy waits having “potentially devastating implications”.

Figures obtained by Schools Week show 31 per cent of the 1,042 active cases on the Teacher Regulation Agency’s (TRA) books were first referred more than two years ago.

The agency has been heavily criticised in the past for delays. TRA accounts, published last summer, show that teachers accused of misconduct waited 113 weeks on average for their cases to conclude – more than double the 52-week target.

‘Putting people at risk’

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the school leaders’ union NAHT, said the regulator was “not just failing, it is putting people at risk ... with potentially devastating implications for valued teachers and leaders”.

One teacher – who wasn’t issued with a prohibition order – told Schools Week they were left in “limbo” for years and suffered “psychological damage”. Another lived “with the fear of public humiliation” for more than two years while waiting for their case to be dropped through lack of evidence.

“It cannot be right that individuals are being left to wait years for a resolution,” Whiteman said.

Our investigation found 32 unresolved cases were referred to the TRA more than five years ago.

Another 336 have been paused, a process called “abeyance”. About 75 per cent are awaiting police investigations, court cases, employment tribunals or other legal action – which are all now taking longer.

The TRA’s two oldest cases are 2,959 days since referral. Both have previously been “in abeyance whilst waiting for information from third-party organisations”.

“A number of other active cases” have also been in abeyance, which “will, in most instances, prolong the amount of time it takes the TRA to conclude them”.



Teachers waiting years for TRA resolutions					
Case type	Up to 2 years	2+ years	3+ years	4+ years	5+ years
Active cases	722	164	77	47	32
In abeyance	242	49	23	13	9

Source: DfE

SCHOOLS WEEK

‘You can’t move on’

A former teacher, who waited three years for their misconduct hearing, said the experience had a “shattering impact”.

“The psychological damage of being in limbo is really pernicious because you can’t move on,” they added. “You’re frozen by something frightening.”

They had scores of therapy sessions following fears of “reputational damage” as rumours spread about why they were suspended. The TRA later found unacceptable professional conduct, but did not issue a prohibition order.

Another teacher had to wait more than two years before they were told there was not enough evidence to proceed.

“It was the most horrendous experience. There was tension, stress, anxiety and the real fear of public humiliation,” they said. “I was working, but the thought, the threat – it was like the sword of Damocles hanging over my head.”

Both would only speak to Schools Week on the condition of anonymity.

Delays ‘hamper heads too’

Teachers facing particularly serious allegations are issued with interim prohibition orders, preventing them from working in classrooms until their case is considered.

But it is sometimes possible to continue working – usually for supply agencies – during investigations.

Pepe Di’Iasio, the head of the Association of School and College Leaders, said that the delays hampered heads who were left to wait for a decision “so they can manage the implications”.

Andrew Faux, of Lawyers for Teachers, wants the government to launch a review of its oldest cases and “discontinue all those where there’s no good reason for the delay”.

Many of his clients felt “tortured” by the process and the long delays. His longest-running case is more than 2,000 days old.

But a Department for Education spokesperson stressed the TRA has made “significant progress in the past 12 months, during which time it has concluded more misconduct hearings than ever before”.

It has also “significantly reduced the number of older cases on its caseload”, they added.

NEWS: TUTORING

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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£134m unspent tutor cash clawed back (and it will fund teacher pay deal)

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Ministers have clawed back £134 million in unspent tutoring money from schools – and have again agreed with Treasury bosses to keep the cash to fund the teacher pay grant.

Government data published yesterday revealed schools did not spend nearly 40 per cent of the £352 million National Tutoring Programme funding given to the sector last year.

This is mostly because to access their allocations, schools had to stump up 40 per cent of their tutoring costs.

About 60 per cent of mainstream schools underspent on their allocations, *Schools Week* analysis shows. For special schools, this rose to 64 per cent.

The data relates to the first year schools were given tutoring cash directly. Despite this, tutoring take-up has slowed.

Last year, Department for Education used some of an estimated £240 million underspend on its flagship catch-up scheme to fund the teacher pay grant. It was meant to be returned to the Treasury.

DfE told *Schools Week* it has again agreed to keep the cash to go towards its school teacher pay rise funding. Officials have also been cutting back



on schemes to plug the gap this year.

Nick Brook, chair of the DfE's strategic tutoring advisory group said many people will "share a sense of deep unease" it is being reallocated to fill DfE budget holes.

"We are facing the largest crisis in education for a decade. The attainment gap stands at a ten-year high, and schools face rising levels of unmet need. It therefore seems utterly perverse to be taking money earmarked for children, in this way.

"The hole in the DfE budget is of the government's making. By failing to provide Treasury funding for pay promises made, DfE have been

forced into a cycle of cuts to programmes and abandonment of successful initiatives."

Julia Harnden, funding specialist at ASCL school leaders' union, added "it's something at least that the money hasn't been returned to the Treasury, but what a shabby way this is of funding an education system".

"The NTP grant can't be accessed by a lot of schools because they don't have enough money to commit the funding required for the subsidy."

Separate data on tutoring take-up this year was also published on Thursday. It showed just 50.1 per cent of schools have taken part so far this year, compared to 65.7 per cent at the same time last year.

Susannah Hardyman, chief executive of Action Tutoring, one of Department for Education's quality assured tutoring organisations, said the decrease "is unlikely to be a lack of need for tutoring, but rather a strong indicator of budgets struggling to match" the 50 per cent subsidy this year.

Half of pupils tutored so far were disadvantaged, compared to 45.5 per cent last year.

In new guidance this week, DfE said it will also continue to collect data on tutoring as part of the termly school census to "understand and build evidence on the delivery of tutoring in schools".

A DfE spokesperson said: "We have always been clear that any unused funding would be recovered and we have reinvested that money into our schools to help fund this year's historic teacher pay award."

Nick Brook

Susannah Hardyman

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOTH

Bang the drum about your music, schools told

Schools will be "expected" to tell parents about their music provision via their websites from September.

In a national plan for music education in 2022, ministers told all schools to develop music summaries to "capture the curricular and co-curricular offer and set out how it will be staffed and funded".

The plan went on to suggest that "publishing the school music development plan on the school website may also help families to understand how their children will benefit from

school music".

That guidance was beefed up this week with schools being told they "will be expected to publish a summary of their music development plan on their website" from September.

The Department for Education added it "should reflect how a school delivers music education to pupils and what changes they are planning in future years".

The expectation is non-statutory, meaning schools have no legal duty to follow it.

The DfE said the summary aimed "to help

pupils and parents or carers understand what your school offers, and who a school works with to support this, including their local music hub and other music education organisations".

The department has published a short template as part of its guidance to help schools produce the summary.

It comes after *Schools Week* revealed 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.

NEWS: EXAMS

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

Computers say no after security loaded onto exams

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Anti-hacking measures to protect exams left additional-needs students potentially unable to use screen-reading software, it has emerged.

Exam board AQA added password protection to digital papers this year to "protect the integrity of exams" following cyber-attack data breaches at three exam boards last year.

But when exams began last week, schools and education technology companies realised the software which reads out exam papers did not work.

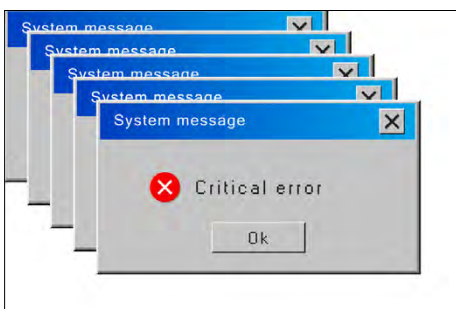
Schools only receive the papers an hour beforehand – and say they were given hardly any notice about the password changes. No testing was done with technology companies prior to roll out.

Last year, 121,300 access arrangements for a computer reader or human reader were approved across all exam boards.

Paddy McGrath, head of education strategy at TextHelp which runs two reader products, said AQA had "removed the accessibility of the paper" and "when you click anywhere on the page, nothing works".

He said AQA had since provided a "workaround", but it required "significant work" by the exams officer.

Each paper also has a different password, meaning IT administrators must type in an alternative password at each computer, he added.



AQA said it was not aware of any student who had been unable to sit an exam as a result of the issue. But it could face special consideration requests if there were cases where students taking exams had been delayed.

Michael Turner, AQA executive director of customer and product, apologised for the disruption caused to students and "additional pressure this places on exams officers".

Schools are encouraged to contact AQA if they believe a student's exam performance has been affected. The board is expected to announce a solution today where password protection can be removed.

The exam board added it was aware "that a small number of schools are experiencing difficulties uploading question papers to certain assistive technology solutions."

It said TextHelp's ClaroRead was the only software with a "compatibility issue", but there have been some "minor speed issues with some other applications".

AQA added: "For the moment, any school that has issues can get in touch and we will provide them with papers in a form they can use."

But McGrath said the issue impacted all reader tools. He said three main companies provided the technology and TextHelp offers two of them.

A multi-academy trust senior leader said this "creates an unacceptable situation where some of the most vulnerable learners are disadvantaged as their exam accessibility arrangements are compromised with little time for the centre to react".

They added: AQA's response was "completely inadequate and they have failed to address the obvious Equality Act implications".

AQA said it only gave notice at the start of May to "to minimise the time during which hostile actors might try to circumvent our improved security systems".

McGrath also said he was "very disappointed" AQA did not test its security measures but said the board was "moving very fast to resolve this".

In response, AQA said it tested changes thoroughly but "we don't have a direct relationship with every tech provider and every piece of software they provide to schools".

Exams regulator Ofqual asked exam boards to introduce new security measures earlier this year.

