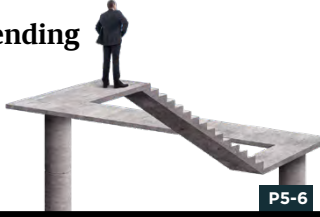




The never-ending  
PFI story



P5-6

THE SECTOR'S  
MANIFESTO

Seven policies to fix  
the SEND system



P23-24

Accountability  
has reached a  
crossroads



P25

## CRUMBLING: THE POST-WAR 'QUICK FIXES' COMING BACK TO BITE SCHOOLS



Page 19-22

## Teacher supply crisis nears tipping point as general election looms

- Departing teachers almost outnumber joiners as exodus deepens
- Profession grew by just 259 teachers this year despite high demand
- 'Stark' DfE data is evidence of need for 'urgent action', say leaders

SCHOOLS  
WEEK

## Meet the news team

**John Dickens**  
EDITOR@JOHNDICKENSSW  
JOHN.DICKENS@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK**Freddie Whittaker**  
DEPUTY EDITOR@FCDWHITTAKER  
FREDDIE.WHITTAKER@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK**Samantha Booth**  
CHIEF REPORTER@SAMANTHAJBOTH  
SAMANTHA.BOOTH@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK**Jack Dyson**  
SENIOR REPORTER@JACKYDYS  
JACK.DYSON@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK**Lucas Cumiskey**  
SENIOR REPORTER@LUCAS\_CUMISKEY  
LUCAS.CUMISKEY@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK**JL Dutaut**  
COMMISSIONING  
EDITOR@DUTAUT  
JEAN-LOUISDUTAUT@EDUCATIONSCAPE.COM**Jessica Hill**  
INVESTIGATIONS AND  
FEATURES REPORTER@JESSJANEHILL  
JESSICA.HILL@EDUCATIONSCAPE.COM**Nicky Phillips**  
HEAD DESIGNER@GELVETICA  
NICKY.PHILLIPS@FEWEEK.CO.UK**Shane Mann**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE@SHANERMANN  
SHANE.MANN@EDUCATIONSCAPE.COM

## THE TEAM

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

**SCHOOLS WEEK**

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

# Did you know about the Schools Week Daily Bell?

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

SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK | @SCHOOLSWEET

You can sign up here





## Say something, anything, about education

As our front page story on damning teacher workforce data demonstrates, education is a critical issue as we head towards election day.

The number of teachers leaving is almost greater than the number joining the profession. And this is at a time when schools say they are struggling to find the staff they need.

Yet schools received barely a cursory mention during Tuesday night's election debate on ITV between Sir Keir Starmer and Rishi Sunak.

Improvements in reading, which result from the hard work of school staff up and down the country, should rightly be celebrated, but have been achieved in spite of the many crises schools have had to face over the past decade or so.

That we are going into an election with school funding, SEND support and recruitment and retention at crisis point, and buildings crumbling around school staff and pupils, will explain why there

is such low levels of support for the Conservatives among teachers.

But Labour must not take the support of school staff for granted. The party's pledge to hire 6,500 teachers has not been clearly explained, and pales in comparison with the gap between the number of teachers we need and the number we are recruiting (almost 14,000 last year).

There is a month to go until polling day. Instead of shouting at each other, we urge the party leaders to set out clearly what they will do if they enter Downing Street on July 5.

The Conservatives say they have a clear plan. But if it is more of the same, it is hard not to conclude that the crises that have emerged on their watch will not ease.

Labour says it represents change, but it has not adequately articulated what that change will look like. It's going to be a long four weeks.

### Most read online this week:

- 1 Ofsted: Trusts 'not convinced' judgments are 'appropriate or optimal'**
- 2 Cost of living and teacher pay rises forcing cuts in schools**
- 3 Exams: Entries boost in statistics and engineering GCSEs**
- 4 Next government faces 'painful' school funding choices – IfS**
- 5 School funding top of teachers' election priority list**

[CLICK LINKS TO READ STORIES](#)

#### Disclaimer:

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

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

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

Please address any complaints to the editor.

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

SCHOOLS WEEK IS PROUD TO BE A MEMBER OF

**besa**  
BRITISH EDUCATIONAL  
SUPPLIERS ASSOCIATION

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

#### ADVERTISE WITH US

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

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



# Safety-valve councils face 'bankruptcy'

JESSICA HILL

@JESSJANEHILL

EXCLUSIVE

More than a third of councils with "safety-valve" deals to plug high-needs deficits face bankruptcy, despite being set to receive more than £1 billion in government bailouts before the end of the decade.

Since 2021, 38 councils with eye-watering SEND deficits have had to strike deals that give them annual cash injections in return for savings plans – with strings attached.

In 2020 the government overrode standard accounting rules, letting councils keep dedicated schools grant (DSG) deficits off their general revenue books, which enabled them to set overall balanced budgets.

That override is set to end in 2026, after which it was hoped councils would have eradicated these deficits.

But more than a third (38 per cent) of the 28 safety-valve councils that responded to a freedom of information request admitted they were at risk of issuing a section 114 notice – meaning they could not balance their budgets – in the next three years. This was partly driven by the escalating cost of SEND provision.

Section 114s restrict council spending to the statutory minimum, forcing more curbs to SEND services.

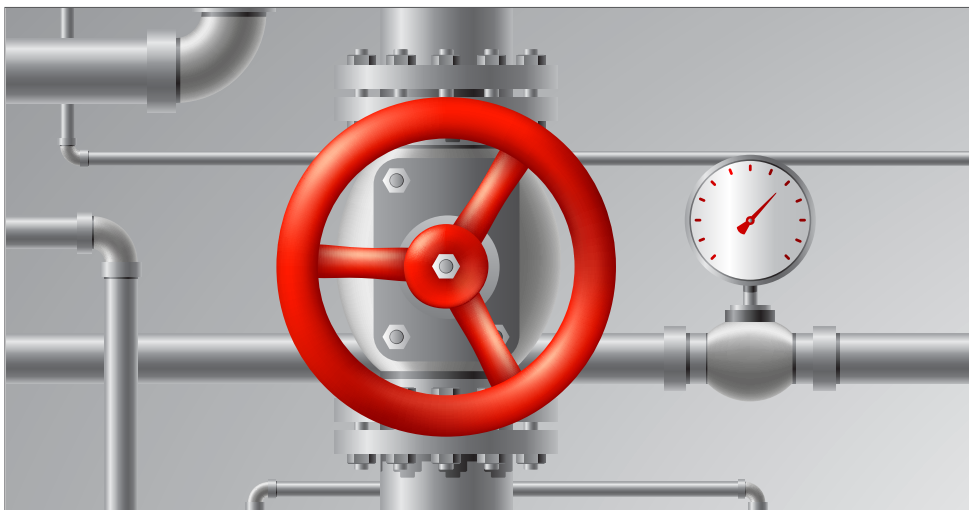
Stoke-on-Trent said it was facing "a risk of section 114 due to pressures and demands across all of children's services". It was "not on track" to balance its DSG deficit by 2025, as agreed in its safety-valve deal, with its officers in "constant dialogue with the DfE".

North Tyneside's risk of a section 114 is currently flagged as an "A1 risk" with "very high likelihood".

Bath and North East Somerset is one of five councils whose safety-valve deals are currently "subject to review" after it failed to hit spending targets.

The authority joined the programme in 2022-23, securing a deal for £19.2 million – but after overspending in its high-needs block by £9.3 million in 2023-24, "grant payments have been suspended", council papers said.

Scott Gardner, senior SEND accountant for Achieving for Children, which runs Richmond's children's services, said it had been "highlighted by the DfE as a success of the [safety valve] programme".



"However if the funding ceases there is a high risk that within five years the borough will be in the same financial position it was before [it] was introduced."

Dorset is "making progress", but this has "not yet translated into financial savings or efficiencies".

The council expected to end the 2022-23 financial year with a £10.4 million high-needs deficit, but it almost doubled to £19.7 million. In March 2024 its £24 million deficit was more than triple a predicted £7 million.

Council officers recently met with DfE colleagues to "find a way forward".

Bristol's DSG deficit rose to £58.6 million at the end of 2023-24. It received only £21.5 million in safety-valve funding from the DfE to offset this, leaving it carrying over a £37.1 million deficit into this year.

Steven Peacock, its chief executive, warned recently of the SEND bailout: "If we get this wrong, we'll be effectively bankrupt."

Councils are also missing their targets to reduce EHCPs under the agreements, as demand for SEND support soars.

More families are also objecting to council decisions. In 2022-23 the number of SEN appeal outcomes rose by a third to 12,000, of which 8,000 were decided by tribunal. Ninety-eight per cent of tribunals found in favour of families, up two percentage points on the year before.

A third of the responding safety-valve councils said the risk of them not being able to deliver their statutory duties for SEND children had risen in the previous year, with a quarter saying it had remained unchanged.



Catriona Moore

All but one of Bath and North East Somerset's three special schools and six resource bases are "full or oversubscribed". It has "struggled to meet its statutory duties" and "had to rely on expensive out of area placements".

A new SEND advice service the council is launching in September will aim to reduce EHCPs and to "focus on data".

Councils are also being hampered by disorganised commissioning of SEND services.

In the 32 Ofsted area SEND inspections since January 2023, almost a third were graded 3 (with systematic failings), another third 1 (typically positive), while almost half were 2 (inconsistent).

Catriona Moore, policy manager at the Independent Provider of Special Education Advice, warned recently that safety-valve councils' targets, which include reducing EHC needs assessments, risk councils "exposing themselves to more legal challenges than ever".



## NEWS: BUILDINGS

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

# Councils still paying PFI bills for closed schools (but some can't talk about it)

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

INVESTIGATES

A council in the north of England remains locked in a battle to end a £657,000-a-year private finance initiative (PFI) contract for a school that closed four years ago, highlighting the "complexities" that continue to plague such deals.

A *Schools Week* investigation has also uncovered documents that reveal ministers footed the bill to end such agreements during the early years of the academies programme to force moves out of local authority control.

Meanwhile, controversial gagging clauses, called non-disclosure agreements (NDAs), have been issued to several PFI school leaders, prompting transparency concerns.

## 'Power in companies' hands'

Andrew Chubb, of Project PFI, said schools and local authorities "through no fault of their own" found themselves ill-equipped to understand the complexities of the contracts, "which leaves the balance of power in any negotiations in the hands of the private sector".

"Failure to grip these contracts and manage them appropriately means it's almost inevitable the quality of service will be substandard, and costs will be far higher than they should be, to the detriment of school budgets."

Successive governments have used PFI to fund the construction or refurbishment of schools since the late 1990s.

Private companies carry out the work and maintain sites in exchange for mortgage-style payments, normally over 25-year contracts – which rise beyond inflation – before handing them over to taxpayers.

## Council's years-long negotiations

Kirklees Council revealed through freedom of



## 'The balance of power remains with the private sector'

information that it is still "working to remove Almondbury High" from its PFI contract – four years after the school shut.

The site was used for 12 months to accommodate pupils from a neighbouring school that was undergoing extensions.

In October 2021, councillors greenlit plans for officers to begin talks to bring the agreement to a halt to pave the way for a £21 million special school to be built on the site.

Documents prepared ahead of the vote noted that a "deed of variation to the project agreement" would have to be secured to stop the authority from having to continue paying its £657,000 annual unitary charge.

They noted "the monetary impact" of the contract – which runs until September 2033 – with Kirklees Schools

Services Limited.

The council said it had "continued to pay a charge under the agreed terms of the contract".

But fees "have been reduced during this period and there were buildings needing maintenance in order to protect the on-site swimming pool and keep it in use for both the local community and the school swimming programme".

"We are now in the pre-planning stage of our ambitious plans to rebuild and relocate one of our existing special schools, Woodley School and College, by using the Almondbury site to create superb new facilities."

Meanwhile, Wirral Council was saddled with PFI payments following Kingsway Academy's closure in 2018.

Council documents, published in 2021, stated the annual costs then stood at £867,500, which would rise with inflation.



Andrew Chubb

Continued on next page

## NEWS: BUILDINGS

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US [NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK)

But the authority said this week it paid the fees to Wirral School Services Ltd "on a reduced basis due to the site either being fully mothballed or only partially occupied".

### Historic contract terminations

Papers uncovered through FOI show the government stepped in 18 years ago to aid the academisation of two underperforming schools by terminating their PFI contracts.

Compensation was paid by the Department for Education "for the loss of potential income" this would have caused the PFI company, NewSchools (Merton), and its sub-contractors.

A Merton Council spokesperson explained this was done because "back in 2006, academy providers did not want to take on" PFI schools, so the DfE "agreed to meet the cost of changing the contract".

Asked how much it forked out, the department said it did not hold information going back that far as it wiped financial records "seven years after the date [they were] last modified".

In 2009, Cornwall Council secured the termination of a PFI deal for 34 schools that ensured "various disputes between the parties had settled".

The authority would not say how much was paid to end the contract or whether any NDAs were issued.

Four years later, four schools in Stoke-on-Trent, which has more PFI primaries and secondaries than anywhere in the country, struck a deal to terminate their agreements with Transform Schools (Stoke) Ltd.

