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Revealed: Secret deal to let benefit fraud squad snoop on pupil data

- National pupil database being used by government to check for benefit fraud
- Concern over transparency and parents 'withdrawing children from schools'

SCHOOLS
WEEK

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When Michael Gove opened up the national pupil database for wider use, it was based on sound principles: "maximising the value of the rich dataset".

It's invaluable for researchers, academics and policymakers to help learn lessons on what works and what doesn't.

But it is a sprawling dataset. And there is concern about both the Department for Education's ability to safeguard the data, and transparency over what it is used for.

Just like the secret plans to share pupil nationality data to aid Theresa May's 'hostile environment', using pupil data to catch benefit fraudsters is problematic (page 8). But even if you don't have a problem with data being used in this way, people should know it's happening so they can make up their own minds.

Elsewhere this week, there has been tough talk from both the children's minister and Ofsted boss over schools not taking their fair share of pupils with special educational needs (page 5).

But it does seem, at this stage, to be

just that: talk.

However, one area that the government has taken tougher action on is unregistered alternative provision (page 4).

A superb investigation last year by our features reporter Jessica Hill revealed a dramatic rise in pupils being educated in such settings, which have little oversight or checks.

Now the government has acted to change that.

Another thing changing is Ofsted grades. Sir Martyn Oliver, the chief inspector since January, has given out far fewer less than 'good' grades than in previous years (although it is still early in his tenure to draw too firm conclusions).

The watchdog says this is just the continuation of trend in recent years of better grades. But why, and how does it impact schools? We dig into all that on pages 6 and 7.

Finally, have multi-academy trusts left behind the era of competition for a new dawn of collaboration? We take a look on pages 15 and 16.

Most read online this week:

- 1** [Ofsted to scrap subject deep dives for ungraded inspections](#)
- 2** [Schools 'putting off' SEND pupils face more Ofsted scrutiny](#)
- 3** [Keegan's special adviser Mark Leahy to run academy trust](#)
- 4** [One of first safety valve councils slammed over 'failing' SEND services](#)
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See story, page 8

'National standards' to keep closer eye on unregistered AP

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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The government plans to "time-limit" the use of unregistered alternative provision (AP), require settings to comply with national standards and have councils maintain lists of "approved" provision for schools to use.

The Department for Education has published a consultation on plans to regulate unregistered AP.

It follows a Schools Week investigation which revealed children as young as five were increasingly being sent to unregulated institutions, which are not inspected by Ofsted or properly overseen by local authorities.

An evaluation report on the government's 2022 call for evidence warned of "insufficient oversight and transparency around the local management of placements in unregistered settings.

"In some cases, this has led to children and young people becoming less visible across the system, putting their safety and the quality of their education at risk."

The call for evidence got just 135 responses, of which nearly half were from unregistered APs. It found the most common use of an unregistered AP was to address the needs of children which "cannot be met in school".

While this "filled a gap", half of respondents said the AP was used due to a lack of space elsewhere.

There was also a lack of understanding as to who had oversight of decision-making for such placements, and half of respondents said no metrics were used to assess whether the provision met young people's needs.

Chris Kneale-Jones, chief executive of AP provider Targeted Provision, which has called for regulation, welcomed the "commitment to enhancing safeguards for vulnerable learners in unregistered alternative provision settings like our own".

Here's what you need to know...

1. Time-limited placements

Under the proposals, placements for children of compulsory school age in unregistered AP would be limited to either...

- Short-term, for 12 weeks or less, and for up to five days a week, with the pupils

returning to their schools after that period

- Longer-term part-time, for up to two days, or four sessions, per week, with the pupils spending the rest of their time at school. Multiple longer-term placements with different providers will be allowed, but the combined total must not exceed two days or four sessions per week

All children would remain on the admission register of their schools, apart from the "small number of cases where it has been determined that it would be inappropriate for children with SEN to receive their special educational provision at a school".

2. Quality-assured provision

Local authorities would be responsible for the "quality assurance of all unregistered AP settings offering time-limited interventions in their areas".

All unregistered AP would have to meet national standards before they could be on LA-approved lists.

Schools and councils would only be able to commission timetabled intervention from those on the approved lists.

Councils will have their quality assurance evaluated during Ofsted and Care Quality Commission SEND inspections.

The new national standards cover five themes: safeguarding and wellbeing, health and safety, admissions, guidance and support, and quality of education and outcomes.

3. Schools 'required to inform' LAs of placements

Schools will still be required to "assure themselves of the suitability of each placement". The government has also proposed that schools be "required to routinely inform their local authority about placements they have commissioned in unregistered settings and provide feedback on their pupils' progress".

They would also have to provide "evidence of reintegration into fulltime education, at the end of every time-limited placement".



4. DfE considering 'flexibility' for some provision

Some pupils with special educational needs receive what's called "education otherwise than in school", often abbreviated to EOTAS. This is sometimes delivered in unregistered AP.

The DfE said it will consider whether there "may be a case for greater flexibility to enable more children in receipt of EOTAS to receive all their special educational provision in a single setting.

Settings providing full-time education to five or more pupils – or one or more with an education, health and care plan – must register as independent schools.

The DfE asked if this was a "barrier", and whether the law "should ensure that the delivery of all of a child's EOTAS special educational provision will not be the trigger for the alternative provider being classified as an independent school".

5. Separate arrangements for some SEND pupils

The consultation deals with two groups of pupils receiving EOTAS – those who remain on their school's register and those who do not.

Provision for those on school registers would be subject to the same council quality-assurance arrangements as for other unregistered AP.

But provision for those who don't stay on a school's register would instead have to register with the DfE, comply with the new national standards, and be subject to periodic inspections.

NEWS

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Government probing how many schools are not inclusive

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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The government is looking into how many schools are not being inclusive enough for children with special educational needs and disability (SEND), the children's minister has revealed.

David Johnston told Schools Week while he doesn't believe non-inclusive schools are "a widespread problem", cases have been raised with him by MPs where a "particular school in their area may not be being as inclusive as it suggests".

He said the department is "looking at the extent to which it is happening, why it's happening and whether there are any changes that need to be made a result".

Chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver revealed this weekend how Ofsted will ramp up scrutiny of schools accused of "putting off" children with SEND from applying for a place. Johnston said he has spoken to Oliver about this too.

'Uncomfortable' exclusions

Johnston told the Confederation of School Trusts' SEND and inclusion summit on Thursday he was "looking at" cases where schools "don't have a single child with an EHCP [education health and care plan] ... and they've just been given an outstanding by Ofsted".

He recently had a "discomforting" conversation



David Johnston

with a parent helpline "who said they had seen a big increase in parents ringing saying their child of [age] five, six, seven had been permanently excluded".

Johnston said he doesn't "deny that there are children at a young age who can present really challenging behaviour". But his "personal view is that's pretty extraordinary to exclude a child of that age" and he was "uncomfortable with that".

"We are looking in the department at exactly what is going on there, because the whole thrust of our education reforms... is to trust headteachers that it shouldn't be me sitting in Whitehall saying 'right, this is what you should do'.

"However, we also need every school that has on its website what an inclusive place it is to genuinely be inclusive."

A Schools Week investigation last year dug into inclusivity in mainstream schools. Basic data on how many EHCP pupils a school has can be problematic, as a low number could mean a school offers early support and that a statutory plan isn't needed.

Education Datalab analysis found there were 276 schools without a single 11-year-old pupil with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) in 2022. This included 94 of the 163 grammar schools.

Defends accountability measures

When asked about the "disincentives" for schools to be inclusive, Johnston said it cannot "be blamed on Ofsted" or league tables, which he "will absolutely defend... they've been so important to improve the level of education for disadvantaged children".

"I don't attribute it to those. But I do nonetheless think there is something going on."

Speaking at the National Association of Head Teachers conference on Saturday, Oliver said leaders are reporting through the Big Listen consultation how some schools tell parents they are "not best suited to meet the needs of their child".

He said that "putting children or families off before they even apply" is a form of off-rolling, adding it "troubles me greatly".

Where Ofsted hear of such cases, "we will ask leaders about those questions and we will follow them up sensitively", Oliver said.

Councils have "insights" on when children moved school, moved to elective home education or were missing education, and Ofsted also looks at national data on pupil intake.

"Where we see schools out of kilter, we do want to ask leaders why that might be the case". He said there "might be very good reasons locally" for this.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Catholic school caught up in row over abolition of 50% cap

Gillian Keegan has been criticised for launching her faith school reforms at "one of the most socially and religiously segregated schools in the country".

But the headteacher of the Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School in Holland Park, London, has hit back at critics, pointing to the ethnic diversity of its student body and the high performance of its disadvantaged pupils.

Speaking at the Cardinal Vaughan school last Wednesday, Keegan announced a change to the rules governing faith-based selection.

At present, oversubscribed free schools can select half of their pupils on the basis of their faith, and special academies are not allowed to be based on faith.

According to government records, 15.3 per cent of pupils at Cardinal Vaughan are eligible for free school meals, compared with over 33 per cent across the borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and 26 per cent across London.

A central criticism of faith schools is that their ability to select based on faith makes them less inclusive.

Andrew Copson, chief executive of Humanists UK, said: "By making her announcement at one of the most socially and religiously segregated schools in the country, the education secretary couldn't have more vividly demonstrated the socially destructive consequences of her flawed policy if she had tried."

But Paul Stubbings, the school's head, hit back, saying the school did not "recognise this characterisation of our community as socially segregated".

He said: "That would come as news to the 73 per cent of pupils who are not white British, to the 41 per cent whose first language is not English, and to the 4.1 per cent of pupils who have education, health and care plans, as opposed to a national average of 2.5 per cent."

A DfE spokesperson said the school admissions code would continue to require faith school admissions "to be fair, clear and objective so no child should be unfairly disadvantaged".

ANALYSIS: OFSTED

Ofsted grades keep getting better after Oliver takes helm

LUCAS CUMISKEY

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INVESTIGATES

Sir Martyn Oliver has overseen big changes in how Ofsted conducts inspections since taking the job in January. Have grades changed too? Schools Week investigates ...

Far fewer Ofsted grades lower than 'good' have been dished out so far during Sir Martyn Oliver's tenure, new analysis shows.

But Ofsted said this was a continued "upward trend in inspection outcomes over the last few years", and is not a new pattern.

However critics have said grading standards should be "consistent" across the same frameworks – so it is not unfair on schools inspected early on.

Schools Week analysed inspection data across the first three months of this year, the latest available, and compared it to the same period in previous years. Oliver joined the inspectorate in January.

'Difficult to draw firm conclusion'

Of the 373 schools that were inspected and had a report published between January 1 and March 31 this year, 11 per cent were rated less than 'good'. Just three 'inadequates' (less than 1 per cent) were issued.

Compared to the same period last year, 20 per cent of the 503 schools were rated less than 'good' – of which 11 (2 per cent) were 'inadequate'.

The difference is also slightly larger when previously 'outstanding' schools – which did not used to be inspected – are omitted from the analysis.

Ian Hartwright, head of policy at school leaders' union NAHT, said: "It is difficult to draw any firm conclusion about different grade profiles across the selected periods, much less whether there are any indicators about the impact of the new chief inspector on the grade distributions across schools."

But it does appear to confirm a trend of better grades is continuing under Oliver.

In the first three months of 2020, prior to inspections being scrapped for Covid, 38 per cent of schools were rated less than 'good'.



Ian Hartwright

Experts said a big factor will be schools having more time to get used to the 2019 framework – which changed inspections to focus less on results and more on curriculum.

Recent rises up the international league tables also point to England's schools delivering better outcomes, too.

'Has Ofsted lost its nerve?'

Adrian Gray, an education consultant and former Ofsted inspector who has published his own analysis on the change in grades, said: "We don't really know what's going on, but the pattern is really clear: you get a better grade now than you did four years ago.

"I suppose the big question is has Ofsted gone soft, or has it lost its nerve?"

Our analysis found 16 per cent of schools inspected and with a published report in the first three



Julie Price Grimshaw

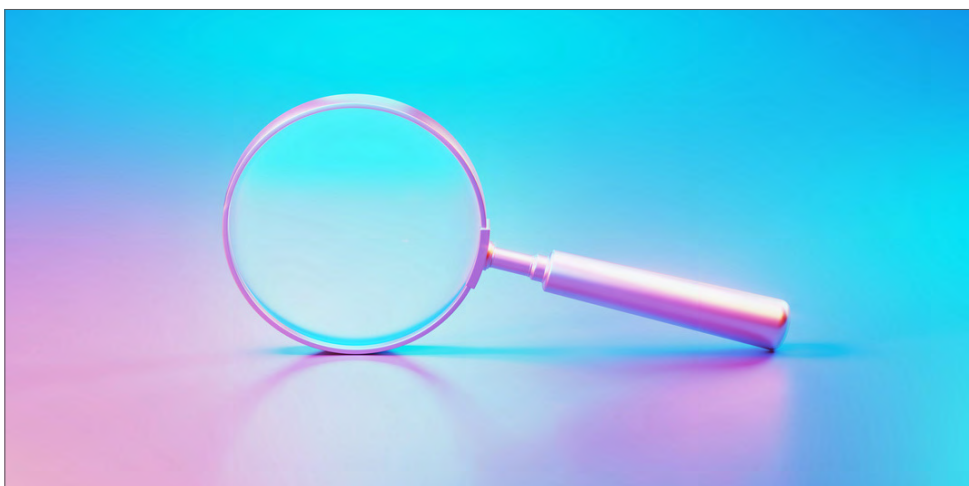
months of this year got 'outstanding'. This is double the 8 per cent in the same period last year.

