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School leaders' favourite newspaper
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How 'edu influencer' Mr P got his MBE


P18

The key stage 3 opportunity barrier


P33

Court challenge over trust's isolation rooms


P17

'Crisis of quality' warning after DfE plea to accept more applicants

- Top civil servant urges providers to increase trainee teacher offers
- But school trainers sound alarm over decreasing 'calibre' of recruits
- Warning 6.5k teacher pledge could turn 'quantity crisis into quality crisis'

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EXCLUSIVE | Pages 4-5

SCHOOLS WEEK

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The Leader

Often in politics there's a mismatch between the rhetoric behind bold promises from ministers and how this translates to classrooms.

That gap has emerged in Labour's pledge to fund breakfast clubs in all primary schools. Actually, many keen schools were unable to take part because the funding available didn't match costs.

Labour is already under pressure over a similar gap in its promise to deliver 6,500 new teachers while the overall number of teachers in the profession is falling.

The government always said it would deliver 6,500 *new* teachers, so it is fairer to judge progress on the number of new entrants (which are up), compared to falls in the teacher population (which has happened in primary schools as the number of pupils drops off a cliff edge).

But this is still a problem of its own making – as ministers have repeatedly dawdled on presenting a clear explanation to the sector about what this pledge actually meant (and we're still waiting).

Our investigation (pages 4 and 5) delves into the impact the rush to hit the 6,500 target could have on the quality of recruits.

The government has told training providers to up cohort numbers so it can increase offers amid a rise in interest in teaching.

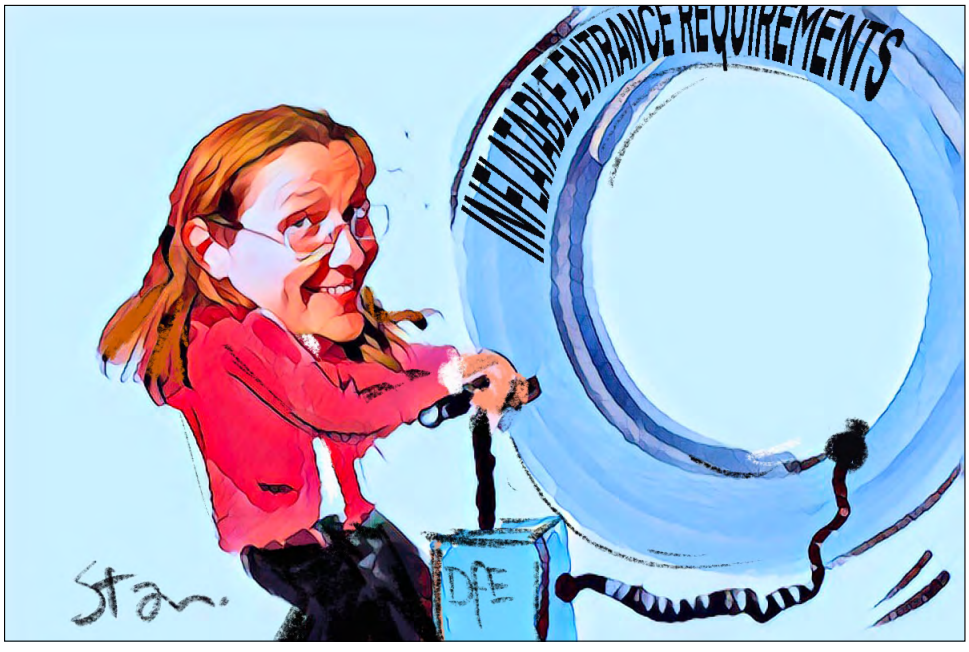
But at the same time, providers say they are increasingly concerned about the quality of applicants and fear schools could be "overwhelmed" by trainees needing "significant additional support".

As Emma Hollis points out, we risk swapping a "crisis of quantity for crisis of quality".

Elsewhere this week, we dive into the murky online world of influencers posting predictions of what will be in exam papers (pages 7 to 9).

On the topic of social media, "education influencer" Mr P stood out among the usual rollcall of CEOs, heads and teachers who bagged an honour. He speaks to Schools Week on page 18.

Meanwhile, it's been a busy week for school building news – with a new announcement on funding (page 6) and a stark warning on global heating (page 11) just as the government axes its school building decarbonisation scheme (page 12).



Most read online this week:

1 Schools should 'shut up' about food handouts, says social mobility chair

2 King's birthday honours 2025: Top gongs for northern trust CEOs

3 GCSE entries fall in German, science and history GCSEs

4 'Most broken school' rated 'good' in all areas

5 12 teacher training providers set for reaccreditation

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SCHOOLS WEEK | **School leaders' most-read**: Teacher Tapp survey in June of 670 headteachers on education media read in past month

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INVESTIGATION: TEACHER TRAINING

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Teacher quality warning over DfE recruitment boost plea

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS
@LYDIACHSW

EXCLUSIVE

Ministers face swapping a "crisis of quantity for crisis of quality" in teacher recruitment after providers were told to accept more applicants.

Susan Acland-Hood, the DfE's permanent secretary, asked teacher trainers in April to "respond" to a "high level of interest" by considering more offers and expanding training cohorts, shows a letter seen by *Schools Week*.

The government is under pressure to deliver on its flagship promise to recruit 6,500 more teachers.

Recent figures show applications to train as a secondary school teacher are 12 per cent up on last year.

But Acland-Hood told providers that the "number of candidates who have received a rejection remains high".

She pointed to an 11 per cent rise in domestic secondary applicants this year, while offers had risen by only 5 per cent.

"I would like to encourage you to consider whether you could increase your offer-making and take a larger number of trainees on to your course," she urged providers.

But a snap poll by *Schools Week* of 182 school-based teacher training providers (SCITTs) this month found nearly 90 per cent "concerned" about applicant quality.

More than 70 per cent said quality was "decreasing", while 22 per cent said it remained the same.

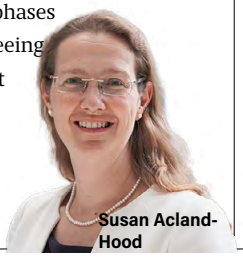
Emma Hollis, the chief executive of NASBTT, which represents SCITTs and which ran the poll, said pressuring trainers into accepting unsuitable applicants "risks swapping a crisis of quantity for a crisis of quality".

Schools Week commissioned the survey after the issue was flagged in a recent NASBTT member survey.

Eleven of 34 providers involved raised specific concerns about "deteriorating applicant quality and rising support needs".

One said there were "no phases or subjects where we are seeing a steady supply of sufficient high-quality applicants", adding primary was "particularly concerning".

One SCITT said it was



Susan Acland-Hood

'No provider will turn away good-quality applicants on a whim'

receiving "huge" numbers of maths applicants, but "the quality of candidates is very poor".

Another said applicant numbers were "similar to two years ago", but the quality was "sometimes lower with qualifications from abroad or degrees in different subjects so takes a lot of time to check subject knowledge meets our require[ments]".

Hollis said concerns focused on "qualifications, subject knowledge, and candidate preparedness".

One ITT provider suggested a lack of financial support and the reputation of teaching could be factors.

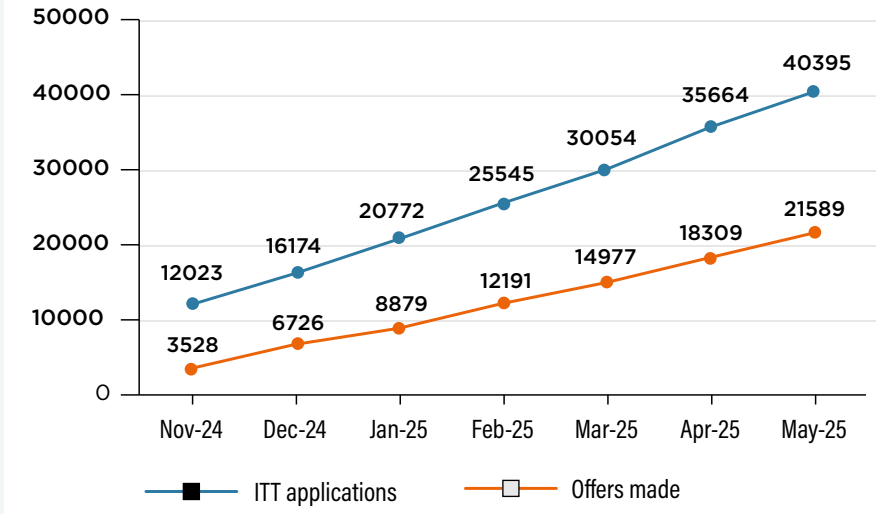
However, it appears to be a different picture among university training providers.

James Noble-Rogers, the executive director of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), said anecdotal reports showed the quality of applicants "is actually increasing this year".

Drop in higher degrees

While it does not necessarily dictate teacher quality, the percentage of postgraduate trainees with a 2:1 degree or higher has fallen from 74 in 2023-24, to 72 per cent of those starting training in

ITT applications compared to offer



Source: DfE

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September – the lowest level in a decade.

Meanwhile, the percentage of new trainees with an "other degree class" made up 7 per cent of those who started training this September, up from 6 per cent last year and between 3 to 4 per cent for ever year before that since 2015.

The DfE said "other" degrees included those below a 2:2 and those that did not fall into the standard UK classification system, such as overseas degrees.

Hollis said any pressure on providers to "extend offers outside of their usual decision-making frameworks" could mean "diluting the quality of training" as well as putting strain on mentors and other staff, and "potentially affecting retention rates over time".

'Overwhelming schools' concern

"No provider will be turning away good-quality applicants on a whim. The danger is that if pressure is put on to increase offers on an arbitrary basis...you're asking providers to accept somebody that they would otherwise have felt wasn't right for the profession."

One SCITT, which did not want to be named, said while it was "flexible and optimistic" about applicants and their suitability, it was "cautious about not overwhelming" schools with high numbers of "trainees who need significant additional support".

Hollis said that any growth in recruitment must be matched by the ability of schools and providers to maintain the quality of training, mentoring and support.

"School capacity – which is already stretched – must be a key consideration in any strategy for expansion."

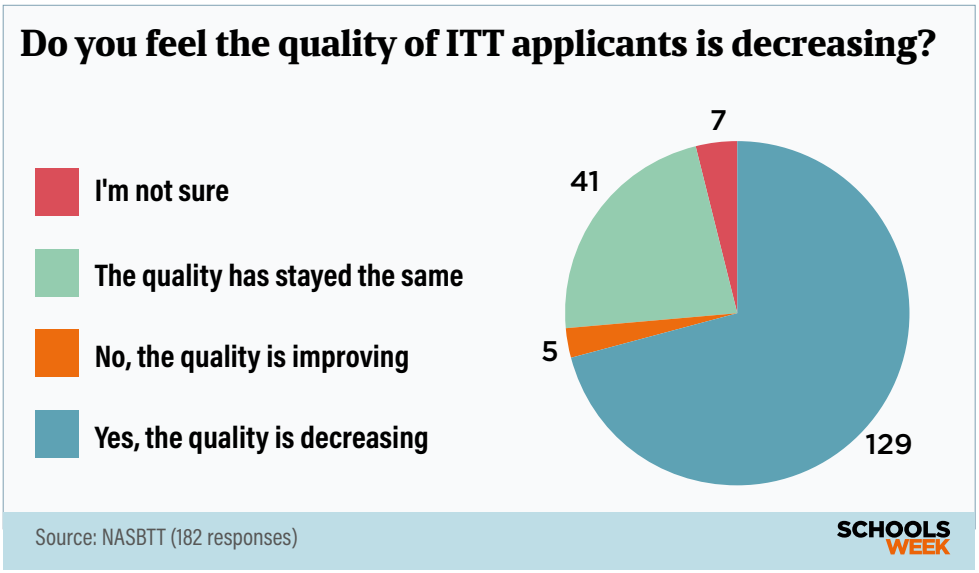
NASBTT, responding to Acland-Hood, said many providers reported a "significant increase" in applicants for the postgraduate teaching apprenticeship – particularly for primary spots, which do not have a postgraduate bursary.

However, the capacity of primaries to support apprentices – who are paid on the unqualified teacher pay scales at least – "remains extremely limited".

"As a result, providers are having to reject many otherwise promising applicants where suitable employment cannot be secured," Hollis said.

"This mismatch between candidate expectations and employment realities is an area where a broader conversation would be valuable."

Emma Hollis



'They have no self-led leadership. They don't have those skills'

Long wait for response'

But Acland-Hood was also critical that about 11 per cent of candidates waited more than 30 workings days for an application response.

"The longer a candidate waits for a decision, the more likely they are to drop out of the recruitment process," she said, urging providers to respond "as quickly as possible".

Hollis said NASBTT has investigated the reason for the lag, and believes providers often communicate with trainees outside the application system.

