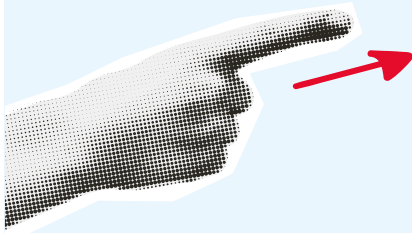




SCHOOLS, THE LAW, AND TEACHER HARASSMENT



Page 30

TRUST MAKES ITS SCHOOLS SHAREHOLDERS



Page 16

HOW TO SOLVE THE EHCP CRISIS



Pages 26-27

THE GROWING CEO PAY PREMIUM



Page 12

Leaders turning away SEND kids 'need calling out'



Interview with ASCL's general secretary Pepe Di'Iasio | Page 16

'DANGEROUS AND DEVASTATING': SCHOOLS HIT BY £82M BUDGET RAID

- Councils slice record amount to cover high needs deficits
- 'Shocking' cuts, as £30m taken without school approval
- Comes as schools find out funding less than expected

ROSA FURNEAUX | @ROSAFURNEAUX

EXCLUSIVE | Pages 5-6

SCHOOLS
WEEK

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We live in uncertain times, and we know school funding remains a matter of high anxiety for school leaders. So, it is concerning to hear that, as they opened funding letters this week, some have found they will receive a paltry increase next year, or potentially even a drop in per-pupil funding.

It has become clear that schools will have very little left over to improve provision once they have covered the ongoing costs of last year's pay rises and the upcoming impact of next year's pay deal, whatever it ends up being.

And, with the Institute for Fiscal Studies predicting that schools' costs will rise by over 3 per cent, it's very clear rises of 0.5 per cent – or even cuts for those schools where councils are siphoning off funding to shore up high needs – aren't going to cut it (see pages 4 to 6).

Today and tomorrow, we should at the least get more information about the government's planned reforms as senior figures descend upon the Association of School and College Leadership

conference.

As the education committee makes clear this week (page 10 and 11), resolving the SEND crisis is the "most significant challenge facing the education sector".

Rightly, one of the key solutions is righting the system so that mainstream schools are more inclusive. But schools cannot do this on the current funding package. And SEND isn't the only cost pressure.

Labour has pledged to recruit 6,500 new teachers. It was a key manifesto pledge. But this week experts said teacher pay rises next year need to be above 3 per cent, which is more than the 2.8 per cent currently proposed (see page 18).

For 2026, experts said the government's spending review must deliver funding for schools so they can increase teacher pay by at least 6.1 per cent.

As always, funding (or the lack of it) will be a key sticking point on reforms – and on what schools can realistically be expected to deliver.

Most read online this week:



- 1** [Sir Hamid Patel appointed interim Ofsted chair](#)
- 2** [Academy trust walks away from merger with struggling chain](#)
- 3** [SEND provision is the last bastion of unevidenced practice](#)
- 4** [DfE won't fully fund unexpected post-16 pupils](#)
- 5** [First rise in teachers' pension contributions since 2015 to go ahead](#)

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One day, my child, this will all be yours....

UNITED LEARNING SHARE CERTIFICATE

Stan

Biggest MAT makes its schools shareholders, see page 16

NEWS: FUNDING

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Budgets much worse than we thought, say leaders

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

School bosses have spoken of their surprise that their budgets will rise by about 0.5 per cent per pupil next year, with some saying they will lose money.

Academy trusts have begun to receive letters setting out their final funding allocations for the next financial year, which begins in April.

Schools Week spoke to multiple leaders who said their allocations were much lower than they expected, and would not cover anticipated cost rises of 3.6 per cent.

Various grants from last year to help schools afford pay rises have now been rolled into the national funding formula's baseline.

The government allocated £1.3 billion in extra mainstream funding for 2025-26 at the autumn budget.

But although this works out as a 2.2 per cent increase in school funding, about 1.3 per cent of that will have to fund pay rises awarded last year that fall between April and August of this year.

This leaves leeway of about 0.9 per cent nationally, but some schools will get even less. In comparison, the Institute for Fiscal Studies predicts cost increases of 3.6 per cent.

Julia Harnden, the ASCL's funding specialist, said the union was "extremely concerned" that the funding was not enough for most schools to meet "the reality of rising costs".

"The additional funding to support last year's teacher pay award was welcome and necessary, and it is logical that it has been baked into school funding allocations.

"However, the amount of new money available for many schools is simply not enough to cover cost pressures over the next year."

She said that as budget allocations were confirmed, school leaders were left with no choice but to make cuts. In many cases, this was on top of cuts that they had already had to make in previous years.

Benedicte Yue, the chief financial officer of the River Learning Trust, said the headline increase in school funding was misleading as it did not represent additional money "but the delivery of



existing commitments".

She said per-pupil funding was rising 0.5 per cent on average across her trust.

"There is therefore a growing disconnect between income and expenditure and, without additional funding, many trusts are projecting deficits in 2025-26."

"We very much welcome the ambition of this government to break down barriers to opportunity, to support teachers' recruitment, to have an inclusive approach to SEND, to tackle child poverty, offer wider curriculum and enrichment opportunities.... but this is going to be hard with this level of investment."

Paul Edmond, the chief financial officer at HEART Academies Trust, said its per-pupil funding was "actually reducing for next year when compared with 2024-25, on a like-for-like basis".

The rolling-in of the pay and pension grants into the national funding formula left it with an uplift of just 0.5 per cent.

But its local authority, Bedford, has been granted permission to transfer 0.9 per cent of its core schools funding, £1.6 million, to its high-needs budget to

deal with crippling SEND costs. This leaves the trust facing a 0.3 per cent reduction in per-pupil funding.

"A 0.5 per cent uplift would have been difficult enough to manage when we already know salary inflation next year will be closer to 3 per cent, particularly as we have spent the best part of a decade finding efficiencies and savings.

"Achieving a balanced budget with a 0.3 per cent reduction in funding whilst maintaining high expectations for pupil progress, student attainment, high-quality SEND provision, pupil and staff retention and wellbeing, safe and secure buildings, etc, puts us in an almost impossible situation."

Multiple other trusts said they believed their schools would also receive a 0.5 per cent uplift. This is understood to be the case for some very large trusts and for those with only a few schools.

A source of further uncertainty is the government's recommendation of a 2.8 per cent pay rise for teachers from September. If the School Teachers' Review Body recommends a higher amount and it is accepted, schools will be stretched further.

The Department for Education was approached for comment.



Julia Harnden

INVESTIGATION: SEND

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Councils seize £82m from schools to cover high needs deficits

ROSA FURNEAUX

@ROSAFURNEAUX

EXCLUSIVE

Councils have been given ministerial approval to seize more than £82 million funding from their mainstream schools to prop up widening SEND deficits.

The approval is thought to be for the highest amount ever and comes despite many leaders refusing to back the raid.

Schools in one area, South Gloucestershire, said it left them contemplating “potentially shocking” cuts – such as breaching class sizes and appointing apprentices, instead of qualified teachers.

Hillingdon schools said planned cuts would have amounted to £50,000 each – the equivalent of employing a teacher.

Meanwhile in Essex, a leader said the “devastating” raid would result in inclusion jobs and strategies being cut.

“It is a textbook case of robbing Peter to pay Paul – and everybody loses out,” said Pepe Di’Iasio, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders.

“The government must write off local authority high needs deficits, otherwise we’ll never get out of this cycle. Beyond that, urgent reform is needed to create a more sustainable system.”

Councils must get approval from the Department for Education if they want to transfer more than 0.5 per cent from their core schools budget to their high-needs block, or up to 0.5 per cent without schools forum approval.

Freedom of information data shows 23 councils requested to “top-slice” funding for 2024-25. Just two were refused – despite nearly half being opposed by school forums.

Last year, 23 councils were given approval to slice £67 million. In 2020-21, just three councils were granted no more than £17 million.

Reducing private SEND school reliance

Kent County Council was given the green light to slice £16.5 million, the most by any council.

Norfolk was allowed to plunder the highest percentage of its core schools budget at nearly 1.5 per cent, totalling £9.7 million.

The government estimates that councils will have high needs deficits totalling nearly £5 billion by 2026.

Currently an accounting override allows the



deficits to sit off balance sheets, but this is due to end next year, with more than half of councils warning of insolvency.

Many councils said the cash would be used to fund early intervention work, documents show.

Devon council said funding early intervention would “reduce escalation to high-cost statutory processes” of pupils obtaining education, health and care plans (EHCPs). The council will slice 0.5 per cent from its schools’ budgets, totalling nearly £3 million.

Barnsley, Cambridgeshire, Hillingdon and Merton all argued that the funding would help set up new state SEND provision and reduce their expenditure on costly private schools.

Cambridgeshire said its “dependency” on private provision led to “unsustainable pressures”.

Hillingdon will use the cash to provide “exceptional funding” to “highly inclusive” schools with above-average levels of EHCPs.

Safety valve failure

Fifteen of the 23 councils that requested fund transfers are part of the government’s safety valve scheme – where those with the largest deficits get bailouts in exchange for severe cost-cutting.

But some councils said they had no choice but to raid school budgets further as bailouts were not enough.

Cambridgeshire council told the government “all savings that can be practically achieved” had been made, but they were “still see[ing] demand increasing above funding”.

North Tyneside council said it would not

“deliver” on its cost-cutting forecast under its safety valve deal unless it top-sliced 0.5 per cent from its mainstream schools.

In some cases, multi-year transfers were agreed as part of councils’ safety valve agreements.

Bracknell Forest has a five-year plan to top slice its schools. The council’s high needs deficit is currently £18 million, equivalent to 70 per cent of its year high needs income.

That deficit was projected to increase to £47 million in five years – more than 150 per cent of income.

Kent’s agreement to move 1.2 per cent will run until 2028, “or until such time that we achieve an in-year break-even position”. The council’s deficit for next year is £81 million.

Essex, one of five councils not on a government SEND spending intervention scheme, will top-slice 1 per cent – £12.5 million – from its mainstream schools.

Leaders were warned at a schools forum to “think carefully” about the decision to “protect ourselves as schools ... to ensure we maintain control rather than being forced into what we should do [by falling into government intervention]”.

“There are some schools with no balances at all, but within the current funding structure there is nothing anyone can do about this,” the forum heard.

But Rob Williams, senior policy advisor at school leaders’ union NAHT, said “core school budgets are already under considerable pressure, and moving money around in this way is simply not sustainable”.

Top-slice more, DfE tells councils

Nonetheless, the Department for Education has asked safety valve councils to cut more.

Officials questioned North Somerset council’s decision to transfer “only” 0.5 per cent in 2023-24. The council ended up agreeing to 1 per cent.

And officials “suggested” that South Gloucestershire increase its transfer this year from £2.2 million to £2.6 million. The council’s schools forum agreed only to the lower amount.

Last year, Schools Week revealed that councils had been given government approval to circumvent laws requiring minimum funding levels in schools so they could divert cash.

The DfE has allowed Kent to reduce its

INVESTIGATION: SEND

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minimum per-pupil funding again, by 0.9 per cent for the upcoming year. In Bournemouth, the government agreed to reducing the minimum limit by 1 per cent. North Tyneside is also now breaking minimum funding levels.

Caroline Derbyshire, CEO of Saffron Academy Trust in Essex, which is top-slicing 1 per cent, said wider transfers could put “a number of schools and trusts into a place where they are no longer going concerns next year. It’s that serious.”

Transfers ‘punishing everyone’

Nearly £30 million of funding was taken from budgets without schools forum approval.

In North Tyneside, 89 per cent of survey respondents did not support the council’s 0.5 per cent transfer. Some schools said the impact on their own finances would plunge them into deficit.

Hillingdon council first proposed transferring 2.5 per cent of its mainstream schools budget.

Over 90 per cent of respondents were against the plan, which amounted to roughly £50,000 per school – or the cost of one teacher.

Hillingdon submitted a request for a more modest 1.9 per cent transfer, but this was refused by the government. Instead, it agreed to a 0.5 per cent transfer of £1.5 million.

The council also discussed with the government whether it could minimise its top-slice by taking £11 million of “surplus” cash held by its schools. However, the process would have “taken too long”.

In Surrey, schools forum minutes noted that some felt the transfer was “punishing everyone”. But a low consultation response rate “might reflect a sense of inevitability about the proposal”, the minutes added.

But in Norfolk, the chair of the council’s schools forum, Martin White, said its transfer “runs counter to the logic of mainstream inclusion”.

Schools told the forum in November that resulting staff cuts meant they “could no longer meet EHCP requirements”.

‘Inclusion strategies will be cut’

South Gloucestershire’s schools forum agreed to transfer £2.2 million, but pleaded with the education secretary to recognise the financial challenges it faced.

The council ranks last in the country for mainstream school funding and said in its application that schools were “hanging on by a thread”.

The councils seizing millions for SEND

LA	Requested Cash	Requested percentage	Ministerial Approval	Schools Forum approval
Hillingdon	£5.7m	1.90%	Partial approval of 0.5%	No
Norfolk	£9.7m	1.43%	Yes	Yes
Cambridgeshire	£6.3m	1.25%	Partial approval of 1%	No*
Kent	£16.5m	1.20%	Yes	Yes
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	£2.9m	1.00%	No	No
Essex	£12.5m	1.00%	Yes	Yes
Barnsley	£2m	1.00%	Yes	Yes
Hammersmith & Fulham	£1.2m	1.00%	Yes	Yes
Kirklees	£3.6m	1.00%	Yes	Yes
North Somerset	£1.7m	1.00%	Yes	Yes
South Gloucestershire	£2.2m	1.00%	Yes	Yes
Surrey	£9m	1.00%	Yes	No
Bedford Borough	£1.6m	0.91%	Yes	Yes
Bracknell Forest	£900,000	0.85%	Yes	Yes
Merton	£1.3m	0.80%	Yes	Yes
Cheshire East	£2.1m	0.70%	Yes	No
Haringey	£1.3m	0.55%	Yes	Yes
Leicestershire	£2.6m	0.50%	Yes	No
North Yorkshire	£2.3m	0.50%	No	No
Staffordshire	£3.3m	0.50%	Yes	No
Trafford	£1Mm	0.50%	Yes	No
Devon	£2.8m	0.50%	Yes	No
North Tyneside	£766,000	0.50%	Yes	No

*Cambridgeshire has decided to only proceed with a 0.5% transfer as agreed by their Schools Forum.
Source: Freedom of information data from the Department for Education

SCHOOLS WEEK

“The things they are having to do to balance budgets are potentially shocking,” it said. This includes increasing class sizes above 30, recruiting apprentices instead of qualified teachers and turning off heating, “leaving children and staff cold”.

