

CAMPAIGN TO STOP SUPPORT PLAN 'MISUSE'



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WHY IT'S TIME TO BRIDGE THE POST-16 AP CLIFF EDGE



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NEW TEACH FIRST BOSS: 'WE'LL DOUBLE DOWN ON QUALITY'



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'BREAKING POINT'



Investigation reveals maintained school budgets fall further into deficit, as governors sound the alarm. **Pages 5 and 6**

Labour plans Teach First recruitment scheme revamp

- Russell Group requirement could be ditched, bidders told
- New focus planned on top grads 'committed' to teaching
- DfE mulls 'supplier neutral' name over Teach First brand

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SCHOOLS
WEEK

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week jobs

FEATURED JOB

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The night before we put to bed our final edition of the school year, education secretary Bridget Phillipson addressed a Department for Education reception for school leaders about her government's first year.

One line stood out: "We won't shy away from what's difficult and long term in favour of what's quick and easy. And I mean that in many ways. The complex policy reform, where there are no simple solutions. On SEND especially."

We are all guilty at times of understating just how difficult the current government's inheritance was – not just educationally, but across the board.

But that doesn't excuse some of its decision-making. Labour is rightly proud of delivering a 5.5 per cent teacher pay rise, with another 4 per cent this year.

But it has fallen into a trap it often called the Conservatives out for, of squeezing schools to fund some of this.

The consequences are dire for school budgets, as we show again this week on pages 5 and 6.

As well as budget cuts, the fallout is hitting children as emboldened unions step up campaigns to push for better conditions that schools say they simply cannot afford (page 9).

Meanwhile, the push to recruit 6,500 teachers is a worthy one.

The government is looking at reshaping its contract to recruit "high potential" trainees, currently held by Teach First. This will involve dropping a requirement to recruit mostly from top universities in favour of finding recruits who will stay in schools for the long term (page 4).

But how does this differ from what many other good training providers already do? And plans to drop the Teach First brand for a "neutral" identity that could be decided by government risk eroding the scheme's uniqueness even more.

Teach First also has a new leader, who this week told us about his vision (page 14).

Making the difficult decisions – and prioritising long-term impact for easy headlines – is what the sector wants from politicians.

But getting better at explaining these decisions, and how they fit into a longer-term vision, is also needed. As is telling the sector how changes will make things better in the long term.

The *Schools Week* edition has now broken up for the summer. As always, you can keep up to date with news on our [website](#) and daily emails. Most importantly, enjoy the break, and we'll be back in your inbox on Friday, September 5..

Most read online this week:

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SCHOOLS WEEK

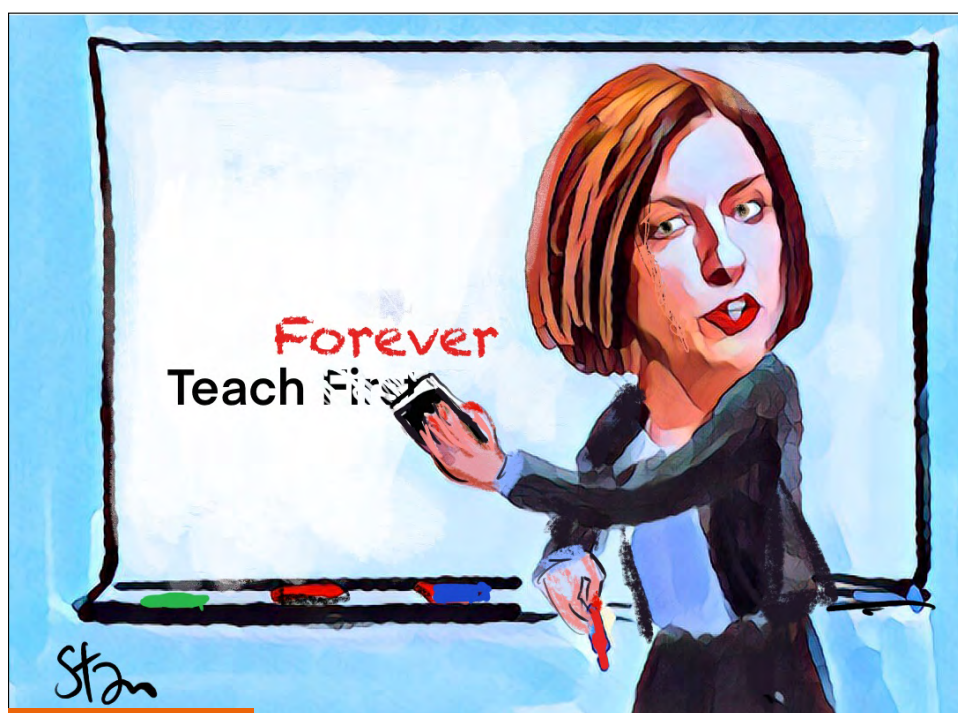
School leaders' most-read: Teacher Tapp survey in June of 607 headteachers on education media read in past month

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NEWS: RECRUITMENT

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DfE plans to shift Teach First from 'elite' unis to 'committed' locals

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

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EXCLUSIVE

The government "intends" to drop a requirement that most recruits for its flagship teacher training route, currently run by Teach First, should come from the elite group of Russell Group universities.

Instead, Labour wants to focus on recruiting graduates who are "committed" to teaching for the long term, show market consultation documents seen by Schools Week.

It would mark a big shift for the scheme, which has been run by Teach First since it launched in 2003 to recruit "exceptional graduates with high academic ability". The charity places recruits in schools in some of the most deprived areas.

Teach First's contract ends next year, with a tender to run the scheme for the next five years, worth up to £150 million, due to launch this summer.

Documents also show the government wants the new scheme to be "supplier neutral" – meaning it is likely to get a new name.

Dropping Russell Group requirement

Those interested in bidding for the contract were told earlier this year that the Department for Education "intends" to drop a "current requirement" that most recruits come from Russell Group universities, Schools Week understands.

This would "widen access", bidders were told, and potentially encourage more candidates to train and teach locally.

However, the government plans to maintain the stipulation that most recruits have a 2:1 degree.

Teach First has faced criticism for lower retention rates than other teacher training providers.

An NFER report in 2023 found its retention rate one year after qualifying was 69 per cent, below the 87 per cent on other routes.

But Teach First has a two-year training programme, compared with the one year of other routes, and trainees are placed in disadvantaged schools in which retention rates are lower.

Teach First supporters also point out many alumni deliver wider impact by moving to high-profile roles in the sector – for instance, setting up their own charities or organisations to improve outcomes for youngsters.

**Focus on retention**

However, the government is now considering whether it can incentivise retention, including by linking it to contract payments.

It wants the new scheme to find "exceptional candidates" "committed" to teaching in poorer areas over the "longer term", bidders were told.

Lindsay Patience, the co-founder of Flexible Teacher Talent and a Teach First alumnus who taught for 12 years, supported the change, adding: "People who will make a huge impact in the classroom don't have to have gone to a Russell Group university."

But others fear the shift could put off top graduates.

"I became a teacher in the early days with an expectation that I would teach in an undeserved community for two years and develop transferable skills," said one former Teach Firster.

"I have since spent more than 20 years in education, including 14 as a teacher and leader. I, and many others like me, would not have come into the profession without the invitation that Teach First made."

The shift could also lead to questions over the Teach First's higher funding.

James Noble-Rogers, the executive director of the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), said: "If Teach First is going to have a role ... then it does need to offer something distinct and add value recruiting people who wouldn't have otherwise gone into teaching."

Renaming scheme

The scheme's name could also change, with the government considering a "supplier neutral" identity, despite the Teach First brand being well-established after 23 years and having high recognition rates among graduates.

For instance, the charity is placed number 15 on *The Times*' Top 100 Graduate Employers list.

It follows similar moves across similar government schemes.

Frontline, England's largest social work charity, last year announced it was renaming its training programme – then known as Frontline – to "Approach Social Work".

Unlocked Graduates – a charity that trained graduates to become prison officers – did not extend its government contract last year after a disagreement over rebranding.

Natasha Porter, the founder and chief executive of Unlocked Graduates and a Teach First alumnus, said previous governments recognised it had "repeatedly failed" to get the best graduates into public service roles.

"Having a brand that is external to government is a key reason why Teach First has gone on to be so successful.

"More than 20 years on and Teach First is one of the best known and most valuable brands on campus. It would be bonkers to lose it"

Teach First did not want to comment in relation to the contract. A DfE spokesperson said the contract "will ensure we can continue to recruit more talented people with the potential to be outstanding teachers. We will set out more details in due course."

NEWS

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School budgets slide further into the red

CHAMINDA JAYANETTI

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EXCLUSIVE

Maintained schools budgets have fallen further into deficit, figures obtained by *Schools Week* show, prompting fresh concerns about their viability amid squeezed funding, rising costs and falling pupil numbers.

The findings come as governors say budgets are now their biggest concern – with one in ten schools relying on financial support to stay afloat.

This week the education unions also demanded that the government fully fund this year's 4 per cent pay rise for teachers to break the "vicious cycle" of funding cuts.

Sam Henson, the deputy chief executive of the National Governance Association, said school finances were at breaking point.

Data obtained under the Freedom of Information Act from 71 councils – nearly half the local authorities in England – shows that the average maintained primary school registered an in-year budget deficit of £6,360.49 in the 2024-25 financial year, compared with an average £3,162.17 in 2023-24.

Fifty-four per cent of primary schools are still maintained. At secondary, just 17 per cent remain under local authorities.

There was a rapid dip in finances in the 299 maintained secondary schools in our dataset, falling from a £46,000 average in-year surplus in 2023-24 to £43,000 average deficit in 2024-25.

Some councils had not yet received schools' end-of-year financial returns when we submitted our request, or declined to release figures ahead of the government national data release.

But of our dataset, the average in-year revenue deficit for all maintained schools quadrupled from £1,169.26 in 2023-24 to £4,585.10 in 2024-25.

The data covers 5,345 maintained schools, but no academies, independent or free schools. The figures also exclude maintained schools that



'Leaders are having to fundraise to bring in the money they need'

became academies during the two financial years.

"As these figures show, many schools are continuing to face severe pressures in making their budgets balance," said Ian Hartwright, the head of policy at the school leaders' union NAHT.

"School leaders are being forced into cuts that include reducing the number of hours of teachers and teaching assistants, with others leaving posts vacant when staff leave.

"Some are even having to fundraise in an effort to bring in the money they need to maintain provision for pupils."

The headline data also hides considerable variation between local authorities, with some seeing improved school finances and others a considerable worsening.

About half of the primary schools that registered an in-year deficit in 2023-24 did so again in 2024-25.

Out of the 4,540 primary schools in the dataset, 710 were in deficit on their cumulative revenue budgets in 2024-25 – just under 16 per cent, and up from 645 in 2023-24 (14.2 per cent).

Running an in-year deficit can be advised when accumulated surpluses run very high.

But the primary schools that registered an in-year deficit in 2024-25 were carrying cumulative surpluses from the previous year only slightly above the national average – £128,000 per school in deficit, compared with £122,500 among all primaries – which fell by about 44 per cent in the past year. This suggests the in-year deficits are down to more than just sensible pruning of excess reserves.

The figures give an indication of how stretched budgets were before the 4 per cent teacher pay rise this financial year, which schools will have to find further savings to fund.

"Ministers have not fully funded the rise in national insurance costs for schools or the salary uplifts for teachers and school leaders



Sam Henson

NEWS			DO YOU HAVE A STORY? CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK
that are much-needed after years of real-terms cuts,” Hartwright said. “At the same time, demands upon schools are ever-increasing, with the government wanting to see more pupils with special educational needs (SEND) educated in mainstream classrooms.” The recent spending review pledged £4.7 billion extra for schools. But accounting for rising costs, this works out as a less than 1 per cent rise by 2028. The Institute for Fiscal Studies also said the expected rise in spending on SEND could also wipe out the small rise – which left schools facing a real-terms spending freeze. Daniel Kebede, the general secretary of the National Education Union, said the spending review was not “a good settlement” for education. “Schools will face further cuts for the foreseeable future.” Our analysis shows great variation between councils. Maintained primaries in North Yorkshire went from an average in-year surplus of £7,963 in 2023-24, to an average deficit of £21,186 in 2024-25. Meanwhile, Bury’s maintained primary schools saw a financial recovery from	an average deficit of £41,589 in 2023-24 to an average surplus of £13,914 last year. Barking and Dagenham is one of the worst affected areas. The London borough’s 32 maintained primary schools went from an average in-year deficit of £4,806 in 2023-24 to a huge average deficit of £112,082 in 2024-25, leaving 14 of the schools in a cumulative deficit position. The council said this was down to more children with high needs moving into the area, falling rolls and rising costs – including unfunded pay increases. “Together, these pressures are rapidly depleting any reserves schools may have previously held,” a spokesperson said. “All schools with a deficit are required to have a recovery plan in place and to take steps to bring their spending back into balance over time. Our schools are working closely with their governing bodies to make difficult decisions in an extremely challenging financial context.”  Daniel Kebede	Teachers’ leaders responded to the figures by calling for more funding. “It’s vital the promised reforms to SEND are backed by the necessary funding, and that children’s education is prioritised in future government spending decisions, with the sustained long-term investment schools desperately need,” said Hartwright. “Without this, with the best will in the world, schools will struggle to consistently provide children with the first-rate education they deserve.” Kebede added: “The effect on the profession of pay, workload and a lack of funding is clear to see and the reason for the worst recruitment and retention teaching crisis in a generation. “The NEU calls on the chancellor to put money into schools so that the long years of cuts that are affecting the ability of schools to give children and young people the education they deserve. can finally come to an end.” Schools Week also asked councils for forecast financial outturns for 2025-26, but hasn’t included the figures as most were formulated before the government decided to fund some of the teachers’ pay award for this year.	

JACK DYSON @JACKYDYS		
‘Balancing the books is our biggest challenge’		
More school governing boards say that balancing the books is their biggest challenge – with more than one in 10 schools needing loans or council support to stay afloat. Many say funding for SEND was a key issue, while one in five says the extra services they are providing for those in need are putting them under “unsustainable” strain. The findings are from the latest National Governance Association (NGA) annual survey of more than 3,000 governors and trustees. Sam Henson, the deputy chief executive of the NGA, said: “This year’s findings confirm what governing boards have been telling us for some time – school finances are no longer just under pressure, but at breaking point.” Sixty-eight per cent of those surveyed	said “balancing the budget” was their main challenge. The figure is 8 percentage points up on last year and the highest NGA has recorded in the past 15 years. Thirty per cent “are unable to balance income and expenditure without drawing on surplus from previous years”. A further 11 per cent said they would dip into the red “without [a] licensed deficit from the local authority” or a government loan. Just 16 per cent believe their school or trust is “financially sustainable”. Staff pay (75 per cent), SEND costs (69 per cent) and projected pupil numbers (39 per cent) were the other main pressures on budgets. The NGA is calling for the government to reinvest “funding released by falling rolls to	secure increased per-pupil and pupil premium allocations”. Sixty-three per cent of boards listed SEND as their top challenge, compared with 37 per cent last year, including accessing funding (84 per cent) and securing education, health and care plans (67 per cent). Just over half reported a rise in the additional services their schools or trusts offered to support families, with 20 per cent saying this was “placing unsustainable pressure” on their organisations. “Without urgent action we risk not only damaging the working conditions of staff and the learning experience of pupils, but also eroding the ability of schools and trusts to meet the needs of their communities,” Henson said.

NEWS: RETENTION

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Ex-teachers campaign to end support plan 'abuse'

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EXCLUSIVE

Former teachers have turned campaigners to call out the misuse of support plans which they say is being "weaponised" to "force out" staff from schools.

Silence by Support, a campaign group they have founded, wants the government to collect data on the use of support plans and capability procedures, fearing they are "disproportionately" used against older teachers and those on higher pay.

Plans should be used to help under-performing teachers improve, but the group says they are too often "weaponised for workforce management".

They have collected testimony from 100 teachers who say they've been "driven out" through the "deliberate misuse" of plans, leaving staff experiencing "grief, trauma, betrayal, and broken identity". Many do not return to the classroom.