However, when the analysis is repeated with previously 'outstanding' schools omitted, the difference is less severe (9 per cent this year compared to 6 per cent).

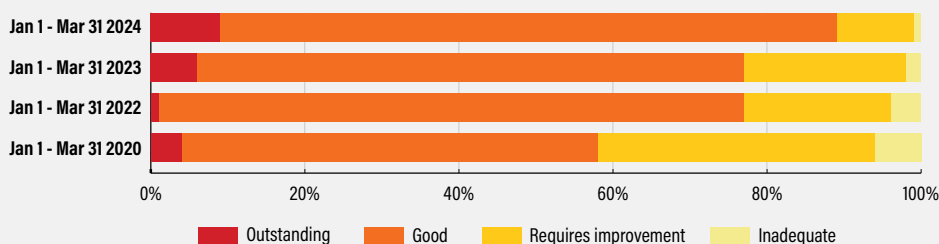
But Gray said the grading "standard should be consistent across the whole lifetime of the framework".

Julie Price Grimshaw, a former inspector and frequent critic of the watchdog, said if Ofsted "had suddenly become more lenient", that was "really unfair" on schools inspected earlier on and would make a "mockery" of the grading system.

The difference appears to be driven by primaries. In the first three months last year, 20 per cent of primary schools were less than 'good', compared to just 8 per cent this year, our analysis found.



Is Ofsted getting more lenient?



Source: Schools Week analysis of Ofsted inspection management information, excluding previously outstanding schools

SCHOOLS WEEK

Continued on next page

ANALYSIS: OFSTED

For secondaries, it was 21 per cent last year and 20 per cent this.

In primaries, 17 per cent were also ‘outstanding’ in the three months this year, compared to just 6 per cent last year.

‘Major shift’ in primary grades

Gray said the data and his own analysis showed an “astonishing increase in outstanding primaries” that marked a “major shift”.

Reflecting on the findings, John Jerrim, professor of education and social statistics at UCL, said if there was a genuine shift, it is “probably more to do with human behaviour and how inspectors might act”.

He cited the death of Caversham Primary School headteacher Ruth Perry and suggested this could be weighing on the minds of inspectors.

A coroner ruled she died in January last year by suicide, contributed to by an Ofsted inspection.

He added: “If I was an inspector, I’d have been thinking, ‘God, if I’m going to give a bad judgment here, I need to be really damn sure, way more sure than I would be previously.’”

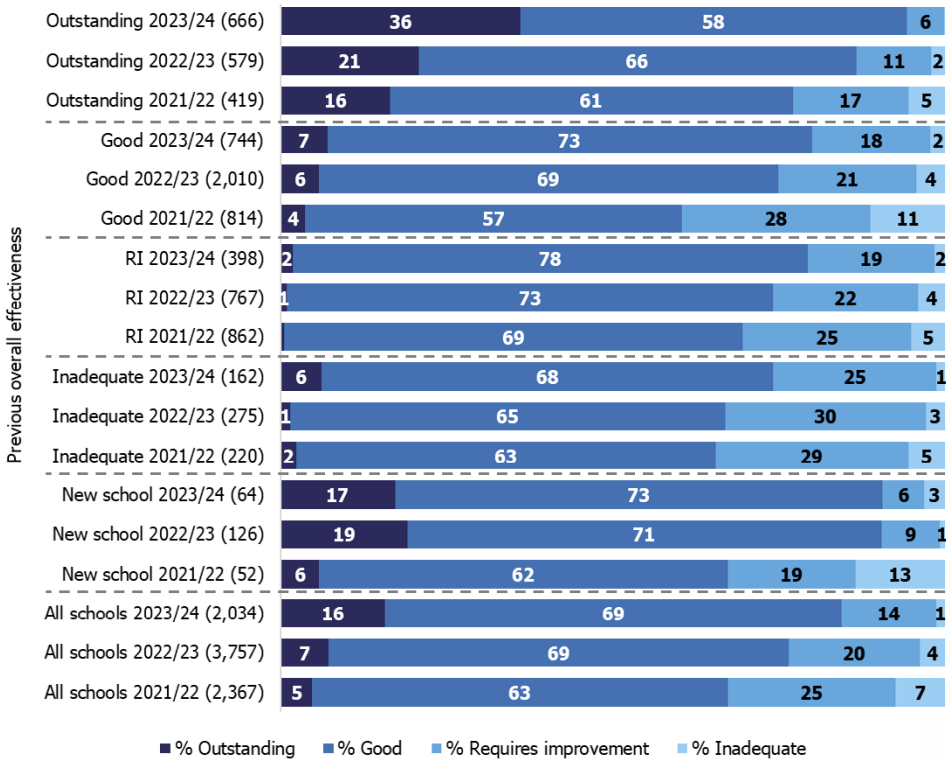
Grades rises ‘not new’

However Ofsted said any suggestion that this is a new trend was not accurate.

“We have been seeing an upward trend in inspection outcomes over the last few years,” a spokesperson added.

“This is due to a variety of factors, including our

Outcomes of graded inspections by previous overall effectiveness grade



return to inspecting previously exempt outstanding schools. This improvement is good news for children – as part of our ‘Big Listen’ we are asking parents, professionals and children for their thoughts on the national profile of grades.”

Analysis provided by the watchdog showed that 16 per cent of all schools this year were rated

‘outstanding’, compared to 5 per cent in 2021-22.

However, because ‘outstanding’ schools are now being reinspected, the overall number with the top grade has fallen overall, from 20 per cent in 2019 to 15 per cent now.

Just over a third of those schools kept the top grade after being reinspected.

LUCAS CUMISKEY | @LUCAS_CUMISKEY

Ofsted head’s former school rated ‘inadequate’

One of Sir Martyn Oliver’s former schools has been rated ‘inadequate’ after inspectors noted frequent suspensions mean “many pupils do not attend lessons regularly”.

Outwood Academy Normanby, in Middlesbrough, was graded ‘inadequate’ after an inspection in February.

Oliver was chief executive of Outwood Grange Academies Trust (OGAT) before starting at the inspectorate in January and the school joined the trust in 2019 while he was running it.

The report, published on Tuesday, said that “despite high expectations, the school has struggled to establish a positive and respectful culture where all pupils thrive”.

“Many pupils do not attend lessons regularly, owing to persistent absence, suspension from

school and time spent removed from lessons within school.

“This means that many pupils miss out on too much of their education, develop gaps in their knowledge and do not achieve well, not least in external examinations”.

It is the latest example of Ofsted criticising school suspension rates. The watchdog has been criticised before for saying some schools have “too high” exclusions, including by the government’s behaviour tsar Tom Bennett.

It is also not the first OGAT school to be criticised. In September 2023, Oliver defended OGAT’s suspension and exclusion rates, saying the trust had “some of the most difficult and broken schools in the system”.

Suspension rates nationally have surged since Covid, and are at record highs. Non-

attendance rates more generally also remain much higher than pre-pandemic.

An OGAT spokesperson said the school joined the trust when it was already in special measures.

“We know there is more to do but this Ofsted report is much improved from all previous inspections,” they added.

“Ofsted is also clear that the school is in a much better position now than before because school and trust leaders have the vision and capacity to continue to improve it.”

Inspectors praised the “commitment” of staff, the “raised expectations” the school has set, plus the “ambitious” and “well-taught curriculum.”

INVESTIGATION: PUPIL DATA

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DWP in secret deal to access pupils' data

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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EXCLUSIVE

Pupil data is being used to check for benefit fraud and pursue parents under a secret deal between the education and work and pensions departments, Schools Week has learned.

Leaders have warned the move may lead to parents "withdrawing their children from schools", amid calls for transparency over the collection of children's data.

The national pupil database holds information about everyone who has been through the school system since 2002. Sensitive data, including names and addresses, is kept for decades after students leave school.

Documents obtained by privacy campaigners Defend Digital Me show the Department for Education has received multiple requests for pupil data from investigators at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) since 2018. A data-sharing arrangement was formalised last autumn.

It will provide the DWP "with the confidence that the right amount of benefit is being paid to the right claimant, and that children included on the claim are benefitting from that award".

This will "reduce the effort to verify information and potentially identify incorrect cases, enabling DWP to make improvements to processes, [and] pursue the recovery of overpayments back into the public purse".

"It will also allow DWP to identify and prevent fraud and error in the future."

Jen Persson, director of Defend Digital Me, said pupil data should be used "for the purposes of their education and that alone", not for the DWP to "hunt people down".

She said that more than 15 million people on the database today "have already left school".

"Each time the DfE comes up with a new type of use for their personal data, they don't tell them [the people on the list] and simply ignore the law."

Pupil data has been shared with other public bodies for years. In 2012 the coalition government expanded data-sharing to include private companies.

The data is invaluable to research organisations and charities. But the sharing of data with private firms and some public bodies has proved controversial.



In 2016, Schools Week revealed that the DfE had agreed with the Home Office to share newly-collected data on pupils' nationality and country of birth for immigration control purposes.

The deal was scrapped after an uproar in schools and a successful boycott of the data collection.

In 2020, the Information Commissioner's Office ruled that the DfE had broken data protection laws in the way it handles pupil data. The department was reprimanded in 2022 after giving a firm providing age-verification for gambling companies access to the personal information of millions of young people.

Pepe Di'Iasio, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders union, said he was "disturbed" by the revelations, and warned against an "Orwellian drift towards what feels like a Big Brother state of affairs".

"Regardless of the rights and wrongs of benefit claims, the use of the database in this way may lead to some families – particularly where there are disputes over claims – withdrawing their children from schools. That cannot possibly be a good outcome."

Government records show that in 2018, the DWP made a request "involving 185 child identities to be checked against the national pupil database".

The DfE was "able to positively match one and confirmed this to DWP as a 'Y' only... No individual data was shared back to DWP."

Documents obtained by Defend Digital Me show how investigators have requested information on six further occasions since 2018.

On August 1 last year, an investigator in the child maintenance service contacted the DfE with "enquiries in connection with offences that appear to have been committed under the fraud act 2006".

They provided the name, date of birth and current address for an individual, all redacted in the documents seen by Schools Week, and asked for information on the address they lived at, school they attended and their main carer on certain dates.

Persson said the DfE "claims it is transparent, but it is a lie".

"Who knows their family's personal confidential records are in the haystack used to find the fraudulent needle?"

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, added: "The government must immediately be clear with the public about how pupil data is being used and for what purposes."

The DfE said the data-sharing agreement was "designed to provide confidence that the right and fair amount of benefit is being paid to the right claimant and any children included are benefitting".

They were unable to provide further detail beyond what is in the data-sharing agreement to "ensure we balance transparency with protecting its capabilities by not tipping off fraudsters about how it tackles fraud".

A spokesperson said the DfE had "robust controls in place to ensure that any data shared beyond the department is highly secure and only used in legal, safe and ethical ways".



Pepe Di'Iasio

NEWS: RECRUITMENT

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Trust plans for accountancy-style career path for TAs

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EXCLUSIVE

A pioneering academy trust wants to establish a “public service” higher education institution to train teaching assistants (TAs) on a “progression pathway” similar to that of accountants.

Ed Vainker, chief executive of the Reach Foundation, said the new organisation would specialise in “establishing pathways to graduate roles in schools for non-graduates in our communities”.

With huge teacher shortages, Vainker believes non-graduates in schools should be a key focus for the sector as graduates turn away from the profession in favour of flexible jobs post-Covid.

“We’ve got a real challenge in our workforce,” he told *Schools Week*. “We’re not able to find the teachers we need.

“Yet we’ve got a number of people in those teaching assistant roles, who have the skills, the experience, the expertise, to be great teachers – but they don’t currently have a degree.”

Only graduates can become qualified teachers, either through a postgraduate route for those with an existing degree, or by completing a bachelor’s degree that includes qualified teacher status (QTS).

The government is setting up an apprenticeship route for non-graduates, but that would still involve them achieving a degree and QTS.

There are around 280,000 teaching assistants in schools, workforce data shows. Last year, the government recruited 26,955 entrants into initial teacher training, missing its secondary target by 50 per cent.

Vainker said a new education degree “optimised for people currently working” would help to get more people on the path to qualifying as teachers.

But it would also be about developing better “progression pathways” generally for non-graduate school workers, to show these roles are “valued”.

“The example that we’re interested in is accountancy, where you do a series of exams and qualifications as your career [progresses], and you develop expertise, you develop your skills.

