

# SCHOOLS WEEK

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## 'DEFINING 'HIGH STAKES' IS FIRST STEP TO LOWERING TENSION'



## HOW GOVERNORS CAN STEP UP TO SEND CHALLENGE



## REVEALED: HOW TEACHERS GRADE OFSTED PLAN



## 6 SIMPLE CODE OF PRACTICE CHANGES TO TRANSFORM SEND

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# SHUT OUT



- Academies' refusal to admit vulnerable kids 'amounts to selection'
- Councils accuse schools of cohort 'caps' to prevent in-year moves
- Trusts issued formal letters after wrongly turning away kids in care
- 'Serious concerns' as Catholic schools shut out looked-after children

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SCHOOLS  
WEEK

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The Labour government's promised school admissions reforms have proved controversial.

But as our special investigation this week shows, there are too many examples of the admissions system not working to just do nothing.

Looked-after children being refused schools. Vulnerable pupils being turned away from schools with space because behaviour needs can't be met. Councils having to issue academies warning letters of further action to ensure they follow admission rules.

This is not a system working well, but one where stretched resources and support are constantly pitting education providers against each other.

Councils are under enormous pressure to find places for children out of school, many of whom wait weeks or months for a suitable setting after difficulties elsewhere.

But that can clash with school heads, who are trying to do the best they can for the pupils they already have.

It leaves many leaders facing an invidious moral quandary: prioritise the learning environment for your current pupils and refuse a place for a youngster with complex

needs, or prioritise a child that has already been marginalised and find a solution for the potential disruption it may cause.

It's a sorry situation, but it's where we are.

Tidying up policies around admission oversight may help. But a bigger solution is needed: one that looks at accountability, inspection, rebuilding support services and, crucially, funding.

Changes are brewing in a lot of these areas.

Ofsted has promised to prioritise inclusion, but this won't pick up and stamp out the practices listed above.

Funding has risen, but it's been sucked up by teacher pay rises and SEND.

And in the meantime, falling rolls have created a new funding storm that could exacerbate many of these problems.

The curriculum review has accountability in its remit, but changes signalled so far are minor.

We will have a much better idea of the school system landscape after autumn. But solutions must be found that move away from leaders trying to do the best for their pupils being pitted against councils that have a responsibility to do the best for the youngsters under their remit.

## Most read online this week:

**1 Ex-DfE civil servant takes up role at SEND contract firm**

**2 Ofsted report cards: the 8 big changes you need to know**

**3 MIS outage leaves schools in the lurch**

**4 Reform on education: All headlines, no policy lines**

**5 Ofsted keeps report cards support (or lack of) secret**

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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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Ofsted reforms: Leaders' union explores industrial action...

FREDDIE WHITTAKER  
@FCDWHITTAKER EXCLUSIVE

The leadership of the NAHT leaders' union is considering whether to ballot members for industrial action over Ofsted reforms.

During an emergency online meeting on Tuesday, almost 2,000 members were asked if they would support exploring industrial options. Eighty-nine per cent voted yes.

The union's ruling executive committee will now consider whether to formally ballot members.

It said the 2,000 members, whose schools are estimated to educate 900,000 pupils between them, "aired serious worries about the planned new system".

"They included concerns that the continued use of crude grading would perpetuate a high-stakes inspection regime. They said this would harm the wellbeing and mental health of themselves and their staff, while failing to offer parents a reliable gauge of schools' effectiveness."

Unions cannot take action directly against inspection reform, but can take it on the grounds



Paul Whiteman

of risk to their members' health and safety or their wellbeing.

The reforms were set in motion following the suicide in 2022 of headteacher Ruth Perry. In 2023, an inquest ruled an Ofsted inspection had contributed to her death.

The response of Sir Martyn Oliver, the chief inspector, has been to propose replacing the current four grades across up to six inspection areas with five grades across up to eight areas, with a further judgment for safeguarding.

The NAHT said members had "expressed concerns that Ofsted and the government appeared to have lost sight of the original rationale for the reforms – the tragic death of Ruth Perry".

Paul Whiteman, its general secretary, said: "This

was the biggest turnout we have had at a meeting of our members since the pandemic, and the strength of feeling was palpable.

"We heard loud and clear that these plans simply do not have the support of the profession and should not go ahead in their current state."

Schools Week understands the NAHT has also updated the terms of its legal challenge against the reforms, which was filed in the High Court earlier this year, following the publication of an independent review of the wellbeing impact of the proposals.

In the report, Sinéad Mc Brearty, the chief executive of the charity Education Support, warned new Ofsted report cards would create more anxiety for leaders with already "concerningly high" stress levels.

Whiteman added: "The worrying findings of Ofsted's own independent wellbeing assessment should have been a red flag, but instead it has rushed ahead regardless, tinkering around the edges while failing to properly work through the recommendations of this assessment.

"We will now liaise with our national executive committee to consider next steps – but we are appealing once again to Ofsted and government to put the brakes on these hugely flawed plans."

Ofsted was approached for comment.

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS | @LYDIACHSW

...while the months of 'tinkering' fall flat with teachers

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| <p>Ofsted's attempts to improve its inspection reforms have fallen flat with teachers as polling reveals the sector feels much the same as when the plans were revealed.</p> <p>Almost 10,000 teachers have given their verdict on Ofsted's finalised reforms, unveiled last week, via polling by Teacher Tapp.</p> <p>Of those who had seen the plans, just 11 per cent felt positive, up one percentage point from February when Ofsted first revealed its plans.</p> <p>Meanwhile, 31 per cent felt "somewhat negative" and 22 per cent "very negative" – a slight improvement from 32 per cent and 25 per cent in February.</p> <p>The majority (37 per cent) felt "neutral", up three percentage points from February.</p> <p>Teacher Tapp said the results were "almost identical" to earlier replies, suggesting "the months Ofsted spent tinkering around were somewhat wasted on teachers".</p> | <p>Teachers were also asked if they felt new-style inspections "will be more fair, clear or accurate".</p> <p>Most (66 per cent) felt the five-tier rating system would make "no difference" to providing a clearer picture of schools.</p> <p>Sixty-nine per cent thought it would make "no difference" to providing a fairer picture of schools, and 71 per cent thought it would make "no difference" in providing a more accurate picture.</p> <p>Teacher Tapp, which also received almost 1,500 written responses, said the verdict was "resoundingly clear: most believe this is a missed opportunity".</p> <p>Far from believing the reforms would reduce pressure on school staff, teachers feared they would "add hugely to workload and stress" and make inspections "even more onerous".</p> <p>Teacher Tapp said the most common reaction "was that the new framework feels</p> | <p>like little more than a cosmetic makeover".</p> <p>One described it as "rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic".</p> <p>The findings come after a snap poll last week showed teachers felt far less positive about the decision to remove single-word headline grades than they did this time last year.</p> <p>More than 6,500 people responded to Ofsted's consultation, including about 4,800 education professionals.</p> <p>But the inspectorate has refused to provide a quantitative breakdown of their responses, instead giving only a narrative summary.</p> <p>Ofsted is also continuing to pilot inspections in 96 schools before they start to be rolled out in November.</p> <p>Schools Week asked if results of these pilots would be published, but Ofsted did not respond.</p> |
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## NEWS: COMPLAINTS

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## Parent engagement expectations and complaints overhaul promised

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

The schools white paper will provide “clear expectations” for schools on their engagement with parents, the education secretary said as she announced an overhaul of complaints and backed planned charity advice for parents on raising concerns.

Bridget Phillipson said the white paper, due this autumn, would include guidance on how parents and schools should interact, and “improve how school complaints are made and resolved”.

The minister also backed work by Parentkind to draw up “shared principles that will support mutual understanding between parents and schools around complaints”.

The charity, which represents parent-teacher associations in England, said it would provide parents with “clear guidance on how to raise concerns with schools”.

This would help them “to understand how to voice concerns” and would be a “vital step towards rebuilding relationships between schools and families, said Jason Elsom, the charity’s chief executive.

Parentkind polling found 13 per cent of parents said they had made two or three formal complaints to their school in the past year. A further 6 per cent complained more than four times.

Forty-two per cent in a school messaging group also said they saw complaints “at least weekly”.

The education secretary said earlier this week that parents needed “an effective route to make their voices heard”.

The “current complaint system isn’t working as well as it could, either for parents or for schools”.

One key concern is that parents target multiple agencies with complaints, sometimes before a school’s formal internal processes have been followed.

The leaders’ union NAHT has warned that “too often schools’ complaints policies are bypassed, with complaints sent to multiple agencies at once ranging from the Department for Education to Ofsted, councils, MPs and the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA)”.

Data obtained from the TRA under the freedom of information act shows how a large rise in public complaints has driven an overall rise in



## ‘Complaints are too often sent to multiple agencies at once’

referrals.

The number from the public – which includes parents – rose from 300 in 2022-23, to 900 in 2023-24, a 200 per cent rise. The number rose again in 2024-25 to 951.

However, of the 951 referrals, 82 per cent were closed with “no further action”. Just three resulted in the banning of a teacher in 2023-24. None did last year.

Overall, the number of referrals rose from 1,019 in 2022-23, to 1,854 in 2024-25, with a 34 per cent rise in referrals from employers, from 518 to 692.

Parentkind’s poll of 2,000 parents in May found that one in four said there had been a breakdown of trust between parents and teachers at their child’s school.

Twenty per cent said they felt headteachers did not welcome contact from parents.

Phillipson’s comments have prompted renewed calls for a single “front door” for complaints once a school’s own processes have been followed.

James Bowen, the NAHT’s assistant general secretary, said the idea of a single portal and a “proper triage system is certainly an option worth exploring further”.

“Ultimately, the key is to reduce the bureaucracy to ensure complaints can be dealt with quickly and smoothly and that schools only have to deal with a complaint once.”

He said AI made it easier for parents to “fire off” long, detailed complaint letters, often creating weeks of unnecessary work for schools.

Matt Wrack, the general secretary of the NASUWT teaching union, said any strategy on improving the current complaints system must address the causes of complaints that lie outside the reasonable control or influence of a school – “which means substantial investment in external services”.

The Confederation of School Trusts said the TRA “should only accept referrals from employers or the police”, and not the public.

Leora Cruddas, its chief executive, said parents “have a right to complain and public services can learn from complaints, but the current situation where we see duplicate complaints made to multiple outside bodies on the same topic is ultimately not helpful to anybody”.

Phillipson said this week that the white paper would “improve how school complaints are made and resolved to make our system more robust and more respectful, more supportive and reassuring”.

It would clarify “roles and responsibilities” so that complaints that schools could not resolve were “dealt with promptly elsewhere”.

The new parental engagement expectations will cover sharing data, supporting home learning and involvement in school life.



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## NEWS: UNIFORM

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# Call for immediate uniform cap made no difference

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

EXCLUSIVE

A last-minute call from the education secretary for schools to immediately introduce limits on school uniforms has fallen on deaf ears, prompting calls for better communication ahead of a national roll-out.

The government's children's wellbeing and schools bill will cap the number of branded items at three or four, including a tie for secondary schools. It is due to come into effect next September.

But Bridget Phillipson angered some heads when she issued a call in late August for schools to implement the cap "right now" to "ease [financial] pressures on families".

However, polling last week by Teacher Tapp shows the proportion of schools that require four or more branded items (not including a tie) remains at 9 per cent for secondary schools and 1 per cent for primaries.

This is the same figure as the past two years.

The data also shows a rise in some individual



branded items required by schools. For instance, 53 per cent of respondents reported their school required a branded jumper, lower than the 59 per cent that said the same in 2021, but up on the 49 per cent reported last year.

The proportion of teachers reporting branded PE kit was needed also rose from 48 to 50 per cent.

Pepe Di'Lasio, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said changing uniform policy "is not a quick process" and involved following existing guidance that included a requirement to consult parents.

"It would not have been feasible for schools to change existing uniform policies in August ahead of the new school term in line with requirements which have not yet come into force.

"While we support the intention of minimising the cost of school uniform, muddled messaging is unhelpful."

He said the national cap "needs to be well-communicated to schools ahead of that date so that they have time to adjust their policies.

"Our view remains that the policy intention would be better realised by capping the total cost of uniforms."

A Department of Education spokesperson said: "Parents have told us they want fewer costly branded items – and that's exactly what we're delivering with the aim of the branded three-item limit coming into force in September 2026.

"Schools can help ease the pressure on families right now by reducing the number of branded items they require."

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INVESTIGATION:  
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# Shut out: how schools are turning away vulnerable pupils

JACK DYSON

@JACKDYDS

EXCLUSIVE

Councils have accused schools of refusing so many challenging pupils it “amounts to selection”, capping cohorts to prevent in-year transfers of vulnerable pupils and wrongly turning away youngsters in care.

