



WE CAN'T ADVISE OUR WAY TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT



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79 SCHOOLS DITCH FLAGSHIP BREAKFAST CLUBS PILOT

- One in ten of original 'early adopter' schools drop out
- Many leaders say the scheme was financially unviable
- But DfE says churn 'expected' and all schools replaced

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How multi-academy trusts fund their schools is still a relatively new world.

As with all new schools policy, we are interested to find out how it works, differences in approaches and the emerging issues.

We've taken that approach to dive into the finances of academy trusts that pool their schools' funding (known as GAG pooling).

Unlike trusts that top-slice to fund central services for schools, information on GAG pooling can be opaque.

Our piece this week sheds some light on that (pages 7 to 10).

There are some large differences in the budgets schools receive compared with what the government allocates to them.

But it is important to understand this money isn't just swiped from them.

It allows trusts to better fund schools in need. It also funds many central services back to schools – which mostly *saves* money.

Trusts have a single strategy. It makes sense they have a single budget. And it's likely many more will move towards pooling cash.

But that makes it important to look at the transparency imbalance.

Last week's Supreme Court ruling on the legal definition of a woman has thrown schools further into the dark on a difficult issue.

Leaders already work incredibly hard to make sure their settings are inclusive for all children, often with little government support.

The publication of the judgment without quick guidance from the government risks knee-jerk reactions that could lead to further discrimination.

It is important to remember that at the centre of a very toxic "debate" on this issue are children – and adults – simply trying to live their lives.

The Labour government has dragged its feet in reviewing the previous administration's guidance on supporting trans children.

Revised guidance is now sorely overdue, but it really needs to be properly thought through and useful for schools.

If this is something that will take months rather than weeks, schools need something in the interim to avoid any unintended consequences.

Most read online this week:

- 1 **School support staff offered 3.2% pay rise**
- 2 **NASUWT members seek public dismissal of NEU merger**
- 3 **6 proposals from academy bosses to improve Ofsted reforms**
- 4 **Matt Wrack confirmed as next NASUWT general secretary**
- 5 **NEU squares up to sister unions over support staff recruitment**

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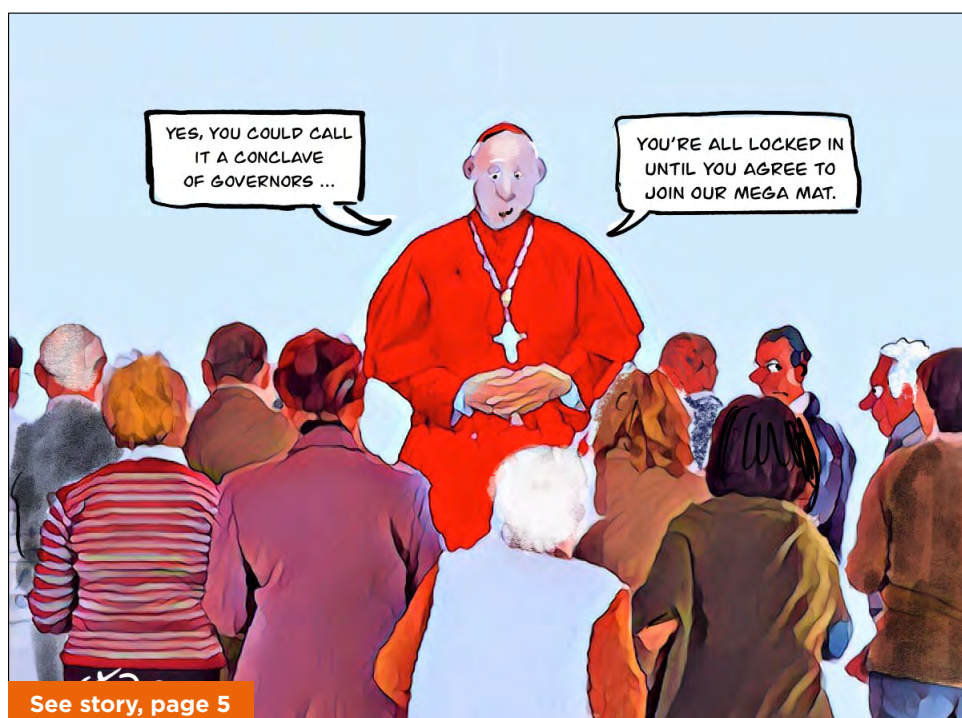


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NEWS

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Primary schools lose appetite for free breakfast clubs

RHI STORER

@RHISTORERWRITES

EXCLUSIVE

Nearly 80 schools named just months ago as trailblazers for Labour's flagship free breakfast clubs have dropped out, with many saying the funding is inadequate.

The government announced 750 "early adopter" primary schools had opened breakfast clubs this week, providing 30 minutes of free childcare and a "healthy start" for about 180,000 children.

But the list, published this week, differed from the original list of 750 schools in February. Schools Week analysis found 79 schools named as taking part in February have since dropped out – equating to more than one in ten.

The government said more than 3,000 schools had expressed an interest, with 89 re-cently added to boost numbers back up to past 750.

However, many of the schools that dropped out blamed inadequate funding, raising fresh concerns about the viability of the clubs which are to be rolled out across all primary schools by the end of parliament.

'Impossible to financially break-even'

Among the schools withdrawn since February are Beamont and Bruche primary schools in Warrington.

Warrington Primary Academy Trust CEO Louise Smith said they had withdrawn "because it currently isn't financially viable for our schools.

"We very much support the concept, but it needs to be properly funded. Schools cannot pick up the hidden costs of this. The scheme is in danger of falling flat because of this funding shortfall."

She said one school had explored linking with a private provider "but they could not make it pay without supplementing it with our own money".

"The funding gap is considerable," said Smith. She calculated a club for 30 children would cost at least £26.10 per day. Funding would equate to £20.70.

"We would be immediately out of pocket before we even buy food."

Heycroft Primary in Essex, an early adopter in February, said it "regrettably" pulled out.

Andrew Cooper, the chief executive officer of South East Essex Academy



Tom Hayes

Trust, which runs the school, said it did "not make financial sense" to participate in a "loss-making activity" based on current staffing ratios.

Broughton-in-Amounderness Primary in Lancashire also pulled out.

Oliver McPhail, its head, told the Blog Preston website it was "no longer in a position to offer this service due the financial impact it will have on our budget."

Hatchlands Primary in Surrey also pulled out over "logical challenges".

While it was "disappointing news" for parents, "ensuring adequate supervision, accommodating all interested pupils within our facilities, and maintaining compliance with nutritional guidelines have all been significant considerations", Moira Anderson, the school's head, said in a letter.

'We haven't got the capacity'

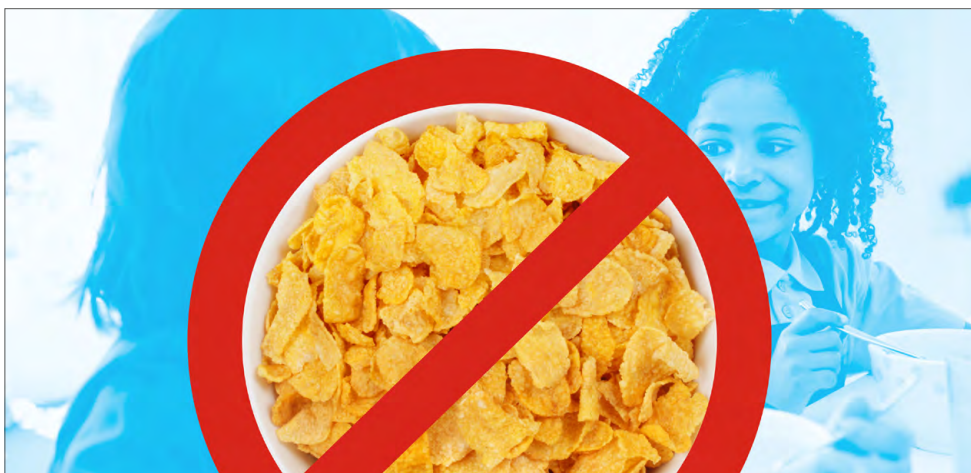
Malmesbury Park School in Bournemouth, part of the Reach South Academy Trust, withdrew as the scheme was "not financially viable".

Tom Hayes, the Labour MP for Bournemouth East, previously said the scheme would "ensure every child has the chance to thrive". He did not respond to a request for comment.

Brookfield Junior Primary Academy in Rotherham pulled out following financial concerns.

Companies such as Kellogg's and Greggs already part-fund some clubs, with schools also charging parents.

A school based in Bedfordshire, which wanted to remain anonymous, said it pulled out after reading the final details.



'Chaotic and mismanaged'

Neil O'Brien, the shadow schools minister, said it was "another chaotic and mismanaged announcement from DfE ministers.

"Coming as school leaders warn of redundancies and valuable education schemes are shut down, this does raise questions about ministers' priorities."

But the government this week said some movement was "always expected as we confirmed the final list".

"That's precisely why we built in time between the announcement and the start of the scheme: to work closely with schools, ensure plans were deliverable, and get clubs up and running from the first day of term."

Schools Week previously reported how interested schools had snubbed the pilot because it would hamstring existing clubs and force them to lose income.

Funding documents for the trial show a one-off £500 set-up payment to cover things such as equipment and materials. A lump sum of £1,099 would cover "start-up staffing costs" for the summer term.

The basic funding rate at mainstream schools is 60p per pupil, per day. Free school meals pupils attract an extra 78p.

The government said the funding worked out as an extra £21,400 for schools taking part.

Bridget Phillipson, the education secretary, previously said the trial wanted to "test really effectively what works ahead of a full national roll-out".



Neil O'Brien

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Governors told to 'resign' if they don't back Catholic mega MAT plans

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

Governors of Catholic schools who oppose plans to join new mega MATs have been told by their diocese in South Yorkshire they "should resign", a Schools Week investigation has found.

Meanwhile, another diocese in the west of England told its governors they could only pass compliance checks if they provided evidence they supported academisation. Failing such a check meant the school would be barred from an 'outstanding' rating in Catholic inspections.

Leaders said the moves showed governors' faithfulness was being leaned on to force through decisions they might not agree with.

It also comes after the leaders' union NAHT revealed members in a London archdiocese were left fearing "negative repercussions" for resisting a bishop's academy vision.

In the west of England, Clifton Diocese wants to begin the "next phase" of its bishop's vision for Catholic trusts to join three mega MATs. These would provide "growth in size and capacity".

But information "regarding the bishop's vision is not reaching all stakeholders effectively", Mary Cox, the diocese's director of schools and colleges, said in a letter this month.

Compliance checks on "whether schools are supportive of the bishop's directives" have been introduced to Catholic school inspections.

"Since the bishop's vision is part of these directives, each governing body of schools not yet in a trust, should include an acknowledgement of the new plan, as well as their intention to support it," she wrote.

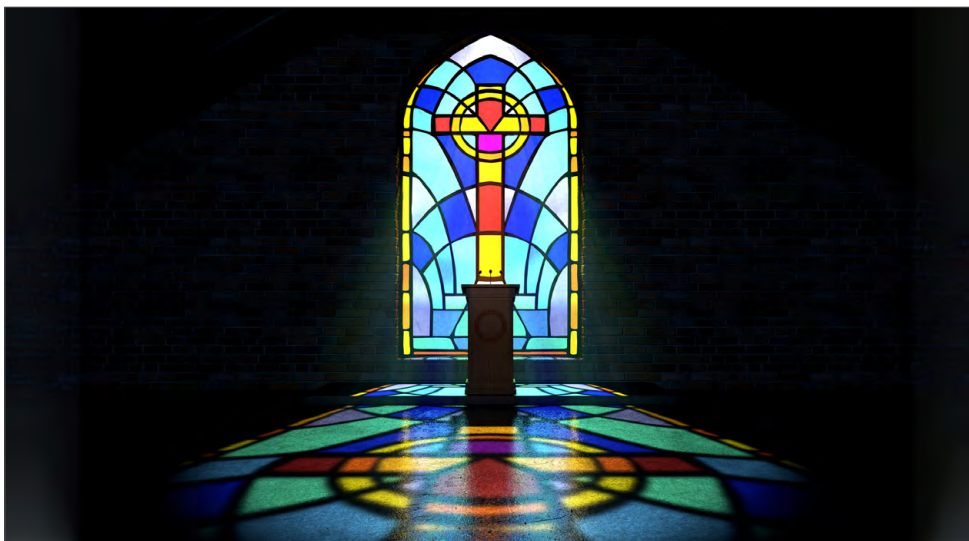
"I can then record your school as compliant in accordance with the Catholic Schools Inspectorate (CSI) framework."

Guidance shows that schools not compliant in this area could not be rated 'outstanding'.

A leader in the area, who asked not to be named, said the "strong link made between faithfulness and joining a diocesan MAT is placing real strain on governors".