“You get paid more as you become more qualified, and it’s kind of more modularised, and that’s what we’re interested in doing in the



school system.”

He gave the example of a TA being a “specialist” after one year of their degree, then an unqualified teacher after year two, gaining QTS after year three.

“We think there’s an opportunity for trusts and schools to pay people as their career develops in this way, and as they become more expert. At the moment that system isn’t sophisticated in schools.

“We’ve moved a lot of teacher training into schools, but we think the next step is to move this wider staff development the same way.”

Other schools have developed such pathways. But Vainker believes schools and trusts are “uniquely positioned to come together” and do it at scale – making it more affordable.

He believes five or six founder schools or trusts would be needed to create the course, which would be a “single degree in education with different specialisms”. It could also have qualified teacher status attached.

While it would primarily focus on upskilling TAs, the degree could also help those working in pastoral and inclusion roles to train as counsellors, educational psychologists or speech and language therapists.

To be viable, it would need a “cohort of around 400 students” per academic year, with the trusts providing about 10 “campuses” between them, each catering to about 40 students.

Reach Academy Feltham, sponsored by the Reach Foundation, already offers two-year foundation courses for early years and special

educational needs and inclusive practice.

The courses are accredited by Kingston University London. School staff work full-time and study from 4pm until 9pm on Wednesdays.

But those taking part must do a third year to gain a degree, before looking at achieving QTS too.

“We’ve been working out how do we turn this into a fuller model, potentially an independent organisation. We’ve got the outline of a plan, and we’re looking to take the next step.”

In the short term, he said the new teacher training institution would need to secure a validation partnership with a university, which would award the degrees.

But Reach is also developing a proposal to apply for degree-awarding powers.

Vainker wants “to bring a group of partners together during the summer, to do the design in the autumn and then start recruiting students in January” for a September 2025 start.

They are also exploring how the new non-graduate teaching apprenticeship might fit into the plans.

“The challenges we are facing demand systemic solutions, not individual efforts,” Vainker said.

“Rather than expecting MATs and schools to independently develop training and progression offers for their non-teaching workforce, we want to come together to facilitate collaboration that improves the quality of provision across the system.”



Read Vainker's opinion piece on page 22

NEWS: OFSTED

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Small schools happy to see end of Ofsted deep dives

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Leaders of small schools have “cautiously” welcomed a move by Ofsted to scrap subject deep dives during ungraded inspections.

Announcing the change on Saturday, chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver said it was not “helpful to try to cram all the detail of a full, graded inspection into an ungraded one”. He instead wants the inspections to feel “more like monitoring visits”.

The change means 40 per cent of school inspections – about 3,000 – planned for next year will no longer include deep dives. The change was made after feedback from small primary schools which felt the methodology was “particularly challenging”.

Schools previously rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ receive ungraded inspections, which can be upgraded to full inspections if inspectors identify concerns.

Subject deep dives were introduced in Amanda Spielman’s 2019 inspection framework, and were aimed at supporting an increased focus on the quality of what is taught in schools.

Heads this week described their difficulties with deep dives, which included staff being in high demand and a lack of physical space to hold meetings.

Liz Harros is executive head of The Wolds Federation, formed of three small church schools in the East Riding of Yorkshire. She has been through “four or five” deep-dives, including last week during a graded inspection.

She said the difficulty was with “freeing up the staff in order to have those conversations...a lot of organisational time and thought needs to go into that.”

“I have to say to Ofsted’s credit, the inspector we had this time, there was definitely an understanding of that, and an acceptance that things couldn’t be as rigid.”

But a previous ungraded inspection was different, with “no flexibility” shown by inspectors.

“The challenge for small schools is making sure that the inspector is accompanied by a suitable member of staff.

“Often in a small school somebody needs to mediate and explain what they’re looking at with



such small numbers. And, you know, context is really key for a small school inspection.”

Her school also “didn’t actually have enough places to put people”, with inspectors based in the school office, and all other meetings moved to the staff room.

“I don’t have a hall. I don’t have a dining room. I’ve literally got the schoolhouse and two classrooms.”

Mari Palmer, head of Settrington All Saints primary school in North Yorkshire, welcomed the “really positive” change.

“I think it will just give people more time. I would say we’re cautiously optimistic about it.”

Ofsted has said instead of the deep dives it will do more “learning walks” with leaders.

The announcement has prompted some heads to ask whether the move would increase reliance on data.

School leader Josh Vallance wrote on X that “My concern about this is that the incentive for schools risks moving away from “what” we are teaching (the curriculum) and towards performance metrics.

“Focus on the latter inevitably leads to distortions, shortcuts, and problems with the former.”

Oliver told journalists at the National Association of Head Teachers conference that there had “always been a balance” and data had “always been a part of inspection”.

But it is not the “only determiner” of school performance and “you may have poor data, but

you may have an excellent curriculum which is showing the children in the school right now are getting a good deal and a great deal”.

“And so it’s bringing that balance. It’s not an either or, it’s both together.”

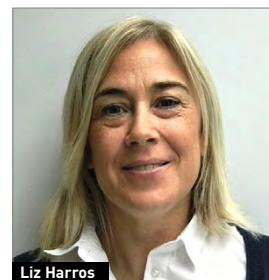
Holme Junior & Infant School in West Yorkshire had an ungraded inspection in February. Damien Bond, its executive head, said he was also taking on another school that was due an inspection.

“The concern is around the deep dive taking up a lot of resources, man hours, trying to get prepared for it. Whereas them having a chat with me looking at the curriculum as a whole, and having more of a conversation is actually better for the school than it is to focus on one subject.”

He added that staff at schools wear “so many hats”.

“My assistant head is reading lead, so she had to do the reading deep dive. She’s DT lead, so she had to do the DT deep dive. She’s also in charge of early years, which is a focus, so she was involved in that.

“With the ungraded inspection, it’s a jam-packed day for small schools with two inspectors. It’s so compressed, and in such a small school with not many available rooms, you’re having to make sure it all logistically works.”



ON LOCATION: NAHT

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From the frontline: Heads reveal poverty, abuse and funding woes

Politicians who have “sidelined” schools to instead play up populist issues must “raise their game out of the gutter of smears, misdirection, and the creation of division to simply win a vote”, Paul Whiteman has said.

The NAHT boss urged ministers to instead put forward a “transformative” vision for education, on a par with the creation of the National Health Service by Nye Bevan 76 years ago.

“Who will promise an education settlement that goes beyond talking big, and delivers great things for the future of the nation?”

Here's your Schools Week round-up of the big talking points from leaders at the conference ...

Head spat on amid ‘disturbing level’ of parent abuse

North-east school leaders have launched a “no excuse to abuse” campaign after facing “bullying” and “harassment” from parents – with one leader reporting having been spat on.

Trust leader Debra de Muschamp, the Sunderland branch secretary, said complaints have taken on “a more sinister complexion” and threats from some parents and carers have reached “a disturbing level”.

Leaders are considering leaving the profession due to the toll it has taken on their mental health, she said.

Threats range from reporting the school to Ofsted to “personally abusive” remarks such as “you’re a disgrace” and “I’m going to have your job”.



Debra de Muschamp

“All of this is often in a public space in front of other families and children, with nowhere to turn and no-one to protect us. We’ve labelled this behaviour in Sunderland – it’s harassment, it’s bullying, it’s abuse.”

The campaign aims to help leaders seek support, encourage staff to report abuse through health and safety channels, and raise awareness.

Her motion calling for the NAHT union to launch a national campaign on parental complaints was passed unanimously.

Data from the survey tool Teacher Tapp last year showed the proportion of school staff who reported verbal abuse from parents or

carers has risen from 28 per cent in 2020 to 36 per cent.

Toni Dolan, of the Barnsley branch, said abuse happens on an “almost daily basis” in the form of “email, social media comments about the school and staff, telephone conversations and, more frighteningly, face to face”.

“If you told me nine years ago that I would be harassed, threatened, humiliated and, as of last month, now spat upon by parents and carers, I would never have believed it.”

Julie Kelly, of the Hampshire branch, told the conference she had been referred to the Teacher Regulation Agency twice by “parents that are trying to get you” on spurious safeguarding complaints.

Malnutrition and mould: Schools on poverty front line

Schools are using their budgets to help families in poverty or fleeing domestic violence because of the housing crisis, heads have warned.

Michael Henry, headteacher at Barley Lane Primary School in Redbridge, said schools are seeing children coming to school malnourished, with mice and rat bites and skin conditions due to mould in temporary housing.

He said “family after family” have been served no-fault eviction notices.

“A family of four in a hostel with shared bathroom facilities. The sound of rats running around in the walls, keeping them awake at night. The list goes on for me, and for many of us in the room.”

He told how a child and her mother, both

victims of domestic violence, phoned the school from a bus shelter carrying all their belongings. They had moved from a refuge to hostels “with neither local authority involved taking responsibility”.

“We ended up paying for a hotel for the night, driving them there, and sourcing food and furniture when they were eventually rehoused.

“We are expected to make significant provision out of our own school budgets and often staff pockets for pupils who are living in bed and breakfast hotels but arriving at school with no breakfast.”

Schools Week investigations have previously exposed how schools are having to fill the

public services void.

Alison Francis, headteacher at Baginton Fields special school in Coventry, added: “We write off dinner debts, our staff buy food for students, we wash clothes because families can’t.”

This year’s Programme for International Student Assessment league tables showed about one in 10 English youngsters skipped meals at least once a week because they didn’t have enough money – above the global average.

A Unicef study found UK child poverty levels have leapt by about 20 per cent since 2012.



Michael Henry

ON LOCATION: NAHT

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Budget squeeze penalises schools that retain experienced staff

The budget squeeze is unfairly penalising schools that are successful at retaining staff because they can no longer afford to keep experienced teachers on higher salaries, a head has warned.

David Huntingford, headteacher at William Ford School in east London, said staff want to stay at his school as he has created a culture that promotes mental health and a manageable workload.

But it means that all but one of his teachers are on the upper pay scale, and he cannot set a

balanced budget.

Advice he has been given by the sector includes "reducing the number of experienced teachers and recruit younger, cheaper ones".

"Really? Is that how we reward faithful service within the teaching profession?"

"This is what keeps me up at night. The thought of having to set a balanced budget, not being able to do so, and the

thought of having to look at colleagues, some of them who have spent 25 years in the school, and to tell them that they are now being made redundant because the funding is just not there."

Department for Education statistics show that just 59 per cent of teachers remain in the profession a decade after qualifying – the lowest since records began in 2010. Ten years ago, that figure was more than 65 per cent.



David Huntingford

'Magnet' SEND schools take financial hit

"Magnet" school headteachers have warned the system is creating a "perverse situation" where being inclusive for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is penalising schools financially.

Mark Sherwin-Peddie, headteacher at Beechwood Primary School in Luton, urged government to overhaul SEN funding arrangements. Mainstream schools must contribute the first £6,000 a year towards the costs of SEND provision.

He said one local school, where the percentage of pupils

with education, health and care plans was three times the local average, had "overspent by approaching £100,000 in a year" on their notional SEND funding.

"Meanwhile a similar school close by with few pupils with SEND receives the same notional funding and has a fraction of the costs associated with employing teaching assistants and so on.

"This has created a perverse situation where success with pupils with SEND is

penalising the [magnet] school financially."

Roger Blackburn, headteacher at Ellenbrook Community Primary School in Salford, said they've become a "magnet school for specialist SEN provision which is very expensive and the gap in the funding is putting a massive pressure on everything we do".

A motion calling on government to overhaul the national funding arrangements for pupils with SEND – so that funding follows each child "in real time" rather than relying on notional funding – was passed unanimously.



Mark Sherwin-Peddie

Head had to abandon hospital treatment after Ofsted call

A headteacher claims she had to abandon getting her broken wrist cast at hospital because Ofsted refused to push back the initial 90-minute inspection phone call.

Lisa Darwood, headteacher at Selly Park Girls' School in Birmingham, told conference how she was waiting in accident and emergency to have her wrist plastered when Ofsted called in 2022.

The then 'outstanding' school had not been inspected in 12 years. Darwood's colleague asked if Ofsted could push back the phone call with inspectors to allow her to get back

to school – but they only offered a 30-minute delay, she said.

"I therefore left A&E with a broken wrist to get back to school. We did get downgraded to good but that wasn't actually the issue. The treatment and how everybody felt on the two days of the inspection was just so heartbreaking."

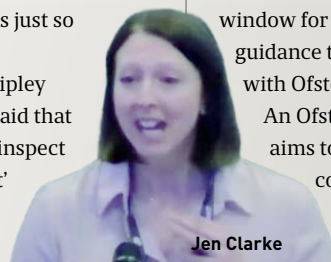
Jen Clarke, headteacher at Ripley Junior School in Derbyshire, said that while waiting for Ofsted to reinspect after a 'requires improvement' rating, she had a "massive

heart attack" last summer.

"My cardiologist said he was certain that the stress from work along with other physical factors was the reason I had something called a spontaneous coronary artery dissection."

