

SCHOOLS WEEK

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

SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK | @SCHOOLSWEEK

FRIDAY, MAY 23, 2025 | EDITION 395

SEND reforms:
The backlash
begins



P9-10

£1bn high needs
boost 'isn't
reaching children'



P8

Are schools
pushing views
about race on
their pupils?



P27

(Not) going green:
Climate fund axed



P13



4% PAY RISE, BUT SCHOOLS MUST FIND SAVINGS

- 2025 teacher pay rise confirmed
- DfE raids budget for £615m
- But schools foot most of the bill
- Time to 'fully embrace' flexible working, leaders told

Pages 4 and 5

DREAM
BIG
DAY

**Celebrate Careers & Encourage
Children To Dream Bigger!**

Join Dream Big Day Friday 27th June 2025

Headline Sponsors

BARCLAYS | LifeSkills

careermap
MEDIA GROUP



SCHOOLS
WEEK

Meet the news team

**John Dickens**
EDITOR@JOHNDICKENSSW
JOHN.DICKENS@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK**Freddie Whittaker**
DEPUTY EDITOR@FCDWHITTAKER
FREDDIE.WHITTAKER@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK**Samantha Booth**
CHIEF REPORTER@SAMANTHAJBOTH
SAMANTHA.BOOTH@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK**Lydia Chantler-Hicks**
SENIOR REPORTER@LYDIACHSW
LYDIA.CHANTLER-HICKS@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK**Jack Dyson**
SENIOR REPORTER@JACKYDYS
JACK.DYSON@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK**Rhi Storer**
REPORTER@RHISTORERWRITES
RHI.STORER@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK**JL Dutaut**
COMMISSIONING
EDITOR@DUTAUT.BSKY.SOCIAL
JEAN-LOUISDUTAUT@EDUCATIONSCAPE.COM**Nicky Phillips**
HEAD DESIGNER@GELVETICA
NICKY.PHILLIPS@FEWEEK.CO.UK**Shane Mann**
CHIEF EXECUTIVE@SHANERMANN
SHANE.MANN@EDUCATIONSCAPE.COM

THE TEAM

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

education
week jobs

FEATURED JOB

THIS WEEK'S TOP
AVAILABLE JOBS IN
THE SCHOOLS SECTOR.
TO FIND OUT MORE
INFORMATION PLEASE
TURN TO THE BACK
PAGES OF *SCHOOLS
WEEK* OR VISIT THE
WEB ADDRESS LISTED

**THE ACTIVE LEARNING TRUST,
HEADTEACHER, £70,293.00 - £87,651.00
ANNUALLY (FTE)**



TO ADVERTISE YOUR VACANCY WITH EDUCATION WEEK JOBS
PLEASE CALL 020 81234 778 OR EMAIL | ADVERTISING@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK

The news this week that the government has accepted the STRB's recommendation of a 4 per cent pay rise for teachers and leaders is welcome, given the previously proposed 2.8 per cent hike would have fallen short of inflation and wage growth in the rest of the economy.

It is also good news that the Department for Education will provide schools with additional funding, though it is worrying that it appears to have had to find this by cutting other things from its existing budget, rather than getting new cash from the Treasury.

However, the rise is nowhere near being fully funded. The government says it expects schools to fund the first 1 per cent, but this assumes they have also found the £400 million of "headroom" that the DfE predicted they could put towards pay.

Leaders will continue to need to make redundancies, exacerbating an already deep recruitment and retention crisis. We desperately need to keep great

teachers in our schools, not cut their jobs.

The "efficiencies" which ministers cite are not universal. Some schools might be able to cut their energy bills or save on recruitment but, in others, there just isn't anything left that can go before provision – children's education – is affected.

Schools cannot weather this storm for much longer. If the outlook for this financial year remains bad, then at the very least they will need the relief of a generous three-year funding settlement in next month's spending review.

The dishing out of emergency pay funding through another grant underlines the need to get away from the current short-termism of school funding.

Leaders are expected to set indicative three-year budgets. It's time we gave them the clarity to do so, rather than lurching from one last-minute decision to the next.

Most read online this week:

- 1 **[EHCP shake-up considered as part of SEND reforms, adviser confirms](#)**
- 2 **[Private school VAT raids: What's the actual impact?](#)**
- 3 **[Large trust CEO leaves after just 18 months](#)**
- 4 **[How academy trusts are 'caught in a trap' on school reserves](#)**
- 5 **[The hidden funding cut that will soon affect your school](#)**

[CLICK LINKS TO READ STORIES](#)

Disclaimer:

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

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

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

Please address any complaints to the editor.

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

SCHOOLS WEEK IS PROUD TO BE A MEMBER OF



EDUCATIONSCAPE LTD
EDUCATIONSCAPE LTD
C/O 1 EDCITY WALK, EDCITY, LONDON, W12 7TF
T: 020 8123 4778
E: NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

ADVERTISE WITH US

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

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

See story, page 9



NEWS: FUNDING

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

Schools must find extra £400m savings to fund 4% pay rise

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Teachers will get a 4 per cent pay rise next year after the government accepted the review body's recommendation, with additional funding of £615 million coming to schools.

However, schools will have to fund around a quarter of the rise themselves – which equates to finding £400 million from their own budgets. This comes on top of savings they had already been told to make.

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson said the pay award “backed by major investment” recognised the “crucial role teachers play in breaking the link between background and success”.

But unions said they were still concerned about whether schools could afford to make more savings.

4% rise for teachers

In its evidence to the School Teachers' Review Body last year, the government said a 2.8 per cent pay rise from September 2025 would be “appropriate”. But this has been bumped up this week after the STRB recommended that pay should rise by 4 per cent.

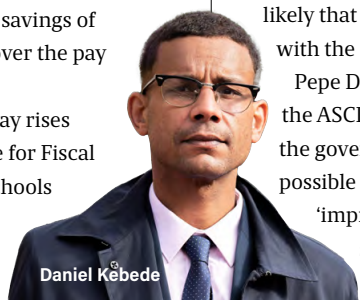
The body said a 2.8 per cent pay rise “risked undermining improved supply, including the additional 6,500 teachers the government has committed to recruiting”.

Last year, the government said schools could afford 1.3 percentage points of the proposed 2.8 per cent pay rise by using £400 million of “headroom” in their budgets.

Schools faced finding the remaining 1.5 percentage points by making savings of around £525 million.

Now, the government says the £400 million of “headroom” in budgets, plus the £615 million of extra funding, will allow schools to fund 3 percentage points of the 4 per cent rise. That leaves schools having to find savings of more than £350 million to cover the pay rise.

Including the 3.2 per cent pay rises for support staff, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) estimates that schools will need to find savings of £400 million.



Daniel Kebede

**Schools to 'do their bit' on savings**

Phillipson said she was “asking schools and colleges to do their part in ensuring that we are driving productivity across all areas of the public sector”.

“There will be those who say this cannot be done, but I believe schools have a responsibility, like the rest of the public sector, to ensure that their funding is spent as efficiently as possible.”

Starting salaries will rise to £33,000 outside London and to over £40,000 in the capital. Average salaries nationally will be around £51,000.

But Luke Sibieta, from the IFS, said: “Given the pay offer is only just above inflation, the real-terms cuts to most teacher salaries since 2010 still remain in place.”

Teacher salaries will be about 8 per cent lower in real terms than in 2010, he added.

NEU threatens dispute

Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the National Education Union, said that, as the “pay award is not fully funded”, it would mean “cuts in service provision to children and young people, job losses and additional workloads for an already overstretched profession”.

He added that “unless the government commit to fully funding the pay rise, then it is likely that the NEU will register a dispute with the government”.

Pepe Di'Iasio, general secretary of the ASCL leaders' union, said that, “if the government really thinks it will be possible to bridge this funding gap through ‘improved productivity and smarter spending’, then it is mistaken”.

Changes to TLRs and flexible working encouraged

Phillipson has also announced plans to change the rules on teaching and learning responsibility (TLR) payments. For part-time staff, they would be based on the proportion of responsibility undertaken, rather than pro-rata based on contracted hours.

The payments are made by schools for additional leadership and management responsibilities undertaken by classroom teachers.

The current school teachers' pay and conditions document states that, where TLRs are awarded to part-time teachers, “they must be paid pro rata at the same proportion as the teacher's part-time contract”.

Phillipson said this would change for all schools from 2026, and schools have the “option of implementing this change from September 2025”.

She said teachers' pay and conditions would be “updated to reference that employers should aim to support flexible working requests where operationally feasible”.

Support staff 'demand parity with teachers'

The announcement has also prompted a row over support staff pay. Support staff have been offered a rise of 3.2 per cent by their employers.

Stacey Booth, national officer at the GMB, said: “School support staff are the forgotten army who look after our children, feed them and nurture them.

“They are shockingly badly paid and it's a scandal this pay award means they will fall even further behind teachers. Our members demand parity with teachers.”

NEWS: FUNDING

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

Make schools 'embrace' flexible working, pay body tells DfE

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@FCDWHITTAKER

The government should make schools draw up policies to “fully embrace” flexible working, review teacher pay grades and consider multi-year settlements, the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) has said.

The body tasked with advising ministers on pay also said it was “concerned” about pension “innovation” being used to “reduce total remuneration”. This follows evidence of teachers “opting out” of the Teachers' Pension Scheme.

The body said “priority action” was required in three areas: improving the attractiveness of teaching by “fully embracing” flexible working, ensuring taxpayer value for money and “modernising” conditions and career pathways.

The STRB has published its 35th report, recommending a 4 per cent pay rise for the 2025-26 academic year. It also made suggestions for improvements to the current system of pay and conditions.

Here's what you need to know...

1. Make all schools have a flexible working policy

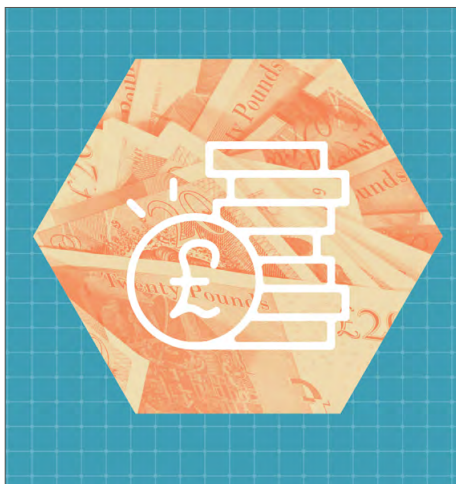
Improving flexible working “would make a material positive impact”, the report said, but there was a “hesitancy in many cases to provide a substantive offer to staff”.

Suggested approaches include advertising all posts as “up to full-time”, allowing job-shares at all levels, four-day weeks or nine-day fortnights. Other interventions include compressed hours, time off in lieu, ad-hoc term-time leave and flexible retirement.

The report said a Department for Education intervention was “needed to move practice in schools forward” so that flexible working is “fully embraced”.

But “rather than STRB prescribing a rigid approach, we suggest that it should be mandatory for all schools to develop, publish and implement their own flexible working policy”.

A senior staff member and governor should “monitor and report back to the wider staff and responsible body each year on the implementation and impact of the policy”.



2. Target pay to address shortages

The current approach “means that schools are not always able to make best use of the funding they receive to ensure adequate staffing, thereby preventing them from being as productive as they could be”.

The report called for “material change” to introduce “additional targeting of remuneration to remediate teacher shortages not currently being sufficiently addressed”.

Teaching is “consistently failing to attract the full range of professionals needed”. The report said the STRB or “another appropriate body” should be “invited to undertake work on targeting remuneration to address teacher shortages”.

3. Time to review grading structures

Terms and conditions for teachers, including grading structures, “need significant review”.

Part of the problem is that the school teachers' pay and conditions document (STPCD) has been “subject to continuing incremental change over many years”.

Given the “fundamental changes to the schools sector over recent years and more change ahead, we see limited value in continuing to make microlevel changes and believe that a significant modernisation is now required”, the STRB said.