The "growing pressure" was also "drawing headteachers into complex governance debates, often at the expense of the urgent day-to-day work of leading schools".

A Clifton spokesperson said the letter "was written in the spirit of encouraging ongoing



discernment". Inspection grades "depend on many aspects of school life, and no single factor determines the outcome", they added.

When asked for comment on the case, a CSI spokesperson said "all judgments are ultimately made by the inspector", with some determining "whether or not a school is following the bishop's vision for the diocese".

This would "vary from diocese to diocese", but "decisions will be based in part on [inspectors'] own individual judgment as well as information provided by both the school and the diocese".

Meanwhile, a document shared by Hallam Diocese in South Yorkshire with leaders last month noted the educational strategy defined by the bishop might "not align" with the vision of governors.

But it said "for the avoidance of doubt" that "it is not for the governing body to decide when they may or may not join their designated" MAT. Not doing this, placed the bishop "in an invidious position".

"Here the position of a foundation governor is clear. If they cannot accept where the authority lies for setting the conversion timeline for their school, reluctantly they should resign their position," the document read.

"It is imperative to reiterate that it is highly inappropriate and disrespectful for any foundation governor not to accept this position and continue in their role to prevent the implementation of the bishop's educational strategy."

Most governors in Catholic schools – called foundation governors – are

appointed by the bishop. They are also charged with preserving the school's religious character.

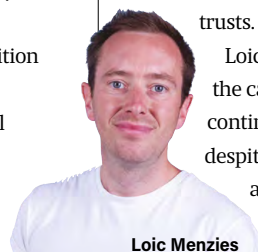
Earlier this month, the Archdiocese of Southwark in London was accused of subjecting leaders to "inappropriate pressure" and threatening to force out obstructive governors in its bid for "universal academisation".

In a letter, seen by Schools Week, the NAHT revealed members in the archdiocese said they had been "met with hostility" and feared "negative repercussions" for questioning the conversion plans.

They also claimed the body representing bishops' national education policy, the Catholic Education Service (CES), hinted that those fighting proposals to join one of five religious multi-academy trusts could be downgraded during Catholic inspections.

A CES spokesperson said there was "nothing within the inspection process requiring academisation". But a school was an "integral element of the wider vision for a diocese... with school leadership embracing this approach being recommended as part of any inspection".

Schools Week revealed in December that all but one of the 19 English Catholic dioceses were pursuing trust growth, with one planning to split almost 200 schools between three super-sized trusts.



Loic Menzies

Loic Menzies, a policy expert, believes the cases show some schools are continuing to be pushed into trusts, despite it being thought recent Labour announcements had initiated "a swing away from academisation".

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Schools have 28% of budgets shaved off by GAG pooling trusts

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

Schools are having up to 28 per cent shaved off their budgets by academy trusts that pool their funding, an investigation has found.

Unions are now demanding greater scrutiny over how trusts pool budgets – known as general annual grant (GAG) pooling – as leaders await promised government guidance to support decisions around the controversial practice.

Schools Week analysis of 15 MATs that employ GAG pooling found dozens of schools with budgets that are 15 per cent less than allocated by the government's national funding formula.

The retained cash is used to fund trust central teams, services provided back to schools or to bump up funding of other schools in the MAT.

Trusts say pooling allows them to save schools money through economies of scale. And redistributing cash to struggling academies means some can actually get more than allocated by the government.

But school finance expert Micon Metcalfe said there should be "more disclosure" around the funding model.

"The public generally should have a right to know that funding that is allocated to those children in those schools, if it's not going directly to them, isn't having a detrimental impact," she said. "There should be a justification and clarity over it."

GAG pooling is used by a fifth of trusts, surveys suggest. MATs pool all their schools' funding that is issued by government, and dish out individual budgets based on their own criteria.

Other trusts top slice their school budgets to fund central services. Under this method, schools get their national funding allocations and the trust instead charges a fee. On average, top-slice charges range from 5.5 per cent in the large MATs to 8.8 per cent in the smallest. This figure is usually published in annual accounts.

Schools see 28 per cent budget cut

GAG-pooling trusts said details showing central service costs are given in annual accounts, but it is difficult to deduce what proportion this accounts for in individual schools.

So Schools Week asked 15 GAG-



"Scrutiny should be the price for receiving public money"

pooling trusts, through freedom of information requests, how much funding their schools got compared with the amount awarded by the Department for Education.

Ten responded with the full data.

Astrea Academies Trust rebuffed our request – saying releasing the information would be "prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs".

Two other trusts, City Learning Trust and East Midlands Academy Trust, did not respond at all.

Of those that did respond, Aspire Academy Trust retained 24 per cent of its 37 schools' GAG funding in 2023-24 – the highest of any trust.

Eight of its schools received 28 per cent less than their government allocation, with all the others having at least 15 per cent effectively sliced.

A spokesperson for the primary school-only trust said that while the pooled amounts "may appear comparatively higher" than others, allocations were "based on need and requirements".

The range and scale of services provided to schools were extensive, they said, including estates management, IT, HR, health and safety, business support and school improvement support.

That left cash delegated to academies "specifically for

school-based staffing and curriculum-related resources only".

Pooling funding ensured "value for money at all times" and met the "needs of all academies... in a fair and equitable model".

Some schools might also get an additional "reallocation" of their original GAG based on "individual needs".

Trusts provide more services centrally

Oasis Community Learning, one of the country's biggest trusts, took 17 per cent of its schools' GAG allocations on average – the second highest. It did not provide school-level figures for its 54 academies, saying this would take more than 18 hours of staff time to compile, the limit for FOIs.

It was followed by the Paradigm Trust in London, whose schools got 15 per cent less than allocated by the government, analysis suggests.

In all, 77 schools across the 10 trusts who responded had at least 15 per cent of their budgets retained centrally.

At three of the MATs – Brigantia Learning Trust, Enquire Learning Trust and Our Lady of Lourdes – no schools had more than 10 per cent extracted.

However, sector leaders say it is not possible to compare trusts based on costs alone, as each provides its schools with different services.

For instance, Paradigm said it runs many central functions "that would, in other trusts, be expected in each individual school budget",



Micon Metcalfe

Continued on next page

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such as IT and SEND support, and mental health provision.

Its "entire school improvement team" was included centrally and not recharged to individual academies.

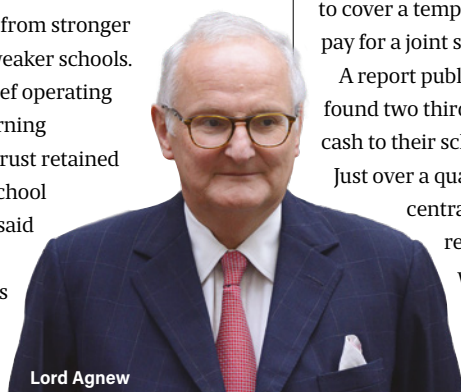
Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust retained about 12 per cent of school budgets overall last year. But as well as school improvement and financial management support, it provided schools with apprentice training, legal help and wellbeing forums.

Pooling 'helps cut variances' ...

The academy trust handbook says GAG pooling enhances a MAT's "ability to allocate resources in line with improvement priorities and running costs across the trust's constituent academies".

Lord Agnew, the former Conservative academies minister, said it was "one of the greatest [academy] freedoms" because it helped shift funding from stronger schools to stabilise weaker schools.

Tim Howes, the chief operating officer of Futura Learning Partnership, whose trust retained about 8 per cent of school budgets on average, said the MAT "wanted to ensure that variances in local authority



Lord Agnew

'This is about using every lever we have to put children first'

approaches [to funding] do not adversely impact any of our schools".

It works across five council areas. It also prioritises funding to disadvantaged schools.

Steve Rollett, the deputy chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, added pooling could allow trusts to target funding between schools, reserves, and shared services – "perhaps to cover a temporary blip in pupil numbers or to pay for a joint staff post".

A report published by IMP Software last year found two thirds of GAG-pooling trusts allocated cash to their schools based on need.

Just over a quarter managed all funding centrally with "education budgets released for local requirements", while one in 10 used revised models "to even out geographical differences".

... and actually saves schools thousands

Oasis said it aimed to use 5 per cent of GAG to pay for "national services or 'the centre'". A further 12 per cent was "for costs that schools would have to include in their individual budgets".

This led to a "lower cost and higher standard than might otherwise have been able to achieve alone".

"We are confident that by procuring and delivering on scale... we can achieve better value for money than 54 schools purchasing the same services individually," an Oasis spokesperson added.

It recalculated funding using pupil numbers and deprivation levels based on government rates, rather than those set by local authorities.

The only adjustments were £20,000 lump sums for one-form-entry schools and cash to support growing schools on lagged funding.

The Diocese of Ely Trust, which retained about 12 per cent of its schools' GAG, said that when the value of the goods and services this paid for was accounted for, the smallest schools got "between 101 to 102 per cent of their ESFA income back".

Among other things, it provided curriculum resources, CPD and insurance.

Brigantia said more than £440,000 went towards purchasing services for its schools such as IT technicians, Microsoft licences and exercise books.

Continued on next page

Councils take up to 9 per cent of school budgets for core services

Councils are effectively slicing up to 9 per cent of maintained school budgets, a *Schools Week* investigation has found – and the true cost could be higher when other charges are factored in.

The findings challenge claims from academy sceptics that trusts charge their schools greater amounts than councils for services away from the classroom.

Steve Rollett, the deputy chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts (CST), said: "School trusts are very upfront about costs for shared services. This investigation highlights how local authorities can take similar amounts, but the data is much less transparent [than for trusts] and as a result likely only the tip of iceberg."

Through Freedom of Information, we obtained figures from 17 of England's biggest local authorities showing how much they de-delegated from school budgets for core services.

We also asked for the number of schools that bought into traded services and how much they paid. The figures were used to calculate the size of an average school budget, de-delegation and how much a school stumped up for traded services.

Leeds charged schools the most (9 per cent). They were able to buy into 37 separate traded services, including HR, catering, cleaning educational psychology and pest control.

Three other councils took on average 6 per cent of school budgets, with County Durham offering services such as building and facilities, SEND and ICT support, and swimming and music lessons.

Jim Murray, Durham's head of education, said the high take-up reflected the size of the area it covered and the "quality and value for money of the services we provide".

Other councils in our sample charged between

1 and 4 per cent.

But Yusuf Erol, of chartered accountancy firm Langbrook Finance, said this was "likely [to] reflect both minimal de-delegation and limited traded service offers" from councils. In these instances, schools were either sourcing these services independently from other providers – and having to pay out more for that – or delivering them in-house using their own staff.

However, Hampshire, which charges 1 per cent, said there were "very few" services that its schools had to secure themselves. "[The council] benefits from economies of scale that academy trusts cannot match."

Erol noted that councils also could not mandate schools to buy into [traded] services or impose a central charge in the way trusts did, which made comparisons with MATs difficult.

Large MATs top slice on average 5.5 per cent, while the smallest take 8.8 per cent.

INVESTIGATION: ACADEMY FUNDING

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The trust believes that once the services it provided back to schools were accounted for, the central trust held 6 per cent.

'We don't know if it's value for money'

But a public accounts committee report from 2022 said the practice "means there is no way to identify if every pupil in a MAT has received the government's guaranteed minimum level of funding".

The practice also runs counter to the long-held aim of a national funding formula, to make funding more transparent by setting out in clear blocks how cash is awarded.

"It is a good thing that trusts can do it," Metcalfe said. "But it's very unclear how much is actually supporting very large central teams that may or may not provide value for money."

Hilary Goldsmith, a school business leader, added "real, genuine transparency [between staff and MATs] about what GAG pooling is for, why and how it leads to school improvement" was needed.

"It's about ensuring staff fully understand the value and agree with the numbers," she said.

Metcalfe said per-pupil funding allocations for each school in GAG-pooling trusts should be published on MAT websites.

'Thinking needed on collaborative decisions'

Rowena Hackwood, the chief executive of the Astrea Academy Trust, told a conference last month that the MAT has "had to have a little bit of a think about how we develop and present that idea of what it means to have a shared, collaborative view of how we allocate our resources".

She said the amounts trusts ringfenced for things such as professional services, school improvement support and estates "typically comes to between 10 and 18 per cent".

But she added: "What we were finding was that ... our school leaders didn't know that was the case, and they were wondering why they couldn't get all of that stuff for 5 per cent."

However, Astrea rejected our FOI request – despite acknowledging the public interest "in knowing how taxpayers' money is used and how schools are resourced". They said information available in the public domain was sufficient.

Daniel Kebede, the general secretary of the NEU, argued the "lack of transparency" around GAG pooling "makes a mockery of

**'Procuring and delivering on scale means better value for money'**

formularisation".

"Scrutiny should be the price for receiving public money."

But Rollett said that all trusts' finances and processes were subject to rigorous external audit.

E-ACT and the David Ross Education Trust also said it was not possible to say how much of the GAG funding their individual schools were accountable for, and that some of this information was available publicly.