Local authorities have reported what they suggest are tactics by schools to skew cohorts to the admissions watchdog as part of annual reports, obtained under freedom of information laws by Schools Week.

The reports detail:

- Schools increasingly refusing in-year transfers of challenging pupils. In Blackpool, an inclusion review has been launched over the practice the council says “amounts to selection”
- Councils issuing formal letters to academies they say wrongly refused to admit vulnerable youngsters in care
- Schools accused of “capping” their cohort numbers for years 8 to 11 – causing “turbulence and pressure” for neighbouring schools forced to take in “disproportionate” numbers of children with complex needs

Councils say the problems are leaving more youngsters with complex needs waiting longer for a school place.

But sector leaders say they are being asked to admit so many challenging pupils that it could jeopardise pupil safety, and argue the issues are a consequence of ever-worsening finances and an accountability regime that “disincentivises” inclusion.

Meanwhile, councils also stand accused of not understanding their place planning responsibilities, with some authorities failing to provide evidence supporting their claims.

## Refusals ‘amount to selection’

Problems relating to in-year school moves involving own admission authorities were “raised



## ‘The selective citing of one element of the admissions code to refuse entry must be stopped’

by most, if not all, local authorities”, the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) revealed in its annual report for 2023-24.

Schools Week has now obtained each council’s full submission to the watchdog.

Several flagged schools with available places regularly refusing to admit challenging pupils outside the normal admission rounds of reception and year 7.

Schools can refuse to offer a place in-year if they believe the child’s behaviour is so challenging it would “interfere with other pupils’ education or jeopardise the right of staff and pupils to a safe and orderly environment”.

But Blackpool accused some academy trusts of citing the refusal so much it “amount[s] to selection”. The area’s secondaries are all academies.

The council said “some are regularly refusing available places for individual children on grounds of prejudice”, with “no specific details” given.

The authority told the OSA that the “selective citing of one element of the [school admissions]

code” to refuse in-year applications “be stopped” to “prevent growing selection by citing prejudice for some in-year applicants based on previous behaviour whilst others are offered places”.

In all, Blackpool’s secondaries refused 52 applications during 2023-24.

A breakdown, obtained through freedom of information, showed Highfield Leadership Academy accounted for more than half (28) of those.

Star Academies, which runs the school, said rejections were because of “significant behaviour concerns” as these “pupils had been suspended multiple times from their previous schools and had already taken part in behaviour improvement placements... which unfortunately did not succeed”.

The trust also said it had accepted 86 applications for pupils to join in-year over the same period – way more than were refused.

The South Shore Academy made 16 (31 per cent) refusals over the same period. The Bright Futures Educational Trust, which ran the school at the

Continued on next page

## INVESTIGATION: ADMISSIONS



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time, said it “co-operated fully” with admissions arrangements and the “joint arrangements with other trusts across the town”.

## Admissions ‘friction’

But a spokesperson for Blackpool council said the refusals were “disproportionate” and led to inconsistencies in how places for “children with complex needs” were allocated. It had also created “friction” between trusts.

The four trusts that run the area’s secondaries are now “liaising about the situation” after refusal figures were sent “to facilitate discussions”, the authority added.

Blackpool warned that if an agreement was “not possible, the council would likely refer all future cases” to the schools adjudicator.

But Star said Highfield was “one of only two under-subscribed secondaries” in Blackpool, meaning it got a “disproportionate number of in-year transfer requests”.

“While we are committed to inclusion, expecting a small number of schools to admit all vulnerable pupils — regardless of capacity or context — is neither equitable nor sustainable. It risks undermining the very support systems these pupils need.”

Blackpool has now appointed an external consultant to lead a “review into inclusion across the town”. It will also “revise and re-issue the local fair access protocol”, which “manages the admission of challenging children outside of normal” points of entry.

In addition, a new “memorandum of understanding will underpin the principles of fair practice and adherence to local agreements regarding admissions”.

Star said last year it refused ten of 93 in-year applications which “reflects improved collaboration with partner schools and the use of off-site directions, which allow pupils to be educated at alternative settings while remaining on roll at their original school”.

Richard Sheriff, CEO of Red Kite Learning Trust, said councils are under “enormous pressure” to find “so many children placements”.

But sometimes this is “at odds” with schools — whose priorities are “to run a good school, survive the next Ofsted inspection. They both want the best for children, but have different and



## ‘Expecting a small number of schools to admit all vulnerable pupils is neither equitable nor sustainable’

competing priorities.”

He also added this has “all become worse” with financially enforced cutbacks.

“Some of the flexibility we had to accommodate in-year admissions has disappeared. Schools are more likely to push back because they don’t feel they have the capacity to cope with the additional pressures of extra children coming in mid-year.”

## Children in care refused places

Many councils reported more schools refusing in-year applications.

In Suffolk, in-year refusals of children deemed to have challenging behaviour rose to 62 in 2023-24, up from 33 the year before.

Pupils refused places have to enter fair access panels to identify a school place. But these can take months to resolve, with the OSA reporting more children who were out of school for at least four weeks referred.

Norfolk also said it had seen “an increase in the number of schools refusing to admit” looked-after children “at first request”.

Non-faith schools cannot cite the behaviour

exemption for these pupils, but some “did not always understand they are required to admit”, the council added. However, it would not provide further details.

The East Riding of Yorkshire council also noted “significant delays” in finding places for looked-after children in “some Hull and Bradford academy secondary schools”.

The council would not name the schools, saying there was “no lawful basis for the disclosure” or “no wider requirement or pressing need for transparency”.

Meanwhile, Nottingham has had to send five formal letters threatening further action to academies that refused places for looked-after children.

Councils have no powers to direct an academy to admit a pupil — instead they must ask the secretary of state to intervene.

Helen Frost-Briggs, the executive headteacher of John Flamsteed in Derby and one of the schools receiving a letter, said it adheres “to all local and statutory admission protocols”.

The other four schools did not respond.

In Leeds, council officers have also expressed concern that the government now asks to see a child’s care plan whenever a request to direction

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## INVESTIGATION: ADMISSIONS

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admission to an academy is made.

This is “irrelevant and intrusive” to pupils in care and “may not support the admission code process to achieve a swift admission for a child with the highest priority”, the council said.

More than 100 local authorities found the in-year admissions to secondary schools overall had become more challenging in 2023-24, up from 72 the year before.

Pepe Di'Iasio, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said it was “important local authorities and schools work well together over admissions”.

But everyone was “under pressure because of lack of funding, and multiple expectations from every direction. It is likely that these factors play a role when problems arise.”

### Admission ‘caps’

Finding youngsters places through fair access panels is disrupted by schools “capping” their cohort numbers for year groups outside the normal point of entry, councils said.

The OSA said councils had “described difficulties caused by schools choosing to reorganise their class structure... to address financial issues, resulting in fewer pupil places”.

Suffolk said “several” secondaries had decided to operate above their year 7 published admission numbers (PANs). But, from September, they “revert back to their determined” admission number, which, among other things, will “minimise in-year” moves.

This was because the schools were “more likely” to refuse moves on the grounds “the admission of another child would prejudice the provision of efficient education or ... use of resources”.

The council said there “does not appear to be any justification for this when the school will have staffed and organised for the number of students they initially agreed they could take”.

The authority named three schools responsible for this in 2023-24. Two are part of the Hartismere Family of Schools, which allocated up to 55 places over PAN.

The trust did not respond to our requests for comment.

Surrey named 54 schools that used this approach this year, 20 of them local authority-maintained. Of the 34 academies, six were run by GLF



Pepe Di'Iasio



## ‘Everyone is under pressure because of a lack of funding and multiple expectations from every direction’

Schools.

A trust spokesperson said it “refuse[s] to compromise on the quality of education we offer, and so will occasionally implement caps to year groups where we do not have sufficient staffing capacity to accommodate additional pupils”.

Dan Morrow, the chief executive of the Cornwall Education Learning Trust, said such limits were also put in place to keep schools from falling into deficit.

A “number of local authority schools have funded deficits ... [which are] propping their class structures up”, allowing them to take on more pupils in-year.

### Refusing schools ‘cause turbulence’

But Suffolk said the practice could lead to “turbulence and pressure” in neighbouring schools forced to admit a “disproportionate” number of such children.

Blackburn with Darwen council reported “significant challenge” caused, in part, by “some schools reducing their admission number” for years 8 to 11.

It said schools have



Dan Morrow

had to “make difficult choices” because of the “challenging financial climate”. But it had “discussed the ongoing reduced capacity issues” at Aldridge Education trust, which runs four schools in the area, with the DfE.

Figures obtained through FOI show admission numbers across two of the MAT’s schools were up to 66 places lower than their original PAN.

An Aldridge spokesperson said it had “a responsibility to manage resources carefully and ensure value for money”, with decisions on class structures based “on exiting and expected student numbers, staffing and budget planning”.

The trust “continue[s] to work closely” with the council and DfE “to support in-year admissions and fair access placements, ensuring all students are placed appropriately and supported effectively”.

Central Bedfordshire said caps could create “a lack of school places in areas of need and have transport implications for the authority”.

In Somerset, 90 children who had moved to the area had to go through fair access panels because most were in Taunton where all four secondaries were at capacity for “all year groups with the exception of year 7”.

Two “reduced their admission, making them full” and did so again for 2024-25, the council said.

The authority said in some cases limits “are reduced by only a very small number” that

Continued on next page



## INVESTIGATION: ADMISSIONS



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have “no effect” on resources. This made it think “this is purely for the purpose of being able to refuse applications”.

Blackdown Education Partnership, which runs Castle School in Taunton, said it was “over its PAN” in every year group and had more pupils than its published capacity. But it “can’t continue to admit over PAN”. The school is working with Somerset to “find a solution to the excessive demand”.

The other schools did not respond to request for comments.

## Council ‘misconceptions’

Morrow argued that “no one wants to not allow children to be admitted, but we are funded on pupil numbers. A number of us have changed our models to accommodate falling rolls in a way that’s strategic and planned. [Admission teams] holding us to PANs which are then out of date becomes really counter-productive.”

Samira Sadeghi, the Confederation of School Trusts’ director of governance, said there were a “number of misconceptions held by local authority staff about how school places operate”.

The OSA has even criticised councils for “erroneously referring to the PAN in year groups other than the normal years of entry or to ‘working PANs’, a term which ... has no basis in law”.

Adjudicators have determined “that seeking to apply an admission number to any year group other than the normal year of entry ... is contrary to the [admissions] code”.

Councils have called for admission limits to be set to other year groups “to enable in-year admissions to function more effectively”. But the OSA said it could not support this unless the admission code was changed.

Councils raised other concerns in their statutory annual admission reports, but were unwilling to evidence their claims.

Haringey pointed to “anecdotal evidence” of so-called “cherry picking”. Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole council reported “a number” of academies “will not offer places to children for whom there is no information regarding behaviour at previous schools available”.



Jon Andrews

## The national admission trends

**33** DIRECTIONS ISSUED TO SCHOOLS FOR CHILDREN IN CARE, UP FROM 31

**36** DIRECTIONS ISSUED FOR CHILDREN NOT IN CARE, UP FROM 28

**79** COUNCILS SAY IN-YEAR ADMISSIONS ‘MORE CHALLENGING’, UP FROM 52 IN 2022-23

**30** COUNCILS SAY ADMISSIONS ‘MUCH MORE CHALLENGING’, UP FROM 20

Source: Office of the Schools Adjudicator annual report 2023-24

Others insist on families visiting their schools for a meeting before offering them a place, despite the authority advising them “these practices are not compliant with the school admissions code”.

And in Suffolk, authority chiefs are “seeing a growing number of parents/carers who apply for a primary school place, claiming to be ‘refused’ verbally rather than in writing”. But the councils refused to provide further information.

## Will school bill plans solve problems?

Jon Andrews, of the Education Policy Institute, said some of Labour’s proposals under the schools bill “may go some way to address some of these issues”.

The introduction of a single unique identifier for all children and a compulsory register for those not in school would mean that pupils who “are missing out will be identified”.

Meanwhile, the government is also planning to give councils the power to direct academies to admit a pupil to ensure unplaced and vulnerable children secure a school place quickly.

A new duty for schools and councils to co-operate on admissions will be introduced, with the education secretary able to “intervene” if relations break down.

Baroness Amanda Spielman, the former chief inspector, speaking in the House of Lords on Tuesday, said: “There is an obvious incentive for local authorities to use this power to offload the most difficult children.”

This would “leave academies to shoulder a

disproportionate responsibility for the most difficult and even dangerous children, and to inflict the greatest risk on the other children and staff in those academies”.

