



UNION NOW STRIKES OVER CLASSES OF 30



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THE WAITING GAME: ENGLAND'S SECRET EXCLUSIONS SCANDAL



Investigation: How councils are routinely failing in their legal duty to provide suitable education for excluded pupils

RHI STORER | @RHISTORERWRITES

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Meet the news team

**John Dickens**
EDITOR@JOHNDICKENSSW
JOHN.DICKENS@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK**Freddie Whittaker**
DEPUTY EDITOR@FCDWHITTAKER
FREDDIE.WHITTAKER@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK**Samantha Booth**
CHIEF REPORTER@SAMANTHAJBOTH
SAMANTHA.BOOTH@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK**Lydia Chantler-Hicks**
SENIOR REPORTER@LYDIACHSW
LYDIA.CHANTLER-HICKS@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK**Jack Dyson**
SENIOR REPORTER@JACKDYDYS
JACK.DYSON@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK**Rhi Storer**
REPORTER@RHISTORERWRITES
RHI.STORER@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK**Rosa Furneaux**
INVESTIGATIVE
REPORTER@ROSAFURNEAUX
ROSA.FURNEAUX@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK**JL Dutaut**
COMMISSIONING
EDITOR@DUTAUT
JEAN-LOUISDUTAUT@EDUCATIONSCAPE.COM**Nicky Phillips**
HEAD DESIGNER@GELVETICA
NICKY.PHILLIPS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

THE TEAM

Shane Mann: Chief Executive | Senior Designer: Simon Kay | Classifieds Manager: Clare Halliday | Operations and Finance Director: Victoria Boyle | Event Manager: Frances Ogefero Dell | Senior Administrator: Evie Hayes | Finance Assistant and PA to CEO: Zoe Tuffin | Office Administrator: Zoe Belcher | Sales Administrator: Tyler Palmer

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Exclusions have soared since Covid. They are now at their highest since recent records began.

There are lots of reasons, but rising need among youngsters coupled with years of schools underfunding are key ones.

The debate around exclusions normally hones in on decisions by schools, with questions around whether some are excluding too many.

The government has recognised inclusion is an issue. It has plans to reform the system to incentivise inclusion.

But that comes at the same time as mainstream schools will be expected to educate more vulnerable pupils as part of reforms to the SEND system.

Given the funding needed to fully rebuild the infrastructure and expertise in mainstream schools is unlikely to be forthcoming, it's not unrealistic to expect exclusion numbers will remain at current levels – at least – for the coming years.

If this is the case, then policymakers must also start focusing on ensuring excluded children can access suitable provision elsewhere in a timely manner –

as the law dictates.

Our investigation this week (pages 5 to 7) shows such pupils are being failed.

Councils have a legal duty to ensure excluded pupils have access to full-time education from six days after their exclusion. Some are waiting two years.

This law is routinely flouted. Councils say there is not enough funding or provision. But it's a scandal that's been hiding in plain sight – and is getting worse.

A fully inclusive system – with the funding constraints schools have – is one where schools maintain the ability to exclude where they believe this is required to safeguard their pupils and staff, but with a safety net to ensure those vulnerable pupils get timely access to specialist support.

We need a high-quality alternative provision, and internal school provision, to ensure excluded pupils are not spending months missing education, and get the support needed to re-integrate back into mainstream classrooms.

Anything less will mean the life chances of more vulnerable pupils are compromised.

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2 [Ofsted to trial inspection proposals with 240 'visits'](#)

3 [Ofsted should measure schools on time pupils get to play – report](#)

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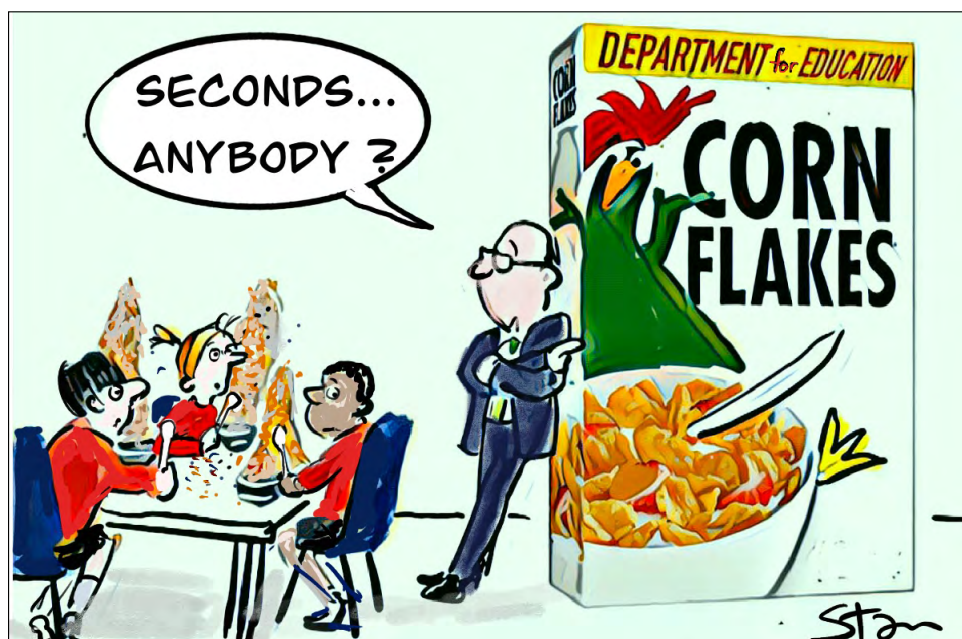


EDUCATIONScape LTD
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E: NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

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See story, page 4

ANALYSIS: BREAKFAST CLUBS

Snap, crackle and flop: breakfast clubs have rocky launch

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Another flagship Labour education policy had a rocky relaunch this week as the government named 754 “early adopter” schools that will test new breakfast clubs.

Within days of the announcement, one school had already pulled out of the pilot because participating would hamstring its existing club and force it to lose income.

And campaigners fear the government is rushing its implementation, leaving little time to learn lessons from the first phase.

Schools taking part will have to guarantee 30 minutes of free childcare at the start of the day, as well as healthy breakfasts for pupils. The government plans to make the clubs mandatory for all primary schools next year.

But six in seven of the early adopter schools already have some form of breakfast provision, and some face challenges in how the new scheme will interact with and replace what they're already doing.

For example, schools that already run longer paid-for provision with charges above the government funding rates face losing income.

The BBC reported this week that Sharneyford Primary in Lancashire, one of the early adopters, had already pulled out.

Sarah Smith, the school's head, told the broadcaster that because the free 30 minutes have to be immediately before school, and the school's existing club runs for an hour, “we'd be losing half our earnings, because you can't charge for that half an hour before the school day”.

All-through and special schools may face issues too. The former would only receive funding for their primary-age pupils, meaning provision would stop at age 11.

Special schools sometimes have classes that span large age ranges, but would only get money for pupils up to year 6.

Extending the policy to the 100,000 secondary-age pupils in special schools would only increase the programme's scope by 2.2 per cent, charity Magic Breakfast estimates.

There are also concerns that funding will not cover so-called “grab and go” schemes in which smaller schools offer breakfast, but not the extra childcare.

Magic Breakfast CEO Dr Lindsey MacDonald



said it was “important that the policy is designed for suitable flexibility to reach the pupils who need it most, every school morning, and maximise benefits for pupils, parents, schools, and communities”.

“The concern with the pilot is they have picked the low hanging fruit and haven't set aside time to learn any lessons,” added school food expert Andy Jolley.

“The implementation will be rushed and schools will be left carrying the cost.”

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the NAHT leaders' union, said it was “vital ministers listen to and act upon feedback.”

The introduction of the clubs has also prompted fears about the future of the previous government's national school breakfast programme, which was open to primary and secondary schools.

The government has so far only committed to continuing with the scheme for the next year.

Bridget Phillipson, the education secretary, told MPs this week the current scheme “is an online platform from which schools can order food.

“It only covers 75 per cent of food, it does not cover wider costs. Schools are required to contribute the remaining 25 per cent, so there is a significant difference in terms of what we are setting out.”

Other existing schemes include those paid-for by parents “or, in many cases, school breakfast clubs where caps are in place and the numbers are limited”.

Phillipson was also challenged this week over revelations by Schools Week that some schools had pulled out of the early adopters' scheme or faced



having to take a financial hit after being told that the basic funding rate was 60p per pupil.

But she stressed that schools would get £500 to cover initial set-up costs and then a lump sum of £1,099 to cover “fixed staffing costs for the summer term”.

“The purpose behind the early adopters is to [also] allow us to test really effectively what works ahead of a full national roll-out.”

Originally pledged by Labour as a way to boost attendance and attainment, breakfast clubs are now also promoted by ministers as a cost-of-living measure.

The DfE claims they will save parents £450 a year.

But shadow minister Neil O'Brien pointed out handing parents £450 for every pupil “would cost over £2 billion a year”, whereas only £315 million has been allocated to fund breakfast clubs when they are fully rolled-out.

The government said the £450 was based on its own analysis of data showing the median cost of childcare at a breakfast club.

INVESTIGATION: EXCLUSIONS

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The long wait for an education

RHI STORER

@RHISTORERWRITES

EXCLUSIVE

The number of excluded pupils is at a record high, with the law demanding that councils have six days to find them suitable full-time education. But a Schools Week investigation finds that most are failing to meet that requirement

Councils across the country are routinely failing in their legal duty to provide full-time education for excluded pupils within six days, a Schools Week investigation has found, with some youngsters waiting two years for provision.

In some areas, not a single excluded child was placed in suitable education within six days – despite laws that councils must deliver this.

The average time for finding provision for excluded pupils also worsened in many areas, as exclusions hit record highs.

Sarah Johnson, an alternative provision consultant who has worked in the sector for 20 years, said the education system was “running into a crisis”.

“Access to education is not an ‘add-on’ or a ‘nicety’, it is a fundamental right enshrined in the UN Rights of the Child.

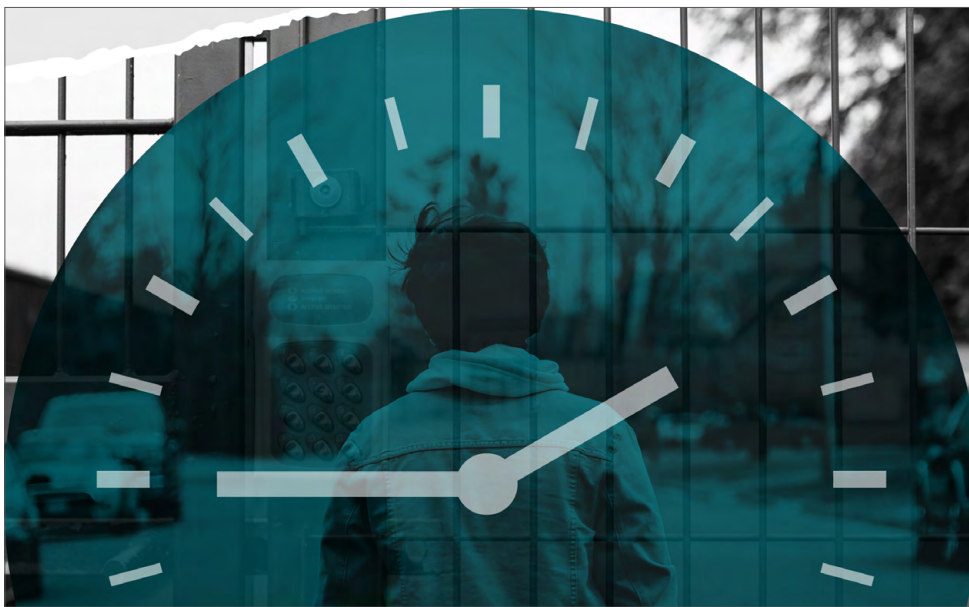
“If we know we are failing to meet our statutory duties to provide suitable full-time education, then we must ask ourselves: what systemic failures are preventing children from accessing school?”

‘We should all be worried’

Statutory guidance on permanent exclusions states councils “must arrange suitable full-time education for the pupil to begin from the sixth school day after the first day the permanent exclusion took place”.

Schools Week asked local authorities for data on how often they met this duty for excluded pupils over the past three years. We also asked about the average and longest times excluded pupils waited for provision.