Acland-Hood also revealed the government would soon trial a new tool that allowed providers to find local applicants who had been rejected.

This would help "ensure that promising candidates are able to secure places even if their first-choice institutions cannot accommodate them".

Paul Stone, the chief executive of Discovery Schools Academies Trust, said applicants tended to have good subject knowledge, but many lacked "practical knowledge" and appeared "unprepared to be adult learners".

"They are often waiting for somebody to tell them what to do...There's no self-led leadership in them. They don't have those skills."

He also said financial incentives meant people choosing certain subjects "because it's got a bursary, not because they've got a love of [the subject]".

Covid consequences

Annie Gouldsworthy, the director of ITT at The King Edward's Consortium in Birmingham, said there had been "no decline in the calibre of applications" at her SCITT.

But since Covid disrupted and stalled some university experiences, trainees sometimes needed more support with the "more outward-facing aspects of teaching".

This involved "interpersonal communication and coping with workload/time pressure".

Some providers have called for the reinstatement of a fully funded subject knowledge enhancement (SKE) programme to ensure that teachers were well-prepared and passionate about their subjects.

SKEs help trainees top up their knowledge on specific subjects before starting their training, but the government recently cut the number of courses from 10 to five subjects.

Gouldsworthy said "negative rhetoric" had "dominated the conversation for too long when it comes to the so-called 'quality' of applications" and teaching in general.

She said a positive change in recruitment could only happen if the profession was given due credit and celebrated its potential as a rewarding career. That included making it "financially rewarding".

The DfE was approached.

NEWS: LEADERSHIP

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Reeves boosts schools' rebuilding programme

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@FCDWHITTAKER

Rachel Reeves

Another 250 schools will join the government's school rebuilding programme over the next decade, with £20 billion from a new 10-year infrastructure strategy earmarked for rebuilds.

The Treasury also confirmed that the annual school and college maintenance budget will rise from £2.4 billion this year to £2.9 billion by 2034-35.

The document, published on Thursday, sets out how the government will spend £725 billion on "economic and social infrastructure" over the next decade.

Chancellor Rachel Reeves announced at last week's spending review that the school rebuilding programme would be ramped up, with spending increasing from an annual £1.4 billion to about £2.4 billion for each of the next three years.

She also committed to expanding the programme, but documents did not state at the time how many additional schools would be covered.

£20 billion for rebuilds, including existing programme

The Treasury has confirmed "almost £20 billion" will be spent on rebuilding between 2025 and 2035. Some of this would be for projects at the more than 500 schools in the existing programme.

But it will enable "a further 250 schools to be selected within the next two years".

The strategy also provides long-term commitments to raise annual school and college maintenance spending.

This will rise from £2.4 billion in 2025-26, to £2.9 billion by the end of the strategy period in 2034-35.

Boris Johnson announced the current school rebuilding programme (SRP) in 2020, planning to spend about £1 billion a year on 500 projects over a decade.

But the Covid pandemic and ensuing cost of living crisis resulted in early projects talking some time to get off the ground.


Boris Johnson

However, the programme has now ramped up with more projects breaking ground and with priority given to schools with dangerous RAAC. The number now approved stands at 518.

'Stop-start' funding lowered 'market confidence'

In its strategy document, the Treasury warned the "stop-start nature of funding for capital programmes over time lowered the market's confidence and did not provide long-term certainty to maximise investment in the technology, training and skills needed to support delivery of projects.

"The government committed to continuing the SRP [beyond those already announced by the Conservatives] at the earliest opportunity, recognising the urgent condition need it inherited in the school estate 15 years after the cancellation of the Building Schools for the Future programme."

It said the SRP provided a "stable pipeline of standardised projects delivering buildings that are net carbon zero in operation, increasing resilience to climate change and reducing carbon emissions, energy use and operating costs."

New construction frameworks and specs

The Treasury said the DfE was "procuring its next construction frameworks that will require contractors to deliver an even higher quality, better value and increased social value through requirements such as hiring apprentices to support the sector moving forward.

"Schools will be delivered to an updated output specification, building on what worked well. The programme delivers projects across England, providing learning environments that improve life chances for pupils ... and supporting local workforces and SME."

Reeves said infrastructure was "crucial to unlocking growth".

"Crumbling public buildings are a sign of the decay that has seeped into our everyday lives because of a total failure to plan and invest.

"We're not just fixing buildings – we're enhancing public services, improving lives and creating the conditions for sustainable economic growth in communities throughout the UK."

INVESTIGATION: EXAMS

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Exam boards consider 'action' over exam predictors

JACK DYSON
@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

Exam boards are to explore taking "action" over the "emerging issue" of social media influencers claiming they can predict exam questions, Schools Week can reveal.

It comes as a quarter of teachers say they have heard of pupils buying so-called "predicted" papers.

Much of this has exploded on social media, but teachers are now sharing "red flags" over certain advice to pupils, while one school has issued a list of YouTubers youngsters should steer clear of.

One TikTok influencer with almost 200,000 followers even mocked students who complained after he issued an incorrect prediction.

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) is now considering whether to take action or provide more advice to schools.

The body, made up of exam boards, has also asked leaders to "help raise awareness of the risks of predicted papers".

However, one influencer hit back, saying teachers who fail to prepare youngsters this way are "failing their students".

Schools Week investigates ...

Influencer 'prediction' backfires

A snap poll by Student Room of around 200 youngsters on Wednesday showed more than half had adjusted their revision after viewing social media prediction videos.

While the survey was self-selecting, it suggests an "increasing trend of the decentralisation of the revision process" away from schools, said Joe Woodcock of Student Room.

But Jenny Webb, director of English at the Carlton Academy Trust, said there is "no regulation" around this type of revision – pointing out "a teacher has to be vetted by a school".

Woodcock said "a lot" of the social media influencers "have teaching backgrounds and are very expert, but we have also seen this year a couple of people mis-prepare due to mispredictions".

Influencer Mr Everything English was at the centre of a social media storm over a GCSE literature prediction video he posted at the beginning of May. He told his 189,000-strong TikTok followers the video was later "trending No 1 on YouTube".

But on May 12, the influencer – a former assistant head – revealed he had been contacted by pupils saying: "You got your prediction wrong, Sir. Because of you, now I'm going to be working in McDonald's for the rest of my life."

We were unable to view Mr Everything English's video as it has been taken down (although now restored). He did not respond to our approaches.

But in a later video he claimed that "the first five minutes" of his prediction was correct and then branded his critics "set 50 students who don't know what the word prediction means".

'I'm going to be working in McDonald's for the rest of my life'

'Relying on guesswork'

However, Amy Forrester, director of behaviour at Cockermouth School in Cumbria, recalled how some of her pupils came out of the exam saying: "The predicted question wasn't right." Other teachers have reported similar.

In an update earlier this month, JCQ urged teachers to help it "make sure students know the limitations" of the material on social media.

Teachers also said a fake letter purporting to be from AQA that circulated online sparked concern among pupils as it claimed "all" of the board's English language paper 1 exams "will need to be retaken". It said this was due to a "miswording" in two of the questions.

Schools Week has also seen one TikTok page advertising "leaked" GCSE papers for £10. A post advertising a maths paper was viewed almost

Continued on next page

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14,000 times.

A JCQ spokesperson told Schools Week that claiming to predict the content of an exam relied on "guesswork".

"Even the people who write exam questions can't be certain which ones will be used and when.

"Our advice to students is that doing practice papers and revision are great ways to prepare for exams, but make sure your preparation is thorough. The best people who can help you do that are your teachers."

'You must make predictions for students'

But Dominic Salles, a YouTuber and former head of English who films his own exam predictions, said pupils "literally can't revise the whole curriculum".

"You must make predictions to give your students the best chance."

In a blog post, Salles said 68 per cent of his viewers "say they went up by at least one grade" from their mocks last year. This was based on an online poll Salles himself ran.

He added "departments which fail to prepare students in this way are failing their students – those marks are simply up for grabs, and exam grades are a zero-sum game."

However, he also noted one of his English literature predictions was that those studying Macbeth would be tested on guilt. But the "actual question was ambition".

While "thoughtless students" might "feel let down", many would have "managed to apply what I taught" to what came up in the exam, he said.

But Pepe Di'Iasio, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, warned the proliferation of predicted papers left children "at risk of relying on resources of uncertain quality ... and finding themselves unprepared for the questions in the real exam".

Exam boards are now investigating whether to take wider action.

JCQ said it would work with schools and colleges to take "a thorough look" at the issue and what action it might take.

The body would not divulge what that might be, but AQA has pursued copyright breaches and used injunctions to clamp down on exam paper cheats previously.

'Even those who write questions can't be certain which ones will be used'

'Not the shortcut pupils hoped'

An examiner report from AQA, written after last year's GCSE English literature exams and seen by Schools Week, said the "ubiquitous nature" of comments that were "not fully understood... illustrates the increasing use of social media for revision".

One example was pupils describing Lady Macbeth "as a proto-feminist or as a femme fatale without demonstrating understanding of these concepts".

In another report from the same year, AQA told pupils some of these resources "might not be the effective shortcut that you hoped... often, the comments they make and advice they give is misleading".

One marker, who asked to remain anonymous, said about 10 per cent of the papers they'd seen this year included "chremamorphism", a term mentioned in Mr Everything English videos.

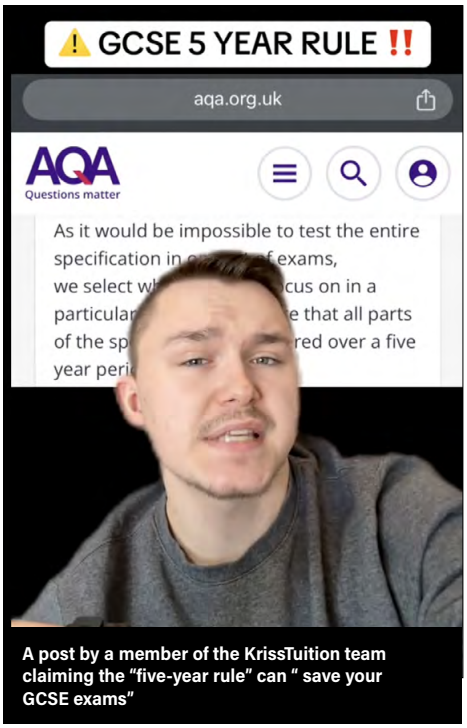
Some of the social media accounts also sell predicted papers.

Teacher Tapp figures show 27 per cent of 4,500 teachers had heard of pupils buying "predicted" papers or what they believed were leaked copies of upcoming exams.

KrissTuition sells biology, chemistry, physics, maths and English exam prediction papers for up to £2.99 each. Two of its bosses have TikTok accounts with more than 167,000 followers combined.

It claims some of its predicted papers last year "reached 60-70 per cent accuracy". Schools Week asked for evidence to back up this claim, but the company could not immediately provide it.


Pepe Di'Iasio



A post by a member of the KrissTuition team claiming the "five-year rule" can " save your GCSE exams"

INVESTIGATION: EXAMS

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‘We’ve figured out exactly what must, must, must come up this year’

> Our advice to students is that doing practice papers and revision are great ways to prepare for exams but make sure your preparation is thorough. The best people who can help you do that are your teachers.

‘Exam-saving rule’ is ‘not true’

In one TikTok post, published in March and viewed almost 600,000 times, it told those GCSE entrants that the so-called “five-year rule” could “save your exams”.

Before plugging a 10 per cent discount, it claimed pupils could “figure out what must be assessed in this year’s GCSEs” by looking “through the last four years’ worth of exams”.

“We’ve spent hundreds and hundreds of hours collectively… figuring out exactly what must, must, must come up this year. We wrote predicted exams based on those things.”

When asked about the five-year rule, AQA said it was “simply not possible” to predict what would come up in an exam.

Ofqual guidance, last updated in 2020, says boards “must test all the content set out in their specifications over a number of years”.

Krzysztof Machnik, KrissTuition’s founder, said references to the “five-year rule” were based on information from an AQA webpage that was “taken down… in April 2025”. Machnik sent us screenshots of the information.

He insisted KrissTuition’s approach was “aligned” with Ofqual’s guidance.

But the company would now introduce “clear disclaimers in all our materials to reinforce that these resources are intended only as supplements – not replacements – to revision”.

‘Predictions, not guarantees’

Primrose Kitten advertises its A-level and GCSE predicted papers on TikTok. Followed by almost 40,000 people, it sells the documents – which come with mark schemes and walk-through videos – for up to £30.

But its website stresses these were “predictions, not guarantees”, adding: “It’s vital to revise all your topics to ensure you’re fully prepared.”

A company spokesperson said it “explicitly and consistently” reminded pupils that it had “no knowledge” of what would appear in exams.

