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'We've put in foundations. Now we build'



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## 'YOU WANTED URGENT REFORM'

Ofsted boss says inspection rush was what sector wanted.  
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# Unregistered AP warning as 1,000 kids educated 'illegally'

- Probe finds 90 AP settings suspected to be 'illegal schools'
- Unregistered AP rise creating a 'shadow SEND system'
- Ofsted 'very concerned' over situation, amid calls for reform

SCHOOLS  
WEEK

## Meet the news team

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

## THE TEAM

Shane Mann: Chief Executive | Managing Director: Scott Forbes | Senior Designer: Simon Kay | Relationship Manager: Clare Halliday |  
Operations and Finance Director: Victoria Boyle | Event Manager: Frances Ogefere Dell | Senior Administrator: Evie Hayes |  
Finance Assistant and PA to CEO: Zoe Tuffin | Office Administrator: Zoe Belcher | Sales Administrator: Tyler Palmereducation  
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A year ago this week, the rain was falling but enthusiasm was high as Labour brought home a landslide victory, aided by a substantial teacher vote.

Alas, this week – with the sun out – the tone is closer to tears (literally, in the case of the Chancellor).

Much of the glumness relates to money.

The spending review, which sets the amount of cash available over the next few years, is not generous.

Without more money, it's hard for leaders to deal with an ever-increasing level of expectations.

It is also pushing more leaders into making redundancies, or at least not replacing teachers who leave, demoralising those left behind.

Unfortunately, the veil of despair means it's harder for Labour to show off that many of its manifesto pledges are being put into practice.

Promised reforms such as the curriculum review, replacing single Ofsted grades, regional improvement

teams, bringing back QTS requirements and making the national curriculum truly national are all on track.

You would also be forgiven for thinking free breakfast clubs should be in the list, but as our full analysis of manifesto pledges on pages 10 and 11 shows, it's not that simple!

What's perhaps more interesting than these stories is what's not yet happened.

Labour promised an entitlement to CPD, giving each teacher a personal budget for training. So far? Crickets.

It promised a "phonics for maths" and mentors for headteachers. Again: zilch.

And as for the broader Ofsted reforms: as our reporting from Martyn Oliver's talk at the Education Festival shows, the delays are worthy of apology. The situation is looking tense ahead of the autumn.

Will it be ready in time? Oliver says it will, if shamefacedly late. Let's just hope that by the time we get there, the sector isn't also crying too.

## Most read online this week:

- New compliance checks to spot schools flouting Baker clause**
- GMB rejects 'disgraceful' 3.2% support staff pay offer**
- Thousands of retired teachers wait for promised pension payments**
- DfE drafting guidance on medical interventions by school staff**
- OGAT staff set to strike for 10 more days in July**

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### SCHOOLS WEEK

**School leaders' most-read:** Teacher Tapp survey in June of 607 headteachers on education media read in past month

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## READWRITE MOVE



See story, page 7



## NEWS

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# 'Illegal school' fear over unregistered AP

RUTH LUCAS

@RUTHLUCAS\_

EXCLUSIVE

Nearly 100 unregistered alternative providers that educate more than 1,000 children could be operating as illegal schools, a new investigation has found

Children's commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza has called for wide-ranging reforms to a system she says is "failing children who often need the greatest support".

Government figures show 24,325 children were educated in unregistered APs last year, with placements from councils almost doubling to 11,436 since 2019.

While de Souza's report says unregistered settings can "be a lifeline" by offering pupils more flexible or personalised education, they are not inspected by Ofsted and the government has few details on how they operate.

It says Ofsted has found some in "appalling conditions ... run by people with criminal backgrounds [or] may be grooming young pupils for gangs".

New analysis of the national pupil database and AP census by de Souza's office found 91 settings could be operating illegally.

**Ofsted: 'Very concerning'**

These settings "appear to be in contravention of their legal responsibility ... to register as a school and to subject themselves to the national inspection system".

They must register as a school if they provide full-time education to five or more pupils.

De Souza warned the unregulated nature of the system could create significant risks to children's safety and to the quality of their learning.

"There is no guarantee that staff are properly trained, or even that they have passed the most basic safeguarding checks. In the worst cases, these settings have been run by individuals with serious criminal histories — and in some appalling instances, have placed children at risk of exploitation."

Her evidence has been passed to Ofsted.

A spokesperson said the watchdog was "very concerned" about the number of illegal schools, with new figures showing that more than 1,500 investigations into potentially illegal schools have been carried out between 2016 and March 2025.

"Ofsted has limited resource for this growing



## 'Some of these settings have placed children at risk of exploitation'

area but our illegal schools team is constantly working to investigate and act on any school operating without the proper registration", the spokesperson added.

**Vulnerable pupil risk**

Roughly one in 50 pupils with education, health and care plans (EHCPs) were in unregistered AP last year. They were often the most vulnerable — from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and with special educational needs.

They tended to stay for most of a year, or more — regardless of the reason for their placement. This is against government advice that AP is for short periods.

"The current system is failing children, often those who need the greatest support from the education system," the report said.

A lack of oversight "has led to the unregistered AP system becoming a shadow SEND system, filling the gaps where there is insufficient support in mainstream or special school places.

"We should not be placing our most vulnerable learners in the least regulated, least safe settings. We should be striving for the very best for these children."

**Who is sending children to unregistered APs?**

Children are referred to unregistered APs either by their local authority or school, with schools making more referrals (58 per cent) in 2023-24 than local authorities (42 per cent).

Most placements made by schools were for off-site behavioural support.

Councils have two routes: pupils who can't attend school because of exclusion, illness or another reason or pupils with an EHCP who can be placed in "education other than at school" (EOTAS). Councils can arrange this if they are "satisfied" education at a school would be "inappropriate".

The report said government guidance "categorically states" that EOTAS is not a form of unregistered AP.

But the research found there was "significant overlap" between the populations of unregistered AP and those in EOTAS.

There were at least 103 providers of unregistered AP which were used for both EOTAS and other reasons.

The report warned any attempt to solely regulate EOTAS "risks unregistered APs pressuring parents and local authorities to commission them" under a different route.

Continued on next page



## NEWS

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**Huge local variation**

Data reveals Northumberland (0.93 per cent), Knowsley (0.85 per cent), Wiltshire (0.82 per cent), Nottinghamshire (0.67 per cent) and Rotherham (0.63 per cent) have the highest proportion of children at unregistered APs.

Nottinghamshire, Knowsley, Wiltshire, Somerset and Torbay councils send the highest number of children on EHCPs to unregistered settings, ranging from 6.1 to 7.8 per cent.

Nottinghamshire, which sends the highest proportion of SEN children to unregistered AP, said it was often for those waiting for specialist school placement.

All providers were "subject to stringent quality assurance assessments and a review of their safeguarding, health and safety, risk assessment, behaviour management, safer recruitment, staff supervision and training".

Wiltshire defended its use of AP, which it said was highlighted as a "key strength" in a recent Ofsted SEND inspection.

The report said the council "maintains a directory of registered and unregistered alternative providers" and "ensure quality is checked regularly".

Sarah Johnson from PRUsAP, which advocates for AP, said the rise in unregistered settings was "a

symptom of a struggling SEND system".

But not all unregistered APs were unsafe or poor quality, she said. "Many are small, community-led, or specialist provisions that offer exceptional care and education, often in partnership with local authorities."

**National standards and market review**

De Souza has called for the government to set up a national register, which would force all education providers to pass a local inspection before licensing. Providers that do not register or fail checks should be deemed "illegal" and Ofsted should intervene.

She also wants new "national standards for licensed supplementary educational providers", which would cover safeguarding, health and safety, quality of education and information on how well they improve engagement with education.

These "proportionate" expectations would "allow small settings to continue", the report said.

The government should also do annual data returns on the use of AP, to "develop a better understanding of the market", and commission a review to uncover the different types of settings and the evidence on what works. The Education Endowment Foundation should "evaluate their

effectiveness".

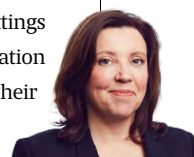
Ofsted should also investigate councils' commissioning during SEND inspections and the government should have powers to intervene and fine owners.

An Ofsted spokesperson agreed with the recommendation for greater oversight, but said the watchdog had "limited resource for this growing area".

A DfE spokesperson said the government was strengthening Ofsted's powers to investigate unregistered schools through the schools bill, as well as reforming the SEND system so more children could achieve and thrive in a local school.

The previous government last year consulted on plans to "time-limit" the use of unregistered AP, require settings to comply with national standards and have councils maintain lists of "approved" provision.

The DfE spokesperson said the department was "carefully considering" proposals to protect children in unregistered AP and would set out its next steps shortly.

**Dame Rachel sets out her reforms, page 6**

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OPINION: AP

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RACHEL DE SOUZA

Children's commissioner  
for England

Unregistered AP: A blueprint  
to safeguard our children

A national register for alternative provision is needed to protect vulnerable children from an education without checks, says Dame Rachel de Souza.

Every child, regardless of who they are or where they live, deserves an excellent education. Yet for too many children in England, this reality feels far out of reach.

A common theme among the children I speak to is how much they value their education – they know it can shape their futures, their confidence and can give them a sense of purpose. But many also tell me about the barriers in the way of getting that great education, or even to being in school regularly: from mental health conditions, to problems at home or the adaptations needed for a disability.

Children with additional needs are over-represented in the 1.7 million pupils either persistently or severely absent from school. And today, new research I'm publishing shows they are also over-represented in the use of unregistered alternative provision, with more than half of the 24,325 children educated in these settings having an education, health and care plan.

The use of unregistered alternative provision has almost doubled over the past five years, meaning soaring numbers of children –

and often those with the biggest vulnerabilities – are educated in settings where there is no national oversight, no shared standards and often no guarantee of safety.

For many of these children, alternative provision (AP) can offer a lifeline. I have heard from children how the support, including one-to-one tuition, smaller vocational settings and therapeutic provision, can offer care and life skills education that school settings might not be able to.

When done well, AP can be transformative. It can be a place where a child's curiosity is reignited, rebuilding their confidence and putting them back on a path to success.

Those benefits from the best AP available should be part of a national network. That means every setting should be registered on a national database – without that, we risk allowing the worst quality settings to operate in the shadows.

Unregistered means staff may not have passed even the most basic safeguarding checks. In the worst-case scenarios, some have been run by individuals with criminal records.

This should never be allowed. We would never tolerate this kind of risk in another part of a child's life, so shouldn't tolerate it for children's education.

Simply put, it's time for change. We need a national register for



“ Alternative provision  
can offer a lifeline

alternative provision. I have seen how unregistered settings have a low level of legislative responsibility that allows them to operate as a small and adaptable market, which can complement the offer of neighbouring schools. But there must be some national oversight.

I want to see an overhaul of the system that compels providers to register with the Department for Education and pass a national standard inspection, done locally, before they can offer education to children. Those that do not meet these standards, or who fail to register, would be considered unregistered and therefore acting illegally. To combat this, Ofsted needs the necessary powers to intervene, and the DfE should be able to close settings and fine owners.

