



SEND SOLUTIONS

LEADERS' TIPS FOR SPECIALIST RESOURCE PROVISIONS



Page 30

ENSLAVED TEACHERS? WHAT DOES THE DATA SAY



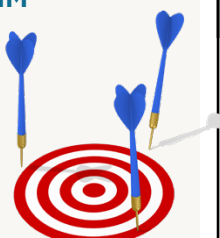
Pages 13-14

UNMUZZLED: NEW GROUP GIVES LA HEADS THEIR VOICE BACK



Page 5

STIFLING SMALL MATS WON'T HELP LABOUR ACHIEVE ITS AIM



Page 28

THE LILAC SKY FILES



BIGGEST LA: 'WE CAN'T AFFORD TO IMPROVE OUR SCHOOLS ANYMORE'

- Kent council tells its schools they will have to pay for own support
- Financial woes mean it's also pulling intervention cash for schools
- Comes days after ministers ask LAs to help support schools again

JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE | Page 4

SCHOOLS
WEEK

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@SAMANTHAJBOTH
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 Belchereducation
week jobsFEATURED
JOBTHIS 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**BIRMINGHAM DIOCESAN
EDUCATION SERVICE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
HIGHLY COMPETITIVE TO
RECRUIT THE BEST**➡ [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/BDAT-SW373P2](https://tinyurl.com/BDAT-SW373P2)TO ADVERTISE YOUR VACANCY WITH EDUCATION WEEK JOBS
PLEASE CALL 020 81234 778 OR EMAIL | ADVERTISING@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

SUBSCRIBE

Subscribe to Schools Week for
Unmatched Education Journalism.From as little as
£1.65
Per edition

CLICK FOR INFO



There is a depressing irony about the country's biggest council saying it can no longer afford to provide school improvement work days after the government invites local authorities back into the tent.

Ministers want councils to help provide improvement support which will be commissioned by its new regional improvement for standards and excellence (RISE) teams.

But just inviting councils back into the fray misses a key issue: do they even have the capacity?

The previous government's 'the only way is academies' approach to education has seen LAs starved of cash and lose expertise.

If government wants councils to help drive its standards agenda, it's going to have to do more than just extend an invite.

It will need to also look at rebuilding infrastructure that has withered away due to neglect.

As Andrew O'Neill sets out in our pages this week, council schools have so much to offer, but feel they've been marginalised and muzzled.

His new group aims to change that – and shift the make-up of those with a seat at the policy table, from CEOs of large trusts to a broader church.

He also makes an intriguing point that because his school is not under a trust, and being top-sliced to fund central services, it has more cash to innovate (and more autonomy, too).

Teacher autonomy in academies was put firmly in the spotlight last week when school standards tsar Sir Kevan Collins said that in our supposedly school-led system, teachers have "never been more enslaved".

Does the evidence back that up? We take a look.

Elsewhere this week, the Labour government has listened to the sector and ditched an "excessive" requirement on training for mentors of new teachers.

While this has been welcomed, it has also caused anger given that some training providers did not gain reaccreditation over this issue not that long ago.

And it means ministers might also push back inspections for providers, due in January.

Most read online this week:

- 1 **'Excessive' 20 hours mentor training requirement scrapped**
- 2 **Phillipson 'open' to academies returning to council oversight**
- 3 **Academy freedoms? 'I've never seen teachers more enslaved' says school standards tsar**
- 4 **EPI calls for review of phonics screening check**
- 5 **Judging schools on middle-class admissions isn't even possible, says Ofsted**

[CLICK LINKS TO READ STORIES](#)

Disclaimer:

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

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

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

Please address any complaints to the editor.

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

SCHOOLS WEEK IS PROUD TO BE A MEMBER OF

besa
BRITISH EDUCATIONAL
SUPPLIERS ASSOCIATION

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

ADVERTISE WITH US

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

E: advertising@schoolsweek.co.uk
T: 020 81234 778 or click here



See story, page 4

NEWS: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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

School improvement unaffordable for country's biggest council

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

England's biggest local authority has admitted it cannot afford to provide school improvement support, just days after ministers confirmed they want councils to help drive their new standards agenda.

Kent County Council – which has a £200 million SEND budget deficit – said its “current financial position” meant it could no longer pay for support for schools.

Schools must now pay themselves for help – with specific support for struggling schools pulled altogether.

Other authorities have also opted to buy in the support for their schools, scrapping in-house teams as funding is cut and budgets are squeezed by academy conversions.

Multi-academy trusts were the go-to school improvement solution under the Conservative government.

But Labour last week revealed details of new regional improvement for standards and excellence (RISE) teams that will commission support to improve struggling schools, including from councils, from January.

However, Loic Menzies, a policy expert, said there were doubts that many councils would have the resource and expertise to get involved.

“Whilst RISE teams’ role as brokers has the potential to help schools navigate a fragmented landscape, the continued withering away of local authority capacity makes it clear that the bulk of support schools access is likely to come from [elsewhere].

“In the long run, most schools will probably be best off in a strong family of schools.”

Last year, the government scrapped a £50 million grant for local authority school improvement activities.

In an update posted online last week, Christine McInnes, Kent's education director, said the council had “continued investing in school improvement services”, through its company The Education People (TEP).

But the authority's current financial position meant this was “no longer possible”. Instead, schools would have to use their own money if they wanted to access support.

Under the plans, additional cash



for “specific interventions” or brokered support would also no longer be available, with schools having to fund this themselves.

Lucia Glynn, an academy consultant, said many council in-house school improvement teams had been “reduced, or cut completely, with external consultancy [companies] taking their place”.

In Haringey, north London, headteachers banded together six years ago to launch their own schools-run improvement company. The authority expected to pay up to £275,000 on redundancies as it “would no longer require employees to carry out these functions”.

Haringey said it used to get £1.4 million as part of the education services grant, scrapped as the government aimed to “reduce the role of local authorities in school improvement”, council documents said.

Staffordshire used previous improvement cash “to commission quality assurance visits based on our analysis of schools”.

But after the grant was pulled, its schools forum – which votes on local funding matters – decided leaders should instead be responsible for taking on the work.

Hull City Council said it no longer ran a school improvement team “as it operates in a near fully-academised education system”. Ninety-four of its 98 schools are in a trust.

“As such, the LA can no longer access central funding to directly deliver school improvement services.

This is the case nationally for academised education

systems,” a spokesman said.

“It is important to recognise that due to increasing financial burdens, the LA has been forced to focus on the delivery of statutory duties.”

Schools Week analysis suggests that at least half of primaries and secondaries in six of England's 10 largest local authorities are academies. In all, 45 per cent of councils had a majority of academies.

Thurrock in Essex no longer has any maintained schools. As such, it “does not have a duty to provide school improvement support”.

Academies in the area “have access to the well-established local teaching school hub”, though, the authority added.

North Somerset continues to provide in-house improvement support for its last six maintained schools.

But the scope of the support “has changed over the years, due to increased academisation, changing responsibilities” and funding cuts.

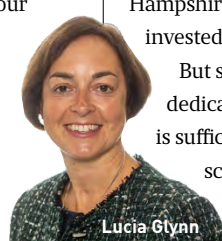
Hampshire still runs more than 85 per cent of schools. The council stressed its improvement work “has not been scaled back and indeed continues to expand”.

Glynn said RISE “will work best” in areas such as Hampshire, where authorities “have retained and invested in their school improvement teams”.

But she called on the DfE “to review the dedicated schools grant and ensure that it is sufficient to recruit and retain high-calibre school improvement leaders in-house”.



Loic Menzies



Lucia Glynn

New body launched to give LA schools policy voice

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

EXCLUSIVE

Maintained school headteachers are launching a collective group to give them a “voice” in policy-making after being “marginalised” by the Conservatives.

Founder Andrew O'Neill, a London head, said the previous government “effectively put a muzzle” on maintained schools and “shamefully” allowed them to “wither on the vine” with “no other choice but to become an academy”.

As well as influencing policy, the new Maintained School Collective wants to provide a supportive network for council schools to collaborate, sound out innovative ideas and share professional development.

More than 100 schools have expressed an interest in joining.

O'Neill, head of All Saints Catholic College in west London, said the previous government's push towards full academisation was “concerted, intentional and relentless”.

“During that time, it seemed that participating in policy-making was contingent upon being the chief executive of a large trust.”

Labour was more agnostic on school structures, with the upcoming children's and wellbeing bill “smoothing the difference” between school types. For instance, academies would be forced to follow the national curriculum and cooperate with councils on admissions.

“The under-representation, not to say marginalisation, of the local authority-maintained sector is a political oversight,” O'Neill said.

“The government's role is to govern for all, not just for the segments that align with specific policy positions.”

This approach had also led to a “broader and more profound issue. We need policies that make a significant and lasting impact on school standards and enhance the opportunities we provide for children.

“It is possible that those occupying seats at the policy table have become too detached from the daily realities of post-Covid school settings to contribute pragmatically to the conversation.”

Since 2015-16, the number of maintained



schools has dropped by a third, compared with a 96 per cent rise in academies. About half of schools are now academies.

But there are still 11,000 local authority-maintained schools, commanding yearly budgets of £24.9 billion, educating 3.3 million pupils and employing 528,000 people.

Those involved in the collective are keen to stress they are not “anti-academy”, saying the collective will provide a space for maintained school heads to stand “shoulder-to-shoulder” and share experiences.

O'Neill “wants to replicate some of the great work” of the Confederation of School Trusts, the membership body for trusts, “but on a smaller scale.

The group could also collaborate on specific projects to address common challenges, such as falling rolls.

Kate Tramon, the head of Christ the Saviour Church of England Primary School in west London, hoped schools could share good practice, resources and expertise.

She said academisation had sometimes “reduced parental choice”.

“Maintained schools are unique, offering different values within each school.”

O'Neill said financial autonomy had also been “crucial” to his school's success.

Most trusts top-slice their schools' budgets to fund their central services, with the average top slice inbetween 5.4 and 7.4 per cent, according to the latest Kreston Reeves report on academy

finances.

O'Neill, at the lower end, said this be £400,000 of his current budget, compared with the £70,000 de-delegation he pays to the council.

“Having the autonomy to allocate these funds allows us the flexibility to run our school in a manner that promptly meets the needs of our pupils, minimises bureaucracy and expedites delivery and implementation.”

Duncan Spalding, the head of Aylsham High School, the only maintained secondary in Norfolk, said there was good work in the sector “that hasn't been celebrated and shared as much as it could be”.

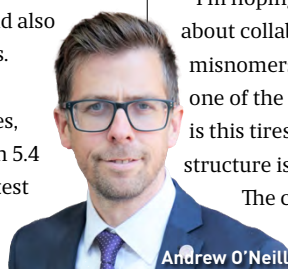
“I think there has been a change in the mood music – it feels like the voice of maintained schools has a chance to be heard. It is interesting to feel that sense that there's a willingness to learn from good practice in all schools.”

The steering group is still being formed, but O'Neill is keen to have an academy voice to ensure “input from the other side of the sector that are part of this”.

Jonny Uttley, the chief executive of The Education Alliance Trust, will serve on the group.

“I'm hoping this sends an important message about collaboration,” he said. “There are misnomers about academies and trusts – and one of the things that has blighted the system is this tiresome debate about whether one structure is better than the other.”

The collective will launch formally in the new year.



Andrew O'Neill

DfE scraps mentor training – after two months

LUCAS CUMISKEY

@LUCAS_CUMISKEY

EXCLUSIVE

The government has scrapped an “excessive” training requirement for mentors of trainee teachers after just two months, following warnings that it caused “huge additional workloads”.

A new re-accreditation round for trainers will also run in the spring to “ensure ongoing coverage and efficient delivery”.

And Schools Week understands Ofsted is in talks with the government to push back the start of the ITT inspection cycle from January.

Under new rules introduced in September, mentors must get a minimum of 20 hours of initial general mentor training, followed by six hours of annual refresher training.

But the DfE has now said that “feedback” recognised the need for “further flexibilities”.

“Therefore, we have removed the 20-hour general mentor training and the six-hour refresher training minimum time requirements, with immediate effect.”

Teacher-trainers should still make sure all mentors receive “sufficient high-quality training to ensure they can effectively support a trainee”, the department said.

Schools will also still be able to claim up to 20 hours of funding per mentor for this academic year.

Requirement ‘difficult to administer’

The ASCL school leaders’ union had urged ministers to review the policy and work with schools on a “more deliverable expectation”.

Members of the NASBTT, which represents school-based trainers, reported the requirement was “difficult to administer with limited capacity in schools”, said Emma Hollis, its chief executive.

She hoped the “concessions will offer ITT providers some additional flexibility to support them in delivering their programmes whilst supporting placement schools whose capacity may be limited”.

Scarlett Murphy, programme director for primary PG ITT at the University of Reading, said the mentor training expectations had a “serious impact on the number of schools who are prepared to take trainees”.



It meant a “huge additional workload” for mentors who were expected to complete the training with no release time or funding. “They, too, are tired and overworked”.

DfE gears up for re-accreditation

Just 179 providers made it through two bruising accreditation rounds following the government’s controversial ITT market review, well below the 240 providers operating in England beforehand.

Providers have now been told another re-accreditation round will open in the spring with those approved able to deliver training from September 2026 or 2027.

The DfE is inviting expressions of interest from eligible providers until November 28.

But it is only open to previously accredited organisations that are lead partners with current providers and without two consecutive Ofsted ratings less than ‘good’.

“In reality, accreditation will only impact a limited number of providers who qualify, and not all of those will chose to apply,” said Hollis.

Ofsted said it had not yet updated its ITT inspection framework and handbook to reflect the changes.