Two "negotiated an arrangement with the council and DfE which permitted them to leave...subject to them demonstrating acceptable alternative arrangements" to government officials and serving notice on the authority.

The others were relocated under the Building Schools for the Future programme. A council spokesperson said "no compensation was paid for potential loss of income from these schools".

### Widespread use of NDAs

Answers to our FOI requests also reveal big variations between local authorities in the use of NDAs.

Most said PFI contracts did not feature gagging clauses, while others rejected

Merton Council has a single PFI contract covering four schools. The contract with NewSchools (Merton) Limited was signed in late November 2002 and expires in December 2029. This contract remains in full force.

However, please note that under the terms of the project agreement between the local authority and NewSchools (Merton) the council was entitled to vary the contract to remove two schools (out of the original six sites included). This option was exercised in September 2006 and the [two] schools...were removed from the contract with the support of the then Department for Education and Skills in order to facilitate their conversion to academies.

## 'Academy providers did not want to take on PFI schools'

our FOI request as it would either take too long to track down the information or for commercial reasons.

Norfolk said "all parties" to its only PFI contract "have to abide by" NDAs. This included the local authority, the PFI company, individual schools and now multi-academy trusts.

The council "does not hold information about the specific number of people this covers" but stressed "the confidentiality clauses were part of the standard PFI contract developed at the time" by the DfE.

A spokesperson added the NDAs were used "to ensure schools consult with us".

"[They] can decide whether they wish to discuss their experiences or their overview of operational experience within a PFI contract, but they are not allowed to disclose certain project agreements to third parties.

"If a school were to breach their NDA, the school and Norfolk County Council would be in breach of contract which could lead to financial penalties."

### Sponsoring MATs gagged

Two other authorities said the orders also covered external lawyers and PFI experts in receipt of "commercially sensitive" information.

Meanwhile, Worcestershire County Council confirmed NDAs had been distributed to two MATs since 2020.

The agreements are issued to sponsoring

trusts and members of the schools' governing bodies after the DfE has granted an academy order. Once signed, confidential documents are released.

Legal expert Jordan Glackin, of Shakespeare Martineau, said one of the reasons NDAs are used in the schools sector "is because of the sensitivity of information being shared and other confidentiality obligations subject to that".

"It could be part of the due diligence process when an academy trust's taking on another school.

"[In these cases] sometimes NDAs will be put in place because, if the transaction doesn't go ahead, you've given information to a third party/competitor and will want to ensure that information you have provided is protected and its use is restricted."

But Chubb noted that, when it comes to PFI, the clauses can make "it far harder for schools and councils to ensure best value is obtained from the contract".

This is because "depending on the wording of the NDA, it may make it impossible for...[them] to obtain the independent advice they need to get best value in terms of costs and service levels".

Semperian Asset Management Ltd, which Wirral School Services and Kirklees Schools Services are a part of, and Vercity Management Services Ltd, the company listed as Transform Schools (Stoke) Limited's secretary on Companies House, have been approached for comment.



# DfE data exposes deepening workforce crisis

SAMANTHA BOOTH  
[@SAMANTHAJBOTH](#)

Almost as many teachers left as joined the profession this year as the number of newly-qualified staff reached a record low, new government statistics have revealed.

The data lays bare the worsening recruitment and retention crisis as the country prepares to go to the polls on July 4. Labour has made hiring 6,500 more teachers one of its key pledges, but has said little about how this would be achieved.

School workforce data shows there were 44,002 new entrants to teaching this year. But 43,522 left in the same period, leaving a gap of 480, compared with 4,004 the previous year.

The gap was similarly narrow during the recruitment crisis in 2017, when just 392 more teachers entered than left.

The drop in new teachers was driven by a fall in the number of newly-qualified staff, now at its lowest since records began. Just 17,462 NQTs entered the profession this year, compared with a high of 26,496 in 2015-16.

Overall, the total teacher workforce increased this year by 259 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers, an increase of just 0.05 per cent, compared with a 0.2 per cent rise in the number of pupils.

Teacher vacancies rose by 20 per cent and the number of temporary-filled posts increased by 10 per cent.



Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the school leaders' union NAHT, said the "alarming" figures were stark evidence of the recruitment and retention crisis.

"We have 18,000 more pupils in our schools this year, but the number of new teachers has fallen by almost 4,000, and nearly as many are leaving the profession as are starting out in it."

The government missed its recruitment target for all teachers by 38 per cent this year. The target for secondary was missed by 50 per cent – and has been missed for 10 out of the past 11 years.

But there have been more returners and teachers who qualified more than two years before taking up their first post in an English state school.

The number of FTE teachers leaving for reasons other than retirement or death remains at a record high of 39,971 – a rate of 8.8 per cent.

However, the retirement rate is the lowest

since records began – a rate of 0.7 per cent compared with 0.9 per cent in 2021-22 and 3.4 per cent in 2010-11.

During the leaders' debate this week, Labour's Keir Starmer reiterated the party's pledge to recruit 6,500 more teachers "which will help the existing teachers who are struggling to cope with the mess that the government has left them in".

But this is unlikely to meet the growing shortfall. Postgraduate initial teacher training recruitment was almost 14,000 short this year.

The government has raised starting salaries and offered bursaries and levelling up payments in some subjects in recent years.

James Zuccollo, the school workforce director at the Education Policy Institute, said policymakers "should build on the success of early career teacher reforms, whilst going further to increase the competitiveness of teachers' pay".

SAMANTHA BOOTH | [@SAMANTHAJBOTH](#)

## Alternative provision placements soar to pre-pandemic levels

The number of pupils in alternative provision has soared by 20 per cent in a year, taking numbers back to pre-Covid levels.

As well as a rise in placements following exclusions, government statistics show increases in the numbers of pupils placed in AP because of a mental health need or in off-site placements for behavioural support.

It comes after government data showed last year how exclusion rates have risen back to pre-pandemic levels, with the number of suspensions soaring again.

Statistics published this week show there were 15,866 pupils in state-funded AP in

January 2024 up 20 per cent from 13,191 the year before. Over the same period, the total school pupil population nationally increased by 0.2 per cent.

Numbers in AP had dipped from 15,396 in 2020 to 12,785 in 2021 and 11,684 in 2022, before starting to rise again.

Of all the council placements in AP as of January this year, 80.9 per cent were because the setting was named on a pupil's education, health and care plan, down from 83.4 per cent last year.

There was a slight increase in the proportion resulting from permanent

exclusion – 2.8 to 3.7 per cent – and those resulting for other reasons, including pregnancy or childcare, up from 9.9 to 11.5 per cent.

The data also shows the number of children eligible for means-tested free school meals rose by 75,000 between January 2023 and January 2024, taking the total number eligible to about 2.1 million, 24.6 per cent of the total school population.

The number of pupils in primary schools fell by 0.7 per cent while the secondary population rose by 1.1 per cent. The number in state special schools rose 5 per cent.

## NEWS

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

# Birmingham withdraws schools from £100m IT system

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

An IT system that left leaders unable to plan budgets and threatened with bailiffs because of unpaid bills will be withdrawn from schools in Birmingham.

Birmingham City Council introduced an adapted version of the Oracle finance and HR platform in April 2022. But the system was fraught with issues and costs ballooned to £100 million, five times the original budget. The authority has since declared itself effectively bankrupt.

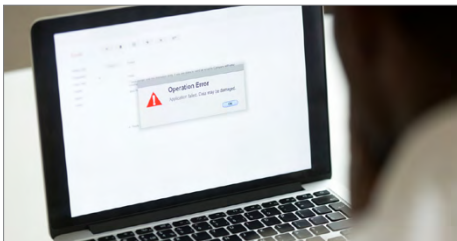
Headteachers were unable to make financial plans as the IT glitches left them waiting several months to learn the size of their budgets.

They were also forced to fork out debt-recovery costs and were threatened with bailiffs as bills remained unpaid.

But senior city councillors have now voted to move primary and secondary schools on to an alternative system in September next year.

Pepe Di'lasio, the general secretary of ASCL, said it was important lessons were learned from "this fiasco" so schools were never again put in such a difficult position.

An investigation by Grant Thornton in December revealed more than 8,000 issues were logged in the six months after the Oracle system was launched across the council.



During a Birmingham schools forum meeting that year, primary governor Pam Garrington blamed problems associated with the system for leaving headteachers with late-payment bills.

Nigel Attwood, the head of Bellfield Junior School, said one supplier "threatened to send bailiffs".

Shortly after revealing the final cost to "fully implement" the platform would be about £100 million, Birmingham issued a section 114 notice, meaning it could not meet its financial liabilities.

During a cabinet meeting last month, Councillor Roger Harmer branded the system a "disaster" that "really is a tragedy for the city". He said he was told by a school a supplier had reported being paid twice.

"Because they...felt an affinity with the school, they reported it. But I wonder if that happened in every case – [it] seems pretty unlikely that every supplier took that view."

A report published ahead of the vote on the system said one reason the authority wanted to withdraw the system from schools was because

"financial and operational arrangements concerning the...system are under extreme strain".

Any "Oracle-based solution for schools would be comparatively expensive and inefficient", which "would not represent good value for money".

The rest of the council will continue using the system while a new version is developed.

A spokesperson for the authority said town hall chiefs were "committed to working closely with the schools who currently subscribe to the HR, payroll and pensions services to support them through this transition".

Lancashire County Council has experienced problems with another Oracle system, Oracle Fusion, used for managing finance, HR and payroll processes in schools.

Among them are issues that have stopped Teachers' Pension contributions records from automatically updating.

"Arrangements have been made so anyone considering retiring or requiring information for other exceptional circumstances, such as obtaining annual allowance details, can get accurate up to date information," a Lancashire spokesperson said.

"We appreciate the frustrations of those impacted by these issues and apologise for any delays which have been experienced."

Oracle declined to comment.

JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS

## Village primary gets a second 'golden ticket' to deck out its new home

A small village primary that was handed the keys to a 400-capacity building has now been given more than £1 million to deck out its new home.

A free school was originally earmarked for the multi-million pound building in Wellingborough, but the government pulled the plug on the scheme after projections showed it would squeeze places in an area already hit by falling births.

Faced with having to mothball the site, North Northamptonshire councillors voted to hand it over this September to Wilby Primary School, which admits 13 children a year. It had 87 pupils on its books last November.

Last month they also greenlit proposals to spend £1.3 million to install internal and external furniture, fittings and equipment to fit out the

site.

Jonathan Simons, the head of education at consultancy firm Public First, previously described the decision to move Wilby into the building as "a failure of strategic planning by the council (or its predecessor)".

North Northamptonshire was created in 2022 when Northamptonshire was split up.

Simons said last month's move "compounds the initial error".

"Once again it raises the question of why the school is moving into this much larger building in the first place."

Council papers show the cash will come from the basic needs grant, which "is a formulaically allocated DfE capital grant that supports the creation of suitable school places".

Wilby's new base was funded through developer contributions and is three miles from its present site.

*Schools Week* understands the cash will buy kitchen facilities, tables, chairs, whiteboards and cupboards.

The Department for Education approved plans for the primary to move out of local authority control and into the Peterborough Diocese Education Trust in February.

At May's council meeting Jason Smithers, the authority's leader, said the allocation would "benefit...the children of North Northamptonshire".

Last year, Lynette Dudley, Wilby's chair of governors, compared the move to winning "the golden ticket".



## SOLUTIONS

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

# Happiness is ... teaching at Springwest

LUCAS CUMISKEY

@LUCAS\_CUMISKEY

Early finishes on Friday that allow staff to jet off on weekend city breaks, a tea trolley service, and banning after-school meetings and emails are among the “scalable, minimal cost” measures helping one school buck the trend on recruitment and retention.

Simon Hart, the principal of Springwest Academy in Hounslow, west London, also encourages “random acts of kindness” such as giving a plant to a colleague.

The word “believe” emblazons his office, a nod to Ted Lasso, the hit television programme about an optimistic American football coach unexpectedly hired to lead an English soccer team.

Nationally, secondary recruitment targets are missed every year and record numbers are leaving the profession.

But a third of Springwest’s workforce has been there for a decade or more, and in-house surveys suggest staff are happy.

Last year, Ofsted found the school was ‘good’ and noted “staff said that leaders are considerate of their wellbeing and have taken action to reduce workload”.

At the time, a survey of 77 staff found 96 per cent enjoyed working at the school and 89 per cent felt bosses were considerate of their wellbeing.

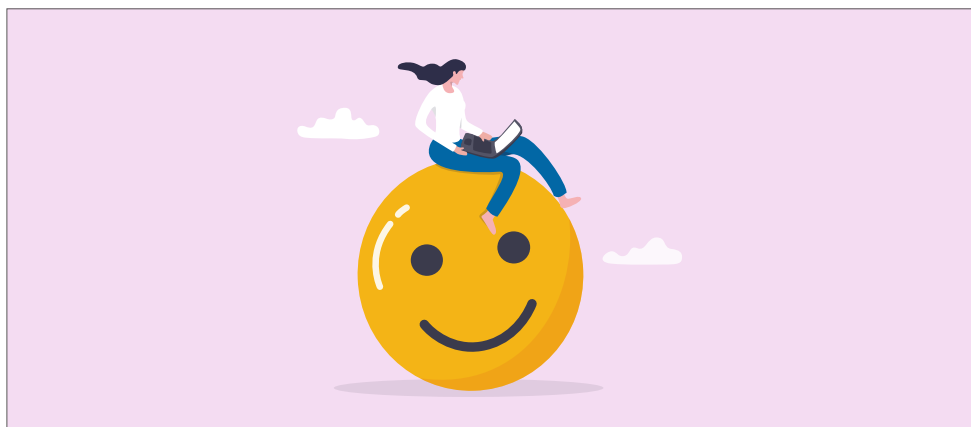
Data suggests the wider teacher workforce is less satisfied with their lot.