National quality standards should also be created for licensed education providers, covering safeguarding, education quality, health and safety and child wellbeing, with Independent quality assurance teams in each local authority to conduct inspections.

Together these would give us

accurate and consistent data on who is running AP, how it's being used and why vulnerable children are being referred there.

Crucially, it also means removing the barriers that prevent existing high-quality providers from registering. I have seen inspiring examples of provision – often small, community-based, and deeply committed to their children – who lack a clear path to becoming part of the regulated system, whether through cost, capacity or access to information. We should be supporting those providers, not shutting them out.

Finally, I want the government to commission a review of all types of unregistered AP, to consider the evidence of what works, and to set metrics for child outcomes within this sector.

My research today sets a blueprint for change. No child should be left in a setting that puts them at risk. Every child deserves to be safe. Every child deserves to learn, with shared standards of quality across the country. And every child should be in a system that puts their needs first.

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# ‘Urgent’ need rushed inspection reforms, says Oliver

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Sir Martyn Oliver has said heads should judge him in September on the Ofsted reforms **due to be released in September**, admitting he only put out “foundations” originally because the sector demanded “urgent” reform.

The chief inspector has been widely criticised for the rushed plans for new report cards and a new inspection framework.

It also emerged recently Ofsted will not respond to its own consultation until September, giving leaders just weeks to digest the proposals before inspections resume in November – despite a previous pledge from the inspectorate that schools would get a full term’s notice.

Speaking at the Festival of Education on Thursday, Oliver was asked how his aim of rebuilding trust with the sector was going.

He said it had “gone to a certain level”, but added that “until we publish the document, there is nothing anyone else can do. And that is a difficult, difficult state.”

On the report card plans, Oliver said Ofsted “could have taken another one or two more years, but that wasn’t what the system was saying.

“The system was saying Ofsted needed urgent and quick reform. And so I chose to put something out that I knew would be just the beginnings, just the foundations.”

## ‘People will understand better in September’

He pointed to the watchdog’s testing of the proposals.

“I think we’ve done something like 234 test visits in the period between publishing that document and where we are today, and ...have listened to teachers, to shape and to change. We’re taking that time to just get it absolutely right.”

He said what he set out to achieve would be better understood in September. “When I get a chance to explain ... I think people will understand better, and hopefully it will begin to rebuild that trust.”

Ofsted originally pledged to give schools a full term’s notice period “equivalent to one term



Sir Martyn Oliver

## ‘I put something out that I knew would be just the beginnings’

between the publication of our post-consultation response and inspection materials and the start of education inspections”.

But with its firm plans not coming until September, leaders have warned they will have just weeks to prepare for the new regime. Unions want the reintroductions pushed back.

Oliver said he was “sorry” for the lack of notice, but said Ofsted had “never ever” paused inspection during development of a new framework, as it will between September and November.

### ‘Judge me by what comes out’

Would he as a leader be happy with just a few weeks’ notice?

“Well, it depends on what you see, what comes out from what I’m about to produce in September, which...I’m still at the state of finalising. I can’t really go into it until that point. Judge me by what comes out and what you read then at that point.”

Ofsted scrapped single-phrase headline judgments last year. New report cards will assess schools across up to 11 judgment areas, using five grades.

Oliver said parents “do want some definition” to be able to judge schools, but that the change may affect other things.

“Here’s the burning question. What’s Rightmove going to do?” he said. The house sale and rental website has a section on “schools” for each advert, showing their proximity and Ofsted grade.

Does he believe the change to report cards will have an impact on house prices?

“I don’t know. I do know that where I live, after all those years of living at least 20 minutes away from my school, sometimes 40 minutes, I ended up supporting two special measures schools right where I lived.

“The house prices shot up. Both went outstanding, and the house prices went up £15,000 within a week. It does make a difference.”



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# We're looking hard at how AI fits in, says Ofqual boss

Ofqual is considering whether "any action is needed" as many in the sector fear the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) could undermine confidence in coursework.

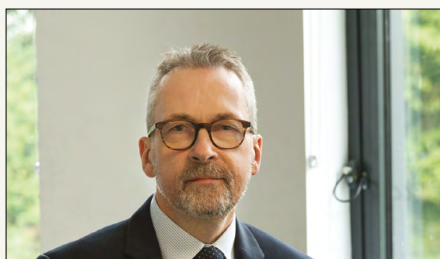
Sir Ian Bauckham, the chief of the exams regulator, has also revealed he has a team examining AI's risks, benefits and how it's "evolving".

The senior official made the comments during an event at the Festival of Education on Thursday, as he predicted AI "probably will be" used to support marking.

Responding to a question on how its could impact confidence in A-levels with assessments not under exam conditions, he said: "There are a couple of A-levels that do have written [assessments] – I think they're history, English language and literature.

"The risk that you are flagging is a risk that we're aware of, and we're looking hard at that and considering whether or not any action is needed."

Bauckham branded as "lazy thinking"



the notion that because of the technology, assessment "that accurately reports what [students] actually know is either not needed or can be outsourced" to AI.

But it could have a "positive impact on the work of ensuring that exams are accurately marked and that papers don't go missing".

"We have our own relatively small but very specialist unit that specialises in AI, exploring risks, benefits and the way in which AI is evolving," he said.

"[This is so] we can really approach this subject... from an informed and up-to-date perspective."

## Vulnerability in pupils is not a trait, says new report



Ofsted inspectors should recognise the vulnerability of pupils as a "state not a trait", with an acknowledgement it can come in "many forms" and change over time, a new research report has said.

Last year the watchdog commissioned the National Children's Bureau to examine "how Ofsted might conceptualise vulnerability in relation to inspection and regulation".

While schools commonly hold lists of pupils considered vulnerable – such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds or with special educational needs – Ofsted does not have a fixed definition of vulnerability.

It follows criticism that inspectors do not adequately take into account the make-up of schools' pupil intake, punishing settings that make efforts to be inclusive. It also comes as Ofsted prepares to look more closely at inclusion.

The research, based on focus groups involving about 400 people, was published this week.

It found many issues contributed to vulnerability, including poverty, prejudice or discrimination. It was also deemed a "state not a trait".

Sir Martyn Oliver, the chief inspector, said the research "provides useful insight as we continue to develop our work related to vulnerability in children and learners.

"I am committed to putting disadvantaged and vulnerable children at the heart of everything we do."

## Inclusion report lists 'principles of promising practice'

Inclusive schools know children "well, early and often", offer "coherent and expert targeted support" and see inclusion as a "strategic and shared responsibility", a report commissioned by the government's inclusion tsar has found.

Tom Rees, the chief executive of the Ormiston Academies Trust who chairs the Department for Education's expert advisory group for inclusion, announced the new Inclusion in Practice project in March.

It set out to "surface and share what is already happening in schools to support inclusive practice for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities".

The report, released today, sets out "five principles of promising practice". They are "knowing children well, early and often", including "balancing knowledge of individuals, alongside knowledge of their barriers to learning".

High-quality and evidence-informed teaching practice is another. "Inclusion starts with expert teaching. When this is embedded consistently and paired with early, targeted support for children, more learners stay in class and make progress," the report said.

The others were "coherent and expert targeted support", strengthening inclusion through relationships and partnerships and "inclusion as a strategic and shared responsibility".

The project was supported by ImpactEd, the Ambition Institute and the Confederation of School Trusts. It took submissions from 165 individual institutions, 820 schools represented by trusts and 7,600 from schools represented by providers or councils.

While some were "successfully organising practice, professional development and resources to strengthen support for all children", there was also "inconsistency in training, support, evidence-based guidance and resources that schools are navigating".

"This report gives us hope and encouragement, in highlighting pockets of effective and evidence-informed practice being implemented in our schools that we can learn from and build on," Rees said.

"But it has also reminded us how much inconsistency exists within the SEND system in terms of frameworks, training, advice and resources."

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England.

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**Chris Rowe,**  
Head of Department, Ashfield Boys  
High School, Northern Ireland.

"What we are discovering is that artificial intelligence has the ability to drive significant efficiencies - not just for the management and administration of schools, which we are seeing about ten hours per week per teacher."

**Frances Meehan,**  
Director, Education Authority of Northern  
Ireland.

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## ANALYSIS: POLICY

A YEAR OF  
LABOUR

## A lot can change in 12 months (or not)...

JOHN DICKENS  
@JOHNDICKENSSW

As Labour marks its first year in government, Schools Week has looked back at each of its manifesto pledges for schools to check progress...

The majority of the school reforms pledged in Labour's manifesto have either been implementing or are progressing, a Schools Week analysis has found.

But there has been no progress seemingly made on five of the 30 manifesto policies. They include a pledge to deliver a 'phonics for maths' scheme and a teacher training entitlement.

Meanwhile, promised funding for many schemes has yet to materialise.

We've rated pledges based on a traffic light system. Policies implemented or on track (with some sort of public commitment or actual date for progress), got green.

Amber went to those where there was little progress, or it was unclear. Note: the 6.5k teacher pledge got amber because it has shapeshifted so much.

Meanwhile red went to the policies where there was zero progress and nothing said in the public domain. We went to the Department for Education with our analysis for each policy, and where they provided response we have included below.

## KEY:

- GREEN: ACHIEVED, OR ON TRACK
- AMBER: LITTLE PROGRESS, OR UNCLEAR
- RED: NO PROGRESS

## Curriculum, assessment and accountability

**Original policy:** Launch an expert-led review of curriculum and assessment, "working with school staff, parents and employers".

**Update:** A review was launched in July last year. An interim report, published in March, outlined key reform areas under consideration, including reducing the volume of content taught



in primary schools and reducing the volume of GCSE exams. The full report is due in autumn.



**Support children to study a creative or vocational subject until they are 16, and "ensure accountability measures reflect this" (Progress 8).**

The government does not appear to have said anything publicly on this. However, the curriculum review is looking at accountability and reviewing the EBacc.



**A "phonics for maths" programme in primary schools**

No progress.



**Fund "evidence-based" early-language interventions in primary schools.**

In May, it was announced the early language support for every child pilot had been extended for another 12 months, with slightly less cash than previously (£3.4 million). But ministers hope it will help 20,000 more youngsters than the 20,000 already supported in about 200 schools.



**Introduce new regional improvement teams to "enhance school-to-school support, and spread best practice".**

The first 200 "stuck" schools have been identified for support – but it will take until March 2026 for all of the roughly 600 schools to get help.



**Replace single-headline Ofsted grades with a new report card "telling parents clearly how schools are performing".**

Headline grades were scrapped in September, with new report card inspections due in November. However, there is widespread criticism that schools will not see final inspection plans until September.



**Bring multi-academy trusts "into the inspection system".**

No progress yet, but Ofsted did get a £20 million budget boost at the recent spending review, including to "develop and implement multi-academy trust inspections and increase accountability of MAT leaders". The DfE said this was a "complex proposal". Officials are "engaging with the sector and are keen to hear views".