Murphy said the market review had a “devastating impact”. Some providers “were not re-accredited, as one part of the criteria was the creation and design of the mentor curriculum that had to demonstrate how we would ensure the full coverage of the core content framework and meet all the mentor curriculum criteria for

hours, expert input, etc.

“The fact that the mentor curriculum is, effectively immediately, no longer compulsory... must be devastating to those institutions who were not accredited due to not meeting the criteria for both of these.”

A number of trainers snubbed in the government’s re-accreditation went on to earn glowing Ofsted reports.

The fresh round offers an “opportunity to ensure immensely experienced and high-quality teacher training providers... have a chance to re-enter the market”, said James Shea, principal lecturer in teacher education at the University of Bedfordshire.

Will ITT inspections start in January?

Ofsted has confirmed it has postponed scheduled training for its ITT inspectors in the new year, calling into question the start of the next ITT inspection cycle in January.

Off the back of its Big Listen consultation, the watchdog has also promised to reform its framework and revise the way it inspects teacher training.

In light of these looming changes, the NASBTT and the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers have lobbied for ITT inspections to be paused for this academic year.

Ofsted said it was in discussion with the DfE about its ITT inspection activity and when this would start.

This was not connected to the department relaxing the mentor training requirement.

Government to review teacher development delivery

LUCAS CUMISKEY
@LUCAS_CUMISKEY EXCLUSIVE

The government has commissioned Sheffield Hallam University to review and develop a “theory of change” for teacher development delivered by teaching school hubs (TSHs).

Details of what this might entail, or the context behind it, are sparse. But Richard Gill, chair of the Teaching School Hubs Council, a sector body set up to oversee the network, described it as an evaluation of the teaching school hub programme.

Some 87 teaching school hubs are accredited to deliver training and development including the early career framework and national professional qualifications.

The Department for Education said the project will build on the existing evaluations already completed into the ECF and NPQs.

The DfE has awarded the university a £38,797 contract for work until March next year. It will involve engaging with a range of stakeholders.

James Noble-Rogers, executive director of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers, said a review of the role of TSHs, “as we move into



a new policy environment, might be timely”.

The DfE has previously described theory of change as a method that helps people designing policy and services to assess what impact they may have, based on the available evidence.

They are often “used to assess different ideas before implementing them”, it previously explained.

The last government spent nearly £700 million funding 13 hubs as part of its push for a schools-led system to share best practice.

But independent evaluations of just four have been published.

Hubs previously also provided additional CPD, but Schools Week reported in March that they

would no longer do so from this autumn.

Gill said they are “supportive of an evaluation” and “look forward to working collaboratively” with Sheffield around “what this theory of change might look like”.

Schools Week previously revealed the DfE was ending funding for the body from September.

But Gill said it will continue its work this year.

Labour was elected on manifesto pledge to update the ECF, while maintaining “its grounding in evidence”.

Another Labour manifesto pledge was to introduce a teacher training entitlement to “ensure teachers stay up to date on best practice with continuing professional development”. But it’s unclear if there is a link with the new review.

Theory of change could just be “another rushed policy, a remnant of the previous government”, said David Spendlove, professor of education and associate dean of the faculty of humanities at the University of Manchester.

Or it might signal the “start of something new and a rethinking of disastrous policy-making over the last decade and a half”.

But “more than a quick and cheap theory of change summary” was needed to bring “coherence and progression” into teacher development.

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBBOOTH

DfE trials ‘dating agency’ to help trainees find school placement

The government has set up a dating agency-type website to hook up teacher training providers with schools offering placements.

The “manage school placements” service, which is being piloted in Leeds, allows schools to publish what opportunities they have for placing students who are on teacher training courses.

The six-month trial is “aiming to make the process of finding school placements easier”.

Would-be teachers need experience of teaching in two schools to be awarded qualified teacher status.

But there is concern about schools’ capacity to take on trainees, especially as they are already using a lot of capacity to support new teachers on the two-year early career framework.

Emma Hollis, the chief executive of the National Association of School-Based

Teacher Trainers, said the issue was “small-scale” at present because recruitment was so low.

But when applications peaked during the pandemic, there was a rise in providers struggling to find placements.

However, she said there was “some concern” in the pilot as some providers already had partnerships with schools, which needed to be balanced with the value of a transparent system.

“The DfE is at pains to point out that there is no requirement for schools to work with another provider – so where placements are already agreed, these will be honoured.

“But I think there is an element of caution among providers about how this might actually play out in practice.”

One provider, who wished to remain anonymous, said that “engagement has been

very small with the portal” so far.

“The way we usually do placements is building up relationships with schools for us to understand them, and them to understand us. It’s a much deeper way of working rather than just a portal.”

Hollis added: “What could be really valuable is the potential to allow providers to search for placements locally where they are struggling to place a trainee – I think this is what the service is trying to offer.”

The service may “come into its own” if Labour’s ambitions to drive up recruitment come true, she added.

The DfE is also offering a £40 voucher for schools who will speak to researchers on decision-making behind placement offers. They want to speak to schools who offer placements, used to but haven’t for the past two years or have never offered them.

NEWS

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

Ofsted: 'Overcrowded' special schools 'pushed towards crisis'

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

"Overcrowded special schools are being pushed towards crisis point" in Derbyshire, the latest damning Ofsted SEND inspection has revealed.

The council has also been criticised for sitting on more than £20 million of capital funding to address high-needs issues – as parents feel they have "no option" other than to educate their children at home.

Ofsted and Care Quality Commission inspectors found "widespread and/or systemic failings" at the area's local authority and health services, giving it the lowest rating for a SEND inspection.

They had significant concerns about the "experiences and outcomes" of children with special needs.

A lack of capacity meant leaders reporting "overcrowded [special] schools are being pushed towards crisis points".

The report also said a "lack of a clearly defined joint strategy for SEND" was leading to schools and trusts "filling the void with their own strategies and resources".

Margaret Mulholland, of the Association of School and College Leaders, said the findings "perfectly encapsulate the crisis in provision for children with special educational needs".

"Additional special school places are welcome, but it takes time to build capacity, and in most cases it will be a new generation of pupils that benefit.

"We need to take action now to support oversubscribed special schools, as well as mainstream schools, to provide for the growing numbers of children with special educational needs."

Council papers, published in July, show Derbyshire has been allocated about £26 million in SEND capital funding by the government since 2021. Of that, just £6.7 million has been earmarked for projects.

The inspection found schools struggling to accommodate SEND children, leading to increasing numbers "being suspended and/or excluded, or placed on a part-time timetable".

Parents have also been left feeling "they have no option other than to



electively home-educate their child".

Inspectors ordered the area partnership to "urgently" tackle the issue, arguing that recent spending announcements for additional special school places "will do little to address the significant number of children... currently out of education".

Families told inspectors they were "in crisis", waiting up to two years to have their child's needs assessed with "significant delays" to education, health and care plans (EHCPs).

EHCPs were also branded "poor", with some "finalised without contributions from health or social care professionals".

"Area leaders have started to address the issues of timeliness and the quality of [the] plans. However, their work in this area is yet to demonstrate impact."

Sian Hampton, the chief executive of the Archway Learning Trust, said specialist resource provision in the one Derbyshire school she ran had grown "exponentially".

In 2020, the secondary had 25 pupils with EHCPs on its books. The figure has since leapt 132 per cent to 58 this year.

"We have had to stretch our provision to meet the needs of our young people. We're now looking at EHCPs much more creatively... [to see] if it's more impactful for that child to get particular adjustments in the lessons, rather than having someone following them around all the time, which is expensive."

Of the 45 areas that have so

far been inspected since Ofsted launched its new SEND inspection framework last year, 13 (29 per cent) have been given the lowest rating. Meanwhile, just 12 (27 per cent) were handed top marks.

Rotherham, whose inspection report was also published today, is one of those.

Its services were found to "typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes" for SEND children – despite it being signed up to the controversial government bailout programme for its high-needs deficit.

Professor Dean Howells, of the NHS Derby and Derbyshire Integrated Care Board, apologised "to children, parents and carers on behalf of the Derbyshire Local Area Partnership for the failings this report has identified".

Alison Noble, the council's director for children's services, added that the authority was "making a multi-million-pound investment in employing more specialist staff, improving efficiency around assessments and creating more special needs school places".

Matt Keer, an expert at the Special Needs Jungle website, said most councils had allocated their capital funding "rapidly", adding Derbyshire was "an outlier".

The council is a member of the f40 group of local authorities, which are "among the worst funded in the country" per pupil. Schools forum papers from January show Derbyshire had a £4.8 million high-needs deficit, which is "expected to increase".



NEWS

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

Trust loses almost £400,000 in cyber scam

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

EXCLUSIVE

An academy trust has been scammed out of more than £385,000 after its was targeted by cyber attackers posing as a construction company.

Police launched an investigation after Wembley Multi-Academy Trust (WMAT) made four payments to the fraudsters in the past financial year.

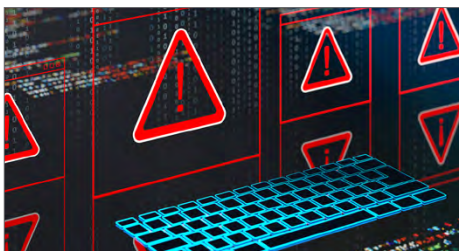
The cash was meant to cover building work, but was paid into the wrong bank account after the supplier's email "was tampered with".

Micon Metcalfe, a school business expert, said the case was a "warning and reminder" of the risk posed by fraudsters.

"Anybody can be susceptible to this type of fraud. The only way to avoid it... [is] to be very vigilant around your controls for changing bank account details."

She recommended "a well-documented process before making changes to bank accounts", including suppliers to double-check details before making payments.

A Metropolitan Police spokesperson said it



received a report of fraud from a trust in Brent in April last year. Enquiries were ongoing.

Accounts for WMAT – which runs three schools in northwest London – state that over 2022-23 "four payments totalling £385,532 were made to a supplier in relation to construction works undertaken".

These went to an "incorrect" account "after the supplier's email... was tampered with".

Metcalfe stressed victims in such cases could usually recover the amounts through insurance, "but it's quite challenging".

Figures published by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) show the number of cyber security incidents in education and childcare has hit a five-year high.

In 2023 353 were listed, more than at any point since 2019. Over the first half of this year, 166 incidents were reported.

A Teacher Tapp survey in September found that one in three secondaries have been rocked by cyber-attacks in the past 12 months.

A teacher, who asked to remain anonymous, said it was "utter chaos" after their school was hit last summer just before results day.

It left all staff "unable to access anything, so we could not prepare for the year". And when they returned to school, they "could not use the desktops and there were not enough laptops".

Secondaries (23 per cent) have most commonly been hit by phishing attacks, according to the survey. The north west was the worst-hit region, with 40 per cent of schools having cyber problems, compared with 28 per cent in the east of England.

Nine per cent of heads said the attacks were "critically damaging". About 20 per cent of schools could not recover immediately, with 4 per cent taking more than half a term.

The survey also revealed that 33 per cent of secondary teachers had not received cyber-security training this year.

WMAT declined to comment.

Wed 4th December 2024

www.westminsterinsight.com



Book with code
'SCHOOLSWK' for 20% off

MAKING THE MOST OF PUPIL PREMIUM DIGITAL CONFERENCE



Anne-Marie Canning
MBE

Chaired by the Chief Executive Officer of The Brilliant Club.



Jon Andrews

Learn from the Head of Analysis and Director for School System and Performance, Education Policy Institute.

... and many more speakers

Join our annual Making the Most of Pupil Premium Digital Conference

Key Points Include :

- Policy priorities for reducing the attainment gap
- Tackling rising child poverty and inequalities faced by disadvantaged pupils
- Practical solutions for improving behaviour and attendance

Teachers’ pension contributions to rise for first time since 2015

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@FCDWHITTAKER

The government is proposing the first rise in employee contributions to the teachers’ pension scheme since 2015 to avoid a shortfall in the fund. However, the Department for Education said rates will not rise for the lowest-paid, and the monthly impact for an employee earning £110,000 a year is estimated to be £17 – just under £200 a year.

It comes after the last government increased the contribution schools have to make from 23.6 per cent to 28.6 per cent. In a consultation published on Thursday, the DfE explained the six “contribution tier” rates had remained the same since 2015, but the thresholds at which each rate was paid had increased annually in line with inflation. As a result, the “estimated yield” from the current structure was now 9.45 per cent, whereas members were “required collectively to contribute 9.6 per cent across the whole scheme membership”. This is “primarily because of the member contribution tier thresholds increasing at a higher rate (based on CPI) than average salary growth, which has affected the expected distribution of the membership in the contribution tiers”. The DfE said it had accepted a “unanimous recommendation” from the government actuary’s department and TPS advisory board “to retain the



current six-tier structure with the forecast shortfall met by an increase of 0.3 percentage points for tiers 2-6”. The result would be...

- No change in the **7.4 per cent** rate for those earning **up to £34,289**.
- Those earning between **£34,290 and £46,158.99** would see their rate increase from **8.6 to 8.9 per cent**.
- Those earning between **£46,159 and £54,729.99** would see their rate increase from **9.6 to 9.9 per cent**.
- Those earning between **£54,730 and £72,534.99** would see their rate increase from **10.2 to 10.5 per cent**.
- Those earning between **£72,535 and £98,909.99** would see their rate increase from **11.3 to 11.6 per cent**.
- And those earning between **£98,909-plus** would see their rate increase from **11.7 to 12 per cent**.