The DfE’s latest working lives survey of teachers and leaders found just 46 per cent of 10,000 polled were satisfied with their job “all or most of the time”.

Officials from the Department for Education’s workload reduction taskforce visited Springwest before Christmas and “were taken by the culture” and “how happy the workforce is”, says Hart.

The nature of their work means schools can’t be as flexible as other employers. For example, they cannot replicate the move to remote and hybrid working seen in many sectors, especially after the pandemic.

But some flexible working is on the rise. From 2022 to 2023, the proportion of teachers granted ad-hoc



requests to start work late or finish early rose from 7 to 14 per cent, the DfE’s survey found.

The number who reported they were given ad-hoc days off also doubled from 6 to 12 per cent over the same period.

Overall the proportion reporting having some form of flexible working rose from 40 to 46 per cent. Part-time working was the most common approach.

## ‘Zero or minimal cost’

Hart says Springwest does things that “are scalable and zero cost or minimal cost”.

School finishes at 1.40pm on a Friday, a policy he inherited when he joined the school, part of Tudor Park Education Trust, in 2020.

Monday to Thursday, school runs between 9am and 4pm. Teachers can leave 10 minutes after their pupils.

Hart “purposefully” leaves promptly on Fridays and encourages others to do the same.

He often takes a “mindful walk”, but said some teachers took advantage of Heathrow’s proximity, jetting off on city breaks.

Science teacher Helen Curtis left Springwest in 2022 but recently rejoined because she missed its “kind” ethos. She used one early Friday finish to take her son to Disneyland.

And he admits to an “ambition” to move to a nine-day working fortnight from September next year.

He also recommends no after-school meetings. “We’re all exhausted, aren’t we?”

At Springwest, staff start at 8.30am on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and at 8.20am on

Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Half-hour teacher-led group coaching sessions are held first thing on a Tuesday morning. The same slot on a Thursday is filled with department meetings.

## No out-of-hours emails

Hart has also banned staff from sending emails in the evenings and on weekends. He sends one all-staff email, collating all key messages, each morning.

In November 2023, Teacher Tapp asked 9,144 teachers what leaders should do to improve wellbeing in school.

Thirty-two per cent said leaders should lower expectations for responding to emails and working out of hours.

Seventy-three per cent said bosses should slash admin requirements, 68 per cent wanted better communication and 57 per cent called for a focus on improving student behaviour.

## Anything from the trolley?

Springwest provides free tea and coffee in the staffroom, served by a member of catering staff, at a cost of £737 a year. It runs a tea trolley service twice a term, which costs £660 a year.

“That one initiative is more popular, I think, than the Friday half-day. It’s madness.”

A daily breakfast club, free for staff and pupils, from Monday to Thursday cost the school about £20,000 from September 2023 to April 2024.

Hart says the “concept of servant leadership” underpins his approach.

He spent a “long time trying to help the senior leaders understand that really their only job is to make the conditions such that staff can be the best versions of themselves”.



Simon Hart



Helen Curtis

## NEWS: OFSTED

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US [NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK)

# Inspection plans divide trust leaders

LUCAS CUMISKEY

@LUCAS\_CUMISKEY

Labour plans to have Ofsted inspect multi-academy trusts must not be “rushed”, sector leaders have said, with chief executives divided on the proposal.

The party wants trusts inspected as part of an overhaul of the inspectorate, which will include single-phrase judgments replaced by a “report card” system.

However, Labour’s shadow education team has said little about how the trust inspections would work, how often they would take place, who would conduct them and how they would be graded.

At present, Ofsted carries out summary evaluations of trusts, batch-inspecting some of their schools, but does not directly look at the workings of their central teams.

Ofsted’s Big Listen consultation, which closed last week, also sought views on whether groups of schools should be inspected.

In its response, the Confederation of School Trusts (CST) said the change was “inevitable”, but must not be “rushed”.

Steve Rollett, the confederation’s deputy chief executive, said Ofsted would “need to understand how those inspections would fit within the wider accountability and regulatory system, what exactly they would cover, and how they can really add value without adding burden or duplication.

“It would be essential that the sector itself is involved in shaping an approach because this is where the expertise about trusts exists.”

## Who would inspect trusts?

In October, law firm Browne Jacobson surveyed 204 school leaders in England, a quarter of whom were chief executives and deputy CEOs.

Forty-nine per cent of respondents identified a lack of necessary expertise within Ofsted as the main barrier to inspections.

Paul Tarn, the chief executive of Delta Academies Trust, asked who would do the inspections. “What makes an effective trust ... we’ve only just got some guidance around that. But who’s going to make a judgment about the effectiveness?”



Steve Rollett



He claimed the current inspection system meant “many schools being judged good (which) are clearly not good” in terms of results.

“The idea you are going to take that same body (Ofsted), which is in a mess, and say ‘let’s look at MAT inspections’, well, there’s a problem. Experts on running MATs are running MATs.”

In January the education committee urged ministers to “authorise Ofsted to develop a framework for the inspection of MATs as a matter of urgency and set out a plan for building the appropriate expertise and capacity in this area”.

MPs said Ofsted would need to be “appropriately resourced to develop” this expertise.

Ofsted said it has “continually been asked to do more with less” and that its funding was 29 per cent lower in real terms compared with 2009-10, despite an expanding remit since 2005.

The inspectorate previously welcomed “the committee agreeing with our evidence that inspection of MATs is appropriate and inevitable”.

It suggested consideration should also be given to inspecting other groups of education providers, such as dioceses, groups of nurseries, children’s homes and independent schools.



Dr Jenny Blunden

## ‘It’s a good thing’

Julian Schofield, the chief executive of Esteem Multi-Academy Trust, said he’d welcome the extra accountability.

“Ultimately, it would mean MATs, get the recognition for the how they improve schools.”

He feared the alternative would be “more regulation by the DfE...and they just look at data and headlines and then they make big judgments based on not that much information”.

There would be “a degree of thoroughness and rigour” if Ofsted inspected trusts.

“If you’re totally against it, then in a sense you’re saying you’re against accountability.”

## Should schools still be inspected?

Dr Jenny Blunden, the chief executive of the Truro and Penwith Academy Trust, said its 34 schools in Cornwall seemed to be on a “very regular Ofsted inspection cycle”.

“Much of what is inspected is relatively repetitive because there is a fair amount of consistency in our practice across our schools.”

She would be “quite happy if Ofsted were to have conversations at MAT level”.

“My view is that it can’t just be layered on top of the current level of scrutiny and interrogation at individual school level.

“It’s healthy for Ofsted to be looking at what is the trust doing with regard to all schools in the trust and particularly those schools that are causing the trust most concern.”

Labour has also said it would introduce annual checks on safeguarding and attendance as part of its planned reforms.



# Teachers switch to private schools

LUCAS CUMISKEY  
@LUCAS\_CUMISKEY

Pay and conditions are making it harder for state schools to retain staff, leaders have warned, as data shows private schools have poached more than 8,500 teachers from the sector since 2019.

More teachers have left state schools to work in the independent sector than vice versa in every year since 2019, analysis of Independent Schools Council (ISC) censuses suggests.

The news comes despite a government decision to cut its teacher recruitment targets, in part because of what it says is improved recruitment from outside the state sector.

It also comes as national data shows almost as many teachers left teaching in the year to November 2023 than joined the profession (see page 7).

All 1,411 ISC schools were surveyed in January for the 2024 report. It found independent schools made a net gain of more than 1,500 teachers from state schools, down 13 per cent year-on-year.

Pepe Di’lasio, the general secretary of the school leaders’ union ASCL, said there was “always a flow” of teachers between state and independent schools, with staff moving for

myriad reasons.

But he warned government policies over 14 years had “eroded” pay and conditions and made it “harder to retain teachers in the state sector”.

“The effect of those policy decisions is also that we don’t have enough graduates coming into the profession in the first place. This means that schools are having to effectively compete from a pool of teachers that isn’t large enough to meet the system’s needs.”

The Department for Education does not publish data on the rate of teachers swapping independent for state schools.

However, annual school workforce figures published on Thursday show the number of “entrants new to the state funded sector” did increase.

The DfE defines these new entrants as those qualified more than two years before taking up their first post at a state school in England. It includes those who previously worked in independent schools, the FE sector or overseas.

There were 5,530 such entrants in the 2023-24 academic year, up from 4,747 the year before.

It comes after the DfE slashed its annual secondary

recruitment targets by almost a tenth in March, despite missing them by 50 per cent last year.

At the time, the department said this “driven by more favourable supply forecasts”.

“Recruitment forecasts for both returners, and teachers that are new to the state-funded sector, are more favourable for almost all subjects this year”.

James Noble-Rogers, the executive director of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers, said that “in some ways” it was good that the private sector wanted to employ teachers that “hold QTS and have been through the excellent ITE provided by accredited ITE providers”.

But he said this “should not be at the expense of publicly funded schools.” “The government should ensure that we have enough teachers to meet the needs of all schools.”

“Any net move from one sector to the other should be taken into account when intake targets are set,” he said.

The DfE said its targets and the methodology behind them did reflect shifting trends between state-funded and independent sectors.



Pepe Di’lasio

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOTH

## Access to counselling would ‘pay for itself’ in 10 years

Every £1 invested in primary and secondary school counselling could bring a £8 return for the government through improved job prospects and attendance, a new study suggests.

Data modelling by researchers at Public First found that universal access to counselling would generate lifetime fiscal benefits to the government of £1.9 billion against a cost of about £250 million.

They claimed the policy would start to pay for itself within the space of two parliaments.

Commissioned by Citizens UK and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), the study said the support could help the “missing middle” of children sitting just

below the NHS threshold for mental health treatment.

Public First said gains from increased employment and higher wages would account for £1.7 billion, with reduced rates of depression in adulthood saving £106 million.

For reduced truancy, the long-term saving could be £19 million and for reduced exclusions, £15 million. The report suggested 5,300 counsellors would be required to deliver the 4.4 million sessions in England.

Joanna Holmes, from BACP, said its workforce mapping data showed more than half of 19,000 members could take on an extra five clients a week. Extrapolated, this could mean 51,000 additional per pupils per week.

But she added: “There will be some workforce challenges as counsellors pay for their own training and tend to opt for courses where there is a good return on securing paid work.”

A 2020 survey found 48 per cent of teachers said their school offered on-site counselling.

A 2016 study of 329 pupils found those who underwent counselling reported significantly less psychological distress. But it had no effect on their willingness to engage with school – however, this was only over a 24-week period.

Labour and the Liberal Democrats have pledged to put mental health professionals into schools, but haven’t specified if these would be counsellors.

## NEWS: OFSTED

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

## Calls to scrap single-word Ofsted judgments – and soon

LUCAS CUMISKEY &amp; JACK DYSON

@SCHOOLSWEEK

Ofsted must embrace “far-reaching reform” that “cannot come soon enough”, leaders’ unions have told its “Big Listen” consultation.

Meanwhile, a body representing academy trusts has warned it is “not convinced” single-phrase Ofsted judgments are “appropriate or optimal for stakeholders or regulators”.

The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and Confederation of School Trusts (CST) have all published their responses to the consultation.

The survey was launched after a coroner ruled headteacher Ruth Perry died by “suicide, contributed to by an Ofsted inspection carried out in November 2022”.

Here’s what we learned from the three organisations’ responses.



NAHT boss Paul Whiteman said Ofsted “still has a long way to go to restore credibility” within the sector after “leaders and teachers have been traumatised by the inspection regime”.

“When the Big Listen reports back, Ofsted must be bold and embrace the deep, far-reaching reform the inspectorate desperately needs.”

The union said it was “troubled by premature statements made by the Department for Education – defending the continued use of inherently unreliable single-word judgments, undermining the independence of the inspectorate’s consultation”.

There should be an immediate pause to graded inspections and a longer window of warning for inspections of at least 48 hours, and for all inspectors to have experience of the school phase they are inspecting.

It is demanding “far-reaching and fundamental reform, as the dangerous inspection regime remains a risk to life for teachers and leaders”.

In the long term, “there must be a sea-change in Ofsted’s ethos, with a new framework and inspection methodology, which takes a constructive, supportive, and developmental



approach to achieve the best outcomes for schools”.

It also raised concerns about Ofsted’s complaints process and said “more must be done to ensure the inspectorate is accountable, and leaders and teachers can challenge poor inspection practice”.



ASCL said it understood the inspectorate did not have the power to scrap single-phrase judgments, “but not to include it as part of the Big Listen was short-sighted”.

The chief inspector “would have been in better position to make a powerful argument to parliament and to government for the removal of graded judgements, had this question been explicitly asked”.