“There is nothing left to cut,” the submission said, “except the things children and staff need to learn and teach in a safe environment.”

Simon Botten, an executive headteacher in South Gloucestershire, said top-slicing cost schools on average £16,000.

Further cuts would “at best jeopardise academic progress, and at worst be dangerous”.

An Essex leader told their schools forum meeting they had to “cull a third of my support staff” last time round.

“The various strategies like inclusion that we have to operate in schools, they are strategies that will be cut,” they added. “The impact on secondary schools will be devastating and that will be passed on to our children in schools.”

‘Bold and brave action’ needed

John Winter, CEO of Weydon MAT in Surrey,

said mainstream schools “have reached the end of their ability to cope with any further cuts”.

The government is working on major SEND reforms. The DfE did not respond to a request for comment.

But Williams said deficits must be written off, so councils have a “clean slate” to enact change.

Top slice councils said they were looking to find the “fairest” solution to a “very challenging financial situation”. Many said it was a temporary solution, and called on government for “urgent reforms”.

A County Councils Network spokesperson added the “financially unsustainable” SEND system meant some have no choice but to ask for transfers.

Arooj Shah, chair of the Local Government Association’s children and young people board, said that “bold and brave action” is needed in the upcoming spending review to

ensure councils have the required financial stability to provide SEND support.



Arooj Shah

ANALYSIS: POLICY

Revealed: The forgotten schools policies

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

A “well overdue” update on school fire safety advice proposed in the wake of the Grenfell Tower disaster is one of seven forgotten policies, a Schools Week investigation has found.

Campaigners also fear consultations on the regulation of unregistered alternative provision and on new guidance on home education, both of which had fairly broad support, have fallen by the wayside.

It comes as the Labour government embarks on major new reforms, including on Ofsted, the curriculum and SEND. But Schools Week analysis of consultations conducted over the past five years found seven with a response overdue.

Departments are supposed to publish consultation responses within 12 weeks. However, a 2021 consultation on ‘Building Bulletin 100’ guidance, which governs fire safety design in schools, is still awaiting a response. The latest version was published in 2007.

That consultation followed a call for evidence on the guidance in 2019, commissioned in the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy.

Tim Warneford, a school buildings and funding expert, warned that an update was “well overdue”, but guidance around fire safety “is a very sticky subject that no body, party or agency is particularly willing to stick their heads above the parapet for”.

Fire compliance was a “difficult issue to define for schools”, he added.

For example, insurance policies can insist on different levels of protection – those that prevent the spread of fire, or those that also detect and extinguish fire.

“The enormous risk that stems from the above confusion is that too many schools undertake their own in-house fire risk assessments via some template they have downloaded as a means of saving money,” Warneford said.

“They thus run the considerable risk of thinking of themselves as compliant.”

A government response is also outstanding for a consultation launched last May which set out plans to clamp down on unregistered alternative provision.

The proposals would have time-limited the use of unregistered



AP, require settings to comply with national standards and have councils maintain lists of “approved” provision for schools to use.

Kiran Gill, founder and CEO of AP charity The Difference, said the original consultation was “itself long overdue”.

“Currently far too many vulnerable children are placed with providers that operate without adequate oversight... far too many are unsafe environments where staff are not required to undergo criminal record checks, and where the quality of education is not routinely evaluated.

“The department need to respond urgently to show they are taking this critical safeguarding issue seriously. Our children deserve better.”

Another response well overdue relates to a consultation launched in October 2023 on draft new elective home education guidance. It proposed voluntary registers of children in home education and information-sharing agreements with GPs and police.

Many of these proposals have been superseded by the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which proposes compulsory registers, checks on the suitability of the home learning environment and a council veto for some pupils.

But the proposed guidance also aimed to “promote a more positive relationship between local authorities and home educators”, a message that Wendy Charles-Warner, from Education Otherwise, fears has been lost under the new government.

Of the remaining four overdue consultations, one relates to a proposed

update to GCSE computer science content, which ran last summer.

Another proposing the removal of an expectation that students engage with unfamiliar and abstract material in language GCSEs ran in 2022.

The other two relate to the last government’s proposed update to relationships, sex and health education guidance and its new guidance on how schools should support gender-questioning children. Both were controversial and the new government has said both are being reviewed.

The DfE said it had no further update on overdue responses. As policies were launched under the previous government, they are being reviewed.

Jonathan Simons, partner at Public First and a former Downing Street education adviser, pointed out that consultations “aren’t free to do”.

“Even a small team of officials working on writing the document, sorting and reading all the responses, coming to conclusions and sending those up to ministers for a view takes time – often weeks or months,” he said.

“And of course, on the other side, policy teams in charities and companies, and educationalists and

MATs and others spend time writing replies to the questions that government is asking.”

He said it was “fine for priorities to shift – especially when governments change colour – but to just leave consultations hanging is verging on rude”.



Kiran Gill



Jonathan Simons

NEWS: OFSTED

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Ofsted to check SENCos have 'sufficient authority'

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

Ofsted will check whether special educational needs coordinators have "appropriate training" and "sufficient authority" within school leadership teams under proposed new inspections.

In a submission to the education committee's SEND inquiry, the inspectorate said schools are "find[ing] it difficult to recruit teachers, learning support assistants and therapists with the specific knowledge and expertise to support learners with SEND".

It added: "Ensuring all schools have a SENCo in place, with appropriate training, could make a significant difference for many children and learners.

"We will propose to consider whether schools have met this requirement in our 'inclusion' toolkit."

Ofsted has further details on this in the "supporting pupils with SEND" section of the toolkit for its proposed new inclusion grade.

To achieve 'secure' in the new five-point scale, the toolkit states "there is a qualified special educational needs coordinator with sufficient



Sir Martyn Oliver

authority within the leadership structure to make a positive difference for pupils with SEND".

Ofsted said the leadership reference does not mean SENCos have to be on leadership teams, just have authority.

The DfE's SEND code of practice says all schools should have a qualified teacher designated as a SENCo, to oversee the provision of support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.

"They will be most effective in that role if they are part of the school leadership team," the code of practice adds.

However, a 2021 report by Nasen and Bath Spa University (BSU) found only a third of secondary SENCos were part of their school's SLT. At primary, the figure was two-thirds.

There were also troubles over accessing training.

The government has introduced a new national professional qualification (NPQ) for SENCos, which is mandatory.

But figures provided by the Association of School and College Leaders last year showed demand for SENCo NPQ places in some parts of the country outstripped places by 600 per cent.

In its submission, Ofsted said the best schools on SEND generally have a "strong commitment" from leaders to make it a priority, have special needs "in mind from the outset" when planning the curriculum and prioritise "teaching fundamental knowledge and skills" such as reading and writing.

Schools "providing less effective support" typically have "low expectations" for pupils with SEND, "frequent withdrawal from lessons to work with a teaching assistant on generic interventions" and staff "avoiding key aspects of the curriculum due to its challenging nature".

Chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver told a conference this week that leadership cannot be of a high standard if "inclusion isn't ingrained in the culture".

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS | @LYDIACHSW

Two more academy chiefs join Ofsted ranks

Two academy trust bosses have been appointed to key positions in Ofsted this week.

Sir Hamid Patel has been appointed interim chair while Mark Vickers is the inspectorate's new "external adviser for inclusion".

Patel, an Ofsted board member since 2019, will serve in the post until a successor is found for Dame Christine Ryan, who announced in November that she would be stepping down after four-and-a-half years.

Patel is chief executive of Star Academies, a multi-academy trust that runs 36 primaries and secondaries in northern England, the West Midlands and London.

Ryan announced her decision to step down as chair months after a damning independent review led by former HMI chief inspector Dame Christine Gilbert broadly criticised Ofsted's response to headteacher Ruth Perry's death.

Gilbert said the watchdog's response had appeared to be "defensive and complacent"

and said it must move away "from the discourse that inspectors are never wrong".

The review also found the Ofsted board "had little or no involvement in determining the strategy for dealing with the crisis and communicating to the media and stakeholders".

The board's role "appears curiously limited, apparently leaving some of Ofsted's most critical activities outside of its control, unless HMCI chooses to let it have some control".

The watchdog accepted Gilbert's recommendation to review its governance framework to "strengthen the role" of the board to help reduce the "entitlement" of the chief inspector.

Meanwhile, Vickers, CEO at Olive Academies which runs five alternative provision (AP) academies, will help Ofsted to implement its inclusion reforms. His trust specialises in helping young people who are "reluctant

learners" and have struggled with traditional teaching methods in mainstream schools.

Ofsted has made inclusion a key criterion in its proposed new report cards, which are currently being consulted on, making it one of nine areas the inspectorate proposes to assess at schools.

Lee Owston, Ofsted's national director for education, said: "As the chair of our external reference group on inclusion, his extensive knowledge and leadership experience of the mainstream and specialist sectors has been invaluable.

"Mark will now be supporting us in implementing our proposed reforms, using his strong links with the school system, and specialist sector in particular, to help make sure we get the changes right for all settings."

He said Vickers would also help Ofsted to continue to improve inspector training, and work as a "key adviser" as it works to "refresh" its strategy around AP.



Sir Hamid Patel



Mark Vickers



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How to solve SEND? 13 sector solutions...

JOHN DICKENS

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The education committee received an “unprecedented” number of responses to its SEND inquiry, it said this week.

Calling on the Department for Education to provide more information about a potential SEND white paper and timescale for anticipated reforms, chair Helen Hayes called it the “most significant challenge” facing schools.

Schools Week has been through the published evidence submissions to pick out some of the sector’s solutions...

1. Incentivise ‘blended’ MATs

Having special schools in trusts was “seen as fostering a more inclusive environment in mainstream schools”, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) said.

This allowed for more tailored timetables for pupils and knowledge-sharing and training sessions for staff.

The NFER said the government should “consider ways to promote and support this ‘blended’ MAT approach, including by emphasising such arrangements in future funding designed to encourage the creation of new MATs and the expansion of existing ones”.

Schools Week analysis last year found that 212 trusts – nearly one in 10 – have at least one special school.

2. Appoint a minister for inclusion

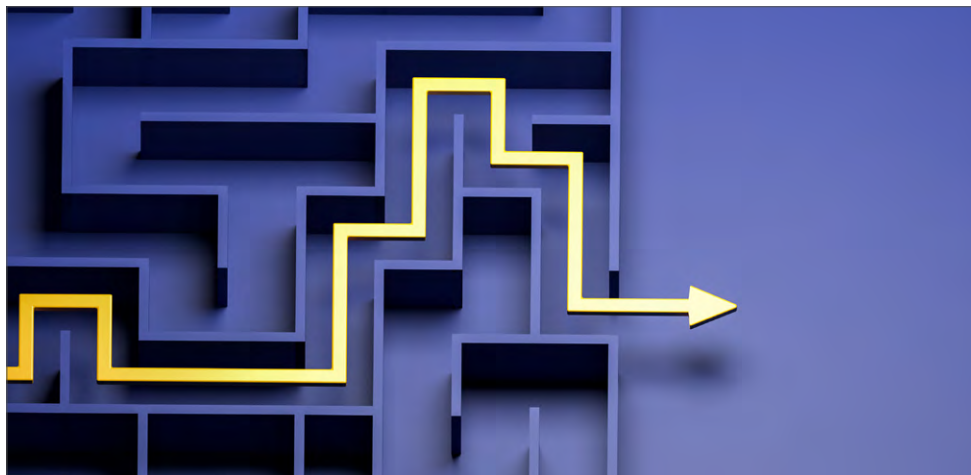
SEND policy “considerations” should be “built into every policy area rather than being treated as a separate issue”, the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) said.

To support “sustained integration”, the government should appoint a “minister for inclusion”. This would “elevate the importance of SEND, disadvantage and other barriers to education and wellbeing within the government structure”.

If not a minister, then “long-term advisory roles are required with status and longevity supporting systemic improvement”.

3. SEND NPQs for all heads

The ASCL also believes all heads should be “required” to complete a SEND national



professional qualification (NPQ). This “recognises that a significant proportion of students will have SEND at some point in their educational journey”.

This could become a “prerequisite” to the NPQ for headship and become an “expectation for effective leadership”.

The NAHT leaders’ union added that the SEND coordinator role has become “huge, varied and significant” and needs a “unified definition” that “encapsulates core expectations”.

Meanwhile, mental health charity Anna Freud said “established” SENCOs should have “guaranteed access to ongoing CPD”, which is “substantial” and ring-fenced. This will ensure they “understand the implications of new and emerging evidence about inclusion”.

4. Ban profit-making SEND schools

A SEND state school capacity crisis has led to cash-strapped councils spending more on costly private provision.

The Local Government Association said profit-making from state-funded education, health and care plan (EHCPs) placements should be “prohibited”, with “standardised regulations and funding”.

Private schools should only be used “strategically for specialist services, rather than as a default solution”, they added.