## ANALYSIS: POLICY

## A YEAR OF LABOUR

**Introduce a “new annual review of safeguarding, attendance, and off-rolling”.**

No progress publicly. Ofsted said in its Big Listen consultation in September it was “working with government” on the plans, but chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver said in January that such checks would cost £45 million a year, adding: “It’s right that we ask ourselves ‘is this the best spending of the money?’”

The DfE told Schools Week it was “looking at options” for the reviews as part of its “wider work to reform accountability arrangements”.

**Recruitment and retention****Recruit an additional 6,500 new “expert” teachers into shortage subjects, supporting “areas that face recruitment challenges”, and tackle retention issues.**

Details have only emerged recently. It will be based on boosting the net number of teachers by 6,500 when compared with the 2023-24 academic year baseline.

This means not all the 6,500 will be new teachers (current teachers who choose not to leave will count).

There is also no commitment towards recruiting in subject shortages, or in areas with recruitment challenges. Primary schools have also been excluded.

The government said numbers are up by 2,300 – meaning a third of the pledge has already been met

**Review the way bursaries are allocated and the “structure of retention payments”.**

No progress.

**Update the early career framework, maintaining “its grounding in evidence”.**

The ECF has been updated, and is now known as the “early career teacher entitlement” (ECTE). A full review will be held in 2027.

**Ensure any new teacher entering the classroom “has, or is working towards”, qualified teacher status.**

Proposals are in the schools bill and are due to be implemented in September next year. But unqualified teachers already employed before that date won’t have to get or work towards QTS, unless they move to a new school.

**Introduce a teacher training entitlement to “ensure teachers stay up to date on best practice with continuing professional development”.**

No progress.

**Reinstate the school support staff negotiating body, which will “help address the acute recruitment and retention crisis in support roles”.**

Consultation . launched last month.

**Create a new excellence in leadership programme, a “mentoring framework that expands the capacity of headteachers and leaders to improve their schools”.**

**6. Recruit 6,500 new teachers in key subjects to prepare children for life, work and the future, paid for by ending tax breaks for private schools.**

10 Change Labour Party Manifesto 2024

**SEND, inclusion and mental health****Take a “community-wide approach” to SEND, improving “inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools, as well as ensuring special schools cater to those with the most complex needs”.**

White paper is due in autumn, with £1 billion extra high-needs funding delivered and £760 million for SEND reforms in the spending review

**Make sure admissions decisions “account for the needs of communities”.**

The schools bill includes new duties for trusts and councils to co-operate on admissions and new powers for local authorities.

**Require all schools to “co-operate with their local authority on school admissions, SEND inclusion, and place planning”.**

See above.



## ANALYSIS: POLICY

## A YEAR OF LABOUR

**Provide access to specialist mental health professionals in every school, so “every young person has access to early support to address problems before they escalate”.**

The government has upped funding, meaning 900,000 more pupils and 1,700 schools will be able to access support by April next year – but it won't reach all schools until 2030.



## Cost of living

**Fund free breakfast clubs in “every primary school, accessible to all children”.**

A trial has been launched in 750 of the roughly 16,000 primaries – but no details of when they will be rolled out to all schools. It is unlikely to be anytime before 2026.



**Bring down the cost of school by “limiting the number of branded items of uniform and PE kit that schools can require”.**

The schools bill proposes primary schools will be limited to three branded items of uniform, and secondaries four items, from September next year.



## Other policies

**Open an additional 3,334 nurseries through upgrading space in primary schools.**

First 200 nurseries to open this September offering 4,000 places.



**Guarantee two weeks' worth of work experience for every young person.**

Guidance updated, with a new expectation for schools to begin in September – but no extra cash to fund it.



**Improve careers advice in schools and colleges.**

Pretty vague commitment, but DfE did not provide any update.



**Improve data-sharing across services with a single unique identifier for children.**

In the schools bill.



**Bring forward a “comprehensive strategy for post-16 education”.**

A skills white paper is due any minute.



**Protect time for physical education, and support the “role grassroots clubs play in expanding access to sport”.**

Every school's sport and enrichment offer will be published in new school profiles.



**Launch a new national music education network – a “one-stop shop with information on courses and classes for parents, teachers and children”.**

National centre for arts and music education promised to launch in September 2026, with £25 million investment in new musical instruments.



**Ensure schools “address misogyny and teach young people about healthy relationships and consent”.**

No public progress, but the government said it is reviewing the relationships, sex and health curriculum.



**Introduce a supervised tooth-brushing scheme for 3 to 5-year-olds, targeting the areas of highest need.**

Councils got £11 million in April to help “hundreds of thousands” of children in the “most deprived” areas brush their teeth.



## SHOW US THE MONEY

The costings are harder to work out – but many schemes have so far been funded at way less than promised.

For instance, the government promised to invest £315 million for its breakfast clubs from closing the non-dom tax loophole. But just £30 million has been allocated.

It said it would use £1.5 billion raised from putting VAT on private school fees to pay for many of its other pledges.

This included £450 million to recruit 6,500 new teachers. The government pointed to the £700 million spent to boost recruitment and retention in 2024-25, however this included already established retention payments.

Meanwhile, £5 million was promised for early language interventions, but just £3.4 million was announced. For mental health support, just £49 million of the £175 million promised has been forthcoming so far.

Of the £45 million promised for Ofsted, £20 million has seemingly been committed. And just £37 million of the funding for new nurseries has been delivered of the £370 million promised over four years.

Another £270 million was promised to increase teacher and headteacher training and £85 million for work experience and careers advice – but it's not clear if any of this has been delivered yet.

## NEWS: POLICY

A YEAR OF  
LABOUR

# The shapeshifting 6.5k teacher pledge

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson has backtracked on a key element of her flagship pledge to recruit 6,500 “new” teachers – confirming that they won’t all be new.

The target also omits any mention of recruiting teachers in “key subjects” and comes after confirmation that primary teachers will be left out too.

## Recruitment and retention

Last spring, Labour made “recruit[ing] 6,500 new teachers in key subjects” one of its six “first steps for change”.

Experts said this should be fulfilled by boosting recruitment – and retaining more teachers. Phillipson pledged in November last year they would all be “new teachers”.

However, the government has now confirmed the target will look at how much the workforce has grown overall, rather than at just “new” recruits. It will only apply to secondary and college teachers.

The number of teachers across both sectors in the 2023-24 academic year will be used as the baseline number, with the government aiming to hit the target by the end of parliament in 2029.

Jack Worth, the school workforce lead at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), said framing the target so it included improvements in retention was “absolutely the right approach”.

But Emma Hollis, the chief executive of the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT), said the change “fundamentally shifts the goalposts”.

“It’s important to be clear and transparent about the distinction between keeping existing teachers and recruiting new ones.

“Redefined targets...risk masking the scale” of the teacher supply challenge.

A DfE spokesperson said that supporting teachers to stay in the profession and thrive is essential to achieving the pledge “in a sustainable way. A successful recruitment strategy starts with a strong retention strategy.”



Pepe Di'lasio



Bridget Phillipson

## Shortage subject promise dropped

Labour’s June 2024 manifesto promised the 6,500 would be “expert teachers in key subjects”.

The word “expert” was dropped from the December 2024 Plan for Change, with the pledge instead for “6,500 extra teachers, focusing on subjects with shortages”.

Neil O’Brien, the shadow schools minister, accused the DfE of “refus[ing] to define what they mean”.

A DfE spokesperson told Schools Week “key” subjects were “the shortage subject areas that are most acute”.

However, the 6,500 target includes all secondary subjects. The government would not say what proportion of new teachers would be in shortage subjects.

It instead pointed to current retention incentives for maths, physics, chemistry and computing.

## The changing workforce

June’s school workforce data shows the secondary and special school workforces grew by 2,326 in the year to June 2024, meaning the DfE is “over one-third of the way” to its target.

The secondary workforce grew by more than 1,400, while special schools and PRU workforce by 900.

Yet numbers fell by 400 across the entire teacher workforce, driven by a drop of 2,900 primary staff.

The DfE says the pupil-teacher ratio was the same because of falling rolls, which meant more teachers were not required in this phase.

But O’Brien said it was “insulting to primary school teachers to say they don’t count, and insulting to the intelligence of voters to try and blatantly spin their way out of their failure like this”.

However, Worth said focusing on secondaries, colleges and special schools was “the right focus, given the acute teacher supply challenges in these sectors”.

But this must not mean losing sight of maintaining healthy primary teacher supply.

The target to recruit new primary teachers has been missed for the past three years. In secondary, the target has been missed for 11 of the past 12 years.

## Is it enough?

Pepe Di’lasio, the general secretary of the leaders’ union ASCL, urged ministers “not to fixate” on the 6,500 figure, and to “focus on meeting the actual need for teachers across the board”.

He cited a recent National Audit Office report that highlighted FE colleges needing between 8,400 and 12,400 teachers by 2028-29 to meet rising demographic needs.

The same report estimated 1,600 more secondary teachers needed between 2023 and 2027.

In this context, Labour’s pledge “doesn’t seem to be anywhere near enough.”

Worth added the 6,500 target remained “very challenging”, which the government must “bring forward new policy measures” to meet.

“There remains a risk the government hits the target, but misses the point.”





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## NEWS: EXAMS

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# Ofqual scrutinising Edexcel's A-level maths replacement paper

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

The exams regulator is “closely scrutinising” Edexcel’s approach to awarding A-level maths this year following complaints that it replaced a paper with a version that missed swathes of content pupils had expected to cover.

About 2,000 pupils have signed a petition after sitting the pure maths “paper 2” issued by the board – part of the education giant Pearson – on June 12. They said the paper “lacked key topics ... fundamental to the course”. They also reported overlaps with paper 1, sat on June 4.

Pearson has since confirmed that the paper was a replacement for its original paper 2, but refused to say why it was forced to make the switch.

The board insisted “all candidates received and sat the correct, intended paper for each exam”.

The matter has now been referred to Ofqual, which told Schools Week it was “aware of the concerns raised about this paper and will be closely scrutinising Pearson’s approach to awarding this qualification.

“Our priority at this point in the exam season is the interests of students and ensuring students’ grades are a reliable indication of what they know, understand and can do.”

The organisation also said that, once results were released and summer exams monitoring was complete, “we will determine whether there have been any issues which have arisen over the course of the series which constitute breaches of our rules”.

In an update published by Pearson, the exam board confirmed it had replaced the original version of paper 2, which was taken by 99.8 per cent of candidates. The 0.2 per cent of the cohort needing modifications sat a different paper.

“We always have multiple versions of each paper available for use in every series. This allows us to replace a paper at any stage if we need to.

“Decisions to replace a paper are never made lightly and can happen for a number of reasons. When we do replace a paper, we consider



carefully the student experience.”

Pearson said two different papers, “whether an original and replacement, or papers sat in different series, will not always cover the same content.

“We are confident that the content assessed in both versions of paper 2 is reasonable and appropriate for candidates to have accessed and effectively demonstrated their knowledge and understanding.”

The board has tasked senior examiners with overseeing the marking of both versions of paper 2, and “to ensure fairness for all students, we will set grade boundaries separately for the two versions of paper 2.

“This approach allows us to account for any minor differences in demand between the papers, so that students are fairly rewarded for their performance.”