However, Jacqui Smith, the skills minister, said the move would enable councils to “reduce delays in securing vulnerable children a school place”.

Currently, it takes 38 days for the secretary of state to decide on an admissions direction for an academy.

“That is a long time for a vulnerable child to be without a school place,” she said.

Under Labour’s plans, the DfE’s regional directors will also be able to issue compliance orders where academies are not meeting or “acting unreasonably” in relation to their legal duties, including over admissions.

But Sadeghi said academy trusts and councils “generally work closely together on school admissions”. She pointed to findings in the OSA’s report showing “a very strong consensus that the annual admission rounds work well”.

Despite this, Carl Cullinane of the Sutton Trust said Labour’s changes could be “transformational in tackling segregation ... and making admissions more inclusive”. Currently, this was “left to the goodwill of individual school and MAT leaders ... to take the lead”.

“These are tentative steps, we want to see the government take bold strides ... with a school accountability system that reduces disincentives to do so.”

However, Mark Boylan, a Sheffield Hallam University professor of education, said small changes to a school’s intake could make “quite a big difference to Progress 8 scores. You can’t really try and put right admissions policy unless you address accountability measures.” ■

## INVESTIGATION: ADMISSIONS



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# 'Serious concerns' as children in care refused places at Catholic schools

**JACK DYSON**

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

A council has raised "serious concerns" over Catholic schools lowering the importance of looked-after children in admissions after a youngster in care was refused a place at the school deemed "most appropriate" by their social worker.

A Schools Week investigation has also found council leaders in another area having to threaten Catholic schools with admission directions to get places for children in care.

Admissions rules state all oversubscribed schools must give looked-after children the highest priority. But those with a faith designation can prioritise religion instead.

Schools Week analysis suggests schools in at least seven dioceses now give priority to children of their faith before non-religious pupils in care.

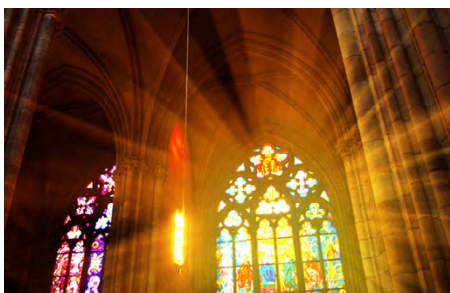
In many of these, youngsters in care have been relegated to the fourth priority band, which normally spans a list of six to eight.

### 'Serious concerns'

In a report lodged with the schools adjudicator last year, obtained by Schools Week, Bristol council revealed "for the first time a child in care did not secure [their] first-choice school".

It blamed this on "the faith-related admissions criteria" that placed youngsters in care "at a lower priority than those not in care but of a specific faith".

An admission appeal "was unsuccessful", leaving the child "unable to attend the most appropriate school for them".



The council said it had raised the case with the Catholic Diocese of Clifton as a "situation of vulnerability and concern".

Christine Townsend, chair of the authority's children and young people policy committee, added this involved "expressing our serious concerns".

However, the diocese said it had not been approached by the council. Its schools "welcome and support children from all backgrounds, including those who are looked after or have previously been looked after", a spokesperson said.

### 'Creates further uncertainty'

Salford Council told the admissions watchdog that faith schools were the "main difficulty" for children in care admissions. Catholic schools often prioritised children of faith, which left looked-after children not of faith "unable to access these schools".

Virtual heads – who champion the needs of children in care – were forced to "pursue conversations" with leaders, including "potentially direction in order to get those pupils admitted", said the council's annual admissions report published last year.

The situation "creates further uncertainty for these vulnerable young people when all their peers have

confirmed school places".

Research published by the charity Humanists UK five years ago found 41 per cent of all state secondaries of a religious character "discriminate against children who are or were in care not of their faith". Ninety-two per cent were Catholic.

Schools Week's checks of diocese admission arrangements showed that while seven prioritised just Catholic children in care, five did give equal priority. Admission documents for the other dioceses could not be located.

### 'Localised but persistent problem'

The Office of the Schools Adjudicator, the admissions watchdog, said a "small number of local authorities" had raised the issue, describing it as a "localised problem, but a persistent one".

Andrew Copson, of Humanists UK, said: "Religious state schools are funded by the taxpayer and they should be subject to the same admissions as every other school."

Haringey council in London called for the admissions code to be revised so looked-after children had better access to high-performing faith schools.

But speaking in the House of Lords, Jacqui Smith, the skills minister, said the government had no plans to change the rules.

Faith schools' ability "to prioritise children of faith when they are oversubscribed" was "important", she said.

A spokesperson for the Catholic Education Service said "all schools can prioritise pupils according to criteria agreed in law when oversubscribed". However, falling rolls meant this was "rarely necessary".

JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS

## Primaries struggling to admit asylum-seekers

Primary schools that have scaled back their rolls because of plunging pupil numbers cannot now take in asylum-seekers, a council has warned.

Meanwhile, another local authority said it was becoming "increasingly difficult to accommodate families in certain year groups" after it was taken by surprise by influxes of asylum-seekers and NHS staff from overseas.

Micon Metcalfe, a school funding expert, said: "This highlights the education system only has so much [financial] flex. This is indicative of the lack of any real offer in terms of funding in the system."

A report submitted to the admissions watchdog

detailed how York experienced challenges finding in-year school places for asylum-seekers from its "contingency hotel" and families moving into the area from other parts of the UK.

Falling rolls meant primaries had already "reduced their school organisation ... [and] in-year place sufficiency", leaving them "unable to afford to create additional classes for so few potential pupils".

The report noted families moving into the hotel "are now large" with a "number of school-age children". The accommodation was originally earmarked for "couples or small family groups".

It described the "pressure" caused by those

moving into the building as "difficult to manage".

Blackpool said it had not forecast increased demand for places from asylum-seekers and refugees, and families moving into the area from overseas to work in the health service. It was "increasingly difficult" to accommodate families, particularly at primary.

The Office of the Schools Adjudicator said it was "commonly reported" that increases in migration had pushed up cases considered through fair access.

Fair access referrals rose from 40 in 2020-21 to more than 350 in one authority in 2023-24.



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## Row over Ofsted's new 'high-quality' research checks

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

EXCLUSIVE

Ofsted has been accused of "mission creep" after it emerged new inspections will mark down teacher training providers that allow the use of "discredited" research – with the watchdog refusing to say what studies would fall into this category.

Initial teacher education (ITE) providers will be judged across five evaluation areas using a five-grade system once Ofsted inspections resume in January under its new framework.

Ofsted's toolkit says they will be graded "urgent improvement" – the lowest grade – under the "curriculum, teaching and training" evaluation area if a "lack of critical engagement with high-quality, relevant research means trainees' use of discredited research is not tackled effectively".

But providers wonder how Ofsted will decide what is "discredited" or "high-quality".

"It is not Ofsted's role, or within its area of expertise, to decide what research findings are legitimate or discredited", said James Noble-Rogers, the executive director of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET).

"Ofsted should only be looking at whether providers are meeting the requirements, and not making subjective judgments about the quality or robustness of particular pieces of research."



Rory Gribbell

## 'Mission creep'

David Spendlove, a professor of education at the University of Manchester, said the new Ofsted framework "further strips providers of agency".

Inspectors passing judgment on research was "mission creep" into territory where they "don't... have sufficient expertise".

"This very much points to the previous government's culture wars, which hopefully we have moved on from."

Under the last government, the Department for Education implemented the controversial 2021 ITT market review, requiring ITE providers to re-apply for accreditation.

It was criticised as being driven by a desire for increased control of course content. The government adviser who led on the changes, Rory Gribbell, is now Ofsted's director of strategy.

Spendlove also pointed out Ofsted's own use of research "has been challenged on numerous occasions".

He cited Ofsted's 2021 mathematics review which faced calls for withdrawal after academics said it widely misused research it referenced.

Dr Christian Bokhove, professor in mathematics education at the University of Southampton, also doubts "whether Ofsted would safeguard well enough" what is discredited or high-quality.

"Maybe they have a whole department of experienced researchers, but if not, I think there is a risk that certain research is prioritised."

## Calls for clarity

Meanwhile, Dr Jasper Green, head of ITE at the UCL Institute of Education, argued critical engagement with "diverse" research was key to allowing beginner teachers to cultivate "professional judgment".

"I hope that rather than compiling lists of 'red flags', this framework is about evaluating how well a programme educates teachers about the qualities of research that may make one piece of scholarship better for a particular purpose than another."

Annie Gouldsworthy, director of ITT at King Edward's Consortium, urged Ofsted to provide "objective definition and clarity" on what it deemed discredited.

"You would struggle to find a single teacher educator who would not applaud an informed, rational approach to the use of evidence-based practice," she said.

"What no provider wants to see are arbitrary or subjective judgments influencing an inspection process."

But Ofsted would not provide *Schools Week* any examples of 'discredited' research.

A spokesperson only said they expected inspectors "to consider the extent to which an ITE curriculum is informed by high-quality, relevant research."

"This may include a range of academic and subject specific research, which provides trainees with the knowledge and understanding of effective teaching, including current educational thinking."

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS | @LYDIACHSW

## Ofsted's AI notetaking doesn't make the grade

Ofsted inspectors have trialled using AI to save them time while taking notes during inspections, but the watchdog has decided against any wider rollout for now.

The inspectorate's first foray into using AI was brought to light in an independent report it commissioned on the impact its revised framework could have on teacher and leader wellbeing.

The "wellbeing impact assessment", led by Sinéad Mc Brearty, the chief executive of Education Support, and published last week, said: "Whilst there are plans to provide support to inspectors through the introduction of AI tools, the initial usage of these proved clunky during visit observations."

*Schools Week* asked Ofsted for more information, including the size of the pilot and what it involved, but it refused to share any details.

A spokesperson said: "Like most organisations, we're interested in how AI can best support our work."

"However, we don't have any plans to introduce AI tools in support of inspections when we start inspecting under the renewed framework in November."

It is understood the trial involved inspectors using tools intended to help make note-taking easier.

Other public workers such as doctors and social workers have adopted AI note-taking

tools as a way of cutting down on paperwork.

But Ofsted felt the tools created more work, rather than streamline inspections, *Schools Week* understands.

Matt Newman, the national officer representing Ofsted at the FDA, said the union's HMI members "look forward to embracing new technologies to enhance the quality of inspection and make better use of their time".

But he added: "The FDA understands that whilst the intention is for Ofsted to utilise these digital tools in the longer term, feedback from HMI suggests that the technology would require further work to maximise its potential."

# Job cuts loom as money worries dominate trust challenges

RUTH LUCAS  
@RUTHLUCAS\_

Financial sustainability remains the top priority and greatest challenge for England's academy trust leaders, with more than half considering cuts to classroom staff to balance their books, a new survey has found.

In its fourth annual poll, the Confederation of School Trusts (CST) surveyed 390 chief executives of trusts with between two and more than 20 schools.

The report, alongside another published by the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) on Friday, found finances are the main challenges for leaders, with falling pupil rolls exacerbating problems.

Leora Cruddas, the confederation's chief executive, said: "Improving education on behalf of children is the mission that drives us forward, but that work depends on the same things as any large organisation: funding, people, and our ways of working."

Here's what we've learnt from the survey.

## 1. Job cuts loom amid sustainability worries

Financial sustainability is the number one priority – and the most challenging – for chief executives this year.

More than four in five said budget challenges are the biggest barriers to delivering their priorities, way ahead of SEND provision (64 per cent). Growth is now less of a priority (falling from 52 per cent last year to 38 per cent), but developing a digital strategy is growing quickly.

Sixty per cent are considering cuts to classroom staff to balance their books. An NFER survey of 350 school leaders also found falling pupil rolls had prompted 41 per cent of primary and 58 per cent of secondary leaders to cut teaching staff.

But the CST found cutbacks at trust level are less likely. Just a fifth of those surveyed are planning a reduction in trust support or leadership roles.



## 2. Falling roll concerns mount

The number of CEOs reporting that falling rolls are a barrier to achieving their priorities has risen from 40 per cent last year to 45 per cent now.

Similarly, the NFER found 20 per cent of primary leaders and 10 per cent of secondary leaders have explored or are considering exploring merges with other schools. More than half (53 per cent) of primary school leaders said they have reduced extracurricular activities or out-of-class interventions.

Fifty-three per cent of bosses said falling rolls are the most immediate risk to trust financial sustainability, followed by SEND costs (46 per cent) and teaching staff costs (37 per cent).

Recruitment and retention worries have plunged from 54 per cent in 2023 to just 19 per cent this year.

While 60 per cent of chief executives said they expect their trust to open or add schools, 15 per cent expect to merge (one in seven), and 5 per cent envisage closing or removing schools.