GAG pooling rise 'inevitable'

Some, such as the EDSK think tank, have called for the practice to be banned.

On pooling allowing trusts to smooth out funding differences, Benedicte Yue, a trust chief financial officer, also said the national funding formula was "already allocating funding based on pupil characteristics".

"It may not be perfect, but it is transparent, and GAG-pooling arrangements could perhaps be more clearly explained externally."

But Dan Morrow, the chief executive of the Cornwall Education Learning Trust, said pooling funding was "an inevitable structural move", with chains increasingly

recognising they were "one employer".

"[This means] the notion of arbitrarily keeping funding in silos makes no organisation sense.

"Top-slicing relies on a static picture and is less responsive to need and the idea that you can resource where the highest need or risk is."

Hackwood added: "One of our greatest strengths as a trust is our ability to harness our collective power—pooling resources to invest smarter, not harder. From finance to data systems, some services simply deliver better value when centralised. This is about using every lever we have to put children first."

Despite this, the IMP report showed that some trusts believe pooling "might discourage schools from joining... especially in cases of voluntary transfers".

There were also concerns about it potentially "diverting attention from broader funding challenges" to "complaints about the trust's allocations".

A report by Kreston accountants predicts pooling will continue to grow as it provided "more flexibility over how trusts achieve their objectives" and allowed them to "make quicker changes".

Metcalfe added that "not giving people enough financial accountability and ability to deploy staff can mean that they cannot take accountability for standards".



Rowena Hackwood



Benedicte Yue

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However, Chris Kirk, of education advisory firm CJK Associates, said providing more services from a trust level meant heads could “focus on teaching and learning. That can be a really good thing ... it means that others who have professionally trained for managing estates, finance, HR can support them by focusing on those things.”

Where is promised guidance?

Schools Week revealed last year that the DfE was considering drawing up guidance on GAG pooling.

The department said this week that it “continues to consider and engage the sector to understand what further support and guidance might be helpful for academy trusts, across a range of areas, including on the pooling of GAG”.

Rules state that trusts “must consider the funding needs and allocations of each constituent” school and have an appeals process that can be escalated to DfE.

Its ruling would be final and could result in “pooling provisions being dis-applied”.

In February the government said no appeals on GAG pooling had been “escalated”.

And a former policy adviser, who did not want to be named, said: “In what

other world would we expect an organisation to have a single strategy, but not a single budget? That makes no sense.

“And those wanting more red tape and checking and publishing of stuff – as if schools aren’t already heavily scrutinised – I’d ask why it’s OK for a trust to spend more money filling

in forms, but not OK for them to spend more on a challenging school serving a low income community that needs to get better?”

“I don’t know why we care about this if trusts are following the rules set out and the schools are getting better.”

How GAG pooling led to parliament spotlight

GAG pooling was thrust into the spotlight last year when staff at University of Brighton Academies Trust (UBAT) went on strike over the issue.

Schools Week revealed one of its schools had 20 per cent of its budget retained centrally.

One staff member said the practice “overrides the [DfE’s] funding formula” and was a “significant amount” from one school, which was “forced to make contact cuts whilst central teams get bigger”.

The issue even landed in parliament, with Catherine McKinnell, the schools minister, telling MPs: “The trust is now committed to ... collaborating with school leaders on future budget setting.”

It will also now shut following the fall-out, with its schools handed to over trusts.

Our FOI shows UBAT took about 10 per

cent from its schools’ budgets on average.

James Ellis, the trust’s lead National Education Union rep, claimed at the union’s conference last week the money was spent on “bloated executive pay”, with nearly “a million quid on marketing ... and they were buying in loads and loads of private external consultants”.

The trust said it had “listened to our community” and was “reducing central spending this year”. It will now set budgets for next year on a typical 7 per cent top slice, which is “broadly in line with sector averages”.

But *Schools Week*’s FOI found three primaries in the trust received up to 20 per cent more than they were allocated by the ESFA – the most of any trust.

A spokesperson said these decisions “were focused on supporting some of our smaller schools with leadership capacity”.

Chris Kirk



SCHOOLS WEEK

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NEWS: RECRUITMENT

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Teacher recruitment dips as pupil numbers fall

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

More than a third of primary schools and four in 10 secondaries expect to reduce staff next year as pupil numbers fall and budgets tighten.

The annual teacher recruitment and retention report by Teacher Tapp and SchoolDash, which combines national data such as job ads with daily responses from more than 10,000 teachers to give a "comprehensive picture" of the teacher labour market in England, was released on Thursday.

It shows cumulative job ads for secondary school teaching roles were 31 per cent lower this year than last, and 22 per cent lower than before the pandemic.

It suggests teachers were less inclined to change roles, following a surge in turnover that followed the pandemic.

But many schools – particularly in areas such as London – were anticipating a decline in pupil numbers, responding with "more cautious staffing plans". The report suggests this was exacerbated by "serious budgetary pressures".



It found 44 per cent of secondary heads expected to reduce their teacher headcount in September, "suggesting a contraction in the workforce may begin even before student enrolment numbers fall".

Meanwhile primary schools, particularly in London and the north east, were "reducing staff numbers, merging classes, or increasing senior leaders' teaching responsibilities".

Just 5 per cent of primary heads said they expected to increase their teacher numbers next academic year, while 36 per cent expected a

reduction.

Primary pupil numbers have been falling since 2018-19 as pupils from the 2000s baby boom reach secondary age. Latest figures show unfilled primary school places have leapt 6 per cent in a year, to 611,330 in 2023-24 from 577,647 the previous year.

Secondary pupil numbers are forecast to keep increasing until 2027-28.

Analysis by SchoolDash shows a significant fall in job ads across all secondary subjects compared with last year. There was a 33 per cent drop across all subjects, including significant drops in English (33 per cent), maths (28 per cent), and science (29 per cent).

Timo Hannay, the founder of SchoolDash, said: "Our job advert data show a clear slowdown in teacher recruitment, particularly since January.

"With budget pressures biting and pupil numbers shifting, schools are clearly having to make more cautious staffing decisions."

Another report will be published in early summer to give a "more complete picture" of the labour market for 2024-25.

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NEWS: FUNDING

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Support staff pay offer fuels funding storm

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

School support staff in England have been offered a pay rise of 3.2 per cent, raising the prospect of worsening the brewing school funding storm.

Pay for council-employed school support staff is negotiated between local authorities – the “national employers” – and unions.

The resulting rises apply to LA-maintained schools, but many academy trusts mirror the deals.

This week the national employers said their offer would mean the pay of the lowest-paid workers – those earning £23,656 – has risen more than £6,000, or 33 per cent, since April 2021.

They also offered to delete the bottom pay point from the national pay spine from next April.

However, 3.2 per cent is lower than the predicted growth in wages across the wider economy, with the Office for Budget Responsibility this year revising its prediction to 3.7 per cent.

The rise is higher, however, than what is proposed for teachers. In its evidence to the School Teachers' Review Body last year, the Department for Education said a 2.8 per cent lift “would be appropriate” for 2025-26.

The government has said it expects extra funding of £1.3 billion allocated last year to cover some of next year's rises, with the rest coming from “efficiencies”.

The proposed pay rise will put further pressure



on schools. The government's own analysis states schools will only be able to afford pay rises of about 1.3 per cent from their existing headroom, with the rest having to be met by cuts.

James Lewis, the leader of Leeds council and the chair of the national employers, said they were “acutely aware of the additional pressure” the offer would place on finances.

“However, they believe their offer is fair to employees, given the wider economic backdrop.”

Unions had called for an increase of at least £3,000 across all pay points, with a “clear plan to reach a minimum pay rate of £15 an hour”.

They also demanded one extra day of annual leave for all staff, a reduction in the working week by two hours with no loss of pay, and staff able to take at least one day of annual leave during term time.

Mike Short, Unison's head of local government, said: “With household bills still rising, council and school

staff need a decent pay award after years of below-inflation deals and deep cuts to local government services.”

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the school leaders' union NAHT, said all staff “deserve to be paid fairly”.

But school leaders must get the funding needed “with budgets already severely stretched in many cases.”

Pepe Di'lasio, general secretary of the ASCL leaders' union, said support staff “play a vital role in the running of schools and colleges and deserve to be paid fairly for the work that they do.”

“However, we are deeply concerned about the increasing financial pressure that schools and colleges are facing.

The pay offer comes as funding for universal infant free school meals will rise by just 1.2 per cent next year, despite predictions food costs and wages will increase by far more.

The DfE told schools this week that the rate for each meal would increase by 3p next academic year, from £2.58 to £2.61. The rate rose 5p last year.

But food price inflation could reach 5 per cent by the end of the year and the minimum wage is rising by over 6 per cent.

Free school meal funding has also failed to keep pace with inflation.

Andy Jolley, a school food campaigner, said it was an “wholly inadequate increase that will just force schools to cut portions and reduce quality”.



Andy Jolley

RHI STORER | @RHISTORERWRITES

Schools will get discounted updates to keep Windows 10 running

Schools will get heavily discounted software updates to keep older computers running Windows 10 when support for the operating system ceases this year.

Microsoft will no longer provide free software updates for Windows 10 after October 14, with the company warning that computers still running the system may stop working.

Private owners face an annual bill of at least \$61 (£45) to continue receiving the updates, which include security support.

Earlier this month, Lord Knight, a Labour

peer, asked ministers for the estimated cost to schools in England.

Baroness Smith said devices that met requirements for Windows 11 would be updated free, and that the DfE and Microsoft had “validated” a discounted plan for extended security updates on Windows 10 devices.

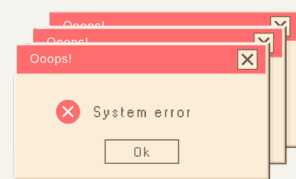
Schools will pay \$1 per device for the first year of support, \$2 in the second and \$4 in the third. Prices will be based on foreign exchange rates at the point of ordering.

Lord Knight said he was “delighted”.

“Inevitably, laptops do need replacing because they become technically obsolete,

regardless of updates. So this is, I think, quite a welcome opportunity.”

According to a government survey, 95 per cent of secondary schools and 43 per cent of primaries have desktop computers.



EXPLAINER: TRANS RULING

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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DfE commits to trans guidance this year after Supreme Court ruling

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

The government has committed to publishing revised guidance for schools this year on supporting trans pupils, with the equalities watchdog also reviewing its advice in the wake of a Supreme Court ruling on the legal definition of a woman.

Legal experts have also urged schools to avoid a “blanket” approach in response to the judgment, which states that “woman” in equality law is based on biological sex, not gender identity.

Here's what school leaders need to know...

What does the ruling say?

The campaign organisation For Women Scotland sought a judicial review of a decision by the Scottish government to allow trans women to count in its target of women filling 50 per cent of public board seats.

The challenge went to the Supreme Court, which ruled “a person with a [gender recognition certificate] in the female gender does not come within the definition of ‘woman’ for the purposes of sex discrimination in section 11 of the Equality Act 2010”.

How might it affect schools?

The impact is unclear, given children cannot obtain a gender recognition certificate.

The government will need to set out how schools should interpret the ruling – for instance, in new guidance – experts have said.

Schools already have a legal duty to provide sex-separated toilets for pupils aged 8 or more, apart from increasingly common individual toilets in fully enclosed rooms.

Schools must also provide suitable changing accommodation and showers for pupils who are aged 11 or more at the start of the school year.

It may have more of an impact on staff, although the ruling does not change the fact that trans people are protected from discrimination under the Equality Act.

What are teachers' concerns?

Bridget Phillipson, the education secretary, said the ruling meant trans women must use men's public



Julie McCulloch



toilets. Again, it is not clear how this will apply to school staff.

Teacher Becks Tebbit, speaking at the NASUWT union's annual conference last weekend, described how “trans colleagues were in tears, shock and felt terrified” at the ruling. They were “now at serious risk of abuse, inequality and harm”.

Claire Ward said “any knee-jerk responses to policies in your workplace around trans rights” should be reported.

Julie McCulloch, the senior director of strategy and policy at the ASCL school leaders' union, said leaders needed “clear, practical guidance from the government on how to interpret the law”.

Tomas Thurogood-Hyde, the director of corporate services at Astrea Academy Trust, said it was “very important to us that the judgment affirms the right of trans members of our school communities to be protected”.

Students and colleagues with concerns “will be supported ... with strong and caring relationships being at the heart of these”.

Toilets already had fully-enclosed cubicles, accessible from the corridor to male and female pupils, and changing rooms remained single-sex. A “bespoke” solution was found if a problem arose.

What does the government say?

The last government published guidance on “gender-questioning children”, stating primary pupils “should not have different pronouns to their sex-based pronouns used about them”.

It also stated that “as a default, all children should use the toilets, showers and changing facilities designated for their biological sex

unless it will cause distress for them to do so”.

However, leaked advice from the government's legal department warned schools faced a “high risk” of successful legal challenges.