Two police investigations into the cyber attack at AQA, OCR and Pearson have gone cold. A 16-year-old boy received a caution, while two other people arrested were stood down from bail.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

GCSEs no longer pass test, says think tank

High-stakes exams such as GCSEs and SATs should be scrapped in favour of regular online testing for five to 14 year olds and "digital SATs" for year 9s, a think tank has said.

The EDSK, run by former government adviser Tom Richmond, has published a paper calling for a "10-year plan to reform primary and secondary education".

It also renewed calls for GCSEs and A-levels to be replaced by a four-year "baccalaureate", with exams for older pupils being made "digital by default".

The call comes as the government develops a new "advanced British standard" to replace A-levels and T-levels. Meanwhile, Labour has said it will review curriculum and assessment if it wins the next general election.

The EDSK report identified a "number of strengths" of the current approach to the

curriculum, assessment and accountability that should be retained by the next government.

They include the "emphasis on academic rigour", the use of external exams in primary and secondary schools and allowing students to specialise with three A-levels in their final year at school.

But it also raised "serious concerns about the impact of the current education system on students and teachers".

The "relentless focus on high-stakes tests such as SATs in primary school and GCSEs in secondary school is encouraging schools to 'teach to the test' and narrow the curriculum to spend more time on exam preparation", it said.

The national curriculum and GCSEs are also "overloaded with content, with over half

of GCSE teachers saying they struggle to get through their course in time".

It added: "The enduring obsession with pen-and-paper tests is also at odds with other countries such as Australia, Denmark and Wales, who have already dropped written exams in favour of national online testing."

SATs at the end of primary school should be replaced by "regular online testing" from the ages of five to 14, EDSK said. These should culminate in "low-stakes digital SATs for 14 year olds in almost all national curriculum subjects to inform their future subject choices".

For pupils aged 14 to 18, GCSEs, A-levels, BTECs, T-levels and apprenticeships "should be replaced by a four-year 'baccalaureate' that brings all academic, applied and technical courses into a single framework".

NEWS: OFSTED

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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School wants wider review after THREE Ofsted inspection visits

LUCAS CUMISKEY

@LUCAS_CUMISKEY

EXCLUSIVE

A London primary school is demanding a "lessons learnt review" from Ofsted after eight inspectors visited three times over two academic years.

Inspectors first visited Kensington Avenue Primary School in Thornton Heath in July last year. The school is part of the Manor Trust.

However, they said more evidence was needed, so made a rare revisit in October (just 37 revisits were made between September 2019 and March 2023).

A third visit followed in March this year to allow inspectors to gather yet more evidence.

Their report, published in March, rated the school 'requires improvement'.

Clare Cranham, the schools' headteacher, said the school wanted to meet Ofsted to discuss what lessons could be learnt.

The saga "took up valuable staff time", she said, while adding Ofsted must ensure its "decision-making is robust and evidence-based" and its "internal moderation process is fit for purpose".

Ofsted said the extra visits were to "gather additional evidence to ensure our evidence base was secure", which ensured the "right judgment was ultimately reached". It has apologised.

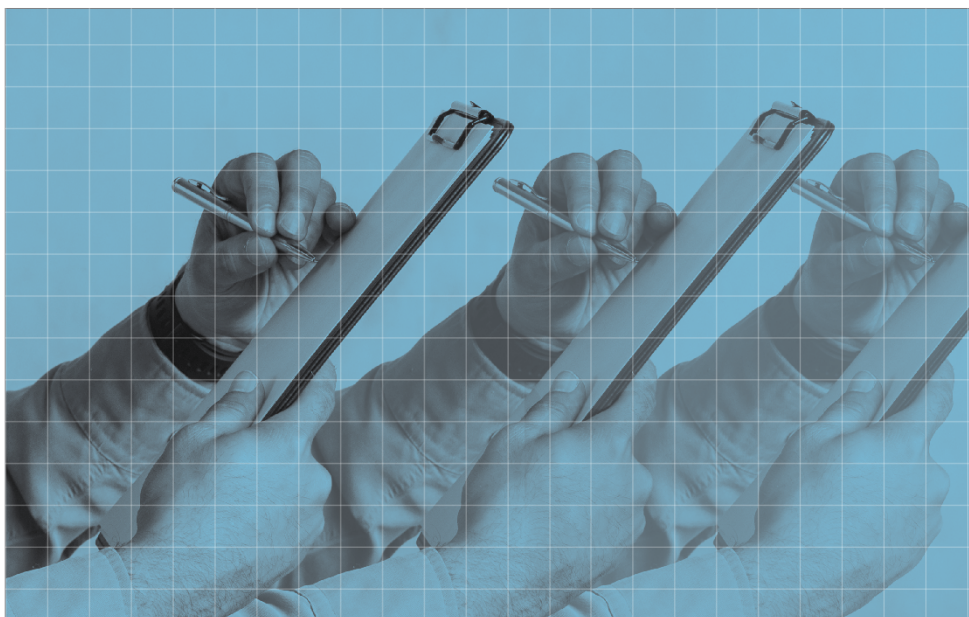
But Alan Chambers, chair of The Manor Trust, claimed there had been "many shortcomings".

"These had a damaging impact on our staff and pupils' wellbeing that we believe was both unacceptable and avoidable; at a minimum we expect key learnings can be taken so other schools do not endure a similar experience," he said in a letter to parents last week.

Inspectors found that "pupils enjoy attending" the school and that they knew that staff "care and want them to do well".

But they needed more help "to achieve the academic success they are capable of" and that "too many are regularly absent from school", among other issues.

Cranham said the school had "concerns"



after the first visit and flagged a "number of inaccuracies" with Ofsted about its subsequent draft report.

After moderation, Ofsted told her elements of its inspection evidence base were found to be "not sufficiently secure", she said.

The school said it requested a new full inspection at this time, but was told this was not possible.

Instead, two different inspectors carried out the first revisit in October last year. The school again raised concerns about the inspection process and the content of the second draft report.

Eight of 14 complaints were upheld, Cranham said.

An Ofsted regional director later told the school a third visit would take place, led by a team from a different region.

"The final report has been compiled from evidence gathered over all three visits by a total of eight inspectors over three consecutive terms and two academic years," Cranham said.

"The impact on a school when Ofsted get it wrong is immense and impacts at every level... [we] do not want any other schools to go through this."

She was critical of Ofsted undertaking its own complaint investigation, which "relied completely on the notes made by the

inspectors at the time of the inspection; there was little attempt to talk to staff or parents."

Ofsted recently made changes to its complaints process, following a review last year.

Adrian Gray, an education consultant and former Ofsted inspector, said the case was "extremely unusual", adding: "The key issue is how long can you be incomplete."

"When the time span is as long as it was between the start and the end, schools change... The point of incomplete inspection is to return because inspection is still live."

He suggested Ofsted should have voided the inspection after the second visit, although there is no guidance on how long an inspection can be incomplete.

The school was rated 'good' in 2017 before it became an academy two years later.

An Ofsted spokesperson said: "All of the judgments we make about a school are important and we have processes in place to make sure they consistently and accurately reflect the evidence collected."

"Where our quality assurance process identifies gaps in evidence, we will return to gather additional evidence."

"We rightly apologised to the school for the inconvenience caused."

NEWS: COVID

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Long Covid teachers join forces to sue ministers

LUCAS CUMISKEY

@LUCAS_CUMISKEY

EXCLUSIVE

Scores of teachers with “catastrophic” long Covid plan to launch a group legal challenge against the government, claiming pandemic policy failures led to them being infected at work.

But a top barrister representing medics in a similar case warned it would be difficult for teachers to prove they caught coronavirus in the classroom.

Long Covid Educators for Justice (LCEJ) wants compensation from the Department for Education for those who “lost their health, income and employment” after working on the frontline during the pandemic.

Founder Emily Mason said long Covid had been “catastrophic for people’s lives and careers”. Many had to leave the profession or take early retirement, leading to loss of income, she said.

“We were told to ‘go into schools, carry on keeping the country running, children have to be in school’. And we’re hung out to dry now when so many of us can’t work,” she said.

Teacher sickness absence skyrocketed by 56 per cent in the wake of the pandemic, DfE school workforce data for the 2021-2022 academic year previously revealed.

More than 3.2 million working days were missed because of illness that year, up from around 2 million in pre-pandemic 2018-19.

It is not known how many teachers have long Covid. But research published in the Occupational & Environmental Medicine journal in March last year found those working in teaching and education and social care “showed the highest likelihood of having long Covid symptoms”.

Mason added: “The policies and guidance schools were given weren’t enough to protect teachers, and schools weren’t given enough support to implement those policies.”

Mason said key failings included schools being kept open for too long at the start of the pandemic and that staff were advised not to wear face masks or personal protective equipment.

Office for National Statistics data last month estimated two million people in England and Scotland were experiencing self-reported long Covid – and three quarters of them said they were “adversely affected” daily.

Long-term symptoms include fatigue, shortness



of breath, “brain fog” and heart palpitations, NHS guidance states.

The NASUWT union has been calling for long Covid to be legally recognised as a disability under the Equality Act 2010.

Mason said she started the campaign after reading about a group litigation order (GLO) by healthcare workers blighted by long Covid which is currently going through the courts.

GLOs are a legal mechanism where people with a common interest band together to pursue compensation from the same defendant.

About 85 teachers in the UK have expressed an interest in joining the action. More than half are primary school teachers and about 80 per cent live in England.

The group is in the process of finding legal representation to build a case against the DfE.

But Kevin Digby, a partner at GA Solicitors, who represents some of the nearly 70 healthcare workers trying to sue the NHS and other employers, said there are key differences between the two cases.

“The hospitals were, quite literally, full of Covid-positive patients, the healthcare workers were being exposed to Covid and their employers knew this,” he said.

“The educator claims will be different as many of the pupils will not have been Covid positive.”