## 3. SEND provision remains a concern

Inclusion and SEND provision have remained a concern.

Funding and resources emerged as the top challenges (86 per cent of CEOs), followed by coordinating support with external agencies and services (55 per cent), and staffing (35 per cent).

## 4. Attendance policies updated – but not impactful

Some 68 per cent of trust leaders said they have updated attendance policies, but when asked what has been the most impactful, only 3 per cent referenced policy changes.

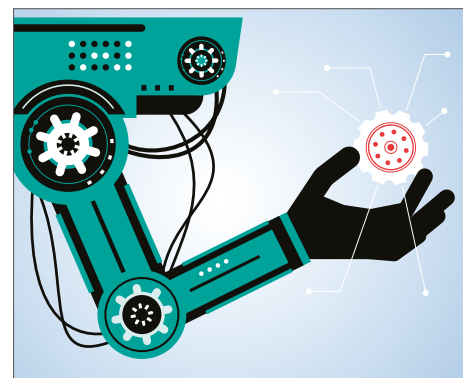
Thirty-one per cent said targeted interventions for at-risk pupils are the most impactful activity, followed by monitoring and tracking (23 per cent) and incentives for parents to get involved (21 per cent).

## 5. AI use on the rise

Twice as many trusts reported pilots and experiments with artificial intelligence compared with last year (33 to 66 per cent).

More are also creating policies on the use of AI in administration and teaching and by pupils.

More CEOs wanted to focus on technology, data and IT infrastructure over the next academic year, up from 53 per cent last year to 68 per cent this year.



The leaders of larger trusts were found to be almost four times as likely to be focusing on environmental sustainability compared with smaller trusts.

## 6. School and staff improvements

More trust leaders said they wanted to focus on staff development compared with last year, rising from 60 to 68 per cent.

More also wanted to build school improvement capacity (54 to 57 per cent) and school leadership support (46 to 53 per cent).



## EXPLAINER: SEND

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# What MPs' SEND solution report says for schools

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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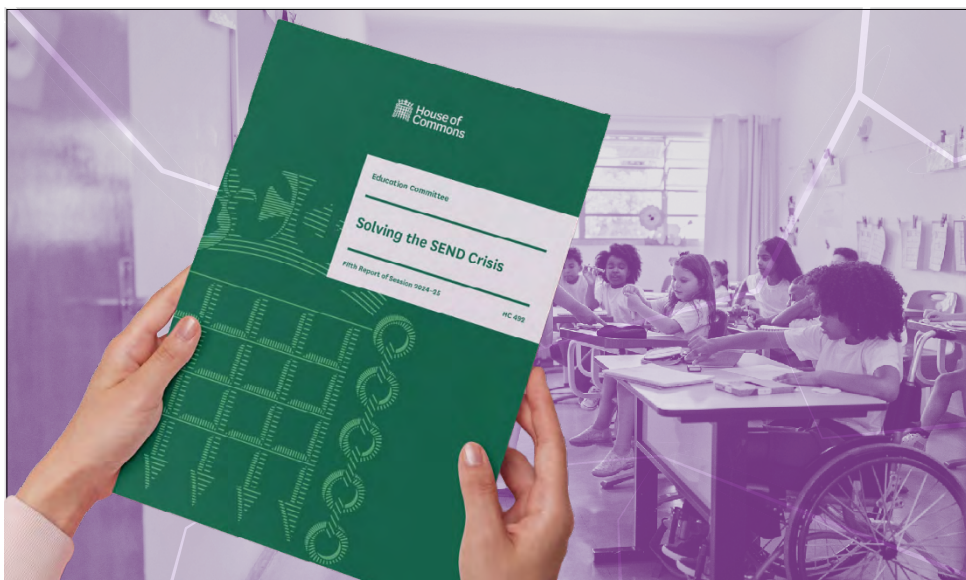
The education committee has published its 209-page plan to fix the broken SEND system. A report, published this week, calls for a "root and branch transformation", with the government set to publish the reforms later this term. Here's a round-up of the most important school-related policy proposals.

## Inclusive mainstream: Define it, publish national standards

- Establish national standards and expectations for ordinarily available provision and SEN support
- Publish statutory requirements mandating the minimum resources, specialist expertise, and equipment that every educational setting must have access to as a part of their offer of SEN support
- Publish a definition of inclusive education and rationale for this vision within the next three months
- Set out a detailed implementation plan if proposals proceed to expand the use of resource bases to increase specialist provision within mainstream schools. Mandatory standards of good practice should also be published

## Funding: Boost notional funding, wipe deficits, review formula

- Urgently assess the funding required to implement meaningful SEND reforms. Publish a plan for how this investment will be delivered in the short and medium term
- Uprate the current £6,000 notional funding threshold automatically each year in line with inflation to prevent further erosion of support for pupils with SEND
- Undertake a rigorous cost-benefit analysis to understand the short and long-term economic benefits of investing in a fully inclusive education system
- Redirect a greater share of high-needs funding towards early identification and support within mainstream settings and through multi-agency services
- Urgently review the national funding formula to ensure funding is allocated fairly



## 'Root and branch transformation is needed'

and reflects the real level of need across the country

- Resetting local authority finances through a partial write-off of SEND-related deficits could provide a necessary step towards long-term stability, but the approach must support improvement while ensuring accountability
- Develop and implement a comprehensive SEND capital investment strategy
- Expand specialist SEND provision by investing in high-quality specialist state schools and mainstream resource bases and other mainstream provision

## EHCPs: Increase accountability, don't revoke rights

- Provide support as soon as a need is identified, rather than only once an EHC plan is in place
- No withdrawal of statutory entitlements for children, instead increase accountability across the whole of the system
- Strengthen the ability of local authorities to meet their obligations under EHCPs by ensuring that the necessary levers are in place to compel other services, for example, NHS services and commissioners

## Workforce: Mandatory SEND training and qualifications for heads

- Make it mandatory to appoint governors or trustees with specific responsibility for and relevant expertise (including lived experience) of SEND
- Significantly improve cross-departmental coordination with the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England to establish clear, consistent accountability for SEND at the integrated care board level
- Extend SEND tribunal powers so they can issue binding recommendations to health services, not just education providers
- Implement a continuous review and update cycle for the teacher training and the early career frameworks to keep training relevant and effective. Explore the idea of mandating every teacher to complete a placement in a specialist setting
- Provide comprehensive training within ITT and clear guidance for schools, multi-academy trusts and education staff on delivering inclusive education practice
- SEND continuing professional development should be made mandatory to ensure that all educators are equipped to meet the diverse

## EXPLAINER: SEND

needs of children and young people with SEND

- In the short-term, mandate that at least one member of the senior leadership team in every school and every trust holds SENCO qualifications
- Publish guidance on appropriate SENCO-to-pupil ratios and develop a national strategy to ensure these ratios are achieved consistently
- Within four years, introduce a requirement for all new headteachers to hold a SEND-specific qualification
- Local authority staff require improved training on child development, SEND law, parent engagement and mediation, alongside changes in practice that strengthen accountability and foster more constructive relationships
- The DfE and DHSC should urgently develop a joint SEND workforce plan to address shortages and build capacity across education, health, and care services
- Set out how to deliver, over time, a system in which highly skilled professionals, including educational psychologists and speech and language therapists, are less tied up in undertaking assessments and writing reports and more effectively deployed in delivering the support children need

### Accountability: Inspect Ofsted inclusion criteria, judge schools on SEND pupil numbers

- Urgently engage with Ofsted to ensure that the inclusion criterion within the new inspection framework is robust, measurable, and reflective of the experiences of all pupils, particularly, those with SEND
- Incorporate metrics in inspections such as the proportion of pupils with SEND on roll, their attendance rates, exclusion figures, school swaps, progression and attainment and other indicators of engagement and outcomes
- Introduce mandatory, comprehensive SEND training for all Ofsted inspectors
- Extend the powers of the local government ombudsman to cover complaints about the delivery of EHC plans, SEN support and other appropriate inclusive education for children with SEND in schools, multi-academy trusts and other education settings
- Monitor SEND tribunal outcomes and identify local authorities that repeatedly fail



## 'SEND training should be mandatory for all Ofsted inspect'

- to comply with their statutory duties
- The outcomes of SEND tribunal cases must be factored into area SEND inspections, with clear scrutiny of how repeated non-compliance reflects the quality and effectiveness of local provision. Where local authorities fail to uphold their statutory duties, this should directly lower their inspection rating

### Early intervention: SEND screening in family hubs

- Ensure Best Start family hubs incorporate routine SEND screening and awareness as a core part of their early years services, supported by targeted training for staff and childcare providers to enhance early identification
- Embed the commitment for every Best Start family hub to have a dedicated SENCO within the SEND workforce strategy and extend to educational psychologists and speech and language therapists

### Health: A NICE for SEND and school healthcare responsibility rules

- SEND should be identified as a priority across the health system and ongoing NHS restructuring must be used as an opportunity to strengthen the role and accountability of health services in

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supporting children and young people

- Bringing education and health more closely together should be supported by an evidence-led approach, drawing on the role of NICE to produce new SEND guidelines and intervention pathways
- investment from the health sector to meet statutory duties, provide timely access to therapies and assessments, and contribute equitably to joint commissioning arrangements
- The DfE and the DHSC should issue joint statutory guidance clarifying how and when healthcare responsibilities can safely be delegated in schools and multi-academy trusts
- The DHSC must urgently appoint a dedicated national SEND lead to drive accountability and coordination across the health system
- Place a clear statutory duty on health services, including ICBs and NHS providers, to ensure their full and accountable participation in the planning, commissioning, and delivery of SEND provision

### Parents: 'Fully engage' with families on any reforms

- Parents and carers must be fully engaged and any reforms that must be implemented gradually and in a carefully phased manner. New approaches should first be piloted through a pathfinder model, allowing for thorough testing in real-world settings before national rollout

### Best practice: Top SEND school 'centre of excellences'

- As part of the expansion of specialist SEND, the highest-performing state specialist schools should be designated as centres of excellence and play a leading role in supporting the development of expertise across other schools, local authorities or multi-academy trusts
- Monitor and report on an annual basis on the number of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools, in specialist independent schools and specialist state schools
- Create a national SEND data strategy that requires local authorities and education settings to collect and report standardised, high-quality data on levels of need, current provision, capacity, and projected demand

# Pupil wellbeing checks ‘counterproductive’, says Spielman

RUTH LUCAS  
[@RUTHLUCAS\\_](#)

The former chief inspector says national wellbeing checks on pupils could worsen children’s mental health and make them “start to believe they are sad or worried”.

Amanda Spielman opposed an amendment to the children’s wellbeing and schools bill, currently before the House of Lords, which called for collecting national data on children’s mental health and wellbeing.

Lord Gus O’Donnell, who tabled the amendment, cited a PISA survey that showed British 15-year-olds have the lowest rate of wellbeing in Europe.

“We should be ashamed. We should be thinking about what interventions are going to make a difference...but we will never know unless we do something about measurement to assess whether they work,” he said.

According to NHS data, about one in five children and young people aged 8 to 25 had a probable mental disorder in 2023.

Long-term harmful impacts

However, Spielman, who served as chief inspector from 2017 to 2023, said: “If we do not want measurement processes in themselves to harm children, we should not collect data by constantly asking children who are not unwell about their well-being, and especially about their negative emotions”.

A government trial on wellbeing interventions in schools published this year found four out of



Amanda Spielman

five tested led to “adverse” or “negative” effects on some pupils.

The trial, which involved 12,166 pupils across 153 schools, suggested interventions had a positive impact on children’s emotional difficulties in the short term, but had a more negative impact in the long term.

Referencing this, Spielman said she had seen “so many dreadful examples in schools” where “you can see the change; they [children] start to believe they are sad or worried or afraid, where this has not even occurred to them”.

Spielman also disagreed with proposals tabled by Baroness Claire Tyler for a mental health practitioner in every school.

“There is a growing recognition that spending too much time talking about mental illness to young people who are not ill can be counterproductive,” Spielman said. “We may need less mental health awareness training in schools, not more.”

But Baroness Natalie Bennett said: “If we measure only the exam results, that is what we are going to judge our schools on. That is what ... has got us into this position.”

Ofsted was heavily criticised during Spielman’s tenure over the impact of inspections on school leaders.

A coroner’s report into the suicide of headteacher Ruth Perry in 2023 found “very easily that Ruth’s mental health deterioration and death was likely contributed to by the Ofsted inspection”.

Spielman said she took wellbeing “very seriously”. In response to Bennett, she said she “wouldn’t ever suggest that academic outcomes were the only thing that mattered for children”.

