SCHOOLS WEEK

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

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More pupils leave big trust schools. Why?

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The local leadership barriers Labour must remove

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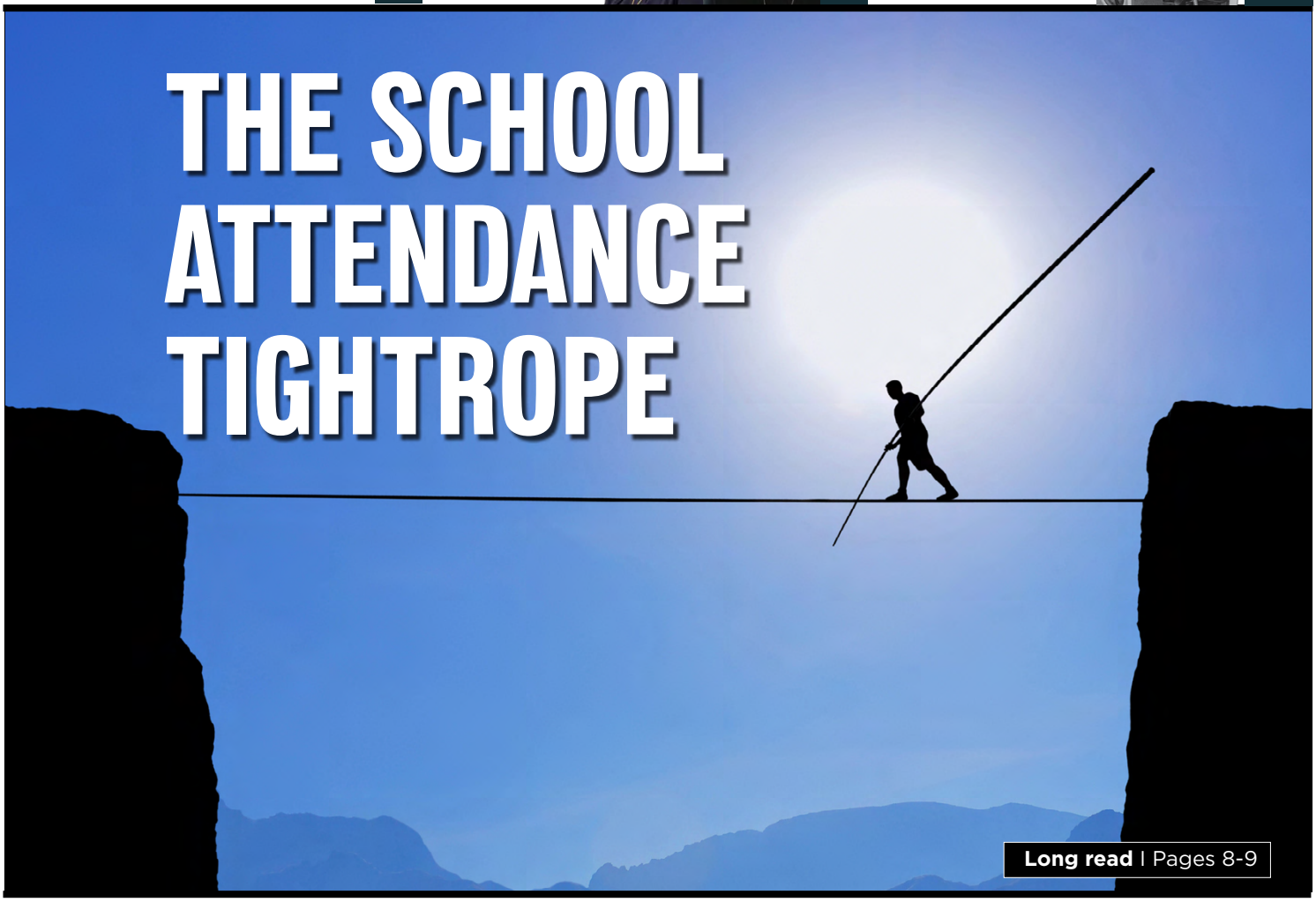

Skint councils allowed to break minimum funding law

- LAs get permission to slice below limit for first time
- Councils use school cash to fill soaring SEND deficits
- 'Ministers complicit in damaging kids' life chances'

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

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Meet the news team

John Dickens
EDITOR
@JOHNDICKENSSW
JOHN.DICKENS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

Freddie Whittaker
DEPUTY EDITOR
@FCDWHITTAKER
FREDDIE.WHITTAKER@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

Samantha Booth
CHIEF REPORTER
@SAMANTHAJBOOTH
SAMANTHA.BOOTH@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

Jack Dyson
SENIOR REPORTER
@JACKYDYS
JACK.DYSON@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

Lucas Cumiskey
SENIOR REPORTER
@LUCAS_CUMISKEY
LUCAS.CUMISKEY@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

JL Dutaut
COMMISSIONING EDITOR
@DUTAUT
JEAN-LOUISDUTAUT@EDUCATIONSCAPE.COM

Jessica Hill
INVESTIGATIONS AND FEATURES REPORTER
@JESSJANEHILL
JESSICA.HILL@EDUCATIONSCAPE.COM

Nicky Phillips
HEAD DESIGNER
@GELVETICA
NICKY.PHILLIPS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Shane Mann
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
@SHANERMANN
SHANE.MANN@EDUCATIONSCAPE.COM

THE TEAM | Senior Designer: Simon Kay | Classifieds Manager: Clare Halliday | 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

education week jobs

FEATURED JOBS

THIS WEEK'S TOP AVAILABLE JOBS IN THE SCHOOLS SECTOR. TO FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION PLEASE TURN TO THE BACK PAGES OF *SCHOOLS WEEK* OR VISIT THE WEB ADDRESS LISTED

ZENITH MULTI ACADEMY TRUST

ZENITH MULTI ACADEMY TRUST
TRUST LEAD PRACTITIONER OF ENGLISH
£56,356 - £66,954 PER ANNUM
(PAY AWARD PENDING)

HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/ZENITH-SW369P2

Hawbush Primary School

HAWBUSH PRIMARY SCHOOL
HEADTEACHER
£70,293.00 - £81,441
ANNUALLY

HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/DRB-SW367-P2

The Leader

Labour will mark 100 days in office on Saturday.

Its record so far is impressive.

It has ditched Ofsted grades, set up social partnerships with unions and other school groups and shifted around things at the department, like where SEND sits and absorbing the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

Ahead of the all-important spending review, it has also announced a trial for breakfast clubs and opened up applications for new nurseries.

But, at least for a few in the sector, there does seem to be the first signs of a nagging doubt creeping in.

There are some more tricky, long-term issues that progress hasn't been forthcoming on (yet). That may sound harsh, and Labour would rightly point to its prompt decision to raise teacher pay by 5.5 per cent as tackling one of those tricky (and expensive) issues head on.

But this was a government-wide decision, and it was sort of bumped into it after winning the election.

The promise to deliver 6,500 more new teachers in shortage subjects was a headline pledge. But details on what this pledge even means are still to be worked out by civil servants, let alone a plan for delivering on it.

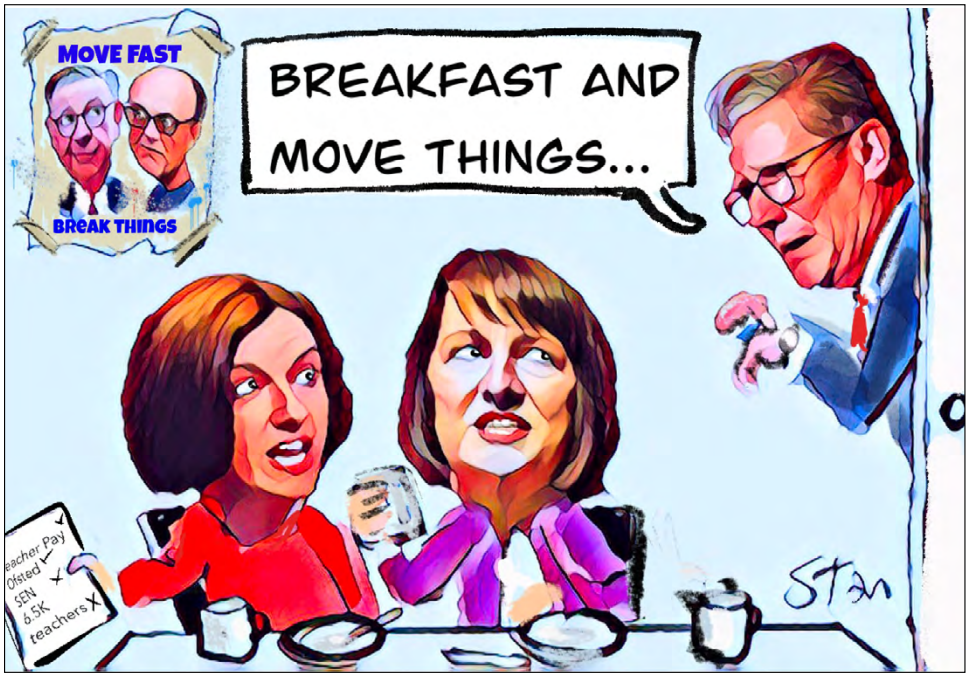
There has also been little on fixing the broken SEND system, other than ministers seeming to now grasp the scale of the problem.

Perhaps those seeds of doubts will disappear.

If given the choice pre-election, I think you would be hard-pressed to find anyone in the sector who wouldn't be pleased with what has been done in the first 100 days.

Ofsted grades gone. A big teacher pay rise. Good progress made in other areas. Even the change in mood music towards the sector shouldn't be sniffed at.

But a smidge of nagging scepticism is creeping in. The challenge now for Labour will be keeping the momentum going.



Most read online this week:

1. Trusts say ta-ta to teaching assistants (as we know them)
2. GCSEs: Exam aids to remain for three more years
3. Teacher pay: The trailblazer schools already flexing TLR payments
4. Lead NPQ provider latest to pull out of scheme after cuts
5. Government must square up to unscrupulous teaching agencies

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EDUCATIONSCAPE LTD
C/O RUNWAY EAST, THE HICKMAN,
2 WHITECHAPEL ROAD, LONDON E1 1EW
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NEWS: SEND

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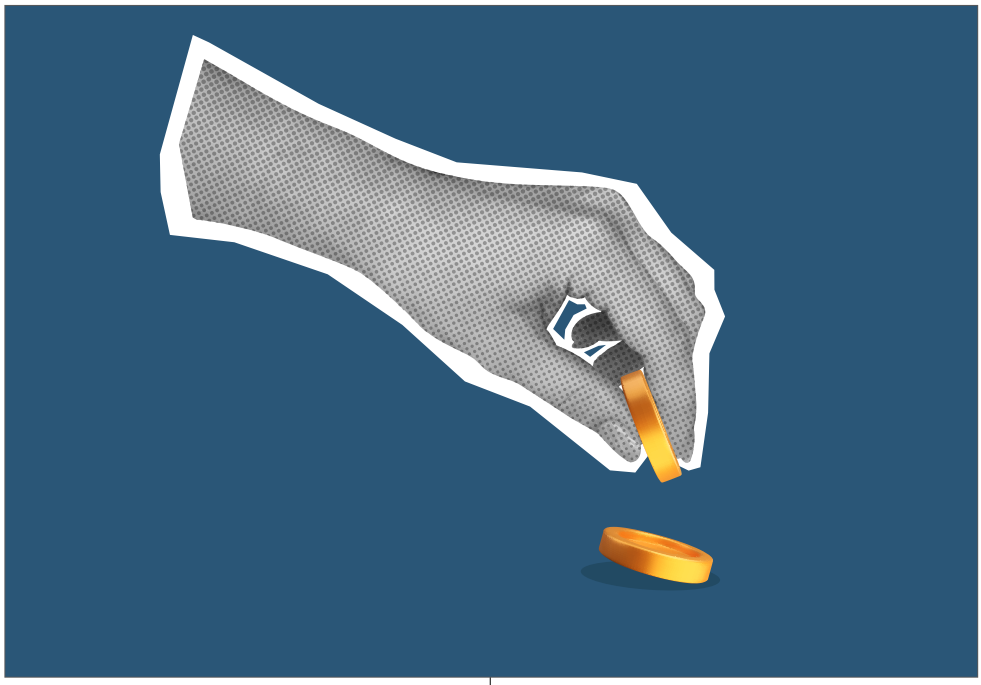
Councils skirt minimum funding to cover high-needs gaps

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE



Cash-strapped councils have been given government permission to circumvent laws requiring minimum funding levels in schools so they candivert cash to cover gaping SEND deficits.

Since 2020 local authorities have had to follow national minimum per-pupil funding levels (MPPFLs). This financial year, the rates are £4,160 for primary pupils and £5,995 for secondary.

Minimum funding levels were a manifesto commitment under the Conservatives. But government documents show Kent, and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP), "gained approval to set a lower value" this year.

Kent was granted a similar request last year.

Andrew O'Neill, a member of the Headteachers' Roundtable, said the move "sets a highly dangerous precedent".

"It's really indicative of the corner that councils have been backed into. It's a massive concern, because all you're doing is slushing not enough money around the same system."

The requests are linked to decisions to transfer money from core schools funding to the high-needs budget. Kent transferred 1.2 per cent – or £15.2 million – this year, while BCP moved 0.5 per cent, £1.3 million.

Such transfers are common. More than 20 councils had requests to transfer £67 million rubber-stamped this year. But until recently the transfers had not affected minimum funding levels.

The Department for Education said it rubber-stamped the deals for both councils "in the context of their safety-valve agreement".

Safety-valve deals involve government bailouts in exchange for efforts to bring down SEND spending. Kent has one, but BCP's bid for a 15-year agreement was rejected this year.

Nevertheless, BCP, which predicts its dedicated schools grant deficit will balloon from £63 million this year to £108 million next spring, went ahead with a 0.45 per cent cut to minimum per pupil funding levels.

The move has particularly affected the area's grammar schools, more likely to be funded at minimum levels because they don't attract as much disadvantage funding.

Keziah Featherstone

Dr Dorian Lewis, head of Bournemouth School, said he now gets £27 less per pupil than the minimum funding level, or about "£25,000 less" overall.

The decision was also made outside of the council's schools forum, where schools would have a say.

"It appears that ministers in allowing the transfer of funds from schools' budgets are complicit with the local authority in damaging our students' life chances," he said.

In council documents, BCP pointed to a growth in school reserves from £13.9 million in 2019, to £37.6 million.

The council also plans to double the amount it transfers from schools next year too.

