



## ALL CHANGE: MEET EDUCATION'S NEW MINISTERS



## REFORM: ALL HEADLINES, NO POLICY LINES



Pages 9-10

## NOW THE ARMY FLAG SEND FAILURES



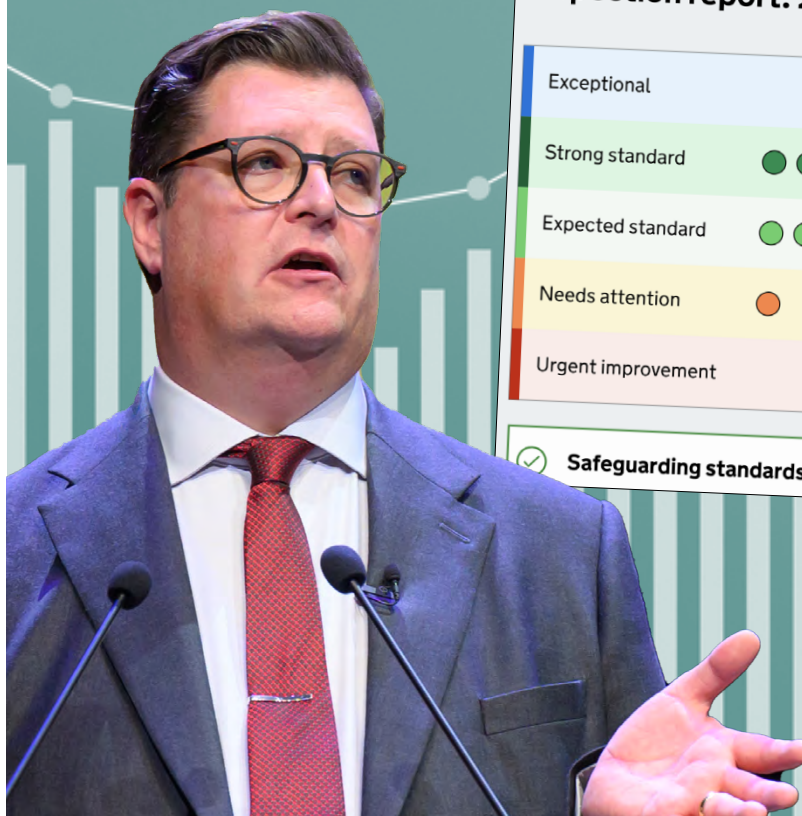
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## OFSTED'S NEW TOOLKITS ARE A GIFT FOR SELF-EVALUATION



Page 26

# OFSTED KEEPS REPORT CARDS SUPPORT (OR LACK OF) SECRET



### Inspection report: 25 June 2024

Exceptional

Strong standard

Expected standard

Needs attention

Urgent improvement



Safeguarding standards met

- Watchdog won't publish sentiment of consultation responses
- ... but does provide plenty of data from supportive parents
- Final report card plan doesn't quell leaders' inclusion concerns
- Independent wellbeing study also reveals more stress for staff

EXCLUSIVE | Pages 4,5 and 6

SCHOOLS  
WEEK

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**ST JOHN FISHER CATHOLIC PRIMARY  
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When Sir Martyn Oliver took over at Ofsted in January last year, the watchdog was in full blown crisis after the suicide of headteacher Ruth Perry.

Oliver put two principles at the centre of how he would restore the organisation's reputation with the sector: openness and transparency.

It's a message he has repeated throughout his tenure. Asked about what was learnt from the trials of report cards earlier this year, he said: "Nothing will be hidden from the system".

He's mostly stuck to that. Inspector training has been published. The watchdog has updated its own progress on delivering promised reforms. It has also, largely, been more open with the media.

That makes this week's decision to keep secret even a basic summary of responses to its report card consultation, answered by more than 6,000 people, seem out of step (page 5).

Ofsted said it reported its own narrative verdict of the consultation response. But this was brief and, crucially, in its own words.

The watchdog's consultation response

makes clear it has qualitative data showing whether responses were broadly positive, negative or neutral in tone. Why not publish it?

There are valid concerns about setting a precedent over publishing every lick of detail in such consultations. But an overall summary of the sentiment of responses to each question in no way does this.

Template responses sent out by organisations opposing the changes may skew figures. But again, that can be accounted for, and we should know the scale of this practice too (Ofsted has data on this).

After tensions improved with the sector early in Oliver's tenure, they are becoming strained again in some quarters over report cards.

And with polls this week showing teachers are regretting ditching headline grades now they've seen the full details of its alternative, it just feeds suspicion Ofsted is hiding something.

When trust is low, transparency becomes even more important. And the real test of delivering on those principles is sticking to them, even with the going gets tough.

## Most read online this week:

- 1 Ofsted report cards: the 8 big changes you need to know**
- 2 Restrict EHCPs to pupils with most severe needs, says children's commissioner**
- 3 Farage: 'Let's start teaching trades and services at school'**
- 4 Year 6 can't keep paying the price of data farming**
- 5 Staff want compensation after summer cyber-attack**

[CLICK LINKS TO READ STORIES](#)

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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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## EXPLAINER: OFSTED

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# What to expect when Ofsted visits this term

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Ofsted has unveiled its new report card inspections. Here's what school leaders need to know ...

## 1. "Confusing" grades renamed

The watchdog has renamed all five of its proposed grades from

- causing concern to urgent improvement
- attention needed to needs attention
- secure to expected standard
- strong to strong standard
- exemplary to exceptional

This follows "concerns" raised in a consultation published on Tuesday. 'Secure' was branded "confusing", and 'causing concern' deemed "too harsh".

### Inspection report: 25 June 2024



It has also "tightened the definitions" of 'expected standard' and 'strong standard' so the "differentiation between both is clearer across all toolkits". The top of a report card

## 2. Core inspection areas reduced from eight to six

'Developing teaching' has merged with 'curriculum' and 'attendance' with 'behaviour and attitudes'.

The new list of core areas is

- inclusion
- curriculum and teaching
- achievement
- attendance and behaviour
- personal development and wellbeing
- leadership and governance

As originally proposed, safeguarding will be judged separately as either "met" or "not met". Early years and sixth form will have their own evaluation areas, if applicable.

## 3. Context "narrative" to run alongside grades

Ofsted resisted calls to replace grades with narrative conclusions. However, it will add a "narrative explanation" for each grade that a school gets.

A sample report card shows a colour-coded summary of how many inspection areas have met each grade.

Below that, visitors will be able to click on each judgment area to see several paragraphs of narrative verdict.

The cards will also show contextual information about a school, such as whether its pupil numbers, prevalence of SEND and deprivation are above or below average.

### School and pupil context

#### Total pupils

350

Above average

▶ What does this mean?

#### School capacity

370

Above average

▶ What does this mean?

#### Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

26%

Close to average

▶ What does this mean?

#### Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan:

3%

Close to average

## 4. Toolkits "tightened up"

Ofsted will publish toolkits for each evaluation area to "take any mystery out of inspection, so providers can be clear about what we will and, importantly, will not look at".

These will "orient around the 'expected standard' grade.

The 'expected standard' is "what we would typically expect to see on inspections" and "covers the statutory, professional and non-statutory guidance that providers are already expected to follow".

Meanwhile, the 'strong standard' has "tighter definitions", and "looks for evidence of practice to be consistent, embedded and highly impactful".

## 5. Exceptional WON'T need an Ofsted Academy submission

Ofsted has dropped plans requiring inspectors to submit examples of 'exemplary' practice to the Ofsted Academy, which would decide whether to award the top grade. Respondents to the consultation said they were "too complex and would create additional burden".

All 'strong standards' will need to be met for an 'exceptional' grade to be considered. 'Exceptional' practice needs to be "sustained" and "evident over time rather than a recent improvement",

and "needs to have a transformational impact" on the outcomes of disadvantaged youngsters.

## 6. Extra inspector to "ease anxiety"

After wellbeing and workload concerns, the inspectorate has added an additional inspector for one day of all full inspections.

This will increase inspection capacity for schools and "allow the lead inspector more time to focus on engaging with leaders... and overseeing and quality assuring the inspection".

## 7. Inspections restart November 10 with volunteer schools

Inspections will resume from November 10, but only for schools that volunteer.

Ofsted will then return to the normal schedule for state-funded schools, with full inspections every four years, "towards the end of the period and not before December 1".

However, if there are enough volunteers, they will "continue to be prioritised" throughout December. Ofsted will not go into schools the week before Christmas.\*

## 8. Ofsted "explore an area" to provide school context

Ofsted will also introduce the 'explore an area' service to "bring together data to show what education provision is like in and around a local area" and "explain how the provider's performance sits within its local context".

It will be published publicly and replace Ofsted's Area Insights service.

The watchdog is also developing a "similar schools" comparison to help inspectors and schools "understand how schools compare with those in a similar context".

It will discuss with stakeholders "whether this measure may be a valuable way of adding more contextual information for inspections" and "ensure it is consistent" with any approach adopted by the Department for Education.

*\*Editor's note: Ofsted publicly discredited a Schools Week story in May that reported the watchdog was considering delaying the roll-out of routine report card inspections. However, the new plans mean the return of routine inspection has been delayed until at least December 1, and potentially January.*



## NEWS: OFSTED

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## Ofsted keeps inspection support (or lack of) close to its chest ...

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

EXCLUSIVE

Ofsted is refusing to publish data showing how many people opposed its new report card inspections, despite pledging transparency over the high-profile reforms.

The watchdog revealed its final plan for the cards this week after making tweaks such as renaming grades and merging evaluation areas. The changes follow an initial consultation.

Unions say the cards are “much worse” than previous inspections and will only heap “more pressure” on leaders.

Teachers’ support for ditching headline grades has also plunged after details of the alternative have emerged.

The watchdog received more than 6,500 responses to its consultation, 75 per cent of which were from education professionals. Twenty per cent were from parents and carers.

However, the inspectorate only provided a narrative summary of the responses in its own reply, published on Tuesday.

**‘Completely unacceptable’**

The consultation had 102 “open-ended” questions. Ofsted’s summary revealed each was given a “sentiment code to indicate the overarching sentiment: positive, negative, mixed, neutral or irrelevant”.

Responses were also given a “thematic” code to help Ofsted “identify recurrent themes”.

When asked for a summary of this data,



an Ofsted spokesperson said its consultation response was “very clear that we received a wealth of rich and varied feedback – all of which we took into account as we designed the renewed framework.

“We’re not publishing any further breakdown.”

Pepe Di’Iasio, the general secretary of the leaders’ union ASCL, said it was “completely unacceptable” that Ofsted had not published a quantitative analysis.

“Complete transparency” was needed to “see in full” sector reactions to the “deeply problematic” proposals.

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the NAHT, also accused the inspectorate of avoiding “clear, multiple-choice style questions” on purpose to avoid “proper analysis of the level of support for, or opposition to, its proposals”.

In its consultation report, Ofsted said the plans “generated a mixed and sometimes negative reaction”.

Teachers welcomed “removing the overall effectiveness grade” and “greater nuance and detail in the report cards”.

However, it “also heard many concerns” about the proposed reporting system. Teachers backed a more narrative-based report, or a “met or not met” grading system.

Meanwhile, “organisations representing school professionals...had a strong negative reaction”.

Sir Martyn Oliver, the chief inspector, has previously pledged to be “open and transparent” over the reforms, with “nothing hidden from the system”.

Whiteman said publishing the data was an “important test of that commitment”.

**Polls suggest dismay**

Polls suggest growing dismay in the sector. In February, a Teacher Tapp survey showed 75 per cent of teachers supported removing single-word headline grades. But that plunged to 36 per cent this week after Ofsted published its finalised plans.

The percentage who had “mixed feelings” about moving from one-word grades also soared from 19 to 44 per cent.

While unrepresentative, polls from the NAHT and the National Education Union showed about 90 per cent of respondents opposed the plans.

Most also wanted the inspectorate to pause its plans – which they believe will not allow for reliable assessment of schools. Inspections will restart in November, initially for volunteer schools.

But Ofsted said Oliver “had a positive call” with 900 school leaders this week and it “looks forward to working with sector organisations in the months ahead to ensure a safe and secure introduction of the renewed framework”.

**... but provides plenty of data on parent support**

Ofsted has been accused of leaning heavily on parents’ views to “force through” its “preferred” model of inspection.

While withholding analysis of its consultation response, the inspectorate has published details of research it commissioned via YouGov, on parents’ reactions to report cards.

A poll of 1,090 parents and focus groups “showed strong parental support”, it said.

Seven in 10 preferred the “new-look” report cards, with nine in 10 saying they were “easy to understand”.

The consultation report contains no quantitative data, or direct quotes from sector feedback.

But the “what we heard from parents” section contains specific data, and seven quotes from

parents, all positive.

“We are delighted that our new approach is thoroughly viewed as an improvement by parents,” said Ofsted.

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the NAHT, accused Ofsted of using “small-scale parental polling and focus groups” to “force through” its “preferred” model of inspection, rather than listening to sector concerns.

He said while grading “might appear clear for parents”, judging schools across up to nine areas in a two-day inspection “seriously risks them being given unfair and misleading judgements”.

Daniel Kebede, the general secretary of the National Education Union, also accused Ofsted of “leaning...heavily” on its poll of parents.