Surrey council said “consideration should be given” to converting profit-making special schools into maintained settings. “There is no justification for profit-making involvement in settings that are solely funded by the state,” the council added.

However, the Independent Schools Association (ISA) said private schools were a “vital partner in alleviating strain on the state SEND system”. They currently teach 132,000 children with SEND.

They want the government to let councils place children in such schools based on “professional assessments, rather than requiring an EHCP”.

But Norfolk council said a “value for money” equation could be introduced for placements, focusing on Ofsted ratings and the cost of schools.

5. Review progress 8 for contextualised model

The ASCL wants “review and reform” of accountability measures, including “reassessing progress 8” to ensure it does not “penalise schools for being inclusive”.

They highlighted FFT’s contextualised progress 8 measure, calling for a “wider set of indicators for school performance that include both hard and soft data”.

6. Give SEND schools bigger system role

Special schools should be “redefined” to “provide outreach and expertise sharing with mainstream schools”, the LGA said.

This could involve better “local partnerships” between mainstream and high-quality specialist settings, the ASCL added.

“This is not just about ‘transplanting’ what is in the specialist setting to mainstream but building infrastructure to support really effective

Continued on next page



collaboration to contextualise curriculum and pedagogy to the settings appropriately and our learners.”

A new “middle tier” could “facilitate school-to-school collaboration”, such as “regional hubs or networks”.

7. SEND evidence institute

The LGA, along with others, has called for a national framework for SEND standards, and a National Institute of Inclusive Education to oversee best practice. They could also “act as an independent authority on inclusive education”.

ASCL wants a “rigorous SEND review process”. This would involve schools being encouraged to review their inclusion provision using frameworks such as the SEND review process currently being evaluated by the Education Endowment Foundation.

8. Specialist units in falling roll classrooms

Many submissions mentioned issues caused by a lack of capacity. The New Bridge Group, a SEND trust, recommended “utilising capacity in mainstream schools with falling rolls”.

Empty classrooms could be used as “satellite bases for specialist school or resource-based units, both improving inclusion”.

9. £13k top-up funding and metro mayors

Lots of submissions, unsurprisingly, called for more funding. But ASCL’s set out a plan for a new funding system, including increasing top-up funding from £10,000 to £13,000 to recognise the “rising costs of providing specialist support”.

A new high needs distribution formula would also “address historic inequality” across different councils. They and others also called for the government to consider wiping high needs budget deficits to open up “reinvestment in frontline services”.

But the County Councils Network said some councils have already spent “significant amounts of their reserves” reducing deficits, so there would be “significant inequity in this solution”.

Meanwhile, Nexus trust CEO Warren Carratt said the government “should consider regionalising SEND support services, possibly with the metro mayors taking on responsibility, with funding diverted from DSGs to cover costs along with revenue funds”.



Helen Hayes

10. How can we get health buy-in?

Health and social care are supposed to be partners in the EHCP process, but that is not happening.

The ISA said a “national SEND partnership framework requiring LAs, NHS services and independent/state schools to collaborate” could help. They also said all school SEND coordinators should have “direct NHS liaisons to facilitate timely assessments and interventions”.

The NAHT said schools were filling health and social care funding and provision gaps, calling for “strong levers” to ensure other services can be “held to account if they do not fulfil their respective duties”.

Carratt added that a “cross-departmental approach” – including the departments for local government and health – was “essential”.

11. Get support into schools BEFORE EHCP needed ...

The LGA said inclusive practice in mainstream schools could be strengthened with a “core offer” of multidisciplinary support, such as therapists and educational psychologists (EP), accessible without an EHCP.

Norfolk council said that most EP time was spent “servicing EHCP assessment reporting”. A national solution would be to “maximise EP time” with SEND pupils to “meet needs earlier and prevent escalation of need/unnecessary referrals for EHCP”.

“We believe a model based on EP supervision of specialist teachers and other SEND professionals can achieve this,” they added.

12. ... and use ‘reasonable adjustment’ more

There were lots of comments related to EHCPs, which have soared in recent years, with widespread concerns over their quality.

The LGA said a “learner record” for “regular, personalised assessment and planning” could stop “over-reliance on EHCPs”. This would be

backed by a “legal framework for inclusive education”.

The NAHT said “national consistency” was key, welcoming plans for a digital EHCP template.

Surrey council said removing EHCP needs assessments for children under five would “avoid early and potentially incorrect labelling of children”.

They also called for clearer guidance on reasonable adjustments – including minimum expectations. The Equality Act requires schools to make such adjustments to ensure that disabled pupils are not discriminated against.

Carratt, at Nexus, said having a pre-EHCP reasonable adjustment system would be better, and a “viable alternative” for children with lower-level needs.

The threshold for an EHCP would be if “a child’s SEND complexities are such that their needs cannot be met by a reasonable adjustment”.

This would be “less bureaucratic”, reduce the need for “multiple professionals’ involvement” and could move a “huge number” of children off EHCPs, he added.

The plan would require amending the Children and Families Act so there is no longer a legal entitlement for all children to be assessed for an EHCP.

Councils could act as adjudicator for any disputes. And all suspensions could lead to a plan being put in place.

13. SEND support complaints enforcer

Many councils bemoaned the SEND tribunal. Surrey said strengthening mediation services over EHCP issues between councils and parents, and making them mandatory, would “reduce adversarial relationships”.

The LGA wants tribunals replaced with a “new, independent non-judicial resolution” – such as a SEND ombudsman.

Nexus said a “more accessible adjudication process” would reduce legal costs for all involved, but an adjudicator “must have the power to direct placements”.

However, the Independent Provider of Special Education Advice service wants the current local government ombudsman’s power extended to investigate complaints from parents over SEND support in schools.

Parents “often seek” EHCP assessments “because their child’s needs are not being met by their school”, they added.

INVESTIGATION: CEO PAY

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Revealed: the academy CEO pay premium

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

CEO pay rises have sparked “inflationary spirals” in some of the biggest-spending trusts – as the wage gap between academy chiefs and their next-in-command widens by up to £65,000.

Schools Week’s annual executive pay investigation has this year included 1,800 trusts, making it probably the largest ever analysis.

More than 60 trusts had leaders paid at least £200,000 last year, with 95 per cent of them awarded rises.

National Governance Association deputy CEO Sam Henson said salary benchmarking is “in some cases, leading to inflationary spirals”.

“[These] don’t come with an accompanying narrative on how this deals with the massive pressures the sector is under, namely money being alarmingly in short supply, ongoing recruitment and retention challenges, and insufficient accountability mechanisms,” he added.

The growing CEO pay premium

Our analysis suggests the gap is widening between CEOs and the rest in the highest-paying trusts.

Nineteen of the 31 highest-remunerated chief executives (see table) saw this grow. Carlton Academy Trust registered the largest increase (£65,000) as Adrian Kneeshaw’s pay rose to at least £260,000.

A spokesperson for the MAT claimed the figure in its accounts was “a gross misrepresentation of [Kneeshaw’s] actual pay”.

This is because it includes earnings from “significant external consultancy work” worth “tens of thousands of pounds”.

To “enhance recruitment and retention of top leaders”, Carlton also allows staff to get a “higher base salary” if they decide not to be part of pension scheme.

Kneeshaw’s “true salary” was about £185,000, they added.

At Flagship Learning, the only standalone trust in the top 31, the gap rose by £45,000. CEO Martin Haworth – who moved into the role last year, having long been its headteacher – earned



at least £275,000.

Chair of trustees Joe Larrigan attributed this to the SAT’s decision to bring “together the roles of CEO, executive headteacher and accountability for our community trading arm”. The “restructure has delivered an overall cost saving on senior salaries”, he added.

Meanwhile, the gap remained the same at six high-paying trusts and closed in just six others.

Increases for a decade

Sir Dan Moynihan, of the Harris Federation, was England’s best-paid CEO, the first to cross the £500,000 threshold.

The trust has five other members of staff earning at least £200,000. One, who makes between £250,000 and £260,000, would have been placed in the top 16 highest-earning CEOs in our analysis. Despite this, Harris had the largest CEO pay gap (£255,000).

The three other academy bosses on more than £300,000 also saw their wages increase. Leigh Academies Trust leader Simon Beamish received the largest rise (15 per cent) as his pay jumped to at least £350,000.



Simon Beamish

A spokesperson said his rise “reflects a cost-of-living increase in line with that of teachers” and was “linked to the continued growth” of the MAT and his “performance”.

Nearly half of the trust’s academies were ‘outstanding’, they added.

Dozens paid over £200k

In all, 64 CEOs earned more than £200,000. On average they oversaw 17 academies, but 19 ran trusts with 10 schools or fewer.

Sharon O’Ryan, of Pay in Education, said there was usually “a strong positive linear correlation between CEO pay and pupil numbers, but this is predominantly in the early phases of trust growth. The strength of the correlation diminishes with continued growth, flattening to a maximum salary for the job regardless of size,” she added.

Fourteen (22 per cent) of the highest earners are women, similar to last year’s 23 per cent. The Confederation of School Trust’s executive pay survey found women CEOs earn about £8,600 less than men, despite the “gap narrowing slightly”.

All but three of the 64

Continued on next page

INVESTIGATION: CEO PAY

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received pay rises. Five registered increases of 20 per cent or more over the period.

At the New Vision Trust in London, chief executive Shahed Ahmed saw his pay rise by 30 per cent to at least £260,000.

Ahmed said this was because he moved out of a pension scheme last year and received about £50,000 in "salary in lieu of pension contributions". This "unfairly distorts my figures in more ways than one".

Other leaders also said their rises were down to this.

CEO snubs £25k boost

One member of the £200,000 club revealed he was offered a £25,000 hike but turned it down, as "it felt like the right thing to do". They added: "Everybody's talking about schools struggling and I thought it was a good time to reduce my burden on the trust a tiny bit."

The Schools Week pay audit last year – which



Sir Dan Moynihan

analysed about 400 trusts – showed almost three-quarters reported rises of some kind. Among those trusts, 280 (70 per cent) moved up pay bandings this time around.

The biggest rise last year was seen at the Danes Educational Trust, near Watford, where CEO Dr

Josephine Valentine went from earning between £115,000 and £120,000 to at least £180,000.

Dominic Richards, the chain's COO, said this was because Valentine's "commitment increased to full-time for nine months and 0.8 for the remaining three months".

This allowed her to take on "additional duties as executive head of a school in special measures that had been identified as being at risk of imminent failure".

Her pay reduced to about £165,000 this year.

50% cut after trust rethink

Of the 400 trusts, pay remained the same at 48 (12 per cent) and dropped at 35 (9 per cent) in 2023-24.

The biggest fall was at St Cuthbert's Roman Catholic Academy Trust (57 per cent), which until this year was a regular in top-pay tables.

Continued on next page

Top of the pay pots: the country's best-paid CEOs



CEO	TRUST	ACADEMIES	MINIMUM PAY	DIFFERENCE FROM LAST YEAR	% PAY RISE	PAY/PUPIL
Sir Dan Moynihan	Harris Federation	54	£515,000.00	£30,000.00	6%	£12.26
Simon Beamish	Leigh Academies Trust	32	£350,000.00	£45,000.00	15%	£15.57
Dayo Olukoshi	Brampton Manor Trust	2	£330,000.00	£20,000.00	6%	£66.34
Sir Kevin Satchwell	Thomas Telford School + MAT	6	£310,000.00	£10,000.00	3%	£45.55
Sir Mufti Hamid Patel	Star Academies	33	£295,000.00	£15,000.00	5%	£12.90
Paul Tarn	Delta Academies Trust	57	£290,000.00	£25,000.00	9%	£9.92
Sir Jon Coles *	United Learning Trust	90	£290,000.00	£22,754.00	9%	£4.43
Martin Haworth	Flagship Learning Trust	1	£275,000.00	£50,000.00	22%	£153.12
Roger Leighton ***	Partnership Learning	13	£265,000.00	£10,000.00	4%	£24.90
Steve Kenning	Aspirations Academies Trust	16	£260,000.00	£15,000.00	6%	£27.07
Anita Johnson**	Loxford School Trust Limited	7	£260,000.00	£20,000.00	8%	£33.88
Shahed Ahmed ***	New Vision Trust	5	£260,000.00	£60,000.00	30%	£71.37
Adrian Kneeshaw ***	Carlton Academy Trust	9	£260,000.00	£55,000.00	27%	£54.30
Dr Karen Roberts ***	The Kemnal Academies Trust	45	£255,000.00	£20,000.00	9%	£11.10
Rob Tarn	Northern Education Trust	28	£247,822.00	£15,246.00	7%	£14.07
Kelvin Simpson	Advance Learning Partnership	18	£245,382.00	£41,738.00	20%	£29.42
Rebecca Boomer-Clark	Lift Schools	57	£245,000.00	£25,000.00	11%	£7.19
Paul West	The Spencer Academies Trust	26	£245,000.00	£10,000.00	4%	£13.48
Jacqueline Valin	Southfields Multi Academy Trust	2	£245,000.00	£25,000.00	11%	£172.29
Diana Owen	L.E.A.D. Academy Trust	27	£240,000.00	£10,000.00	4%	£21.46
Esther MacDonald	Hull Collaborative Academy Trust	16	£240,000.00	£30,000.00	14%	£37.34
Dr Carl Ward	City Learning Trust	4	£240,000.00	£15,000.00	7%	£91.67
Alun Williams	Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership	34	£235,000.00	£15,000.00	7%	£17.87
Jo Heard-Jones	The Shaw Education Trust	31	£235,000.00	£15,000.00	7%	£20.12
Alex Russell	Bourne Education Trust	22	£230,000.00	£10,000.00	5%	£18.66
Rob McDonough ***	East Midlands Education Trust	23	£230,000.00	£15,000.00	7%	£17.69
Marc Jordan	Creative Education Trust	17	£230,000.00	£10,000.00	5%	£15.82
Sir John Townsley	The Gorse Academies Trust	15	£230,000.00	£10,000.00	5%	£20.50
Sir Mark Grundy	Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust	11	£230,000.00	£-	0%	£42.55
Sir Andrew Carter	South Farnham Educational Trust	9	£230,000.00	£25,000.00	12%	£59.51
Hugh Greenway	The Elliot Foundation Academies Trust	33	£230,000.00	£10,000.00	4%	£17.51

* Coles is paid by trust sponsor

** Majority of earnings from headteacher role

*** Includes salary in lieu of pension contributions

Nerd note:

The difference was calculated using the minimum pay figures for both years Academy and pupils numbers from August 2024

SCHOOLS
WEEK

Continued on next page

INVESTIGATION: CEO PAY

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In 2022-23, Ged Fitzpatrick was paid just under £288,000. But its new chief executive received between £120,000 and £130,000 the following year.