Measuring has ‘immense value’

Jacqui Smith, the skills minister, said about 60 per cent of schools already used wellbeing measurements, which had been of “immense value”.

“We do not agree that a centrally administered survey, costing millions of pounds a year over this spending review, is necessarily the right way forward”, she said.

“We believe in measurement, but for schools to choose to measure, it is important that the tools they use is relevant to them and they can be assured that results will not be used for accountability in an overly simplistic way.”

Both amendments were removed.

Recent YouGov polling suggests 66 per cent of parents consider pupil wellbeing important when choosing a secondary school, above school location (62 per cent), facilities (61 per cent), school culture and ethos (56 per cent), Ofsted rating (52 per cent) and exam results (43 per cent).

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | [@FCDWHITTAKER](#)

## Private schools face another funding whack

The government is “considering options” for Ofsted to recover more money from the private schools it inspects, with the watchdog currently subsidising two thirds of the costs.

The prospect of extra charges comes after the government started charging VAT on private school fees and removed the sector’s exemption from business rates.

While most of the biggest private schools are inspected by the Independent School Inspectorate (ISI), Ofsted inspects about 1,250 “non-association” independent schools.

These tend to be smaller private schools, with Ofsted charging between £2,000 and

£2,750.

But government data shows that last year, just £2.2 million of the £6.5 million cost of the inspections were recovered in fees.

Stephen Morgan, a former early education minister, said that policy stipulated that costs associated with inspections by government bodies should be recoverable. “This will reduce the need for government subsidy. The government is considering options to close the gap.”

The DfE would not say what options were under consideration.

Fees would rise to between £3,320 and

£4,565 if the schools had to fully fund inspections. ISI schools are charged up to £20,000.

A spokesperson for the Independent Schools Association, which represents some non-association schools, said they were “more than covering their costs to the country’s finances by passing VAT on to the government.

“Add to that increased national insurance contributions, the ending of business rates relief for schools with charitable status as well as general tax, including tax on purchases, the net contribution to the UK economy from our schools is vastly positive.”



## NEWS

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# Capacity checkers launch primary school visits

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Capacity checkers will visit state-funded primary schools to assess how many pupils can be taught and the space available for breakfast clubs.

Ministers are rolling out the four-year "net capacity assessment" programme into primaries after a "successful" phase one that collected data on secondary and special school capacity.

Between now and 2029, officials from the government's Valuation Office Agency will measure and record room types to calculate how many pupils a primary school can accommodate.

These reports are then shared with schools, councils, dioceses and academy trusts about four months later.

The government aims to visit more than 600 schools before Christmas.

The Department for Education said the assessments ensure better use of space, aid curriculum planning, and provide accurate information to inform the development of policies such as the government's breakfast clubs.

It can also identify spare capacity where demand for places is high and provides independent verification for admissions and appeals.

Last year, 16 per cent of primary schools were at

or over capacity, down from a high of 23 per cent in 2016-17.

However, government data shows that 12.3 per cent of primary school places were unfilled in 2023-24, with falling rolls impacting schools across the country.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of school leaders' union NAHT, said the drive for improved accuracy was "positive, but the government needs to think carefully about how it intends to use any spare capacity".

He added: "A nuanced approach is required... because capacity varies hugely across different regions and sectors, with some primaries struggling with lack of numbers but others – in areas of intense house building, for example – over-subscribed."

The DfE needed to "empower and resource local authorities to utilise the capacity data gathered to establish the right type of provision to meet pupil needs in the right places", he argued.

The early tranches of capacity checks will focus on schools where up-to-date information is "most important".

This will include areas where demand is highest, and some early adopters of the breakfast clubs. Councils can also nominate priority schools.

The DfE said it carried out pilot visits during the

summer to identify "good practice", including how to "make the best use of schools' valuable time".

Officials will measure any school buildings on site, other buildings used by a school for at least 80 per cent of the week, circulation space and open-plan areas.

They will also measure areas such as special education needs resource units, but will not include these in their capacity calculation.

It "expects" the data to "inform a discussion between the responsible body and the local authority regarding what would be an appropriate figure to report" in a separate school capacity survey collected by the DfE.

The department may ask for an "explanation" if the figure is different to its capacity assessment, but does "accept that there can occasionally be circumstances where this is appropriate".

A previous pilot assessment of 200 mainstream schools found 6,000 potential extra places.

It comes after a Schools Week investigation exposed how the DfE previously did not collect capacity data for special schools, which instead fell to councils.

But new figures published earlier this year now show approximately 8,000 more secondary pupils on-roll in special schools than reported capacity.



RUTH LUCAS | @RUTHLUCAS\_

## Ex-OCR boss Duffy joins Ofqual board

Former chief executive of exam board OCR Jill Duffy is among four new appointments to the Ofqual board, the Department for Education has announced.

Another newcomer is Conor Ryan – who also serves on the board of Oak National Academy alongside Ofqual's chief executive Sir Ian Bauckham.

Duffy stood down from OCR earlier this year after seven years at the helm. Her declared interests show she is also a governor of Oxford Brookes University.

Ofqual regulates exam boards and fined OCR twice in 2018. OCR paid out £175,000 over an incorrect question about Romeo and Juliet on a GCSE English literature paper that affected nearly 3,000 pupils.



Jill Duffy

It shelled out another £125,000 after partial answers to GCSE computing exam questions were found in textbooks it had endorsed.

Ryan is a member of the Labour party and was a special adviser to Tony Blair's government.

The other new appointments are Kurt Hintz, interim principal and CEO of Petroc College, and Andrea Rigamonti, the former CFO at

Videndum PLC.

They will both serve from October, while Ryan will serve from November and Duffy from January.

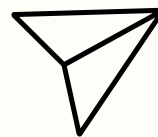
The appointments last for three years and board members are paid £9,000 per annum for around 20 days' work.

Six existing Ofqual board members were also reappointed earlier this year.

They included Chris Paterson, acting co-CEO of Education Endowment Foundation and a trustee at Ormiston Academies Trust, Cindy Leslie, who holds various trustee positions, and Hardip Begol who is a board member at Oak National Academy and trustee of the Education Policy Institute.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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



## Letter of the week



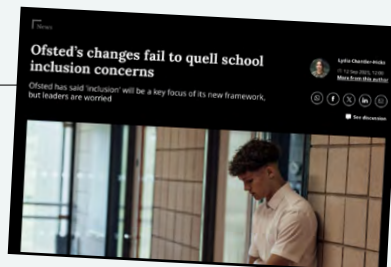
I hope I am not alone in feeling ashamed to read that leaders believe schools will be tempted to exclude pupils who are unlikely to make the grades to support the highest 'achievement' judgment of the new inspection framework.

([Ofsted's changes fail to quell school inclusion concerns](#), 12 September)

We have truly created a monster. Politicians, professionals and indeed journalists should be enraged at the very sentiment, let alone the fact that it has been true for decades.

Predictably, we're now ganging up on Martyn Oliver for a less-than-perfect framework instead of facing up to the truth that he is introducing it into an education landscape that has seen its value base eroded over many years by political pressure and populist policies.

Campaigners for greater inclusion like Thomas



Keaney at TCES (no exclusions in 25 years) are not alone in demanding real change. I have worked with many who demonstrate great integrity but are consistently thwarted by a narrow definition of success.

At least inclusion is now a key part of that definition. We can finally value it, applaud it, and perhaps require a little less 'courage' from leaders in delivering it!

**Kevin Parker, Education leadership consultant, Andover**

So Ofsted are not publishing in detail the comments made by respondents to their so-called second "consultation". ([Ofsted keeps report cards support \(or lack of\) secret](#), 12 September) What a surprise!

We created the Alternative Big Listen and the Alternative Big Consultation specifically because we were concerned that they would prevaricate and obfuscate. We were right to be worried.

Ofsted's decision shows a lack of respect to those who responded. Worse, it throws into question its stated ambition to be transparent in its efforts to extract itself from the serious crisis of confidence after the death of Ruth Perry.

It's hard not to see more of the same

organisational arrogance that was evident in the coroner's report, the subsequent, damning review conducted by Dame Christine Gilbert and a third report conducted by the education select committee.

Unlike Ofsted, we read and published all of the written comments to our two surveys. They provided a very strong indication of the level of disquiet about Ofsted's approach. They are all available for scrutiny on our website.

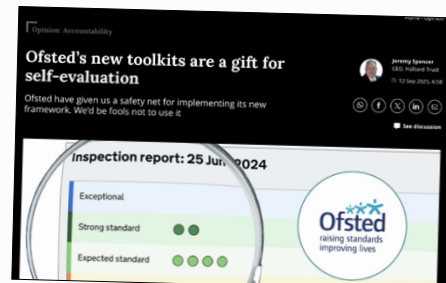
The multitude of comments made to Ofsted are not. Why not? Does that question even require answering?

**Colin Richards and Frank Norris, Co-founders, The Alternative Big Listen**

Some parents might well need support to encourage their children to attend school, ([Top trust boss backs 'absence awareness courses' for parents](#), 8 September) but given the rise of home-schooling, exclusions, suspensions and more, it seems to me schools and trusts should be questioning whether their curriculum, culture and values truly support the communities they provide education for.

Focusing on attendance is convenient for education leaders because parents are easy targets, but the truth is that the education system is broken. What it could really do with are some accountability and inclusion awareness courses for heads and trust CEOs.

**Veronica Walker, Parent, Dorset**



Jeremy Spencer would seem to suggest that each new Ofsted framework should be taken as the new gospel of educational quality ([Ofsted's new toolkits are a gift for self-evaluation](#), 12 September). He even describes those who look elsewhere for such defining insights as 'dangerously rebellious'.

I fear I must be counted among that number, but for very good reasons.

As a trust leader, I needed a compelling vision and notions of quality that were more enduring, more evidence-based and more contextually relevant than Ofsted criteria ever were.

There is benefit in cross-referencing third-party checklists for critical self-review. When those lists change (as Ofsted's often do), the new and old criteria continue to have value in this 'MOT' process.

Equally, school leaders owe it to their colleagues and communities to have a good understanding of external accountability frameworks.

But securing a favourable judgment from inspectors cannot ever be a sufficient motivation for a thriving school.

It matters more to consider enduring ethics, to develop effective evidence-informed practice, to be efficient in the use of time and resources, and to ensure schooling is, for all involved, fundamentally enjoyable.

Is that really the manifesto of a dangerous rebel?

**Dr Robin Bevan, Former headteacher, CEO and NEU president**

Send your letters here:

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SCHOOL  
SPOTLIGHT

RUTH LUCAS | @RUTHLUCAS\_



# It's in their nature

Schools are now expected to have a climate action plan and a sustainability lead. So as climate expectations increase, what lessons can be learnt from a trust that has prioritised sustainability for seven years? Ruth Lucas visits Bradford to find out

Jenn Plews recalls being on a farm for a trust away-day when she set upon making climate change a key priority following a discussion with trustees.

"It's an absolute given that our job is to improve educational outcomes for our children in all its guises," the Northern Star Academies Trust CEO says.

"But as a corporate entity, a multi-academy trust, we had a lot of discussions that year on what's the difference that we're actually making?"

"Climate change and environment, it was just so obvious to us. It wasn't something that we plucked out of thin air, it was just a natural

synergy with the work of the headteachers and trust at the time."

## Trust-wide climate strategy

The trust started to develop a climate change strategy in 2018. It has held them in good stead for new government expectations, introduced this month, for all schools to have a climate action plan and nominated sustainability lead.

Since 2020, 'sustain' has been one of the core tenants of the trust's wider strategy, along with 'nurture', 'aspire' and 'thrive'.

Across its 15 schools, this translates into things like focusing on strengthening children's

understanding and appreciation of nature, or drilling into each school's carbon consumption.

The strategy includes a 2030 climate change strategy which pledges to encourage "new and groundbreaking educational initiatives addressing climate change" and "use our experience, influence and relationships within the education sector as an active force of good".

An example is children from two of the trust's schools, Victoria Primary School and Eastwood Community School in Keighley, being surveyed by academics from Bishop's University, in Canada, and Leeds Trinity University.

The study, published last week, found that art





Left to right: Jenn Plews (CEO), Paul Booth (Head of Byron) and Jane Dark (Head of Victoria and Denholme Primary)

and philosophy-based interventions can help reduce children's anxieties around climate change.

### A climate curriculum

"It was quite an eye-opener, realising that children are quite anxious about climate change, that it is their future it's going to affect," executive head of Victoria Primary Jane Dark says.

She noticed children raising concerns about how the climate is impacting on their favourite animals like polar bears and penguins, the rise of extreme weather at home and in hotter climates where relatives live.

The school has weaved climate change education throughout its curriculum.