Motions calling for a three-month time window for inspections, and employer guidance to support school leaders in dealing with Ofsted were passed unanimously.

An Ofsted spokesperson said it always aims to inspect "with professionalism, courtesy, empathy and respect. We want to keep improving."



Jen Clarke

NEWS

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De Souza: Disrupted AP pupils should be funded to repeat year 11

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

The government should fund pupils who arrive in alternative provision (AP) late or face disruption to their GCSEs to repeat year 11, the children's commissioner has said.

Dame Rachel de Souza also said funding should be provided to offer a "graduated stepdown programme of support for all year 11 leavers", amid concerns AP schools lack the resources to support the transition into post-16 education.

Polling of young people by Opinion for de Souza's office found children attending AP were far less likely to say they were confident they would get the education they wanted (53 per cent) than all children (74 per cent).

There was a similar gap when asked whether they would learn the skills needed for a good job (52 per cent vs 72 per cent) and whether they thought they would have a job they were happy with (50 per cent vs 67 per cent).

AP leaders said they "needed to support AP leavers for a period after they left school, to ensure that they sustained a positive destination", but this support was "difficult to provide".

Settings "are only funded for the children on roll, and often do not have the capacity to provide additional support to previous Year 11s", the report warned.

In response, the government should fund



Dame Rachel de Souza

alternative providers to "offer a graduated stepdown programme of support for all year 11 leavers and, where necessary, provide an opportunity to resit the final year of AP for some learners who have had a disrupted key stage 4".

As part of its AP funding review, DfE should look at how it can provide "ring-fenced funding for the work AP schools do to support their children to transition to positive post-16 destinations".

The review "should look at how to create a limited number of post-16 placements for children who have had a disrupted key stage 4, who have entered AP very late in year 11 or who have been unable to access education during

their exam years."

These placements "should enable children to resit their final year in alternative provision and to study the qualifications they need for post-16 pathways".

The review should also look at how to finance careers advisors, work experience, and an "extended support programme for all children transitioning from AP to a post-16 destination".

Ministers should also review accountability measures, to "ensure they capture the extent to which AP leavers secure and sustain positive post-16 destinations".

De Souza said her research showed children in AP were "deeply ambitious and see getting a good job or career as a priority".

"However, often they are not given the support they need to succeed... These children are every bit as ambitious as other children. It is up to us as adults to match that ambition."

A damning Ofsted and Care Quality Commission report in February found AP was in "desperate need of reform" amid "systemic issues" that lead to "inconsistent outcomes".

De Souza's report also called on the DfE to develop an AP workforce strategy and train AP teachers to become PSHE specialists. The AP taskforce programme, which provides wraparound support for children in AP in 21 areas, should be rolled out nationally.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Locations of 16 new special schools announced

The locations of 16 new special schools have been revealed, as ministers also named seven academy trusts selected to run seven other specialist settings across England.

At the spring budget, chancellor Jeremy Hunt announced £105 million in capital funds to open 15 special free schools.

The government revised that number up to 16 – and announced on Thursday where each will be.

The areas are Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Newham, Enfield, Harrow, Bury, Westmorland and Furness, Hampshire, Surrey, Buckinghamshire, Bournemouth, Herefordshire, Stoke on Trent, Walsall, Solihull and East Riding of Yorkshire

Ministers also confirmed the trusts

selected to run seven other special schools, which had also already been announced.

Meridian Trust will open a school in Gamlingay, Cambridgeshire, the Lime Trust will operate one in March, Cambridgeshire and the Fortis Trust will run one in Whitstable, Kent.

Leigh Academies Trust will set up a school in Swanley, Kent, the Orchard Hill College Academy Trust will open one in Merton, the Eastern Learning Alliance will operate one in Downham Market, Norfolk and the Unity Schools Partnership will run a school in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk.

But free schools take years to open, meaning capacity pressures will not be immediately addressed.

Education secretary Gillian Keegan

said special schools "can truly transform children's lives, enabling pupils with special education needs and disabilities to thrive in environments that meet their needs".

"I know how hard it can be for families trying to navigate the SEND system, and the creation of more brilliant special schools is just one part of our plan to make sure every family and every child get the right support."

But Pepe Di'lasio, general secretary of the ASCL union, is "worried it is too little too late".

Government data show around two-thirds of special schools are at or over capacity.

"The pressure on places is happening now and the lack of capacity in the system is the result of the government's underinvestment over the past 14 years," Di'lasio added.

Bailout council still failing SEND children

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

One of the first councils to sign up to a controversial government bailout programme over its high needs deficits has been slammed by inspectors over its “failing” services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Bury was one of the original five councils that agreed a “safety valve” deal in 2020-21. Cash-strapped councils get millions of pounds from the Department for Education (DfE) to pay off deficits, on condition they make changes to their SEND systems.

The council got £20 million.

But in a report published this week, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission found “widespread and/or systemic failings” at the council and health services – giving it the lowest rating for a SEND inspection.

Safety valve ‘not improving services’

Inspectors, who visited in February, warned the experiences of many children with SEND have “been poor for too long” and have faced “limited positive change over time”.

Experts say the findings highlight the safety valve scheme is failing.

“Safety valve agreements are a mechanism for deficit recovery and it is hard to see how this can be a way of improving service levels,” said Margaret Mulholland, SEND specialist at the ASCL union.

“These agreements mean that additional government funding is being channelled into deficit recovery rather than paying for SEND support for children – which is, to put it mildly, missing the point.”

Ofsted found education, health and care plans for youngsters with SEND in Bury are “typically poor”. Many are “significantly out of date” and “unacceptable quality”. Some plans for older youngsters still described them when they were in primary school.

The average waiting time for speech and language therapy was 75 weeks – nearly a year and a half. Children over five wait up to 15 months for an autism or ADHD assessment.

Inspectors said the concept of “waiting well” is “more of a strapline than a reality” and “very little” is offered to help children while they wait.



‘Disabled children suffer’

As part of a new safety valve agreement this year, Bury has been told to improve early years identification and intervention strategy, to prevent “the need for escalation where possible”. They were also told to target transition to secondary school.

Inspectors found “young children do not benefit from a robust approach to identifying and assessing their needs at the earliest opportunity”.

“Many professionals work in isolation and do not share relevant information with each other. As a result, some children and young people move to primary, secondary or tertiary education with unidentified and unmet needs.”

DfE said Bury’s agreement was updated and extended “due to slippage on delivery”.

Stephen Kingdom, campaign manager at the Disabled Children’s Partnership, said the report is evidence of the negative impacts of the safety valve programme.

“Whilst the government focuses on forcing councils to make cuts to balance the books, the system to support children and families crumbles. And it is disabled children and their families who suffer.”

Two safety valve councils – Bury and Bexley – have been given the lowest rating under the new SEND inspection framework.

Bexley, which signed an agreement in 2023, has been issued an improvement notice by government.

Three other safety valve councils received the

middle rating of “inconsistent experiences”, while two achieved the top grade of “typically positive experiences”.

‘Disappointing’, but changes pledged

Children’s minister David Johnston said yesterday he has “confidence” in the safety valve scheme, adding it is “really working. It’s a long-term programme where the changes will take time.”

DfE’s top civil servant Susan Acland-Hood told the government on Wednesday she was “seeing some really good progress from councils” taking part.

She claimed “a group of authorities have removed their deficits as a result”. But the government would not say which councils. Analysis of data in the public domain by expert Matt Keer suggests just one council has done so.

Bury council said improvements have not happened “at the pace required” and attributed this to a “huge increase” in requests for education, health and care plans. Waiting times have “reduced substantially” since the start of 2023.

“While this is disappointing, we welcome their recognition of the improvements made, while recognising the distance we still must go.”

They added their safety valve strategy is to tackle the deficit by 2028-29 “by reducing both the volume of demand and the costs of provision, through an improved SEND system”.

A DfE spokesperson said most plans are “on track” but “Bury have faced some difficulties... All authorities are held to account and we will always intervene where needed.”

FEATURE: MATS

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Mentoring MATs swap competition for collaboration

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

Bosses of trusts wanting to expand are being told by regional directors to get mentoring from other experienced leaders as collaboration comes to the fore in the sector.

Schools Week analysis of regional director board minutes shows numerous chief executives, chief finance officers and chairs of expanding chains have been advised to secure support since September.

The sessions have helped chief executives assess their school improvement capacity and structure their central teams.

Some have been put in touch with multi-academy trust chiefs by the Department for Education – while others were left to seek out mentors themselves.

Supporting second generation CEOs

One expert close to the advisory board process said: "It's not a judgement [on the leader]."

"We're onto the second- or third-generation CEOs with new people stepping in and their trusts are growing quite a lot, so it's about supporting that so they don't fail or struggle."

Regional director advisory board minutes show mentoring support for leaders has been recommended 14 times since September.

On four other occasions, it was included as a condition of approval for academy trust expansion bids. The trusts had, on average, nine schools.

The southwest issued the advice the most (six times) since September, while no such recommendations were minuted during meetings in London and the East Midlands.

**'From running a school to a business'**

Anthony Guise is set to launch a five-academy trust in September, having run a local authority-maintained school since 2019.

He has discussed the "practicalities of setting up and securing compliance" since being put in touch with Carol Dewhurst, of Bradford Diocesan Academy Trust.

"I'm going from running a school to running a business essentially," he said.

Northern Education Trust CEO Rob Tarn, who used to be on an advisory board, added that maintained school heads "suddenly get exposed to things they've never needed any knowledge of" when they take on a multi-academy trust.

"They have to have an external auditor, a risk register, produce monthly management accounts and follow the academies handbook.

"People can come into CEO roles not even knowing what 'scheme of delegation' means, let alone what the best one is."

It was during the talks that Guise learned he

wouldn't need to apply for capital funding, as his trust would have more than 3,000 pupils so would get it automatically.

Dewhurst will also run the rule over Guise's central services plans, too.

The mentoring has also extended to his chair. "She's going to be observing one of their meetings to see how they're run," he added.

Dewhurst's chief financial officer will also attend the interviews for the soon-to-be-formed trust's CFO position to ensure candidates "have the technical nous required to fulfil the role".

Minutes show that the leaders of two new trusts in the southwest were advised they should be mentored for 12 months "to provide [them with] positive and constructive support".

Advice on growth

Andrew Minchin, of Beyond Schools Trust (BST) in Kent, contacted Jon Chaloner, GLF Schools' former CEO, after being told in November to consult another multi-academy trust to "support the scale of change".

The DfE had approved plans for

Sarah Baker

Andrew Minchin

FEATURE: MATS

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BST to expand from five schools to 10. The pair have since had three sessions, which have been paid for by the trust.

Chaloner has looked at the trust's school improvement capacity and functions, but will also advise on the "next stage of our five-year strategic plan, [which] we're going to review and update".

Chaloner said one of the key focuses will be helping Minchin to prioritise. "Sometimes as CEO you prioritise the issue that is the noisiest at the time. But sometimes you need to step back, and talk it through."

In the southwest, Salterns Academy Trust was advised to speak to an advisory board member "to understand and learn from experience of overseeing an all-through" trust.

The recommendation was made as the regional director gave the multi-academy trust, which only consisted of two secondaries, the go-ahead to take on a school that teaches children aged between four and 16.

'Talent pooling' and central teams

Meanwhile in December, Yorkshire and Humber advisory board members suggested mentoring "may be beneficial" to TEAM Education Trust CEO Sarah Baker, as they considered plans for her to take on a special school in the region.

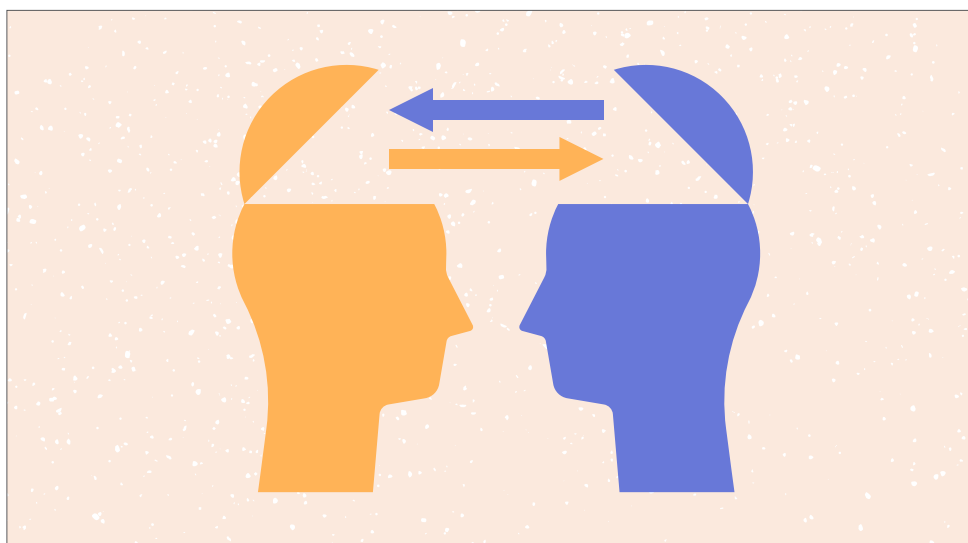
At the time the chain, which has three east Midlands academies, was also developing two satellites linked to its special school, Stubbin Wood in Mansfield.