A Pearson spokesperson said both the standard and modified versions “were equally valid exam papers, written to meet the specification requirements and our own standards and quality checks.

“We can reassure all students and teachers that they received and sat the correct intended paper and we have written to all schools and colleges that received modified versions to clarify and confirm this.”

On the petition website change.org, pupils

wrote of their dismay after sitting the paper.

“We worked hard for two years and it seems like our efforts have gone to waste,” the organisers wrote, adding the paper “lacked key topics that are fundamental to the course”.

“We were tested on the same topics multiple times. This oversight unfairly challenges our capacity to demonstrate the knowledge and skills we have painstakingly built.”

They added that the lack of coverage of the topics “means that the grades we will receive on results day won’t be a true reflection of our understanding and ability in mathematics.

“Usually, these core topics are covered extensively across examination papers, offering students a balanced opportunity to exhibit their proficiency.”

They called on Edexcel to “consider implementing lower grade boundaries or compensatory measures for this year’s exam.

“Students’ futures could be at stake, and it is only right that every effort is made to ensure an equitable assessment.”

An account on X set up in the wake of the exam, – “Pearson Edexcel 2025 Maths A-Level Scandal” – said pupil performance in the qualification “cannot be fairly or validly assessed because the exam series did not test the entire pure mathematics curriculum as required by Ofqual”.

## ANALYSIS: SAFEGUARDING

# Just 0.07% of schools now fail safeguarding

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

EXCLUSIVE

Three of the more than 4,000 schools inspected so far this year have failed safeguarding checks, raising some concerns that inspectors may be missing serious issues.

While the number failing to meet the requirements has always been small, it has decreased markedly since the death of headteacher Ruth Perry in January 2023.

## What the data shows

Twenty-seven schools out of more than 2,700 inspected in 2020 were judged to have safeguarding practices that were “not effective” (1 per cent).

After the pandemic, the proportion rose to about 1.6 per cent, last year dropping to 0.16 per cent and 0.07 this year.

Ofsted has inspected more than 3,370 primary schools this year, but only one has “not met” safeguarding requirements, equating to just 0.03 per cent.

In 2020, 4.1 per cent of secondaries failed safeguarding, falling to 2.65 per cent in 2023.

So far this year, two of 731 secondaries inspected have failed safeguarding (0.27 per cent).

## More generous inspectors?

“If inspection works at all you’d expect a gradual fall in how many schools fail safeguarding,” said Adrian Gray, a former senior HMI. He said it was “rational” to “expect a peak after Covid”.

“But I am not convinced 99.9 per cent of primary schools are great at safeguarding. Would you believe a garage that certified 99.9 per cent of cars it tested for MoT? No, you would conclude either there was something wrong with the test, or they were not being robust”.

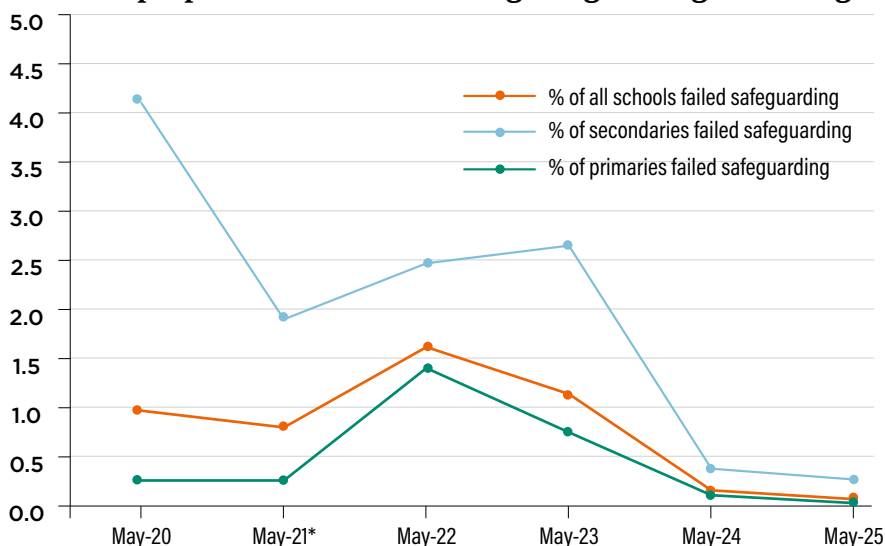
Gray suggested that inspectors could “have lost their nerve” following Perry’s suicide. A coroner ruled an Ofsted inspection contributed to her death.

The drop in safeguarding failures also follows a similar shift on overall grades.

In 2023-24, the final year before headline grades were abolished, just 16 per cent of schools were rated below ‘good’ – the lowest ever, and down from 32 per cent in 2021-22.

Perry’s school, Caversham Primary in Reading, was downgraded from “good” to “inadequate” after inspectors raised concerns over safeguarding.

## How the proportion of schools failing safeguarding has changed



Source: Ofsted  
(Academic year to end of May)

\*Due to the pandemic only a relatively small number of schools was inspected

SCHOOLS WEEK

If a school failed safeguarding, it would be rated ‘inadequate’ overall.

## Ofsted changes effect?

Policy changes are another factor. As of mid-2023, schools graded ‘inadequate’ overall because of ineffective safeguarding, but with ‘good’ or better in all other areas, were re-inspected within three months. Ofsted said this gave them a chance to make improvements, although this happened “rarely”.

A new “suspend and return” policy introduced last September lets inspectors pause an inspection to allow a school to resolve safeguarding, “where that is the only issue in the school”.

But Ofsted told Schools Week it was “extremely rare” that a school had ineffective safeguarding without any other issues and so this was unlikely to have a significant impact on figures.

## Perry case ‘raised awareness’

Steven Isaacs, a school safeguarding consultant, said the Caversham case led to leaders being “more in tune with the expectations and the requirements. People have realised how serious it is, what kind of effect it can have if it does go horribly wrong”.

He witnessed a recent inspection where checks were “more rigorous than ever”.

Pepe Di'Iasio, the general secretary of the leaders' union ASCL, added the rarity of “ineffective” safeguarding judgments was “testament to the work of schools in getting right

this vital area. It is not surprising few fail ... [they] are sharply focused on making sure they keep pupils and students safe.”

## ‘Schools getting it right’

Ella Savell-Boss, a safeguarding trainer and consultant who works with schools, said there had been “a real shift in recent years towards embedding safeguarding into everyday culture”, with many leaders having a “much more sophisticated understanding of what good safeguarding looks like in practice”.

Gray also said schools could have just “got better at giving inspectors what they want”.

But Daniel Kebede, the general secretary of the National Education Union, said the previous Ofsted framework was “overly punitive”. It was now “far more sensible and accurately reflects” the sector.

## Grades ‘fluctuate year on year’

An Ofsted spokesperson said the grade profile of schools inspected “fluctuates year on year”. But the proportion of primaries failing was “low and always has been”.

Sir Martyn Oliver, the chief inspector, also said this week safeguarding was something schools “prioritise perhaps above everything else. Nothing infuriates me more than glib commentary about schools falling short on inspection because of duff paperwork – or schools pulling the wool over inspectors’ eyes because their paperwork is on point.”



## INVESTIGATION: SCHOOL BUILDINGS

## DfE officials 'concerned' over school building impact of Grenfell bans

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

Potential bans on building companies involved in the Grenfell Tower disaster could impact "every" school project, the government's property arm has warned.

Ministers are considering whether to use new powers to bar companies linked to the 2017 fire, in which 70 people died, from bidding for public contracts.

But LocatED, the Department for Education's school construction company, fears the move could hit the sector's "material supply choices" if some of the bigger companies, such as Saint-Gobain Construction Products UK and Kingspan Insulation are barred.

Experts also believe the changes could expose schools – many of which lack construction "expertise" – to a "whole host of new responsibilities" and "critical legal decisions" when procuring.

**DfE's "concerning" emails**

In February, the government announced intentions to investigate seven companies in relation to the Grenfell fire, using "new powers in the procurement act" to "establish whether the organisations have engaged in professional misconduct".

If it is found that they did, they would be added to "a published and centrally managed debarment list".

Georgia Gould, parliamentary secretary for the Cabinet Office, said this list "must be taken into account" by contracting authorities, including schools, in "awarding new contracts and undertaking new procurements".

But speaking at a recent event, Will Mumford, a LocatED director, said: "This is going to sound a bit dramatic, but I've seen a number of, to me, quite concerning emails from within the DfE talking about the firms associated with the Grenfell fire and the fact that they're going to be banned from being able to be procured on public frameworks and for public works.

"If you start banning the likes of Kingspan... and Saint-Gobain, you have really impacted on your material supply choices."

The DfE declined to comment because of the ongoing investigation.

Saint-Gobain Construction Products is being



investigated "in relation to the actions of Celotex Limited", which is no longer trading. Saint-Gobain's eight businesses supply internal wall systems, external wall insulation and acoustic ceilings among other things.

Mumford said the likes of British Gypsum, Gyproc and Ecophon – all of which are part of Saint-Gobain Construction Products – were used "in every single school project".

British Gypsum is listed as a supplier to one of the DfE's building framework contractors, McLaren Construction.

A post on Saint-Gobain's website said its Weber flooring products "are used extensively throughout many" school projects, with "over 300,000m<sup>2</sup> of Weberfloor... successfully installed in educational, healthcare and commercial sectors".

Meanwhile, Kingspan Insulation provides insulation boards for floors, roofs and walls for retrofit school projects.

"Trying to find alternate products will genuinely be quite difficult," Mumford said.

"We don't know exactly where that's going to land, but we just need to be mindful."

Debarments can be issued on mandatory – in the "most serious, high-risk scenarios" – and discretionary grounds. They can last up to five years.

Mandatory exclusions – banning schools from allowing suppliers to take part in procurements – are enforced if companies have been convicted, have breached competition law or have been deemed a national security threat.

Discretionary bans – giving schools the choice to allow suppliers to take part in projects – "mostly do not require a conviction" but are given in "situations which may pose unacceptable risks".

**Onus 'on schools' to check**

In such circumstances, lawyer Dr Rebecca Rees said the "contracting authority needs to look at the relevant information as to why the firm was put on the debarment list and should only proceed with that supplier if there's good reason to do so".

She said it would put "significant onus" on schools to "check their supply chain is clean".

An "unintended consequence" is that the restrictions could extend to "connected persons", such as directors, sub-contractors and parent companies.

Lucia Glynn, an academy consultant, said many trust boards "wouldn't have the knowledge of the construction industry, so you're asking people without the expertise to make those really critical legal decisions".

A Saint-Gobain Construction Products spokesperson said the company would "continue to cooperate fully and openly with all official investigations".

Celotex, which provided Grenfell Tower's "principal insulation product" – later deemed "combustible" and not suitable for use – had not traded since 2015.

The spokesperson said "government testing" showed the insulation could be used in cladding systems – different to the one used in Grenfell – that "met the relevant standards".

Businesses in Saint-Gobain Construction Products UK "had no connection with the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower", they added.

Kingspan was accused of "knowingly" creating "a false market in insulation for use on buildings over 18 metres".

