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How DfE is getting  
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## SEND SOLUTIONS

WHY WE SHOULD  
DITCH EHCPS FOR AN  
INCLUSION PREMIUM



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SAFETY VALVE FAIL



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LIGHTS, CAMERA,  
FACTIONS! WHY TRUST  
CASH TALK MISSES THE  
BIG PICTURE



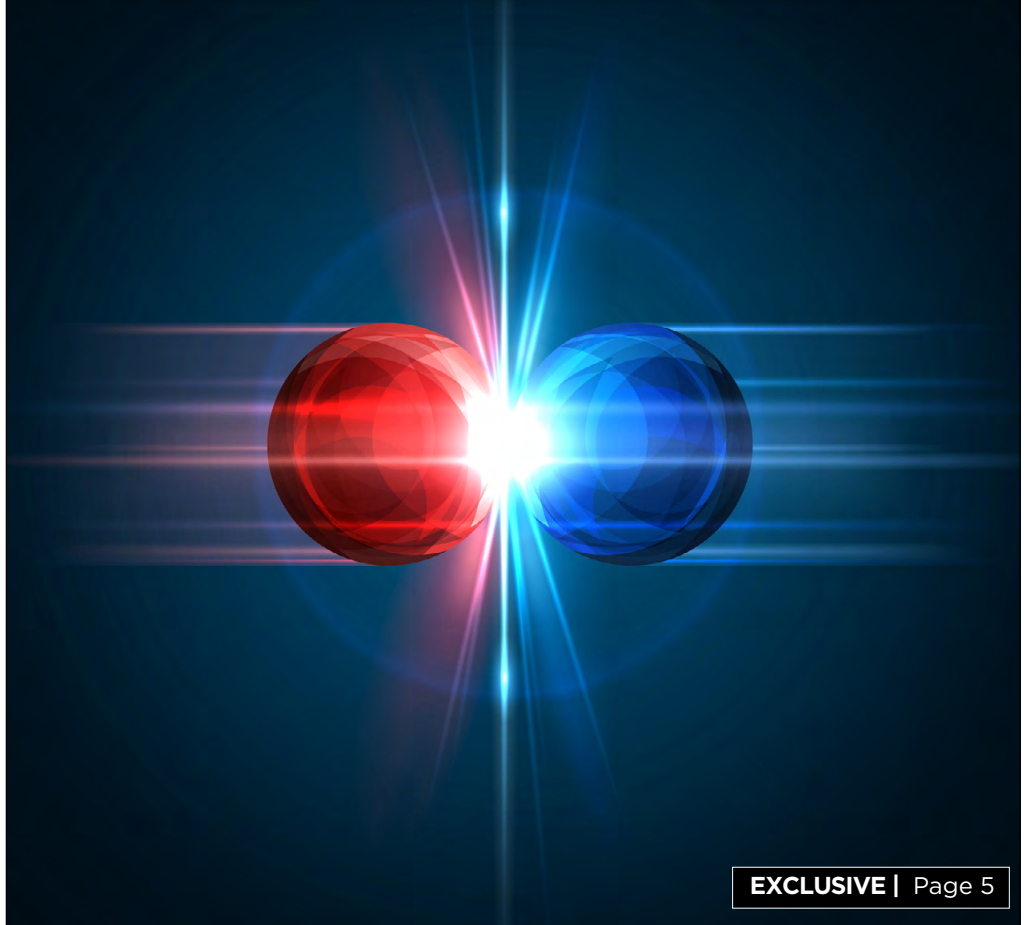
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BSL GCSE: NOT UNTIL  
(PROBABLY) 2028



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# COLLISION COURSE: BUDGET CUTS PIT BOSSES AGAINST UNIONS



EXCLUSIVE | Page 5

# Ofsted mulls delaying new inspections until 2026

- Inspectorate considers pushing back reforms amid widespread concerns

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS | @LYDIACHSW

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SCHOOLS  
WEEK

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week jobs

## FEATURED JOB

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Ofsted has already shown it's willing to concede ground on inspection reform plans.

Our exclusive story this week (page 4) that the inspectorate is now also mulling a delay to the reintroduction of new inspections seems like a no brainer.

It's been clear from the start that plans to introduce the reforms in November, leaving just a few weeks outside of the summer to actually test the new approach, was way too optimistic.

Giving a bit more breathing space is the right course of action. While no decision has been made, that Ofsted is considering a delay is good news.

Elsewhere in our edition, an escalating funding storm is already causing clashes between trust leaders looking to trim their cloth accordingly, and the two teaching unions that now seem hellbent on challenging the biggest academy trusts (page 5).

The details of next year's teacher pay award – and crucially whether it's funded – will dictate whether these clashes are just the first of many.

Schools Week has led the way in revealing how Labour has taken an axe to the Conservative government's school hubs model.

This week we have news of another cut (sort of) among maths hubs that leaders fear will result in less support for schools (page 6).

Another Labour policy that has caused concern is RISE improvement teams. The government this week set out which schools are getting support, and we've got the key findings and trends (page 13).

Meanwhile, we have delved into the controversial SEND safety valve scheme – a policy problem not of Labour's making – to reveal how delays elsewhere in government are all but wiping out bailouts aimed at keeping councils financially viable (page 11 and 12).

Ministers have pledged to deliver a costed SEND plan sometime this year (page 12). One area under close focus is the system of education, health and care plans (EHCPs).

As one leading policy expert writes for us this week, is there a better model? (page 26).

## Most read online this week:

- 1 Harris blames 'unfunded' pay rises as it plans redundancies**
- 2 EHRC guidance causes trans toilet trouble for schools**
- 3 Heads' union pushes for academies' right to rejoin councils**
- 4 200 schools where few bright girls study maths to get extra support**
- 5 Calls for language GCSEs to be graded less harshly**

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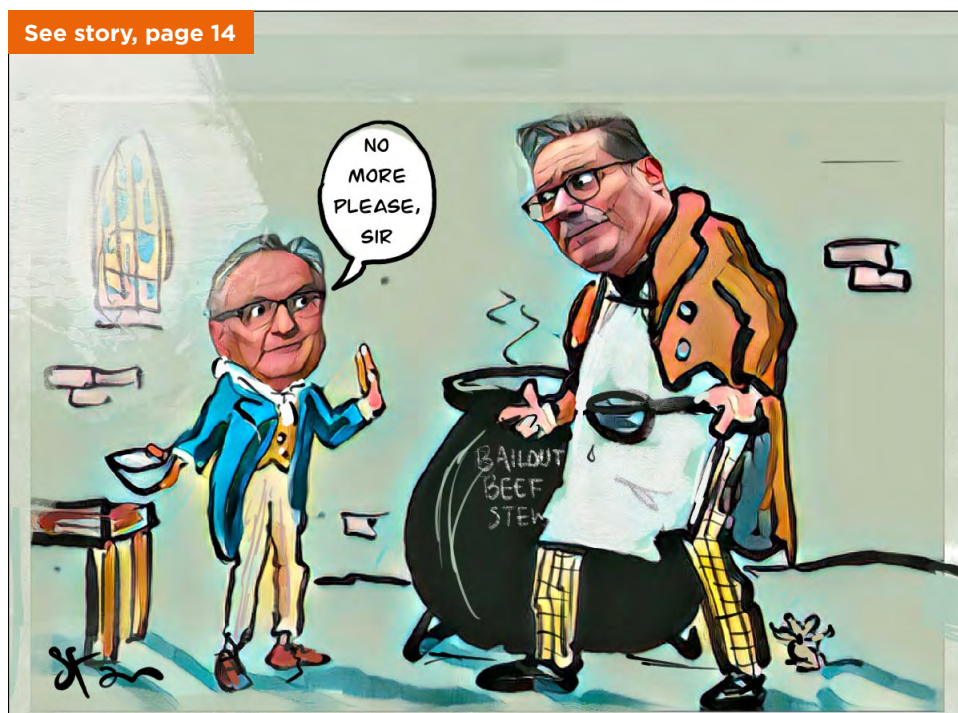
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See story, page 14





## NEWS: RECRUITMENT

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## Apprenticeship training time cut to line up with school year

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

The government will cut the length of postgraduate teaching apprenticeships from 12 to nine months to bring them in line with the school year.

It comes as analysis shows interest in the route continues to increase, with recruitment already a third higher in the first half of this academic year compared with the same period last year.

The postgraduate teaching apprenticeship is a one-year course for graduates and leads to both a level 6 qualification and qualified teacher status. It is different from the four-year teaching degree apprenticeship for non-graduates currently being piloted.

But its 12-month minimum length causes a headache for schools. Apprentices gain QTS after nine months, meaning some drop out of the apprenticeship part of the training. If this happens, the government claws back funding.

Analysis shows about 85 per cent of participants complete the year.

The route has become increasingly popular as schools seek ways to spend money paid into the apprenticeship levy and trainees seek a way of earning while they learn.

Schools Week analysis found there were 1,702

starts on the postgraduate apprenticeship between August 2024 and January this year, up 33 per cent from 1,283 in the same period the year before.

Unlike other routes, apprentices don't always start training in September. In 2023-24, more than 400 starts were registered between February and July.

Figures from the Department for Education also show that last year about 2,800 eligible applicants were "unable to secure a place on a coveted course".

Ministers hope that by changing the course's duration, more schools and providers will take on apprentices.

Sir Andrew Carter is chief executive of the South Farnham Educational Trust, which hires dozens of apprentices every year and was involved in the route's design.

He said the 12-month rule "added a great sense of jeopardy" to hiring apprentices, and his trust had wanted a change "for a very long time".

Carter said more schools would now hire apprentices, which was an "opportunity for the DfE and others, all of us in the business" to convince sceptical leaders of the benefits of the course.



Catherine McKinnell

"It's such a simple solution. Recruitment in England and Wales is simply solved, and yet we don't seem to have grasped the nettle."

Pepe Di'Iasio, the general secretary of the leaders' union ASCL, said there was a limited number of places available largely because of the demand placed on employers.

"There are workload implications for the school as a whole, as well as individual teachers and the apprentice themselves, and this needs to be supported with appropriate investment"

He said shortening the apprenticeships would make them "easier to accommodate, but the fact remains that apprenticeships are only a suitable route into teaching for a relatively small number of people".

The DfE insisted courses would still offer "the same high-quality content, but at a reduced length, with trainees gaining qualified teacher status after they have completed the programme, going on to build successful careers in teaching".

Catherine McKinnell, the schools minister, said bringing teaching apprenticeships in line with the school year was "not only logical, it will open the doors for more and more people to become brilliant teachers".

EXCLUSIVE

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS | @LYDIACHSW

## Ofsted mulls report card inspection delay

Ofsted may postpone the roll-out of its new school inspections until 2026, *Schools Week* can reveal.

While the proposal is only on the table and no decision has been made, it comes after the inspectorate promised wider changes to its inspections amid fierce backlash from the sector.

Ofsted plans to introduce new report cards, with schools graded on 11 evaluation areas using a five-point grading scale.

A public consultation that ended last week garnered more than 6,000 responses. Ofsted plans to publish a report on its findings in summer, before rolling out the new framework in November.

Many in the sector have said the timeframe is unrealistic – giving schools little time to digest changes and Ofsted little time to trial their approach.

*Schools Week* understands Ofsted is now

considering pushing back the introduction of routine school report card inspections until January.

This would give more breathing space for the inspectorate to consider feedback, fine tune its plans and for the sector to get to grips with reforms.

Ofsted has already confirmed it is making a series of other concessions following feedback to its consultation and pilot inspections.

It is working to clarify the difference between the middle 'secure' grade and higher 'strong' grade, following confusion.

As revealed by *Schools Week*, it is also looking at renaming the 'secure' grade. Other changes being considered are reducing the overlap between evaluation areas and simplifying grading.

In March, the school leaders' union ASCL floated

an alternative proposal for a three-point grading scale, and for inspections to not be reintroduced until 2026.

NASUWT has also called for the timeframe to be extended "to allow for meaningful consultation with the profession".

Its general secretary Dr Patrick Roach said there must be "adequate piloting and testing of the proposals, including examination of their implications for workload and wellbeing".

Last week, union leaders, former inspectors and sector experts joined Ruth Perry's sister Julia Waters in calling for delays to "get change right".

Chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver previously said Ofsted would "respond to what the consultation tells us" and "will not do anything as a fait accompli".

Ofsted did not want to comment.



Dr Patrick Roach

## NEWS: FUNDING

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## Cracks widen between big MATs and unions as cuts hit

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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EXCLUSIVE

Looming redundancies and restructures are setting trust leaders on a fresh collision course with unions as they battle a funding storm and seek new ways of working.

The National Education Union is balloting teachers at Oasis Community Learning over a restructure of central team curriculum and inclusion leads which could mean 30 staff lose additional responsibilities and pay.

Schools Week revealed this week the Harris Federation, another of England's largest trusts, is planning job cuts at around 20 of its schools, blaming "extremely challenging" school budgets caused by "unfunded" pay and national insurance rises.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the NAHT union, said school leaders were "in an invidious position trying to balance the books while doing their best for children and staff".