He suggested teachers’ claims may be stronger if they could show they were “having to deal with pupils exhibiting symptoms as part of their job, as a result of guidance provided”.

Government guidance for schools during the pandemic said wearing a face covering at work was “not recommended” in most circumstances.

But if a pupil fell ill with suspected Covid and needed care until they could go home, the supervising adult was advised to put on a fluid-resistant surgical face mask (FRSM).

If contact with the youngster was “necessary”, then disposable gloves, a disposable apron and a FRSM should be worn. It said eye protection might also be needed.

Digby said a key point in the GLO could centre on whether it was “negligent guidance to make a teacher stay with a sick pupil whilst wearing FRSM and a plastic pinny”.

He added such teachers should have been “adequately risk assessed” and “provided with adequate training and PPE”.

But teachers would need to prove that, on the balance of probabilities, they caught Covid at work.

Ryan Bradshaw, a partner at Leigh Day lawyers, added as claimants will need to “establish that the harm they have suffered results from a breach of a legal duty or obligation by the party being claimed against, evidence is likely to be key.”

A Government spokesperson said they “acted to save lives and livelihoods” throughout the pandemic.

“We have always said there are lessons to be learnt from the pandemic and we are committed to learning from the Covid Inquiry’s findings which will play a key role in informing the government’s planning and preparations for the future.”



Emily Mason

Abused children ‘lacked protection of a school’

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@FCDWHITTAKER

Deaths and abuse of children in home education happened because the “protective factor that school can offer was missing”, an independent review has found.

A report by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, which reviews serious child safeguarding cases, examined 27 referrals about 41 children – including six who died – between August 2020 and October 2021.

It found the children were “subjected to sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect” and all were “seriously harmed”.

A Schools Week investigation revealed the rate at which children left the classroom for home education doubled last year.

Analysis suggests around 140,000 pupils were home educated at some point last year, and government data shows a further 117,000 are “missing” from education entirely.

Of the 41 children, the “data available” suggested 29 were in elective home education, while six others “appeared to be children who could be described as children missing education”.

The panel said home education “is not, in and of itself, a safeguarding risk... most children who are electively home educated are safe, thrive and live happy lives”.

However, it added while the number of such children coming to harm was “comparatively low, the protective factor that school can offer was missing from their lives and this had serious, and sometimes fatal, consequences for their safety and welfare”.

‘Out of sight’

Home educated children were “less visible to safeguarding agencies than those who attend school”, meaning they are “not in the ‘sight’ of agencies who have a statutory duty to protect them from harm”.

The panel identified a “range of harms” that may be associated with children not having the “everyday access” provided by schools to the “world outside their home and family”.

Twenty-one of the children had never attended school. Of the children who died, three committed suicide, one died from an undiagnosed eating disorder, one had undiagnosed leukaemia and one was stabbed.

Of the other children, 20 experienced physical neglect, 16 suffered physical abuse, 10 suffered sexual abuse and eight had their “access to food restricted, were malnourished and underweight”.

Twenty-three children were previously known to children’s social care as children in need or were subject of a child protection plan. But over half “appear to have been kept out of sight of any agency”.

Many of the children lived in houses with known domestic abuse or with a parent with mental or physical ill health.

Seven siblings described “exposure to religious or faith-based views associated with prolonged physical chastisement”.

The Review Panel’s report found that practitioners lacked the legislative powers and guidance to get “regular access to children who are educated at home”.

Elective home education teams in councils “can lack necessary capacity and safeguarding knowledge”, it said. Some teams only consist of “one or two part-time staff”. A lack of funding was “cited by a number of stakeholders as a significant issue in some areas”.

A statutory register of children in home education would “help safeguarding agencies to have better local knowledge about this group of children”, the report said.

Government should also consider placing a duty on parents to “inform the local authority when a child is to be educated at home”.

A Department for Education spokesperson said “any incidents of abuse relating to children are abhorrent and the cases highlighted in this report are truly tragic”.

It added councils have a “legal duty to safeguarding children... we expect them to use their safeguarding powers when warranted”. Government is also working on a proposed law for councils to keep child not-in-school registers.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Do what works to disarm youth violence, says charity

Schools should focus on proven strategies such as mentoring and sports to support vulnerable pupils, a charity has said.

But the Youth Endowment Fund – a group similar to the Education Endowment Foundation set up to test approaches to tackling youth violence – said staff should use caution when considering interventions not backed by “robust evidence”, such as holding assemblies on knife crime.

The group has published guidance for schools after a Teacher Tapp poll it ran last year found 67 per cent of teachers reported that a child had physically assaulted another child in the last term. Forty-three per cent said a child

had assaulted a teacher or other staff member.

Meanwhile, 15 per cent of teachers reported that a child had brought in a weapon, while 12 per cent reported sexual assault against another child, and 1 per cent against a staff member.

However, the report said schools were “still safe spaces”. Eighty-nine per cent of teachers agreed they felt safe in school, while 5 per cent said they did not. A separate YEF survey of 7,500 teenagers found 85 per cent reported feeling safe.

The YEF’s new guidance “aims to reduce children’s vulnerability to violence by making effective support more accessible in schools”.

Its recommendations are:

1. Keep children in education by using “evidence-backed strategies” to improve attendance
2. Provide vulnerable children with “trusted adults”
3. Develop children’s social and emotional skills with a “universal curriculum”
4. Target efforts at the places and times violence occurs
5. “Cautiously” consider unproven strategies, such as knife crime education assemblies
6. “Carefully consider” use of trauma-informed training as “little” is known about its effectiveness
7. Avoid “harmful” approaches such as prison awareness programmes.

School software giant in (another) competition abuse probe

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

An investigation into England's largest school management information system (MIS) provider has been launched amid fears it is abusing its "dominant" market position.

The Competition and Markets Authority is probing suspected law breaches by Education Software Solutions, which runs School Information Management System (SIMS).

This comes after *Schools Week* revealed the firm had told its school customers they would be breaching their contracts if they sent copies of their databases to third parties.

Concerned headteachers and the MIS company's rivals argued the practice was commonly used to transfer information during provider switches.

The CMA said it was concerned that schools' ability to move to a new system would be "severely hampered" as the alternatives are said to be "complex, time consuming and error prone".

Juliette Enser, the watchdog's interim executive director, said: "We're concerned about the complaints we've received regarding ESS's alleged behaviour. As such, we'll be investigating their conduct with urgency."

"Management information systems are an integral part of protecting schools' data, reducing costs and safeguarding students. It's essential that schools are able to pick the most appropriate system for their needs – and change providers with ease when their contract is up."

Schools and competitors also reported "that ESS had objected to the alternative solutions put forward to enable the extraction of their data".

A notice posted online by the CMA added it is investigating whether the firm "might be abusing a dominant position" in the supply of MIS. Its market share stands at just under 50 per cent, analysis by the Bring More Data blog shows.

The watchdog will assess if competition



law has been breached and will consider whether it "needs to impose interim measures to prevent harm from occurring" while it carries out the probe.

Lawyers at Stone King – which has previously taken action against ESS – have been approached by a number of schools.

Graham Burns, a partner at the firm, welcomed the investigation and said: "There is [a] great deal of concern about the lack of flexibility which academy trusts have in switching providers and this is a real constraint on how trusts can achieve value for money and the best outcomes for pupils."

Ali Guryel, who runs rival MIS supplier Bromcom, added that schools, multi-academy trusts and local authorities were being "spooked" out of going through with switches away from SIMS.

A spokesperson for ParentPay, which has owned ESS SIMS since 2021, said the firm was "extremely surprised" by the CMA's "sudden announcement" and claimed it "overlooks the fact there are legitimate methods of migrating data from SIMS to the systems provided by our competitors".

ParentPay added: "Guidance on these methods has long been available and we have made multiple communications to



Juliette Enser

competitors, customers (and their support providers) explaining this.

"That some competitors have chosen to ignore these methods and have instead created a 'workaround' that accesses our core code, is the only abuse in this situation."

In 2022 the CMA launched a separate probe after ESS announced it was scrapping its normal 12-month rolling contracts in favour of three-year deals.

It closed the case when the provider agreed to let eligible schools leave long-term agreements a year early. However, it did not rule on whether the company breached competition law

NEWS IN BRIEF

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Plea for teacher pension emergency fund

An emergency fund to top up school contributions to teachers' pensions is needed, unions have warned.

Last year, the government announced employer contributions to the teachers' pension scheme would rise by more than 20 per cent this April from 23.6 to 28.6 per cent.

Ministers said they would fully cover the rise for state schools with £1.1 billion in additional funding.

But *Schools Week* revealed in March that some schools feared they would be short-changed in their grant allocations.

The Association of Schools and College Leaders and National Association of Head Teachers have written to education secretary Gillian Keegan to say they are "extremely concerned" about reported "substantial" shortfalls, with some exceeding £70,000.

Full school-level allocations for 2024-25 have not yet been published but the Department for Education has provided an online calculator tool for schools to work out what they will receive.

The grant is calculated based on funding rates



for pupils of different ages, with an extra £65 to £100 for each pupil eligible for free school meals.

Speaking in March, leaders said they believed it was this weighting that was skewing the allocations in favour of more deprived schools.

In their letter, union leaders Pepe Di'lasio and Paul Whiteman warned schools were "currently locked in a downward spiral of underfunding and cuts", and many would have to "make further cuts".

The unions want the DfE to allow schools with a shortfall to apply for extra cash from a supplementary fund, as happened in 2019 after a similar pensions rise.

[Full story here](#)

Schools win slice of £530m green fund



Thirty-four academy trusts are among the public sector bodies to win a slice of £530 million government funding for green initiatives.

Of the 222 projects announced in the latest Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme tranche, 47 with funding worth £37 million were schools.