Of the 58 councils that provided figures for last year, just over three quarters failed to place all excluded pupils in full-



‘Access to education is not an add-on or a nicety’

time education within six days.

Seven had at least one child waiting six months or more for suitable education last year, 30 times longer than the law demands. Two had pupils waiting two years.

But it wasn't just the odd pupil waiting longer. In 12 areas, three quarters of the excluded pupils that year were not in suitable education within six days.

Many councils also said they did not record the data – suggesting they may not be aware of the scale of the problem.

Kiran Gill, the chief executive of the Difference charity, said: “We should all be worried that the most vulnerable children – those who stand to gain the most from the belonging and purpose of being in school – are not in education at all.”

A Department for Education spokesperson added: “These shocking figures highlight devastating levels of disruption to children's learning and the scale of the challenge we have inherited.”

‘Vulnerable children at greater risk’

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP), Cumberland, Dudley and Warrington

councils had the highest proportion of excluded pupils in 2023-24 not in suitable education within six days (all over 90 per cent).

In BCP, 65 excluded pupils were not in education within six days last year, despite just 36 exclusions, suggesting some of the 119 pupils excluded in 2022-23 were still awaiting provision.

Youngsters in the area waited, on average, 41 days.

Councillor Richard Burton, BCP's cabinet member for children, said pupils waiting longer than six days were “typically those who are unable to benefit from rapid online learning solutions.

“This reflects that online learning for younger children or children with specific needs does not provide an appropriate form of learning. In these cases, bespoke solutions are developed and commissioned working with multi-agency professionals and families.”

In Medway, the average wait last year was eight weeks. One pupil waited 13 months. The council said increasing exclusions and a “limited number of options and ongoing SEND funding crisis means [meeting the duty] is not always possible”.

Alternative provision is funded from the high-



Kiran Gill

Continued on next page

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needs block, which is already overspent in many areas.

Newcastle and West Berkshire both had a pupil who had been waiting two years – at least 730 days – for a place.

Newcastle said the delays were down to “challenges around suitable space, the complexity of pupil needs, and a shortage of registered providers”.

West Berkshire did not respond to a request for comment.

Permanent exclusions in both areas have soared over the past three years. Exclusions are at a record high across the country after sharp rises post-Covid.

Dr Patrick Roach, the general secretary of the NASUWT, said difficulty in accessing alternative provision affected how schools supported pupils at risk of exclusion and “seriously” hampered efforts to keep pupils and staff safe.

“After over a decade of underfunding, external services for pupils are on their knees. A world-class education system has to include timely access to alternative provision if we are going to provide equal opportunities for all our children and young people.”

Situation worsens in many areas

Dudley, where one excluded child waited 200 days last year for provision, said it was “working tirelessly” to combat the rise in school exclusions, and claimed a new pathway strategy had reduced suspensions.

Warwickshire is also “strengthening” early support for primary pupils at risk of exclusion, and undertaking risk assessments in secondary schools to identify those at risk earlier.

But Newcastle said it has “limited direct influence” to bring down “record numbers” of exclusions because all its secondaries are academies.

Bexley’s average wait rose from 39 days in 2021-22, to 112 days last year – one of the biggest rises. The longest recorded wait last year was just under four months.

The council blamed the rise on parents refusing the provision offered, saying all the pupils in the data it provided had been offered a “suitable school place at the six-day provision”.

“Unfortunately, in some year 10 and 11 cases, parents did not accept the offered place.”

Brighton and Hove, where the average wait rose

Excluded pupils wait years for suitable education

Council	Longest wait in days
Newcastle	760
West Berkshire	730
Medway Council	395
Stockton-on-Tees	374
Warwickshire	214
Dudley	200
Plymouth	168
Solihull	159
East Riding	152
Cheshire West and Chester	128

Source: The longest time to find full-time, suitable education for an excluded child. Data obtained by FOI from councils

SCHOOLS WEEK

Councils routinely fail to meet six-day exclusion duty

Council	Average wait for provision in days
Dudley	200
Bexley	112
Brighton	90
Stockton-on-Tees	88
East Riding	80

Source: Average length of time to place a child in suitable full time education, in days. Data obtained under FOI from councils

SCHOOLS WEEK

from 12 days in 2021-22 up to 90 days last year, also said some delays were down to parents, “especially if there are strong parental views that need to be considered”.

Bexley also said academies having their own admissions authorities “at times leads to delays in the offer of a school place”.

But Gill added: “Where are these children? At home with nothing to do they’re at greater risk of worsening mental health, criminal exploitation or susceptibility to online conspiracy theories and extremism. “Without education and qualifications, these are children likely locked out of our workforce for years to come. This is a national and rising challenge post-pandemic, and the numbers affected are really alarming.”

Kids ‘not left to their own devices’

In Dudley the average wait soared from 23 days in 2021-22, to 200 days last year.

However, David Stanley, Dudley’s cabinet member for children’s services, said: “While we recognise there is concern over delays in children returning to education full time following an exclusion, they are not simply left to their own devices.”

Councils said while pupils may not be in full-time schooling, they are provided with at least part-time education.

Stanley said this might involve tutoring or use of AP, with pupils “monitored through our dedicated team until they can return to full-time mainstream education”.

Newcastle said its “interim solution” was an “inclusion key worker” for each child, which



Dr Patrick Roach

Continued on next page

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it said had helped integrate pupils back into education.

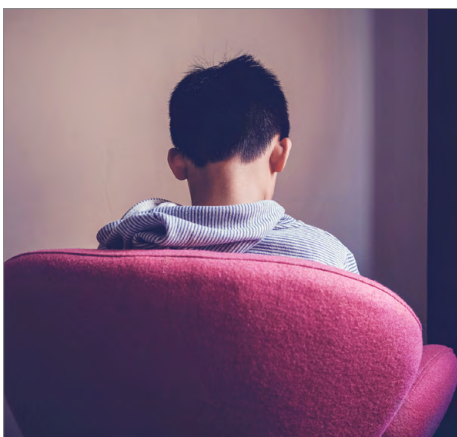
Medway said children not in full-time education after six days also got a “face-to-face tutor from our tutoring framework”.

But a Schools Week investigation last year found that excluded pupils waiting for specialist provision in more than one in ten councils had no provision at all.

Others were receiving less than full-time education, with some getting online tutoring only.

Theresa Kerr, partner at Winckworth Sherwood, said: “We know that many alternative provision schools are full, but there are significant safeguarding risks if children are not in school because they are waiting for a place – the statutory timescales are there to offer this protection.

“It also makes the prospect of reintegration back into mainstream school much harder for them if they fall even further behind with their



education, and can ultimately affect their long-term life chances, with the risk of falling.”

‘Full-time’ duty grey area

Ed Duff, a director at HCB Solicitors, said the findings seemed to be a “result of public services being crippled financially to the point where there are plenty of excellent sounding duties, but it’s impossible to comply with them.”

But he said one of the issues around the duty

was the lack of definition for of what constituted “full-time” education.

“As such, any education could in theory be deemed or at least argued to be ‘full time’ – so for councils to acknowledge the level of pupils not in full-time education [in their FOI responses] is a concern.”

The government said schools now have a statutory duty to provide daily attendance data, which includes a code for pupils attending education provision arranged by councils – meaning there is “greater oversight”.

The DfE spokesperson added “we know there is more that needs to be done to support [excluded pupils] and that is what this government is delivering.

“We are tackling the causes of poor behaviour at their root including by providing access to specialist mental health professionals in every school, introducing free breakfast clubs in every primary, and ensuring earlier intervention for pupils with special needs as part of our Plan for Change.”

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Teachers strike over schools' plans for classes of 30

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

Four council-maintained secondary schools in London closed classes this week when teachers walked out over plans to increase class sizes up to 30.

Headteachers in the north London borough of Haringey also want to increase teacher-contact time so they "align with national standards".

The schools – Fortismere, Gladesmore, Highgate Wood and Hornsey School for Girls – are among the last local-authority maintained secondaries in the borough.

They have adhered to an arrangement signed off by the council and union bosses in 1988 to cap classes at 27 and teacher contact time at 80 per cent.

'Change ensure financial viability'

But in a joint letter to parents earlier this month, the schools said they have been operating "curriculum models that cost more than the funding we receive".

To "ensure financial sustainability", the secondaries "have had to make cost-saving decisions to varying extents", including "delaying site development projects" and "carefully managing" recruitment.

They believe "aligning class sizes and teacher contact time with national funding levels is necessary to ensure our staffing models are financially viable and consistent with how schools operate across the country".

National Education Union (NEU) members at the schools took part in the first set of walkouts yesterday.

The union is also re-balloting staff at Park View, the only other council-maintained secondary in the borough, on potential strike action after failing to meet the 50 per cent turnout threshold in an earlier poll.

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) talks between the schools and the union kicked off this week.

30-year agreement 'broken'

Efe Kurtluoglu, the assistant secretary of the Haringey NEU, said it "feels like the breaking of a contract".

"This agreement has been in place [almost] 40 years. Our members are angry, they want the



One of two pickets outside Highgate Wood School

schools to roll back these proposals.

"If they won't, they need to come to the table with things we can offer our members."

NEU teachers are also considering action in other London boroughs.

The union is balloting members across the Harris Federation in a row over teaching conditions, in what could be the biggest strike against a trust.

Meanwhile, the NASUWT union has also threatened strike ballots over plans by another large trust, Outwood Grange, to increase the school day past 2.30pm.

On the Haringey action, Brian Lightman, the former general secretary of the leaders' union ASCL, said: "Rolls are falling in all sectors, particularly in primary, and budget constraints are affecting all kinds of schools, regardless of the structure they're in.

"School have to make their budgets balance."

Government figures show the secondaries racked up in-year deficits of up to £416,000 in 2023-24.

They each spent more on teaching and support staff per pupil than nearly all similar schools.

Haringey funding cut

A presentation to parents by Patrick Cozier, Highgate Wood's head, stated the government's national funding formula (NFF) worked on the assumption of 30-strong classes.

Before the introduction of the NFF in 2018-19, the council "re-distributed funding from the primary school sector to the secondary schools to compensate them for running a more expensive model".

But with the formula benefiting "schools



Striking staff gathered outside Gladesmore Community School this week

in typically poorly funded areas... the most", the borough has lost out on cash, Cozier said.

Subsequently, the financial support for secondaries "is no longer available, which has created a critical financial shortfall".

Cozier estimated the class size changes would generate £300,000 in savings. More than 500,000 secondary pupils – about 14 per cent of youngsters aged 11 or over – were taught in classes over 30 last year, a rise of 67 per cent since 2016.

Schools have 'few solutions'

The schools also face falling rolls, with the crisis in London exacerbated by families leaving the capital in response to housing costs, Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Park View has 165 year 7 children, against a published admission number (PAN) of 243, which amounted to a £500,000 income drop, the school said. It is consulting on reducing PAN to 189.

Hornsey School for Girls also wants to cut its intake from 162 to 135.

Talking about the pressures of a falling roll, Cozier said increasing teacher-contact time "by one period per fortnight would reduce the cost of staffing our curriculum by approximately £100,000".

Haringey council, speaking on behalf of the schools, said "progress is being made" on ACAS talks. It "remains hopeful" an agreement can be reached.



Patrick Cozier

NEWS: CURRICULUM

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GCSE paper changes paused amid curriculum review

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

The exam board OCR has paused changes to a geography GCSE paper amid “unanswered questions” about the future of qualifications during the government’s curriculum review.

A new GCSE geography paper B specification – numbered J386 – was due to be taught from September and assessed in 2027.

But in an update to schools this week, the board told leaders to “continue to teach our current GCSE geography B specification (J384) for the remainder of this academic year and from September 2025”.

OCR said it was “always mindful of your workload and want to make sure you have everything you need to prepare for the delivery of any new qualification”.

It said its decision was the result of “feedback and two other key factors” – one of which was the government’s curriculum and assessment review, which will not issue its final report until the autumn.

The review’s terms of reference state it will “ensure that the assessment system captures children and young people’s knowledge and abilities and consider the overall volume of assessment”.

OCR told schools: “With many unanswered questions about the future of GCSEs, we believe it’s wise to wait for the Department for Education’s review outcomes later this year before making significant changes.”

“Development process and timelines” were other factors.