Campaign co-founder Nick Smart, a primary teacher, said: "We urgently need transparency, oversight and reform. The overuse and abuse of support plans must end.

"The profession cannot afford to keep discarding those who still have so much to offer."

101 testimonials

He launched the campaign 'alongside former teachers Sarah Dunwood and Sharon Cawley, who set up the Facebook group Life After Teaching: Exit the Classroom and Thrive. It now has 175,000 members.

Dunwood says they noticed "more and more people...almost on a daily basis" posting about support plans. They created Silenced by Support after writing to the education secretary last year.

Government guidance for schools says capability procedures should apply "only to teachers and school leaders where there are concerns, which the appraisal process has been unable to address, of not meeting the required standards of work performance".

"Except in the most serious cases", formal capability procedures should only be used after "a period of informal support

Support plans 'out of the blue'

But testimonies collected by the group suggest otherwise.



'That one brutal meeting changed my life'

One teacher says all middle leaders at their "struggling" academy were placed on informal support plans for just two weeks following an 'unsatisfactory' Ofsted judgment.

They had no prior warning about performance, but were scapegoated for the inspection outcome.

"Obviously, we all 'failed' to improve in two weeks and were essentially given a choice of resign before being put on formal plans or fight. Most of us left. One stayed and fought, and was managed out as they failed their formal plan."

Another "dedicated" primary teacher of 33 years was placed on a support plan at 55. The school had recently been academised, and she says "many" teachers were "driven out" this way.

She recalled her "shock and heartbreak" at being summoned for a "brutal" meeting with her headteacher out of the blue.

"To say I was subjected to a character and professional assassination is an understatement. It was so traumatic that I broke down, drove home and was then off with WRS (work-related stress) for four months."

Her union helped her to negotiate a redundancy payout and she left.

"Teaching has always been my true vocation. However, that one brutal meeting changed my life."

Others also claim government guidance that says informal support plans should have "clear objectives, timelines and goals" are not followed.

NDAs used as part of settlements

Many of the testimonies end in "resignation under duress, often accompanied by a settlement agreement, an agreed reference, and a non-disclosure clause", he says.

NDAs preserve "a misleading narrative" that staff turnover is natural, when it was often driven by a system that prioritised budgets over people.

One teacher says they were "bullied out of post with a settlement and an NDA" after they challenged the way support plans were used to "manage out" other staff.

Another said they were an upper pay scale 3 teacher "with a great career spanning 23 years" when they were "suddenly" placed on an informal support plan involving hourly observations.

They took leave due to WRS and came to a settlement involving an NDA.

Another senior leader had been teaching for more than 30 years when they were placed on a support plan "with no warning".

"I was devastated and went off with WRS...My union said they dealt with two a week. I accepted a pay-off and signed an NDA but never recovered."

Testimonies collected by the group span a decade, but campaigners say many relate to recent years – and unions say they have encountered recent examples too.

It comes as the government this week promised to "ban" NDAs – but only when they were used to

Continued on next page

NEWS: RETENTION

“silence employees subjected to harassment and abuse”.

“What unites these stories is not failure, incompetence, or misconduct. It is the quiet, creeping removal of experienced, often older and more expensive professionals through the mechanism of the support plan,” says Smart.

Higher pay scales targeted?

A lack of national data makes understanding trends difficult.

A survey by Teacher Tapp this month, commissioned by Edapt, suggests older teachers are less affected.

It shows 7 per cent of teachers and leaders in their 20s had been put on a support plan in the past year – up from 5 per cent the previous year.

This dropped to 4 per cent for those in their 30s and 40s, and to 3 per cent once teachers were in their 50s.

NASUWT's 2024 Big Question survey, involving more than 10,000 teachers, also found teachers with fewer than five years' experience had the highest rate of being put on support plans in the past year (7.6 per cent), compared with 3.7 per cent among those with 25 years or more experience.

But a union review of casework between 2008



and 2010 found 46 per cent of teachers receiving capability or competence support were aged over 50.

Matt Wrack, the union's acting general secretary, says older teachers at the top of pay scales are being “threatened with capability procedures. This is increasingly seen as a cheaper alternative to redundancy by some employers”.

National data shows teachers over 50 made up a quarter of England's workforce in 2010, but this dropped to a low of 18.4 per cent in 2017 and has since nudged up to 21.1 per cent.

But the UK's teacher workforce remains the youngest across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Data from 2020 shows 28 per cent of UK primary teachers were under 30, compared with 13 per cent across the OECD.

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Lack of data

Campaigners say more data is needed to gauge the scale of the issue and uncover whether support plans are being disproportionately used.

NASUWT's survey suggests staff with a disability are more than twice as likely to be threatened with a support plan or put on one.

Meanwhile, black teachers are almost three times as likely as white staff to be threatened with capability procedures, and more than 2.5 times as likely to have them put in place.

Dunwood acknowledges there will always be circumstances where it is right and proper for somebody to go through capability [procedures].

“But the scale of it, anecdotally, feels like that's not what is happening all of the time.”

Alistair Wood, Edapt's chief executive, says that without national data on suspensions or support plans, “we're flying blind”.

“You can't fix a system you're not measuring, though any move towards better data must avoid placing unnecessary burdens on schools.”

The DfE did not directly respond to queries on whether it would consider collecting data on support plans. It said: “Recruiting and keeping great teachers in our classrooms is vital for our Plan for Change.”



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NEWS: STRIKES

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Maternity pay gap sparks strike in London chain

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

A London trust that already offers maternity pay 30 per cent above national levels is facing disruption today as staff strike over what unions claim is a “two-tier” policy.

Eight of the Charter Schools Educational Trust’s nine schools will be affected by strikes for four days.

It comes after the National Education Union found the maternity pay offered at two of its academies was “significantly higher” than at its seven other schools.

Daniel Kebede, the union’s general secretary, called it a “two-tier policy”, adding it was not “fair that some staff receive thousands more maternity pay than their colleagues, despite sharing the same employer”.

However, the MAT said this was because the two joined the trust having offered employees rates in line with those provided by Lambeth council. These are said to be 58 per cent above the £17,600 guaranteed in the burgundy book.

A teacher at the top of the main pay range would receive £27,800 over 12 months. Staff at the rest of the trust’s schools, which are in neighbouring Southwark, would get about £23,000.

Kebede – whose union is demanding equal maternity pay across the trust – accused Charter of “complete intransigence” as it had not “offered a single penny more”.

He pointed to the “tens of thousands” it spent on “external consultants, marketing



and branding, a growing central team and substantial pay rises for its leaders”.

However, a Charter Schools spokesperson said the consultant and marketing fees were “one-off” payments that were “fractional compared to what it would cost us to increase maternity pay just in the first year alone”.

It also was “one of only a few academy trusts who already pay our staff more than the national agreement for maternity pay”.

“However, when trying to protect jobs because of the pressure of falling rolls and increased costs, we simply don’t have the wriggle room to nearly double that commitment.”

If government funding “changed”, they said, the chain “would more than welcome the opportunity for all staff to be on that even higher maternity rate”.

It is just the latest example of school funding woes pitting leaders against unions, with disruption for pupils. Some of the schools will have to close – although not for vulnerable

pupils – while others will part-close.

Jess Balado, the chair of the National Headteachers’ Associations Network, said: “It is inevitably going to be the case that as things become tighter there will be more conflict [with unions].

“It’s not fair on school leaders... there is not adequate funding in schools to be able to do everything.”

One trust chief executive, who asked to remain anonymous, warned of more strikes this autumn “due to the shortfall in funding and increased costs”, noting: “The chickens have come home to roost. Schools will have to make redundancies.”

Elsewhere in London, NEU members at Harris Academy Beckenham took part in two days of walkouts this week over “unacceptable management” and workload.

The union also claimed Harris Federation, which runs the school, has “intervened to stop staff exercising their trade union rights” by stopping officers from accessing the school and “falsely” claiming “the NEU is refusing to meet”.

But a Harris spokesperson said it did not recognise the “malicious allegations being spread about our schools” and accused the union of “encouraging dissent amongst our staff”.

The chain has “attempted to engage” with the NEU “on a number of occasions, but they have repeatedly refused to meet with us”.

“We have extended the invitation to meet again and are committed to resolving any issues they have as soon as possible.”

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

NPQ take-up plummets after funding cuts

Cuts to funding for national professional qualifications (NPQs) have prompted a sharp drop-off in take-up, despite more schools raiding their own budgets to pay for them.

Starts on NPQs fell from 43,840 in the 2023-24 academic year to 29,818 this year, a drop of 32 per cent.

However, the fall is even larger (56 per cent) if starts on the new NPQ for SENCOs – which became compulsory this year – are excluded from the analysis.

It comes after the previous government scaled

back funding for the qualifications, which had been free for several years as part of a £184 million Covid recovery plan.

Since last autumn, only teachers and leaders in the top half of schools with the most youngsters on pupil premium have been eligible for funded NPQs, apart from those for heads, SENCOs and primary maths leaders, which remain free.

Data shows the number of funded NPQs dropped by 43 per cent, from 41,274 last year to 23,477 this year.

At the same time, the number funded by schools themselves rose by 168 per cent, from 2,266 to 6,063.

The data shows there were 10,537 starts on the SENCO NPQ this year, the first year it has operated. The compulsory qualification is now the most popular out of the suite, followed by senior leadership with 5,801 starts.

This week’s data also shows the completion rate of NPQs has also dropped: 84.3 per cent of NPQs started in 2021-22 were completed, falling to 81.4 per cent of those begun in 2022-23.



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20 CEOs on advisory group - but questions over selection transparency

JACK DYSON
@JACKYDYS

Twenty leaders have been appointed to the Department for Education's new academy trust chief executive advisory group – but concerns have been raised over officials handpicking the members.

Among the names are leaders of the biggest academy trusts – including Sir Jon Coles of United Learning, Lift's Becks Boomer-Clark, Ark's Lucy Heller and Sir Hamid Patel of Star Academies.

The DfE refused to say how the members were selected, but Schools Week understands at least two were invited and did not apply.

One spoke of their "surprise" at their appointment.

A trust boss not named in the group argued that the lack of transparency could leave it open to criticisms that it's part of an "old boys' or old girls' network".

"It undermines the, I'm sure, laudable work they'll go on and do if we don't understand that," they said.

"It would have been nice to know how this has been created, understand its place within the consultative frame for government, and know how people could nominate themselves or would be nominated to be on it."

Other appointees include John Barneby of Oasis Community Learning, Cathie Paine of REAch2 and Tom Rees of Ormiston.

On average, the chief executives on the group run 36 schools. Twelve have more than 30 schools on their books, while only one, Susan Douglas of the Eden Academy Trust, has fewer than 10.

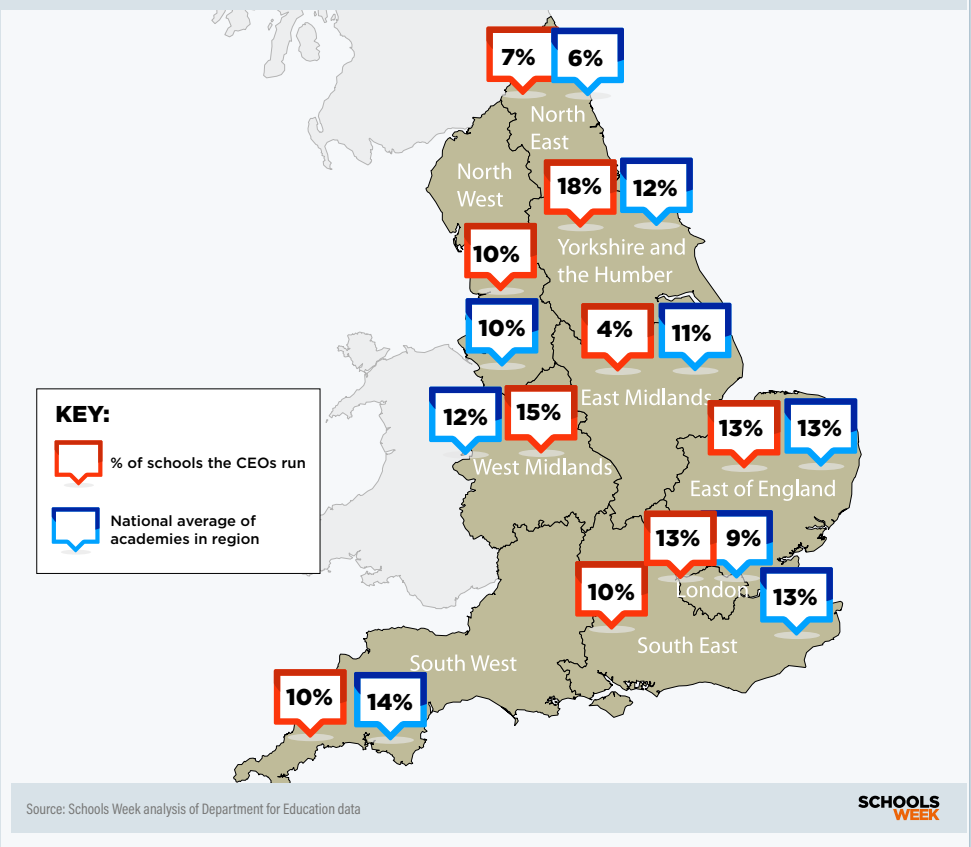
Lucia Glynn, an academy consultant, described group members as "top drawer", but questioned whether they would have "full understanding" of the challenges faced by smaller trusts.

Seven (35 per cent) of those selected are women – below the national figures for women heads, but similar to the number of women leading trusts with 15 or more schools.

Our analysis suggests 18 per cent of the chief executives' academies are based in Yorkshire and the Humber, more than any other area. Nationally, 12 per cent of trust-run schools are based in the region.

It is followed by the West Midlands (15 per cent), east of England and London (both 13 per

Where are the CEOs' schools?



cent).

Just 4 per cent of the leaders' schools are in the east Midlands, the region with the lowest representation, even though it accounts for 11 per cent of all academies.

In a recent briefing for members, the Confederation of School Trusts, which is supporting the group, said it was "established to continue the government's engagement with the sector and will provide a forum for meaningful discussions on matters relating to the achieving and thriving pillar of the opportunity mission".

The organisation said it was "pleased to contribute to this group", and that it would "ensure that the wider views of membership are represented through our contribution".

Michael Pain, of Forum Strategy, believes this is "one part of a wider picture for a system that is now further developing in its own maturity".

It follows criticism of the Labour administration for a lack of engagement with the trust sector before the release of its schools bill, which seeks to wind back many academy freedoms.

The DfE's academy CEO advisers

Jennese Alozie, University of Chichester Academy Trust
John Barneby, Oasis Community Learning
Becks Boomer-Clark, Lift Schools
Tom Campbell, E-ACT
Zoe Carr, WISE Academies
Sir Jon Coles, United Learning
Dr Tim Coulson, Unity Schools Partnership
Susan Douglas, the Eden Academy Trust
Lucy Heller, Ark Schools
Tom Leverage, Our Lady of the Magnificat trust (and incoming CEO of Reach South)
Cathie Paine, REAch2
Sir Mufti Hamid Patel, Star Academies
Tom Rees, Ormiston Academies Trust
Paul Rickeard, Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust
Sarah Ridley, the Mead Educational Trust
Luke Sparkes, Dixons Academies Trust
Sir Paul Tarn, Delta Academies Trust
Steve Taylor, Cabot Learning Federation
Chris Tomlinson, Co-op Academies Trust
Jonny Uttley, the Education Alliance

NEWS

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'We won't shy away from difficult reforms' vows Phillipson

SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER

@SCHOOLSWEEK

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson told leaders this week she would not "shy away from [doing] what's difficult and long term" after a row reopened over proposed SEND reforms.

The government has been heavily criticised over plans to overhaul education, health and care plans (EHCPs), including rationing them for pupils in special schools only.

A new campaign group has launched to fight the changes it says are the "greatest threat to children and schools in over a decade".

Meanwhile, national newspapers have reported that backbench MPs fear the reforms could cause a fresh revolt after Labour's welfare bill u-turn.

But speaking to a Department for Education stakeholder reception this week, Phillipson said: "We won't shy away from what's difficult and long term in favour of what's quick and easy."