In January, Ofsted said on its new inspections: “We want to get it right for parents and carers. First and foremost, that’s who Ofsted works for. And that also means getting it right for the profession.”

Detailing its reforms in a press release on Tuesday, “parents” were mentioned 24 times, while “leaders” were mentioned just four times, and “staff” once.

Professor Julia Waters, the sister of headteacher Ruth Perry who took her own life after an inspection, told *Schools Week*: “Despite the coroner’s warning of a risk of future deaths, Ofsted and the government are once again prioritising ‘ease of message to parents’ over ‘teacher welfare’.

This is reckless, dangerous and complacent.”

## NEWS: OFSTED

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## Report card changes fail to quell school inclusion concerns

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

EXCLUSIVE

Leaders fear schools will be tempted to exclude pupils who are less likely to hit top grades so they can score highly in Ofsted's new "achievement" evaluation.

Ofsted has said "inclusion" will be a key focus of its new framework, with schools to be judged on a standalone "inclusion" area.

But Jonny Uttley, the chief executive of the TEAL trust who led an inclusion study for the Centre for Young Lives charity, said this was offset by the achievement judgment being "heavily geared towards achievement above-average".

For instance, the Ofsted toolkit states to achieve a "strong standard" grade, pupils – including those with SEND – must "consistently achieve well, develop detailed knowledge and skills, and produce high-quality work across the curriculum".

"Typically, this achievement will be reflected in above-average outcomes in national tests and examinations over time, including for disadvantaged pupils," it adds.

To hit the top "exceptional" grade, "exceptionally high standards of achievement" must be "sustained". This will be reflected in "consistently high outcomes" in national tests and exams.

Uttley told Schools Week: "To do really well on 'achievement', [a school] would have to

be performing above-average – so there's an incentive to curate your roll."

Schools could find it easier to achieve higher grades for inclusion and achievement if they had fewer pupils with EHCPs, he said. The new framework also fails to account for "subtle versions" of off-rolling.

"A school could turn away children with new EHCPs...they could have lots of kids going into elective home education, lots of kids leaving on suspensions, exclusions, managed moves...and still score highly on inclusion.

"You could continue to curate the school roll, and then do a really good job for the kids who actually come to school."

An independent wellbeing report, commissioned by Ofsted, found stakeholders were concerned the new framework would affect "selection at the point of entry to a school".

This would "increase the incentive for 'cream-skimming' in the sector", and leave schools committed to inclusivity "with an ever more challenging intake".

At a press briefing on Monday Lee Owston, Ofsted's national director for education, refuted this, saying: "There is no tension between inclusion and achievement."

He said achievement "is around national outcomes" but "is

also about broader outcomes".

"For those children with SEND, that can be about their preparation for adulthood and the opportunities they may have for training and employment."

Kiran Gill, the chief executive and founder of The Difference, also welcomed Ofsted's expanded definition of inclusion "to acknowledge poverty and safeguarding concerns", as well as SEND.

But she said Ofsted had "missed a trick" in "not taking a data-led approach to inclusion accountability".

"Inclusion is measurable by students' wellbeing and belonging, and by levels of absence from class...and sanctions," she said.

Ofsted must also "provide a clearer definition of what constitutes 'inclusive practices'".

Caroline Barlow and Keziah Featherstone, co-chairs of the Headteachers Roundtable, said the creation of a standalone judgment for inclusion "runs counter to the widespread understanding across the system that this should be an embedded design principle for schools, not a separate consideration".

However, Owston and Adam Sproston, senior inspector for SEND, have previously said inclusion "will also be a golden thread that run through all evaluation areas". The toolkits suggest inspectors must look for inclusive practice when assessing other areas.

But Uttley said Ofsted "has missed the key point", with inclusion "almost bolted on to each section".



Jonny Uttley

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS | @LYDIACHSW

## New report cards 'will add to leaders' stress'

New Ofsted report cards will create more anxiety for leaders with already "concerningly high" stress levels, a wellbeing impact report commissioned by the watchdog has warned.

The report from Sinéad Mc Brearty, the chief executive of the charity Education Support, warned the "baseline stress level of school and college leaders is concerningly high".

New inspections would not reduce pressure on leaders. "The consequence of not meeting the expected standards will remain high stakes in nature."

Moving from a known framework to a new one also created anxiety about "getting it right". And "more granular judgments" meant schools were unlikely to be "uniformly 'good'", which will be "very stressful for many leaders".

Leader stress would also likely "spillover and increase pressure on staff teams to perform well in inspection". And leaders having to "evidence impact across a larger number of evaluation areas... may drive new forms of bureaucracy and data collection".

The report called for Ofsted to reduce isolation on heads, invest in wellbeing training for inspectors, add more independence into the complaints' process and monitor the "unintended consequences" of the new framework.

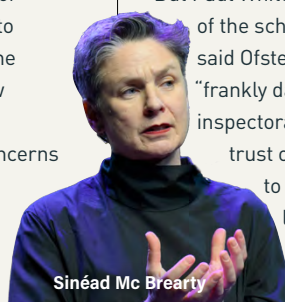
Ofsted said it has taken wellbeing concerns "extremely seriously" and nothing in its plans "should add to a provider's workload".

Expanded inspection teams

should "ease anxiety" and it was working with the government on how to "introduce further independence into the complaints' process".

It would also run "exit" interviews with a sample of leaders inspected this term and had commissioned an independent evaluation of the new framework.

But Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the school leaders' union NAHT, said Ofsted pushing ahead despite the "frankly damning" report "speaks of an inspectorate that has completely lost the trust of the profession, that has failed to properly listen to teachers and leaders".



Sinéad Mc Brearty

## INVESTIGATION: SEND

# Now the armed forces flag SEND system failures

JOHN DICKENS

@JOHNDICKENSSW

EXCLUSIVE

Councils have been told to honour the Armed Forces Covenant – pledging fair treatment for military families – amid “frequent” cases of service children left without a school place because of SEND failings.

One MP even said a council delay in issuing an education, health and care plan (EHCP) for a service child in his constituency was causing “serious operational problems for the armed forces”.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) wrote to local authorities earlier this year, it has emerged, to raise how children with complex needs were “frequently” unable to find a school after a service-related move.

Military families sometimes must relocate every two to three years when the serving parent’s posting changes.

Laurence Turner, the Labour MP for Birmingham Northfield, said: “The admission of widespread delays is yet more proof that SEND reform is urgently needed, and I hope that the specific needs of service families is taken into account.”

The MoD “advisory note”, sent in February, highlighted to councils their legal duties towards service children under both the SEND code of practice and the Armed Forces Covenant. About 36,000 military children in the UK may have SEND.

It warned “being without a school place following a service-related move is a frequent scenario faced by service pupils with more complex needs”.

This was often due to councils adopting EHCPs on “the day pupils arrive in their new local authority area”.

While this could happen to any child moving area, the note says service children “have a greater likelihood of doing this more than once, thereby generating a cumulative effect”.

Councils were called on to “ensure adequate planning and preparations are made prior to the arrival of armed forces children”, including completing consultations with schools beforehand.

This is already done by 19 councils with large numbers of service children who are part of MODLAP, a group chaired and overseen by the MoD

It suggested seven recommendations based on its own “SEND principles” to help councils “meet the



## ‘Delays can cause serious operational problems for the armed forces’

unique needs of service children with SEND”.

The note also said councils involved in MODLAP have “recognised the too frequent instances” of service pupils with SEND “leaving LA areas with non-finalised EHCPs”.

A submission by the RAF Families Federation to the education committee’s SEND inquiry cited a case where, despite being given six months’ notice, one council did not look at a placement until the child arrived.

To mitigate this, MODLAP councils have agreed to honour the assessments for EHCPs from other member councils, including transferring plans that are not yet finalised.

Turner added: “The reality is that armed forces personnel and defence resources are being tied up with exactly the same kinds of problems that are all too familiar to other families.

“I know from my own constituency casework that EHCP delays can cause serious operational problems for the armed forces.”

The MP said he was unable to give details of the ongoing case, but he intended to raise it with the armed forces minister.

Collette Musgrave, the chief executive of the Army Families Federation, added the “consequences” of such cases “can be quite severe”.

She said some families who put their children

in private schools instead have been whacked by higher fees after the government applied VAT to fees.

The SEND code of practice states bodies with statutory responsibilities for service children with SEND “should ensure the impact of their policies ... does not disadvantage such children because of their service-related lifestyle”.

But Musgrave said the government’s desire to reinvigorate the Armed Forces Covenant needs “actual levers to compel people to do this”.

Turner is also demanding to know “the full scale of the resources that are being devoted to mitigate wider failings in the SEND system”.

A parliament question he submitted revealed the MoD runs its own education advisory team, staffed with SEND specialists, to help military families navigate the system.

It has distributed £1.4 million this year to schools and councils to support pupils and has commissioned research into how service life affects educational opportunities and outcomes, including during transitions to new areas. Findings will help improve provision.

Amanda Hopgood, chair of the Local Government Association’s children, young people and families committee, said the SEND system is “not working ... that’s why we are calling for reform”.



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# Rising stars move into ministerial slots

**FREDDIE WHITTAKER**  
**@FCDWHITTAKER**

Three Labour rising stars have been appointed as education ministers in a brutal reshuffle in which two MPs left government and another moved.

Of the original ministerial line-up, only education secretary Bridget Phillipson and skills minister Baroness Smith remain, though Smith's role is now split with the Department for Work and Pensions.

Georgia Gould, a former leader of Camden Council, is now a minister of state at the Department for Education, likely replacing schools minister Catherine McKinnell.

McKinnell said she was offered another role but chose to leave government.

Josh MacAlister, a Teach First alumnus and the founder of the social care charity Frontline, and Olivia Bailey, a former partner at the consultancy Public First, have been appointed as junior education ministers.

Given his background, it is likely MacAlister will take over the children and families brief vacated by Janet Daby, who also left government at the weekend.

This would leave Bailey to take on the early education portfolio previously held by Stephen Morgan, who is now a government whip. However, it is possible the DfE will move responsibilities between portfolios.

Jonathan Simons, a former Downing Street

education adviser and partner at Public First, said the trio were "considered as big hitters in the Labour party of the future".

"They can be expected to be as keen on standards and accountability as most Tory ministerial teams and will likely support Bridget Phillipson's similar instincts in this area."

The reshuffle comes at a critical time for education policy. A schools white paper, which will set out wide-ranging SEND reform, is due this term. As is the government's curriculum and assessment review final report.

But Simons said it was "likely that these changes in personnel (and those announced in Downing Street at the start of last week) will lead to a stock-take that could further slow the publication of the white paper".

## 15 facts about the DfE's new intake

### Georgia Gould, education minister

- The MP for Queen's Park and Maida Vale was a leader of Camden in north London from 2017 to 2024. The borough includes the constituency represented by Sir Keir Starmer.
- Gould was a parliamentary undersecretary of state with responsibility for public sector reform, oversight of government functions and public bodies' policy.
- She is the daughter of New Labour grandee Lord Philip Gould and Baroness Gail Rebus, the chair of the publishing house Penguin Random House. Gould was a Labour peer until his death in 2016, while Rebus remains a Labour member of the Lords.
- In 2015, the new minister wrote *Wasted: How Misunderstanding Young Britain Threatens Our Future*. "Young people don't just want a job, they want the opportunity for creativity, entrepreneurialism and to be part of something bigger than themselves," she wrote. One of her solutions was for "radical devolution".
- Gould told the *Local Government Chronicle* that she saw the "depths of inequality" in her borough while she



was a pupil at Camden School for Girls. In another piece, she described herself as a "proud feminist" and points out the school was founded by suffragist Frances Buss.

### Josh MacAlister, junior education minister

- The MP for Whitehaven and Workington in Cumbria trained with Teach First, before teaching citizenship at a school in Oldham for more than three years.
- Within months of becoming an MP last year, MacAlister tabled a private members' bill to ban smartphones in schools. The bill has since been watered-down, instead calling for the education secretary to research the impact of children's use of social media. He has also called for a "resurgence of civics in schools".
- In 2013, MacAlister established Frontline, a graduate social working training programme modelled on Teach First. The DfE gave it £45 million funding in 2019.
- He also led a review of children's social care under the Conservative government between 2021 and 2022. It made more than 80 recommendations, calling for schools to become statutory safeguarding partners and "corporate parents" of



children in care.

- MacAlister is married to Matt Hood, an education policy expert who helped found and then lead the Oak National Academy.

### Olivia Bailey, junior education minister

- Bailey became the MP for Reading West and Mid Berkshire – a new seat – in the 2024 election.
- Her mother worked as a secondary teacher and her father, Roy Bailey, is deputy leader and executive member for education at Bracknell Forest Council.
- Bailey was head of domestic policy to Starmer from 2020 to 2022.
- She was a director and then partner at Public First, a consultancy that has clients in education.
- Bailey was women's officer of the National Union of Students from 2009 to 2011, publishing the first national study into harassment and abuse suffered by female students.





## POLITICS: INTERVIEW

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# 'I got up every day and gave it everything'

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

Politics is a brutal business. For 14 months, Catherine McKinnell had her "dream job" as schools minister.