With the children's wellbeing and schools bill proposing extending pay and conditions requirements to academies, “we believe the timing is right for that work to start as a priority”.

4. 'Consensus' over multi-year pay settlements, but no 'priority'

Change is also needed to “provide schools with the ability to manage their budgets well with multi-year awards”.

Some consultees said they would support such awards, “citing the potential benefits for schools to plan financially and to provide greater certainty to staff”.

These benefits “would particularly apply where multi-year pay awards coincided with the corresponding comprehensive spending review periods”.

However, there were “differing views on the precise approach to multi-year awards, including on the detailed mechanisms for reconsidering awards in reaction to economic volatility, and the need for suitable economic conditions”.

The STRB said the issue was one to “return to in the future”, but “we do not see this as a short-term priority”.

5. 'Concern' over pensions opt-out

The STRB had received “evidence of teachers opting out of the existing pension arrangements with consultees suggesting this was for cost-of-living reasons”.

There has been renewed debate around the issue after Schools Week revealed how United Learning, the country's biggest trust, plans to offer teachers a less generous pension in exchange for higher salaries. The government and unions oppose the plan.

The STRB recognised “consultees' concerns about the risk of members taking poorly informed decisions that could have negative long-term consequences”.

There is a “widespread view that this part of teacher remuneration is not well understood”.

The board was “concerned that some teachers are insufficiently familiar with the options offered by the existing scheme, including in relation to flexible retirement”.

“Pensions flexibility can make a positive contribution to employment flexibility, but we would be concerned about innovation in this area being used to reduce total remuneration. The department should consider promoting flexible retirement”.

OPINION

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

Education secretary

We're backing teachers because we have a job to do together

Today's investment is a clear sign of the government's commitment to partnership in delivering high and rising standards for all

When I took up this role almost a year ago, my very first message to the sector and to the wider public was that this government would reset the relationship with the education workforce.

Because ultimately, this government, education leaders and teachers are all focused on a single, shared aim: improving outcomes for children and young people.

Resetting that relationship means treating our brilliant teachers and leaders with the respect they deserve. It means valuing them properly. And it means partnership.

And as a government, that's what we have done. Last July, we accepted the independent pay review body's recommendation for a 5.5-per cent pay award and provided over £1 billion, despite immensely tough public finances, to make sure schools could deliver it.

Today we are taking another decisive step, once again accepting in full the pay review body's recommendation, and making a 4-per cent pay award, again with significant investment to make sure the pay rise becomes a reality

for teachers.

This decision, alongside further funding, reflects education as a true national priority. And it reflects this government's determination to lift outcomes for all young people, because teachers are the single most powerful tool we have to do that.

But the value of teachers and leaders must be measured in more than just pounds and pence. That's why we're also giving the sector a voice in the development of policies that most affect them, through our Improving Education Together board, which launched last year.

This partnership approach is crucial, but it must be a two-way street. Joint responsibility. Government to do its bit to turn around the challenges that are all too familiar in our education system, and schools to do theirs.

And there are areas where we are asking exactly that. On attendance, we are seeing the tide begin to turn, but schools still have a big role to play.

On accountability too, where together with Ofsted we are introducing a new, strengthened inspection system, because with higher standards for children must come stronger accountability for schools.

Partnership also means honesty, and as school leaders you have not



“ Partnership must be a two-way street

always had a government that has been honest with you about the state of school funding.

That's why I'm being upfront and asking schools to fund the first 1 per cent of the pay rise by making efficiencies so every pound benefits children with the high-quality education they deserve.

Because the reality is that there's enormous variation across schools in how effectively money is being used. Some brilliant, some less so. It's only right we are honest about that.

My department will support schools in getting far greater value from their budgets, whether that's savings on energy bills, better banking returns on cash balances, best value when procuring goods through our Get Help Buying for Schools service, or lower recruitment costs through our Teaching Vacancies Service.

And real gains are possible. Take the example of a multi-academy trust in Yorkshire which was using more than 50 agencies for temporary staff recruitment. After better centralising their approach, that trust saved over £110,000 from

their annual budget.

I know that isn't an example that will resonate with all schools, and I know that all schools have their own circumstances, but this is a nettle we all need to grasp over the months to come.

But tough public finances does not mean slow progress when it comes to improvements for the children and young people we all serve.

Schools and colleges now have a government that is determined to put education back at the forefront of national life. We are building on the progress made in recent years including by tackling the huge injustices we know still exist in our system – for children with SEND, children and young people from the most deprived backgrounds and those who the system to this point has all but left behind.

And we will do that together: government, teachers and leaders working in partnership. That's how we build a system where every child and young person, wherever they grow up, has the opportunity to make the very best of their life.

IN PARLIAMENT

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

More criticism for ministers over 6,500 extra teachers pledge

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

Ministers have been criticised again over their silence on Labour's flagship pledge to recruit 6,500 more teachers, as a senior civil servant was also unable to provide details when questioned by MPs.

In its annual report, published on Thursday, the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) said it was "increasingly concerned" about the ongoing struggle to recruit and retain teachers. It also sees "no signs of a change in this trend".

The body, which makes recommendations on teacher pay rises, is also "concerned" that the 6,500-teacher commitment "does not appear to have, to date, a detailed and funded plan to ensure its execution".

The STRB said it also remains unclear whether "the additional teachers will be in the areas suffering the most from shortages".

Department for Education officials were also questioned about the pledge by MPs at the public accounts committee on Monday.

Permanent secretary Susan Acland-Hood appeared alongside Juliet Chua, the department's director general for schools, and director general for skills Julia Kinniburgh.



Susan Acland-Hood

Acland-Hood assured the committee that delivery of the pledge "is underway" and there are "positive signs" in recruitment and retention activity. But she appeared unclear when quizzed on the timeframe and other details.

"We think it's got to relate to this Parliament... it's got to be 6,500 more than it was before you started," she said.

She said the "fine detail" – including how the new recruits will be split across schools and colleges – will only be announced following the spending review.

"It sounds like [the pledge is] underway, but you don't know what it is," said one MP.

Acland-Hood described the pledge as "a really important spur to action" but said it was "not a cap or a limit". While the specifics are yet to be confirmed, she said the pledge "won't stop us trying to recruit as many teachers in both schools and FE as we can".

A recent National Audit Office report estimated that 1,600 more secondary teachers will be needed before 2027, while FE teacher vacancies could rise to 12,400 by 2028, amid growing pupil numbers. The report also revealed that in February the DfE said delivering on its 6,500-teacher pledge would be a "significant challenge" in the current fiscal environment.

Four more takeaways from the session ...

1. DfE expects to retain 2.5k more teachers ...

Last month, the DfE revealed it was cutting its recruitment target for the coming academic year by 19.3 per cent for secondaries and 19 per cent for primaries.

The department said this was due in part to a boost in recruitment, which has led to "more favourable" secondary supply forecasts.

Meanwhile the recent 5.5 per cent pay rise is also expected to help improve retention.

Acland-Hood said the government now "expects to retain about 2,500 more teachers" than previously projected.

2. ... but admits better parental leave offer needed

The panel was quizzed on parental leave. One MP described the two weeks' paternity leave fathers are allowed under the burgundy book as "absolutely rubbish" and "not really in lockstep with where a lot of the private sector is heading".

He asked if the DfE "should go further" on paternity leave, "to help the retention crisis and teachers".

Acland-Hood said this was "absolutely something [the DfE] should be looking at", pointing out there "have been similar questions" about maternity leave.

She said the burgundy book "is for employees and the trade union side to discuss and negotiate", but that "it's worth us looking at, and raising".

3. Concerns over £26m Get into Teaching website

The panel was quizzed over the £26 million cost of its Get into Teaching website.

It features information on routes into teaching, with DfE guidance on training courses, finding funding, and what teaching is actually like.

One MP said it "seems an awful lot of money for a website" and asked for a breakdown of spending. But Acland-Hood said the cost was "a combined

budget for marketing".

It also covers "a service which helps people step through the stages of applying for and becoming a teacher".

4. Wellbeing charter sign-up 'not good enough'

The DfE was also quizzed on whether its "education staff wellbeing charter" is "fit for purpose".

The charter – drawn up in 2021 by the DfE and sector bodies – is a declaration of support for, and a set of commitments to the wellbeing and mental health of education staff.

Sign-up is voluntary, but all state-funded schools and colleges are invited to join.

In November, only around 3,700 schools and colleges had taken the pledge – around 17 per cent of those eligible.

Kinniburgh said the number of sign-ups was "good, but they're not good enough".

INVESTIGATION

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

Extra £1bn high-needs funding is 'not reaching children'

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

Many councils have effectively frozen special school budgets again this year, with leaders sounding the alarm that £1 billion of extra funding is "not getting anywhere near children".

In November, chancellor Rachel Reeves announced the core schools budget would increase by £2.3 billion next year, with £1 billion specifically for high needs.

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson said the extra £1 billion would "go directly to providing provision" – and represented a 6 per cent real-terms increase.

But Schools Week has found that many councils are not passing on the funding.

Confederation of School Trusts (CST) research suggests that, of a sample of 27 local authorities, 20 (74 per cent) have not lifted high needs funding for special schools.

The highest increase in the sample was also just 3 per cent.

'Little choice but to make cuts'

CST CEO Leora Cruddas said the "stagnant funding" – combined with "increasing demand [and] rising costs" – will leave special schools with "little choice but to make cuts to the education of our most vulnerable pupils".

Special schools receive a £10,000 payment, called place funding, for each of their pupils. This has remained since last year.

They receive additional "top-up" payments – set by local authorities – based on the needs of individual children detailed in education, health and care plans (EHCPs). However, there is no requirement for councils to improve their high needs funding – only to ensure that it does not fall.

National Association of Special Schools CEO Clare Dore said the findings suggest the extra cash "isn't making its way through to schools".

She added: "There's an expectation that schools can do exactly the same on real-terms less money... but special schools are now really struggling. You're in danger of eroding specialism over time."

Special schools with high reserves

Warren Carratt, CEO of Nexus MAT which runs special schools, said the government has "enabled this" by



Warren Carratt



setting a "minimum funding guarantee of 0 per cent, which is allowing some councils to withhold much-needed funding increases from the schools that need it most".

Staffordshire council said its decision not to increase top-ups was in line with the government's minimum funding guarantee which, the guidance says, "continues to offer protection for special schools".

The authority is "one of the 40 lowest funded" and "determined to campaign for fairer funding for all pupils in the county".

Southwark council deputy leader Jasmine Ali revealed that the authority "identified significant budget surpluses in most" of its special schools while drawing up plans to reduce its dedicated schools grant deficit.

Benchmarking suggested its top-ups were about "20 per cent above comparators", so top-up funding has not increased overall.

But individual arrangements have been negotiated with special schools not carrying "similar financial reserves... to ensure they were not adversely impacted by the pause in the inflationary uplift", she added.

0% plan ditched after pushback

Luton said it has increased high needs funding by 15 per cent since 2021. But "due to the continued and growing strain on the high-needs block, it has not been possible to implement a further increase".

However, it has "introduced two additional funding streams specifically designed to support the most complex pupils attending special schools" in "recognition of the increasing complexity of needs within the borough".

Nottinghamshire schools' forum papers show it consulted special schools on keeping top-up rates at 2024-25 levels. It forecasts

that increased high-needs funding "may not be sufficient to cover the costs expected to be incurred... most notably the expenditure on independent specialist provision".

But, after the schools flagged "inflationary pressures", it was "decided that an uplift... of 0.83 per cent should be given to the lowest funded".

James Macdonald, who chairs the forum and is COO of a trust running a special school, said the rise creates "a very tight picture".

"As with every special school in the country, we have a significantly higher support staff ratio per pupil and their pay increase has been suggested at 3.2 per cent," he said.

"While the majority of special schools in Nottinghamshire have some reserves, you can only spend them once."

What use is 'record funding'?

Carratt, who runs three special schools in Nottinghamshire, branded the increase "paltry". His schools "will have to do less with less, as there are no more efficiencies left in the system".