Baker said the board wanted her to speak to CEOs with experience of "taking on multiple projects at once".

She "linked up with a CEO of a special trust in a different part of the country, so it was non-



Jon Chaloner



competitive" and the boss of a medium-sized mainstream multi-academy trust.

"[Talking about] onboarding the schools has been critical, [along with] scaling up and when you would be ready to take on the next school or satellite provision.

"It's also been about the roles you might need in your central team, what you might centralise, and how you develop your staff to work across the trust, rather than going out to recruitment."

As part of this, Baker has done work around "talent pooling", which focuses on "where the next layer of leadership will come from" within TEAM.

Chief executives are also being talked through subjects such as integrated curriculum financial planning and executive team structures.

'Real appetite for collaboration'

These attempts by regional directors to nudge leaders towards mentoring are in addition to DfE's attempts to develop the next generation of CEOs.

The 2022 schools white paper promised an academy



Rob Tarn

trust chief executive training programme as part of the "golden thread of professional development".

The National Institute of Teaching's government-backed scheme subsequently kicked off two months ago. Its 12-month course will involve mentoring from up to 25 CEOs.

Leora Cruddas, chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, said it was "very good to see the spirit of professional generosity and collaboration now permeating our sector."

There is "a real appetite for collaboration among trust leaders," she added. "We are richer as a professional community when we work together."

Chaloner added that societal shocks in recent years have led people to realise "if we work together, we go further.

"Competition means that you can only win at the expense of someone else, whereas collaboration's aim is to uplift each other.

"To have the next generation of CEOs working together, that can only be for the benefit of our children."

A spokesperson for the Department for Education said trusts sharing best practice is a "hugely important part of continuously improving the standards of education for children".



Leora Cruddas

NEWS

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School teacher trainers reveal mentor workload doubts

LUCAS CUMISKEY

@LUCAS_CUMISKEY

EXCLUSIVE

Nearly half of school-based teacher training providers doubt mentor workload will be reduced though the new teacher training framework, and a third don't think it will cut unnecessary repetition, a survey has suggested.

However three-quarters of respondents to a poll by the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT) said they backed the new initial teacher training and early career framework (ITTECF) in principle.

The Department for Education announced in January that the core content framework and early career framework would be combined into the ITTECF.

Ministers pledged changes alongside the new framework would lessen mentor workload and cut out unnecessary repetition between the two.

But just 21 per cent of NASBTT members who responded think the new framework will help slash workload for mentors. Nearly half said it wouldn't make a difference.

In January, schools minister Damian Hinds admitted mentor workload is "too high", as he unveiled a new "lead mentor role" and said Early Career Framework (ECF) mentors will have their training shortened from two years to one year.

But Jo Palmer-Tweed, chief executive at Essex & Thames Education and chair of The East of England Regional Network for Initial Teacher Training (ITT), said: "Capacity at schools is



probably at an all-time low ... and a lot of what's been implemented relies on expertise in schools which isn't necessarily there, and relies on capacity in school which definitely isn't there.

"Attempting to make sure every trainee has a consistently excellent experience is really tough because we're having to train the mentors before they can mentor the trainees."

Hinds also pledged that merging the two frameworks would get rid of "areas of unnecessary repetition between ITT and early career training" – one of the criticisms of ECF and Core Content Framework (CCF).

While 40 per cent of providers think it will help, a third think it won't.

While the survey was based on just 77 responses, this makes up a large proportion of NASBTT's 200-odd members.

Leaders said unresolved issues around delivering the new framework from September included mentoring capacity,



Emma Hollis

workload related to mapping and reshaping curriculum content, time pressure and potential for continued repetition.

Emma Hollis, NASBTT chief executive, said it is "entirely understandable that ITT providers are not fully confident that the government will achieve its targets through the new framework".

But there was some optimism. Nearly two-thirds of respondents think the new framework will improve content to help teachers support pupils with special educational needs. And more than half think it will create a more coherent journey for those joining the profession.

Providers were also surveyed on the new non-graduate apprenticeship, due to be piloted next year.

Concerns raised included the costs to schools and length of time apprentices would spend in school without qualifying, the additional strain on mentoring and school capacity, and the competition for existing routes into teaching.

Some 28.5 per cent said they did not think it would boost recruitment, versus 27.5 per cent who said it would help. Only 6.5 per cent think it will aid retention.

"It is almost impossible to navigate your way through the apprenticeship policy and red tape, and until it is simplified significantly it is generally overly complex and too expensive for providers to run effectively", Hollis added.

The DfE has been approached for comment.

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOTH

'Supersized' music hubs revealed

The creation of new "supersized" music hubs has driven a "coach and horses through the concept of partnership working" and risks creating "forced marriages", the government has been warned.

Introduced in 2012 as a new way to distribute music education funding, hubs are groups of schools, councils, community groups, music organisations and others that support education settings to develop "high quality" music education.

Ministers announced in 2022 that they would re-tender for a smaller number of hubs covering larger geographic areas. This week the Arts Council announced that numbers had been reduced from 116 to 43 (see full list online).

Arts Council chief executive Darren Henley heralded the "new generation of music hubs, which will support the brilliant work of our dedicated music teachers across the country, and help bring high-quality music education to even more children and young people in every part of England."

But Nigel Taylor, a retired music education consultant who was involved in setting up the Staffordshire and Stoke music hub in 2012, told *Schools Week* the government had "never produced any compelling rationale for the need for change".

"They've driven a coach and horses through the concept of partnership working, and in a sense created some forced marriages, which very rarely end well."

He said "money, time and effort" had been wasted on the tender process and more would now be spent on rebranding the hubs.

"Hubs are mandated to work with schools. To create the supersized hubs, the challenge is going to be to develop an identity that all schools in these huge areas can identify with."

New hub lead organisations include local authority music services and arts charities. Two areas don't yet have lead organisations, pending a re-tender.

The hubs receive £79 million in annual funding and next year will receive £25 million for instruments and technology. The annual funding amount has not increased since the hubs were created in 2012, despite high inflation.

Focus on holistic education as much as results, Ofsted told

SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER

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Ofsted should focus equally on how schools are meeting the “holistic needs” of pupils as they do on results, a new report which sets out how classrooms can be at the heart of a new Sure Start revolution has said.

Analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies showed Sure Start – a network of ‘one-stop shops’ for families with children under five years old – “greatly improved disadvantaged children’s GCSE results”.

At its peak under the last Labour government, spending cost £2.5 billion per year, but has since fallen by more than two thirds with many closed, or integrated into family hubs.

Revitalising the programme is understood to be something Labour is seriously considering, but with a bigger role for schools.

A report today by the Centre for Young Lives, run by former children’s commissioner Anne Longfield, and the Child of the North project, looks at how that might work. Here’s what you need to know ...

1. National strategy with schools at heart

The report says schools are a “consistent point of contact” for children and young people and are “well-positioned” to act as hubs for services.

It adds schools “have become anchor institutions” within many poorer areas, especially after Covid – developing “trusting relationships with communities”.

The report flags “innovative approaches being adopted which show how ‘outside school-gate services’ such as dental care, mental health services, and youth work can be brought inside educational settings”.

Using schools would also “utilise existing resources”. And wrapping this support around them would “boost school readiness, reduce absenteeism and tackle the impact of poverty”.

Longfield added “we can place schools at the heart of a fresh start for Sure Start”.

2. Ring-fence funding for hub network

The report calls for ring-fenced cash for schools so they can access the programmes, activities and services that “meet the needs of local

A country that works for all children and young people

An evidence-based plan to build the foundations of a new “Sure Start” in and around education settings



children and families”.

A national network of “hubs” in schools would provide breakfast clubs, before- and after-school provision and holiday clubs, in-school dedicated health and support teams, provision or signposting to other out-of-school youth, adult learning, and community provision.

However, this proposal is not costed. The report just states “adequate funding should be allocated”, but they should focus on the most disadvantaged areas first.

The Labour party has already committed to funding new youth hubs to tackle serious violence, alongside universal breakfast clubs and a mental health support team in every school.

3. Link up schools with other services

The report wants to “encourage holistic and collaborative working by co-producing connected services with children, young people, families, and the wider community”.

Examples include school staff and parents working with other providers such as charities, health services, businesses, and local authorities to produce positive change in their communities.

The report names schools already taking “innovative, creative” approaches to early intervention. They include the eight primary schools running the West End Children’s Community, in Newcastle, the Surrey Square Primary School, in south London, and Oasis Academy Hadley, in Enfield.

4. Ofsted should focus on ‘holistic needs’

The report also sets out how government must tweak external drivers to affect change.

For instance, it states Ofsted criteria should include how schools link with their communities, external agencies and look at “how well they attend to the holistic needs” of youngsters.

“We recommend that schools move to a model of holistic support and are judged and rewarded on this basis by Ofsted,” the report states.

They say this should be given “equal weight to academic attainment and attendance”.

Another suggestion is for integrated care boards, the commissioning bodies for health and social care, to include education leaders.



Anne Longfield



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Profile

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL

Labour's plans for tackling skills shortages starts with schools

Seema Malhotra, shadow skills minister, aims to build new partnerships between schools and employers

If Labour wins power, it will unleash a “skills revolution” by revamping school curriculums and building more bridges between the worlds of school and work, says Seema Malhotra, the party’s shadow skills minister.

More specifically, the party has promised to “modernise” the curriculum to make it “rich and broad, inclusive and innovative”, offering pupils a better grounding in both skills and knowledge.

But how might this swing back to skills work in practice?

One example is Malhotra’s enthusiasm for funding “applied learning” – a teaching model

based on real-world experiences – to revitalise maths in primaries, “alongside having fun and other learning experiences”.

She sees bringing young people closer to the world of work as solutions to disengagement.

The former shadow business minister says employers “want to be in schools earlier – in primary schools, because they know that children are making choices much earlier”.

She adds that government has a “responsibility” to “work in partnership with business”, which is “so important” for making sure the school curriculum is “teaching the things we need to”.

Feeling like you belong

Malhotra’s own workplace experience began as a little girl, standing on tiptoes to see above the counter while helping her mum serve customers in the family shop.

The family of eight (including her grandmother) lived in the flat above. Malhotra, her three older sisters and younger brother shared two bunk beds in one room.

The lack of space meant Malhotra valued open, green spaces in her local community of Hounslow.

She came to see the area – which she has

Profile: Seema Malhotra

represented as Feltham and Heston MP since 2011 – “with different eyes” thanks to her school’s local history projects. She wants to see more local history taught in schools as part of Labour’s proposals for a broader curriculum.

“When people feel they belong in a place and they’re cared for, that can often be a seed for contributing in the community,” she says.

When Malhotra was nine, her mum began teaching English as a second language and provided special needs support at local primary schools, a role she says is “significant”.

She was inclined to follow in her mum’s footsteps, but then became drawn to politics at the age of 14. She was told to “work yourself up about something” for an English assignment, and chose Margaret Thatcher.

But she still sees education as “something so important that you need to invest in”. And education was highly valued in her household; her grandmothers had both been forbidden from attending school in northern India, although her maternal grandmother attended a “secret school” until she was 11.

Malhotra went to the local comprehensive, and her parents “put everything into supporting” their children’s education.

She spent much of her parliamentary career also being the main family carer for her parents when they became ill.

Shortly after she was elected in 2011, her dad got cancer and she cared for him until he died in 2014 – the year she first became a shadow minister. She also cared for her mother who, following three strokes, died in 2022.

Work experience

Work experience was compulsory for schools when Malhotra was growing up. Her two-week placement at a garden centre was based on her passion for horticulture, which itself came from growing potatoes and carrots under the guidance of her elderly neighbours, Frank and Gladys.

Shortly after becoming the first ever Punjabi woman MP in 2011, Malhotra felt “very angry” the government was making work experience optional.



‘Communities have been utterly let down by 14 years of failure’

A subsequent freedom of information request revealed there were 60,000 fewer work experience placements in the next year. It was a policy change taken “without thinking through the consequences”.

Labour wants to make two-week work experience placements mandatory again.

Malhotra acknowledges it won’t be easy because of “employer fatigue”. Only half of pupils now do work experience, but employers face conflicting demands to offer work placements on new T-level courses and apprenticeships.

Malhotra would want to consult on the move first “to get it right”, and for her party to “work across departments on how we engage employers”.

She speaks enthusiastically about how education business partnerships – which DfE withdrew funding for in 2011 but still exist as local networks linking businesses with education providers – had been “facilitating a lot of that opportunity locally”.

“It needs to be easier for teachers to reach out to the world of work, and for industry to reach in,” she adds.

Malhotra describes her party’s commitment to “recruit and train” over 1,000 new careers advisers in schools as “really significant”.

Their role will be “to operate between our schools and the world of work, to keep in touch with what’s changing” and to “help upskill teachers”.