A spokesperson said Fitzpatrick's departure in 2023 "gave trustees the opportunity to reconsider the roles and responsibilities" of the leadership team.

'Remember the sniff test'

The latest report produced by the Kreston group, a network of accountancy firms, found salaries had grown "across all trust types".

Those running medium and large MATs were given "increases of 5 to 6 per cent on average". Teachers were given a 6.5 per cent rise in the same year.

In the biggest trusts, chief executives were paid, on average, almost £190,000.

Nathan
Jeremiah,



Dayo Olukoshi

managing director of school resource management adviser supplier EPI, stressed that many trusts should employ "the sniff test" when calculating pay levels.

"If it doesn't pass that test, then you've got to go back to the drawing board, change the trusts you are looking at for the benchmarking or ask yourself, 'is this value for money?'"

The highest-paid person across more than 1,800 trusts whose accounts we analysed received, on average, £119,000. This is less than usual estimates because the analysis picked up smaller SATs that are not usually examined.

CST's annual pay report shows charity and public service chiefs receive, on average, under £145,000. Wages for similar roles in the private sector hover around £270,000.

Difference in CEO salaries widening

However, our outlier analysis – which calculated

the expected pay for leaders based on pupil numbers – showed nearly a quarter (415 trusts) paid their CEOs at 15 per cent or more over expected levels. The figure was 19 per cent last year.

The biggest outlier was Brampton Manor. Our figures suggested a trust of its size would usually pay its leader £135,000, which is nearly £200,000 less than CEO Dayo Olukoshi's actual package.

However, 27 per cent of trusts (483) were paid at least 15 per cent less than expected levels. This is up from 24 per cent last year.

Our investigation also found nine instances where the leaders of single-academy trusts were receiving more than the maximum that a local authority-maintained school boss can be paid.

Flagship was one of those that paid more Charlton Park Academy, a London special school, paid Mark Dale-Emberton at least £215,000. Accounts show £45,000 to £50,000 of this was for "consultancy and additional hours/duties".

Two others – the New River Trust and Queen

Continued on next page

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Elizabeth's School Barnet – paid their leaders between £190,000 and £200,000.

But EPI's Jeremiah, who is also a trust COO, noted there is a “difference in accountability” in the roles.

Those running council schools have the “safety net” of the authority, whereas at SATs “trustees are accountable and it's the headteacher who's accountable to Parliament as the accounting officer”.

£20k to ward off head-hunters

Our figures suggest that Amanda Nicholson, of the Kings Academy Trust in Manchester, received the highest pay packet per pupil (£320.64/child) last year. The chain consists of one primary, one special school and two APs.

Nicholson's salary is “temporary” while the trust expands to 10 academies by 2030.

A spokesperson noted that she was “paid a recruitment and retention allowance of an additional £20,000” to “prevent [her from] being head-hunted”. A further £27,000 was given for “qualifications gained” and being an Ofsted inspector.

The lowest-paid leader by pupil was United Learning Trust CEO Sir Jon Coles,



Samira Sadeghi



Sir Jon Coles

who earned £4.43 for every child across his 90 schools.

He was followed by Oasis Community Learning's John Barneby (£5.77). A spokesperson said: “Remuneration is purposefully set to ensure fair compensation while holding true to our principles of equity and justice”.

In October, the Department for Education named and shamed the 37 leaders it wrote to in 2023 to seek assurances over their pay. All the trusts were “found to be compliant”.

But at least 30 bumped up their chief exec's pay after being quizzed by officials.

Schools Week understands that some trusts received letters asking them to justify their levels of remuneration earlier this month.

‘Don't set arbitrary limits’

The EDSK think tank last year called for mandatory CEO pay scales, capped at £263,000 and with fines for those who do not follow it.

But Samira Sadeghi, CST's director of

governance, stressed that “no two trusts are the same” and they have “challenges specific to their context”.

While the NGA's Henson warned against imposing “arbitrary limits”, he said the growing gap between “CEO pay and other senior leaders risks undermining the collaborative leadership essential to school improvement”.

He added: “Disproportionate increases of up to 30 per cent become really unpalatable for many – and more thought needs to be given to how these rises can be rationalised.”

NERD NOTE:

In previous years, we solely analysed trust accounts manually – focusing on larger trusts and those that had already been scrutinised by the government for high pay.

But, with the help of AI whizzes, we were able to use artificial intelligence to sift through some accounts – meaning our analysis included 1,800 academy trusts.

Where necessary, optical character recognition software was used to extract text from scanned documents. Quality assurance checks were also conducted.

Best paid per pupil					
TRUST	CEO	ACADEMIES	MINIMUM PAY	PAY/PUPIL	PUPILS
Kings Academy Trust *	Amanda Nicholson	4	£160,000	£320.64	499
ACE Learning	Paul Ketley	2	£150,000	£186.34	805
Discovery Multi Academy Trust	Alison Nettleship	3	£150,000	£180.72	830
Southfields Multi Academy Trust	Jacqueline Valin	2	£240,000	£168.78	1422
The Bishop of Winchester Academy Trust	Paul McKeown	1	£180,000	£156.79	1148

* Three of four academies are special or AP schools

Nerd note:
Eliminated AP- and special-only trusts and UTCs, as well as those who also held headteacher roles outside their trust
Only considered trusts with CEOs on over £150k
Academy and pupils numbers from August 2024

SCHOOLS WEEK

Lowest paid per pupil					
TRUST	CEO	ACADEMIES	MINIMUM PAY	PAY/PUPIL	PUPILS
United Learning Trust	Sir Jon Coles	90	£290,000	£4.43	65455
Oasis Community Learning	John Barneby	53	£180,000	£5.77	31182
Ormiston Academies Trust	Tom Rees	42	£202,203	£5.83	34704
Outwood Grange Academies Trust	Sir Martyn Oliver/Lee Wilson *	40	£180,000	£5.84	30834
Lift Schools	Rebecca Boomer-Clark	57	£240,000	£7.04	34076

* Two leaders held the CEO post during the year

Nerd note:
Academy and pupils numbers from August 2024

SCHOOLS WEEK

NEWS: GOVERNANCE

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Biggest MAT makes its schools shareholders

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EXCLUSIVE

Academies in England's biggest MAT will be made shareholders of its parent charity to "guarantee that they can always make their voice heard".

United Learning Trust will hand local governing body (LGB) chairs "share certificates" giving them the right to speak and vote on binding resolutions at annual general meetings.

The share will represent legal membership of charitable foundation United Learning – which is actually a company limited by shares and acts as the trust's parent organisation.

Trust CEO Sir Jon Coles said the move would strengthen "the voice of local governance" among his 90 academies "in national decision-making".

"I am sometimes asked by schools joining us, 'how do we know that the group will always work in this way – even when there is a change in the board and the executive?'"

"This is our answer: by making every school a shareholder in the group, we guarantee that they can always make their voice heard."

Each LGB chair who has been in the position for at least two years "will be given a share certificate on behalf of their school" by ULT. Should the chair leave, it would be passed on to their successor.

However United Learning's board will continue to hold the majority of votes.

The trust said examples of resolutions could cover anything from thanking the board for its leadership, to disagreeing with executive pay recommendations and seeking a review.

The relationship between governance of schools and trusts has proved to be a tricky one.

National Governance Association guidance states that LGBs form "the bridge between the trust board and its schools". But the "nature and extent of the responsibilities delegated to the local tier will vary depending on the role given to it" by trustees.

A Confederation of School Trusts report last year showed trusts tend to give local governing boards duties that "benefit from being 'on the ground' and having local expertise and knowledge".

Areas such as "finance, policies, facilities and



resources" were most likely to stay with the trust's governance.

E-ACT went public with its decision to scrap its governing bodies in favour of "academy ambassadorial advisory bodies" in 2016.

The National Governance Association said many trusts had done a similar thing and applauded the honesty over the LGB role.

Meanwhile, Lift Schools rolled out "academy councils" in 2022, overhauling the previous LGBs. The change involved guaranteeing a spot for parents, with the chain noting it was "too easy for school trusts to become distant and disconnected from communities".

Academy consultant Lucia Glynn noted that LGB relations were a "tightrope" that trust chiefs must walk. "If you fall off it and the relationship is fractious, that's where trusts go wrong."

"It's a really big concern [among governors during conversions] that your school will be swallowed up into some machine and that it will lose its local character."

United Learning said it was unlikely that others would be able to follow its model, unless they have a similar "very old parent charity" model.

Prior to the change, Coles, the ULT chair, and the board had held a formal meeting with all LGB chairs each year to review performance.

This will now "become the AGM", the trust said, "adding a layer of legal formality and



guaranteeing for the future that the group's current ethos of building local views into all strategic decision-making will continue".

"As a growing, national group, we are determined to retain a relationship-based, listening, responsive ethos and the things that have made us successful so far – irrespective of political, economic or other changes," Coles added.

"Making sure that we will always have to account for ourselves as a board and executive, act transparently and listen to local voices will help to make sure this is always the case."

NGA CEO Emma Balchin said it was "very encouraging to see the trust thinking seriously about how these challenges can be overcome, and we look forward to tracking their success".

She added: "Maintaining cohesion and community voice is a particular challenge for MATs which span multiple geographical areas."

She said other "innovative models" adopted by MATs include some "inviting any parents and individuals in the wider community to become members", which act as "guardians of governance" in trusts.

INTERVIEW: ASCL

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ASCL head: Leaders turning away SEND pupils needs calling out

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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EXCLUSIVE

CEOs and school leaders are turning away SEND pupils and the practice “needs calling out”, the ASCL union head has said, as he called on leaders to adopt “ethical” approaches and become “models for the next generation”.

Speaking on the eve of ASCL's conference, Pepe Di'Iasio said that, while wide-ranging SEND reform was needed, leaders had a “part to play” in creating a “culture that is more inclusive and more open”.

Schools need the money and resources to do that, and accountability structures then need to “acknowledge, recognise and reward schools that are inclusive – and not punish them”, he added.

Schools Week has documented how some schools attempt to discourage children with education, health and care plans from applying, sometimes overtly turning them away. This is because they must pay for the first £6,000 of support detailed in an EHCP.

Speaking to Schools Week, Di'Iasio said: “The stuff going on that some CEOs are doing, some school leaders are doing, that absolutely needs calling out. And they are our members, and I would want to do my best to help them come to a better conclusion.”

He said some of the non-inclusive behaviour “has been modelled to them by predecessors”.

He added: “There's plenty of models out there for leadership in the world right now that I don't think are positive models for inclusive, ethical, moral leaders.

“[But] we have got to be those models for the next generation. I know that the vast majority – if not all school and college leaders – want to do that, but some of them are under immense pressure because of the way the system is set up.”

Di'Iasio is concerned that this won't change. As the former head of a school with large numbers of SEND pupils, he pointed out that Ofsted's proposed new inspection framework would require pupil attainment in national tests to be “broadly in line with national averages” in order to get a ‘secure’ rating for achievement.



Pepe Di'Iasio

“What that will immediately do is put a barrier up to headteachers wanting to have students with SEND and emotional and mental health needs coming into their school.”

The Guardian reported this month that the government was considering drawing up a white paper to set out its proposed reforms later in the year. But Di'Iasio said the crisis was “something that that can be addressed with a realignment of investments in the first instance”.

A big part of the crisis is soaring council SEND deficits. Four in 10 councils face bankruptcy over estimated deficits of £4.9 billion when a measure keeping them off their books runs out next April.

“If you look at the amount of money going into local authorities, that's going in there to service a debt and pay off a debt, and we think there should just be a line drawn under that debt,” Di'Iasio said.

“There's an understanding about the systemic issues where money is being spent that shouldn't be spent, be it on tribunals, be it on long drawn-out processes for EHCPs, be it on transport. All of that money could be reinvested more directly into the provision for young people.”

Some reform of SEND “will require legislation”, but “some of it can be done tomorrow”, he added.

ASCL's conference will hear from education secretary Bridget Phillipson and Ofsted chief Sir

Martyn Oliver today.

Di'Iasio said he wanted to hear from Phillipson that accountability pressures would be eased, for example through the scrapping of the EBacc performance measure.

He will interview the education secretary on stage, asking her to reflect on the “highs and lows” of her time in office so far.

He said: “I think I know what they are trying to achieve, but I don't think that's the way the messaging has always come out, particularly around the schools bill.”

He also welcomed comments from Ofsted national director Lee Owston, who told the Apprenticeship and Training Conference they will “think again” if there is sector-wide opposition to its report card plans – including another consultation if necessary.

Di'Iasio said that “behind the scenes, we've been working on this for six months, and I think our people would say we haven't got very far.

“We were pushing at doors that were often bolted and secured when we were hoping that they would be willing to be opened, and they weren't opened before Christmas.”

But Owston's comments were “incredibly reassuring”, he said. “I would hope that we would continue with that theme.”