It said earlier this year that the public inquiry "explains clearly and unambiguously that the type of insulation... was immaterial" to the fire.

# SCHOOLS WEEK

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## Guidance on staff medical responsibilities pledged

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

The government is preparing guidance clarifying the “roles and responsibilities” of school staff when it comes to medical care for vulnerable pupils.

Catherine McKinnell, the schools minister, was pressed during an education committee hearing on Tuesday about the delegation of medical support to unregulated school staff.

Schools Week revealed last month how the dwindling number of nurses in schools means junior staff are forced to undertake complex medical procedures on vulnerable pupils.

Committee chair Helen Hayes told the minister that the SEND code of practice and the Department for Education’s guidance on supporting pupils with medical conditions “doesn’t address the question of the delegation of medical support to unregulated school staff”.

“We know this is a situation that leaves, potentially, both pupils and staff extremely exposed, because there are unqualified staff



Catherine McKinnell

delivering medical support in school settings. That is a situation that is unacceptable.”

She asked what work the government was doing to “make sure that there’s clear guidance, but also to make sure that the financial responsibility for delivering medical support in education settings is borne by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)”, rather than “eating into” already-stretched high needs funding.

McKinnell said the government appreciated “the appetite for updated guidance on the delegation of clinical tasks by healthcare professionals to school and college staff”.

She said DfE officials, alongside DHSC and NHS England, were “developing non-statutory guidance to clarify the roles and responsibilities. We plan to publish this as soon as possible in the autumn.”

NHS data for England shows the number of full-time equivalent school nurses has fallen from 3,000 in 2010 to about 2,000.

The National Association of Head Teachers annual conference in May debated a motion highlighting the problem.

Proposed by Marijke Miles, a member of the association’s practice committee, the motion warned that DfE guidance was being misinterpreted and used to pressure schools into providing medical care.

“Clinicians up and down the land are quoting it as a requirement for schools to undertake clinical procedures, including ones that are quite invasive, when that is not what the guidance actually says,” she said.

JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS

## Reforms will not force pupils out of special schools

Pupils who are “very settled” in special schools will not be forced to move into mainstream settings, a senior government official has said today amid concerns over upcoming reforms.

But Alison Ismail, the director of SEND at the DfE, said ministers wanted to do “more to support” the needs of pupils with autism, speech and language needs and conditions such as ADHD “in their local school where possible”.

Schools Week revealed earlier this year how the government was considering restricting the use of education, health and care plans to pupils in special schools as part of planned reforms to the SEND system.

The government is due to set out its full plans in a schools white paper this autumn.

Giving evidence to the education committee, Ismail referred to snap data collected from councils about shortfalls in provision over the past two years.

She said that regardless of whether an area



Alison Ismail

traditionally had more special schools, there was “really strong feedback that there’s a shortage of specialist places”.

The prevalence of hearing and visual impairment and profound and multiple learning disabilities – which would traditionally have been supported in special schools – had stayed “very, very steady”.

“Where we’ve seen overwhelming growth is in autistic spectrum disorder...speech, language and communication...especially in young children, and in social, emotional mental health.”

Although those with the most acute needs would stay in special schools, ministers wanted more children’s needs met in mainstream settings.

“Obviously there will be children within those groups who are very settled in specialist provision. We absolutely wouldn’t expect them to move, and we recognise it’s a complex picture with many children having more than one type of need.

“But in general, of those real growth areas, we would like to be doing more to support them in their local school where possible.”

Catherine McKinnell, the schools minister, said that she wanted to be “really clear from the outset that we won’t be removing any existing, effective support”.



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Feature

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS | @LYDIACHSW

# Raising the status of the classroom teacher

The Teaching Commission this week recommended a new role to keep good staff in the classroom. Does it signal the return of the advanced skills teacher?

Expert teachers” should be established to reward and retain staff who want to further their careers but stay in the classroom, a new report has said.

The Teaching Commission has also called for the teacher pay review body to have a wider remit to include investigating how much longer staff work above their 1,265 directed hours and to look at better parental pay.

*Shaping the Future of Teaching*, released today, highlights a “weakened workforce” and says long-term reforms are needed to deliver a “thriving” profession.

One of the key recommendations is the establishment of an “expert teacher” role to “recognise and reward expertise in classroom teaching”.

They would act as role models of “good professional practice” and “raise the status of the classroom teacher” by offering those wanting to further their careers an option that does not

mean leaving the classroom.

The report recommended “appropriate financial incentives to make the role attractive to teachers”.

Baroness Mary Boustead, the commission chair, told *Schools Week*: “At the moment the only way that teachers can progress in their career is to go the management route.

“You take on management responsibilities and you get extra pay for that in the form of TLRs [teaching and learning responsibility payments]. Then you get put on the leadership scale.”

She said the new role would likely be “very popular and a very good move for teachers in their 30s, particularly women who may well leave to have children and may not want to take on management responsibilities”.

Nearly one in four of the 40,000 teachers who left the profession in 2022-23 were women in their 30s.

**Return of the “advanced skills teacher”?**

Boustead said expert teachers would need “a lesser timetable” to allow them to mentor and support other staff. They should be paid “equivalent, at least, to the TLR scale”.

She suggested it could be similar to the “advanced skills teachers” initiative, introduced in 1998 but phased out in 2013 when funding was cut.

An Ofsted study found most had “significantly” improved the quality of teaching in their school.

Boustead said the new position could be linked with chartered teacher status, a professional accreditation run by the Chartered College of Teaching.

The report does not say how many expert teachers should be appointed, but about 4,000 were designated under the previous scheme – one for every five schools.

The report did not cost the proposal, with Boustead saying any policy should be shaped by “unions, employers and the government”.

# Feature: Teaching Commission



Pepe Di'Iasio, the general secretary of the school leaders' union ASCL, described expert teachers as "an interesting proposal".

"Progression opportunities are important for aiding retention and this new role could be helpful in this regard. We'd be happy to discuss this recommendation further."

## Review of "excessive working hours"

While recruitment is on track to improve this year, secondary recruitment is still expected to hit about 86 per cent of its target.

Almost 10 per cent of teachers left the profession in 2022-23, most of them of working age.

"This wastage means that it takes 10 newly qualified teachers to replace every seven who leave the profession early," the report said.

"We are losing far too many teachers because the reality of their working lives does not match their motivation for joining and remaining in the profession."

The commission also calls for a big expansion of the School Teachers' Review Body's (STRB) remit, which makes recommendations on pay, duties and working time.

This would include a "review [of] the excessive working hours culture in schools and to develop proposals which place a limit on teacher and school leader contracted working time".

A headteacher can direct a full-time teacher to work 1,265 hours over 195 days in a year.



## 'This could be a very good move for teachers in their 30s'

### Look at other duties

But the commission says the STRB should look at the time spent on other duties over and above the directed hours, including planning, marking, and managing behaviour.

Boustead said this would "document the excessive hours teachers work and require a change of mindset in leadership". She said leaders would then have to reduce a teacher's workload to give them new responsibilities, rather than requirements "just added on".

The most recent working lives of teachers report, published last week, showed a slight fall in teaching hours last year. But they remain high.

Primary teachers worked an average of 52.5 hours a week and secondary an average of 50.3, far above the average 36.6 working hours for all workers, according to the Office for National Statistics.

The Teaching Commission says the Department for Education's working lives of teachers survey should also go beyond counting working hours, and measure work "quality and intensity". It recommends schools should also take part in discussions about working hours and work quality, including consultation with unions on directed time.

Di'Iasio said: "We have long been concerned by the unsustainable and excessive hours worked by many school leaders and would like to see teachers' pay and conditions updated to provide them with guaranteed breaks and maximum working hours."

### Tackle "institutional racism" and better parental leave

The report also looked at diversity. Thirty-seven per cent of primary and secondary pupils are from BAME backgrounds, but just 10 per cent of teachers.

Meanwhile, research last year from the National Foundation for Educational Research found while people from BAME backgrounds were over-represented in initial teacher training applications, they were disproportionately likely to be rejected.

This inequality continues throughout the profession, with BAME staff less likely to be promoted to leadership.

The commission is also calling for the government to make ethnicity pay gap reporting compulsory "so that employers are encouraged to identify and address disparities".

It is also calling for the government to "amplify the voices of black and global majority teachers" in recruitment materials and public engagement,



# Feature: Teaching Commission

and funded leadership development programmes for aspiring BAME leaders.

The commission also found maternity leave “compared very poorly with other graduate professions”.

It recommends the parental leave policies outlined in the Burgundy Book – the national agreement that outlines teachers’ conditions of service – should be “improved” to become “equal to equivalent professions”.

Emma Sheppard, the founder of The Maternity Teacher/Paternity Teacher Project, which has been campaigning for this move since 2023, said: “Equal and improved parental leave and pay would reduce the impact of the motherhood penalty that drives so many experienced women out of teaching, and attract more men into the profession who want to care for their own children, as well as the students in our schools.”

## The key recommendations

### How do teachers feel about their working lives?

- \* Give the STRB a remit to “review the excessive working hours culture in schools”, including proposals to “place a limit of teacher and school leader contracted working time”. This should include the work staff do over the 1,265 hours of directed time
- An annual government plan to address “excessive workload intensity”

### How do pupils feel about their learning lives?

- Pupils should be consulted on “priorities for change” on curriculum and assessment reform

### Pupil behaviour

- All schools should have “protocols” to respond centrally to parental complaints, with government guidance on the issue Teachers and leaders as learners
- Create “expert teachers” to “recognise and reward expertise in classroom teaching, with appropriate financial incentives”
- Update Burgundy Book to adopt equal and improved parental leave policies, compared with “equivalent professions”.