He added: "We are increasingly hearing from our members who are being forced to make really tough decisions over staffing due to school budget difficulties. Clearly, teacher redundancies hit directly at the quality and breadth of education schools are able to provide pupils.

"This is the unsavoury consequence of a dire funding situation and school leaders are strongly urging the government to address this in their upcoming spending review."

At Oasis, 30 teaching staff who currently spend one to two days a week on trust-wide curriculum and inclusion work face losing that extra role, along with the pay that goes with it. The roles will be replaced by six full-time national jobs.

Pay protection has been offered, but only for three years to those with four years' service in the role, which the NEU estimates accounts for a third of those affected.

The union is formally balloting its roughly 20 affected members for strike action after an indicative ballot yielded an 87 'yes' vote with 100 per cent turnout.

Rob Owen, national lead rep for the NEU in Oasis, said affected members "still have no idea whether they may have roles within the new structure, what those roles may look like, or whether they will be able to apply for them before the resignation deadline".



"Those who applied for the 'subject lead roles' did so with no clarity on the scope of the new roles or what the wider team around them may look like," he added.

John Barneby, Oasis's CEO, said the trust was seeking to "cease additional paid duties of staff that are reflected in an annually renewed, fixed-term contract".

He added: "With the exception of one role, all staff affected have a remaining substantive role within their academies and we have committed to offering pay protection for these additional duties in line with school teacher's pay and conditions."

The trust is developing a "new model for school improvement", he said, and is "working closely with our school leaders and staff to make sure that we are structured to deliver maximum impact in our classrooms and communities, while ensuring that our staff are fairly supported and remunerated".

Barneby insisted the approach was "not a cost-saving exercise but a thoroughly assessed action that will contribute to ensuring that the young people we serve receive an exceptional education".

Earlier this week the NASUWT teaching union accused the Harris Federation of "disgraceful behaviour" over its planned redundancies.

Its acting general secretary Matt Wrack pointed out its chief executive Sir Dan Moynihan earns over £500,000 a year and the trust

has tens of millions in reserves.

Schools Week understands around 20 schools are in scope – nearly half of Harris's 55 academies. NASUWT has said it believes 45 teachers are at risk. The trust was approached for comment.

In a letter from Harris about the redundancies, seen by Schools Week, the trust pointed to the "UK-wide issue that schools are experiencing in respect of a challenging financial situation".

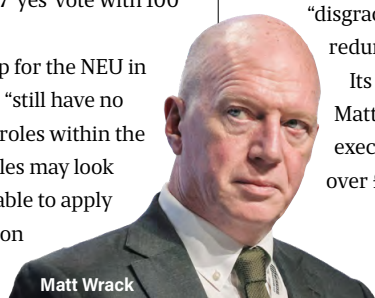
It went on: "The key elements of this problem are outside of our, and indeed most schools', control. These issues can only be dealt with by reductions in costs and this will regrettably impact on teaching and support staff numbers for the next financial year."

It pointed to "unfunded" pay rises and underfunding for national insurance contribution rises.

The letter states the other issue is a "critical drop in income as, like nearly all London schools, we are experiencing a significant drop in our rolls resulting from the falling birth rate and therefore we have no extra income to offset costs".

The trust will "look to 'natural wastage' and redeployment wherever possible to preserve employment. It is never our aim to lose good and dedicated teaching staff, but the current situation is extremely challenging".

But Wrack accused Harris of "trying to make dozens of dedicated teachers redundant and are using underhand tactics to try and force this through".



Matt Wrack



Sir Dan Moynihan

## NEWS

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# Maths hubs' funding drops (but DfE says it's not a cut)

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

EXCLUSIVE

Funding for the government's widely lauded maths hub scheme will fall by 20 per cent next year, with one trust saying its budget has been slashed by a third.

Leaders say the funding fall could result in redundancies and less support for teachers.

However, the government says the change is not a cut.

This year, funding for the scheme was boosted by £7 million to "expand teaching for mastery approaches" as part of the Conservative government's plans for an Advanced British Standard (ABS) qualification.

Those plans have been axed with the budget for September now set at £29 million – 20 per cent less. The government has said this is "consistent with previous years".

Funding was £26 million in 2022-23, and £32 million in 2023-24.

A DfE spokesperson said: "While funding remains consistent with previous years, we are prioritising supporting schools with the biggest challenges, as well as ensuring value for money for taxpayers through more efficient delivery models."

A spokesperson for the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics (NCETM), which coordinates the hubs, also said there would be "no reduction in what's available to schools, and no significant change to how professional development is delivered through maths hubs."

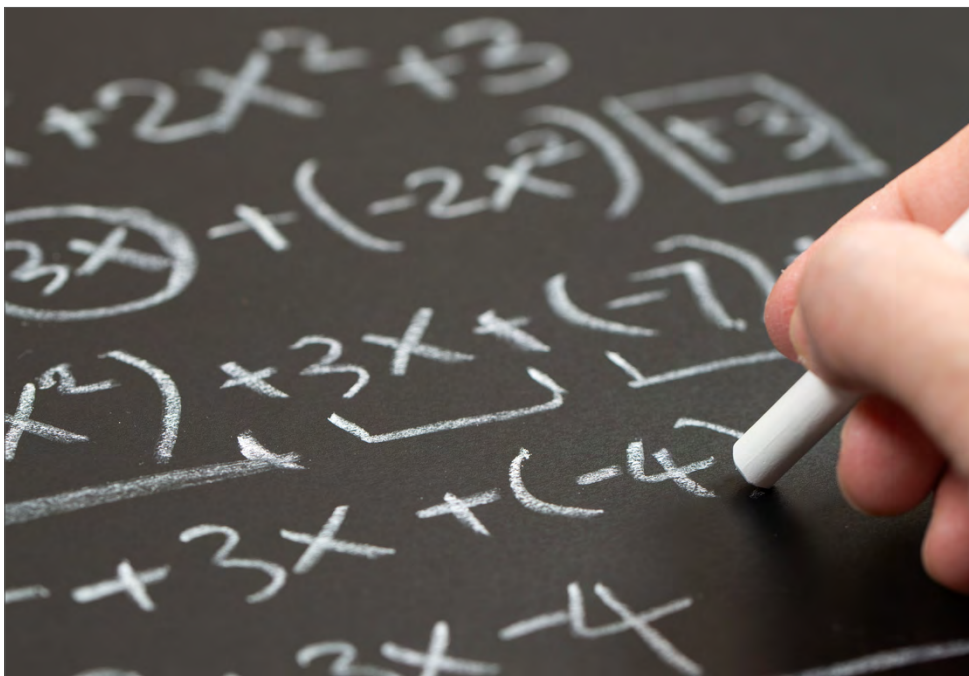
Schools Week understands that no school will be turned away from participating in the scheme.

Launched in 2014, the national network of 40 hubs is led locally by an "outstanding" school or college to share best practice and boost maths education for teachers and pupils.

Sir Isaac Newton Sixth Form in Norwich, part of the Inspiration Trust, leads one hub.

Gareth Stevens, its chief executive, said funding would be "reduced by about one third" from £1 million to about £650,000.

There would be less on offer as a result. "That's the bottom line. If you're cutting something by a third, the offer is going to be reduced."



**NCETM**  
NATIONAL CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE  
IN THE TEACHING OF MATHEMATICS

He described the move as "somewhat perplexing", and "counter to what the government is trying to achieve, which is elevating standards".

"The evidence shows that [the maths hub scheme] works," he said. "There is a real worry that it will die through a thousands cuts if this continues."

Another leader said the cut would lead to "fewer CPD sessions and fewer work groups".

Stevens said schools with significantly reduced funding could be forced to make redundancies – itself a costly process they could find "challenging".

Another trust chief executive said the situation was unclear, but it "did not appear the changes to funding would

substantially change...what we're able to offer".

Maths hubs have been credited with boosting the understanding and uptake of maths. As of August last year they had worked with more than 85 per cent of schools.

One senior leader, whose funding will be reduced, described it as "disappointing", but said it was a "wake-up call" that the sector must "show the impact of government funding".

"I'm not convinced that the maths hubs have done a good enough job demonstrating impact and so have been left vulnerable and open to cuts."

Despite £220 million spent on the scheme since 2014, there has been no independent evaluation of its effectiveness other than a report detailing how many schools it has reached.

A DfE spokesperson said the government was "committed to ensuring every child, regardless of background, has a strong foundation in maths so they are able to thrive in the modern economy".

Maths hubs would continue to support schools to provide teacher professional development, "spanning all phases from early years to post-16, driving up standards in maths teaching."

Labour has scrapped computing and science hubs and scaled back languages hubs.



Gareth Stevens



## NEWS: FUNDING

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# New schemes target A-level maths for girls

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

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Two-hundred schools with low rates of girls going on to study advanced maths will get support under a refreshed government scheme. Schools Week reported in January how the Labour government had cut elements of its Advanced Mathematics Support Programme (AMSP), designed to increase uptake and improve teaching of maths at AS and A-level in disadvantaged areas.

The government on Tuesday announced a reworked £8.2 million scheme, billed as a “crucial step” in “creating a strong talent pipeline and driving greater diversity across the AI talent pool”.

It will include three new programmes. Under “Girls’ Progression to A-level Maths Programme”, 200 secondary schools with low rates of high-attaining girls going on to study advanced maths will now be eligible for support.

Currently only one-third of A-level maths pupils are girls.

The government says participating schools will be supported “to identify the issues that are preventing girls progressing to A-level maths, and devise strategies to overcome them.” About 7,500 girls will be eligible.

Schools will be approached from June, with the programme kicking off in September.

The AMSP will also support “thousands” of



pupils from 400 disadvantaged secondary schools go on to study core maths and A-level maths and further maths, through a “Higher Level Maths Achievement Programme”.

A third scheme – “Maths into AI” – includes “pilot teacher training and pupil enrichment courses on the key maths concepts and skills needed for AI”. It will be delivered to 450 pupils and 360 teachers from September.

Teachers will be offered five online “twilight” professional development sessions, and one face-to-face study day.

Pupils will access a new online term-long course. Successful pupils will be awarded a certificate from Maths Education Innovation (MEI).

The government said the overall funding package for the AMSP was the same as before.

However, the maths charity XTX Markets is now funding a £500,000 element of the scheme to support disadvantaged pupils prepare for university tests.

AMSP has reached more than 2,500 schools since 2018.

## New AI taskforce launched

The DfE has also launched an expert panel to advise on what changes are needed to improve digital skills, including in AI. It will be chaired by Sir Kevan Collins, the school standards adviser.

The members are:

- **Kristopher Boulton**, chief executive, Unstoppable Learning
- **Beverly Clarke MBE**, chief executive, Technology Books for Children
- **Nick Kind**, managing director, Tyton Partners
- **Lynette Leith OBE**, deputy chief executive and curriculum lead, Hull College
- **Professor Rose Luckin**, professor of learner centred design, University College London Knowledge Lab
- **Lynne McClure OBE**, chair of the education sub-committee, Academy for the Mathematical Sciences
- **John Roberts**, interim chief executive, Oak National Academy
- **Dr Sue Sentance**, director of the Raspberry Pi Computing Education Research Centre, University of Cambridge, and chair of the BCS schools and colleges committee
- **Cheryl Shirley**, director of digital learning, LEO Academy Trust