The DfE said the “particular circumstances of a member will determine the precise effect”, but provided “the estimated impact on take-home pay (ie after tax relief has been applied) for the majority of members”. It said a teacher on £30,000 would pay no extra contributions, a teacher on £50,000 would pay an extra £10 a month or £120 a year, and someone on £110,000 would pay an extra £17 a month, or £198 a year. The department is also consulting on other tweaks to pensions. One change will enable the National Institute of Teaching to participate in the TPS. At present it has “temporary acceptance” as it doesn’t qualify for full acceptance against current criteria. Another change will mean FE employees who are already members, or eligible to be members of the TPS, to retain access if they contract is transferred to a new employer.

How will changes impact pay?

Example Salary	Net effect (Annual)	Net effect (Monthly)
£30,000	£0	£0
£40,000	£96	£8
£50,000	£120	£10
£65,000	£117	£10
£85,000	£153	£13
£110,000	£198	£17

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOOTH

Scheme will help recover energy over-payments

A new government scheme will help schools and academies overcharged by energy suppliers to clawback the cash. The Department for Education has contracted energy consultancy PCMG to run an energy cost recovery service, which will be optional for schools and trusts. The company will carry out audits to look for “anomalies and billing errors”, then recover funds. The DfE said it would help support schools “in this economic climate” as they came under “increasing pressure from increasing costs”. It has predicted schools spend £1.3 billion a

year on electricity and gas following huge hikes to energy bills. The scheme aimed to “drive value for money” by “ensuring that schools can be assured that they are and have been billed accurately for their energy bills”. It would also facilitate “better access to their own data to help them manage and monitor their energy consumption”. PCMG would look at up to six years of bills. It said energy billing was “surrounded by complex structures” and “inaccuracies can happen for a multitude of reasons and can remain undetected for a long time”. A case

study on its website shows savings of £173,950 for Hull City Council. Tim Golding, an energy expert, said overcharges could relate to VAT, climate change levies and third-party charges incorrectly applied by the supplier. Micon Metcalfe, a school finance expert, said a trust she once worked for paid a small fee to have its energy bills checked. “They would check we paid the right amount of VAT, check the metering was correct and check we were being charged for the right site. We found once that one school was sent the bill for another school.”



Call for T-level transition to be scrapped

A think tank has called for the “overwhelmingly negative” T-level transition programme to be scrapped after finding one in four students drop out of the qualification within the first year.

A report published by the Education Policy Institute also found T-levels were not “currently suitable” for many level 3 students as more than one third of drop-outs left education and training altogether.

The institute recommends the government overhaul or abolish the “failing” transition

programme, which was recently renamed the T-level foundation year.

Ministers should also pause the defunding of alternatives to T-level qualifications, it said.

A smaller version of T-levels – about one A-level in size – should also be considered.

The report analysed data from the national pupil database and the Office for National Statistics to investigate the early-stage trends and impacts of the technical qualifications, which were launched in 2020.



The high cost of youth club closures

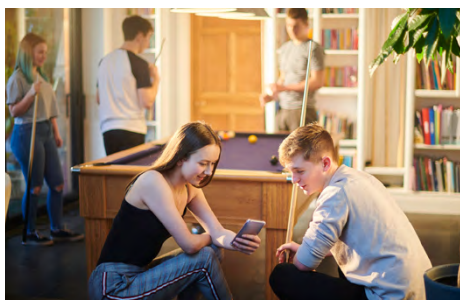
Youth club closures in the 2010s resulted in lower GCSE results and increased offending among young people, a study by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) suggests.

The report estimated that there were “societal costs of nearly £3” for every £1 saved.

The austerity programme enacted by the coalition government in 2010 led to huge cuts to council budgets, which resulted in swathes of youth club closures.

The IfS compared exam results and offending rates among teenagers living in areas where all youth clubs within a 40-minute walk closed, with those teenagers whose nearest club stayed open.

It found teenagers whose club closed did



worse in school “roughly equivalent to a decline of half a grade in one subject”.

But the effects “were even more severe for pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds”, whose test scores fell by the equivalent of more than a grade in one subject.

EEF expands regional partnerships

About 300 schools will be supported to improve teaching and outcomes for pupils by 10 new education endowment foundation (EEF) regional partnerships, the charity has announced.

The £700,000 project will support schools to improve reading and writing outcomes, boost social and emotional development and develop oracy skills.

There will be a specific focus on pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Each two-year partnership will be led by an EEF-supported research school that “champion the use of evidence-informed education in their area”.

Each research school has teamed up with groups such as councils and academy trusts to “identify and address a specific challenge facing disadvantaged pupils in their area”.

The EEF’s research schools network was established in 2016 and now has 33 schools, colleges and early years settings. The charity said more than 11,000 schools in England had accessed support.

For a full list of new partnerships, visit the [Schools Week website](#).

‘Use falling rolls to help worst-off pupils’

The new government should use falling pupil numbers to boost funding by at least £640 million a year for the worst-off pupils, says the Education Policy Institute (EPI).

A report from the think tank renewed its calls for better targeted funding towards “persistently disadvantaged” pupils – those eligible for free school meals for 80 per cent of their time at school.

The first of three suggested options would allocate funding for persistently disadvantaged pupils by adding new factors to the national funding formula at a cost of £80 million.



In its second scenario, the EPI would fund persistent disadvantage through the pupil premium, at a cost of about £200 million a year.

The third would again fund persistent disadvantage through the pupil premium, but would also reverse the real-terms cut to the value of the fund since 2014.

Natalie Perera (pictured), the institute’s chief executive, recommended targeting “at least £640 million to this group by the end of the spending review period, money which can be found from the forecast reduction in pupil numbers”.

NEWS: EXAMS

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

Ofqual investigates why so many private school pupils get extra time for exams

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Ofqual is investigating a growing gap between private and state schools in the use of exam access arrangements, after concerns were raised by the education secretary.

But the regulator has been urged to publish better data on their use and the attainment of those who receive them, after admitting it could not say whether independent special schools were skewing statistics.

Data published by Ofqual last week showed the use of access arrangements for pupils who would otherwise struggle to take exams soared by 12.3 per cent last year, with three in ten pupils now granted extra time.

But the proportion getting extra time in private schools was almost 42 per cent, far above the 26.5 per cent in state secondaries.

The *Financial Times* reported last week that Bridget Phillipson had said it was a “real concern to me there is such a big divide between the state and private system”. She had asked Ofqual to look at “why so many children require this support”.

Extra time of 25 per cent is the most common form of arrangement, granted to pupils who would otherwise struggle to complete papers, such as those with ADHD or dyslexia. Other arrangements include a reader or access to modified papers.

Private school pupils have been more likely to get an access arrangement for years, but the gap has grown from less than 10 percentage points in 2019 to almost 16 last year.

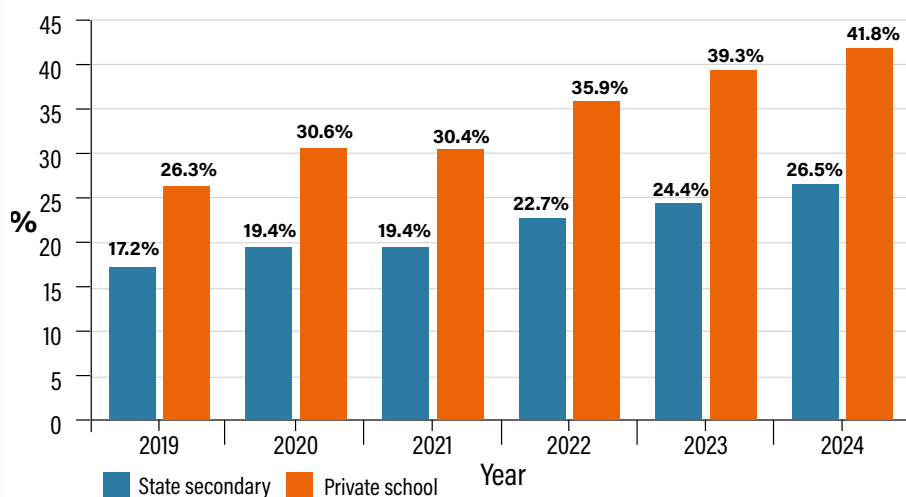
Ofqual said that when it published official statistics, “we look carefully at the figures and any implications for regulation”.

“As the secretary of state has said, we are looking at recent changes in the data on access arrangements. We will consider what they show and how they should inform our regulatory approach.

“It is important that students receive the access arrangements they need to allow them to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do.”

Jon Andrews, from the Education Policy Institute, told the *FT* private schools “already get much higher results than other pupils ... but if you are being given additional time in exams, that is

Proportion of pupils getting 25% extra exam time



Source: Ofqual

SCHOOLS
WEEK

going to materially improve outcomes”.

There are also questions around the data published by Ofqual, which it collates from exam boards.

For example, data is not broken down by individual centre type, meaning figures for independent schools include private special schools.

Ofqual said most special schools would be badged either as “independent” or “other” centre types. This suggests special schools may be under-represented in the data for state secondary schools.

Special schools cater for pupils with the most complex needs, who are more likely to need such access arrangements.

The regulator told *Schools Week* it was unable to break the data down further.

Dave Thomson, a statistician from FFE Education Datalab, said special schools “only make up a small percentage of the total”.

In 2023 key stage 4 data, about 6 per cent of pupils in the independent sector were in special schools, compared with 2 per cent of state pupils.

“There will be a bunch of kids with SEN attending independent schools that aren’t classified as independent special ... but not huge numbers. Certainly not enough to explain the differences the *FT* has reported.”

He said Ofqual should publish aggregated data on grades achieved by pupils receiving extra time

by institution type and subject. Andrews pointed out the proportion of pupils receiving some form of SEND support was higher in private schools (22.4 per cent) than state (15.6 per cent).

“So the difference in SEND rates will likely explain some of the difference – there’s a higher percentage of SEND in independent schools – but it’s clearly more complicated than that.”

Ofqual’s data shows that across the whole education sector, almost 625,000 access arrangements were approved for the 2023-24 academic year, up from 556,000 the previous year.

Last year, the equivalent of 30.1 per cent of all candidates taking exams were given 25 per cent more time, up from 28 per cent the previous year.

There were 69,095 requests for modified papers – for example for visually impaired pupils – a 10 per cent rise on 2022-23.

Ofqual also said that the figures “only show the number of granted requests ... not the total number of modified papers actually produced or used in the summer series”.

Schools Week revealed earlier this year how some pupils with additional needs will be able to listen to white noise or music during their exams next year after new rules were introduced following a post-Covid rise in requests.

Meanwhile, schools will also be able to use mental health support service referral letters to apply for extra support to ensure youngsters are not disadvantaged by long waiting lists.

Are teachers 'enslaved?' What the data says

LUCAS CUMISKEY

@LUCAS_CUMISKEY

Labour's school tsar last week sparked a debate about whether England's teachers are "enslaved" by a "narrow compliance culture". Schools Week investigates ...

Signing off a session at the Confederation of School Trust's annual conference last week, Labour's school standards tsar Sir Kevan Collins warned the audience he was about to say something "provocative".

"There is an irony in the school-led and freedom kind of culture that we've worked on in the last 15 years but, in some classrooms, I've never seen teachers more enslaved.

"I think we've sometimes slipped into a shallow compliance culture, where you see people being told what to do down to the degree of the slide-stack we're going to use in every lesson."

So, are England's teachers "enslaved" by compliance? And if so, in which schools?

Teacher autonomy lower in trusts

The 2018 OECD TALIS, a major international survey, ranked participants based on how much control they have over lessons.

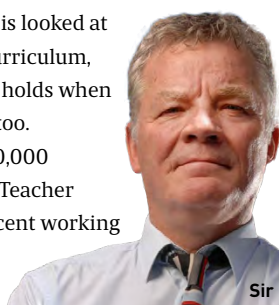
Just 62 per cent of England's secondary teachers agreed they had control over determining course content – lower than almost all other countries and way down on the OECD average of 84 per cent.

A 2020 report by the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) also found teachers had less autonomy than similar professions, with only doctors and nurses below them.

The study also found teacher autonomy, overall, was "significantly lower" for teachers in trusts, compared with maintained schools. This was "particularly the case" for those in trusts that had ten or more schools.

While this analysis looked at tasks other than curriculum, the trend seems to hold when looking at lessons too.

A poll of nearly 10,000 teachers in July by Teacher Tapp found 18 per cent working



Sir Kevan Collins



'Teachers are effectively delivering a pre-set bunch of slides'

in local authority-maintained schools had "total freedom to plan whatever they want". This fell to 13 per cent in large trusts.

However, teachers in standalone academies had the most freedom in the state sector, at 25 per cent.

Teachers at academies were also more likely to report they had pre-prepared lessons they could adapt – 28 per cent at larger trusts, which was more than double the 13 per cent of teachers at maintained schools.

Meanwhile, a recent survey of more than 400 trust chief executives, run by Edurio and the confederation, found one in five trusts primarily direct their curriculum centrally. This rose to a third in trusts with more than 20 schools.

Teachers in private schools were also more likely to have more freedom over lessons.

'Rigid schemes reducing joy'

Some schools in big trusts have "very set, rigid schemes", said Caroline Derbyshire, the chief executive of the nine-academy Saffron Academy Trust and a former chair of the Headteachers' Roundtable.



Caroline Derbyshire

"The argument is that it reduces workload. That may be true, but it also reduces joy and engagement," she said.

Teachers were taught to plan lessons and be creative in their delivery. But when they "get a job in some trusts and in some schools, they're effectively delivering a pre-set bunch of slides, and that's not very entertaining for them".

Such prescriptive approaches can make the headlines, with unions sometimes getting involved.

The NASUWT has been heavily critical of the Astrea Academy Trust, which runs 26 academies in Yorkshire and Cambridge.

It previously claimed the headteacher at St Ivo Academy in Cambridgeshire was not even "at liberty to make a decision on whether or not teachers were allowed to change the desk layout of classrooms".