The importance of creativity

Malhotra’s politics and philosophy degree from Warwick University included a scholarship year at the University of Massachusetts.

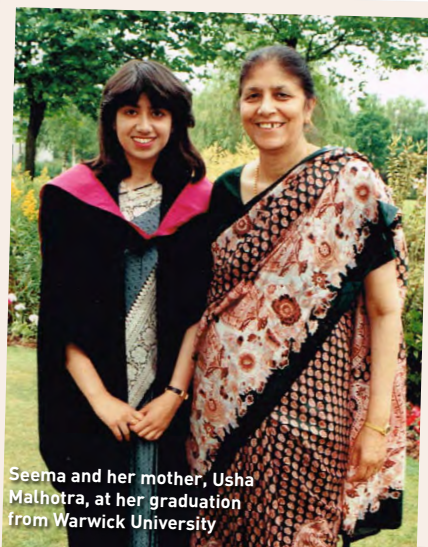
Having never holidayed abroad – “our family holiday was a day trip to the seaside when the shop closed on August bank holiday Monday” – the experience was “eye opening”.

She bagged her first graduate job as a management consultant for IT firm Accenture in 1995, “just as computers were starting to take off”.

But feeling out of her depth, she delayed the role to take a master’s in business IT at Aston University.

She sees some parallels with the “skills revolution” that she “very strongly” believes is now needed with the advent of AI.

Profile: Seema Malhotra



Seema and her mother, Usha Malhotra, at her graduation from Warwick University



Seema at a roundtable with Keir Starmer in Birmingham

'Labour wants to make two-week work experience placements mandatory'

6,500 more teachers and more mental health professionals in schools.

Rolling out supervised toothbrushing in schools (a policy that hasn't gone down well with some teachers) is "because young people with children are ending up in A&E, because they haven't had dental health care. That shouldn't be happening in 21st century Britain".

'We need optimism'

On the wider criticism of a lack of detail, Malhotra points to its industrial strategy, Start up, Scale Up Review and the Missions document as proof of the details it has published around skills.

She claims there was "not this much detail" from Labour before the 1997 or 2010 elections.

There's also wariness that Labour's ideas could be stolen. She claims when Labour unveiled its NHS workforce plan, the Conservatives "took that idea".

"There will be more that comes out closer to the election," she adds.

And there's still more to learn from overseas. Malhotra is visiting Singapore this week,

Although polls show Labour capitalising on frustration with the government's lack of direction, the party has been criticised for not clearly setting out strong alternative proposals.

On schools, the party has said it will "weave oracy into lessons throughout school", and Malhotra is keen to champion speaking skills.

She waxes lyrical on "the importance of music, drama, theatre and art", and "the links between the creative industries and our economy".

Malhotra also highlights the party's recently-launched plan for the arts, culture and creative industries which promises a new "National Music Education Network".

Labour also plans to "investigate the maths equivalent of phonics" and upskill primary teachers to teach the subject.

But she is all too well aware of the lack of bandwidth available to schools to deal with the fallout from cutbacks in other arms of the public sector. She's "angry" with how "communities have been utterly let down by 14 years of failure".

This is why Labour is pledging to employ



Seema and her sisters outside their family shop, Ransom of Osterley

believing it to be "10 years ahead of us on skills strategies". She hopes to learn "how to get ahead" from their experiences.

But Labour has first to seize power if it's to see these ideas come to fruition.

Malhotra takes "nothing for granted", but is "ready for government". However, she admits "things aren't going to change overnight" if Labour wins.

"Everybody knows that. The country is so broken ... But what we do have is hope, optimism and a plan to change what we can."

Opinion

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ED
VANKER

Chief executive,
Reach Foundation



RAJBIR
HAZELWOOD

Director,
ImpactEd Consulting



The solution to our recruitment crisis is in our communities

By pulling together, we can create a new institution to offer progression pathways for people in and around our schools and nourish our public services

In education, the NHS, policing, justice and social care, a doom loop of under-target recruitment and wicked retention challenges means staff are over-stretched and under pressure to meet multiple and complex needs. But what if we could come together to fix this ourselves?

At the Reach Foundation, we know stability, continuity and coherence matter for all children, especially those in our most under-resourced communities. But nationally, the demoralising reality is that staff shortages, high turnover and a lack of community representation in the workforce harm our ability to support those in need.

We believe schools and trusts are uniquely positioned to come together and pioneer a new Public Service Higher Education Institution. The aim of this body would be to offer non-graduates in our communities pathways to graduate roles in our schools.

The aim would be to harness the power of co-locating resources for mental health, occupational therapy, and speech and language therapy in schools. This multidisciplinary offer would then offer pathways

to developing specialist expertise across these domains.

We want to start with teaching. Schools spend approximately £4.4 billion each year on the employment of 281,100 teaching assistants, and yet there is no clear, work-based route from that role into classroom teaching.

According to The Engagement Platform, which collects data each term from all members of school staff, 25 per cent of TAs are dissatisfied with their development opportunities, compared with 18 per cent of teachers.

Some MATs and schools have invested considerable effort in designing progression pathways. These include local validation agreements with universities to deliver high-quality but ultimately costly support to small cohorts of learners.

The pilot scheme for a Teacher Degree Apprenticeship, launching this autumn, is a significant and promising new pathway. We believe there is potential to do more by offering multidisciplinary, modularised learning.

However, the funding for providers to develop the TDA pilot course for secondary maths is poor (£12,500 per provider or partnership). In addition, the apprenticeship requirements (including trainees spending approximately 40 per cent of their working week studying at university)



“ Our challenges demand systemic solutions, not individual efforts

are rigid.

We want to build more pathways in collaboration with others. What would it look like for multiple MATs and schools to collaborate on designing modular courses that would enable TAs to become teachers? Could we make it possible for non-graduates to progress through work-based learning? Could we offer them specialised, multidisciplinary pathways, with tailored support services available to them in their regions?

As the support staff job market has shifted after Covid, with more part-time and flexible working options outside of schools, would offering accredited qualifications and structured pathways attract more support staff?

What would it mean for school and trust leaders to strategically plan to recruit one, 10 or 100 teachers in a five-year period through a work-based, school-centred experience? Our current students are our future workforce. How can we engage them in this thinking and planning?

The challenges we are facing in the sector demand systemic solutions, not individual efforts. Our ability to recruit, retain and support a diverse,

culturally competent and highly skilled workforce will depend on innovative partnerships.

Rather than expecting MATs and schools to independently develop training and progression offers for their non-teaching workforce, we want to come together to facilitate collaboration that improves the quality of provision across the system.

Imagine that 2 per cent of FTE TAs started a well-structured modularised progression pathway annually. If half of this cohort progressed through the programme to QTS (with others branching off to other allied qualifications), by 2030 school leaders would be workforce planning for just over 2,800 new teachers a year, largely drawn from and committed to their local communities.

The talent pool is even larger when we include other school staff who provide pastoral support to students or sixth form leavers interested in a career in education.

If you are a MAT or school leader and would like to join the conversation, please get in touch. The power to move the dial in our schools already there in our communities.

Opinion

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JEN
PERSSON
Director, DefendDigitalMe

Schools must step up to defend families from data intrusion

Revelations about pupil data being secretly shared across government are not new – but they are an escalation schools should be deeply concerned about, says Jen Persson

The secret Department for Education (DfE) agreement with the Home Office to use pupil data to find and match family records including “to further the aims of the Hostile Environment” was exposed in 2016. But monthly handovers continue. Now it seems it’s open season to give pupil data to the rest of government too.

Another secret policy has started, this time using the National Pupil Database (NPD) to match records on demand from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Welfare benefit fraud detection is a legitimate government task, but is it legitimate to use children’s school records to do so? What’s next? Only last year the communities secretary Michael Gove suggested that the parents of pupils truanting from school could have their child benefit stopped.

It will soon be compulsory for schools to send every child’s named attendance record to the DfE twice daily. Termly for nearly everything else. How will we know if pupil data is used for more by the DWP? Who knows if their family’s confidential

records are in the haystack of 23 million+ records used to find the fraudulent needle?

The problem with secret data re-use, beyond statistics, is that there is no way to know when errors are made, or how to get it fixed if you are wrongly caught up in any operational exercise. That’s why data protection law says, bar very narrow exceptions, people must be told where personal data goes and why, and how they can exercise their rights, including the right to object.

But when the then education secretary Michael Gove decided in 2013 to give away identifying pupil data to commercial companies too, “for a wider range of purposes than currently possible” to “maximise the value of this rich dataset”, he didn’t inform families or offer any opt out. So much for the importance he placed on parental choice.

The lives of our children encoded in data are not the government’s to give away. Data is controlled, not owned, and that carries obligations to communicate to those in the dataset. Around 15 million people in the NPD then had already left school, and that number grows each year. Who is going to tell them?

In 2018, Defend Digital Me polled 1,004 parents via Survation after the



“The digital lives of children are not government’s to give away

widely reported schools’ boycott of collecting pupil data on nationality and country of birth. More than two-thirds (69 per cent) still had no idea that the NPD existed, or that their families’ personal data could be given away.

The 2019-20 Information Commissioner’s Office audit of the Department found failings in the provision of privacy information and that, “many parents and pupils are either entirely unaware of the School Census and the inclusion of that information in the NPD or are not aware of the nuances within the data collection, such as which data is compulsory, and which is optional.”

But there’s been no meaningful change, and each time the DfE comes up with a new use for our personal data, it seems they simply ignore the law on informed processing. The situation is likely to be made worse by the weakening of data protection law which is currently being rewritten by MPs,

even giving the DWP powers to get ‘signals’ from our bank accounts about receiving welfare benefits.

The named data on every child in a state-funded setting is collected only for the purposes of their education, as far as they know. This is what the law says it is for, which allows the collection in the first place. Not for the DfE to hand over to the DWP or the Home Office, or to the Merseyside police, who were given 2,136 pupil records in 2019, or to give away to create heat maps for estate agents (just one of the approved commercial uses).

Schools are joint data controllers. It’s time to speak out on how the personal data entrusted to teachers is used. If a school handed over their entire community’s records to a commercial business without telling families, there would be outcry over a safeguarding failure.

The misuse for non-educational purposes must end, and the next government must guarantee every child an opt-out.

Opinion

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DR KATE CHHATWAL
Chief executive,
Challenge Partners

Schools can redefine ‘mainstream’ but need support

Even without substantial investment, there’s plenty government could do to support our beacons of inclusion and navigate the system their way, says Kate Chhatwal

The policy and accountability framework is driving a too-narrow understanding of what it means to be a mainstream school. Parents know this from the quiet conversations at open days, where they are advised that the school down the road would be better for their child because “we’re sorry, we just can’t meet their needs”. It doesn’t have to be like this.

The best mainstream schools are beacons of inclusive excellence, offering all pupils the chance to flourish. They don’t try to ensure children with SEND are taught elsewhere. They design their provision to embrace every child.

At Prescott Primary School, for example, headteacher Steve George is seeking to “expand the definition of mainstream education”. Inspired by provision he saw on a Challenge Partners quality assurance review in Nottingham, he created “The Hive” – a space dedicated to meeting children’s short- and long-term additional needs, whether diagnosed with SEND or not.

It doesn’t stop there. The school has thought hard about how to develop

their curriculum and pedagogy, extending a play-based approach through year one to offer more active lessons, better suited to their pupils.

Others have harnessed the pedagogical power of technology. A recent evaluation of Leo Academy Trust highlighted how access to adaptive software on one-to-one devices led to greater inclusion and a reduction in pupils being added to the SEND register.

Hillside High School in Bootle has developed onsite provision for pupils who might otherwise be excluded or in alternative provision. The students have their own base, staffed by a full-time inclusion manager and higher-level teaching assistants, with lessons given by some of the school’s best staff. It required a significant investment, but one that headteacher Amanda Ryan believes is worthwhile.

Schools and trusts are also forging partnerships with outside specialists. St Paul’s CE Primary School in the Forward as One CE Trust has made innovative use of EHCP funding to meet the holistic needs of a wider cohort of children in “The Nook”. This includes partnerships with music and play therapists, as well as weekly visits to sensory and swimming centres.

Many more mainstream schools across the country are working tirelessly and creatively to cater to increasingly complex cohorts,



“ It’s not enough just to say every teacher is a teacher of SEND

redefining mainstream education as they go. At Challenge Partners, we recently launched a pilot developmental peer review to evaluate and enhance the impact of mainstream SEND provision and accelerate further improvement.

However, there is only so much schools and trusts can do for themselves. Barriers stemming from funding, workforce shortages and accountability constraints demand government intervention.

Investment across all services for young people is crucial, from schools to CAMHS to specialist therapists. Although extra funds seem unlikely to be forthcoming, greater flexibility and discretion over how money is spent could help, and even incentivise schools to attract more pupils with high needs.

The workforce challenge requires joined-up thinking across government departments. Schools need access to more counsellors, speech and language therapists and educational psychologists so pupils can flourish and teachers can teach.