“We aim to develop the best possible qualifications for you and your students, and provide you with clarity and sufficient planning time for any changes we may make.

“We’re currently unsure how much longer the development process will take and, as the summer term approaches, want to offer you more certainty for next year.”

OCR added that it had received “lots of feedback” about the new paper, for which it was “extremely grateful”.

It wants to use the feedback to make “some smaller improvements to our current specification (J384)”.

Options include offering enhanced support



with new and updated resources, “improved accessibility” and “factual content updates to the specification”.

“We’ll notify you in advance of any changes we’ll be making. However, our aim will be to enhance the experience of our qualification for you and your students.”

The board also apologised “for any inconvenience this news may cause.

“Please don’t hesitate to get in touch if you have any queries or concerns – we’d be happy to help.”

OCR told Schools Week it had no plans to pause the development of other specifications.

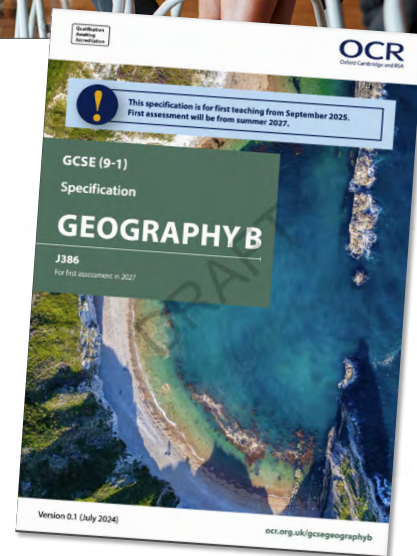
AQA said it was “following the government’s curriculum and assessment review closely and looks forward to reading its interim report soon and full report later this year.

The exam board said it was “always looking to enhance our qualifications, and do what’s right for students and their teachers”.

It recently announced some “light but meaningful changes to increase the clarity of our exam papers and mark schemes for GCSE English language.

“We have not formally paused changes to qualifications, but we are bearing in mind the curriculum and assessment review, as well as the potential impact on the workload of teachers and exams officers.”

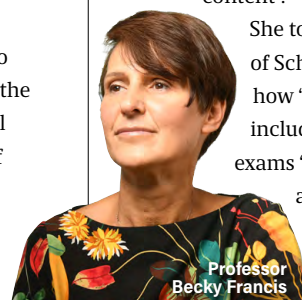
Edexcel said it had no plans to pause the development of any specifications.



The government has said the curriculum review, led by Professor Becky Francis, will publish an interim report this spring, before a final report in the summer.

Outlining themes from roadshows run by the review, Francis warned last year that teachers felt “disempowered and de-professionalised by over-stipulation and the challenge to cover content”.

She told the Confederation of School Trusts conference how “frequent complaints” included that assessment and exams “dictate curriculum” and the curriculum was “overprescribed and overstuffed”.

Professor
Becky Francis

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Ofsted to test report cards in 240 settings

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

Ofsted will test its proposed new inspections in the coming weeks with trials in 240 education settings – with some checking whether different inspectors award the same grades.

The watchdog is currently consulting on plans to overhaul its inspection process with new report cards. Schools will be judged on up to 11 areas, using a five-point grading system.

Here's what you need to know ...

Who will get a visit?

Ofsted will visit about 240 providers, including schools, FE settings, teacher-trainers and nurseries.

It said its visits would “provide an early opportunity for our inspectors to become familiar with the main features of the new approach”.

Visits would also test “how the new approach and toolkits feel, both for the providers and the inspectors”.

Will schools be forced to take part?

All the visits are voluntary. They are not official inspections and will not result in official, graded assessments.

However, it is not known whether Ofsted will draw up unofficial report cards that will remain unpublished.

What form will the visits take?

The test visits will take three forms.

Half will be **full, “end-to-end”** to test the entire



inspection methodology and toolkits.

The other half will be split between “thematic” or “paired thematic” visits – both limited to assessing specific areas of the proposals.

Thematic visits will test the “feasibility and validity” of specific aspects of the proposed methodology, and inspection toolkits.

Paired thematic visits will be carried out by more than one inspector, and will test the consistency of assessments.

Reliability has long been a concern with leaders expressing fears the proposed new framework will make judgments less reliable.

Paired thematic visits “will test whether inspectors follow the same process, and have shared views on the strengths and areas for improvement”, for the body that is being inspected.

‘Validity’ of new inspection toolkits

A key facet of Ofsted’s proposals is the introduction of inspection “toolkits”,

which will be available to schools.

These rubrics describe the quality inspectors “expect to see at each point on the scale” from ‘exemplary’ to ‘causing concern’.

Critics have described the toolkits as “nonsense”, and say the descriptors for different grades are too similar.

Ofsted said its trial visits would look at the “feasibility” and “validity” of the toolkits, or how well they help inspectors gather evidence and whether they enable them to collect evidence on “the most important aspects of education”.

They will also look at “scalability” – how well the toolkits work together, whether they cover the right areas and how to “avoid unnecessary or unhelpful repetition”.

How will feedback affect the reforms?

Sector leaders have stressed that Ofsted must be open about its pilot process and the way it uses feedback to change its proposals.

The watchdog said it would gather and consider all feedback from the visits – from inspectors and providers – and “reflect on the process and the effect of the new toolkits”.

“This will allow us to make any necessary changes before introducing our new approach later this year.”

Before launching its consultation early this month, Ofsted trialled its proposals at six settings.

Lee Owston, the watchdog’s national director for education, recently claimed the “overwhelming” response to the mock inspections had been “very, very positive”.



Lee Owston

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS | @LYDIACHSW

Former inspectors launch an alternative consultation

Former senior Ofsted inspectors behind the “alternative big listen” last year have launched their own consultation on the new inspection plans, fearing the watchdog is asking leaders to “take it or leave it”.

Frank Norris and Colin Richards (pictured) have created the “alternative big consultation” (ABC) to gather opinions on report cards.

The survey, which launches today and closes on April 4,



will run alongside Ofsted’s official 12-week consultation, which closes on April 28.

The ABC uses the same questions as the government’s consultation, but also asks respondents if they believe the proposals are “fit for purpose”.

Richards said it will “also allow respondents to suggest different features of a responsive inspection system,

which we will share in the report of our results”.

Last spring, the alternative big listen received submissions from 1,368 respondents, revealing widespread dissatisfaction, with nine in 10 deeming the watchdog “not fit for purpose”.

The official big listen received more than 16,000 responses, making it the largest consultation in Ofsted’s history.

The online ABC survey [can be found here](#).



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NEWS: RECRUITMENT

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New ITT re-accreditation renews criticism of 2021 review

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

Leaders have slammed the government's disruptive teacher training market review as "completely unnecessary" after ministers reopened a new re-accreditation round.

The 2021 review forced all teacher trainers through a re-accreditation process which resulted in around a quarter of providers losing their status.

Many opted to become a "partner" for other accredited providers, but some quit the market.

On Wednesday, the DfE opened a "targeted accreditation round" – the first chance providers that lost out on re-accreditation four years ago have had to re-apply.

While the market review relied on an onerous written application, the new process involves an additional oral element.

It is open exclusively to providers that were previously accredited, are a lead partner and have not received two consecutive 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' ratings.

The DfE says the round "will provide an opportunity for eligible organisations to demonstrate their ability to meet the new quality requirements and provide a smooth transition from any existing partnership arrangements".

Market review 'a travesty'

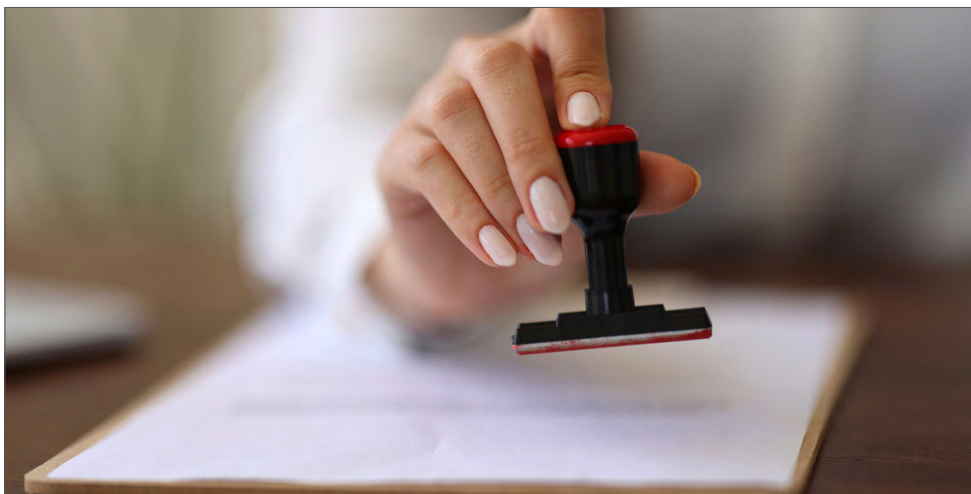
Jan Rowe, a former head of ITE at Liverpool John Moores University, described the 2021 review as "a travesty" and "completely unnecessary".

"People lost their livelihoods and reputations," she said, adding she believed unsuccessful providers "are going to find it very hard to come back".

David Spendlove, associate dean at Manchester Institute of Education, said an inquiry should be held into the 2021 review.

"The process was not an indicator of quality... Individuals will have potentially lost jobs and institutions will have faced severe disruption and lost income on the basis of a deeply flawed process."

He said the new round "suggests a less



hostile government recognising the deficiencies of the process", but believed it "remains a flawed and unnecessary process".

Application timeline

All applicants must complete an "apply for ITT accreditation" form by March 16, the government said this week. Outcomes will be published in June.

James Noble, the executive director of the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers, said he was "hopeful that the process would be a lot more collegiate and open and professional than it was the first time around, and more objective".

"While we think we'd have rather these providers had not lost their accreditation, we're hopeful that as many get through the process as possible. We'll be supporting them in any way that we can."

Emma Hollis, the chief executive of the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers, criticised the previous review, which required a lengthy application and "became about the ability to write bids".

The introduction of a verbal element showed the government had taken that criticism on board and was taking a more "holistic" approach.

"It's not that if they're dumbing-down the

process at all. They're not making it easier, but what they're doing is asking people to present in a different way."

'Lessons have been learned'

Sam Twiselton, who has been involved through her role as an ITT associate in helping design the new re-accreditation process, was also involved in the 2021 market review.

"I didn't support the way they did the process last time because it was a pure desktop exercise, involving people who weren't ITT experts," she said.

But she said "lessons have been learned", with providers now being "questioned very closely and intensively on their thinking."

"Hopefully, good providers will appreciate that verbal element and find it very useful and valuable."

She said the verbal element of the application would take the form of a presentation and interview, with questions "released beforehand in the applicant pack, so that people have time to think".

"It's multiple opportunities to demonstrate the success criteria," she said. "So we're not trying to catch anybody out. We're trying to give people the opportunity to show us their thinking in a number of different ways."



Emma Hollis



Sam Twiselton

SOLUTIONS: ATTENDANCE

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FOMO Fridays (and prizes) to boost attendance

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

EXCLUSIVE

An academy trust has rolled out “FOMO Fridays” to boost attendance – including moving its “golden ticket” scheme with prizes such as laptops and other incentives to the end of the week.

Friday attendance at the nine-school Two Counties Trust in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire has since gone up 1.5 percentage points.

The scheme started as “feel-good Fridays” at Friesland School, where leaders noticed absence was higher on Fridays, as is the case nationally.

“Whatever we did in terms of punitive measures...it just wasn't impacting [attendance],” said Craig Patterson, the school's head.

Attendance boost biggest on Fridays

Instead, the school decided to pack Fridays with fun, incentive-led schemes that allowed pupils to win prizes such as a laptop or day out.

Attendance has risen from 89.9 per cent last February to 90.7 per cent this February. The increase has been biggest on Fridays.

The idea, said Patterson, was to make Fridays “the day children want to be in school”.

Under Friesland's “golden ticket”, staff give out 10 tickets to pupils throughout the week, “for upholding our values, for being polite, for holding doors, for saying good morning”.

The system runs at points of the year when attendance is lowest, such as November and the second half of January.

On Friday lunchtime, Patterson mans a station in the school hall where pupils deposit their golden tickets, selecting which of three prizes they would like to win.