The guidance has been under review since Labour took office last July.

This week, Phillipson said the government would “publish revised gender-questioning guidance for our schools this year to provide that necessary further clarity”.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has also said that, where the judgment impacts on its published advice for schools, “we have committed to reviewing that advice as a matter of urgency.”

“The EHRC will be issuing all updated guidance as soon as is practically possible.”

What do the lawyers say?

Lawyers at Stone King said it was “important to proceed with caution, mindful of the whole school community.”

“Schools are advised to avoid a blanket approach, to look carefully at the circumstances of each case as it arises, and to take all relevant legal and practical considerations into account, seeking advice where necessary.”

Lawyers at Browne Jacobson said senior leaders and governors “should pause and understand their organisation's position before reacting to the ruling”.

The use of single-sex spaces in schools “may need re-evaluation”. But schools “should consider the safety, privacy and dignity of all students while seeking ways to accommodate everyone's needs”.

“It's hoped further clarity will arrive with new government guidance.”

OPINION

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What the supreme court's ruling on 'sex' means for schools

It's been represented as a consequential judgment, but the Supreme Court decision's impact on schools will be limited – though it should spur better guidance for the sector

The Supreme Court ruling on the legal interpretation of "sex" in the Equality Act 2010 will have implications across public life, including in relation to schools and other education institutions.

The narrow point the court decided was whether the appointment of a trans woman with a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) counts as the appointment of a woman in respect of the goal set for some Scottish public authorities of ensuring half of their non-executive members are women.

In the court's judgment, it does not, invalidating the Scottish government's guidance on that point.

While GRCs are not available to individuals under 18, the ruling brings long-standing issues relating to gender-questioning pupils into sharp focus.

There is currently a lack of clear and comprehensive guidance on this topic for schools in England. The two most recent publications are: the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) for schools, and the Department for Education's draft non-statutory guidance on

gender-questioning children.

The latter – a consultation document issued by the previous government – attracted a significant response and was never finalised. It dealt with practical issues such as name changes, the use of pronouns, single-sex spaces and sport.

It was broadly in line with the recent Supreme Court judgment insofar as it stated that schools' legal duties regarding sex should be framed around biological sex. However, neither the guidance nor the judgment fully consider the complex legal issues arising from the scenarios schools regularly deal with.

Specifically, it is often necessary to balance safeguarding, data rights, regulatory and equality duties for pupils with different protected characteristics.

In April 2024, the Cass Review examined gender identity health services for children. It highlighted issues in relation to socially transitioning children of particular relevance to schools, but it did not offer specific guidance to the sector.

Following the recent judgment, the EHRC has said it will work at pace to revise its code of practice in relation to services, public functions and associations, but has not said whether it will also review its technical guidance for schools.

It is hoped that this will be considered by the DfE and/or



“ This brings long-standing issues into sharp focus

EHRC in the coming months, for instance as the government reviews its statutory guidance on Keeping Children Safe in Education.

In the meantime, there continue to be significant protections for trans people under the Equality Act which are relevant to pupils, staff and members of the wider school community.

The Supreme Court's decision does not change the fact that gender reassignment is a protected characteristic under the act. The court emphasised this point, stating that trans people have exactly the same level of protection as other groups against discrimination, harassment and victimisation and therefore the judgment is not a rollback of rights on the scale some have suggested.

In relation to consequences for schools as employers, there may be some immediate impact. For example, trans employees are no longer able to make an equal pay claim based on the gender stated on their GRC (though they may still do so on the basis of their biological sex).

However, in terms of the practical, day-to-day management of trans employees, little has changed.

We therefore urge caution before making significant changes to staff policies or practices. It may be that this case sets a precedent which will impact future judgments or guidance, but for the time being it is unlikely that major changes to working practices are needed.

That said, this is a very emotive issue for trans people and those with gender-critical beliefs (which can also be protected under the Equality Act). It may therefore be sensible to consider offering support and clarity to staff who may be directly or indirectly affected by the judgment.

Pending further guidance from the DfE or EHRC, it is important to proceed with caution, mindful of the whole school community.

Schools are advised to avoid a blanket approach, to look carefully at the circumstances of each case as it arises, and to take all relevant legal and practical considerations into account, seeking advice where necessary.

NEWS: OFSTED

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Ofsted looks again at gradings in new framework

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

Ofsted has said it is willing to back down on several of its proposed inspection reforms, including simplifying grades and potentially reducing evaluation areas.

Schools Week revealed last month that Ofsted was working to clarify the difference between the proposed new five grades – including renaming the middle ‘secure’ rating.

The watchdog has now clarified it is rethinking more areas of its proposals. A consultation closes on Monday.

Policy teams are now working to simplify grading, including the controversial ‘exemplary’ grade.

They are also looking at how to reduce overlap between the 11 evaluation areas, which could result in some being dropped.

The watchdog also said it would look again at its inclusion evaluation to ensure it was not treated as a “bolt on”.

As already reported by *Schools Week*, it is also working to clarify the difference between the middle ‘secure’ grade and higher ‘strong’ grade.

Rory Gribbell, the director of strategy and engagement, said the inspectorate was “delighted to have had such a wealth of feedback and challenge” on its proposals and was “turning our focus to how we can make improvements to our work”.

It has had “clear feedback from professionals about the need to tighten some of our drafting and simplify our approach to grading. Policy teams and inspectors will be working flat out to make these improvements in the coming weeks.”

Academy bosses call for raft of changes

The concessions, first reported by *TES*, follows similar issues raised this week by the Confederation of School Trusts (CST), which represents almost 80 per cent of academies and trusts.

It laid out a string of changes it said should be made, including scrapping the new standalone judgment area for ‘inclusion’.

Ofsted has threaded inclusion through all



evaluation areas to make it a core feature of inspections. But the CST said having a standalone evaluation area on top of this complicated matters.

The confederation also recommended merging the teaching and curriculum judgment areas, saying their criteria “overlap significantly”.

It suggested a single judgment, such as ‘teaching the curriculum’ or ‘quality of education’.

The CST also proposed removing the criteria for both the “highly subjective” ‘exemplary’ grade, and ‘attention needed’ grade to help remove ambiguity.

Instead, any school meeting all ‘strong’ criteria would be judged ‘exemplary’ for that evaluation area.

Similarly, any school that did not meet the ‘secure’ criteria but did not fall into ‘causing concern’ should be awarded ‘attention needed’.

The CST also warned that increasing monitoring inspections could clash with government improvement plans and put too much pressure on “stuck schools”.

Alternative consultation results in

Meanwhile, the “damning” results of the Alternative Big Consultation (ABC), released this week, showed more than 65 per cent of respondents

felt the inspectorate’s proposals were worse than the current framework.

The ABC was carried out by former senior HMIs Colin Richards and Frank Norris – also behind last year’s Alternative Big Listen – to independently gather responses to the inspectorate’s plans.

More than 700 people responded, with questions largely mirroring Ofsted’s own.

Just one in 10 (11 per cent) felt Ofsted’s proposals would be an improvement on the current framework, while 90 per cent felt its proposed five-point grading system was either “largely unfit” or “unfit” for purpose.

The report acknowledged the “limitations” of the ABC, which it said was not statistically representative.

But Richards and Norris have called for Ofsted to abandon its reforms rather than pushing ahead to roll them out in autumn.

They say there is “a strong case for a total re-evaluation of inspection policy and practice”.

An Ofsted spokesperson responded: “The consultation on our proposals for education inspection is open until April 28 and I would urge anyone with an interest to participate at gov.uk/ofsted. To date more than 5,000 people have had their say.”

The official consultation closes at 11.59pm on Monday (April 28).



Frank Norris

INTERVIEW: UNIONS

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Go on, give us some hope, Roach tells Phillipson

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

The outgoing leader of the NASUWT has urged Bridget Phillipson to “focus on delivery” and give teachers “hope”, warning that Labour was too negative when it entered office.

Dr Patrick Roach left as general secretary of the teaching union this week after Matt Wrack, the former head of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), was elected unopposed to replace him.

Speaking to *Schools Week* in Liverpool during his final annual conference last weekend, Roach reflected on a “bruising” 15 years.

He became deputy general secretary weeks after Labour's defeat in 2010. The union had been close to the Blair and Brown administrations, but the new Conservative-led government was a different beast.

“Fourteen years of pain began. That assault, we'd seen nothing like it,” he recalls, accusing Michael Gove, a former education secretary, of waging “war on the profession”, with deregulation that left teachers and pupils “so cruelly exposed”.

That exposure was demonstrated when Covid 19 struck. Roach became general secretary in April 2020, just a few weeks into lockdown.

“No one had a clue ... what to do to keep education going, to keep schools safe, to keep teachers safe, nobody.

“And we had the lies and the misinformation, disinformation about how the virus was spread.”

The lesson was that government must act “in the public interest, not its own interest”.

“Over the past 15 years, we've had 14 years of Tory rule. That's what has failed. But people need to restore their trust in politics. They need to feel that politicians are on their side, and that's the same for teachers.”

Hot on the heels of the pandemic came the cost-of-living crisis, followed by the bitter pay dispute of 2023.

A fresh confrontation with government looms. The NASUWT has voted to move to a strike ballot if teachers don't get a “fully funded” pay rise.

“Our members don't want to see their pupils suffering or the outcomes for their pupils damaged as a result of action that they take.”

He points out that action short of strikes recently won teachers a funded 5.5 per cent pay rise in Northern Ireland.

“Not a single day of education of pupils was lost



Patrick Roach

Credit: NASUWT

‘Ministers should be positive in the narrative they're using’

as a result.”

Of the four education union leaders, Roach has been the most vocally supportive of the new Labour administration.

But he has become more critical. Ministers' suggestion that teachers should only get a 2.8 per cent pay rise next year and their support for controversial Ofsted reforms has soured the relationship.

In his keynote speech last Friday, Roach savaged the government for its cuts to disability benefits and the winter fuel payment, and its maintenance of the “spiteful” two-child benefit cap.

His parting message for the education secretary? “Focus on delivery. Even if that is relatively modest ... you've got to focus on beginning to make change – and to show the profession, but also to show the country that change is happening.”

He describes it as a “tactical mistake” for the government, in the first few days and weeks of office, to be “saying that things are going to get worse, and they're going to get much worse before they get better.

“All that does is destroy hope. People voted for change, to be told ‘it's just going to be miserable for a long time yet’. So it is incumbent, I think, on ministers ... to be positive in the narrative that

they're using.”

Quick delivery was especially needed for the “dire crisis” in SEND, he said.

“We've got money that's literally pouring out the system day after day after day to private equity firms that are just basically shaking down the taxpayer.

“The government could do something about that. You could insist on a [profit] cap.”

Roach's successor is an outspoken critic of Labour, and is likely to build closer ties to his allies in the National Education Union, who crave a merger.

But the NASUWT conference voted last weekend to instruct its ruling executive to “reiterate publicly that there is no desire by NASUWT to consider any union amalgamation or merger”.

Roach said the union's position was clear ... “we have no desire to be merging or amalgamating with anybody”.

While many union leaders serve multiple terms (Wrack led the FBU for 20 years), Roach surprised many when he announced last year he would stand down after just one.

“It has been a bruising 15 years,” he said. “That's enough for anybody.”

ON LOCATION: UNIONS

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NEU backs strikes 'blueprint' to 'take on' large MATs

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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EXCLUSIVE

The National Education Union has voted to "pro-actively seek" disputes with academy trusts to win improved working conditions and "undermine the notion of academy freedoms".

Delegates at the union's annual conference in Harrogate argued last week that victories in disputes that put trusts "on the back foot" should be replicated as a "blueprint" to take on larger national MATs.

The NEU has long opposed the academies programme, but the rhetoric ramped up this year in the wake of Labour's children's wellbeing and schools bill, which seeks to row back academy freedoms.

The mood was set by the union's president Sarah Kilpatrick, who used her opening speech to describe the impact of forced academisation on a school she had worked at.

"I saw the joy sucked out of learning and replaced with talk of 'standards' and 'expectations'. Respected, valued colleagues removed from their posts for the audacity of holding an opinion not shared by the central team of the academy trust.

"I wish I could say this was an unusual story, but it's been repeated in schools, particularly schools in disadvantaged areas, all over the country."

Chris Denson said the union in Coventry had a "conscious policy" to take on trusts "one at a time" if members had issues with pay and conditions.

"We put serious resource into each of those trusts. We create a dispute. We try to spread it across as many the schools as we can."

This puts "every one of those trusts on the back foot because they don't want to be the next one.

"It makes everyone else's battle easier because they are terrified of being the last one. I think that has to be a blueprint for how we start to take on some of those national MATs."

A motion passed at the conference commits the union to "develop an industrial and organising strategy of targeting individual trusts" where conditions fell short of what was required in maintained schools.

Pay and conditions are not always the flashpoint for action. In Birmingham, teachers at George Dixon Primary School have taken more than 48 days of strike action in an attempt to stop the school's conversion.