Pepe Di’Iasio, the association’s general secretary, said reform was “long overdue and cannot come soon enough”.

ASCL is calling for a “report card approach to accountability, which could constrain the role of inspection to ensuring compliance against an agreed set of national standards”.

If a school failed to meet a standard during inspection, “early and intelligent intervention” could help it meet it before the report is published, it said.

Safeguarding should be checked separately through an annual audit as this “is too important to only be inspected every four years”.

ASCL also said it was “concerned that too often too great an emphasis is placed on the voices of a small group of pupils” during inspections.

“While pupil voice is undeniably an important part of inspection activity, it must always be

triangulated with other evidence, especially what inspectors see during their time at the school.”



The CST said it was “not convinced” single-phrase judgments were “appropriate or optimal for stakeholders or regulators”.

In a call for their “review and potential reform”, the confederation said: “The understanding that inspection is a snapshot in time and differing interpretations could be made risks being lost when we privilege ‘clear judgment’ over all else.”

Instead, Ofsted’s role as a regulator could require “some indicator from inspectors” when they encountered those in need of greater “support or significant intervention”.

Meanwhile, a “more sophisticated approach” could encourage “parents to be curious about schools...and to use the important but transient findings...in a cautiously informed way”.

And while the CST said there was “merit” to proposals for a separate safeguarding judgment, it warned the “implementation of this is not straightforward. Assurance must be balanced with burden.”

Ofsted’s culture “should be a significant focus of inspection reform”, the response said.

“In particular, we remain concerned about the conduct of a minority of inspectors who engage with leaders in a way that can be dismissive or insensitive.”

The organisation also warned that it “seems to be the case that the pressures of the accountability system, which includes but is not limited to inspection, have played a role in the off-rolling of pupils in some instances”.



# New government will face funding dilemma as rolls fall

FREDDIE WHITTAKER  
@FCDWHITTAKER

The next government faces a “painful set of choices” on school funding, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has warned, with schools facing stagnating cash, real-terms cuts to teacher pay and a soaring SEND bill.

Politicians looking to falling pupil numbers as a way to make savings would face having to cut staff numbers and close schools, the think tank also warned.

Pupil numbers are due to fall by about 10 per cent by 2032, Falling primary rolls have already closed and merged schools, particularly in London.

The crisis has prompted calls for school funding overall to be kept at current levels, allowing per-pupil funding to rise.

Neither of the main parties has said what it will do to school funding after the election.

Report author Luke Sibieta, a research fellow at the IfS, said an incoming government “might be tempted to cut school spending in response to falling pupil numbers”.

But realising such savings “could be easier said than done as it would likely require workforce reductions and, perhaps, school closures”.

He said there was a “growing list of pressures on school spending, which may become harder to address over time, such as the spiralling cost of special educational needs provision, real-terms cuts to teacher pay and a growing backlog of



Luke Sibieta



repairs to school buildings”.

Based on wider inflation across the economy, school funding is due to return to 2010 levels in real-terms next year.

However, schools’ costs are rising more sharply, potentially leaving their spending power 4 per cent lower in real terms than 14 years ago.

The funding situation is made worse by rising demand for special educational needs and disabilities support.

This has driven a £3.5 billion increase in the high-needs budget, which has “used up” nearly half of the £7.6 billion increase in school spending since 2015.

Spending on school buildings is also 25 per cent lower than in the mid-2000s and about 40 per cent below what the government thinks is needed to bring all schools up to a good state of repair.

At the same time, average teacher pay is 6 per cent

lower in real-terms than in 2010, exacerbating recruitment and retention woes.

Sibieta said: “Looking to the coming parliament, policymakers are caught between a rock and a hard place.”

The report found that “in principle” a fall in pupil numbers “should reduce spending needs and pressures”.

Freezing per-pupil funding in real terms “could generate savings of over £3 billion per year by 2028–29”.

However, schools’ costs were “unlikely to fall in proportion to pupil numbers, particularly in the short run”.

“There are savings to be had, but realising those savings would generally require cuts in staff numbers or closing some schools if they are no longer financially viable, which can both be hard to achieve in practice.”

The IfS also warned there was “uncertainty” around pupil number forecasts “when looking to the medium term”, and warned falls would “not be even across the country”.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

## Cost of living forcing heads to make spending cuts

The increased cost of living and teacher pay rises are the “main drivers” forcing schools to make cuts, with falling numbers hitting primaries even harder, new research suggests.

A report by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) found large increases in the proportion of school staff reporting problems accessing the mental health and special educational needs support their children need.

It also revealed schools had a “significant” number of pupils needing additional financial and welfare support, with many providing free school meals to non-eligible youngsters. This prompted a call for the earnings threshold to

rise.

The research, based on online surveys of 884 teachers and 398 senior leaders, sheds further light on the crisis faced by headteachers as they have less money to help the increasing numbers of children needing support.

The study found that only about one in ten staff reported not making cuts to any areas of their provision this academic year.

About two-thirds of primary and secondary school leaders said cost-of-living pressures were a main driver of spending cuts this year. About the same proportion said teacher pay was top of the list.

Schools have cut learning resources,

targeted support and the number of teachers, teaching assistants or their working hours.

Cuts to building maintenance were reported by 53 per cent of primary staff and 32 per cent of secondary staff.

The NFER said this was “particularly concerning in the context of the recent reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) crisis”.

About four in 10 primary teachers reported that the number of pupils coming in without adequate clothing had increased this year. About a third also saw increases in the number of children regularly arriving hungry or without books or equipment.

## Advertorial

# HOW CAN WE PREPARE LEARNERS FOR THEIR FUTURE IN AN EVER-CHANGING WORLD?

I'm sure you would agree that change is happening in the vocational education sector – and in the world of skills and work generally – at an unprecedented pace.

As Senior Product Director for Vocational Qualifications here at Pearson, I was actively engaged in designing our new BTEC 2025 (AAQ) qualifications. Our insight and data on the future of skills tells us that if we are to give learners the best chance of finding their brightest and best future, we must think differently about how we evolve and update vocational qualifications to reflect the changing landscape.

BTEC qualifications have existed for over 40 years and over that time we have worked with educators, HEIs and professional bodies to evolve the qualifications to ensure they remain current and future-facing. I know our college and school partners have always taken incredibly seriously their responsibility to ensure learners are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to thrive in an ever-changing world.

## Transferable skills: All together now

According to our [Pearson Skills Outlook 2022 research](#), while technical skills remain highly valued, the top five most sought-after skills by employers are all human skills. These include communication, collaboration, attention to detail, leadership, and customer service.

Transferable skills are essential for a changing workforce and bring about personal and social benefits for individuals and society. However, there is a gap between the skills that employers seek and the skills that graduates possess. This highlights the need for an approach to developing transferable skills that goes beyond just aligning skills to the curriculum.

In response to this insight, we have identified

transferable skills as one of the three critical skill areas and have integrated them into all our new BTEC qualifications.

## Digital Skills: For the connected world

In addition to transferable skills, digital skills are essential for effectively operating in an increasingly digital and technology driven planet. However, the digital skills gap is widening, with over 80% of all jobs advertised in the UK now requiring skills that over half of the UK's workforce lacks \*Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index 2020

To address this gap, we have integrated digital skills into our new BTEC National qualifications

## Sustainability: Learning that supports our planet

Despite the growing importance of sustainability education, only a small percentage of FE students are enrolled in qualifications with significant sustainability content.

At Pearson, we are responding by incorporating sustainability education throughout all our new BTEC National qualifications. We have used the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals as a frame of reference and worked closely with sector experts on this.

## Putting skills front and center

Our [Pearson Skills Outlook 2022 research](#) has given us the opportunity to embed these all important human skills into our most recent qualification developments. The current Level 3 reforms have meant that we have embedded these in our new BTEC 2025 (AAQ) qualifications should any changes be made.

By focusing their curriculums on transferable skills, digital skills, and sustainability, colleges



**Donna Ford Clarke, Senior Product Director, Pearson PLC**

and schools can be confident that learners will have the knowledge, skills and behaviours to thrive in the rapidly changing world we are all navigating. My sincere hope is that, using the very latest insight and research, together we can deliver future-proofed vocational qualifications that properly prepare learners – helping them to flourish no matter how fast the world changes.



**Explore our new approved Level 3 BTECs**

## NEWS: ELECTION

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

# Keegan keeps teacher pay offer under wraps

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

The government will not publish its response to recommendations on teacher pay before the election on July 4, Gillian Keegan has said.

In a letter to unions, seen by *Schools Week*, the education secretary said “all government decisions, including a response to the [School Teachers’ Review Body’s] recommendations, will need to be carefully considered in light of the sensitivity of the pre-election period”.

“The government will publish its response in due course, but will not be able to do so during the pre-election period.”

Union leaders called on the government to “immediately” publish its pay and funding offer shortly before Rishi Sunak called the election last month.

Ministers had pledged to speed up the pay-setting process. In recent years announcements have come right at the end of the summer term, throwing school budget-setting into turmoil.

But the early July election date prompted fears that the decision could be left up to whoever forms the next government as the pre-election “purdah” period, which began on May 25, bans most announcements.

Those fears have been realised, leaving a

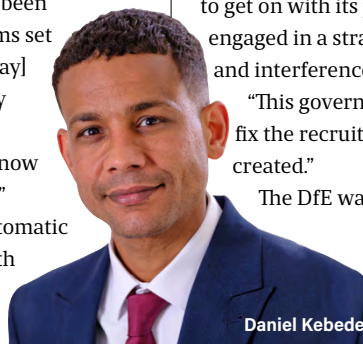


potential Labour government to face a tough decision that could put it on an immediate collision course with unions.

Daniel Kebede, the general secretary of the NEU, accused Keegan of a “shameful abdication of duty”.

“The STRB process should have been concluded by now, as per the terms set by Keegan following last year’s [pay] dispute. School leaders absolutely need to know what pay award to budget for. Teachers deserve to know what pay to expect in September.”

He said the conduct was “symptomatic of a failed government, in its death throes, that has spent 14 years



Daniel Kebede

eroding comprehensive education”.

“This is an unbelievable act of cowardice in leaving the issue of teacher pay in the in-tray for a new government. The STRB report has been on Keegan’s desk for a fortnight. There is no excuse to not have published it in full.”

Pepe Di’Iasio, the general secretary of ASCL, said it was “extremely frustrating because it means a long delay before schools have any degree of certainty over their costs next year”.

“Schools just cannot plan their budgets under these circumstances.”

Paul Whiteman, of the NAHT, said it was “disrespectful to the profession to withhold this information, and the government should have published it before we entered the pre-election period”.

And Patrick Roach, leader of the NASUWT, said “instead of allowing the pay review body to get on with its job, the government has engaged in a strategy of delay, stonewalling and interference”.

“This government has run out of time to fix the recruitment and retention crisis it created.”

The DfE was approached for comment.

JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS

## Election delays release of academy handbook

School leaders have been warned that publication of the government’s updated academy trust handbook (ATH) will be “delayed until after the election”.

In a letter to chief executives, David Withey, the chief executive of ESFA, said the vital guidance would be released after the country goes to the polls on July 4 as any changes would require ministerial approval.

New versions of the document – which trusts must comply with or risk breaching their funding agreements – are usually published before the end of the summer term.

However, Withey stressed that the ESFA would provide leaders “with an update at the earliest opportunity”.



Baroness Barran

“Given the election announcement, the publication of the handbook will now be delayed.

“The ESFA aims to publish an updated academy trust handbook for the new academic year at the earliest opportunity in order to provide the sector with certainty about our requirements around financial oversight and compliance.”

He also said any updates to the handbook would require ministerial approval. The ESFA “must pause on communicating anything new or novel, and on most of our external engagement activities” in the lead up to the vote.

The DfE rebranded the academies financial handbook as

the ATH in June 2021, with ministers dubbing it a “one-stop shop” for trust leaders.

But the following year officials apologised for publishing the handbook in August, giving schools just days to digest its contents before it took effect.

That edition contained few reforms, potentially reflecting the political limbo Whitehall was in before Liz Truss’s move into Downing Street.

The current version was published last July, before coming into force the following September.

Baroness Barran, the academies minister, said at the time the 62-page handbook was “clearer and more concise” to “provide more clarity on the requirements of academy trusts”. It was 78 pages.



## NEWS IN BRIEF

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US [NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK)

## Lib Dems pledge more free school meals

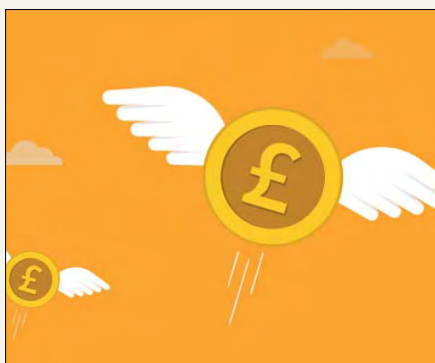
Liberal Democrat plans to extend free school meals to all children in poverty risk a "two-tier pupil premium system" because schools would not initially receive a funding boost.

The party has said it will raise the earnings threshold for free meals from £7,400 to £20,000, expanding eligibility to 900,000 pupils. It will provide £500 million to cover the additional meals.