A plentiful supply of skilled TAs is equally imperative. The best are

co-educators, able to share with teachers the specialist skills they develop through training and one-to-one pupil support. Yet too many are lost because their wages don’t cover the fuel to get to work.

Schools also need teachers who are properly equipped to meet the variety of needs entering their classroom each day. This means more time and focus to develop these skills through ITT, the ECF and beyond, with mandatory placements in special or alternative provision. It’s not enough just to say every teacher is a teacher of SEND. We have to foster the necessary mindset, prepare teachers for that role and support them to grow in it.

Finally, our accountability framework must incentivise inclusion and high expectations. Schools should not be rewarded for excluding needy pupils rather than ensuring their success.

In redefining mainstream schools as beacons of inclusive excellence, we can provide every child with the opportunity to thrive and foster a truly equitable education system for all.

Opinion

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Career changers could be game changers for teacher recruitment

A career change to teaching shouldn't be such a hard sell to a motivated audience, writes Nicola Davenport – so what is DfE waiting for?

The government has ditched funding for Now Teach. “Utter madness,” says its founder, Lucy Kellaway. As a late career-change SCITT trainee, I could not agree with her more. Secondary school teacher recruitment in key subject areas continues to fail miserably to hit its targets. Meanwhile, the normally buoyant primary recruitment market is also showing signs of strain. So, yes, it does seem barmy to drop the training support group that has probably done more than any other to persuade older professionals to switch to teaching. What prompted my career-flip was the chance to learn a portable new skill, and the not-unattractive prospect of future-proofing my employment courtesy of a tax-free bursary. Throw in government-funded – and grant-supported (also untaxed) – pre-course tuition with my SCITT provider, and guess what? The DfE’s teacher training programme started to sound like a massively appealing proposition. So, by this time next year, I hope

to be on the verge of gaining Qualified Teacher Status and a PGCE. I will then have a flexible, globally recognised skill that opens up a range of options, from working as a full-time teacher to part-time and supply work, seasonal marking, tutoring and consultancy. That shouldn’t be a tough sell. In my experience, increasing numbers of 50-something professionals just like me are opting to re-train as teachers, swapping high-earning industries like finance and software for a fast-track to the classroom. Yet I had never heard of the SCITT scheme until an ad popped up in my Instagram this spring. Within three weeks, I had applied, been interviewed, been offered a place and signed up. I’m already earning £175 a week on a Subject Knowledge Enhancement course to brush up my French grammar, which will complement my skills in Spanish. Others in my circle are doing the same. We all have degrees from good universities in much-needed subjects like computer science, engineering, MFL, maths and physics. Many have already paid off the mortgage and are now making the switch to teaching for motives that are philanthropic rather than financial. “Giving something back” is a



“ Mature career-changers are a largely untapped workforce

common refrain. As parents, we know our kids’ schools are desperate for staff. We see the impact on them of being taught by a frequently changing cast of often non-specialist teachers. If we can be part of the solution, bring it on. Far from being desperate for a job, we find it flattering that our skills and experience are in demand. It’s also exciting to discover a whole new career mountain to climb, although many of us simply want to do a good job in a key area of need for a few years, with no hunger for professional advancement. Mature career-change teachers come with a grounding in the real-world application of our subject specialisms, a healthy dose of life skills and resilience, and a range of interests and contacts that may well enhance a school’s extra-curricular offering. And yet we are still a largely untapped workforce. Meanwhile my current profession is undergoing radical change thanks to AI: pay rates are in a tailspin and employers exhibit a

depressingly ageist mindset. So, it’s great to hear that rather than being too old to teach, I am in fact a compelling candidate. In short, my cohort is motivated and the sector needs us. And that might be why the DfE thinks Now Teach is no longer needed. But it won’t do to simply hope career-changers find their way to schools, or that education job ads will make their way to ex-journalists and bankers. Government is going to have to invest in an ongoing, high-profile campaign to promote teacher training to mature applicants. That campaign will need people like me to talk about why they are making the switch to teacher training. It will also need greater awareness of the funding on offer and a confidence-building campaign to publicise the availability of SKE courses. Come on, government: if you’re serious about recruitment, put in the effort. Or is it time for some career change there, too?



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NATHAN BURNS

Metacognition trainer,
Mr Metacognition

Six situations all trainees should be exposed to

New teachers shouldn't have to struggle when they encounter situations that are a normal part of the job. Here are some every trainee should practise, says Nathan Burns

Exactly how a trainee teacher should be taught and what they ought to be exposed to during their training year is a continuously evolving picture. At present, for example, there are calls for all trainees to have a placement in a special school.

This week, research from Ambition Institute shows how scenario-based learning can be made highly impactful in teacher training. In particular, there are a number of key situations that our trainee teachers are not exposed to regularly – and really ought to be. Unfortunately, many are out of the hands of schools and mentors, but there are a few that are well within the control of placement schools.

Break and lunch duties

When a trainee is "let loose", one of the first things they will find themselves doing is a break and/or a lunch duty, completely solo. This can be quite daunting. Providing trainees with the opportunity to carry out a few supervisions in their training year will reduce the stress of doing it alone when the time comes.

In fact, it may actually start to make them enjoyable. After all, they provide a wonderful opportunity to get to know students outside of the classroom and to meet others they don't otherwise teach. It is also a fantastic way to quickly "make yourselves known" – perfect when moving around different placement schools.

Deliver a briefing announcement

During their training year, it is unlikely that a trainee would have to deliver an announcement to 50-100 staff in a morning meeting. However, the chances will significantly increase in their first "proper" year.

Whether it's an update about a student in a tutor group, a department-specific announcement, a question or a club that they're launching, it is something that a trainee will need to do. Tick it off during training so it doesn't induce anxiety in future.

Covering the isolation room

Another shock to the system in the first solo year is staffing the isolation room, which most schools have. This is a challenging experience, not least because students there typically present challenging behaviour – and need clear, strong rules.

Trainees should practise handling this, though clearly not alone. Can



“ These are just six scenarios, but there are more

they cover a session with their mentor either present in the room or, if they're confident, as a fall-back a radio call away?

Parents' evenings

What should a teacher say to parents? How much information should they give them? How do they make sure they run to time? We don't expect people to learn by trial-and-error in other high-stress situations, so why would we expect trainees to learn how to do a parents' evenings on the hoof?

Some prior training on the questions above would be ideal, but at worst they should sit in on at least one parents' evening while still a trainee (and, arguably, one per placement, so they can see how they vary). To make the experience even more helpful, trainees should lead on at least one conversation with their mentor present.

Supporting school trips

School trips can be a huge amount of fun, but they also come with significant stresses: roads, members

of the public, and the all-important headcount! Going out on one with their mentor is a great experience for any trainee to have, to see how staff work together to keep students safe in what can be more relaxed situations with regards to rules.

Last-minute cover

Every now and again, we all have to cover a lesson at the last minute, which requires a lot of skill. Trainees need to maintain their school's core lesson components, keep students busy, ensure they make progress and not stress that they've lost a non-contact period. It's quite the balancing act, and a good one for a trainee to experience in their first year in the classroom.

These are just six scenarios, but there are more: holding a parental meeting, leading a fire drill line-up, producing GCSE grade predictions, marking exam papers, data entry. How many can you fit into your trainee's placement? And how much will their early careers benefit from these experiences?

THE REVIEW

HOW LEARNING HAPPENS
(SECOND EDITION)**Authors:** Paul Kirschner and Carl Hendrick**Publisher:** Routledge**Publication date:** March 29, 2024**ISBN:** 1032498390**Reviewer:** Robbie Burns, Vice Principal, Bede Academy

For the classical educators of the past, one of the principles for designing a truly excellent curriculum was "ad fontes": back to the sources.

For the modern-day educator there is an undoubted, evidence-based turn in all areas of the profession; a good thing. But to avoid the inevitable biases of social media summarisers and one-page CPD makers, we must always seek to go back to the sources, back upstream to the original work of those who still influence our practice.

This is hard for time-poor educators. Unlike the classical teachers of the past, we do not sit around debating Socratically; we have books to mark, meetings to attend, parents to make peace with. We need a guide or two who can help us systematise the sources to more deeply develop our own mental models and improve our decisions, our conversations and our teaching.

Kirschner and Hendrick do this effectively in *How Learning Happens*, and that is its greatest strength: two thoughtful researchers guiding their readers to develop a stronger framework for how learning happens than would be possible if those readers simply looked up the papers for themselves.

However, this is not a textbook. Neither is it merely an annotated list of papers, or even a history of educational psychology. The writers thought carefully about the way they sequenced the research, the introductions they wrote and the comments they made. The result is a work that can be read cover-to-cover or dipped into according to need or level of interest.

In doing so, they've created a thoughtful

springboard into further research on particular themes, providing a wise and guiding hand to other sources through their use of QR codes and suggested readings.

The original works are not watered down, but the writers are conscious of the barrier created by technical terminology for teachers who may be accessing writing like this for the first time. By signposting key terms and concepts in the margins of each chapter, alongside a repetitive, clear structure, the writers have ensured that their target audience will be able to develop a strong understanding of those works.

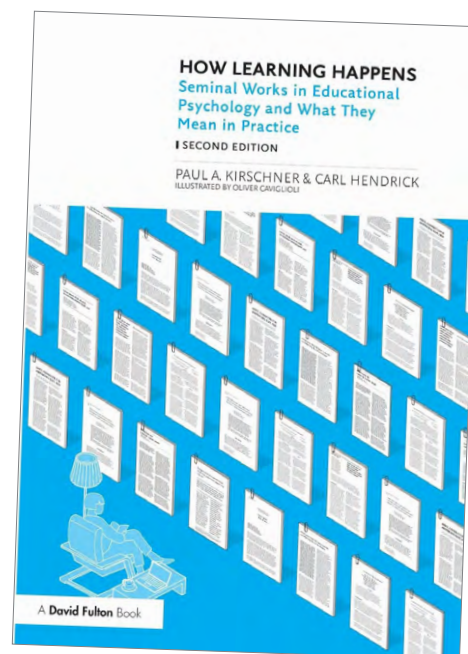
This second edition includes important additions that add greater depth. For example, it begins with the inclusion of the work of Miller, Tulving and Bartlett, which has the potential to broaden our understanding of memory and cognition well beyond some of the overly simplistic views that are seeping into school policies. A good grasp of the original thinkers in this area should support school leaders to be cautious about generalising complex aspects of memory and cognition to lesson design.

But, despite its usefulness, I have two cautions about the way this book has positioned itself.

Firstly, it is important that educators recognise that the science-of-learning movement does not encapsulate a full-orbed understanding of learning. We are not brains on sticks, nor do we fully, truly know what goes on inside our brains with any clarity.

We can learn a lot about learning from learning about the way our brains learn, but there are many aspects of the process that can't (and may never) be understood by empirical research or

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psychology as a broad discipline.

Secondly, I applaud the sections in each chapter that attempt to explain how each paper might be applied in practice, but in one fell swoop this over-reaches and over-simplifies. Some of the research is so complex, and the data so nuanced, that it is difficult to make claims about learning align perfectly with claims about pedagogy. Although linked, they are two very different things.

Is *How Learning Happens* worth reading? Definitely. Is it definitive? No.

Do buy and read this book, but tread carefully. Do not treat it as the sum total of all there is to know. And leaders, be doubly beware: to see this as the basis of your teaching and learning policies would not lead to the development of the whole child, as your vision statement requires.

★★★★☆
Rating

THE CONVERSATION LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM

**Shekeila
Scarlett**

Chair of governors,
Stoke Newington
School and
Sixth Form



IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR

As exam season commences, the importance of prioritising wellbeing is on everybody's minds. So, here's a great read from Andy Mellor, reprising his talk at last week's Schools and Academies Show, and offering some important takeaways.

One is how much the emphasis on outcomes contributes to the stress felt throughout the school community. A teacher feels stressed by the pressures of delivering, this has a knock-on effect on students, who then carry that stress, and the stress of having to sit the exams, home to their families, who are affected too.

Mellor suggests that schools create a culture where students can vocalise that they feel overwhelmed and ultimately, feel less intimidated by the season. Parental encouragement simply "to do your best" can also help to drive down anxiety levels.

The most prominent point for me was Mellor's call out for governors to check in on the wellbeing of their chief executive or head. How often, he asks, does their wellbeing reach the agenda? As a chair of governors myself, I have regular one-to-one catch ups with my headteacher.

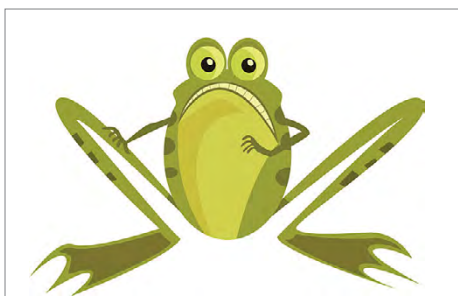
Governor hub has a great resource on

supporting headteacher/CEO wellbeing

but I always wonder, could I do more? With the huge responsibility of steering the ship, I recognise it's probably not often that our leaders are asked by the community: so how are you? And by that, we are not asking after your school or your strategic priorities or what's occurred recently. We are asking how YOU are doing?