Describing it as one of her "principles", she added: "And I mean that in many ways. The complex policy reform, where there are no simple solutions. On SEND especially."

Phillipson did not answer when asked by the BBC on Sunday if she could rule out getting rid of EHCPs.

"What I can say very clearly is that we will strengthen and put in place better support for children."

"Even parents of children with EHCPs know that they've often had to fight really hard to get that. It's too adversarial, it takes too long, it's too bureaucratic."

"We need to just take a step back and think about how do we build a better system that is more timely, more effective, and actually maximises support."

Any phasing out of EHCPs would be introduced gradually, with no withdrawal of current plans.

But the proposals have alarmed parents, campaigners and some MPs, who say the changes could cause another rebellion, *The Guardian* reported.

The SEND Rights Alliance, which launched this week claims the "legal rights of disabled children are under threat".

"This is the greatest threat to children and



Bridget Phillipson

schools in over a decade," the group's website says.

But the government is also now facing a more difficult outlook on public finances after the welfare U-turn.

The Office for Budget Responsibility's (OBR) fiscal risks report for July, published this week, said "efforts to put the UK's public finances on a more sustainable footing have met with only limited and temporary success in recent years".

The report highlighted that by March councils are estimated to have a £4.6 billion deficit on their dedicated schools grant budgets as support balloons for the rising numbers of children with SEND.

The National Audit Office estimated in October that more than two in five councils would be at risk of bankruptcy if a statutory override – which is temporarily keeping deficits off balance sheets – was not in place.

"The government has not stated how these liabilities will be dealt with at the end of the newly extended override period, and they therefore represent a substantial ongoing fiscal risk," the OBR said.

It is understood the SEND reforms, drawn up by the inclusion expert group headed by Tom Rees, the boss of the Ormiston Academies Trust, are now with Number 10.

The government has promised to publish

the proposals in a white paper due in autumn. Reforms will focus on early intervention, setting up more specialist provision in mainstream schools – such as SEND units – and upskilling teachers.

But speaking in parliament on Monday, Phillipson insisted that there would always be a legal right to the additional support that children with SEND need – "and we will protect it".

There was no explanation on what this means. But those with knowledge of the process say that the equality act and public sector equality duty already offer certain protections for pupils with additional needs.

Phillipson promised to deliver a "better system, with strengthened support, improved access and more funding, something that the Conservatives failed to provide in 14 years."

"They left a terrible mess behind – families and children were failed – and a degree of humility and understanding from any of them would take us a great deal further along the way."

The Conservatives said they had "big questions" about how parents could be assured their children's needs would still be met if EHCPs were scrapped. They called on the government to "come forward with specific proposals".

The Lib Dems told *Schools Week* they would oppose scrapping EHCPs. Reform did not respond to a request for comment.

OPINION: SEND



TANIA TIRRAORO

Co-Director,
Special Needs Jungle

EHCPs: Why we're campaigning to save a 'broken' system

A SEND parent explains why she's co-founded a new campaign group to fight future reforms to education, health and care plans

It is hard to think of a worse target for government cuts than disabled people. But this autumn, another prospective policy could plumb the depths even further: an assault on the hard-won rights of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Save Our Children's Rights, a collection of SEND groups including the parental advocacy website Special Needs Jungle and legal support charities such as IPSEA, is fighting to prevent this.

The campaign is a response to briefings from government advisers and officials that the upcoming schools white paper will include proposals to remove education, health and care plans (EHCPs) from children attending mainstream education settings.

We launched our campaign amid ministers' repeated refusal to deny these briefings, ensuring a media splash. Given the strength of feeling around this, as evidenced by a petition with 110,000 signatures, perhaps they should thank us for helping them to avoid another embarrassing climbdown.

We will not back down until

they do.

But why do we want to save a system that most agree is "broken" and "on its knees"? The answer is simple. It is not the law that is at fault; it is how the last set of reforms in 2014 was implemented and funded that has failed.

It is not the law that has consistently underfunded education as a whole, and schools' SEND budgets in particular.

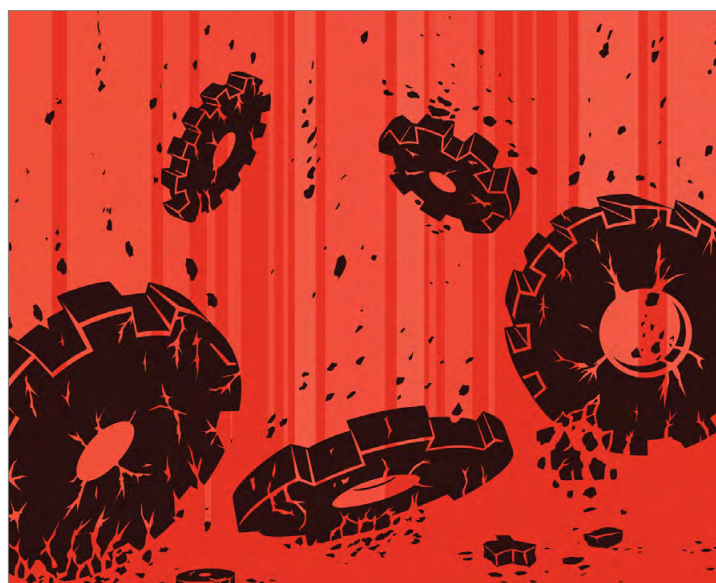
It is not the law that has designed a curriculum that creates barriers for many neurodivergent children.

And it is not the law that makes so many poor EHCP decisions that they are overturned on appeal in 98.3 per cent of cases. That is on the human beings working for councils and schools.

Far fewer parents appeal than could; they are too exhausted from caring and keeping a roof over their heads, or they have been poorly informed about their rights.

This also means that when an EHCP is obtained, many parents do not know if it is any good. Deficient EHCPs make for poor outcomes and are one reason why many parents want a specialist placement where they know their child will be properly supported.

The education select committee's 2019 SEND inquiry and the last government's SEND improvement plan both acknowledged that the 2014 reforms were, essentially, good ones.



“ It is not the law that is at fault

But implementation coincided with austerity, from which local authorities are still reeling. The pandemic and lockdowns also played a large part in the number of children now in need of support.

Programmes funded by the Department for Education for SEND training, neurodiversity, and speech and communication issues have had a positive reception.

But the direction of travel seems to be boosting the number of mainstream schools with resource bases or units – something for which there is little research evidence and no guidance or national policy to ensure quality.

How inclusive will they really be, so that children feel part of the mainstream experience? If children spend all their time in the base or unit, then it becomes segregation, not inclusion.

Without EHCPs in mainstream education, what will happen? Will children's needs magically disappear? No. Will schools be guaranteed extra cash ringfenced for SEND? Unlikely.

Better inclusion is a must, but without the safety net of an EHCP

parents will not be won over. Their experience tells them that when a school is short of money or staff, SEND provision is always first to go. [Is this true? "EHCP-mandated provision means that a child's needs must be met and, if not, parents can hold the council to account.

If the government believes that its plans for inclusive mainstream education will be successful, why waste money changing the law?

Firstly, fewer schools will need to apply for EHC assessments. Secondly, if assessment applications fall, then tribunal appeals will also be reduced.

The government broke SEND through lack of funding and insufficient accountability for inclusion. It is a disgrace to make children with SEND pay for its mistakes.

Politicians should determine the cost of making inclusion work, and of supporting councils out of their financial holes.

Then they must find the money to fund it long term. Our children deserve nothing less, and our country's future depends on it.

INTERVIEW: RECRUITMENT

Toop's Teach First target: 500 headteachers by 2030

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

EXCLUSIVE

"Doubling down" on quality, boosting retention numbers and getting more recruits into headship – Teach First's new chief executive speaks to Schools Week about his plans ...

James Toop is something of a poster boy for Teach First, the education charity tasked with recruiting top graduates to teach in England's poorest schools. But he also bears the hallmarks of why it has divided opinion.

He joined the scheme's initial cohort in 2003 after graduating from the University of Oxford, working as a French teacher at a struggling school in Croydon.

He left the classroom after two years to work in management consultancy, before returning to education to run leadership organisations and, more recently, a food charity to tackle childhood obesity.

Now, he's back at Teach First – but this time to lead it, succeeding Russell Hobby who has run the organisation since 2017.

He joins at a pivotal time, with some alumni feeling the charity has lurched too far from its core purpose: to recruit the best.

A new tender for the contract that Teach First oversees is due to launch soon too, with the Labour government shifting focus away from Russell Group applicants towards retention (see page 4).

'Delivering change-makers'

Toop said it was "too early to say" whether Teach First would bid again.

The organisation must "make sure that we're delivering the mission – delivering really high quality and bringing those change-makers into education, and supporting the wider movement for change.

"That's the unique thing that Teach First does – that's my absolute focus. And that's why we'll need to have a look at the contract and see: does it allow us to deliver those things going forward?"

Some say the organisation had moved away from its original MO, choosing to prioritise quantity over quality.

Toop said: "At its core, Teach First is about quality, and that's going to be the bit that I really double down on."

But recruits did not have to be exclusively from the Russell Group. They "absolutely have to



James Toop

'At its core, Teach First is about quality'

have a really great degree" and show "leadership potential and the moral purpose, to want to really make a massive difference to the life chances of children who often don't get a great teacher".

Leadership push

Toop said part of ensuring Teach First attracted "the right people" – including top graduates who might otherwise not have considered teaching – would always mean some leaving after their agreed two years.

But Teach First "can do and should do" more to boost retention and ensure some "stay for a third, fourth, or fifth year".

"We need to accelerate more of our community into leadership roles," said Toop, who was chief executive of Ark's Teaching Leaders start-up, and of Ambition School Leadership.

Building a stronger "leadership pathway and progression... will start to have a knock-on effect on retention".

There are now 150 Teach First headteachers, but he'd like to see that hit 500 by 2030.

He said Teach First would be "investing in the leadership pathway in the second year of the programme, to really get them thinking about how they can

Alumni mentors

Ambassadors were "much more likely to progress" if they were exposed to, or mentored by,

Teach Firsters who went on to become leaders.

One of Toop's three "big priorities" for the next five years will be to "reignite" Teach First's "movement for change" by "harnessing" the power of the charity's more than 20,000 alumni.

"There's a big opportunity to see how we join the dots of the ambassador movement, bring together business, NGOs, civil society and education together to drive real change."

Another priority is "to get the right people where they're needed most".

While it's "easy" to recruit in London and major cities, the charity needs to address the "new challenge of educational disadvantage sit[ting] in rural coastal communities, small towns".

Targeting Gen Z

His third priority is to make teaching "the career of choice for Gen Z", who he describes as "very driven by purpose and making a difference".

Teaching in a challenging school when fresh out of university is "life-changing", he says. "You learn so much about yourself. You can see the impact that you make."

But he says teacher pay and conditions must improve, and the narrative needs reframing – which he hopes Teach First can play a leading role in.

"We are going to prove that no matter where you're born, what your family income is, you can achieve."

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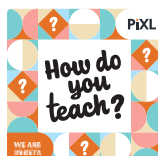


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EXPLAINER: POLICY

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School readiness policy blitz: what leaders need to know

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Intensive support will be offered to reception classes and school staff will receive more early years training as part of a new government strategy to give children the “best start in life”.

Prime minister Sir Keir Starmer has set a target of 75 per cent of reception children reaching a “good” level of development by 2028. Last year the figure stood at 67.7 per cent.

Here's what you need to know ...

1. Three levels of RISE reception support

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson announced earlier this year that the quality of reception would be one of four priorities for the government's regional improvement for standards and excellence (RISE) teams.

This week's strategy states that “all schools will receive support to improve reception teaching, with some schools being eligible for enhanced or more intensive offers”.

A “universal reception offer” will give all schools access to better data and analysis. They will also be invited to participate in face-to-face and online training.

An “enhanced reception offer” will give some schools “additional early years engagement”, with the creation of English and maths hubs offering specialist support in language, literacy and maths.

An “intensive reception offer” will see some schools receive more assistance from the hubs, including “dedicated time with a literacy expert and engagement from maths hubs to increase participation in other training”.

No further details, including on funding for the hubs, have been provided.

2. More training for leaders and teachers

The strategy document states that the government wants a “clear ‘golden thread’ of high-quality evidence to underpin the training, support and development for people working in the early years”.

This includes £400 million of funding over the next three years to “improve quality in early years settings and reception classes and drive better outcomes for children”.

The NPQ for headship – a qualification for



aspiring headteachers – will be “enhanced” with more early years content.

The government is developing a new training course for reception class teachers and creating a “new professional development offer for setting leaders”.

The Department for Education will also fund more places on the NPQ for early years leadership, but has not said how many, or how much this will cost.

3. Family hubs involve school staff – but who pays?

The government will fund Best Start family hubs in every council area, effectively extending the current network of family hubs created under previous governments.

These hubs will “include professionals working across all local teams”, including education, and would work with schools.

No details have been provided on how school staff will be involved, nor whether schools will be paid for their time.

The government said that the rollout could see the creation of up to 1,000 hubs across the country by 2028, with one in each council area by April 2026. The hubs are backed by more than £500 million funding, the government added.

4. Funded partnerships with nurseries

The government will fund “new partnerships between schools and local nurseries to strengthen transitions into school – so children feel confident, prepared and supported when

they start school, and schools are ready to meet each child's needs”.

The partnerships will allow staff in schools and nurseries to “spend time learning from each other and sharing knowledge, expertise and best practice, strengthening local early years systems”.

No further details have been provided.

5. Reading campaign to boost school readiness

Phillipson also called on parents this week to “put their phones down and pick up a book” as part of the government's National Year of Reading 2026 campaign to make more children school-ready.

The campaign, launched alongside the National Literacy Trust, will involve school and community events, supported by more than 30 organisations, including the Premier League, the Julia Rausing Trust and Arts Council England.

6. A “school readiness tool” and statutory council targets

A “school readiness data tool” will launch in the autumn to help schools make decisions on where to focus their efforts in reception.

It will “show schools the development target they should be aiming for based on comparator schools, and single out areas of focus for schools to improve their current scores”.

Phillipson has also announced that every council will work with the government to “agree statutory targets to improve school readiness in their area”. They will have to develop Best Start local plans to achieve the milestone by 2028.

Framework backs early start to writing

FREDDIE WHITTAKER
@FCDWHITTAKER

The government has published a 150-page “writing framework” for primary schools that encourages schools to prioritise handwriting, get children to speak aloud and put a “renewed focus” on reception.

But leaders have been told the “first-of-its-kind” document will have to be revised after the publication of the government’s curriculum review later this year.

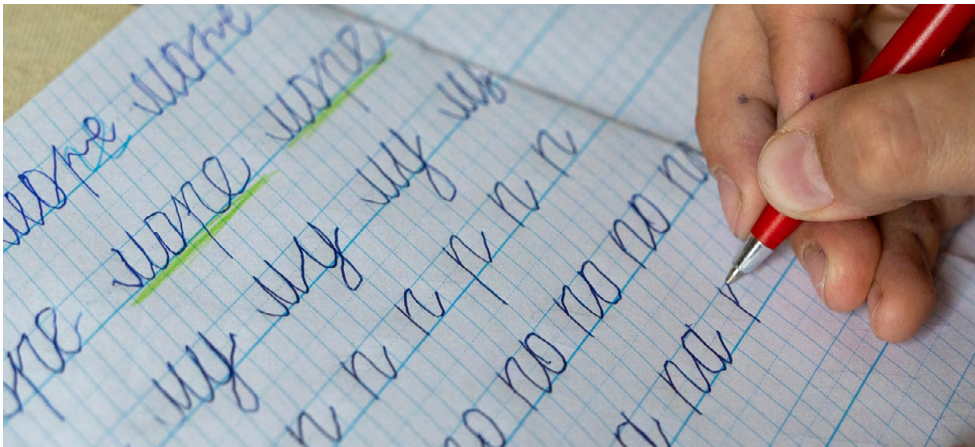
The DfE said the non-statutory guidance document would “build on the success of phonics” and “give teachers practical tools and guidance to plan high-quality lessons and teach writing from reception and throughout primary school”.