The papers were “simply one part of the broad and comprehensive revision toolkit we provide”.

Sarah Hannafin, head of policy at the school leaders’ union NAHT, noted that while it was “possible” to track areas that had appeared before, this had no bearing on whether it would appear in future papers.

Forrester stressed that youngsters were also “not able to think critically” when viewing content online. “A lot of [the influencers] will have vulnerable audience members in that sense.”

Trust’s ‘red flag’ checklist

Carlton Academy Trust, which runs nine Yorkshire schools, is sharing documents with pupils and parents outlining the “red flags” to look out for on social media.

An early draft puts “grade 9 vocabulary” among its red flags. It also warns against being told to memorise whole essays or chunks of essays and to write a specific number of sentences.

The head of English of a Midlands school told pupils in an assembly that some people flogging predictions “did not have their grades at the forefront of their minds – it’s clicks and quick wins”.

She hosted an online revision session the night before a GCSE exam to ensure pupils were not using social media to cram. The teacher also handed out a literature revision guide that listed “recommended YouTubers” and those to avoid.

Forrester also viewed a video with her class, breaking down “this is where it’s wrong and this is why it’s bad for advice”. She said secondaries would have to devise whole-school strategies to limit the spread of exam misinformation.

Fifty-eight per cent of teachers have had to correct a misconception picked up from social media more than once this year, according to a Teacher Tapp poll.

There are also concerns this is increasing anxiety over exams.

An ASCL survey showed 77 per cent of teachers reported seeing mental health issues related to assessment anxiety last year.

Hannafin said that pupils’ use of online predictions “highlights the pressure” they are under as they must navigate “so much content” – a process that could be “completely overwhelming”.

“The curriculum and assessment review is an opportunity to change this and ensure that the content in qualification specifications and the volume of exams is reduced.”


Sarah Hannafin

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NEWS: CLIMATE

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Pupils could lose 12 teaching days a year due to global heating

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS & ELLA JESSEL
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As many as 12 teaching days a year could be lost to global heating by the turn of the century, new research suggests.

A Met Office and University College London report analysed nearly 20,000 state school buildings to investigate how climate risks such as flooding and overheating could affect learning.

It comes after the government scrapped a grant scheme aimed at making school sites greener.

The report, published in a week when amber heat warnings have been issued in some parts of the UK, said some schools may already have one or two days a year during which indoor temperatures pass 35degC and learning becomes "very difficult".

But increased "extreme heat events" alongside "more subtle" increases in temperature could lead to the loss of more teaching time, such as school closures during heatwaves in July 2022.

"Without the implementation of any adaptation measures, students could potentially lose up to 12 days of learning per year on average, as a result of generally warmer temperatures and not just from extreme heat."

Newer schools more likely to overheat

The prediction is based on global surface temperatures rising about 4degC above pre-industrial levels by 2100.

Researchers calculated the number of days schools would exceed the 35degC threshold by looking at schools' location, the type of building and the local climate.

It revealed schools built from the 1960s onwards were more likely to overheat than older buildings because of better insulation and lower ceilings.

Schools in the south and east of England, as well as London, were at greatest risk.

Most secondary sites at risk of flooding

The DfE also released new figures from the Environment Agency (EA) on flooding, showing the proportion of state-funded schools at risk from surface water and river and sea flooding.

The report said many school buildings, playgrounds and access routes were at risk, with 59 per cent of secondary school sites and 39 per cent of buildings at a high risk.

According to EA definitions, "high risk" means a one in 30 chance of flooding in any given year.

More than.76 per cent of secondary school sites and 53 per cent of primaries are at "medium risk".

Figures on the government's risk protection arrangements – an alternative insurance scheme for schools – show 342 (2.7 per cent) of the 12,697 schools signed up have experienced floods since 2015-16, costing more than £34.6 million.

One estates specialist, who wished to remain anonymous, said some schools and trusts were likely to be anxious about the scope of insurance schemes to deal with damage caused by major weather events to old buildings.

Sweltering week for schools

As the report was published on Thursday, one secondary teacher told *Schools Week* how staff have suffered headaches and pupils have fallen asleep at their desks this week.

She said some colleagues, particularly in newer classrooms, logged indoor temperatures as high as 32degC, including readings of almost 30degC as early as 7.30am.

Rosie, who did not wish to give her surname, said her head was "doing his utmost", giving staff fans and buying "expensive portable air coolers, reflective window film and white window blinds" for the worst-hit classrooms.

But she said the measures were "not making enough of a difference" and the school "simply doesn't have the budget for anything more impactful".

She said staff reported headaches, nausea, dizziness and high blood pressure, while pupils were falling asleep with heat exhaustion during lessons.

'The climate emergency is here'

A Teacher Tapp poll carried out in March for the leaders' union ASCL found 55 per cent of teachers reported classrooms were too hot in summer.

"The climate emergency is here and our teachers, support staff and children are feeling the brunt of it," said Rosie.

Daniel Kebede, the general secretary of the National Education Union, said the report made for "grim reading".

"The government needs to act upon these findings and move further and faster to ensure that all schools are safe and comfortable places to learn."

Emma Harrison, a business leadership specialist at ASCL, said: "The thought of multiple weeks of education being lost each year to extreme heat events... should be cause for major concern."

There must be "greater support and investment from the government", particularly following the scrapping of funds such as the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS).

Steve Brace, the chief executive of the Geographical Association, said the report's findings on overheating, flooding and water scarcity "underline the importance of pupils studying these issues in the geography curriculum and being able to apply what they have learnt through positive action".

NEWS: CLIMATE

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Government ends school decarbonisation grants scheme

SHANE CHOWEN
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A government fund that has seen than tens of millions of pounds allocated to schools and academies to replace inefficient heating systems and reduce energy bills is being axed.

The Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS), launched in 2020, has been quietly scrapped after five years and more than £3.8 billion awarded to schools, colleges, local authorities and other public sector organisations.

Schools have used the fund to upgrade their estates by fitting air-source heat pumps, installing solar panels and improving insulation.

Salix, which administers the scheme for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ), confirmed that "government has taken the difficult decision to commit no further investment beyond currently awarded projects" following last week's spending review.

The fourth and final phase of the PSDS was awarded last month, allocating £940 million across the public sector, including £41.8 million to 36 academies across the country. Tens of millions

of pounds was also awarded to local authorities, to help with a range of projects including decarbonising LA-led schools.

Those projects are expected to run until the end of the 2027-28 financial year.

The PSDS aimed to cut emissions from public sector buildings by 75 per cent by 2037, using 2017 levels as the baseline.

A parallel initiative, the Public Sector Low Carbon Skills Fund (LCSF), which supported organisations to prepare bids and heat decarbonisation plans, was scrapped in May.

DESNZ said it would announce any plans for future years "in due course".

A department spokesperson added: "We will deliver £1 billion in current allocations of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme until 2028 and, through Great British Energy, have invested in new rooftop solar power and renewable schemes to lower energy bills for schools and hospitals across the UK.

"We want to build on this progress by incentivising the public sector to decarbonise, so they can reap the benefits in lower bills and emissions, sharing best practice across government and exploring the use of repayable finance, where appropriate."

Individual grants of as much as £5 million have been awarded to academy trusts and schools, with some receiving multiple allocations.

Harris Federation was awarded just over £5 million in the most recent funding for air source and water source heat pumps at five of its schools.

Together Learning Trust was awarded £4.97 million for projects to connect four schools to a centralised heating network, and installing air source heat pumps at three others.

It is unclear exactly how much funding has gone to helping decarbonise maintained schools. But Leeds City Council got £5 million to decarbonise a leisure centre, two nurseries, and two primary schools.

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Watchdog extends investigation into bid-rigging

The UK's competition watchdog has extended its investigation into construction companies suspected to have "illegally colluded to rig bids" on contracts for school repairs.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) this week said it was gathering further evidence, focusing on roofing contractors.

Last year the watchdog opened its investigation into suspected bid-rigging in the government's condition improvement fund (CIF), which provides cash for building maintenance to about 4,500 academies in small trusts, sixth-form colleges and voluntary-aided schools.

At the time the CMA said it had "reason to suspect that several companies providing roofing and construction services – including building contractors and technical advisers – illegally colluded to rig bids to secure contracts".

The government withdrew funding for "a number of projects" after identifying "serious irregularities" in their applications.

The CMA has already made surprise inspections at "several business premises" to gather physical and digital evidence.

Its original timetable scheduled its initial investigation to last from last December until May.

The investigation will now be "continuing... including further evidence-gathering, analysis and review of information gathered" until this December.

CIF money is awarded annually to schools in urgent need of repair every year and can lead to lucrative contracts. In the most recent round for 2025-26, £470 million was awarded to 789 projects at 656 educational establishments.

Full story here

Solve the SEND deficits now, warns committee

The end is "looming" for the short-term workaround that is keeping councils from bankruptcy because of their spiralling SEND deficits, MPs have warned, after the government's reforms were kicked further down the road.

The public accounts committee (PAC) has again urged the government to set out its plans to avoid a "financial cliff-edge for hundreds of councils" next year.

The government estimates overspending on high-needs could hit almost £4 billion a year by 2028.

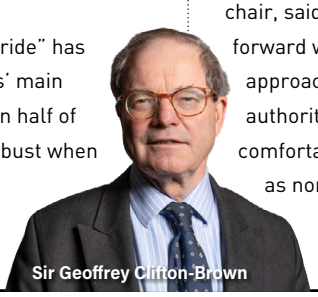
Since 2021, a "statutory override" has kept SEND deficits off councils' main balance sheets, with more than half of authorities saying they will go bust when the override ends next March.

The PAC recommended in January that the government set out its plans for the override by March. Ministers said they could not meet that deadline, setting themselves a new one of this summer.

But it was confirmed at last week's spending review the plans will not be fully set out until the autumn.

The committee noted that, "despite us calling before for a solution as a matter of urgency and by March 2025, one has yet to be brought forward".

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, the committee's chair, said "the lack of urgent action to come forward with a plan to address the fast-approaching cliff edge for under-pressure authorities would seem to suggest it is comfortable with the current state of affairs as normalised background noise."



Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown

Full story here

Special school pupils shun free school meals

The government has been urged to investigate free school meal uptake in special schools after new research suggests a quarter of children are missing out.

"Unmet dietary and eating needs" mean that one in four pupils in special schools eligible for a free meal are not taking it up, according to an Adapt-Ed study led by the University of Hertfordshire.

The study, conducted with the University of Essex and the charity School Food Matters, also found that one in five infants in special schools are also not accessing their free school meal, compared with one in eight in mainstream schools.

The report calls for new "evidence-based guidance" on how to meet the eating requirements of children with special needs.

It said that children with SEND, especially those with restrictive diets, often relied on access to familiar or "safe" foods.

"The way food is presented and how new foods are introduced are also very important and can make a big difference," it said.

The government has expanded free school meals to all universal credit households from this September. But the Adapt-Ed report argues that special schools have little guidance on food policy such as how to make reasonable adjustments or meet school food standards.

Full story here

NEWS: INCLUSION

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Call for school inclusion audits and national framework

ELLA JESSEL
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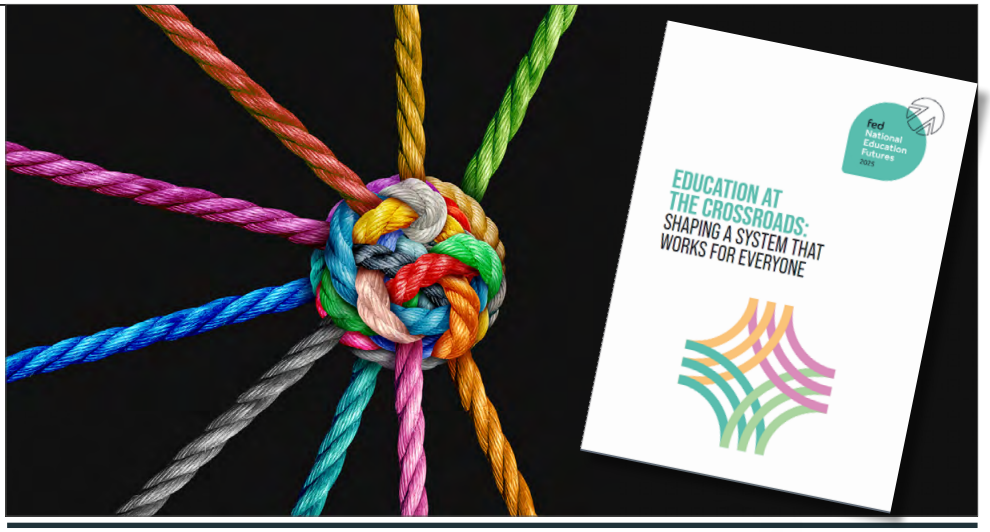
EXCLUSIVE

Schools should produce inclusion audits and follow "enforceable" national inclusivity standards, suggests a new report that sets out a blueprint for "shaping a system that works for everyone".