Mark Burn, the union's then-national executive director for Cambridgeshire, told the website Education Uncovered his members had been threatened with disciplinary action if their room was not "Astrea-approved".

Continued on next page

LONG READ: CURRICULUM

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

An Astrea Academy Trust spokesperson said “workload is a very real issue for many. This is why we have introduced common curriculum resources – which are a starting point, not the end goal – for our departments and curriculum communities.

“We are passionate about creating the conditions where teachers can use and develop their knowledge and have the agency to be curriculum-makers.”

‘Teachers must have agency’

Collins said in schools with “compliance cultures people aren’t fulfilled and they leave.

“[They] have to feel they have agency, responsibility and support and training to be the best teacher [they] can be.”

The NFER study found that teacher autonomy is strongly associated with improved job satisfaction and a greater intention to stay in teaching

About two thirds of teachers polled by Teacher Tapp in July said that if they moved to a new area, they’d rather work at a maintained school than one in a multi-academy trust – even when everything else in the schools was identical.

Only 11 per cent said they’d go for the job at the trust school.

Teacher Tapp did not ask why local authority schools were overwhelming favoured. But Gráinne Hallahan, its head of community, said it could be because of a “perception” that MATs gave teachers less autonomy and had more bureaucracy because of the layers of management in a chain of schools rather than standalone.

More than half of 7,356 teachers polled by Teacher Tapp in July who had worked in an academy also thought trusts offered classroom teachers less autonomy than other school types. About a quarter said there was no difference

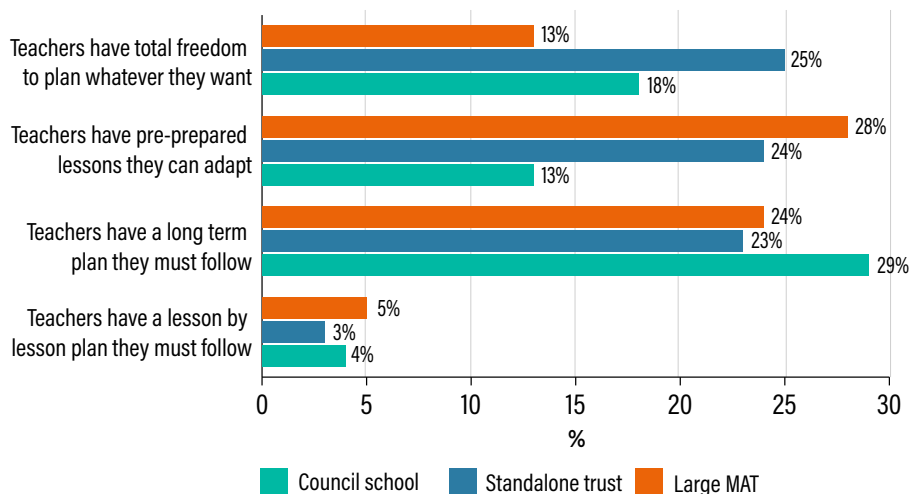
‘Less autonomy isn’t necessarily negative’

But in a 2020 report, Jack Worth, the NFER’s school workforce lead, said less autonomy “isn’t necessarily a negative”.

It could be linked to trusts “standardising or aligning” practices across schools as they developed to ensure they had the “necessary coherence to deliver good pupil outcomes”.

Ernest Jenavs, the co-founder and chief executive of Edurio, stressed trusts were “navigating a complex balance between school autonomy and a shared commitment

How much freedom teachers have to plan their lessons, by school type



Source: Teacher Tapp poll of 9,689 teachers in July. They were asked: ‘What best describes your school policy (primary), department policy (secondary) on planning lessons?’

SCHOOLS WEEK

‘People aren’t fulfilled in compliance cultures. They leave’

to improving education quality and pupil outcomes”.

Liz Robinson, the chief executive at the Big Education Trust, said it was “unhelpful” to make it an “academy versus non-academy argument”. The key issue was school culture.

Lumping trusts as having “one big, closed curriculum” was “really reductive. That is true about some MATs, but it’s also true about some maintained schools – and always has been.”

Paul Tarn, the chief executive of the 57-school Delta Academies Trust, said alignment across schools in a trust boosted collaboration, cut workload and boosted retention.

“The idea that there’s some standardisation and sharing of resources is a good thing. You can’t say ‘we should all be able to do our own thing’... but then complain about workload”

For instance, standardisation across science lessons allowed Delta to send a box twice a term to each of its 38 primaries containing everything teachers needed for experiments. This also included resources explaining how to deliver lessons.

Tarn said it had “transformed” teaching and was a good example of “effective prescription. The staff love it because they don’t have to spend Sunday going around Poundland to find something to do for an experiment.”

In May, a report by the NFER found cutting teacher workload could have the same effect on teacher recruitment and retention as a 3 per cent pay rise.

In 2020 it found that, more widely, teacher autonomy had not changed much over time. Worth concluded it has not been “significantly affected by policy changes since 2010” – when the academy programme was expanded.

However he said some trusts “may be missing the opportunity to harness the benefits of teachers having autonomy over their work”.

Loic Menzies, an associate fellow at the IPPR think tank, added the government had “yet to make clear where it sits on this tension – but they need to be careful: a lack of strategic clarity could wreak havoc with effective policy-making.”



Paul Tarn

NEWS

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

Minister wants more details on home-to-school travel

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Ministers will ask councils to provide more details on the travel they arrange for pupils to get to school in an attempt to help bring down soaring costs.

The Department for Education currently only collects data on how much councils spend on home-to-school travel.

But schools minister Catherine McKinnell said “even fundamental information” such as the number of pupils who received free transport was not collected. Nor was information on catchment areas relating to travel.

Councils predict home-to-school travel costs could soar to £2 billion this financial year, with transport for pupils with special educational needs costing up to £1.5 billion – nearly treble what it cost a decade ago.

They are expecting to spend an additional £514 million on transport to mainstream schools, up 46 per cent since 2015-16.

Local authorities are required to arrange free travel for children of compulsory school age who attend their nearest school but cannot walk there because of distance, special educational needs and disabilities, or because the route is not safe.

McKinnell told MPs this week she was “determined” the DfE improved its data “so that local authorities can benchmark themselves



against similar authorities and learn from one another, and so that central and local government have the robust evidence to inform decision-making on those issues”.

But in a Westminster Hall debate several MPs told McKinnell about their constituents’ difficulties and inconsistencies in accessing transport in Northumberland.

Joe Morris, the MP for Hexham, said it was “not just illogical, but vaguely Kafkaesque” that a father had to drive 170 miles a week to get his son to school as he did not get a free transport place, despite his daughter receiving one.

Pupils living in rural communities were “regularly late” for school because of delays with transport, he added.

Morris said another constituent’s daughter was collected at 7.45am for a 15-minute journey – but did not get to school until after 9am.

David Smith, the MP for North

Northumberland, said it was common in villages in his area for an 11-year-old to spend up to two hours a day on four different buses.

He told of one child with autism who was no longer attending school for several reasons, the first being transport.

Smith said parents were “resigned to the notion that having a child with more complex needs will require spending large amounts of money and time travelling to school” because of the lack of suitable nearby schools.

McKinnell said the department is writing to councils “in the coming days, setting out our plans to ask them to provide data on travel”.

It will be voluntary initially, but she hoped councils “will see the benefit of the data collection and share the requested data that they hold”.

She said there were several reasons for the increased costs, including the rising cost of fuel, driver shortages and more children with education, health and care plans travelling long distances to a school that could meet their needs.

A County Councils Network spokesperson said the data would be useful for benchmarking, but

costs had “dramatically increased as they are directly linked to special educational needs and disabilities services”.

“As useful as data collection could be, the need for reform of the SEND system should be paramount.”



Catherine McKinnell

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBOTH

SEND override needs to be clarified, says adviser

The future of a mechanism that keeps SEND deficits from bankrupting councils needs to be clarified, a government adviser has warned, adding its impending end “dominates” thinking about reform.

Dame Christine Lenahan was last week appointed as a “strategic adviser” on SEND. She will play a “a key role in engaging the sector, including leaders, practitioners, children and families”.

Speaking at the County Councils Network conference on Tuesday, she said “clarity” was needed on the statutory override, which has allowed councils to keep the deficits off their books. It is due to expire in March 2026.

The override was introduced by the previous government, but there was no update in chancellor Rachel Reeves’ budget last month on how Labour plans to proceed – although the National Audit Office has warned that four in 10 councils may be at risk of declaring effective bankruptcy when the override ends.

“My worry for that is it just dominates thinking,” Lenahan said. “It stops us being creative, it stops us thinking what we need to do. All we think about is what’s going to happen... I’m not saying I know what that will be, but I’m saying it’s important we actually take it head-on.”

Lenahan, the former director of the Council

for Disabled Children, urged the government to “articulate...an absolute clear vision about where we want to go to and how within that clear vision we take the different parties along the way”.

She also warned there was a “fear factor” on SEND reforms.

“There’s a fear ... that the minute we start to say ‘we are going forward’ there will be backlash.

“There will be parents who say ‘you’re taking our children’s rights away’. There will be schools who say ‘you’re not interested in attainment anymore’.”

It was “part of the role of everyone to hold consensus, and to me that’s going to be the key”.

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION

DfE reveals why it banned Lilac Sky trust founder

JOHN DICKENS

@JOHNDICKENSSW

EXCLUSIVE

An academy boss authorised payments of hundreds of thousands of pounds to his companies after stepping down by accessing trust bank accounts on his phone, government documents allege.

Schools Week can reveal the bombshell allegations behind a decision to ban Trevor Averre-Beeson from managing schools.

Averre-Beeson founded and was chief executive of the Lilac Sky Schools Trust, which at its height had ten schools. It shut in 2017 following allegations of financial impropriety.

The government has refused to publish its full investigation into what happened, but an “outcome” report last month revealed more than £3 million of trust spending was deemed “contentious, irregular or improper”. It is one of the biggest academy scandals to date.

Unusually, Averre-Beeson’s prohibition notice also lacked an explanation for the decision.

But Schools Week has been given a detailed summary of the evidence, heard during a tribunal last year, by the Department for Education.

It sets out the full allegations that led to the ban, including that Averre-Beeson:

- allegedly agreed a five-year, £1 million contract with the trust the day after stepping down as chief executive. The deal was authorised by the new CEO Chris Bowler, Averre-Beeson’s friend and “business partner” that he recommended for the role weeks earlier
- allegedly accessed trust bank accounts – after supposedly stepping down – to “authorise and make” payments of more than £620,000 to his own companies. He was paid nearly £1,000 a day as a consultant under one contract
- allegedly used more than £80,000 grant funding meant for his trust to “maintain cash flow” at his private company.

Averre-Beeson denied wrongdoing and said some elements were untrue. He accused the government of “stretching” facts to fit a “false narrative”.

In a statement to Schools Week,



On 24 March 2017, the Serious Crime Directorate of Essex Police confirmed that no further action would be taken, but commented that “... this decision has not been taken lightly, in view of the wholly unethical nature and relationship between the LSSAT and Mr Averre-Beeson’s companies”

Government’s witness statement reveals police concern

he said the government had not published the documents because “they know them to be flawed, libellous, defamatory and without substance”.

Publishing the allegations was “lazy, shoddy journalism which is no more than a defamatory character assassination”.

The documents show the case was referred to the police in 2016. They took no further action. But documents state the police said the decision was “not taken lightly” given the “the wholly unethical nature” of some aspects of the case.

Micon Metcalfe, a school finance expert, said the allegations were “shocking”. They showed “there was no attempt to set up appropriate governance structures or appropriate financial controls” at the trust.

The documents given to Schools Week include the government and Averre-Beeson’s witness statements.

They formed part of a tribunal after Averre-Beeson appealed his ban. But he dropped the appeal midway through the hearing. Lawyers for the government said this “gives credence” that the ban was “absolutely justified”.

The ‘secret’ five-year, £1m contract

The government first contacted Lilac Sky over “concerns relating to financial control and governance” between

late 2014 and March 2015, documents allege.

The trust was sponsored by Averre-Beeson’s school improvement company, Lilac Sky Schools Limited. The company was paid to provide services to the trust.

In April 2015, the government “ordered” the trust to cease transactions with this company and Lilac Sky Outstanding Education Services, also run by Averre-Beeson.

This was to “ensure future compliance” with academy rules, annual accounts for that year stated.

Averre-Beeson resigned as chief executive, chair and a member of the trust “on or around” March 1, 2015. He remained a trustee until May, though he claimed in his evidence this was an administrative delay.

Also on March 1, documents allege he agreed a £1 million, five-year contract to work as a “freelance agent” through a new company called Trevor Averre Beeson Ltd.

The government alleges Beeson did so “in the knowledge” the contract broke rules requiring a formal tender and board approval.

The deal was signed off by Bowler, his “friend and business partner”. Averre-Beeson had recommended that Bowler succeed him as chief executive weeks before. He too has been banned from managing schools.

Responding to these allegations, Averre-Beeson said the contract, which included VAT, amounted



Micon Metcalfe

Continued on next page

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION

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

to £200,000 a year, and was for services provided by at least three other people.

He added it was the responsibility of the new chief executive to ensure trust procedures were followed.

He also disputed claims that the government contacted the trust over finance concerns before he stepped down, or that it ordered the trust to stop paying his companies.

"The truth was that I took the decision to try and separate the business of the trust from the company [Lilac Sky Schools Ltd] because I recognised that the political approach to academy trusts had changed."

However, Metcalfe said while "there may be questions about the DfE's due diligence of academy trust sponsors, the interconnected structure was at odds with all the guidance signposted at the time of incorporation".

"It was a failure of proper governance and oversight from the start," she said.