"The thing for me that really irks is that they're now saying, 'well, you can afford it because you've got a reserve'," Lewis said. "And actually, we've built that reserve up over time to fulfil capital projects, because that's the only way we get that money available.

"It's almost like, 'well, you've managed your budget...you put money aside, you've been prudent. But now that's our excuse now for trying to take money away from you'."

David Sims, head of Bournemouth School for Girls, said his budget had lost about £27,000, "equivalent to half an experienced teacher, the refurbishment of a couple of computer rooms or the provision of significant pastoral/learning support".

"Whilst I am of course mindful of the importance of the need for effective provision for the area's SEND children, I am deeply concerned that our pupils should be funded below the MPPFL."

Keziah Featherstone, co-chair of the Headteachers' Roundtable, said extra SEND funding was "without a shadow of a doubt" needed, but "every single school also needs a minimum amount of funding per pupil".

"That is more critical than ever now. It just feels like robbing Peter to pay Paul."

Last year, Kent reduced minimum per-pupil funding rates by 0.5 per cent to move money to its high-needs budget. This year it reduced the rate by 0.9 per cent. The council has a near £200 million SEND budget deficit.

Seamus Murphy, the chief executive of the Kent-based Turner Schools, warned that schools that were not inclusive could claim they did not have the resources to meet need and "further exacerbate the crisis in provision for children with SEND".

A Kent spokesperson said the changes were approved by its schools forum with 83 per cent support, and the move "does not impact on the viability of any schools".

INVESTIGATION: SEND

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Backlash and legal threats: inclusion push turns sour

SAMANTHA BOOTH
@SAMANTHAJBOOTH

Schools are setting aside cash for potential legal action, being asked to "make the case" to secure SEND cash and signing up to inclusion charters as cash-strapped councils try to boost inclusivity.

The government's key plan to fix the broken SEND system is to make mainstream schools more inclusive.

Buckling under huge deficits on their high-needs funding, some councils are already attempting to get their mainstream schools to educate more pupils with complex needs.

But plans in some areas have led to huge backlash from heads, with threats of legal action and fears over more cuts by the back door – providing a stark warning sign for future reforms.

Schools Week investigates ...

Special schools 'turn away most complex' kids

Kent council – the country's largest – plans a raft of changes to get its spending on pupils with additional needs under control. It was criticised by Ofsted previously for failing to tackle "a lack of willingness" among some schools to "accommodate" children with SEND.

One of the more controversial proposals is to change the admission guidance and designated needs that some special schools cater for, to ensure pupils with more severe and complex needs can access places.

Kent said the current admission guidance means six schools only admit children who are achieving within the range expected for their age, a situation one leader branded as "mad".

This results in some special schools "turning away the most complex pupils and in some cases recommending a mainstream school", council papers stated. In fact, some mainstream schools now have pupils with "more complex needs than those in special schools".

The papers reveal a Kent special school told a parent via an email in March that their child's needs "are too high" for their school, but their "needs could be met at mainstream".

Christine McInnes, Kent's director of education, told *Schools Week* a third of special schools now "reflect our selective system in secondary schools" as they have "very, very restrictive admissions criteria".

Snowfields Academy, for instance, states pupils must have an education, health and care plan with autism as their primary need. But students "should be working at, or close to, age expected attainment levels, within 2-3 years of age expected and on a pathway to achieve GCSE or functional skills qualifications at the end of year 11".

It adds students with a primary need of social, emotional and mental health or a "significant global developmental delay or challenging behaviour" are not appropriate for the school.

McInnes added: "Kent is the only authority that I have come across that restricts the entry of children to special schools by saying, 'we will only take children who can achieve well at GCSE'. It's a complete outlier."

Legal action eyed over inclusion push

However, the proposals have caused a huge backlash.

Kent Special Educational Needs Trust, which represents special schools in the region, has warned the scale of proposals "will require affected schools to make sweeping changes to their curriculum, staffing resources and capital infrastructure".

The heads warned there was "little confidence" the changes "will have the desired impact of better outcomes for children" or address the deficit.

They pushed back on "rhetoric from [Kent council] officers that special schools do not wish to change and are actively resisting change... This is simply not the case and is causing further friction".

Schools Week understands a KSENT leader said during a meeting that it was seeking legal advice on the plans, and suggested it had £100,000 that could be used for this purpose. Schools have to pay for membership.

A KSENT spokesperson said the organisation had "a contingency fund for unpredicted costs", but said: "No monies from the contingency fund are set aside for specific purposes. No money from the

Continued on next page

KSENT budget is ring-fenced for legal challenge.

"KSENT headteachers will continue to work with Kent County Council colleagues in order to ensure the best outcomes for children and young people."

Simon Beamish, chief executive at Leigh Academies Trust which runs schools in the area, has also said if the plans were implemented, his trust would consider legal action against the council.

The proposals would be "damaging" for the region's special schools, and make it "more difficult to achieve a place".

Schools 'sticking fingers in ears'

But Seamus Murphy, chief executive at Turner Schools, said: "The system is broken in Kent and there are those who are working with the local authority to deliver change and those who are sticking their fingers in their ears, shouting [King] Canute-like at the incoming tide and hopping up and down pleased that everybody else's castles are washed away."

He added inclusive mainstream schools currently "face a triple whammy of lower progress rates, staff burnout and risk adverse Ofsted judgements".

Kent said it would aim to "encourage" academies, which are their own admission authorities, to make the changes.

Kent is also creating what it calls a "continuum", setting out what needs schools should be able to cater for.

A draft document stated secondary schools should be able to support children "operating within six to seven years below their chronological age". Kent said the contents of the document "reflect the range of existing practice" in schools.

But some academy bosses are worried the new model will mean funding cuts and a "lack of clarity" about the thresholds for which they will be able to receive additional funds to support children with complex needs.

A consultation response is due this autumn.

Brighton and Hove City Council is also reviewing its admissions system. They want to rebalance the proportion of pupils on free school meals across schools and have started consultation with schools.

Plans include modifying schools' catchment areas to ensure they are more "equitable".

Councillor Jacob Taylor, the council's deputy leader, said he would like a system "where there is a better social mix within our schools".

Heads must 'make case' for cash

Several councils have also moved to a "locality" model on SEND decision making and funding.

Generally, an area is split into "localities" or "clusters" which are made up of headteachers, SENCos and other representatives. They get allocated a chunk of high-needs funding and make decisions on what support each school receives.

Usually, a council just makes decisions on which pupils receive "top-up" funding from the high-needs block, and the cash follows the individual pupil.

Schools can apply for this extra cash, which is for pupils with more complex needs. However, Kent council said schools that see themselves as more inclusive are less likely to apply for top-up cash because they see pupils instead as part of the "ordinary population".

"This can reward schools financially which are less inclusive, and result in unfair allocation of limited resources," they added.

"There is a need to ensure that SEN provision is more clearly linked to agreed, moderated levels of need and that access to additional funding and support is fair."

A similar model has been rolled out in other areas, such as Croydon and Sheffield.

In Sheffield, just a small percentage of its high-needs funding is given to the localities.

The schools in each locality then agree together how the funding should be used.

To access locality top-up funding for individual pupils, schools have to make an application to the panel.

A tool called the Sheffield Support Grid is used to describe the different levels of needs and links them to packages of provision – to make sure decisions are consistent across the city.

In Kent, the proposals have caused big concerns among heads about funding being slashed.

Debbie Rousell, chief executive at The Island Learning Trust, added mainstream heads are also concerned about the "level of need they will be expected to manage and educate – without training, experience or adequate resourcing".

She said: "All three of my schools are incredibly inclusive now, I'm not sure how much more complex children we can educate, without detriment to other pupils and staff wellbeing."

Another boss, who wished to remain anonymous, said schools are worried they are "going to end up out of pocket and having to make support staff redundant". They claimed no financial modelling had been shared.

Asked about these concerns, McInnes said there won't be


Simon Beamish


Seamus Murphy

less funding "but it's going to be distributed in a different way to enable head teachers to make decisions around what's the best way of investing that money".

But they will essentially have to make the case to secure funding. McInnes added heads will "have to come and make the case to the other headteachers in their group about why they should get that level of funding – which I think is fair and transparent, because they're accountable to their peers".

The changes are based on national "evidence and research", she added. "Some people are going to be a bit anxious about it, absolutely it's a change, but there is widespread support for moving to another system. We can't stay on the same system."

But David Bartram, a former government SEND adviser, said that in theory the model prevents a "clashing of horns" between councils and schools as it still depends on having enough money and resource available locally.

Councils slash top-up cash under inclusion plans

As part of inclusion plans, two councils have actually cut their top-up funding.

Norfolk headteachers warned of redundancies after the cash-strapped council cut top-up funding to remain within its £35 million budget.

Heads warned this will impact on their ability to be inclusive, but the council is already falling behind its spending targets linked to the £70 million bailouts it is due to get under the government's controversial safety valve scheme.

Meanwhile, Buckinghamshire Council will only give top-up funding to pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHCP), unless in "exceptional circumstances". It has a £6 million overspend on its SEND funding.

As councils try to lower soaring rates of EHCPs, Margaret Mulholland, SEND specialist at ASCL leaders' union, said: "It's not helpful to set a precedent that EHCPs are the only route to additional funding.

"Not all pupils with high needs require a plan, and this could delay them from being able to access timely support."

Specialist in mainstream

Another focus for councils is opening more specialist provision within mainstream schools.

A quarter of new specialist places planned by councils as part of the £2.6 billion capital grant they got from government are in mainstream schools, Special Needs Jungle analysis found.

There are two routes to do this.

SEN units are a special provision within mainstream schools where pupils are taught in separate classes for at least half of their time. These have risen from 352 in 2020-21 to 392 last year, government data shows.

The second is resourced provision, where places are reserved in mainstream schools for pupils with SEN, who are taught for at least half of their time within mainstream classes but require a base and specialist support. There were 1,168 of these last year, up from 1,066 three years ago.

Norfolk will utilise £120 million capital funding to open 50 "specialist resource bases" in its mainstream schools, providing 746 places by 2027.

This would help reduce its reliance on the independent specialist school sector.

Norfolk's special schools are so full that some dining areas are too small to serve all students at once, forcing "some to have meals in classroom settings", council documents state.

There has also been the "elimination of dedicated spaces needed for delivering aspects of the curriculum – like art, music or science facilities to make room for classes of pupils".

There have also been delays by DfE in the timeline to deliver two new special schools.

"Extreme pressures" in these schools risk lower Ofsted grades, they said. "To enable special schools to remain sustainable and to provide good education for their pupils it is imperative that inclusion in mainstream schools is increased," the council warned.

SEND consultant Natalie Packer said resourced provision provides "balance" for pupils, but she is concerned schools with the most physical space will be chosen over those that can provide the best quality provision.

She also pointed out there was little guidance over the use of such provision, with leaders more widely concerned about oversight.

Unity School Trust has offered to create specialist places in its mainstream schools after rolling this out in neighbouring Suffolk.

Tim Coulson, chief executive, said they can be quick to open and relieve the pressure on councils, with pupils staying local rather than being sent to specialist provision miles away.

"Typically, you appoint staff with a greater level of expertise... so it's really useful for the whole school. It feels like a special school environment but in a mainstream school," he added.

North Somerset is also opening more resource bases as well as "nurture groups" for youngsters with social, emotional and mental health needs. The council, also on the safety valve scheme, warned it faces effective bankruptcy unless it receives more government cash for SEND.

It is also launching a memorandum of co-operation, which schools are asked to sign up to, setting out expectations on inclusion.

For example, schools should ensure that "they are using any funding given in the most efficient and effective way".

NEWS

Labour set for academies support staff pay showdown

JACK DYSON
@JACKYDYS

The organisation representing England's trusts said academy "flexibility" should not be impacted by a national support staff pay framework – in what looks like the first clash over Labour plans to water down freedoms.

Legislation to re-instate the support staff negotiating body (SSSNB) through the employment rights bill was introduced in Parliament on Thursday, as part of attempts to establish national terms and conditions, career progression routes, and fair pay rates.

The changes – which were featured in Labour's election manifesto – will apply to both maintained schools and academies to ensure all staff "have access to fair pay and conditions", according to the Department for Education.

Trusts currently do not currently have to follow national pay rules.

Leora Cruddas, CEO of the Confederation of School Trusts, said: "School trusts do not all operate in the same way, and we must ensure that schools in all types of structures can benefit from the flexibility to deploy support staff in the ways that most benefits pupils, particularly some of our most vulnerable pupils."


Bridget Phillipson

She said reforms "so desperately needed to our special educational needs system rely on this".

The SSSNB was abolished at the start of Michael Gove's academy drive in 2010. The DfE said the reintroduction of the body "marks a key milestone" in its commitment to "reset the relationship with the sector".

The SSSNB will consist of representatives of employers, unions and an independent chairperson.

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson said reinstating the body will ensure support staff "are properly valued and respected as the professionals they are".

The bill will pass through the legislative process. As part of this, the government will consult on the detail of the changes.

Cruddas added CST will "work closely with government to ensure that the final legislation both supports fair employment terms for these vital colleagues and protects the flexibility that we have seen is crucial to the ongoing work of trusts to improve children's education".

EXCLUSIVE

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

DfE saves £1.6m by scrapping key stage 1 SATs opt-out scheme

Government has scrapped a scheme forcing schools to opt-out of receiving optional key stage 1 SATs papers, which cost an estimated £1.6 million last year.

In 2023-24, the Standards and Testing Agency required schools to opt out of receiving the SATs materials for year 2 pupils, despite them becoming non-statutory.

Fewer than one in 10 primary schools opted out, with the Department for Education estimating it would cost £1.59 million to print and distribute the papers, a *Schools Week* freedom of information request found.

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

But the STA confirmed on Thursday it would no longer print and distribute papers for the tests.

Instead, it will make the test papers and mark schemes available on the primary assessment gateway for schools to download and print from May 1.

Schools can still order hard copies of modified test papers by November 15, to be distributed next spring.

The government encouraged schools to administer the optional tests and teacher assessment, but there is no requirement to report the results to parents or councils. They will not be used for school accountability purposes.

'Common sense has prevailed'

In an email to schools, the STA said: "The purpose of the optional assessments remains to support schools with measuring pupil achievement and identifying where their pupils need additional support as they transition into key stage 2.

"The tests can also be used to inform teacher assessment judgements, using the optional teacher assessment frameworks."

James Bowen, assistant general secretary at school leaders' union NAHT, said: "It is good to see that common sense has prevailed here.

"We said last year that it was an unnecessary waste of money for schools to be automatically sent these papers now that the tests are optional – not to mention the completely avoidable environmental impact."