This includes 39 schemes proposed by 34 academy trusts, seven schemes at diocese schools and another for a voluntary-aided school.

More than 70 projects to win funding were proposed by councils and are likely to include school projects.

Cash can be spent on installing heat pumps, solar panels, insulation and low-energy lighting to reduce reliance among public sector organisations on fossil fuels.

The largest single schools grant was £4 million for Benfield School and Sports Centre, run by NEAT Academy Trust in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Meanwhile, Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership trust won six grants totalling just over £2 million.

The projects will be completed in the next two years.

Launched in 2020, the £2.5 billion Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme has funded more than 1,000 projects.

Schools Week analysis of previous funding rounds found schools got just 20 per cent of the cash, despite being responsible for a quarter of public sector emissions.

[SEE THE FULL LIST HERE](#)


MATs favoured in free school bids

Bids to run new special or alternative provision free schools proposed by councils are more likely to succeed if they come from multi-academy trusts, the government has said.

The Department for Education wants applicants to demonstrate that settings opened via the free school "presumption route" will be financially and operationally "resilient".

It comes as the sector grapples with cash shortages and a falling rolls crisis, leading to fears for the viability of some primaries and secondaries.

The Education Policy Institute warned last month that school funding could plunge by more than £1 billion in five years as a result.

Unlike free school application waves, which allow trusts to apply to set up academies, the presumption route lets councils seek bidders and then put forward their preferred chain to ministers.

Updated government guidance on the route

now states applicants "should be aware that an emphasis will be placed on ensuring the ongoing resilience of new schools that are approved through this process".

Special and AP settings were "typically smaller than many mainstream schools, increasing the importance of demonstrating this resilience both financially and operationally".

Multi-academy trusts "are able to operate at increased scale, supporting the resilience" of their academies.

"Applications that result in a school which is part of a MAT are more likely to be successful in a special or AP free school competition," the guidance added.

Any single-academy trusts would be expected to show "clear plans about how they will grow and become a MAT over time to ensure its resilience".

[Full story here](#)

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK**Helena Brothwell****Education director (north), Ormiston Academies Trust****Start date:** May 1**Previous role:** Director of school improvement, David Ross Education Trust**Interesting fact:** Helena is passionate about the benefits of being outdoors. She led a programme of summer camps with 500 children participating in residential, with canoeing, climbing and abseiling. She's also recently paddled 100km across Scotland in a canoe!

Movers & Shakers

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

**Robert Coles****Deputy CEO, Education South West****Start date:** September**Current role:** Executive headteacher and director of school improvement, Education South West**Interesting fact:** Renowned for losing things, Rob once left his jumper, coat and camera at a bus station before climbing to 3,399 metres to trek through Machu Picchu in Peru. It was a cold few days.**Polly O'Malley****Head of education employment, Browne Jacobson****Start date:** April 29**Previous role:** Deputy head of education, Stone King**Interesting fact:** Polly's family has its own coat of arms which records that the O'Malleys are seafaring warriors and defenders of the land, who would have once been close to royalty.**Dr Aimee Quickfall****Council member at the British Educational Research Association****Start date:** September**Concurrent role:** Head of the school of education at Leeds Trinity University**Interesting fact:** Aimee plays bass guitar and the best band she has ever played in had a death metal drummer, punk guitarist and a jazz singer.**Heather McNaughton and Caroline Pusey****Chief operation officer (jobshare), River Learning Trust****Start date:** April 30**Previous job:** Directors of teachers and tutors, Department for Education**Interesting fact:** We first worked together in a military bunker in Northwood, Herts, where we first 'job shared' as Caroline did the late night shift and Heather took over at 4am!**Mark Lehain****Executive headteacher, Wootton Academy Trust, Bedfordshire****Start date:** September**Current job:** Special adviser to education secretary Gillian Keegan**Interesting fact:** Mark was at school with Irwin Sparkes of pop band The Hoosiers and once stood in for the bass player at a talent show they did in Exmouth. They got "whooped" by an Elvis impersonator and a ventriloquist.**Clare Berry****Principal of Malcolm Arnold Academy (part of David Ross Education Trust)****Current role:** Interim head, King Edward VI Handsworth School for Girls, Birmingham**Start date:** September**Interesting fact:** Clare absolutely loves musical theatre and has seen at least 50 musicals across the world. Her favourites so far are *9 to 5* and *Matilda*.**Tim Mobbs****Head of Community, Teach First****Start date:** May 1**Previous job:** Head of networks, Teach First**Interesting fact:** Once referred to in print as 'The Brick Wall of Birmingham' due to being a heavy hitting tackler for The University of Birmingham Lions American Football team.



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Feature

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL

Living with RAAC: How one school is still coping with crisis

Nine months after the RAAC crisis hit, the issue no longer dominates the news agenda but its fallout still impacts schools. Jessica Hill visits St Andrew's Junior School, in the Essex village of Hatfield Peverel, to see the problems first hand

The story of what happened to a school at risk of collapse from reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) isn't really one about buildings at all.

It's about the extraordinary resilience of school staff faced with multiple crises. How leaders learnt to be kinder to themselves. And how, caught up in a storm of the uncontrollable, staff decided to focus on the things they could manage.

RAAC and nearly ruin

Last summer, clumps of RAAC fell from the rafters of St Andrew's, despite its roof already being reinforced.

Headteacher Rebecca Black believes it was the trigger for education secretary Gillian Keegan's dramatic U-turn on RAAC 10 days later. On the last day of August, 100 schools with the crumbly concrete were told they could not open for the new school year.

St Andrew's, one of the 100, decamped to a Georgian wedding venue for the first six weeks

of term.

Its 220 children are now back at their school site. But they are taught in temporary classroom blocks that sprawl across the playground, with the old RAAC-infested school building looming over them.

And while it has secured a place on the government's rebuilding programme, alongside just over half of the 234 RAAC-affected schools, it's unclear when the work will begin.

"The [pupils are] settled and making fantastic progress," says deputy head Allison Dutaut, as she gestures at children playing on the patch of playground that remains.

"But there have been points in the last year where staff have been on their knees with exhaustion with the effort of making that possible. It's the human cost."

Around 14 years ago, the school's ever-leaking roof was propped up with steel-frame reinforcements.

When Black took over as head in 2019 she asked

the Department for Education to replace the roof. She was told to wait another three years.

It wasn't until May last year that a survey detected RAAC's presence. Black asked again for a new roof – this time she was told she must wait a further two years since the steel reinforcements meant it was "low priority".

Then nine weeks later, on August 23, the site manager came to her with a box containing lumps of dislodged concrete. Leaks had caused the RAAC to fall apart. This time her call to the DfE got a very different reaction.

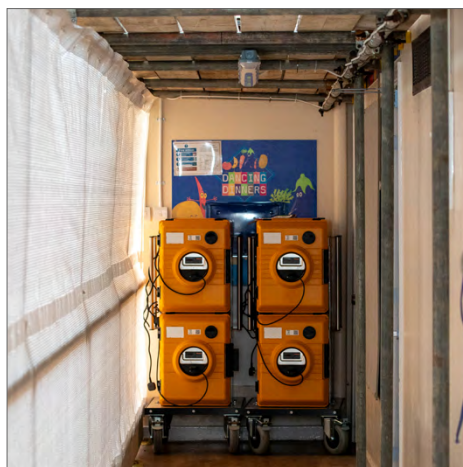
Through the ET tunnel

Black and Dutaut guide me into the old school building through an apocalyptic polythene-clad walkway propped up with scaffolding.

Black, who has retained her sense of humour as a coping mechanism throughout the crisis, refers to the walkway as the 'ET tunnel' as it evokes memories of the escape scene in the 1982 film.

Desolate classrooms, abandoned like the Mary

Feature: RACC



£5,000 worth of 'hot boxes' used to transport dinners to the new temporary hall



The temporary classrooms

Celeste on August bank holiday weekend, still have work pinned to the walls.

Staff only had time to grab essential items before the 54-year-old building was condemned.

Looking back, Dutaut believes the "loud banging noises" she heard must have been RAAC cracking above the room where year 3 children received extra reading practice.

The only room back in use is the school kitchen, where catering staff navigate their way around the metal poles of a 'crash deck'. It was put in place last term to catch falling RAAC debris in polythene sheets above their heads. They can now cook hot dinners again for the 400 children across St Andrew's junior school and its neighbouring infant and nursery schools (the latter two schools are RAAC-free).



Allison Dutaut, the school's deputy, with Jess Hill and headteacher Rebecca Black in the kitchen

'We put ourselves under huge pressure to get the school up and running'

Food is wheeled to children in the new temporary hall via two 'hot boxes' the school bought for £2,500 a pop. Black compares them to the scream extractors in children's film *Monsters, Inc.*

Before their return, caterers made sandwiches on half a metre of workbench in the nursery's galley kitchen.

Flight risks and fatigue

The school recently applied for counselling to support several members of staff. And Black still finds it hard to drive past Hatfield Place, the grand estate the school called home for a few weeks.

Its orangery and rose garden provided the children with "lots of beauty and cultural capital", she says. But teaching had to be done in year group classes of 60. Smaller intervention groups weren't possible and SEND children struggled.

Each week, furniture was carried to and from makeshift classrooms across the sprawling 15-acre estate. Limited resources meant many class activities stopped.

Dutaut admits patrolling the grounds each day was exhausting, and since the site was not

secure, staff were forced to make "constant risk assessments" and "you were always thinking on your feet". Some children with significant social, emotional and mental health needs were a "flight risk" and had to be permanently placed with alternative provision locally. Transporting children on and off site, with staggered departures via coach, car and on foot, also proved challenging.

Dutaut reflects on the importance of everyone coming together for collective worship at the end of each day, allowing "that sense of community".