### Culture counts

- Leadership national professional qualifications (NPQs) should be “revised” to build on “extensive business research literature beyond schools”
- Schools should run “regular” reviews into their “professional culture”

### Schools as first responders

- School staff dealing with pupil poverty should get training and wellbeing support
- The STRB should investigate teacher and leader supply in deprived schools, and make recommendations for solutions

### Early departures

- Government to work with teacher training providers to ensure the early career framework is a “spiral curriculum, not a repetition of content” already covered in initial training
- Subject- or phase-specific professional development entitlement for early career teachers

### Returner mother teachers

- Burgundy book updated to adopt improved parental leave policies
- Extra support for returning mother teachers in their first year back

### Move with the times: Flexible working

- Schools should adopt “a more strategic and

iterative approach to timetabling”, involving “multiple senior leaders”

### Race to the top

- “Anti-racism framework” for initial teacher training providers and schools

### Compulsory reporting of ethnicity pay gap for employers

- Government-funded leadership programme for black and global majority leaders

### Money matters

- The STRB should be given an additional remit to explore raising starting salaries so they reach the top third of graduate earnings by 2030
- Review into how much deprivation funding streams such as pupil premium are being used for “core operational staffing costs”
- A 25-year school rebuilding and refurbishment programme

### Measuring the effects

- Ofsted should commission independent research into the consistency, reliability and validity of judgments
- Ofsted inspections ditched in favour of self-evaluation system
- Independent body to manage complaints about the conduct of Ofsted and inspection outcomes

[CLICK HERE TO VIEW THE REPORT](#)

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### SEPTEMBER 2025

September 17 | 10:00 am – 11:30 am  
**Innovate, Thrive and Craft: Your Professional Development Journey**  
With Jo Shirley and Karen Plowman



Online

FREE

September 22 | 2:00 pm – 5:00 pm  
**JCQ Access Arrangements 2025–26: What you Need to Know**  
With Lia Castiglione



Online

September 23 | 9:30 am – 4:00 pm  
**Beyond the Screen: Schools' Digital Safety and Mobile Use Summit**  
In association with The Bridge and Schools Week



In-Person

EdCity,  
London

### OCTOBER 2025

October 1 | 9:00 am – 12:30 pm  
**Mastering Self-Assessment: Transform Quality, Achieve More**  
With Tony Davis



Online

October 8 | 3:45 pm – 4:45 pm  
**Understanding substance misuse and addiction.**  
With Anoushka Dunic



Online

October 14 | 9:00 am – 4:00 pm  
**The Cybernetic Classmate: Safe and Secure AI for Teaching and Learning**  
With Darren Coxon



In-Person

EdCity,  
London

## Opinion

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## A YEAR OF LABOUR



## BRIDGET PHILLIPSON

Education secretary

## We've put in the foundations, now it's time that we build'

**The government and the sector working together can create an education system in which every child gets the education they deserve, writes Bridget Phillipson**

Time moves differently depending on where you stand. In opposition, each day was a reminder of how far off real change felt. We've all known that feeling of waiting, hoping, pushing through.

But it barely feels like weeks ago that I stepped into the Department for Education. What once felt distant now feels immediate — and the past year has flown by.

Taking on the role of education secretary is taking on what I truly believe to be the greatest job in government — delivering real change to benefit future generations.

There's a huge amount that's good about our education system and our teachers and leaders are at the heart of that.

But you, the schools sector, are loud and clear about the challenges that persist. Chronic teacher shortages, a broken SEND system, schools stepping into the gaps left behind by local services.

And above all, a system that is providing opportunity for some

children, but not for all children. And righting that wrong is my defining mission as education secretary.

But these are generational challenges. Challenges that require rock solid foundations on which to build.

So that's where we've started.

For children to achieve, they must be in school, and we have begun to turn the tide on the growing numbers absent.

They must be surrounded by brilliant teachers, and we have stopped the rot that had set in to recruitment and retention.

They must be settled and ready to learn, which is why I am so proud we have extended eligibility for free school meals to all families on universal credit, alongside rolling out our free breakfast clubs — which have delivered 2 million meals already.

That's not all. We were able to accept in full the pay review body's recommendations for a 4 per cent teacher pay award; more than 120,000 pupils are now in schools getting tailored support from RISE teams; and we're full steam ahead on delivering vital expanded childcare entitlements, with 6,000 new early places to be created through the first tranche of our new school-based nurseries.



## “Progress, and the work still to come, belongs to all of us

Let me be clear — this progress, and the work still to come, belongs to all of us. To the thousands of school leaders who attended our RISE conferences, sharing best practice to drive attendance improvements.

To the entire childcare sector, working tirelessly to offer families the affordable, high-quality childcare they deserve.

To every teacher, teaching assistant, social worker, early years practitioner, and education professional who has partnered with us to deliver the best possible outcomes for children, despite the challenging fiscal environment we inherited.

This is what true partnership looks like — government and sector, working hand in hand, united by a shared commitment to our children's futures.

But make no mistake. This is just the beginning. These are just the foundations. Now we build. Together we will create an education system where every

child, in every classroom, in every corner of the country gets the education they deserve.

Later this year, our schools white paper will set out an ambitious reform agenda. We will transform support for children with SEND. We will show an unrelenting focus on raising attainment for disadvantaged children and particularly the white working class, where outcomes continue to be shockingly low. We will equip every teacher with the tools they need to support every child. We will intervene earlier when children need help.

And I'm determined to work with you, the education sector, to deliver that transformation, to deliver an education system in which opportunity isn't an accident of birth.

The year's flown by — but opportunity can't wait. The change we're already delivering shows what is possible when we pull together. Now it's time to pick up the pace.



## Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## A YEAR OF LABOUR



## STEVE CHALKE

Founder, Oasis Charitable Trust

## More power to those who can deliver the PM's five missions

**The prime minister will put rocket boosters under his priorities, not by joining up Whitehall but by joining up communities, explains Steve Chalke**

Over the past year, I've been involved in various conversations with various government departments about how to deliver the "change" Sir Keir Starmer promised as he entered Downing Street. My answer is always the same: get out of the way.

Four of the government's five missions – on crime, health and growth as well as opportunity – all revolve directly around investing in children and young people. Ministers understand this, and are keen to work cross-departmentally.

But while that ambition is right, it won't happen fast or flexibly enough to make the impact we need now. On the other hand, partnership at the local level can, and ministers can certainly (and cheaply) nudge us in that direction. Here's an example.

One of the prime minister's top priorities, he declared in July last year, was to reduce crime by preventing teenagers from being swept on to the "escalator" to prison.

To do this, he committed to a new Young Futures programme, with a network of hubs "reaching every community" and bringing together youth workers, mental

health support workers and careers advisers.

A year on, the government have restated that commitment, but it has yet to publish a timeline. ("More details in due course.")

We do know that the rollout will begin with some "early adopter" pilots which will shape the policy's longer-term development, but the lack of substantial progress is frustrating and £95 million raised from applying VAT and business rates to private schools is clearly insufficient to fund it.

But there is a way of stretching the money and expanding the delivery.

The core issue – the one that sits behind all the presenting issues – is poverty. Poverty compounds all other difficulties for children and hugely increases their vulnerability to early contact with the criminal justice system.

When issues such as special educational needs and, say, developmental trauma are layered on top of poverty, a child's vulnerability multiplies exponentially.

Add in the lack of school resource to offer the bespoke care such children and their families need to thrive, and all too often the result is exclusion. This marks the start of a so-called "school-to-prison pipeline" that is not only disastrous for the child involved and their family but for all of us.



**“ We can stretch the money and expand the delivery**

So how do we move away from exclusion and towards a system strong enough to offer bespoke support to every child?

The first phase of a national roll-out of free breakfast clubs to primary schools in some of the most disadvantaged areas is a help. But there is much more we can do to support schools to mitigate the effects of poverty.

As the culture, media and sport secretary, Lisa Nandy, declared, "harnessing the dynamism, innovation and trusted reach of civil society organisations" is key.

Just as Labour was elected, and taking Lisa Nandy's words to heart, we opened Oasis St Martin's Village on the site of a former secondary school in South London. I was an unofficial Young Futures hub pilot.

Working to support the local schools, parents and the whole community, our aim is that no child is off-rolled from their mainstream school.

Our partners, a network of local community charities and organisations, work together to offer a therapeutic, relational approach to support, learning and engagement via everything from

music and catering to horticulture and photography (never losing sight of numeracy and literacy).

On top of this, we've added in a multidisciplinary NHS health team, plus advice and support services for parents.

Declining birth rates have led to school closures nationwide, leaving behind under-utilised or empty public buildings. Repurposing these – offered by local councils to educational trusts or other charities – provides a way for others to replicate and improve on the model we've pioneered.

Then, all you need are the salaries for a "village" director and administrator, whose tasks are to develop the infrastructure and partnerships with local charities invested in redirecting more young people towards extraordinary young futures.

Delivering Labour's missions won't start by joining up Whitehall, however innovative (and welcome) that would be.

It will start with less centralisation and joining up local communities.

And that's the kind of change we can all get behind.

## Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
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## A YEAR OF LABOUR



## DR NIC CROSSLEY

CEO, Liberty Academy Trust  
and national SEND  
representative, ASCL

## SEND: Hope still prevails, but Labour must learn to listen

**Treating the specialist and alternative sectors as afterthoughts means ministers have missed chances to progress towards a more inclusive system, writes Nic Crossley**

The Labour party's focus on "change" during its most recent years in opposition meant many in the specialist sector were cautiously optimistic come election day. Twelve months in, that hope prevails – but it does so despite some worrying observations.

While special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) didn't feature heavily in its manifesto, there was a sense that Labour intended to take stock of the true extent of the challenges before putting pen to paper and setting out detailed policy.

Some key commitments have certainly been acted upon since then, including the removal of tax exemptions for independent schools.

However, there is a growing and justified unease as the public starts to better understand what those of us in the specialist sector have long known about education and the types of schooling on offer: education is far more nuanced than we are willing to admit – and "need" takes many forms.

Independent schools are not solely populated by the wealthiest. Many are from families who have scrimped to secure a place for their child who

struggles in mainstream education yet lacks an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Many more are there because councils lack the capacity to offer the places required by EHCPs.

For these families and the state sector, closures as a result of this policy could be disastrous.

That said, addressing socio-economic disadvantage remains the right priority. The appointment of Sir Kevan Collins, first as a member of the Department for Education's non-executive board in July last year and then as its lead in January, is reassuring on that front. His experience adds credibility.

But to see the changes we desperately need, we also need champions embedded throughout the system, not just at the top.

Meanwhile, Labour's emphasis on inclusion (at least rhetorically) is an encouraging, necessary and positive step. But it's hard not to feel disappointment when the reality on the ground suggests that far too often SEND continues to be treated as an afterthought.

Yes, the SEND crisis has created a financial black hole. However, opportunities have been missed to make progress towards a more inclusive system.

For example, recent government-funded programmes to improve the maths teaching and enhance early language acquisition in primary schools are brilliant. But they are



“ It's hard not to feel disappointment

not open to special schools – or at least not to mine, which have been advised they are ineligible.

What message does that send about who these reforms are really for and what "breaking down barriers to opportunity" looks like in practice?

The same applies to the government's push to expand nursery provision. It makes good sense to make use of falling primary numbers and underused classroom space. But again, special schools were excluded from capital investment.

The reason given is that they are already at full capacity and cannot absorb nursery places as well. But this overlooks the opportunity that early intervention presents, both for children and for easing long-term system pressure.

Similarly, while proposals to increase Integrated Resource Provision (IRP) or Enhanced Resource Provision (ERP) within mainstream schools are logical on paper, they must be implemented with care.

It's sensible to use empty mainstream classrooms for learners with SEND, but that's not inclusion. Too often, these spaces are physically and socially isolated, set apart at

the far end of the building or in a temporary classroom across the playground.

This may improve access and integration, but it doesn't necessarily create a sense of belonging.

These examples point to a deeper issue: the failure to fully involve specialist and alternative provision in shaping policy from the start. The creation of a truly inclusive education system must begin with collaboration.

Engage with colleagues in specialist and alternative provision. Let them share their expertise in designing environments that support sensory integration. Let them share resources on pedagogical approaches that include, stimulate and stretch all learners. And let them support with behaviour that challenges, so teachers can teach, and learners can learn.

The expertise is here. Those of us in the specialist and alternative sector are not a threat; we're here to help and we're part of the solution.