NEWS IN BRIEF

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'Now or never' for 6,500 teacher pledge, Labour warned

The time for the government to fulfil its pledge to recruit 6,500 new teachers is "now or never", a report has warned as it revealed that unfilled teacher vacancies have reached record rates.

The National Foundation for Educational Research found that teacher leaving rates have not reduced since before the pandemic and an increasing number of those leaving the profession are of working – rather than retirement – age.

The report explains that it typically takes "a year or two" for policy actions to impact staffing levels, and "another year or two" for this to show up in reporting data.



Because of this, the government faces a critical "now or never" moment if it is to deliver on its pledge to address teacher shortages by recruiting 6,500 new teachers during this parliament.

Teacher pay rises should be above 3 per cent next year, and at least 6 per cent from 2026, the report added.

Jack Worth, school workforce lead at NFER and co-author of the report, said recruitment and retention in England "remain in a perilous state, posing a substantial risk to the quality of education".

"The time for half measures is over," he said. "Fully funded pay increases that make teacher pay more competitive are essential to keeping teachers in the classroom and attracting new recruits."

He said the government's upcoming spending review provides "the ideal opportunity to show its long-term commitment to increase the attractiveness of teaching".

[Full story here](#)

Auditors flag trust pension deficit problem

The Department for Education does not know the extent of academy trust pension liabilities, auditors have warned.

Academy conversions are also returning to pre-pandemic levels as the government opts to rely less on trusts to turnaround struggling schools, a new government report on academy finances states.

Trusts estimate that they had a total net pension liability of almost £2 billion by the end of 2022-23.

But, in his notes attached to the annual report published on Tuesday, National Audit Office boss Gareth Davies said he was "unable to obtain sufficient appropriate evidence



regarding the valuation of the sector's net pension liability".

The report also shows more trusts in deficit, but the proportion with surpluses over £3 million has also risen. It reveals that an employee at an unnamed trust was handed between £200,000 and £250,000 as part of an "agreed" exit package.

[Full story here](#)

Minister ducks calls to rule out core subject cuts



The curriculum and assessment review will publish its interim report "in the spring", the schools minister has confirmed, as she ducked calls to rule out cutting back on core subjects or scrapping SATs.

During education questions in the House of Commons on Monday, shadow minister Neil O'Brien asked Catherine McKinnell to "reassure the house that time will not be taken away from the core academic subjects as a result of this review, and that their content will not be cut back as a result of this curriculum review?"

However, she gave no such reassurance.

She was also challenged by Tory MP and former Downing Street chief of staff Nick Timothy to "rule out abolishing SATs in primary schools".

Again, the minister made no guarantee.

[Full story here](#)

Teachers' pension contributions to rise

The government will increase teachers' pension contributions – the first rise since 2015 – despite concerns over the "financial impact" on staff.

Last year, the Department for Education consulted on plans to raise contributions for teachers earning the most to avoid a shortfall in the fund. The changes have now been ratified and will come into effect on April 1.

Teachers earning less than £34,873 will not be impacted – with their pension contribution remaining at 7.4 per cent.

But a teacher on £50,000 will pay an extra



£10 a month, or £120 a year, and someone on £110,000 would pay an extra £17 a month, or £198 a year.

[Full story here](#)

ANALYSIS: TIMSS

TIMSS: Boys pull ahead, teacher admin woes

SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER

@SCHOOLSWEEK

Teachers in England are much more bogged down by admin than their international counterparts, a new survey has found.

The government has published a second research report detailing England's performance in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

The first report, published last year, revealed that year 5 and 9 pupils in England had seen improvements in their science attainment and "high" maths results "maintained" in 2023.

The new report digs into more detail on the findings. Here are eight things school leaders need to know ...

1. Gender gap widens as boys pull ahead ...

Boys' performance in maths and science has jumped "significantly" above that of girls, with the year 9 maths gap in England the largest of any country taking part.

The findings "signal an urgent need to assess why a gender gap of this kind has re-emerged over time in England, especially given the large-scale initiatives in place to address this in mathematics and science", researchers warned.

2. ... and confidence seems to be a key issue

Pupils' confidence in their ability was the "most strongly associated" attitudinal factor associated with performance, the report found. Other factors included instructional clarity, valuing the subject and liking the subject.

Girls were "significantly less confident and liked the subject less [than boys] in both year groups and for both subjects". In 2019, girls also had a shortage of confidence, but it was not accompanied by a significantly different performance.

Overall, boys demonstrated "more interest in further study of both subjects beyond secondary school and in careers that might include some aspects of mathematics or science".

This suggests a need to "review how future study and employment related to mathematics and science are communicated, particularly to girls, to ensure the related sectors are attractive".



3. The 3 key school factors linked to high performance ...

There were three factors "most strongly associated" with performance, the same as in 2019. They are:

- Heads who reported their schools placed "an emphasis on academic success" had a "significantly positive" association with performance.
- Pupils reporting "disorderly behaviour in school" had a "significantly negative association" with performance.
- Pupils who experienced bullying behaviour in schools also had a "significantly negative association" with performance.

4. ... 'belonging' plays important role, too

There was a "significant positive association between pupils agreeing that they felt a greater sense of school belonging and higher average" scores across both subjects, and in both year groups.

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson has talked about the importance of pupils feeling "they belong" in school. Belonging has also emerged as a key factor for boosting attendance rates.

5. Less experienced teacher? It doesn't seem to make much difference ...

Nearly half of England's year 5 maths pupils were taught by a teacher with fewer than 10 years' experience – which is above the international average.

Meanwhile, the proportion of pupils taught by teachers with more than 20 years' experience was below the international average. The same finding applied to science, and year 9 maths.

However, there was no "significant difference" in average scores for "different levels of teacher experience", the report found.

6. ... as newbie teachers seem to get better?

When looking at year 9, most kids were taught maths by teachers with at least 10 – but fewer than 20 – years' experience.

However, the report found there was "no significant difference between the average score for pupils taught by teachers with 20 or more years' experience, compared with those taught by teachers with fewer than five years' experience".

This was also "in contrast" to 2019, when pupils taught by teachers with 20 or more years' experience had an average score of 55 scale points more.

7. Cut the red tape! Make teachers teach again!

Teachers were asked whether certain issues affected them. Having "too many administrative tasks" appeared to be a particular issue for teachers in England.

In year 5, 86 per cent of teachers in England said they were affected by this, compared to just 63 per cent internationally. In year 9, the gap was even bigger: 83 per cent affected in England compared to just 53 per cent internationally.

Year 5 teachers were also more likely than their international counterparts to say they were affected by "too much material" and "need more time to prepare".

The TIMSS researchers concluded that "staff in schools in England are committed and highly experienced individuals who are challenged by complex needs in their classrooms and who would benefit from fewer administrative tasks and more time to prepare for teaching".

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Clare Halliday

Tyler Palmer

Feature

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

The school that policy forgot

Surrey Square primary followed a very different path from the Conservative government-led reforms of the past 15 years. But as the policy agenda shifts, what can we learn from a school that provides a blueprint for many of Labour's education reforms?

Ask most people what they know about the Old Kent Road and they'll probably tell you it's the cheapest property on the Monopoly board.

But nestled among the area's vast council estates in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the country is Surrey Square Primary School.

Over the past two decades, as ministers have steered schools towards knowledge-rich curriculums and strict behaviour policies, Surrey Square has been quietly breaking the mould.

And as Labour shifts the agenda, Surrey Square is no longer a school that education policy forgot. It's a trailblazer for many of the government's new ideas.

Trainers allowed and 'no rules'

"What does the Monopoly board tell you about this area?" associate head Nicola Noble asks me when I visit the school. "It tells you it's the cheap square, the brown square, the square that nobody wants. So culturally, it's endemic within our society that this area is written off.

"What we want [the children] to do is to really thrive and step into their light. Show the world the incredible human beings they are and change that square on the Monopoly board, change the narrative around it."

The moment you arrive on site, the school feels different.

Pupils can wear trainers and pick the colour of the T-shirt they wear under their optional branded SSQ jumpers.

Noble says there are "no rules". Instead, she says "we teach the values and we teach them from the child's starting point and without judgment. If a child comes to school and they find it difficult to show compassion, we teach them."

'Behaviour is information'

Surrey Square hasn't permanently excluded a pupil in almost two decades. The school sees behaviour "as information", Noble says.

"If a child is behaving in a challenging way for us, [we need] to understand what they're trying to communicate to us, whether that be something

that's going on at home, or a learning need or something else."

These values sit at the core of a large wheel graphic that depicts the school's ethos, alongside skills (maths, reading, writing and oracy), relationships and wellbeing.

"We talk about relationships being the precondition to any meaningful work. So we support people in how to develop, maintain, deepen and repair those relationships, because again, we believe that provides the foundation that's needed."

Pupils 'can't lose their joy time'

Another difference in the school's approach is how it preserves "joy time" for pupils.

Other schools might do "golden time", which you can earn or lose. But Noble says "joy time for us is part of the curriculum".

"It's fundamentally about children connecting with each other and with the adults, and about playing. You can't lose your maths lesson. So, you definitely can't lose your joy time. It's a right for everybody.

"And we would also say that children displaying

Feature: Surrey Square

some more challenging behaviours probably need joy time the most.”

Such language and approaches are often dismissed as coming at the expense of academic rigour and discipline.

But Surrey Square's progress scores are above average. Ofsted confirmed in 2022 the school remained 'outstanding', lavishing it with praise for putting wellbeing and mental health “at the centre of the curriculum”.

Last year, it also won the coveted primary school of the year at the National Teaching Awards

Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is also “exemplary”, the report added.

Inspectors also praised the school for adapting subjects “so they are more relevant to the pupils at this school.”

‘It’s endemic in our society that this area is written off’

“For example, in year 3 pupils learn about the kingdom of Benin. This is because a large proportion of pupils have roots in Nigeria.”

Noble recalls that when Ofsted visited, the inspector asked to see pupils' history books.

“We were like, we don't have history books. I said, I'll go and get some children for you, because they're the knowledge. And I brought the children in, and they sat and talked to her about their history learning.”

Adapted curriculum frees up time

The school introduced an “identity curriculum” around 10 years ago after realising “lots of children weren't quite sure who they were,” says Noble. It is aimed at making the curriculum relevant to all pupils.

The school has now “really built this so that by the time they leave us, they understand their place as a global citizen and really just have a sense of who they are”.

The way the school adapts the curriculum is key to its success, head Matt Morden says.

“The insistence on knowledge across the whole



One of a set of photographs of Noble taken by pupils in the school's SEND unit

curriculum and the amount of knowledge that is intended to be taught is too much for people that follow it to the letter.

“So we look at all of the foundation subjects and go: what are the key things that we think our children need to understand from their context?”

“It frees up some time,” he adds. Whereas “other schools would feel they need to do everything”, Surrey Square is confident in its rationale for “reducing some of that content”.

That process is aided by an experienced staff. The average length of service here is 11.2 years. Noble has worked at the school for 17 years; Morden for 10.

That retention is “so important”, because “each year, they see what's working for their class and the community, and it builds in that way”, says Morden.

Inside ‘The Hive’ resourced SEND provision

Children can join Surrey Square aged two via its on-site nursery provision, a colourful, fun space in purpose-built facilities funded by the sale of some of the school's land for flats.

The school already offers free breakfast clubs for all pupils, another policy the government wants to emulate. All pupils are entitled to free school meals under a long-running Southwark council scheme. Take-up is around 90 per cent.

In what used to be the caretaker's house, the school also operates ‘The Hive’, a resourced provision for around 16 pupils with the most complex needs.

Again, this is exactly the sort of provision Labour is looking to emulate as it seeks to make

Feature: Surrey Square

mainstream more inclusive.

I ask some of its pupils what they like about the school, and learning in The Hive.

"Learning and maths!" one pupil exclaims. "Being creative," says another. They tell me they like it that there are only a few of them with two staff.

The children are transfixed by our photographer's cameras. With his guidance, they take photos of Noble.

We meet Nicky, a parent who joined the school's staff 17 years ago and now leads one of the groups in the Hive.

"I love it. I really do," she says, "seeing the children achieve, children who really, really struggle. Seeing them able to shine."

Supporting the school community

Hannah also started as a parent and has been on a "big journey" with Surrey Square.

When her children were pupils, the school stepped in to help her family move out of damp, mould-infested housing. It set her up with counselling when her former partner struggled with drug addiction. And the 'family wellbeing lead' supported her to tell her children when their father died.

"The first place I came was to school. I wouldn't have got that [support] elsewhere," she tells me. "Just to have an establishment, a group of just lovely people, showing me empathy and humanity was life-saving."

Eniola Ogundolie was a pupil here until 2015. She joined in year 1 when her family arrived from Nigeria. She says: "The help that they provided, especially [with] that big a transition, it was amazing."

"After me, my two younger siblings came. They really make you feel like you're part of the community, it's a family."

The school helped her get British citizenship. She kept in touch while her siblings were there, came back to volunteer, and now serves the school as a learning facilitator.

"I'm 10 years down the line, and they're still doing things for other young kids that they did for me, it's so consistent."

'Our families are just told to be grateful... it's not OK'

Schools at the hearts of their communities is another idea that Labour is keen on. At Surrey



'They make you feel like part of the community, it's a family'

Square, pupils come up with ways of solve local problems.

For example, year 3 pupils wrote to the council to complain of rodents in their homes, using rat-shaped paper. Their local councillor then visited the school to hear concerns.

"It is about challenging the status quo. So many of our families are expected to just be grateful for what they have," Noble says.

She shows me a picture she has been sent of a family's bathroom on a local estate, covered in black mould.

"They were told that they should be grateful for this bathroom, and that's not OK."

'We've got much higher expectations'

Originally separate infant and junior schools on the same site, the school formed in 2009 when the two settings merged.