The Foundation of Education Development (FED), which advocates for a long-term approach to education policy, said a national inclusion framework would help set "consistent and enforceable" expectations for inclusive practice.

Despite a national focus on boosting inclusion, there was no "shared statutory definition" of what it meant, it said.

Carl Ward, the foundation's chair, said the blueprint emerged after a year-long consultation with thousands of sector leaders. Schools and councils were already trialling some aspects.



'We need a national commitment on what inclusion is'

How would inclusion standards work?

A framework would define "nationally agreed inclusion standards" across a range of areas, including admissions, attendance, curriculum, and assessment, FED said. The standards would also be built into EHCPs, transition plans, inspections and leadership qualifications.

Under the proposal, all schools and colleges would produce an inclusion audit that would form part of their annual improvement plans. But extra funding would be needed to train inclusion teams to meet standards.

"What became very clear from the vast majority of stakeholders is that there was a need for a national commitment to all learners on what inclusion is, how it works in the system and how it can operate," said Ward, who described the current system as "broken".

FED wants the government to set up a national taskforce to deliver the framework, and wants "enforceable expectations". It proposes the reform of accountability metrics such as Progress 8 to "reflect inclusive outcomes".

Ward said the taskforce would decide how enforceability would work, but insisted there needed to be accountability for schools and all educational establishments, local authorities and metro mayor regions.

The framework could help improve a "fragmented and overstretched" system of support. The report said at present families were often forced to relocate just to access educational support.

Meanwhile, attainment-focused accountability systems were driving exclusionary behaviours such as "off-rolling" – the removal of pupils from school rolls to protect results – which disproportionately affected disadvantaged children or those with SEND.

Essex council, which introduced its own inclusion framework in 2021, said support included inclusion reviews, training and access to professionals.

The approach "empowers schools to implement inclusive, sustainable early intervention", and enabled "creative solutions to be developed", said Tony Ball, Essex's member for education excellence.

What are the hurdles?

Karen Burns, the chief executive of the Victorious Academies Trust in Greater Manchester, said a national framework had "real potential" to bring "greater clarity and equity" across the system.

But it would need planning and investment, she said.

Claire Dorer, the chief executive of the National Association of Special Schools (NASS), said that framework "without a strong mechanism for enforcement and accountability likely offers no additional value".

Frameworks also had the "potential danger" to reduce some people's engagement to the level of compliance.

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the school leaders' union NAHT, welcomed the plans. "Further improving inclusion across schools and wider society requires not just good intentions, but tangible commitment through cross-departmental government support and increased and sustained investment, as well as partnership-working across and between services."

Other proposals

FED also said teachers should receive mandatory training in inclusive pedagogy and curriculum reforms to include more diverse histories and languages, pointing out that schools still failed to reflect the communities they served. It called for a future education workforce that was more "adaptable, inclusive and sustainable" and proposed a national strategy that made education more appealing, prioritised professional development and increased flexibility in the profession.

The study also highlighted the need for a more "collaborative and coherent" system across academy trusts, schools and education partnerships, urging the government to embed collaboration as "core infrastructure".


Carl Ward


Claire Dorer

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Trust says cost-cutter call to court schools is 'misuse of funds'

JACK DYSON
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EXCLUSIVE

Government cost-cutters have urged one of England's biggest trusts to rethink its growth strategy and "proactively" search for schools to add to its ranks.

But the Elliot Foundation Academies Trust (TEFAT) says that "using public money" to court schools is "a misuse of funds".

The trust recently took the rare step of publishing its school resource management adviser (SRMA) report.

SRMAs – normally school business leaders – started visiting schools in 2018 as part of a money-saving drive under Lord Agnew, the then-academies minister.

TEFAT was visited after posting in-year deficits in 2022 and 2023, with

Hugh Greenway, its chief executive, attributing the deficits to unfunded pay rises and energy price hikes.

However, after registering a surplus last year and forecasting another this year, the adviser said creating the normal list of costed recommendations to help the trust save money was not his "main priority".

Instead he suggested Elliot should review its "organisational decision to not proactively approach schools or smaller trusts to instigate the conversation about joining".

The report said the trust only responded to requests and did not want "to be seen to be pressuring schools to join them".

"This ensures that schools are coming to them for the right reasons and that the values of the potential new school will be better aligned."

But the adviser argued the MAT – which runs 36 academies – should regard itself as a "strong" chain with "much to offer". It "could have a significantly positive impact on other vulnerable children's life outcomes".

The report, dated September 2024 to March 2025, recommended that "TEFAT consider identifying schools that fit its values and delivery model and become more proactive in looking to initiate those conversations".

"Equally the [Department for Education] should regard [the trust] as a strong partner to have in helping find solutions for schools that may be struggling for financial, educational or other reasons."

Greenway said he published the report online for transparency, pointing to the requirement for openness outlined in the Nolan principles.

However, he has knocked back the recommendation to start proactively approaching schools.

"Anyone who tells you they have all the answers in education is either lying to you or selling you something. Change is complex, messy and takes time," he said.

Describing the trust's growth as "organic", he added: "Using public money to market one solution over another is a misuse of public funds – we don't put up big banners, we don't do sales pitches, we don't have brochures."

The process of academy trusts taking over schools has been criticised in the past.

In 2022 Baroness Barran, a former academies minister, accepted that more "transparency" was needed in government decision-making over academisation and the transfers of schools into new trusts.

The following year *Schools Week* analysis showed just one in 10 regional director meetings – which rule over trust growth plans – had representations from the public. The findings backed up concerns important academy decisions were determined with little input from parents.

There have also been concerns about "beauty parades" in which several trusts pitch to schools looking for new guardians.

"If you go and promote to a school, they're going to be sceptical," Greenway said. "We wait to be asked, either by the school or the DfE."

Sam Henson, the deputy chief executive of the National Governance Association, said not all big trusts found growth to be the panacea it had sometimes promised to be and that not all small chains found their size "holds them back".

Adopting a "deliberately non-assertive approach to growth" could be a "strategic decision – not a lack of ambition – grounded in a belief that growth should be organic and driven by relationships and readiness, rather than imposed or pursued under pressure".

However, Greenway has previously said primary-only trusts – such as his – need at least 10,000 pupils to be "sustainable". As of August last year, it educated more than 13,000 pupils.

Elsewhere, the SRMA report recommended the trust reduce money spent on administrative supplies and use the government's free teacher vacancy website more.

Latest government figures, obtained through freedom of information, show SRMAs identified £964,000 of "three-year cumulative savings opportunities" per school in 2023-24.

But the government only keeps track of any savings made within the first six months of visits, which are a fraction of the amounts identified.


Hugh Greenway


Baroness Barran


Sam Henson

NEWS: BEHAVIOUR

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Trust legal challenge over child in isolation for half a year

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
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'Children sat in enforced silence for six hours a day'

Pupils who spent up to half a year in isolation rooms are challenging a trust's use of a behaviour policy that they claim failed to consider the impact on their wellbeing.

But lawyers for the GORSE Academies Trust have defended its "positive discipline" policy, and insist the use of isolation rooms has helped to improve the behaviour of the pupils now challenging the practice in court.

The High Court in Leeds is considering a judicial review against the "repeated isolation and suspensions" of three pupils at John Smeaton Academy when they were aged between 12 and 14.

The pupils' legal team said isolation involved sitting "in a three-sided booth in a dedicated 'isolation' room in enforced silence for six hours a day without being allowed to interact with or speak to peers, including at breaks and lunch time, and without active or meaningful teaching".

All three, who have been given different names to protect their identities, have "special educational or additional needs affecting their behaviour", a skeleton argument filed by their lawyers claimed. The trust disputes this for one of the pupils.

Sir John Townsley, the chief executive of GORSE, was an early adopter of isolation rooms and, as reported by Education Uncovered last week, spoke openly about its use as long ago as 2008.

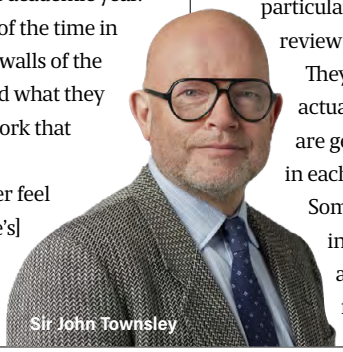
Townsley, then head of Morley High School, told The TES that "very few pupils (less than 3 per cent) spend any time in isolation".

Lawyers for the children said data obtained from GORSE, which runs John Smeaton, showed 187 pupils – 31 per cent of those at the school – served an "isolation sanction" in 2023-24.

One pupil, known as Lydia, spent 83 days in isolation and 14 days suspended in 2023-24, equating to more than half of the academic year.

Her lawyers said that for most of the time in isolation, she "just stare[d] at the walls of the booth" and "[couldn't] understand what they [were] asking [her] to do in the work that [was] given".

The repeated isolation made her feel "really stressed" and "[w]hen [she's] stressed it makes [her] angry, and then [she does] things that get [her] warnings, which gets more Iso[lation]".


Sir John Townsley

Luke, who has "significant traits of autism spectrum disorder", was either isolated or suspended for 39 per cent of the academic year.

Lawyers said he found it "impossible to learn in isolation and frequently could not cope with the strict rules and ended up either breaking them or walking out, which led to further isolation or suspension".

Elise spent 28 days in isolation in the 2023-24 school year, and "seldom completed the work...as she struggled to understand it".

Lawyers argued there was "no evidence" the school considered the "negative impact of repeated isolation" on the claimants, their education, self-esteem and socialisation.

They also alleged the school failed to consider whether the isolation was proportionate.

But in their own skeleton argument, GORSE's legal team said assessing proportionality was "exactly the exercise carried out by its staff, particularly the senior staff members who review isolation decisions".

They also claimed children were "not actually isolated – on any one day there are generally around ten pupils working in each of the two isolation rooms".

Some behaviour that led to isolation included physically assaulting another pupil, absconding from lessons and "screaming at other students".

The legal team, which includes high-profile defamation specialist lawyers Carter Ruck, said each instance was a disciplinary response by staff to a discrete instance of poor behaviour by a pupil.

John Smeaton, previously part of United Learning, was rated 'inadequate' in 2019. It joined GORSE in 2021. Last year, it was rated 'good' across the board.

The trust's lawyers said its "positive discipline" policy was "at the heart of its success over the course of the last two decades".

It is not the first time that isolation practices, which allow schools to "remove disruptive pupils" while avoiding suspension or exclusion, have been challenged.

A judicial review was threatened against the Outwood Grange Academies Trust in 2019, then run by Ofsted chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver, over the legality of using isolation rooms for long periods.

The trust amended its behaviour policy amid the challenge to "better support pupils".

At John Smeaton, lawyers said there had been a "striking drop" of about two-thirds in Lydia and Luke's rates of isolation after legal action was launched.

But GORSE's lawyers said this improvement "reflects the support" put in place and showed "discipline policies are delivering results".

A judgment is yet to be handed down.

INTERVIEW: HONOURS

‘I’m a champion for teachers’: How Mr P got his MBE

ELLA JESSEL
@SCHOOLSWEEK

EXCLUSIVE

Lee Parkinson – AKA Mr P

Among the usual rollcall of academy chief executives, union bosses and headteachers in the King’s birthday honours last week was a primary teacher from Manchester.

While his name may be unfamiliar to senior leaders, Lee Parkinson – AKA Mr P – is something of a minor celebrity among primary teachers, with a Teacher Tapp poll last month naming him the UK’s top "education influencer”.

Mr P, awarded an MBE for services to education, has built a huge online following by posting videos on the frustrations and hilarity of classroom life.

He has nearly half a million Facebook followers, but is also a hit on Instagram (272,000 followers) and Tiktok (214,000). A podcast he runs with his teaching assistant brother (the other Mr P), has amassed 7,000,000 listens.

The content is a mix of observational humour and teaching in-jokes. In one post, titled “What you see in every primary singing assembly”, Parkinson does impressions of the children and teachers who take part in productions.

But his popularity also stems from his outspoken views on education policy, where he fiercely fights the corner of teachers and support staff.

‘Influencer label lets people put you on a pedestal only to knock you off’

From triplets to tech

Parkinson found it difficult to keep his MBE secret. “When I finally shared the news it was amazing, I had a lump in my throat reading all the support,” he says.

Born and bred in Manchester, would-be actor Parkinson ended up training as a primary school teacher, before moving to his first (and only) job at Davyhulme Primary.

He started training other teachers in 2010 when he found out his wife was having triplets and he realised he might need to move into a leadership role.

At his head’s suggestion he began covering PPA and teaching ICT. He persuaded the school to get iPads for pupils and started a school blog on how to use tech tools across the curriculum.