"We are being audited by the EFA re the Trust and we have realised that I might still be a signatory on the bank account whilst I am no longer the CEO or Director.

If I am - can you put in process my removal and email Chris to confirm that is the case - or let us know what we need to do to demonstrate that I no longer wish to be a signatory?

I hope that makes sense.

....."

Email from Averre-Beeson to the trust's bank amid a government finance review

5. TAB undertook role of CEO at circa £16-18k per month (plus significant expenses) invoiced through the sponsor on an off payroll basis, from 2012 till RSC intervention in 2015.

6. Inappropriate recruitment of related parties

a. CEO position (£130k) awarded in 2015 with no formal recruitment to a related party (long term friend/business partner)

b. MD position (£100k) awarded in 2015 with no formal recruitment to a related party (Wife of TAB).

7. Limited evidence of MD role being undertaken"

Findings from the unpublished government finance review into the trust. TAB stands for Trevor Averre-Beeson and MD stands for managing director

Approving' £620k to his own firms' (after stepping down)

Despite the trust supposedly having cut payments to companies run by their founder, documents allege 21 such transactions between May 2015 and mid-2016.

They totalled more than £600,000, with individual payments as high as £250,000, and were described as "funds transfer" or "regular payment".

This was despite "significant assurances" to the government in April 2015 "around management of conflicts of interest and regularity of use of

Gagging clauses, secret deals and 'managing media risk'

Documents show Averre-Beeson refused to attend an interview as part of the government's investigation.

This was because officials wanted him to sign a confidentiality agreement in exchange for sight of documents he was to be quizzed on.

Investigators also considered a behind-the-scenes deal.

Averre-Beeson offered to "provide a

declaration that he will take no further part in running an academy or an independent school". In exchange, no ban would be published.

But this was "considered inappropriate". One reason was that he would not appear on the Disclosure and Barring Service's banned list.

Prohibition notices are published online, and normally with details of why the person was banned.

However, the notice published for Averre-Beeson simply said the ban was over "inappropriate" conduct.

Tribunal documents show the government published Averre Beeson's ban in a "streamlined format" to "take into account the need to manage ongoing risks of media exposure".

By publishing the prohibition direction in a streamlined format, the DfE sought to achieve the objective of making a public direction, but also take into account the need to manage ongoing risks of media exposure.

Government omitted key details from prohibition notice to 'manage ongoing risks of media exposure'

Continued on next page

INVESTIGATION

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

funds", documents allege.

Despite stepping down, Averre-Beeson "continued to access trust bank accounts, authorise transactions, and make payments" totalling at least £623,725 to his companies.

He had "no just cause to access or make payments from trust bank accounts, demonstrating a lack of integrity regarding public funds". Payments were for "his own benefit".

Under one contract, Averre-Beeson's day rate was nearly £1,000.

In his statement, Averre-Beeson said he "accepted" that "accessing and actioning payments from the trust bank account was unwise". But he "did not intend to, nor did I in practice, do anything wrong via that access".

Trust staff "informally approved my continued operation of the account" as they knew he was "completely trustworthy and functioned with integrity", he said. Some payments "weren't easy" for the finance director to make.

The trust account was in a "suite of accounts" that included his personal, private and savings accounts.

"It was only the hysteria stirred up by the ESFA investigators that led colleagues to doubt their judgment and mine in this matter," he alleged.

Documents show that in February 2016, Averre-Beeson emailed the trust's bank to say "we are being audited" by the government.

"We have realised that I might still be a signatory on the bank accounts whilst I am no longer the chief executive or director." He asked



Dominic Herrington, former regional schools commissioner for the south east and south London

the bank to "put in process my removal".

In his statement, Averre-Beeson claimed he had asked on several occasions to be removed before the investigation was "even known about".

He said it was a "transitional matter which was going to be rectified", but because an "unknown person" had "decided my success as a school leader was some kind of fakery. Therefore I was dishonest... It is amazing how far decent people will go to discredit an innocent person, when they believe they are right."

'Significant irregularity'

A government investigation into the trust has never been published. But the documents reveal key findings from a financial management and governance review, launched in January 2016.

Its findings "suggest" previous assurances given by the trust over conflicts of interests to the then regional schools commissioner, Dominic Herrington, "were deliberately misleading (in substance)".

Some issues raised by government also "appeared" not to have been resolved "in any real manner", the documents state.

An example cited was assurances that transactions with the "commercial arm" of Lilac Sky would end. But the "same transactions continued with a new company" set up by Averre-Beeson in May 2015, it is alleged.

And despite resigning as a trustee, Averre-Beeson "continued to attend board meetings potentially acting as a de facto trustee".

The review also found "almost" all trust members, directors and senior managers had links to Averre-Beeson's sponsor company.

At one point, governance roles were held by his wife, daughters, sister, paid consultants at his company and his personal assistant.

Documents allege "extremely poor oversight and scrutiny" and "significant irregularity" around related-party transactions.

Some lacked "any formal procurement", records of decisions and in many cases had "no contract in place".

A 2015 contract provided "preferential terms" to Averre-Beeson "to the detriment" of the trust, the witness statement alleges.

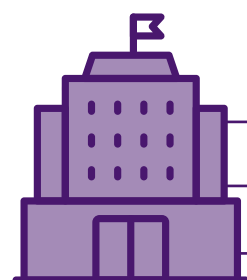
But Averre-Beeson said in his witness statement the government's case "casts doubt over the integrity of my family members once again, with no evidence".

The estimated spend by the trust with Averre-Beeson's companies in the three years to 2015 was "in the region of £1.27 million", documents state. This excluded spending on contractors "connected to" Averre-Beeson.

Averre-Beeson's firms' £1.3m payday



Payments from Lilac Sky trust to firms connected to Averre-Beeson between 2013 and 2016, according to Companies House filing



LILAC SKY
SCHOOLS TRUST

• £775K TO LILAC SKY SCHOOLS LTD

• £272K TO LILAC SKY EDUCATION LTD

• £308K TO CORPORATE BESPOKE SERVICES LTD



Continued on next page

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION

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

Averre-Beeson was paid “circa £16-£18k per month (plus significant expenses) invoiced through the sponsor on an off-payroll basis” until the government “intervention” in 2015, documents claim.

There was “no formal recruitment” for Bowler as chief executive in 2015, nor Averre-Beeson’s wife Jane Fielding as managing director. Despite a £100,000 salary, the review found “limited evidence of [the] MD role being undertaken”.

Averre-Beeson said the claim about his wife was “a libellous slur” and “pejorative hearsay that is vindictive and without any factual evidential backing”.

She oversaw the trust schools, liaised and advised heads, provided training and coaching, took part in Ofsted reviews and was chair of governors at three schools.

Averre-Beeson did not provide a specific response to the alleged findings from the government review.

‘Improperly retained’ trust cash as private company ‘cashflow’

Documents also allege Averre-Beeson “improperly retained” more than £80,000 of grant funding paid to one of his companies by East Sussex County Council, but meant for the trust.

He “attempted to legitimise the holding of those funds by inappropriately negotiating staged payments when full payment should have been made with immediate effect”.

In September 2015, Averre-Beeson emailed the trust to ask if the cash could be paid back “over the next 4 months at £20k-ish a month – just to maintain the cash flow?”.

Averre-Beeson said the allegation was “worthy of a social media conspiracy theory”.

He said the repayment schedule was agreed with the trust, and there was no personal advantage.

“It was done for cash flow purposes – which is a normal business practice. The company was employing over 100 people so maintaining the business viability was important.”

He added that emails quoted as evidence “read very clearly to me as open conversations with the finance manager trying to untangle the links between the company and the trust, which were in the first two years [of the trust] basically run as one organisation”.

Another allegation is he “acted with a lack of probity” over a failure to repay nearly £90,000 that he had “facilitated” to one of his companies,

which he had “no reasonable cause to access”.

Averre-Beeson said the payment was mistakenly made by the trust, but, by the time it was communicated to him, the private company was “under a great deal of pressure” and later became insolvent.

‘Allegation worthy of social media conspiracy theory’

The “direct consequence” of the “one-sided, incomplete and unpublished investigation” into the trust was that his three companies closed. Monies that “would have been repaid to the trust couldn’t be and then the secretary of state in this allegation blames me for the destruction that her staff set out on.

“Finding new business became impossible... it is plain that I did not seek personal gain. Indeed the very opposite is true. My personal circumstances were decimated. My work, my marriage, my family, my life.”

Unpaid VAT led to insolvency investigation referral

After resigning, Averre-Beeson also “caused” a VAT-only invoice for £115,046 to be raised by one of his companies to the trust.

“He then accessed a trust bank account without authority and transferred this amount from the trust to his company prior to the authorisation of the invoice,” DfE documents allege.

The witness statement said £23,000 of VAT was owed to HMRC at the point the company was liquidated.

In December 2018, the ESFA made a referral to the insolvency service, stating “concern” that neither the government nor the trust was notified of the winding-up of Lilac Sky Education Limited or listed as creditors.

“We are also interested in any on-going recovery action being contemplated, or sought, in relation to that asset.”

Averre-Beeson said VAT repayments were “insisted upon” by HMRC over an error after the private company’s schools joined the trust.

His accountant “negotiated that the company paid HMRC the VAT in instalments, which HMRC agreed to. Those instalments were paid until the last when the company became insolvent.

“I absolutely deny any wrongdoing in this allegation... Again, I did not personally gain in any way whatsoever, particularly as the company became insolvent.

“Of the five allegations, this one feels to be the most wilfully brought or otherwise misunderstood. The facts have been stretched to meet the needs of the embedded false narrative established by the initial ESFA investigators.”

The Insolvency Service said in May 2020 it was “unable to pursue its investigation” as a statutory time limit for company director disqualifications had lapsed.

The overall case was also referred to the police in July 2016. But eight months later, it told the government no further action would be taken.

However, the serious crime directorate of Essex Police said the decision had “not been taken lightly, in view of the wholly unethical nature and relationship between” the trust and Averre-Beeson’s companies, the documents allege.

Averre-Beeson said the government’s case “does not establish any evidence from the police referral that I acted dishonestly or exclusively in my own interest”.

The Insolvency Service said it was “not able to comment on any investigatory activity”.

DfE breaks promise to publish investigation

The government has long promised to publish the Lilac Sky investigation after enforcement action had been taken.

However, last month it instead published an investigation “outcome” report. Rather than full findings, it ran to just three pages – with little new information.

The DfE said this week that it would not publish the report, but would not say why, nor answer any other detailed questions.

On why the investigation took so long, the documents state the investigations team of about 10 staff were tasked with “other high-profile investigations”. Covid also “influenced the pace”.

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

Movers & Shakers

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



Lorna Hamilton

Chief executive, The Primary First Trust

Start date: September

Previous role: deputy chief executive, The Primary First Trust

Interesting fact: Lorna once worked at The Body Shop – where she did Victoria Beckham's make-up for the *Wannabe* music video shoot



Ian Walsh

Non-executive chairperson, The Sutton Trust

Start date: November

Current job: Managing director and senior partner, The Boston Consulting Group

Interesting fact: Ian was a student activist as president of the UCD Students' Union in Ireland. He was also a finalist in the world university debating championships



Richard Clutterbuck

Head of strategic relations, Bromcom Computers

Start date: September

Previous role: Headteacher, Cirencester Deer Park School, Gloucestershire

Interesting fact: The name Clutterbuck has Flemish origins. The official story dates back to Flemish cloth makers who came to the UK in the 1500s and settled in Gloucestershire, making cloth in many of the mills around Stroud and Stonehouse.

Anthem's CEO takes up overseas post

FEATURED



Anthem Schools Trust chief executive Mohsen Ojja will step down next April to take up a post overseas.

David Moran, the former boss of E-ACT

and Mohsen's mentor, will become interim chief executive until a permanent recruit is found. Ojja's new post has not yet been announced.

He was one of only four non-white chief executives of the 171 trusts with 15 schools or more, *Schools Week's* diversity audit found.

He says he will continue as a trustee to support the strategy he launched when joining in January last year.

"It has been a great privilege to work alongside such a talented and dedicated team of professionals across our schools, on the central team and on our board of

trustees.

"I am so incredibly proud of what we have achieved as a team so far, and I have absolute confidence that given the impressive progress that has already been made, that Anthem will go from strength to strength."

Jay Bhutani, Anthem's chair, has offered her "deepest gratitude to Mohsen for his outstanding leadership and dedication to the trust. His vision and passion have laid a strong foundation for Anthem to thrive, and we are confident that David Moran's expertise will guide us smoothly through this transition."

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

Are you ready to move?

Check out the top roles in Further Education and Skills at educationweekjobs.co.uk

education week jobs



the
one
show

THE PEARSON NATIONAL TEACHING AWARDS

LIVE ON BBC'S THE ONE SHOW
MON 25th - FRI 29th NOV 2024

Could this be your school in
2025? Enter The Pearson
National Teaching Awards
TODAY at
www.teachingawards.com

Entries submitted before the
31st December are eligible for
feedback, the chance to win
signed Michael Morpurgo books
AND £200 worth of vouchers for
your school library!



WATCH BBC'S THE ONE SHOW
25th - 29th NOVEMBER 2024

X TeachingAwards



TeachingAwards



TheTeachingAwards



The-Teaching-Awards



Feature

JESSICA HILL | @JESSJANEHILL

Deputy headteacher Alex
Blagona with cover manager,
Debbie Kwakkelstein


Why flexible working for teachers can bring the best of all worlds

In the face of recruitment challenges and a national state school exodus, a school in Suffolk is pioneering a more cooperative way of keeping its staff on side

When English teacher Gareth Edwards broke his ankle, attempting a karate kick dance move at the school Christmas party, he was able to recuperate at home and teach classes remotely.