But not much more than 24 hours after Angela Rayner's resignation as Labour's deputy leader, a move that kicked off a big reshuffle, she's now left government.

The Newcastle North MP says she was offered a different role, but decided to return to the backbenches.

When we meet in Parliament a few days later, she won't go into what happened, but says she "absolutely loved" her job. "So obviously, when that changes in a flash, it's a big jolt."

But she is an "eternal optimist". Being free of the ministerial brief means she can again speak in parliament about non-education issues.

During her tenure, McKinnell says she is proudest of the two pay rises for teachers – 5.5 per cent last year and 4 per cent this year.

"They enabled us to be really clear how much we value teachers and teaching and schools and education and children".

She also mentions the government's new RISE improvement teams for schools that make sure that, while some schools need "fundamental change in terms of structure", others get that support in "as fast as possible".

Labour was criticised for its children's wellbeing and schools bill, rushed out before Christmas with many of its academy reforms catching the sector off-guard.

McKinnell insists the team had a "very clear vision for what we wanted to achieve.

"The process of putting that into legislative form is obviously complex, but there are time restrictions. You get a take-off and landing slot in parliament, and you have to deliver within that.

"I actually think it's a hugely important piece of legislation. It is going to visibly and tangibly improve outcomes for children, particularly not just the safeguarding aspects of it, but also how schools interrelate in a local community."

The early days of the bill's passage were humiliating for Labour, with McKinnell forced to announce an amendment over concerns it would prevent academies from paying teachers above national scales.

She rejects criticism she was not across the



## 'The bill will visibly and tangibly improve outcomes for children'

Catherine McKinnell

detail of the bill, including from the Conservatives.

"No, no, absolutely no," she says. "They don't agree with our approach. That's politics."

The Tories, licking their wounds after last year's huge election defeat, often boast of their record in improving England's standing in international league tables.

"But it's not good enough," says McKinnell. "Nobody should be satisfied with the numbers of children that still leave school without the qualifications that give them that springboard to the next stage. It has to change."

The reshuffle comes at a crucial time for education policy.

McKinnell was preparing a schools white paper for release this term that will set out the government's approach to wide-ranging SEND reform, another key policy area in her previous brief.

But she's confident the reforms will be delivered, with Bridget Phillipson remaining as education secretary.

McKinnell says a key part of her role over the past 14 months has been "really close listening and working with children and families", particularly on SEND.

Rumours of plans to change or scrap education,

health and care plans have prompted a fierce backlash from families.

But McKinnell says she has "never underestimated how deep those feelings run for families that are trying to navigate the system".

"That is what has always motivated me to want to improve it, not just to improve the outcomes, which clearly need to be improved, but to really change that whole experience for families."

McKinnell says her time in office has shown her "how incredible our educators are, whether that's the support staff, the headteachers, the teachers, the governors and trustees.

"The absolute love, sweat and tears that goes into educating our children is something to behold."

Is there anything she would have done differently? She pauses, her voice faltering.

"It's a natural question to ask, you would think I'd be asking it of myself. But...no, I genuinely got up every single day and gave it everything."

Reflecting on her government departure, she adds: "For the first time in a long time, I took my dog for a proper walk. And I helped to make the family a proper meal.

"It's good to have the energy to do [things like that]. But I wouldn't change a thing."



## POLITICS

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# Phillipson leads in race for Labour's deputy leadership

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

Bridget Phillipson is the favourite to take over as Labour's deputy leader following the resignation of Angela Rayner over underpayment of stamp duty.

The MP for Houghton and Sunderland South was one of six MPs to throw their hat in the ring this week.

At the time of going to press, it appeared that only Phillipson and Lucy Powell, the former shadow education secretary and leader of the Commons, would receive the necessary 80 nominations from fellow MPs to take part in the contest.

Phillipson has the backing of much of Labour's right and is seen as Sir Keir Starmer's preferred candidate, although the prime minister has not publicly backed anyone.

Powell has garnered support among soft left



Bridget Phillipson

MPs after falling out with Downing Street after her sacking from the cabinet last week.

Phillipson said: "As a proud working-class woman from the north east, I have come from a tough council street all the way to the cabinet.

"I will be a strong voice to unite our party, take the fight to Reform, and deliver for our country."

Schools Week understands Phillipson would want to stay on as education secretary if she were elected.

And if she were appointed deputy prime minister after winning the deputy leadership election, that role is usually held alongside a

departmental one.

David Lammy, the new deputy prime minister, also runs the justice department, and Rayner ran the housing and communities department.

Among Phillipson's backers are former education ministers Catherine McKinnell and Janet Daby, as well as new minister Josh MacAlister.

McKinnell said Phillipson "has been a good friend and a tireless champion for the causes she cares about.

"I have seen first hand what a dedicated education secretary she is – that's why I'm proud to back her for deputy leader."

Powell said that "living with my family in my home city, Manchester, has rooted my politics in an understanding of people's everyday hopes and fears".

"These are the experiences our MPs and party members hear too. As our deputy leader, I would ensure these are at the heart of what we do and how we operate, bringing together all parts of the party and uniting our broad voter coalition."

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ON LOCATION: REFORM CONFERENCE

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# All headlines, no policy lines

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

From a jumpsuited Dame Andrea Jenkyns belting out a rock anthem to flag-draped supporters sipping pints in plastic cups at 10.30am, the atmosphere at Reform UK's annual conference was one of jubilation.

The party may have just four MPs, but following huge success in May's local elections it now has almost 900 councillors and consistently tops opinion polls.

But what would a Reform government mean for education? *Schools Week* spent two days in Birmingham trying to find out ...

## Policy holes

"Again and again at elections, they talk the talk. They never walk the walk," Nigel Farage told supporters on Friday, after arriving in a blaze of pyrotechnics.

But the party leader did not respond when asked about Reform's education policies.

Lee Anderson, MP for Ashfield and the party's chief whip, would say only: "That's being worked on as we speak."

We asked to speak to education spokesperson Belinda de Lucy, but the Reform press office told us the role was now vacant. There was no further explanation.

"This time last year, we had eight local councillors," Gawain Towler, a Reform board member, told a fringe event.

"We've now got over 900 ... When you stretch so fast, there are holes, but we are rapidly trying to fill those holes," said the eccentrically tailored Towler.

## Patriotism and plumbers

The conference certainly gave a flavour of what the party's education agenda could look like. "Let's start teaching kids



Lee Anderson



Nigel Farage

Alamy

## 'Education's being worked on as we speak'

at school trades and services," Farage told thousands of cheering supporters during his keynote address. "One thing that AI will not replace is the local plumber."

He also hinted at a desire to reshape the curriculum, saying education must "make Britain proud again".

"We refuse to have our kids' minds poisoned in schools and universities with a twisted interpretation of the history of these amazing islands. We will not stand for it."

Reform's 2024 manifesto pledged a "patriotic" curriculum in schools and for history and social science content to be reviewed to ensure children were "taught about their heritage". (The other manifesto pledges included banning transgender ideology in schools and doubling the number of pupil referral units).

## School 'indoctrination camps'

Zia Yusuf, Reform's new head of policy, also spoke of the need to "stop schools from becoming indoctrination camps".

His inbox was "full", he claimed, from parents and school children complaining about being "admonished by teachers" for supporting Farage.

Anderson told another fringe event: "There are some teachers in our schools [who] are brainwashing our kids into their way of thinking. "And when we get into power, we will root these teachers out and hold them to account."

Elsewhere, George Finch, the 19-year-old Reform UK leader of Warwickshire County Council, described the nation's education system as "broken" and dogged by a "wave of



Zia Yusuf

REFORMUK

Continued on next page



## ON LOCATION: REFORM CONFERENCE



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wokeism”.

At sixth forms, “the only thing you do develop is a woke mindset. [You’re] not allowed to question what’s going on...You’re just told to think a certain way.”

### SEND issues hit

Whether Reform wins the next election or not, the party is already having to deal with education at a local government level.

Linden Kemkaran, the leader of England’s largest council, Kent County Council (KCC), said the huge recent rise in SEND diagnoses was “not normal”.

“There’s something going on,” Kemkaran said, whether parents were “pushing more for diagnoses” or more was known about SEND so “we’re diagnosing it more often”.

The council has been given a £140 million government bailout after racking up a huge deficit on its SEND spending.

“We need to be asking the honest questions that I think people are very afraid of talking about because they don’t want to be seen to be mean or nasty,” Kemkaran said.

Jenkyns, a former Conservative skills minister and now Reform’s mayor of Greater Lincolnshire, said she wanted “every teacher... [to] spend six months in a special school” during their training.

“Children learn kinaesthetically, visually, auditorily, and I think we’ve got to get the basics right.”

She also echoed Farage, stressing the need to “bring a parity of esteem between vocational, technical, academic and trades” rather than “pushing everyone down the university route”.

### Does Reform care?

But education scored lowly among Reform loyalists when asked to name the biggest problems facing the country.

Teachers also came bottom among the groups the government should protect when making spending decisions, a More in Common poll found. “Rich people”, “big businesses” and immigrants all ranked more highly.

Teaching unions were notably absent in Birmingham.

Matt Wrack, the general secretary of the NASUWT, said his union could not support the “weaponisation” of issues such as migration and asylum to sow unrest. “This unrest makes its way into classrooms, where



George Finch

it disrupts lessons and causes harm.”

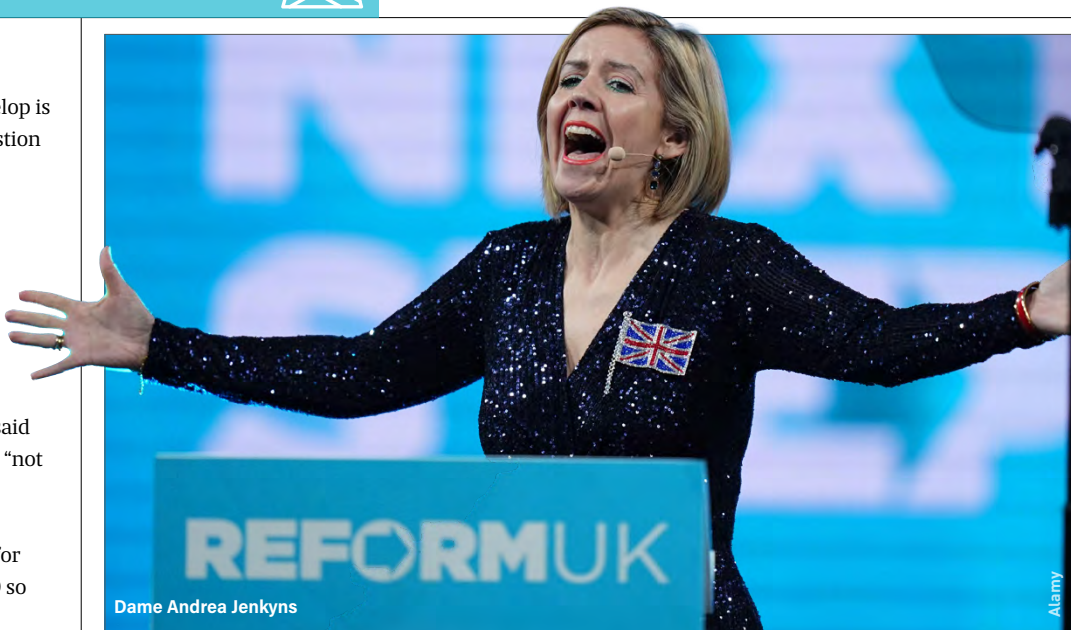
He criticised Reform for “openly deriding trade unions” and making “bogus claims about school curriculums and publicly undermining local teachers”.

However, the union reviewed the conferences it attended remained “ready to liaise” with those “committed to making schools

safe, inclusive spaces to work and learn”.

Pepe Di’Iasio, the general secretary of the leaders’ union ASCL, said it tended to “focus on the traditionally dominant parties”.

But he added: “The political landscape is evolving, and we will keep our engagement activities under review to ensure that we are able to represent our members as effectively as possible.”



Dame Andrea Jenkyns



Team Reform

## ‘Let’s start teaching kids trades and services’



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# Pupils behind most insider cyber attacks

RUTH LUCAS

@RUTHLUCAS\_

Pupils are behind more than half of “insider” cyber attacks in schools, analysis by the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) has found.

Its analysis of 215 data breaches caused by insider attacks in education settings between January 2022 and August 2024 found 57 per cent were caused by pupils.

Insider attacks are made by someone from within an organisation, such as a pupil or member of staff, rather than an outside hacker.

Thirty per cent followed stolen login details, most of them initiated by pupils (97 per cent).

The watchdog has called on schools to be “part of the solution” by improving their cyber security and data protection practices, as well as taking steps to “remove temptation from students”.

Of the 215 data breaches, the ICO found 23 per cent were caused by poor practices, such as staff accessing or using data without a “legitimate need”, devices being left unattended or pupils using staff devices.

A further 20 per cent were caused by staff sending data to personal devices.



According to the National Crime Agency, pupils often hack following a dare, to seek notoriety or revenge, or for financial gain.

Teen hackers are commonly English-speaking males, with about about 5 per cent of 14-year-olds admitting to hacking.