This month, the prizes are a JD Sports voucher, a laptop or a donation to a charity.

Pupils can request music, and Patterson said many relished the opportunity to chat.

Every class then watches a live-stream as the winners are drawn.

‘Proud stickers’

Friesland also runs “proud stations” and “scholar of the week” schemes that reward academic achievement.



Teachers are asked to hand out five “proud stickers”, for good work.

On Friday breaktime, pupils can exchange these for a prize in the school hall.

“We've got 1,200 students, so around 300 a week come and queue,” said Patterson. “We've got music playing – a really nice atmosphere.

“They show [us] their work and they explain why they're proud. We sign them a little certificate that they take home, and then they get a small prize – a pen, or a chocolate bar, or Friesland-branded water bottle.”

Every week, teachers also nominate a “scholar of the week” who has “done something of note, tried really hard, or produced an excellent piece of work”.

Patterson announces the nominees and winners each Friday morning. Pupils cheer and are “really engaged and invested” in the process.

Winners then leave their tutor group and go to the hall, where they walk along a red carpet lined with clapping staff to receive a certificate.

What impact is it having?

According to the latest DfE figures, attendance at state secondary schools averaged 91.2 per cent during the week commencing February 3 this year, meaning attendance at Friesland is still below average.

“This is not a panacea,” said Patterson. “We've still got so much work to do, but it is making an improvement.”

Similar initiatives have been rolled out at the trust's other eight secondaries, under “fear of

missing out (FOMO) Fridays”.

Trust-wide, attendance has increased in the past year by 1 per cent on Mondays to Thursdays, and 1.5 per cent on Fridays. Among pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, Friday attendance has increased by 1.8 per cent.

Wesley Davies, the trust's chief executive, agrees attendance was far from “a fixed problem”, but FOMO Fridays were “a firm stepping stone”.

What is the effect on teachers?

Patterson said he was “mindful” of the schemes “just giving teachers more to do”.

But the reward schemes were not onerous, and gave staff the chance to “do something joyful”.

“The way I sold it to teachers was, why did we become teachers? Did we become teachers to give out corrections or to complain about students who aren't in [the right] shoes? We want to inspire people.”

It also reduced work long-term “because if we're not doing these things, getting children to school, teachers are going to end up with more workload, catching children up, and doing absence phone calls”.

A separate scheme is aimed at boosting staff attendance.

Towards the end of each half-term, pupils are encouraged to fill out appreciation notes for staff. In the final week, when staff attendance often drops, those in school are given a “golden envelope” containing notes of thanks.

NEWS: MOBILE PHONES

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School phone bans reduce overall screen time, poll suggests

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

Restrictions on the use of smartphones in schools can heavily reduce pupils' overall screen time, suggests new research.

Polling also seems to show tougher policies aren't harder to enforce – contrary to claims.

The research by The New Britain Project and More in Common for the National Education Union has prompted fresh calls for a national ban on phones during the school day.

Pollsters asked parents how much time their children spent using screens both in and outside school.

Those attending schools with no restrictions spent on average 2.83 hours a day using screens, compared with 2.2 hours among those whose schools enforced locker storage.

This dropped to just 1.5 hours for schools that did not allow phones at all, 47 per cent lower than those with no restrictions.

The polling also found most parents of children under 16 wanted tighter restrictions in schools.

Ministers in successive governments have opted not to make phone bans statutory, opting instead to trust leaders to do what is best for their school.

Earlier this month, Labour MPs voted down a Conservative amendment to their schools bill that would have mandated a ban.

But Luke Tryl, a former Tory special adviser who now leads More in Common, warned the government may “end up on the wrong side of parents' opinions on smartphones in schools.

“What emerges so clearly from our polling of parents and conversations in focus groups is that they can't handle this alone and want the lead to come from the Department for Education to make schools smartphone-free.”

The polling also suggests schools with tighter restrictions “face fewer challenges related to phone use”.

Thirty per cent of parents reported frequent issues with phones in schools with the strictest policies, compared with 40 per cent in those with the most lenient rules.

Researchers said this disproved “the notion that tougher



policies are harder to enforce”.

Anna McShane, from the New Britain Project which worked on the poll, said parents “want schools to take a stand on smartphones – because the ones with stricter rules see the benefits.

“Over half of parents want tighter restrictions, and those in schools with phone bans say the policies work. But right now, it's a postcode lottery. It's time to stop debating and start protecting children in every classroom.”

Most schools already have some form of restriction on smartphone use, but just one in seven secondary schools have a blanket ban during the school day.

Headteachers' unions have been broadly supportive of the government's approach – using non-statutory guidance to encourage bans, but not mandating them.

Sarah Hannafin, head of policy at the school leaders' union NAHT, said the “negative impacts” of phone use “must not be overlooked or ignored”.

“But the reality is that children and young people need to be able to interact with and understand the boundaries of an

increasingly digital world.”

“School leaders and their staff teams are best placed to develop and implement the policies and processes on mobile phones and recreational screen usage that are most suitable for their pupils and school communities.”

Pepe Di'lasio, the general secretary of the ASCL leaders' union, said the “interesting findings” around the potential benefits of the strictest smartphone policies “warrant further research”.

One of the key arguments in favour of a mandatory ban is consistency across the country.

According to Teacher Tapp, more than 50 per cent of schools ban the use of phones during the school day, while less than 10 per cent allow their use during breaks.

However, some schools still allow their use at any time.

Daniel Kebede, the general secretary of the National Education Union, which commissioned the study, said the research “shows that effective policies at school-level can drive down screen time for young people and help them to remain engaged in their learning. “Teachers need greater support from government to tackle the challenges that smartphones and social media are presenting in our schools.”

Anna McShane

Daniel Kebede

NEWS

The warning notice that won't raise an eyebrow

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

An academy trust broke funding rules after paying for its head to go on Botox and aromatherapy training courses, a government investigation has found.

The government investigation into Dorrington Academy trust in Birmingham also found “excessive spending” on gifts – such as a Harrods’ hamper – and “luxury hotel stays”. Staff were also given “aromatherapy treatments”.

Recent annual accounts for the single-academy trust also show that a £120,000 consultancy contract had an “indemnity” linked to it that protected the “recipient against costs” incurred in connection with “any potential proceedings” over the deal.

Auditors say this also broke funding rules.

The trust has been issued with a government notice to improve on “financial management and governance grounds”, seen by Schools Week and due to be published today.

The notice to improve said the trust’s former headteacher and accounting officer, Loretta Barratt, had “failed to uphold their personal responsibility to parliament by not ensuring high standards of probity in managing public fund”.

It added: “Irregular spending was identified, including expenditure on luxury hotel stays, a Botox course, aromatherapy courses and a plastering course, none of which align with the 7 Principles of Public Life (Nolan Principles).”

Botox courses... for training

The notice to improve – issued in November – said government officials launched “an investigation into potential irregularity” at Dorrington over financial “non-compliance”.

The investigation ruled the payments were “novel, contentious and repulsive”. But the “trust failed to refer these transactions” to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), as required.

It also “continued to offer aromatherapy treatments to staff”, even though auditors highlighted in 2021 “that the provision of cosmetic procedures was irregular”.

Schools Week understands Dorrington paid for Barratt to attend aromatherapy and Botox courses as part of her training.

A spokesperson for the trust said while it



“continues to be in a strong position financially”, it has “not always met the high standards that should be expected of us when it comes to how our school’s finances have been managed and spent”.

A “huge amount of work has already been undertaken”, and the warning notice “gives us the opportunity to show that our new leadership team will continue to do things in the right way for the right reasons”.

Dorrington is also working with the government and its legal team in “exploring whether some of the former transactions can be reversed”.

Conflict concerns over Harrods gift

The investigation also uncovered “excessive spending on retirement gifts and a Harrods’ hamper for a consultant”.

The consultant is said to have “had a direct role” in Barratt’s “performance management, leading to a real and perceived conflict of interest that the trust did not adequately consider”.

Dorrington also failed to maintain “adequate documentation”, appropriate reporting or seek the approval of the ESFA for related-party transactions.

The trust had a majority of members who were also trustees, but that has since been resolved.

Legal ‘indemnity’

Dorrington’s accounts for 2023-24, published last month, show auditors flagged further funding rule breaches. One was over a “two-year consultancy contract” worth £120,000.

The arrangement “was not subject to a formal tendering or value-for-money process”. Despite this, “the whole of this contract is understood to remain payable”, accounts added.

When the deal was signed off, an indemnity was given that protected “the recipient against costs incurred in connection with any potential proceedings taken in connection with matters arising as a result” of their role at Dorrington.

This did not receive ESFA approval. Yet the “indemnity is still in place”. Accounts do not show who was given the contract.

However, the services “are not being used after the senior team enquired into the circumstances”, the accounts add.

Bid to reverse payments

The Dorrington notice highlights government concerns “in relation to the breadth of evidence demonstrating a lack of effective practice in approaches to financial management at the trust”.

The Department for Education said the notice followed “serious breaches” of academy rules and would “only be lifted when we have strong, evidence-based assurance that similar breaches will not take place”.

A Dorrington spokesperson highlighted that the government recognised the “positive action the trust has recently taken to address the concerns”.

Barratt, who retired in August, now works as a “business and education leadership consultant”.

She was approached for comment through her website and publishers. She published a book last year titled: “If The Gravy is Good, Then Lick the Plate.”

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NEWS

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QTS plans worry special school leaders

ROSA FURNEAUX

@ROSAFURNEAUX

Special school leaders fear the government's plans to ensure all teachers have qualified teacher status (QTS) could limit the curriculum and worsen the recruitment crisis.

State-run special schools employ significantly more teachers without QTS than mainstream settings, according to a new report by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).

About 10 per cent of teachers in special schools do not have QTS, compared with 2 to 3 per cent in primary and secondary schools.

"This isn't about SEND and AP being more willing to appoint unqualified staff," said Nic Crossley, the chief executive of the Liberty Academy Trust. "Right across the sector, recruiting QTS teachers is a constant challenge."

As well as staffing issues, she said there was no established QTS pathway for many of the vocational subjects taught in her schools. Instead, she employed industry professionals and higher-level teaching assistants who "bring valuable real-world experience and can do an excellent job".

Staff without QTS are "less a preference, but more a necessity driven by the structure of teacher training and the limited availability of QTS staff in relevant disciplines."

Recruitment challenges

QTS is a legal requirement to teach in many English schools. However, where no suitable qualified teacher is available schools can recruit staff with "special qualifications or experience".

NFER research shows rates of special school staff without QTS are highest in the east of England (16 per cent) and London (14 per cent) — both areas with high rates of special school vacancies and temporary staff.

The government's schools bill will extend to academies a requirement that teachers must have or be working towards QTS, which currently applies only to local authority-maintained schools.

The DfE has clarified the new law will not apply retrospectively. But SEND specialists worry it could have "unintended consequences" for special academies, which have a higher rate of



unqualified teachers.

The government's own impact assessment noted that "due to lack of supply, some schools may struggle to find the teachers that they need".

Some special academies ensure that all teachers without QTS are on a pathway to qualification. Mark Wilson, the chief executive of the Wellspring Academy Trust, said that as a result, he had "no concerns" over the schools bill.

But Tom Pegler, the chief executive of the Propeller Academy Trust, said the bill would "absolutely" affect recruitment. "We are in a climate where it's so hard to recruit anyway."

Compared to applicants transferring from mainstream settings without significant SEN training, Pegler said: "I would argue that the children get a much better deal from some of our UQTs."

Margaret Mulholland, a SEND and inclusion specialist at ASCL, said recruitment challenges meant schools might "appoint candidates with strong experience in areas such as autism, speech and language difficulties, or severe learning difficulties" even if they did not hold QTS.

Reduced flexibility, reduced curriculum

Many special schools are much smaller than their mainstream counterparts. Their size is reflected in their funding — and that can have a knock-on effect when it comes to curriculum, experts said.

Marijke Miles, the head of Baycroft

School in Hampshire, said despite having more than 200 pupils on roll, her school could not afford qualified teachers in every subject.

"They would have to teach several subjects, or be employed only part-time," she said. "Even I have to use unqualified staff simply to give me the breadth of the curriculum that my children deserve."