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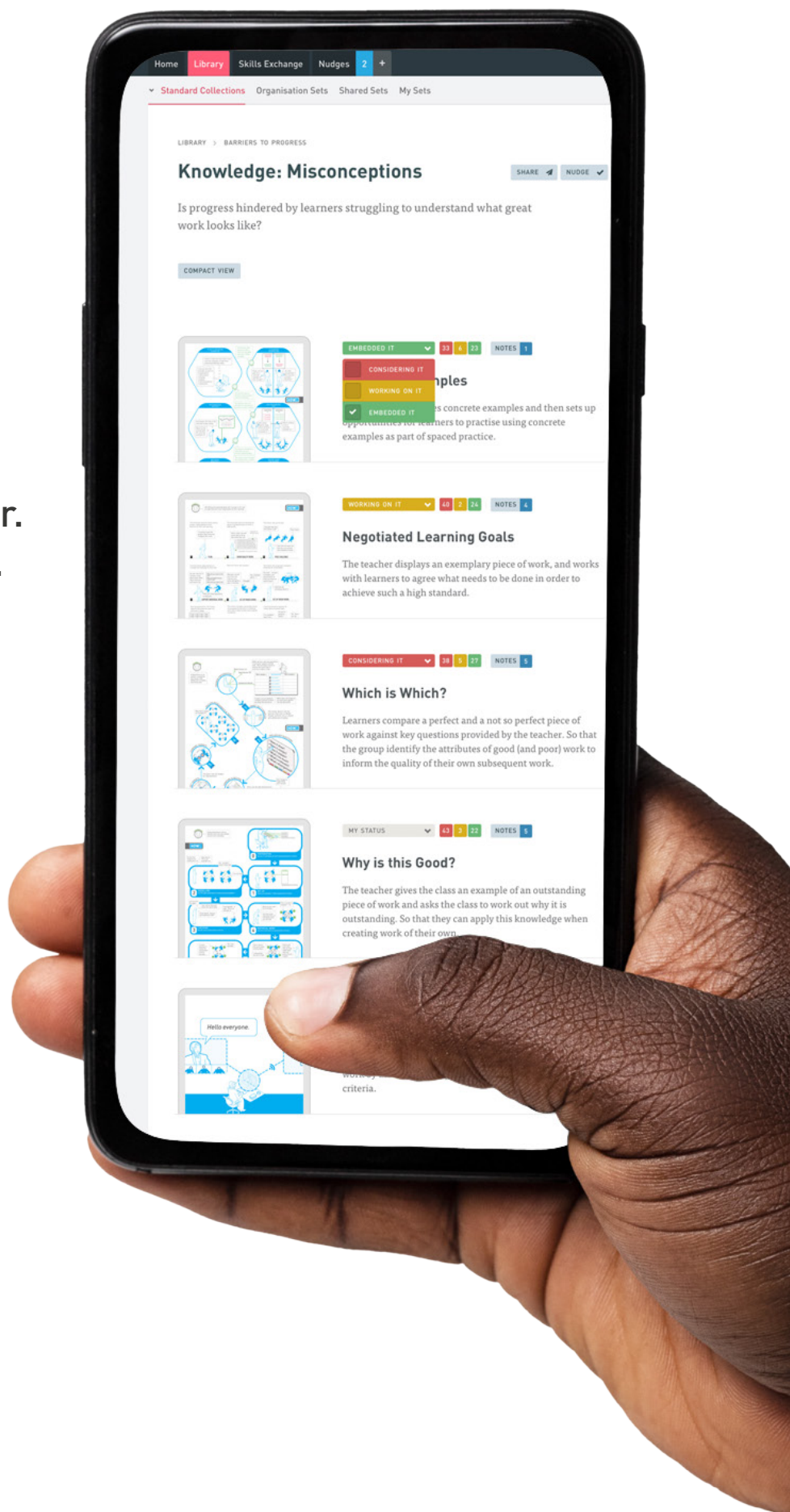


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# Heads drop over strained budgets and Ofsted pessimism

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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EXCLUSIVE

Ministers “mustn’t forget to dream about the legacy they want to leave, as much as the desire to balance the books”, Paul Whiteman has said, as he called on ministers to properly fund schools.

The leader of the NAHT leaders’ union warned the government its “vision for education, the ambition for our children, for our country’s future cannot start with your bank balance. “If we fail to invest in education, we fail to invest in our future.”

Here’s your Schools Week round-up of the big talking points from leaders at the conference.



Amy Lassman

## ‘Sleepless nights over another unfunded pay rise’

A motion on funding warned of “growing budget deficits, leading to long-term financial instability in schools”.

Debra Walker, the CEO of the IRIS Learning Trust, said the “leadership model in our system is on the edge of a precipice.

“Another unfunded pay rise will be catastrophic for us all. We are having sleepless nights about what we can and cannot do.”

Headteacher Simon Smith added that funding formulas focused on headcount also “don’t match the needs in schools”.

He said his school had eight fewer staff than four years ago, despite “more children with SEND”.

David Pattison, from Leeds, warned of the impact of falling rolls.

“If you have 23 children in a class, you still need a class teacher, but the funding model does not reflect this.”

He added that schools dread the “transfer deadline day” of the school census, “where there is so much churn as schools try to ensure they have full rolls”.

Pattison said: “Schools are being forced into



Debra Walker

## ‘We are having sleepless nights about what we can and cannot do’

impossible financial decisions, diverting money away from core education priorities just to keep the lights on and ensure children are fed. We in schools are under constant pressure to do more with less. This is unsustainable.”

Simone Beech, head of Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School in Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, said she’d “had no school building” since January 16, 2023, “when we were told to leave immediately because it was deemed unsafe.

“Our budget was balanced on the day of the evacuation, but it isn’t balanced now.”

### Academies ‘shuffled between MATs like monopoly cards’

Delegates passed a motion calling for a process “for a school to leave one trust and either join another or rejoin the local authority, to suit the school’s needs”.

Alasdair Black, head of Moat House Primary School in Coventry, warned some academies were being “shuffled between MATs like property cards in a Monopoly

board”. But the current situation was akin to “marriage without the prospect of divorce”.

Currently there is no mechanism for a school to choose to leave a trust – moves only happen due to intervention after poor performance or if a trust decides it no longer wants to run a school.

Michelle Sheehy, of Millfield Primary School in Walsall, said the current setup means the proposed policy would be “very difficult to put into practice”.

She added: “Headteachers, when they do join a MAT, often lose any say in what happens to them subsequently. But I think something does need to be done to ensure the leaders of the school, the school heads themselves, get to choose what happens in terms of structure.”

### Academy leaders ‘demonised’

While excessive CEO pay was criticised, others were also concerned about academy criticism.

Debra Walker criticised the “demonisation of us as leaders and workers within the academy system”.



Alasdair Black

Continued on next page

## ON LOCATION: NAHT CONFERENCE



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"There are some rogue people out there, but we cannot tarnish the whole system," she added.

And Jim Nicholson of Stockport said "the majority of CEOs actually do hard work for the children.

"Many CEOs actually are paid less than some of our primary school colleagues in charge of individual schools in the maintained sector. We have to stop that rhetoric."

### Ofsted 'glimmers of hope are now in the shadows'

The NAHT's motion on Ofsted calls on the union to consider all "legal and industrial options" in fighting the watchdog's plan for new report cards, which would give schools one of five grades in up to 11 inspection areas. The union has since launched legal action.

Martin Vayro, of Crow Lane primary school in Milnsbridge, Huddersfield, said heads were given a "glimmer of hope" when Sir Martyn Oliver was appointed chief inspector and the Labour government was elected.

But "in the here and now, those glimmers of hope are in the shadows".

He said the plan for report cards was "an idea that was set up in Nando's, written on the back of a serviette, taken back into the office and run through ChatGPT".

Donna Taylor-Smith, head of Stansfield Hall Church of England in Littleborough, Gtr Manchester, said her school was rated 'good' in all areas last year, but then inspectors returned to gather additional evidence.

"The lead inspector called not to collaborate, but to dictate. There was no discussion, no understanding, just control."

What followed was "one of the most traumatic 48 hours of my professional life. I didn't sleep. I was at school at 4am shovelling snow, terrified that they would defer us.

"My staff were shattered and I was broken. By midday, the inspectors told me that they had no concerns. They praised our journey, but the damage was already done."

### 'Remove last remnant of performance-related pay'

Delegates passed a motion stating that performance-related pay in England "has been removed for everyone except those on [main pay scale point six].

This is because teachers "still have to apply" for the upper pay scale, and this is subject to a judgment.



Donna Taylor-Smith

## 'The lead inspector called not to collaborate, but to dictate'

Amy Lassman, of Birmingham, said all teachers "develop well when they are supported and able to take part in meaningful professional development.

"Over time, their skills develop, they support others, they become better teachers. This should be rewarded with a fair and equitable pay scale that recognises commitment and experience."

But Clem Coady from Cumbria warned that if the policy changed, "wages will go up... but the school funding will never match it, and therefore, members in this room will be making colleagues redundant to pay for this".

### 'Teaching apprentices just surface-level instructors'

The government is developing teaching degree apprenticeships, which will allow those without an existing degree to train to become teachers. They will obtain a degree and qualified teacher status at the end of the four-year course.

NAHT conference voted to "oppose the introduction and expansion of non-graduate apprenticeship routes as a substitute for high-quality, university-led teacher training".

The only basic entry requirements are that applicants must be over 16 and have passed GCSE English and maths. The number of A-levels or equivalent qualifications "will be set by individual universities".

Emily Jones, from Staffordshire, asked

delegates to "imagine hypothetically" a non-graduate apprentice teacher working with pupils with additional needs.

"No required specialist knowledge, no required understanding of pedagogy, psychology, differentiation, SEND needs and the true grit required to work with such people. A 60 per cent teaching commitment and a 40 per cent study."

She said the union's executive had questioned the government, and "there are far too many holes in this poorly thought out solution to our recruitment crisis".

"Will this reduce workload for schools? Absolutely not. Will this increase our workforce solving all of our recruitment issues? I very much doubt it."

Toni Dolan, of Barnsley, questioned how apprentice teachers would identify learning gaps "if they do not have any strong sound subject knowledge specific to their teaching area.

She added: "They will just be surface-level instructors."

But George Samios, of Bath, pointed out trainees often take on debts of £9,000 to do a PGCE or up to £50,000 for a teaching degree.

He argued we should not place "additional barriers in the way of good people, whatever their circumstances, doing something meaningful and vital."



Emily Jones

## NEWS

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# Who are the stuck schools getting RISE support?

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

The government has named the first 218 stuck schools set to receive targeted support from its new RISE improvement teams.

It comes after 45 new advisers were announced last week to join the 20 who have been in the RISE divisions since the start of February.

The teams will commission support for 'stuck' schools – those rated 'requires improvement' following an earlier below-good inspection grade – from bodies such as trusts, councils and federations.

Here's what you need to know...

## 1. Most 'stuck' schools are academies

In all, 175 (80 per cent) of the schools on the list published on Thursday are academies.

Forty (18 per cent) are under local authority control.

The remaining three are UTCs, all of which are part of a trust.

Three MATs – Hope Sentamu Learning Trust, Plymouth CAST and Kemnal Academies Trust – have four schools named on the list.

Meanwhile, Derbyshire council was the only local authority with four RISE schools.

One of the reasons for this is because the definition of a 'stuck' school includes those that have been rated less than 'good' multiple times – irrespective of whether a school has only one of these ratings after joining an academy trust.

## 2. RISE schools with RISE advisers?

Our analysis suggests eight of the trusts that have employees working as RISE advisers also have at least one school that is in line for targeted support.

Four of them – Bishop Hogarth, Meridian Trust, Oasis Community Learning and Tove Learning – have two academies set to be given the help.

Of the five councils with a member of staff on the teams, one, West Berkshire, has a local authority-maintained school on the list.



## 3. Just 3% in London

Only seven of the RISE schools (3 per cent) are based in London, the lowest of any region.

With the exception of the northeast, all the



other parts of the country accounted for at least 10 per cent of those on the list.

Thirty two of the schools (15 per cent) are in the northwest – the highest of any region.

## 4. Half are secondaries

Some 114 (52 per cent) of the schools are secondaries, compared to 91 (42 per cent) for primaries.

Secondaries are also more likely to be academies.

Just 10 (5 per cent) are special schools. The remaining three consist of one all-through and two pupil referral units.

There are seven MATs with RISE advisers who have at least one special or AP school. Only three of them are special or AP specific.

## 5. Schools 'no longer eligible'

When the first 20 RISE advisers were named in February, it was announced they would be working with an initial tranche of 32 schools that were previously in line for structural change.

But three of them have been listed as "no longer eligible" for support.

This is because they have since been rated 'good' across the board by Ofsted.

**View the  
full list here**





## INVESTIGATION: SEND

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## SEND safety valve fail: 'Delays are costing us millions'

CHAMINDA JAYANETTI

@CJAYANETTI

EXCLUSIVE

Councils on the controversial safety valve scheme are blaming government delays in opening new special schools for undermining their plans to shrink huge financial deficits.

Nine councils – nearly a quarter of those on the scheme – have flagged delays, with many pointing the finger at the Department for Education.

Wokingham Borough Council estimates that a delay last year in opening two new special schools will cost £20 million – the amount the council has been pledged in government bailouts to get its high-needs deficit under control.

Of the 179 approved free schools waiting to open, 67 (more than a third) are special schools.

Six have been waiting more than eight years, with others caught up in a government “value-for-money” review as wider SEND reform plans are drawn up.

“We would encourage the DfE to act swiftly on progressing special free school decisions to ensure children with special educational needs and disabilities get the support they need,” said Arooj Shah, the chair of the Local Government Association’s children and young people board.

“A lack of special schools ... also means more children have to be placed out of area, in independent settings that are often more expensive.”

The safety valve scheme has pledged about £1 billion in bailouts over up to seven years to councils with the largest deficits on their special needs spending. But they must meet strict cost-cutting targets in return for the cash.

Jonathan Wilding, Wokingham’s safety valve consultant, said it was “disappointing” the government had moved the opening of two new specialist schools to 2028.

In a November meeting, he said the “delay would be very costly”, with ongoing talks attempting to bring the openings forward.

The council said it could have delivered the project two years earlier than the DfE’s timescale as the schools were on council-owned land, but the department refused permission. In the meantime, the council will have to spend



## ‘More children have to be placed in expensive independent settings’

more on independent special schools.

“Our assessment is that the two-year delay will cost an additional £20 million by 2030,” a council spokesperson said. “Given that we have a shortfall in local maintained special school places, this has been calculated based on every intended placement being made in the independent sector as the only alternative.”

Similarly, November’s safety valve monitoring report from Isle of Wight Council said: “Until expansion of SEND provision is established on the island, it is likely there will be

continued consideration for EOTAS [education otherwise than at school] required. The lack of progress with the free school is significant in plans.”

The council now wants to take the funds earmarked for the special free school and spend them on other projects.