Bridget Phillipson, the education secretary has said she wants children to be “as confident putting pen to paper as they are posting on TikTok”.

The framework forms part of a £2 million package announced in February to boost writing, which also included cash for teacher training.

However, primary schools will have to read and digest an amended version as it has been released before the culmination of the curriculum review.

“While acknowledging that changes to the current statutory national curriculum and statutory assessments may soon follow, we do not intend to pre-empt the findings of the review,” the



document says.

“Once the final review report is published, we will publish a revised version of this writing framework to align it to the revised national curriculum.”

The DfE later clarified that the document would not be updated until curriculum changes had been made, rather than immediately after the publication of the report.

In a summary published alongside the main document, the government said that “teaching handwriting and spelling from the reception year is crucial to ensure that these skills become automatic for children”.

The summary goes on to say that pupils “should compose orally while they are developing their transcription skills”. And pupils “need to master the foundations of writing – handwriting, spelling and sentence construction.”

“They should not be expected to write at length before they are ready.”

It describes the reception year as “vital”, and said it “builds the foundations that support pupils’ writing throughout primary school and underpin their future success”.

Schools should identify the pupils who need additional support with writing from reception onwards and should “concentrate initially on teaching high-quality transcription and sentence instruction, while gradually developing broader writing skills”.

And they should “avoid focusing too heavily on test preparation. This can limit the development of skills and knowledge, stifling pupils’ creativity and wider writing development.”

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Key stage 2 SATs creep up (but still below pre-Covid)		
National key stage 2 SATs results show another slight increase in the proportion of pupils meeting the “expected” standard. The data, published on Tuesday, shows 62 per cent met the benchmark in reading, writing and maths, up from 61 per cent in 2024. Results have been creeping back up after dropping to 59 per cent in post-pandemic 2022. However, the headline figure has still not reached its 2019 level of 65 per cent. The data for individual subjects shows that, • In reading, 75 per cent of pupils met the expected standard, up from 74 per cent in 2024. • In maths, 74 per cent of pupils met the	expected standard, up from 73 per cent in 2024. • In writing, 72 per cent of pupils met the expected standard, an increase of 0.5 percentage points from 72 per cent (rounded) in 2024. • In grammar, punctuation and spelling, 73 per cent of pupils met the expected standard, up from 72 per cent in 2024. • In science, 82 per cent of pupils met the expected standard, up from 81 per cent in 2024. The results show that just under three in 10 pupils (29.4 per cent) at the end of key stage 2 were assessed as not meeting the expected	standard in reading, writing and maths combined. And 8.5 per cent were not assessed in all three of the subjects, “either because they were below the level of the assessment or for another reason”. The department said 7.9 per cent of pupils were working below the level of assessment in at least one subject, and therefore did not take the test or teacher assessment. But these pupils “could still be meeting the standard for some subjects”. Analysis shows 47 per cent of the pupils in this group “were only below the level of assessment in writing”.

NEWS: ADMISSIONS

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Watchdog reveals councils' academy admission woes

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

The Office of the Schools Adjudicator's (OSA) annual report for 2024, published this week, outlines key admission trends throughout the year, based on submissions from councils.

While it does not identify areas or details of cases, the report has flagged several issues and comes as Labour plans a wider admissions shake-up in its children's wellbeing and schools bill. Here's what you need to know ...

Falling rolls admission changes

The OSA dealt with 351 cases in 2024, up 20 per cent on the previous year.

The number involving bids to vary admission arrangements "increased significantly" to 142. These largely consisted of "proposals to reduce published admission numbers (PANs) for primary schools". In all, 96 applications to cut PANs were greenlit with seven rejected.

However, the OSA is "concerned" about PAN reduction requests "after the closing date for applications for admission", where it is "clear" some parents will not receive an offer if the plan is approved.

It comes after Schools Week revealed the watchdog stopped two school closures because of falling rolls after uncovering "shortcomings" in councils' decisions.

Enforcement action 'a first'

The body also considers referrals by LA-maintained schools over council plans to direct them to admit a named pupil. It offers advice to Bridget Phillipson, the education secretary, in cases involving academies.

The 61 referrals in 2024 "represented the highest ever annual total". Thirty-three concerned looked-after children (LACs).

Of the five cases involving council-run schools, two were ordered to admit the child.

And in what the report describes as a "first", one continued to refuse to take on the pupil. The case was "referred to the secretary of state for enforcement", but no further details were provided.

Meanwhile, one OSA decision was also facing a judicial review. Schools Week asked the DfE for more information.



Children in care turned away

The adjudicator heard from "a small number of local authorities" that "mentioned the effect of faith schools in their area not giving equal priority to all looked-after or previously looked-after children [PLAC] based on their religious affiliation".

While "a localised problem, but a persistent one", one council said a child in care did not secure their first-choice school "for the first time".

DfE guidance states 'good' or 'outstanding' schools "should be prioritised when seeking a place for looked-after children in need of a new school".

However, a shortage of places in these schools meant some were "obliged to admit what they considered to be a disproportionately high number of LAC and PLAC".

The adjudicator would "welcome" DfE guidance on the placement of these children following the scrapping of headline grades.

Several councils also reported schools have turned away LACs and PLACs by using provisions in the admissions code that allow them to snub those they have "good reason to believe... may display challenging behaviour". This is despite rules stating the provision "cannot be used to refuse admission to looked after-children, previously looked-after children".

One in 12 councils falls short for SEND

An OSA survey showed 8 per cent of councils believed children with education, health and care plans (EHCPs) were "not well" served by admission arrangements.

Just over half also said in-year primary admissions had become more challenging since 2023. The figure rose to 72 per cent at secondary.

This was attributed to an increased demand sparked by more exclusions and migration, fewer available school places and "a greater reluctance from schools to admit additional pupils".

Some councils said another contribution was a rise state school applicants following Labour's decision to impose VAT on private schools.

Academies accused of 'capping' places to refuse kids

Problems with schools outside council control – including those in academy trusts – were "raised by most, if not all, local authorities".

Several "described difficulties caused by schools choosing to reorganise their class structure... to address financial issues, resulting in fewer pupil places".

Many reported schools "capping" admissions for year groups outside "the normal point of entry".

The adjudicator found such practices breached its rules. One council said this was done to "reduce admission limits and close year groups... purely for the purpose of being able to refuse applications".

Some councils also said own admission authority schools failed "to notify parents of the outcome of their application, in writing, within the 15-day limit" required by the admissions code.

Some councils reported these schools "were meeting with parents and children prior to applications being considered, with suggestions that such meetings were prompting refusals to admit". This would breach admission rules.

NEWS: AP

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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Post-16 AP funding gap exposed as school raids reserves

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

An AP free school plans has been forced to use £180,000 of reserves to bankroll a new sixth form after council bosses snubbed its bid for cash from the authority's high-needs budget.

Nottingham's Stone Soup Academy's plight has reignited calls for the government to provide APs with post-16 funding, with many forced to dip into their pockets to support their pupils' moves into mainstream education after year 11.

'Disastrous consequences'

Kiran Gill, the chief executive of the education charity The Difference, said: "Many alternative provision schools offer amazing and innovative post-16 support, but do so without sufficient government funding or guidance.

"Without more schools filling this gap, we will continue to see disastrous consequences for children and the economy."

Isos Partnership research from 2018 revealed the average cost of an AP placement – which are largely funded through authority high-needs budgets – was £18,000 a year.

But mainstream 16 to 19 funding rates range between £2,715 and £5,105.

Local authorities are only legally required to provide AP places to children of compulsory school age, which means after year 11 they are funded at mainstream levels.

Councils can choose to fund post-16 AP settings, but Schools Week analysis shows just 21 of England's 332 APs – 6 per cent – have their own sixth forms.

Stone Soup will launch its sixth form in September, with one its aims to improve not in education, employment or training (NEET) rates.

The number of NEETs between October 2024 and December was just shy of 1,000,000, almost 300,000 more than in 2021.

'Gutted' by council's decision

Forty per cent of Stone Soup's 35 year 11 leavers last year became NEET within six months. Kerrie Henton, the school's executive principal, said in previous years the figure rose to 60 per cent



after 18 months.

She said Nottingham council's decision left her "gutted".

An authority spokesperson said the "primary reason" for its refusal was the sixth form was "not prioritising post-16 students with an education, health and care plan (EHCP), which is our statutory obligation".

They stressed the council's "limited funding requires us to prioritise our statutory duties".

Henton will use more than £180,000 of reserves to pay for the provision and will lodge an application with the DfE to access mainstream funding for the places.

She hoped council chiefs "will see the work that we're doing, the impact of that work and... fund us next year".

Going 'cap in hand' to LAs

"There needs to be a better way of ensuring support for our most vulnerable young people post-16, rather than having to go cap in hand to a local authority."

"The DfE should fund it for at least two years post-16. The most vulnerable young people in our society are being failed."

An education committee report published in 2018 said it was "extraordinary" that the coalition government's decision to lift the education participation to 18 "was not accompanied by statutory duties to provide post-16" AP.

It said ministers "must allocate resources to ensure that local authorities and providers can provide post-16 support to pupils, either in the form of outreach and support to colleges or by providing their own post-16" alternative.

The committee, then chaired by Robert Halfon, noted these youngsters were "denied access" to education after year 11 "because the system is not designed or funded to accommodate their additional needs".

During the pandemic the last government set aside £7 million to fund "additional transition support provided by AP settings for year 11 pupils". The fund was canned in 2022-23.

Post-16 'dream'

A report published last year by Dame Rachel de Souza, the children's commissioner, said the lack of funding made it "difficult" for AP leaders to provide such support.

De Souza told the DfE to "look at how to create a limited number of post-16 placements for children who have had a disrupted key stage 4".

She also called on it to fund a "graduated stepdown programme of support for all year 11 leavers".

Last year, the Education Policy Institute found 63 per cent of pupils permanently excluded from school would be considered NEET at age 24. This was over double the level for the average cohort (25 per cent).

The DfE has been approached for comment.



Kiran Gill

NEWS

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Ofsted to solve inspection reform timeline unrest with ... webinars

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Ofsted has announced a series of webinars and regional events for schools to quell fears about the pace of its reforms.

The watchdog has faced growing criticism over the short timeline for implementation of its new report cards and inspection framework.

Sir Martyn Oliver, the chief inspector, has also been reprimanded by the education secretary after announcing Ofsted would not confirm its final plans this academic year, pushing the announcement back to September.

This gives schools and inspectors just weeks to prepare for the new inspections when they resume in November.

In response, the inspectorate has announced a "full programme of sector engagement to be launched in September".

Oliver said: "I know there are some concerns about the timeline for these changes, that's why we are planning such a comprehensive programme.



"I have every confidence that our approach will support a successful roll-out of new-look inspections in November."

Different types of provider will get their own live webinars, with a full programme available online and recordings due to be made available on YouTube afterwards.

Ofsted will also hold "face-to-face and online regional events, hosted by local providers, local authorities and partners.

Oliver added: "I want to reassure education providers that, through our national engagement programme and published materials, they will be able to familiarise themselves with the changes

during the first part of the autumn term – while routine school and further education and skills inspections are on hold.

"Our inspectors will all receive extensive training between now and November, and many will have had the experience of a full pilot inspection."

Ofsted has also released more information about its new "nominees".

In its consultation in February it said that it would ask "every provider to nominate a senior member of staff to work closely with the inspector or inspection team throughout the inspection".

It clarified today it would "not be mandatory" for any school to appoint a nominee.

The system is already in place for further education inspections, with one in place for every provider.

In advance of the renewed framework, Ofsted said it would "offer a short online training package tailored for nominees in specific remits".

These sessions would provide an overview of the framework and more information on how "nominees can work together with inspectors during a future inspection".

JACK DYSON | @JACKDYDS

DfE lacks 'coherent plan' to boost recruitment, say MPs

The government lacks a "coherent plan" to boost recruitment, hasn't clearly explained how its 6,500 teacher target was calculated and should assess how effective pay rises are at retaining staff, MPs have said.

The findings have been laid out in a report by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), published on Wednesday, that follows on from the National Audit Office's study into teacher supply earlier this year.

Committee member Sarah Olney said: "The shortfalls laid out in our report show how urgent it is that DfE lays out the detail behind its pledge for 6,500 more teachers.

"If the recommendations in our report are followed, the government will have an explicit answer, based on its own analysis and evidence, on whether it is time to offer teachers more flexibility, and/or to pay them more."

The report noted officials could not give



the committee a "clear explanation" of how the government's 6,500-teacher pledge was calculated or how it would fill workforce gaps.

Forecasts suggest up to 12,400 more teachers will be needed in colleges alone by 2028.

The committee said the department should set out this information and outline how "it will stay focused on teacher retention alongside recruitment".

The government told *Schools Week* last week the pledge would be based on improving the net number of teachers, using the 2023-24 academic year as a baseline. Not all teachers would be "new", as promised, and would not be focused on shortage subjects.

But the committee also said the DfE "lacks a coherent plan, suitable targets, and sufficient evidence" to show its wider recruitment spend was focused "on what works best" to boost teacher numbers.

While it had evaluated "some" of its recruitment and retention initiatives, it had not undertaken a "full" review, despite "a recommendation by a previous PAC in 2016".

The committee also asked the government to investigate why schools with more poorer pupils had greater staff turnover and to look at the "value for money" of some of the financial incentives for would-be teachers.

ROUND-UP: CURRICULUM

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Chair spells out 'dilemmas' of curriculum review

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Professor Becky Francis, the curriculum and assessment review chair, updated education committee MPs on Tuesday. Here's what we learned...

1. 'Dilemmas' about assessment volume

The review's interim report said its next phase would consider reducing the "overall volume of assessment" at key stage 4 "without compromising the reliability of results".

Francis told MPs that the review was "really mindful of...the more volume, the higher the reliability...and that there is obviously a risk that if you cut too far, you might damage reliability, and that's something that obviously we're not going to do".

She warned of the risks in reducing the qualification to one paper per subject, suggesting a "one-shot" approach might be unsuitable for "such an important exam". This was one of the "dilemmas" they were working through.

2. Adding qualifications 'not always the solution'

Exam board OCR has proposed a short-course GCSE in maths for pupils in year 10. Those who wanted to study the full course would continue into year 11. Francis said the review was considering the idea.

However, she also warned that qualifications which are benchmarked too low "become pointless".

"Everyone can get it and it doesn't really mean anything," she said.

"If you benchmark them high, same problem with significant groups of young people that don't pass them. So, adding qualifications isn't always the solution, in my view, but definitely also has a role," she added.

3. Many reasons for 'overburdening'

Francis said that programmes of study – statutory documents which make up the curriculum – can lead to an "overburdened



Professor Becky Francis

curriculum" if they lack breadth and balance.

However, she noted that while some programmes of study are "very, very thin", teachers might feel compelled to "teach everything" if they are unclear what will be expected in exams.

"So actually, in some areas, we think that better specification might actually help teachers to make sense of that," she said.

4. Languages a 'profound' problem at secondary transition

The review will explore ways to improve teaching and learning of languages in primary schools.

Francis warned of "very severe problems across transition", which she attributed to Britain's lack of a "natural second language", which means secondaries receive pupils from primary schools which teach an "array" of languages.

"Some kids are starting from scratch in secondary or they're having to rehearse a rather boring lesson where they're re-taught things that they already know," she said.

She suggested that the "profound problem" could call for "pretty radical" solutions.

5. Some subjects 'severely' squeezed by exams

Pressed on whether her review would recommend that two hours of PE per week should become mandatory, Francis said the review was looking at it.

She said she was "mindful of... sometimes squeezing subjects that are meant to be held dear in the basic curriculum, but sometimes aren't".

6. Trusts using freedoms to avoid 'expensive' DT equipment

MPs grilled Francis on the government's move to force academies to follow the national curriculum.

She said had been heartened to learn that 70 per cent of headteachers at academies feel the move won't change their approach.

But she suggested that she was taking a close look at design and technology, where "some multi-academy trusts have used their freedoms not to provide often expensive equipment".

7. Review won't create programmes of study

Francis said that the scope and pace of the review had been "enormously intense and challenging".