Claire Dorer, the chief executive of the National Association of Special Schools, said the report's headline figures should be "interpreted with caution".

"Special schools often deliver a broader, more holistic curriculum designed to meet the unique needs of their learners," she said. QTS in subjects such as horticulture or construction "may not necessarily confer an advantage".

"This policy risks reducing the flexibility that special academies currently have to offer a curriculum best suited to their learners."

James Bowen, the assistant general secretary of the NAHT, said: "Ultimately, what we really need is bold action to ensure there is a sufficient supply of teachers for all types of school."

The NFER's own recommendations included the need for the government to find out why so many special school teachers did not have QTS.

"Given the value successive governments (including the current one) have placed on the standards encoded in the QTS, this disparity should be monitored and evaluated," it said.



Margaret Mulholland

NEWS IN BRIEF

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DfE proposes estates management portal

A new estates management portal that will provide a “single door” between government, councils and trusts could be launched by the autumn.

Schools Week revealed last year the Department for Education was developing the online portal to bring together its interactions with those responsible for school buildings.

Dr Jonathan Dewsbury, the department’s director of education estates and net zero, told a Westminster Education Forum webinar this week that “we’re looking to launch ... probably autumn time”.

The government intends to test the system with some trusts and councils “through spring



time”.

“This will be a two-way system, so we can share data both through our cycle of condition data collection and surveys and things that estates professionals might be doing on site, and make sure that we are really thinking about where we should invest our money.”

Ofsted should look at play too, says report

Ofsted should measure school performance based on how much time pupils have to play, a new report has said.

The Raising the Nation Play Commission said the “sufficiency” of playtime should be included as a “measure of school performance to encourage schools to boost play in school time and reward those schools who value play highly”.

A year-long independent inquiry’s interim “state of play” report, published on Monday, said children were spending less time playing



at school and outside education.

The report found that, on average, break times have fallen by 23 minutes a day for the youngest primary pupils over the past 25 years. This equates to almost two hours a week.

Tarn leaves NET for Dubai’s desert sands

An influential turnaround trust boss is set to move to a Dubai-based global education company launched by one of the world’s biggest private school providers.

Rob Tarn, the chief executive of the Northern Education Trust (NET), will up take up a senior position with First School Management (FSM).

The company, founded by GEMS Education, offers school management services to, among others, governments and investors.

Tarn has led the 30-school NET since 2017. An Ofsted evaluation said leaders had transformed the trust since that time.

A date for his departure has not been set. Meanwhile, Stuart Burns will stand down as



Rob Tarn

chief executive of the 36-school David Ross Education Trust in the autumn.

Foundation looks for 1,500 research schools



The Education Endowment Foundation is seeking 1,500 schools to take part in 11 research projects aimed at boosting maths, writing, communication and language.

The projects include peer-to-peer coaching to build maths skills in secondary pupils, and professional development for reception class teachers to support skills through play and structured activities.

Each project “has been selected because of its potential impact on the attainment of socio-economically disadvantaged pupils and will be independently evaluated to give a reliable estimate of its impact”, the EEF said.

In one of the new projects, Rehearsal Room Writing, teachers will receive five training sessions with the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-Upon-Avon.

Other schemes include Action Tutoring’s maths programme, CoachBright, the Power of Reading and the OTTO Club.

Schools can check their eligibility [here](#).

IN PARLIAMENT

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DfE slapped down over 'rushed' schools bill

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Ministers have been slapped down by an influential parliamentary committee over the "rushed and inadequate" timetable of their schools bill, which has "prevented" full scrutiny of the proposals.

The education select committee, which has a substantial Labour majority, said ministers failed to involve it in pre-legislative scrutiny and did not even give it advance notice of the bill's publication.

Many of the schools' elements of the bill were unexpected when it was published in December. The King's Speech last year had promised only a children's wellbeing bill.

Ministers have also been forced into a series of climbdowns and clarifications after sector leaders warned of the potential consequences of academy reforms.

In a report today, the committee warned the "decision not to involve our committee in pre-legislative scrutiny, or even to give us prior notice of the bill's publication, has made it more difficult for us to conduct proper scrutiny".

The bill's timetable "has been rushed and inadequate", the report added.

Helen Hayes, the committee chair, said that while the committee welcomed the government's ambition, "my colleagues and I from across the political parties were disappointed by how the government has rushed this bill through the House of Commons at the expense of time for proper scrutiny.

"With such wide-ranging reforms that will have dramatic, lasting consequences for children and families, the DfE's need for speed should not have been prioritised over diligent examination of evidence."

Hayes has now tabled a series of amendments which will be considered when the bill is next read in the Commons.



Helen Hayes

One would remove the requirement for pupils eligible for free school meals to register to receive them. The current opt-in system is estimated to exclude about 250,000 young people.

The committee heard that about one in 10 eligible children "miss out because of language barriers or difficulty with the admin process".

The committee said it considered "that the arguments for auto-enrolment in free school meals for those children currently eligible are conclusive.

"In the interests of alleviating hunger in schools and improving health and educational outcomes for the poorest children, auto-enrolment must be brought in without delay."

Some councils have already introduced auto-enrolment, raising extra money for schools because they receive the pupil premium paid to each child who has been eligible for free lunches in the past six years.

Schools Week revealed in 2023 that in Lewisham, south-east London, this led to increased pupil premium funding of £1.2 million. Implementing the system cost just £800.

At present, the government's "apply for free

school meals" service simply points users to their local council's website. Councils then have access to a digital portal to check their eligibility based on the benefits their families claim.

Pressed on auto-enrolment during a committee hearing earlier this month, Stephen Morgan, the early education minister, revealed "that checking system is being redesigned to allow parents and schools to check eligibility independently of their local authorities.

"The system will make it quicker and easier to check eligibility for free school meals, and has the potential to further boost take-up by families who meet the eligibility criteria."

Morgan also said he was "aware of a range of measures being implemented by local authorities", and added the government was "considering further work to improve auto-enrolment".

But auto-enrolment nationally would have huge cost implications.

Based on current rates, the cost of providing free meals alone to 250,000 more pupils would be more than £120 million. The extra pupil premium would cost upwards of £300 million.

The DfE was approached for comment.

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PRESENTED BY: KAREN PLOWMAN



MARCH 6 @ 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM

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PRESENTED BY: HANNAH MILLER



MARCH 19 @ 10:00 AM – 11:30 AM

SEND/LLDD Network: Collaborating for Inclusive Excellence in Education

PRESENTED BY: DARREN COXON
AND ANTHONY BENEDICT



MARCH 20 @ 10:00 AM – 11:30 AM

Safeguarding Network: Empowering Educators to Protect and Support Learners

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Profile

JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS



'Carrying the responsibility of a trust is a 24-hour-a-day role'

Diversity, deprivation and tackling parents' abuse of home education – Sian Hampton tells Jack Dyson about a life that has taken her from Uganda to leadership of the Archway Learning Trust

Labour's surprise assault on academy freedoms has caused consternation across the sector.

But for the Archway Learning Trust, it has already had a more tangible effect; long-term plans to fast-track staff onto leadership wages are now on the backburner, says chief executive Sian Hampton.

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson was forced into a U-turn on restricting academy pay freedoms – saying she would instead introduce a “floor” but “no ceiling” on pay and conditions.

But Hampton believes the damage has already

been done.

“Parts of the bill were a real distraction,” she says. “Academy terms and conditions – did we really need to talk about that now?”

“I don't know if the government is for or against trusts, but the mood music makes trusts feel they are maybe less valued than they were in the past.”

From Uganda to Burton

We meet in a bustling café in the middle of London's St Pancras Station. Having arrived from Nottingham with a large holdall containing freshly laundered clothes, Hampton is stopping here

before hopping on a train to Bristol to spend the weekend with her daughter.

She intends to work remotely for the rest of the day. I later learn she remained glued to her laptop after checking into a Bristol branch of Premier Inn that evening.

Born in 1966, Hampton spent the first four years of her life in Uganda. Her parents had moved to the country to teach.

“It could have been Canada or Uganda, but they got the Uganda job first. They were constantly taking us out on safari, not that I remember much about it.”

Profile: Sian Hampton

They moved to Burton-on-Trent in 1970. Blood-thirsty dictator Idi Amin seized power 12 months later, prompting many of the family's friends to flee the country.

Hampton's "ambitious" father regularly switched headteacher jobs, causing the family to regularly relocate too.

After leaving school, she read history at Cambridge University.

Her first job was working in a Wolverhampton halfway house. The building was equipped with emergency buttons, but she says it was "never somewhere I really felt frightened".

"Working with blokes who've just come out of prison was an eye opener.

"I ran basic cooking courses. That was always interesting as you never knew how it was going to go – you were giving these ex-offenders knives and all sorts."

Hampton then moved into secondary teaching. But it wasn't until she took over as deputy head at Bluecoat Aspley in Nottingham that she encountered "inner-city diversity".

"There were cultural things I needed to learn about children who came from different backgrounds to my own. The level of SEN, I hadn't seen that before [as well].

"I love that vibrancy – I couldn't go to a monochrome school and work out in the shires now.

Boot searches and arrests

At times, though, there "was an edge".

Once, she was asked to search a pupil's boot amid fears they were armed. On another occasion, police descended on the secondary to arrest "members of the school community because they were involved in gangs".

Having risen the ranks to executive headteacher at Bluecoat, she became Archway's founding CEO in 2012.

The trust consists of 10 schools mostly spread across Nottingham and Derby. Some have "70 per cent pupil premium", while "others are 30 per cent".

Instead of taking a "one-size-fits-all approach" to running the academies, the 58 year old ensures



'You were giving ex-offenders knives and all sorts'

"heads are autonomous" as they are "uniquely placed to understand their own communities".

"We don't pretend [the schools are] all the same", she tells me. "However, there are key facilities that we run through the central team.

"The intention of all of that was to reduce workload on our heads and to allow them to maintain and sustain teaching and learning."

Advisory board longevity

Hampton also sits on the Department for Education's east Midlands advisory board. The meetings are intended to inform regional director rulings on trust growth plans.

At their best they are "really rich and informed conversations that I hope help DfE make their decisions", she says.

At their "worst" they're presented with proposals "where so much development has gone on that saying no is actually going to undermine something that's happening already" – even if the project isn't the best long term.

With the likes of the academy conversion grant and trust capacity funding cut completely, Hampton thinks there could be "a drying up of people wanting to academise".

"With the launch of the RISE teams, is the regions' work going to be less about managing conversions [and] more about school improvement, which is not what the advisory board is there to do?

"I don't know how much longevity they [advisory boards] have going forward in this new educational landscape."

RISE team ambition

Hampton has thrown her hat into the ring to join the new RISE teams: groups of DfE officials and turnaround leaders charged with brokering support for struggling schools.

When the government's vision for the school improvement teams was revealed in November, ministers said they wanted councils to help drive their standards agenda.

Just days later England's biggest local authority admitted it could no longer afford to provide school improvement support.

Hampton has received similar messages from council chiefs in the Midlands.

"They're saying, 'We haven't got the appetite or resources to run schools that are in difficulty ourselves. With 80 per cent of all secondary

Profile: Sian Hampton



schools in trusts, why would we suddenly go into this place where we haven't got the skills or the money to support?"

Despite this, Hampton backs a number of Phillipson's reforms. She regards the curriculum and assessment review as an opportunity "to make schools think about how children can be happy and successful".

She also backs plans to tighten up elective home education (EHE) rules. One of her schools, Alvaston Moor Academy in Derby, welcomed around 193 children in-year over 2023-24. Thirty-six per cent of them had been home educated.

EHE how-tos on Facebook

Education Datalab analysis last year showed the secondary issued 176 suspensions per 100 pupils across 2022 and 2023. The rate was among the highest in England.

"The community there was playing games," she says. "A child would get into trouble in one school and the parents would then choose to electively home educate and apply for a completely different school."

"There were parent forums and all sorts of social media [groups] where it would say 'how to home educate your child'."

She claims some leaders in the area have also told the parents of misbehaving kids: "We're looking at permanent exclusion, but if you prefer to educate your child at home, then we won't take that final step."

The children accepted into Alvaston Moor through this route "usually need really bespoke support" to reintegrate them into classes, which "costs money".