The leadership team regularly put in 16-hour days. And Dutaut says there were times she returned home "absolutely exhausted" and fell into bed fully clothed.

Black adds: "There was a huge amount of pressure we were putting on ourselves to get the school up and running as quickly as possible.

"We didn't realise what it would physically take, and how long-term the crisis would be. We were constantly trying to foresee the unforeseeable."

It's testament to the dedication of her team that only two families pulled children out of the school, for logistical reasons.

Feature: RACC

Everything is awesome

In late October, willing grandparents and former staff joined the decamp back to St Andrew's and its new portable classrooms.

Black told the children it was like going to Legoland since their new classrooms resembled Lego bricks.

She says: "Some of the staff struggled with that concept, but the children really liked it."

Although the temporary classrooms are a decent size, they lack storage space. There's no room for PE, assemblies, interventions and staff meetings.

Heavy rain this winter meant the now-measly outdoor play area shrank by another third due to puddles and poor drainage.

Black says essential services have failed on dozens of occasions.

They nearly had to close the site when the pipes of the "three-season" toilets, as site manager Jason Pheifer calls them, froze and they wouldn't flush.

On one occasion sewage flowed across the playground.

A messier Ikea showroom

Black is incredulous that a fourth-hand prefab cabin, which she says came to the school "to die" 35 years ago, ended up "saving our bacon".

Despite having been previously sealed off because its roof was falling in, it became the "emergency hub".

Computers and essential files were moved inside despite rainwater dripping onto desks. Black arrived one morning to find the ink on her to-do list had been washed off.

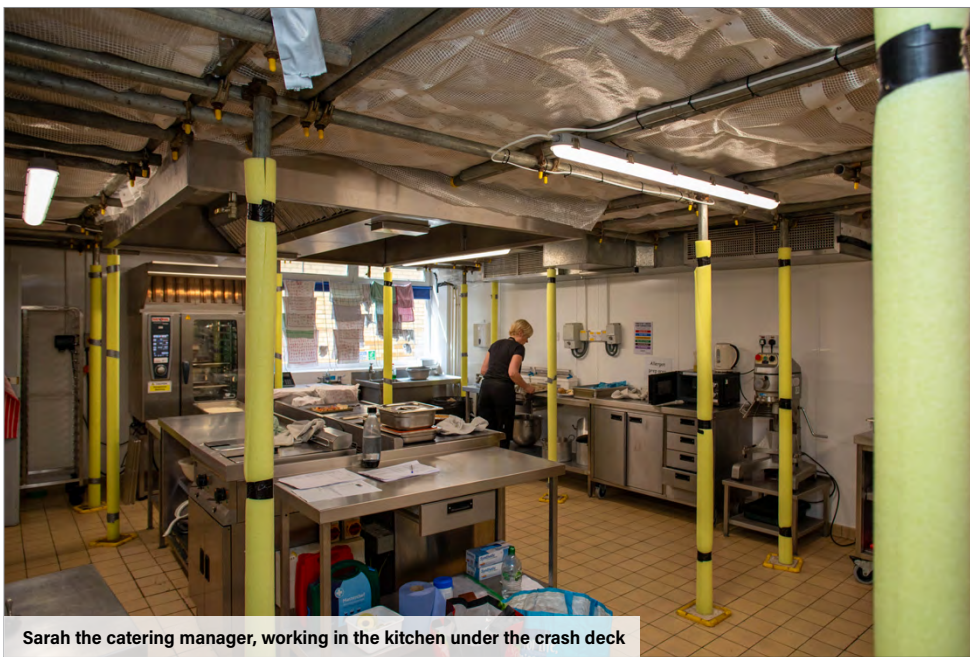
The prefab's roof was replaced and now the space resembles a messier version of an Ikea showroom, with screens dividing a makeshift staff room, breakfast club snug, maths intervention space/teachers' dining table and kitchenette.

Since Easter, the school has also been able to hold phonics and maths interventions in three swanky wooden cabins, normally bought to be used as garden offices.

When "life gets back to normal" Black says she hopes to convert them into changing rooms for



Black in her temporary office



Sarah the catering manager, working in the kitchen under the crash deck

'The DfE will do what they want, regardless of how much I stamp and shout'

a new outdoor swimming pool that was being planned before the RAAC crisis hit.

Policy churn and burn

The headteacher is frustrated by how long progress has taken and describes "banging my head against every brick wall going" in countless

meetings, tendering processes and decisions that often felt beyond her control.

Work on a temporary hall that staff hoped could be used for a Christmas fair only began in February. School assemblies were viewed remotely until it finally opened last month.

"I understand procurement processes," says

Feature: RACC



Staff wheeling the hot boxes to the classrooms

Black. "But this isn't a normal situation. People are following flowcharts and there's no flowchart for us – we're having to do lots of hard thinking really quickly."

While normally a school's policies, risk assessments and evacuation plans "stay the same for decades" (aside from a "little polish"), St Andrew's has been "rewriting significant chunks of policy", says Dutaut. Guidelines drawn up in October were deemed "useless" by January.

The deputy headteacher says there was anxiety that someone would "come in and audit whether my piece of paperwork matches exactly what the children are doing... you can't keep on top of it all in a site that's changing as quickly as this is. But we're learning to be kinder to ourselves about it".

The school is currently in the window for an Ofsted inspection but the watchdog recently said RAAC schools can request a deferral.

Around 60 per cent of Black's time is still taken up dealing with the RAAC fallout. Her makeshift office desk groans with paperwork.

But she says it's important to smile since "stomping around because it's hard and we're frustrated only tells everybody else it's OK to be grumpy about things".

A new school anthem

There have been silver linings, however. Toilet pipes are now insulated, and two old



The three-seasons toilets

'There's no flowchart for us, we're doing lots of thinking really quickly'

conservatories have been revived as intervention areas.

The school's new hall hosts collective worship, which has been "transformative" in "making things feel more normal," says Dutaut.

But there is a fear that so-called temporary structures may become more long term.

While the initial plan had been for the old RAAC roof to be replaced before the start of the next academic year, in February it emerged that because the building no longer complied with modern building regulations, a complete rebuild was required.

Initially, Black's team were relieved. They assumed that being "the poster school for RAAC" they would be prioritised for a rebuild.

But relief turned to dismay when they heard they were on the same timeline as other schools facing less trying circumstances.

St Andrew's is one of 65 RAAC primary schools waiting to be rebuilt. The Department for Education has not said when work will be finished but its 10-year rebuilding scheme that

runs to 2030 is already behind schedule. And because St Andrews' temporary classrooms sit so close to the old school building, they may have to be moved before any rebuild can begin.

The words "elections" and "costs" kept being mentioned in a recent "very long and painful" meeting with DfE officials, Black says. She adds: "There are moments where we're a pawn in a chess match – the DfE will do what they want, regardless of how much I stamp and shout."

Amid the uncertainty, the leadership team have had to learn to "live more in the moment", "let go of normal expectations" and be "adaptive to change at very short notice", says Dutaut.

That's not been easy because "as teachers, you're used to being highly organised and micromanaging your environment".

Perhaps it's not surprising that Black says her team's theme tune is Elton John's *I'm Still Standing* – and they all danced to it at their Christmas do.

"Our school is still standing. It's still a place where all children love to learn," she says, smiling.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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The sector's manifesto



LUKE SPARKES
CEO, Dixons Academies Trust

Three policies to put schools at the heart of a civic mission

Our work in Bradford shows local communities – with schools at their heart – are the best source of solutions to the challenges people face, says Luke Sparkes

Poverty is created at distance but lived locally. We need a government that understands that. If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a nation to raise a society (and an economy) of which we can be internationally proud.

Radically redefining education offers the next government the opportunity to claim our global status as a nation of innovation, technology and equality. This requires a civic mindset, and it requires us to act on, not just in, the system. Our next government must act locally to help communities solve their own problems and build their own futures.

In 2020, Confederation of School Trusts chief executive Leora Cruddas wrote: “Civic work has the most impact when it is delivered in partnership with other civic actors.” These words are as true today as when they were written, and they are the transformative mindset in which our educators live daily.

As educators, we act today so that children can lead choiceful lives tomorrow. That means being

ruthlessly practical, so what must the government do urgently to empower us to do so?

Partnership is key. School is the last civic institution with open doors, and the chance to talk. We are the only institution of obligation – meaning your absence will be noticed, and that absence acted upon.

It is very hard to educate a child who is hungry, cold or reeling from trauma. By stealth, schools have become the fourth emergency service, but not overtly by policy discussion and mutual decision: rather because other local services stopped.

Children are still coming through our doors every day, and we are seeing a crisis of vulnerable children. Schools cannot be expected to carry the weight of being an emergency service, we urgently need to rebuild the resilience of local services.

Government needs to do its bit through the exchequer, but beyond this it should transfer power so that families can speak up for themselves and get what they need from effective partnerships of schools and local services.

The fragmentation of local services is a blocker to effectively supporting young people with SEND and their families, who must wade through acres of bureaucracy



“School is the last civic institution with open doors”

from separate, unaligned agencies.

We want to see local convening partnerships bringing together the public sector agencies that support young people. Crucially, these partnerships must be led and driven by the people we serve.

In Bradford, we have supported the creation of the Education Alliance for Life Chances, which brings together schools, children's services, the local authority, the NHS, the VCS and the police, and Bradford's world-leading research community. This enables better decisions for young people.

Through our work with Citizens UK, young people have a seat at the table. We want to work with others who share our aspirations across the cities we serve, and we are absolutely not precious about who ‘owns’ this work. It is time to move past the artificial divides that have existed for too long between, for example, local authorities and academy trusts.