Some of the posts resonated with other teachers, who Parkinson says began asking him for step-to-step guides.

He then launched his teaching blog and it “all went from there really”.

Parkinson, who recently turned 40, also runs his own training company providing courses to help schools improve their use of tech. He is also the co-founder of teaching AI tool Teachmate.

‘Polarising’ social media

Much of his content focuses on the joy and absurdity of being a teacher. His podcast soared in popularity during the pandemic, with episodes devoted to the impossibility of trying to get primary children prone to licking walls, and each other, to socially distance.

With between 100,000 to 1,000,000 followers Parkinson could be classed as a “macro-tier influencer”.

But he says the “influencer” label allows people to “put you on a pedestal only to knock you off”, and feels there is “more substance” to his work.

He does make some money from his social media accounts, but says he turns down most brands and only does ads for tools he would use himself. He now teaches part-time.

“Whatever I post or share online, I always ask if it is adding value to teachers, whether giving them a laugh or helping them out.”

Yet he admits he struggles with the “polarising effect” of social media, citing it as a reason he would never make content aimed at schoolchildren.

“I'm aware of the detrimental impact it can have. The emotion that keeps you on social media longest is anger.”

Champion for teachers

He is an outspoken critic of Ofsted, which he recently called a “cult”, and regularly posts videos dissecting education news. During the pandemic, he made national headlines for his “sweary rant” about Boris Johnson.

“Sometimes people ask me how I get away with it,” he admits. But he is determined to speak out about the impacts of “years of underfunding”.

He is hopeful that Labour will improve the system, and hopes to have education secretary Bridget Phillipson back on his podcast for a second time soon.

Asked which aspect of his work he is most proud of, he says it is his serving as a “real advocate for teachers” in a system inn which they are consistently undervalued.

“I think it's maybe down to being a champion for teachers. It’s not just teachers, it's all staff in schools, who are constantly going above and beyond in, let’s be fair, a bit of a broken system.”

NEWS

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DfE faces big bill as secret settlement ends academy saga

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
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EXCLUSIVE

'It's ridiculous that millions have gone into pursuing these people'

Ministers face writing off a sizeable chunk of a £2.8 million debt owed by a failed academy trust after a four-year legal battle ended in secret settlement deals.

In 2021, the SchoolsCompany Trust launched legal action with backing from the Department for Education to recoup £2.8 million in alleged "losses" from six former trustees.

The chain gave up its three Devon alternative provision schools and mainstream Kent secondary school in 2018 amid allegations of financial mismanagement.

But the list of defendants narrowed over time, and the trust has now settled with Elias Achilleos, its former chief executive, his company SchoolsCompany Limited and Everton Wilson, the trust's former finance director.

However, under confidentiality agreements thrashed out behind closed doors at the High Court on Monday, the deals will not be disclosed to the court and the former trustees are banned from discussing them.

The settlements raise the prospect the DfE will recoup only a fraction of the £2.8 million it is owed by the trust, despite bankrolling the case.

Accounts for SchoolsCompany Trust, whose sole function now is to oversee the legal action, show it received about £1.6 million from the government between 2020 and 2023.

The total spend is likely to be much higher, given that a number of High Court hearings have taken place over the past 18 months, with the trust forced to resubmit its claims last year.

Andy Jolley, an academy transparency campaigner, said it was a "true scandal".

He questioned the behaviour of the directors, and said it was "ridiculous that millions have gone into pursuing these people".

He said the case highlighted how much those accused of wrongdoing in the early academy expansion days could "could away with" under a "lax regulation regime".

The settlements were reached during a chaotic day in which lawyers had been due to discuss a settlement reached last year with Patrick Eames, another former trustee.

Judge Master Dagnall had ordered the trust to reveal to the remaining defendants the value of that settlement. Its confidentiality would have been waived had it been discussed in open court this week.

However, lawyers for the trust asked for repeated adjournments while they negotiated with Achilleos, who has represented himself, and Wilson's lawyer John Meredith-Hardy.

Court documents also reveal how the trust was ordered last year to submit an updated set of claims against the defendants, following criticism of its "convoluted" allegations.

Business trips around the world, thousands spent on consultants, holiday cottages, luxury hotels and a £380 meal in an upmarket steak house were among 120 "losses" set out in the trust's original claim, which ran to 83 pages.

A defence filed on behalf of Eames before he reached a settlement said the trust's claim was "exceptionally long, convoluted and, at times, difficult to understand".

Master Dagnall ordered the trust to amend the claim document, including a "summary of no more than four pages" setting out the "basis for the claim for the £2,793,000".

He also told the trust to be clearer about how it was calculating individual losses and which defendant each allegation related to. The updated document has not been made available by the court.

Since giving up its schools in 2018, the SchoolsCompany Trust has existed as a shell charity to preside over the legal battle. The debt of £2.8 million remains on its balance sheet.

The DfE has been handing the trust money annually in amounts ranging from £220,000 to £604,000, both to fund the legal battle and to keep it functioning.

It is expected to be wound up once the case is fully settled.

Labour ministers may now face writing off much of the trust's debt, seven years after the schools were removed and after the public purse potentially spent millions on legal fees.

Leora Cruddas, the chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, said only those involved in the case had seen all the evidence. "But in principle it is crucial for the sector that we adhere to the highest standards in governance and, on the rare occasions where that falls short, it should be fully investigated.

"Over the years the academy trust handbook has been strengthened to encourage stronger financial controls and prevent conflicts of interests, protecting both public funds, and trustees and employees."


Andy Jolley


Leora Cruddas

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Movers & Shakers

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

Donna Wiggett

General secretary, Association of Educational Psychologists

Start date: September
Current role: Senior educational psychologist, Education Authority Northern Ireland
Interesting fact: Donna is a 7th Kup grade in taekwondo (yellow with green stripe belt) and has completed more than 50 park runs. She turned 50 this year and is determined to do 50 great things (including becoming general secretary!).

Anne Peck

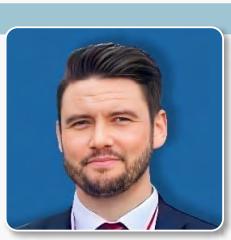
Education director for primary and early years, HFL Education
Start date: September

Start date: September
Current role: Head of primary curriculum, HFL Education
Interesting fact: Since lockdown Anne has run every day. She is an active volunteer in her community and has been part of Girlguiding for more than 40 years.

Aimee Tinkler

Director of education, Odyssey Collaborative Trust

Start date: September
Former role: Head of education, Diocese of Coventry MAT
Interesting fact: Aimee is president and a founding member of the Chartered College of Teaching. She also takes her family to the Inner Hebrides each year for two weeks to go cold-water surfing.



Craig Nicholson

Chief executive, Extol Academy Trust
Start date: September

Start date: September
Current role: Regional education director, Lift Schools
Interesting fact: Craig was a football coach at Middlesbrough FC and across the US before he became a teacher. He holds the UEFA "A" licence.

Tarn set to retire from Delta

FEATURED

Sir Paul Tarn is retiring after nine years at the helm of the Delta Academies Trust.

Tarn, who was knighted last week, will continue working voluntarily for the Education Exchange project, a network of schools that share best practice.

Delta said it had known of Tarn's intention to retire "for some time" and has worked with him on a "comprehensive succession plan".

Steve Hodsman, the trust's chair, said the chain owed "a huge debt of gratitude" to its departing boss.

"When Paul became CEO in 2016, Delta was not the strong, successful academy trust it is today.

"It has been his drive, hard work and ambition that has transformed Delta into an organisation that is both academically strong and financially secure, trusted to lead more than 50 schools."

Tarn took over Delta, then the School Partnership Trust Academies, in 2016.

A month later Sir Michael Wilshaw, the Ofsted chief, published a scathing letter naming and shaming trusts for "serious weaknesses that were contributing to poor progress and outcomes for too many pupils".

Tarn previously recalled how the MAT "had schools in special measures, lots of RI schools and the finance was absolutely broken" when he stepped in, calling it a "complete and utter mess".

It also had a "projected £8.6 million in-year deficit in 2016–17".

Hodsman added: "Tens of thousands of children and young people, many of them in disadvantaged communities across the north of England, have received a world-class education and the chance to take successful next steps in their education, training or employment thanks to his work,"

The announcement of his replacement "will be made in due course".

Last week, *Schools Week* revealed how the trust had turned around one of the country's "most broken schools" – which three other trusts walked away from – to 'good'.

Delta now runs 57 schools, with only Reach2Academy and United Learning Trust running more, although a planned merger leaves it set to move up to number two.

But it has faced criticism, with former staff alleging in 2019 that children were shouted and screamed at during "flattening the grass" assemblies.

The trust denied it had such a policy, but emails showed senior leaders arranging support for the controversial practice.

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

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Feature

CHAMINDA JAYANETTI | @SCHOOLSWEEK

'I was a real fanboy, but the school had lost its way'

Once a shining beacon for 'progressive' education philosophy, School 21 was more recently cited as an example of the approach's failure. But headteacher Moray Dickson tells Schools Week how he restored the shine by adding pragmatism to principles

I came to School 21 for a reason," says Moray Dickson. "It had lost its way. [But] that doesn't mean its founding values and principles were ridiculous at all."

The free school was founded in 2012 by Peter Hyman, Sir Keir Starmer's former education adviser, and Oli de Botton, who took up the role advising the prime minister in April.

In an education reform era dominated by traditionalist approaches, the all-through school broke the mould with its progressive values.

But after the early boost of a 2014 'outstanding' rating, things began to go awry.

Staff turnover rose to 25 per cent. There were five headteachers in the six years from 2017 to 2023. That year, Ofsted delivered what was seized upon as a 'progressive' education bubble-bursting 'requires improvement' verdict.

Curriculum content was "inconsistent", leaving pupils with "gaps in their knowledge". Secondary lessons were "too often disrupted by poor behaviour".

The headline of a [ITALS] Spectator newspaper piece on de Botton's appointment read: "Starmer's skills adviser founded failing school".

Dickson joined as deputy head around six months before the critical Ofsted inspection. He took over as head six months after it.

Two years on, the school was this week rated 'good' in all areas. Now, its curriculum is "ambitious". Secondary pupils "typically achieve well". They "work hard and behave well".

Dickson speaks at length about what went wrong, and how it was fixed.

What drove the decline?

"There was a real disconnect between School 21 and its community," he says, looking back to when he joined. "I think the idea [was] that the founders of the school had got to a stage where results were starting to falter and things were getting difficult, and [the community's] perception is that they then left."

The 2014 inspection came just two years after opening when there were only a couple of hundred students.

"At that scale, it was probably easier to do," he said. But after, the school grew fast. Dickson says there was a reluctance from previous leaders to introduce centralised systems, policies and curriculums.

Instead, a quasi-federal structure developed, with each phase of the school effectively doing what it wanted. For instance, each had their own senior leadership team.

"They definitely weren't harmonious and synchronised in terms of their overall vision of

Feature: School 21

the school."

Hyman was founding head of School 21 until 2018, when he and Liz Robinson set up Big Education Trust, which now runs it. De Botton took over from Hyman, who left the trust completely in 2022, with Robinson becoming CEO.

Dickson joined that September. He had come from Voice 21 – the charity founded by the trust to promote oracy, the teaching of speaking skills.

"I was a real fanboy, if you like," Dickson says. "But when I came for the interview, I was just like, 'oh my goodness, this place has lost its way'."

Behaviour at secondary school was "really bad. There was a huge amount of lost learning in class. Teachers were at times frightened and they were not happy in their jobs. There were fights. And as a result of that, the expectations for behaviour were very low."

Suspension rates were "extremely low", and there were no permanent exclusions.

Ofsted's 2023 report found the school behaviour policy was "not applied consistently by staff" meaning "some pupils do not behave as well as they should".

Dickson also adds that "outcomes for students were not good enough, and that was based on lack of a cohesive curriculum, lack of high expectations, and then how the behaviour fed into that as well."

Turnaround's behaviour focus

"Where we were at as a school at that time, I made that call that it was going to be quite a top down [response]," Dickson says on his approach to the turnaround. "We had to tighten things up significantly."

Not everyone agreed. Some leaders left, others joined.

"Securing that leadership team who really bought into my vision for the school was really important," he adds. "And then from there, we set about things in a systematic fashion."

The priority was behaviour. School 21's founding vision was based on a "relational" approach to school discipline, based on restorative practices rather than strictness. But this was manifesting in a way that meant standards were not being properly enforced.

"I've met a few MAT leaders and school leaders who have said to me, 'Moray, you need silence in the corridors and you need a regimented approach, you're in east London'. And there are certain schools in which that has worked."

But he wanted to maintain School 21's vision.