"They are the academy terminators," David



Room, a delegate from the city, told the conference.

Anna Scott, from the East Riding of Yorkshire, said the union had had "successful battles locally against academisation, but we need to bring that all together into a national strategy".

The schools bill will end automatic academisation of failing schools, set minimum pay for academy teachers, make all schools follow the national curriculum and force academies to cooperate with councils on admissions and place planning.

But delegates argued it did not go far enough. A conference motion called for a legal mechanism for schools to return to council oversight, something the education secretary has said she is "open to considering".

NEU members also want a cap on academy executive pay, with boos in the hall for Harris's Sir Dan Moynihan, who makes £515,000 a year.

But executive pay was defended by Leora Cruddas, the chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, who said: "Education is a crucial public service and especially large trusts are complex and demanding organisations.

"We should want to attract and reward the best leaders at all levels in schools."

Ben Gresham, a teacher from Lambeth who previously worked at a school taken on by Harris, said academies had a "negative impact...on everything, but particularly funding.

"In particular top-slicing, division and diversion of resources and the doubling-up of jobs in central services."

The schools bill "could be a much needed step in the right direction".



Not all delegates were negative about academies, however.

Bruno Duckworth-Russell, a teacher based in Southampton, said the city's three main trusts had scrapped performance-related pay and introduced enhanced menopause and maternity rights, while the council "refused point blank".

"So do not sit here and tell me that in Southampton, my members are better off working for the local authority. Unfortunately, they are not."

Meg Powell-Chandler, director of the New Schools Network, said free schools and academies "have been instrumental in raising standards in our education system by focusing on having excellent teachers in the classroom.

"Rather than taking freedoms away from teachers and school leaders and giving control of schools to bureaucrats and politicians through the children's wellbeing and schools bill, the government should let these schools, and the teachers in them, get on with delivering a fantastic education to their pupils."

NEWS: EXCLUSIONS

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'Undue focus' on pupils' race risks 'over-complicating' exclusions, says judge

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

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A Court of Appeal judge has said schools risk "over-complicating and over-legalising" exclusion decisions if they give "undue focus" to a pupil's ethnicity and background.

A headteacher said her school had been "vindicated" after a landmark ruling that her academy acted lawfully when it permanently excluded a boy of black Caribbean heritage following "violent" behaviour.

The boy, who has special educational needs, was 15 when he was permanently excluded after alleged violent incidents against fellow pupils.

But his mother challenged the decision as a breach of the public sector equality duty (PSED) set out by the Equality Act 2010.

She accused the school of not giving due attention to her son belonging to a racial group the DfE has acknowledged is "disproportionately" excluded, or to his special needs.

The mother said the permanent exclusion on her son's record was "prejudicial", and "affected the way that he felt about himself".

The school has since spent four years and "tens of thousands of pounds" defending itself in court.

The PSED says public authorities must "have due regard to the need to...eliminate discrimination, harassment, [and] victimisation". They must also "advance equality of opportunity" between people with protected characteristics and others.

Protected characteristics include having a disability, or being from a minority ethnic background.

Black Caribbean pupils nationally have among the highest exclusion rates (0.18), while rates among mixed white and black Caribbean pupils are even higher at 0.24 – far higher than the 0.11 rate across all pupils.

The DfE has previously acknowledged black Caribbean boys experience "continued disproportionate exclusion".

The boy was permanently excluded in May 2021, following "two separate assaults on fellow students".



A panel of school governors later decided he should not be reinstated.

An independent review panel from the local authority upheld the recommendation, but did recommend a reconsideration as it found "some concerns about its reasoning".

The governor panel reconsidered the case, but again decided the boy should not be reinstated.

The boy's mother later launched a case at the High Court, challenging the lawfulness of this decision. A judge dismissed her claim.

A Court of Appeal judge has now ruled the judge was "right to reject the PSED challenge".

The court heard evidence the headteacher and governors had "considered" the requirements of the Equality Act when deciding whether to exclude the boy.

But the Court of Appeal judge expressed concerns "an undue focus on [the PSED] may risk over-complicating, and over-legalising, the decision-making process in exclusion cases".

"A focus on the requirements of the PSED in the context of an individual exclusion decision is liable to be distracting and unhelpful."

The judgment said the "proper focus" for decision-makers was instead the "individual circumstances of [the pupil's] case" such as his actions and the risk of harm to others.

"There will certainly be cases where the seriousness of the pupil's conduct and/or the harm to the school of allowing them to remain will be such that it can make no difference that they belong to a high-risk group or that they may have received inadequate support in the past."

The boy had already been temporarily

excluded multiple times, including twice for violence. He had also received "extensive educational and pastoral support".

The headteacher, who cannot be named, said the exclusion had "as always" been a "last resort".

"Sadly, there is a misconception, often encouraged by those with axes to grind, that heads have an incentive to exclude.

"In reality, the very opposite is true. Following a very nasty incident, it took four years and tens of thousands of pounds to be finally vindicated in what was factually a very straightforward case."

Because the child's family received legal aid, it is understood the school will not be able to recover its legal costs.

The head said despite the academy having "supportive governors, experienced staff and a record of not giving in to pressure", the case had been "an ordeal."

"I fear less well-placed schools might succumb to unwarranted pressures ... potentially risking student safety. I hope our case will encourage them."

Richard Wilkins, legal director at Russell Cooke solicitors who represented the school, said he hoped the case was "useful guidance on disciplinary decisions concerning vulnerable or 'over-represented' groups, which frequently trouble school leaders".

A spokesperson for the Coram Children's Legal Centre (CCLC) which represented the boy's family, said: "We were disappointed. CCLC has noted the judgment and will continue to consider the implications for the rights of children facing school exclusion."

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK**Haili Hughes****Director of professional development, All Saints MAT****Start date:** June**Current job:** Director of education, IRIS Connect**Interesting fact:** Haili will combine her new role with a professorship at Academica University of Applied Sciences in Amsterdam – which she believes makes her one of the only serving professors and trust leaders in the UK.

Movers & Shakers

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

**Jane Nolan****Chief executive, Thrive Co-operative Learning Trust****Start date:** September**Current job:** Interim CEO, Horizons Academy Trust**Interesting fact:** Jane trekked for six days through the Himalayas to reach her first teaching post in a remote village on the Nepalese-Tibetan border.**Myles McGinley****Managing director for UK Education, Cambridge OCR exam board****Start date:** September**Current job:** Responsible officer and regulation director, OCR**Interesting fact:** Myles is a keen Germanophile, after living and teaching in Berlin as a new graduate.**Andrew Jordon****Deputy chief executive, Northern Education Trust****Start date:** April**Former job:** Senior executive principal, NET**Interesting fact:** Andrew is a keen musician and plays the piano and the flute.**Joe Hallgarten****Inaugural director of the Goldsmiths Foundation****Start date:** April**Former job:** Working on education projects in Ghana and Sierra Leone**Interesting fact:** Joe is fending off a mid-life crisis with Zumba and dance fitness.

DfE regions group leader John Edwards to be council CEO

FEATURED

John Edwards, the head of the Department for Education regions group, is stepping down to become the chief executive of Rotherham council.

He has been director general of the DfE group, which oversees the academies system and other education policy areas in England, since its creation in June 2022.

The group replaced the old regional schools commissioners structure, with Edwards's role replacing that of the national schools commissioner.

Edwards announced on Wednesday he will become chief executive of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council at the end of June, "subject to council agreement".

"It has been an honour



to work in the Department for Education and particularly in regions group since we formed in 2022, and I'm proud of the work we have delivered with you to help give children and young people opportunities to grow and learn."

Edwards, a former regional schools commissioner and interim chief of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), is one of five director generals at the DfE, making him one of the highest-ranking civil servants in the department.

The regional directors broker and re-broker schools between trusts and intervene when settings fail.

More recently, the regions group is home to the government's new specialist RISE (Regional

Improvement for Standards and Excellence) teams, launched in February to broker support for struggling schools.

The teams have been heavily criticised by school leaders.

The regions group also took on oversight of school finance when the ESFA closed this year.

Edwards began his career as a maths teacher and a senior leader in secondary schools, before moving into local government as director of education and skills at Manchester City Council.

Susan Acland-Hood, the permanent secretary for the DfE, said Edwards "has had a profound impact on our work improving the lives of young people across the country".

"We thank John for his wisdom and leadership and wish him well in his future endeavours."



Upcoming events

Informative training and events that inspire and empower.

10:00 – 11:00, TUESDAY 29 APRIL

Knife Crime Awareness: Keeping Young People Safe

ONLINE EVENT
WITH ANOUSKHA DUNIC



APRIL

10:00 – 13:00, THURSDAY 1 MAY

Funding Assurance Approach for Apprenticeships in 2024/25

ONLINE EVENT
WITH KARL BENTLEY



8:30 – 17:30, TUESDAY 6 MAY

Training and Technology Summit

EDUCITY, LONDON
COUNTY HALL, BELVEDERE RD, LONDON



16:00 – 17:00, WEDNESDAY 7 MAY

Navigating Shame: Building Shame Resilience and Self-Worth

ONLINE EVENT
WITH SARAH CHAMBERLAIN



15:45 – 16:45, TUESDAY 13 MAY

AI Tools for Efficiency

ONLINE EVENT
WITH DARREN COXON



16:00 – 17:00, THURSDAY 15 MAY

The Harmful Impact of Online Misogyny: What Educators Need to Know

ONLINE EVENT
WITH NATASHA EELES



15:45 – 16:45, MONDAY 19 MAY

Empathy: The Key Skill for Human Connection in Education

ONLINE EVENT
WITH ED KERWAN



10:30 – 11:30, WEDNESDAY 21 MAY

Building resilience and mastering self-accountability for lifelong learning

ONLINE EVENT
WITH DR. EMMA PAUNCEFORT AND GAMU MATARIRA



9:30 – 16:00, THURSDAY 22 MAY

Mastering Crisis Communication in Education

EDUCITY, LONDON
WITH BEN VERINDER



MAY

JUNE

15:45 – 16:45, MONDAY 2 JUNE

Embedding Formative Action into Curriculum Design

ONLINE EVENT
WITH RENE KNEYBER AND VALENTINA DEVID



8:30 – 16:00, TUESDAY 10 JUNE

Psychological Safety for Staff and Students

EDUCITY, LONDON
WITH KIM RUTHERFORD



10:00 – 11:30, WEDNESDAY 11 JUNE

Safeguarding Network | Summer Event

ONLINE EVENT
WITH NATASHA EELES, AMIT KALLEY & ED KERWAN



10:00 – 11:30, TUESDAY 17 JUNE

Neurodiversity Network | Summer Event

ONLINE EVENT
WITH JO SHIRLEY AND KAREN PLOWMAN



10:00 – 12:30, WEDNESDAY 18 JUNE

Subcontracting Refresher 2024/25: Staying Compliant and Confident

ONLINE EVENT
WITH KARL BENTLEY AND MARK TAYLOR



10:00 – 11:30, THURSDAY 19 JUNE

Quality Assurance Network | Summer Event

ONLINE EVENT
WITH JO SHIRLEY AND KAREN PLOWMAN



9:30 – 16:30, TUESDAY 24 JUNE

Enhancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging in Education Summit

EDUCITY, LONDON
DELIVERED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
THE BRIDGE AND THE DIFFERENCE



8:30 – 15:30, TUESDAY 1 JULY

The Teach Like a Champion Guide to the Science of Reading

CENTRAL LONDON
WITH DOUG LEMOV



8:00, THURSDAY JULY 3 – 17:00, FRIDAY JULY 4

Festival of Education UK

WELLINGTON COLLEGE, CROWTHORNE



JULY

Profile

RHI STORER | @RHISTORERWRITES

'We need to change the narrative to reducing inequality'

IPPR associate director Avnee Morjaria has taught, inspected and worked in government. Now she is influencing policy from the outside

It seems Avnee Morjaria's modus operandi is cutting to the chase.

She's responsible for all public service policy at the IPPR, a think tank known to be influential in Labour policy making.

It's a stressful job, she says, but perhaps not as stressful as the one Rachel Reeves' has (we meet on the day of the chancellor's spring funding statement).

The venue is a quiet cafe along Millbank, a pleasant suntrap while the metaphorical clouds engulf Westminster less than a mile away.

"I think the education sector is probably in the worst place that it has been since, well, for decades, in terms of the amount of resources that it's got committed," Morjaria says.

"We shouldn't be [having to] find cuts in the schools system. And if you want to find efficiency,

you need to do reform. That takes time – and is not going to deliver you the savings you need for this kind of fiscal statement anyway."

Time in teaching

Morjaria was born in Leicester, to parents who had been expelled from Uganda under Idi Amin's dictatorship.

She attended what she described as a 'coasting'

Profile: Avnee Morjaria



school. "It wasn't the worst school, but it wasn't the best school either."