Here are three policies for the next administration to deliver the civic partnerships our communities need:

A smart government would

craft a joint workforce plan between local services, enabling multi-disciplinary work to happen smoothly, effectively and with efficiency that isn't cruelly reductive to what the price is today.

A visionary government would mandate local convening partnerships in every local authority: make people who live and breathe communities the core of the solution.

A bold government would understand that schools cannot act in isolation – we need a national mission to reset child protection and wellbeing, fix the parlous state of children's services and the care system, and fully recognise that childhood is now partially online.

Education is a profession of ideas and delivery. We have proven that we can continue to deliver on the vapour trails of budgets long wrung dry. But the world has changed and so must the system.

We need a government that listens and responds, and that understands a nation is built of individuals. Of one child, at one table, learning day by day.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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PASSEYDeputy headteacher,
Kimichi School

Allied professionals must not cloud the vaping issue for schools

A new trend is emerging that threatens schools' ability to impose their policies on vaping – based on questionable reasoning, explains Chris Passey

The tobacco and vaping bill is wending its way through parliament, and there appears to be a rare glimpse of national unity in the effort to curb the excesses of producers and marketers of these products. But are we all really pulling together for the good of young people?

According to the latest data from the Department of Work and Pensions, "youth vaping has tripled in the last three years, and one in five children have tried vaping". Indeed, global news feeds are filled with stories of young people vaping in toilets and other areas of schools – in primaries as well as secondaries.

It's no wonder. Vapes are bright, colourful, sometimes wilfully concealed as highlighters and offer Wonka-esque flavour choices. Add in a dose of generational rebellion and it's pretty irresistible for some.

Then there are the excuses. "It's safer than smoking!" Except that their addictive potential is actually greater than cigarettes. "It calms me down." Does it really, though?

The litany of side-effects of nicotine include anxiety, depression and of course withdrawal.

I'm not entirely convinced that handing out severe consequences, as some schools are doing, is quite the deterrent it is intended to be. But these schools are taking action. Their policies, like every school's, are designed to safeguard pupils.

They influence what they can, whether that's what happens in school or outside of the school grounds when pupils are in uniform. But a trend is growing that is undermining these policies. And it's not coming from defiant teens or parents but allied professionals.

Vapes are being prescribed.

OK, that's an exaggeration – but only a slight one. I promise this is happening. GPs aren't handing out scripts, but in the eyes of some children and their families, what is happening is as good as.

What we've experienced and heard from various teachers and leaders is the curse of the 'lesser of two evils' problem: some therapists – with no known affiliation – placate their patients' addiction as a replacement to self-harm.

Who are we to argue with that? How on earth are we meant to apply our school rules and policies if these vulnerable young people can legitimately say "But, my therapist



“ This is the curse of the 'lesser of two evils' problem

says it's better than self-harming”?

Prescribed? No. Endorsed? Absolutely. Vulnerable young people, albeit closer to upper Key stage 4 and older, warmly sit in the belief that consuming their vape is better than self-harming. How could anyone advise choosing the latter?

More disturbingly still, one teacher described the moment a social worker insinuated that not allowing a child's vape in school was tantamount to causing trauma by denying their medically endorsed coping strategy.

Do we really find ourselves in a place whereby we must allow these challenges to the law, and what will eventually become law, in order to prevent harm? We must not, not least because vaping is being promoted as better than cigarettes and cannabis. All of these things are illegal.

Sadly, though I'm sure we are all disgusted by this, few educators I've spoken to are entirely surprised. We know and value the hard work and dedication of ethically just and morally sound therapists, social

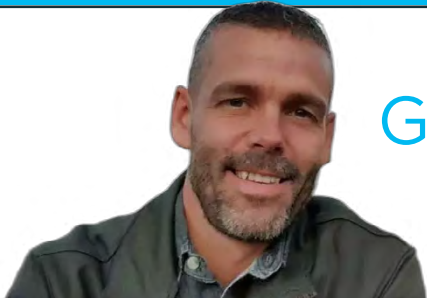
workers and service providers.

We also know some see us and our policies as the bad guys of the mental health story.

In this time of 'broken social contract', we need parents and carers on side more than ever. We need them to support our policies (which, let's not forget, mirror the law) and recognise that the lesser of two evils is still evil. And we need to be united in our safeguarding purpose.

To that end, we need support from law-makers to make the case that the idea of vapes as an anti-anxiety cure for our most vulnerable students is a fever dream. All those working with young people should be guided to speak with one voice on this: Vapes are wolves in strawberry and shortbread-scented clothing.

We will be steadfast in our resolve to educate about the harms of all addictive substances. We need our caring colleagues to be just as steadfast in their guidance: vaping is not a treatment.



CHRIS
GOODALL
Head of digital education,
Bourne Education Trust

AI offers a big prize if we can learn to lead others to it

True prize of AI-powered education may be the shift in leadership approach required to deliver it, explains Chris Goodall

If you view AI as a standalone add-on to your school development plan, it's time for a rethink. Whether it's improving student outcomes, closing achievement gaps, fostering critical thinking skills or preparing students for the workforce, AI can and should be integral to your approach.

We have to shift our perspective away from the idea of AI as a flashy, showcase technology. Instead, we should focus on the powerful support it can provide for day-to-day activities, whether that's assisting with mundane tasks that consume valuable time or enhancing learning opportunities for students.

Effective AI integration involves the creation of bespoke, individual prompts or applications tailored to the unique needs of each person, task, and sometimes even the specific tool being used. This level of customisation ensures that AI directly supports the goals and objectives of the school and its stakeholders. It's not about preset libraries of prompts or generic solutions.

There are risks, of course, but AI safety is much better ensured by embedding AI literacy into the fabric of your school than by relying on an

assembly or a few explicit lessons. The AI landscape is constantly shifting, so the more sustainable approach is to foster a culture of constant conversations around AI that equips students, staff and parents with the knowledge and skills necessary to make informed decisions about its use.

This is best done through a proactive, iterative approach that is both systematic and collaborative. Based on the experiences and successes of Bourne Education Trust, here is a framework for how to get started:

1. Identify a problem or challenge faced by the school
2. Analyse the current method of solving the problem and break it down into steps
3. Demonstrate how AI can speed up and enhance each step
4. Provide hands-on opportunities for staff to experiment and create their own solutions
5. Share and discuss after each step
6. Compare the pre-AI and post-AI final output and process.

This approach is more impactful than generic training on a specific theme or tool. It builds agency and hands-on experience that is crucial for understanding the intricacies of how AI can be beneficial, risky, or simply not useful in specific contexts.

For these reasons too it's best



“ It's best to resist over-centralised control

to resist over-centralised control and generic implementation. True transformation happens at the granular level. Effective strategies and policies should emerge from experiment and nuanced understanding – and not stifle them.

Fundamentally, no one has done this before. Policy, safety and structure are undoubtedly important but they should be underpinned by an evidence base. For now, this can only come from context-specific exploration and experience.

Importantly, staff should be empowered to try things out. A recent survey of subject leaders revealed the most important factors influencing their ability to embed AI in everyday practice are hands-on experience and opportunities to collaborate.

These factors matter even more amid resistance to change, lack of resources and valid concerns about potential risks. But the prize is potentially huge: more efficient planning and assessment, more effective personalisation, richer data analysis for more effective interventions – and all of this as well

as reduced workloads, less stress and a better classroom experience.

Edtech has had its share of false dawns, in part because it has often offered solutions that were looking for problems. Now, our problems are writ large and the technology gives us the space to design the solutions ourselves. This elusive and much-needed transformation won't happen overnight. But now more than ever it is within reach.

As leaders, all we have to do is to create the conditions that will allow it to flourish: tailored professional development, a low-stakes culture of innovation and continuous learning, a collaborative approach (internally and externally), and a healthy balance between bottom-up and top-down implementation.

That's a far cry from a 'nice to have' add-on. In fact, the prize of AI may be this very shift in leadership itself.

Embedding AI use in schools was co-authored with James Newman (headteacher) and Aisleen Campbell (deputy headteacher) of Epsom and Ewell High School.
[Read the full report here](#)

Solutions

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DEBBIE ROSE

Education systems team
leader, Cantium

Five ways to use AI to get the best from your MIS

While the sector's AI focus has been on teacher workloads and student learning, the biggest impact may be at leadership level, explains Debbie Rose

As the backbone of a school or MAT's operations and communications, modern Management Information System (MIS) infrastructure is continuing to evolve and improve. One technology in particular is becoming a transformative force for school MIS, and that's artificial intelligence (AI).

Some schools are already using the power of AI to enhance their MIS, reduce repetitive tasks and make use of the vast amount of data in the system to the benefit of staff, students, parents and guardians. Here are five ways schools can use AI in their MIS to get the most out of the evolving technology.

Automate admin

Freeing up time for administrative staff means they can focus on more urgent and complex tasks. AI-powered automation can streamline routine administrative processes, such as attendance tracking. Some schools are already experimenting by creating individual reports on students' behaviour or attendance, using AI to pull the necessary data from their MIS.

Utilise chatbots and virtual assistance

AI-powered virtual assistants or chatbots can be implemented within an MIS to handle further routine administrative tasks, such as scheduling appointments, answering FAQs or managing paperwork.

Chatbots can operate around the clock, providing support and information to users at any time. They can also assist in data management tasks within the MIS, such as updating information in the system, helping to ensure data accuracy and integrity.