She confirmed that it won't create programmes of study or draft exam content. It will be for government to respond to its recommendations, she added.

8. 'Range of timelines' for implementation

Francis's panel is due to present its final report to government in the autumn. She said there will be a "range of different timelines for change", but expects there to be "at least a year" before any changes are introduced.

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

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Movers & Shakers

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



**Pete
Kirkbride**

**Chief education
officer, E-ACT**

Start date: September

Current job: National education director of secondary, E-ACT

Interesting fact: An army child, Pete attended five primary and four secondary schools.



**Abbie
Watts**

**Director of
SEND, Odyssey
Collaborative Trust**

Start date: September

Current job: SENCo at the Village Federation, Derbyshire

Interesting fact: Abbie has converted her second camper van to enjoy school holidays.



**Adam
Dabin**

**Chief executive,
Horizons Education
Trust**

Start date: September

Current job: Director of SEND, Unity Schools Partnership

Interesting fact: Adam is a very happy fan of Tottenham Hotspur after years of pain [the club recently won its first trophy for 17 years].



**Kate
Mann**

**National education
director of primary,
E-ACT**

Start date: September

Current job: Deputy national director of primary, E-ACT

Interesting fact: Kate is an international netball umpire and in 2023 officiated in the first Netball World Cup to be held in an African country.



**Phillipa
Sherlock-
Lewis**

**Chair of the National
Association for
Special Educational
Needs (NASEN)**

Start date: June

Concurrent job: chief executive, PA Community Trust

Interesting fact: Phillipa has championed inclusive practice across mainstream education settings and believes passionately in the right of every child and young person to access a high-quality education.



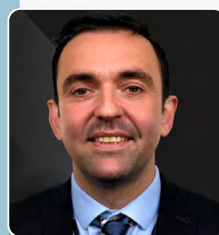
**Geoff
Barton**

**Trustee, Education
Policy Institute**

Start date: September

Former job: general secretary, the Association of School and College Leaders

Interesting fact: Geoff has a collection of more than 500,000 American radio jingles (and once held an ambition to become Radio 1's breakfast show DJ).



**Phil
Denton**

**Chief operating
officer, EdStart
Schools**

Start date: June

Former job: Director of education at an edtech company and headteacher of St Bede's Catholic High School, Ormskirk

Interesting fact: Phil co-wrote *The First 100 Days: Lessons in Leadership from the Football Bosses*, drawing insights from premier league managers to shape leadership strategies in education and beyond.

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Feature

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER


 A portrait of Josh MacAlister, a man with short dark hair and a beard, wearing a dark suit, light blue shirt, and dark tie. He is smiling and looking slightly to the right. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with green trees and a red double-decker bus.

MacAlister's calling

Labour MP Josh MacAlister has made action on mobile phone use his key cause in Parliament. He describes how his own upbringing and time teaching citizenship shaped his passion for reducing inequality

Josh MacAlister isn't wasting time. Weeks after becoming the MP for Whitehaven and Workington in Cumbria last July, the Teach First alumnus and founder of social work training charity Frontline was trying to change the law to ban phones in schools.

Now he's a Parliamentary aide to one of Sir Keir Starmer's most trusted ministers and getting involved in public service reform.

But things could have been very different for the 38-year-old. He tells me when we meet in Parliament that while growing up in Rochdale, Gtr Manchester, family separation sent him "off the rails" at primary school.

He has "strong memories of being taken out of class for the 'Biff, Chip and Kipper' books... the red box for catch-up reading.

"And that sinking feeling of everyone else in the class moving ahead and being left behind and all

the stuff that came with that, like acting out, some bad behaviour," he adds.

MacAlister's fortunes were turned around by the intervention of his stepfather, Peter, who "ended up doing an hour of extra reading, writing, times tables every night after school for years".

The extra help meant he started secondary school with a "decent chance" of success.

Moving to rural southern Scotland during his secondary education, MacAlister took an interest in history, geography and politics, spurred on by current affairs discussions at home and by "great teachers". He read politics and social policy at Edinburgh university.

He remembers being attracted to Teach First as "really the only graduate programme going that was saying to people, 'there's this massive social problem which is educational inequality, and we want a movement of people who are committed

to going into some of the toughest schools in the country and contributing to solving that problem'.

He says: "That was such an exciting invitation, and it offered something that was a challenge that had social purpose and that, in a way, I think probably linked back to the experience I had with Peter growing up where I had someone in my life who was a champion and was able to focus on me and my development."

'Practising what I preached'

MacAlister taught citizenship in schools in Oldham for three-and-a-half years, or "preached what I'm now practising", as he describes it.

He is adamant that with the government's commitment to lower the voting age to 16 must come a "resurgence of civics in schools".

"I really think we have to find a way of boosting civics education, and putting that together

Profile: Josh MacAlister

could mean we end up with the most informed, most engaged voter demographic being 16 and 17-year-olds, and completely overturning some of the preconceptions people have got about young people's attitude to politics."

It was during his time in the classroom and interacting with young people in care that MacAlister hit upon the idea for Frontline.

Similarly to Teach First, the charity encourages top graduates to consider the often-maligned field of social work. He remembers being told there was "no way you'd get graduates to consider doing child protection as a first step into their career."

But "when you put aside for a moment the label 'social worker' or child protection and describe what the task is, you're describing somebody who is asked to go into a child's and a family's life, often at the point of greatest crisis, and help steer them back onto a better course, which can be totally transformational for that child."

He adds: "You've got to get through that, get alongside that family and change what's happening so that that child can have a better future. And that is one of the most extraordinary leadership challenges. Why wouldn't people want to do it?"

Children in care review

MacAlister was picked by the last government to lead a review of children's social care.

It made over 80 recommendations, calling for schools to become statutory safeguarding partners and "corporate parents" of children in care.

MacAlister was initially critical of ministers' responses. The review called for £2.6 billion over five years. The last government initially allocated £200 million over two.

Many of his recommendations are now due to come to fruition as part of the children's wellbeing and schools bill. It will introduce things like regional care cooperatives and a single unique identifier for all children.

But that key advice to make schools a statutory safeguarding partner has not yet been realised.

MacAlister accepts bringing education into the safeguarding partnership system is "not straightforward".

"You have to pick, at a strategic and an operational level, someone from the school system who can speak on behalf of and control and coordinate the school system.

"That's hard to do when you've got local authorities and multi-academy trusts. But I do



'We've taken a lot of nonsense out of the education system'

think that that's moving in the right direction."

He believes the approach needs to be tested in a "couple of partnerships" across the country to "show how it can work, and then that approach gets replicated across the system".

'We should be so proud of academies'

While the fragmentation of the school system presents a "coordination challenge", MacAlister is unapologetic in his support for academies.

This is despite his constituency having been home to one of highest-profile failures in the early years of the programme's expansion.

In 2017, the Bright Tribe trust, founded by businessman Michael Dwan, walked away from the Whitehaven Academy after it was placed in special measures and amid growing concerns about its dilapidated buildings.

MacAlister said the scandal left a "deep and visible print on the town and let down a generation of kids".

But the "strength of the multi-academy trust system" was demonstrated after the school joined the "brilliant" Cumbria Education Trust in 2018. It was rated 'good' by Ofsted in 2023.

"For every high profile, visible example of educational vandalism from the likes of Bright Tribe, there were sleepy, quiet state schools

completely failing generation after generation of kids," he says.

"I'm as intolerant about one as the other."

He points out Labour introduced the academy scheme "to make sure it's really clear to people that we're on the side of kids and parents, particularly in the poorest neighbourhoods.

"We should be so proud that we did that. There was huge resistance to doing it back in the 2000s.

"The Conservatives recognised it was a good agenda, and they ran with it, and I'm really pleased that we're not turning back on that because it needs to be a part of the system that where an institution is letting kids down, we don't tolerate it. You need that challenge in the system."

The Tories also deserve credit for "really going after standards", MacAlister says. He remembers receiving training on learning styles, and lesson plans "crammed with loads of stuff that bore no resemblance to what the evidence said".

"We've managed to, over the last 15, 20 years, take a lot of that nonsense out of the education system, and it's all for the better."

But he doesn't share the fears of some academy supporters that Labour's reforms will water-down standards or prevent academy innovation.

"I think all the things that have made academies great, they'll still be able to pursue and get on with

Profile: Josh MacAlister



MacAlister
as a child

in the future, and they've got a government that believes in the model and wants to back them."

Mobile phone movement

Another area of common ground MacAlister shares with the Conservatives is on mobile phones.

Labour has repeatedly resisted calls for a national ban, favouring leaving it up to heads. Even the Tories, who now advocate for a total ban, themselves stopped short of enacting one during their time in power.

Last October, MacAlister took matters into his own hands. He tabled a backbench bill that would have put current guidance advocating a ban on a statutory footing.

In March, he watered it down in the face of government opposition. Ministers have now committed to research the matter further. The bill will have its third reading in Parliament today (Friday).

MacAlister tells me he picked the issue to "stimulate the national debate", believing politics has "failed to keep up" with one of the "top dinner table discussions for parents and families".

"I wanted to get some movement," he says. "I wanted the government to go somewhere on the set of issues. So I was very prepared to put forward ideas that I would tweak and adjust in order to get government to commit to taking some action."

"I think we will see in the next few months



MacAlister taking part in a mountain rescue

'That child can have a better future. Why wouldn't people do it?'

and years, quite a lot of further action from the government on this."

But new-intake MPs aren't waiting around for ministers. MacAlister says he and others are now "working with their local schools to put in place full bans in schools and wider changes to social norms amongst parents about when should kids have smartphones".

"There have been MPs who've managed to get all of their schools in an area to agree to a full ban," he adds.

'I want to make an impact'

After living in London for many years, MacAlister and his husband Matt Hood (also a Teach First alumnus and founder of the Oak National Academy) settled in Cumbria five years ago.

He got to know the area while conducting his social care review, and subsequently sought and won Labour's nomination and took the new constituency last July.

His party may have a massive Parliamentary majority, but the rise of Reform UK and dismal polling for Labour raises the serious prospect that many of its new intake could be single-term MPs.

In MacAlister's seat, Reform came second, just ahead of the Tories, but still more than 13,000

votes behind Labour. Both of its predecessor seats, Copeland and Workington, had Conservative MPs until last year.

What are his ambitions for his time as an MP? He ducks my question about whether he aspires to be an education minister.

MacAlister volunteers with mountain rescue, and he jokes that he's "just about" managing to maintain his hours to stay on the team.

"This team leader from another team said to me, 'make sure you keep it up, because mountain rescue will certainly last longer than politics'. Both are great. I'm not taking anything for granted."

MacAlister is also now a Parliamentary private secretary to Pat McFadden, the chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and one of Starmer's close-knit inner circle.

This role sees him contributing "to some of the thinking on public service reform".

"I might only be here for four years, and I want to make an impact. So that's why I chose the issue around social media and smartphones," he says.

"The reason I'm here in Parliament is to make a difference. So the only question I ask myself is whether the place I'm in gives me a chance to make a difference, and [in 12 months] I've found quite a few ways to do that."

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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ANTHONY BENEDICT

CEO, Ambition Community Trust

Internal AP is not the way to make our system more inclusive

To include or not to exclude? That is the question. Either way, internal alternative provision that forces students to sit down and shut up is unlikely to be the answer, writes Anthony Benedict

Referring to unregistered alternative provisions (AP) last week, the children's commissioner spoke of the need to register, regulate and raise standards. She is right, of course, but she should be equally concerned about the rise in internal AP.

If we asked all school leaders to raise their hands to signal that their school wasn't inclusive, there would be a murmur of disbelief, perhaps even the odd gasp of horror. Not one hand would move.

But are our schools truly inclusive if, for many, 'inclusion' simply means 'not exclusion'? And how does the growing trend for internal AP really differ from 'respect' or 'reflection' or 'reset' rooms?

I'm certain there are examples of great practice, settings where the curriculum is properly tailored to meet need, support is intense and re-integration is the aim.

But I'm equally certain that in many cases these so-called internal APs are little more than isolation rooms where those who might 'spoil the other children's learning' are rounded up, given a

watered-down curriculum and held until they become someone else's responsibility.

Meanwhile, Edurio's pupil experience survey shows that 'pupil interest in learning' has dropped significantly from 42 per cent in 2020/21 to 28 per cent last year.

Levels of enjoyment, trust, agency and safety drop dramatically among year 7 pupils and don't fully recover.

And we know that falling engagement predicts not only increased absenteeism but worsening behaviour.

In short, our schools are clearly not as inclusive as we think.

In this context, it's not hard to see why there is growing concern that, rather than fostering inclusion as its proponents argue, internal AP is in fact a way to mask or offset rising suspensions and exclusions and falling attendance.

Witness the growing assertions that children aren't 'school ready'. Maybe we need to look at this through a different lens: Are schools ready to really meet the needs of their changing pupil population?

To that end, imagine if what the best APs do was a recognised and accepted alternative.

Imagine a curriculum that didn't require children to sit down and shut up for most of the time and positively encouraged movement breaks and fresh air.

Imagine a system where children



“ Our schools are clearly not as inclusive as we think

weren't divided according to labels like neuro-typical and neuro-diverse but taught in a way that recognised and understood neuroscience.

And imagine if discipline didn't mean red lines and zero tolerance but, as Dan Siegal suggests, "to teach, not to punish. A disciple is a student, not a recipient of behavioural consequences."

What I am not doing is making excuses for poor behaviour. But I am concerned about our behaviours as a profession.

AP doesn't need to be the result of a painful process of butting up against rules and expectations that children can't meet. It doesn't have to be an alternative to exclusion.

It should be a genuine alternative to an academic curriculum that we have too long taken as the only one worthy of respect. It should be part of an entitlement for every child to belong, thrive and achieve.

This doesn't mean lowering our expectations. It means upping our game.

Imagine a school with a hair salon next to the science lab or a

bike repair room next to the maths classroom; with outside grass areas which are home to rabbits and hens. Imagine if forest schools were an expected and accepted part of every child's curriculum.

For that matter, imagine a curriculum that placed equal focus and value on the EEF core competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making.

Doesn't that sound like a true alternative? Doesn't that sound like an environment all our children should be entitled to?

If our pupil referral units and special schools can do this with some of our most vulnerable children – and indeed if so many primaries can hang onto this curriculum ideal in spite of increasing accountability metrics – why can't we all follow suit?

We can't have a more inclusive mainstream if we don't broaden its course. For now, it seems to me that all internal AP does (at best) is to channel an inconvenient overflow elsewhere.

Opinion

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PETE WHITEHEAD

Senior policy manager,
Public First

To fight online misinformation we must start with ourselves

Stereotypes and assumptions mean our efforts to tackle nefarious online content are stifled from the outset, reveals Pete Whitehead

For those of us who work around the impact of online disinformation, there's been nothing bigger in terms of generating discussion around the impact of online content on young people than TV drama *Adolescence*.

Stephen Graham and co-creator Jack Thorne have spoken about their desire to portray a very normal family, and they do this well. Too often, though, there's a thread that runs through this programme and through most depictions of young people impacted by conspiracy content: whatever else they may be, they're usually male.

Our research for the Commission into Countering Online Conspiracies in Schools shows that actually the inverse is true. Girls are more vulnerable to conspiracy belief than boys.

To be clear: there are unquestionably forms of online disinformation content that appeal to young men. We heard in our focus groups about the influence of Andrew Tate, and it was a very real concern. But there is so much more out there than just the so-called manosphere.

For the past year, the Commission, funded by the Pears Foundation, has

examined the impact of mis- and disinformation content in schools. We polled school staff, students and parents on the issue and conducted focus groups across the country. We believe this is the largest ever study into the impact of this content in school environments.

What we found offers an important challenge to many of the stereotypes around misinformation.