English lessons involve writing a persuasive letter to the CEO of McDonald's regarding its deforestation for beef farming. Geography includes children going outdoors to test levels of sewage pollution and its impact on river health. For science, classes take on allotment projects, designing seasonal planting schemes and researching native species.

"It comes into every subject so naturally, you've just got to spend a bit of time reflecting on how," Dark says.

### Widen the funding net

While school funding is tight, the trust has secured grants from both within and outside education.

At Byron Primary, £800,000 from the Department for Education's 'resilience schools



Left to right: Aahil Hussai, Samad Ahmed, Zarrien Gul Iqbal, Ayla Saqib make up Byron Primary School's eco team

## 'Children are quite anxious about climate change'

project' has helped transform the inner-city Bradford school.

Hundreds of trees have been planted, formerly derelict areas cleaned up and allotments and herb gardens created.

"If you walk 100 yards that way, we're on one of the busiest streets of Bradford," Paul Booth, the school's head says, "but here, we could be anywhere."

Inside, the whole school has energy-efficient LED lighting and solar panels on the roof.

Zarrien, Samad, Ayla and Aahil, members of the school's eco club, proudly show off the transformation of the school building during my visit.

But Plews also won funding from the Department for Food and Rural Affairs in 2022 after noticing a "chink" of opportunity in the department's 'farming and protected landscape funding'.

The cash has funded nearly 5,000 pupils to visit the Nidderdale National Landscape area and



elsewhere in the Yorkshire Dales.

Booth recalls that his inner-city pupils questioned 'is this even England?', despite the trips being "just an hour up the road".

### Climate focus's 'harmonious' side-effect

Plews adds: "Children, particularly with autism and ADHD, have found the experience life-changing. Children who would be selective mutes or find it very difficult to communicate have had





Daryll Tudball, site manager of Byron Primary

these experiences and it's helped them."

Closer to home, leaders have noticed the new environments of their schools are having a positive impact on kids, who themselves describe the spaces as "serene" and "joyful".

Bradford is ranked as the fifth most income-deprived and sixth most employment-deprived local authority area in England, with 40 per cent of children living below the poverty line.

According to West Yorkshire Police, the city has a crime rate 175 per cent higher than the UK average.

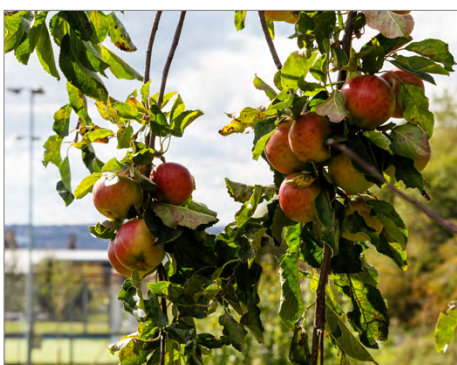
Showing off the green spaces at Byron Primary, Plews adds: "It's all about freedom. They can run. You can't run in any urban Bradford streets, with all those threats and risks."

Booth agrees. "Some days you walk up there, and it is really silent – all you can hear is the bees or butterflies. It's just a different environment to what they're getting at home, which also helps their mental wellbeing. We describe it as being like a harmony."

Parents are also taking notice.

The trust's schools that grow their own food also now sell it to their communities, either from mini-fridges or fully-fledged grocery shops.

Dark, who has led on the projects, says: "When you really start to think deeply about it [sustainability] as an agenda, it just feeds into all our education, into all our community work, into



Byron's outdoor spaces have been transformed over the past year with help from the DfE's Resilient Schools Project

## 'It is really silent – all you can hear is the bees'

solving some of the big problems we've got in our communities today".

Plews adds the focus also goes "hand in hand with everything we believe in terms of inclusive mainstream education, what we need to be doing for all our children, specifically the most vulnerable and disadvantaged".

### Leadership 'at every level'

Given competing pressures on schools, Plews says leadership is key to continue driving the agenda.

Trustees, who Plews is accountable to, have been appointed for their sustainability expertise. That includes Professor Leigh Hoath, who leads science education at Leeds Trinity University and is the co-founder of a curriculum climate change organisation.

Meanwhile, trustees are held to account by the 'next generation board', made up of pupils from each school. They speak at the start of every board meeting to keep the "thread of pupil voice in the trustees' minds".

"If you're going to enact long-lasting change,

there has to be strong leadership behind it. That's something that for us, I'd like to think we've got right," Plews adds.

"I'm held to account on this by the board of trustees. The government are not telling our board to do that. It's not in the academy handbook."

And the future?

Plews speaks with excitement about her idea of creating an alternative provision for children with social, mental and emotional health needs, inspired by the impact climate-focused education has had on such pupils.

She also wants to pair each school in the trust with a local river or canal, to continue the trust's work connecting climate change to the local environment.

### Want to feature in the School Spotlight?

Are you pioneering brilliant ideas to solve the biggest issues? We're hunting for schools and trusts leading the way – and ready to share their secrets.

Fire over a few bullet points about what you're doing to [john.dickens@schoolsweek.co.uk](mailto:john.dickens@schoolsweek.co.uk)







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### SEPTEMBER 2025

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 9 | 12:15 pm – 1:15 pm  
**Data Protection and Privacy Law Update:  
The Data (Use and Access) Act 2025**  
Trevor Fenton



Online

FREE

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



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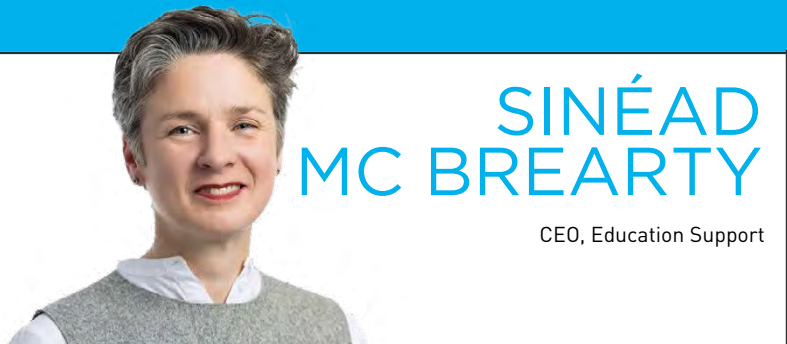


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Opinion

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SINÉAD  
MC BREARTY  
CEO, Education Support

We can't lower 'high stakes' until we define it

If we want to dismantle the causes of school leaders' wellbeing and mental health issues, we must start by naming them clearly, explains Sinéad Mc Brearty

I've been troubled by the impact of the high stakes associated with school inspection on our school leaders since I became CEO of Education Support in 2019. To this day, a large proportion of those who turn to us for help are in significant distress because of it.

In the year to March 2025, we supported over 850 educators who were clinically assessed as at risk of suicide, and many thousands more who were struggling with wellbeing and mental health issues.

We also provided professional supervision to over 900 school leaders, among whom inspections were a significant source of stress and anxiety.

The anxiety is driven by two factors. First, leaders are concerned they will be on the receiving end of inspector bias. Second, and most importantly, they are understandably fearful of the consequences of a disappointing inspection outcome.

School leaders tell me they worry an adverse judgment could mean they lose their livelihoods, that their school could lose its ability to attract pupils or staff, or that their

setting could be forced to undergo structural interventions.

These consequences are the high stakes of inspection. It's important that we're clear on the meaning of these stakes, so we can work on dismantling them without affecting school standards.

In a wellbeing impact assessment of the Ofsted framework, I proposed a starting definition of these stakes in the hope that we can achieve clarity on what it is we need to change.

My hope is that colleagues across the sector will amend it, improve it, and that we can eventually coalesce around a shared definition that supports meaningful change.

Calling for the removal or lowering of high stakes is not a call for an easy ride or a lowering of standards. School leaders want and expect to be held to account, and most hold themselves to extremely high standards. Achieving great outcomes for children and young people is their core purpose.

However, the stress generated by such high stakes is counterproductive. It distracts school leaders from their most important work: educating children and young people.

High stakes drive unnecessary workload among leaders who, entirely rationally, want to avoid the cataclysmic consequences of a disappointing inspection. This is



Excessive focus on compliance doesn't benefit anyone

effort that could otherwise be spent on frontline activity that makes a real impact on the community.

It's hard to see how excessive focus on compliance benefits the school, its pupils, staff or parents and carers.

Of course, the inspection system should address poor or complacent practice. Leaders of schools and trusts who are not working well for their communities should be worried about inspection. There are countless cases where inspections have catalysed meaningful change in underperforming settings.

We mustn't lose sight of this, but equally we can no longer sustain the culture of fear that distorts the focus of school leaders.

High stakes do not drive high standards; they only drive stress and workload. Our children and young people deserve energised leaders in their schools, focused solely on their core purpose.

It is time for the government to act to improve the system. We can, and must, do better in pursuit of a high-performing education system that breaks down barriers to opportunity for everyone.

Defining the high stakes of accountability

- Loss of control:** structural intervention where a maintained school is required to become an academy, or, an existing academy is transferred to an alternative trust.
  - Job/career loss:** Trust boards or school governors may terminate the employment of a Headteacher or other staff. In this sense, an Ofsted judgement is used by employers as a performance management tool.
  - Financial strain:** Parents/carers may choose to move their child to an alternative setting, following a disappointing judgement. Falling pupil numbers lead to a drop in funding and a commensurate degradation of in-school provision. This can ultimately mean that schools cease to be financially viable and tip into a vicious cycle of restructuring and redundancy, reduction of provision and/or reduction of pupil roll.
  - Workforce strain:** It tends to be more difficult for schools with a poor Ofsted report to recruit and/or retain qualified staff. This makes it ever harder for them to improve.
- Source: *Independent wellbeing impact assessment of the revised Ofsted framework*, Sinéad Mc Brearty, 2025

## Opinion

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## DR DARREN PAFFEY

MP for Southampton Itchen  
and member of the  
education select committee

## Schools need flexibility to respond to their communities' challenges

**The death of a young constituent is a powerful reminder that the curriculum must also prepare young people to navigate their environments, writes Darren Paffey**

As the autumn publication of its final review nears, there is a palpable optimism arising from the government's curriculum and assessment review.

It comes at a pivotal time, as the new national curriculum will shape the educational experiences of more young people than its predecessor. Academies, which have had a significant amount of latitude in this respect, will now be required to follow it.

This will ensure that all children have a strong and consistent core at the heart of their education, but this greater reach does of course mean that it's more important than ever that we get it right.

To do so, one of the most pressing priorities must be to restore breadth and balance to the curriculum. The (perhaps well-meaning) prioritisation of international league table positions became obsessive and misguided under the previous government, and this came at the cost of limiting young

people's engagement with the enriching opportunities provided by the arts, music and languages.

We must address this unfortunate narrowing and the factors that have driven it if we are to make learning inspiring for everyone and provide opportunities for all children to achieve and thrive.

But getting the curriculum right involves more than just fixing the wrongs of the past. It's also about making sure that it acts as a bridge between the worlds of childhood and adulthood, teaching our young people the skills and knowledge they need to be able to navigate the modern world safely and successfully as grown-ups.

Now it is the case, as the interim curriculum and assessment review notes, that our children's learning needs to reflect fast-moving technological and other changes and to provide them with the knowledge they need to be ready for work. But it needs to do more than that: it also needs to be preparing them to live.

This is not just about transforming lives but potentially about saving them too. For example, I recently spoke in Parliament and led a debate on improving water safety education in schools. I did this following the tragic death of a young constituent who had been



“ Curriculum is also about potentially saving lives

enjoying a day out at the beach when he was taken by a rip tide.

At least in coastal constituencies like mine, I want children to learn how to be safely near and on the water as a core and compulsory part of their education. In other constituencies, there will be other vital practical knowledge and skills for keep young people safe in their environments.

Rightly, when adding to the curriculum is raised, so too is the issue of our already overworked teachers and over-loaded curriculum. I agree, but any curriculum review worth its salt should be looking at the whole offer in the round and asking whether its goals are best achieved by the existing content and assessments. In doing so, we should be prepared for the answer to be 'no'.

So part of the solution involves not just looking at what's in the national curriculum, but also at ensuring that schools have the time, flexibility and capacity to be more responsive to their communities'

needs, whether this is teaching water safety, financial literacy, outdoor safety or any of the other myriad topics that will help their young people to learn, and to grow, safely.

Whether the answer is ensuring that schools can adapt the curriculum to the local context, or easing the pressure from so many high-stakes examinations, it's important to look not just at what we're teaching as part of the curriculum, but how it sits alongside the other things that create a rounded school experience.

I hope Bridget Phillipson and her recently refreshed team of education ministers will get this right and not be afraid to ask tough questions and make the right decisions.