“We haven’t heard back from the DfE on the free school bid and, as such, are being proactive in creation of more specialist places to meet the needs of our children,” a council spokesperson said.

Arooj Shah

Continued on next page

## £1bn of taxpayer money – but where’s the transparency?

The issues with special school delays were raised in school forum and safety valve monitoring reports examined by Schools Week.

However, of the 38 local authorities on the programme, just seven appear to publish the monitoring reports they are required to send to the DfE.

Both the department and councils have blocked freedom of information requests for the reports on the grounds that disclosure would compromise “freed and frank discussion” between councils and the DfE.

Of the seven councils that do publish

their reports, only two do so in a relatively accessible manner – Kent and Isle of Wight – with the other five burying them in schools forum committee papers.

“We believe in transparency and by sharing our plans there is no ambiguity,” said an Isle of Wight Council spokesperson.

“We have even invited parents and carers to sit on our area SEN partnership board. The only way we are going to improve SEN provision across the Island is by working together.”

## INVESTIGATION: SEND

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"The free school was an integral part of our safety valve agreement, but its lack of progress is outside our control or influence and, as such, has impacted upon our safety valve programme. However, we developed a new satellite provision for SEMH [social, emotional and mental health] that has countered this.

"We would want to use any available capital to expand specialist provision across the Isle of Wight, which we believe could be more aligned to need and delivered more quickly than a new special free school."

Bracknell Forest, Richmond, Kent and Kirklees have also highlighted DfE delays around new schools.

Kent County Council attributes £1.9 million of its in-year deficit to delays in opening special schools that the DfE is leading on.

Kingston, Salford and Bristol have flagged similar issues, but haven't publicly blamed the DfE. None responded to a request for comment from Schools Week.

Government data for last year shows that about two thirds of special schools are at or over capacity.

Margaret Mulholland, the SEND and inclusion specialist at the leaders' union ASCL, said delays to the opening of new schools would be "keenly felt".

"While recent investment in new special schools is



Margaret Mulholland



welcome, these will take years to establish. The huge pressure on places will continue in the meantime, with schools and local authorities struggling to cope and children going without the support they need.

"We are currently paying the price for underinvestment over the past decade. It's time to draw a line under local authority deficits and focus on ensuring all SEND pupils, in both mainstream and special schools, are able to access timely support."

A government spokesperson

said work on special and AP free schools was continuing. "As with all government investment, [these] projects will be subject to value for money consideration through their development, in line with the government's vision for the special educational needs system."

They added the SEND system inherited from the Conservatives was "on its knees – which is why, as part of our plan for change, we are thinking differently about what the system should look like, to restore the confidence of families and ensure every child can achieve and thrive."

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

## Costed SEND plan 'by end of year', DfE promises

The government has pledged to investigate the reasons for increasing demand for SEND support and later this year provide a "costed" plan for reforming the system.

The Department for Education was responding to recommendations from the Public Accounts Committee.

The committee said the DfE's ability to reform the system was "hindered by a lack of data, targets and a clear, costed plan".

It also called on the department to "urgently improve its data, and then use this information to develop a new fully costed plan for improving the SEN system, with concrete actions, and clear interdependencies, alongside metrics to measure outcomes".

The government said it had already done some work, including more "granular" analysis of education, health and care plans that provided "deeper insights into specific patterns and trends to support decision-making".

Ministers said that later this year they would set out plans for reforming SEND. This would be "underpinned by its objective to ensure local authorities can deliver high-quality services for children and young people with SEND in a financially sustainable way".

The DfE has also given itself a deadline of this summer to meet a recommendation to "urgently involve local authorities in conversations to develop a fair and appropriate solution for when the statutory override ends in March 2026".

The statutory override keeps SEND deficits off councils' balance sheets, effectively preventing them from going bankrupt.

The DfE said it was "unable to set out plans by March" as requested by the committee, but "intends to set out plans for reforming the SEND system in further detail in 2025".

This would include details of how the government would support councils to deal

with "historic and accruing deficits and any transition period from the current SEND system to the reformed system".

"This will inform any decision to remove the statutory override," the DfE added.

The committee also warned that "without fully understanding why demand for support has increased, the department's ability to provide value for money is undermined".

The government said it could not meet a demand to work with the health department to "better understand" the reasons for increased numbers of SEND pupils, but would do so "later this year".

It was already collaborating to "address the increased pressure on SEN support in schools". There was a "much steeper rise in SEND" in England than in other similar countries.

The department would also "clarify expectations" for inclusive mainstream schools.

## NEWS: FUNDING

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# Academy bailouts should come with merger clause, demands Agnew

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

Trusts in financial trouble should not get government bailouts unless they agree to mergers or to clear out “failing management”, a former academies minister has said.

It comes after two trusts were given multi-million pound lifelines after racking up £600,000 deficits – citing lagged funding, falling rolls and unfunded pay rises.

But sector leaders have urged ministers not to rely on rescue payments to prop up ailing trusts, with calls for more transparency over the deals as budgets are expected to be pushed to the brink by a gathering financial storm.

Speaking in the Lords last week, Lord Agnew, the Conservative academies minister between 2017 and 2020, said: “In my home county of Norfolk, at least two academy trusts have just received financial bailouts from the [Department for Education] that should have come with a requirement for mergers or a clear-out of failing management.

“That has not happened. This is where the government’s energy should be directed.”

Agnew, chair of the Inspiration Trust, based in Norfolk, was speaking on a debate on the schools bill.

Broad Horizons Education Trust appears to be one of the MATs Agnew referred to.

After posting an overall deficit of £670,000 last year, the government offered it a “fully repayable” £2.7 million loan to ensure the trust could “maintain its operations” for another year.

The trust said rising heating, maintenance, and staffing costs had been “compounded” by the “sustained pupil growth of around 100 pupils per year over several years” at one of its schools.

Funding for this rise “lagged behind creating a cumulative shortfall that placed pressure on the trust’s budget”, it added.

Broad Horizons stressed it had “undergone a complete refresh of leadership” and “taken significant and difficult decisions to restructure both central services and staffing in schools themselves”. This included cutting 30 support staff.

The “strength of our financial management and



the swift actions taken”, meant just £290,000 of the government loan had been used.

Meanwhile, Synergy Multi-Academy Trust, also based in Norfolk, confirmed the DfE had approved an advance of up to £2.1 million. It had not yet used the cash, despite posting a £636,000 deficit last year.

Synergy said its new management “has been working on and implementing a phased plan” to balance the books by September 2027. This included “difficult decisions around staffing and the use of resources”.

It singled out “unfunded pay rises in past years”, SEND funding challenges and “falling pupil numbers in some of our rural catchments” for contributing to its struggles.

Sam Henson, the deputy chief executive of the National Governance Association (NGA), said the sector’s long-term health could not be based on bailouts or “punishing trusts that enter this scenario due to the fragility” of funding.

“We need an equitable and improved long-term strategy, one that looks beyond existing political spectrums and policy, one that stops treating children and schools as commodities and starts to invest in an authentic ambition for the next generation.”

The DfE would not provide bailout figures, saying the data was included in the academy sector’s annual report – but this is usually published two years late.

Analysis suggests 16 payments – totalling £4.7 million – were made to

trusts in 2022-23, the latest year for which figures are available. In 2019-20 this was 34, worth more than £12 million.

However, unfunded teacher pay and national insurance contribution pressures are now hitting schools.

A third of respondents to the NGA’s annual governance report last year considered their school or trust “financially unsustainable without significant changes”.

The figure was highest among local authority-maintained school governors (46 per cent), compared with 29 per cent of MAT trustees.

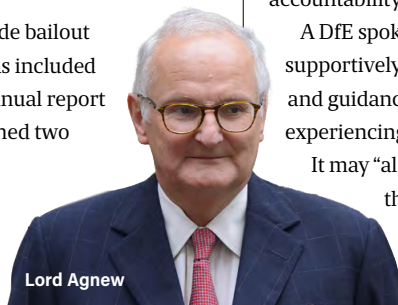
The Southend High School for Boys has been given a loan after forecasting deficits of more than £650,000 this year. This was down to high staff retention resulting in an annual salary bill about £750,000 higher than in a similar school.

The trust has asked the government to change its “inadequate” funding approach after concluding minimum per-pupil levels were “insufficient to allow for significant local variations in costs”.

Dame Meg Hillier, the former chair of the Public Accounts Committee, said there was an “unacceptable lack of transparency and accountability” for parents and taxpayers.

A DfE spokesperson said it “engages supportively to provide practical advice and guidance” in cases where trusts “are experiencing significant financial difficulty”.

It may “also provide longer-term support that aims to prevent financial failure in the short term and secure the trust’s long-term sustainability”.



Lord Agnew



## NEWS: AI

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# Pupils in poorest areas 'shut out' of computing A-level

RHI STORER

@RHISTORERWRITES

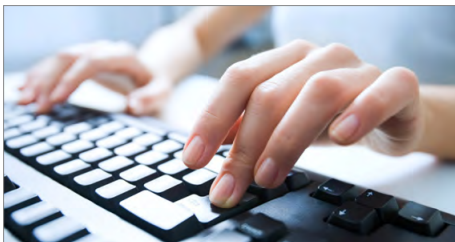
More than 30 per cent of schools in the poorest areas do not offer computer science A-level, leaving pupils "shut out of one of the best paid career paths".

Research by Teacher Tapp found the figure for the wealthiest areas was just 11 per cent.

The schools in the poorest areas were also much more likely to shun French (23 v 3 per cent), Spanish (17 v 6 per cent), music (17 v 5 per cent) and physics (9 v 1 per cent).

The government has repeatedly failed to meet its teacher recruitment targets in all five subjects. Last year it recruited 37 per cent of needed computing teachers and 31 per cent of physics staff.

The poll found 17 per cent of respondents reported not having a computer science teacher at all, equating to about 600 schools nationally.



## 'Best paid career path'

Ahead of the spending review, the teacher training charity Teach First has called for an increase in starting teacher salaries to £40,000 by 2030, to put the profession in the top third of graduate earnings.

It also wants ministers to expand pay premiums for teachers in shortage subjects who work in poorer communities.

The charity warned that as a result of fewer staff in subjects such as computer science, poorer pupils were "shut out of one of the best paid career paths".

Russell Hobby, its chief executive, said the

country risks being "held back" and failing young people "because there simply aren't enough trained teachers".

"This blocks pupils from poorer areas from some of the best-paid careers in a fast-growing tech and AI-driven economy. The government must act in the spending review."

Belinda Chapple, the headteacher of Caterham High School in Essex, said national staff shortages had forced her to make "difficult choices".

"We've struggled to recruit computer science teachers, like many other schools, removing a key career pathway for our A-level students."

This year, Labour launched its AI opportunities action plan to help "give teachers their Sunday evenings back".

The plan proposed efforts to increase the numbers of "AI graduates" from higher education and "expand education pathways into AI".

Figures released last week show 2,000 more people are training to become secondary teachers compared with last year.

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## NEWS: GCSES

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## BSL GCSE 'unlikely before 2028'

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

A much-anticipated GCSE in British Sign Language is not expected to be taught until 2028 at the earliest, three years later than planned.

The Department for Education initially hoped the qualification would be launched in autumn this year, but progress has stalled.

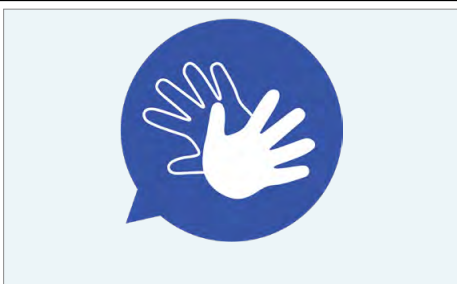
Ofqual last week launched its second consultation on the new exam, which it said marked "significant progress toward a fresh qualification that has the potential to connect communities".

But the watchdog said the outcome of the consultation – a standard part of developing a new qualification – will only be published in September.

If could not clarify when the qualification will be rolled out, saying the timeline depended on exam boards.

After reviewing the current consultation, Ofqual expects to confirm its decision on the qualification rules this autumn.

Interested boards can then develop their offers,



which must go through Ofqual's accreditation.

None of the boards would provide details on a potential timeline, with AQA saying it depended on "various factors".

But one insider said it was likely the earliest it could be taught was September 2028, with the first exams in 2030.

Simon Want, the head of policy and influencing at the National Deaf Children's Society, said deaf youngsters has been campaigning for the qualification for years. "The continued delays and missed deadlines are incredibly disheartening and disappointing. Deaf children and their classmates deserve better."

He acknowledged it was important that the course was robust and credible, and that it met pupils' needs.

But he said: "Every year that goes by is a missed opportunity for a generation of children eager to learn BSL."

The British Deaf Association also welcomed the consultation as "a step in the right direction", but was concerned about the long delays.

The government relaxed its position on the creation of a BSL GCSE in 2018, following threats of a legal challenge by the family of 12-year-old deaf pupil Daniel Jillings.

In 2019, Nick Gibb, the then-education secretary, confirmed the DfE was working to develop draft subject content for the GCSE, which it said it wanted to introduce "as soon as possible".