Despite Phillipson's comments, the Treasury admitted in budget documents that it expected £865 million of the £1 billion extra on high needs to go on reducing councils' huge SEND deficits.

A National Audit Office report last year revealed that the DfE predicted a cumulative deficit on councils' high-needs funding budgets of about £4.6 billion by March 2026.

The cash was an "important step" to return the system "to financial sustainability", the Treasury said.

But Carratt added: "Trumpets are being blown about 'record funding going into SEND'. What use is that if it's not getting anywhere near children and young people?"

LONG READ: SEND

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

Fierce backlash begins as DfE sets sights on EHCPs reform

JOHN DICKENS

@JOHNDICKENSSW

When Rachel Filmer tried to launch a petition in December demanding that ministers commit to laws mandating support for pupils with special needs, it was turned down by the government website.

She was told that, because such plans were not under consideration, the petition was not valid. But she pushed back, and the petition was published, to little fanfare, in April.

It exploded last week after a government adviser told Schools Week that ministers were considering reforming education, health and care plans (EHCPs) as part of a wider SEND shake-up.

The backlash hit the pages of national newspapers and has filled MPs' inboxes – offering a glimpse of the tinderbox the government could be walking into with its SEND reforms. The petition now has around 55,000 signatures.

"Parents are absolutely panicked," Filmer told Schools Week. "Many have fought for three, four, five years to get that plan – and now they fear it will be removed. These parents have clear, recent memories of how their child was failed – they are extremely worried."

The reaction gets to the heart of Labour's biggest hurdle with any SEND reforms: how to change a system everyone admits is broken without diluting support, or the commitment of support, for our most vulnerable pupils.

Schools Week investigates...

The funding issue

Experts drawing up reforms are discussing changes to EHCPs, Christine Lenehan, the government's "strategic adviser" on SEND, said last week. One consideration is whether such plans should only apply to pupils in special schools.

"Do I think the structure around EHCPs will change? Yes, I think it probably will, because it's not fit for purpose," Lenehan added.



An EHCP is a legally binding document outlining the support a youngster with SEND must receive. But many are of poor quality and plagued by delays, leaving families waiting years for support as councils struggle with rising demand.

Writing for *The Independent*, Lenehan said plans have "become emblematic" of a "highly adversarial" system. "SEND support must be normal and routine – not something special or exceptional," she wrote.

"The conversations I'm having are not about whether we do or don't scrap EHCPs – they're about fixing these systemic issues that make SEND support so hard to access."

An outline of wider SEND reforms is currently being considered by Downing Street, Schools Week understands.

Lenehan offered "every reassurance that for hundreds of thousands of children with EHCPs, there will continue to be high-quality support". But a key concern is whether the government can provide the funding required to make mainstream schools more inclusive, which will be the bedrock of any new system.

"If the government wants to provide better non-statutory support – you don't need to change the existing framework – and EHCP numbers will go down really quickly," said Filmer.

"But schools and teachers know through bitter experience the resources they need aren't frequently available to them," the mother of two autistic boys added. She fought for support at a tribunal in 2021 and has since been helping other families.

"If we were in a period of investment – to improve services – they [government] may get a different response. But we know there's a financial catastrophe."

Even those who have publicly criticised the quality of EHCPs have concerns about reforms being driven by "cost cutting". Any savings should be a "by-product of better general inclusion," said Ben Newmark, a teacher and SEND expert.

"Removing EHCPs and the individual attached funding is a big risk in a system that isn't yet generally inclusive enough," he added.

"EHCPs are lifebelts we need because of sinking ships. We won't need them when the ships aren't sinking, but until then removing them without confidence the ships are fixed could mean more drowning."

But the counter argument is that the system won't become more inclusive until the funding system is changed.

Funding attached to individuals through EHCPs "forces" schools and parents to "emphasise pupil deficits" and has "contributed significantly to current issues", Dr Peter Gray, co-coordinator of



Rachel Filmer

Continued on next page

LONG READ: SEND

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

the SEN Policy Research Forum, has said.

One idea is for more targeted provision to be funded directly in schools, so that support can be accessed without the need for formal assessment or diagnosis.

Another is for some funding to be pooled and distributed locally, to drive more collaborative behaviour between schools.

The politics issue

But policymakers also face a huge political hurdle. "I have no doubt that those MPs who, like me, are new to this House will have been blown away by the scale of the SEND crisis in their constituencies," Labour MP for Suffolk Coastal Jenny Riddell-Carpenter told Parliament in February.

"Parents are quite literally crying out for help, and we must listen to them and act."

Munira Wilson, Liberal Democrat MP for Twickenham, said that "barely a week has gone by when we have not had questions or debates" on SEND.

Any legislative changes – such as reforms to EHCPs – would need to go through Parliament.

"This should be a shoo-in for a government with a majority like this one," Catriona Moore, policy manager at SEND legal advice charity IPSEA, said. "But MPs' offices are bursting with casework for constituents desperate for help."

Nearly one in five MPs elected at the 2024 general election (115) won in a marginal seat – meaning the margin of victory was 5 per cent or less. Just over 50 of these were Labour MPs, the most of any party.

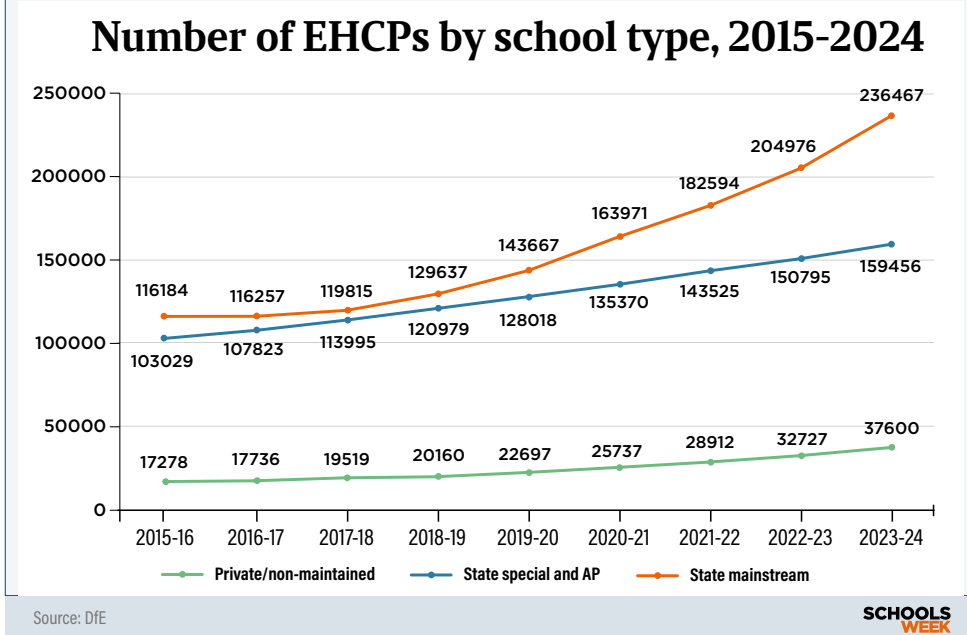
"MPs, especially those with wafer-thin majorities, need to ask themselves if reducing the number of children with special educational needs or disabilities who have a right to support in school is really the solution, and something they want to be part of," Moore added.

But one source close to the reform process said advisers "are not doing this to screw families over. Nowhere in the terms of reference does it say they're removing children's rights."

"The current statutory vehicle stops decisions being made quickly and efficiently – they have got to look at how you make assessments and secure provision much quicker and nearer the child and school."



Munira Wilson



If the SEND system issues are not resolved now, they also fear it "becomes like social care – just so broken and big, it gets shunted to each new government to solve".

"Those involved feel this is the last moment the SEND system is fixable in this Parliament," the source said. "Number 10 needs to grasp that."

The communications issue

Another major concern is the government's political ability to successfully "land" any reforms, particularly around communications.

Labour MP Helen Hayes, chair of the education committee, said SEND was "the issue that MPs raise with me above all others".

"Understandably anxious" stakeholders should be "meaningfully engaged and consulted with" before any changes are announced. "The government needs to handle its communications carefully and sensitively."

Lenehan said last week that "any system that the government looks at will have a full consultation process ... and a long lead-in time in terms of implementation".

But campaigners already fear their voice is not being heard.

"There's been lots of lobbying to reduce these [legal] rights as it is [from councils]," added Filmer. "The fact they are listening to that, and not families, while there is a SEND inquiry ongoing means it looks unlikely they are going to handle it better."



Helen Hayes

The government is struggling with other controversial reforms. A U-turn on winter fuel payments for pensioners was confirmed this week and there are reports it is considering concessions to its disability benefit reforms.

One policy expert said Labour must learn from the welfare changes that reforms "can't be tagged into the conversation about making savings".

"Cutting budgets for SEND would be a disaster," they added. "Nobody should be in a position where there is less money".

But Emma Bradshaw, CEO of the Alternative Learning Trust, said "there is going to be pain – but we have to have pain".

"Everyone in the system – from parents to schools and other agencies – is channelled into this funnel to get an EHCP. Can we get that resource in to meet needs without it? If we can get this right, we can get it right for a massive percentage of pupils."

David Thomas, a former Department for Education policy adviser, said the government must "lead with how the reforms improve outcomes for children, as well as the taxpayer".

"They will also need to win trust in the new system before it asks people to surrender the old."

And Filmer added: "No one is desperate to cling onto the system as it is now – it's devastated and not functioning properly. But we are desperate to hang on to those legal protections. If that goes away, what options will parents have?"

Celebrate Careers and Encourage Children To Dream Bigger!

Join Dream Big Day
Friday 27th June 2025

DREAM
BIG
DAY



NEWS

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

Lukewarm reception for Phillipson's Ukrainian GCSE plan

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

The education secretary's plan to introduce a Ukrainian GCSE so that pupils from the war-torn country do not have to study Russian has been criticised for being impractical and taking years to introduce.

Bridget Phillipson wrote to exam boards and qualifications watchdog Ofqual this week urging them to consider developing a Ukrainian language GCSE. She announced this on Tuesday, sharing a photograph of her meeting with the Ukrainian minister of education at the Education World Forum in London.

The news was welcomed by children's commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza, who has been lobbying the government to "consider making qualifications available in Ukrainian for [Ukrainian] children, who rightly want an opportunity to feel proud of their culture and their language".

But a senior exam industry source said the Department for Education "has not taken the time to engage with or consider whether a GCSE is the



Bridget Phillipson

best way to support these students, or whether creating one is even practical".

Developing a new qualification would take years, and "such GCSEs are not at all designed to accredit the abilities of native speakers", they added.

Quicker ways of supporting those students could include accrediting existing qualifications.

About 20,000 school-aged Ukrainian children are currently living in the UK following Russia's invasion. *The Daily Telegraph* reported this week that some were being "forced" to take Russian GCSEs to boost grades at their schools.

According to a 2001 census, 67.5 per cent of the country's population spoke Ukrainian as their first language, while around 29.5 per cent spoke Russian as a first language.

Ukrainian pupils told the *Telegraph* that learning and speaking Russian while war raged in their

homeland was "psychologically hard" and felt like a "betrayal".

In her letter, Phillipson said Ukrainian refugees in the UK "still intend to return home when the time is right", adding: "To ensure they are ready to pick up their lives in Ukraine, they are keen to see more opportunities for qualifications in Ukrainian."

"While I recognise that developing a new GCSE is a significant undertaking, I hope very much that this is something you can support."

Ofqual said any exam board "can offer a GCSE in Ukrainian, providing it meets the requirements for GCSE modern foreign language qualifications".

A spokesperson for AQA, England's largest exam board, said they had "every sympathy with Ukrainian students" and "stand ready to do what we can" to support them. They were "considering carefully" Phillipson's letter.

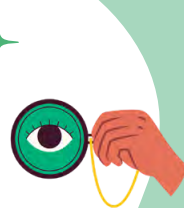
Fellow exam board Pearson said they "appreciate the opportunity to engage in a discussion on this".