He added: "Issuing schools with test papers unless they opted out also seemed to signal that asking children to do these tests was still the default option."

DfE said earlier this year the £1.59 million figure was an estimate only, based on budgeted costs before they worked out a final figure later in the year.

LONG READ: ATTENDANCE

Schools stumble on the attendance tightrope

JACK DYSON
@JACKYDYS

Schools are walking an attendance tightrope as the government ratchets up pressure on reducing stubbornly high absence rates – but parents are becoming more vocal in their opposition to measures to get kids back in the classroom post-Covid. *Schools Week* investigates ...

Schools are having to apologise and scramble to dampen parental anger over proposed attendance policies with one parent taking to social media to tell a school: "You do not own my child."

Leaders say the incident is indicative of heads put in an "impossible position", as the government increases the pressure to get pupils back into class.

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson has described absence levels as an "emergency", with analysis suggesting it has become a bigger issue during inspections.

Parents' views have changed in a post-Covid world. Research conducted by consultancy Thinks Insight & Strategy,

cited by the Department for Education, shows parents "consider small periods of absence from school manageable" and are more concerned about "spreading illnesses".

The attendance tightrope

Towards the end of last month, Glenmoor and Winton Academies in Bournemouth sent an "attendance pledge" to parents and pupils that required pupils to commit to "always" coming into school, "even if you feel unwell".

But following a number of comments about the letter's "tone and content", principal Leon Lima said: "We got this wrong and apologise for doing so."

The Neale-Wade Academy in Cambridgeshire was also at the centre of controversy this week after informing parents it would not accept "ill", "unwell", "poorly" or "has a cold" as reasons for missing school.

Absences because of period pains also would be listed as unauthorised, "unless we have medical information".

But Graham Horn, the academy's principal, said staff had since "written to families to clarify our approach, which does not require medical notes when a student is absent".

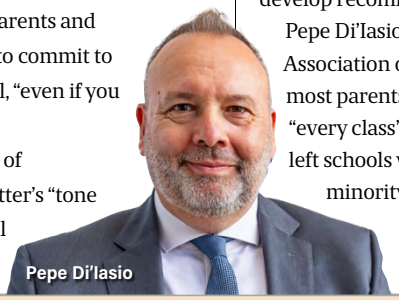
Ellie Costello, a director of the parent-support organisation Square Peg, said the wider attendance challenge was "a tightrope. It's a balancing act of the two hands of leadership – the boundary, as well as the care – but it is doable."

Glenmoor, which is part of United Learning Trust, has now said attendance solutions will need the "support of our parent community", inviting parents to join a "working group" to develop recommendations.

Pepe Di'Iasio, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said most parents understood pupils should attend "every class", but the "rise of social media has left schools vulnerable to abuse from a vocal minority".

Costello also said attendance

Ellie Costello



Pepe Di'Iasio

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JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS

Attendance mentors move into ten new areas

The government has named the 10 areas where attendance mentors will operate under a £15 million expansion of the scheme.

Etio – previously known as Tribal Education Services – will take the reins of the scheme that has been piloted by Barnardo's in five of the government's 24 priority education investment areas since 2022.

From March, it will cover Nottingham, Walsall, West Somerset, Ipswich, Hastings, Blackpool, Norwich, Hartlepool, Portsmouth and Rochdale.

The three-year trial has been running in Middlesbrough, Salford, Doncaster, Knowsley and Stoke on Trent – but it will stop in those areas when the Barnardo's contract ends later in the year.

It comes as schools grapple with high school absence rates. One in five pupils currently misses the equivalent of an afternoon a week.

Pupils on the programme are supported over a 12 to 20-week period with a plan developed by the mentor.

The Department for Education centred its announcement today on a £15 million expansion of the scheme to reach more than 10,000 persistently absent pupils over three years. This works out at about £1,500 for each pupil.

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson said the investment would help thousands of children back into the classroom and marked an important step towards "truly turning the tide on persistent absence".

The DfE said the pilot had "successfully supported pupils with a wide range of challenges, including low-level anxiety, special educational needs, poor attitude to learning and complex family circumstances".

"The pilot evaluation showed improvements in individual pupils' attendance, wellbeing, home routines, and engagement at school."

The Youth Endowment Fund has also been appointed to oversee an external evaluation of the programme.

Etio, whose three-year contract will run from next March, has started recruiting mentors, who will offer one-to-one support to the youngsters.

was "nudging on the multiple challenges that are requiring schools to be more things to more people. That's an impossible ask because it's exposing all the tensions that are there, the loss of allied services."

Ofsted scrutiny

Schools are increasingly held to account for their attendance rate, with mentions of "attendance" rising to about 1.7 times every 1,000 words in inspection reports this year, analysis by SchoolDash shows, the highest figure since the start of 2017.

Ofsted said attendance was not scrutinised more than in the past, but rather that "attendance is becoming a more prevalent issue".

Absence rates are falling, but are still higher than pre-pandemic. However, unauthorised absences are almost 80 per cent higher at secondary than they were before Covid, Education Policy Institute analysis has found.

And there was "a smaller decline in absence rates than others" among disadvantaged children and those with SEND, widening the attendance gap.

Many of the factors behind absences, such as mental health illness, were outside a school's control and came as attendance services and other forms of support were increasingly inaccessible, Di'Iasio said.

Ofsted reports should "acknowledge the external factors that are making this more challenging, while also taking local context into account".

Last month Phillipson wrote in *The Sunday Times* that "too many parents" believed "cheaper holidays, birthday treats or even a runny nose" were reasons not to attend class.

Before the election, then schools minister Baroness Barran claimed boosting the attendance of pupils who missed the "odd day" was the "really big prize" for heads.

Her team discovered 31 per cent of children missed 5 to 15 per cent of school in 2022-23, up from 21 per cent before the pandemic.

'Don't be threatening'

The government raised its absence fines from £60 to £80 this school year. If not paid within 28 days, the figure rises to £160.

But Rob Tarn, the chief executive of the Northern Education Trust who was appointed the last government's attendance tsar, said parents needed to "be trusted to make judgments about whether their children are well enough to get into school".

"Covid made people very sensitive to respiratory illnesses. I don't think it's for schools to be threatening around that, but it is for schools to question when that happens with individual families too much."

'Lambasting parents is not a constructive way to improve attendance'

In Yorkshire, Red Kite Learning Trust has this year moved its attendance approach "from penalising parents, to much more about focusing on the culture within our schools".

The tactic was trialled at Temple Learning Academy in Leeds after an Ofsted inspection report noted a "significant minority of pupils do not attend school as regularly as they should", despite staff "doing everything they can to improve attendance"

Staff carrying out calls and home visits to absentees now stress to the child they "are being missed". It also has a "stratified approach" to identify children whose attendance has fallen below particular levels and "allocates resource and individuals to them according to their need", said Richard Sheriff, Red Kite's chief executive.

Attendance has risen to 91 per cent, the "highest it's ever been in the school's short history".

One Red Kite primary has also created a "safe space" for parents to gather at pick-up and drop-off times.

"If they're worried about seeing a teacher, or the headteacher's going to have a go at them because they've missed school, it doesn't matter, they can come that safe space on site. It's about making the school less intimidating," he aid.

Horn said close partnerships with families was important, with the trust working hard "to understand any challenges or difficulties".

"We very much have an open-doors approach and encourage families to come and talk to us about any worries they have so we can ... find a positive way forward."

Home-school agreements

Many leaders use home-school agreements that set a school's aims, values, responsibilities and expectations of pupils and parents.

In 2016 the government scrapped a requirement for schools to put the agreements in place. At the time, a DfE spokesperson said the decision was made to "cut red tape" and free schools of a "one-size-fits-all, prescriptive approach to engaging with parents".

But their use appears to be creeping back. A Teacher Tapp survey found 56 per cent of leaders had such as agreement, up slightly from 55 per cent last year, They were more likely in affluent areas.

Red Kite gives its academies the option of using the agreements. One outlines expectations for pupils to "try my best" to hit its attendance target of more than 95 per cent.

Sheriff said "colds and runny noses aren't the big issue for us. Often it's much more fundamental issues associated with mental health ... and poverty.

"Most parents are very keen to get their children into school and I don't think lambasting parents, particularly after what we've been through with Covid, is a particularly constructive way of improving attendance."

Home-school agreements at North Star Community Trust's schools in London set out expectations that children "arrive on time at school each day" and "family holidays are not taken during term time".

Marino Charalambous, its chief executive, said 90 to 95 per cent of parents were fine with everything a school did. "It's the ones that are challenging who you refer back to the home-school agreement."

A DfE spokesperson said: "We must tackle the national epidemic of school absence". The department advocated a "support-first approach for children who are facing barriers to regular school attendance".


Rob Tarn


Richard Sheriff

NEWS

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Longer school days boost pupils' results (a tad)

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@FCDWHITTAKER

A longer school day has a "small yet positive effect on overall attainment", with schools given top Ofsted grades and those that select pupils by ability more likely to extend their hours.

The previous government set out an expectation that schools should provide at least a 32.5-hour week for pupils from this September.

An Education Policy Institute (EPI) study confirms what other research has already shown – that most schools already meet or exceed the new expectation.

Its report, published this week, sheds further light on the types of schools with longer days, and the impact on pupil outcomes.

The research concluded that extra time in school "is associated with a small, yet positive, effect on overall attainment in primary and secondary school".

An additional hour a week in primary schools is associated with improvements in key stage 2

scaled scores of 0.053 and 0.066 for maths and reading.

At secondary, an additional hour of weekly school time was associated with 0.17 of a grade improvement in one GCSE subject. Its impact was greater in languages than in English, maths, science and humanities.

Secondaries tended to have slightly longer average school weeks than primaries by about 20 minutes.

Free schools also had "noticeably longer school weeks than other types of school".

In 2023-24, primary free schools on average had almost an additional hour of school time every week compared with the average primary school.

At secondary level, free schools had more than one hour extra. In community and foundation schools, weeks were 30 minutes shorter than the national average.

Selective schools had almost an hour more than non-selective schools, and 'outstanding' rated schools had weeks between 10 and 20 minutes longer than the typical school.

The new government has not said whether or not it remains committed to the 32.5-hour week.

The Department for Education said it would consider the EPI's findings carefully and set out its position "in due course".

"Every hour in the classroom helps break down barriers to opportunity for young people and paves the way for their future success," a spokesperson said.

"That's why we are taking action to address the barriers to being in the classroom, including increasing access to mental health support in schools, offering free breakfast clubs, and ensuring earlier intervention for children with additional needs."

LUCAS CUMISKEY | @LUCAS_CUMISKEY

Phonics results edge up, but Ofsted critical of KS1

The percentage of pupils meeting the government's "expected standard" in their year 1 phonics screening check has edged up, but remains below pre-pandemic levels.

Government data published this week shows 80 per cent of pupils taking the test for the first time met the standard this year, up from 79 per cent last year and 75 per cent in 2022.

Achievement rates hit 82 per cent between 2015 and 2018.

Pupils who do not meet the expected standard in year 1 do the check again in year 2.

The percentage meeting the standard by the end of year 2 now stands at 89 per cent, the same as last year and up from 87 per cent in 2022.

However, again, this remains below the pre-pandemic norm of between 91 and 92 per cent.

The gap between disadvantaged pupils and their better-off peers stands at 16 percentage points, the same as last year.

There has been a slight increase in the percentage of pupils with special educational

needs meeting the expected standard, from 42 per cent in 2023 to 44 per cent.

The findings follow an Ofsted report this week warning that some schools do not ensure all pupils learn the foundational knowledge they need by the end of key stage 1.

The "vulnerable minority" of pupils are most likely to suffer from flaws in curriculum, teaching and assessment, the watchdog said today. Curriculums for English, beyond the teaching of phonics, were also often below par.

The report is based on previous Ofsted subject reports and research reviews, and visits to 20 schools.

It looked at how schools provide foundational knowledge and skills such as the ability to communicate, read, write and calculate as well as strong physical, emotional and social development.

Sir Martyn Oliver, Ofsted's chief inspector, said: "It is those children who are most vulnerable who benefit most from a strong start to their education.

"I hope this report helps teachers and school leaders in developing a curriculum that provides all children with the knowledge and skills that they need."

Ofsted now intends to review and update its guidance for inspectors to help them focus more on how well curriculum, teaching and assessment leads to foundational knowledge.

Sir Martyn Oliver

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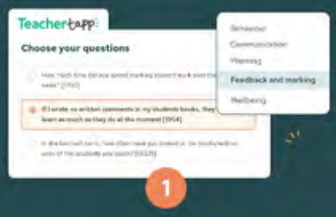

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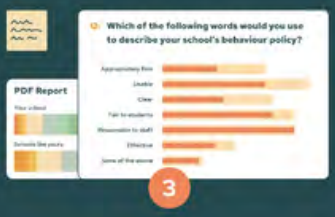

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ANALYSIS: PUPIL MOBILITY

Big trusts see more kids leave their schools

JOHN DICKENS
@JOHNDICKENSSW

'Higher rates are unlikely to be a matter of chance'

Ministers have been urged to investigate why some big academy trusts have nearly 50 per cent more pupils leaving their schools than expected.

Education Datalab analysis has revealed that big trusts have higher numbers of vulnerable pupils joining other schools.

Council schools also disproportionately take in those pupils, the study found.

The Campaign for State Education (CASE), which commissioned the research, said the higher leaving rates were "unlikely to be just a matter of chance". It called for the government to "instruct its regional directors to investigate".

But others urged caution on drawing conclusions. Trusts said differences were sometimes down to unique circumstances or the make-up of their cohorts – such as educating more children from families seeking asylum.

Anne Longfield, the executive chair of the Centre for Young Lives (CfYL) charity, said: "None of us should assume high numbers of children leaving some schools is just a part and parcel of our education system."

"While many schools and MATs are leading the way on inclusion, it needs to become the norm. All children should be able to succeed in school, whatever their needs, and the system should support all schools to do it."

More kids leave big trusts

The study looked at pupils in years 7 to 10 who were on roll at a state-funded secondary at the time of the January census in 2021-22. It then compared this with the number of pupils in years 8 to 11 in the January census of the following year.

Datalab found rates of "outward mobility" – pupils leaving – was higher in academies that were part of large trusts. The rate was 5.6 per cent compared with 4.4 per cent in local authority schools – 28 per cent more.

This difference was smaller (13 per cent), but still persisted when pupil characteristics of school cohorts were accounted for.

Vulnerable pupils who left school during the year were also disproportionately taken in by a local authority school. The leaver rate for vulnerable pupils at large trusts was also slightly higher than for other schools.