Heather Toomey, the principal cyber specialist at the ICO, said: “Whilst education settings are experiencing large numbers of cyber attacks, there is still growing evidence that ‘insider threat’ is poorly understood, largely unremedied and can lead to future risk of harm

and criminality.

“What starts out as a dare, a challenge, a bit of fun in a school setting can ultimately lead to children taking part in damaging attacks on organisations or critical infrastructure.

“It’s important that we understand the next generation’s interests and motivations in the online world and to ensure children remain on the right side of the law.”

The ICO said schools should regularly refresh GDPR training and raise awareness of cyber security.

JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS

## Property company to move into the DfE

The government’s education property company LocatED is set to be absorbed into the Department for Education.

Launched eight years ago to procure sites for new free schools, the company is expected to move into the DfE by April next year.

Its work has been extended to acquiring and selling sites on the department’s behalf and providing “an expert commercial property consultancy service”. Falling rolls have meant fewer new schools.

Officials said the move, announced today, will allow LocatED’s “commercial expertise” to combine “with the department’s capability in delivering capital programmes, policy knowledge, and strategic oversight”.

It comes after the Cabinet Office launched a review earlier this year of all arm’s-length bodies across government.

Susan Acland-Hood, the DfE’s permanent

secretary, said: “I’m delighted to be welcoming LocatED colleagues even more closely into the department.

“[This will] help us manage and transform the education estate, make it sustainable, give great value to the taxpayer, and support excellent outcomes for children and young people.”

The DfE added that the new, “unified” team “will be better positioned to identify opportunities, streamline processes, and deliver more coherent support to schools, academy trusts, local authorities, and other education providers requiring specialist property guidance”.

LocatED’s latest accounts state it “generated important capital receipts, delivered substantial savings to the public purse and is at the heart of delivering programmes to enable our schools to reduce their energy

consumption and carbon emissions”.

In 2024-25, it was given a budget of just over £9 million. About £2.2 million was spent on “project related pre-acquisition costs for sites [and] mixed-use developments”.

A further £5.4 million went towards employee costs. Lara Newman, the company’s chief executive, was paid between £220,000 and £225,000, with between £40,000 and £45,000 in performance-related pay.

Her wages eclipse those of Acland-Hood, who took home £180,000 to £185,000 last year. The DfE said she would remain chief executive until April 2026.

The department added that it is committed to offering Newman employment in the department. It has no plans to reduce headcount.

*Schools Week* has asked whether Newman’s salary will be maintained.

## LONG READ

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## The pitfalls of RISE team's new 'low attainer' push

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

EXCLUSIVE

The government has been warned not to worsen off-rolling by placing schools "under unnecessary pressure to demonstrate rapid improvement" as RISE teams prepare to step into schools with "concerning" attainment.

Analysis suggests hundreds of schools could be in line for the targeted help, with most among the most deprived in England.

But leaders fear the new attainment push could leave them "swamped" with conflicting advice, while others believe the changes could extend children's time in underperforming classrooms.

## Off-rolling concerns

Until now, targeted support from the government's RISE improvement teams has only been given to "stuck" schools, those rated 'requires improvement' following an earlier below-good inspection grade.

In documents published this week, the DfE said Ofsted "should remain the principal trigger", but confirmed that this term it will begin "informal engagement with some schools that have low or concerning attainment".

Sam Henson, the deputy chief executive of the National Governance Association, said: "The government has acknowledged that off-rolling is unacceptable. Yet time will tell if the changes resulting from both the accountability review and Ofsted's new framework will go far enough to ensure that schools are not placed under unnecessary pressure to demonstrate rapid improvement by resorting to excluding vulnerable pupils."

## Plans just 'weighing the pig'

Under the new plans, RISE teams will meet with low-attaining schools to "discuss their attainment trends and agree actions, including how they will work with hubs, higher performing schools and other sources of well-evidenced support, such as regional networks".

Describing this as a "first step", it added ministers will also consult this autumn on further options to use the improvement



Sam Henson



## 'Leaders may be swamped with conflicting advice'

teams to address low attainment.

But Jeremy Spencer, the chief executive of the Cheshire-based Halliard Trust, said "leaders may be swamped with conflicting advice [or] areas for improvement" if RISE focuses on attainment while Ofsted, under its new framework, homes in on 'achievement'.

"Whose advice [or] requirements will take precedence?" he asked.

Sir David Carter, the former national schools commissioner, said the plans "fall almost entirely into the weighing the pig category of actions".

Noting the "best school improvers" work in MATs, he said: "Every day a child is left to learn in a school underperforming is a day too many."

"Time should be spent speeding up the process for joining a trust so that children get a chance to have a better deal."

## 277 schools could be in scope

Leora Cruddas, the chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, said the policy attempted "to strike a balance between adding a lighter touch approach to intervention while ensuring schools that aren't improving are not left that way indefinitely".

But, despite calling

it a "reasonable starting point", she stressed it would be "important that it is closely monitored and evaluated against the impact on quality of education".

To understand how many schools could fall within scope, FFT Datalab examined the number of schools with Progress 8 scores of less than -0.5 in each of the past three years. In all, 277 fell below the threshold.

Of these, 163 (59 per cent) were among the 20 per cent most disadvantaged in the country.

Seventy (25 per cent) are in the north west, with 55 (20 per cent) in the south east. The fewest schools were in London (11).

Similar examples aren't available for primary schools as key stage 2 progress measures have not been available since 2023 because of covid.

Hugh Greenway, the chief executive of the Elliot Foundation Academies Trust,

warned the criteria government will use to decide which schools receive attainment support will be "the single most important thing".

Some of those at the top of performance tables "aren't always there through merit", while "not all" of those at the



Leora Cruddas

Continued on next page



## LONG READ

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bottom “are there through demerit – some are just unlucky or dealing with significant additional challenge”.

The government has also set out its new approach to school intervention (see box out). Officials said this, alongside the RISE support, means there will be “twice as many mandatory interventions on average than in the two years before the policy change”.

RISE teams alone are expected to increase their number of interventions from 218 stuck schools to 377 this term, the DfE said this week.

Loic Menzies, an associate fellow at the Institute for Public Policy Research, said RISE teams were “another string in the DfE’s bow when conversion isn’t needed”.

But he said “more strong trusts are urgently needed if these interventions are to be backed up by the possibility of rebrokering”.

“The DfE needs to avoid putting too many eggs in this



Hugh Greenway

## ‘More strong trusts needed to back up interventions’

basket until RISE teams’ work has been carefully evaluated.”

### How to capture context?

The government also faces a difficult decision over the metric it sets for the new low-attaining intervention.

The consultation states it wants to “identify a metric that contextualises performance using prior attainment, while noting that there will be no secondary progress data in 2025-26”.

This is because key stage 2

attainment data from 2019-20 and 2020-21 is not available to calculate Progress 8 scores.

Dave Thomson, the chief statistician at FFT Datalab, said this left the department with “two options, neither of which is ideal”.

“The first is to use key stage 1 data, although this will be missing for pupils who entered the state system since then.

“Alternatively, they could use the average level of [key stage 2] attainment for the previous cohort as a proxy, although ... [this] can change from year to year.”

Some schools have already told the government “a multi-year data sample could offer a more stable and accurate picture, helping to avoid misinterpretation due to short-term fluctuations”.

Research conducted by academic John Jerrim and Loic Menzies in 2021 found such multi-year averages would be “technically feasible ... and [have] the potential to mitigate several longstanding shortcomings of England’s accountability system”.

# The accountability changes

1. School profiles to trial this year, with full launch in 2026-27. They will feature data covering a “breadth of information”, including achievement and attendance. Pupil wellbeing and a school’s enrichment offer will also be looked at, as well as inclusivity within local communities.
2. A new digital service providing data insights to help schools improve will be launched next year, replacing Compare School and College Performance and Analyse School Performance.
3. On intervention, the “default” position for ‘special measure’ schools will be structural intervention (academisation for council schools, rebrokering for academies). Schools will be ‘special measures’ if they receive an ‘urgent improvement’ rating – the lowest grade – for leadership and at least one other area. A school would also be in ‘special measures’ if it got an ‘urgent improvement’ grade for leadership and safeguarding was ‘not met’.
4. ‘Requires significant improvement’ schools will until September “normally undergo structural intervention”. After that date, these schools will get targeted RISE support, with structural intervention if they have not achieved the ‘expected standard’ in all inspection areas after 18 months. Schools will be ‘requires significant improvement’ if they get an ‘urgent improvement’ in any area other than leadership or a safeguarding ‘not met’. They will also fall into the category if they have an ‘urgent improvement’ for leadership only and are meeting safeguarding standards.
5. Stuck schools will now be those rated ‘needs attention’ for leadership and governance, and previously graded below ‘good’. They will receive “bespoke, targeted RISE intervention” and be given “two years in which to achieve ‘expected standard’ ratings in all [Ofsted inspection] areas”, or face structural intervention. For schools already considered stuck, the two-year period will start from the date report cards are introduced.
6. RISE teams will also start “informal engagement” with schools that have the “very lowest levels of pupil attainment”. Advisers will “discuss attainment trends and agree actions” such as schools working with hubs or higher-performing schools. Ministers will consult this autumn on further options to use the school improvement teams to address low attainment. This will help set the measures used to determine eligibility. The government wants to find a metric that “contextualises performance using prior attainment, while noting that there will be no secondary progress data in 2025-26”.
7. The government is starting to update its wellbeing charter, a set of commitments signed by 4,100 schools and colleges, to help schools remove workload and wellbeing barriers.



## NEWS

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# MIS outage leaves schools in the lurch

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

A management information system (MIS) outage at a major supplier has left schools unable to pay suppliers, run after-school clubs and respond to safeguarding concerns.

Leaders say the problems with the Bromcom system have also left them without access to timetables and prevented them from completing everyday tasks within working hours – with one MAT boss calling the situation a “car crash”.

The company has apologised for the start-of-term issues, but admitted it is unsure how many schools have been hit.

## ‘Simply not acceptable’

A Bromcom “status page” shows the incident impacted the company’s MIS cloud between September 4 and 9. Two days were hit by “100 per cent severe degradation”, with the system “degraded” for more than nine hours on two others.

The system was also listed as being offline for periods – but Bromcom stressed the system has “remained online” over the “four working days”. The page shows the MIS cloud has been “100 per cent operational” since Wednesday. Sharples School in Bolton sent parents its formal complaint letter to Bromcom.

The letter said “poor and unreliable” service was having a “major impact on the day-to-day running” of the secondary. The school’s ability to “respond to safeguarding concerns logged on the system” was also impacted.

“As you will appreciate... we rely heavily on Bromcom for these functions, and not being to access the system is simply not acceptable.”

A boss at a trust whose schools were also impacted called the situation a “car crash”.

Pupils and staff were unable to access timetables online and were unable to print hard copies.

Meanwhile, one headteacher said staff were working early in the morning and into the evenings to rectify issues.

## An ‘annual’ problem

Their school also decided to postpone after-school clubs, as parents were unable to book slots online.



## ‘We faced the same chaotic issue this time last year’

“We haven’t been able to pay suppliers or raise the right invoices. We’ve had suppliers on our backs. It’s more the reputational damage – it reflects badly on us.”

A senior trust leader elsewhere said attendance teams had suffered the “single biggest hit”.

The chain was uncertain who was absent “until much later in the day and we’re having to tally which children have hit thresholds for home visits”.

The trust was also unable to contact parents to notify them their child had a medical incident.

“The bigger worry [is] this is becoming an annual problem as we faced the same chaotic issue this time last year. It’s just not good enough.”

Staff have added scores of posts to Reddit and EduGeek pages, with some sharing images of the error messages they received when trying to use the system.

## ‘We’re sorry’

Simon Walters, Bromcom’s chief operating officer, stressed that the platform was “now stable”, but the company continued to “closely monitor” the situation.

“We sincerely apologise for the disruption,” he said.

“Safeguarding is hugely important to us, and we deeply regret the strain this issue has placed on the affected school staff, pupils and the wider community, specifically at the start of the academic year.”

A notification sent to schools last Thursday said one of Bromcom’s “servers developed a serious fault”, which caused some “instability”.

The company would not say why the outage happened, but added that it was “working on a full root-cause analysis” and would tell customers and stakeholders its findings “within the next seven days to both restore confidence in the platform and to ensure it doesn’t happen again”.

The cause was “different” to the issues at the start of last year, even though “the disruption/impact is similar”.

## Market shift in MIS world

The emergence of cloud-based suppliers such as Bromcom has led to big changes in the MIS world, estimated to be worth about £200 million.

Bromcom’s market share has risen to 16 per cent, analysis by the Bring More Data blog suggests, with accounts for 2024 showing the company’s turnover soared 50 per cent to £32 million. Net profit also rose 75 per cent up to £3 million.

Nick Finnemore, a consultant who used to work for SIMS, another supplier, said schools were now so reliant on these systems that “when they do go down it has a massive impact”.

“Schools need to be aware that anything can happen with software. For the high-risk, important processes, they should make sure they have a way continuing to do [them] without relying on the MIS solely.”

## NEWS

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# Ex-DfE staffer joins SEND consultancy firm

RUTH LUCAS

@RUTHLUCAS\_

EXCLUSIVE

A former senior civil servant has become an adviser to a consultancy that delivered a controversial government contract aimed to cut new education, health and care plans by 20 per cent.