'There's no reason to scream, shout and take away their fun and liberty'

School report

Ofsted
raising standards
improving lives

Inspection of School 21

Pitchford Street, Stratford E15 4RZ

Inspection dates:	29 and 30 April 2025
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

"My firm belief is we still are very much a relational school, and relationships are everything to us, but there was just a lack of cohesion. There was a lack of a system. And there was a lack of structures which maximised learning time, minimised disruption, and actually dealt with significant behaviour issues that were leading to unsafe behaviour."

Dickson called his approach "sustainable improvement".

First, the school's new leadership team consulted secondary students, parents and staff about what behaviour expectations should be in place. This led to expectations around four principles: be ready, be productive, be respectful and be safe. These now run across all phases.

And if expectations aren't met?

"We firmly agree that we are a relational school, and we don't believe in an escalation of sanctions as such. I don't believe in kids being in isolation and things like that.

"That said, if students have had chances and are still disrupting learning, then we need to make sure that the classroom is a calm learning environment."

Misbehaving secondary school students may be removed from the classroom. If that happens, the teacher has a "restorative conversation" at the end of the school day.

"They don't have a detention, they go back and they have a talk about what happened. Sometimes the teacher learns something about what triggered the child. It's a restorative conversation, it's not a punishment."

'We do suspend pupils'

The school introduced systems for reporting discriminatory language and bullying. But the setting and enforcing of expectations that had previously gone unenforced did lead to an early spike in classroom removals and suspensions.

"We do sometimes suspend students if they've been fighting, and we also internally exclude students if there's any sort of discriminatory language. There's an automatic one-day suspension, which includes some education

Feature: School 21

work around that, and then hopefully some restorative work around that."

Dickson says that once the new behavioural expectations became clear, those spikes tailed off and returned to normal. "Within a term, we had classrooms that were much quieter, much more productive learning spaces, and we had corridors that were calm."

Five pupils were also permanently excluded in the last two academic years. All the exclusions related to things that happened outside school, and each time after trying short-term placements elsewhere, Dickson adds.

"It's something that I think very, very deeply about and do my best to avoid. The only time I would permanently exclude a student is if I felt that them being back in School 21 would be a risk to the other students."

The approach is described as clear rules and enforcement, but without the "screaming and shouting" of some other high-profile cases.

"There's absolutely no reason to scream and shout [at students] and to take away their fun and liberty, because there's not enough joy in students' and children's lives these days, so I want them to be happy at school."

Central curriculum 'disbelief'

Aside from behaviour, the other challenge facing the school was its teaching. Ofsted's 2023 report identified weaknesses in the secondary curriculum. Teachers did not routinely check pupils' understanding, leading to gaps in pupils' knowledge.

"There was no centralised curriculum to speak of," Dickson says. "There was a disbelief that things should be done centrally."

Teachers have been given space to "think deeply" about their subjects under a curriculum improvement drive.

"We talk about the head, the heart and the hand," adds Dickson. "That's a real staple of School 21. So in each subject, how can each curriculum really look to develop the head, which is more the academic side, the heart, which is about our values, our moral compass, and in our hand, which is about the application of learning, but also about the creation of beautiful things, and that can be in maths as well as art."

It resulted in a centralised common planning document with full subject curriculums including progression maps, medium-term plans and assessments.

"Assessment had been something like a bad word at School 21 previously. But if we're not checking how children are progressing, how we're giving them feedback in terms of how they can know more and remember more, how they can develop their skills?"

'We don't have to do it the same as everyone else'

The school has also developed continuing department reviews, featuring lesson visits, interviews with teachers, feedback from students and monitoring of outcomes.

But there's still work to do. The new Ofsted report notes "some variability across the school in the way that the ambitious curriculum is implemented". The "preferred approach to teaching is not utilised consistently well across all phases and subjects".

Dickson adds: "We know that some of our subjects are further along that journey in terms of the implementation of their curriculum.

"There wasn't an assessment and feedback policy to speak of [before]. We've got that now. We've got the framework. Everyone likes it, Ofsted liked it. It's going to work."

Taking hands off

The school's leadership will continue to focus on the curriculum into the next school year, but by increasingly taking a hands-off approach.

The school is looking to use its oracy work to systematically build students' vocabulary in certain subjects, while attention is also being paid to closing the reading gap with the bottom 20 percent of readers.

Staff turnover has also plunged from a high of 25 per cent to just five now.

In terms of exam results, the school has mostly caught up with the national average too, but not the local average. Its sixth form still trails results-wise both locally and nationally.

"That's a significant improvement in one [exam] round at key stage 2 and key stage 4," Dickson says, adding that key stage 5 is "our next big thing next year".

In the past, "there was not an endeavour for strong academic outcomes" at School 21, he adds.

"I really want students to come here and achieve academically well. What I don't want to go down the route of, there are certain schools in Newham that are very strong on their academic outcomes – some parents have labelled them exam factories, for example. Now that's never going to be School 21."

Dickson gives the example of performing arts, a subject area that some cash-strapped or results-focused schools eschew, but which remains a big focus of School 21.

"We don't narrow. And as a result of that, we might never compete with those top, top schools in terms of the top end of academic results. I want to be above national [averages]. I want to be competing with those other schools.

"But I also want students to be leaving School 21 with a real sense of self, of how they can make a difference in the world and their communities."

He adds the Ofsted report is a "stepping point along the journey but it gives me a bit of vindication to say, look, we don't have to do it the same as everyone else."

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Curriculum Conversation

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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MARK ENSER
Former national geography lead, Ofsted

Geography needs convergence - but without the earthquakes

The current curriculum model is too limited in its scope to help young people meet the challenges of the future, writes Mark Enser, but radical reform is not what it needs

Geography seeks to understand why the world is the way it is, and uses this knowledge to consider different ways of thinking about the future we want to create. For obvious reasons, this makes the subject extraordinarily important today. But what – if anything – should the curriculum review do to improve it?

Its breadth and powerful potential are also geography's greatest challenges. It is all too easy to distort its curriculum to meet personal views of what pupils need to know – and more worryingly, what they should think – about the world.

But if geography becomes little more than an attempt to craft the model citizen, then the subject itself becomes lost. This is something that the Francis review must be very cautious of.

Despite the proclamations of various futurologists, disruptors and hucksters, we don't know what the future will hold or exactly what challenges the next generation will face.

The power of geography comes from the flexibility of its knowledge. By studying a broad range of subdomains, pupils should be left with an awareness of different processes that shape the planet.

However, studying different aspects of geography discretely also creates limitations, especially when coming to consider those problems that cut across them, such as the climate emergency.

The current geography curriculum encourages this approach of studying parts of the subject in isolation. This is due to the way the content is presented and a lack of detail on what should actually be studied.

For example, in key stage 3 pupils should "understand, through the use of detailed place-based exemplars at a variety of scales, the key processes in" physical geography (e.g. weather and climate, including the change in climate from the Ice Age to the present) and human geography (e.g. population, urbanisation, international development and the use of natural resources).

But beyond some very broad points in the 'purpose of study and aims' section of the curriculum, there is no detail given about *what* pupils should learn about these topics, or to what end.

This leads to schools and publishers creating schemes of work that attempt to tackle each of these named topics in turn, with the knowledge learned in each topic sitting in a silo.

> "This subject's power is in its flexibility

This can make it very difficult to see how geography is helping to prepare pupils to meet future challenges, which invariably leads to calls for radical reform.

This is not what the subject needs. Instead, it needs more help and support for teachers and other curriculum makers to see past the list of disparate topics so that they can make the future-facing power of geography more explicit.

For example, there is a consistent flow of urgent calls for schools to do more to teach pupils about the causes and impacts of climate change, but the list of topics presented in the national curriculum for geography should already be doing this.

Knowledge of plate tectonics, rocks and weathering is necessary to understand the role of the slow carbon cycle in the Earth's climate. Pupils need to know about coastal processes to understand why some areas are especially vulnerable to climate change.

Meanwhile, studying urbanisation can help pupils to understand how cities create opportunities for more sustainable living as well as the challenges that a changing climate will create for them.

The same is true of other problems people are likely to face in the future. How can resources be managed as populations increase? How can barriers to development be removed to create a more equitable world? To what extent should people seek to manage natural processes?

These are all questions that a knowledge of geography should leave us being able to answer.

Where the Francis review could be most useful is in helping to define the end points of the geography curriculum at each phase and being more explicit in what we expect pupils to be capable of as a result of their geography education.

That's all that's really missing to release the powerful potential of the subject and create a generation that is ready to tackle the future – whatever the world throws at them.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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PETER HYMAN
Co-founder,
Voice 21 and School 21

Voice 21 at 10: Oracy must define education's next decade

Oracy education has taken off, writes Peter Hyman. Now the prime minister must make sure it lands in every school

A teenager who hates putting pen to paper holding an audience in the palm of her hand.

A Socratic seminar on the meaning of causation in history.

A group of students persuading local councillors to do more about homelessness in the area.

A six-year-old speaking with no notes for five minutes on why we need to take climate change more seriously.

A heated dispute in the playground resolved, not with fists, but words.

These aren't rare moments in exceptional schools, but everyday examples of something quietly transformative: oracy education.

It's rare in that one idea has so many layers, but oracy is such an idea. It deepens thinking. Aids collaboration. Improves writing. Resolves conflict. Fosters kindness. Bridges divides. Builds confidence.

In the past 10 years, thanks to the work of Voice 21 and nearly 16,000 teachers and 4,000 oracy leaders across the country, oracy is taking off. It has gone from an afterthought to mainstream: one in 10 schools now have an oracy lead, a role that didn't even exist 10 years ago.

Voice 21 began its work with just 12 schools in 2015. It now partners with over 1,100 schools every year. In total, more than half a million students have had access to a high-quality oracy education over the past decade.

But the context for oracy is changing fast. In the past, a school leader could get away with seeing it as a 'nice to have'. Put it in that basket and we might dismiss it as 'yet another thing teachers have to think about'. No longer.

With the rise of AI, we need to cultivate the kind of communication, empathy and reasoning skills that machines can't replicate. Oracy education is at the heart of that.

And my recent research into the rise of far-right populism has made me more convinced than ever that in a world of polarisation and growing intolerance, how we teach children in school to 'disagree agreeably', to listen as well as speak, is vital work that won't be done anywhere else.

In the workplace, oracy is prized as a tool for both collaboration and creativity. Yet employers often comment on how new recruits lack this important skill.

This is probably why last year polling from YouGov for the Oracy Education Commission found that 80 per cent of business leaders supported spending more time on the development of young people's spoken language and listening skills at school.

> "Oracy must become an entitlement for every child

The growing importance of oracy is backed by evidence.

We know that children with good language skills achieve better results in English and maths and have higher rates of motivation and confidence.

We know oracy in the classroom deepens thinking and improves writing.

On leaving school, young people with oracy skills have better job prospects and are less likely to suffer mental health difficulties.

Crucially, research shows that oracy can be taught effectively. Using innovative comparative judgment software, Voice 21 has found that students in schools with a sustained focus on oracy demonstrate significantly stronger skills than those in schools that don't.

This is why oracy education needs to become an entitlement for every child. And the prime minister, who is fully committed to oracy, can make this manifesto commitment happen in his curriculum and assessment reforms.

So, what needs to change?

Oracy needs to become a fourth R – alongside reading, writing and maths. It needs to be given similar status and similar attention.

Oracy needs to be embedded meaningfully in the national curriculum across all subjects, and not be bolted on.

We need an assessment system that recognises and values oracy.

And every school should be equipped and supported to deliver oracy well – from teacher training to leadership roles like oracy leads.

This isn't just about raising standards. It's about fairness. Every child, no matter their background, should leave school with the skills and confidence to speak up and be heard.

Oracy provides a toolkit for success and a repertoire for navigating life. Now is the time to ensure the next generation has what it needs to thrive.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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KRISHNA PANCHOLI
Associate, Browne Jacobson LLP

What the new phase of the Covid inquiry means for schools

Here's what 'Module 8' of the Covid inquiry will aim to ascertain, along with some advice for schools and trusts that are asked to provide evidence

The UK Covid-19 Inquiry was set up to examine the nation's response to the impact arising out of the pandemic. Education was hard-hit, and it is only natural that the inquiry should turn its attention to the sector.

Its latest module of investigation relates to children and young people and will have implications for staff working in all education institutions. The chair may make recommendations following the inquiry's findings.

A preliminary hearing was held last week and the formal evidence hearings will take place in September, so as this phase of the inquiry gathers pace, here's what schools and trusts need to know.

What will Module 8 cover?

Module 8 will consider "the impact of the pandemic on children across society including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and from a diverse range of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds".

This includes the decisions made regarding school closures and reopenings, exam cancellations and mitigations, and whether any of those decisions disproportionately impacted young people, made their lives harder or exposed them to a greater risk of harm – as a whole and in sub-groups.