Conservative ministers pledged to introduce the qualification from September this year. But Ofqual warned it wouldn't be possible in that timeframe.

Ofqual's first consultation in 2023 looked at "high-level principles" for the qualification. The latest, running until June 25, seeks views on specific areas such as accessibility of assessments, vocabulary and grammar, and the structure of non-exam assessments.

The DfE said its focus is on ensuring the qualification is the "highest quality" and "serves the needs" of students and teachers.

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS | @LYDIACHSW

## Some GCSEs should be graded 'less harshly'

A prominent think tank is calling for modern foreign languages and computer science GCSEs to be graded more generously as new analysis shows pupils taking the subjects still get worse results.

FFT Education Datalab analysis of last year's results calculated average scores for every pupil in English and maths and compared it to their grades in other subjects.

Computer science appeared most "harshly" graded, with pupils tending to receive a mark that was almost an entire grade lower than their average grade for English language and maths.

It was followed by French and Spanish, psychology, German and statistics.

Grades in these subjects were more than half a grade lower than grades in English and maths.

Exams regulator Ofqual has attempted in the past to even things up in some of the subjects.

Dave Thomson, the chief statistician at

FFT and author of the report, said action to address historic low grading in modern foreign languages was "long overdue".

"At the very least, pupils' grades could be brought in line with those that they achieve in geography and history."

In 2023, when Datalab last ran a similar analysis, German topped the table, followed by French, computer science and then Spanish.

Efforts have since been made "to bring French and German grades in line with Spanish".

German now appears slightly less severely graded than Spanish. But Datalab said the latter was "still graded too severely".

Reformed GCSEs in MFL were rolled out last September, designed to make the qualifications "more accessible". The first set of results will be reported next year.

"If ever there were a time to adjust grading standards it would be then, although there does not appear to be any suggestion that this will

happen," Thomson said.

Last summer Ofqual reported grading in computer science gradually became more severe between 2014 and 2019, and recommended a grading adjustment to help balance this.

But Thomson said the adjustments did not go far enough.

The "MFL penalty" appears greater for boys than girls, the Datalab study found.

In other subjects, the gender divide was much more mixed. Girls' grades in a range of subjects – including drama, English, and media studies – were generally higher than their English and maths average, while for boys they were lower.

Ofqual said it would "continue to review" standards across GCSEs.

"It is important that standards are maintained in qualifications, so that they signal accurately what students know, understand and can do," said a spokesperson.

One officer for 1,000 kids: councils’ home education woes revealed

RHI STORER  
@RHISTORERWRITES

Overwhelmed councils will face an “impossible task” if they have to scrutinise home-educated pupils, says the leader of a children’s charity.

Data obtained by the NSPCC show elective home education (EHE) officers in English councils are responsible for an average of 388 children each – but three have just one officer responsible for more than 1,000 children.

The findings come as the schools bill proposes to give councils more responsibilities over children educated at home.

Councils will get new duties to check family homes are a “suitable learning environment” and provide support. They will also have to keep a register of the pupils.

Chris Sherwood, the chief executive of the NSPCC, said councils had a “duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of home-educated children, but these worrying figures show there are currently nowhere near the necessary resources for them to adequately fulfil these responsibilities.

“We know that receiving an education at home can be the best option for some children and families. However, robust safeguards must be in place no matter where a child’s education takes place.

“But without additional resources and funding, councils are likely to face an impossible task to deliver these reforms and effectively safeguard the rising numbers of children educated at home.

“The government must invest to ensure their welcome reforms to the law can deliver in practice.”

According to data published by the Department for Education, more than 150,000 children were home-educated at some point last year, up from 126,000 in 2023.

Meanwhile, another 150,000 were estimated as missing education.

Cambridge has 2,270 home-educated pupils, but employs just 1.5 full-time equivalent staff. The ratio of one full-time officer per every 1,513 children is the highest in the country.

However, the council said it also employed six attendance officers who supported parents considering home education and families interested in reintegrating back into mainstream schools.



Essex, which has 5.6 full-time equivalent home-education staff for 5,015 children not in school, said it did not receive any dedicated funding and would “welcome” more support.

“This would allow us to ... offer more support, advice and guidance to our growing electively home-educated community,” a spokesperson said.

Schools Week has previously reported on a lack of EHE staff in local authorities. York said it had no full-time EHE officers, with duties shared between a school inclusion and an attendance adviser.

Havering had none, but said it was recruiting two EHE officers.

The surge in home-educated pupils has overwhelmed many councils, with the NSPCC analysis finding the number of home-educated children has risen by 186 per cent on average since 2018-19.

Fourteen of the councils said the number of children learning at home had quadrupled over that time.

Numbers in Nottinghamshire County Council

increased from 339 pupils to 2,385 in the same timeframe.

Most councils said they had increased staff numbers, but the per-child ratios had also risen.

Medway, which has one home education officer for more than 1,000 children learning at home, said it has “very limited powers” to address “inappropriate” home education.

Unless extra funding supported the new powers, the increase would “have to be funded from a reduction in other areas in the council”, a spokesperson said.

Attempts to change legislation around home education follow the death of Sara Sharif, who was murdered by her father and stepmother after she was pulled out of mainstream education in April 2023.

The changes will also remove the automatic right for parents to home-school their child if they are subject to a protection investigation or are under a protection plan.

Pepe Di’lasio, the general secretary of the leaders’ union ASCL, said the safeguarding provisions in the schools bill “cannot come soon enough”.

“Sufficient funding must be made available to ensure that all local authorities have the capacity required to successfully carry out these new and hugely important safeguarding responsibilities.”

A DfE spokesperson said the schools bill would deliver a multi-agency approach to child protection.

“We want children to have the best life chances no matter the education setting.”

The councils most overwhelmed by home education demand

Council	Children in home education	Allocated staff (full-time equivalent)	EHE child to staff ratio
Cambridgeshire County Council	2,270	1.5	1513
Lancashire County Council	3,592	2.6	1382
Medway Council	1,038	1	1038
Blackburn with Darwen County Council	547	0.6	912
Bolton Metropolitan Council	823	1	823
Cornwall County Council	2,910	3.6	808
Devon County Council	3,515	4.1	857
Essex County Council	5,015	5.6	896
Kent County Council	6,391	8	799
London Borough of Brent	643	1	643

Source: Freedom of Information requests sent by the NSPCC



# Government trials GCSE results app

SHANE CHOWEN

@SHANECHOWEN

Nearly 100,000 year 11 pupils will receive their GCSE results through a government app this year as part of a trial that ministers claim could save schools and colleges £30 million in annual admin costs.

Pupils in the Greater Manchester and the West Midlands combined authority areas will be the first to trial Education Record, which automatically collates their key information and exam results.

Alongside receiving their GCSE results through the app in August, pupils can enrol for a college course or an apprenticeship with an employer without needing to bring physical copies of their qualifications or ID.

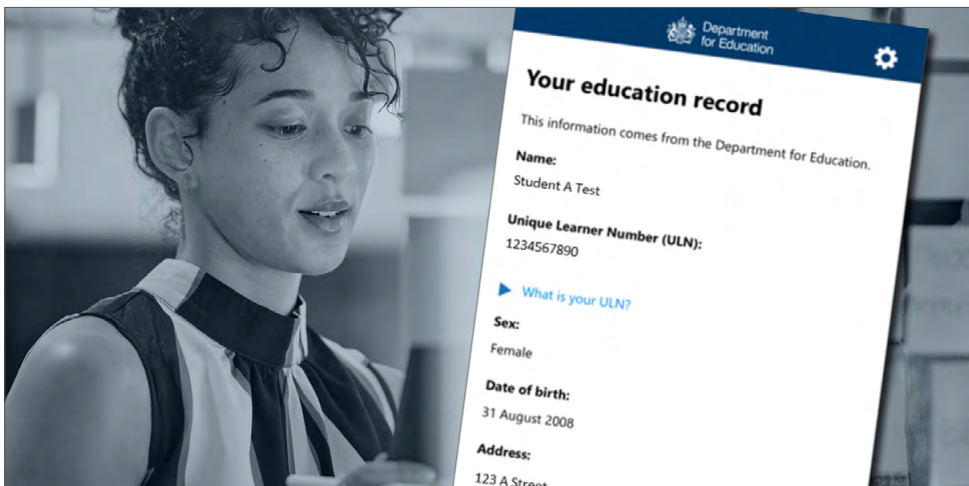
Stephen Morgan, the early years minister, told Schools Week the move would reduce burdens on school and college staff and was “just common sense” for learners moving to further education.

“Far too often you hear about documents being saved in dusty old cabinets,” Morgan said.

“It just makes sense to have all that information in an app to make that transition to your next step. Hopefully, it will make a big difference.”

Pupils can use the app to share their information with a sixth form, college or training provider. This will then automatically share their learner number, date of birth, sex, address, GCSE results, school information, financial and learning support needs.

A Department for Education press release claimed the app could collectively save schools



and colleges up to £30 million a year in admin costs if fully rolled out.

However, sector leaders reacted with concern about plans potentially ruining results days.

School leader Zoe Enser said she hoped pupils would not miss out on coming in to school. “It is a communal moment of sharing joy and getting support.”

## ‘More efficient’

Year 11 pupils at The Hathershaw College in Oldham have had access to the app since spring last year. One pupil, who is hoping to go on to an engineering T-level at a local college this September, told Schools Week the app was “a lot more efficient”.

“Now you get your results on GCSE day, and you have to keep your certificates safe for weeks and weeks.

“Whereas if it’s all on your phone, you know it’s going to be with the younger generation all

the time. So, when you go to college, everything they ask for is on your phone already.”

In total, 487 schools and colleges have been invited to take part in the pilot, which runs until September. A decision about next steps will be made in the autumn.

Morgan was cautious not to commit to a rollout while the pilot was underway, but said he was “really keen to learn lessons and think about how we can use AI and technology more broadly in the education system”.

Pepe Di’Iasio, the general secretary of the leaders’ union ASCL, said the app was a “positive step forward”, but that he wanted a “much more strategic vision” for education technology, including exams.

“A digital exam system would improve matters for everyone and we urge the government to invest in creating the infrastructure schools and colleges need to make this a reality.”

SHANE CHOWEN | @SHANECHOWEN

## ‘Bridget is doing a brilliant job’, says minister

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson is doing a “brilliant job”, her early years minister has said as reports emerge that she could be sacked in a reshuffle next month.

*The Sunday Times* reported at the weekend that Phillipson was “set to lose her job” in a cabinet reshuffle expected at the end of June “over her handling of the schools reforms”.

The paper said Peter Kyle, the Blairite science secretary, was “tipped to replace her”.

Asked if Phillipson would be education secretary by Christmas, Sir Keir Starmer’s

spokesperson said the prime minister had “full confidence in his entire cabinet to deliver the policies and the agenda that he has set out”.

MPs loyal to Phillipson told *The Times* that Number 10 “seems to have a women problem” and the briefings about her were “sexist”.

When asked about the reshuffle reports, Stephen Morgan said: “I think Bridget’s doing a brilliant job as secretary of state.

“We’ve introduced landmark legislation through the children’s and wellbeing bill,

and we’re getting on delivering our plan for change.

“The prime minister has been clear following the local elections that we need to move further and faster to bring the change that people voted for in the general election last year.”

He was “absolutely excited” with the schools bill, saying free breakfast clubs would make “a huge difference on attainment, behaviour and attendance ... and we’re really pleased we’re rolling that out to every primary school across the country.”

## EXPLAINER: CAREERS

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## Ofsted, curriculum ... and now work experience reforms next year

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Schools will have to arrange a week of work experience “activities” for pupils in years 7 to 9 and at least one placement in years 10 to 11 under new careers guidance published by the government.

Leaders have been told to begin “planning and, where able, reforming their work experience programmes” from September.

It marks another reform school leaders will have to implement in the next academic year, alongside any changes from the curriculum review and new Ofsted inspections.

Labour committed before the election to require two weeks of work experience. Now it has updated statutory guidance to set out how it will work.

The document states the two weeks should be broken down into one week’s worth of “activities” in years 7 to 9 and a week’s worth of placement in years 10 to 11.

Activities in years 7 to 9 should consist of “multiple, varied and meaningful employer-led activities”, for example, visits involving employer-set tasks, work-shadowing or talks in workplaces.

Placements in years 10 to 11 should allow pupils to “experience a real working environment”.

But pupils will be able to work with more than one employer, and spread their placement time across a number of days or weeks at any point in the two years.

The DfE said “in due course” it would set out implementation timelines, who is responsible and accountable for delivery, the support available and delivery plans.

Schools will also have to follow updated Gatsby benchmarks for good careers guidance from September.

The previous benchmarks became statutory for schools in 2018.

Here’s what has changed...

**1. A stable careers programme**

Governors should now “understand” and back their school’s careers education programme and guidance.

Programmes will also need to be “tailored to



the needs of pupils, sequenced appropriately, underpinned by learning outcomes and linked to the whole-school development plan”.

**2. Learning from career and labour market information**

Where previous guidance said pupils should access and use information about career paths “by the age of 14”, the update states this should happen “during each key stage”.