Indra Morris, who spent six years at the DfE and most recently worked as director general for families between 2022 and 2023, has joined Newton Europe 16 months after leaving her government post.

Newton Europe worked with the government on its Delivering Better Value for SEND programme in 2022, which sought to support 55 councils in bringing down their large SEND deficit budgets.

But the £19.5 million contract was revealed to target a 20 per cent reduction in the number of new EHCPs. The government repeatedly denied it had any such target.

Morris sought advice for her Newton appointment with the government's advisory committee on business appointments.



Indra Morris

She told the panel her role would include helping the company to develop its service offering, positioning and marketing in central government, and to develop staff skills and capabilities. It would not involve lobbying or direct sales.

The committee said Newton's potential clients were unknown, meaning there was "a risk of possible unfair advantage, or a perception of one", and there were further risks given Morris's "influence and network of contacts in central government".

The role should be subject to a two-year ban on lobbying the government, helping with potential contracts or any policy relating to previous work

at the DfE.

The DfE has since confirmed Morris had no involvement with any contract with Newton when she was at the department.

Morris told Schools Week: "I'm passionate about using my time to make a meaningful impact, and Newton's focus on evidence, data and delivery aligns perfectly with how I like to work."

"My experience in children's social care, justice, welfare, public sector reform and consultancy position me well to help create better outcomes for families."

Newton is not the only consultancy to have secured a lucrative government contract to help reform the SEND system.

PA Consulting was awarded £7.6 million to oversee a pilot of the last government's proposed changes. In 2023, Schools Week was gagged from revealing the day rates paid to its consultants.

A spokesperson for advocacy group Special Needs Jungle said: "Politicians like to say SEND is 'lose, lose, lose', but that's never really been true. Families, meanwhile, are still waiting for the system to work in a way that benefits children."

## AUTUMN TERM

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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



## MOVERS AND SHAKERS

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## Movers &amp; Shakers

Your fortnightly guide to  
who's new and who's leaving**Keziah Featherstone****Chair and treasurer,  
WomenEd****Start date:** September**Current role:** Executive trust leader,  
The Mercian Trust**Interesting fact:** Keziah worked as a free-range chicken catcher in Somerset before she went to university. Everyone got paid based on how many chickens the full team caught. She lasted three shifts.**Martin Fitzwilliam****Director of schools,  
Birmingham City Council****Start date:** September**Former role:** National education director – primary, E-ACT**Interesting fact:** Martin once went to the doctor with what he thought was a frozen shoulder, only to discover he'd been carrying a poorly-mended broken arm from a rugby match years earlier.**Helen Stevenson****Interim CEO,  
Transforming Lives Educational Trust****Start date:** August**Current role:** Director, Satis Education**Interesting fact:** When Helen was 18, she spent a week at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival before heading to university and ended up going on a date with a lion tamer.**Jude Macdonald****Director,  
Wolf Inclusion****Start date:** September**Current role:** Director of inclusion, Keys Academies Trust**Interesting fact:** Jude was a skydiver for many years. She has completed 1,300 skydives and has flown more hours in the wind tunnel than she cares to imagine.**Niall Gallagher****National education  
director – secondary,  
E-ACT****Start date:** September**Former role:** deputy national director – secondary, E-ACT**Interesting fact:** Niall swam competitively for Liverpool as a teenager, stopping only when he stopped growing and everyone else continued to.**Sir Charlie Mayfield****Chair,  
Sparx Learning****Start date:** October**Current role:** Chair of tech training company QA and leading the government's Keep Britain Working review**Interesting fact:** Charlie was awarded the *Sword of Honour* at Sandhurst which is given to the Officer Cadet considered by the Commandant to be the best of the intake.

## Former Michaela staffer joins Sunak's charity

FEATURED

A founding teacher of Michaela Free School has joined former prime minister Rishi Sunak's new charity to boost numeracy skills among schoolchildren.

Bodil Isaksen has been appointed chief programmes officer at The Richmond Project.

Set up by Sunak and his wife Akshata Murty, the charity aims to "support creative ways of tackling numeracy problems"



including among "children struggling at school".

Isaksen was a founding programme director at prison recruitment charity Unlocked Graduates and more recently led edtech maths platform Dr Frost.

"I will focus on practical, evidence-led programmes that help people use numbers in everyday settings at home, at work and in the community," she said of the new role.

Lizzie Gaisman, a former charity and finance worker, has been appointed chief executive of the charity.

Sunak said "education is the closest thing we have to a silver bullet for changing lives ... But when it comes to numeracy what we need most is cultural change. If we can give more people confidence with numbers, we can change lives and boost social mobility in this country."

## Feature

RUTH LUCAS | @RUTHLUCAS\_

# Can citizenship education meet the challenge of votes at 16?



**Ministers hope lowering the voting age will engage young people in democracy, but schools face an uphill battle to prepare them. Ruth Lucas investigates ...**

**S**era Shortland has taught pupils about the UK's political and legal system for the past 20 years. "If I can sum up teaching citizenship," she says, "it's been a privilege but a real battle to keep it on the curriculum."

Shortland has seen pupils go on to successful careers in politics and law, and even stand for Parliament. She's also noticed a "general increase in their political thirst" among pupils who take the subject.

But over those 20 years, just as the influence of social media has polarised views and changes in social attitudes have put schools and the curriculum under greater scrutiny, experts say the subject has been "decimated".

Now, government has announced the most "seismic" change to the UK's voting system in the last fifty years – giving 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote.

So, what will it take to ensure the government's policy delivers not just more voters, but better-informed ones?

## Why is the voting age being lowered?

According to think tank IPPR, young people's faith in traditional democratic politics is lower than any other age group, with deep concerns over social challenges including climate change and racism.

An Opinion poll of 50,000 students under 18 before last year's general election found 70 per cent did not know the name of their MP and 59 per cent didn't know which party their MP belonged to.

Government says lowering the voting age to 16 (and allowing 14 year-olds to register to vote) is "just the start of successfully engaging young people in our democracy".

The move will "allow strong links to be made between theory and action, supporting effective and relevant democratic education in schools," government says.

But a March Teacher Tapp survey found 84 per cent of state school teachers believe the national curriculum doesn't do enough to prepare students for voting in elections.

Meanwhile, a report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on political literacy found that although 60 per cent of teachers felt responsible for developing young people's political literacy, only 1 per cent felt fully prepared to do so.

## Subject 'essentially decimated'

Citizenship, which covers democracy, law, financial literacy, critical thinking and global issues, has been a statutory part of the key stage 3 curriculum since 2002.

But academies, which educate more than half of England's pupils, do not have to follow the national curriculum.

A study by the Association for Citizenship Teaching (ACT), Nottingham Trent and Royal Holloway Universities found students who took GCSE citizenship were significantly more likely to express interest in politics and to trust democratic institutions.

They were also more confident in their ability to vote and take civic action.



# Feature: Voting

The last national curriculum review, initiated by then-education secretary Michael Gove in 2012, revised citizenship's programme of study. Or, as ACT chief executive Liz Moore puts it, the subject's content was "essentially decimated".

"What was left was a very thin national curriculum document, which left teachers quite confused about what this subject is actually trying to achieve," she explains, adding that other coalition government reforms impacted citizenship, most notably the introduction of the EBacc.

From 94,000 entries for the 'short course' GCSE in 2010, the number of GCSE citizenship entries has now fallen to around 21,000. Just five subjects receive fewer, according to data published by JCQ.

## 'A postcode lottery'

A 2021 study by political literacy advocacy group Shout Out UK found less than one-third of schools formally taught citizenship as standalone lessons.

Instead, many schools integrated its teaching with personal, social, health and economics (PSHE) or relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) to save time and resources. Others provided non-curricular activities instead, like debating clubs.

Matteo Bergamini, from Shout Out UK, says provision was currently a "postcode lottery".

"If there's a teacher that really wants to champion this, then they will do it. But once that teacher leaves, their expertise will leave with them."

This rings true for Bryden Joy, who started his career as a science teacher but decided to take the lead in citizenship teaching at his school in 2008.

"I think a lot of the time it's just people feeling their way and trying to figure out what to do, not necessarily having actively trained in it," Joy says.

According to Department for Education data, the number of citizenship teachers has dramatically declined too, from 9,958 in 2011/12, to 4,156 in 2021/22. Indeed, only UCL and Kingston University even offer a PGCE qualification for the subject.



Liz Moore



## 'Citizenship decline means students lack frameworks to navigate complex issues'

### 'A Danger Point'

Moore says teachers have to play their part "and need to be reminded of their duties and responsibilities to the young people they're serving. I don't think that's been happening in a lot of places."

But Dan Morrow, CEO of Cornwall Education Learning Trust, says teachers often see politics as a "danger point".

Teachers are expected to avoid promoting personal political views and present balanced views when issues are covered. However, he says, "in the culture wars and social media era, it has become quite a toxic debate".

This leaves individuals vulnerable, he adds, "open to being othered and put in a negative spotlight when they're just trying to do good work. That's why I think we need to be in a statutory space."

Data shows the divide between youngsters' views on these issues is also widening.

A study by Kings College London found that young men are more skeptical of feminism and less supportive of gender equality policies compared

to both their female peers and their older male counterparts.

In the 2024 election, twice as many 18–24-year-old men voted Reform as women the same age, and the inverse was true for Green Party voters.

Teachers have noticed this shift in the classroom, with more discussions around controversial issues like the Israel and Gaza, 'small boats' and feminism.

"It's really hard, because you don't want to end up giving too much oxygen to controversies," Joy adds. "Sometimes it's better to have a one-to-one conversation with that person later rather than trying to fight fire with fire."

But Mackenzie Dawson-Hunt, head of civics at St Mark's school in Mitcham, says this is where the subject can help.

"It is often poorly understood [...] The content of the GCSE equips teenagers with vital tools to combat misinformation, engage in political debate and participate in making change."

And Phil Denton, chief operating officer at AP provider EdStart Schools, adds the "decline in structured citizenship education means students often lack the critical frameworks needed to



Dan Morrow



## Feature: Voting

navigate complex democratic processes”.

While 16-year-olds should “absolutely have a voice in shaping the world around them, they may not yet be ready for the full responsibility of voting, as many are still in the early stages of forming their beliefs and can be vulnerable to external influence without broader life experience”, he added.

### ‘Simply unwieldy’

Teachers who do choose to take it on often lack other crucial tools: time and resources.

Joy, who now leads citizenship for a trust in the southeast, says whether schools teach citizenship is “often driven by existing accountability. If there’s no external measurement, I can absolutely understand why a school leader would want to give that extra lesson a week to English and maths.”

ASCL general secretary, Pepe Di’lasio says the “big challenge” facing schools is fitting in provision “when there are already so many competing demands”.

And the NAHT’s head of policy, Sarah Hannafin says the current curriculum is “simply unwieldy, with teachers expected to cover far too much material in this time available”.

Ofsted evaluates citizenship through its current personal developmental judgment, focusing on how well schools prepare pupils for life in modern Britain, covering topics like democracy, British values, debating and responsibilities.

An Ofsted spokesperson told Schools Week inspectors evaluate this through assemblies, discussions, literature and extra-curricular opportunities.

But Joy says his inspections focused on “how you prepare them for life outside of school” and says it was a “great rarity” to be asked “what citizenship content do you do?”

### ‘New opportunities’

And there is a notable push for change.

The Electoral Commission, which oversees elections and is currently preparing materials for schools in light of the widening franchise, recently told *The Guardian* that democratic



## ‘It’s a whole different matter if you can exercise your opinion at the ballot box’

education should be taught from as young as 11.

“Right now is a very interesting moment,” Moore says. “The combination of the curriculum and assessment review and the policy to lower the voting age should provide new opportunities for reasserting the role of citizenship in the curriculum for every child.”

Tony Meneagh, principal at St Ivo Academy in Cambridgeshire, adds personal development, that “embraces informed debate about important political topics”, should be the “bedrock of any good school”.

“[But] until now, such conversations were, in essence, theoretical. It’s a whole different matter if you are able to exercise your opinion at the ballot box. I think this development can only enhance curriculum delivery at post-16.”

But Denton adds schools will need to “embed political literacy more deeply into the curriculum to ensure informed participation rather than reactive decision-making”.

Labour MP Josh MacAlister, appointed as a junior education minister this week, told Schools Week earlier this year the commitment to lowering the voting age must come with a “resurgence of civics in schools”.

“Putting that together 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 about young people’s attitude to politics.”

The ACT has also called for citizenship to be made statutory at primary school, as well as better training opportunities for teachers and greater scrutiny of the subject by Ofsted.

Meanwhile, Bergamini argues government should provide a bursary to incentivise teachers to train in the subject.

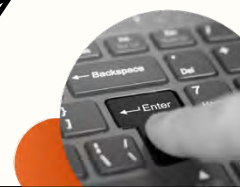
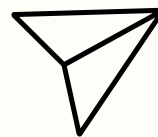
A DfE spokesperson told Schools Week that “deepening young people’s knowledge and understanding about democracy is a vital part of implementing votes at 16”.

The curriculum and assessment review will consider the state of citizenship teaching today, they added.