Schools currently receive pupil premium funding of between £1,050 and £1,480 for each pupil eligible for means-tested free school meals at any point in the previous six years.

But the Lib Dems have said this would not initially be the case for the 900,000 additional pupils because of the proposed threshold increase. It would expand the pupil premium to those pupils "when the public finances allow".

Schools Week analysis estimates the additional pupil premium funding would cost



at least £1.3 billion.

School food campaigner Andy Jolley pointed out that the pupil premium was a "coalition policy created to boost outcomes for low income pupils".

"Creating a two-tier pupil premium system would seem to undermine its whole purpose."

[Full story here](#)


## Trust wants more cash for poorer schools

The next government should "rebalance" funding back towards schools with the poorest intakes, extend and increase pupil premium funding and reinstate cash for tutoring, a social mobility charity has said.

The Sutton Trust has published a report that also calls for the extension of free school meals to all families claiming universal credit, and for schools to be forced to prioritise poorer children in admissions.

Successive governments in recent years have used the national funding formula in an attempt to address historic underfunding of some better-off areas of England.

The Sutton Trust said the next government should reform the formula to "rebalance funding back towards schools serving the most disadvantaged communities, with a specific element reflecting persistent disadvantage".

Pupil premium funding, handed to schools for any pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the previous six years, has not kept pace with inflation.

Real-terms cuts to pupil premium funding should be reversed, restoring funding to 2014-15 levels by the end of the next parliament, the report said.

[Full story here](#)

## Statistics attracts more pupils

GCSEs in statistics and engineering have become more popular this year, while fewer pupils are taking citizenship and performing arts.

At the same time, entries rose for A-levels in further maths, physics and computing, but dropped in sociology and drama.

Provisional entry statistics for GCSEs and A-levels published by exam regulator Ofqual show the biggest jumps at GCSE were in statistics (20.3 per cent) and engineering (17.4 per cent).

Entries to citizenship dropped 3.9 per cent, performing/expressive arts 3.1 per cent and drama 0.8 per cent.

At A-level, entries to further maths increased by 19.8 per cent, physics by 12.6 per cent, computing by 11.8 per cent and maths by 11.4 per cent.

Entries to sociology fell by 6.9 per cent, drama by 5.8 per cent and geography by 3.9 per cent.

[Full story here](#)

## Funding tops teachers' list of election issues, poll shows

School funding is the most important education issue for teachers and leaders in the run-up to the general election, a new survey suggests, while less than 1 per cent listed implementing Rishi Sunak's advanced British standard qualification as a top concern.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) polled 1,282 teachers and leaders as part of its election "teacher voice

omnibus survey".

Asked which education issues were most important to them when considering their vote, 81 per cent put school funding in their top three.

The second-highest issue was reform of the accountability system/Ofsted, (56 per cent), followed by "addressing the teacher recruitment and retention issues" and

ensuring sufficient SEND support (both 47 per cent).

However, according to YouGov polling, just 12 per cent of the population more broadly think education is one of the one most important issues facing the country – way below other leading issues such as the economy, health and immigration.

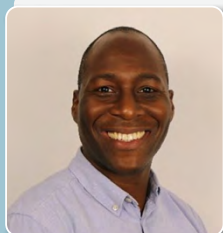
[Full story here](#)

## MOVERS AND SHAKERS

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US [NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK)

## Movers &amp; Shakers

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

**William Asare****Education account director, Cantium Business Solutions****Start date:** April 1**Previous Job:** Account manager, Wavenet Education

**Interesting fact:** Despite studying biomedical science, Will is still squeamish about blood. Also proving you're never too old to try something new, he learnt how to swim when he was 34 – but admits he still can't tread water.

**Faisal Sameja****Senior associate (education employment), Browne Jacobson****Start date:** April 15**Previous role:** Senior solicitor, Association of School and College Leaders

**Interesting fact:** Faisal once completed a 30 day-step-challenge raising money to build homes for displaced families following natural disasters. He completed a staggering 704,000 steps ... the equivalent of 325 miles.

**Suzannah Wharf****Director of secondary education, Education South West****Start date:** September**Current job:** School improvement director and executive headteacher, Teign School

**Interesting fact:** Growing up in Devon, Suzannah took part in the Ten Tors Challenge in which a two-day, team of six walk 35, 45 or 55 miles across Dartmoor. Since taking on her headship in 2017 she always attends the start of Ten Tors to watch 2,400 young people set off on the challenge.

**Kate Baddeley****Director of education, The Learning Partnership****Start date:** June 3**Previous role:** National lead for secondary improvement, Oasis Community Learning

**Interesting fact:** Kate actually has a screw loose – thanks to a broken wrist that needed a metal plate and screws, one of which is loose!

**Dr Paul Van Walwyk****Director of education, Ambitious about Autism****Start date:** June**Previous role:** Director of education, Eden Academy Trust

**Interesting fact:** Paul had many jobs before discovering teaching, including time as a baker, greengrocer, cook and roadie. He is also a qualified social worker – and is still working out what he wants to be.

**Dr Maureen Glackin****Religious education adviser, Catholic Education Service****Start date:** May 28**Previous role:** General secretary, Catholic Independent Schools' Conference

**Interesting fact:** Maureen was a professional actress, with television credits that include *The Bill*, *Chancer*, and *Sherwood Forest*, before training to be a teacher and working as a lay chaplain, RE coordinator and SENCO.

## Brodie joins United Learning

FEATURED

Christian Brodie has become chair of England's largest academy trust. He succeeds Richard Greenhalgh as chair of United Learning's group board. Greenhalgh held the post for nine years. Brodie worked in international financial services and now holds a portfolio of roles, including



Christian Brodie

chair of the Wates Foundation. He says that in education there are "always significant challenges and opportunities to navigate". "United Learning has built its reputation on successfully addressing the former and seizing the latter." Trust chief executive Sir Jon Coles says Greenhalgh

had "transformed governance within the charity, brilliantly guided our strategic ambition and has led us with a confident, collegiate and conscientious manner which has been incredibly helpful and positive". Brodie "brings with him decades of experience both in the corporate world and in the voluntary, higher education and not-for-profit sectors".

Please let us know of any new faces leading your school, trust or education organisation by emailing [news@schoolsweek.co.uk](mailto:news@schoolsweek.co.uk)

## Developing expert teachers and leaders

A great teacher changes the future every day. They can be the critical factor in a child's success.

Ambition institute is a charity providing professional development for teachers and leaders based on the most rigorous research and evidence about what really works.

Over 48,000 teachers and leaders from over 10,000 schools are currently developing through Ambition's programmes. Together, we're helping over 4.3 million children receive a better education and start in life.



### NEW

#### **Leading Trust Improvement: SEND**

For trust or senior leaders who are looking to develop their approach to special educational needs and disabilities. This programme allows participants to co-create and implement an evidence-informed solution to improve SEND provision across a trust.

**Length:** 12 months.

#### **Instructional Coaching**

Designed for experienced teachers and led by expert instructional coaches. Participants will improve their coaching practice by learning how to support teachers to overcome existing ingrained habits and adopt new teaching behaviours, so they become more expert over time.

**Length:** One term.

#### **Initial Teacher Training**

Our initial teacher training course will provide participants with on-the-job teaching work experience, so they can start their career with confidence. It will also allow them to explore their subject and help them to develop the skills needed to be a teacher.

**Length:** 12 months.



✉ [info@ambition.org.uk](mailto:info@ambition.org.uk)

🌐 [ambition.org.uk](http://ambition.org.uk)

📱 @Ambition\_Inst



## Join us at the Festival of Education

We are proud festival partners for the Festival of Education at Wellington College Thursday 4 and Friday 5 July 2024.

Across the two days, we will share insights and original research on topics including pupil engagement and boosting teacher retention. Join us in venue number three for cutting edge sessions on teacher professional development.



## Investigation

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL

# The quick-fix school building hazards that could be the next RAAC scandal

**Timber rooves held together with 'glue and panel pins' and materials that turn to 'fragile Weetabix' when wet are ticking timebombs in our schools, finds Jessica Hill**

A swollen national debt, depleted construction force and baby boom after the Second World War made Britain desperate for new ways to build schools cheaply and quickly.

Many of the quick fixes – from lightweight cement to hollow concrete blocks embedded in asbestos – were then forgotten about for decades.

Now the Department for Education is finally commissioning a £4.8 million research project into the structural dangers of post-war buildings, two years after it was proposed.

Matt Byatt, the president of the Institution of

Structural Engineers, believes there is “a whole legacy” of buildings that have been forgotten about.

“Several new technologies were tried and adopted in the 1950s and 1960s. Those buildings have not been maintained as well as they should have been.”

## **‘System-build’ stresses**

Of the 64,000 school buildings across England, 13,800 (22 per cent) come under the loose banner of “system-build blocks”. There are 12 known types made from concrete, steel and timber.

Of these, 3,600 (26 per cent) “may be more susceptible to deterioration”, a National Audit Office (NAO) report last year found.

Like those made with RAAC (reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete), most system-build blocks are fragile structures, now at double their recommended shelf life of 30 to 40 years.

But repairing or replacing them often involves disturbing the asbestos buried within them.

As of last year, the DfE knew of six system-built blocks fully or partially closed since 2017 because of structural instability.

But officials don't know exactly how and with



# Investigation: Buildings



what materials these post-war schools were built. The DfE's own condition data collection surveys (CDCs) are only simple visual assessments.

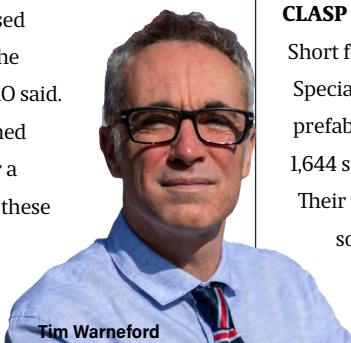
Schools Week analysis of CDC surveys carried out between 2017 and 2019 found 987 system-built school structures referred to as "unknown" type.

## Laingspan and Intergrid

Laingspan and Intergrid are two light-frame concrete systems that sit with RAAC at the top of the DfE's priority list. They were used in the 1950s and 1960s to speed up construction and economise on steel, and were found in two buildings that closed urgently, one following the collapse of a wall, the NAO said.

The union Unison warned "there is the potential for a catastrophic collapse" of these structures.

In March, schools



Tim Warneford

## 'Solar panels on rooftops are also creating safety concerns'

minister Damian Hinds said 24 schools had such buildings. All but one are now part of the school rebuilding programme.

Unison last year accused the DfE of knowing about the risks for "at least a number of years" but not communicating the risks with "staff, pupils or parents using those buildings on a daily basis".

## CLASP

Short for the "Consortium of Local Authorities Special Programme", these buildings were prefabricated with a steel framework. There are 1,644 such school buildings in England.

Their structures make them vulnerable to fire, so asbestos boards lined the steel. They are also prone to crumbling and easily

damaged. While some local authorities replaced them over the decades, others didn't.

Former Labour schools minister Lord Knight chairs the E-Act trust. He claims one of its schools built using the CLASP system – Willenhall Academy in the West Midlands – is now "teetering" with weak foundations. Fixing the issue is a "£10 million-plus [job]".

## Scola

A similar system, called Second Consortium of Local Authorities, was used in the construction of 767 school buildings from the 1960s on. It was often poorly insulated, contained asbestos and had a 25-year lifespan.

A quarter of Scola schools were built in Hampshire, where the council admits they're

# Investigation: Buildings

now “well beyond their estimated initial design life”.

Rather than embarking on expensive rebuilds, the council is “recladding” as its annual school capital funding grant of £23 million is “insufficient”. At current funding levels and pace of improvement, some of its Scola buildings will have to “wait a further 20 years to be improved”.

## Folded plate timber roofs ‘held with glue and panel pins’

Some dangerous construction techniques only reveal themselves when it’s too late. Two school hall roof collapses in 2011 and 2019 were linked to the failure of folded timber roofs over school halls.

In both cases, the structural engineer who reported concerns to the safety body Collaborative Reporting for Safer Structures UK (CROSS-UK) concluded the end blocks were only held together with glue and panel pins.

They warned “a significant number of these roofs...could exist, and users of such buildings may be at significant risk”.