**3. Addressing the needs of each young person**

Programmes should now seek to “challenge misconceptions”, and schools will be required to keep systematic records of the “participation of pupils in all aspects of their careers programme”.

Schools will also have to use “sustained and longer-term destination data as part of their evaluation process and use alumni to support their careers programme”.

**4. Linking curriculum learning to careers**

Previous benchmarks said that “STEM subject teachers should highlight the relevance of their subjects for a wide range of future career paths”.

The new benchmarks widen this responsibility out to all subject teachers.

The new guidance also says that “every year, in every subject, every pupil should have

opportunities to learn how the knowledge and skills developed in that subject helps people to gain entry to, and be more effective workers within, a wide range of careers.

“Careers should form part of the school’s ongoing staff development programme for teachers and all staff who support pupils.”

**5. Encounters with employers and employees**

This states still that “every year, from the age of 11, pupils should participate in at least one meaningful encounter with an employer”.

But Gatsby’s guidance has been updated to say that young people “should encounter employers of different sizes and specialisms, including the self-employed, that reflect trends in the labour market”.

The updated benchmark also adds pupils’ “own part-time employment where it exists” to the “range of enrichment opportunities” schools can offer.

**6. Experiences of workplaces**

The previous benchmark stated that by age 16, pupils should have had “at least one” experience of a workplace, additional to any part-time job. It also said that by 18 they should have “one further such experience”.

The new guidance states by age 16, every pupil “should have had meaningful experiences of workplaces”. By 18, they should have had “at least one further meaningful experience”.

The update includes a definition of “meaningful”.

**7. Encounters with further and higher education**

Independent training providers have been added to the providers pupils should have engaged with by age 16, while “apprenticeship providers” have been removed.

**8 Personal guidance**

Every pupil should have opportunities for guidance “meetings”, rather than “interviews”.

Information about personal guidance support, and how to access it, should be “communicated to pupils and parents and carers”, including through the school website.

## MOVERS AND SHAKERS

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## Movers &amp; Shakers

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

**Phil Banks****Chief executive officer, St Christopher's MAT****Start date:** September**Current role:** Director of partnerships on school improvement, Westcountry Schools Trust**Interesting fact:** Phil is working on a PhD at Coventry University looking at the impact of "belonging". He is also a keen musician and cyclist who enjoys time outdoors.**John Yarham****Interim chief executive, The Careers & Enterprise Company****Start date:** April**Previous job:** Deputy chief executive, The Careers & Enterprise Company**Interesting fact:** John's first jobs included working in an ice-cream van and in a factory making wine racks.**Victoria Hatton****Partner and South West education lead, Browne Jacobson****Start date:** April**Former job:** Senior associate, Browne Jacobson**Interesting fact:** Despite growing up in Newquay, Cornwall, Victoria has never been on a surfboard and prefers scones with cream, then jam (she says she's sorry!).

## Gibb to advise mobile phone-free pouch firm

FEATURED

The former schools minister Sir Nick Gibb is to become a strategic adviser for a company that sells pouches to lock away children's phones.

He will advise Yondr, an American company that supplies about 250 schools in the UK, on education policy, strategic partnerships and product development initiatives.

It comes as a national debate grows about whether schools should ban the use of phones during the school day.

Gibb, who served four prime ministers as schools minister for more than 10 years across three separate terms, stood down last year.

Alongside Michael Gove, he was a principal architect of Conservative education policy for about two decades.

He said he was delighted to join Yondr at a time when the relationship between technology and education

was evolving.

"I look forward to supporting Yondr's innovative approach to creating distraction-free teaching environments that enhance student focus and achievement."

*Schools Week* understands the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOPA), which gives guidance on new roles for recent ministers and advisers, has issued conditions. But it is yet to release details.

During his time in office, Gibb championed the academies and free schools programme, a knowledge-rich curriculum and strict behaviour policies.

He has since worked for the Education Development Trust and served as an unpaid member of the Unesco global alliance on science of learning for education.



He was knighted last year.

Yondr, which has an office in London, is used by 3,000 schools in 35 countries.

In the US, the company's sales figures reportedly increased from \$174,000 in 2021 to \$2.13 million in 2023 (£1.6 million) in 2023.

Schools pay about £25 for each pouch, which uses a magnetic lock and is kept with pupils while they are in school. They can then unlock their phone before they leave at the end of the day.

Research by Dame Rachel de Souza, the children's commissioner, found almost all schools restricted phone use, but just 3.5 per cent of secondaries imposed total bans.

Graham Dugoni, the chief executive of Yondr, said: "Nick's deep understanding of education systems and his commitment to evidence-based approaches align perfectly with Yondr's mission.

"His expertise will be invaluable as we continue to develop solutions that support focused learning environments."

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





# Upcoming events May 2025

**Informative training and events that inspire and empower.**



15:45 – 16:45, TUESDAY 13 MAY

## **AI Tools for Efficiency**

**ONLINE EVENT** WITH DARREN COXON



12:30 – 13:30, THURSDAY 15 MAY

## **Franchise Partnerships – How to Strengthen Internal Controls**

**ONLINE EVENT**  
WITH ANDREA DEEGAN AND WILLIAM SIMPSON



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



9:30 – 16:00, THURSDAY 22 MAY

## **Mastering Crisis Communication in Education**

 **EDCITY, LONDON** WITH BEN VERINDER

## Opinion

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

CEO, Maritime Academy Trust

## We need to advocate for poor white boys – or others will

**The government's opportunity mission must unashamedly include white working-class children or others will capitalise on their disenfranchisement, writes Nick Osborne**

**T**ireless work is rightly being done to improve outcomes and break down barriers to opportunity based on class, race, gender, disability and more. But one group has been forgotten in the push for social justice: white working-class boys.

This is not a hunch. It is one of the most consistent findings in our education data. White British boys from low-income backgrounds have the lowest outcomes of any major ethnic group. The trend begins early and persists all the way to adulthood.

At the end of primary school, just 40 per cent of white British boys who are eligible for free school meals (FSM) reach the expected standard in reading, writing and maths. That compares with 58 per cent of Black African boys and 71 per cent of disadvantaged Chinese pupils.

White FSM-eligible girls do slightly better, but even they remain well below the national average.

By the time these boys reach their GCSEs, the picture is still bleak. Around one in four achieves strong passes in English and maths. On the Progress 8 measure, they record some of the lowest scores nationally.

In other words, they are not just under-achieving but falling far behind.

Higher education also remains elusive. Just 13.7 per cent of white British boys from low-income backgrounds progress to university by the age of 19.

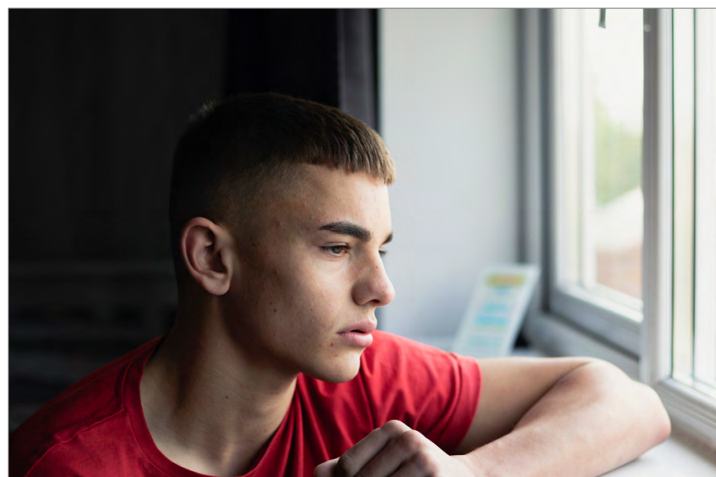
That figure is dwarfed by the rates for other disadvantaged groups. More than half of Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi girls in similar financial circumstances reach higher education.

And at the most selective institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge, white working-class representation is virtually non-existent.

This is not some sort of 'reverse racism'; it is about poverty and its interaction with place, culture and identity. But we should not be surprised when some political factions make hay from turning it into a race issue.

Poor white communities, particularly in post-industrial towns and coastal areas, often feel disconnected from national policy. Their educational outcomes remain stubbornly low, their schools struggle to recruit and their aspirations are often shaped by generations of limited opportunity.

But white working-class boys have become politically awkward for mainstream politicians to advocate for, for fear that acknowledging their



“ Discomfort must not get in the way of action

struggle will diminish the legitimacy of support given to others.

Case in point: a 2021 parliamentary education committee report described white working-class pupils as "a forgotten group" and called for action to tackle the underlying cultural and economic issues affecting their attainment. It should have been a turning point, but progress remains slow. Who has even heard of the report?

In truth, this very idea of a zero-sum equation plays into the hands of what were once fringe parties. We can recognise the need for targeted support for minority groups while also recognising that this particular group has been overlooked for too long.

The challenges are complex. Low expectations, limited parental engagement and a lack of visible success stories play a role. However, other disadvantaged groups face similar hurdles and have made significant progress, often helped by culturally responsive outreach and community engagement.

This is not a call to shift resources away from anyone else. It is a call to expand the conversation. If we are

serious about social mobility, we must be honest about where the gaps are widest.

White working-class boys are less likely than almost any other group to read fluently by age six, to achieve five good GCSEs or to attend university. That cannot be acceptable in a system that claims to value fairness.

We need a renewed national focus. That means better early years support, targeted intervention in primary and secondary schools, stronger community engagement and a bold approach to post-16 pathways. It also means ensuring that university access initiatives explicitly include this group, rather than unintentionally excluding them.

We must not allow discomfort to get in the way of action. These boys are not underperforming because they are less capable. They are underperforming because, somewhere along the line, society stopped believing they could do better.

It is time we started believing again. And more than that, it is time we started advocating for them – or someone else will.

## Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UKREBECCA  
BLACKHeadteacher,  
St Andrew's Junior School

## 'High and rising standards' must apply to buildings too

**How can we deliver the government's inclusive vision if its own rebuilding programme drives building standards down? asks Rebecca Black**

**T**he learning curve since unstable RAAC was discovered in my school in August 2023 has been steep. The many challenges my amazing team and I have navigated have been diverse, challenging and frustrating. Not least among those is the Department for Education's school rebuild programme (SRP).

There have been positive outcomes, though you wouldn't wish this kind of CPD on anyone. Our once strong and able team is now a total powerhouse: problem solvers, morale boosters, masters at putting their heads down and powering through the difficulties our site brings.

So it was a morale boost for them when Ofsted visited last term and praised their efforts. They saw and valued the team's focus on always ensuring the children's learning opportunities are as immersive and engaging as possible in spite of the makeshift temporary site we inhabit.

But there's no chance to settle. Our world is changing again under our feet. After a term in a wedding venue, and three terms in quickly-

erected temporary classrooms, construction has just begun on our second set of temporary buildings.

This will give the construction team access to the old building, so that it can be demolished and a new one built, marking the official start of the DfE-led SRP. If all goes to plan, our fourth and final whole-school move will be in September 2027.

I was very excited to be informed in February last year that a RAAC policy change meant St Andrew's would be rebuilt. Until then, extensive remedial work was still a possible outcome.

A year on, I can safely say that the process is carefully planned: so many meetings, so many discussions – advisers, architects and designers all contributing to policy-approved plans.

But while a shiny new net-zero building should be bringing excitement and positivity about the future, the process is in fact proving frustrating. Anyone who has been through it – apart, perhaps, from all those advisers – will understand my headache.

Rightly, the 'quest for equity' in all schools is high on the DfE agenda. To that end, the rebuild process begins with a computer program that, fed a school's published admission number, produces a 'schedule of accommodation' – specifically the amount of square metre space to be allocated.



## “ The computer says no to our nurture space

That sounds good and fair, but the reality is that the context and pupil demographics of the school are not taken into account by said computer.

When Ofsted came, they identified that we do a great job in personal development for our children. The opportunities, experiences and support that we put in place allow each of them to shine brightly.

But 'the computer says no' to a suitable space for our nurture provision, and we will be compromising on a library space in order to have the intervention spaces we use so effectively.

Nurture doesn't just 'pop up' in the corner of a school hall and have the impact that our 'home from home' space does. The DfE and Ofsted want schools to be as inclusive as possible, so it seems utterly ridiculous for the (brand-new, DfE-paid for) building to be a barrier to that.

A policy change and a commitment to provide what schools need is the only way forward if we are to meet the expectations they set and deliver high and rising standards for our

children.

Sadly for us, the allocated space in our new school will present substantial challenges to delivering our curriculum and to meeting the needs of our diverse and wonderful children.

The inability for the footprint to be expanded or deviated from in any way is a huge wasted opportunity.

I don't believe there's any cost difference in delivering what we need. This is a decision based on 'spatial equity' that, in reality, keeps building standards artificially low where they might better meet local need and national objectives.

Our local authority has been amazing in its support and in advocating for us in the higher-level meetings I do not attend. Knowing what spaces we need and valuing the amazing 'life-defining' impact our curriculum has on our children and families is key.

But when the final decisions are made by a poorly-tuned computer program, the future feels less shiny and exciting, and more frustrating and compromising than I had anticipated.



## Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## STEVE ROLLETT

Deputy CEO, Confederation  
of School Trusts

## Narrow conversations about budgets miss the big picture

**Crucial parts of the story of school budgets are too often left on the cutting room floor, writes Steve Rollett. Finance teams deserve more credit than that**

**H**ave you ever sat to the end of a film in the cinema, and seen the hundreds of people involved in bringing it to the screen?

Each plays their part in the production, just as crucially as the lead actors.

When we talk about schools, we talk a lot about teachers. As some of the most visible people in schools it's understandable, but they are not the only ones who make the magic of education happen.

You can have your Anthony Hopkins and Michelle Yeohs in the classroom, but without the army of colleagues in roles outside of the gaze of parents and pupils, their potential is severely limited.

This blind spot can grow all the greater when it comes to discussion of school finance. Too often, talk about top-slicing and GAG pooling takes place in a strange bubble that risks assuming that the estates staff who keep our buildings running and finance staff who pay the bills (and our wages) work for free.

Trusts have legal duties to publish accounts that far outstrip anything in maintained schools. This increased transparency has rightly

brought focus on value for money. But it hasn't been accompanied by a shift in thinking that recognises that trusts deliberately work differently, including how they budget.

The national funding formula has helped reduce wide discrepancies in funding across the country, but that doesn't make it perfect. A formula can only go so far. Trusts have a deeper and visceral understanding of the needs of their schools, and the flexibility they have to budget accordingly is a tremendous strength.

Rather than assuming a cold, statistical uniformity, trust budgets can reflect schools' collective real-life needs, supporting each other through blips in pupil numbers, long-term building projects or joint work on curriculum or teacher development.

Trusts bring together schools in a single organisation. They offer the potential to work together in wide-ranging and flexible ways, with deep and shared understanding of common challenges and goals. Accounts and budgets should be ways to help manage those needs, not to constrain them.

Schools Week's recent investigation confirmed that local authorities have long charged a type of 'top slice' to maintained schools to pay for shared services. At the other end of their budget sheets, these schools frequently buy services from council



### “ True transparency is nuanced and informed

trading firms or joint ventures.

Some commentators would have you believe this must mean that money is being “funnelled into the pockets of a handful of education profiteers”. The reality is it doesn't make councils the baddies, any more than it does trusts.

Whether upfront charges in a trust or local authority levies squirreled away in schools forum minutes, this is still money that is ultimately aimed at making life in the classroom better.

But these two different systems, and the wide flexibility that trusts have to shape their structures and finances to match the unique needs of their schools, make comparisons difficult.

We get strange arguments talking about an “average top slice” or claims of money being “shaved off” budgets without any meaningful comparison of what that money pays for in each circumstance. Transparency is important, but true transparency is nuanced and informed.

We understand that a sci-fi film and a historical drama might have inverse special effects and costume

budgets, because they have different needs. In the same way, spending between trusts will differ because they have differing challenges and differing needs.

Any fair comparison needs to look at the detail and the resulting outcomes for children, not just the names of rows in the accounts.

There is plenty of evidence that trusts are improving education, including their positive impact on previously underperforming schools. This is one reason why they're now playing an integral role in the government's RISE programme.

So next time you hear someone complain that schools are 'losing money' for shared costs, stay to the end of those metaphorical credits, and think about every single person and activity involved in making a school succeed.

All schools, regardless of type, have real and vital costs beyond the classroom; we should always remember that we depend on each other to ensure our children succeed.

## Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US [NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK)



LYNSEY  
HOLZER

CEO, Active Learning Trust

## How developing our values led to trust-wide development

**Coming up with a values code for our trust was a high-stakes challenge, but the process and outcomes have been equally transformative, explains Lynsey Holzer**

Like many conscientious CEOs, I have been to all the courses, read all the books and analysed all the models of organisational values. But putting all of that in action for a trust has taught me more than all of those put together.

It's one thing to look at the iceberg model and to nod along when someone says culture eats strategy for breakfast. I've even confidently delivered sessions telling people that values drive behaviours which become a culture.

But it's an altogether different thing to put values in place in an organisation made up of, well, values-driven organisations.

As trust leaders, the tension we all contend with is how to influence school-level culture while maintaining the individuality and freedom that makes each one work for and with its community.

There are systems and processes, of course, and there are events and training and reviews. But the most powerful thing we can do is to ensure that everyone is following a code of values.

That's what makes determining

those values so tricky and why I avoided it for so long. It's a high-stakes business.

We started by researching what other trusts do. Most, we found, capture theirs in three to five words, often including 'integrity' and 'high standards'. They're hard to argue with, but we wanted more than fancy words to trot out on the website. We wanted something that truly reflected us.

So we looked more widely. Organisations like Apple or Patagonia, for example, are much more mission-focused, lofty and emotional. These stopped us in our tracks.

But as we began to try to craft our own, we came to an important realisation: every time we tried to make our values fit the adults and children, something became watered down for one of those groups.

Children are at the heart of our work, but as a trust we work through the adults to improve their education. So we decided to focus on them.

But this made the whole endeavour even harder; those adults had worked hard to shape their schools' values, and we shouldn't be using children as an excuse to rip all that up.

Sometimes an answer won't present itself until you stop looking for it, and that's what happened



**“ I don't know how we managed without them ”**

here. One Friday evening, sat with a colleague, a whiteboard and a bag of crisps, they just emerged.

They didn't look like anything we had seen before, but they felt like they might be a 'thing'.

There were nine of them, which we whittled down to five. They steadily became punchier, more emotionally charged and provocative. The process was painful, but the result was authentic. They felt like us.

- I aspire, we achieve
- We're curious, creative and bold
- A family, not a house-share
- Comfortable being candid
- Humour, humility, humanity

When we first revealed them, the response was mixed – but always a strong one, because they provoke emotions. No one needed to have them explained though, because what they mean is obvious.

Nine months on, they are embedded across the trust. The rollout has involved joint training. We have a symbol, a lapel badge and visual reminders on documents and in schools, but they have a life of their own.

We use them within our appraisal model. We evaluate against them

in recruitment. We use them as a cornerstone of our coaching. People use them in everyday conversations as they become the common language of our trust.

People seek connection, purpose and value in their work. Our values provide that in spades – not just a licence but an expectation to be creative, to drive for high expectations, to be innovative, kind, humble and candid. Across a dispersed organisation, that is gold dust.

They underpin so much of our work that I don't know how we managed without them, and they have clearly caught the imaginations of people across the trust.

Above all, staff are pleased that our values are unashamedly about them; it shows that we value them, their work, their feelings and behaviours.

Which all goes to show that the training was right. Values do influence behaviours, and behaviours do create a culture. And yes, culture does eat strategy for breakfast.

Just make sure you have yours before you launch into this mission.

## SEND Solutions

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US [NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK)



MATT  
HOOD

Co-founder, Oak National  
Academy and Ambition  
Institute

## There's a better way to fund SEND than ruinous EHCPs

**The EHCP approach and the incentives that flow from it are the primary cause of the SEND crisis, explains Matt Hood. We'd be better off allocating resources differently**

**T**he SEND system isn't working. Outcomes for pupils are poor and parents are tearing their hair out. All credit to the government; they have inherited a bin fire and they are trying to fix it.

Getting accurate spending numbers is tricky. On my back-of-an-envelope calculations, we spend around one-quarter of the schools budget (£15 billion) on the 5 per cent of pupils with the highest needs, and another £4 billion of the mainstream schools budget on the 15 per cent of pupils who the school has identified as SEND. Health puts in £1 billion.

In 2011, I was a junior official working on SEND reforms, including introducing Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs). Because these plans included a health element, we had to present the idea to officials in the Department of Health. They laughed at us, and the awkwardness of that meeting is seared into my memory.

They asked us to imagine what would happen to the NHS if we allocated health resources in the way proposed in EHCPs. It was a rhetorical question, because the

answer is that the NHS would collapse. EHCPs are fundamentally at odds with how the health system works.

In the NHS, we trust medical professionals to make decisions about conditions, needs and treatments and they allocate the resources available based on these needs across the population.

By contrast, in our SEND system, bureaucrats (not professionals) lead a process that provides a legal entitlement to provision, enforced by a court, to be delivered immediately.

This approach and the incentives that flow from it are the foundational issue from which others flow. It makes the system:

### Inflexible

Plans are written at a fixed moment in time rather than dynamically as children learn. Teachers are legally required to give pupils something today that they might have needed six months ago but don't need now.

### Impractical

The focus is on what pupils 'have' rather than what they 'need'. But it's knowing what a pupil needs (e.g. more help with reading) that best guides teachers' actions, and we can understand needs quickly without lengthy diagnostic processes determined by a private market that can often feel like the Wild West.



**“ The current system's promise is an illusion**

### Incompatible

Teaching is a collective endeavour, delivered in groups and dependent on shared routines, expectations and relationships. EHCPs, however, are grounded in an individualised model of intervention.

### Inadequate

As exposed in these pages recently, too many interventions named in EHCPs are not grounded in any evidence about what works.

Allocating resources via professional expertise would go a long way to fixing these issues.

High-needs funding for pupils educated in mainstream schools would go directly to those schools via a weighted formula rather than through EHCPs. This would be a fixed, nationally-agreed, per-pupil amount based on a number of factors like deprivation – a sort of Inclusion Premium.

Crucially, it would not be an amount linked to the price tag attached to the EHCPs a school has.

From there, school leaders and teachers would be empowered to make swifter and more dynamic decisions about how best to provide the additional support pupils need. Ofsted would hold them to account for it, not the courts.

This isn't a small step, and it's a controversial one. Parents want a personal, legal guarantee that their child is going to get the support they need immediately, and the current system promises that.

But this promise is an illusion, and the gargantuan efforts that go into sustaining this illusion are causing havoc, undermining any chance of delivering the promise.

No policy change on this scale is all upside, and there is of course detail to be worked through. Should we keep the EHCP system as the gateway for special school places? Do we need a system of top-ups to support edge cases where support is exceptionally expensive? What about small rural schools?

But before we can bring forward the other good ideas to improve the system, we have to tackle this foundational issue.



Having thought about that meeting with the health department in 2011 many times, I'm convinced that other attempts to improve the system will fail unless we do so.

**Next week, Matt Hood will explore how a better-funded system can deliver on its inclusive promise**





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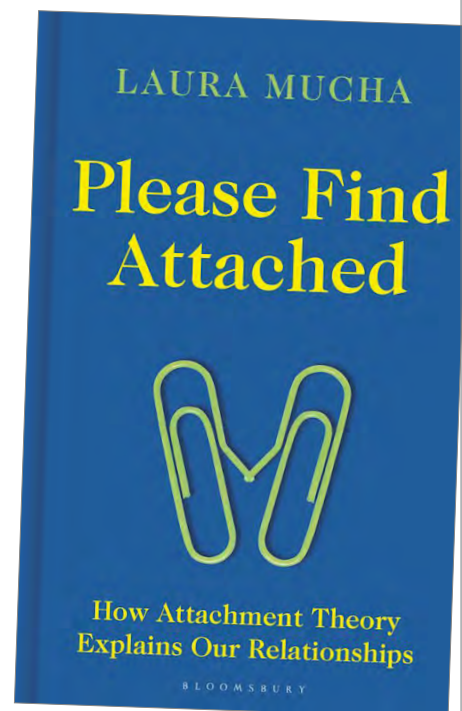
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## THE REVIEW

## PLEASE FIND ATTACHED

**Author:** Laura Mucha**Publisher:** Bloomsbury**Publication date:** January 16, 2025**ISBN:** 9781472988041**Reviewer:** Ed Finch, School storyteller and former teacher and principalBOOK  
TV  
FILM  
RADIO  
EVENT  
RESOURCE

Why does this child want to sit as close to you as they possibly can while that other child keeps their distance? Why is that pupil breathlessly desperate to be the 'perfect' student while this one has to be seen to be doing the wrong thing every time?

Well, there are a lot of reasons, but attachment provides some good thinking tools and this book is the perfect introduction. The fact that it is well-written, beautiful and very moving is a solid bonus.

Teachers will have heard of attachment theory but it's unlikely that they will have got past the headlines. It's also unlikely that they will have learned how the field came about, how successive generations of researchers have challenged early assumptions and moved theories on, or how the theory has grown and adapted to describe adult life and relationships.

Laura Mucha does a remarkable job in making the development of attachment theory a gripping story in itself and interweaving it with the stories of seven people whose journeys through life both illustrate and challenge the lessons of attachment.

Told through their own words, these stories give powerful illustrations not just of how early childhood experiences shape and mark us but also of how humans have the ability to change, to survive and thrive – often in the most surprising ways.

We hear about a child whose parents are so overprotective that she has no room to grow; a child growing up in a wealthy but neglectful environment; a child in a violent household; a child growing up in a home filled with love;

a child sent to a cold boarding school and more. We follow these children through early childhood, school, adulthood, marriage and bereavement.

The roots of the book lie in the AAI – the Adult Attachment Interview – a research tool which asks adults to reflect on their early childhood. It's a highly structured format with set questions and highly regulated responses. The interviewer doesn't interrupt or fill silences; they just listen. In the pauses that grow, interviewees often find they had more to say than they had thought.