But Shortland warns, without further action, government will essentially be saying “I’m going to give you some votes at 16, but not the knowledge and the information and the power you need to actually do something with your vote.”

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

OUR READERS' RESPONSES TO THE WEEK'S NEWS AND VIEWS



## Letter of the week

James Searjeant's article ([Year 6 can't keep paying the price of data farming](#), 3 September) is sadly correct but doesn't go far enough. The problem is not just the focus on testing in year 6, but an entire system failing children who struggle academically, especially boys.

Schools squeeze interventions into their assembly times so that they don't miss lessons they can't engage in anyway because they are so far behind. What they really need is consistency: one trusted person to spend a little time with them outside of class each day.

I recently worked with three boys who were three years behind when they started year 3. I wasn't asked to do it, I just made it my mission to get them reading. I made the time before lessons started and just after lunch.



By the time they started year 4, they could all read, and they wanted to engage in lessons. Their parents' desire to support them also increased.

It isn't rocket science. We've just lost sight of the basics. Until we go back to those, children will keep relying on TAs with the time and the support to use their initiative.

**Sherrie Paget,**  
Primary teaching assistant, London

Thirty years ago, a friend taught maths at Chipping Norton High School. She probably taught *Clarkson's Farm* star Kaleb Cooper's dad. Or, judging from Kaleb, failed to teach him much about anything.

Kaleb is clearly bright. He is articulate and capable of thinking through serious and complex issues. And, judging from his conversations with Jeremy, he had no interest in most of the things teachers tried to teach him.

So, dare I say it, Reform has a point. ([Farage: 'Let's start teaching trades and services at school'](#), 5 September). Some kids really know what they want to do, and I don't see why we should not support them in that.

Why shouldn't Chipping Norton High School offer a serious farming course at Key Stage 4? That would have directly helped Kaleb in his career, and I think he would have been a more engaged pupil more generally had they done so.

**Tim Leunig, Director, Public First Consulting**

I was saddened to find in last week's edition that your long-running feature, The Conversation, is no more.

I loved it. It was a weekly chance to find blogs from diverse perspectives, ignored by social media algorithms and echo chambers. Even the research schools publish each other's blogs in a bubble. Often these are great, but how do we find new perspectives that challenge us?

The blogs linked in The Conversation were often perfect for this kind of discovery. *Schools Week* had us covered.

Sure, there will be many different perspectives on the letters page that replaces it. But can anyone really make you think deeply in 150

words? That would be a very rare letter indeed.

And who reads published letters anyway?

Not me. They're all "Outraged of Bury St Edmunds" (not to judge Mr Outrage, of course) and I'm, like, "Slightly Miffed from Swindon", and you'll just cruise on past this like yet another turnoff on the M4 on the way to Bristol.

**Dominic Salles, Education consultant,**  
YouTuber, author, entrepreneur,  
and English teacher



Splitting EHCPs into chunks seems to be inviting extra stress for already struggling families, who would surely end up having to apply for each segment separately. ([Restrict EHCPs to pupils with most severe needs, says children's commissioner](#), 8 September)

It would also inevitably create extra work for the agencies involved, and potentially create gaps for children to fall through.

On the other hand, a new national framework of need levels seems sensible. I just hope it comes with statutory compliance and support, like EHCPs do!

**Jayne Cooper, special education teacher and mother of two, North Yorkshire**

So, Lee Anderson has finally exposed our diabolical plot to "brainwash" children with dangerous propaganda like... **[Checks notes]** reading, critical thinking and the radical notion that treating others with respect is a good thing. ([Reform government would 'root out teachers brainwashing kids' says MP Lee Anderson](#), 6 September)

I can't wait to see how he performs as education secretary. After all, what could possibly go wrong with a DfE that treats education as a conspiracy and learning as suspect?

Yours in manufactured outrage,  
**Dan Morrow, CEO,**  
Cornwall Education Learning Trust

Send your letters here:

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## JEREMY SPENCER

CEO, Halliard Trust

## Ofsted's new toolkits are a gift for self-evaluation

**Ofsted has given us a safety net for implementing its new framework, writes Jeremy Spencer. We'd be fools not to use it**

If the measure of a good inspection framework's strength is its helpfulness to school leaders, then my honest assessment is that some during my time as a leader and inspector have been weaker than others. So what about the new one?

I've heard some exasperating statements from headteachers over the years.

The frankly mind-boggling: "I haven't looked at the Ofsted grade descriptors, but I know we're Outstanding."

The worryingly egotistical: "I know my school. Why should I look at it through an inspector's eyes?"

And the dangerously rebellious: "I don't do things for Ofsted. I know what's best for our children."

Is it any surprise, then, that every new framework brings with it so much gnashing of teeth? A proportion of our leadership workforce seem intent on ignoring Ofsted in the hopes it will go away rather than engaging with its efforts to raise standards – and then seem surprised when that doesn't work out for them.

There can be no denying that the

most recent inspection framework determined strategic development priorities and demonstrably improved the quality of education in almost all schools – I dare say in every school that engaged with it, whether willingly or reluctantly.

We now have a new framework, its predecessor having fallen victim to the cries of its detractors. I see it is already being met with the same level of opposition, and I suspect also with the same disregard.

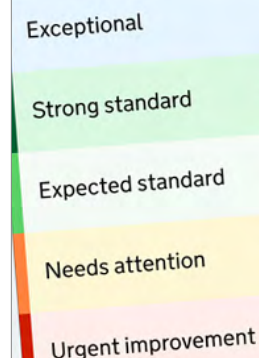
Ofsted, for its part, has made it its business to be as collaborative and as accessible as possible. Any school who has wanted to shape the new framework has had a voice, and each of us has been given a helping hand to make its implementation more manageable and effective.

I refer of course to the toolkits the inspectorate published at the start of the year, which have now been improved by the constructive criticism we were able to offer.

Will they be a hindrance? To an extent, yes. The reality is that they will require time and effort to engage with fully. But then, any new framework will, and you might say we asked for it.

But will they be helpful? Absolutely. Used honestly and effectively, they have great potential to reduce anxiety, sharpen self-awareness and strengthen leadership. They offer

## Inspection report: 25 June 2024



“ They have great potential to strengthen leadership

school leaders a clear framework for understanding how their schools measure up and how to improve, and this is before an inspection even takes place.

Given my background as an inspector, you might think “he would say that, wouldn't he?” But from where I stand, significant progress has been made in recent years. Every school's curriculum is the result of ongoing, thoughtful iteration. This simply would not have happened without the previous framework.

Yes, the schools that consistently secure strong or improved inspection outcomes tend to have leaders who understand Ofsted's expectations inside out. They've read the handbook and studied the grade descriptors.

That's not “playing the game” or being a soulless technocrat, and it's frankly disingenuous to suggest knowing the framework is in any way opposed to knowing your school.

So for our part, Halliard Trust will

fully embrace the new toolkits.

Our leaders will evaluate themselves against every part of the framework, leaving no word or expectation unexamined. As a result, they will approach inspections with clarity and confidence, fully aware of what inspectors will focus on.

In the same spirit, we will also ensure that leaders' toolkit-informed self-evaluations are shared with governors and trustees. This transparency will ensure everyone is on the same page about how each school aligns with national expectations.

And if gaps are identified, we'll support leaders to address them through strategic development plans. Because as Sir Jon Coles wrote in these pages, it is us who determine how high-stakes inspection is in the end.

Preparation and a supportive culture are crucial parts of a leader's safety net. I wouldn't want to do the job without one, and I wouldn't want that for you either.

# Opinion

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## TIM LINEHAN

Writer and inclusive schools advocate

### Loose talk about attendance does more harm than good

**We need policies that empower schools to work with families and welcome children back through their gates, writes Tim Linehan**

New school year, same old rhetoric. Bridget Phillipson, the Education Secretary, has launched her now-customary exhortation to schools and parents to ensure children attend school from the first week of the academic year.

Why? Because children who miss their first week of school are more likely to become persistently absent and their future prospects will be damaged to the extent that they are likely to earn £10,000 a year less.

As Phillipson notes, absenteeism in schools is falling but is still above pre-pandemic rates. The trouble is, absenteeism as she describes it (with its connotations of families conspiring with children to skive) is not the issue.

The real problem is education policy, which pits schools against families and is overseeing an exodus of children, especially those with special educational needs.

It's easy to bash parents. We're used to it. I'm used to it. My daughter didn't go to secondary school because of anxiety. Both of my children are neurodivergent. I'm a bad parent.

Lots of parents feel this way

because that's how the education system makes them feel. Instead of heaping pressure on them, we should think about the corporate parent, the DfE, the body which is administering our allegedly universal education system.

What Phillipson's statement didn't address is the 350,000 children missing from education, or the approximately 180,000 children who are severely absent (two-and-a-half times more than pre-pandemic levels), or the 60 per cent rise in home-educated children since Covid, three-quarters of whom opt out because their families say schools can't meet their needs.

Then there are the exclusion and suspension figures, both up by two-thirds over the past two years, overwhelmingly affecting children who have additional needs. These combined figures point to an increasingly less inclusive system, or to put it another way, state-enforced absenteeism.

Teachers are caught in the crossfire: fielding parental anxiety while their own demands for better training remain unmet. Yet there are things that schools can do.

The first is obvious: listen to families. Your child not being able to go to school is the second most anxiety-inducing life event after the death of a close family member. Parents may have to give up their jobs. Their relationships with



“ It's easy to bash parents. We're used to it.”

partners and their other children suffer.

Second, listen to children. Half of those who are unable to go to school experience anxiety at twice the diagnostic threshold. A recent study of 700 11- to 16-year-olds found that reducing the emotional burdens students experience in school could prevent decades of mental health struggles and save the lives of some neurodivergent adolescents and adults.

Listening means learning and developing a true partnership with families to offer the best hope for a school return. It means accepting that some things are not visible to schools.

A survey I carried out in Hackney found that parents were two-and-a-half times more likely to have identified a symptom in a child than a teacher. Six times as many parents noted suicidal ideation than they said schools did.

These findings are not surprising given that teachers have 30 pupils in their class, but they highlight the importance of listening to families to get a holistic understanding of a child's experience.

In short, families feel the shame of their child's absenteeism, which makes them defensive. Meanwhile, children feel their parents' shame and blame themselves. So it's up to schools to build trust and develop solutions with families. Validate them, connect them, encourage them to share their experiences.

You may learn that this polite child is self-harming and talks about killing himself at home, that this disruptive one just needs a safe, quiet place in school and that this child is late because their mind wanders.

You may learn how some of your policies are putting some children on a fast track to exclusion and how some others are hampering your attendance efforts. (For example, autistic children are often particularly sensitive to textures; try making them don an itchy uniform in the morning.)

It's not just policy that has failed to keep up with changing needs; it's political rhetoric too. A child risks losing an education every time a relationship between school and parent breaks down, and loose talk about absenteeism costs lives.



## Opinion

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DR SAM  
PARRETT

CEO, London  
South East Academies Trust

## Trusts are Labour's secret weapon for greater inclusion

**Trusts are uniquely placed to lead local efforts to provide the right placement for each child and the right support for each school, writes Sam Parrett**

**T**he government's ambition for a more inclusive education system is well-intentioned.

As Bridget Phillipson and her new ministerial team develop their plans for reform, I hope they will see trusts as key allies in delivering on them.

Every child, regardless of background, need or previous experience of school, should be able to access the education they need to thrive and achieve.

But inclusion is not a single pathway or a one-size-fits-all approach. It looks different for every child and, as we know from the work we do in our own schools, the system must be flexible enough to meet individual needs.

With the right mix of schools, effective partnerships and high-quality outreach, multi-academy trusts are uniquely placed to make a real difference.

Too often, inclusion is interpreted as "every child being able to do everything". This is neither realistic nor desirable. Our experience shows that specialist schools are vital for some children and will always be the right environment for them.

However, the expertise in those settings should not sit in silos. A

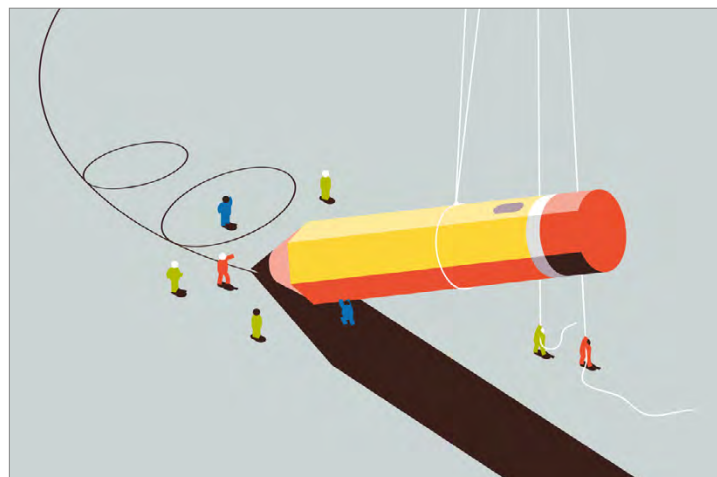
genuinely inclusive system is one in which mainstream schools and specialist schools work closely together, each learning from the other.