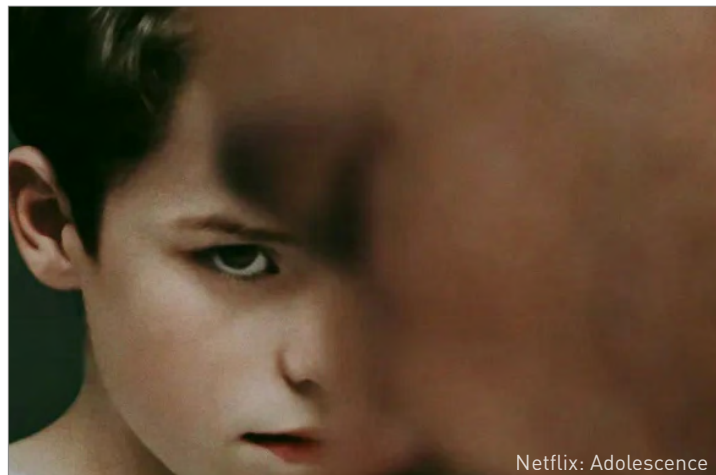
Firstly, we found that the most receptive demographic group to conspiracies wasn't boys. It was girls, as well as younger siblings, and pupils eligible for free school meals. In the second phase of our research, we are attempting to uncover why this is the case.

And there's another reason to think about the impact of this content on girls. We also found that conspiracy content has wider implications, aside from classroom behaviour.

Around one-third of pupils say that they have experienced a friendship becoming more difficult because of an opinion held by a friend, with girls more likely to report experiencing this than boys.

In one focus group I ran, a girl explained that Andrew Tate content had made it harder to keep friendships: "...I don't speak to them [friends who had got into Tate content] anymore, for obvious reasons. But they were tunnel-vision with that mindset."

The Commission's evidence



Netflix: *Adolescence*

“No demographic is immune, and no group is ‘the problem’”

sessions warned of mental health harms linked with exposure to harmful content, including conspiracy-adjacent material tapping into self-harm, suicide and eating disorders.

Schools cannot treat girls as passive bystanders in these harms. In many cases, they're the ones most caught in the crossfire where conspiracy, anxiety, self-image and peer pressure intersect.

So, should schools looking to tackle this issue pivot, and focus on girls?

Well, yes and no.

We should be far more open to the idea that girls are impacted by online misinformation and disinformation. We absolutely should be thinking about the knock-on impact on social bonds and self-esteem when it comes to girls.

But most importantly, we also found that demographics are the wrong place to be looking. Psychological factors are more closely linked to how students approach conspiracies and therefore are better predictors.

Marginalisation (the feeling that the world has been set up in ways that discriminate against the

respondent) had the strongest link with receptiveness to conspiracy belief of all the variables we tested.

The wider issue of misinformation is a cross-societal one. In our focus groups with parents, participants revealed conspiracy belief quite casually: "I mean, I'm open to them looking at conspiracy theories and talking about it, because my husband believes 9/11 was a conspiracy..."

It's easy to just focus on a single demographic. It's reassuring to think that interventions can be targeted or that the real problem is somewhere else.

But the fundamental issue of combatting misinformation and conspiracies is only going to get more important, and to have real impact we need a whole-school approach.

No demographic is immune, and no group of pupils is 'the problem'. The problem is in all of us.

This is the first in a new series exclusive to *Schools Week* from the Pears Foundation's Commission into Countering Online Conspiracies in Schools.

Opinion

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?
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KATE AMBROSI

Chief executive officer,
Baker Dearing Educational Trust

Schools should not be left out of extra funding for technical courses

The government's industrial strategy is missing an important element that would drive up inclusion and youth employment and boost the economy, writes Kate Ambrosi

The new industrial strategy states the government will use the I6-19 high-value course premia to uplift funding to courses that support key sectors. It also acknowledges that the nation's skills pipeline starts at school. So why not introduce the uplift earlier?

As things stand, technical education courses at pre-16 will receive no such uplift. This leaves schools (and colleges in the 14-16 space) to deliver expensive technical courses that support high-growth sectors with no extra funding.

Technical education at the crucial key stage 4 (KS4) helps prepare students for more rigorous T Levels and apprenticeships, which lead to promising careers in industry.

It can also help inclusion and engagement: Two-thirds of university technical college students told our 2024 survey their attendance had improved since their last school. Almost 90 per cent agreed that the mix of academic, technical and practical learning had helped.

If schools are expected to become more inclusive and prepare young people for the workplace, technical education must be seen as part of the

solution and funded accordingly.

The Department for Education already gives different weightings to technical subjects at KS5. Applying the same principle to KS4 would ensure consistency, address cost disparities and ought to support progression to T Levels and apprenticeships.

Improving destinations

The high-value course premium gives providers £600 for each student taking certain level 3 courses in specific subject areas including engineering and manufacturing technologies. Government guidance states this is "to encourage and support provision that leads to higher wage returns, to enable a more productive economy".

Such a premium for KS4 technical subjects would support provision that can help progress young people to work. Our own UTC Sleeve initiative shows the positive impact of placing high-quality technical pathways within mainstream schools.

Last academic year, a fifth of UTC Year 13 leavers progressed onto an apprenticeship, four times more than the national average. We put that down to most UTC students starting at 14, or maybe earlier.

Not only do they get the opportunity to study the technical subjects they need for work at a relatively early age but, as one UTC leader said to us recently, they learn



“ Applying the same principle to KS4 would ensure consistency

what they do not want to do and can target their preferred destination.

Properly-funded 14-16 technical education can also help inclusion at a time when the government is eager to improve this in mainstream schooling. Pupil referral units have achieved great results by linking provision to employment destinations.

However, technical education should not be seen as a way to keep troubled kids in school. It offers brilliant opportunities for all.

Just one in 25 UTC Year 13 leavers become NEET (not in education, employment, or training). At a time when one in eight young people nationally are NEET, better funding for KS4 technical education is a powerful lever to reduce economic inactivity among young people.

Return on investment

Technical education is expensive at any key stage. Specialist teachers must be recruited and trained, and industry-standard equipment must be purchased which comes with other associated costs, like maintenance, energy usage and consumable materials.

The DfE recognises the increased costs of this provision, which is why

it provides the post-16 programme weightings.

But the benefits from a KS4 technical funding uplift would be seen throughout the skills pipeline, ensuring return on investment.

Progression to employment is good for the student and good for the economy. As more young people are prepared for careers in high-growth sectors identified in the industrial strategy, they boost growth and become net contributors to the Treasury.

The opportunity to feed talented young workers into these sectors and increase youth employment makes it clear that the government should introduce a funding uplift for KS4 technical provision.

I wrote previously for Schools Week on how the curriculum and assessment review should lead to the promotion of KS3 design and technology.

If we want to build a strong pathway from school, through T Levels and A-levels and onto apprenticeships and high-paying, growth-driving careers, then it should also consider a further recommendation: to match the funding uplift for post-16 technical education in earlier key stages.

Opinion

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RUTH
MARVEL

CEO, The Duke of
Edinburgh's Award



DAVE
PARR

Oasis
Charitable Trust



Enrichment: the golden thread the opportunity mission needs

Enrichment isn't a luxury but an essential part of education, and our new benchmarks can help ensure every child enjoys its opportunities

If we're serious about giving children the best start in life, we need to talk about the role of enrichment in education.

With the government's launch this week of its plan to give every child the best start (including the provision of family hubs in every local authority), ministers have a chance to make this the golden thread weaving through their plans to deliver wellbeing and opportunity for all.

By enrichment, we mean the broad range of activities and experiences that support young people's social, personal and educational development. Central to all enrichment are the voices of each child or young person, and support from a trusted adult.

Access to enrichment matters in the moment, offering young people enjoyment, challenge and connection. And it matters in the long term, with a growing evidence base, including *Beyond the Classroom* and research from the Education Policy Institute, showing links to improved self-belief, wellbeing and belonging.

Crucially, enrichment also helps develop essential skills for life and work: teamwork, resilience, emotional management, confidence and creativity – the very attributes

that employers need but complain school leavers lack.

Enrichment can broaden horizons, raise aspirations and support successful transitions into further learning or work. It even supports attendance, because when young people feel engaged and successful at school, they are more likely to show up.

But despite these benefits, provision is patchy. With schools under immense pressure to boost attendance, close attainment gaps and support pupil wellbeing, enrichment is too often an afterthought, when it should be part of the solution.

In our recent work engaging with hundreds of stakeholders, including school leaders, youth organisations and young people themselves, 10 clear "enrichment gaps" emerged. These include gaps in strategy, staff capacity, pupil access and partnerships with external providers.

Perhaps most importantly, we identified a systemic gap: enrichment is not currently prioritised in accountability frameworks, inspection criteria or funding formulas. Without these levers even the most committed school leaders face an uphill battle to embed it.

However, the landscape is shifting. The launch of the government's Best Start plan follows a series of announcements this year that taken together could significantly improve outcomes for children and young people.



“ Enrichment is too often an afterthought

In March, the Department for Education announced it will develop a national enrichment framework with supporting non-statutory guidance – an encouraging step.

And in June, the prime minister committed to a framework to increase school engagement, recognising that children's sense of belonging in school really matters.

This is why The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Big Education and Oasis Charitable Trust have collaborated to publish the report *Towards Enrichment for All* – setting out eight proposed national enrichment benchmarks to help schools build inclusive, high-quality enrichment for every young person.

Our aim is to inform and support the government's efforts because, implemented well, a new framework would enable schools to plan enrichment more intentionally, create a quality offer and measure its impact.

Crucially, it will send a clear message to schools and parents that this government recognises the value of enrichment alongside the academic curriculum.

Taking inspiration from the Gatsby Benchmarks used in careers education, our proposed enrichment benchmarks have been developed with widespread engagement across

the education and youth sectors.

They draw on several years of collaboration, research and pilots by the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the National Citizen Service Trust.

We are not calling for rigid targets or top-down mandates. But we do believe that enrichment needs a shared language and a strategic approach, and that school leaders need access to best practice guidance, practical tools, case studies and support to build partnerships and enrichment networks beyond their school gates.

Ultimately, schools need to prepare students for life, in all its complexity and uncertainty. We hope these benchmarks will play an important role in ensuring an enriched education for all.

The Department of Education's priorities are a testament to this government's opportunity mission commitment. Enrichment offers a means to tie these objectives together, so every child not only has the best start in life, but the best possible experience of childhood too.

**This article was co-authored with
Liz Robinson, CEO, Big Education**

Read the full report [here](#)

SEND Solutions

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PROFESSOR
MICHAEL GREEN

Visiting professor of
teacher education,
University of Greenwich

How to get SEND training right to foster inclusion

Effective inclusion starts with improving how we prepare teachers for the job in a changed sector, writes Michael Green. Here's how to get started

Pupils with SEND are not the exception in today's classrooms. Department for Education data shows over 1.7 million pupils are now identified with SEND, with more presenting complex needs. For these pupils, a teacher's ability to adapt the curriculum and create an inclusive classroom is essential.

At the heart of this challenge lies a simple truth: the quality of SEND provision depends on the confidence and capability of teachers.

Yet Ofsted's 2024 review of teacher development found variability in how well SEND training prepares new teachers. Too many enter teaching with limited experience of complex needs and without a secure understanding of how to tailor instruction without lowering expectations. Consequently, many feel underprepared to meet the diverse needs of their pupils.

If we are serious about inclusion, new teachers must leave training equipped with the knowledge and skills to adapt teaching for all. The risk is that SEND remains a bolt-on topic in ITT programmes – rather than a thread running through every aspect of training.

To support that, here are four ways

ITT providers can get SEND training right.

Adaptive teaching as a core skill

Adaptive teaching is not the same as differentiation, nor should it be viewed as a strategy solely for pupils with SEND. At its core, it's responsive teaching: noticing, understanding and addressing learning barriers in real time.

ITT providers must embed adaptive teaching as a core pedagogical principle across all subject and phase-specific content, not confine it to professional studies modules.

Trainees need practical tools to plan, model, scaffold and assess learning across diverse needs, without reducing cognitive demand.

The strongest programmes highlight how high expectations and inclusive strategies go hand in hand, helping trainees see adaptive teaching as a marker of teacher expertise, not an optional extra.

Deeper understanding of SEND needs

While adaptive teaching supports all pupils, trainees also need a deeper understanding of common SEND needs and their classroom implications.

This should go beyond textbook definitions to focus on practical realities such as how language processing difficulties affect access to a word problem, or how sensory difficulties could impact behaviour in



“ This isn't about compliance; it's a moral imperative

an art lesson.

Case studies offer a valuable way to explore and discuss these issues, alongside intensive training and practice (ITAP) opportunities. High-quality SEND input from experienced practitioners, specialist teachers and educational psychologists should be a core component of all ITT routes, underpinned by up-to-date research and evidence.

Stronger school-based SEND training

Exposure matters. Trainees need sustained, structured opportunities to work directly with pupils with SEND.

Placements should include time in inclusive classrooms where adaptive teaching is strong, as well as in specialist settings where complex needs are effectively met. This relies on ITT providers knowing their school partnerships well and drawing on expertise within them to ensure trainees observe best practice.

Providers should also ensure school-based mentors are confident in modelling adaptive teaching, with feedback focused on how well trainees plan for and respond to diverse learner needs (this has implications for mentor training too).

Building vital relationships

An often-overlooked aspect of effective SEND training is the

importance of partnership: with families, teaching assistants and professionals such as speech and language therapists. Trainees should be explicitly taught how to listen to parental insight, contribute to review meetings and communicate effectively about pupil needs and progress.

Case studies, role play and video analysis can be powerful tools for developing the empathy and interpersonal skills needed to build trust with families of children with SEND.

Inclusion starts with training. Mentors, tutors and leaders should model inclusive attitudes, reinforce that SEND is everyone's responsibility and monitor trainee progress in this area with the same rigour as subject knowledge.

If every trainee teacher left training confident in teaching pupils with SEND, we'd be far closer to a system where all pupils can thrive. This isn't about compliance; it's a moral imperative.

ITT providers are the gatekeepers of teacher identity and practice. They shape the beliefs and habits new teachers take into classrooms. In an era of rising need, getting this right has never mattered more.

And of course, all the same applies to skilling up teachers already doing the job.

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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

THE CONVERSATION OF THE YEAR

OUR REGULAR REVIEWERS ROUND OFF THE ACADEMIC YEAR BY SELECTING THEIR MOST COMPELLING BLOGS AND PODCASTS OF 2024/25

Jess Mahdavi-Gladwell

Deputy Head and SENCO, Fairford Academy Barnehurst, Illuminate Minds Trust

TEACHING IS A BEAUTIFUL REBELLION

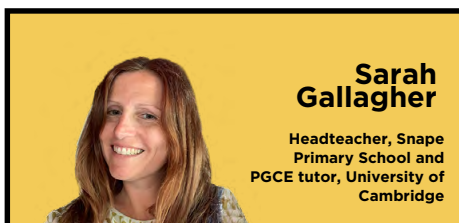
I was instantly drawn to the title of this blog. Written for new teachers at the end of their training and describing itself as a manifesto, it contains a call to us all.

As we approach the final days of the school year, I wish for us all some deep rest. Rest which will prepare us for the new school year. Rest which will leave us refuelled to create classrooms where joy waits at the door to greet our children.

But as well as the anticipation of an ending, headteacher Jeremy Hannay points out that this time of year also brings anticipation of new beginnings – the start of a new autumn term which he describes as 'wild, wonderful, painful, hilarious, messy, magical'.

As we prepare to say goodbye to children, colleagues and classrooms, let us rest in preparation so that we can bring our whole selves to the new opportunities ahead.

Have a great summer, beautiful rebels.



Sarah Gallagher

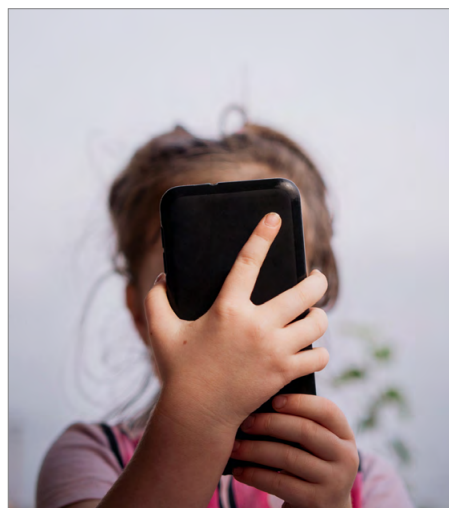
Headteacher, Snape Primary School and PGCE tutor, University of Cambridge

ARE SMARTPHONES RUINING CHILDHOOD?