Pupils move schools for a variety of reasons, including family relocation or a search for a better education. Others may be encouraged by their schools to leave, known as off-rolling, the study said.

But its authors warned: "The motivation behind such moves cannot be inferred from data alone."

The government has pledged to inspect and highlight inclusivity as part of new Ofsted report cards introduced in September.

Jonny Uttley, who is putting together an "inclusion vision" for the Centre for Young Lives charity, said it was important "we don't leap to judgment about particular trusts... We should not assume those with higher-than-expected levels of mobility are involved in nefarious practice."

But he added it is "equally important that there are honest and transparent discussions about why some mobility levels are so high".

What do trusts say?

Of the 27 trusts with 10 or more mainstream secondary schools, 23 had higher than expected numbers of pupils leaving. Eight were at least 30 per higher.

At the Ted Wragg Multi Academy Trust, 6.9 per cent of the pupils left their schools over the year – 44.3 per cent higher than expected, based on Datalab's modelling of pupil cohorts.

However, the trust pointed out the analysis included two schools that joined late in 2023, which meant the figures could have included earlier mobility.

A spokesperson also said it had the highest percentage of pupils that moved from one trust school to another because of their close proximity and "unique culture".

Many of its schools were in areas with high pupil mobility, such as Plymouth, and also supported families seeking asylum who were in temporary accommodation.

The trust's own data also shows 40 per cent of pupils that had "outward mobility" joined a Ted Wragg school from another secondary.

"We are proud to support our communities and work hard to ensure our schools are ambitious and inclusive places where children can transform their life


Anne Longfield


Jonny Uttley

chances through learning," the spokesperson said.

Star Academies had a 5.5 per cent leaver rate, 41.8 per cent higher than expected. The trust did not respond to a request for comment.

David Ross Education Trust, which has 35 schools, had a 41.5 per cent higher leaver rate. The trust said its academies were in "above-average areas for high mobility, in coastal and urban areas where industry is declining or stopped altogether".

The areas have also been "heavily affected by Brexit and changes to immigration and emigration, often with families returning overseas".

'We need better inclusion understanding'

The previous government shelved a plan to include contextual information relating to inclusion alongside league tables.

Showing again why data around inclusion is tricky to draw conclusions from, Unity Schools Partnership said its figures included many pupils who had left amid a wider, local reorganisation of moving three-tier to two-tier schools.

The trust was "committed to working with local schools and does not believe it has higher numbers than average of pupils leaving its schools".

A spokesperson for The Kemnal Academies Trust added its inward and outward mobility levels were similar, which reflected "the challenging contexts of the communities we serve".

The other trusts with 30 per cent more pupils leaving than expected did not want to comment or did not respond.

The Co-Operative Academies Trust was one

of just four large trusts to have below expected numbers of pupils leaving (5.5 per cent compared with an expected 6.5 per cent).

Chris Tomlinson, its chief executive, said the trust had a "real commitment to social inclusion and its local communities".

Uttley added that Ofsted and the government "must become much better at understanding how inclusive different schools and trusts are and show more interest in the proportion of children from local communities that attend and succeed in particular schools.

"This is something neither has even attempted to do until now."

Frank Norris, an education adviser for the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, said pupil mobility numbers were "quite complex" and often came down to "circumstances around an individual school".

However, he said "independent oversight" of schools in particular areas was needed, adding "analysing the circumstances around the inward and outward mobility would be a key element of this oversight".

Labour has pledged to give councils more powers to coordinate school admissions.

Others have called for regulation responsibilities currently overseen by the government's regional directors to instead sit in an independent regulator, or be devolved to regional mayors.

Internal AP and community pioneers

But trusts also say other parts of the system are not helping.

DRET has called for national standards for fair access protocols and panels (FAPs), which are responsible for finding a school place for vulnerable children who move mid-year.

A *Schools Week* investigation in 2019 found hundreds of pupils had failed to secure a place, with some waiting up to ten and a half months.

A DRET spokesperson said it was "becoming clear that pupils are at risk of being moved from school to school without intervention through ineffective FAPs".

They also said that boosting per capita funding for areas of high mobility, and particularly schools that took on significant numbers of in-year transfers, "should be considered".

Co-Op said all its secondaries now had their own internal alternative provision – as opposed to using external AP – to boost inclusion.

It had also appointed "community pioneers" at its schools to help pupils with food, hygiene and wellbeing issues.

The big trusts with higher than expected pupils leaving

Trust name	Predicted leaver rate	Actual leaver rate	Difference (%)
The Ted Wragg Multi Academy Trust*	4.8%	6.9%	+44.3%
Star Academies	3.9%	5.5%	+41.8%
The David Ross Education Trust	5.3%	7.6%	+41.5%
Greenshaw Learning Trust	4.9%	6.8%	+38.3%
The Kemnal Academies Trust	5.3%	7.3%	+37.5%
Leigh Academies Trust	4.4%	5.9%	+35.1%
Unity Schools Partnership	4.1%	5.4%	+31.1%
Harris Federation	4.4%	5.7%	+30.9%

Source: Education Datalab analysis of pupil roll numbers between 2022 and 2023
* The figures include data for two schools that joined later in the 2023 year

SCHOOLS WEEK

Oracy should become 'the fourth R', says commission

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@FCDWHITTAKER

'In some ways key stage 3 is a disaster zone'

Ministers wanting to weave oracy into the curriculum should focus on the transition to secondary school and key stage 3 to avoid years 7 to 9 becoming a "long, tedious runway" to GCSEs, the chair of the Oracy Commission has said.

Geoff Barton, the former general secretary of the ASCL school leaders' union, also said schools should not be judged directly on their oracy offer as this would lead to teaching "to a gimmicky trick".

The commission's report this week called for oracy to become the "fourth R", with equal status to reading, writing and maths. It needed to be supported by better teacher training, reforms to GCSE English language and investment in expressive arts and extra-curricular activities.

Communication skills should be embedded "throughout the primary and secondary national curriculum", but also more widely throughout each school's culture.

Speaking at the launch of the report on Tuesday, Barton said oracy already "shows up" in the national curriculum, but "sometimes in the wrong place".

"It shows up in the aims of the subject, rather than the stuff that teachers will be using and planning their work, those schemes of work."

"If I was advising the government, I'd say you could probably afford to leave primary at the moment and focus on transition and key stage 3, because in some ways, it's a disaster zone.

He said it had been seen as "this long and tedious runway and that exams are the only thing that matters".

One of the commission's key recommendations is a review of GCSE English language.

Barton said the qualification "should do something radically different...it should teach about the English language, because at the moment, [it] doesn't".

"You will grind through an anthology of poems, you will read a series of texts, you won't fundamentally learn about joys and richness and influences on your language. We think that should be an entitlement."

The commission report came up with a new "broad and expansive" definition of oracy: "Articulating ideas, developing understanding and engaging with others through speaking, listening and communication."

It called for schools to be properly "resourced and incentivised" to give pupils access to a broad curriculum, including the expressive arts. Schools in poorer areas also needed more resources and capacity to provide extra-curricular activities, the report said.

Teacher training should equip teachers to use "dialogue and discussion to enhance learning", and include understanding of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

The definition of oracy should also recognise "other forms of communication which children and young people use to articulate ideas, develop understanding and engage with others to avoid excluding children who communicate through means other than spoken language".

The commission warned that without formal assessment, currency and reporting, there was a "risk that oracy remains sidelined and fails to cut through the competing priorities and pressures schools aim to address".

However, this "has to be balanced with evidence as to how high-stakes assessment and accountability could pervert the purpose of oracy education and detract from an expansive understanding of oracy".

Investment in curriculum guidance and exemplification, teacher development, evidence and research, and the mobilisation of existing high-quality practice should therefore "precede any attempts to introduce new high-stakes testing of oracy".

It should also be "considered a contributing factor to the quality of education a school provides" within the new report cards. But Barton warned this should not amount to a specific Ofsted judgment.

"There are some people who said to us, if oracy matters, then it needs to show up in Ofsted inspections. Really? What would they look at?

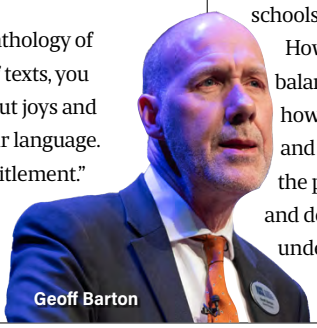
"They need to understand oracy. They need to recognise the importance of oracy. They need to celebrate it when they are seeing it and feed back to the school and put in the report it's great to see it.

"But as soon as you start to make a judgment about oracy, ... the quality of oracy teaching in school will get less good, because people will teach to a gimmicky trick."

The government has said it will consider the recommendations as part of its curriculum and assessment review, chaired by Professor Becky Francis.

But Barton said care was needed. "Some of the things that we're saying will feed, we think, into that review, but there's other stuff as well."

He said the commission would continue to try to "influence that curriculum review".


Geoff Barton


Professor Becky Francis

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Former head denies off-rolling at Manchester school

LUCAS CUMISKEY
@LUCAS_CUMISKEY


Drew Povey

A school featured in the hit TV series *Educating Greater Manchester* was like a "zoo" with "dangerous" behaviour worsened by the head's refusal to exclude pupils, a misconduct panel has heard.

Drew Povey, the former executive head of Harrop Fold School, Worsley, is accused of off-rolling three pupils before the January 2018 census to boost performance data.

But he denied "massaging results" as his Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA) case opened this week. It was one of the first off-rolling cases to emerge.

It is alleged Povey caused or failed to stop data being amended to record that two of the pupils had attended when they hadn't.

Pupils regularly sent home before the end of the school day were also not logged properly, according to claims put to the TRA panel in Coventry.

His then deputies, Ross Povey and Jennifer Benigno, face the same allegations, which relate to the 2017-18 academic year. Benigno denies wrongdoing. Ross Povey is not attending and is not represented.

Jonathan Storey, representing Benigno, said proceedings had been "hanging over" them for six years, a "very long time" in a senior leader's career.

Off-rolling to 'make school look better'

The hearing was told three pupils were off-rolled in an "inappropriate way" in a "certain window" ahead of the statutory census in January 2018, and then put back on soon afterwards.

Two were in alternative provision and the third was "missing in education".

Andrew Cullen, for the TRA, asked the panel to consider whether there was "some calculation here...to make the school look better".

In a statement this week, Drew Povey said he held his hands up for "administrative mistakes that were made involving two children, and as the leader of that school, I take full responsibility".

But to conclude that there was a "deliberate plan to off-roll to benefit the school's performance as a whole is completely wide of the mark".

Povey, who featured in the Channel 4 fly-on-the-wall documentary in 2017, announced his resignation in a letter published on social media in September 2018.

He alleged a "heavy-handed" approach from Salford City Council, which he claimed had "completely ignored the best interests of the pupils, staff and school".

Attendance figures 'inflated'

Cullen claimed attendance data was "inflated to create a distorted picture of attendance".

Gary Chambers was the school's director of attitudes and learning in the 2017-18 year.

He gave a statement to a Salford-backed investigation, saying he was "vaguely aware" of some pupils being taken off roll around census time, the panel heard.

Ofsted has defined off-rolling as removing a pupil from the school roll without using a permanent exclusion, when this is primarily in the best interests of the school, not the pupil.

Chambers said in the statement this was done to "artificially amend the figures relating to school performance and I think that means artificially improve the figures", said Andrew Faux, representing Drew Povey.

If pupils were not recorded in the January census, their GCSE results would not have counted for the school's performance that year, Faux said.

However, he claimed Chambers was not being "wholly truthful".

Povey's "mantra" was about being inclusive, not excluding pupils and taking on challenging children from other schools.

Faux said Povey wasn't "bothered" by taking on pupils who would "never" get five A*s to C grades, and asked why he would then off-roll children to boost statistics.

Pupil behaviour 'like a zoo'

Phil Ince, a senior staff member, said in a statement to the investigation he'd heard Povey using walkie-talkies to order staff that "kids be sent home".

Faux said that occasionally, when a pupil was "having a meltdown, in mental distress, parents would be called and with their agreement the child would go home before the end of the school day".

Ince told the hearing Povey's refusal to exclude pupils and alleged withdrawal to focus on external projects led to a breakdown in pupil behaviour.

"Towards the end it was a zoo," he said.

He claimed the behaviour policy was not followed, and that staff had considered striking over safety concerns while Povey was in charge. These claims are disputed.

"From around about 2015 it started to deteriorate fast and first it would be small things but then it became a snowball coming down a hill." Ofsted rated Harrop Fold 'inadequate' after inspecting it in October 2018 and it reopened as the Lowry Academy in 2021.

The hearing continues.

NEWS: MATS

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Trust gets notice to improve after school blaze

JACK DYSON
@JACKYDYS

An academy trust has been given a notice to improve over an insurance issue that emerged after a massive fire largely destroyed one of its schools.

The blaze tore through SS Simon & Jude CE Primary in Bolton last year, forcing 400 pupils to be taught at three different locations for three months.

Seventeen fire engines and 85 firefighters were called to the blaze, which destroyed almost all the school's buildings.

But Vantage Academies Trust, which runs the school, was issued a notice to improve (NtI) after the incident highlighted a failure to secure adequate insurance for expansion work in 2022-23. The notice was published this week.

Micon Metcalfe, a school finance expert, said the case showed how severe the ramifications could be if insurance arrangements were incorrect.

"When you're having contract works done, you need to have insurance in place that will cover you if anything goes wrong.

"To do that you probably need to get broker advice. Not having it and going ahead is a big risk."

The trust is signed up to the Department for Education's alternative insurance scheme, the risk

protection arrangement (RPA).

But the DfE said the RPA did not provide cover for contract works above £250,000. Members had to ensure third parties had an appropriate level of public liability cover or take out additional joint-names insurance with the contractor.

In this instance, the necessary commercial insurance arrangements were not in place.

The NtI said that it was issued to Vantage "on governance grounds" after "failing to take out adequate insurance cover", which is a breach of the academy trust handbook.

It recognised "that the trust has been under new leadership since September 1, 2023" and the "positive actions" taken "to address some of the governance and executive team issues identified by the fire".

It also "acknowledged the exceptional and challenging circumstances the trust has been dealing with" since the fire.

A department spokesperson said Jill Messham, the trust's new chief executive, "has investigated the circumstances surrounding the failure in governance and leadership, has taken action to change finance systems and lines of accountability and has commissioned an external governance review".

Messham, who was appointed in September last year, said the matters were taken "very seriously. We have swiftly addressed many of the issues.... significant changes have been made to the leadership, governance and structure of the trust, strengthening governance, financial and estate management.