So, as the government enters its second year, enough has happened to mean hope still prevails. Mine is chiefly that it's ready to listen to us. For our part, we're ready to contribute.

## Opinion

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## A YEAR OF LABOUR

BECKS  
BOOMER-CLARK

CEO, Lift Schools

## Curriculum: Labour is on the right path – but it's a tightrope

**The government must find a way to re-engage young people without sacrificing what we've gained from the past decade's knowledge-rich focus, says Becks Boomer-Clark**

In many ways, it's hard to believe that Labour's election victory was just a year ago given how much has happened since: Ofsted wranglings, the emergence of regional improvement for standards and excellence (RISE), a national reckoning on special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and a funding crisis that continues to bite. The list goes on.

It would be all too easy to become a little Eeyore-ish about it all, focusing only on the mounting challenges and seeing only the gathering storm clouds.

But there is a light breaking through. Amid the noise, the government has quietly begun to take curriculum seriously.

The curriculum and assessment review led by Professor Becky Francis looks set to bring some welcome clarity about the need for a knowledge-rich approach, rooted in ambition for every child. That should be applauded.

But as I said when giving evidence to the House of Lords social mobility policy committee,

we cannot ignore the reality that too many pupils are disengaging. As I told peers, children today are "voting with their feet".

To be clear, this is not an anti-knowledge argument, though it raised a wry smile to see how quickly some rushed to frame it that way. The front line between so-called trades and progs still seems remarkably well-defended.

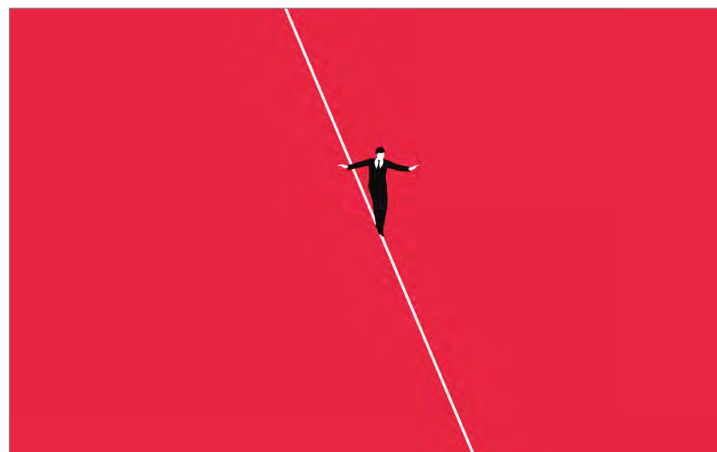
In fact, the truth is precisely the opposite. I believe deeply in the importance and power of knowledge. But we must also confront how we teach it, and how we make it stick.

Today's pupils are more digitally enabled than many of the people teaching them. They have a clearer sense of what the future might hold. They are more discerning.

And, bluntly, they know that if they don't want to turn up, they don't have to. We can levy penalty fines, cajole them, pressure them, but it's not going to switch them on.

So, we have to look to ourselves. In the face of this more discerning, demanding audience, it's for us to work out how we teach "the best that has been thought and said in the world" not just rigorously, but imaginatively and engagingly too.

Critics of this line of thinking claim it risks undermining the case for rigour. They are wrong. Strong



“ Knowledge comes first, but it can't stand alone

curricula and strong engagement are not at odds. We must marry academic excellence with teaching that sparks curiosity, makes space for discussion and connects big ideas to the real world young people inhabit, now and in the future.

We can and must champion strong curricula while ensuring they are delivered in a way that captures young people's attention and imagination, and speaks to the issues they care about most.

This is exactly what the curriculum and assessment review is edging towards in its recognition that skills, attitudes, values and engagement matter. Knowledge must come first, but it can't stand alone.

At Lift Schools, we are tackling this challenge head on. Our Innovation Lab's inaugural project, being launched this September, will explore how to make the Key Stage 3 curriculum unforgettable.

We'll be working with Year 6 and Year 8 pupils across our network to understand what makes learning stick – and what makes it sing.

We'll also be gathering views from leaders on how to revitalise Key Stage 3 so it becomes a catalyst, not a waiting room.

Systemic change takes time. In the meantime, it is up to us as trust and school leaders to show what is possible.

Across our 57 schools, we are relentlessly focused on engagement alongside rigour. We do this not to dilute standards but to ensure that the powerful knowledge we teach actually lands, is remembered, recalled and relished.

We should be encouraged by the government's early moves on curriculum reform. Becky Francis's interim report has taken some important first steps. But now is the moment to go further.

Let's invest in teachers' capacity to deliver unforgettable lessons.

Let's listen carefully to what pupils are telling us about how they experience learning.

And let's build a system that recognises that imparting knowledge isn't about dry delivery; it's about bringing the curriculum to life.



## Opinion

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## A YEAR OF LABOUR



LEORA  
CRUDDAS

Founding CEO, Confederation of  
School Trusts

## Engaging trusts is key to the opportunity mission's success

**Ministers have shown they can listen to the sector. More of that will be necessary as the details of its proposed programme are worked out, writes Leora Cruddas**

The Japanese word for crisis is made up of two parts, meaning danger and opportunity. That shift in perspective is perhaps never more keenly felt than when a politician moves between opposition and government.

As the Labour frontbench switched from one side of the dispatch box to the other in July last year, easy calls of crisis – a reflex word on the campaign trail – became knotty problems to unpick and dangers in the offing. Round-worded manifesto promises became detailed policy proposals to be costed, consulted, negotiated and legislated.

As a charity, the Confederation of School Trusts (CST) is strictly apolitical. We worked with the Labour team in opposition and into government, as we work with all the main political parties.

Our role is to work constructively to get the best education system we can – something we think is best achieved through schools working together in organisations dedicated to that cause.

We believe in deep and purposeful

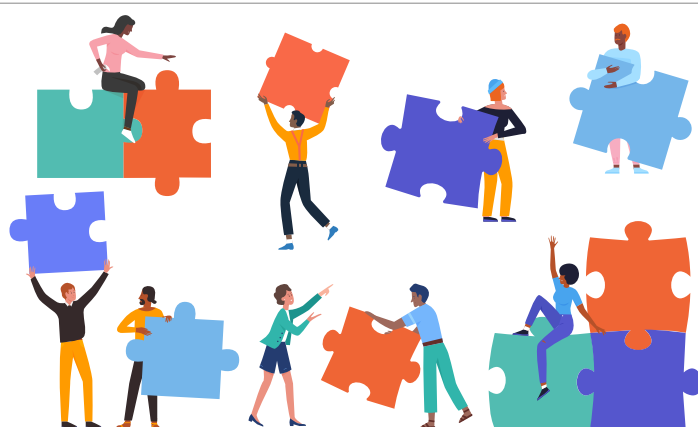
collaboration which is enacted by a group of schools working together in this way. This honours the work of schools, while also creating resilience in our school system.

Labour's relationship to academy trusts has long been a complicated one. It pioneered the concept and its leaders have largely supported trusts, though some party members, and particularly the unions, have been less keen.

We have been pleased to hear positive words from Sir Keir Starmer and the education secretary, Bridget Phillipson, with the prime minister telling the House of Commons that "academies are here to stay, and will continue to drive up standards". He added: "We introduced academies, we are committed to them, and we are driving standards up."

It is no secret that CST and many of our member academy trusts have been concerned about what we believed may be the unintended consequences of some aspects of the government's proposed legislation.

We welcome the constructive engagement we have had with government and its ensuing amendment to the teacher pay and conditions measure in the children's wellbeing and schools bill. We continue to work closely with ministers and officials on the regulations that will underpin other measures in the bill.



**“ We welcome ministers' constructive engagement ”**

There are many things we agree on. The urgent threat of child poverty. The need to reform our approach to special educational needs, so that all our children flourish. The challenge of revitalising teaching as a career that people want to join and to stay in, as well as ensuring rewarding jobs for all the many essential support staff without whom our schools couldn't function.

This truly is an opportunity mission. But there is also potential danger.

We need to balance doing something with doing the right thing: looking to the evidence to inform our actions and prioritising changes that really make a difference today, and not reliving the battles of the past.

We have faith in Professor Becky Francis's approach to the national curriculum review, but we understand why the potential for change and upheaval makes colleagues anxious. There is much nuance in the detail.

We have worked for many years with Tom Rees, chair of the Department for Education's expert

group on special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). We are so proud of the paper he authored with Ben Newmark on *A Good Life*, which makes the powerful case for greater dignity for people with learning disability. But we also understand the fear that any change in this incredibly sensitive area can illicit.

This autumn's promised white paper will be an important marker of what approach the government will take in future years. We look forward to the clarity that this important policy paper will bring.

We are committed to working with government to set out a shared vision for our school system, underpinned by the principles of excellence, inclusion and equity.

Our children get just one chance at childhood. Over the past 30 years we have seen significant changes in our schools. We have moved from a system that sometimes seemed to abandon children born in the wrong postcodes to one where the vast majority of our schools are good and improving.

We will keep working with government to seize the opportunity.

## SEND Solutions

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# CHARLOTTE BARTON

Managing director,  
Progress Schools

## How to make the most of AP's expertise

**Alternative provision is an untapped source of expertise on behaviour, engagement and attendance, writes Charlotte Barton. Here's how to make the most of its potential**

**T**he government's educational vision clearly rests on delivering more inclusive mainstream schools. This is a positive step, but transformation takes time and we can't afford to leave young people behind as we await reform. We must start learning lessons from alternative provision (AP) now.

Much of the focus on "inclusive mainstream" has been specifically on SEND, but there is a growing cohort of pupils in AP schools who don't necessarily come under this broadly used banner. With permanent exclusions and suspensions at an all-time high, it is evident that the mainstream system is not yet built for their needs.

So what can we do to better support pupils who are persistently disruptive, struggle to engage academically or rarely attend irrespective of the settings they are currently registered with?

### A policy voice

We are supporting young people who face mental health challenges, have experienced childhood trauma and deal with turmoil in their home lives.

Inspection frameworks for the

sector must be reflective of these challenges. Progress measures must account for their starting points in a much broader way.

The recent announcement of a new SEND taskforce is welcome, but where are the voices from AP? The sector should have its own taskforce to reflect its own challenges.

### Equal partners

On a practical level, there is clear opportunity for AP and mainstream schools to work more closely, particularly when AP is used as a stepping stone back into mainstream.

Mainstream school teams are highly skilled, but a close working relationship with an AP school can provide a useful sounding board when responding to issues AP practitioners deal with every day.

There is huge potential for this peer-to-peer approach to be implemented more widely.

### Respite, not response

With more than 10,000 permanent exclusions a year, we need to shift the focus from reactive to preventative action. Sadly, AP is often seen as a last resort and even as a final threat for pupils who persistently fall short of mainstream expectations.

Instead, AP should be more commonly used as respite from an environment that these pupils find challenging. Earlier intervention to help a young person get back on



**“ AP is often seen as a last resort or a final threat**

track makes a return to mainstream more viable for those who want it.

### A change of mindset

Many of those who are permanently excluded do want to work towards a return to mainstream, but find they can't because places aren't available to them. Others find they thrive better with smaller classes and an alternative approach.