This podcast has consistently informed the many, many conversations I've had this year about childhood and adolescence today.

Last week, I misplaced my phone during our summer performance. Unable to doom-scroll that evening, I wondered whether I should go back to an analogue phone.

I know the theory, but I haven't quite been brave enough to put it into practice yet. And I'm a grown-up who did experience a phone-free childhood.



For me, it's not just about the mobile phone issue though; it's the insidious eradication of childhood in many more areas. This is what Jonathan Haidt argues so compellingly.

How do we build resilience in our children and let them explore and go outdoors into the big wide world like we used to while ensuring their safety in what feels like a more dangerous world?

As the podcast discusses, it's about being present and enabling children to be present in their childhood. Perhaps the summer will give us some fresh air and playtime to do just that – for our good and theirs.



Zara Simpson

Deputy head of prep, Streatham and Clapham High School

WHAT MAKES A GREAT SECONDARY SCHOOL LIBRARY

I've always appreciated the role of libraries in schools, but even so this podcast has completely reframed my thinking about their potential – as hubs of inclusion and wellbeing as well as literacy.



Listening to school librarians and English leads describe how carefully-designed spaces with soft furnishings, flexible layouts and quiet corners can become sanctuaries for neurodiverse pupils was genuinely eye-opening.

Since then, I've looked at our own library with fresh eyes. We already incorporate some of these ideas, but the podcast made me realise just how vital it is to protect these spaces in the face of shrinking budgets and ever-expanding digital demands.

It also prompted me to explore ways to use the library more creatively across the curriculum and to think harder about how pupil-led initiatives, author visits and cross-curricular projects can boost engagement.

I would recommend a listen to anyone involved in school leadership, pastoral care or curriculum planning. It's a brilliant reminder that a great library isn't a luxury, it's an engine of school culture.

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts





THE CONVERSATION OF THE YEAR



Louise Lee

CEO, Howard Partnership Trust

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY: BEST PRACTICES

If you're like me you're already thinking about next year's 'shocks' to our system, not least SEND reform. Amjad Ali has revived his blog NewToThePost to bring an update on inclusive pedagogy – a timely reminder of how much we know about strategies to include.

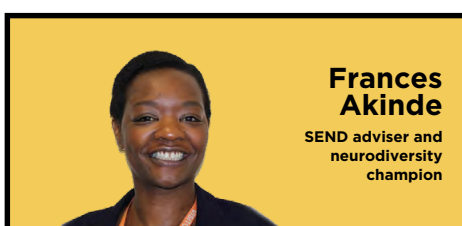
The focus is simple: teach our children as well as you can – all of them.

In this spirit, Ali contrasts more traditional 'differentiation' (involving pre-lesson preparation) with 'adaptive teaching' (responses in the moment to maximise learning).

With 40 per cent of children recognised with SEND at some point, he advocates for responsive teaching to support 'anybody that needs help, support, extra, a push and a probe'.

Ali quotes the SEND code of practice on the value of "high-quality teaching", but he also reminds us that "poor teaching affects underserved students disproportionately".

As more is being rightly asked of teachers in building more inclusive classrooms, this is a fitting reminder that we must know all we need to meet these challenges.



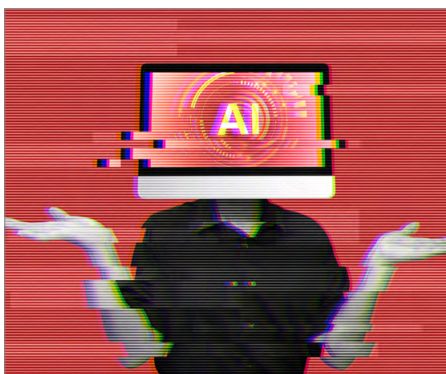
Frances Akinde

SEND adviser and neurodiversity champion

WHY AI CAN'T HANDLE AUTISTIC COMMUNICATION STYLES

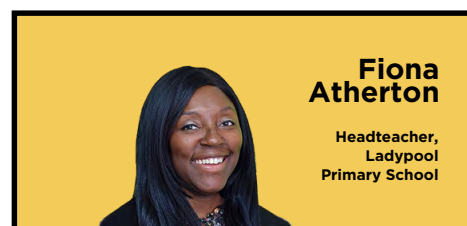
My blog of the year was only published a couple of weeks ago, but it's a powerful, necessary critique of how AI systems often fail to understand neurodivergent ways of communicating and it's one I know I will keep referring to.

As someone who champions inclusion and equity in education, I found Caroline Keep's words both validating and challenging. A leading voice in education, neurodiversity and technology, Keep writes about the people often left out of the systems that are meant to be designed with them in mind.



This piece made me pause and reflect on how we define communication in schools. Too often, neurodivergent (in particular, autistic) voices are misunderstood or dismissed. The way this article exposes how AI risks replicating those same biases at scale truly made me pause and reflect.

This is not just about AI; it's about the future of communication, which in turn has a profound effect on how we teach. Essential reading for educators, technologists and policymakers alike.



Fiona Atherton

Headteacher, Ladypool Primary School

THINKING FAST AND SLOW ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Leading a new school with a new team, I've spent a lot of time this year trying to strike the right balance between urgency and purpose (and definitely not always succeeded!).



I've often felt the need to prove myself by being seen to act quickly and decisively, and this blog has reminded me that deep, strategic thinking requires space and permission to slow down.

Kat Howard's idea of noise (ie. all the pressures that surround us as school leaders) really resonated with me when I first read it, and it still does now in the season on school development plans, reports to governors and the like.

Whenever I've needed to 'reduce the noise' I've turned to Howard's blog – and her discussion of cognitive bias is also well worth engaging with.

As I read the blog one more time for this column, my reflection is that strategic change and improvement need deliberate thought, and sometimes the bravest thing we can do as leaders is pause.

Click the links to access the blogs and podcasts



The Knowledge

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



Will EHCP numbers continue to rise, and what then?

Steve Preston,
Managing director, Mime

It is well known that many local authorities have significant overspends in their SEND budgets. The latest announcement that these deficits will be kept off councils' balance sheets for two further years will have come as a huge relief to many. But to what extent is the government simply forestalling a deeper crisis?

Given these stretched finances and increasing levels of SEND need, it's vital for local authorities and policymakers to proactively plan, and prioritise provision and support services for investment.

Predicting the future can seem like a dark art, but there is much we can say with a high degree of confidence about what the next few years will hold.

At Mime, we have worked closely with local authorities to develop a novel SEND forecasting model, built from data including the age and primary need profile of the existing SEND cohort, request rate trends, birth rates and population change.

From this, we have produced an "unmitigated" forecast of the trajectory for the number of EHCPs across England. In other words, this tells us what will likely happen if existing trends, in particular the rate of requests for an EHCP assessment, remain broadly consistent.

Key findings

The headline finding from our new forecast for England is a projected 60 per cent increase to over 920,000 pupils with an EHCP by 2040, assuming request rates stabilise. But if request rates continue to rise, we could see a scenario where the cohort tops 1.1 million.

We can also see that much of this growth will be felt in secondary and post-16 education. This reflects the recent uptick in new plans issued in early years and early primary working its way through the system.

The main driver of this growth is the increasing numbers of requests for EHCP assessments, particularly in the early years. There were 154,000 requests for an EHCP in 2024, an 88 per cent increase from 2019, in spite of falling birth rates.



There will be particularly large growth in the numbers of children with an EHCP needing support for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

The number of children with an EHCP with a primary need of ASD has doubled since 2019 and the growth is forecast to continue.

The predicted rise in SLCN is a reflection of the profile of new EHCPs being far more likely to have SLCN recorded as their primary need than was the case even a few years ago.

Implications

There are four key implications of these forecasts, each urgent given the scale of local authority deficits.

Enhancing the universal offer

More parents of children with special education needs must feel that their children's needs are being met through universal and targeted SEN support services, reducing the need to request an EHCP.

Improving inclusive practice

In line with our previous research, ensuring all young people feel a sense of belonging and are fully supported in mainstream settings may make it less likely that families request a move

into specialist provision, which is typically far more expensive.

SEND units and resource bases attached to mainstream schools provide a good middle ground for this. What is more, inclusive practice has been shown to improve outcomes for children with special educational needs. This may also reduce the likelihood of a child's needs escalating to the point of requiring an EHCP.

Earlier intervention

Earlier diagnosis means putting in support that can delay or prevent needs escalating to the point that an EHCP is requested.

Proactive place planning

Local authorities too often have to rely on expensive out-of-borough independent provision, which can isolate young people. Instead, they should use robust local forecasts to develop adequate provision and reduce reliance on the independent sector.

In reality, all of these come with an initial cost. Without the necessary significant government investment, we will continue to see delays, parental dissatisfaction and young people lacking the support they need to achieve their full potential.

Now, at least, no one will be able to say we didn't know.

DIVERSITY COUNT

The sector's looking glass can only distort so much

JL DUTAUT
@DUTAUT

Schools Week plays an often unspoken role: it is a mirror in which the sector sees itself. We think about it all the time. We take the adage that you can't be what you can't see seriously, because we and our readers know that education has systemic barriers standing in the way of many people.

As far as possible, we try to be a somewhat distorting mirror – albeit a flattering one – to bring out the version of the sector it clearly aspires to be.

But there are limits to that strategy. Over-distortion would mask some of the sector's very real problems, and this year's diversity audit brings out those limits.

Here are the numbers.

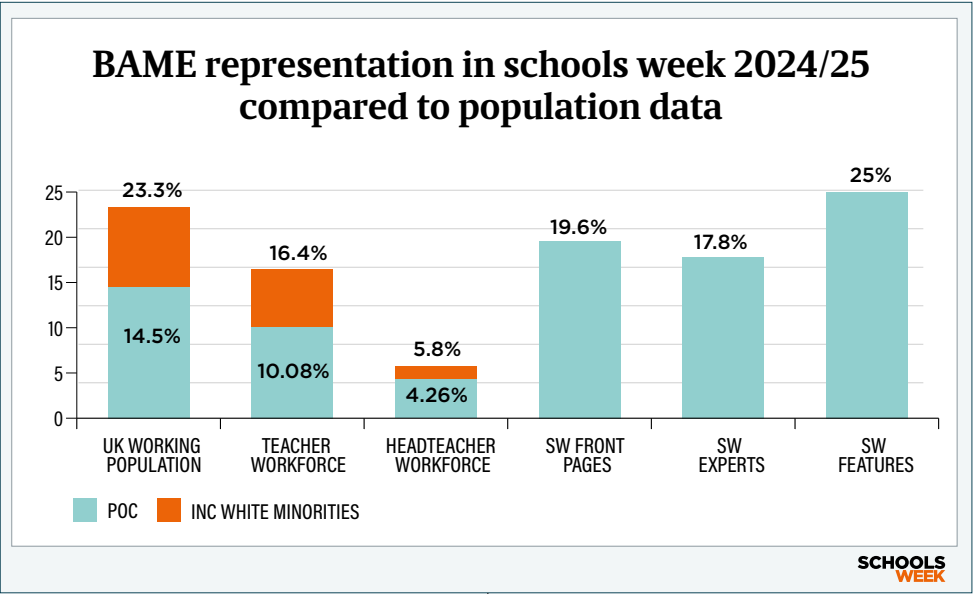
Two years ago, 21 per cent of our expert contributors were from ethnic minorities. This year, that's 18 per cent.

On our front pages, non-white faces have fallen back from a high of 27 per cent to 19 per cent.

On the other hand, the people we feature in profiles and investigations have risen from 23 per cent to 25.

The factors are complex – and sometimes a little silly. Last year, Rishi Sunak was still prime minister. His regular appearance on our front page easily inflated a percentage of a small number. After all, there are only 38 front pages in a year.

When it comes to opinion writers, the number



is relatively stable – 56, down from 61 – but they are a proportion of a larger total – 315, up from 282.

In essence, as the sector has continued to grow confident about voicing its thought leadership in our pages, the effect we aim for – to present the views of the widest range of diverse voices – has been harder to achieve.

But relative to England's working-age population, we are still over-shooting. Relative to the sector's workforce, this is also true. It's even truer of you, our core readership.

But here things get difficult. How do we count?

The 2021 census suggests 23.3 per cent of workers stem from ethnic minorities. However, 8.8 per cent are from white minority groups, so 14.5 per cent are people of colour.

I know of one regular Schools Week contributor from a white minority group, but I haven't counted him in my audit, because you wouldn't know, and because I don't know how many more there are.

This is also true of DfE statistics about the school workforce. Do we measure ourselves against the DfE's preferred measure including white minorities (16.4 per cent) or not including them (just 10 per cent).

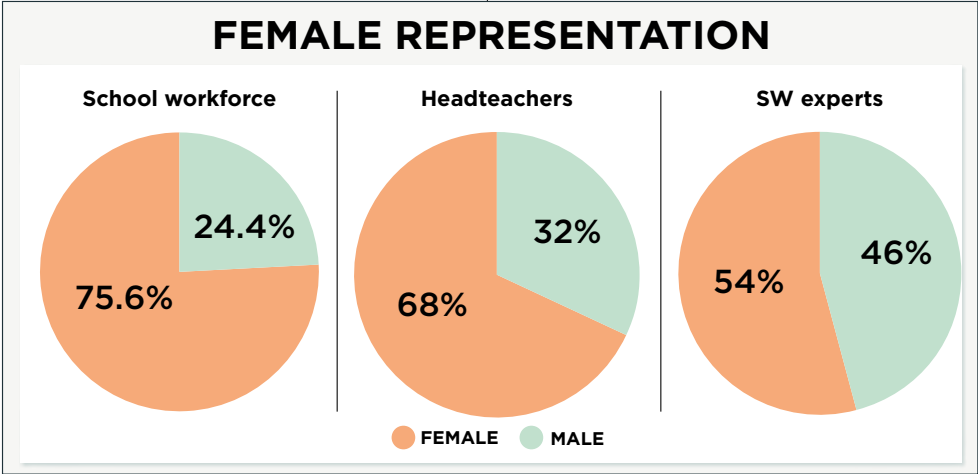
And as to leadership, there are only known to be 957 headteachers of colour (4.26 per cent of the headcount). Add those from marginalised white backgrounds (all 339 of them, including Irish), and you still only get to 5.8 percent.

But I haven't set out to audit the profession. I set out to audit Schools Week, and in true Schools Week fashion, to be transparent and solutions-focused.

In the meantime, our efforts to represent female school leaders offers a mixed picture. Your expert opinions are up two percentage points this year, and your presence in our features and investigations is up solidly from 43.5 to 54.5 per cent.

But you make 75 per cent of the workforce and 67 per cent of headteachers. You are already being 10 per cent braver, we'll work hard to be 10 per cent more inviting.

We hope our openness is part of tackling a problem we face together as a sector, and we'll keep working with you on the solutions.



10 things

you probably wouldn't know if *Schools Week* hadn't told you

1 REVEALED: HOW ACADEMY TRUSTS PARACHUTE CENTRAL TEAMS INTO OFSTED INSPECTIONS

Trust bosses defended parachuting in central team staff to their schools during Ofsted inspections after the union representing inspectors raised "significant concerns", figures we obtained from several large MATs showed.

[Click here to read](#)

2 INVESTIGATION: HOW EHCPs ARE FAILING OUR MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Our months-long investigation found education, health and care plans for vulnerable children included ineffective interventions such as fidget spinners, copied and pasted chunks of text and were breaking the law.

[Click here to read](#)

3 DfE LETS COUNCILS SKIRT MINIMUM FUNDING RULES TO PROP UP SEND

Cash-strapped councils were given government permission to circumvent laws requiring minimum funding levels in schools so they can divert cash to cover gaping SEND deficits. The story exposed a new low for dwindling budgets.

[Click here to read](#)

4 SECRECY FEARS AROUND ACADEMIES' POOLING OF SCHOOL FUNDS

Schools are having up to 28 per cent shaved off their budgets by academy trusts that pool their funding, we found. However, some trusts refused to provide figures – leading to calls for greater transparency.