The inquiry also wants to understand the ongoing consequences of the pandemic and the decisions made during that period.

It will consider its impact on education, transitions, physical and mental health, as well as any other repercussions that arise from the evidence it hears.

Core participants have already been contacted. These are people or organisations with a specific interest in the work of the inquiry. They (and anyone else who is asked for evidence) will assist by providing the inquiry's chair with information on the decision-making process, who made those decisions and why they were made.

The inquiry will also set out the lessons to be learned for the future.

Rule 9 requests and having your say

The inquiry has sent out Rule 9 requests to individual schools and trusts.

Those contacted could be asked to provide a statement, for example because they assisted the Department for Education or the wider government with the country's response, both going into and easing out of the pandemic.

> "The chair can compel anyone to provide a statement

You do not have to be a core participant to assist the inquiry. The chair has powers to compel anyone to provide documents or a statement via a Rule 9 request if it deems these individuals or organisations have relevant information to give.

In previous modules, the inquiry has approached a range of individuals, organisations and bodies to provide information, perspectives and, where appropriate, for witness statements and documents pertaining to the issues raised in the course of its work.

How to prepare for participation

Individuals may be approached by the inquiry in relation to a request for documents or a witness statement on behalf of a school or trust. If you are, here are some useful points to note:

Official inquiry documentation will be sent to you or one of your schools on behalf of the chair on Covid-19 Inquiry letter-headed paper.

The request for information will be referred to as a Module 8, Rule 9 request.

If you receive a request from the inquiry, you will need to find evidence among the documents you have preserved from the school or trust's time during the pandemic. This will assist in drafting your response, and the inquiry may ask to see them.

The request will ask for relevant information pertaining to the school, the trust, or potentially to individual schools within a trust.

Usually, this will be in relation to the institution's actions during the pandemic, the difficulties it faced and how it overcame them.

The inquiry plans to hear evidence for this part of its investigation in London across four weeks from September 29 to October 23.

Remember, this is simply a request for information. The chair is simply interested to know the experience of educational establishments across the country, not to hold them accountable for it.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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JAMES LOVELL
Director of sixth form, Ark Schools

How we're driving up KS5 for our disadvantaged students

James Lovell sets out what the trust has learned from developing its first generation of sixth forms – and the challenges that still lie ahead

Ark has been growing as a sixth-form network for a decade, and we've learned a lot in the process.

To develop our approach, we visited high-performing providers across the country achieving excellent results in the face of socioeconomic disadvantage.

We've also learned some lessons the hard way. Misjudgments about timing and readiness resulted in difficult decisions to pause sixth form in a couple of instances.

We now have fourteen 11-18 schools delivering A-levels and BTECs to over 2,500 students. Our sixth-form cohorts include significantly higher-than-average numbers of young people on free school meals (FSM)

These students are statistically more likely to fall behind in KS5, but ours do just as well as their non-FSM peers. In 2024, we were the top-performing large trust for academic progress in KS5 and the top-performing trust of any size for progress on applied general qualifications.

As a result, about 85 per cent of our Year 13 leavers progressed to university last year. Over two-thirds of these went onto 'top-third' institutions, around twice the national average.

Key drivers of success

Here's what we've learned about what works well.

Distributed leadership

Our network sixth form strategy supports decision-making around readiness for opening, curriculum design and implementation, personal development and quality improvement.

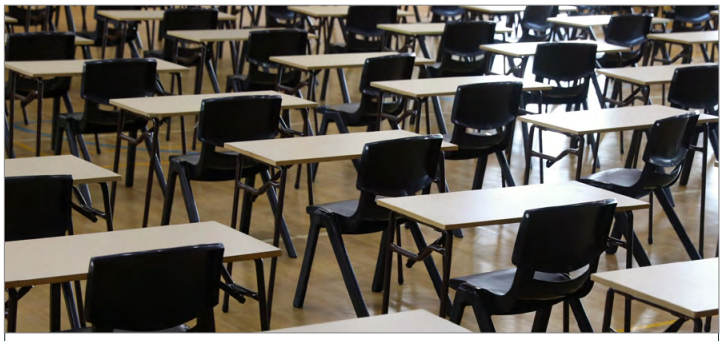
We promote systems that ensure as much coherence as possible across key stages 3, 4 and 5 to avoid the risk of silos, but we have particularly focused on distributed leadership for KS5 curriculum, teaching and assessment.

Aligned models

We have gradually moved towards greater curriculum alignment as a foundation for supporting, developing and retaining our teachers.

We provide regular subject-specific training and development through KS5 subject networks for our large subjects. These are led by school-based staff with coordination from the network team.

Common assessments ensure robust, accurate and consistent monitoring data at key points, with actions to address under-achievement discussed in termly achievement reviews with principals.



> "We've had to learn some lessons the hard way

Vocational alternatives

We wanted to provide an aspirational alternative to A-levels, with parity of esteem and parity of opportunity for a cohort typically including a higher proportion of our most vulnerable students.

Our Professional Pathways programme, launched in 2014, comprises BTEC Extended Diplomas in four subjects, carefully chosen to support progression.

The core qualification is enhanced by carefully-planned wraparound support and guidance, including student conferences and employer and university visits.

Destinations support

Our destinations team supports schools from KS1 to KS5. This support ramps up in KS5 to provide the information, guidance and opportunities that drive destinations success.

Meanwhile, the Professional Pathways team ensures that the AGQ cohort has an even broader entitlement and graduate with ambition, employability skills and industry insights.

Remaining challenges

Nevertheless, we still face a number of short- and medium-term challenges which will require innovation and collaboration.

Sustained destinations

Access is not enough. We need to keep improving the persistence rates of our students, particularly those from less-advantaged contexts, in the face of national trends pointing in the opposite direction.

We need to do better at providing them with the skills, mindset and resilience to succeed in their next steps.

Recruitment and retention

Attracting, developing, and keeping hold of our strongest KS5 teachers is a significant challenge. This is heightened by shortages in subjects accounting for a relatively high volume of our A-level entries.

Consistent teaching

We are constantly reviewing our approach to supporting and developing staff to ensure greater classroom consistency. This means balancing network pedagogical approaches with school-level choices to provide a smooth and logical progression from KS4.

Our students' successes over the past decade give us confidence that we are on the right path.

Colleagues from other trusts, schools and colleges have helped us greatly in this first phase. We look forward to continuing those conversations and starting new ones as we continue to develop.

SEND Solutions

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

JUDE MACDONALD
Director of SEND, Keys Academies Trust

How to prepare for more pupils with complex needs

These five key initiatives are driving our secondary school's readiness to meet increasing needs among pupils locally, explains Jude Macdonald

Rising demand for specialist provision in mainstream education is national headline news, but the growth in the number of children with needs and the increasing complexity of those needs is not new, and in the end the solutions will be found locally.

In Peterborough, data from schools and the local authority shows us that by 2027, our secondary school will receive its first intake of high-needs students. By this, we mean students for whom a special school would previously have been sought for secondary.

Knowing this, we are taking proactive and strategic steps to prepare. These are already paying off for our current cohort and over time will build our capacity to meet more complex needs.

Information sharing

Using data analysis of increase over time, we can predict the growing amount of EHCP funding year-on-year.

Though this is an estimate based on previous years, the trends provide a good indication of the level of need the secondary should expect. Sharing this information with staff, along with national and local data on trends in the dominant presenting needs, ensures they understand the growth.

In turn, we use the school's provision map to review and update the SEND register, and increased staff understanding of reasonable adjustments informs how they plan and deliver lessons accordingly.

This database will also record the Assess, Plan, Do, Review (APDR) information for students who require specific support (see below).

In the meantime, our information sharing at transition is now focused on the provisions each individual child has required in primary to thrive, alongside recorded information such as involvement from specialist professionals.

Teacher training

This information sharing also informs our training priorities for the next three years as the level of need rises.

All our secondary teaching staff have already received training on the statutory obligations EHCPs set, the provision map, identifying possible speech and language needs and engaging with the SEND register to ensure it is accurate.

The SEND team at the school have identified the provisions they will run in 2025-26 and are ensuring skills audits and a training programme are in place for the staff who will deliver these specific interventions.

> "In the end, solutions will be found locally

Teaching assistant training

For teaching assistants to deliver such interventions to a high standard, they need time to plan, prepare and debrief lessons. Baseline assessments and end-of-intervention sessions are critical in continually adapting interventions to ensure only the most effective are in place.

We use the new EEF Effective Deployment of TAs document to ensure leaders at all levels consider the impact of interventions. Omitting planning, preparation and assessment time for TAs inevitably impacts on workload for others who then have to support, plan and address issues that will arise through lack of quality planning time.

Our teaching assistants also attend high-needs primary classrooms to understand first-hand the types of need the secondary will receive.

Assess, Plan, Do, Review

With almost 300 students requiring accommodations, the school is taking a pragmatic approach to the APDR cycles. It is not realistic for 300 documents to be completed to a high quality, or for staff to read and process so many.

Therefore, the school's new deputy headteacher for curriculum is working with our SENCo to ensure the reporting cycle follows the code of practice with parent feedback three times annually.

Curriculum and capital

Our relentless focus on high-quality teaching ensures that the vast majority of 'do' strategies are in place for all students, regardless of need. Meanwhile, our curriculum options to support progression to key stage 4 are under review, which includes considering unit awards and functional skills.

The school is also already planning for the investment it will need to make to add continuous provision, a robust life skills offer and the purchase of a primary model curriculum.

In due course, the school will advertise for a high-needs teacher who can deliver precise pre-teaching and scaffolding to allow students to attend mainstream lessons for at least some of their week.

Rising need may be headline news today, but there's no reason for it be breaking news to our teachers when it arrives in their classrooms.

THE REVIEW

JAMIE'S DYSLEXIA REVOLUTION

Producer:
Channel 4
Aired:
June 9
Reviewer:
Dan Morrow, CEO, Cornwall Education Learning Trust

There's a certain irony to Jamie Oliver, Britain's best-selling non-fiction author and the nation's favourite culinary campaigner, returning to our screens not to wage war on turkey twizzlers, but to take a blowtorch to the education system itself.

Oliver's campaigning *nous* is undeniable. His last education campaign also kicked off with a TV programme, way back in 2005.

Jamie's School Dinners transformed the national consciousness about school nutrition, and he is still fighting that fight. Just last March, he was calling on government to "step up to the plate" and extend free school meals eligibility.

I'm happy to follow in his footsteps with kitchen-related wordplay, so ready, steady, cook.

First off, it's pretty clear to me that Oliver's latest campaign will be anything but a flash in the pan.

With *Jamie's Dyslexia Revolution*, he serves up a documentary that is as raw as it is restorative, a dish best tasted with a side of professional humility, especially for those of us in education.

Oliver's story is familiar to many: labelled 'special needs' at school, shuffled out of class for extra help and left with just two GCSEs. As he reminds us with characteristic candour, it was the kitchen, not the classroom, that saved him.

His dyslexia, undiagnosed until he was 50, became both a source of struggle and, ultimately, a secret ingredient in his recipe for success.

But the documentary is not just about Jamie; it's about the 870,000 children across Britain who, like him, find themselves boxed in by an "archaic education system".

The show's most searing moments come not from celebrity cameos but from the children and families who speak (sometimes haltingly, always honestly) about the emotional toll of being misunderstood and unsupported at school.

Oliver's mission is clear: no child should feel "stupid, worthless, or dumb" just because their brain works differently.

He interviews teachers who admit their training is "not fit for purpose" and highlights the threefold increased risk of exclusion for undiagnosed dyslexic teens. The message? The system, not the child, is broken.

Predictably, #Edutwitter (or should that be #EduX?) has been a bubbling cauldron of reaction.

Some have praised Oliver's candour and his call for early screening and better teacher training, echoing accessible learning experts who argue we need "a full-scale shift" in how we support all learners, not just "small tweaks".

Others, ever the armchair sous-chefs, have questioned whether a celebrity can really understand the complexities of classroom life.

But here's where we, as a profession, must turn down the heat. Respectful scepticism is vital, but so is a willingness to listen and learn. Sometimes, just sometimes, those outside our echo chamber can see what we cannot.

Oliver has been brave enough to address the sector directly and constructively with a well-informed article in these very pages. The flip-side of the pancake is surely to offer him the professional courtesy of engaging with him on the same terms.

If there's a lesson to be drawn from Oliver's documentary (and from the best of EduTwitter) it's this: real progress demands humility.

Oliver's documentary is not a panacea. One TV show won't fix a system decades in the making. The real revolution will come not from celebrity campaigns but from a profession willing to be humble enough to adapt.

The genius of Oliver's show is not in its celebrity, but in its challenge: to see our system as it is, not as we wish it to be, and to be brave enough to change.

In the words of the man himself, "You are NOT worthless." The same could be said for our profession, if we can accept this programme's lessons and be bold enough to act.