"I'm not saying it [the exclusions] is all EHE, but I think those that come through fair access and have failed in other schools are usually the ones



'There were parent forums about home educating your child'

that come to us and fail again," Hampton stresses.

Alvaston Moor managed to reduce suspension rates to 12.3 in the autumn. Since the start of the academic year, it has held 10 in-school meetings with parents every day.

Archway also invested £1.5 million in "an internal AP and intervention system", recruiting staff to work with children with additional needs.

Being CEO a '24-hour responsibility'

Hampton spends half her week working from the trust's central team base on Bluecoat's top floor.

The rest of the time she hot-desks during visits to the rest of her schools. She rails against the notion of having a separate office building for central staff.

"I hate the idea of me somehow being in an ivory tower and making edicts. I still pick up litter [and] challenge children to tuck their shirts in."

A working group has been assembled at Archway to examine "how we can make working in our trust as attractive as possible". It hopes to do this in ways that aren't to "the detriment of other players nearby".

One of the measures being looked at is the leadership pay fast-track. Under the plans, experienced staff will be able to skip the final

upper pay scale level and move onto the leadership spine.

The move will cost up to £30,000 to implement. But Hampton says the plan is "still very much paused" and expects it to be examined again in September.

The idea is that employees could move into assistant head roles sooner, and give leaders the chance to ask them to "do other stuff as well" as they won't be " beholden to 1,265-hour" rules, Hampton reasons.

"So, they've got more flexibility and so do we. I think it would allow us to be more imaginative in what we're doing, rather than being rigidly attached to teachers' pay and conditions."

The delay means the plans will likely be someone else's to implement. Hampton will retire in August – saying it is time to make way "for somebody new with fresh ideas".

"Carrying the responsibility of the trust is a 24-hour-a-day role. You just know that if something happens, it's you who's got to respond. It's a big responsibility.

"I've got enough of my career left to go off and explore different things. I didn't want to go on for so long that people were saying, 'She should have left years ago'."

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Opinion

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EDWARD TIMPSON

Former minister for
children and families

Schools should be held to account for pupil movements

The government must do more to monitor pupil movements and identify schools that use the practice to off-load their challenges onto others, writes Edward Timpson

My adopted brother's education was a cycle of instability, and this still happens today.

Now 49, Ollie came to our family at six after a traumatic early childhood in care. Despite my parents' best efforts, he was bounced between five different schools before ending up in a specialist setting known as "the naughty boys' school".

Each move made it harder for him to settle, to catch up and to belong. He was lost to the system, and the consequences lasted far beyond his school years.

Decades later, children like Ollie are still moved around our education system without proper oversight.

One in five secondary school pupils with a social, emotional or mental health issue moves schools, compared to one in 17 of all secondary pupils who finished year 11. This adds up to tens of thousands of families whose children's education is disrupted and who have no right to appeal whether the move is in their best interests.

While there are times when moving a child to a new school is necessary, far too often these moves

amount to little more than offloading a 'problem'.

The children most affected are overwhelmingly those with special educational needs, those in contact with children's services, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

One-third of pupil movements, nearly 30,000 children, lead to an 'unknown' destination. They become invisible to schools and services. Some spend months, even years out of school, their education derailed.

The way we judge and measure school performance is partly to blame. It has created incentives for exclusion rather than inclusion.

Ofsted ratings and league tables rightly reward academic performance but fail to capture how schools support their most vulnerable pupils. Too often, those who need the most help are quietly moved on to protect results.

It cannot be beyond our capability to ensure we know, at any given time, where every child is being educated. This is the first step towards making better decisions for children at risk of being lost to the system.

If we tracked pupil movements properly, we would expose where decision-making is failing children and identify schools which consistently move pupils on.

This is why I am a supporter of the work of the Who's Losing Learning Solutions Council, an expert group chaired by ASCL general secretary,



“ The way we judge schools is partly to blame

Pepe Di'lasio. Their work focuses on tackling the rise in school absences and exclusions, particularly among disadvantaged pupils, and addressing the lack of political and policy solutions to this issue.

The council was founded following the publication of the Who is Losing Learning? report, the first from a coalition founded by Impetus, IPPR, Mission 44 and The Difference.

That report diagnosed the scale of the challenge and made the case for whole-school inclusion.

Next month, after gathering extensive evidence from school leaders, parents, carers and experts, they will publish a second report setting out the solutions.

Darlington offers an example. The town has introduced a Vulnerable Pupil Panel Protocol to ensure school moves are made in the best interests of vulnerable students. This kind of collaborative approach between schools, local authorities and pupil referral units shows that change is possible.

But government policy has so far failed to address the scale of this

growing issue, and the children's wellbeing and schools bill follows the same pattern.

The bill's provisions for a unique child identifier number and local authority registers for children who are not registered at a school or who are receiving some of their education outside of school are important first steps, but we must go much further.

Government should require schools to collect data whenever a child is moved off-site or off-roll and to report this to their local authority. There is also a clear case for holding those schools who fail to do so to account.

When I published my independent review of school exclusion in 2019, there was broad agreement that we needed a greater sense of collective responsibility for excluded pupils.

Six years on, the problem appears to still be in the DfE's 'too difficult' pile.

We need a system that values children like Ollie, not just the easiest to educate. That begins with the simple premise that we must always know where they are.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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AVNEE MORJARIA

Associate director for public services, IPPR

How Phillipson can unite DfE and teachers on standards

Needless division between ministers and the sector threatens the government's agenda, writes former DfE assistant director Avnee Morjaria. Here's how we can get past it

Bridget Phillipson hasn't had the easiest start in government. In part, this is a product of the tough political landscape she inherited. After all, education is a domestic policy area the Conservatives regularly chalk up as a success, which has left her with very little space for manoeuvre.

This was starkly evident in her recent standards speech, which was inspiring and frustrating in equal measure.

Hearing her personal story and what it meant for her vision was the inspiring part. She referred to her own experience as "proof that the system can work, that a great education can be a transformational force" and that "background doesn't have to determine destiny".

But this optimistic vision wasn't broadly reported in the press. Instead, and frustratingly for her, the media have focused on a standards policy that has landed badly with unions and the sector.

This was most true in relation to Ofsted reform. Phillipson used the speech to launch a formal consultation on the report card model that will now likely replace the one-word judgments.

This is delicate ground following the death of Ruth Perry and Phillipson's speech was a great opportunity to take a conciliatory approach. She could have set out the advantages of a broader set of measures and encouraged the sector to participate in consultation. Instead, she leaned in heavily on the raising standards agenda and has given teachers and school leaders the jitters.

Reflecting an almost entirely critical response from the unions, ASCL general secretary Pepe Di'lasio said: "Ofsted and the Government appear to have learned nothing from the death of headteacher Ruth Perry and have instead devised an accountability system which will subject a beleaguered profession to yet more misery."

Phillipson's response was unhelpful as she doubled down, asserting that her priority is children and their life chances and suggesting this might not be the case for her critics.

Such rhetoric, from both sides,



“ The secret is harnessing the sector's own ambition

is needlessly divisive. As a former teacher and school leader, I know that teachers care deeply about children and their life chances.

You can see this every day. We buy our students breakfast if we know they come to school hungry, put on unpaid after-school and holiday clubs, organise trips and sit up late at night marking books after dinner.

I have personally driven to collect a school refuser from my tutor group knowing the relationship I have with them is the thing that has the potential to make a change. I am privileged to have worked with many colleagues who routinely go the extra mile in a profession that has been undervalued for too long.

As a former Ofsted inspector, I also recognise that the inspectorate has an important role to play in ensuring that schools don't fall below floor standards. But while it will be interesting to see how the consultation develops, this alone will never be the thing that takes the

system from good to great.

The real secret to making the shift to a world-class school system lies in harnessing the drive and commitment of teachers and school leaders. They stand ready to support the government in delivering on that ambition, and in turn expect to feel supported in doing so.

In the end this won't be about a conciliatory tone. The government must go further with tangible policy solutions that invest in teachers and school leaders, allowing them and the children in their care to flourish. This is exactly the type of policy that the new education policy unit at IPPR is working on.

This kind of policy will land well with the sector and ultimately will help Phillipson achieve her goals. We all believe, as she does, that "a great education can be a transformational force". Harnessing the sector's commitment and ambition is the route to delivering that vision.

Opinion

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ABRILLI
PHILLIP

Director of Education,
London Borough
of Lambeth

DR SAM
PARRETT

Group CEO,
London South
East Colleges



Policy must better promote local SEND collaboration

Our recent work in Lambeth shows that government could quickly drive up SEND capacity nationally by incentivising partnerships between LAs and trusts, writes Phillip and Parrett

Education select committee chair Helen Hayes MP has described SEND as “the single biggest challenge at all points of the education system”. She is right, and the committee’s continuing inquiry into how best to address the challenges of SEND provision ensures the issue remains at the forefront of national education policy.

As a local authority and an education group, we see first-hand the escalating needs of children and young people with SEND. The demand for education, health and care plans (EHCPs) continues to rise, yet budgets and resources are shrinking, forcing many schools, trusts and councils to navigate an increasingly fraught landscape.

There is also concern that the schools bill may reduce autonomy for trusts, limiting their ability to make locally-informed decisions and implement innovative solutions.

In this context, cross-agency collaboration is more important than ever, and the partnership between our organisations over the past two years demonstrates why.

In 2022, Lambeth faced a SEND

provision crisis. The Michael Tippett School and the independent Michael Tippett College, both special provisions for learners with complex needs including PMLD, SLD and ASD, had both been rated inadequate by Ofsted.

This meant that many vulnerable learners in the borough from the ages of 11 to 25 were without access to the high-quality education and care they were entitled to.

London South East Academies Trust was named as the Department for Education’s preferred sponsor for the school, and Lambeth agreed, owing to our expertise in both SEND provision and school improvement – and the capacity we had to undertake this.

An opportunity then arose to take a more holistic approach when London South East Colleges, the sponsor of LSEAT and part of the same education group, was asked by the DfE to take the failing Michael Tippett College into its network.

Renaming it Nido Volans Lambeth, we both made commitments to its improvement, including the procurement by the LA of a new, fit-for-purpose building. Learners are now located there and their numbers are set to expand.

The rate of improvement in both these provisions has been rapid, thanks to our shared vision and pooling of resources. Through our partnership we have established a



“ We have established seamless progression for SEND learners

seamless progression pathway for SEND learners, supporting them through to the age of 25 within their local community.

And it is this ‘place-based’ focus that is so fundamental when looking at ways to ‘solve’ the SEND crisis.

Many local authorities are struggling with high-needs budget pressures, exacerbated by a reliance on expensive independent placements. Without sufficient local options, councils are often left with no choice but to fund out-of-area provision. This drives up costs and forces young people to travel away from their families and communities.

The DfE’s SEND and AP Improvement Plan (2023) highlighted the importance of local, place-based solutions, yet achieving this requires structural change. As we discovered in Lambeth, the challenge is not just about curriculum reform or specialist teaching; it is about building a truly integrated system that encompasses education, health and social care.

However, not every local authority will have a SEND-specialist trust it can rely on, and even when they do, there might not always be the willingness to work together.

Establishing genuine collaboration is complex and requires overcoming systemic barriers, including differing priorities, accountability structures and funding mechanisms.

The work we have undertaken together has required trust, negotiation and a willingness to listen and flex. Crucially, it has also needed a shared commitment to long-term improvement rather than short-term fixes.

To encourage such partnerships, more incentives are needed for local authorities and trusts to collaborate. For example, there are opportunities to reduce bureaucracy and ensure that national SEND policy actively supports, rather than hinders, joint working.

With no extra money in the pot, the future of SEND provision will require collaboration across every part of the system, and learners must be at the centre of every decision.

Our partnership has shown that, by working together rather than retreating into silos, we can ensure every child regardless of their needs receives the education, care and opportunities they deserve in the communities where they belong.

Curriculum
ConversationDO YOU HAVE A STORY?
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UKRICHARD
BUSTINDirector of pedagogy,
innovation and staff
development,
Lancing CollegeA 'capabilities' approach should
underpin a new curriculum vision

A model informed by a Nobel-prize winning economist offers a way to overcome the knowledge vs skills divide and make curriculum more inclusive, explains Richard Bustin

The curriculum and assessment review prompted by the change of government has once again opened up debate about the nature of what we teach in schools. Sadly, this debate is characterised by the same rigid positions that have been vying for dominance for decades. But what if we could finally find a way out?