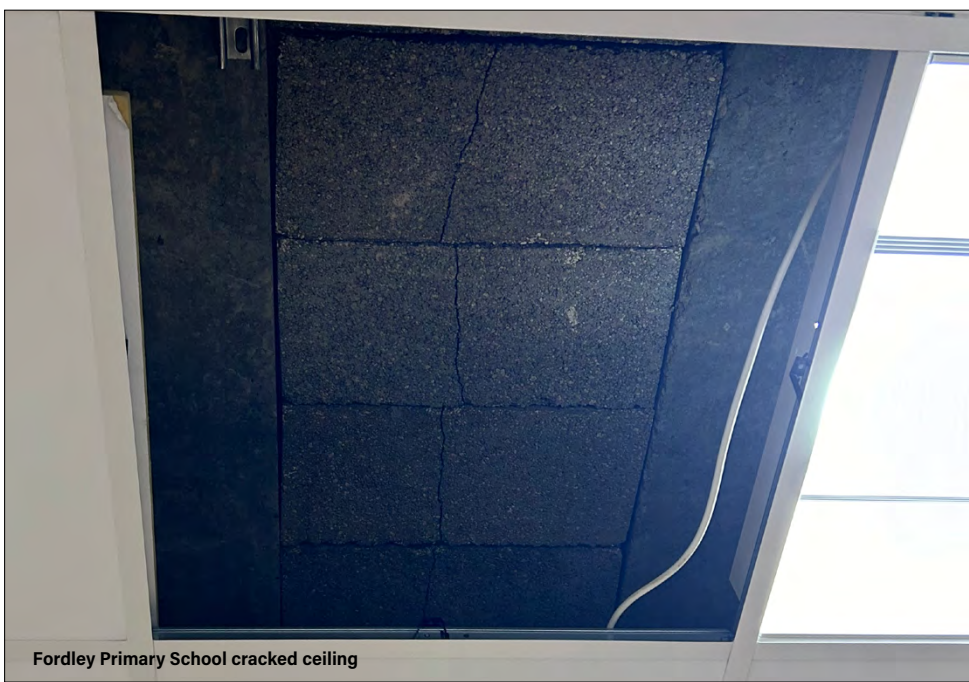
Another engineer reported in May 2023 how a 1950s primary school roof with an “unusual hybrid concrete and steel strand truss” in the north west collapsed with no warning. Its design was “inherently defective”.

## Concrete crisis

It’s not just the RAAC that’s crumbling. In the past six months, four schools in North Tyneside have been found to have used an inappropriate pour of concrete – the “hollow block and beam plank” method. This led to their partial closure.

Concrete fell from a computer suite ceiling and multiple roof cracks were discovered in Fordley Primary School. The council found three other schools – Churchill Community College, Hazlewood Primary School and Grasmere Academy – had the same problem. They were built by different companies.

Jon Ritchie, the council’s resources director, describes it as an “extremely complex situation that’s occurred on a large scale” in the four schools.



Fordley Primary School cracked ceiling

## ‘It’s a cheap way to get you out of a pickle in the short term’

Fordley’s headteacher Claire Withers says she’d be “very surprised” if the issue was “just limited to this area”.

She claims the DfE, which says the construction issue is “historic and isolated”, was “not very keen” for the council to share the problem more widely. But the local authority insisted other councils and academy trusts knew about it.

Some of Fordley and Churchill’s children are bussed to other schools, while Grasmere’s are crammed into other buildings and Hazlewood’s make do with outdoor toilets and a marquee.

Cardinal Newman Catholic School in Luton was also built using “hollow” concrete blocks. Cracks in the ceiling forced buildings to close with some pupils taught remotely.

## HACC

Other schools were built using

high alumina cement concrete (HACC).

In 1973, the collapse of Camden Girls’ High School’s hall roof in north London, blamed on HACC, prompted the hasty closure of some other schools. It was banned in 1976 because it degrades rapidly when exposed to chemicals or water.

IStructE warned in 1997 that “the matter of seriously defective HACC roofs does not seem to be widely understood”.

## Woodwool and stramit

Woodwool – shredded timber bound in a cement paste – was used extensively in the 1960s and 1970s, often in the roof decks of system-builds.

It’s similar to stramit, a strawboard insulation made from fused wheat

or rice straw used in the same decades. Both are

flammable and often



Matt Byatt



# Investigation: Buildings



What can happen when a roof is subjected to excessive loads from ponding of rainwater

laden with asbestos.

These materials cause no problems as long as they're kept dry. But that's getting harder to do with the DfE estimating that nearly half of schools (10,710) are at risk of flooding. That's expected to increase to as many as 16,394 by the 2050s, with scientists predicting severe storms to become more common.

Academy funding consultant Tim Warneford says water-damaged woodwool and stramit are the two biggest building safety issues that keep him awake at night.

He recently declared the sports hall at All Saints Academy in Bedfordshire a "no-go area" because of "vertical and horizontal cracks in the woodwool and the weight of rainwater pounding on their roof".

A recent governors' report for the school said "academy reserves will not cover the cost of repairs/replacements".

Sean McGinty, a technical manager for Sike Roofing, describes stramit as being like "fragile Weetabix" when wet. About one in five of the surveys he has undertaken in schools finds stramit or woodwool in their structures.

"Like RAAC, [these structures] could collapse at any time," he says.

**Solar strain**

In a cruel twist of fate, installing solar panels on rooftops is also creating safety concerns.

A 2021 CROSS-UK report highlighted "dangerous assumptions" in assessments for the instillation of solar panels in schools that did not take into account the existing structure and load

Concerning postwar school building construction methods	
Concerning postwar methods of building schools	Number of school buildings are so far known to have been built this way
Integrid	18
Clasp	1,644
Scola	767
Folded plate timber rooves 'held with glue and panel pins'	2
Hollow block and beam plank	4
Sources: Various	

SCHOOLS WEEK

of roofs and did not calculate additional weight correctly.

The increasing use of air source heat pumps and air conditioning condensers are also adding weight and strain to rooftops.

**Modern methods of construction**

National problems that led post-war school buildings' problems – a swollen national debt and labour force constraints – have returned.

The solution has been modular structures built using modern methods of construction (MMC), promoted through government initiatives.

But at least seven such schools built or partially built since 2020 are now earmarked for demolition because they are structurally unsafe.

In February, CROSS-UK reported a "systemic issue" with modular timber frame systems, detailing six common flaws with their design and construction.

These include issues with fire stopping, structural element protection, protection of connections and, in particular, "cavity barriers to the voids created when modules are fitted together to form multi-storey buildings".

Of the ten companies contracted to build schools in 2021 under the DfE's £3 billion offsite schools' framework, two have gone into administration.

An online brochure for the new Harrier Primary Academy in Essex, which gives an opening date of 2020, shows children playing at being construction workers laying bricks . But the DfE shunned the bricks and mortar approach to build the school, contracting Eco Modular Buildings Ltd.. The company collapsed in March 2023 and the school still has no opening date.

Eco Modular had also been contracted to build The Flagship School, a special school in Sussex which remains unfinished after an opening date of last September.

The school's last Ofsted report from 2022 found "problems caused by temporary accommodation" meant leaders' "capacity to do anything other than react to day-to-day events" had been "severely restricted".

**Preventing 'floor rot'**

James Emery, a sales manager for modular builders Wernick Buildings, says his company always ensures buildings have underfloor ventilation to prevent "floor rot".

But he has visited schools built by other companies that "sunk the buildings into the ground without any ventilation".

By the time problems emerge, the original contractors have "walked away" as their warranties have expired.

Caledonian Modular, which went into administration in 2022, built Haygrove School in Somerset, Buckton Fields Primary School in Northampton and Sir Frederick Gibberd College in Harlow, which were all ordered to close. Surveys found Sir Frederick Gibberd could not withstand "very high winds or significant snowfall".

Byatt says it's "almost as though we've come full circle" with the "quick-fix" construction problems of the past.

He sees MMC as "a quicker, cheaper way to get you out of a pickle in the short term. But if they're not maintained – and we know that these schools are not maintained because they simply haven't got the budgets – then it deteriorates."

Opinion

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

The sector's manifesto



DR NIC  
CROSSLEY  
Chief executive Liberty Academy  
Trust and national SEND  
representative, ASCL

Three policies to get SEND  
working better now

**Vulnerable learners who need consistency and routine deserve a political and funding climate that is fair and stable, says Nic Crossley**

Inclusion and inclusivity are highly contested concepts, but ones that the next government must prioritise to truly address the inequity of current education. The Forgotten Third remain of key concern to policymakers and a substantial sub-group are learners with SEND. Recent EPI data identifies that by the end of year 11, learners in this group are now between two and four years behind their peers, considering the differentials of SEN support and those with education, health, and care Plans. Clearly, the current education system is not working. So what can we do to support learners with SEND now and in the future?

**A universal policy for SEND education**

For too long, learners with SEND have been thrown around as a political football in a game that is far from beautiful, leading to a rise in mental ill health, low academic outcomes and increasingly dissatisfied parents. The next government needs to commit to a universal policy for

SEND education that unites the parties, so that vulnerable learners who need consistency and routine are not further disadvantaged by political wranglings. All young people should have access to the same curriculum offer as their peers, and no child should ever be outside the conversation. Our children should not be disadvantaged in adulthood by a lack of general knowledge; a universal policy for SEND education should begin from this premise. But we also need to acknowledge that not all qualifications suit everyone. So we need to recognise the differing pathways learners may take, and not devalue the less academic routes if they ultimately lead to greater independence and self-sufficiency.

**Mandate a specialist placement for ITT**

The current non-statutory guidance encourages ITT providers to “involve special schools in ITT partnerships”. This is simply not enough in a sector where early career teachers report they feel least prepared to adapt their teaching for learners with SEND. New teachers need to be exposed to the varying levels of ability and need. The “learn that” and “learn how to” theoretical entitlement



“ For too long, SEND has been a political football

of the initial teacher training and early career framework is not enough, particularly as rates of learners with SEND continue to rise. Mandating a SEND placement as part of initial teacher training will expose trainees to a wealth of expertise and specialisms that will provide foundations they can draw on for life. This will allow them to see the complementary benefits of experiencing mainstream and specialist provision; they will no longer lack confidence in adapting their teaching for learners with SEND – and potentially make them better teachers overall. **Re-evaluate funding methodologies** The current policy of a notional budget for learners with SEND in mainstream schools is a mythical beast that gets eaten up in school budgets. Meanwhile, place funding for special schools has not shifted from the £10,000 per pupil of more than ten years ago.

Separately, lack of financial regulation means independent special schools can charge six-figure sums, thus impacting further on available resources within the high-needs block – a pot that is meant to provide additional financial support to all settings, independent, mainstream and specialist. We cannot apply a knee-jerk reaction, robbing the rich to pay the poor, but we do have to be able to adequately fund provision and pay staff a decent wage. We therefore need to re-evaluate existing funding methodologies and look to create a fairer system that sensibly considers inflation and long-term affordability, without watering down provision (or expecting schools to do significantly more with significantly less). It takes a brave government to place SEND front and centre of policy priorities. But if we get it right for learners with SEND, we will get it right for all.

# Opinion

## The sector's manifesto



TOM REES

Chief executive, Ormiston Academies Trust

### Four policies to transform SEND for the long term

**It will take time, money and leadership, but these four policies could ensure specialist provision is equal to need – now and in the future, says Tom Rees**

**A** lack of policy attention on SEND over the past decade has led to little improvement in delivery, despite significant increases in funding.

Almost 40 per cent of young people are now assigned the label of SEND at some point in their school career. This is clearly too high a number to deal with through specialist or personalised intervention. Meanwhile, evidence points to this categorisation being inconsistent in its application and ineffective in attracting the necessary support.

Parental complaints and legal disputes continue to rise as poor implementation of policy pitches schools against parents.

Unlike other important policy areas, however, there is little in the way of comprehensive end-state solutions. This is urgent work for a new government serious about improving education: here are four policies that should feature in this reform programme.

#### A new promise of 'dignity, not deficit'

We need a bold vision of inclusion that normalises children's different learning needs rather than seeing

them as "special". This promise challenges our outdated, medicalised model of inclusion based on "deficit", which too quickly reaches for labels and prescribes provision that is "additional and different".

This vision requires action now, but will require sustained leadership and time to realise. Through ten years of rebuilding and renewal, it should become normal for most learning needs to be more precisely understood and catered for in mainstream schools through ordinarily available provision.

By 2034, we should aspire for a more expert and professionalised system in which special school admissions are de-coupled from mainstream inclusion and the SEND label retired.

#### Investment in school workforce expertise

Expert teaching benefits everyone. To build more classroom expertise, we should invest in a national programme of professional development for every member of staff in a school.

Reform to professional development for early career teachers, and school leaders' access to fully-funded and redesigned professional qualifications have been a recent policy success. Expanding this entitlement, we can be ambitious for all teachers and support staff to access rigorously designed and nationally accredited professional



**“ The cost of doing nothing is eye-watering ”**

development, with SEND content at the core and with optional areas of specialism.

#### Early and evidence-informed intervention

The most important thing we can do for children who need more support to succeed is to identify their needs and intervene early. Reforms to childcare and early years can ensure more have their needs identified and receive targeted support so they are "school ready" by 5.

The current quality of intervention is variable for pupils who need help at different times throughout their school careers. Investment in research so schools can better understand which intervention programmes have impact (and under which conditions) can improve quality and consistency.

#### A national commission on specialist placements

There are not enough high-quality and affordable specialist school places. A national commission should undertake work to fully understand and plan for the places required in the next decade and to deliver this through different

methods.

School trusts should lean into this challenge more, and work with different partners locally to ensure every child has a high-quality suitable place in a local school.

With pupil numbers falling, we can use classroom space in mainstream schools. But we need a well-designed programme of development to help schools and trusts create a high-quality resource base, specialist units and satellite provision. This is also an opportunity to reset roles and responsibilities and galvanise relationships within local partnerships.

Reforming the SEND system comes with a price tag, but the cost of doing nothing is already eye-watering. Money that is currently plugging holes in budget deficits, being squandered on legal fees or paying for expensive private provision could be transformational if directed to the frontline.

It will take time and leadership, but ensuring a great education for every child, and restoring the social contract between schools and parents is an urgent priority for the next administration. It can't remain on the "too difficult" pile.



## Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US [NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK)



PAUL  
WHITEMAN

General secretary, NAHT

## Scrapping one-word judgments is just the start of vital reform

**The government's refusal to heed consultation about changes to Ofsted is tin-eared and outrageous, says Paul Whiteman**

With Ofsted analysing responses to its Big Listen consultation and a general election weeks away, we could be on the brink of the most significant accountability reforms since the inspectorate was formed in 1992.

For too long, the inspection regime and its damaging labels have cast a shadow over schools, driving dedicated leaders and teachers to the brink.

Last week, NAHT responded to Ofsted's consultation. Frustratingly, there was no specific question on the future of single-word judgments. Nevertheless, we have reiterated our call for an immediate end to their use.

While not the only issue with how Ofsted inspects schools, the judgments are unreliable, overly simplistic and lie at the heart of a punitive and deeply harmful accountability system. For the safety, health and wellbeing of leaders and their staff, their removal is an immediate priority.

Other nations are exploring and developing alternatives, and we are increasingly an outlier in using

such simplistic labels to attempt to describe the complexity of school quality and performance.

We are also hearing more from parents who do not think these judgments provide the breadth and depth of information they need.

Calls to scrap grades have become overwhelming, establishing a broad consensus for change. Even previously staunch advocates, such as the former chief inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw, now accept a new approach is required.

That is why I was angered (but, sadly, not surprised) when the Department for Education signalled its commitment to their continued use despite a clear recommendation from the education select committee that alternatives should be explored.

The government's tin-eared and outrageous response seemed calculated to stifle the Big Listen. It led many to question the value of a consultation whose outcome had seemingly been predetermined.

By contrast, the new chief inspector had signalled a genuine intent to listen to the profession's concerns, reassuring us that "nothing is off the table".

In the meantime, these grades continue to do immense damage. Testimony from leaders and teachers paints a harrowing picture of sleepless nights, relentless stress



“ Using such simplistic labels makes us an outlier

and a climate of pervasive dread.

They fear their careers could be shattered by a simplistic judgment made in less than two school days, potentially by an inspector lacking expertise of the phase, specialism or subjects they are inspecting.

Last year, one in two (49 per cent) leaders told us they needed professional mental health or well-being support, citing Ofsted as the primary reason. Amid a spiralling recruitment and retention crisis, some chose to leave rather than face another brutal encounter with Ofsted.

Nothing less than fundamental reform is required. Beyond the immediate removal of single-word grades, that means culture change and the development of a new inspection framework and methodology in collaboration with the profession's representatives.

The quality of a school's curriculum is clearly important, but Ofsted's narrow, over-prescriptive approach, with its subject "deep dives", have proved unreliable and a driver of unnecessary workload,

particularly in primary schools.

Schools should have more notice of inspection, so that leaders have time to make operational arrangements and no longer have to worry about "the call" coming when they leave the building for any length of time.

They should only be inspected by those with extensive expertise of the relevant school phase and, where appropriate, specialism or size.

In addition, there is a desperate need to overhaul the toothless complaints process that lets the inspectorate be its own judge and jury and leaves leaders to resort to costly legal challenges.

It is our firm hope that Ofsted will reflect deeply on what representative organisations such as the NAHT tell it through the Big Listen. The chief inspector must resist forces of conservatism that cling to old ways of doing things.

We know reform won't be easy and will need careful thought and meticulous planning. But we stand ready to work with the inspectorate to create a more humane, fair and

Opinion

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



HAYLEY  
SHERWOOD

Founder, 1decision and governor  
for PSHE/mental health, The Leys  
Primary and Nursery School,

Personal development must be  
on Labour's school scorecard

Without any formal  
assessment, provision and  
accountability for this vital  
area of the curriculum are  
at best patchy, says Hayley  
Sherwood

Labour's plan to end single-word Ofsted judgments and bring in report cards with annual checks for school accountability has received a mixed reaction, including around its lack of challenge to a deleterious surveillance culture.

Assuming the party wins and carries out its plan, a constructive approach will be to support the new administration to develop it in a way that genuinely delivers for schools and young people. In that vein, I'd like to make an early gambit to include progress and attainment in personal development in any such scorecard.

There is currently no way to formally and consistently assess children's knowledge of personal development. In other words, we can't consistently evaluate important aspects of their emotional, social and moral growth at key stages of their education.

PSHE, RSE, British values, protected characteristics and character education have all been thrown at schools with too many

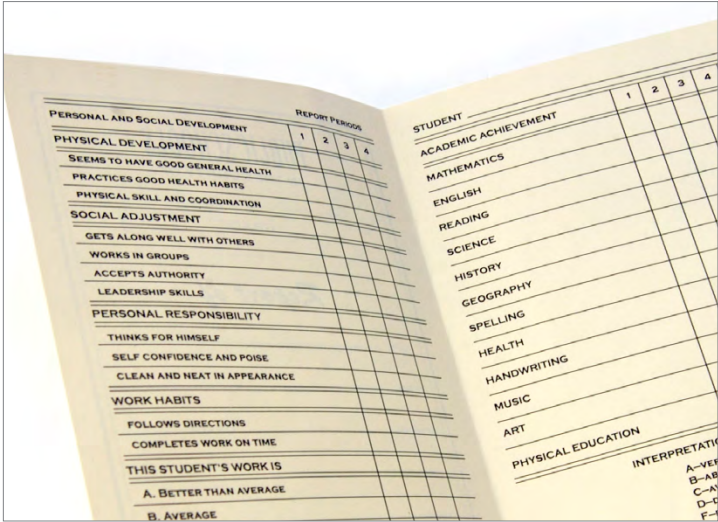
grey areas around assessment and curriculum coverage. But given the major societal issues we and they face, we need to focus more on prevention, not cure.

Knife crime, for example, is one of the greatest and most alarming threats. According to the Office for National Statistics, police recorded more than 50,500 offences involving a knife or sharp instrument during the year ending March 2023, a 10 per cent increase from 2022. These figures are not abstract numbers; they represent lives shattered, families torn apart and communities left in fear.

The reason for this rise is complex and involves societal, economic and cultural factors. However, one undeniable truth emerges: knife crime often starts young. Many perpetrators and victims are teenagers or younger. The importance of PSHE in driving these numbers down is evident.

Or take childhood obesity. According to Public Health England, 23.4 per cent of children in year 6 are obese. Diabetes costs the NHS £14 billion a year, with 90 per cent of the spend on type 2. The impact of obesity on children's physical and mental health will inevitably lead to future costs.

These two examples alone make a powerful social and economic case



“ We need to focus more  
on prevention, not cure

for more early education with a strong focus on (and accountability for) personal development.

Secondary school is too late. We have to find a way to make space in the primary curriculum for teaching personal development effectively. With curriculum time already at a premium, the next government should consult with the teaching profession on doubling the 60 minutes that schools typically find to cover these topics.

A curriculum that favours academic knowledge over all else doesn't educate children in vital areas such as conflict resolution, emotional regulation and self-care. Nor can it improve self-worth and self-confidence, reduce anxiety or foster healthy relationships and better nutrition.

Increasing coverage of personal development can do this, with evident benefits for children and society. But schools need data to inform their focus.

To that end, we are trialling an

assessment to gather children's personal development knowledge towards the end of primary school. It gives teachers crucial personal development data (which does not currently exist) before pupils transition from year 6, helping them to address gaps in knowledge and to sharpen their personal development provision.

By identifying and closing gaps, not only can staff feel satisfied that they are supporting pupils to move into secondary prepared for the challenges ahead, but the evidence can also improve inspection outcomes, demonstrating intent, implementation and impact in this otherwise evidence-light aspect of the curriculum.

The road to reprioritising personal development is a long and challenging one, but it's an investment in a future where every child grows up in a safer, healthier and more prosperous country. That has to be worth a place on any school accountability scorecard.

## Solutions

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US [NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK)



# RACHEL JONES

Headteacher and  
safeguarding lead, Kingsley  
St John Primary School,

## Six strategies to improve wellbeing in primaries

**A data-informed approach supported by new technology has led to calmer classrooms without increasing teacher workload, explains Rachel Jones**

The post-pandemic increase in mental ill health among children and young people is as well documented as it is deeply worrying. Early intervention is critical, and one of my primary objectives has been to establish a comprehensive approach to pupil wellbeing.

Leveraging innovative technology is a key component of how we support our teachers to foster resilience and to empower pupils to manage stress.

One of the main challenges was home-to-school transition, which was impacting the start of the school day. We've seen some great improvements, with one pupil in particular demonstrating the transformative power of our approach.

In just a few days we went from school refusal and 45 minutes of teacher time each morning settling this very anxious child, to the excitement of coming into school without difficulty.

Here are six steps we've taken to improve pupil wellbeing at our school:

### Early intervention

We know that timely support is vital, so we have taken steps to identify and address every child's needs early on so that we can increase protective factors that positively influence wellbeing and decrease risk factors.

This includes pupil wellbeing meetings to identify low-level anxieties around transition, capturing those pupils with difficulties and cultivating a more personalised approach upon entering school.

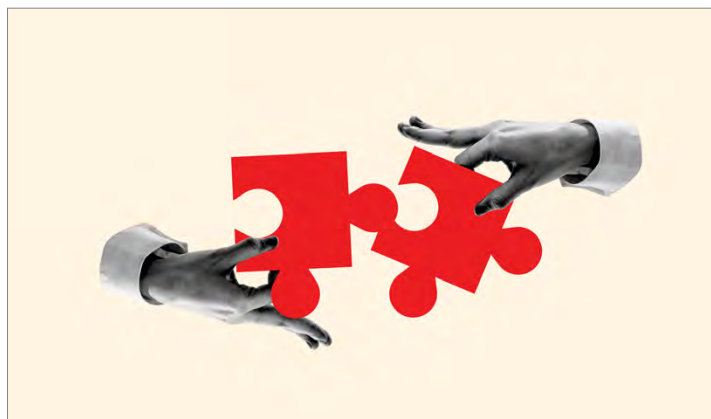
### Personalised support

We have fostered a school-wide appreciation that we must understand each pupil's wellbeing journey and its uniqueness. A personalised approach to wellbeing support provides immediate support to pupils facing various challenges, empowering them to manage their emotions effectively.

It covers a wide range of strategies, including one-to-one support at difficult times, small roles of responsibility upon entering school, bespoke visuals and emotional support.

### Data-informed practices

We prioritise data-informed decision-making. Collecting and analysing data gives us valuable insights into trends, patterns, and areas requiring additional support.



“ We don't always land on the right strategy first time

We can then tailor our interventions, allocate resources effectively and measure the impact of our efforts over time. The data we collect includes attendance, CPOMs, behaviour records and good day/bad day information.

### Embracing technology

From NHS Mental Health support to solutions such as the Lumii app, technology is helping us to automatically tailor interventions and coping strategies to each child's needs.

This approach has transformed outcomes for some of our pupils and acts as a strong foundation for our data-informed practice.

Children can access them daily and are offered bespoke time to consider their feelings on a range of issues (home and school). In a two-week window, every child in key stage 2 accesses the app that guides them through regulating their emotions, provides gentle and generic advice and allows us to better support them.

### Empowering pupils

However, the point is not for pupils to become dependent on the technology or on us for support in the long term. Our aim is to prevent or minimise crises when we can, but

also to empower pupils with self-regulation strategies.

We don't always land on the right one first time, but by giving pupils a range of strategies, we gradually empower them to soothe and help themselves. Learning that their thoughts and behaviours can help them accept and manage their feelings is powerful knowledge at its best.

More than that, the approach encourages open dialogue, takes the stigma away from mental ill health and offers valuable insights.

### Track and trace

These valuable insights include the ability to track and monitor pupils' overall wellbeing easily, which has been game-changing for teachers and pupils. But it goes much further; we can monitor other areas of pupil life too, such as friendships, academic access, home, long-term worries, changes in life anxieties and more.

This has allowed us to create calmer classrooms without increasing teacher workload. In fact, it has allowed adults to meet other needs and requirements by freeing them up from co-regulation first thing in the school day.



# THE REVIEW

## WHY LEARNING FAILS (AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT)

**Author:** Alex Quigley

**Publisher:** Routledge

**Publication date:** May 8

**ISBN:** 1032648767

**Reviewer:** Emma Cate Stokes, Key stage one phase lead, East Sussex

In the crowded field of educational literature, Alex Quigley's *Why Learning Fails (And What to Do About It)* stands out as a refreshing, pragmatic guide that provides actionable strategies for teachers.

Quigley, renowned for his contributions to vocabulary instruction, expands his focus to encompass a comprehensive analysis of learning failures, providing educators with a theoretical understanding and practical solutions.

The book is organised into eight sections, each dedicated to a specific learning failure. This structure allows a focused exploration of each issue and ensures that readers can easily navigate to the areas most relevant to their needs.

Each section is divided into two main parts: the first identifies and explains the problem, while the second offers clear, actionable strategies for addressing it.

I find this format incredibly beneficial. Too many educational books delve deeply into theory without offering practical applications, but Quigley strikes the perfect balance.

Examples within each chapter span key stages in primary and secondary education. I was initially sceptical about the effectiveness of such a broad approach as I thought the book might try to cater to too many audiences and end up serving none effectively.