It became an academy in 2018 when its then-head Liz Robinson formed the Big Education trust with Peter Hyman, a former adviser to Tony Blair and more recently to Sir Keir Starmer in opposition.

Robinson, the trust's chief executive, recalls last year's Labour conference and says: "There was a lot of articulation about thriving and inclusion. Nicola and I were sitting there thinking 'we're already doing it; it's possible'."

She describes Surrey Square as the "embodiment of a nuanced approach which avoids the ridiculous binaries of being child-centred or knowledge-rich, progressive or traditional".

The school teaches maths mastery and synthetic phonics, for example. But other things are "very different" from other schools, like the identity curriculum.

Robinson speaks of the need to "morally re-conceptualise what success is, because I will not be comfortable as a headteacher or CEO with a model of education that does not allow for success for every pupil".

She also dismisses any potential accusation of low expectations. "I've got much higher expectations, because I've got expectations about every child, and I've got expectations around a broader range, which is inclusive of very high academic achievements, but not limited to."

Curriculum
ConversationDO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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MOONEmeritus professor of education,
The Open UniversityLet's sound the death knell
for the damaging bell curve

Our system of ranking students at 16 causes untold damage. It's time for the 14-18 curriculum the sector has long called for, writes Bob Moon

Our assessment model is rough on the self-esteem of many young people. This is particularly true of the impact of the monolithic 16+ GCSE system that now defines achievement in school.

Local newspapers like to show the 'celebrations' of high achievers, but the rest – a goodly proportion of the population, many of whom have worked hard at school – slide away unnoticed.

That's because it is essentially a normative process. It ranks 16 year olds from the highest to lowest and distributes results along a statistical bell curve. The figure below shows the overall grade distribution for the 2024 GCSE results.

The examination boards might talk the language of 'criteria'; they say they design assessments that show what students can do. The truth, however, is that the system ranks one student against another. Remember the fuss during Covid when teachers gave grades more optimistic than the bell curve permits? (see table above)

The secondary school curriculum is structured around this normative

process. Essentially, most subjects are taught in a sequence that prepares a minority to obtain higher GCSE and A-level grades. The lower grades of many are the bedrock of success for a few.

I believe that the increasing problems of attendance, and some mental health issues, are directly associated with the lack of reward and lack of success experienced by so many young people.

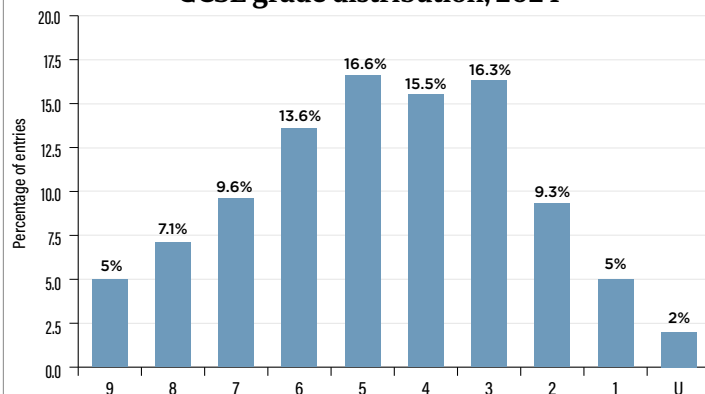
What's more, thousands of students who worked hard in primary school begin to switch off at the realisation of their ranking in the system. They learn about this early in their secondary career. My grandson, for example, has been talking GCSE grades since he started year 7.

And this has consequences later in life. Our system of technical and vocational education is challenged by the insecurity that so many bring to post-school learning.

Sadly, many policymakers are unaware of the statistical basis of GCSE grading. I remember one secretary of state saying that he wished he had understood the consequences of the bell curve when he came into office.

I was fortunate, in the early years of the century, to work as an advisor with Sir Tim Brighouse and Sir Jon Coles to improve the performance

GCSE grade distribution, 2024



“ We can free lower secondary from its normative shackles

of London secondary schools.

Essentially this meant improving GCSE results. We achieved this to some acclaim. But we also knew that, statistically, grades somewhere else would suffer.

Of course, our attachment to the bell curve has historical lineage. This was the statistical basis of the IQ testing used to justify the grammar school/secondary modern divide.

So what should we do? All the commissions and enquiries on secondary schools this century have said we need a 14-18 curriculum. Such a structure would allow overlapping but differentiated routes to a common qualification.

In turn, this would allow many to spend part of the week on technical and vocational studies while others might choose a more academic programme.

This is the model in many other countries. In France, for example, 'Le Bac' is taken by most secondary students and offers both academic and professional pathways. Elements of GCSE could be incorporated into such a structure.

The huge (more than £1 billion) cost of GCSE would then be available to use in a different way. Did you know we spend more on exam entries than we do on the resources to teach the subjects?

We would also be able to return the whole term we currently lose to administering GCSE to teaching and learning.

The other great advantage is that it would free the lower secondary curriculum from its normative shackles and permit a more criteria-based approach.

The Royal Society has argued for a core mathematics curriculum that everyone should know and understand. When I taught French, I used to wonder why we couldn't just focus on everyone speaking French for the first year. Less would mean more in so many subjects.

School is a dull experience for too many. A more flexible lower secondary curriculum and a more differentiated 14-18 offer would go a long way to solving that – and I guarantee it would raise standards.

Opinion

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SUREENA BRACKENRIDGE

Labour MP, education committee member and former science teacher

Government must act now to secure the future of UK science

Filling teacher recruitment gaps and targeting funding at schools in poorer areas are two STEM policies that would boost the UK economy, says Sureena Brackenridge

We stand at a crossroads. With bold investment in STEM education, we have the potential to lead the world in the scientific industries. Without targeted action, we risk a future where access to dynamic and high-paying careers is determined by postcode rather than potential.

As a former science teacher, I've seen the transformative power of education. There is nothing quite like seeing students experience science first-hand: eyes widening in amazement as elephant's toothpaste erupts in colourful foam, laughter as carbon sugar snakes grow before their eyes, the thrill of holding fire safely in their hands.

These moments aren't just fun; they are the foundation of real scientific understanding. Hands-on experiments allow students to see, feel, smell, and hear science come alive. They turn abstract concepts into tangible experiences that spark a lifelong love for STEM.

However, I have also seen how a lack of resources and overburdened teachers can dash that spark.

Part of the reason I stood to be

the MP for the city that is home to my former pupils was to help secure the future opportunities they deserve. British Science Week – which happened this week – presents an opportunity to highlight these issues.

At the heart of our manifesto was one cornerstone: a homegrown workforce equipped with the skills to do the jobs of the future and to power the economy of the future. Yet right now, the reality is that we've inherited a shrinking pipeline.

The UK's shortage of STEM workers is already costing our economy £1.5 billion annually. More than 173,000 STEM jobs sit unfilled – an average of 10 per business. Almost half (43 per cent) of these are hard to fill due to a lack of skilled applicants.

Meanwhile, only last week we saw that nearly 1 million young people are not in education, employment or training.

This gap between opportunity and talent is widening. If we want to reverse this trend, compete with our international counterparts and meet the chancellor's promise to build our own Silicon Valley, then radical policy changes are needed.

This starts upstream: we must invest in our young people now.

Better STEM education could be one of the great equalisers, opening doors for all young people



“ The gap between opportunity and talent is widening

regardless of their background, while driving the economic growth our country desperately needs.

Yet it risks becoming the opposite. Schools serving the communities that could benefit most from high-quality STEM teaching are the very schools that struggle to recruit and retain the teachers they need to make that vision a reality.

Without the right teachers in place, how can we expect students to break cycles of educational inequality or to equip the next generation for success in the industries that will define our future?

Labour has already committed to recruiting 6,500 additional teachers. This is a vital first step – but we must learn from successful models like Teach First to ensure these teachers are placed in the schools serving the communities that need them most.

Two key policies are essential as a starting point: targeted recruitment incentives to attract teachers in shortage subjects, and additional funding weighted toward schools in

the poorest areas.

This two-pronged approach would ensure schools can recruit brilliant teachers and provide the resources they need to deliver world-class STEM education. And it would target the areas where this can have the greatest impact.

We have already made great strides since entering government, from increasing the early years pupil premium to announcing the youth guarantee to further learning and help to get a job or an apprenticeship.

To build on this momentum and truly break down the barriers to opportunity, we must now focus on what is happening in our schools and how we can give every pupil a chance to secure their future and ours.

Investing in STEM education is not just an education policy; it's an economic necessity. By ensuring every child, regardless of background, has access to high-quality STEM teaching, we can build an economy that works for everyone.

Opinion: EHCPs

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ANDRÉ IMICH

Former Department for Education SEND adviser

Caseworker teams are crucial to SEND system improvement

Neglecting this section of the SEND workforce is a key reason the system is in crisis, explains André Imich. They deserve a workforce strategy, not opprobrium

Last week saw the announcement of Department for Education plans to improve the SEND system as well as a critical investigation in these pages of the quality usefulness of EHCP recommendations for educators. While the latter is difficult to hear, I hope the combination will finally bring due attention to the crucial role of SEND caseworker teams.

These teams of SEND officers are central to the development and co-ordination of education, health and care needs assessments for children and young people. On behalf of the local authority, they ensure that processes are in place to meet statutory requirements and timeframes.

They are responsible for the publication of the final education, health and care plan (EHCP), which follows close consultation with families and with prospective schools and colleges.

Once the final plan is in place, they are then responsible for monitoring, reviewing, amending and ceasing the plan during the child or young

person's education.

Their wider roles include dealing with queries, resolving concerns and managing complaints and appeals. They are usually the first port of call for families and providers in navigating the complex SEN system and are effectively the outward facing SEND delivery arm of the local authority.

Yet, despite the importance of their role, there is little focus on these teams in SEND policy or guidance, and no mention of them in the SEND code of practice.

The role requires no formal qualifications or training, there is no structured career path, and there are no minimum standards that underpin their work.

In addition, there is no published data on the size of this workforce. Anecdotally, however, many teams are operating at a ratio of one caseworker to at least 250 EHCPs.

A Leeds Trinity University study by Tracy Laverick and Richard Baron published last year provided a comprehensive insight into the job. It showed that SEN officers want to work well and co-produce with families and providers, but are often frustrated by their lack of a clearly defined role, excessive workloads, time constraints and an absence of training and standards.

In a survey of 11 local authorities in



“ Many have a ratio of one caseworker for 250 EHCPs

one region, the authors found that 55 per cent of caseworkers had only been in the role for two years or less. Their evidence suggests this high level of staff churn is due to high caseloads and demoralised staff.

Some areas have begun to address this issue locally. Hertfordshire, for example, has launched a SEND Academy, a training and development programme designed to support a “new generation of SEND workers”. NASEN also now offers an accredited training programme for staff directly involved in local authority SEND casework.

Such initiatives are hugely valued by staff but need to be underpinned by nationally agreed minimum standards (akin to those that exist for SEND Information and Advice Support Services), coupled with descriptors of the role of the SEND caseworker.

The education select committee's ongoing SEND inquiry asks some fundamental questions in its search for solutions to the challenges in the SEN system. Among these, it wants to know how waiting times for EHCPs

can be improved and what can be done to support families during and after the EHCP process.

Many of the answers to those questions relate directly to the significant workforce issues facing local authority caseworker teams.

The DfE's 2023 SEND and AP Improvement Plan recognised that “local authority SEND casework teams play a vital role in supporting families to navigate the system and ensuring they have good experiences”. It committed to providing new guidance on delivering a responsive and supportive SEND casework service to families when next consulting on the SEND Code of Practice.

While this is welcome, more needs to be done to emphasise the importance of these teams and to develop their professionalism.

Creating a workforce strategy that strengthens this critical workforce would not only improve their work and the quality of the EHCPs they write; it would make a significant contribution to a more efficient, responsive, communicative and family-friendly SEN service.

Opinion: EHCPs

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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PHIL HUMPHREYS

Director of Education, Lift Schools

How to restore trust in EHCPs (and mainstream SEND provision)

Poor-quality EHCPs are just one symptom of a broken system, writes Phil Humphreys. Here's how we can begin to put it right for children, families and schools

Last week's Schools Week investigation into EHCPs highlighted that a critical part of the SEND system is clearly broken.

Analysis of EHCPs in our 57 schools in Lift (five of which are special schools) shows that they frequently neither reflect children's needs nor how these needs present in the classroom and how they can be adequately addressed.

Ignoring the extremely poor examples, EHCPs are frequently too general and simply refer to what most people would recognise as effective, high-quality teaching. They can also be heavily influenced by parental opinion rather than professional expertise. On outcomes, they are typically too broad and not nearly ambitious enough.

In addition, many local authorities still just allocate TA hours. We find that many do not include any additional external professional services such as health and/or care services.

All of this amounts to a picture of a system crying out for a review and a fresh start. So what might that look like?

From labelling to inclusion

One of the sector's biggest challenges is convincing parents that mainstream schools can meet their children's needs. Too often, the narrative around SEND provision focuses on cost, complexity and difference rather than inclusion, ambition, and high standards.

When parents feel their child's needs are not being identified early enough or met effectively, this results in demands for EHCPs and specialist placements. In some cases, children are withdrawn from school altogether.

But securing an EHCP focuses on proving need rather than supporting it, and labelling rather than inclusion.

What if, instead, we built an inclusive education system on the premise that every child has a special educational need? After all, each deserves to be known, noticed and supported to flourish regardless of their start points.

Less than 10 per cent of children with SEN attend special schools in the UK. The vast majority are educated in mainstream settings. To ensure these pupils thrive, mainstream schools must be properly resourced and trained to meet their diverse needs effectively.

There is much to welcome in the government's mooted SEND proposals, including national standards, enhanced accountability and digital EHCPs.



“ Let's focus on outcomes, not outputs

But to effect real change, we must go further.