Those of us who were teaching under the previous Labour government will well remember the focus on key skills and a more progressive view of the curriculum. While this had real benefits for employability and soft skills, what seemed to be lacking was a sense of the purpose of subjects beyond taking exams.

The Conservative government's more traditional approach over the past 14 years focused instead on a knowledge-rich curriculum, steeped in factual recall but lacking in a broader educational vision for young people and their holistic development.

Some fear the pendulum of curriculum thinking is swinging

again, back towards the more progressive thinking of the past. Mere mention of 'oracy' has already resulted in innumerable blog posts and a swathe of experts ready to deliver whole-school CPD on the matter.

Only knowledge-rich purists and child-centred activists can fail to see that this setup is wrong. In the course of researching my latest book, *What are we teaching?*, I became increasingly convinced that we might find a way out of our polarisation by framing curriculum discussions around the 'capabilities approach'.

This concept applies the Nobel prize-winning ideas of Amartya Sen in development economics to education. Rather than judging the success of schooling on instrumental measures such as GCSE pass rates, it would require us instead to focus on what an education allows young people to do, how they can think and be in the world.

This is not expressed in terms of key skills but in terms of real freedoms to think critically and creatively. Subjects play a central role in this curriculum vision.

Rather than being seen as an end in themselves, often expressed through grades achieved in high-stakes exams, the real benefits of studying a subject should drive the curriculum.



“ Subjects play a central role in this curriculum vision

This takes us beyond those 'statements of intent' that we have all written for our subjects, and looks at the unique educational benefits – the disciplinary knowledge, skills and values – that come from studying them.

On the one hand, this can be expressed as the empowering or 'powerful' knowledge of our subjects, in line with the work of Michael Young and others that has been dominant since Michael Gove's reforms. Subject specialist teachers with a deep understanding of their subject and its role in the curriculum are key to the capabilities approach.

On the other hand, this thinking can also help create a more inclusive curriculum as it enables all young people to access an enriching educational diet. Under this approach all students can gain a set of 'educational capabilities' that will be of lasting benefit to them.

These could include capabilities such as finding new ways to make sense of themselves and the world, assessing competing claims to truth, thinking critically, and developing their agency.

The key is that these are entirely distinct from the types of basic statements of generic key skills that have seen previous incarnations dismissed as 'soft skills'. A capabilities curriculum is not a place for the expression of the latest fad, but for desirable qualities derived from the deep study of school subjects.

Curriculum thinking in this way takes us beyond our obsession with grades and the idea that subjects are simply a means to an examinable end. It also avoids the trap of doing away with subjects completely in favour of some vacuous key skill that someone, somewhere has deemed valuable.

The curriculum and assessment review provides an opportunity for a once-in-a-generation change to re-examine what young people in schools are learning, and most importantly, why.

The capabilities approach can provide a language with which to frame these much-needed discussions about the purpose and value of what we are teaching – and finally move us beyond the stale dichotomy around this vital debate.

SEND Solutions

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STEVE
HAINESCo-editor,
Education, Disability
and Social PolicyPROFESSOR DAVID
RUEBAINCo-editor,
Education, Disability
and Social Policy

How to get beyond 'need' to genuine inclusion

Focusing on resource distribution to meet individual needs is a self-defeating distraction from the greater purpose of creating inclusive learning environments

We compiled *Education, Disability and Social Policy* 15 years ago, in what were clearly more optimistic times. Looking back as we prepare the second edition to be published this spring has been a sobering experience – but an enlightening one too.

Then, the Equality Act had just been enacted and the 'every child matters' agenda was looking comprehensively at services for all children. Today, successive reforms have failed to fundamentally change a system established in the 1970s.

Faced with the three key policy problems of a demographic shift, conflicting legislation and a change in the delivery infrastructure, policymakers have instead opted for piecemeal reform.

The result is a toxic combination of frustrated professionals, disappointed families and, most importantly, inadequate support and faltering outcomes for children with SEND.

Our SEND framework, sitting alongside the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equality Act, has placed increasing pressure on local authorities just as

they have lost much of their power to direct schools.

This has increasingly left them to fight parents over provision – in direct opposition to the intent of the legislation.

In short, today's children are not being served by a system geared to meeting individual need rather than to creating inclusive education environments. And the result is a system that is dangerously close to market failure.

What to do next?

We need an approach that is equal to our changed environment, rooted in an update to the 'jigsaw of provision'. The best way to achieve this is by replacing our deficit model of 'need' with one informed by 'capability' – that is, one that focuses directly on the quality of life individuals can achieve.

This approach places its primary focus on making policy choices based on expanding individuals' capabilities instead of simply distributing resources. It has been used widely in policy and legislation from the Future Generations of Wales Act to the Human Development Index.

But what would this look like in practice?

An end to silos

First, there would need to be a shift of the intent of the system (and accountability) from meeting



“ Our system is dangerously close to market failure

individual need to proactively promoting better outcomes.

By bringing the SEND system into the mainstream of education policymaking, we can have a wider conversation about what all young people need to thrive. Providing effective support and making reasonable adjustments would still be of paramount importance, but a more inclusive environment overall would raise the threshold.

Take curriculum, for example. A capability approach would enrich the content of what young people learn with a greater emphasis on social and emotional skills, benefitting not just those with mental health conditions, but all children.

High standards for all

Second, a capability approach would remove the expectation on teachers and school leaders to be the experts on meeting all needs. Instead, all those who are actively invested in supporting children would work together to achieve this ambition, just as the Children and Families Act intended.

Professionals across education, health and other services would actively collaborate to understand and mitigate the barriers to a child's outcomes: poverty, insecure housing, or the legacy of the overdiagnosis of

Black children as having SEN.

And no, this would not create 'excuses' for 'low expectations' but reasons for evidenced intervention and higher standards for all.

Inclusion from the top down

Third, it would put a completely different onus on government too. Its remit would be to identify and remove policies that create disincentives to inclusion.

At the broadest level, this would involve replacing the dangerous pressure of individual accountability with a collective responsibility for shared outcomes. In other words, government would need to replace competition with collaboration.

Other organisations would need to adapt too. For example, awarding bodies would have an incentive to design more inclusive qualifications and assessment processes, rather than operate a narrow sense of objective comparison.

There is broad consensus on the need for change. But setting an ambitious destination requires realism about our starting point.

Wanting all children to achieve and thrive is already fundamental to most who work in education. It's time they were operating within a system that worked with, not against them.

THE CONVERSATION LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM

Fiona Atherton

Headteacher,
Wrekin View
Primary School
and Nursery

THINKING FAST AND SLOW

We've reached the midpoint of the academic year, and with this comes an opportunity to reflect on our plans for the year, how far we've come and what still needs to be done.

It's in this context that I read Kat Howard's latest blog this week. It all really resonated with me, but particularly the section about the pursuit of continual school improvement.

As a school leader, it can sometimes feel as if you are not moving forward if you aren't striving for change and making continuous small steps of improvement. The reality is we can easily become surrounded by so much 'noise'.

The day-to-day minutiae of our jobs are of course important, but they can take up so much room that there is not often enough space and time left for deep strategic thinking.

Here, Howard explores how cognitive biases can impact our decision-making. Her analysis is based on Daniel Kahneman's popular book, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, in which he distinguishes two distinctive modes of thinking: the intuitive and automatic, and the deliberate and analytical.

The realities of school leadership encourage the first. But making the quick and 'easy' decisions can become so automatic that when it is time to do the deeper thinking, we struggle to slow down and allow ourselves

the time we really need.

Howard also mentions the danger of other common cognitive biases playing into this fast-thinking reality. Among those, one that really spoke to me was the 'availability heuristic', which is overestimating the prevalence of issues based on memorable examples.

We all have that one example to draw upon when describing how terrible something in our job is. Sometimes, that example harks right back to our initial training. And yet it still provides us with a shortcut for decision-making. But rightly or wrongly?

The key to Howard's piece is that to enable the success of our long-term plans, we need to engage the deliberate and analytical system.

It's great advice. But will all the changes coming down the track really help us to do that?

FROM INADEQUATE TO WORSE

And on the subject of those changes, the latest episode of the NAHT's school leadership podcast discusses Ofsted's proposals for its new framework and the future of school inspection. General secretary Paul Whiteman and assistant general secretary James Bowen are in conversation, and share their union members' widespread skepticism about the content of the consultation.

Ofsted's stated aim is to provide a more nuanced five-step rating scale across eight core areas, many of which will be familiar, but with the addition of a new judgment category for inclusion. This shift is designed to provide a more comprehensive evaluation



School inspection toolkit

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of schools, moving away from the current labels to detailed assessments that better reflect each school's unique strengths and areas for improvement.

But while the ambition may be widely shared, so is the dismay at Ofsted's suggested means of achieving it. NAHT members (and the digital staffroom more broadly) are very unhappy. "Very, very angry," in fact.

It would have been thought impossible for Ofsted to make things worse for itself a year ago. Now, NAHT members "feel betrayed, and I don't get the sense that either the government or Ofsted quite realise the depth of mistake they've made here".

The Headteachers' Roundtable joined the fray, with a warning in these pages that this new framework "could annihilate not just the current generation of school leaders but the next one too".

Perhaps Ofsted should have engaged their deliberate and analytical systems.

SUNDAY-NIGHT SCARIES

And on an unrelated note, my social media feed was alive with comments on a post about teachers' 'Sunday-night scares'. Cue: dozens of stories about early retirement, burnout and other sundry departures from the classroom.

I won't use this column to signpost those, but if that's you this weekend, you could do worse than to listen to this new episode on the US podcast, *The Principal's Handbook* – precisely on conquering that sinking Sunday feeling.

At least Ofsted will only call on Mondays now.

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The Knowledge

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



How are leaders navigating the AI revolution?

**Claire Archibald, Legal director,
Browne Jacobson**

As someone who closely follows educational technology trends, it has been exciting to see schools taking tentative first steps towards adopting artificial intelligence in the classroom.

In a sector facing its fair share of challenges, opinion may be split on whether the introduction of AI will help solve these or create more issues for teachers and leaders.

Browne Jacobson's latest School Leaders Survey paints a picture of cautious embrace, with respondents identifying many existing and future AI use cases, while grappling with significant implementation hurdles.

The survey captured the views of more than 200 leaders – including CEOs, executive headteachers, trustees and governors – representing about 1,650 schools.

How schools are using AI

The headline figure that jumps out is that half of school leaders surveyed are now using dedicated AI tools, with 20 per cent doing so regularly.

Considering how new many of these tools are – those cited include ChatGPT, Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, Claude and TeachMateAI – this suggests a willingness to get to grips with new technology.

Two in five (41 per cent) report positive experiences, with only 5 per cent providing negative feedback.

What I find particularly interesting is how schools are using AI. The focus appears to be primarily practical: creating and enhancing resources, managing workload and summarising content were the most popular capabilities, each used by at least one-third of respondents.

This suggests AI is being embraced first as an administrative aid rather than a direct teaching tool. However, there's also evidence of more innovative applications, with 19 per cent using AI for personalised learning and 34 per cent of leaders seeing potential in using AI to support students with SEND.

Challenges with AI adoption

But beneath this surface-level adoption there are deeper challenges. The most striking is the



expertise gap; 75 per cent of leaders feel their organisations lack sufficient AI knowledge.

This means schools are adopting powerful tools without fully understanding their implications.

The concerns raised by school leaders are particularly telling. Malpractice and plagiarism tops the list (cited by 65 per cent of respondents), followed by training needs (62 per cent) and quality control (58 per cent).

These worries reflect the unique challenges of implementing AI in educational settings, where maintaining academic integrity and ensuring fair assessment are paramount.

Developing an AI strategy is integral

What I find most concerning is the AI governance gap. Only 9 per cent of schools have an agreed AI strategy (though 31 per cent are developing one). This suggests many schools are adopting AI tools in an ad hoc manner rather than as part of a considered, strategic approach.

Given the Department for Education's strengthened requirements for safe AI usage, this governance gap needs urgent attention.

However, I'm encouraged by the fact almost half (47 per cent) of leaders are confident these challenges can be managed with appropriate mitigation.