Ultimately, this government's mission is to break down barriers to opportunity, and this is just about the greatest opportunity we can offer young people: an education that empowers them to live long and enriching lives.



## Opinion

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BENEDICTE YUE

Chief financial officer,  
River Learning Trust



DR PETER GRAY

Co-coordinator, SEN Policy  
Research Forum



## SEND funding must align with the government's inclusive vision

**Our reactive, deficit model of need is matched by our reactive funding model and budget deficits. Both need to change, write Benedicte Yue and Peter Gray**

**T**he crisis in special needs (SEND) relentlessly dominates headlines. Despite a doubling in investment since 2014 (the high-needs budget is reaching £12 billion in 2025-26), outcomes for children with SEND haven't improved and the system is on the brink of bankruptcy.

But this crisis is also an extraordinary opportunity to reimagine inclusion, not as a bolt-on policy, but at the heart of our vision for education. This requires a funding system designed to support a universal offer, not to fix a problem.

To do this, we must shift to a "social model" where support is readily available without requiring a formal label or diagnosis, recognising that inclusive education is simply excellent education, not something separate.

This requires a very different approach to funding. Our current funding model incentivises the opposite of what we want from our schools. It is a reactive, deficit-driven system that rewards failure and penalises success.

That's because funding is largely tied to individual pupils through education, health and care plans

(EHCPs), leading to an overwhelmed, bureaucratic and adversarial system where specialists' precious time is consumed by paperwork instead of frontline support.

Pressures on core school funding over recent years have further increased demands on the high-needs block to access additional support, giving the illusion of an open-ended budget.

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education research backs this up, showing that where funding is linked to individual pupils, it can paradoxically lead to less inclusion, more labelling, rising costs and segregation.

Pupil-bound budgets are no longer manageable when almost half of the school population has some form of label at some stage. Instead, financing mechanisms should support a universal design approach from the outset.

It is not about funding a problem that needs to be fixed, but about funding a fully resourced education system that meets all learners' needs.

This would mean increasing the core funding for schools to support a universal offer, while recognising that some pupils may require additional funding and support beyond what the ordinary offer can provide. It should also encourage more opportunities to bring specialist expertise into mainstream provision.

International research and



“ **The current system rewards failure and penalises success** ”

emerging practice in England point towards more effective and sustainable hybrid funding models that shift the focus from individual pupils to greater collective responsibility.

One promising model involves school clusters, where groups of schools collectively receive high-needs funding and make decisions without reliance on EHCPs, fostering peer support and equitable resource allocation while being more dynamic and tailored to local contexts.

But reforming SEND funding should not be seen in isolation. It will be crucial to do so as part of strategically sequencing reforms.

As outlined in Benedicte's recent paper for the Institute of School Business Leadership, funding is just one part of an ecosystem of interrelated factors that include workforce, specialist support, curriculum, assessment, accountability, infrastructure and integrated local provision.

Reform should start with a clear national vision alongside clarified expectations, building capacity, ensuring greater consistency and quality, and increasing school funding.

This is essential to restore

parental confidence and must precede any alterations to EHCPs or accountability frameworks. Indeed, a reduction in new EHCPs would come as a natural result of an improved system.

In the meantime, parents must retain the crucial safeguard of initiating a needs assessment for an EHCP in cases of significant disagreement, ensuring a vital backstop in the system. This shift is not about cutting support but about improving the quality of education for all.

While initial investment is crucial for building capacity, significant long-term savings will come through a rebalanced, less adversarial system. It will also ensure greater budget stability, allowing longer term investment in the workforce and proactive early intervention.

Inclusive education should stop being viewed as a cost to be managed, but as a foundational, long-term investment that yields significant educational, economic and social benefits.

**Read the full report, *The special educational needs crisis in England: Challenges, drivers, and possible ways forward* [here](#)**

# SEND Solutions

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US [NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK)

## LONG READ

### Six changes Labour must make to the SEND code of practice

With a SEND white paper due this autumn, six professionals offer simple legislative changes they say would revolutionise inclusion in practice

#### Start preparing for adulthood earlier

Jude Macdonald,  
director of inclusion,  
Keys Academies Trust



'Preparing for adulthood' permeates the current SEND code of practice, but outcomes and focus on this area only start as a requirement from year 9. This is far too late.

Aspirational and realistic conversations should start in settings from the moment SEND is identified if we are to safeguard our learners and prepare them for life beyond the school gates.

For example, the duty to provide reasonable adjustments in the workplace relies on employees requesting them. We must give all learners the confidence to recognise and ask for adjustments as part of their learning journey. Year 9 is too late to embed this.

In addition, every tutorial session and assembly with a theme relevant to preparing for adulthood (eg. knife crime and exploitation) must be adapted and delivered to SEND learners in a way they can access, if we are to prepare them for life in modern Britain.

#### Redefine the S in SEND

Brenda Keirnan, education  
director, Forming Connections  
and inclusion advisory teacher,  
Derbyshire County  
Council



In education, precision matters and so does the language we use. The acronym SEND is part of our shared vocabulary, so it should stay, but 'special' can feel vague and, at times, suggest a child is "less than" their peers. Replacing it with 'specific' is a critical change.

Working with pupils with specific needs beyond high-quality or adaptive teaching, they need targeted and/or specialist approaches tailored to their individual needs.

The first part of any graduated response is to assess need and either adapt, intervene or support, so we are talking about specific challenges, adjustments and provision.

This isn't about labels; it's about clarity. Changing one word can move us from stigma to understanding, and from assumption to action.

“ Replacing 'special' with 'specific' is a critical change



“ One word can move us from stigma to understanding

#### Set teachers up for success, not failure

Chris Lefcovitch,  
head of ALS  
and SENCO, MK  
College Group



Too many early-career teachers (ECTs) say they are not or don't feel prepared for their classrooms. Training in SEND can no longer be treated as a bolt-on session. It must be woven through every aspect of training and repeatedly emphasised until it's normalised.

Only then will teachers become equipped to meet their duty under section 1.24 of the code of practice, which states that high-quality, inclusive teaching is the foundation for SEND provision.

SEN cannot be an afterthought. It needs to be an integral, constant thread in preparing teachers for the inclusive classrooms they will inevitably be required to work in, and is even more important given the government's clear drive to reform SEND on the basis of more

inclusive mainstream settings.

But even well-prepared teachers can't be expected to deliver their best in an ambiguous context.

Because only a small percentage of the current code of practice refers to 'must' and leaves the rest open to interpretation, schools operate amid localised thresholds and views on ordinarily available provision that lead to postcode variations and confusion.

Many schools receive pupils from more than one local authority and end up having to work differently for each. Meanwhile, inconsistencies arise for professionals and parents who are trying to access support and meet local requirements that are markedly beyond the law.

High-needs funding, consultation processes and Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs) often require an entirely unique approach based on what local authority is involved.

A centralised, person-centred approach full of finite detail and clarity would be revolutionary.

Continued on next page



## SEND Solutions

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## LONG READ

### Clarify the curriculum for those with complex needs

Vicky Wells, SENDCo,  
Nova Primary Academy



Mainstream schools have worked exceptionally hard to manage a national rise in complex needs that predate the SEND code of practice.

This month, Nova will admit 15 pupils with EHCPs into its early years provision, taking us to nearly 10 per cent of our cohort with such plans (against a national average of 3.5 per cent). Half of our school's pupils are eligible for pupil premium, and we operate a 12-place enhanced resource provision for deaf children.

This increase in need has led us to review and make significant and relevant changes to our SEND policy and practices to ensure we can adapt to meet the growing need, very little of which is reflected in the current guidance within the code of practice.

Specifically, the section of the code relating to 'curriculum' (6.12) needs to be a focus. There needs to be much more guidance and training on how mainstream schools can consistently adapt their curriculum provision for learners with complex needs.

To ensure every school plays its part in a more inclusive

“  
**Too many SENDCos remain isolated from decisions**



“ **‘Should’ implies guidance rather than obligation**

system, the law should clearly communicate expectations about accommodations and staff development.

### Mandate SENDCos on leadership teams

Anonymous independent school  
SENDCo (with Jude Macdonald)



The code of practice states that SENDCos 'should' be part of school leadership teams. This should be rephrased to 'must'. Too often, SENDCos are excluded from strategic decision-making, not only massively devaluing the role but directly affecting the

children who are nominally their responsibility.

Too many SENDCos remain isolated from decisions about curriculum, assessment, and school systems and processes, when involving them in the planning stage is not only crucial in getting support right first time but in preventing more (and more complex) workload later.

In addition, significant variation in SENDCo pay scales and working conditions lead to disparities in workload. Reducing directed time for SENDCos increases the level of whole-school support for SEND learners through coaching, team teaching, developing ordinarily-available provision, identification and quality assurance.

### Make a graduated approach the norm

Charlotte Ims, SEND  
lead, Thomas Deacon  
Education Trust



The code of practice currently states that schools *should* have a clear approach to identifying and responding to SEN (Section 6.14). This implies guidance rather than obligation. To ensure consistency and accountability, this is another 'should' that ought to become a 'must', thereby embedding the graduated approach as a statutory requirement.

Supported by targeted training, adequate funding and cross-agency collaboration, this would enable more children's needs to be met within ordinarily-available provision, reducing reliance on specialist placements and the number of requests for EHCNAs.

From November, Ofsted's new inspection framework will make inclusion a core priority, with a heavy emphasis on SEND and disadvantaged children. Schools have evidence from the EEF that high-quality teaching is foundational to inclusive classrooms. Now, they need a code of practice that supports them in delivering it.

Clarifying and making the graduated approach within the code a statutory obligation would help distinguish between pupils needing targeted support and those requiring catch-up or keep-up interventions. The Assess-Plan-Do-Review (APDR) cycle, central to the graduated approach, ensures that support is responsive and evidence-based.

## Solutions

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DR GITANJALI  
BHATTACHARYA

Director, Lumina Tutoring

## Five routes to inclusive learning that will help children in care

**The specific challenges children in care present to schools are far from insurmountable, writes Gitanjali Bhattacharya. Here's how to make a start**

Creating an educational environment where every child can thrive is challenging enough. For children in care with frequent school moves and common issues with trauma and mental health, these challenges can sometimes seem insurmountable. It needn't be this way.

Here are five practical, inexpensive and time-efficient ways that leaders can create a whole-school culture of inclusion for this vulnerable cohort.

### Be consistent with care awareness

As with most professional development, what makes the biggest difference isn't usually the one-off, full-day course but a steady drip-feed of awareness raising, built into the rhythm of school life.

Short 15 to 30-minute slots during staff inductions and CPD, framed in the same way as safeguarding refresher sessions, will keep the essentials of trauma-informed practice alive and remind all staff how language, consistency and predictable routines support children in care.

Revisiting the core ideas regularly and making care awareness part of the annual calendar means it stops feeling like an expensive bolt-on

and a specialist knowledge. Instead, it becomes an accessible part of the professional grammar of teaching.

### Support your designated teacher(s)

Every school with children in care is required to have an assigned designated teacher (DT). An excellent DT combines strong knowledge of statutory duties with empathy, advocacy and the ability to embed trauma-informed, high-expectation practice across the whole school.

The role naturally draws in capable, committed staff, but demands are significant. DTs often shoulder extra responsibilities on top of their core workload, and it's easy for goodwill to tip into overload.

Schools that build in timetable remission, provide dedicated time and establish clear reporting lines make it possible for the role to be carried out well. Importantly, when senior leaders show visible support and recognition, it signals to the whole school that the DT's work matters, further facilitating their impact.

### Build a network of trusted adults

Having a DT in place is essential, but depending on a single relationship can sometimes leave children in care exposed if things shift or break down. Many schools already do this instinctively, but it's worth being intentional about creating a small circle of trusted adults.

Two or three people who can



“ Small but deliberate steps send a powerful message

provide consistency and support are ideal. These don't need to be formal roles; often it's the approachable member of support staff, the caretaker who always says hello or the teaching assistant who takes time to listen.

What matters here is presence, stability and genuine care rather than a detailed grasp of policy, though some brief training in active listening can help significantly.

### Be authentic in building relationships

That's because strong relationships are the foundation of inclusive education. Taking the time to connect beyond the classroom with a simple 'How's your day?' or noticing small successes like punctuality builds trust and signals to a child that they are seen and valued.

Teachers don't need to overshare or have lived care experience. Being aware of a child's context and approaching interactions with empathy will make a huge difference.

Embedding one-to-one time, modelling inclusive language and normalising diverse family experiences (single parents, foster carers, extended family) all help

children feel understood. Offering tailored support and celebrating small wins will also reinforce positive outcomes.