The right drivers

First, we need to shift from funding-driven diagnosis to needs-led identification. A needs-led system, where support is tailored to what a child requires to succeed rather than a label, would ensure that resources go where they are most effective. It would also reduce unnecessary bureaucracy.

Second, rather than forcing schools to prove need before accessing support, we should empower them to deliver high-quality, personalised interventions as part of a graduated response.

This means:

- Providing every mainstream school with the tools and resources to meet a broad range of needs, without waiting for an EHCP.
- Ensuring EHCPs are reserved for those requiring specialist provision, not a mechanism to unlock basic support.
- Focusing on early years and primary to ensure learning difficulties are addressed before they escalate.

Third, let's focus on outcomes, not outputs. Rather than relying on person-heavy models with blunt prescriptions for “support hours”,

we should shift investment from staffing ratios to effective, evidence-based interventions. To make SEND provision proactive, not reactive, we should be investing in:

Learning tools that personalise support, like a personal AI assistant for each pupil.

High-leverage interventions that target the root causes of learning difficulties, such as evidence-based speech and language support, care and therapeutic interventions.

Specialist training for all staff – not just ENCos – so that every teacher is equipped to meet the diverse needs of their pupils.

Finally, we must transition to child-centered digital EHCPs. These should celebrate children's capabilities, clearly identify their needs and recommend personalised educational, care and therapeutic support packages, with clear outcomes that are ambitious, achievable and measurable.

The challenge of restoring trust in mainstream education for SEND families is significant. But it is entirely achievable with clear national standards, needs-led assessment, personalised support and investment in innovation.

High standards and inclusion go hand in hand, and we must build a system that delivers both for every pupil.

Opinion

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TIM LEUNIG
Director, Public First

Can Ofsted listen its way out of its political bind?

Scorecards are on their way back to the drawing board, but eventually Labour's manifesto promise must meet with the reality that it is a manifestly bad idea, writes Tim Leunig

Ofsted's Lee Owston has said that they will "think again" if opposition to their new report cards is sector-wide. I hope he means it, because the plans are badly flawed.

Examining is a science. It even has its own scientific discipline: psychometrics, whose insights I want to apply to Ofsted today.

Psychometrics tells us that longer exams are more reliable than shorter exams. A five-minute driving test would be hopeless.

It also tells us that increasing the number of grades reduces the chance that the assigned grade is correct. If GCSEs had 26 grades, no one would expect an examiner to tell a J in history from a K.

Finally, reliability and validity are in tension. The driving theory driving test is very reliable, but it does not prove you are safe on the road. Hence, we have the practical test – less reliable, but more valid.

Assessing school performance has the same issues. Aggregate exam results are relatively reliable, but exam results alone are not sufficient for a valid judgement. We also need to know if a school is

sacrificing everything for that extra GCSE grade. We need to know about safeguarding, wellbeing and British values.

Hence Ofsted. It examines schools. But unless everything is wonderful, or everything is terrible, two inspectors may legitimately come to different conclusions about the quality of education. In other words, its inspections can never be fully reliable.

The inspection framework mitigates that risk, which is why we see complaints of stale reports constructed from sentences plucked from a databank. Soulless, perhaps, but more reliable.

The proposed new framework makes life much harder. Currently, inspectors have to choose one of four grades across four areas of judgment. This is relatively reliable and, in most cases, uncontentious. Indeed, Jon Coles reports that 98 per cent of inspections of United Learning schools either agreed with the school, or the school accepted that the result was borderline.

Now, however, Ofsted proposes to rate as many as 11 aspects of a school, using five grades. It's as a matter of psychometric certainty that this will be less reliable. There simply won't be time to assess a school accurately in so many aspects, or to the required degree of precision.

The results will inevitably be



“ It is no surprise that leaders are up in arms

more arbitrary, to the point of endangering validity. A school might be confident they are 'strong' on teaching quality, but if the inspector judges they "check pupils' understanding systematically", they will only be 'secure'.

What the difference between that and "expert at checking pupils' understanding" is, is beyond me. According to Schools Week's investigation, it is beyond most of my readers too. And since Ofsted draws most of its inspectors from the sector, I doubt they will be any more capable of accurate discernment.

The one clear improvement in the proposals is the plan to make safeguarding a simple yes/no, separate from other school judgements. Beyond that, though, the new framework cannot lead to consistently reliable judgements, so it is no surprise that school leaders are up in arms about it.

The chief inspector, Sir Martyn Oliver, made his name with the Big Listen, and the sector is speaking with one voice. Lee Owston says

they will listen again, and that is great news for anyone who cares about children or teachers or justice.

The problem Ofsted faces is that Labour are committed to report cards, premised on the very idea of giving a broader picture of school performance. In other words, more data points.

And so the inspectorate is caught between the political rock of a manifesto commitment and the psychometric hard place of inspection validity.

Further consultation is surely now inevitable. Hopefully, it will gather enough evidence for Sir Martyn to go to the secretary of state and confront her with the reality that her plans are flawed.

And if she will not listen, then he will need to say that she has made his position untenable. You cannot serve as a chief inspector if you know that the system you preside over does not work.

Politics is less predictable than psychometrics, but I'm reliably certain that Ofsted isn't out of the woods yet.

Opinion

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MICHELLE LEVESLEY

IT training and digital literacy
consultant, Risu

The edtech dream is a a safeguarding nightmare

The education sector needs to very quickly get very serious about its procurement and governance of technological 'solutions', writes Michelle Levesley

Education has been sold a hype-filled edtech dream, now with added 'AI'. It's a thriving market, but it's one where schools are essentially unable to make informed and ethical choices – with potentially dire consequences for young people.

Edtech is not regulated in the same way as, say, playground apparatus or food. This is not to say that all edtech is nefarious, but all edtech is designed for profit, and I have yet to see any that is 100-per cent privacy-respecting or secure.

I would love to see some exceptions. I would also love to see the information commissioner's office (ICO) engage in more enforcement. Because it should not be down to schools to get 'security and privacy by demand'; they should be getting it by design.

In the private sector, compliance teams demand clear responses from vendors on security or privacy issues. In education, procurement is less rigorous.

Vendors find it easier to obfuscate and bamboozle with National Cyber Security Centre or generic AI governance checklists. All it takes is for a school IT team and GDPR

consultant to wave things through.

I have seen this as a school data protection officer and as a parent; schools defer to consultants for advice and the advice is often sadly incorrect.

Once schools pay or sign up for the 'free trial', they usually discover that the promised innovation is missing. And that's because the end product of these companies – where their money comes from regardless of their other intentions – is not learning; it is children's data.

This data can be used to help pupils make academic progress. But it can also be used for more questionable ends. Have we really asked ourselves how these ends reflect our values, and where we draw our boundaries?

The truth is that we haven't, and those boundaries are being drawn up without broad societal consent. And I'm not just talking about the normalisation of dubious practices in schools like online proctoring, biometrics in canteens and CCTV in bathrooms.

That free-to-use app is likely using tracking pixels that could well be sharing children's data with third parties like advertisers, law enforcement or other interested parties.

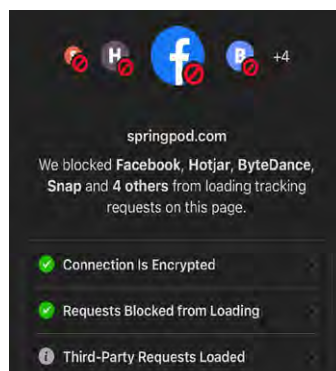
Meta, Google and Bytedance (owner of TikTok) are the main users of this technology. It is present on nearly one-third of websites globally, and it should never be embedded into technology for children.



“The end product here is not learning; it is children's data”

And yet. Free, privacy-respecting search engines like Brave, Privacy Badger or Duckduckgo all provide instant reports on trackers. Here is one such report on the popular work experience website, Springpod.

So while we are nominally teaching



children and young people to be careful online, we are in fact – often unwittingly, sometimes because we've been deceived – creating huge digital footprints for them.

And all this when we know that education is a high-risk target for cybercriminals. More than half of primaries and over two-thirds of secondaries identified a breach in the past year.

Establishing effective edtech governance is challenging. I wish I could point you to an ICO checklist and tell you to just work through it, but even that would not guarantee safety in this wild west.

Having said that, there are some best bets:

Consent as standard

Whatever you choose, everyone should have the option to opt out at any time.

Bare necessities

Once stolen, biometric data cannot be changed. For any data collection or processing, always ask yourself: Do I really need to do this and should I keep it? The same goes for CCTV in bathrooms.

Safety in numbers

Work with other schools and use your collective power to force better security and privacy from providers.

In-house expertise

Try to recruit privacy and cybersecurity specialists onto your trustee or governance teams, or ask parents with expertise to consult on edtech procurement.

There's another important dimension to expertise too. If you didn't grow up poor, harassed by police or discriminated against, it can be hard to imagine how technology might be used against you.

I can think of no stronger argument to listen to your community – nor indeed to get serious about this issue.

Solutions

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ANDREA SQUIRES

Partner and head of
education, Winckworth
Sherwood LLP

What's the law on protecting teachers from harassment?

Amid growing complaints of an increasingly serious nature, Andrea Squires sets out the range of schools' legal recourse in the face of the extreme and the vexatious

Last week's news that teaching remains the third most popular job among children masks a grim reality: the professional respect parents have traditionally had for their children's teachers is rapidly eroding. So what can schools do about it?

In addition to the ever-increasing number of parental complaints schools receive, we now have an even more worrying tendency for parents to vent their frustrations on social media, and indeed to turn up at school to remonstrate with anyone prepared to listen.

All state schools are required as a matter of law (or statutory guidance) to have and publish procedures to deal with complaints. But these trends are such that most schools now also have systems and policies for dealing with "extreme complaints" and "unacceptable behaviour" by visitors.

The stakes are higher too. It used to be the case that the regulatory bodies would generally leave schools to deal with complaints, only seeking reassurance that they were following their procedures.

Now, it is increasingly common

for the Department for Education, Ofsted, regional directors and local authorities to carry out their own investigations.

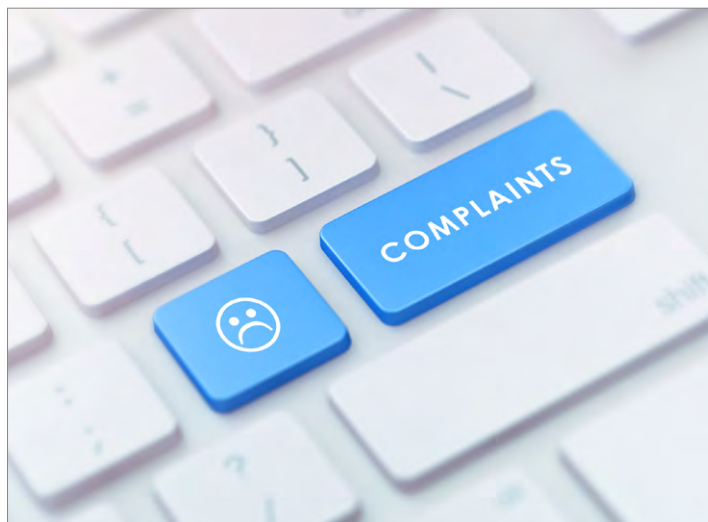
These can have significant consequences for the school and the individuals concerned, no more so than when a complaint about a teacher is repackaged and lodged with the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA).

The TRA will now, as a matter of standard practice, investigate a complaint made about a teacher by a parent or member of the public, even when a complaint is evidently vexatious.

While there is clearly a need for checks and balances, in effect we have seen the weaponising of these systems by parents intent on causing harm. It is rare not to see a complaint to a school also shared with all the regulatory bodies, reigniting a process that might have been properly concluded (in some cases several times).

The stress involved for teachers and senior leaders (and, more often than not, governors) should not be underestimated. The disruption and cost can be eye-watering.

Worse, schools often feel powerless in the face of such onslaught. This is especially true in dealing with the growing number of instances of teachers becoming the focus of online trolling, potentially defamatory posts, or experiencing



“ We have witnessed the weaponising of complaints

behaviour which amounts to harassment.

Such posts may constitute an offence under the Malicious Communications Act 1988. The offence covers communications that are offensive, obscene, menacing or false.

There is no legal requirement for the communication in question to reach the subject or intended recipient; it is the act of publishing or sending the communication and the intention to cause distress that count. The offence is punishable by up to six months in prison or a fine.

Harassment and stalking are offences under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, defined as someone repeatedly behaving in a way that makes a person feel scared, distressed or threatened. It may also be a hate crime or other offence.

If a crime may have been committed, the police should be involved and schools should consider what support they will need to provide to teachers who have become the target of such activity.

Social media posts may also be

defamatory under the Defamation Act 2013. This covers libel and slander, both of which concern the publication of material that adversely affects a person's reputation (i.e. tends to lower the subject in the reasonable estimation of others).

Libel concerns "lasting" forms of publication such as print, online or broadcasting. Slander concerns more transient forms such as spoken words or gestures. The words need to relate to a person rather than an organisation.

Schools should support their teachers in dealing with such abuse, but taking action can be fraught. Applications to platforms can be made to take down posts and a "cease and desist" letter can be sent.

However, the reality is that this may not be enough to deter some individuals. Indeed, it could even fuel the fire and provide further material to use against the school.

There are no simple answers, but regaining some of that professional respect for teachers is crucial. Knowing the law and applying it rigorously is key to that.

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THE CONVERSATION

LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM



Jess Mahdavi-Gladwell
Freelance SEND consultant

THE HUMAN TOUCH

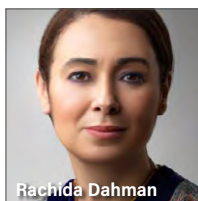
I've had the opportunity to visit a few schools recently, and I've really noticed the impact of sunshine on children, adults and environments. Perhaps lifted by the sunshine myself, I've noticed other things shining brightly too.