Some trusts, like ours, operate a "mixed economy" model, bringing together mainstream, alternative provision and specialist schools under one umbrella. The value here is immense. Knowledge and expertise flow across the different settings, improving provision for all pupils, at all levels.

For example, colleagues in mainstream schools can access specialist advice from SEND staff to help them better support children with additional needs in their classrooms. Meanwhile, mainstream curriculum specialists can enrich teaching and learning in special schools. It genuinely is a two-way street.

Being a specialist provision, however, does not automatically mean a school is "inclusive". Inclusion is about personalised support; it means knowing each child and their family, understanding the context and background of each child, and building networks of appropriate care around them.

As schools have been hit by budget cuts over the past few years, this level of pastoral care has sadly been eroded in many mainstream settings. Too many schools have had to lose staff who knew pupils and their



**“ The government should be championing this model**

families individually. This has been detrimental to many children.

However, within a mixed economy trust, additional pastoral and SEND expertise can be more readily available for mainstream settings, which can help to address this gap.

Importantly, this work is not only about the schools within a trust. Inclusion requires a whole-system approach, reaching into local communities, working with other schools and local authorities.

All our schools collaborate with neighbouring schools, both specialist and mainstream. Our outreach team is also supporting wider system development by working with staff and pupils in mainstream schools to reduce exclusions, which is ultimately building inclusive capacity in schools we do not run.

It is also important to focus on what happens to pupils once they reach the end of Year 11 or Year 13/14, to ensure that they can continue to access inclusive provision. In our case, being part of a wider education group that includes a multi-campus further education college supports this.

Where schools and colleges work together to identify and address

individual needs, students will transition more effectively and have a far greater chance of long-term success.

The government should be championing this model of trusts working as system leaders. It avoids two unhelpful binaries: "academies versus maintained" and "mainstream versus specialist", instead creating a continuum of provision in which children can access the right support at the right time.

For some, inclusion means thriving in a mainstream classroom with the right adjustments; for others, it means flourishing in a specialist environment. What matters is that the system recognises and supports these differences rather than expecting every child to go in the same direction.

Trusts have the tools to make this happen: pooling expertise across schools, embedding inclusive governance models and forging reciprocal relationships between mainstream and specialist provision.

This can ensure that more children enjoy the educational experience they deserve, which is precisely this government's aim.

## Opinion

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



# ADAM DANCE

Liberal Democrat MP for Yeovil

## The government's SEND reforms should adopt my backbench bill

**The measures I presented to parliament this week would reduce pressure on children, families and schools. I hope the DfE are listening**

Teachers know better than anyone that the phonics test is not enough. Children are asked to read 40 words, but this narrow measure tells us little about the skills that shape learning – from phonological processing to working memory. In some cases, children are drilled to memorise the words, and the deeper challenges they face are missed.

As a result, too many children fall through the gaps. By the time their difficulties are spotted, frustration and loss of confidence have already taken root. Parents tell me again and again that years were wasted before their child was recognised as needing support. Teachers themselves often admit they feel under-trained and under-equipped to intervene sooner, even as they work tirelessly to do their best.

That is why I am bringing forward a Ten Minute Rule Bill on 10 September, proposing universal screening for neurodivergent traits in primary schools, with statutory guidance on training for teachers. The purpose is not to create a new

layer of bureaucracy or to hand out diagnoses. It is to give teachers a light-touch, observation-based tool to help them recognise needs earlier and adjust their teaching accordingly.

I know school leaders will ask about workload. That concern is justified. The last thing teachers need is more paperwork. But this Bill is designed to make life easier, not harder. A national framework would provide consistency and confidence, building on what teachers already do instinctively: notice a child is struggling and adapt to help them. With clear training and guidance, those instincts would be backed up with knowledge and tools. Far from increasing stress, it could help reduce it.

Others will question why I am pursuing this through a Ten Minute Rule Bill, when such Bills rarely become law. The truth is that as a backbench MP, this is the route available to me to raise the issue and force it onto the political agenda. Often these Bills succeed not by passing directly, but by influencing government policy and building cross-party consensus. I hope the Department for Education will take these proposals and incorporate them into its own



“ Teachers should be given the tools to act early

SEND reforms.

Funding and capacity are also key concerns. The SEND system is already under immense pressure. Special school places are limited, mainstream schools are stretched, and Education, Health and Care Plans can be complex and costly. My Bill is not a silver bullet. But by helping teachers identify needs earlier, we can prevent more children from reaching crisis point and reduce demand on the most intensive forms of provision. That is in the interests of children, schools and the wider system.

For me, this is more than a policy idea – it is personal. I grew up with severe dyslexia and ADHD. I know how it feels to be called lazy or disruptive when in fact you are struggling to keep up. I know what it is to carry shame from being made to take medication in front of classmates, or the hurt of being

bullied for being different. Those scars do not fade.

And yet, I also know what a difference it makes when someone believes in you. Teaching staff who backed me gave me the confidence to keep going. One of them now works alongside me in Parliament. That faith is what every child deserves.

Earlier this year, I joined Jamie Oliver in calling for better support for dyslexic pupils. We agreed the system is failing too many children, and that practical, affordable steps can make a real difference. This Bill is one of those steps.

Not long ago, a boy with ADHD and dyslexia told me: “You’ve made me realise I won’t fail in life.” That is why I am determined to see this change through. Teachers should be given the tools to act early. Every child deserves the chance to thrive.

Solutions

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TERRI  
BOTTRIELL-WYSE

Headteacher,  
Woodfield School

Six Ps to avert an exodus of mothers from the classroom

**Parenthood almost caused Terri Bottriell-Wyse to abandon her teaching career. Here she reveals why she stayed and how it shaped her leadership**

Often throughout my career I have considered leaving.

I remember coming home during teacher training after a really tough day. I sobbed about how hard I was finding the job. My husband asked if it was the right job for me—I replied (through tears) that I wouldn't want to do anything else! It only got harder once I became a mother. Tough days, sleepless nights, trips to the hospital with poorly babies.

And then harder again with promotions into leadership roles. Being a leader in education while raising two teenage boys is not only physically exhausting but emotionally the most challenging thing I've ever done.

So why do I stay? And what do I offer working mothers, beyond flexible hours? Six Ps capture my reflections and my efforts to ensure motherhood isn't a barrier to a long and fulfilling career.

**Purpose**

From a young age, I knew I wanted a job that helped children. I considered social work and child

psychotherapy, but after a brief time as a learning support assistant (LSA), I knew I wanted to teach. I remind myself regularly that I am not the only one who felt this calling. So I make sure that students are at the centre of any tasks I ask them to complete. If it's not making a difference, then we don't do it.

**Practical**

Even before flexible working, teaching has always fit better around having children than most careers. I value deeply the school holidays and spending quality time with my family. There aren't many perks in this job, but as a parent, this one is precious. So I leave staff alone during their holidays and encourage them to switch on their "out of office".

Another practical benefit is the teachers' pension, which always makes me think twice about leaving. Helping staff understand pensions through training can be helpful.

**Personal**

Teaching is collaborative, and relationships are key to wellbeing. I encourage staff to work together positively and have fun along the way. Laughter is a powerful stress-buster: great for everyone, especially parents juggling the added stressors of parenthood.



“ Parenthood shouldn't halt career progression

**Professional development**

I've enjoyed gaining qualifications over the years. The knowledge I've accrued has benefited schools and pupils, and given me a sense of achievement that keeps me engaged in the profession.

Parenthood shouldn't mean the end, or even a pause, in career progression. Yet, too often it does. Work with staff around their parental leave and flexible working to see how they can keep developing the knowledge and skills your school (and the system) needs.

**Permission**

When leaders have given me permission to be creative, it has really kept me excited about my job. Having autonomy to work on projects aligned with my values and interests benefits me immensely.

At home with small children, you can feel you're not fully using your intellectual capacity. So coming to work knowing you have a project to complete – perhaps even just for

that project initially – keeps you driven.

**Powerful women**

Reflecting on my career, it's easy to identify a number of key female leaders who shaped it.

The first was the SENCo at my first school, where I worked as an LSA. She encouraged me to train as a teacher. The second was another SENCo at my next school, who mentored me through my teaching qualification and then through my master's degree.

Beyond these early role models, I've been privileged to work for inspiring female headteachers. Each saw something in me and encouraged my advancement, kept me focused and motivated.

I don't know if my staff see me as a positive female role model, but I hope they do. I hope they see that it's possible to stay in a tough job while raising children, and I hope that this gives them the motivation to stick with it rather than go missing from the classroom.



# THE LEGAL LEADER

Expert advice on education and the law



## The Intradev breach is a wake-up call on cyber risk

**Claire Archibald**

Legal director,  
Browne Jacobson LLP



The recent cyber-attack on the Online Single Central Record (Online SCR) supplier has sent shockwaves through the education sector, affecting many schools and thousands of school staff. While this incident is deeply concerning, it should serve as a learning opportunity for schools in their relationship with edtech vendors. Ultimately, it highlights the trade-off in risks that often occurs when procuring technology services, and the need for robust, proactive risk management.

### Outsourcing's hidden trade-off

Using the services of an external company to manage processes such as your Single Central Record (SCR) and recruitment checks is perfectly valid. Many edtech vendors provide high-quality platforms that reduce both workload and risk by efficiently identifying gaps and errors in the record.

However, reducing risks in one area does not eradicate risk altogether. In fact, transferring sensitive data to an external supplier creates a new one. Many schools we speak to acknowledge that they have not considered this trade-off. This is the crux of the problem.

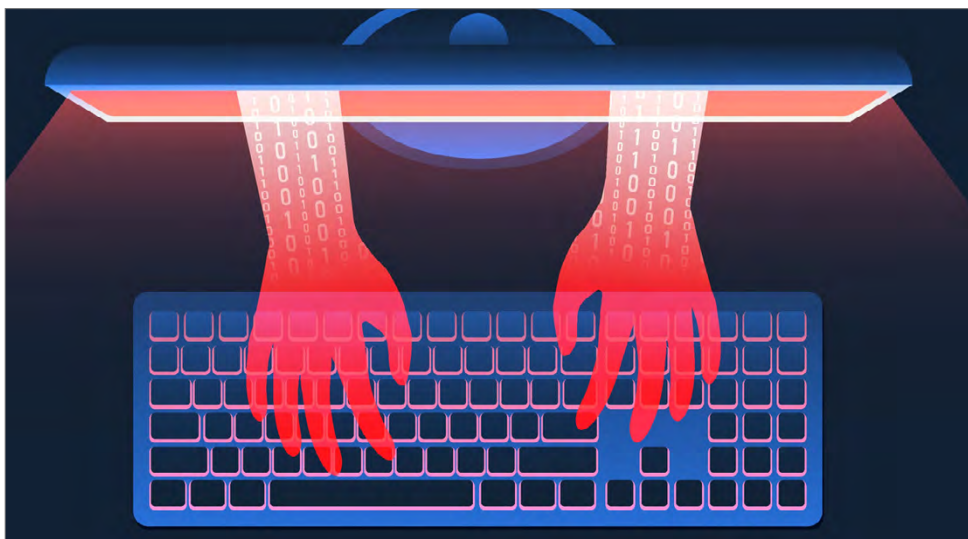
In the case of the Online SCR incident, it was the platform's own software supplier, Intradev, that was hit by the cyber-attack. Hackers were then able to access the names, addresses and phone, national insurance and passport numbers of school staff.

This illustrates the complexity of modern data-sharing arrangements and the critical importance of understanding exactly which data flows where.

Risk management should be front and centre of any technology procurement exercise, never just an afterthought.

### Data protection issues aren't going away

With the Department for Education encouraging schools to embrace AI tools, and Browne Jacobson's School Leaders Survey last autumn showing that half of schools are using AI tools



in the classroom, the volume of data being shared with external vendors is only going to increase. As a result, so is risk.

The consequences of compromised data are serious. The Information Commissioner's Office last year reprimanded an Essex school for failing to protect data when installing facial recognition technology, while some staff have been asking schools to compensate them after the Online SCR cyber-attack.

### Strategic risk management

The first time that trustees or governors become aware of risk should not be when they are asked to deal with a data breach. Accepting and managing vendor risk means:

#### *Involving DPOs from the outset*

Schools should always assess data risks and conduct vendor due diligence before entering into contracts. Your data protection officer (DPO) should be involved from the beginning of any tech procurement exercise to focus on data protection risks.

#### *Conducting thorough DPIAs*

When talking to vendors, read their terms and conditions and privacy notices. A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) is not just a box-ticking exercise; it's your opportunity to understand and mitigate risks before they materialise.

### *Getting proper legal advice*

When entering into high-risk processing activities in which significant amounts of or sensitive personal data might be shared, seek independent legal advice to review or draw up contracts that ensure any risks are effectively mitigated.

### *Transparent governance*

Schools might decide after reading the contract that there is still risk. They should then ensure their governors or trustees are making a fully informed decision on whether to proceed.

The Online SCR incident should be a wake-up call for the entire education sector.

The worst thing schools can do is fail to acknowledge the risk of outsourcing tasks to edtech vendors. Instead, they must start viewing edtech procurement through a risk management lens, understanding that every technological solution promising to solve one problem may create others.