"We know, due to the nature of the breach, that none of these challenges have impacted our schools... although the new structures and processes we have put in place will undoubtedly improve how we serve them all."

Pupils are now being taught in temporary accommodation on an adjacent site while the school is rebuilt.

EXCLUSIVE

JOHN DICKENS | @JOHNDICKENSSW

Trust to close after losing £4m council legal row

A special school trust saddled with a seven-figure deficit after having to repay a near £4 million bill to its local council over unpaid services is to close.

Parallel Learning Trust's six schools are to be handed to new trusts. The board took the decision after Mark Jordan, the former chief executive, left in September last year, a spokesperson for Parallel said.

Rather than appoint a new CEO, the government installed its chief troubleshooter Angela Barry to oversee the closure.

Parallel this year finished paying back a £3.38 million settlement it struck with Lambeth council in south London following a legal claim for unpaid payroll services.

A settlement was agreed in 2019-20, and the cash was repaid in March. A further £504,000 relating to a pension fund liability is also due to be repaid.

Annual accounts for last year, published in February, show the trust had a £2.3 million deficit.

This was "predominantly linked to the financial challenges arising from the historic payroll debt", which related to its Evolve Academy special school in Lambeth, accounts stated.

The school was created in November 2022 following the merger of Park Campus Academy and Kennington Park Academy.

The accounts blamed "poor financial management many years ago, overseen by the previous executive team" for a £1.7 million deficit.

Accounts for 2016-17 show its chief executive at the time, human resources manager and financial accountant were dismissed for "attempted falsification of salary-related documentation". Jordan took over after this.

As well as the repayments, the school has struggled with reduced pupil numbers and funding levels.

Schools Week previously revealed the government had stepped in to resolve the legal battle between Lambeth and the trust, which also runs schools in Essex and Kent.

A reduction in high-needs top-up funding had been "challenging", the trust said in 2019, criticising the council for declining "repeated attempts to renegotiate this".

A spokesperson for the trust said this week: "Our board voluntarily took the decision to transfer our academies to new providers following the departure of our CEO and to best assure the schools' ongoing improvement. This process is underway and progressing well."

It is not clear who will pick up any remaining trust deficit. The government has written off trusts' debts before, and sometimes does the same when academies with deficits are handed to new trusts.

Government accounts for last year show it waived more than £4.5 million in debt owed by trusts that had schools rebrokered to others.

NEWS: POLICY

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Capital calling: London leaders dominate adviser panels

JOHN DICKENS
@JOHNDICKENSSW

Leaders of London schools dominate the advisers appointed to develop key Ofsted and curriculum reforms.

Schools in the north east last week warned education secretary Bridget Phillipson of a "severe lack of representation" from their area.

Of the 94 members on the seven external reference groups established by Ofsted, only two worked in the region's schools, Schools North East analysis found.

There was no representation on the Department for Education's 12-member curriculum and assessment review panel, it said.

But analysis by *Schools Week* has found that the Midlands is the most under-represented.

Chris Zarraga, the director of Schools North East, said the absence of "diverse regional representation on policy-shaping bodies perpetuates a harmful cycle of 'one-size-fits-all' solutions, which fail to address the pressing needs of schools serving the most vulnerable students".

Dominance of the capital

Our analysis looked at the DfE's curriculum panel members and the four Ofsted panels relating directly to schools: curriculum, behaviour, inclusion and wellbeing.

Of the 54 schools representatives, 27 were from organisations that worked in London. However, this may be skewed by 13 people representing national organisations headquar-tered in the capital, but whose reach may extend to other areas.

Of the other regions, the East Midlands was the most under-represented – with just one person. The south west had two.

Given the caveat about national organisations, we also looked at the 18 panellists who work directly in the schools sector.

All but two of these are from academies or trusts. We included two leaders who recently left their positions as trust chief executives.

Schools in London make up 13 per cent of the total nationwide. But seven of the advisers (39 per cent) worked in London schools.

Another five also worked for a trust that had some schools in the capital alongside other regions (taking the total to 66 per cent).

Missing Midlands

Schools in the north east, north west and Yorkshire and the Humber represent 29 per cent of schools nationally. Four (22 per cent) of those on the panels hailed from organisations that had schools in those regions – so they are not far off being representative.

While a small sample size, the north east is actually over-represented among the 18 leaders we looked at. The region has 5 per cent of the country's schools, but two panellists (11 per cent).

Again, the Midlands were under-represented. The East Midlands has 9 per cent of England's schools and the West Midlands represents 11 per cent. But none of the 18 panellists hailed from school groups in those regions.

Claire Ward, the mayor of the East Midlands, said the lack of representation was "all too familiar story that has real impact on our children and young people".

"We don't just need a seat at the table, we need the government to understand the challenges in the East Midlands that are a barrier to

Pepe Di'Iasio, the leader of the ASCL leaders' union, said while it might be difficult to balance the panels, it was disappointing that "some regions have been missed out entirely".

"Regional context and insight are important factors. Ofsted and the curriculum and assessment review will need to ensure they find ways to engage with all regions."

A DfE spokesperson said review panel members were appointed to "ensure the very best expertise available is balanced with the need for broad sector and demographic representation".

Ofsted did not want to comment.

Northerners calling the shots

In a letter to Phillipson, Zarraga said non-representative adviser panels "threaten the effectiveness of education policy-making".

However, Phillipson and schools minister Catherine McKinnell both represent constituencies in the north east, as do both the department's private parliamentary secretaries.

The head of Ofsted, Sir Martyn Oliver, works mostly from the inspectorate's York office.

And Lee Owston, Ofsted's national director who chairs three of the expert groups, was an inspector and taught in the north east.

The DfE spokesperson said that Phillipson and McKinnell "continue to be proud and vocal supporters of the region".

But Zarraga said it was "equally troubling that the process for selecting members of these reference groups remains opaque".

Ofsted said its experts were "invited external stakeholders with relevant experience". It did not provide further comment.

Professor Becky Francis, chair of the government's curriculum review chair, has previously said she "resisted the temptation to tokenistically place, say, a parent or an employer or a young person on the panel".

She was responding to "surprising" criticism of having no local authority-maintained schools represented.


Chris Zarraga


Catherine McKinnell

NEWS ROUND-UP

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Six things you might have missed this week

Here's your trusty Schools Week round-up of the news, announcements and research you may have missed this week.

Ofsted shakes up ECF and NPQ inspections

Organisations inspected for their early career framework training and national professional qualifications will get the right to present additional evidence in meetings with Ofsted.

They will also have more time to request a deferral and to flag concerns after the inspection.

But guidance is now more vague on when providers will new told of an impending inspection, when conversations with the lead inspector will take place and when teams will arrive.

Ofsted has set out a range of changes to its inspection framework and handbook for lead ECF and NPQ providers, which get full inspections every two years and monitoring visits during the first year of delivering their course.

Read a full summary of the changes online here.

Consider 'parachute payments' for falling rolls

New "parachute payments" could help protect schools from the financial implications of falling rolls, says a report from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).

Primary pupil numbers have been dropping nationally since 2019, while secondary numbers are due to peak in 2026 before falling as a population bulge from the 2000s baby boom makes its way through education.

Schools can get funding for falling rolls, but only if they can demonstrate that pupil numbers are expected to rise within three to five years.

The NFER said this was "likely to mean most schools with falling numbers which are seeing their intake fall year-on-year are ineligible to apply".

Instead, reformed "parachute payments" would give schools some breathing room while pupil numbers are falling quicky.

Read the full story online here.

DfE resumes antisemitism prevention project


Bridget Phillipson

The government is resuming a £7 million procurement to tackle antisemitism in schools, colleges and universities, it announced on the first anniversary of the October 7 terror attacks in Israel.

The programme aims to give staff the confidence to teach and facilitate discussion related to antisemitism, including around the Israel-Gaza conflict.

It will also try to help them recognise and respond to antisemitism and develop policies to tackle it.

Bridget Phillipson, the education secretary, said it was "vitally important" that education staff had the confidence and skills to root out antisemitism as soon as it emerged.

Read the full story online here.

Children less happy at school

Pupils feel less happy at school and are less likely to find what they learn interesting than three years ago, while staff are more likely to report bullying or physical violence.

Edurio's "high-quality and inclusive education 2024" report, published this week, also found that just 32 per cent of pupils polled were likely to recommend their school to others.

The report is based on data from three surveys of 245,000 staff, pupils and parents.

Forty-seven per cent of 102,782 pupils said they felt very or quite happy at school, the first time that figure has dropped below 50 per cent.

Just 28 per cent of 76,534 students said they always or quite often found what they learned at school interesting, while 35 per cent rarely never enjoyed them.

Read the full findings online here.

NPQ lead provider quits scheme

One of the government's lead providers of national professional qualifications (NPQs) is quitting, claiming its ability to support schools "as effectively and impartially as possible" has been "constrained" by relying on taxpayer cash.

Gareth Conyard, the joint chief executive of the Teacher Development Trust (TDT), called the NPQ market "increasingly dysfunctional", with "unequal relationships" between providers and the Department for Education.

Schools Week revealed this year that ministers were scaling back their free NPQ programme. Officials were tight-lipped about how many places they would provide, but it's understood they were capped at 10,000, down from 40,000 in 2023-24.

TDT has also announced the withdrawal of its bid to deliver the Early Career Framework (ECF).

Read the full story online here.

Covid squeeze wanes but disadvantage gap persists

The Covid squeeze on pupil outcomes "has started to wane", but the disadvantage gap continues to be "substantial".

Researchers from the National Foundation for Educational Research were commissioned by the Education Endowment Foundation to follow the attainment of children now in years 4 and 5.

The differences between pre and post-pandemic scores in reading and maths had "significantly" reduced since 2021.

The gap between results for poorer children and their more affluent classmates narrowed, but a "substantial disadvantage gap remains", the researchers said.

Read the full story online here.

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

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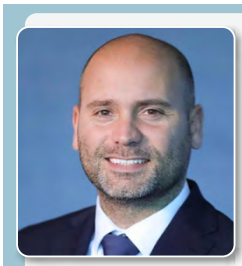
Movers & Shakers

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

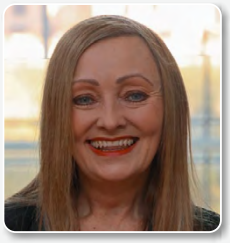


Chris Davis

CEO, Ethos Academy Trust

Start date: January
Current job: Deputy chief executive, Consilium Academies

Interesting fact: Previously a football player at various levels, Chris now enjoys road cycling, a sport he has found to be injury free and excellent for mental health and wellbeing; another big passion of his.



Anne-Marie Holdsworth

Director of operations, Priestley Academy Trust

Start date: January
Former job: Previously interim CEO at Falcon Education Academies Trust

Interesting fact: Anne-Marie enjoys the dying art of calligraphy, learnt to tap dance as a child and can still time step. She also once flew with the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team!

Dr Richard Kueh

Director of strategy and Improvement at the CAM Academy Trust

Start date: September/October
Former job: Deputy director for schools and early education, senior HMI and national lead for religious education at Ofsted

Interesting fact: Earlier in life, Richard won an eclectic set of prizes, including for biblical studies, educational research, choral singing and, most importantly, contributions to an episode of the daytime chat show Trisha, with Trisha Goddard.

Tom Fay

Director of school improvement, Priestley Academy Trust

Start date: Easter 2025
Current job: Director of school improvement, Pontefract Academies Trust

Interesting fact: As a musician in his spare time (guitarist), Tom has previously shared stages with The Hoosiers, members of ELO, Toploader and Blue October! He has also written tracks featured on American TV series such as Heartland and LA Ink.

Louise Jaunbocus-Cooper

Principal, Cedar Mount Academy, Bright Futures Educational Trust

Start date: January
Current job: Deputy headteacher, Wellington School

Interesting fact: Louise is tracing her family tree on her father's side – and it looks likely the family came from India to Mauritius as indentured servants. Louise's subject is history, so this really interests her.

NASUWT and Teach First leaders to stand down

FEATURED

Two stalwarts of the trade union movement and education sector have announced their plans to stand down next year.

Dr Patrick Roach, general secretary of the NASUWT teaching union, will not seek a second term when his first runs out next year.

And Russell Hobby, the chief executive of Teach First, will step down next summer. He was previously general secretary of the NAHT.

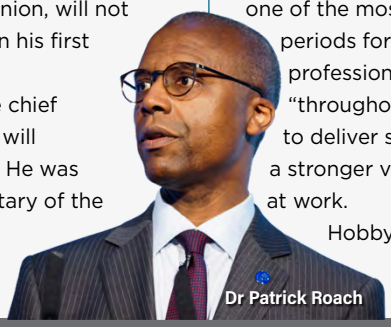
Before taking over the top job from Chris Keates in 2020, Roach served as the union's deputy general secretary for a decade. He was previously its assistant general secretary.

He said the past 15 years "witnessed one of the most difficult and turbulent periods for the teaching profession," and added that "throughout, we have continued to deliver support, protection and a stronger voice for our members at work.

Hobby said he had "loved my time at Teach First.

"It is like a shot of energy and enthusiasm. I stand in awe of our trainees and ambassadors, and of all the staff at our partner schools and trusts.

"My colleagues are amazing, some of the smartest, most dedicated people you could hope to meet; I will miss them a great deal. I am comforted by the fact I will keep meeting our ambassadors and staff in all sorts of fascinating places."



Dr Patrick Roach

Russell Hobby

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

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Profile

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL

‘If you really believe in deep collaboration, why would you resist joining a trust?’

The Confederation of School Trusts leader tells how teaching in apartheid-era South Africa forged her determination to improve the lot of all children

Leora Cruddas opens our conversation by telling me she hates talking about herself and is nervous about the thought of a profile piece.

Such apparent shyness seems misplaced for someone who has achieved such a successful career – from teaching in a South African township to leading the Confederation of School Trusts.

But it does align with Cruddas’ modus operandi at the influential membership body for academy trusts where, under the previous government, she preferred to quietly influence.

Being bolder

Cruddas says she believes “ministers respect you if you air particularly strong disagreements quietly first” and don’t “shout in the press”.

But the approach has caused problems. Particularly towards the end of the Conservatives’ time in office, some felt that CST wasn’t critical enough.

“We will be bolder publicly than we have been before,” says Cruddas, pointing out that because CST now represents more than three quarters of all academies, it has a “huge amount of authority to speak to government on behalf of the trust sector”.

That’s quite an emergence in just six years since the body was founded.

But how do you represent the views of such a huge range of leaders, whose trusts range from one school to more than 90?