Then, when the 59-year-old was contemplating early retirement last year, he was persuaded instead to go down to three days a week.

Had his school, Thomas Gainsborough in Suffolk, not allowed him that flexibility, he “probably” would have ended his career altogether.

Last year, almost 40,000 teachers left state schools for reasons other than retirement. Because of his school’s flexibility, Edwards wasn’t one of those.

Part of Unity Schools Partnership, Thomas Gainsborough is one of 10 ambassador schools and trusts (one for each region) appointed by the Department for Education to develop flexible working approaches and provide advice to others

interested in doing the same.

Nationally, only around 20 per cent of secondary school teachers work part-time. At Thomas Gainsborough, it is more than a third (34 of its 100 teachers) - a rise of 15 per cent on last year.

Assistant headteacher Alex Blagona, who leads the school’s flexible working programme, says that, given flexibility, “the vast majority” of staff will “pay that back in kind later down the line”.

The school is also, literally, being paid back. The approach led to a 30 per cent drop in staff absences last year, helping to save £30,000 in supply costs. Paid leave was also down by 80 per cent.

‘Not just being fluffy bunny’

Given the recruitment and retention crisis, schools like Thomas Gainsborough feel they have little choice but to be flexible.

Just over one-third of teachers and leaders

in 2023 (36 per cent) were considering leaving the state school sector over the next 12 months (excluding for retirement), up from 25 per cent in 2022. Eighty per cent of teachers leaving blamed the high workload, while 37 per cent cited lack of flexible working opportunities.

“We had to adapt, because teachers know the job market out there means they can find part-time work elsewhere,” Blagona says. “Schools are now aware of the value of their teachers.”

Headteacher Helen Yapp has just allowed one of her heads of department to work from home on the day of our visit because absences elsewhere mean “she had flogged herself to the bone”.

“That was the human thing to do. We talk about trying to understand the invisible emotional backpacks people carry, but I’m not soft – I also don’t want her going off long-term sick. So, it’s not just about being fluffy bunny, it’s about being quite strategic.”

Feature: Thomas Gainsborough School

Yapp believes the parents of her pupils are unaware of its flexible approach. "They don't need to be as it doesn't affect their child." However, "they would comment if we had long-term supply".

But there is nervousness about an apparent public perception of lazy teachers. The DfE's flexible working group and leaders from its ambassador schools and trusts got together in London last month on the day that a news story broke about a Teach First report on attracting new teachers. Teachers were being "offered lie-ins", the headline said.

The framing of the story "sent alarm bells" through the group, Blagona says, because "that's not the narrative we're trying to push".

Thomas Gainsborough's staff can spend their planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time off-site so long as they are not required for cover duties. Several teachers start late on some days – so they can do school drop-offs, not sleep in. They also sometimes leave school early.

Blagona currently has flexibility to work from home four mornings a week, which enables him to spend more time with his daughter and get a "mental break" from the hectic school environment.

Timetabling turmoils

But Blagona says the school, which is the ambassador for the Eastern region, is facing "challenges" in "bringing other schools along with us".

"It's still that perception that the new age of hybrid working in the private sector isn't one that really fits in with the educational picture."

Two of the original ambassador schools have since pulled out of the programme.

The DfE's survey suggests a rise in cynicism around the feasibility of flexible working. Fifty-six per cent of teachers and leaders thought flexible working was incompatible with a teaching career, up from 51 per cent in 2022.

Blagona says that among the participant schools he speaks to, "the number one issue" holding them back is timetabling constraints. Some tried offering all staff a free period on set days, which proved impossible.



English teacher Gareth Edwards



Helen Yapp, headteacher

'Schools are now aware of the value of their teachers'

But he believes timetabling should not be a deterrent. "You have to be canny, it involves thinking outside the box as to how you allocate teachers," he says.

The secret, Blagona says, is "being open with people, so there's no special deals done behind closed doors to different members of staff".

Job-share joy

Thomas Gainsborough's approach was born out of a "tough pandemic", after which a dozen

staff announced their retirement plans. Its rural location – an hour's commute from the nearest big town (Ipswich) – makes recruitment tricky at the best of times.

The school "needed a plan to encourage people to join us". It has been advertising flexible teacher roles, which helps to outweigh the negatives of a potentially long commute for those based further afield.

Half the school's part-time staff have changed their work patterns since joining, including six

Feature: Thomas Gainsborough School



Thomas Gainsborough School

young mums and four teachers in job-shares. This is unusual for a secondary school; the DfE's survey found only 1 per cent of teachers at secondaries in job-shares, compared with 12 per cent in primaries.

Liliana Hurtado-Read, the school's head of modern languages, job-shares with her husband Laurence. She almost quit after returning from her last maternity leave, finding the hours "quite challenging" given that one of her children has special needs and is partially home-schooled.

Now she teaches Spanish four days a week and Laurence takes over on the other day. They also share a tutor group, which "feels like a family". When there is a crisis at home, they "step in for each other".

Liliana says the job-share has allowed the couple to "continue growing professionally and benefit from being with the children".

But "levels of coordination and organisation" in their household have to be "really high", and they have "little time together" as a couple. "It's not an easy thing to do. You need to be able to give from both sides."

Yapp says being flexible has meant "keeping some of our better staff". While experienced staff are more expensive to hold onto, it is a price worth paying. "I don't not balance my budget," she says.

Wellbeing in work

A common misconception of flexible working is that it costs schools more. The school was reluctant to get into the finer details of its budget, but said its staffing costs this year were 75 per cent of its total income, which has not changed significantly in the past two years.

Government guidance says staff pay typically represents over 70 per cent of expenditure;



Head of modern languages,
Liliana Hurtado-Read

Liliana with husband
Laurence and their children

'It involves thinking outside the box as to how you allocate teachers'

anything over 80 per cent is "considered high".

Thomas Gainsborough also receives around £50,000 for being a DfE ambassador school.

Yapp believes the "interest in flexible working is growing", but there is still a cultural stigma in secondaries where "it's too complicated not to work full time".

Mistakes have been made around staff not having "professional understanding that being able to work flexibly needs to fit both parties".

Since the pandemic, Blagona's team has also become "really aware" of staff "putting on a brave face and sometimes going into school when really they shouldn't... Part of maintaining wellbeing is understanding it's OK not to be OK."

Debbie Kwakkelstein, the school's cover manager, recalls how a decade ago its teachers believed that "you couldn't just have one day off, because no one would believe you were sick. So they used to take two."

She reassured them that she believed their reasons for absence, which helped bring about a cultural shift towards "lots of one-day absences" instead. "That saves us money in our cover output... There's a very good rapport of people helping each other."

Kwakkelstein, 60, was herself feeling "pulled in all directions", juggling caring responsibilities as a daughter and grandmother with her job, when she started mulling retirement this year. Blagona says the school saw her as a "valued agony aunt" with 20 years of "personal knowledge of staff and supply agencies" they "didn't want to lose".

So, they struck a deal, reducing her responsibilities to finding cover in the mornings, rather than teaching cover herself, in return for a 50 per cent pay cut.

Blagona says the willingness to reduce hours "is still rare in schools... Some would rather just see a member of staff go."

But he believes that holding onto experienced staff for longer means they can "pass down knowledge", to newer staff members, which "makes them feel valued in school".

Meanwhile, Edwards' new shorter working week has given him time for other pursuits. Yesterday he went dancing with a friend – hopefully avoiding any karate-kick moves.

"It does seem like I've got the best of all worlds now," he says. "I have to keep the grin off my face sometimes, as I don't want to look too smug."

SCHOOLS WEEK



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

Did you know about the Schools Week Daily Bell?

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

You can sign up here



Opinion

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



TAMSIN FRANCES

Executive director of operations and innovations, Ted Wragg Trust

Why joy belongs in our secondaries too

Secondary schools can replicate the joy and sense of belonging that primaries foster without sacrificing standards, writes Tamsin Frances

I am honoured to have been invited to take part in a new ImpactedED commission which will examine student engagement's potential as a lead indicator of key educational outcomes and a driver of school improvement. This is crucial to ensuring our children love coming to school, attend well and ultimately receive the education they deserve.

My experience has taught me that exceptional outcomes and a joyous culture are not mutually exclusive. In fact, joy is essential for genuine success.

In our primary schools, we are doing exceptionally well at creating a strong sense of belonging and joy. In our most recent student survey, 93 per cent of our students said they were happy studying at school. The national primary average is a strong 79 per cent.

However, as a nation we seem to have accepted that our children are not as happy studying at secondary school, and I don't think that's OK.

Fostering belonging

Our secondary schools are working hard to replicate the sense of belonging and joy that you can achieve at primary.

In one, the reward system involves golden tickets being handed out to deserving students. At lunchtime once a week, a staff member cycles into the playground with a top hat on, a large box of goodies strapped to the front of their bike. Students flock to them to swap their tickets for treats; the buzz it creates brings about a real sense of community and fun.

Another has recently launched a "Make Their Day" initiative. The school asked parents to send in suggestions on how school can make their child's day. Feedback from students and parents has been overwhelmingly positive.

Such thoughtful activities, focused on fostering a sense of belonging, are having an impact. The school finished the first half term with attendance five percentage points above where it was this time last year.

A joyful curriculum

Events, activities, rewards and trips are all vital parts of making sure that our children are happy at school, but sometimes we seem to forget the classroom. Joy can and should be experienced through learning.

Through our fortnightly instructional coaching, we ensure that we are empowering our teachers to inspire our children. What correlates most with happy children and parents is where the



“ We don't have to pit consistency against fun

teaching is inclusive and of the highest quality.

Here, too, we have already seen the positive correlation between engagement and success for our students, especially for those who need us the most.

Reframing our aims

This year, we are also transforming our key performance indicators (KPIs). Our top three measures will align with results from our three engagement surveys with students, staff and parents.

I had a long debate with our director of performance about attendance as a KPI. Ultimately, we decided that attendance is a symptom of a lack of engagement, and that attendance alone – without engagement – is not enough to truly transform children's lives.

By focusing instead on our children's love of school and their ability to achieve well, we are reframing our leaders' entire approach to school improvement, including attendance.

A community asset

Focusing on engagement has also meant spending time really thinking about how our schools feel

for our parents and carers.

Last year, we invested heavily in strengthening our communities strategy. We appointed someone to lead it, developed our community hub models, trained and supported staff to improve family relationships, established our own charitable foundation (the South West Opportunities Fund) and focused on improving communication with our families.

The investment has paid off with improved outcomes for our most vulnerable, improvements in all areas of our parent survey and reduced complaints.

It may sound simplistic or emotional to talk about wanting our parents to love our schools, and children to love coming to them, but I believe the establishment of the engagement commission is part of a new movement in education.

We don't have to pit consistency against fun, or rigour against engagement, or high standards against creativity and community.

I am proud that one of our secondary schools has made "love" one of its core values. I hope more of them do, because that's how we will create the conditions to rebuild a love of education.

Opinion

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



DR KATE
CHHATWAL

CEO, Challenge Partners

Every leader should RISE to this improvement challenge

Early concerns aside, RISE teams are an opportunity to be part of re-defining school improvement as sector-led, universal and collaborative, says Kate Chhatwal

Much of the discourse so far on the DfE's new Regional Improvement in Standards and Education (RISE) teams has focused on targeted support. Questions about commissioning and accountability are discouraging exceptional school and trust leaders I have spoken to from applying for team adviser roles. I urge them to reconsider, focusing instead on advisers' broader and more alluring role in the universal offer.

For too long, school improvement policy has been based on a deficit model, with the emphasis on intervention in "under-performing" schools. I am well aware of this, having been responsible in my former role as a senior civil servant for implementing the £400-million National Challenge programme under Ed Balls.

That initiative saw government-funded "National Challenge Advisors" devise and deliver bespoke improvement plans for around 700 secondary schools at risk or below the "floor target" of 30 per cent of students achieving five good GCSEs, including English and maths.

Last week, the DfE indicated that

far fewer schools would be in scope for targeted support from RISE teams - suggesting a figure in the "low hundreds".

By contrast, the universal offer commencing in April 2025 has the potential to make a difference to thousands of schools and millions of pupils. It is a task I hope school and trust leaders will be queuing up to play their part in.

Challenge Partners has worked since 2011 to drive "upwards convergence" in the school system. We invest as much effort in "growing the top" as tackling weaker areas, because it is only by stimulating the best to rise higher that we can push the boundaries of strong performance and create the capacity to move the whole system up.

So I am excited by a government approach to school improvement predicated on a similar principle of continuous improvement for all schools, where even the best are expected to get better.

RISE teams are also intended to align resources and system endeavours around agreed local priorities. This mirrors the approach embodied in Challenge Partners' 34 local hubs, locally constituted and led groups of schools, often drawn from across phases, trusts, governance types, specialist and mainstream provisions.

Our hubs collaborate to deliver a



“ Success relies on everyone playing their part

funded action plan to tackle needs collectively that are decided by participating schools and informed by an annual peer review of each school.

For example, the Aspire hub provides a vehicle for collaborative profession-led improvement across the North-west. Encompassing 64 schools and 10 trusts across 16 local authorities, the hub is jointly led by co-senior partners from Forward as One Trust and Wade Deacon Trust, who share the belief that, with so much at stake, collaboration can't be fluffy.

Of course, success relies on all schools and partners playing their part in realising collective goals. But the trusts provide the "organisational capital" to run the hub and co-ordinate activities. These have centred in recent years on improving SEND provision by learning from special schools in the Leicester-based Ash Field hub.

What makes our hubs effective is that they are locally determined, with sensitivity to the local education landscape. As the DfE configures RISE teams, they should embrace regional variations

and grant them the latitude to craft their own priorities and improvement approaches, based on local education leaders' greater knowledge of the challenges they face and the capacity available.