The author, Laura Mucha, trained to take these interviews. As a result, she gets extraordinary results from her subjects.

More than that, she is a poet as well as an author, and there is an echo of those skills in the way that she lays out these interviews on the page. It is beautiful to see a book destined for the popular science shelf using the tools of poetry to amplify its impact.

*It has a massive impact on my sister's childhood.*

*If she was to open all those boxes, She would cry for years.*

*Please Find Attached* is not written for teachers but it gave me a great deal to think about. It asks questions which could move on the tired debate about behaviour in schools.

Some of the children in the book have a rough time at school. Some (not all) played up and found themselves in trouble or excluded. These aren't children identified as SEND, but it's clear their behaviour is arising from factors outside

their control.

I was brought up short more than once by thoughts and realisations about pupils I have taught, about my own life and about the lives of people I love. I would love to see *Please Find Attached* on the staffroom 'please borrow' shelf or assigned for the senior leadership team book club.

Over and over, and in stories of unutterable sadness, we witness the impact of the right adult at the right time – lives that seem damned, turned in a more positive direction by contact with an adult who listens, cares and sees the child. Often, it's a teacher who is the right person in the right place.

Attachment theory was devised to explore and explain relationships between young children and parents, usually mothers.

But what we learn here is that humans need and hunger for attachment. When that isn't provided, children and adults alike can still find a way to form healthy relationships when they get the chance.

## THE CONVERSATION

### LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM

**Shekeila Scarlett**

Chair of governors,  
Stoke Newington  
School and  
Sixth Form



## UNTANGLING THE POLYCRISIS

### EDUCATIONAL POLYCRISIS



Coming across Dr James Mannion's blog, *Confronting the Educational Polycrisis* via his [LinkedIn post](#) (and its striking infographic) felt like someone finally naming the deep-rooted frustrations so many feel in education, the things that don't always get said out loud.

Dr Mannion cuts through the noise and names the reality: we're not facing one single issue but a tangled web of challenges that together make it harder for education to truly serve every child.

What really landed with me was the call to pause and ask bigger, braver questions. Not just "How do we fix this bit?" but "What kind of system are we actually trying to build?"

As someone who firmly believes in people-powered change, I appreciated the emphasis

on co-creating a vision. It's a timely reminder that meaningful transformation doesn't sit with one person or policy; it's on all of us.

We talk about innovation a lot in education, but this blog — and the 15 guiding principles it lays out — nudged me to think wider and deeper. It challenges us to imagine an education system that's not just efficient, but truly equitable, responsive and rooted in human flourishing.

That's not just refreshing, it's necessary.

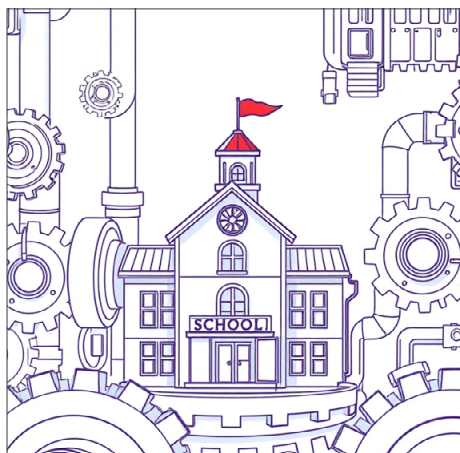
## TEACHING FOR LIFE

I couldn't help but feel both affirmed and challenged by the arguments posed by Joel Keyon's blog entitled *The Purpose of Education – Why Didn't I Learn This in School?*

Here, Keyon peels back the layers of the education system's history, one that was once built on a bold vision of equity and opportunity, and questions why so much of that promise feels out of reach today.

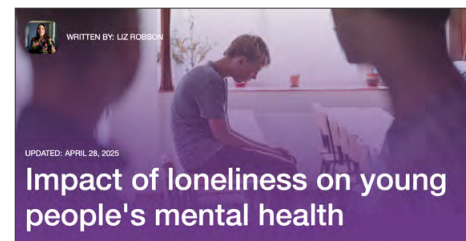
The reference to schools not adequately preparing students for the complexities of the 21st century struck a chord with me because what does that really look like these days? With the ever-changing nature of the world, it feels hard to define in the current climate.

The call to reimagine education as something broader than just exams resonates deeply. Thinking back, the most meaningful professional learning I've ever had was that I needed to stop teaching just for the test and start educating for life.



## CONNECTING THE DOTS

Reading Liz Robson's blog for Worth-it on the impact of loneliness on young people's mental health really stopped me in my tracks. It captures something we see all too often in education and youth spaces: young people showing up with heavy feelings they can't always name.



The way loneliness chips away at self-esteem, messes with sleep and fuels anxiety isn't theory; it's real life. It's what's happening in classrooms, playgrounds and youth clubs — spaces that should feel safe and full of connection.

Post-Covid, I think we're still trying to figure out how to be with each other again. After being so disconnected for so long, it feels like we're all trying to get back to 'normal', but the truth is, that version of us doesn't exist anymore. We've changed. And for some, that's meant feeling more alone than ever.

What really stuck with me in this blog was Robson's focus on proactive solutions like the Wellbeing Ambassadors Programme. There's something powerful about young people being given the tools and trust to support each other.

Belonging, community and feeling seen are not just nice-to-haves; they are essential. No matter our age, connection is a basic human need.

For me, it always comes back to this: how are we creating environments where young people feel valued, heard and safe enough to be themselves? Addressing loneliness isn't just about fixing problems; it's about building cultures rooted in care, curiosity, and connection.

That's the work we should always aim to show up for.

Click the links to access  
the blogs and podcasts





# The Knowledge

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



## How can leaders foster a positive school culture?

**Ourania Maria Ventista, Research statistician and CJ Rauch, Head of teaching and learning, Evidence Based Education**

The ethos and culture of any workplace can affect the work that happens there. Schools are no exception; a positive school culture can have a positive, direct impact on student outcomes.

A recent study examining school culture and academic achievement at school level showed that on average, high-performing schools have a strong positive school culture. This means that developing the school culture is essential for students' academic achievement.

However, school culture is not a singular, easily-isolated concept. What does it refer to? And, if it is so valuable, how can school leaders encourage a positive school culture?

### What is school culture?

Researchers argue that school culture involves beliefs, values, behaviours and other evidence that are physical, visual, auditory and demonstrate the behaviours taking place in the school. School culture also involves aspects such as organisational learning, shared responsibility, trust, respect and student support.

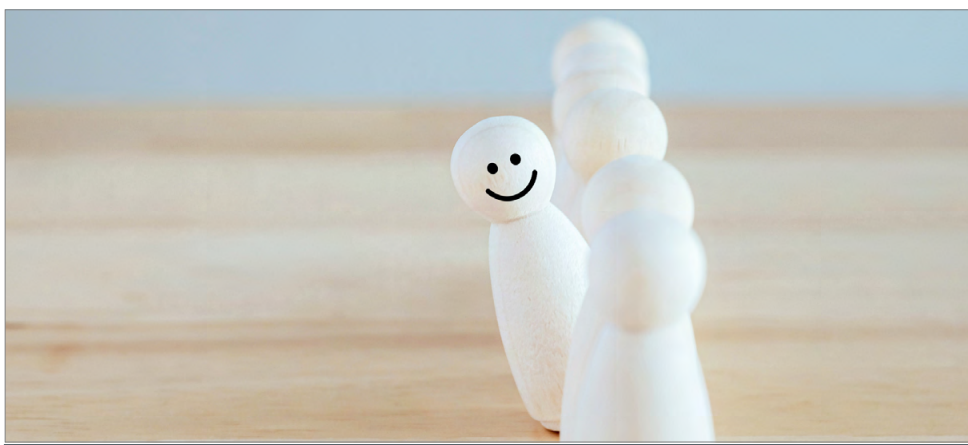
Researchers have also sought to describe and categorise the cultures we see in schools. In their book [ITALS] School Culture Rewired: How to Define, Assess, and Transform, Steve Gruenert and Todd Whitaker present types of school culture, such as the collaborative, the contrived-collegial, the fragmented, and the toxic.

Some school leaders may find it a useful exercise to identify the type of school culture present in their school (and their ideal school); regardless of a school's culture, it is important to recognise that it is a complex spectrum, not a simple good/bad dichotomy.

Above all, irrespective of the current culture in your school (and how good it might be), school leaders should recognise that elements of school culture can be influenced and transformed – for better or for worse.

### How can school culture be reshaped?

While there may not be a single accepted



## 'Culture is a complex spectrum, not a simple good/bad dichotomy'

definition of school culture, there is consensus that it is a concept encompassing different elements. Influencing just a single element can have a powerful impact on the overall culture of a school.

For instance, since school culture is partially a product of physical space, adjusting pupils' (and even teachers') workspaces could lead to a shift in overall culture. Removing physical barriers alters the feeling of a space, which can lower the metaphorical barriers to working together.

Another example is developing the organisational learning of a school, which is a key component of culture. One study examining teachers' professional development highlighted different types of interventions that can take place.

Of these, three offer specific steps that school leaders can undertake to alter their school's culture:

- creating a shared school vision on learning
- facilitating professional learning opportunities for all staff
- encouraging collaborative work and learning

These changes can have a positive outcome on professional learning and subsequently on a variety of school outcomes.

### Where to start?

It is widely accepted that school culture cannot change quickly. What leaders need to know is

which elements are important to actively target for improvement, and if there are many, then which to prioritise.

Before any intervention, a first step can be the evaluation of the current school culture. This makes it possible to identify areas that are working well and areas that may require improvement.

For instance, a properly designed and administered anonymous staff questionnaire can enable the school leadership to identify and prioritise areas for improvement.

As part of our professional role supporting schools across the world, we know that supporting the development of school culture matters a great deal. To this end, our colleague Rob Coe has led a review of school culture and developed a tool for leaders to investigate teachers' perceptions of the school environment; this information can help inform the elements to target and next steps.

Ultimately, improving a school culture will involve the whole staff, not just the leadership team. Whether leaders opt to create a shared vision of learning, facilitate professional learning opportunities, or encourage more collaboration, the school or trust's staff will be crucial to shaping how that is implemented.

Fostering a positive culture starts with understanding their views, so that the culture encourages the best in them.


*Week in*

# Westminster

## The week that was in the corridors of power

### FRIDAY

The Conservatives continue to wage war on the government's private school tax policy, now going after Labour ministers for their school visits.

Minister Stephen Morgan admitted earlier this month in an answer to Tory shadow minister Neil O'Brien that of the 69 schools visited by ministers since taking office, only one was a private school.

He published a full table, dates and everything.

Another question, this time asking when the education secretary last visited a private school, got a more barbed response, also from Morgan.

My right hon friend, the secretary of state for education prioritises visits to state schools, which serve 93 per cent of pupils in England.

"The secretary of state for education and the wider ministerial team visit a wide variety of education settings, including to private schools."

We thought government was supposed to answer parliamentary questions, not just avoid them.

PS. The one private school visit was actually done by Morgan – suggesting despite overseeing reforms that have a huge impact on the private school sector, Phillipson hasn't visited any of them!

### TUESDAY

Since its inception, it has seemed like the national funding formula has been

perpetually under review. And sure enough, Labour ministers have kept the trend going.

Catherine McKinnell, the schools minister, confirmed to MPs this week that for the 2026-27 financial year, government is – you guessed it – reviewing the national funding formula.

There have been incremental improvements over time, but it really does need sorting out.

However, the government will need to share some home truths with MPs who think fully implementing the formula means every single school will get exactly the same amount of money for each pupil.

Ministers have shown no desire to move away from our current system of weighting funding heavily based on disadvantage just because home counties MPs endlessly compare their school budgets to those in, say, Camden.

However, given funding is so scarce it's fair to argue that schools that receive the lowest funding are likely to feel it more, but funding is higher for schools in inner-London because it's more expensive to run schools there, not because of some historic unfairness.

\*\*\*

The DfE continues to tell only part of the story about its breakfast clubs rollout. We revealed last month how 79 schools had withdrawn since being named as early adopters in February, and been replaced by 89 more.

This technically allows the DfE to say the "total number of schools participating in

the breakfast clubs early adopters scheme has increased since the initial list was published on 24 February".

But it masks the fact that one in ten schools dropped out because of concerns the scheme was financially unviable.

That's *\*quite important\** given Labour plans to make all primary schools offer breakfast clubs – and, as it stands, soak up a load of unfunded costs themselves.

A big deal? Apparently not.

"The department built in time between the announcement and the start of the scheme in order to work closely with schools, ensure plans were deliverable, and get clubs up and running from the first day of term," said minister Stephen Morgan this week.

That's right, it's all going according to plan!

\*\*\*

There's been some pretty brutal briefings about the education secretary Bridget Phillipson recently, with repeated news articles reporting she faces the sack at an impending reshuffle.

But her allies pushed back this week as they described the briefings as "sexist", pointing out fellow northern women Lisa Nandy and Lucy Powell had also been targeted.

"She is a genuine working-class voice that can connect with voters looking at Reform and is one of our strongest communicators," one MP told the Times.

If Phillipson is going, we doubt she's going quietly.



## 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.

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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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