Since 2022, Pearson has offered an "extended project qualification (EPQ) in Ukrainian" – equivalent to half an A-level – which allows Ukrainian students to gain a qualification that can "complement their studies in the UK".



Looking for Examiners, Moderators and Assessors?

Subscribe to our new introductory offer of £3,500+vat to help you attract subject specialists



Education Week Jobs has been one of the top recruitment partners for the education sector over the last 10 years. Now, we've expanded to cover even more roles!

Our clients include Pearson and City & Guilds, who are showcasing roles such as Examiners, Moderators and Assessors to our strong audience of highly engaged education professionals subscribed to Schools Week and FE Week.

Access the same audience and get 12 months of unlimited recruitment advertising for your subject specialists at the special introductory rate of £3,500+vat.

Our clients include



Contact us today and win over some of the best talent!

education
week jobs

NEWS: CLIMATE

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

Loss of £80m grant could stop schools going green

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

Schools could be forced to abandon plans to go green after the government quietly ditched an £80 million grant to help leaders draw up applications to access emissions-cutting cash.

The low-carbon skills fund (LCSF) has been axed this year, having allocated sums to hundreds of schools since 2020.

The LCSF helps organisations to pay experts for plans to be used in complicated applications for the multi-billion-pound public sector decarbonisation scheme (PSDS).

Academy funding consultant Tim Warneford believes the decision will leave some cash-strapped schools unable to afford PSDS bids and likely to “miss out”.

“For schools already facing tight budgets and rising costs, the removal of LCSF effectively shifts the burden of upfront investment onto institutions that may simply be unable to absorb it.

“In the absence of this early-stage funding, the pipeline of well prepared and justified applications is likely to diminish, potentially stalling or weakening progress on the decarbonisation of heating systems within buildings.”

Launched in 2020 and run by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, the LCSF gave public bodies funds to “engage the specialist and expert advice and skills required to develop a heat decarbonisation plan”.

Guidance for the fund said this would put “organisations in a strong position to take the next steps” to go green and be better prepared to lodge PSDS applications.

Over £3 billion has been allocated for efficiency upgrades through PSDS in five years. Analysis suggests more than £80 million has been issued through LCSF across its five funding waves. Of this, just under £20 million has gone directly to schools.

However, the number of successful school applications has dropped from 271 to 55 in the latest round. Three academy trusts received sums in excess of £100,000, while three diocesan boards of education received more than £166,000.



Chloe Pett, of Surveyors to Education, noted the cancellation “has introduced uncertainty as to how schools can now access the expertise of low carbon professionals who can help them allocate existing resources for maximum benefit across their estates”.

Warneford added: “Without the funding to support a survey, [some] schools will not be able to afford such applications and so it is likely that many will now miss out.”

Schools might also decide to “proceed without the strategic input and detailed planning that LCSF provided”. This could lead to the creation of “poorly scoped” plans, resulting in “underperformance, cost overruns, increased operating costs or missed carbon savings”.

The Department for Education set itself targets of slashing emissions by three-quarters by 2037, before going net zero in 2050. Among other things, it wants education settings to put in place climate action plans this year.

But National Audit Office bosses warned the DfE two years ago that its sustainability goals were at “risk of being deprioritised or traded off when making decisions”.

It found the department “does not know what contribution” its climate change schemes will have – even though education settings produce 37 per cent of public sector emissions.

The watchdog also argued that the department is failing to adequately fund green

programmes – despite pledging to make the UK “a world leader in sustainability across the education system” two years ago.

DfE tender papers, seen by Schools Week, show it has asked companies to draw up feasibility reports for the creation of a “regional condition, decarbonisation and resilience service”.

It would provide “data collection, intervention prioritisation recommendations, procurement frameworks... estate management (including condition works) and decarbonisation activity in regions”.

Among other things, the department wants firms to examine how “private finance and other sources of funding at regional and national level can be incorporated to enhance the service offer”.

Emma Harrison, of leaders’ union ASCL, noted that the other resources available for schools “are strictly limited”.

She added: “With all education settings expected to have a climate action plan in place this year, you would hope the level of support available to help them achieve this would be increasing, not reducing.”

An energy department spokesperson said the LCSF “has overlapping support with other government schemes, and we have therefore decided to focus funding elsewhere”.

IN PARLIAMENT

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

500 schools bill amendments reflect 'serious concerns' of peers

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Peers will attempt to amend the government's schools bill to water down proposed council admissions powers, get paused free school projects back on track and limit wide-ranging new direction powers for ministers.

One member of the House of Lords has submitted more than 180 amendments seeking to give home educating families sweeping tax breaks and even close schools down and convert them to education "hubs" if a majority of parents opt out.

The children's wellbeing and schools bill is currently in its "committee stage" in the upper house. This means peers are going through the bill line-by-line, while considering around 500 tabled amendments.

These generally only pass when they get government backing or if several parties team up to force them through – which means that most will fail. But they give an insight into the key issues that peers have with the bill.

Baroness Barran, the shadow education minister, has proposed extending academies' pay freedoms to council-maintained schools. She also wants the government to proceed with the opening of more free schools, which was paused last October.

Limit direction powers and ease curriculum requirement

Peers have been highly critical of proposed powers for the education secretary to give trusts whatever "directions" she "considers appropriate".

Barran will seek to amend the legislation to "limit" the power to only relate to academies' "statutory duties, the requirements of a funding agreement, or charity law".

Lord Agnew, another former academies minister, is seeking to ensure that academies rated 'good' will not have to follow the national curriculum.

Another controversial element of the bill is its proposal to allow councils to object to the admission numbers of academies. An Agnew amendment



argues that these should be limited "to situations where the admission authority has failed to meet its admissions obligations or has treated pupils unfairly".

The peer also wants to change the law so that maintained schools have to ensure their accounts are externally audited and publish annual accounts on their websites – bringing them in line with academy trusts.

SEND profit cap, phone ban and council school mergers

Liberal Democrats will seek to amend the bill to extend a profit cap on private social care providers to include independent special schools.

Several Lords are seeking to extend free school meals and introduce auto-enrolment, while Conservatives will again seek a requirement for schools to ban mobile phones during the day.

Lord Blunkett, Tony Blair's first education secretary, has tabled an amendment on Ofsted inspection of academy trusts and another that would allow failing schools to merge with a "high-performing maintained school".

Boost faith admissions cap and scrap daily worship

Ex-Labour shadow minister Lord Watson and veteran peer Lord Dubs are seeking to require all new schools to apply a 50 per cent cap on faith-based admissions when

over-subscribed. This currently only applies to free schools.

And a group of Labour and Liberal Democrat peers is seeking to remove the requirement for daily collective worship in England for schools without a religious character.

Baroness Morris, another former education secretary, has tabled an amendment which would mean only resources in the public domain can be used to teach relationships, sex and health education.

The government is also proposing to limit the number of branded uniform items that schools can require to three in primary schools and four including a tie at secondary.

Barran has tabled an amendment seeking to allow schools to exceed those limits "if they are making them available, whether new or second-hand, at a lower cost than buying non-branded items".

Another amendment seeks to exclude from the limit any items of PE kit required when representing the school in sporting activities.

Home educator seeks sweeping rights

Speaking in the Lords on Tuesday, Agnew said the number of amendments demonstrated the "serious concerns" about the bill.

But, of the nearly 500 amendments, around 180 relate to home education and have been tabled by Lord Wei, a Conservative peer who helped to set up Teach First and worked for the charity Ark.

Wei, a home-educating parent, is proposing a "child-led school closure mechanism", which would force a consultation on shutting a school "where at least 80 per cent of pupils... express a preference for home education".

Agnew said he feared ministers would "dismiss many of [the amendments] as distractions".

But Smith said that was "wholly wrong. I want to get on to discuss the detail of those amendments in this committee."

She also clashed with Barran over a proposed new first clause, which she said would "clarify the purposes of the bill".

Smith said the amendment was "not only unnecessary but has been tabled to delay our detailed consideration of the significant legislation before us".



Baroness Barran



Lord Agnew



Cinema trips and summer schools boost attendance

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

EXCLUSIVE

Putteridge High School, in Luton, is bucking the national trend of declining attendance for vulnerable pupils. How have they done it? Schools Week takes a look ...

Support pupils before they join

The school has a four-phased approach, which begins before pupils even join.

Moving to a new school is a key time for pupils with special needs, who could struggle in an unfamiliar environment, says Laura Bartoletti, assistant headteacher for pastoral care at Putteridge.

"If we get this process wrong, it can have a detrimental effect on their attendance from the very get-go."

The school runs three "summer school" days in August, for all new year 7s to "learn about the school building, meet their peers and take part in school-based activities".

They hold an additional day specifically for pupils with special needs, to meet the SENCo and tour the site.

Another pre-transition day solely for SEND pupils allows them to experience a typical day at the secondary, attending lessons and eating lunch in the canteen.

Teaching assistants from primary schools also meet with the school's SENCo, while Putteridge's year 7 staff visit feeder schools to meet SEND pupils too.

"We also send photo booklets about our building and publish videos so they can watch over the summer," says Bartoletti. "This is really special for our autistic children, because they can start to familiarise themselves."

Staff "give up their time" over the summer to facilitate some of the visits.

At the end of year 6, a quarter of pupils with SEND are "persistently absent" (missing at least 19 days or 10 per cent of school), DfE figures show. This rises to around a third in year 7.

At Putteridge, persistent absence among year 7s with SEND is just 8.9 per cent. The school's persistent absence rate for those pupils is also 20 per cent – significantly lower than the national average of 30.3 per cent.



Pupil passports and adaptive seating plans

Once at the school, staff then work to "get the minor details right" for vulnerable pupils. "Pupil passports" containing likes, dislikes and special requirements are sent to their teachers.

The school also has a wide range of support including a sensory room, a full-time literacy support assistant (ELSA), ADHD and autism screening, Braille lessons, a counsellor, lunch clubs for SEND pupils, speech and language therapy, and reading and writing support.

The third approach is around teaching and learning. "Adaptive seating plans" mean teachers know which pupils are vulnerable, while "hover" teaching assistants support children with additional needs who do not have a dedicated assistant.

Children with autism are also given lunch queue passes, so they "don't have to worry about that social environment".

Attendance at Putteridge is monitored closely and the school's family worker visits pupils at home if it slips.

Putteridge's SENCo is full-time and sits on the SLT, to help ensure SEND pupils "are a priority".

All lessons across the school begin and end in exactly the same way, so that teachers "create a really consistent environment".

Pupils must also follow a one-way system through school buildings. "For students with needs, this is really comfortable because they can predict what's happening next."

Bartoletti says that removing isolation rooms has been "one of our school's biggest successes".



Laura Bartoletti

Instead, the school focuses on "working out what that child's barrier was to behaving in a class" and addressing it so they can continue learning there.

Instant phone calls and cinema trips

The fourth phase is "attendance support that every child in the school receives".

School-wide attendance is around 96 per cent – compared to a national average of 91.7 per cent for secondary schools.

The school's "robust" attendance policy is "communicated regularly" to both parents and children.

If vulnerable pupils are absent, they are called "straight away to ask where they are, what's the matter? Can we support and try and get them into school?"



David Graham

Uniform can sometimes be a barrier, says Bartoletti, so some is provided for free.

Pupils hitting 98 per cent attendance are invited on a termly rewards trip, such as a cinema visit or garden party. "The students love it," Bartoletti adds.

Pupils are also given pins for their blazers to show they have high attendance, which they "wear... with absolute pride".

Headteacher David Graham says attendance was "significantly below average" when he joined a decade ago. The school joined the Chiltern Learning Trust in 2017.

"Although it defies national figures, we're constantly working on getting it even better," Bartoletti says. "We know that the more they're in school, the better their life chances are going to be."

NEWS

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

Adopt our definition of inclusive schools, think-tank tells ministers

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Inclusive schools take a “representative cohort” from their community, operate “culturally sensitive” behaviour policies and have low numbers of exclusions and detentions, according to an influential think-tank.