Let's not just serve up the same old fare. Let's cook up something better together.

THE CONVERSATION

LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM

Zara Simpson

Deputy head of prep, Streatham and Clapham High School

SPECIAL ISSUE

As the education sector marked Thank a Teacher Day earlier this week, many took to social media to share stories of those who go above and beyond, not just in their subject knowledge but in how they connect with and inspire young people.

Increasingly, that means embracing digital tools, or even AI, to transform how lessons are delivered.

In light of the Department for Education's publication last week of its support materials for safe and effective AI use, the Chartered College of Teaching, in partnership with the Department for Education, is hosting a **free webinar**.

The session will draw on contributions from their special issue of *Impact* journal, is open to all, and will feature authors from the publication. Best of all, you can read all of its articles online.

Get those questions ready!

READ ALL ABOUT IT

While tech is reshaping education, it's worth remembering the value of spaces like school libraries – physical places that quietly drive literacy, wellbeing and inclusion.

I was powerfully reminded of this by the latest episode of the **SecEd podcast**. These are not just rooms full of books, but real engines of whole-school culture.

The episode is hosted by Pete Henshaw and includes thoughtful contributions from school librarians and English leads. There's loads in there, but I was especially struck by the ideas around creating neurodiverse-friendly spaces and how important that is for pupils who need somewhere to decompress or feel calm.

Ours already has soft furnishings and sensory lighting, but I'm already looking at it in a new light.

The discussion also explores how libraries can be used across the curriculum, not just in English. There are shout-outs to student-led book clubs, author visits and even cross-department projects. For heads and budget-holders it makes a strong case for protecting or even expanding library provision.

I would have liked to hear a bit more about developing use of AI and e-reading tools, but otherwise it's a brilliant listen.

GET THE PICTURE

Back to AI, and the latest episode of the **Teen Tips podcast** on AI-generated explicit image extortion is hard-hitting but essential. The host is therapist Alicia Drummond, and she certainly doesn't sugar-coat things. These incidents are traumatic and the response from school really matters.

Here, Drummond sets out research that shows that girls are disproportionately affected, and talks through how schools can support all pupils who've been targeted.

What stood out to me was her focus on language: avoiding blame, staying calm and making sure the child knows they're not alone. To help with all of that, we recently hosted a parent talk with Dr Kathy Weston, founder of Tooled Up Education, where we worked together on creating a parent pledge.

Drummond also talks about teaching

digital boundaries in a meaningful way: not just "don't send photos", but helping pupils understand how AI can manipulate images, and how to spot coercion.

While the podcast doesn't go into the legal side of things in depth, it's a really practical, empathetic guide for DSLs and pastoral leads.

Definitely one to share with safeguarding teams.

BREAKING NEWS

At this stage of the summer term, of course, we are all deep into report-writing season. It's another thing AI is supposed to eventually help us with, but it should never undermine the careful process of recognising individual progress and offering tailored guidance.

This short **blog by Jacinta Browning** focuses on involving parents more meaningfully in the assessment process. It's a useful reminder that assessment isn't just about sending home grades or reports at the end of term.

The post encourages schools to ditch the jargon and try things like regular feedback snapshots or real-time dashboards, all things AI could support. But it also suggests parent-pupil-teacher conversations as a way of making feedback more collaborative, an invaluable human touch.

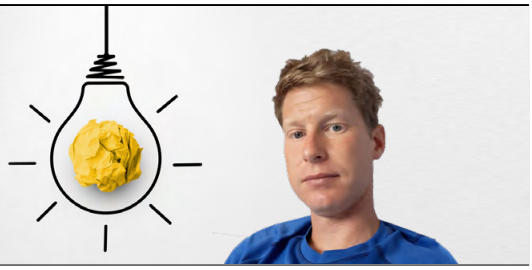
We use a variety of platforms to keep parents updated and help families feel more connected to what's happening in class.

The blog doesn't touch on tools like that, but its core point stands: if we want parents to support learning at home, we have to let them into the process.

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts

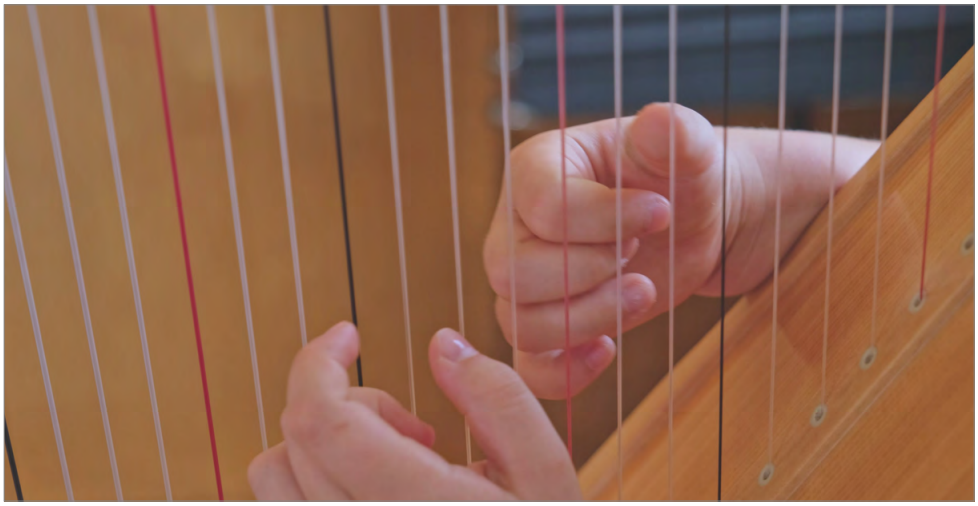
The Knowledge

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



Is key stage 3 a barrier to opportunity?

John Jerrim, Professor of education and social statistics, IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society



Later this year, we will be publishing the long-term outcomes of participants in the last Labour government's 'Gifted and Talented' programme, which was abolished by the Conservatives in 2010. In the meantime, my ongoing research reveals why the current Labour administration must focus its attention on this group again to deliver its ambition.

In a major project funded by the Nuffield Foundation, I am currently conducting the largest investigation into high-achieving pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in England to date.

These young individuals, despite their challenging upbringings, have shown great academic potential early in life. They possess the essential skills to excel in school and are well positioned to climb the socioeconomic ladder.

This should make this group a key target for policymakers aiming to enhance diversity in top universities and high-status careers.

However, these children still face significant hurdles in realising their full potential, in and out of school, but also through it and beyond it.

This research has produced a range of evidence across several outcomes, including:

Attendance

As high-achieving disadvantaged children enter secondary school, their level of absence sharply rises. This is a particular challenge for high-achieving disadvantaged pupils of white and mixed-race ethnicity.

Exclusions

By Year 10, the fixed-term exclusion rate is much higher for disadvantaged high achievers than for high achievers from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds (5.4 per cent versus 1.2 per cent). This is especially the case for high-achieving, disadvantaged black boys (10.7 per cent).

Crime

A similar socioeconomic gap emerges in police cautions/sentences by age 16 among high-achieving pupils, standing at 2.5 per cent versus 0.5 per cent for the most and least disadvantaged groups respectively.

Education

A series of studies now demonstrates how disadvantaged high-achievers start falling behind equally high-achieving pupils from affluent backgrounds between the ages of 11 and 14.

For instance, among five-year-olds with similar levels of cognitive ability, the chances of achieving a grade 7 or above in GCSE mathematics differs by around 25 percentage points among those with top key stage 2 scores from different socioeconomic groups.

Health

Thirteen in 1,000 disadvantaged high achievers will experience a hospital admission in year 11 due to a mental health or risky behaviour issue, compared to six per 1,000 of the most advantaged group.

A recurring theme throughout is the importance of key stage 3. Between the ages of 11 and 14, disadvantaged pupils with the strongest SATs scores don't make the most out of the firm academic foundations they have built.

They increasingly get involved with disruptive peer groups, suffer mental health issues, get into trouble with the law and are increasingly absent from school.

This is consistent with recent evidence from The Engagement Platform, which demonstrates how young people's engagement with school declines dramatically during year 7 and into year 8.

My hypothesis – which I hope I will be able to scrutinise in detail later in the project – is that the fall in school engagement during year 7 for high-achieving disadvantaged children is particularly stark.

What, then, should be done so that we better support this group?

For one, much better evidence is needed. While the EEF has done a great job in building the evidence base for disadvantaged children in general, much less has been done focusing on the highest-achieving disadvantaged pupils.

So we need a rapid evidence review as a first step, followed by a set of bespoke randomised trials, focused on supporting high-achieving disadvantaged pupils navigate key stage 3.

And at the national level, targeted support for disadvantaged high-achieving pupils must become a policy priority once more.

While the 'Gifted and Talented' programme had its problems, the current government should consider how it could deliver a new and improved version.

Because the evidence is clear: their experience of early teenage years represents a substantial barrier to opportunity for disadvantaged pupils leaving primary school with strong academic foundations.

Schools can't fix that alone, but a focus on key stage 3 at all levels of education policy is crucial in ensuring these children go on to fulfil their potential.

Week in Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

SATURDAY

Busy weekend for skills minister Jacqui Smith, who posted on Instagram about the 500 pages she had to read on the schools bill, which landed back in the House of Lords this week.

A sneaky zoom in on one of the pages in her picture showed "RESIST" in bold letters after the amendments listed as 147 and 152, which appear to be administrative requirements relating to kinship care. Bad luck.

MONDAY

After education minister Stephen Morgan trumpeted the government's expansion of mental health support teams, former Tory schools minister Damian Hinds couldn't resist asking his counterpart what the "principal differences" were between Labour's "groundbreaking" teams and the Conservatives' "already in progress programme".

"As I like this minister," he added, "let me give him a hint – this has been a rhetorical question."

WEDNESDAY

Given how depleted the Conservative party's shadow education team already is, it might be surprising that shadow education minister Diana Barran has time to take up a swanky new gig on the side.

She has become a paid adviser to venture capital firm Phoenix Court Group that targets investment in technology-related sectors. She's already an investor in the group's funds, and has met with co-founder Saul Klein to "discuss the potential for the use of artificial intelligence in education", says a report by the revolving-door body ACOBA.

During her time in government, Barran was "responsible for policies that resulted in contracts being awarded" to Faculty AI, a company that Phoenix invests in.

But Barran was not involved in evaluating the contracts, the report found. Therefore the "risk" she was "offered the role as a reward for decisions made" in officer is "low".

The role is also "limited to internal advice and excludes any dealings with government, reducing the risk you could be perceived to be lobbying government – which all former ministers are prevented from doing for two years after leaving office," ACOBA added.

***

With it being Thank a Teacher Day, education secretary Bridget Phillipson and her boss, Sir Keir Starmer, posted on social media their praise for those working in schools across the country.

But with it, they shared the *dubious* claim their government is "getting more teachers into our classrooms".

As *Schools Week* reported earlier this month, new workforce data for 2024 shows the number of full-time equivalent teachers reduced by 400, the first fall since 2017-18.

To be fair, recruitment this year *is* rising – but it's another sticky situation Labour has sleepwalked into by being so opaque about what the pledge means.

***

Three weeks after The Telegraph published what was clearly a scam story online entitled "we earn £345k, but soaring private school fees mean we can't go on five holidays", it has finally apologised.

The article centred on investment banker Al Moy and wife Alexandra. Two of their children, Ali and Harry, attend edprivate school. They had a third child, two-year-old Barry.

The article, published on May 25, told how Labour's VAT raid on private school fees had forced them to make cuts – they stopped shopping at Waitrose, reduced the gardener's days and cut foreign holidays.

This was despite their combined earnings of almost £350,000.

All too good to be true (including the rhyming names). It was later taken down after it emerged the photos of the make-believe family were 13-year-old stock images.

A deafening silence followed. But on Wednesday, the newspaper admitted it was not "able to verify the details published", before clarifying the story was not created using artificial intelligence.

"We apologise to our readers for these errors that should not have occurred."

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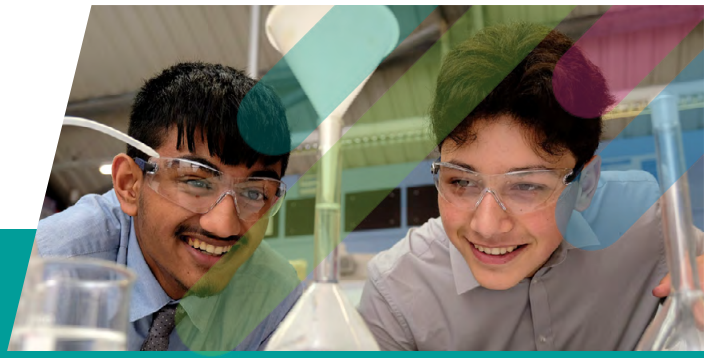

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