None deserve to feel they are in a second-class setting, or marginalised as a form of punishment. And those who can make the move back often need ongoing support to make the transition a success.

Key here is for mainstream teams to see and to talk about AP as expert settings and the right place to support pupils with specific needs.

### Reaching the 'unreachable'

Some 39,000 children were missing education this academic year, and the number of pupils not registered at a school or receiving suitable education elsewhere is increasing. This includes many who have been referred to AP but do not attend.

To be truly inclusive, we need to reach these young people too.

Schools make welfare checks but often lack the resources to address the barriers to attendance.

Last year, we trialled a community learning initiative with a local authority that focused on reaching these lost pupils. A specially trained community teacher was assigned up to five pupils. They did home visits, assessed the barriers and developed tailored plans that included sessions on emotional wellbeing, resilience or academic subjects, depending on need.

This work provided the first stepping stone for many on their return journey to mainstream education. Its success means we're now rolling the approach out in other areas, and there's no reason it shouldn't happen in every local authority.

In short, AP is key to delivering the more inclusive mainstream schools and rising standards the government envisions.

To do that, the sector must be seen as the willing partner that it is, its specific context recognised and its experience valued so that an early, flexible response to need becomes the norm.

## THE CONVERSATION LISTENING IN ON THE DIGITAL STAFFROOM

**Shekeila  
Scarlett**

Chair of governors,  
Stoke Newington  
School and  
Sixth Form



### PURPOSEFUL COMMUNICATION

Having navigated the challenges of studying this year while also coming to terms with my neurodivergence, I found it timely and affirming to come across a blog exploring creative approaches to home education for neurodivergent children.



Michelle Chaoiry outlines five key strategies for creating an environment that supports meaningful learning: breaking the mould, transforming everyday spaces, blending technology with tactile experiences, fostering curiosity, and – my personal favourite – building community.

What struck me most while reading (and scribbling notes) was how each strategy is rooted in meeting individual needs with empathy. It's about making minor, thoughtful adjustments that help children feel seen, and transforming safe spaces at home into supportive, dual-purpose learning environments.

Best of all, the same principles could easily inspire more inclusive approaches to things such as homework or revision spaces. Why not make them part of your community-building?

### PURPOSEFUL READING

One of the things we want all children to do at home is read – for learning and for fun – and



the above could help with that. In school, our role is to model and support that activity, and this blog is a helpful reminder that to do that, we must be intentional about making their reading purposeful.

Purposeful reading isn't just about decoding words but about contextualising texts with subject knowledge, so students truly understand why they're reading – whatever the subject.

The blog's emphasis on scaffolding, discipline-specific approaches and choosing rich, curriculum-aligned texts made me think about how I, as someone who doesn't teach, can influence or better support young people I work with to read differently. It requires a shift from encouraging reading as a generic skill to fostering deep engagement with the content.

After all, how else can we hope to empower young people with the confidence to question, analyse and make sense of what they read?

### PURPOSEFUL INCLUSION

With Schools Diversity Week just behind us, I wanted to reflect here on something that has grown increasingly important to me since completing a course with the Institute for Equity, University Centre this year.

That course has transformed my approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), and the bee it put in my bonnet is diversity in leadership.

It's in that context that I read this blog by Yasmina Koné, and it really resonated with me. It explores how schools can embed cultural awareness into leadership and practice, and how doing so benefits the entire school community.

Drawing on insights from HMC's recent deputy heads' conference and conversations with Katie Shapiro and Dr Clare Ives, Koné

outlines three key takeaways.

The first is the importance of cultural awareness in pastoral care, and Koné calls for concrete investment in staff development. As someone who's benefitted from similar training, I can't emphasise enough how necessary this is for meaningful progress.

The second insight was perhaps the most doable: the importance of consistency in the everyday. Inclusion isn't about grand statements; it's about making equity and belonging to the norm. Small daily acts speak volumes, and it goes without saying that inclusion should not require extra effort but should be embedded.

The final insight struck me the most. It's about empowering students to be inclusive, right from the start. It reminded me of a TikTok video I watched recently, where a young girl – no older than five – was in tears because she couldn't wear a hijab like her Muslim friend.

In a follow-up video, her parents let her wear one to school, and the child was visibly and verbally ecstatic about it. It was such a touching moment and a perfect example of what happens when young people are exposed to environments where inclusion is normalised.

With the right teaching and encouragement, children instinctively adopt values such as respect, curiosity and empathy toward the diverse ways of being they come across.

This blog also rightfully notes that inclusive practice isn't just the responsibility of EDI leads; it belongs to all of us.

I urge you to read it. Purposefully.



Click the links to access  
the blogs and podcasts





# The Knowledge

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



## What are the barriers to unleashing our STEM potential?

**Dr Lauren Sullivan MP, Chair,  
Parliamentary Office of Science  
and Technology**

From classroom to careers, education is essential to inspiring young scientists, securing the UK's future in a fast-evolving science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) sector and meeting challenges such as net zero and more.

However, new research from the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) shows that long-standing challenges continue to limit STEM opportunities in schools, and the gap between supply and demand of STEM skills is wide in some areas.

One of the most significant barriers to STEM progression begins at GCSE. Recent figures show 12 per cent of schools can't offer triple science, largely due to shortages of specialist teachers.

POST's research shows that triple science is crucial. Seventy-nine per cent of those who go on to study a science at A-level have taken three science subjects at GCSE, and those with triple science at GCSE are also more likely to pursue STEM degrees.

This lack of opportunity disproportionately affects students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are already underrepresented in STEM. Students from working-class and minority-ethnic backgrounds are also more likely to be affected by high teacher turnover and poor-quality teaching.

In many schools, science and engineering subjects are taught by teachers without relevant post-16 qualifications. This limits options across the board, as teachers spend their time on science, leaving their specialist subjects with less resource and further reducing opportunities for these students.

Meanwhile, recruitment and retention of STEM teachers remain major challenges. STEM Learning, a non-profit organisation, told the education select committee that increasing access to subject-specific professional development for STEM teachers could significantly improve retention. Parliament must consider whether greater support is needed here.

The current approach to maths GCSE has also been met with criticism. Some say it fails to



support those who struggle most.

In 2024, around 30 per cent of 16-year-olds did not pass their maths exams. Although these students are required to continue studying maths, only a quarter of them eventually achieve a passing grade.

Although uptake of A-level maths post-16 is relatively strong, many STEM university students lack maths qualifications beyond GCSE. In the workforce, 46 per cent of businesses struggle to recruit data skills.

"Core maths" (equivalent to an AS-level) was introduced in 2014 to improve post-16 engagement, but uptake remains low. Schools can play a pivotal role by promoting this alternative to better prepare students for opportunities in higher education, technical training or the jobs market.

Improving careers education is also vital. POST's research shows that many students are unaware of the wide range of STEM careers or the pathways to reach them, including vocational routes.

Increasing participation in vocational routes is one way to improve the availability of technical, occupation-specific STEM skills.

The number of apprentices starting in a science field fell by 16 per cent between 2017-18 and 2021-22; and in 2024, the industry body Make UK reported a 42-per cent drop in engineering and manufacturing apprenticeships since 2016-17.

Of course, limited funding affects the number

of apprentices, but the persistent perception that academic study is the only way into STEM also needs to be challenged. Apprenticeships and other vocational routes can provide technical skills and expertise that are typically harder to develop through academic learning.

As well as being seen as highly academic, STEM is also perceived by many as a domain for the "brainy" or for boys. Evidence shows that these stereotypes continue to discourage capable students (especially girls and those from disadvantaged backgrounds) from pursuing STEM, even when they perform well in these subjects.

Schools must actively challenge these stereotypes and foster inclusive learning environments that reflect the diversity of their students.

As they prepare to leave school, students also need high-quality, personalised careers guidance that demystifies STEM and expands their sense of what's possible. It is essential that all students, regardless of gender or background, are encouraged to explore the full range of opportunities available to them.

By empowering young STEM talent to explore its full potential, we can build a more inclusive and resilient workforce, equipped to meet the challenges of the future.

**Read the full report on the UK STEM skills  
pipeline from POST**

Week in

## Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

## SUNDAY

"Two million meals already served at free breakfast clubs," boasted the headline of a government press release issued today.

With ministers under fire from multiple directions, we can understand the desire for some positive press.

But data published by the government shows take-up in many participating schools remains low.

The government's survey in May found 35 per cent reported below 20 per cent take-up, while 47 per cent said it was between 20 and 40 per cent.

Still, that didn't stop Bridget Phillipson from trumpeting the government's achievements.

"This milestone in our plan for change will make all the difference to working families, as every child deserves the chance to start the day supported and ready to learn," she said, predictably.

"That's why we are determined to break the link between background and success – delivering two million meals in the first term of free breakfast clubs, making an immediate and direct impact and easing the pressures on working families.

"We know parents are living busy lives, juggling family time and jobs, so I urge all parents who can to make use of the clubs."

## TUESDAY

Former education secretary Sir James Cleverly has already proved himself to be a thorn in the side of the government after joining the education committee last week.

Chair Helen Hayes was forced to intervene when the Conservative politician started a back-and-forth with schools minister Catherine McKinnell today.

Cleverly, who never got to make his mark on the Department for Education in his two-month tenure during the 2022 government crisis, did have a point.

McKinnell kept telling MPs that under her government's SEND reforms, pupils receiving EFFECTIVE support will not lose that provision.

Cleverly correctly pointed out that this was not a cast-iron guarantee that no provision would be pulled, given it's not saying what would happen to any support deemed not to be effective.

But his questions and the minister's reticence to answer them points to a wider issue with the reforms.

An absence of a proper narrative from the government has left room for speculation, rumour and fear. It's going to be a long wait for the white paper in the autumn.

## WEDNESDAY

While we accept it wasn't the biggest talking point emerging from today's prime minister's questions, it needs to be pointed out.

Sir Keir Starmer was happily listing what his government has delivered so far.

"Promised free breakfast clubs ... a promise delivered." Errrm.... the government's pledge was actually free breakfast clubs in all primary schools.

The government has only rolled out a trial that involves about 750 primaries – less than one in every 20!

## THURSDAY

Sir Martyn Oliver addressed the Festival of Education this week, and when he wasn't talking about the poetry of John Milton and how it's everyone else's fault he's half-arsed his Ofsted reforms, he gave us a rare glimpse of his in-tray.

It turns out the chief inspector has been receiving letters, not just about the quality of education, but about water supplies. It seems some members of the public have got their Ofsteds and Ofwats mixed up.

All the more reason to push the phonics agenda!

\*\*\*

Ofsted's social media team was on fire this week, promoting the chief inspector's keynote speech at the festival.

What image did they pick to illustrate the selected quotes from the speech pushed out on X? The same picture of Sir Martyn, smiling to the camera. Which looks odd when all four are displayed on the same screen...





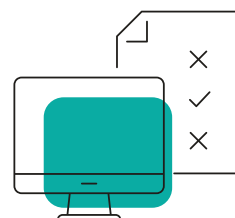


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