The Centre for Young Lives (CFYL) has published a definition of inclusion which it said had been “stress-tested, redrafted, expanded and refined with the support and engagement of a network of over 130 local education leaders”.

The Labour government has said it wants to make mainstream schools more inclusive, and Ofsted’s proposed reforms will see schools judged on their inclusivity. But the government has yet to define precisely what it considers inclusive practice in schools to be.

The CFYL, founded by former children’s commissioner and Labour peer Baroness Longfield, hopes the government will adopt its definition. Its report, written by academy trust leader Jonny Uttley, says inclusive schools “take a representative cohort of pupils from their community, and achieve good outcomes for all these children”.

The think-tank said it expects data for inclusive schools to show a “staff and student population that broadly reflects the demographics of the local community”. This should include the proportion of pupils with education, health and care plans.

However, others have raised concerns before about such a metric, as some councils have poor track records on issuing timely plans.

The report said inclusive schools would have

“good academic outcomes for all students, measured by attainment gaps broken down by pupil characteristic”, as well as strong destination data for school leavers.

Such schools should be able to demonstrate “low levels of lost learning” through things like exclusions and suspensions, detentions, internal exclusion and absence.

The report also sets out a “non-exhaustive list” of practices and policies “that we might expect to see an inclusive school implement”.

These include having a behaviour policy that is “culturally sensitive, sets clear boundaries underpinned by appropriate consequences for poor behaviour, while encouraging pupils to take ownership of their own actions”.

“At the same time, approaches to poor behaviour should recognise and respond to the contextual drivers of repeat poor behaviour and take a restorative approach.”

Asked what was meant by “culturally sensitive”, the think-tank said it was “around recognising that racial bias may sometimes influence how some teachers might implement behaviour policies”.

Inclusive schools should also have “transparent and clear” admissions arrangements where student ability plays no part.

The government’s push on inclusion has prompted some to accuse ministers of pursuing it to the detriment of academic standards and strict behaviour policies, but the report said it was “important also to define here how we do not see inclusion”.

It continued: “We do not accept, as some imply, that inclusion is somehow

soft or divorced from high standards, either academically or in terms of behaviour – it is not.

“We believe that every single young person deserves the very best in terms of outcomes, destinations, quality of teaching, school experience and extra-curricular opportunities.”

The report called for a government green paper on options for “wholesale reform of the school system to become meaningfully inclusive, including the accountability system, with inclusion at its centre”.

It said the DfE should issue statutory guidance on inclusion, drawing on the report’s definition and principles, and extend its live attendance dashboard to include information on a school’s roll.

RISE school improvement teams should have their remit extended to include monitoring and accountability of school roll data, and the DfE should review the right of academy trusts to be their own admissions authority, returning the duty to local councils.

Training on inclusive practices should be mandatory as part of continuing professional development, and statutory guidance should be issued on managed moves. Councils should collect and publish data showing the inclusivity of local schools.

Uttley said the definition of inclusion in the report “is a starting point for a future where mainstream inclusion is a reality.

“Schools that follow this definition are those that take responsibility for the progress and wellbeing of all pupils, including, and especially, the most vulnerable or disadvantaged.”



Jonny Uttley

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS | @LYDIACHSW

‘Action plans agreed’ to improve attendance

The government has “challenged” trusts and councils with high absence rates to set out “action plans” for how they will boost attendance.

However, the Department for Education did not respond to several requests about whether those written to would be named, or what happens if they do not improve.

Last week, as part of wider attendance announcements, the government said it had “challenged trusts and local authorities” with high absence rates compared to similar schools “to set out a plan of action to increase

attendance as fast as possible”.

The letter was sent in the spring and the DfE said officials would remain in touch with the schools about progress. But the department would not provide details of which trusts and LAs have been written to, or how many there were.

It would also not reveal the threshold used to establish poor attendance, or what action would be taken if improvements are not made.

The DfE said that, as a result of this work, trusts and LAs “agreed to a series of actions”

including data analysis to help find potential causes of poor attendance.

Other measures include reviewing staff training and setting attendance targets for schools, such as for children who are eligible for free school meals or those with special educational needs who typically experience higher absence rates.

Meanwhile, as attendance and behaviour hubs are rolled out, the targeted trusts and councils will be offered intensive advice if needed, DfE added.

NEWS

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

'Triple whammy' hits private school finances, says ISC chair

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

EXCLUSIVE

Private schools have cut their fees and increased bursaries following Labour's decision to remove their tax breaks while pupil numbers have dropped by 13,000 in a year, well above government estimates.

But new data also shows that the fee reductions in January followed a hike last September, ahead of the government's changes.

The Independent Schools Council has published its annual census, its first since ministers began charging VAT on fees and making private schools pay business rates.

Mark Taylor, interim chair of the ISC, said it showed the "triple whammy" affecting independent school finances, the third being the rise in national insurance employer contributions.

"This series of political decisions is unprecedented," he said, stressing the importance of data to ensure "black and white" evidence of their repercussions.

A negative impact of tax raids on private schools had been widely feared by the sector, with national headlines warning of a major "private school exodus". However, the education secretary told Times Radio this week that private schools had "cried wolf".

Bridget Phillipson accused them of "whacking up their fees year on year, way beyond inflation" and said it was for them to "justify their decision-making around the level of fee that they set".

According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, private school fees rose by 24 per cent in real terms between 2010 and 2020.

Pupil numbers at the 1,380 ISC member schools



which participated in both the 2024 and 2025 censuses dropped by 2.4 per cent, or around 13,000 students.

The government had estimated that there would be around 3,000 more pupils in the state sector as a result of the introduction of VAT this year, with another 300 expected because of business rates. Numbers are expected to reduce by 37,000 in the longer term.

However, the decrease at the ISC schools from 551,578 to 538,214 takes numbers closer to the population seen in 2022 – 544,000 – though the drop is more than double the decrease of 5,000 seen after the pandemic struck in 2021.

Part of the decrease could be due to falling pupil rolls, however. Primary school numbers have been falling nationally since 2018-19, while secondary school numbers are forecast to keep growing until 2027-28, due to a population bulge moving through the system.

Across state primary schools, pupil numbers fell by 0.8 per cent between 2022-23 and 2023-24, while secondary school pupil numbers increased by 1 per cent.

The ISC report said the population decline "does not explain the whole decrease".

All private schools were required to add 20 per cent VAT to their fees from January 1. ISC data shows that the average fee rise in September 2024, before the VAT change hit, was 6.7 per cent.

However, when the January VAT change came in, schools then reduced their fees on average by 5 per cent. This means that "on average, schools passed on in effect 14 per cent VAT to parents", the ISC said.

Looking solely at day fees – and excluding SEND schools where fees can differ depending on a child's needs – two-thirds (69 per cent) of ISC schools reduced their fees in January.

Despite national reports that private schools would no longer be able to afford bursaries because of the VAT raid, many have increased the amount of help they give pupils with fees.

The ISC census shows 34.5 per cent of all independent school pupils (more than 183,000) currently receive help with fees. This equates to more than £1.5bn – an increase of 11.4 per cent on last year's support.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Wifi funding only for schools getting RISE support

A scheme providing grants to schools to boost connectivity in the classroom will now only be available to "stuck" schools eligible for RISE improvement support.

Previously, all schools located in an "education investment area" (EIA), left-behind parts of the country, were prioritised for funding through the connect the classroom scheme.

But *Schools Week* revealed in March that officials were drawing up fresh eligibility criteria after the EIA programme was axed by

the new government.

And, in an update published this week, the Department for Education confirmed that those "receiving targeted intervention" through RISE will be eligible for the scheme, which aims to improve class internet speeds.

They will be contacted directly by the DfE and receive funding if they fall below its "wifi connectivity standards", which include having "fully functional signal from a wireless network" and "installing security features to stop unauthorised access".

The government said £25 million is available in 2025-26. This is less than the almost £54 million a year allocated on average through the fund between 2021 and 2025.

However, the government also said it was inaccurate to make such a comparison – as funding for the first year of new schemes is always less before projects are scaled up.

It added that the £25 million funding was more than the £18 million invested in the first 12 months after connect the classroom was launched by the Conservatives in 2021.

NEWS: FUNDING

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

More trusts merge for 'resilience'

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

A new 25-school academy trust will form after two chains announced plans to merge in a move leaders hope will give them "resilience and strength".

The 15-school Compass Partnership of Schools and 10-school Eko Trust say a merger could take place as early as 2026 subject to trustee and Department for Education approval.

It comes shortly after it was announced that the five schools in the ACES Academy Trust will join the 12-school CAM Academy Trust, and as new Schools Week analysis shows the average size of trusts continues to grow, while the number operating is falling.

If approved, the new Compass Eko Partnership of Schools will lead 21 primary schools and four special schools in London, Essex, Suffolk and Brighton, serving more than 9,100 pupils in total.

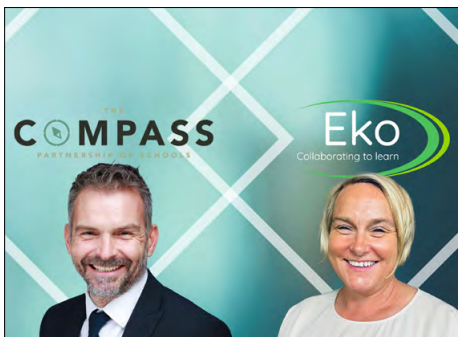
Trusts are getting larger

Government data shows how trust mergers are changing the profile of the academy sector.

In April this year, there were 2,152 trusts with 11,494 schools in them. Last year there were 2,272 trusts, but with 10,839 schools.

It means the average size of a trust has increased from 3.1 schools in 2019, to 4.8 last year and again to 5.3 this year.

The proportion of chains that are single-academy trusts has fallen from 51.2 per cent in



2023 to 48.5 per cent last year and then 46.5 per cent this year.

In 2023, the second most common size of trust, after standalone, was three to five schools. Now it is six to 10.

The merger of Compass and Eko will put the new trust in the top 3 per cent of trusts by size nationally.

Trusts already share HR

The two trusts already work together, collaborating on school improvement and sharing a human resources operation.

The full merger would "create new opportunities for staff, which will mean schools can continue to develop their quality of education and care," the trust said. "At the same time, each school will continue to retain the elements that make them unique."

It will also expand professional development opportunities.

The new organisation will be led "collaboratively" by current Compass CEO and

former ASCL president John Camp and Eko's chief executive Rebekah Iiyambo. Schools Week understands their future titles have not been agreed.

'Aligned on ethos'

Camp said the two trusts "have enjoyed a strong, long-standing relationship built on shared values and a mutual commitment to putting children and young people first, setting high standards and delivering a great quality of education and care".

Iiyambo said Eko and Compass "are aligned on ethos, values and commitment to excellence... Together, we will be a strong organisation that safeguards what our schools already do so well and allows us to build on that."

Stretched school budgets have launched an academy merger era, with increased pressure on funding likely to drive further consolidation with smaller trusts joining together, experts have said.

ACES Academy Trust said last week that joining the larger CAM trust was the "best route to ensuring long-term stability and unlocking new opportunities for pupils, staff and school communities".

Claire Heald, CEO of CAM Academy Trust, added the "existing links between our schools – particularly where some CAM primaries feed into Hinchingsbrooke – give us a strong foundation for this next step together".

The proposal will be considered by a regional board in June.

JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS

Broader curriculums make savings harder, says EPI boss

Broadening their curriculums will make it even harder for schools to find savings as cost pressures bite, the boss of the Education Policy Institute has warned.

Natalie Perera, the think-tank's CEO, told an event on the future of education funding this week that her researchers have found that "schools have been making savings by narrowing their curriculum".

But she questioned whether they would have any further room for cuts following the curriculum and assessment review, led by Education Endowment Foundation chief Professor Becky Francis.

"If they are going in the direction which they seem to be, through a more broad and balanced curriculum, what scope then will schools have to make any further narrowing of the curriculum to make savings?" she said. "It is really hard to see where they [savings] will come from."