This suggests a pragmatic rather than a fearful approach to AI adoption. The focus on specific use cases – from resource creation to SEND support – indicates schools are thinking carefully about where AI can add value.

Next steps for schools

It's clear that AI in education isn't just about keeping up with technology; it's about understanding and navigating the complexities of implementing new tools in school environments.

The challenge now is to bridge the expertise gap while developing robust governance frameworks that allow schools to harness AI's benefits while managing its risks.

Schools must also be aware that government bodies such as the DfE, Ofsted, the Information Commissioner's Office and Joint Council for Qualifications increasingly expect them to be engaging with these risks and properly considering compliance in order to use AI safely and effectively.

Without effective governance, schools are likely to lack the evidence of that risk and compliance work.

It's also important when signing up for AI tools such as ChatGPT to consider procuring commercial licences rather than merely signing up with work or personal email addresses, which offer inappropriate terms and conditions.

The education sector stands at a crucial juncture. With proper support, training and governance, AI could help reduce teacher workload, personalise learning and improve educational outcomes.

But getting there requires careful navigation of the challenges identified in this survey.

Week in

Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

SUNDAY

The government spent the weekend engaging in one of its favourite activities: re-announcing its breakfast clubs early adopter scheme.

The scheme was announced in September, and again in November, and again in January.

But just to make sure, the DfE proclaimed on Sunday: "Families and children in every corner of England will soon benefit from free, daily breakfast clubs as the government confirms the first 750 schools to offer the scheme, putting up to £450 a year back in parents' pockets."

Except there was a problem. The DfE hadn't confirmed anything. It took it a full 24 hours to publish the list of schools, for reasons escaping our grasp. We can only assume someone didn't have their Weetabix (boom tish).

Still, who doesn't love a nice re-announcement. Worryingly, *The Guardian* reports that Labour MPs fear the extra coverage is to butter them up so the government can keep the controversial two-child benefit cap. Education as political football? Surely not!

MONDAY

Tory MPs are few and far between since the party's election drubbing, so it was perhaps unsurprising so few turned up to a debate about breakfast clubs.

The lack of dissenting voices resulted in a gigantic Labour love-in.

MP after MP stood up to grovel and thank education secretary Bridget Phillipson for her generosity in giving a school or two in their constituencies money for breakfast clubs.

"I thank her for the investment...would she like to visit?...will she say a little more about the opportunity that will be



unlocked for parents as a result of today's announcement?..."

It was left to shadow minister Neil O'Brien, who seems to be doing about a third of the opposition's job on his own, to actually scrutinise the policy. But he did so with only a couple of colleagues for back-up.

We hope Labour's landslide election win does not cause the party to rest on its laurels.

TUESDAY

With schools closing and the government keen to see vacant sites put to use, it's amazing the ideas the experts at DfE property company LocatED can come up with.

During a presentation to a Westminster Education Forum webinar this week, the organisation revealed that one un-named former school site in Manchester is being "used for storage, community sports and police dog training", although we suspect not all at the same time.

This is an example of what the company calls "meanwhile uses", which are an "important part of our asset management strategy, ensuring vacant sites owned by the DfE continue to provide value to the public purse as well as to local communities while longer-term plans are developed.

"These arrangements are typically time-limited and subject to regular review as we progress our long-term plans for each site." The company says it has saved the taxpayer "over £25 million on managed assets".

But not all vacant school sites have gone to the dogs.

Other "meanwhile uses" have included film shoots, repurposing schools into offices and housing for live-in property "guardians".

The SEND crisis was debated again this week, but matters soon descended to political bickering.

Gloucester's Labour MP Alex McIntyre said the last government "failed to invest, failed to plan and failed an entire generation of our children and their parents".

And Derby South MP Baggy Shanker said SEND was a "particularly shocking example of the real consequences for families and individuals who are lost in a system that has been mismanaged, neglected and starved of funding".

Conservative spokesperson Gregory Stafford wasn't best pleased.

"Despite a relatively collegiate debate, a number of members...have seen fit to blame the Conservative record and point out Conservative councils' record in this area."

He pointed out that "of the three councils with the highest appeal rates for EHCPs, however, two are Liberal Democrat and one is Labour, so I gently say to government members that this is a nationwide problem".

He's right that it's a nationwide problem. But one that got a hell of a lot worse during his party's 14 years in power...



Deputy Chief Executive Officer (DCEO)



ACET is multi-academy trust with over 5,500 students/pupils on roll across twelve academies in primary and secondary phases. The vast majority of ACET academies are located in communities with a high level of deprivation across Rotherham, Sheffield and Derbyshire; all but two academies have a higher than national average rate of children in receipt of free school meals.

We are looking for an inspirational and talented leader, who will work closely with the CEO to continue our journey to excellence, embracing our vision and values.

We are looking for applicants who have:

- The ability to lead and inspire others and the bring people along with you
- Values aligned to those of ACET
- A track record of improving attainment
- A clear understanding of the current education landscape
- Ability to communicate well with staff, parents/carers, students/pupils and external partners

The successful candidate will work with a committed CEO, Trust board, an experience central Trust team, skilled Principals and leaders and high performing educators.

If you are confident that you have the skills, drive and vision to support the CEO in achieving our vision, we sincerely hope that you will apply for this post.

[Click here to apply](#)



Killigrew Primary & Nursery School

Job title: Headteacher
Location: St Albans
Start date: September 2025
Salary: L15 – L24 Fringe
(£71,665 - £89,033)
Full time

Closing date:
Friday 21st March 2025 at 9am
Shortlisting date:
Thursday 27th March 2025
Interview date:
Thursday 3rd April 2025

Job details

At Killigrew Primary and Nursery School in St. Albans, we nurture bright futures with an inclusive, forward-thinking approach to learning. Our well-resourced environment supports both pupils and staff to thrive.

Joining us means leading a school that values diversity, embraces technology, and continuously enhances its curriculum. Our engaged parent community and thriving PTA foster collaboration, while extra-curricular activities enrich every child's experience. We prioritise cultural capital, preparing pupils for academic and personal success.

As our new headteacher, you'll bring vision and innovation, driving the school forward. You'll foster collaboration, embrace technology, and tackle challenges with tenacity. A commitment to mental health, well-being, and strong communication is essential.

In return, we offer:

- A stable team and eager learners.
- Supportive parents and financial stability.
- Flexible working and freedom to innovate.
- A collaborative, inclusive environment where you can make a real impact.

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Headteacher

Location: Stevenage, Hertfordshire

Pay range: L28 – L39 (£96,673 - £126,517)

Start date: September 2025

Closing date: 10th March 2025 @ 9am

The Nobel School in Stevenage is seeking an inspirational Headteacher to lead our vibrant, inclusive secondary school and sixth form. We pride ourselves on fostering academic excellence, personal growth, and a strong sense of community. Our values of inclusivity, ambition, and belonging shape a supportive environment where both students and staff can thrive.

We are looking for an experienced, visionary leader who embodies these values, inspires ambition, and promotes well-being. The successful candidate will collaborate with staff, students, and Governors to build on our successes and shape the school's future.

In return, we offer a dynamic, supportive community, modern facilities, flexible working opportunities, professional development, and a competitive salary.

To arrange a visit to the school, contact Suzanne Crow at suzanne.crow@nobel.herts.sch.uk. Apply via Teach in Herts.

We welcome joint Co-Headship applications and are committed to safeguarding and diversity.

[Click to apply](#)



Principal, Ipswich Academy

Leadership Pay Scale

L25 - L31 £89,830 - £104,040 per annum.

Paradigm Trust is looking to appoint a principal into the team at Ipswich Academy. You'll be joining a Trust that is committed to developing and sustaining great schools to make the biggest difference for pupils. It's a place where we work together, helping each other to make sure every child can reach their potential.

The school has an unrelenting focus on supporting and challenging pupils to achieve academic success, while also enjoying a broad and balanced curriculum.

This is a great opportunity for a highly motivated, ambitious professional who wants to make an impact. Leaders at Paradigm Trust are committed to changing children's lives through continuing growth and commitment to excellence and the successful candidate will therefore have the inspiration and drive to ensure Ipswich Academy provides an excellent education to its pupils.



[Click to apply >](#)

HEADTEACHER

An exciting opportunity for an exceptional leader to make a real difference in the lives of our pupils, their families, our staff and the wider community at Strathmore School. Strathmore is a happy, thriving, oversubscribed, unique and growing special academy for children and young people aged 4 -19 with severe and complex learning difficulties including those with an additional diagnosis of autism and/or physical/sensory disabilities. Uniquely, pupils attend one of four campuses, each co-located with inclusive minded mainstream schools.

Strathmore is part of The Auriga Academy Trust, a small special school Trust based in Richmond Upon Thames. Our small size means that our three schools collaborate very closely, knowing that together we can offer more to our pupils. We are committed to creating an inclusive environment where every pupil, staff member, and stakeholder is valued, respected, and empowered to thrive. We actively promote equality, celebrate diversity, and challenge all forms of discrimination and inequality. Headteachers will be role models for inclusive leadership, fostering a culture where difference is embraced, barriers to learning and participation are removed, and everyone has the opportunity to succeed.

We are committed to encouraging further growth from diverse groups and we welcome applications from currently underrepresented groups.

We currently have an underrepresentation from the global majority at leadership.

Leading a school is always a challenge and Strathmore's unique circumstances means leading here requires someone with a particular set of skills. We need someone who is passionate about working in a special school, someone committed to developing their staff as well as themselves.

By joining the Auriga Academy Trust and providing inspiring leadership to Strathmore School, you will benefit from a committed, mutually supportive team, both within your school and across the Trust, sharing best practice, resources and benefitting from economies of scale.

Strathmore School is committed to the safeguarding and welfare of its pupils and expects all staff to share this commitment. All applicants are subject to an Enhanced Disclosure Check from the Disclosure and Barring Service and an online check by the Trust.

[Click here for more information](#)



CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

INSPIRATION EXCELLENCE PARTNERSHIP



Extol Trust is seeking an outstanding CEO to deliver our mission to provide stand-out education for every child.

At the heart of our vision for education is a self-improving school-led system which has the best evidence-led practice and in which every child thrives and achieves through the opportunities provided.

We are seeking an outstanding CEO with a strong belief in, and commitment to, the Trust's vision and values, who is able to demonstrate them daily throughout every aspect of the role and refresh and re-articulate them as the Trust evolves and grows.

About You:

As CEO, the successful candidate will work closely with the Board and wider long-standing Trust leadership to develop, renew and implement our Trust strategy, including future growth. You will be able to function at both a local and national level as an excellent ambassador for Extol through our engagement with a wide range of partners, and with our school communities.

Able to inspire and motivate others, even when things are tough, you will embody a visible and immersive leadership style, with intimate knowledge of the Trust's schools and operations and be an active presence throughout the school year.

You will value and support rigour, efficiency and ongoing development of finance, IT, estates and other operational services, and will be constantly looking for opportunities for innovation and improvement.

In line with our Trust ethos and values, you will have the capacity to invigorate and empower our talented Trust community of staff and stakeholders through devolved networking, ensuring inclusive decision-making across the Trust.

We can offer you:

- A supportive and collaborative culture with staff, Trustees and the CEO working closely together, with wellbeing and personal growth engrained in our culture.
- A highly focused professional workforce with a relentless drive for improved educational outcomes.
- A financially robust Trust with a proven track record of strong management from a highly regarded Trust Central Team.
- Significant investment in professional infrastructure to ensure the Trust is an employer of choice.
- Opportunities for professional development and growth within a dynamic and expanding Trust.
- A culture of rigorous governance and evidence-based practices driving continuous improvement.

If you have a proven track record in education leadership, a commitment to demonstrating the highest standards in all areas of professional life and share our belief in the power of education and learning to transform children's life chances and choices, then we would love to hear from you.

Contact us

For further information about our opportunity, please visit our dedicated recruitment microsite – www.nyresourcing.co.uk/extol-trust-chief-executive-officer

For an informal, confidential conversation about the role please call Helen Poole on **01609 532254** or email Helen.Poole@northyorks.gov.uk

Alternatively contact Leanne Auton on **07815 028 548** or email Leanne.Auton@northyorks.gov.uk

Helen and Leanne have been engaged to support us with recruitment to this exciting opportunity.