She said she was "a bit too bright for my own good." I was bored and easily switched off, that didn't result in anything terrible. Some bunking off... [but] I got the syllabuses and books and I taught myself and that worked for me in terms of the grades that I got, but I guess not the best way to deal with the school environment."

Morjaria's time in college studying A-levels sparked her interest in teaching.

"The staff were pretty absent," she says. "People off, on long-term sick leave, and continuous supply teaching across a couple of different subjects."

"When I looked across at more affluent members of my family and the schooling they were getting and paying for, I understood how transformational good education can be."

"I really wanted to, without sounding cheesy, make a difference."

Morjaria began her career teaching maths after studying the subject at the University of Warwick. It was a utilitarian choice – she tells me she would have loved to have read politics.

"As a teenager I didn't really understand what

'The National Tutoring Programme isn't a sufficient response'

my options were and where they would take me," she says. "I enjoyed maths, I had a good maths teacher, and she was the one who was consistently there."

Morjaria enjoyed teaching "and the banter with the teenagers", but realised the subject she picked to teach was "absolutely wrong. I hated the subject content, and while I loved the job, I hated that element of it."

She worked at Stoke Park and Lyng Hall schools in Coventry, teaching largely white working class children, many deprived and some who lived in caravans.

Morjaria entered senior leadership at Lister school and Elmgreen school in south London. She was responsible for pastoral care, "which I absolutely loved", and supporting young teachers.

Lister school was rated 'satisfactory' in 2012, but improved to 'good' with 'outstanding' behaviour.

"We did a thing called Lister character to work

together with the pupils to define what that meant and what it meant to be a good pupil," she says.

What helped was consistent systems and routines. "When it came to crunch time teachers were supported where things didn't work out."

The Ofsted call

Morjaria also inspected while she was a senior leader, a job she describes as "one of the most difficult" she has ever done.

"The way that inspections were conducted, it was super high stakes for a school," she says.

"A one-word judgment against a few categories could change the outlook for the local community. It could change the careers of the senior leaders there."

"It put a lot of pressure on the teachers, and that made the responsibility of the job itself super high stakes, because you wanted to make sure

Profile: Avnee Morjaria

you got it right.

"[But] you can't really see what a school is like in two days. There's a lot for you to understand and to take in and you can't do that in two days.

"There were a lot of moments where I felt very sad leaving inspections. Did I ever feel: 'Oh, that's brilliant. I had a great day'? Not really.

"There were the kind of isolated moments where there were schools that got a grade above what they expected, and they were pretty elated with that. Most of the time when schools are going to be good or outstanding, they already know."

Despite this, does she welcome the reforms to Ofsted?

"I'm not wholeheartedly sold on the new report cards, but on the other hand, I don't know what the right answer is. I think that they've got an incredibly tough job in trying to find that answer and do the job that they need to do with the responsibilities that they've got to parents and students."

Education strategy

In 2016, Morjaria moved into the Department for Education to work as an assistant director on various strategy roles, including heading up the education recovery, remote education, and the curriculum strategies during the pandemic years.

She was also part of the education recovery strategy which included the national tutoring programme (NTP), with a focus on supporting disadvantaged pupils. Around 2.5 million courses were delivered under the NTP.

But now the scheme has ended, and funding has dried up, few leaders can afford to keep this support going.

"There was a time where Kevan Collins [the then Conservative government's recovery commissioner] set out some proposals, and those were good ones," Morjaria says.

"But they were never funded, and what we ended up with is the National Tutoring Programme, which really isn't a sufficient response to what had happened.

"Schools don't have the money for tutoring –



'We should have thought about the overall impact of Covid'

they've barely got the money to hire teachers.

"If I was a senior leader now, would I prioritise tutoring in terms of my budget? No, I would prioritise things like attendance, employing teachers, and training teachers."

But the biggest issue Morjaria identifies is mental health. She said the rise of related issues since the pandemic "were never dealt with or invested in".

"We really should have thought about the overall impact of Covid, not just on kids' attainment, but more broadly than that," she says.

"I just don't think that the DfE, which was responsible for intervening and supporting children after that disruptive period, ever really got to grips with that."

Policy life

Before moving to the IPPR, Morjaria briefly spent time as a policy and strategy director at Oxford University Press. She enjoys the big-picture thinking that policy roles provide.

She says: "I love thinking about the whole system, the policies within it, how to work together to make life better for people.

"When I was in actual government civil

service-style roles, I got to do that with ministers. Here at IPPR, I get to do that, but also I get to be a little bit political about it, or I get to think about the politics as well as the policy. I've been super lucky."

Morjaria is focusing on social mobility.

"We've got some pieces out in education on how empowering the workforce could be the next thing that makes the big transformational change, and how great leadership could be that too.

"How do we change the narrative to one that talks about reducing inequality, a broader impact about making the difference on a larger scale to children's lives?"

So, with her policy hat on, what's her advice to education secretary Bridget Phillipson?

"My advice would be that children and young people are operating in a more complex environment than ever before, and schools will need to broaden their scope and offer to help children and young people to deal with this complexity," she suggests.

"Labour shouldn't be worried about this approach, both with the public and the sector, as everyone already knows that it is needed."

Curriculum
ConversationDO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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BARTON

Chair, Oracy Commission

How to embed oracy as the
national curriculum's 'fourth R'

Weaving oracy through all subjects can be the focal point for breathing new life into the curriculum as a whole, writes Geoff Barton. Here's how

One year on from the convening of the Oracy Commission, where do we go next in helping oracy education to have a wider impact for all children from all backgrounds?

Last October, the commission's report – We Need to Talk – was generally well received. It made the case that oracy is important for children and young people in the quest for social justice, an essential part of teachers' professional repertoire, and vital to our civic society.

Then, just a few weeks ago, the interim report from the curriculum and assessment review was published. It too received a range of notably welcoming comments, but its failure to mention oracy – a central plank in the government's education agenda – raised a few eyebrows.

Some exhorted me to summon up the ghost of old ranty Geoff and clamber onto the barricades. Instead, I had a reassuring conversation with Becky Francis. She's better placed than most to grasp the weight of high-quality research behind oracy, and this was, after all, an interim report.

But now the tougher work of the

review group begins, so here's what I think they need to do to get oracy right across the curriculum.

Bring back the arts

First, it's heartening that the interim report places such emphasis on the arts. In doing so, it tacitly acknowledges that a government concerned with social justice must ensure the entitlement to these most human and humane of subjects for every child from every background.

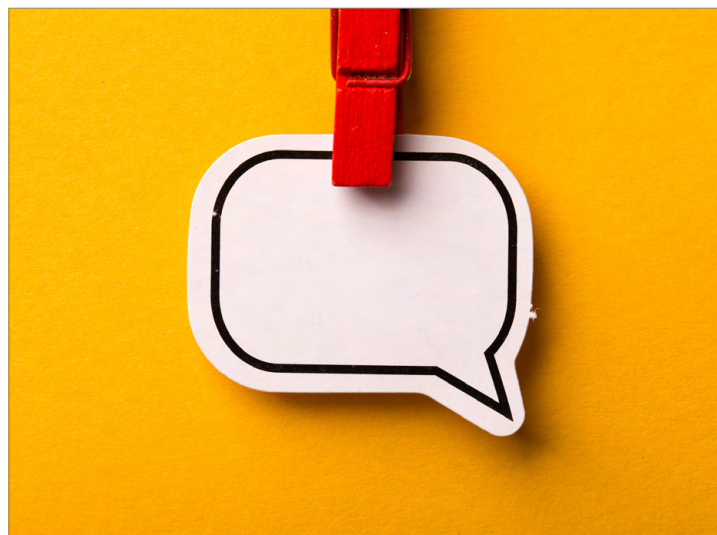
Oracy must become intrinsic in every subject, but if there is one area where talk is integral to the disciplinary process, it is surely here.

It is difficult and costly to deliver high-quality arts teaching, especially as expertise is being lost from the state sector. But the review group must hold its nerve. The arts must be brought back from the curricular margins, and the EBacc measure that consigned them there needs to be scrapped.

A means, not just an end

Second, the Francis review needs to learn lessons from the current national curriculum. Oracy appears there more than most realise. However, it's chiefly included in the aims of each subject and not in the granular outline of the subject knowledge to be learned.

But the aims are not where you look if you're writing a scheme of work for Year 9 geography. If we



“ To say this adds content misses the point

want young people to be able to have thoughtful debates or conversations about, say, climate change, then it's in their geography and science lessons that the skills of speaking and listening about it should appear.

To say this adds content to the curriculum misses the point. Building young people's agency around subject knowledge through oracy will help them to learn more powerfully and more deeply. In turn, this can only make teaching more rewarding.

For them, their teachers and for policymakers, this is a win/win/win reason to drive 'disciplinary oracy' into subjects.

Talk for democracy

Third, the curriculum review needs to pay attention to citizenship. For young people to take their place in our democracy, they need to practise arguing their case based on evidence and learn to be discerning, critical listeners. This matters particularly because they are soon likely to be granted the right to vote at the age of 16.

Assessment matters

And finally – and most boldly – if the curriculum review group accepts our argument that oracy is the fourth 'R' (as foundational as reading, writing and arithmetic), then like the other three, we must track young people's progress through low-stakes and high-stakes assessment.

Currently, we don't assess a child's speaking ability and capacity to listen at all beyond the age of five. Low-stakes assessment at, say, the age of 12, could provide vital feedback on speech and language skills at a key transition point and trigger extra support.

More than that, in this age of the robots, it would signal to everyone that children's oracy matters more than ever.

It's impossible for a curriculum to please all the people all the time. But oracy provides a genuine opportunity to restore joy and agency to the classroom – and that will surely, at least, please all the people most of the time.

Opinion

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MATT HOOD

Co-founder, Oak National Academy and Ambition Institute

We can't advise our way to school improvement

Failing to deal with legal and regulatory divisions will hamper the government's attempts to drive up standards, writes Matt Hood – but there is a solution

Let's start with the good news. We know what a good school looks like, and we know how to turn a struggling school into a successful one. School improvement expertise exists in abundance, and we can see it in action across the country.

More good news: innovation is raising the bar. Some remarkable schools are pushing the boundaries of excellence. They are giving researchers new practices to evaluate, and that research helps to lift standards for everyone.

But there's a problem. Further improvement is difficult when the system itself is a fragmented mess. Some schools are run by local authorities and others are in academy trusts, governed by individual funding agreements. They follow different rules, different processes and different accountability measures.

That means every time a new policy is introduced – whether on behaviour, curriculum, SEND or funding – it must be filtered through multiple legal frameworks. The

result? Confusion, inconsistency and slow progress.

Unfortunately, like other attempts before it, the current Schools Bill won't fix it. If the goal is to improve education across the board, it would help if every school was operating under the same structure.

The Hoodinerney Model
Which brings me to the Hoodinerney Model. A relic of 2014, created by Laura McInerney and me, it is still, I believe, the best bet for school improvement.

The Hoodinerney model is simple: every school runs on a funding agreement overseen by a school trust. That's it. Instead of two completely different legal systems – LA and academy – the Hoodinerney Model removes the division. Everyone has a funding agreement; everyone is in a trust.

Some will argue this is the wrong answer because "it's standards, not structures" that matter. That sounds nice, but it doesn't hold up. Structures define who is responsible, what rules they follow, and how they're held accountable.

If we want every school to improve, we need every school to be in the same structure. The best one available is a funding agreement overseen by a school trust.

If implemented, the model would



“Advisors can recommend change, but they can't make it happen”

do a few simple things:

Create one clear legal model for all schools
No more patchwork of different rules.

Group schools into strong, accountable families
Every school would be part of a trust, with shared leadership and geographic clustering (without being restricted by local authority boundaries).

Give local democracy an important role
Elected bodies would represent community interests equally as they'd have the same stake in every school.

Clarify the roles of the Department for Education and Ofsted
The DfE commissions schools; Ofsted inspects them.

Improve transparency and reduce conflicts of interest
Everyone follows the same rulebook.

Seven benefits
In previous posts, Laura and I have argued that this model makes sense for policymaking: one system is better than trying to filter policy through two.

Here, I want to focus on why the Hoodinerney Model is the best bet for school improvement – why it's a better bet for delivering high and rising standards, particularly when compared to the advisory-style models that dominated before the academies programme and which are now on the RISE (wink) again.

First, it keeps expertise where it belongs: in schools, doing the work of improvement. It's important to avoid expertise being siphoned off into slow-moving bureaucracies instead of staying in the hands of those leading change. The trust is the school improver. The 'school improvement team' is the trust.

Second, it ensures that those designing the improvement plan are also responsible for executing it. Advising is easy. Delivering change is the hard part. Leaders in

Opinion

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challenging schools deserve support from people standing shoulder to shoulder with them, not offering advice from the sidelines.

Third, it provides the certainty and time needed for sustained improvement. Turning around the most challenging schools takes three to five years of relentless focus – day in, day out. A few visits over a year won't cut it.