Where possible, they should build on the infrastructure and connections that remain from Opportunity Areas and Priority Education Investment Areas (PEIA), rather than starting again from scratch.

What they could add is something I have often felt lacking as Liverpool PEIA chair, and which is evident in the work of the Aspire hub to learn from its Leicester counterpart.

Namely, we need more systematic joining up of parallel efforts in different areas so they can learn from each other and spread excellence, avoiding the inefficiency of each reinventing the wheel and the injustice of further entrenching regional disparities.

We can only achieve these ambitions if the exceptional school and trust leaders with school improvement capacity and wisdom to share step forward to contribute as advisers.

Opinion

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



ANTHONY BENEDICT

CEO, Ambition Community Trust

Do small trusts belong in the new government's vision?

The government appears to want to discourage small, new MATs like ours, but we must all be partners in delivering its vision, says Anthony Benedict

In January our new multi-academy trust (MAT) will hopefully launch. It is the culmination of three years' work, none of which has been plain sailing. However, the new government's direction suggests that we may be facing headwinds from the outset.

It was only just two years ago that the previous government's intention was set out for all schools to academise by 2030. The small print also included an intention for smaller trusts to "merge or grow".

Then that bill was cancelled. Some authorities committed to full academisation, some avoided entering the discussion, and some hedged their bets, leaving us with a two-tier system.

Currently, 42 per cent of schools are academies and 55 per cent of pupils attend one. Received wisdom was that we were past the tipping point.

Yet there did not appear to be an official line on where the creation of new MATs fitted into this. Certainly, in my neck of the woods, the message appeared to be "no new MATs". As you can imagine, this was problematic.

How does a new MAT with a very clear culture and ethos based on inclusion and a relational approach get off the ground? How could we simply "join another MAT" when none met our expectations?

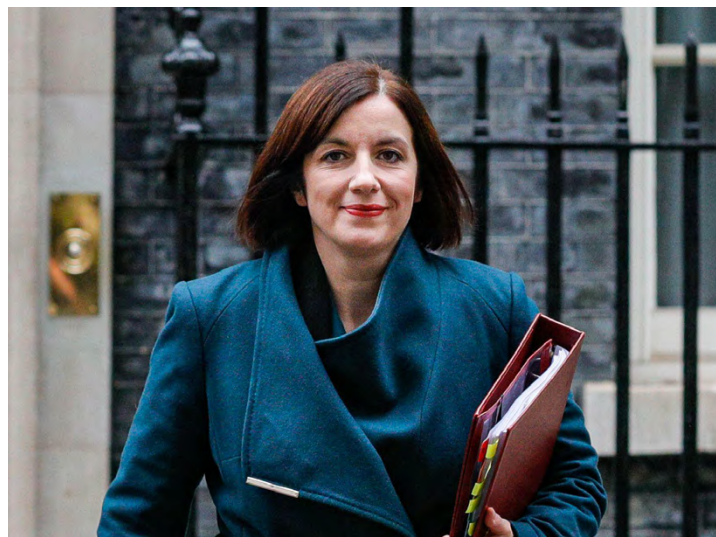
Somehow, we navigated through this difficult channel. Six schools (all previously anti-academisation – but weren't we all?) across two authorities covering primary, special and alternative provision will convert in January. A further three primary schools will join us with partnership agreements.

Exciting times. Or so it seemed...

On 1 November we received an email explaining the decision to "not award TCAF funding to window 4 applicants". The Trust Capacity Fund had previously been provided to support MAT growth. This also meant no TEG (Trust Establishment and Growth Fund). At the same time, it was announced that, from January, there was to be no £25,000 conversion grant.

I'm no conspiracist and I'm no more paranoid than any other school leader, but it does make me wonder: are MATs no longer in favour? After all, actions speak louder than words.

Lack of funding certainly suggests that smaller MATs won't survive, and that single-academy trusts and new MATs won't be able to grow. And what about single-form entry



“ Lack of funding suggests smaller MATs won't survive

primaries who may want to join trusts but won't be able to afford the conversion fees?

This isn't the same for large academy chains, which will be able to support growth and conversion. Are we entering a new educational landscape where "all academies are equal, but some are more equal than others"?

Last week, *Schools Week* reported that Bridget Philipson is "open to letting academies rejoin councils". Is this a re-launch of the idea that councils can create their own academies – an initiative that didn't gain traction previously – or is there to be a reversal on the whole MAT agenda?

For sure, the sector is in need of change, and there are plenty of opportunities to do things better.

In the North-west, more and more of us are working collaboratively – not competing as MATs but forming families with a core purpose: to improve the lives of the children we serve.

A key barrier is that true

collaboration is hard in an education system based on competition. Our model has, let's be honest, allowed some schools and chains to appear to thrive while rising suspensions and exclusions indicate a system that is failing a significant number of young people.

We all want what Phillipson wants: for all children to achieve, to thrive and to know "that deep down inside, they belong". Regional improvement teams can help deliver that, but they must not be led by the same people who created the problems we face.

If the RISE initiative is to work, it needs proper consultation, a clear focus and the right people to drive positive change – people who are focused on relationally inclusive practice.

This isn't about local authorities or trusts. If we want a system where every child belongs, then we must create a system where all schools and academies of all sizes feel like they belong.

Opinion

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



ANDREW O'NEILL

Headteacher, All Saints Catholic College and CEO, Lighthouse School Analysis

How we'll give maintained schools their voice back

We must redress a political imbalance that has seen half of our sector effectively marginalised from policy making in spite of its strengths, writes Andrew O'Neill

Our 11,000 local authority-maintained schools command yearly budgets of £24.9 billion, educate 3.3 million pupils and employ 528,000 people, including 185,000 teachers. Yet they have had next to no voice for the past ten years. That's why we are setting up The Maintained School Collective.

The push to academise and join academy trusts driven by the previous government was concerted, intentional and relentless. During that time, it seemed that participating in policymaking was contingent upon being the CEO of a large trust.

Today, policy advisory groups for the Department for Education, Ofsted and key political think-tanks are dominated by these leaders, with minimal representation from the maintained sector.

I am not anti-academy. Academisation has introduced numerous strengths to our educational landscape, including robust partnerships and collaborations, high-quality professional development and innovative leadership ideas.

However, it is not a one-size-fits-all model. Maintained schools still comprise nearly half of all schools,

yet they currently seem to lack any significant voice in policy discussions.

Over the past 10 years, our own maintained school has gone from the brink of closure to becoming one of the most popular schools in the country.

We have garnered national attention for innovative initiatives such as creating an online school analytics platform called Lighthouse, implementing an extended school provision dubbed a "12-hour school day", introducing flexible working to significantly reduce workload and enhance wellbeing, and employing graduate academic support assistants to improve special educational needs provision and establish a long-term teacher recruitment pipeline.

How? The simple answer is autonomy: the ability to make decisions that are right for our school community and to execute them effectively.

Financial autonomy is a crucial factor too. The average top-slice fee in a trust is approximately 5.3 per cent. For us, this would amount to a whopping £470,000 a year. By contrast, our de-delegation to the local authority is £70,000.

Having the autonomy to allocate these funds allows us the flexibility to run our school in a manner that promptly meets the needs of our pupils, minimises bureaucracy and expedites delivery and implementation.

This flexibility has been



“ Our under-representation is a political oversight

instrumental in my development as a headteacher over the past decade. It has enabled me to cultivate outstanding senior leaders too. Coupled with support from a strong local authority and an experienced director of education, we have the ideal conditions for success.

The under-representation, not to say marginalisation, of the local authority-maintained sector is a political oversight. The government's role is to govern for all, not just for the segments that align with specific policy positions.

This approach has led to a broader and more profound issue. Many education leaders I have encountered (within and outside the academy system) have expressed frustration over the policy paralysis we face.

We need policies that make a significant and lasting impact on school standards and enhance the opportunities we provide for children. It is possible that those occupying seats at the policy table have become too detached from the daily realities of post-Covid school settings to contribute pragmatically to the conversation.

Returning to maintained schools, our sector needs a voice because we constitute nearly half of the educational landscape and have leaders who, despite challenges

posed by previous governmental policies, have delivered high-quality education to the children we serve.

Often, we are the ones championing and sustaining local collaborations and partnerships. The concept behind The Maintained Schools Collective is to replicate some of the great work of the Confederation of School Trusts but on a smaller scale.

Over time, we want to be able to provide these schools with a supportive network outside of their local authority so that they can collaborate with others, have critical friends to sound out their innovative ideas and also a platform of professional development they can tap into, locally and nationally.

Key to this will be harnessing the data we have analysed in Lighthouse around "dynamic" schools to ensure that we can help to build and grow a self-improving school system.

Maintained schools have proven their resilience and innovation. It is imperative that their voices be included in policymaking to ensure a more equitable and effective educational system for all.

To find out more about The Maintained School Collective, [click here](#)



GARY AUBIN

National MAT SEND Leaders
Network lead, Whole Education

Solutions: Six tips for opening a specialist resource provision

Six SEND leaders with experience of opening specialist resource provisions share their top tips for ensuring yours delivers on its inclusive promise

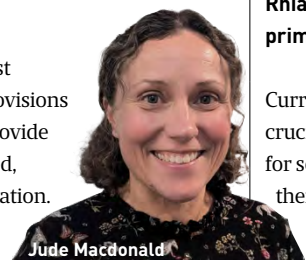
With SEND funding and capacity failing to keep up with rising demand, Bridget Phillipson has indicated that part of her plan is to take a more “strategic and coordinated” approach to increasing the number of specialist resource provisions in mainstream schools.

Setting up your own specialist resource provision is attractive to schools too, for a number of reasons. However, doing so comes with risks if it is not done well. Six MAT SEND leaders, engaged in Whole Education's SEND leadership network, share their advice on how to get it right.

Get your admissions right

Jude Macdonald, Director of SEND, Peterborough Keys Academies Trust

The specialist resource provisions we set up provide child-focused, quality education.



Jude Macdonald

They never become exclusionary “holding spaces” for learners. To ensure this, leaders must first consider which pupils the provision is there to serve.

When constructing admissions guidance, we consider the age, cognitive profile or speech and language profile of pupils, or group pupils according to the provision specified in an EHCP/SEND support plan. We know that we can often have the greatest impact when pupils have overlapping needs.

This admissions guidance will include the nature of the provision, setting out for example the proportion of the school week that pupils will attend the provision and the proportion they will spend in their mainstream class, as well as setting out the responsibilities of various adults.

Once this guidance is created, we communicate it clearly, uphold it rigorously and review it regularly.

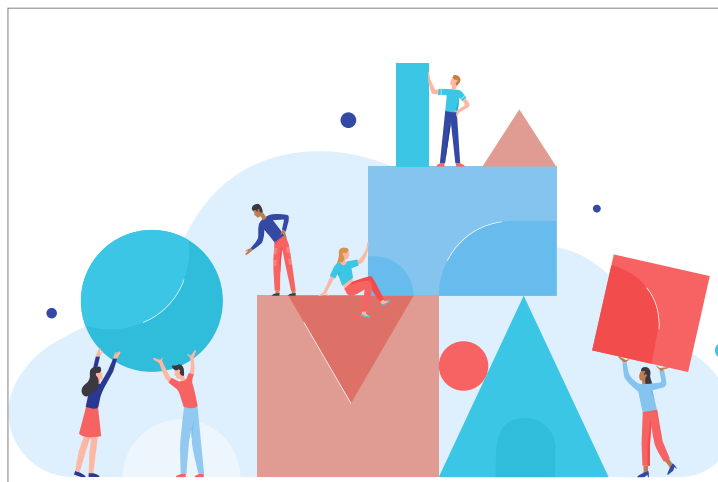
Carefully plan a connected curriculum

Rhian Warner, Director of primary SEND, E-Act

Curriculum is such a crucial consideration for schools creating their own specialist



Rhian Warner



“ There is a wealth of hard-won experience to draw on

resource provision. A well-designed, coherent curriculum, informed by accurate developmental assessment while also aligning to the whole-school curriculum, is vital to ensuring progress from pupils’ starting points.

Many of our primary academies use *Development Matters* or *Birth to 5 Matters* as assessment frameworks that inform our curriculum planning. Our specialist provisions work best when these frameworks are considered alongside EHCP targets, and when the subsequent curriculum content is aligned with the books or topics that the pupils would be following in their mainstream classroom.

This alignment with mainstream supports pupils’ successful transition out of the specialist resource provision in many cases.

Sometimes, this alignment of content starts with the provision, for example by choosing picture books that are accessible for pupils

who attend it, but whose themes also add value to pupils in the mainstream classroom.

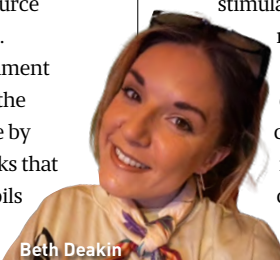
Create the right environment

Beth Deakin, Trust inclusion lead, White Woods Primary Academy Trust

One of the goals of our specialist resource provision was to provide a low-arousal environment that encouraged interaction and helped children to learn how to navigate a learning space.

Our first step was zoning the new, potentially overwhelming space to maximise its impact. We focused on supporting children to use the zones appropriately, offering sensory stimulation and embedding micro-routines.

We were careful to design a space that could be replicated in any mainstream classroom, ensuring



Beth Deakin



we didn't create a highly specialist environment that fostered dependency.

Instead, we created a flexible space that complements and enhances existing classrooms, building children's skills for broader integration. This helped pupils to transfer skills and build tolerance for the times each day when they return to their mainstream classrooms.