Has Cruddas found the right balance? “Gosh, no”, she responds. “It’s a perennial challenge”.

And is there an element of also having to manage egos? Cruddas says she takes the approach of leading “with humility”.

“I never forget that my authority and our authority as CST comes from our members,” she adds.

“This is nothing to do with personal importance or positional power. It is about remembering every day, the trust we hold with children.”

One issue the body has been increasingly vocal about is education’s SEND crisis.

Labour has faced criticism for an apparent lack of urgency on the issue.

But Cruddas cautions that it’s still “early days” for the new government and not helpful to criticise yet – arguing the new team will need time to understand the issues and work out how to respond.

School segregation

Cruddas values democracy. She was raised in apartheid-era South Africa where she fiercely opposed how schools were segregated by skin colour.

Cruddas was head girl at her all-white school

Profile: Leora Cruddas

("for my sins") and trained as an English teacher after studying English literature at university in Johannesburg.

She still thinks of herself as an English teacher "first and foremost", admitting it's a "huge part" of her professional identity.

But rather than teach in the segregated state school system she detested, Cruddas took up a post in an NGO-funded school.

Non-white groups typically lived in overcrowded townships on the outskirts of cities, and Cruddas's school was in a community hall in the township of Alexandra – then one of the country's poorest.

Residents faced "poverty we would find difficult to imagine here", with many living in homes with no running water or electricity.

Much of what she believes today about education policy is a consequence of those experiences.

Cruddas believes that when we talk about "economically under-resourced communities, we need to respect that they can still be hugely rich in their cultural traditions".

Alexandra was where the poet Mongane Wally Serote and author Mark Mathabane grew up, and African jazz was "core" to people's lives.

Cruddas' views on the "right of every child to a knowledge-rich curriculum" come not from the American educational theorist E.D. Hirsch or English policy debates, but from seeing black children denied such an experience.

She also has a passionate belief in the "need to undo the conflation between social mobility and social justice". Whereas social mobility entails "lifting up a few", Cruddas wants a just education system that "lifts up all children".

Austerity cutbacks

Whilst teaching, Cruddas took an English literature master's degree, intending to forge a career in academia. But her school closed when international organisations withdrew funding as apartheid ended.

Instead, she ventured to London in 1996 on a programme that recruited teachers from overseas.

She taught children with special needs in Newham, East London, then an "international beacon in what inclusive education looked like",

'It's about remembering the trust we hold with children'

before being seconded to the area's local authority as a SEND adviser.

She criticises the "predominant policy discourse" around SEND children, both then and now, as "based on an over-medicalised deficit model".

"We have literally not moved on at all," she says.

Cruddas then spent the next decade working for various London local authorities where she realised the issue with councils running schools was it is "not their only job", adding "our children's education is so important it really does need a specialist vehicle with specialist governance".

She compares schools to GP surgeries in this respect, arguing: "We wouldn't think it a good idea for local authorities to maintain GP surgeries, would we?"

Her time with councils came as the austerity axe fell on local government.

Cruddas was being forced to make cuts to youth services, educational psychology, school improvement schemes, SEND and music services.

"That's not why I came into education," she adds, saying cutbacks went "too far and weren't strategic".

At the time she wanted ministers to look into "renegotiating the social contract" so councils could be "clear with our residents what we were responsible for delivering". She's disappointed that this dialogue "still hasn't happened".

But her next job was one she "really loved". As director of policy and public affairs for the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), in 2015 Cruddas led the production of its first blueprint for a self-improving system.

It reflects her strong belief that "it's easy to get angry with the government about what we stand against, but then you also have a responsibility to say what you stand for".

The paper presents a vision of the education system in 2020, with all schools having moved "away from prescription to a profession-led system", but required to join multi-academy trusts or federations.

CST is born

It was during her last 18 months at ASCL that Cruddas realised the government lacked a "good way" to engage with the newly-emerging academy trust sector, beyond approaching "a few favoured CEOs".

She left ASCL in 2017, initially to lead CST's predecessor organisation Freedom and Autonomy for Schools – National Association (Fasna), which aimed to "promote and secure autonomy for schools".

It folded when CST launched the following year.

Profile: Leora Cruddas


Leora with her mum after collecting her CBE

Instead, CST had three "strategic anchors": to advocate, connect and support the sector.

During the pandemic the body became a lifeline for many trusts – struggling under a tide of new rules, guidance and the sheer difficulty of continuing to provide an education to pupils.

Cruddas pivoted the body to become "entirely member facing. I did very little else in that period other than serve my members".

She started member briefings and weekly Wednesday morning meetings, which still continue now.

During Covid she would ask her members what they needed from government. But she says calls were also therapeutic for leaders, many of whom felt isolated during that period.

They gained "a sense of community" in hearing from others who were dealing with the same novel leadership challenges.

Cruddas adds: "We were all learning how to do risk assessments and stand up testing sites together. And because we were dealing with it together, it felt safer than just trying to do it on our own."

Pride and regrets

Eight weeks before the pandemic, Cruddas wrote a paper, *The three nested narratives of leadership*, on the topic of civic and trust leadership. It proved timely as civic leadership had risen to the forefront during Covid.

The paper now forms part of the wider "CST canon" that Cruddas is particularly proud of.

She says the organisation's "think pieces" have "helped the sector develop a new narrative for itself, away from the anti-academies narrative of privatisation and much more about civic leadership".


Leora with her COO Clare Robson-Farrelly

'There was poverty we'd find difficult to imagine here'

Another career highlight was collecting her CBE in 2022. She flew her "hugely proud" mum over from South Africa. "It was a big thing for her, more so I think than for me."

But there are also regrets, particularly over being able to shift the last government's view on certain issues.

Her deepest regret was failing to stop plans for minimum strike levels in schools, but Labour has since committed to scrapping the policy.

Cruddas says the rules were "undermining that fundamental principle of our democracy – the right to withhold labour"

Meanwhile, with regard to the new government, she says Labour "understand" the economic argument for investment in schools as it "directly supports" the party's mission to break down barriers to opportunity.

At the top of her wish-list is "the eradication of child poverty, without any shadow of a doubt".

Labour has set up a cross-government child poverty taskforce.

She says: "If this government can lift children out of poverty in the next five years I would certainly be delighted, but I think all my members would as well."

Regional school improvement teams

But a change Cruddas is perhaps less keen on is Labour's introduction of regional school improvement teams next year to intervene in struggling schools.

Intervention will take place before a decision is made on whether to academise a school, which suggests that should a school get back on track there will be no need for what are sometimes expensive and drawn-out academy conversions.

Cruddas says "there are other ways to secure improvement" in struggling maintained schools.

However, she still believes that being part of "a group of schools working together in a legal entity" is "the only secure, long-term, sustained improvement".

But what about federalisation as an alternative to academising?

Cruddas says she "would love to disrupt this idea that 'we have to resist joining a trust'.

"If we really believe in deep and purposeful collaboration, why would we seek to resist? It's political in the end, isn't it?"

But she adds: "I hate the term [academisation], I don't even know what it means.

"I believe in the power of a group of schools working together in a single legal entity. We call that an academy trust. That is the most powerful educational structure for schools and for children."

Opinion

GEOFF BARTON
Chair, Commission on the Future of Oracy in Education

Oracy must become as essential as literacy or numeracy

The oracy commission's final report calls for oracy to become the 'fourth R' of modern education's emancipatory missions. Geoff Barton explains

Six months ago, I was asked by the charity Voice 21 to convene and chair an independent commission on the future of oracy in education in England. I hesitated.

As a grizzled former English teacher, oracy had become fundamental to my own repertoire in class, and I'd experienced the way various activities beyond the classroom (like drama productions, debates and public speaking) enhanced the confidence of so many students.

But all of those years in the classroom and in leadership had also shown me that 'oracy' was a slippery term.

Still today, it is often met with hesitation, stemming from uncertainty about what the term actually means. Some consider it simply a 'nice to have', and one former schools minister dismissed it entirely as 'idle chatter in the classroom'.

But then I realised that it was once the same with 'literacy'. This term appears to have emerged in the late 19th century with the beginning of formal state education – in response to the much earlier (17th century) term 'illiteracy'.

And with numeracy too, which appeared on the collective radar in the late 1950s, no doubt to some bafflement and scepticism.

Yet both are now inarguable parts of what we want every child to learn.

The challenge, then, was to do the same for oracy. To that end, in April, we assembled a formidable and diverse group of commissioners from schools, trusts, employers, the arts and mental health support.

We started with three simple questions: What is oracy? Why does it matter? And why now?

Then, instead of waiting on a final written report, we launched our 'Commission Conversations' – short podcast interviews designed to explore different perspectives on oracy.

There are now more than 50 of these podcasts, each around 20 minutes long. Alongside our five commission meetings, roundtables with expert groups, and some illuminating think-pieces by oracy specialists (see the *Schools Week* collection here), it was these conversations that helped me demystify oracy the most.

A key issue throughout has been to ensure our understanding of oracy doesn't start from a deficit model. It can't be the case that some young people from some communities think that we are denigrating their home language.

> "This is a report rooted in optimism

Done well, oracy is about empowerment, not limitation, of young people. Rhetoric, after all, can wrest social change from those in power.

Which brings us to our report. Over these past bewildering years, Covid has shone a bleak spotlight on the educational experience of too many young people. Our education system too often feels narrow and mechanistic, driven by crude accountability rather than an optimistic vision of what we want for them.

But as the great sociologist Neil Postman said: 'Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see'. And this is the starting point of the Oracy Commission's recommendations.

Reading, writing and arithmetic are recognised by all as the foundations of children's future learning. They are deemed 'the three 'Rs'.

Based on all of our evidence, and against a backdrop of artificial intelligence and an increasingly fragmented society, we argue that it's time to make oracy 'the fourth R'.

Learning to talk, listen and communicate, learning through talk and learning about talk should be every child's entitlement. Oracy should help them to learn and articulate what they have learned, to analyse, explain and justify, to listen critically and to disagree agreeably.

Our final report argues that oracy should therefore show up more explicitly in the national curriculum and in teacher training.

But for this report to be on the side of young people, it must be on the side of their teachers too. So we aren't reaching for the easy levers of Ofsted inspecting oracy (they couldn't) or more high-stakes exams at 16 (there are too many already).

Instead, our recommendations are grounded in helping to prepare young people to take their place as flourishing, fulfilled citizens.

In other words, it's a report rooted in optimism: about recalibrating our education system and about the extraordinary capacity of educators to prepare our children and young people for a time we shall not see.

Opinion

NICOLA NOBLE
Associate head and founder, Old Kent Road Family Zone

LIZ ROBINSON
CEO, Big Education

Labour must remove these barriers to local leadership

The new government's desire for more place-based school system leadership requires a rethink of fundamentals, explain Nicola Noble and Liz Robinson

This is an article about two obsessions of ours: place and leadership.

Everyone is talking about 'place'.

The government has committed to greater work in regions. The Confederation of School Trusts has made 'anchor institutions' a core part of its lexicon. And the Fair Education Alliance has highlighted place as one of its key themes for policy development.

Meanwhile, there are many examples of deep, hyper-local collaborations making a real difference in communities.

The C-Change collaborative in New Brighton is re-imagining the Wirral seaside town. National Literacy Trust hubs are innovating across the country, like the one in Bradford where local barbers are becoming reading role models for young boys.

For our part, we've been busy setting up and supporting the development of the Old Kent Road Family Zone, an authentic community co-production to design and deliver services. The Mayor of London's violence reduction unit is on board, and we are supporting leaders across the capital to work in this way.

But what is remarkable about these examples is, well, the fact that they are remarkable. This kind of integrated, collaborative work has now become the exception rather than the norm.

A narrowing view of what school is for, with academic achievement dominating priorities for the past 14 years, has seen this kind of joined-up, integrated work falter. Where it happens, it does so *in spite of* incentives and accountability rather than *because of them*.

As a result, there is a yawning gap between the political desire to deliver what communities want and need, and the current reality of how we achieve that *at scale*.

That's where leadership comes in, and in order to unlock its potential we need to look again at what we mean by 'system leadership'.

Doing that requires leaders to acknowledge our system as complex and adaptive. It demands inter- and trans-institutional leadership. And it challenges us to do that *even when it may not be in our own immediate best interests*.

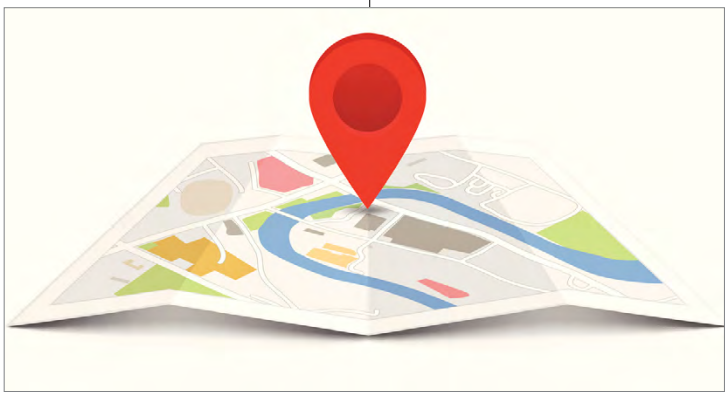
> "Potent incentives hinder real system leadership

This phrase is often used to refer to executive roles in trusts, to the leadership of teaching school hubs and delivery partners for ITT and NPQs. It also stretches to include some with large social media followings.

But being in a job which is deemed a 'system leadership' role does not necessarily mean that those leaders are leading *systemically*.

But potent incentives hinder this. Schools and trusts, for example, are judged on our outcomes, our financial health, our policies and practices. Nothing in our current accountability context acknowledges or requires us to work beyond or outside these.

As a result, genuine system leadership often entails significant professional and personal risk. We should rightly look to examples of this for inspiration, but also understand that it is reliant on circumstance, leadership and resource.



To deliver its vision of more place-based working, government will need to remove these barriers. Here are three ways to get started:

Review and adapt incentives

Ofsted reform and the proposed balanced scorecard are opportunities to embed greater awareness of (and accountability for) local outcomes.

Ofsted used to evaluate a school's 'contribution to community cohesion' and 'capacity to improve'. Why not revive these helpful rubrics and combine them into an evaluation of 'commitment and contribution to local collaboration and community'?

Make it a development goal

All leadership development programmes including NPQs should include the knowledge and skills to work in this way.

This should encompass the research, examples and need for this type of work, and support the development of the mindsets, skills and behaviours this kind of complex leadership requires.

Avoid deliverology

Much of this work is about relationships, culture and building capacity. These are not easy to put a number on. The Demos report, 'Liberated public services' gives a great argument for the use of smarter metrics and resistance to the temptation to measure everything.