The key is not to avoid all risk. That would be impossible and counterproductive. Instead, it is to understand, assess and consciously manage it.

The future of education technology is bright, but only if we approach it with our eyes wide open to both its benefits and its risks. The time for naive optimism is over; the era of informed, strategic decision-making must begin now.

# THE KNOWLEDGE

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



## Four proven steps to maximise your pupil premium strategy

**Chris Paterson**

Co-CEO, EEF



As the autumn term kicks off, there is one deadline on the horizon for school leaders that matters more than most: updating their pupil premium strategy statement before December 31.

In the whirlwind of school life, updating and evaluating this strategy can easily fall down the list. But a considered approach to spending, informed by the best available evidence, can make sure that every pound makes a difference.

After all, the pupil premium is more than just extra funding. It's one of the most powerful tools we have to reduce educational inequality. Indeed, it is precisely this clear and urgent aim of boosting outcomes for every socio-economically disadvantaged pupil that makes pupil premium so compelling and so widely-supported.

Since its implementation, it has enabled access to a range of resources that help children facing additional challenges to reach their true potential: targeted interventions, pastoral support, enrichment opportunities or broader enhancements in provision.

Importantly, while the policy offers leaders flexibility, it is also balanced with accountability. That means navigating the glut of potential approaches for pupil premium spending can feel overwhelming.

That's where our updated guidance on Pupil Premium spending comes in. It offers clear, actionable and evidence-based support to plan, monitor and deliver a transformative Pupil Premium strategy.

Here are four ways schools can make use of it to make evidence the engine of impact.

### Start with a clear picture of need

Before diving into decisions about strategy and spend, it's vital to understand the unique context of your pupils and school.

What are the specific challenges facing your disadvantaged cohort? What has worked in the past and what hasn't?

Taking the time to diagnose your pupil's needs lays the foundation for every decision that follows. Strong strategies begin with sharp insight.



### Adopt a tiered approach to spending

Our tiered approach gives you a framework for thinking about your Pupil Premium spending. It gives examples of interventions with strong impact and helps you find those most suited for your context. It's also aligned with DfE guidance and encourages you to allocate resource to three areas:

#### *High-quality teaching*

Building teacher expertise through evidence-based professional development benefits all pupils, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

#### *Targeted academic support*

Employ small-group or one-to-one interventions to support the specific needs of individual pupils.

#### *Wider strategies*

Address non-academic barriers such as attendance, social-emotional support, or behaviour.

### Embed an evidence-driven culture

Evidence use shouldn't rest solely on senior leadership or the Pupil Premium lead: it should be a collective mission. Building a culture where every staff member values and uses evidence will fortify your strategy sustainably.

Governors and trustees also play a pivotal role. They should actively endorse and scrutinise spending decisions and the evidence supporting them.

### Evaluate and sustain

Delivering impact is not just about planning well; it's about learning, adapting and embedding. Monitoring should be continuous, not just a one-off review at year-end.

Use both quantitative data and qualitative insights to assess what's working, where gaps remain and where strategies need to evolve.

Sustaining impact also means making your approach part of the school's ongoing improvement and professional development cycle. Build in time for regular review points across the year, and ensure staff at all levels understand their role in delivering and refining the strategy.

Additionally, ensure that successful approaches are not reliant on individual staff members or one-off funding cycles. Plan for succession, scalability and sustainability, so that your Pupil Premium strategy can drive improvement not just this year, but long into the future.

So as the deadline draws near, now is your moment to move beyond input-based strategy and into outcome-driven action, to invest your funding not just with intent but with evidence, clarity and conviction.

In doing so, we hope our updated guide provides more than guidance. We offer it as a blueprint for long-lasting impact.

**[Access the Guide to the Pupil Premium here.](#)**

Week in

# Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

## TUESDAY

In what is clearly a busy time for Ofsted, the inspectorate appears to have left an editor's note in one of its inspection toolkits.

In the document for early years inspections, it states that inspectors will consider the extent to which "any accessibility planning meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and is implemented effectively and reviewed regularly".

However, the original version of the document continued "to give a nod that ideally they would do it but it's not a requirement".

Oops!

\*\*\*

In other Ofsted news, the watchdog appears to have invested in video editing.

In a bizarre release alongside Ofsted's new inspection framework, chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver paces around an empty classroom, talking to the camera and even pointing at the lens.

\*\*\*

Talking of bizarre videos, former shadow education minister Neil O'Brien's new job as the Tories' "shadow minister for policy development and renewal" appears to involve posting dimly lit fact-checks on social media of Bridget Phillipson's speeches.

You were wasted on the schools brief Neil!

\*\*\*

Nick Gibb was the schools minister for about 150 years, so we were interested to

see how he would embrace life outside government.

Turns out he's embracing it in the most Nick Gibb way possible.

"The 2023 key stage 2 assessment in reading non-fiction text was an article about the Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin Texas, under which over a million bats live, coming out at dusk in a huge swarm to feed on flying insects. A daily spectacle. And this is the bridge!" he posted on X.

His tweets from Texas also tell us that he is the proud owner of a peaked cap. Who knew!

\*\*\*

"We are really excited to be a part of RISE; it feels like a bit of an accolade," said Lee Kane, the head of Astor Secondary School in Dover, in a DfE press release about the further rollout of the government's school improvement teams.

Some might feel "accolade" is a generous word for being singled out for RISE support. Records show the school has been rated 'requires improvement' four times since it became an academy in 2012.

But Kane is to be applauded for speaking out about the school's improvement journey.

"I think some might assume it is just another department initiative – a passing trend. But, in our view, it is absolutely not that," he said.

"Our involvement has seen us partnered with Mulberry Schools Trust and, together, we have established a working partnership focused on key fundamentals and on co-producing agreed initiatives

and adaptations that will ensure sustainability beyond the programme."

## THURSDAY

The school sector's spidey sense is tingling after actor Tom Holland announced his ambition to open a free-to-attend school in London for pupils who can't afford private school.

According to the *International Business Times*, Holland plans to set up the establishment through his charity, The Brothers Trust.

It is unclear if he intends to open an actual free school – a type of state academy – or whether he is planning an independent school that simply does not charge fees.

Nevertheless, it didn't take long for the New Schools Network, which exists to champion free schools, to weigh in to offer help.

"We hear you want to set up a free school," the charity posted on X.

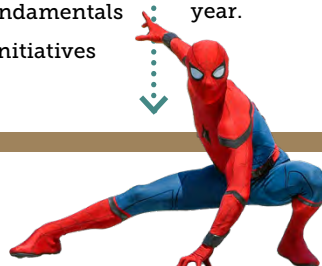
"We've got to warn you, with great power comes great responsibility. But we're here to help.

"We'd love to chat about your vision."

Not all heroes wear capes!

\*\*\*

Many in education will probably recognise Bridget Phillipson's new parliamentary private secretary. Amanda Martin was a teacher and once served as president of the National Education Union before becoming a Labour MP last year.







# Chief Executive Officer

**Job reference:** RBQPC

**Closing date:** Noon Thursday 18 September

**Location:** Head office Haverhill, Suffolk and schools across the East of England

**Salary:** Competitive and commensurate with role

Unity Schools Partnership is an ambitious and values-driven multi-academy trust, dedicated to delivering an outstanding education to every child in our care. With a family of over 40 primary, secondary and special schools across Suffolk, Cambridge, Norfolk, Essex and Havering, we are proud of our inclusive ethos, strong community roots and relentless pursuit of excellence.

Our schools have their individual identities while benefiting from the strength, support and shared vision of the Trust. At our heart is a belief that education transforms lives – and that every child, regardless of background or need, deserves the very best.

As we look to the future, we are seeking an exceptional leader to take us into the next phase of our development.

## The Role

As Chief Executive Officer, you will lead Unity Schools Partnership with clarity, purpose and ambition. Building on a strong foundation, you will work with our Board, executive leaders and Heads to deliver a cohesive strategy that puts pupils first, supports staff at every level, and reflects the distinctiveness of our communities.

You will ensure educational excellence across the Trust, underpinned by financial and operational rigour. Your leadership will be both visionary and grounded – championing innovation while maintaining a deep focus on standards, inclusion and trust-wide collaboration.

## The Person

You will have a proven track record of strategic leadership at scale, ideally within the education sector or similar values-aligned public service. A deep understanding of the educational landscape is essential, alongside an authentic commitment to inclusion, equity and social mobility.

Inspirational and empathetic, you will be a natural collaborator with the credibility to engage a wide range of stakeholders. You will be a values-led leader with the resilience, agility and judgement to navigate complexity – and a steadfast belief in the power of education to change lives. Unity Schools Partnership is committed to equal opportunities, safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. An enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check will be required.

Saxton Bampfylde Ltd is acting as an employment agency advisor to the Unity Schools Partnership on this appointment. For further information about the role, including details about how to apply, please visit <http://www.saxbam.com/appointments> using reference RBQPC.

Alternatively email [Belinda.beck@saxbam.com](mailto:Belinda.beck@saxbam.com). Applications should be received by noon on **Thursday 18 September**

**CLICK HERE** ➔

## HEADTEACHER TURVES GREEN PRIMARY SCHOOL



We are seeking to appoint a Headteacher to join Turves Green Primary School.

This is a pivotal and exciting time to join Turves Green Primary School and make a real difference to children's progress and outcomes.

The Head Teacher will report to the Directors of Education and the Chief Executive Officer.

### They will:

- support the Director of Education and the Chief Executive Officer to set and review the school's priorities and objectives, leading activity to ensure these are delivered and standards are raised.
- demonstrate exemplary leadership.
- develop, motivate, and deploy teaching and non-teaching staff to secure the best possible use of available talent.

- determine and drive appropriate standards and targets to deliver improvement.
- promote and demonstrate strong parent partnerships.
- create an accountable, safe, and positive learning environment in which diversity and co-operation are celebrated.

We welcome applications from talented and experienced Head Teachers.

Our Excelsior People Strategy aims to get the right people into the right seats from where they will grow into bigger seats, enabling our Trust to meet the needs of all our pupils effectively. Your further growth into ambitious leadership within Excelsior here is key.

**Closing Date: 3rd October 2025**

**Interview Date: 13th October 2025**

**Start Date: January 2026**



Vacancies - Excelsior Multi Academy Trust - Driving Equality, Innovation & Aspiration

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO](#)



## Principal - Saint John Fisher Catholic Primary School Coventry



### Lead with Faith, Vision & Purpose

Saint John Fisher Catholic Primary School in Coventry is seeking a faith-driven leader to take up the role Principal from January 2026. Rooted in Gospel values and part of the Romero Catholic Multi-Academy Company, this vibrant, inclusive school serves children aged 3-11 and is committed to nurturing every child academically, spiritually, and socially.

This is a rare opportunity to shape the future of a thriving Catholic school with a strong foundation and a clear mission: "Through Christ we live, love and learn, in our caring community." The successful candidate will be a practising Catholic with a deep commitment to Catholic education, bringing proven leadership experience, strategic vision, and a passion for inclusion and excellence.

You will lead with compassion and clarity, embracing a trauma-informed approach where every child is respected and loved. Your role will involve strengthening the school's ethos, driving high standards in teaching and learning, and fostering strong relationships with parents, parish, and the wider community.

In return, you'll join a faith-filled, supportive environment with dedicated staff/governors, engaged pupils, and a collaborative leadership network. You will benefit from centralised MAC services, a strong School Improvement Team, and opportunities for personal and professional growth.

If you are ready to lead with heart, purpose, and impact — and help shape lives through Catholic education — we invite you to apply.

**Salary: £78,702 – £91,158**

**Closing Date: 9am, 19th September 2025**

**Interview Date: 26th September 2025**

**Start Date: 1st January 2026**





## Two exciting leadership opportunities within Lift Schools.

### VACANCIES

#### Head of School – Lift Hamford



Join us at **Lift Hamford**, a warm and ambitious two-form entry primary school in Walton-on-the-Naze. We're seeking an inspiring leader with a proven record in primary education, ready to step into headship with the full support of an experienced Executive Principal and a talented leadership team.

This is an exciting moment in our journey: we're opening a brand-new 40-place nursery in January 2026, alongside modern facilities including a Wellbeing Hub, Autism Support Centre, and extensive outdoor grounds.

As Head of School, you'll foster a culture where staff and pupils thrive, drive improvement, and lead our community into the next chapter of success.

#### Principal – Lift New Rickstones



**Lift New Rickstones** is a vibrant secondary school with a thriving sixth form in Witham, Essex. We're looking for a strategic and ambitious Principal who can inspire ambition, build character, and create opportunity for every student.

You'll lead a high-performing school with a curriculum tailored to every learner, exceptional teaching and pastoral support, and a rich extra-curricular offer. Working closely with our Regional Education Director and central team, you'll shape the future direction of New Rickstones while contributing to the wider Lift Schools network.

Bring vision, drive, and compassion and take this exceptional school into its next chapter of success.

Both roles demand **inspirational leaders** who can develop staff, build a thriving school culture, and secure excellent outcomes for every student.

If you have the **vision, ambition, and drive** to lead a school into its next chapter of success, **apply now and take the next step in your leadership journey.**

[CLICK HERE TO APPLY ➞](#)

# SCHOOLS WEEK

# FE WEEK JOBS

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