Natalie Perera

It comes as schools brace for further savings to afford a proportion of the 4 per cent teacher pay rise and 3.2 per cent increase for support staff next year.

Luke Sibiet, a research

fellow at the Institute for Fiscal Studies, said policymakers were "making it harder for schools to make efficiency savings".

Labour's pledge to find 6,500 more teachers "has implications for how much you pay them". Schools also "can't do much with teaching assistants and support staff [as] most [are] increasingly covered by EHCPs, and they are governed by statute".

Some savings could be made in energy and catering costs, Sibiet said, but "the scope for it is very, very small".

NEWS

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

GLF Schools boss steps down 'immediately'

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

EXCLUSIVE

The boss of one of England's biggest multi-academy trusts has stepped down suddenly from his role – less than 18 months after he took the job.

An email sent to GLF Schools staff this week, seen by Schools Week, announced that CEO Julian Drinkall had left the chain "effective immediately". He took over from Jon Chaloner, who was in the position for 11 years, at the start of 2024.

"We would like to inform you that, by mutual agreement, Julian Drinkall will be stepping down from his role as chief executive officer of GLF Schools effective immediately," the email read. "We thank him for his hard work and contribution."

Chief finance officer James Nicholson has been appointed CEO on an interim basis.

With "24 years' experience of senior leadership", he will ensure the trust "continue[s] to build on the good systems and processes now in place to



Julian Drinkall

prioritise and support our schools", the trust said.

GLF runs 43 academies, making it the 11th-largest in England, according to latest government data.

Drinkall became CEO last year following a brief spell as general manager at Aga Khan Schools, the educational arm of the Aga Khan Development Network which works to improve the welfare and prospects of people in the developing world.

Before that he ran Lift Schools, which was then known as Academies Enterprise Trust.

Under Drinkall, GLF spent £240,000 on redundancy payments last year and attracted attention for trialling an app that blocks

"distracting" mobile phone use during school hours.

This year, it was revealed that GLF will trial a "blackout" app at four of its academies which blocks certain content from pupils' phones during classes. The technology would prevent access "to distracting apps, including social media, games and web browsers", and "disable cameras and recording features".

But it would allow "essential functions", like calls and messages, to remain accessible. Some parents nevertheless have privacy concerns over the app.

Accounts show that the trust spent £242,000 on redundancy payments in 2023-24, compared with £36,000 the previous year. Staff numbers also dropped by 4 per cent from just over 2,700 to 2,631.

The trust told Schools Week in January that it had "restructured in order to increase efficiency and investment in education provision". This is why the changes "predominantly involved administrative staff".

It added: "The trust is in a good financial position, but the emphasis is on investing in education rather than maintaining a larger administrative structure."

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS | @LYDIACHSW

Dramatic drop in pupil engagement in year 7

More than a quarter of pupils begin to disengage from school during year 7, a landmark study of pupils has found, with engagement particularly low among girls and disadvantaged pupils.

The report, published on Tuesday, is believed to be the largest study of pupil engagement in England. It used insights from more than 100,000 pupils across the country through The Engagement Platform (TEP) to examine how engagement changed across the 2024-25 academic year.

The study was carried out by the Commission on Engagement and Lead Indicators – led by education research organisation ImpactED Group in partnership with the ASCL union, Confederation of School Trusts (CST), The Reach Foundation and Challenge Partners.

It found that year 7 marks a steep, and lasting, drop in pupil engagement.

While engagement declines through school "in almost every country", the magnitude "is

more pronounced in England", suggesting disengagement is not just a symptom of age "but something atypical" that is happening in the country.

Pupils' average school enjoyment – using TEP's 0-10 reporting scale – drops from a score of around six in year 6, to just 3.8 in year 7, before falling further to 3.2 in year 8.

Headline engagement – which includes how willing pupils are to recommend the school to others, and how happy they are with it – follows the same downward trend and does not fully recover.

There is a strong link between headline engagement scores and attendance among secondary pupils, the study found.

Secondary pupils in the top 25 per cent of headline engagement scores in November 2024 were 10 percentage points less likely to be persistently absent from school than pupils in the bottom 25 per cent.

The study also found that, while girls report



feeling marginally safer than boys during primary school, between year 7 and year 9 they increasingly feel less safe at school than boys.

Pupils eligible for free school meals also reported lower levels of trust, enjoyment and belonging – with the disadvantage gap widening as they progress through secondary school.

The study, under the research direction of Professor John Jerrim from UCL IOE, raises questions about how to approach the secondary school transition and the start of key stage 3 in English schools.

Find the Right Job in Education



Tailor your job search to your skills and experience
with account filters on Education Week Jobs

Education Week Jobs, the jobs board for Schools Week & FE Week, makes finding your dream job that bit easier. Register today to add account filters so you are shown opportunities based on what matters most to you.

You can include your preferred location, salary range, subject specialism and more when you sign up to see roles tailored to your priorities.



**Click [here](#) to register and
browse open vacancies!**

**education
week jobs**

Curriculum
ConversationDO YOU HAVE A STORY?
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UKMICHAEL
FORDHAM

Principal, Thetford Academy

The last thing history
needs is more revolutions

History teachers already have the tools to drive improvement, writes Michael Fordham. We mustn't jeopardise that in the quest to modernise

History has always been a contested subject in schools. It almost certainly has the most column inches written about it, often lambasting the fact that a particular commentator's chosen area of interest is not named in the curriculum.

The fact of the matter is that, since 1995, the national curriculum for history has been very thin on detail, leaving history teachers and leaders with a great deal of freedom to choose what to teach.

At key stage 3, history teachers have typically thrived on these freedoms. Extensive published literature captures the rich discussions that teachers have about curriculum design.

Up to 2014, these debates were somewhat constrained by the assessment system built into the national curriculum. However, we have now had a decade without that in place and curriculum discussions have gone from strength to strength.

There is therefore a strong case for not making radical changes to the status quo. While some wordings may need changing, fundamentally

the current curriculum model is allowing teachers to thrive.

This may not be quite as true at key stage 2. However, in recent years local authorities, trusts and primary schools have made big steps forward in provision. I certainly do not think the current curriculum has stopped that from happening.

Which is not to say things are perfect. There are longstanding issues the curriculum and assessment review could focus on.

One of these is content repetition. It would not be unusual, for example, for students to study 'the Tudors' or 'the First World War' in primary school, in key stage 3, at GCSE and then potentially again at A-level.

Another issue is time allocation: some children might get two hours a week for three years in secondary school, while others might get one hour a week for two years. Others might suffer a carousel, or a humanities model.

However, the only way to resolve these issues within the national curriculum would be more specificity and compulsion.

For example, we could resolve a lot of issues with key stage 2 to key stage 3 transition by stipulating that schools have to study the same bits of history at the same time, but there are numerous negative



“ There is a strong case for not making radical changes

consequences that flow from greater prescription, and I certainly do not think there is any appetite for this.

At most, the Francis review could make a light-touch recommendation for local schools to work more closely together on planning their curriculum offer as a whole.

Having said all that, it is widely recognised – as captured in numerous surveys by bodies such as the Historical Association – that the GCSE is overcrowded.

This problem arose from changes introduced in 2016 which merged the longstanding 'Schools History Project' and 'Modern World' courses. This was supposed to create a broader curriculum, but in practice the majority of children are still studying the same handful of periods, often ones they have previously studied at key stage 3, such as the Norman conquest or the Nazi regime.

To improve the quality of the GCSE, there is a strong case for adding a compulsory modern

British depth study. We are now a quarter of the way through the 21st century, and an excessive focus on the first half of the 20th century is crowding out opportunities to focus on the last 80 years.

GCSE is also where we still see the remnants of 'source analysis' questions that ask students to make (typically) superficial comments on sources about which they know very little. There is a real opportunity to bring GCSE in line with the better practice we tend to see at key stage 3.

There is nothing to stop exam boards making such changes under the current regulations, but even the bravest of them will not risk losing market share. A nudge from the DfE is probably needed.

You can insert clichés here about babies and bathwater: history is not in a bad state and teachers have a lot of freedoms already to drive improvements.

This is a part of the curriculum where the review is best advised to be true to its promise of 'evolution, not revolution'.

Opinion

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



SIMON KIDWELL

Principal, Hartford Manor Primary School and former NAHT president

Continuity at the top is crucial to Labour's opportunity mission

Talk of a reshuffle may have the education secretary's detractors excited, but it would be bad news for a sector in desperate need of stable leadership, writes Simon Kidwell

There are no quick fixes" is a well-worn phrase in education leadership. Sadly, the sentiment is not so widely adopted in political circles. As the spending review approaches and talk of a reshuffle grows, the prime minister should nail his colours to the mast of continuity in education.

In 2007, I stepped into my first substantive headship, becoming the fourth headteacher in three years at a school in crisis. Standards and progress were in the bottom one per cent nationally, pupil numbers had plummeted, staff morale was at rock bottom and an inadequate Ofsted judgment had put the school on the brink of closure.

Over the next five years, our dedicated staff rebuilt a school that had been devastated by leadership instability. Now, 17 years on (and 12 since our talented deputy head took over), the school continues to thrive.

This experience underscores a fundamental truth: sustained, stable leadership is essential for lasting improvement. The government must heed this lesson.

Consider Michael Gove's tenure as Secretary of State for Education from

2010 to 2014. His extended time in office, preceded by nearly three years as shadow education secretary, gave him the opportunity to implement significant and enduring policy changes.

In stark contrast, the following decade saw nine education secretaries of come and go, each introducing initiatives (from teacher sabbaticals to universal academisation) that largely failed to deliver.

This revolving door eroded confidence in the Department for Education and alienated school leaders. Worse, it eroded the department's confidence in itself and its ability to meet emerging challenges, from Covid to the mental health crisis, and from attendance to recruitment and retention – to name but a few.

Since July, Bridget Phillipson has served as education secretary. Like Michael Gove, she spent time as shadow secretary before stepping into Sanctuary Buildings, which gave her time to engage with a broad cross-section of the sector and develop a deep understanding of its complexities.

Her policies, including introducing free breakfast clubs, reducing uniform costs and creating registers for children not in school, are pragmatic, evidence-informed and widely supported.

The development of regional



“ No radical reform happens without bumps in the road

improvement (RISE) teams reflects a thoughtful approach to supporting under-performing schools without resorting to disruptive structural reform. Her lived experience, growing up in a disadvantaged community, shapes an authentic leadership style rooted in the belief that education can transform lives.

A testament to her ethos and determination to face the challenges previous administrations failed to grapple with, she has put inclusion and belonging at the heart of her agenda for curriculum, assessment and accountability reform – and not just for pupils but for staff too.

At the recent NAHT national congress, Phillipson attended our end-of-conference dinner. Her genuine engagement with members was warmly received, reflecting the broad support she enjoys among school leaders.

Her inclusive approach contrasts sharply with the narrow engagement of some predecessors, who often focused exclusively on academy trusts and bypassed the views of those working most closely with children.

It hasn't been plain sailing for Phillipson in her first year, but no radical reform happens without

vocal opposition from some and a few bumps in the road. Indeed, Michael Gove's first year in post isn't remembered for his stellar performance. Remember the fiasco around scrapping the Building Schools for the Future programme?

Yet today he is remembered as one of the most consequential education secretaries in a generation by supporters and detractors alike.

So as talk of a government reshuffle gets louder, the sector should make its voice heard in support of continuity.

Speculation about Phillipson's tenure may serve some people's narrow agenda, but a new team at the DfE – unversed in the many complexities of the education brief – will not serve the wider sector. It's not clear it would even serve those who oppose Phillipson's policies.

More than ever, what education needs is long-term strategy shaped by those on the front line. Only through sustained, stable leadership can we secure meaningful and lasting improvement in our education system.

Sir Keir Starmer's backing of his education secretary would communicate his unwavering commitment to that ambition.