Collaborate

Sally Philpotts, Director of SEND, Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust

Collaboration is essential to establishing a successful resource provision. That means working with local authorities as well as school and MAT leaders. It means involving students, families, advisory teachers, educational psychologists (EPs) and NHS services to ensure that diverse perspectives inform decision-making, resulting in tailored and effective provision.

It is only with such collaboration that we have been able to get our communication environment right. We use the expertise of speech and language therapists, the specialist equipment available through the local authority and the intimate knowledge families have of their children.

This builds a picture which supports our TAs and teachers to make the best decisions for the pupils in front of them.

Collaborative partners in different settings may vary.

However, the core principle remains: a shared responsibility



Sally Philpotts



ensures a more holistic and informed approach to meeting students' needs, promoting innovative solutions and leaning on a range of skillsets to foster success.

Be informed by high-quality assessment

Debra Roscoe, Director of pastoral support, Pioneer Educational Trust

If the learner requires an alternative curriculum, then it is likely that they will need an alternative assessment programme, tracking both academic and wider progress.

As a starting point for assessment, seek a framework responsive to the primary area of need being catered for in the specialist resource provision. An autism spectrum condition resource provision, for example, would not necessarily have the same assessment framework as a cognition and learning resource base.

Seek advice from your EP, consult national charities working in the field (ie the Autism Education Trust) or visit similar resource provisions.

Assessing progress



Debra Roscoe

towards an academic curriculum is typically a collaborative process, working with staff across the school to identify appropriately ambitious targets against which progress can be tracked.

Whatever your starting point for developing assessment frameworks, ensure it is developed with rigour, that staff are trained appropriately and that it is properly explained to families and other stakeholders.

Maintain strong links to the mainstream class

Lisa Henshall, SEND strategic lead, St Bart's Multi Academy Trust

Regular access to an inclusive mainstream environment is a fundamental aspect of our specialist provisions. This not only benefits pupils who access them; it also helps other pupils to learn respect for the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion.

For children in our specialist resource provisions, we retain the link to their mainstream peers at key, often lower-arousal/less academically demanding points in the day - registration and check-in at the beginning of the

day, for example.

We increase these opportunities over the course of a term, responding to our pupils' successes. Trips out of school, visitors into school and community partnerships are vital for all pupils and are carefully planned so that they can be accessed collaboratively.

A great deal of work takes place in the specialist resource provision to get pupils ready to thrive in their mainstream classroom. That might mean working on focus and attention, on positive engagement, on co-regulation and on interacting with peers, gradually developing pupils' capacity to regulate and thrive in a busy classroom environment.

Pupils' learning content mirrors that of the mainstream class but is taught using intensive interaction and Makaton. These approaches can then be shared with their class peers, who learn the symbols, rhymes and actions developed in the specialist setting.

With increased focus on SEND, the growth in the number and complexity of needs, and a new government focus on mainstream inclusion and belonging, more schools and trusts will be looking to develop their own specialist resource provisions.

Luckily, there is a wealth of hard-won experience to draw on, across the sector and beyond it, to get the early decisions right and start making an impact immediately.



Lisa Henshall

THE CONVERSATION

LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM



Robert Gasson
CEO, Wave Multi-Academy Trust

SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND

I thought I would try something different this week. With what could be seen as a challenging news period nationally and internationally, and a time of the year when many people struggle, I thought a look at the lighter side of the education podcasting world might be in order.



As such, I enjoyed listening to Two Mr Ps in a Pod(cast), two teachers (and brothers) who share funny stories from the classroom. It's a relatively gentle listen to two guys who clearly have chemistry. Don't expect to learn anything profound; I think there is a place for that on occasion.

The latest episode takes in flying anxiety, Halloween, flexible working, retention, and which film best describes your teaching style.

A LOVE OF TEACHING

Speaking of teaching styles, Sir Kevan Collins made some comments at the Confederation of School Trusts conference last week which made headlines and inflamed social media. Addressing the shibboleth of school and academy freedoms, he set this against his



experience that he has "never seen teachers more enslaved".

"I think we've sometimes slipped into a shallow compliance culture," he added, which does not prioritise "longer, deeper" processes. "People aren't fulfilled, and they leave."

When I was recently lecturing SCITT students, I (hopefully) expressed my love for teaching, particularly as I believe we can all do it differently. That's its beauty.

As such, Hrund Gunnssteinsdottir's TED talk on intuition hit a nerve. Here she takes us through the concept of intuition and explores its Icelandic counterpart, *innseae*, or the sea within, which can't be put into boxes, as it ceases to flow.

She reflects on its impact on us, how it shapes our responses and impacts on our creativity, analysis and connectiveness.

Gunnssteinsdottir gives us examples from her own and others' vital work on change, particularly climate change. However, I think the concept of listening to one's own inner voice, or intuition, is a useful concept for teachers to ensure that they aren't boxed in, as Collins observes.

We all have intuition and it's up to us to tune into it. Hrund urges us to use our inner wisdom to align our inner compass. Perhaps Collins is right, that some schools' practices do not match their teachers' vision of true north.

Simply put, using our intuition as a guide for essential change could lead to that rare beast: authenticity, an aspect of building successful relationships with young people that I think is often overlooked, but is absolutely vital in effective and fulfilling teaching.

Now, if we applied the same thinking to leadership...

EVIDENCE-BASED RETENTION

SCITT students are encouraged to journal and record their teaching journey, so it was fortuitous for me and for them that I came across this recent episode of *Ten Percent Happier*, hosted by former *Good Morning America* and ABC News anchor Dan Harris.

Here, Harris explores the many benefits of expressive writing, therapeutic journaling, to-do lists, gratitude lists and more with the science of journaling Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, James Pennebaker.

Pennebaker is known for his early research on expressive writing and health. Author of more than 300 scientific articles and eight books, his research has affected our understanding and treatment of mental and physical health of people dealing with upheavals in their lives.

The podcast explores the rumination of things, particularly after trauma, but it is clear that this approach doesn't need that to work. Everybody suffers one way or another: conflicts, stress and on occasion tossing and turning at night.

We all know that the start of a career in teaching is hard. Whoever made the recommendation that trainees should journal at this time clearly knows a thing or two, and the techniques and tips for doing it effectively could really help. An evidence-informed professional development practice. Whatever next?

And, if we're asking brand-new teachers to undertake these tasks, perhaps the aim should be to embed them as career-long habits. Well, I'm writing this. What about you?

10% HAPPIER
➔ with
Dan Harris

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts



The Knowledge

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



Does belonging really matter – and what does it look like?

**Kathryn Riley, UCL Emeritus
professor of urban education**

Addressing the Confederation of School Trusts, Bridget Phillipson made her pitch for school belonging: "Every child should go to a school where they are free to be themselves, free to make friends, free to explore their talents... (Where they know) deep down inside, they belong".

But does it make sense for the education secretary to be steering the school system towards the notion of belonging in her drive to improve inclusion? Is the evidence with her that it will deliver?

Meet Marina. I met her while undertaking my 2021 study, *Place and belonging in school: Why it matters today*.

Marina stood at the threshold of her school life, eagerly awaiting what was to come. Her sense of joy and anticipation stretched to the very tips of her fingers. Her school is a place of welcome and belonging. "I belong here," she wrote in a caption to a picture of herself basking in the rays of a rising sun.

Sadly, the dawn of a new school day brings anxiety and dread for many children and young people.

What, if anything, can we do to ensure that Marina's experience is more universally shared?

System realities

It is a pressing issue. According to PISA's 2018 results, nearly one in three felt then that they didn't belong, and the signs are that young people's sense of school belonging has only declined since the pandemic.

Children from disadvantaged communities are twice as likely to feel they don't belong as their more advantaged peers; neurodiverse students, three times more likely to drop out.

Many are voting with their feet. Exclusions and suspensions are rising and young people with the greatest needs find themselves handed the ultimate red card of exclusion. The disaffected search for belonging elsewhere. The excluded become the exploited.

The long-term impact of these trends extends beyond individuals. The lifetime cost of a young



person being permanently excluded has been estimated at £170,000. We are hemorrhaging the human potential of many young people.

Benefits of belonging

Belonging is that sense of being somewhere you can be confident that you will fit in and be safe in your identity: a feeling of being at home in a place.

In schools where belonging is the guiding principle, more young people experience a sense of connectedness and friendship, perform better academically and come to believe in themselves.

The benefits are shared more widely too. Their teachers feel more professionally fulfilled and their families and communities more accepted.

In effect, there is a cycle of connectedness: reduced student absenteeism and increased student motivation conspire to change the school climate, benefitting staff and students alike and increasing their sense of wellbeing and agency.

Addressing a sense of school belonging has been found to close the achievement gap by between 50 and 60 per cent and has many benefits that stretch into adulthood.

What belonging looks like

School belonging does not happen by accident. As I showed in my 2022 book, *Compassionate leadership for school belonging*, it's nurtured by compassionate and relational leadership and

supported by whole-school practices designed to create a climate of welcome and belonging for all.

In such schools, there is little talk of tough sanction-based behaviour policies which rely on social isolation but a commitment to a broad set of principles:

- Safety – physical and emotional,
- Presence – knowing and accepting each child,
- Voice – staff, pupil and family participation,
- Connectivity – respectful and enabling relationships,
- Agency – a sense that each of us is making a difference.

In short, Phillipson is promoting a mindset of possibilities supported by a robust research base, not only in terms of its many positive impacts but also with regards to its implementation.

Indeed, a system nudge towards belonging is long overdue.

How young people experience school life – the degree to which they feel they belong in that place called school – will shape their belief in themselves, and their readiness to encounter the world they live in.

And it just might help with the sector's many workforce challenges too.


Week in

Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

FRIDAY

We're all familiar with the sore heads that can plague delegates on the last day of education conferences. After all, people who work very hard need (and should have) the chance to let their hair down.

After a posh dinner at the Confederation of School Trusts (CST) annual conference last week in Birmingham, sensible delegates returned to their hotel rooms to get a decent night's sleep before a packed day of events the next day.

But we understand a substantial contingent of well-known trust bosses moved on to the second city's fabled party district of Broad Street. Their chosen destination? Popworld.

Parliaments come and go, but there will always be MPs who ask for things to be added to the national curriculum that are already in the national curriculum.

Schools minister Catherine McKinnell this week had to patiently explain to two MPs that schools do, in fact, already teach two key parts of the curriculum.

Jo White asked "what steps her department is taking to ensure all schools teach financial literacy".

The reply, somewhat wearily, referred to an answer to a previous question that pointed out that "financial education currently forms a compulsory part of the national curriculum for mathematics (at key stages 1 to 4) and citizenship (at key stages 3 and 4)".

Charlotte Nichols asked if the

government would "make an assessment of the potential merits of including first-aid training in the national curriculum".

McKinnell's reply? "All state-funded schools in England are required to teach first-aid as part of statutory health education, which is taught as part of relationships, sex and health education (RSHE).

"It includes basic first-aid and dealing with common injuries. Pupils in secondary schools are taught further first-aid, for example how to administer CPR and the purpose of defibrillators."

We dread the state of Professor Becky Francis's inbox...

TUESDAY

It's been a baptism of fire for the new "strategic adviser" on SEND, Dame Christine Lenehan.

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson announced the appointment last Thursday at the CST conference.

But it seems Lenehan was not immediately read in on the government's plans for the SEND system, or, in fact, her own role.

"My role as a strategic adviser was announced last week, which was good. Maybe next week I'll know what it means," she told a County Councils Network event days after her appointment.

"So if you're expecting me to be completely up to date with government policy, I'm afraid I'm not."

"Evolution, not a revolution" seems to be the phrase of the moment.

It's a favourite of ministers and Becky Francis when describing the government's curriculum review.

Now it appears to have found favour at Ofsted towers.

Sir Martyn Oliver, the chief inspector, sought to assure the Association of Colleges' annual conference that "that I am not changing the framework for change's sake. Much of what we do now will continue. I'm talking about an evolution, not a revolution."

It'll be on t-shirts next!

THURSDAY

Part of long-serving former schools minister Nick Gibb's rationale for the disruptive teacher training market review and shake-up to ITT inspections was that every provider in England was rated either 'good' or 'outstanding'.

That couldn't possibly be right, thought Gibb, particularly with all those lefty, blob universities spouting their radicalised nonsense.

So he set about reforms that tore the sector apart and left unaccredited providers scrambling to become "partners" with those more fortunate or risk leaving some areas without courses.

And after all that? The ratings are starting to sneak up again. This week, data showed 97 per cent of ITT providers are 'good' or better, up from 96 per cent the year before.

Gibb must be fuming!



ARCHDIOCESE OF BIRMINGHAM CATHOLIC MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST (CMAT)

INSPIRING EXCELLENCE THROUGH CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP

Recruitment for Chief Executive Officer

We are seeking an outstanding, dynamic, and visionary Catholic servant leader to guide our new Trust of 63 schools, opening in September 2025. This Trust, the largest of its kind, will serve 10 secondary and 53 primary schools, nurturing the education of 21,500 pupils.

Key Responsibilities:

- Lead with a Christ-centred approach, ensuring alignment with the Catholic ethos.
- Develop a strategic direction and foster a supportive, inclusive environment.
- Ensure educational excellence and robust governance across all schools.

Ideal Candidate:

- Practising Catholic with proven leadership experience.
- Passionate about improving the life chances of all children.
- Skilled in managing diverse, complex organisations, especially in education.

What We Offer:

- A supportive Trust Board and dedicated staff.
- Opportunities for personal and professional growth.



Apply by:

25th November 2024

Interview Dates:

17th–18th December 2024

For more information,
contact Mark O'Connell at
academies@bdes.org.uk

www.bdes.org.uk

DID YOU KNOW?

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

Online listings, classified advertising, and package options available.

“

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

The Shared Learning Trust



Click here to contact our team