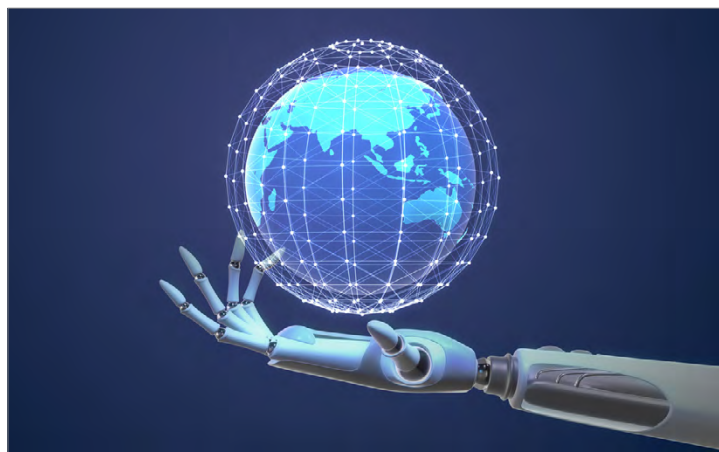
Streamline stakeholder engagement

An MIS is designed to enhance communication between different stakeholders in the educational ecosystem. A virtual assistant can further streamline communication between stakeholders by providing instant access to information and resources.

The virtual assistant can integrate with existing communication and collaboration tools such as email, messaging platforms and calendars, allowing the right stakeholder groups to access the correct information – seamlessly and from their preferred platforms.

Communicate more inclusively

AI can automate personalised communication to parents/guardians using the data pulled from the MIS.



“ Schools are not alone on their journey of AI discovery

This means schools and MATs can tailor the tone and formality to align with their desired communication style and ethos.

Some MIS can even live-translate data within communications. For example, a non-English speaking parent/guardian can receive messages translated into their native language, and their responses can be sent back in English.

Integrate adaptive learning platforms

Integrating AI-driven adaptive learning platforms within the MIS can deliver personalised learning experiences for students, customising learning pathways and content based on individual student needs identified through data analysis captured in the MIS. These customised tools can be shared across a department, school or MAT network to increase consistency and efficiency.

Support at every stage of the journey

The capabilities of AI are vast and evolving. A key barrier to engagement is the fear of making mistakes in what is a high-stakes environment with deep ethical

considerations around data.

What schools and MATs must remember is that they are not alone on their journey of discovery and that support is out there. AI support will introduce participants to the tools and technologies commonly used in MIS such as machine learning algorithms, predictive analytics software, natural language processing tools and chatbots. It can also provide hands-on experience with these tools through interactive workshops and simulations.

Furthermore, it can help foster a culture of continuous learning and collaboration among educators and administrators. It can educate participants about the ethical considerations surrounding AI, including issues related to privacy, bias and transparency. The right support will encompass a range of topics to ensure educators and administrators have the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively leverage AI tools and technologies.

The roadmap for AI in schools remains unclear, but the future looks very bright for its potential in MIS. Ultimately, its success will depend on how effectively it is implemented, integrated, and embraced by the sector.

THE REVIEW

YOUNG LIVES, BIG AMBITIONS

Author: Anne Longfield, CBE**Publisher:** Jessica Kingsley Publishers**Publication date:** April 18, 2024**ISBN:** 1839972807**Reviewer:** Caroline Derbyshire, chief executive, Saffron Academy Trust

Young Lives, Big Ambitions is a powerful manifesto calling for urgent change to the way our society treats its children and young people. Written by former Children's Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield CBE, the book paints a bleak picture of the lives of those who fall through cracks in the system because our services are overstretched, lacking in ambition or insufficiently inclusive.

Take the cases of Jaden, aged 14, and Jacob, 16. Longfield argues their premature deaths following criminal exploitation and drug abuse could have been avoided. Tragically, the agencies involved in supporting their families could not or did not intervene early enough, before the boys became isolated and prey to the criminal gangs that groomed and befriended them. She concludes they "fell through gaps in the school, care and justice systems".

What she describes is systemic failure, and failure that happens despite the best efforts of those delivering these services. Teenagers whose families are in crisis can end up on the streets because they wish to escape chaos at home and do not recognise criminal exploitation when it is wrapped up as friendship and belonging.

Shockingly, Department for Education figures revealed nearly 13,000 children were at risk of being exploited by gangs in the 12 months to March 2021. Longfield asks, quite rightly, what could be done to avoid this sorry state of affairs and whether earlier intervention could not only save young lives but save the country a good deal of money in managing the consequences of social failure.

"Young people make up 20 per cent of our population and 100 per cent of our future", she reminds us. Yet young people's needs are far too

low down society's list of priorities. It is not a position any of us can dispute.

Before many were closed, the country used to spend £1.8 billion on Sure Start family centres. Spending on these services has now dropped by 48 per cent. Sure Start helped families access the help they needed in a timely way when issues arose. They remain one of the best-evidenced models of community support and intervention for families and children.

Families no longer have obvious places to go when they need help and children suffer consequently. It is a convincing argument and compellingly made.

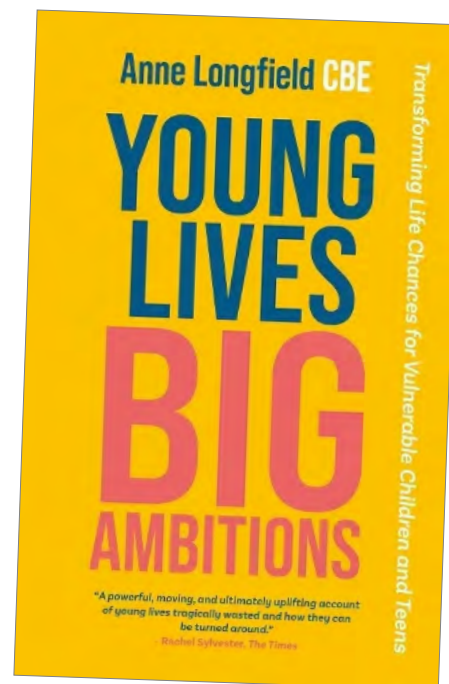
This book does not make comfortable reading for any of us who work with children, but that is also why it is an important book for educators to read. Schools are central to the life of a child. When a child does not attend school or is permanently excluded, spending long periods away from formal education, their connection to constant, trusted relationships and social norms are lost.

Rightly, Longfield calls for schools to be as inclusive as possible. News this week that the Department for Education and Ofsted are looking into schools that try to put off children with SEND or have fewer on roll than might be expected is proof enough that there are gains to be made here.

But Longfield goes further. She asks school leaders to think more deeply about the impact on the life chances of children when they permanently exclude. If possible, she would like us to avoid exclusion entirely.

Many teachers and school leaders would dispute this. School leaders can point to examples of young people who are already involved in criminal drug-related activity while

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at school, which offers them a market and puts others at risk. Others will argue that dysregulated behaviours undermine the learning and safety of the well-behaved majority.

I sympathise to an extent, and I would have wished for the book's education-related solutions to be more developed. However, it is clear we could do more as a society to make positive provision for the children who find themselves excluded (or, even better, at risk of exclusion).

As a clarion call for more funding for joined-up services and more attention to be paid to meeting children's needs, the argument could not be better made. Whether you agree or not with what it claims about the impact of permanent exclusion, you will no doubt share in Longfield's evident frustration - and that can only inspire us to be more ambitious for our young people.

★★★★☆
Rating

THE CONVERSATION LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM



Jess Mahdavi-Gladwell

Deputy head, Robson House, Camden

COULD'VE BEEN AN EMAIL

Using time well at work is vital for productivity as well as work-life balance. The sense of always being 90 seconds behind, chasing one's tail perhaps, is no fun and doesn't enhance our sense of control. As school leaders work towards being 'September-ready', I think some of business leadership author Simon Sinek's tips could improve everyone's experience, at least in terms of meetings.

I've often heard (and perhaps used) the phrase 'should have been an email' about meetings. Here, Sinek suggests three 'game-changing' tweaks to make them more effective.



First, ending meetings on a number that ends with five, thus creating a five-minute buffer between meetings, is something I plan to implement (perhaps at home as well as at work). Whether to transition thinking from one focus to another, make a drink or take a comfort break, this feels like a simple and impactful change with no drawbacks.

Second, assigning three roles (meeting 'owner', note taker, time keeper) is something else that could be impactful and may be more relevant to schools than some suggestions that come from business.

Finally, having a stated goal for meetings. I will reflect on my sense that the meetings I'm responsible for have one, and ask if this is the experience of everyone in them.

This isn't one of Sinek's suggestions, but I'll also resist the temptation to hold a meeting about holding more effective meetings. I'll just signpost this blog!

IT'S ALL CONNECTED



In this article, James Foster and Michael Lokshin discuss inequality as something which is multidimensional. They describe educational inequality and income inequality as two of those dimensions, and reflect on the interaction between the two, drawing on a study carried out in Azerbaijan between 2016 and 2023.

Perhaps more interestingly, they go on to present a hypothetical 'counterfactual' where, rather than people who have lower incomes experiencing poorer quality education and medical care, these groups have access to the best quality of both. They ask us to imagine the impact of this, suggesting that reducing educational inequality will itself reduce income inequality.

At the end, they draw focus back to the interconnectedness of the dimensions of inequality. It left me pondering, when we are so often reminded of the roles we can't or should not fill, that our impact really does go far beyond test scores and exam outcomes.

PRU are you?

There is still time to contribute your opinions to Ofsted's Big Listen consultation. But for those of us who work in Pupil Referral Units, there is no box to tick to identify the sector in which we work. 'Other' it is, then.

It's in this context that I read this Chartered

College blog outlining the organisation's own response to the Big Listen and why professionalism defines their call for change to the inspection process.

The blog shares the thoughts of college members, and the overall sense is that an inspection is really only one of a number of pieces of data to be considered in evaluating school performance.

That feels right. If only Ofsted wouldn't so readily forget we exist.

BUILDING BELONGING

The sense of belonging that can exist within school teams can be heady. Ironically, it can be particularly heightened (as well as much more valued) at crunch points, such as Ofsted inspections.