[Click here to read](#)



5 BREAKFAST CLUBS TRIAL DITCHED BY 79 SCHOOLS

Almost 80 schools named just months earlier as trailblazers for Labour's flagship free breakfast clubs ended up dropping out, with many saying funding was inadequate.

[Click here to read](#)

6 'LOWER YOUR TONE': THE DfE'S ACCOUNT OF THAT BIRBALSINGH MEETING

Bridget Phillipson had to ask headteacher Katharine Birbalsingh to "lower her tone" and "allow her to finish her sentences", official government minutes of a controversial meeting between the pair claimed.

[Click here to read](#)

7 MOCK 11-PLUS ENTRANCE EXAMS BOOST GRAMMARS' FUNDS

Grammar schools were accused of "making a fast buck out of parents' 11-plus test anxiety" after an investigation found their parent and teacher associations were raking in thousands running mock exams.

[Click here to read](#)

8 SCHOOL PREVENT REFERRALS RISE – BUT FEWER GET SUPPORT

Schools are increasingly referring children to the government's anti-terrorism programme, but fewer than one in 10 youngsters got support, our analysis showed. The findings came after it was revealed Southport killer Axel Rudakubana had been referred to Prevent three times.

[Click here to read](#)

9 INVESTIGATION: HOW COUNCILS ROUTINELY BREACH EXCLUSION DUTY

Councils across the country are routinely failing in their legal duty to provide full-time education for excluded pupils within six days, with our investigation finding some youngsters waiting two years for provision.

[Click here to read](#)

10 LILAC SKY SCANDAL: £3M OF 'CONTENTIOUS' PAYMENTS – BUT NO REPORT

More than £3 million of spending by the since-collapsed Lilac Sky Schools Trust was deemed "contentious, irregular or improper", a government report released after several *Schools Week* investigations showed. But ministers refused to publish the full report and have dropped their investigation transparency pledge.

[Click here to read](#)



The year in front pages

EDITION 366

SCHOOLS WEEK
A digital newspaper determined to get past the bluster and explain the facts.
FRIDAY, SEP 4, 2024 | EDITION 366

After the riots: Their legacy and how to address it in school
Ofsted reforms won't address the root problem
Grammars net £1,000s from mock II+

A NEW CHAPTER?

- Government and Ofsted announce biggest inspection reforms in decades
- Headline grades scrapped immediately, report cards from September 2025
- Schools held to account for inclusion, but heads warn of 'perverse incentives'
- Labour's new improvement teams will offer support to all schools

Four pages of Ofsted news and analysis

#Clearing2024 is open!
Students can apply for BTEC Higher Nationals

Pearson BTEC

A new chapter? Our first edition of the year covered the early details of what was billed as the 'biggest inspection reforms in a decade' and changes that have dominated the news agenda this year

EDITION 373

SCHOOLS WEEK
A digital newspaper determined to get past the bluster and explain the facts.
FRIDAY, NOV 8, 2024 | EDITION 373

Curriculum Conversation
HOW WE CAN LAY FIRMER FOUNDATIONS

RISE AND SHINE: SECTOR QUESTIONS 'UNINTELLIGIBLE' IMPROVEMENT PLANS

EDUCATION POLICY AVENGERS ASSEMBLE FOR NEW INSTITUTE

STANDARDS TSAR: AUTONOMY? TEACHERS ARE ENVELOPED

PHILLIPSON 'OPEN' TO LETTING ACADEMIES REJOIN COUNCILS

- Ed sec also considering plans for LAs to open new schools again
- New children's bill will 'smooth difference' between school types
- Questions CEO salaries, saying trusts 'need to justify levels of pay'
- Reveals SEND plans to make mainstream schools more inclusive

EXCLUSIVE | Pages 4-5

Phillipson and academies: The new education secretary talked about her academy reforms that have caused controversy this year, revealing ahead of time she would let councils open schools again

EDITION 380

SCHOOLS WEEK
A digital newspaper determined to get past the bluster and explain the facts.
FRIDAY, JAN 10, 2025 | EDITION 380

MATS SET OUT THEIR PAY FREEDOM DEMANDS

BEHAVIOUR HUBS TO END - BUT WHAT NEXT?

CEO PAY CLAMPDOWN FAVOURS BIG TRUST CEOs

FIVE WAYS TO AVOID LEADERSHIP BURNOUT

STEM SCHEMES CUT DESPITE STARMER'S AI 'SUPERPOWER' PLAN

- Scheme to get more girls studying physics latest on scrapheap
- 'High impact' science teacher training at STEM centre also cut
- 'Undermines decades of progress' and 'blow' for 'critical AI areas'

EXCLUSIVE | Page 4

Labour's budget cuts: The new government cut school hubs, a Latin scheme for state schools and STEM training to cover what it says was a multi-billion pound budget blackhole left by the Conservatives

EDITION 381

SCHOOLS WEEK
A digital newspaper determined to get past the bluster and explain the facts.
FRIDAY, JAN 24, 2025 | EDITION 381

Home education check? Some councils have no staff

Let LAs choose trust members

Labour opportunity champion: 'Happy' children the priority

Time for a school management inquiry

Starmer struggles on school standards

RISE IN SCHOOL PREVENT REFERRALS - BUT FEWER GET SUPPORT

- Children deemed vulnerable but 'no terrorist ideology' in 40 per cent of cases
- Kids fall through the cracks as 'greyzone' means no Prevent support provided

INVESTIGATION | Page 8

Starmer's standards struggle: Revoking academy freedoms in the schools bill saw the government on the back foot in a school standards political row, a debate still raging on

EDITION 383

SCHOOLS WEEK
A digital newspaper determined to get past the bluster and explain the facts.
FRIDAY, FEB 7, 2025 | EDITION 383

How Relational Inclusion transformed our school

'Stuck' schools are back: but who are they?

MAT central teams soak up more millions

Cease and desist: Staff get parent abuse help

Schools judge Ofsted report cards as 'causing concern'

Ofsted reforms news and analysis: Pages 4-8 and 24

Sector gives Ofsted verdict: School leaders raised grave concerns about Ofsted's proposed new report cards, including over reliability and validity of grades and the speed of their introduction

EDITION 385

SCHOOLS WEEK
A digital newspaper determined to get past the bluster and explain the facts.
FRIDAY, FEB 28, 2025 | EDITION 385

UNION NOW STRIKES OVER CLASSES OF 30

GOVERNMENT MUST CRACK DOWN ON PUPIL MOVEMENTS

HOW PHILLIPSON CAN UNITE THE SECTOR ON STANDARDS

THE WAITING GAME: ENGLAND'S SECRET EXCLUSIONS SCANDAL

Investigation: How councils are routinely failing in their legal duty to provide suitable education for excluded pupils

INSPIRING LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE 2025
BRINGING TOGETHER 1000+ CEOs, HEADTEACHERS & SCHOOL LEADERS
plus 10% off using code 'schools-week'

The rise (and rise) of exclusions: Our investigation showed councils were failing in their legal duty to provide education for soaring numbers of excluded kids, as wider societal changes hit schools

BOOK MARK

10 holiday reads for the discerning educator

INSPIRATION AND ASPIRATION

Outstanding

Steve Baker
Crown House
April 2025



If you missed Stephen Lockyer's review in these pages recently, then here's your second chance to get your hands on what is likely to be your most cathartic reading experience this summer. A satirical send-up of the sector by a former school leader with nothing to lose. Maybe you even make an appearance.

INSPIRATION AND ASPIRATION

Because of you, this is me

Jaz Ampaw-Farr
Crown House
July 2025



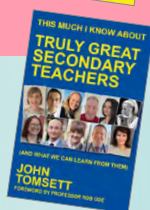
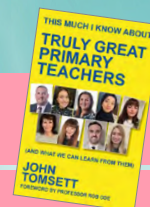
If what you're looking for in a holiday read is a poignant, inspirational reminder of why you do this job, then look no further. Jaz Ampaw-Farr reveals her heart-rending personal story, singling out the teachers that made a world of difference on her unlikely journey to success. Bound to make you rethink your pupils and your role in their lives.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

This Much I Know About Truly Great Primary Teachers: (and what we can learn from them)

This Much I Know About Truly Great Secondary Teachers: (and what we can learn from them)

John Tomsett
Crown House
July 2025

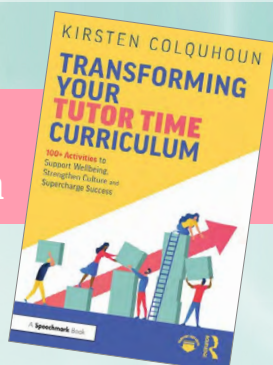


John Tomsett returns with not one but two books looking at what makes for great teaching. The books draw on Tomsett's observations of nine primary and 11 secondary teachers to set out what we can all learn from their enthusiasm, skill and dedication. Written with Tomsett's usual deft touch. It promises to challenge any one-size-fits-all model of classroom approach.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Transforming Your Tutor Time Curriculum

Kirsten Colquhoun
Routledge
July 2025

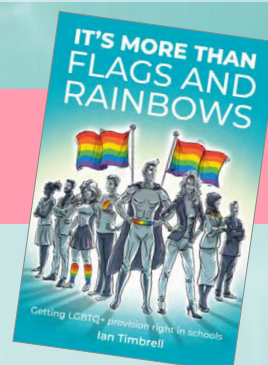


Scottish pastoral lead Kirsten Colquhoun follows up her successful *Practical guide to pupil wellbeing* with a set of resources for an often under-utilised part of the school day. The book promises to help more teachers make the most of tutor time's potential to switch pupils on to learning and create the culture of belonging all schools aspire to.

INCLUSION AND BELONGING

It's More Than Flags and Rainbows

Ian Timbrell
Crown House
July 2025



With such focus on SEND inclusion in the policy sphere these days, it's easy to forget other groups still face marginalisation. Indeed, many in the LGBTQ+ community are concerned that wider social trends could be leading to a roll-back in efforts to increase their representation. Here's the antidote to that.

BOOK MARK

10 holiday reads for the discerning educator

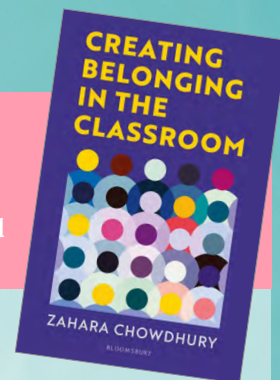
INCLUSION AND BELONGING

Creating Belonging in the Classroom:

A practical guide to having brave and difficult conversations

Zahara Chowdhury
Bloomsbury
August 2025

Whether it's SEND, race, gender, religion or other protected characteristics, the common challenge in tackling marginalisation is the need to have difficult conversations – with pupils, parents and each other. Zahara Chowdhury's book sets out to help with precisely that, in order to create classrooms where every pupil feels seen, heard and safe.



POLICY AND SYSTEMS

Reforming Lessons:

Why English Schools Have Improved Since 2010 and How This Was Achieved

Nick Gibb and Robert Peal
Routledge
August 2025

Who better to give the inside account of over a decade of school reforms than the long-serving schools minister who oversaw them almost consistently from 2010 onwards? And who better to co-author it than a teacher whose career has been defined by what those reforms enabled? Agree or disagree with it, this book is set to define the Conservatives' educational legacy.



POLICY AND SYSTEMS

Rewilding Education:

Rethinking the Place of Schools Now and in the Future

Hilary Cremin
Routledge
July 2025

And for a diametrically-opposed view of what schools could and should be, who better to turn to than the head of Cambridge University's faculty of education, Hilary Cremin? Here, she calls for 'a radical, system-wide reinvention of education as an adaptable ecosystem'. Whatever your personal view, it won't be enough to dismiss this as the revenge of 'the Blob'.



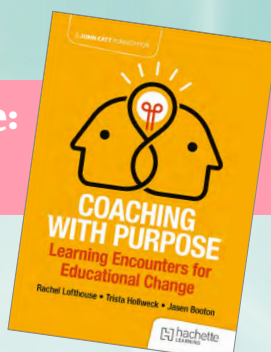
DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

Coaching with Purpose:

Learning encounters for educational change

Rachel Lofthouse, Trista Hollweck, Jasen Booton
John Catt
11 July 2025

Professor Rachel Lofthouse was making the case for coaching as an effective tool for professional development long before it became the buzzword it now is. Here, she returns to the topic with two esteemed co-authors to set out a variety of approaches that come under the coaching banner, and a range of case studies on its effective use.



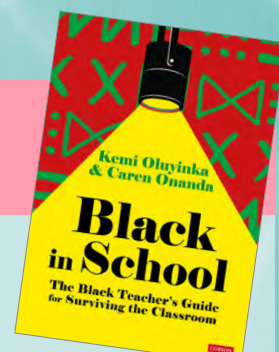
DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

Black in School:

The Black Teacher's Guide for Surviving the Classroom

Kemi Oluyinka and Caren Onanda
October 2024

If you missed this earlier this year, then given all the evidence published since of race-based systemic barriers to the profession, Black in School may be the most useful book you read this summer. That it's billed as a survival guide says enough. Will you take this chance to move from a culture where some survive to one where all can thrive?



Week in

Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

FRIDAY

Professor Becky Francis, the curriculum and assessment review chair, hit out at the national press during the Festival of Education over unflattering coverage earlier in the year, noting a "few headlines reflected some misunderstandings".

"The intricacies of primary school curriculum and so on actually aren't necessarily understood by the average parents or indeed, perhaps the average journalist, so it's easy for misunderstandings to arise," she said.

She insisted that her review will not "axe GCSEs or slash exams". It is also not intending to "dumb down" the curriculum or infuse it "with issues and campaigns", she said.

MONDAY

Policy wonks might have noticed something familiar about the government's "best start in life" strategy, which was launched this week.

As shadow education secretary Laura Trott pointed out in the House of Commons on Monday, the Conservative government previously launched the similarly-named "best start for life" report which, you guessed it, also focused on the early years.

It follows last year's children's wellbeing and schools bill, in which keen-eyed legal eagles noticed passages lifted from the Tories' 2022 schools bill.

It gave the Conservatives plenty of ammunition to chuck at the education secretary, Bridget Phillipson. Trott also pointed out that expanding family hubs, as the government has announced it will do this week, was in her party's election manifesto.

"Perhaps recent events have reminded



her that Labour does not have a monopoly on good ideas — if indeed it has any good ideas at all," Trott jeered.

But Phillipson was in no mood for "petty point-scoring", accusing the Tories of "confected outrage, the same negativity" in response to every government announcement.

"The Conservatives can talk all they want, after 14 years in government, about what they put in an unsuccessful manifesto, but it came with a post-dated cheque if ever there was one."

Ouch!

TUESDAY

Elsewhere in this week's edition we've covered the government's questionable decision to release its writing framework for primary schools BEFORE its curriculum and assessment review has concluded.

As we point out, this raises the prospect that leaders and teachers will have to digest TWO, 150-page tomes on writing in quite quick succession.

One saving grace is the fact the DfE has published a short summary alongside the massive publication.

Among its many words of wisdom is this

corker: All writing is made up of sentences.

Glad to have that important clarification, thanks DfE!

"We all shout at our PCs sometimes," former education secretary Damian Hinds told a room full of MPs this week. The confession came during a Westminster Hall debate on the use of generative artificial intelligence in education, conjuring entertaining images of such outbursts when he occupied the seventh floor of the DfE between 2018 and 2019.

He was, however, making an important point. He went on to say that "adults using AI may start to give human form, which is called anthropomorphism, to the machine they are interacting with", revealing "I occasionally try to be polite when I interact with one of these interfaces".

But he warned we had to "think about the impact on children in their most formative years—on their sense of self, their understanding of the world and their mental wellbeing.

"That includes the very youngest children, who will be growing up in a world of the internet of things and connected toys.

"It will be that much more important to draw a line between what is real, what is human, and what is not. In time, when the system has had enough time to think about it—we are not nearly there yet—that may be yet another area for regulation."

With government ministers generally very pro-AI, it's good to know a former cabinet minister is keeping an eye on the potential dangers.



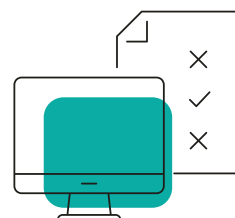


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