This week saw the publication of *Unfinished Business*, a tribute to the late Sir Tim Brighouse. The inspirational launch encouraged us all to 'Be More Tim' - i.e. get on with it.

We are, and many others just need more encouragement and support to join us. So go on, Labour: Be More Tim!

Opinion

MICK WATERS
Co-author, *Unfinished Business*

Unfinished business: Sir Tim, the curriculum review and me

Sir Tim Brighouse's long-time friend and colleague Mick Waters reflects on what the educational giant would have said to Becky Francis's 'mammoth task'

I know what Tim would have said about the curriculum and assessment review. We talked about the need for it often. Our book, *About Our Schools* highlighted two important failings of our system.

First, there are no agreed, statutory purposes for schooling in England, so schools are subject to the whims of education secretaries. Even when the national curriculum is reviewed and in place, new content is added, based on current political issues.

So, the first thing we need, as Tim argued, is a clear statement about what childhood and youth should be like and how schools help to achieve this. Agreement on this would guide the secretary of state over an agreed period of, say, seven years.

Second, previous versions of curriculum have been handicapped by not considering assessment and examinations at the same time, nor the pedagogic approach needed to ensure success for pupils. We likened it to a 'three-sided wheel and a very bumpy ride'. The current review does include both curriculum and assessment and that is to be applauded.

Next, Tim and I would discuss the structure of learning. As a nation, we never recognise that a curriculum must meet the needs of children, helping them to climb from early years into adulthood with rich, fulfilling and nurturing experiences while also meeting the needs of the economy, employers and universities with a pathway to higher-level qualifications.

Tim was vexed that one-third of our children are destined for failure with our examination system based on norm-referencing. We despaired about the limited progress made since the Newsom report of 1963, which exposed the neglect of 'half our future'.

We've now reduced that to a 'forgotten third'; is that the extent of our national schooling success over 60 years?

The vital step in assessment would be a move to criteria-referenced exams. That would allow pupils to take exams when ready rather than on a day shared with everyone else born in the same year. We could also look at modular, project-based, incremental exams and more practical assessment.

We recognised the imperative of focusing on equity in learning and achievement. Our system's impact on children in poverty or under-served by society or with additional learning needs have not been sufficient. Nor have we paid enough attention to the issue of race. We must now address these issues coherently.

> "A curriculum must meet the needs of children

We would smile, perhaps grimace, that the new review might see the usual rush to polarities.

It is possible to teach knowledge *and* skills. We can blend subject specific *and* interdisciplinary learning. We can have practical and creative learning *and* scholarly and academic learning.

It can't be an either/or. Crucial experiences should be the right of a young person. The arts, sport and practical subjects should be at the heart of a curriculum, not additional, optional areas. Of course we want 'the basics', which should include the long-neglected oracy.

And a relevant curriculum can't ignore current societal issues. From changing childhoods to an ageing population, and from AI to sustainability to our legacy of history: such issues have to be addressed.

They should be taught by qualified teachers, so teacher training needs investment to overcome the deplorable shrivelling of recent years. We would hope those teachers could use their skills, free from the constraints of metronomic timetabling and the perverse need to generate evidence for accountability.

Tim always argued for 'guarantees' that children would have opportunities like residential visits, performances and tournaments. I would say that schools should see such experiences as integrated aspects of their curriculum, not a parallel offering.

Good schools take every opportunity to teach what pupils need to learn: health, finance, English, mathematics, humanities, languages and personal qualities. Children should see themselves as linguists, artists, scientists and so on and should be confident, ethical, responsible citizens.

They are our future plumbers, doctors, engineers, clean energy innovators and craftspeople. Many will do jobs our society needs but few of us can face or imagine.

The review is an incredible opportunity. Becky Francis has a mammoth task. She would have had Tim's blessing and support and she will have mine.

***Unfinished Business: The life and legacy of Sir Tim Brighouse – a tribute and a call to action* is available now from Crown House Publishing, 2024**

Opinion

BERNARD ANDREWS
Teacher of philosophy, Spain

Let's acknowledge the cost of our knowledge-rich ambition

Nick Gibb is unrepentant, but the fact remains that delivering his vision has hollowed out the curriculum, educational experience and the very definition of knowledge

Listening to Laura McInerney's recent interview with Nick Gibb for a *Schools Week* 10th-anniversary podcast, I was struck by the former schools minister's certitude about the 'knowledge-rich' turn in educational policy. In his view, it has evidently been a triumph of good over evil.

Gibb expressed no doubt that the phonics check and 'knowledge-rich' curricula are Good Things; that higher PISA results represent absolute progress; and that, if some schools can get every child to pass their GCSEs, then every school ought to.

He wouldn't even entertain the idea there might be opportunity costs to any of this. Each was just another example of children nourished by more 'Goodness'.

The train of thought is plain: unless you are Adam or Eve, it's better to know more. And doing better in a phonics check, GCSE, or PISA test is an indication you know more. Isn't it?

Well, certainly not without important caveats.

First, there *are* obvious opportunity costs involved in, for example, sacrificing drama lessons for more maths, killing the joy of reading with limiting phonics programmes, or damaging wellbeing with too much exam-related stress (something Gibb dismissed out of hand, instead blaming social media and mobile phones).

It's as if Gibb believes no price is too high for knowing more. But even if that were true, I'd argue Gibb has pulled off a classic bait-and-switch.

He has sold us on the promise of more knowledge, but what children actually take home is often eviscerated of the very things that would have made it worthwhile.

During the interview, Gibb trotted out the view – popularised, he points out, by Daniel Willingham and E. D. Hirsch – that due to limitations of working memory, 'if you want to do high-level thinking, critical thinking, problem solving, or to be creative, you have to have access to information, knowledge, content in your long-term memory'.

According to this speculative metaphysics, knowledge is reduced to data or schema stored in the memory. However, while I agree that remembering is a necessary part of learning, it's not sufficient for possessing the virtue of knowledge.

A student may memorise the entirety of Wikipedia, be able to recite it on demand, get a briefcase full of 9s, but have knowledge only in a very narrow sense. To have the virtue of knowledge is to be able to respond to a context in the right way, at the right time, for the right reasons and so on.

> "This is a fag-packet sketch of a folly

But these adverbial criteria for being knowledgeable are largely ignored by GCSEs and the other markers Gibb sanctifies. By their nature as standardised tests, exams invariably reward and thus encourage standardised responses – the opposite of the ability to respond and adapt to context entailed by knowledge-as-a-virtue.

Far from being the blueprint for a 'knowledge-rich' curriculum, this is a fag-packet sketch of a folly – the educational equivalent of a Potemkin village.

Furthermore, for knowledge to be powerful, it can't just be had; it has to be possessed. While I have children, I do not possess them because they have their own agency. Knowledge, however, is different. To have it without controlling it (in different contexts, not just tests) is a hollowed-out version of knowledge – powerless and ultimately forgettable.

Similarly, we don't always have possession over our memories or what we remember. We might have knowledge as a result of traumatic experiences, for example, but it's far from clear whether we possess it. It is precisely our lack of power in the face of a traumatic memory that sustains the trauma.

My reference to Adam and Eve above wasn't just glib. When they ate the fruit from the tree of knowledge, they weren't rewarded with a 'strong pass' and better life prospects; they were banished from Eden. They didn't possess knowledge of good and evil. They acquired it, but at what cost?

Now of course I'm not suggesting all knowledge of facts and phonemes is overpriced (or trauma-inducing) but such stories point to the opportunity cost of knowing things if not acquired properly.

Instead of the powerful knowledge they've been promised, I worry our students are being handed a fig leaf for an impoverished education.

Solutions

KATIE PERRY
Director of curriculum and learning, The Four Stones Multi Academy Trust

How to ditch teacher appraisal – and what to do instead

Using a tool for development that was actually designed for accountability was hindering our improvement aims, says Katie Perry. Here's what we're doing instead

With recruitment and retention presenting such a challenge for schools, a key lever at a leader's disposal is long-term investment in teachers' professional development. To get this right, it's vital to consider our intended outcomes and to keep workload low and impact high – and the traditional appraisal hinders this.

The pressure on schools is huge. A staggering 95 per cent of leaders in the most disadvantaged state-funded secondary schools have experienced recruitment difficulties this year. The last time we saw more than 90% of teachers remaining in the profession a year after qualifying was in the mid-1990s. Change is clearly needed.

One of our 'Trust Dividends' is that we care about staff development, no matter the pay grade or position. But when we looked at how our policies and practices were supporting this, we found appraisal wasn't helping us achieve this aim.

Why should it? Appraisal is a tool that exists chiefly to hold staff to account. While there's certainly a place for accountability, there are better mechanisms for it.

Making the bold move from teacher appraisals to professional development reviews (PDRs) in our trust has enabled us to focus on what matters: staff development. No judgement, no pointless projects, no one-off events.

Research shows that prioritising teachers' development and professional growth is effective in supporting retention. In switching to a PDR model, we've gained a lever to achieve a systematic, bespoke approach to incremental and sustained teacher development.

To increase momentum and ensure a valuable process, we've put effort into securing staff buy-in through clear messaging, rigorous training, high-quality resourcing and ongoing support.

To begin this strategic shift to a more holistic staff development approach, we looked beyond our trust into successful models that increased staff confidence and improved classroom practice.

We obtained teacher, leader and trustee viewpoints to explore how to empower staff, determine a secure approach to implementation and identify training and tools to fulfil our mission: "Our students deserve to experience the best and we do this most effectively by working together".

Following consultation, we established an implementation timeline, developed a process for self-review and mapped reviewee and reviewer training needs. Leaders determined teacher reflection on classroom practice to be the highest-leverage aspect of the new model.

> "Staff morale and motivation are on the up

After extensive discussion we agreed on 10 core self-review components linked to our teaching and learning handbook: classroom culture, planning and preparation, explanations, modelling, questioning, assessment, feedback and adaptive teaching, deliberate practice, retrieval practice and literacy.

We then developed statements for self-reflection using a RAG-rating approach (alongside criteria), helping to identify confidence levels and create a positive, motivating culture around staff development.

Using online forms, staff can easily share their self-reviews with reviewers to prepare for their PDR conversation. The whole process is premised on fostering open discussion about development areas without fear of judgement.

When these PDR conversations happen, the focus for reviewers and reviewees is on levers for improvement and appropriate CPD. Then, reviewers check in on reviewees' progress throughout the year.

We launched PDRs with in-school leaders during the summer term alongside training and resources. They subsequently trained reviewers and reviewees in the approach.

Additionally, we developed an internal CPD hub which acts as a one-stop shop encompassing numerous resources including: PDR videos modelling the conversation, teaching and learning videos/modules and a directory of excellence.

The hub is a key tool to aid reflection on CPD needs to steer teachers towards appropriate provision.

An important part of this journey has been the staged approach (across a 10-month period) to consult, plan, train and implement, so that schools feel empowered to drive professional development, and not feel done unto.

Ensuring that teachers understand why the approach is right and leaders actively champion collective messages has been key.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Staff morale and motivation are on the up. Staff like the self-reviews and reviewers are keen to signpost the best CPD to their teams.

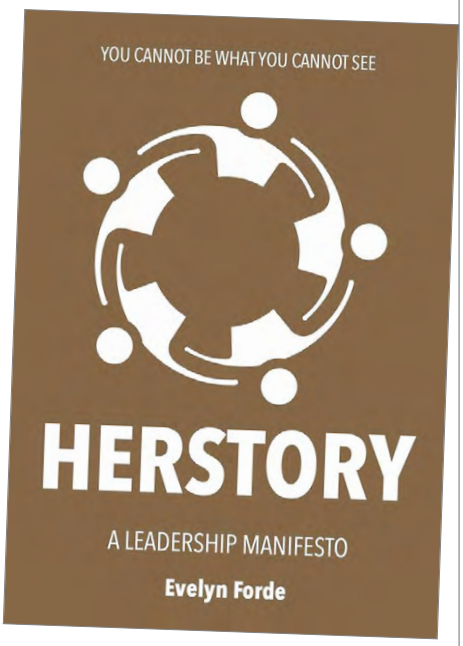
All of which points to a virtuous cycle of improvement in which staff feel more valued and better supported. And that can only help to attract and hold on to our talent.

THE REVIEW

BOOK
TV
FILM
RADIO
EVENT
RESOURCE

HERSTORY: A LEADERSHIP MANIFESTO

Author: Evelyn Forde
Publisher: Cadogan Press
Publication date: 1 October 2024
ISBN: 1838007385
Reviewer: Zoe Enser, School improvement lead, The Education Partnership Trust



When Evelyn Forde's *Herstory* landed on my doorstep, the timing could not have been better. I was reading Kim Scott's *Radical Respect*, a book already making me consider how we ensure organisations tackle bias, prejudice and bullying. I had also recently engaged in some online communications which had made me think about what I, as a white woman, did and did not notice in my places of work.

We all like to think we are attuned to some of the barriers people encounter. Coming from a working-class background and being a woman, I consider myself an ally to those who are systemically prevented from achieving their potential, whatever that may be.

But while we like to think this, what does it mean for leaders like Forde?

We know there is a wealth of research which shows representation, especially representation of black women in school leadership, is a long way from where it should be.

So what better place to begin thinking about how to tackle this than from the perspective of someone who has been there. What better place to begin than with someone who rightly reminds us on page one of her book that 'black leaders are successful'.

Forde also reminds us from the start that this 'might not be your regular book about education'. She is right.

Herstory takes us on her journey, from a council estate in north-west London to being awarded headteacher of the Year in 2020 and an MBE for services to education.

However, it is a book that doesn't only chronicle her experiences, but is, as the subheading suggests, 'a manifesto'. One where leaders, both those on the ground and at system level, are reminded we have a system which is set up in opposition to the success of already marginalised groups, from the pupils in our schools to ITT access and selection and leadership.

Without minimising the difficulties Evelyn faced, there is much in the book that resonated with me; being a mother who wanted the opportunity to offer something more for my son; the importance of seeing people like you making choices that empowered them, and, in turn, empowered you.

There are moments in Forde's experience which will make you rage. These include governors not appointing her as they weren't sure how their 'community' might respond to a black woman in leadership, as well as explicit racial abuse from staff and parents.

And there are moments that make you stop and pause as you think about how bias manifests itself within a profession where enlightened reflection should be baked in.

Although Forde states at the beginning that this is just one Black woman's experience in education, she also gathers testimonies from other Black teachers and leaders as well as talking to students about their experiences. She enriches this with a wealth of data and research as she builds to the manifesto in the final two chapters.