Rachida Dahman's blog, entitled *I Am Not Afraid*, is a compelling read. In it, she writes about language and the impact it has on relationships, and therefore children.

Emphasising the interpersonal nature of learning, she reminds us that 'true education requires profoundly personal and meaningful relationships... to renew and solidify the interpersonal foundations of teaching and learning'.

Reflecting on the things that have stood out when I've been visiting schools, it has been the times when I've seen (and felt) children experiencing 'what it means to be part of a community'.

Dachman ends with a thought on what schools are meant to be – a poignant reminder to enjoy and appreciate those schools which are 'places of deeper humanity'.



Rachida Dahman

OWNING INCLUSION



But how do we know that a school is truly inclusive, that every child experiences it as a place of deeper humanity?

In this blog, Gary Aubin proposes this question as a good way to consider who 'owns' SEND in your school: 'Can good discussions happen about SEND, which move provision forward, when the SENCo is not there?'

It's a great reminder that simply saying that 'every teacher is a teacher of SEND' is not enough. Those words must be backed up by action.

Aubin goes on to suggest further questions and share practical suggestions to support schools to more deeply embed inclusion in their fabric. My favourite is the idea of CPD time for teachers and TAs to share good practice. This not only celebrates what is going well, but models what is possible in that setting with those pupils.

This is a blog full of inspiration. Aubin is clearly driven to achieve true inclusion, and his enthusiasm is infectious.

READING FOR PLEASURE

Another educator with infectious positivity is Ed Finch, whose knowledge and regard for the children he teaches leaps out of the screen in this blog. Reminiscing about how he has seen his class show their budding love of reading, he indirectly shares suggestions for increasing reading engagement in all classes.

The blog is ostensibly written in advance of a 'tricky meeting with the head'. Finch is concerned about how he will justify the reading scores of the children with SEND in this class.

But what oozes from the text (and what I hope we would all be able to recognise, irrespective of reading scores) is what an excellent teacher has done to support children to access reading and the impact that this has had.

Oh for a system that would allow leaders to enjoy hearing about the progress that is not measurable, as much as that which is.

In passing, Finch rightly points out that the D in SEND might not impact reading scores, the importance of not conflating EAL with SEND and the differential impact of the four areas of need.

The message throughout is clear: assessment scores are only one part of the information we have about our pupils.

BEYOND TOKENISM

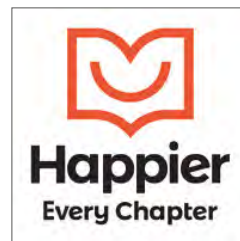
In light of the above, it would be remiss not to mention World Book Day this week. Sometimes dismissed as a tokenistic dressing

up day, the reality is that in schools across the land, children and adults are enthused by it to share their love of books.

But there's a deeper purpose to the day too. In this blog, Ndah Mbawa shares a sobering statistic about the book tokens schools hand out each year: A quarter of children on free school meals who received the £1 token say the book they bought with it was the first book they ever owned.

Challenging us to see World Book Day as a call to action, Mbawa goes on to give practical steps for parents, school leaders, policymakers and anyone in a position to put their money where their mouth is.

As he rightly says: 'It's not enough to believe in literacy'. Challenge accepted.



Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts



The Knowledge

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



Why speech and language matter to mental health

**Jane Harris, CEO,
Speech and Language UK**

Last week brought news that government-funded trials of interventions designed to boost mental health literacy largely failed to yield lasting benefits. Some were in fact linked to worsening emotional difficulties over time.

This week brings news that teachers are grappling with increasing numbers of children starting school with poorer-than-expected language and communication skills.

While both findings are concerning, the unacknowledged link between them could be empowering for schools and yield huge benefits for young people.

When we talk about the causes of poor mental health, we tend to focus on poverty, neglect and attachment issues – all factors that teachers have little to no ability to prevent.

Yet over the many years I've worked in mental health, I can't remember a single discussion about the one factor schools *can* affect: language.

Once you see the links, they are hard to deny. Language helps us to name and identify our emotions. It allows us to engage in self-talk and reasoning about what is happening to us and how we are feeling. And ultimately, language allows us to participate in talking therapies if they are necessary.

Most school-based mental health interventions are verbally mediated; they assume children possess the language skills required to understand, articulate and engage with complex emotional concepts.

Yet a significant (and evidently growing) proportion of pupils have speech and language challenges that undermine this very assumption.

Robust and disquieting studies indicate that around 45 per cent of young people referred to mental health services struggle with core language skills, such as making inferences, interpreting ambiguity and understanding figures of speech.

Meanwhile, longitudinal research reveals that children diagnosed with developmental language disorder (DLD) face a 1.8 to 2.3-fold increased risk of poor mental health by adolescence compared with their peers.



Language is far more than a tool for communication. It is the medium through which children learn to understand, regulate and express their emotions. It underpins social interaction and is crucial for developing the emotional literacy needed to navigate interpersonal relationships.

Struggling with speech and language compromises these fundamental processes, with predictable consequences for the individual, the people around them, and any attempt to bolster their mental health through traditional interventions.

Compounding the issue are broader social and economic factors. Research by Speech and Language UK finds that 1.9 million children (and rising) are behind in talking and understanding words, with one million living with the lifelong condition of DLD, which is hardly talked about in the education sector.

Alarmingly, government statistics show over 20 per cent of children in reception already lag behind expected communication levels. In disadvantaged areas, that rises to nearly half. And as child poverty reaches record highs, it's sadly unsurprising to see teachers' perceptions foreshadowing worse figures in YouGov's new poll.

The evidence is clear. Without robust support for speech and language development, any intervention aimed at improving mental health

risks falling short.

Redirecting resources and policy so that speech and language challenges are tackled more thoroughly is not a luxury but a necessity if we are to ensure that children have better mental health.

But investing in speech and language support requires more than hiring extra therapists. It demands a comprehensive approach.

This must include training teachers to identify speech and language challenges early, integrating spoken language skills into the curriculum and ensuring that there is guidance for teachers on how to adapt their teaching for children with lifelong speech and language challenges.

Such measures would have a double pay-off. They would help enhance children's educational outcomes, and they would bolster children's ability to identify and regulate their own emotions.

This would improve their mental health and their behaviour. Better still, improved communication leading to increased social interactions and higher self-esteem can be the bedrock of inclusive environments where all children feel they belong.

In short, it is only by fortifying foundational speech and language skills that we can ensure our children are given the chance, as Bridget Phillipson put it so well, to achieve and to thrive.

Week in

Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

MONDAY

Could the government be gearing up to push back its target for a full breakfast clubs rollout?

A seemingly well-placed question from Labour MP Mark Ferguson and the education secretary's answer has prompted speculation.

Ministers had already delayed the implementation of a requirement for all primaries to offer a universal breakfast club until at least April 2026.

But in Parliament on Monday, Ferguson asked Bridget Phillipson if she could "confirm that all primary schools and all primary school students will have breakfast clubs by the end of this Parliament".

"I recognise the incredible work that the early adopters will be taking forward, but it is the case that all primary schools will offer a universal free breakfast club under this Labour government," she replied.

Phillipson had a strong rebuke for the "private schools lobby" when Conservatives continued to snipe at her private schools VAT policy at education questions.

The Guardian reported this week that more families had received their first choice of state school this year. London councils reported "no obvious impact" from the policy.

A survey of 70 councils outside London by the Press Association found a rise in first choice offers in 44. Two had no change and 24 reported a fall.

Phillipson told MPs that "contrary to all of the scaremongering that we have seen from the private schools lobby, more children at national offer day last week got their first-choice place.

"The scaremongering that they have been suggesting just hasn't come to pass."

TUESDAY

Written questions from MPs provide an invaluable way to hold the government to account. But they are often misused to ask silly questions to which MPs really should already know the answer, or to which the answer could easily be found.

Labour MP Fabian Hamilton recently asked schools minister Catherine McKinnell "whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of ending compulsory written national curriculum assessments for key stage one students".

It fell to the minister to point out that "end of key stage 1 national curriculum tests and teacher assessments have been non-statutory since the 2023-24 academic year".

OK, that's fairly recent. But the error looks sillier when you remember that the consultation on making them optional launched in *2007*. At that point, Hamilton had only been an MP for...10 years.

WEDNESDAY

We're not saying Sir Martyn Oliver has got a bit big for his boots, but the Ofsted boss suggested this week that, simply by talking about inclusion, he has started to prompt a shift in approach in the system.

He told this week's SEND and inclusion conference that "when Ofsted put curriculum front and centre in our approach" – something that happened under his predecessor Amanda Spielman – "the dial shifted".

He now wants to "do the same for inclusion", to make sure that every school is "thinking really hard about what they are doing, and what they could be doing, for disadvantaged and vulnerable children, and those with SEND".

"Anecdotally, we're already seeing this starting to happen," he boasted.

"I have been in this job for a little over

a year, and I've been banging on this drum for that whole time, and indeed for my whole career in education before that. And we are hearing reports already of the system responding."

His evidence?

"I recently met Solace's Susan Parsonage. She told me about her area of Wokingham and the strengthened focus across the education partnership on inclusion."

THURSDAY

Former education secretary-turned-Spectator editor Michael Gove has written an illuminating article in his new mag.

Illustrated with a picture depicting the infamous "Blob" (Gove's characterisation of the evil progressive teaching unions and education academics), it is titled "The lessons I learned as education secretary".

Gems include calling former schools minister Nick Gibb "both Sam and Gandalf to my faltering Frodo" and dubbing David Laws as the "single brightest and nicest Liberal in history".

But he also has a lesson for Bridget Phillipson.

"If you find the unions are praising you and the academics in university education departments proclaim themselves your allies – ask yourself, as Mrs Gaitskell did of Hugh: 'Are the wrong people clapping?'"

Gove is exactly the person to be giving advice about clapping (reader: if you don't get this great gag, then Google "Michael Gove clapping gif").





SHEREDES PRIMARY SCHOOL

HEADTEACHER

Pay range: L16 – L24 (£73,539 - £88,150) Fringe
Location: Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire
Start date: September 2025
Closing date: 14th April 2025

Sheredes Primary School is seeking an inspiring and passionate Headteacher to join our thriving community.

At Sheredes, children are encouraged to explore, learn, and grow in a supportive environment, surrounded by expansive grounds and superb facilities.

As Headteacher, you will lead a dedicated team, fostering high expectations, inclusion, and innovation, while ensuring a balanced and well-being focused school culture. You will drive school improvement, support staff and students, and build strong relationships with parents and the community.

If you are ready to lead a school that values excellence and personal development, we want to hear from you!

To discuss the role, please contact Natalie Knight-Wickens, Chair of Governors, at admin@sheredesprimary.herts.sch.uk.

Apply via the Teach in Herts website.
 CVs will not be considered.



[Click to apply](#)



The Greenfield and Hurst Drive Federation



Job title: Executive Headteacher
Location: Waltham Cross
Start date: September 2025
Salary: L18 – L27 Fringe (£77,051 - £94,758)
Closing date: Tuesday 15th April 2025

Join us at the Greenfield and Hurst Drive Federation, where leadership meets purpose. We seek an Executive Headteacher ready to elevate their career in a role that combines innovation, inspiration, and community focus.

Our federation, founded on collaboration and inclusivity, invites you to lead two esteemed schools deeply embedded in their local community. Championing excellence in education, you'll build on our strong foundations, fostering a culture of high aspirations and wellbeing.

Why choose us?

Benefit from a stable, dedicated team, a culture of innovation, and strategic governance. Join a growing community offering fresh opportunities in an evolving local area.

Who are we looking for?

An experienced Headteacher or Executive Headteacher passionate about early years and primary education, with the vision to inspire, lead confidently, and drive excellence.

For more information and to apply, visit www.teachinherts.com



CEO Vacancy

Archway Learning Trust are looking for our next dynamic, inspirational and committed Chief Executive Officer, as our current exceptional and founding CEO looks to pass the baton on and enjoy their well-earned retirement.

We are looking for someone with the passion, energy, drive and focus to lead the next part of Archway's journey. Someone who is motivated by further enhancing the life chances of the children and communities we serve; and harnessing the considerable energy, enthusiasm and commitment of the many wonderful, committed professionals who collaborate to make Archway a truly unique, engaging and amazing place to work.

Archway Learning Trust (ALT) is a multi-million-pound business with an annual turnover of £72m and an estates portfolio valued at £186m that comprises of a mixture of PFI, leased and owned properties. This is a fabulous role with so many opportunities to make a real difference.

As the Archway CEO you will be an exemplar role model of the

Trust's vision, mission and values. You will ensure that the outcomes, attainments and development of the character of the children that we serve stay central to all decision making. You will demonstrate consistently high standards of principled and professional conduct, always upholding and demonstrating The Principles of Public Life (Nolan Principles).

A passionate, engaging and respected leader, you will have an excellent understanding of the current educational landscape with a deep knowledge of Ofsted, DfE, and academy legislation. Working in the 'business of education' you will have a sound commercial acumen with the skills to oversee executive leaders in education, finance, operations, HR, and data.

Please visit CEO Vacancy - Archway Learning Trust for further information, our CEO brochure, Job description and People specification and to apply.

**Applications for this role close at
 Midnight 6th April 2025**

[JOIN US](#) →

Charter.

Financial Controller

North Dulwich

£55,000-£60,000

Closing date: 20th March 2025

Looking for a job in finance that really adds up?
Where you can really make a difference?
Then search no further....

About the Role

We are seeking to appoint a dedicated, well-qualified and skilled individual to join our successful and growing Trust. This is a key role, overseeing the finance function and ensuring regulatory compliance, as well as working in partnership with a distinct group of schools.

[Click here for more information](#)



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.

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](#)