Opinion

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



SARAH LINDEN

Legal director, education
employment specialist,
Browne Jacobson

Legal: How to manage restructuring, redundancies and industrial action

With more budget cuts on the horizon, education employment expert Sarah Linden looks at how to manage their predictable consequences

With reports suggesting a 1.2-per cent gap between government funding and recommended pay rises, another round of 'efficiencies' (budget cuts) could be on the way. This means leaders may be forced to consider how best to manage restructuring, redundancies and industrial action.

Here, we answer some of the key questions school leaders ask us regularly.

Industrial action

Many schools may anticipate a repeat of the 2022/23 national strikes and localised industrial action last year.

During local disputes where schools have some influence, leaders should engage directly with unions to understand their concerns around pay and conditions.

Collective bargaining plays a vital role. School leaders should check whether they have a Trade Union Recognition Agreement (TURA) in place, which outlines how they'll work with unions. Most schools will have a Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) or Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) for negotiating terms and conditions.

If negotiations stall, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) can help to find resolutions.

Meanwhile, a robust communications strategy that

explains the school's position directly to staff can be remarkably effective. It ensures staff receive a balanced overall picture of the issues in dispute, and our experience with clients shows that it can significantly reduce staff participation in strike action.

Closures

Contingency planning is mandated by the Department for Education. Headteachers are expected to take reasonable steps to keep their school open for as many children as possible. If staffing levels would compromise safeguarding or safety requirements, closing the school may be necessary.

Schools are within their rights to ask staff whether they intend to strike, though they can't pressure them not to participate. Leaders must communicate expectations clearly for strike days, including that non-attendance will be treated as participation in the strike action unless staff have reported their absence for a different reason in accordance with their policies.

Crucially, parents and stakeholders need adequate notice of arrangements to make alternative childcare plans.

Unions must notify schools seven days before balloting members and 14 days before industrial action commences, providing valuable planning time. Using these notification periods effectively can help mitigate disruption.

Restructuring

Restructuring doesn't necessarily



“ Planning is preferable to crisis management

indicate financial failure. While many schools consider restructuring in response to deficit concerns, it can also be a forward-thinking approach to achieve financial sustainability or improve student outcomes. A clear rationale should be attached to any restructuring plan.

We recommend employers start by creating organisational charts that map both current and proposed staffing structures to identify which roles are retained, job-matched or no longer needed.

Job-matching often entails comparing present and proposed job descriptions to determine the degree of overlap or change. Any substantial change is likely to result in the previous role being at risk of redundancy where it is displaced from the structure.

Redundancies

Where school leaders identify the potential need to make redundancies, one mechanism worth considering is voluntary redundancy, which gives staff a degree of control over their future.

Support staff aged over 55 in the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) may be eligible to receive their pension if made redundant, which can result in pension strain costs. However, leaders must be mindful

of potential discrimination claims if voluntary redundancy applications are handled incorrectly.

Whether voluntary or otherwise, consultation with affected staff and trade unions is not just good practice; it's a legal requirement.

For collective redundancies (20 or more within a 90-day period), there are additional statutory obligations regarding consultation timelines. Schools should follow a fair and robust selection process. For those selected for redundancy, schools have a duty to seek suitable alternative employment before termination.

Redundancy packages should be calculated according to statutory requirements as a minimum, though some schools may offer enhanced terms where budgets permit. Staff with at least two years' continuous service are entitled to a redundancy payment, with the amount depending on age, length of service and weekly pay.

Discussions about restructuring and redundancies may seem pessimistic, but proactive planning is preferable to reactive crisis management. School leaders who assess their options early and develop clear strategies will be better positioned to navigate these challenges while minimising their impact on provision.

Opinion

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

NANSI
ELLISCommissioner,
The Teaching
CommissionHAILI
HUGHESCommissioner,
The Teaching
Commission

An impoverished work-life drives too many teachers out

The default position that teaching should be professionally (and sometimes personally) all-encompassing is a retention own-goal, write Nansi Ellis and Haili Hughes

When we talk about teacher retention, we often talk about the familiar culprits: workload, behaviour, accountability. But lurking behind these headlines is another factor that may matter more than we appreciate: the profession's inflexibility to let teachers be anything other than teachers.

What if we started to view teaching as part of a broader professional identity? What if we accepted and embraced the possibility that teachers might thrive (and stay) if they had flexibility to do other things alongside?

Master teachers

In Singapore, different teaching tracks enable teachers to stay in the classroom while getting involved in wider education work. 'Master Teachers' play a significant role in shaping education policy, leading professional development, driving curricular innovation and supporting pedagogical research – all while still teaching. Their intellectual curiosity is seen as an asset, not a threat.

In contrast, our system often seems suspicious of teachers who want to stretch beyond the classroom. To be

involved in wider activities, teachers often need to leave behind the very thing they love: teaching itself.

Over time, this erodes the mindset that brings many into teaching in the first place: the desire to think, to question and to connect teaching to the wider world.

Professional wellbeing

It's not just about education roles though. People are increasingly entering the profession after successful careers in other fields. Some want to combine teaching with their former roles.

Teachers who stay long-term often find ways to keep that part of themselves alive: directing theatre, writing, researching, working in the community. This should be happening because of our systems, not in spite of them.

As the Church of England's *Flourishing Teachers* report suggests, the opportunity to live a "rich and varied work-life" is essential to professional wellbeing. If the fear of losing staff causes us to hold onto them too tight, we will find they only slip through our fingers.

Horizontal growth

The ladder to leadership is not the only form of professional growth. Many teachers are keen to explore their subject in more depth – its curriculum, pedagogy, or its application beyond the school gates.

Chartered teachers from the



“ Rather than ‘Teach First,’ why not ‘Teach And’?”

Chartered College of Teaching told the Teaching Commission that engaging with research and policy in their own classrooms had given them a renewed sense of purpose and connection, and led to broader coordination roles.

Now Teach told us that schools need to welcome the expertise career-changers bring, rather than seeing it as irrelevant (or worse, an inconvenience).

There are also teachers and leaders working part time who work with schools as consultants, or sit on steering groups at the Department for Education.

Recently, Dr Haili Hughes has been appointed as a trust leader alongside a professorship and a DfE role, making her perhaps the only serving professor and school leader in the country.

Opportunities to grow horizontally can only drive up expertise and credibility and, in turn, strengthen the system.

Making it possible

This won't be a quick fix. Schools are already struggling to recruit teachers, so releasing them to do other things at this point may seem unachievable.

Political focus is rightly on making their working lives in school attractive and sustainable first, but a few practical changes could kickstart progress.

Flexible contracts could allow for part-time arrangements to pursue outside work, study or community engagement.

Wider CPD pathways could allow teachers to own their own learning, including research and policy work. For example, engaging teachers in policymaking would enhance teaching and policy alike.

And to support all of this, we need trusting leadership cultures that encourage pursuing interests beyond school, as well as an accountability system that recognises that teacher development is multifaceted.

Retention is complex and issues like behaviour, workload and pay still need urgent attention. However, too many good teachers leave, not because they're tired of teaching, but because they're tired of only teaching.

An important piece of the puzzle is to treat teachers like whole people, with lives, passions and ambitions. Let them teach – and do other things too. Rather than 'Teach First,' why not 'Teach And'?

SEND Solutions

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

**EMMA
BRADSHAW**

CEO, Alternative Learning Trust



**TOM
LEGGE**

Managing Director,
Premier Advisory
Group



We must reclaim our role as SEND and AP's fixers. ASAP

A new project aims to gather and broadcast the solutions to the SEND funding crisis that are lighting the way to an effective long-term plan, explain Emma Bradshaw and Tom Legge

Private Eye has a recurring column which appears under the satirical banner, '24 hours to Save the NHS'. At the heart of that incantation is a truth that applies directly to the SEND and AP Sector.

The NHS is never going to fall over in a day, and neither will specialist education. What will happen is far more insidious: without short-term, practical interventions, lives will continue to be negatively affected.

If a pound was paid for every page of consultation and green paper, evidence or opinion submitted to various committees, working parties and steering groups, we would not be dealing with the daily realities of staff burnout, workforce reduction, family frustrations and unmet needs.

That is not to say we don't need long-term planning and reform. We really do. Our sectors and local areas are actively developing them, and we're committed to long-term change.

But listening without acting soon becomes its own form of failure. We also need pragmatic responses with immediate impact, and as much as

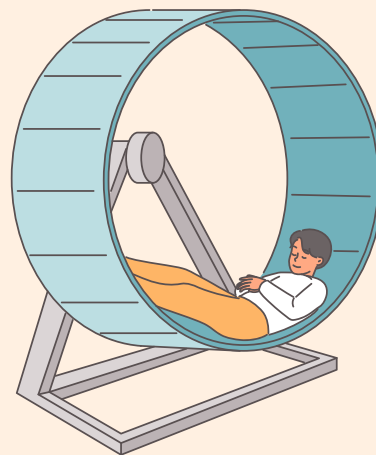
possible these should align with a plan for long-term change. Indeed, they should shape it.

There are many examples of excellent initiatives leading the way. Some LAs are establishing independent provision in contravention of their Safety Valve agreements to combat profiteering. Others, like Veronica Armson and the Phoenix Specialist Classrooms project in Tower Hamlets, are sharing their expertise to raise standards for whole areas.

The problem is that in a fragmented system under daily pressure, few have time to empirically evaluate the financial impact of their work, let alone shout about it from the rooftop of the school. And yes, we do mean financial impact. We all want the very best for all our children and young people, but the bottom line remains the bottom line.

And the bottom line is that we need affordable, pragmatic solutions now. That's why the Alternative Learning Trust joined as a founding partner of Accelerating SEND Autonomy & Practice – or ASAP, along with Shireland Collegiate Academy Trust, Nexus MAT, and Venn Academy Trust.

The priority must be to stop the bleeding out of high-needs blocks and to reset the relationships between commissioners and providers of all types. ALT is lucky to



“ Listening without acting is its own form of failure

work in genuine partnership with some of its home authorities, but colleagues tell us daily about the increasingly fractious relationships they have with commissioners.

Often, public sector provision gets cut, only for the private sector to flood in to fill the gap with much more expensive and often lesser-quality provision (or excessively high quality on a highly selective basis). It's not just money that is lost but on-the-ground expertise from people who know and care about their communities.

We need sensible commissioning that is based on results. We need AP and special places that cost half (or less) than the private sector charges. And we need every penny spent on children and communities, not shareholder dividends.

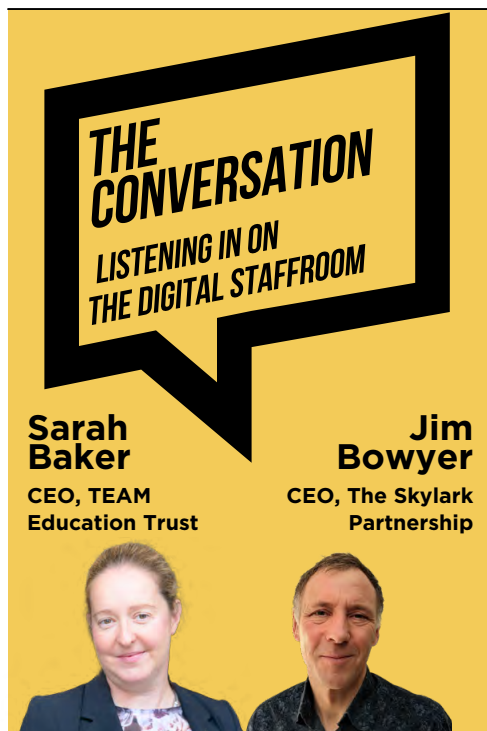
The idea of the ASAP Programme is to bring creativity, energy, networks and urgency to drive change in the short term. If you've got an idea that maintains high-quality provision and can demonstrate cashable savings

between 12 and 18 months, we'll evaluate it, help develop it further, create toolkits to scale it, and importantly, broadcast it far and wide.

Of course, we recognise that no two schools or communities are the same, so this is about providing tools and capacity, not templates. We want to unleash the sector's potential, not stifle it further.