However, Quigley deftly dispels these concerns. The examples are not afterthoughts, but integral to the narrative, demonstrating a deep understanding of the diverse educational landscape. Whether you're a year 4 class teacher or a year 11 science teacher, you'll find relevant, applicable insights.

Quigley breaks down how students learn

and the obstacles they face, articulating these challenges with clarity and offering realistic, classroom-tested strategies to overcome them.

For instance, in tackling "Learning Failure #6: An inability to learn independently", he highlights the barriers pupils face with self-regulation. He effectively dissects why they struggle with independent learning and provides a practical framework for teachers to support them.

In this particular section, Quigley introduces "naming, framing, and sustaining", an insightful approach that breaks down the process of teaching independent learning skills into manageable steps.

"Naming" involves explicitly labelling the strategy so it is clear and memorable. "Framing" then places these strategies within a broader context, describing why it is useful and how it can be used. Finally, "sustaining" focuses on guided practice, reiteration and reflection.

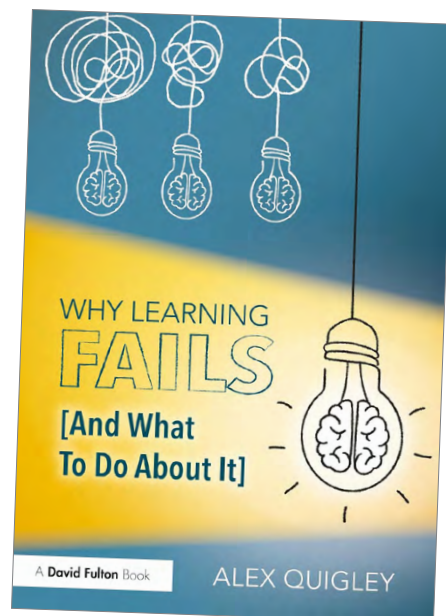
The method not only equips pupils with the tools they need, but also empowers them to become autonomous learners.

The steps to success at the end of each chapter are particularly useful. Concise and accessible summaries of key actions ensure that the essential points are not lost in the more detailed explanations and provide a quick reference for busy teachers.

One of the book's greatest strengths is Quigley's ability to distil complex ideas into actionable steps, making it a practical guide rather than just a theoretical discourse.

The reflective questions at the end of each chapter are a brilliant addition, prompting educators to think critically about what they've read and fostering a deeper engagement with the material. These questions are not just about

BOOK  
TV  
FILM  
RADIO  
EVENT  
RESOURCE



recalling information, but about considering how to implement strategies in one's own teaching context.

Visual aids are another highlight. Diagrams and illustrations effectively demonstrate how various concepts look in the classroom, complementing the text beautifully, making complex ideas more accessible and providing concrete examples of implementation.

In sum, *Why Learning Fails* is an exemplary resource for educators at all levels. Its well-organised structure, clear distinction between problems and solutions, and wide range of practical examples make it an invaluable tool for addressing learning failures.

Quigley's ability to combine theory with actionable advice sets this book apart from many others in the field. That makes it a must-read for any educator committed to understanding and overcoming barriers to student learning.

I wholeheartedly give it five stars and highly recommend it to my colleagues.

★★★★★  
Rating

## THE CONVERSATION LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM



**Sarah Gallagher**

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

## FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES

As the country gears up to July 4, social media has gone into overdrive, not least with the twitterati.

All the digging in, taking black and white

viewpoints and refusing to see any grey, is increasingly scary.



It's in this context that I discovered this very on-point podcast discussing leadership that features Neil Jurd, a former army officer. He reminds us of the dangerous territory we are in if we need to get involved and "hard manage" our staff. Trust people, he says and, more to the point, you can be friends with those you lead.

I chuckled when I heard that one. How many times do we hear "but you might have to tell them off one day, which will be a problem if you're friends". Here lies the problem, says Jurd. We're grown-ups leading grown-ups. Infantilising our staff doesn't help to put children front and centre and to create for them an "unfair advantage".

Much to make you think here, about school leadership and about the election too.

## CAPITAL INVESTMENT

There's a lot of political crowing about how pupil premium helps to achieve that "unfair advantage" – and taxing private school fees won't. However, Melissa Lynch's ex-position of her research tells a depressing tale that should make us all angry.

(Incidentally, we are about to take part in a netball tournament at a local private school whose facilities make it very clear we are not playing on a level court – although the courts themselves are, of course, perfectly level.)

But that is the tip of the iceberg. Lynch's research, which involved speaking to 15-year-olds from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, found that grants and loans might buy them entry into university, but in no way do they guarantee they'll stay or succeed.

In fact, they don't begin to bridge the gap in cultural capital: language, accent, clothing, experiences and much more. All contribute to unequal access and accessibility for the degrees that lead to – almost automatically, it seems – positions of power.

When every one of the students Lynch spoke to said they didn't feel good enough to qualify for a place, it's clear the price tag of that unfair advantage is much higher than a maintenance grant.

## MAKING THE NUMBERS ADD UP

And that financial leg-up itself comes with its own price tag – one that many can't work out – of the interest on student loans.

The primary sector is now enjoying a few weeks of respite from our focus on SATS. Elsewhere, GCSEs, A-levels and resits will be dominating everyone's thoughts. I wonder how many parents will echo the sentiment of one I spoke to during SATs week, questioning

the value of all this abstract learning when what young people need to know is how to budget and manage their finances.

Given the current economic climate and the uncertainties of the future, I have a lot of sympathy with this argument.

In the meantime, this blog from Harriet Young is a great resource to start preparing your pupils (and educating yourself) about the intricacies of student loans and their repayment.

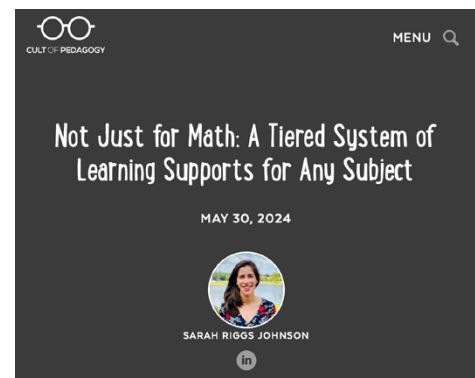
## TIER FOR FEARS

We haven't yet heard any promises to forgive student loans, but in the US, where President Biden has written off billions of student debt at the stroke of a pen, they are also having similar discussions about the maths curriculum.

In this blog, Sarah Riggs Johnson and Nate Wolkenhauer don't talk about "anti-maths attitudes" as our current prime minister likes to do, but they do approach improving maths confidence and anxiety in their own world of high-stakes testing.

Having just watched six and seven-year-olds completing tests and, of course, 10 and 11-year-olds last half term, their points really resonated with me.

With some handy tips on turning around the test-induced cycle of maths disengagement, it's a source of good inspiration for post-exam recovery.



Click the links to access  
the blogs and podcasts



# The Knowledge

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



## What young people are reading – and why it matters

**Crispin Chatterton, director of education, Renaissance; Natalie Perera, chief executive, Education Policy Institute**

Reading is probably the most important cognitive skill we teach children. It provides information about our world and it unlocks a gateway into rich histories and alternative worlds where animals talk and intergalactic battles are fought. Beyond language and literacy skills, reading can also build concentration, provide escapism, build empathy and enhance social experiences.

The annual *What Kids Are Reading* report from Renaissance reveals a worrying 4.4 per cent year-on-year decline in the number of books read by children from years 1 to 11. Other than the first year of the pandemic, this is the first decrease since the research began in 2008.

During the pandemic, our research on learning loss and recovery identified a decline in pupil outcomes in reading. Teachers and schools have worked diligently to tackle this challenge and, as a result, pandemic-related learning loss has on average been recovered.

However, the effects have not been felt equally. The gap has widened between the highest and lowest attainers, and between pupils from low-income backgrounds and their peers.

As well as the pandemic, it's clear that wider challenges such as pupil absence, the rising cost of living and wider economic challenges are impacting literacy.

Recent research suggests teachers believe one-third (33 per cent) of their pupils are weak readers and that children are struggling to keep up with the curriculum because of their reading ability. Further, one quarter (26 per cent) are taken out of class for reading support for half a day of curriculum time per week on average.

This year's report therefore offers an important reminder that we cannot be complacent in our efforts to get children reading more and taking enjoyment from it.

*What Kids Are Reading* explores the favourite books and authors of more than 1.2 million



### 'Despite challenges, there is still much to celebrate'

pupils. By examining the texts that children are reading and how well they are doing so, we can better understand how schools, parents and carers can support them to become happy, confident and engaged readers.

One of the key takeaways is that children need to read more and engage with texts that are the right level of difficulty to stretch and build their skills without causing frustration. The research confirms the link between more reading time in school and higher reading attainment.

When considering Engaged Reading Time (ERT) and Cumulative Number of Words Read, we see further evidence of the impact of the time spent reading. The more time is allocated to reading, the greater the number of words read. And the biggest gains occur when ERT is more than 30 minutes a day.

Strong reading skills are key to success across subjects. By positioning reading as an activity to enjoy, teachers, parents and carers can help support improved reading skills, encouraging children to read more and to try more challenging texts.

Despite some of the challenges, there is still much to celebrate. The report reveals the true depth and breadth of the books children read. It identifies which books and authors are most engaging them and it's encouraging to see them turning to texts that offer more representation and feature aspirational role models.

When pupils can see themselves reflected in the literature they consume, they're more likely to connect with it. This in turn can lead to reading for pleasure and to content that stretches beyond their school years.

Strong reading skills are vital to ensure all children reach their full academic potential and can excel in the subject areas they're passionate about, from maths and science to history and art.

We must all therefore continue to ramp up our efforts to create a lifelong love of reading among pupils by actively listening to them and being guided by their passions and motivations. This will be key to fostering the talents, intellect and wellbeing of our next generation.

**Read the full *What Kids Are Reading* report [here](#)**



Week in

## Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

## SUNDAY

Jonathan Gullis (remember him?) told the House of Commons in 2021 that Dr Mary Bousted and Kevin Courtney, then joint general secretaries of the National Education Union, needed to resign immediately.

"I will come up to their offices, pack their stuff and send it to their houses," he not-so-kindly offered.

His comments may come back to haunt him ahead of July's election. If polls are to be believed, the former schools minister (remember that?) faces a sizeable drubbing in Stoke-on-Trent North.

Courtney delighted in posting on X that Gullis "never did come to help me and Mary Bousted clear out our offices. But we would be only too delighted to help clear you out of parliament!"

\*\*\*

The Tories latched on to the announcement that a Norfolk prep is closing down. The owner of the school, where a third of pupils have SEND, said the "tipping point" was Labour's plan to end tax breaks for private schools.

SEND campaigner Matt Keer pointed out Norfolk is a safety-valve council that agreed with the DfE to place 126 fewer children and young people with SEND in the independent sector this year – and about 800 fewer each year by 2029.

## MONDAY

Gillian Keegan arrived in Winchester on Monday to campaign for her Conservative colleague Flick Drummond.

So keen was the education secretary to hit the campaign trail, she turned up the day BEFORE the event was supposed to

take place, and Drummond was not there. Either Keegan's very efficient or she got the day wrong.

\*\*\*

If, like many Conservative MPs, you are looking for a new job, then the DfE may have just the role for you.

The department is on the lookout for a new "strategic communications manager" to develop "no/low cost-partnerships", lead on school campaigns and update the teacher blog.

But, it gets more exciting. You'll need an eye for "finding a consumer angle and getting stories in a range of non-news channels such as women and lifestyle magazines, podcasts and daytime TV consumer programmes to reach our target audiences and support agreed departmental outcomes".

Get *Loose Women* on speed dial!

\*\*\*

Government SEND reforms are super important, right? Well we think so. And we're sure the national SEND and AP implementation board thinks so too. But we wouldn't know, as a year on since its first meeting, no meeting notes or minutes have been published.

The DfE said last year it planned to publish meeting summaries in early 2024, but summaries came there none.

It told us it was still its intention to publish summary notes, but now the deadline is "as soon as we practically can".

Probably 2027 at this rate...

## TUESDAY

Future UK governments considering messing with school holidays need

only look to Wales for inspiration.

The Welsh government shelved its plans to cut the summer break and extend the October half-term after "opinion was hugely divided".

Unions over the border said it was a distraction from other school challenges. We can't help but agree.

\*\*\*



Education is clearly of huge importance in this election, but you wouldn't have guessed if you watched the tiresome and frustrating Starmer vs Sunak debate on ITV on Tuesday night.

Host Julie Etchingham – who was forced to act like a school teacher to try to keep the two bickering leaders in line – asked what could they do for teachers who "cannot believe how bad things are".

Sunak spent his 45 seconds talking about the government's record on reading and failed to mention the many crises facing schools, while Starmer spoke of plans to recruit 6,500 extra teachers, but gave no detail on how the party would go about it.

Viewers came away with little grasp of what's in store for the sector. Let's hope the next debate ditches the absurdly short responses and dedicates more time to this critical issue.

# DID YOU KNOW?

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

Online listings, classified advertising, and package options available.

“

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

The Shared Learning Trust

**Click here** to contact our team