Here, psychotherapist Nilufar Ahmed considers the impact of remote or hybrid working (not so relevant to our profession) and how vital psychological safety is, particularly when considering diversity within our teams.

When the sense of belonging is not present for someone who seeks this, the impact on physical health is real. An increased sense of belonging is related to fewer sick days and higher productivity, as well as happier colleagues.

Whether a sense of belonging comes through time and opportunities to build meaningful connections at work, from a sense of shared values or whether it is found outside work through other activities, it's something most of us need and something that most school leaders, I believe, want to provide.

If this is something you're missing at work and you can find a way, I'd try to raise it; senior leaders genuinely want schools that are staffed by those who are happy at work.

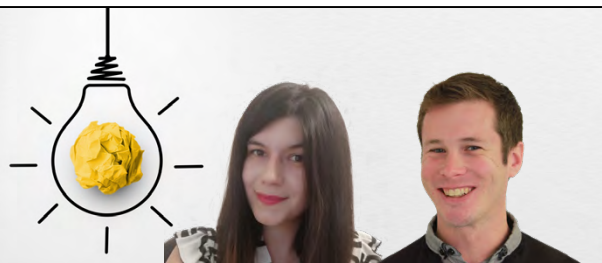


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The Knowledge

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



What are key considerations when planning CPD?

**Ourania Ventista, research statistician,
Evidence Based Education**

**C.J. Rauch, head of teaching and learning,
Evidence Based Education**

Aside from being a statutory obligation, teachers should see continued professional development (CPD) as an integral (and integrated) component of their role.

A recent Teacher Tapp report revealed that teachers are keen for quality CPD; unfortunately, interest does not automatically translate to success. Teachers and school leaders need to think strategically when planning CPD. What then are the considerations that should be taken into account?

Purposeful learning

As with so much in education, a driving consideration for planning CPD is purpose.

Of course, the purpose of some CPD will be necessary training, such as safeguarding and school policies. But while these are important workplace training sessions, we consider them a different category from professional development to improve student outcomes.

The latter is the kind of professional development that actually develops teacher expertise, and fortunately we know what the 'best bets' are for teachers to dedicate their precious time on to that effect.

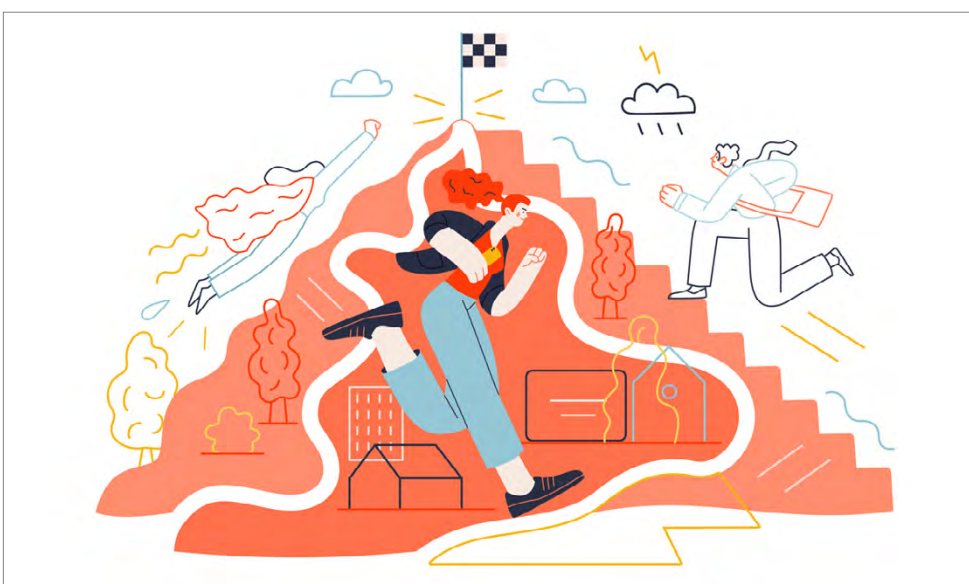
The research base provides insight into how to allocate this time strategically. Our colleagues' Great Teaching Toolkit: Evidence review, for example, summarises the existing research and offers a research-informed curriculum for CPD in the form of the 'Model for Great Teaching'. It offers a summary of the things on which teachers should develop their expertise.

On beyond twilight

Having selected a purpose, the next natural step is to plan the CPD's format.

Our colleague, Rob Coe, has written about using CPD time strategically. It is, after all, probably one of the most limited resources in our field.

It's easy to just rely on twilight sessions or hearing from experts on specific techniques. However, the reality is that the choices are much more vast, as shown in a recent



'How CPD takes place is just as crucial as what it is about'

systematic review of professional learning for primary and secondary school teachers.

CPD is not uniform. Training sessions may be the most common, but teaching observation, coaching and mentoring, and professional learning communities are also effective.

The key is to match the format to the aims, the resources available, and the staff most likely to benefit. In other words, the question of how CPD takes place is just as crucial as what it is about.

Bang for your buck

The aforementioned systematic review also showed that training courses, collaborative professional development and ongoing coaching are beneficial for students' learning. So the evidence suggests that some forms of CPD may be more effective than others, at least in some contexts.

And while matching form and content matters, there is another dimension to the 'how' of CPD that also appears to make a substantial difference.

A recent study highlighted that science teachers' professional development which

lasted over multiple years was more effective for their pupils' achievement scores.

Importantly, the training in this study focused not just on teachers' learning for its own sake, but also the final effect on student learning itself.

Therefore, both the form and the duration of the professional development are important considerations when selecting the 'how' of CPD. Likewise, a consistent focus on impact appears to be crucial.

Ultimately, we know CPD is essential. Arguably, it should be seen as one of the most important activities a teacher undertakes, though it is often the one afforded the least time and resource.

Research shows us that when planning a programme of CPD (whether for a school or one's own), it is crucial to consider both the *what* and *how* of any development activity. It also gives us some useful best bets to get from intent to impact.

Given schools' stretched resources, our duty to our students dictates we use them strategically.



Week in

Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

FRIDAY

Despite leaving the sector a decade ago, Michael Gove is still probably the most talked-about former education secretary.

It's clear he's still living rent-free in the heads of staffers at the NASUWT union.

On a webpage about Ofsted's Big Listen consultation, members are encouraged to visit the Gove.uk page to submit their responses! (It should of course be Gov.uk).

MONDAY

The official teacher pension scheme is beset with problems, including many teachers having thousands of pounds and years' worth of employment missing from their pot (as *Schools Week* has written about previously).

So you'd think there might be a decent response to a call made for a "dynamic and inspirational" person to join the Teachers' Pension Scheme Pension Board as an employer representative.

The person will be expected to "support and challenge" the scheme to ensure it "continues to be effectively and efficiently administered".

Ignoring the fact the "continues" in this sentence seems to be doing some heavy lifting, if you can commit up to 20 days a year then you have until the end of May to apply here.

Meanwhile, another shout-out today for more sector representation (what happened to the days of schools minister Nick Gibb just handpicking a few pals to provide the advice?)

The School and College Voice panel, a regular survey that collects "robust insight on high-priority topics", is expanding to "hear from more teachers and leaders".

The insight informs government policymaking and delivery.

However, the government does still choose which teachers and leaders take part. So, you can only make your voice heard if you get a Golden Invite.

Perhaps we've not moved on too much from the Gibb era?

TUESDAY

A slap on the wrists for the DfE today after Clive Betts MP, chair of the levelling-up committee, took the rare step of writing a strong-worded letter about its "refusal to engage constructively" with an inquiry into the importance of outdoor space for children.

He was critical of the department's overall "lack of engagement", but was particularly disappointed that children and families minister David Johnston did not attend an inquiry hearing when invited.

In a response, DfE permanent secretary Susan Acland-Hood said that while her department had an "interest" in the inquiry, it "does not hold formal joint responsibility for the policy areas in the inquiry's terms of reference".

She also said the department offered Baroness Barran, the academies minister, to attend as her portfolio includes school buildings, but the offer was not taken up.

The inquiry is looking at "how better planning and building and urban design in England could enhance the health and well-being of children and young people, while also benefitting the population as a whole".

To mark Mental Health Awareness Week, the DfE sent out a press release congratulating itself for take-up of its senior mental health lead training grants increasing to 70 per cent, with 44 per cent of pupils attending schools that had mental health support teams.

But as Association of School and College Leaders SEND and inclusion specialist Margaret Mulholland pointed out – is that something to boast about?

"It's just not acceptable that in 2025, eight years after the initiative was first proposed, half of all pupils will still be without access to mental health support teams," she said.

WEDNESDAY

Barran took to X this week to explain the government's latest attendance initiatives.

While many had a pop at her suggestions that schools need to spice up their Friday curriculum to stop kids bunking off, she took criticism on board and responded (graciously) to a few.

Our highlight included someone complaining more generally about a politician making this comment "whilst quaffing champers over subsidised beef wellington in the Commons cafe before heading home to their third home with a moat on the chopper around 2pm".

Barran simply responded: "Actually.... I visit schools on Fridays ...one of the best parts of my job."

Boom.

THURSDAY

Tory MP Sir John Hayes was clearly hoping to unearth some dirt to push the "war on woke" by asking the DfE how much they had spent on events and activities associated with Pride Month last year, a celebration of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender pride.

Alas, schools minister Damian Hinds had the disappointing news that the department has spent ...zilch on it!

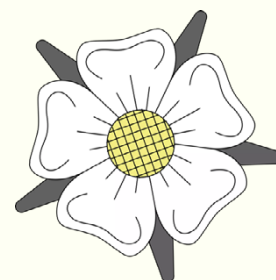
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