As Mellor says, we must not forget that our leaders are human too.

SWALLOWING THE FROG



Continuing this conversation's theme of wellbeing, how often do we tackle difficult tasks and then get drawn into tackling yet more difficult tasks? I know I have, and I never considered that, perhaps, making more conscious efforts to do enjoyable things could provide the balance I needed.

Jenny Swift's article perfectly sums up the problem with the adage of "swallowing the frog" – that is, doing the hardest jobs first. School leaders, she says from experience, rarely finish their to-do list, so all tasks end up being frogs.

One point that resonated with me was a reference to Madeleine Dore's book, *I Didn't Do the Thing Today: Letting Go of Productivity Guilt*. This suggests that we commence the day by eating clotted cream: starting with something nice rather than delaying gratification could improve our mood. Although a sweet treat might not suit everyone, I do agree with the sentiment.

Having a pick-me-up (in Jenny's case, greeting children at the front gate) can truly brighten our day.

EMOTIBOOKMARK THIS

Last on my list this week, I'd like to highlight a news and blog post about work done by the University of Northampton and year 5 and 6 researchers to create ways to help children identify and track their emotional wellbeing.

One tool to come out of the research is the *Emotibook*, which covers ways students can express and understand their emotions through methods such as games, creativity and language.

The research is aimed at enabling children to become subject matter experts about their own lives. It suggests primary school students become "mini researchers" and design interventions to support the mental health of young people like themselves. Having been a peer researcher in my teens, I understand the empowerment this brings. Being able to do so at such a young age is truly incredible.

With the ever-growing mental health crisis among children and young people, tools like *Emotibook* could reshape how adults perceive and handle children's emotions. More importantly, it'll be a great tool to help children recognise and express them, and hopefully be a foundation to creating good coping mechanisms.

Congratulations to all involved. I sincerely hope that *Emotibook* becomes available for other schools across the country to purchase and use in the future.



Click the links to access
the blogs and podcasts



The Knowledge

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



How to ensure CPD has classroom impact

Dr Sam Sims, Research lead, Ambition Institute and Dr Briony Banks, Senior research scientist, Ambition Institute

Many coaches will recognise the situation. They have observed a teacher's lesson and spotted some room for improvement, perhaps around behaviour management. The coach and teacher jointly identify the part of the lesson where things began to go wrong and discuss what the teacher could have done differently. They told over the theory behind the new approach and the two of them practise it in a role play. Everything seems to be progressing nicely.

But then, back in the classroom, things look a little different. The pupils, inevitably, don't behave quite like they did in the role play. And the lesson format is, naturally, somewhat different. The teacher misses opportunities to apply what they learned and they draw on some of the focal techniques at the wrong time. The progress gets lost in translation.

Understanding how to help teachers to adapt and transfer what they have learned is a big challenge for teacher educators. All professional development delivered outside the classroom needs to bridge the gap back to the classroom. But how?

Ambition Institute has just [released a study in conjunction with Ark Teacher Training](#) that tested an approach that might help. In particular, we evaluated whether breaking down behaviour management practices and then getting teachers to recombine them in a different order, in a different role play, would help.

In theory, this recombination provides additional context and varied practice. We hypothesised that this would help teachers to apply what they learned at the right time and for the right reasons.

We recruited 144 trainee teachers to take part in an online training exercise, where they used a classroom simulator to practise short sequences of teaching. Using a simulator in this way helps us control the conditions in the experiment, and its use in other studies has been shown to be highly reproducible.

In the training exercise, teachers led the class through a transition from one activity to



another, carefully managing pupil behaviour as they went. A coach observed them and gave feedback on their behaviour management. The coach modelled best practice, and trainees practised with her.

Half the trainees were randomly assigned to receive this feedback on the whole sequence of teaching that the coach had observed. For this group, the coach modelled how she would manage behaviour in the whole sequence, and trainees practised in the same way.

For the other half, the coach gave feedback on and modelled three individual behaviour management practices separately ("decomposition"). In theory, this allowed the coach to make feedback more manageable for teachers.

These trainees then received the same professional development for a *new* sequence of teaching. The coach explained and modelled the techniques in a different order, and used them in response to new examples of pupil behaviour ("recomposition"). Trainees then practised this new sequence with her.

After receiving two rounds of professional development, all participants again practised their behaviour management in the classroom simulator – this time with a completely new teaching scenario.

We found that the teachers who received

decomposed-and-recomposed coaching did a better job at transferring what they had learned to this novel scenario than the group that did not. They were able to draw on aspects of what they had learned and apply it to new pupil behaviour in a different order. In line with the theory, breaking down practice and building it back up again helped teachers flexibly to apply what they had learned to suit their particular needs in the classroom.

These findings suggest that professional development designers should incorporate opportunities for decomposition and recombination. For example, a coach might design two different role play scenarios to support a teacher's understanding of when and why to draw on a particular technique. It's additional work, but our research suggests that it's worth the extra time investment.

This finding is also highly relevant to the new Intensive Training and Practice component of initial teacher training.

The ITAP guidance requires teacher educators to carefully break down practice and provides plenty of advice around how to do this. Our research suggests that teacher educators should place equal weight on subsequently recombining these practices in varied sequences to help bridge the gap back to the classroom.

Week in

Westminster

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

FRIDAY

Former headteacher Mark Lehain had been on an X (Twitter still sounds better) lockdown since becoming education secretary Gillian Keegan's special adviser last year.

But in true edu-showbiz style, he posted today declaring he was "breaking my Twitter silence" to inform followers he was joining Wootton Trust as executive headteacher in the autumn.

"Until then: lots still to do at DfE!" Lehain added.

Week in Westminster welcomes him back into the sector with open arms. (Although, it appears that the Department for Education *is* actually still doing something – which surprises us).

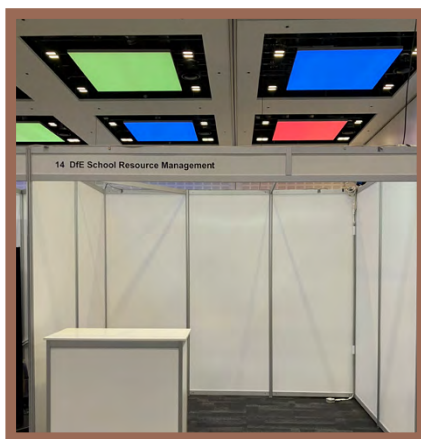
The education select committee has just got a lot more moderate.

The committee announced two new members today: Labour MPs Gen Kitchen and Jess Phillips.

The pair are much more centrist than their predecessors Apsana Begum and Kim Johnson, who are both members of the Socialist Campaign Group.

A similar switch for the Tories too in January when Vicky Ford, the MP for Chelmsford, took the place of Miriam Cates, who spent pretty much all of her time asking questions on gender wars nonsense.

While we might have a more centrist committee, fear not. Phillips is known as somewhat of a firebrand, and given fellow firebrand Ian Mearns is still deputy chair, we think hearings should still be nice and spicy.



Over at NAHT's annual conference in Newport today, Carlisle headteacher and NAHT executive member Graham Frost opened a debate on curriculum and assessment by reading out the names of every education secretary since Kenneth Baker.

"Not the shipping forecast," he joked, but "the myriad secretaries of state for education over the past three decades".

SATURDAY

Heads of cash-strapped schools desperate to get some help in balancing the books were left wanting at the NAHT conference today, with a Department for Education stand on 'school resource management' just left totally empty.

Perhaps ministers have finally accepted what leaders have long been saying – there's just little "fat" left to cut in school budgets, and any savings are now just stripping kids of a decent education.

WEDNESDAY

We nearly spat out our tea when reading The Diary in *The New Statesman* this

week, penned by former skills minister and former education committee chair Robert Halfon.

He started by sentimentally praising Great Ormond Street and his father for the help he received as a child, after being born with spastic diplegia.

But he went on to reveal: "At one time, I was in a small hospital for a few months and none other than Nadine Dorries was a nurse there.

"I can legitimately say that she is the only MP ever to see me in my birthday suit."

Blimey!

Halfon also said that "civil servants should not carry the blame for policy failures".*

"I have always felt – and experienced – that as long as a minister has clear priorities, the work that is needed to be done is done."

*DfE civil servants, print this off and keep it for insurance.

THURSDAY

Another Tory MP bites the dust. This time, erstwhile education secretary Nadhim Zahawi is stepping down at the general election.

What fond memories he will have of his successful time at Sanctuary Buildings, and what a legacy he left.

His schools bill... oh wait, that's been scrapped.

His target of all schools being in a trust by 2023... oh that's vanished into thin air.

Parent pledge, anyone?

At least he still has the vaccines!



Head of School - Great Bentley Primary School

Required September 2024

Salary L9-14



Further to the promotion of the current Executive Headteacher, Great Bentley Governors and Penrose Learning Trust Board are seeking to appoint an inspirational and forward thinking Headteacher from September 2024 to take this successful school to the next stage of its development.

Great Bentley Primary School is a one form entry school that is committed to ensuring diversity, equity, and inclusion and that every child entrusted to our care achieves their full potential in a happy and caring environment.

The school motto of 'Growing together - making a difference' encapsulates our approach to learning, and our school values are underpinned by championing the success and life chances of all children where learners are at the heart of all decisions to ensure they are happy, confident and that the opportunities provided to them through our curriculum meets their needs both now and for the future.

This is a great opportunity for the right person with a passion for developing each and every child to lead this popular primary school into

the future and build on its established vision and ethos. Furthermore, the expansion of the school with a new build and increased PAN from September 2024, makes this an extremely exciting time for the school and local community.

The successful candidate will have experience of teaching and leadership across the Primary stage. You will be responsible for evaluating the school's performance, identifying areas for continuous improvement, raising standards and collaborating with other school leaders across our trust.

Our Trust was established in 2017 and we rebranded to become Penrose Learning Trust in 2023. Working within and beyond the Trust, we aim to provide support and drive improvement in all of our schools.

We pride ourselves on our positive, hardworking ethos and collegiate atmosphere.

Closing date: Thursday 16th May 2024 4pm

Interview date: Monday 20th May and Wednesday 22nd May



As the first non-selective state school of its kind in the country, our unique partnership with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO) enables us to seamlessly blend the rigour of traditional education with the transformative power of music.

In Key Stage 3, we teach the national curriculum through our Trust's innovative Literacy for Life (L4L) programme. L4L consists of three-week thematic units, promoting interdisciplinary connections. Each form group is taught by a dedicated L4L teacher for 17 hours a week in year 7, offering robust pastoral support and ensuring a smooth transition to secondary school.

With an emphasis on both academic and musical excellence, we have high expectations of our students in all of their subject disciplines and seek to appoint staff who are passionate about their subject.

In the upcoming academic year, our school is set for more growth and development, with our first year 7 cohort advancing to year 8, the expansion of our Sixth Form, and continued collaborations with the CBSO. As we evolve, there will be many opportunities for our staff to grow subject areas, develop our pastoral structures and, most importantly, provide the highest quality teaching to enable our students to be successful.

CURRENT VACANCIES:

- **Teacher of Literacy for Life**
- **Teacher of Mathematics**
- **Teacher of Languages**

Salary: £30,000 to £46,525

Start: September 2024

Closing date: Sunday 12 May

Find out more and **apply now:**
careers.shirelandcat.net



Deputy Headteacher

The Bromley Pensnett Primary School
L8 - L12 (£56,082 - £61,882)

This is an exciting and unique opportunity for a highly effective and inspiring school leader to move this school forwards and improve outcomes for all pupils.

The Deputy Headteacher is a key Trust leadership role at both school and Trust level. The successful candidate will develop the role further and support wider school leadership in imaginative, innovative ways.

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

Once completed application forms can be emailed to:
recruitment@drbignitemat.org.

The Trust is absolutely committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults through its safer recruitment processes. An enhanced DBS check will be required for this post. All shortlisted candidates will be subject to online searches.

The closing date is 15th May 2024 12 noon.

Interviews 22nd May 2024.

Start date September 2024.



HEADTEACHER

ST MATTHEW'S CE PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY

Full Time Permanent, Start date 1st September 2024 or ASAP

Salary Leadership Scale: L17 - L23 (£69,970 - £81,070)

The successful candidate will have:

- A commitment to ensuring our children achieve their biggest and bravest ambitions.
- A commitment to the distinctive nature of Church of England schools.
- A passion for developing your team.
- A firm commitment to achieving success through partnership and teamwork.
- Excellent interpersonal and communication skills.
- Drive, ambition and high expectations.

We can offer you:

- A supportive and forward-thinking Leadership Team in an inclusive Academy and Trust.
- A stimulating, attractive and welcoming learning environment.
- An approach that supports and stimulates professional growth, with a bespoke CPD package.
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- The opportunity to make a positive difference to the lives and careers of pupils and colleagues.
- The opportunity to work in a diverse and inclusive school.

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