Chapter 5 offers specific and practical recommendations for aspiring leaders, governors and policymakers. There is much to reflect on here, and it offers helpful advice for anyone wishing to move into leadership, or to support others to take this step.

The book concludes with a final message for the new government and Forde's own reflections on the writing process, which included an acknowledgement of her own biases.

Confronting these is uncomfortable for anyone and Forde recognises this. She states this may not be a book everyone is ready to read. At least not right now. But she knows *Herstory* is indelibly there in print for when people are ready.

She is right that some won't choose to read this. Others may find something to disagree with in the statistics used or the conclusions reached from them.

This is a slim book, and sometimes it does leave you yearning for more detail. But hearing human stories, even those that don't immediately intersect with our own, and thinking about the experiences our colleagues, pupils and families have, can only be a positive step in helping us notice and bringing change.

If Forde's story lingers with us beyond the pages, that can really happen.

★★★★☆
Rating

THE CONVERSATION

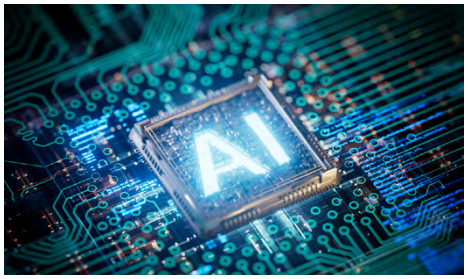
LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM

Fiona Atherton

Headteacher, Wrekin View Primary School)

AI'M FEELING GOOD

It's a new dawn, it's a new year for me and the longest half-term of the year (and possibly the century!) moves into its final portion. Having taken up a new role in a new local authority this year, I have found myself surrounded by lots of alien processes and information.



When looking at how to streamline my own working processes, I started thinking about how to incorporate workload tools to support not just my work but that of my colleagues too.

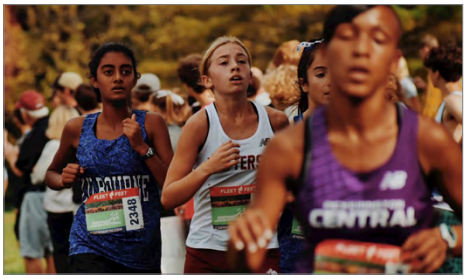
After looking at a range of available tools that are available on the market, this blog by Nexus on key questions for schools when considering AI came in really handy.

The government's project to enhance the use of AI can only be a good thing. While the workload issue rumbles on and school leaders try to find ways to make teaching manageable (and attractive), we do need to be creative and relevant.

I have seen examples of AI being used to adapt resources, produce lessons that are specific to given criteria and support SEN learners with accessibility tools that would otherwise take teachers hours to plan.

But balancing this against the possibility of bias and potential GDPR concerns means hesitation is warranted, which can only delay the march of progress.

WRITING WRONGS



Meanwhile, I have been getting to grips with my new school's writing scheme, which is new to me too. I've spent time observing teachers delivering its various strands and thinking deeply about the teaching of writing, and what children need to be able to do it effectively.

In this context, Alex Quigley's latest blog on writing stamina was a timely piece for me. It came just as I found myself coming back to the question of whether we ask for too much writing from children throughout the school day.

For some children, this is absolutely not the case. Nevertheless, there are growing numbers of children who need more support. As Quigley notes, "a common observation for every teacher is that errors increase as pupils write more". Additional time spent at the task taxes "pupils' mental energy and limited working memory capacity".

We know more about working memory now than ever, so it stands to reason that we reconsider how we support children to become good writers.

I have been in teaching long enough to have worked through both arguments here: the first is that the only way to teach children to write is by expecting them to do it in almost every lesson; the second is that 'they can't write it if they can't say it'.

For me, a combination of both works well. Quigley's solution of getting pupils to edit and revise their work as they go rather than at the end certainly seems to put that into practice.

TIME FOR AUTHENTICITY

Finally this week, I went to reread **one of my favourite blogs** of the last academic year and found that Ian Frost had written a new one that resonated with me just as much, this time on being authentic.

When working with new people it can often be hard to truly be yourself. You find yourself wanting to create the best first impression, or not wanting to let them see the real amount of sass you have behind that professional exterior.

"Authentic leaders," Frost says, "are often transparent in their thinking". Sharing their own experience and revealing important parts of themselves helps them provide important context for others about how they lead.

I agree, but it can take time to reveal those parts of yourself. One leader I worked with was confident and extroverted enough to put everything out there right from the outset. But as an introvert, that is not usually where I start in my relationships with colleagues.

Having said that, I aspire to be the kind of leader Frost describes: one who treads lightly on other's lives and understands "when to share themselves, and when to hold back".

So here's to a year of authenticity.

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts

The Knowledge

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

What new data tells us about hours spent at school

Oana Gavriloiu, Researcher, School Systems and Performance, EPI and Louis Hodge, Associate director, School Systems and Performance, EPI

In 2022, the then government laid out a new expectation that state-funded mainstream schools should deliver a school week of at least 32.5 hours from this term. Now, new census data allows us for the first time to better understand the length of the school week across the country and its relationship with pupil outcomes.

Earlier this year we examined what the international research tells us about the length of the school week and its impact on pupil attainment and wider outcomes.

It showed that the effects of providing additional school time, which encompasses instruction time and extracurricular activities, are varied but broadly positive with the diversity of effects often being attributed to variations in the timing, manner, and nature of the activities during these extended hours.

Previous research has also shown that the effect of increasing school hours varies depending on the subject being taught. Crucially for those interested in tackling the persistent disadvantage gap, extending the school day tends to have a more pronounced impact on the academic outcomes of pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

We can now build on these earlier studies. In 2023, the Department for Education expanded the school census to include information on the number of hours that schools were offering in a typical week.

Our latest report uses this new data to develop a better understanding of how the school week varies across schools and assesses whether we see any relationship with pupil outcomes.

Perhaps not unsurprisingly, most schools (four-fifths of primaries and three-quarters of secondaries) already have school weeks that are at least 32.5 hours. The government had said at the time of announcing the expected minimum that the large majority of schools were already meeting it. This was supported by survey evidence.

'Free schools had the longest school days on average'

The data provides an opportunity to dig a little deeper.

We can see, for example, that free schools have the longest school days on average – almost an additional hour of school time a week at primary and over an hour extra at secondary, compared with the average school.

This is likely due to the greater flexibility free schools have over their school days, although it is still greater than other academies which have similar freedoms.

We also found that academically selective secondary schools, schools rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted and those in London tend to have longer school weeks.

Academically selective secondary schools have, on average, a school week that is almost one hour longer than non-selective schools. 'Outstanding' schools have school weeks that are between 10 and 20 minutes longer, and pupils attending secondary schools in London have over half an hour extra time in school a week when compared to the typical school.

When we linked data on the length of the school week with pupil attainment data, we detected a small yet positive effect on overall attainment at the end of both primary and secondary school. The effects on primary attainment outcomes are larger than those at secondary.

We estimate that an additional hour of weekly secondary school time is associated with a 0.17 grade improvement in one GCSE subject.

We also find that this varies by subject. An additional hour a week at secondary school is associated with a 0.063 grade improvement in language GCSEs, much larger than the estimated 0.018 grade improvement in English, 0.014 in maths, 0.016 in science and 0.017 in humanities GCSEs.

However, it is plausible this larger association with respect to languages is due to factors we cannot observe in the data, given the available measures of prior attainment and relatively low take-up of language subjects.

This speaks to a wider challenge in this research. The current data collection requires schools only to report the total weekly time pupils spend in school each week. We don't know, for example, how much time is allocated for instruction rather than breaks, nor how much is spent on each subject and how broad the subject mix is.

Nevertheless, this is an important first step in understanding how time spent in school might affect pupil outcomes. The key question now is: how can that time be best spent?

Week in Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

MONDAY

The Telegraph went big today on a story about Luke Sibieta, who wrote the Institute for Fiscal Studies' analysis on Labour's private school VAT pledge, being best pals with a Labour minister.

Matthew Pennycook was best man at Sibieta's wedding, they reported.

Sibieta's study found the new government's controversial policy to charge VAT on private school fees was expected to have little impact on state schools and would likely raise up to £1.5 billion. It has been regularly used by Labour to fend off criticism of its plans.

The IFS was forced to point out it is "widely recognised to be a politically independent research organisation committed to the highest standards of empirical analysis on important issues of public policy". This report also adhered to the usual "standards of excellence and impartiality, laying out the evidence as it exists whilst making clear the limits of that evidence".

And since it is strongly against being friends with anyone who might influence your view, Week in Westminster wonders who the best pals of the Telegraph's powers-that-be are?

We are *absolutely certain* they won't be people with a vested interest in private schools...

***

The Department for Education's sector update also dropped into our inboxes today.

Their latest attempts to get a grip on the recruitment and recruitment crisis include urging schools to take part in research on international teacher recruitment.

This will "will help us to understand the challenges or barriers you face and identifying where the department may be able to support schools and teachers", it said.

Schools Week clicked through to the survey questions. They included:

What are your views on overseas trained teachers' need for mandatory ECT (Early Career Teacher) induction?

When hiring an overseas trained teacher, do you check that they have completed an induction, similar to the ECT induction in England?

Have overseas trained teachers in your school completed mandatory ECT induction?

Do you think the current ECT induction has valuable content for experienced overseas trained teachers, or do they require something different?

Seems to suggest the government is wondering whether it should water down requirements for foreign teachers to do the ECT, right?

Wrong, according to the DfE, who said very sternly there are no plans to water down or drop the requirement for overseas trained teachers to do a statutory induction.

So that's all clear then!

TUESDAY

Irony is certainly not lost at the Department for Education.

It updated a website page, on how people can access the personal information that DfE holds on them, to remove the name of the data protection officer.

LOL.

***

Former education secretary Estelle Morris praised the oracy commission report today at a Lords event to launch it.

She paid particular tribute to how quickly it's come together: "If government could take the lesson of producing high quality reports in the time that you've done it, public sector reform...would be far easier than it is."

We like the sound of that.

WEDNESDAY

Many in the sector will give Sir Martyn Oliver credit for improving Ofsted's reputation.

But he made quite the claim in a speech at the Association of Special Schools conference today.

"I am particularly heartened that our new recruitment programmes are bringing HMIs and OIs from the area where Ofsted needs greater expertise, just last month I met a group of new OIs who were headteachers, executive and chief executive leaders who were from primary schools and special schools, for example," he said.

"We have circa 15,000 expressions of interest for leaders to be OIs for Ofsted."

WOWZERS. Quite the figure.

However, when we asked Ofsted for more details about the expressions of interests, they admitted today the figure for all the interest they have received since ... 2017!

LOL (again).

ZENITH MULTI ACADEMY TRUST

Trust Lead Practitioner of English

Required: January 2025

Leadership Pay Range 8-15

£56,356 - £66,954 per annum (pay award pending)

Starting pay point negotiable dependent on experience

'The limits of my language mean the limits of my world' Wittgenstein

A unique opportunity has arisen for an exceptional and inspirational leader to work as a Trust Lead Practitioner of English, supporting Zenith's school improvement team as we grow.

We are a medium sized, local Trust **in South Essex**, currently comprising **three secondary schools, one primary school, and one special school**: Castle View School in Canvey Island, Castledon School in Wickford, Laindon Park Primary School and Nursery in Basildon, The James Hornsby School in Basildon, and The King John School (with a Sixth form) in Benfleet.

We are seeking applications from candidates with a genuine **passion for English**, and the drive and flair to instill a life-long love of the subject in all students, championing the unique value of English in the school curriculum.

Along with an excellent track record of curriculum innovation and outstanding academic results, the successful candidate will have the right skills, experience, and potential to add to our dynamic Multi Academy Trust. Zenith Trust has formed an innovative partnership with the **Education Endowment Foundation** (EEF), and this means it is a very exciting time to join us. Initially, this post will predominantly be based within The James Hornsby School (rated Good by Ofsted in all areas) for 4 days, where responsibilities will include working closely with the Head of Department and Senior Leaders to ensure outstanding progress for students across Key Stage 3 and 4. The role will include working with, and supporting the wider English department, delivering coaching and training as required, and developing resources/formulating strategy.

At a Trust level, the role will involve working across all our 5 schools (1 day), liaising with department leads to improve standards of achievement, and ensure teaching is of the highest quality across all Key Stages. There will be a particular focus on delivering CPD, developing resources/ approaches to improving standards, and supporting the work of our **English cross-Trust community of practice**. This work will involve visits to other schools, but you will be based in Zenith's central office at The King John School. You will **report directly to the CEO**, and this role will offer **significant development opportunities** for the successful candidate, with ongoing support for CPD such as a Master's qualification.

All the students in our care deserve the very best from our schools, and the successful candidate will share our deep commitment to the Trust's Mission, Aims, and Values, which should be clearly reflected at both the application and interview stages. The Trust will ensure the successful candidate has the very best resources and support to drive strategy and lead change, thus providing a truly quality education for all. Zenith Multi Academy Trust provides a wide range of additional staff benefits, including **Benenden Health membership, VIVUP employee discount scheme, access to on-site staff counsellors, and ongoing wellbeing initiatives**, ensuring our staff are able to achieve the very best outcomes for their students; as such this is a wonderful career opportunity.

If you would like an informal discussion with the Chief Executive Officer prior to applying, please contact Leigh Christensen on **leighch@zmat.co.uk**.

Please refer to **www.zenithmultiacademytrust.co.uk** for further information and to download an application pack.

Completed applications should be submitted via email to **recruitment@zmat.co.uk** before the closing date.

Closing date for applications: Midday, Friday 11th October
Interview date: Wednesday 23rd October

CVs alone, or CVs submitted via agencies will not be accepted.

HEADTEACHER

Salary: L15- L21
(£70,293 - £81,441
subject to nationally agreed pay award)

Hawbush Primary School

drb Ignite Multi Academy Trust

We are looking for a Headteacher who shares our values and has the vision, drive, and resilience to lead Hawbush Primary School, securing rapid improvement whilst also bringing leadership capacity that supports other Trust schools to learn from each other and beyond.

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

We prioritise staff wellbeing and are deeply committed to investing in staff at every level of our organisation through clear professional development pathways and opportunities. Interested candidates are encouraged to contact the Executive Director of School Improvement to discuss the opportunity in more detail – jhill@drbignitemat.org

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

To apply for this role, please complete the online application form located in the Jobs Section on the drb Ignite Multi Academy Trust website: www.drbignitemat.org/jobs

Closing date: Monday 14th October 2024, 12pm

Interviews: Wednesday 23rd October 2024