### See behaviours through the lens of inclusion

Children in care often respond to trauma in ways that can look like defiance. In the heat of the moment, even the most experienced teacher can react in ways that exacerbate situations and deepen feelings of rejection.

A helpful approach to address this is to regularly review policies on behaviour, uniform and attendance with an eye to making adjustments where pupils might struggle. Understanding the 'why' behind an action matters: a missing tie or blazer may be a matter of affordability, not defiance.

When policies are framed with empathy, staff can better respond in ways that support rather than punish.

Inclusiveness isn't about costly programmes or sweeping reforms. When schools take small but deliberate steps, they send a powerful message that every child matters and has the chance to thrive. This is especially important for young people in care.



# THE BOARDROOM LEADER

The governance view on education's top priorities



## Boards must step up to the SEND challenge – here's how

**Charlotte Harding**

Chair of trustees,  
Lykos MAT and Director  
of professional  
development, NGA



**Our trust has put SEND at the heart of its boardroom decision-making and it's having a transformative impact on inclusion, writes Charlotte Harding**

The National Governance Association's (NGA) 2025 annual survey of over three thousand governors and trustees delivers a stark message: even schools with robust SEND systems are struggling. As a result, effective governance of SEND has never been more critical.

SEND has surged up the list of governors' and trustees' biggest challenges. Just 24 per cent of respondents placed it among their top three challenges in 2023. This year, it's 63 per cent.

The data reveals a perfect storm of challenges: SEND funding pressures are exacerbating the stark budgetary situation facing many schools and trusts, while driving some local authorities to the brink of bankruptcy.

Two-thirds of boards (67 per cent) report difficulties obtaining Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), and 61 per cent reported struggling to engage effectively with local authorities and support services.

In this context, SEND governance cannot be an afterthought. As chair of a mixed-phase trust, I've witnessed first-hand how strategic board oversight can transform outcomes. And with a son who has SEND, I've personally experienced the transformative impact of an exceptional and inclusive SEND culture.

Our approach at Lykos MAT has been comprehensive and deliberate, recognising that effective SEND provision requires systematic monitoring across every aspect of our governance structure.

We've embedded SEND data into all our reporting mechanisms, ensuring trustees receive regular updates on provision quality, outcomes and resource allocation across our primary and secondary phases.

Recognising that governance effectiveness depends on knowledge and understanding, we began by arranging for the SENDCos across the



trust to deliver comprehensive bespoke training to all local governors and trustees.

These sessions have equipped us all with the expertise to ask probing questions, challenge assumptions and support strategic decision-making. Our SEND link roles within each governing board meet regularly as a group, with SENDCos and a lead trustee, resulting in holistic oversight across the trust.

This isn't simply about compliance; it's about creating accountability structures that drive genuine improvement in pupils' attainment, school experience and wellbeing.

Every data point, every report and every trust and local governing body meeting includes specific SEND metrics, making progress visible and measurable.

Perhaps most importantly, we've fostered collaboration between our primary and secondary SENDCos, breaking down traditional phase barriers. This cross-pollination of expertise has strengthened practice across all schools while enabling us to support pupils and their families seamlessly through their entire educational journey within our trust.

Our local governing boards have been absolutely integral to maintaining our connection to our communities: complaints are down, engagement is up.

We've established joint case review processes, shared professional development opportunities across mainstream and specialist staff and governors and trustees, and we've created transition protocols that ensure no child falls

through the cracks, as well as regular cross-phase moderation sessions to ensure consistency.

Lykos' governors are becoming fluent in the lived experience of children and families in their schools. Their connection to the community cannot be underestimated.

As a parent I have experienced the devastating impact of under-invested mental health and wellbeing services, of insufficient local paediatric services and of four-year waiting lists for assessment and diagnoses – on my child and our family.

At times, I have only had the school to turn to, and I have benefitted hugely from them stepping into that 'fourth emergency service' role, and I know it's only possible and sustainable because of our whole-trust approach.

Investment in our pastoral teams, SEND specialists and safeguarding staff means we can confidently say that inclusion isn't something we now need to focus on, but something that is embedded in our vision, ethos and values, and is totally culture driven.

Effective SEND governance requires more than good intentions. It demands strategic oversight, professional development and collaborative working. As funding pressures intensify and system challenges multiply, boards must step up.

The children and families we serve deserve nothing less than our unwavering commitment to putting SEND at the heart of everything we do, because if we get it right for our vulnerable pupils, we are much more likely to be getting it right for all.

# THE RESEARCH LEADER

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



## Understanding and tackling violence against girls in school

**Dr Lauren Sullivan**

MP for Gravesham and  
chair of the Parliamentary  
Office of Science and  
Technology Board



**Research shows the worrying extent of violence against girls in and out of school and points to ways we can better protect them, explains Lauren Sullivan**

New research from the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) shines an uncomfortable light on the violence faced by young women and girls in school settings.

To produce this briefing, which was co-funded by the Nuffield Foundation, POST's in-house researchers undertook a review of the latest data and analysis on violence against women and girls (VAWG) in schools and among children and young people.

POST's unique approach sees them consult extensively with experts and stakeholders from across government, industry, academia and beyond to produce their impartial and peer-reviewed briefings.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) includes offences like rape, stalking, domestic abuse and technology-facilitated abuse

What our research found is that the latter is rapidly increasing, with girls aged 10 to 15 most likely to be affected. POST's research shows that this violence is also present in schools, where misogyny and harmful sexual behaviours can be visible, normalised and frequent.

Many girls face a toxic mix of verbal and physical abuse. One-quarter of them in mixed-sex schools experience unwanted touching, and an estimated nine in 10 receive unsolicited images or experience sexist name calling.

This violence at school doesn't exist in a vacuum. The online spaces children access are a wild west of unsupervised, often unregulated content. Until recent reforms from the Online Safety Act, children could unintentionally stumble across pornography, violence and the casual misogyny of "manosphere" influencers.

Many children aren't seeking out this content themselves. A 2024 study found that within five days of downloading TikTok, the 'for you' page increases the amount of misogynistic content it



shows fourfold.

Similar research from the charity Girlguiding found that 60 per cent of manosphere content appears on young boys' phones through perversely incentivised social media algorithms, rather than through active searches.

Viewing this content isn't without consequence, especially for boys and young men. POST's research highlights a report from the Women and Equalities Committee that found misogynistic attitudes from boys directly enable sexual harassment and other types of VAWG.

One piece of evidence in POST's research particularly alarmed me: children and young people who watch misogynistic content are almost five times more likely to think hurting someone physically is OK if you say sorry afterwards. It shows how pervasive these narratives around control, entitlement and violence are.

When boys absorb this harmful messaging, these patterns of behaviour inevitably play out in playgrounds and classrooms.

Girls are left humiliated and scared, as VAWG affects their mental health and lowers their self-confidence. Critically, it makes girls less likely to attend school and more likely to avoid male-dominated subjects and hobbies.

Earlier this year, I spoke about how young women were avoiding STEM subjects at school because they perceived them as 'brainy', so they must be 'for boys'. As a scientist myself, it's particularly worrying to think of a generation of girls reluctant to seek out rewarding careers because of classroom humiliation and abuse.

So how can this combination of online and in-school misogyny be tackled? The new Relationships, Sex and Health Education guidance is a good start, but it's important that its focus on VAWG not be confined to one-off lessons.

Instead, the evidence points to long-term, whole-school approaches that integrate topics like consent, online safety, gender norms, respect, healthy relationships and boundaries.

For example, charity Beyond Equality worked with schools in Derbyshire to address gender-based violence. Eighty per cent of pupils involved in their workshops agreed they had learned more through the workshops, and teachers said it helped build relationships with students, improving long-term attitudes and behaviours.

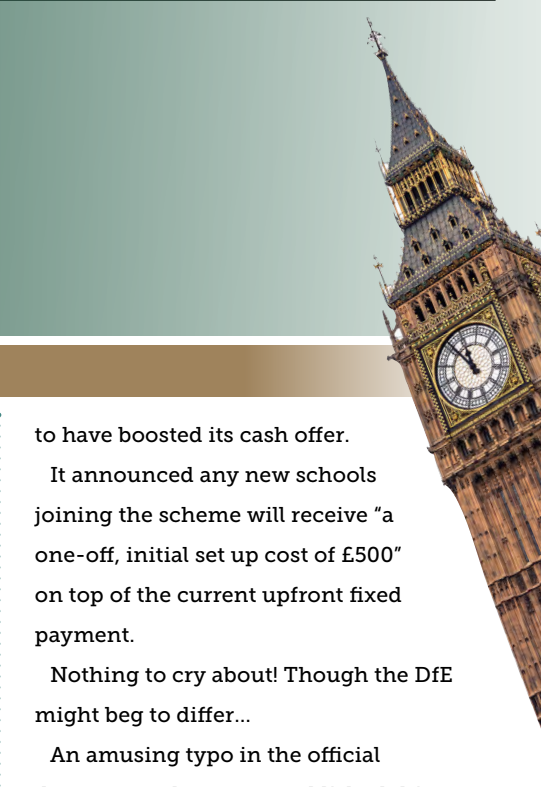
Studies show that long-term approaches like this have the most positive and long-lasting effects on school communities, in part because they create the space for complex and nuanced discussions around gendered violence.

Not everyone feels comfortable or able to have these discussions without support. For this reason, toolkits for teachers, parents and carers are vital, like those developed by the National Education Union. We have a responsibility to make schools safe for everyone. This means we must help our boys develop the tools they need to have fulfilling, respectful relationships with their peers.

And to do that, we must empower schools to provide relevant, targeted and evidenced approaches to tackle misogyny and VAWG.

Read the full research briefing [here](#)





Week in

# Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

## TUESDAY

As Bridget Phillipson's efforts to become deputy leader of Labour ramp up, social media accounts for her campaign were activated on Tuesday.

"BackBridget2025" had just 242 followers on Instagram, as of 6pm yesterday.

The account's first post was a two-minute video giving background on her early life and political career (a story the education sector is by now well used to).

## WEDNESDAY

Conservative peer John Nash was full of praise for Labour peer and former union boss Baroness Mary Boustead in the House of Lords this week, as he clarified an earlier misunderstanding.

Speaking on September 10, Boustead had smilingly referred to her time as a union leader as "doing the work of the devil, according to the noble Lord Nash".

But as the children's wellbeing and schools bill was discussed in the Lords yesterday, Nash sought to clarify his feelings.

"I did not hear very well...but the word 'devil' was mentioned.

"Having checked Hansard, I see that the noble Baroness, Lady Boustead, seemed to think that when we had some dealings in the Department for Education, I thought she was doing the devil's work in working for unions."

He was quick to refute this, telling Boustead he "always found her the most charming person to deal with".

Far from "the devil's work", he commended the unions "on doing what seems to me the Lord's work in their campaign on smartphones".

We note that he didn't praise the union's other activities.

He was met with chuckles, including from Boustead, when he welcomed her back from a "sojourn in the Arctic this summer" (we don't have intel on her trip, sadly).

"I hope she is finding the atmosphere in the Labour party at the moment somewhat less glacial than she found it there – although in the current circumstance, maybe not very much so."

\*\*\*

Talking of unions, members of Unite working for the National Education Union continued their strike this week over a "proposed restructure that will have a catastrophic impact on staff workloads".

It was the second time more than 400 staff working for the union were due to walk out over the proposals, with Unite saying its members were "angry over how plans for a significant restructure have been mishandled by NEU management".

The NEU said earlier this year that it believed "that the majority of the demands put to us by Unite have been met and that a settlement is within reach"...

## THURSDAY

The DfE had more to say on its breakfast clubs yesterday.

More than 750 "early adopters" have so far been confirmed. But the DfE is encouraging more to sign up, and appears

to have boosted its cash offer.

It announced any new schools joining the scheme will receive "a one-off, initial set up cost of £500" on top of the current upfront fixed payment.

Nothing to cry about! Though the DfE might beg to differ...

An amusing typo in the official department document published this week referred to the scheme as "breakfast blubs".

\*\*\*

Ofsted provoked a fierce backlash last week by refusing to publish details of the responses it received to its consultation on report card reforms, despite its previous promises of transparency.

More than 6,500 people replied, including about 4,500 education professionals. Yet Ofsted has given only a brief narrative summary of the overall sentiments expressed.

Moving on a week and the inspectorate was again up to its old tricks.

It confirmed to *Schools Week* that it will be running a pilot of its new inspection framework before it is rolled out on November 10, that will involve 96 volunteer schools receiving trial visits.

But asked if it would be publishing the results of these trials, the watchdog did not reply.

It also failed to respond to questions about what would happen if issues were found during the trials, and whether amendments would be made to the framework.

Transparency!

## 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

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