Fourth, practice makes perfect. Improving schools is difficult. Improving the most challenging schools is even harder. But when a Trust takes on this task repeatedly, it refines its approach and builds a team of leaders with direct turnaround experience – people who can be deployed to support the next struggling school.

Fifth, team beats individual. School improvement isn't just about teaching – it requires expertise in curriculum, behaviour, finance, HR and operations. No single adviser can provide all of that. But a well-run Trust can.

Sixth, this model has a business end. Schools that aren't good enough need to change. Change is hard, especially when leaders are personally invested in their existing approach. External advisers can recommend change, but they don't have the authority to make it happen. A Trust can.

Seventh, there's a built-in safety net. If a school isn't improving, it can move to another trust. Local authorities can't do this; their borders make it impossible. But when every school is on a funding agreement overseen by a trust, schools can move between families as needed.

Addressing the criticisms

Some people push back on this



“ It's easier to improve 500 trusts than 24,000 schools

model, so let's address the main objections.

First, the cost and time of conversion. Moving every school into this model isn't an overnight fix, and it comes with a price tag – I agree (though if we'd started in 2014 we'd be nearly done by now!). But we should at least set one system as the end goal so we can keep moving in the right direction.

Second, what happens to struggling schools while they wait for a trust? I agree that some immediate support is needed – whether you call it RISE teams, National Leaders of Education, or the Trust Capacity Fund. But the real issue is why it takes so long to place schools in the right trust. The official

target for conversion is six months. The data available suggests that it is currently taking 18.

This badly missed DfE target is absent from the current debate and it shouldn't be. The best way to improve struggling schools isn't to prop them up with short-term interventions but to fix the system that leaves them in limbo for years.

Third, some trusts aren't doing a good enough job. That's true. But it's easier to improve 500 trusts than 24,000 individual schools. Trusts should be inspected, their leaders held accountable, and schools moved between trusts when improvement isn't working.

And finally, yes, of course some advisory models work. Softer

collaborative structures sometimes make a difference. But they are the minority. They generally lack the seven features above, which makes them less likely to drive the deep, lasting improvement we need.

Four immediate actions

For all these reasons, if we are serious about school improvement, we can't ignore structures. We need to:

- Fully implement the Hoodinerny Model, making every school run on a funding agreement by the end of the next Parliament, including legislation for a common regulatory framework.
- Transfer the powers set out in the model to local authorities and city regions which move ahead of the deadline once all their conversions are complete.
- Inspect school trusts and hold executive leaders accountable for their performance on improving the schools in their family.
- Hit the six-month DfE conversion target, slim down RISE teams for emergency support, and reinvest savings in trust capacity.

This isn't about ideology. It's about practicality. One system is easier to manage than two. It makes accountability clearer and ensures every school operates under the same rules and expectations.

We know what works in school improvement. For it to happen everywhere, we need every school on a funding agreement overseen by a trust.

So let's get on with that, because we can't afford to still be making this case in another decade's time.

Opinion

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EMMA SHEPPARD

Founder, The MTPT Project

We've taken another big step in parent-teacher support

Recent developments at the National Education Union's national conference give hope that we may soon stem the flow of parents out of the profession, explains Emma Sheppard

The celebratory noise from this year's NEU national conference promises to be hugely positive for parent-educators around the country.

A motion put forward by Hampshire, with amendments from Sutton (supported by Worcestershire) and Northumberland (supported by Lewes, Eastbourne and Wealden) focused on issues that overwhelmingly impact mothers and women.

In particular, Hampshire and Northumberland called for 26 weeks' fully-paid maternity leave for educators, and increased campaigning at local level for improved conditions for parent staff.

Northumberland pushed for maternity campaigns to be "a priority in bargaining campaigns", and Hampshire and Sutton linked their maternity requests with improved access to and financial equality around flexible working practices.

The NEU boasts a history of successful negotiations around maternity pay. Colleagues working in local authority schools in Birmingham, Tameside and at least six London boroughs including

Camden and Tower Hamlets enjoy better-than-Burgundy Book maternity pay. In many cases, this is thanks to negotiations from NEU reps.

Often, increased parental leave and pay negotiated for local authorities is also then taken up by multi-academy trusts working in these regions, who don't want to be seen as less generous employers than their local authority counterparts.

For example, Ark Schools (with academies in Birmingham, London and the southeast) offer occupational maternity pay at a higher rate than the Burgundy Book, and higher than both Birmingham and Haringey local authorities, which already boast an increased package.

Much of the supporting evidence for the maternity motion at this year's NEU conference (and its amendments) echoed the findings of The MTPT Project and New Britain Project's Missing Mothers report, which found that the motherhood penalty is a primary cause of avoidable attrition for teachers aged 30-39.

Indeed, the call for equal and improved parental leave and pay was one of the main recommendations in that report.

The amended motion passed, and the establishment of a NEU Women's Conference has now been agreed – a significant victory for members.

Rosie Kelly-Smith, who runs NEU Parents, said: "The passing



“The motherhood penalty is a primary cause of attrition

of this amended motion is hugely welcomed by members – especially NEU parents and carers who have experienced just how appalling maternity pay and paternity pay and leave entitlements are.

"We are also delighted that the union will now throw its weight behind campaigning for a change to the school teachers' pay and conditions document (STPCD) so we can end the exploitative and discriminatory practice of paying part-time TLR holders pro-rata wages, even when they're carrying out the full TLR role."

Northumberland also added an amendment for a doubling of paternity leave. In this regard, however, the NEU may not be ambitious enough in its campaigning.

National groups are putting pressure on the government for 'six weeks for dads' – paternity leave paid at 90 per cent of a new father's salary. This follows a recent study that found that this is the point at which fathers' involvement at home begins to have a positive impact on the gender pay gap at work.

In Hounslow, four weeks' fully-paid paternity leave has been available since early 2024. With adoption

policies also often matching maternity policies, adoptive fathers can also benefit from any improved maternity pay – a policy that particularly benefits single parents and fathers in same-sex couples who are more likely to be the primary adopter.

In Lambeth, an enhanced shared parental leave offer has already been in place for a decade. It even mirrors the local authority's improved maternity pay, offering fathers and non-birthing partners the option of up to 40 weeks of decently-paid leave.

At The MTPT Project, we're working with a group of pilot schools to push for equal and improved parental leave, exploring financial modelling of between 20 and 26 weeks at full pay for all staff.

If it can support the retention of more than 9,000 parent-teachers who leave every year, then it could represent an overall saving for the DfE.

With backing on this issue from the country's largest union, there is increasing hope that a better deal for new parents in the sector could become a reality.

And that would be a net good for everyone.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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LEE ELLIOT
MAJOR

Professor of social mobility,
University of Exeter

Ofsted must ensure inclusion and equity go hand in hand

The new framework must be applied consistently and fairly to deliver Ofsted's inclusive ambition, writes Lee Elliot Major

Michael Gove's messianic belief that poverty should be no excuse for poor school results was one of his defining messages as education secretary. Fifteen years on, this powerful narrative continues to shape our education policies – and we are still paying the price.

Try telling today's frontline teachers that a school's context has no impact on what they can achieve in the classroom. Serving communities ravaged by poverty and mounting mental health challenges, teachers juggle many roles — social worker, family mentor, crisis responder – all before they've even started their lesson.

For too long, these realities have seemed invisible to those in the Westminster bubble. As a result, our inspection and accountability system has judged schools too harshly.

Gove's Law states that recognising that some children face greater barriers to learning inevitably leads to a 'soft bigotry of low expectations'. This law is flawed; the only bigotry has been to hold schools solely responsible for solving all society's ills amid widening inequities.

Not only has this been unfair to teachers, it hasn't worked. For all

the tough talk, achievement gaps between education's haves and have-nots have remained stark, widening on many measures.

That's why the proposed education inspection framework marks such a watershed moment. It puts equity and excellence side by side at the heart of inspection.

It challenges teachers to have the highest standards for all their pupils, not just those from better-off homes. It promises to celebrate practitioners performing heroic jobs in tough circumstances, when in the past they have been slammed for it.

It introduces a standalone category for inclusion and asks explicitly how well schools are supporting pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

This is not a dilution of standards. It's a long-overdue rebalancing of how we define and recognise great teaching. As Sir Martyn Oliver has put it: "If providers are getting it right for disadvantaged children, they will undoubtedly be getting it right for their non-disadvantaged peers."

Inclusive schools are strong schools – for everyone. This principle lies at the heart of our work on the Equity Scorecard, a self-evaluation tool for schools that empowers schools to reflect on their equitable practice in the classroom and in their parent and community partnerships.

But to make its new vision real for the entire sector, Ofsted's new framework will need to be crystal-clear about what inclusive



“A lack of clarity would be a fundamental flaw

and equitable practice looks like.

A lack of clarity here would be a fundamental flaw, leading to different interpretations and unfair variations in inspection processes and outcomes.

In our response to the inspectorate's consultation, informed by our work on the equity scorecard, we try to spell out exactly how this practice could be defined.

Crucially, no school should be rated 'strong' in any area unless it can demonstrate great practice with all its pupils facing additional material and cultural barriers to learning.

Ofsted could go even further than its current proposals, setting out what 'secure' and 'strong' inclusive practice looks like in each of its inspection areas, and only giving these ratings if this inclusive practice is met.

Inspectors must also be encouraged to understand local contexts. This means considering the efforts schools are making to support pupils with specific barriers that might go beyond standard pupil premium (and special needs) markers – like poor access to transport or stretched social support

services.

Yes, our inspection regime should demand the highest expectations for all our pupils. But previous regimes rewarded schools serving more affluent areas – even when their learners from disadvantaged backgrounds lagged significantly behind.

High expectations must mean recognising students' progress from their varied starting points and their diverse aspirations, as well as the full range of their talents, be they academic, vocational or creative.

Recognising disadvantage in schools is not about making excuses. It's about giving teachers the right support, tools and accountability to drive up standards.

This is Ofsted's chance to help level the educational playing field. Focusing on inclusion and equity is the right ambition. But it must be clearly defined so that we all pull in the same direction.

Read the South West Social Mobility Commission's response to the proposed new education inspection framework [here](#)

Solutions

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FINOLA WILSON

Author, *Closing the Disadvantage Gap in Schools: A Visual Workbook*

How to mitigate disadvantage in the classroom

We must go under the bonnet of disadvantage as it applies to individuals to have any chance of mitigating its impacts across the sector, explains Finola Wilson

The disadvantage gap is one of education's most persistent challenges. The link between high deprivation and low attainment is a constant concern for policymakers and educators alike – but are we looking for solutions in the wrong place?

Schools Week readers won't need to be reminded of the extensive evidence that socioeconomic disadvantage affects educational outcomes. Nor can they have failed to note that progress in closing it had stalled before the pandemic, only to go into reverse since.

And that's not for want of effort from school staff or politicians, but if what we have been doing isn't working, then what should we be doing instead?

Until now, closing the disadvantage gap in schools has tended to focus on high-quality teaching and tutoring supported by activities designed to mitigate the worst effects of poverty, such as food parcels, uniform clubs, digital access and social and extra-curricular activities.

While these interventions are valuable, what's often missing is a deeper, evidence-based understanding of what works and

why. There is a lack of discussion on how educational disadvantage affects the cognitive and emotional experience of children and why tackling it is so crucial.

The disadvantage gap is so pervasive because family life has been changed not just by poverty but by a decline in mental health and wellbeing. It's not just about a lack of money; it's the effect poverty has on the entire structure of a family.

This doesn't just affect how children feel about themselves and the world around them. It also alters their brain structure.

It doesn't matter what the cause of the disadvantage is, the impact is the same. It's not just a "learning gap" – it's a cognitive disadvantage. When children's basic needs are unmet, their cognitive functioning suffers, making it harder for them to focus, engage and succeed.

Closing the disadvantage gap in the classroom means teachers must somehow mitigate for these deep-seated effects. Before children can fully access the curriculum, they need help to think and feel differently.

It's not as simple as identifying disadvantaged children on the register and holding teachers accountable for their progress. Done badly, this only adds pressure that can undermine the sense these children have that they are important and have value.

Instead, here are four practical



“ Disadvantage alters children's brain structure

strategies that successful schools are taking to genuinely mitigate the impact of disadvantage in the classroom:

Use data for deeper insight

Disadvantage takes many forms. A simple label cannot capture it, and it cannot tell teachers how to tackle it.

Collect and analyse all available data to build a comprehensive picture of each child's circumstances. Understanding their challenges and the issues they face will allow every teacher who works with that child to give them better support.

Prioritise full engagement

Setting high expectations must mean more than aspirational targets. Teachers must also have high expectations for participation and create tasks that support every child to be actively involved in learning, regardless of their background.

Get students talking

Articulating thoughts helps solidify understanding, while having a strong vocabulary is linked to long-term academic and career success. Developing subject-specific and

school-wide oracy strategies can be a powerful tool to level the playing field.