ASAP's programme lead Danielle Corley, a principal consultant at Premier Advisory Group, underlines the programme's urgency: "We can't wait for system reform to trickle down over years. The needs are immediate. ASAP is about making support real, visible, and effective – now."

Resources will continue to be tight, but we can do much better with what we have. We can be better stewards of the now. We have the answers and we need to take our place as the creative solution providers. No one is going to give us the lead, so we have to take it. ASAP.



TARGETING FUNDS

Amid rising demand, stretched resources and growing expectations around inclusion, local authorities face mounting pressure to ensure that funding is both fair and effective. Against this backdrop, Nottinghamshire County Council's recent blog offers a timely and potentially influential update.

The council outlines a revised funding model it is piloting in selected schools,

designed to better match resources to pupil needs. This is not just a matter of budgets, it's about improving how schools fulfil their legal and moral duty to make reasonable adjustments and provide inclusive education.

A particularly welcome feature is the introduction of a 'SEND bridging fund' intended to ease the transition from nursery to school, a vulnerable moment for many families.

While this update is specific to Nottinghamshire, it holds wider relevance. Local innovations like this can shape national thinking, offering potential models for replication elsewhere.



Moreover, SEND is not a niche issue. When children with additional needs are properly supported, the benefits ripple outward leading to more inclusive classrooms, stronger communities, and a society where every child can thrive.

BUILDING CAPACITY

Elsewhere, Whole Education's recent publication of an independent evaluation of its SEND work offers timely lessons as the government continues to give

clear signals that they expect

mainstream schools to meet the needs of more children and young people.

Based on observations and feedback from just 16 education professionals who have worked with Whole Education on a variety of programmes, the report nevertheless reads as a comprehensive piece of work.

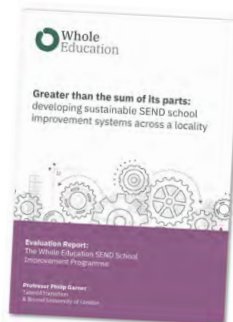
For me, however, the biggest questions this report raises are around the increase in confidence the majority of respondents reported after taking part in Whole Education's programmes.

There's no question of the quality and impact of the programmes, but if this is a representative sample of our current workforce, what does that say about the curriculum we provided when they were students?

Following on, how has our professional development system failed to enable them to put all the research and exemplary case study evidence they have access to into practice?

And worse, how have those frameworks in some cases destroyed the confidence they had at the start of their careers?

The five solutions included in the report's foreword reflecting the strategies are unsurprising. For example, *Schools Week* readers won't be shocked to hear that clear and committed leaders who place a high value on meeting the needs of all students



are vital, or that working in wider networks drives up standards more broadly.

Now, the government needs to find ways to apply them nationally to meet its aims. I would add to them that the SENCo role needs to be redefined as a leadership role, and that all staff should be trained and resourced to share in the responsibility of supporting all our students.

It's too important for us to rely on heroic individuals – or isolated programmes, no matter how impactful.

WHO'S WATCHING THE WATCHMEN?

It's hard enough keeping track of a council initiative here and a CPD programme there, but on top of that it feels like a new consultation is being launched every week.

Thankfully, Catriona Moore, policy manager for the Independent Provider of Special Education Advice (IPSEA), was watching the proceedings of the ongoing select committee inquiry into "solving the SEND crisis" and blogged about it for Special Needs Jungle.

Last week's evidence session focused on accountability. It featured representation from IPSEA as well as the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission.

It's always of particular interest (and not as rare as you might think) when inquiries hear from MPs who have either misunderstood (or are misrepresenting) reports on provision from their own constituencies.

Last week, Caroline Johnson MP did just that, citing Lincolnshire's 'grade' in its area inspection as evidence others could learn from. There is no such grade, and the report is far from rosy.

At best, our system is now so complex that even the MPs holding people to account in the 'accountability' evidence session remain confused by the ins and outs of national SEND policy.

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts



The Knowledge

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



Are schools pushing views about race on their pupils?

Professor Karl Kitching, Director of research in the school of education, University of Birmingham

In the heated debate on teaching about race equality in schools, claims abound that teachers are pushing 'politically biased' views on young people by discussing anti-racist ideas and movements like Black Lives Matter. Our research, published today, proves this is not true.

Our University of Birmingham team has conducted the first national-level study into the extent to which young people are supported to express themselves about race and faith equality issues at school.

We surveyed over 3,000 Year 10 students and over 200 teachers, and conducted in-depth case studies in secondary schools.

What we found is that young people from racially and religiously minoritised backgrounds are often unlikely to feel they can talk about these issues at school.

The report paints a complex picture of multiple factors leading minoritised young people to censor themselves. These include feeling their experiences won't be heard, that they might offend or be judged by peers or that they might be disciplined for being 'too political'.

Our findings show clearly that it is a myth that anti-racism is being taught ideologically and preventing people from expressing their opinions.

On the contrary, students at schools that talk about Black Lives Matter were 2.5 times more likely to say teachers present several sides of an issue, 3.5 times more likely to say teachers encourage them to share their opinions, and almost 3 times more likely to say teachers encourage them to make up their own minds.

Furthermore, we found that schools that do not talk about these issues are less likely to have teachers who present several sides of an issue or listen to young people.

These findings are important to informing the current curriculum and assessment review, as well as changes to Ofsted inspection criteria.

The former aims to evaluate how effective the current system is at delivering excellence for all, preparing young people to address society's civic and economic needs, and breaking down



barriers to opportunity. Its terms of reference promise to address the issue of content diversity.

The latter aim to make inclusion a key area of school evaluation.

Let's take each in turn.

A curriculum for all

The system is clearly not 'delivering excellence for all' when it comes to race and faith equality. Only 23 per cent of the teachers we surveyed felt the examinations system enabled them to teach about these issues. This means GCSE subject criteria must seriously change as part of efforts to diversify the curriculum.

Meanwhile, young people who viewed their schools as doing well in this space were four times more likely to say that pupils trust how their school will deal with racism. However, 75 per cent said they learned about socio-political issues online.

Introducing political education into a revised citizenship curriculum is therefore crucial. However, it must be properly supported through teacher training and given parity of esteem in school accountability metrics.

Smarter evaluation

Race and ethnicity are key determinants of children's life chances in nuanced ways. Our study shows how the policy and political climate

of the past decade has discredited scientific evidence of race inequalities in education.

Ofsted's plans to evaluate inclusion can help address this by being specific about examining how attainment, exclusions and grouping by 'ability' are patterned by ethnicity, Free School Meal eligibility and SEND status.

Based on our wider dataset, we are calling on government to go further than their promise to 'end the culture wars'. They must address the damage those wars have caused to young people's education too by establishing an anti-racism framework and a CPD strategy as part of the revised national curriculum.

It is vital for their civic education that all young people can engage with complex real-life issues in a meaningful way, especially if the government is serious about lowering the voting age to 16.

To prepare young people to engage in society, we need to give them the tools they need to express themselves freely.

This article and the research on which it was based were co-authored with Professor Reza Gholami, Dr Aslı Kandemir, and Dr Md Shajedur Rahman, all from the University of Birmingham

Read the full report [here](#)

Week in

Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

TUESDAY

The home education lobby has a powerful voice in Parliament thanks to Lord Wei.

The Conservative peer, himself a home-educator, holds very different views to his colleagues on the value of children being in school.

This is borne out in the *180* amendments he has tabled to the schools bill.

One amendment seeks to allow over 14s to "register as self-directed learners", while another would allow parents to "self-certify SEN provision".

Another amendment would allow parents to delay formal education to age seven, while another "ensures that home-educating families are not required to contribute financially to local school services they do not use, through a council tax adjustment".

Wei is also proposing a "child-led school closure mechanism". This would mean that "where at least 80 per cent of pupils in a maintained school, aged 10 or over, express a preference for home education through a verified process, the secretary of state must consult on transitioning that school into a home education support hub". Gulp!

Wei also proposes that local authority inspectors be suspended if three or more families complain of misconduct. What could possibly go wrong?

Another amendment would force independent schools to allow home-educated children to sit exams even if they are not enrolled. What would Wei's private schools-loving colleagues make of that?!

The amendments are likely to fail, but they offer a fascinating glimpse into what home educators believe they should be entitled to.

Several Conservative amendments to the bill sought to "probe the adequacy" of resources available for new social care duties, but during the debate on Tuesday minister Baroness Smith was quick to point out the impact of austerity.

"I will resist the temptation to comment on how noble Lords opposite have come to the significance of funding only at this point, notwithstanding the very difficult funding position that children's social care has found itself in over the past 14 years," she said.

WEDNESDAY

Lo and behold, the Conservatives have also suddenly found their voice on school funding, too.

Shadow education secretary Laura Trott launched a petition today against "reckless unfunded pay rises" that are "putting thousands of jobs on the line".

We guess one way to avoid such an issue is to let teacher pay fall in real terms for the best part of 14 years, just as the Conservatives did when they actually had the power to do something about it.

Isn't it easy to be in opposition!

Former schools minister Nick Gibb was recently appointed as a strategic adviser to Yondr, a US firm which makes pouches used to keep schools smartphone-free.

The Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOPA) has now

published its advice on the appointment.

It states that Gibb is not allowed to personally lobby the government or its bodies on behalf of Yondr "for two years from your last day in ministerial office". Gibb quit months before the general election, so technically that lobbying can start in November...

The senior Tory is also not allowed to "draw on... any privileged information available to you from your time in ministerial service" in the role.

He is also banned until November from advising Yondr on any bid or contract related to the work of the government, and for the moment cannot lobby contacts which he "developed during [his] time in office in other governments and organisations for the purpose of securing business for Yondr".

As part of the appointment process, Gibb confirmed to ACOBA that, as minister, he "did not meet with, nor did you make any policy, regulatory or commercial decisions specific to Yondr Inc while in office".

"The committee considered that the risk that this role could reasonably be seen as a reward for your decisions made and actions taken in office is low."

THURSDAY

Former education secretary Michael Gove was introduced to the House of Lords this week. Who was watching adoringly from the second row? Fellow new Tory peer Baroness Amanda Spielman!



ENHANCING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND BELONGING IN EDUCATION SUMMIT

📍 **Hosted at EdCity, London, 24 June 2025**

This summit brings together experts, policymakers, and leaders to share strategies, tackle challenges, and drive DEI and belonging initiatives.

£ £99 excl VAT

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



The Bridge
Wellington College Education

| The
Difference

Buy tickets



Active
Learning
Trust

PRIMARY HEADTEACHER OPPORTUNITIES

Due to internal promotions, Active Learning Trust now have two Headteacher opportunities available in North Suffolk. Whether you are an experienced Headteacher or stepping into headship for the first time, we want to hear from you.

We're looking for hearts-led leaders who believe in the transformative power of education - and who want to be part of something much bigger. People who want to change lives and build brighter futures for children who deserve the very best.






This is a rare opportunity to make your mark in an organisation where values aren't wallpaper, they're the walls! You will be surrounded by team players and a people-first culture where support, shared purpose, and a joy in the work we do are central - and where the kettle is always on.

Get in touch today, and let's talk about the future you could help shape:

recruitment@activelearningtrust.org

ACTIVE LEARNING TRUST VALUES



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

HEADTEACHER

at Red Oak Primary School



Location: Southwell Rd,
Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR33 0RZ
Contract: Permanent, Full-time
Salary: L18-24 (£75,674 - £87,651)

Red Oak Primary is a two-form entry school with over 450 children, with Kirkley community at its heart. The school's ethos radiates throughout their classrooms, which offer a calm environment that's rich with inclusion, nurture and aspiration.

HEADTEACHER

at Pakefield Primary School



Location: London Rd, Pakefield,
Lowestoft, NR33 7AQ
Contract: Permanent, Full-time
Salary: L15-21 (£70,293 - £81,440)

Pakefield Primary is a wonderful vibrant school with hard working children, dedicated staff and a shared love of learning. The school aspires for all children to leave Pakefield as resilient, ambitious and active citizens, taking with them many marvellous memories and a desire to follow their dreams.