Measure the impact

Don't assume an intervention is effective just because research suggests it should be. Continuously assess its impact on student progress and be prepared to refine or adapt your approach as needed.

But remember: the impact may not be immediately measurable in outcomes. Improvements in self-belief, self-efficacy and participation are early signs of progress too.

Closing the disadvantage gap requires a shift in mindset. It's not simply about compensating for economic hardship; it's about reshaping how disadvantaged pupils experience education.

Teachers can play a vital role in this transformation, providing students with the tools, confidence and opportunities they need to break the cycle of poverty and wider emotional effects.

Research-based practical steps can ensure every child has the chance to thrive in our schools. And the first step is to know and understand their individual needs.

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THE CONVERSATION

LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM



Zara Simpson

Deputy head of prep, Streatham and Clapham High School

NEXT STEPS

As we begin the summer term, our focus as a school and as a sector rightly turns to transition: ensuring that our Year 6 pupils are emotionally, socially and academically ready for the move to senior school.

Transition is an exciting as well as an uncertain time, so it's vital we support pupils with care and consistency. As an all-through school, we're fortunate to offer a seamless experience. Our head of transition and head of Year 7 engage with pupils from the start of Year 6, and this sustained connection helps pupils feel known and supported well before September.

Crucially, effective transition relies on clear and ongoing communication, not just with pupils but with parents too. In today's educational landscape, effective communication is essential for school leadership teams aiming to build trust and foster meaningful engagement with parents.

A recent blog from Weduc offers a helpful reminder of the importance of proactive communication strategies that reflect a school's values and meet the needs of its community.



From creating consistent communication frameworks and being transparent, to engaging SEND and EAL families and addressing funding gaps, the guidance encourages leaders to see communication not as admin but as culture-building.

Strong parent partnerships enhance the educational journey, and clear, consistent messaging plays a crucial role in sustaining that trust. This blog is full of helpful tips to get that right.

NEXT GEN

Digital literacy is another key focus as we look ahead. In the latest episode of the *Hello World* podcast, the Raspberry Pi Foundation explores practical, classroom-tested ways to build digital skills – a growing necessity for today's learners.



Featuring teachers from the UK and US, the episode offers advice on embedding digital literacy across subjects. The conversation goes beyond coding, touching on topics like evaluating digital content, understanding online safety and encouraging curiosity in a tech-driven world.

One teacher in the podcast emphasises that digital learning becomes more effective when it's relevant. Whether through creative storytelling, data projects or cross-curricular links, pupils are more engaged when they see the real-world purpose behind the tech.

The podcast is a useful listen for educators looking to introduce digital thinking in meaningful, manageable ways.

NEXT LEVEL

Another key area of professional development this term is supporting pupils with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). With SLCN now the most common need among pupils on SEN support in England, it's essential that school teams are confident in identifying and responding to this challenge.

The latest *Headteacher Update* podcast tackles this issue head-on, offering practical



advice on recognising and supporting SLCN in the classroom. It stresses the importance of early identification, spotting difficulties with vocabulary, comprehension or social interaction and integrating support into everyday teaching, rather than seeing it as a bolt-on.

Strategies such as visual scaffolding, simplifying language and creating safe speaking spaces are discussed, alongside the value of whole-school collaboration with speech and language therapists and parents.

Given the significance of this topic, we are hosting a dedicated **parent talk** this May with speech and language expert Tina Archer. She will share practical advice with families on how to support communication development at home, ensuring that parents feel empowered as partners in their child's progress.

For teachers seeking to develop their practice further, an upcoming free webinar from **AQUEDUTO** (the Association for Quality Education and Training Online) offers a timely CPD opportunity. On May 15, this free, interactive session will look at how AI tools can support online language teaching and teacher education.

With so much discourse around AI, this promises a grounded, practitioner-focused perspective on using these tools with confidence and purpose to meet a growing challenge.

As we head into the final term, our focus remains firmly on ensuring that all pupils feel ready for their next steps, whether they're preparing for senior school or developing new skills in the classroom.

That means ensuring each child – and their family – feels secure, supported and seen.

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts



The Knowledge

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



Is young people's mental health finally recovering after Covid?

Jane Lunn, Headteacher, Alleen's School and Jon Needham, Director of safeguarding, Oasis Community Learning

When the pandemic hit, it didn't just disrupt learning; it exposed and deepened an existing youth mental health crisis. Teachers and pastoral staff have shouldered that burden since. Our latest report, published today, reveals encouraging signs of recovery, but also stark reminders of how uneven that recovery remains.

New polling from Public First at the heart of this report shows 77 per cent of young people rate their mental health as 'quite good' or 'very good', rising to 84 per cent among 11 and 12 year olds.

And there is evident progress since 2021. Then, 60 per cent of 16 to 18 year olds were worried about their mental health, including stress and anxiety. This has now dropped to 39 per cent.

Reports of negative feelings and behaviours such as restless sleep, difficulty concentrating and loneliness have declined across the board, and the proportion of this age group rating their mental health as 'quite poor' or 'very poor' has fallen from 21 per cent to 10 per cent.

These improvements speak to the resilience of schools, staff and young people in emerging from the dark days of the pandemic. This is without doubt cause for celebration.

However, today's results also mean that tens of thousands of young people are still suffering from poor mental health, day in and day out, in our schools.

Amid cause for optimism, we must not lose sight of groups within the school-age population who are disproportionately likely to report poor mental health outcomes. There are uncomfortable truths in these findings that everyone working in the school system must face.

A key finding relates to the gender gap in mental health: girls are more than twice as likely as boys to rate their mental health as 'quite poor' or 'very poor' (11 per cent and five per cent respectively). They also report higher stress levels (3.8/10 compared to 3.2/10).

Family income is also significant. Young people



'These findings should spur those in power to do more'

from households earning under £30,000 rated their school-related worries at 4.9/10, compared to 4.1 among those from households earning over £60,000.

It will also be concerning to many that young people are hugely reliant on their phones. Among 11 to 18 year olds, 32 per cent say having their phone taken away would be more likely to ruin their day than getting detention (25 per cent) or a poor grade (23 per cent).

Despite age restrictions, 63 per cent of 11 and 12 year olds have at least one social media account, and one-quarter of all users aged 11 to 18 say they couldn't do without it.

Perhaps most challengingly of all, schools emerge as the area of their lives that 11 to 18 year olds find most stressful, outstripping their own futures and the general state of the world. Under half of young people (42 per cent) say they have been taught about how to look after their own mental health, and 40 per cent believe schools put too much pressure on them.

These findings should give policymakers confidence in the school sector's ability to support young people's mental health and wellbeing. They should also spur those in power to do more for those whose mental health

outcomes remain poor.

For example, Labour's manifesto commitment to Youth Hubs could give disadvantaged young people a place to receive wraparound support outside the stresses of a school environment.

Additionally, a joined-up approach will be vital in delivering the commitment to counsellor access in every school. These professionals could play an important role in filling the gaps schools feel less confident in addressing when it comes to teaching young people how to take care of their own mental health.

Day in and day out, school staff work with young people for whom the pandemic feels like a dark and distant memory, and those who still struggle to set foot in school.

They are well versed in celebrating the progress that children have made and guiding them on the tough road that still lies ahead. It is time for policymakers to learn this skill too.

Read the full report [here](#)

Jane Lunn and Jon Needham are co-chairs of The Coalition for Youth Mental Health in Schools alongside Alicia Drummond, Founder of Teen Tips and The Wellbeing Hub

Week in

Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

TUESDAY

Another day, another chance for the Department for Education to reannounce the trial of its breakfast clubs.

After launching the early adopter scheme in September, and then again in November, and then in January listing the 750 schools taking part – today it was time to announce that things have actually bloody started.

As you will have probably read now, there was also a bigger change – but the DfE wasn't as keen to shout about this one.

It slipped out a new list of the 750 schools taking part, and after some top sleuthing from the *Schools Week* team, we found that 79 have dropped out since January, many because they couldn't afford the clubs. Awks!

Meanwhile, the Conservatives are kicking off about offering the clubs in the first place. Tory London mayor wannabe Susan Hall tweeted this week: "Please stop referring to 'free' breakfast clubs and 'free' school meals. They are not free. Whether taxpayers should pay for them is a different matter, but they are not free!"

WEDNESDAY

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson, also the equalities minister, tweeted after the Supreme Court ruling on the legal definition of a woman that "we have always supported the protection of single-sex spaces based on biological sex".

Hmm. As several people point out, this is a big porkie pie.

Conservative party leader Kemi Badenoch reposted a Times Radio interview from last year during which Phillipson was challenged on where a trans women should go to the toilet if the option was mens or womens.

After lots of evading, she said "in those cases, people would be using female toilets".

After recent reports of a reshuffle as Labour gets pelters from all parts on its education standards agenda, the last thing Phillipson needs is another attack line for her critics.

Her department is also still sitting on the political-hot-potato-but-incredibly-important trans guidance for schools, something the Tories also sat on.

The new ruling makes the guidance even more important – and Labour needs to get it right and not be distracted by doing things just for the politics.

But it's unlikely the problem is going away.

Badenoch tweeted today: "It's not just

that they got things wrong before (we all do), it's that they would rather lie to the whole country than admit they were wrong. So how can we trust them when they say they will follow the Supreme Court ruling?"

Speak to any school leader and they'll tell you funding for the upcoming year is as bad as it's been for a long time, with unfunded wage rises, rising costs, etc, etc.

So they really didn't need another budget blow today – with the funding rate uplift for T-levels halved to 5 per cent next year.

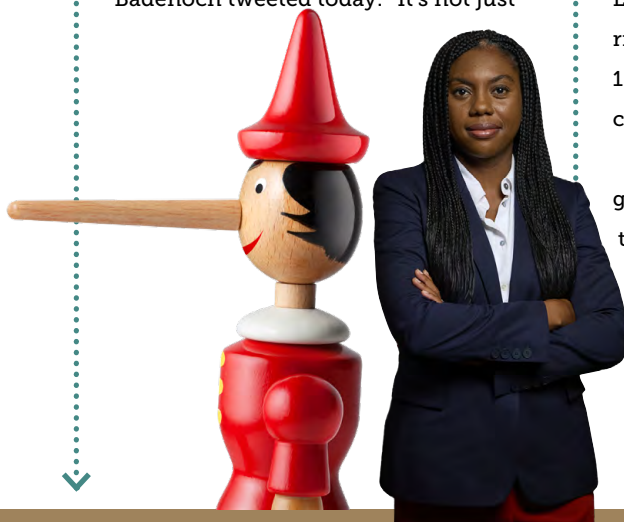
It also comes after a damning National Audit Office report revealed the DfE had an original budget of £1.94 billion for T-levels up to the end of 2024-25, but low student uptake meant it only managed to spend £1.25 billion.

So much for Labour being the party of funding "education, education, education".

THURSDAY

Exclusion data today shows ANOTHER rise in the rate of school suspensions – up 12 per cent in the spring term last year compared with the one before.

Some more food for thought for the government and those working on plans to make mainstream schools more inclusive.





TRUST LEAD - MATHEMATICS

This is an exciting opportunity for an ambitious subject specialist to join the Curriculum team. Working from the Curriculum Centre and across our seven secondary academies, the Trust Subject Lead's primary responsibility is to work with heads of department on the implementation of Future Academies' common curriculum strategy.

The role of a Trust Subject Lead is a high-profile position that sets the standard for effective subject leadership and excellence in the classroom. Working as part of the central team, the Trust Subject Lead's primary responsibility is to work with heads of department on the implementation of Future Academies' common curriculum strategy at key stages 3 and 4.

Beyond this, the Maths Lead will have a broader role in working with senior and middle leaders to shape Maths teaching and improve outcomes across the Trust. This will involve leading department reviews, overseeing subject-specific training for trainees, providing coaching and mentoring for Maths teachers at all stages of their career, and developing a strong network of Maths leaders and teachers.

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Click here to find out more about the role and our staff benefits.

Applications must be received no later than 9 am on 12th May



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The successful candidate will be responsible for the strategic leadership of inclusion and will be particularly focussed on supporting and safeguarding those vulnerable children, children with SEND and additional needs and those who are disadvantaged or at risk of disadvantage or harm. The postholder will be expected to support our current academy leaders through a mix of coaching, mentoring, direction and at times rolling your sleeves up and role-modelling excellent practice. If you think you can be our exceptional candidate, we can't wait to meet you.

Hours of work are flexible to meet the needs of the Trust but will not routinely exceed 37 hours per week. Occasional evening work is expected and this role is office based.



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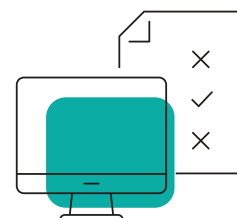


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If you can answer yes to these questions, we would love to hear from you. Further details about the academy, the application process and the application pack are available on the academy website: www.lythamhigh.lancs.sch.uk

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