



LABOUR MUST NOT LET PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS LOWER STANDARDS



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OLIVER BLASTS SCHOOLS CHARGING 'TECH TAX'



Pages 8-9

DIDAGOGY: THE TEACHER TRAINING PRACTICE REFORM FORGOT

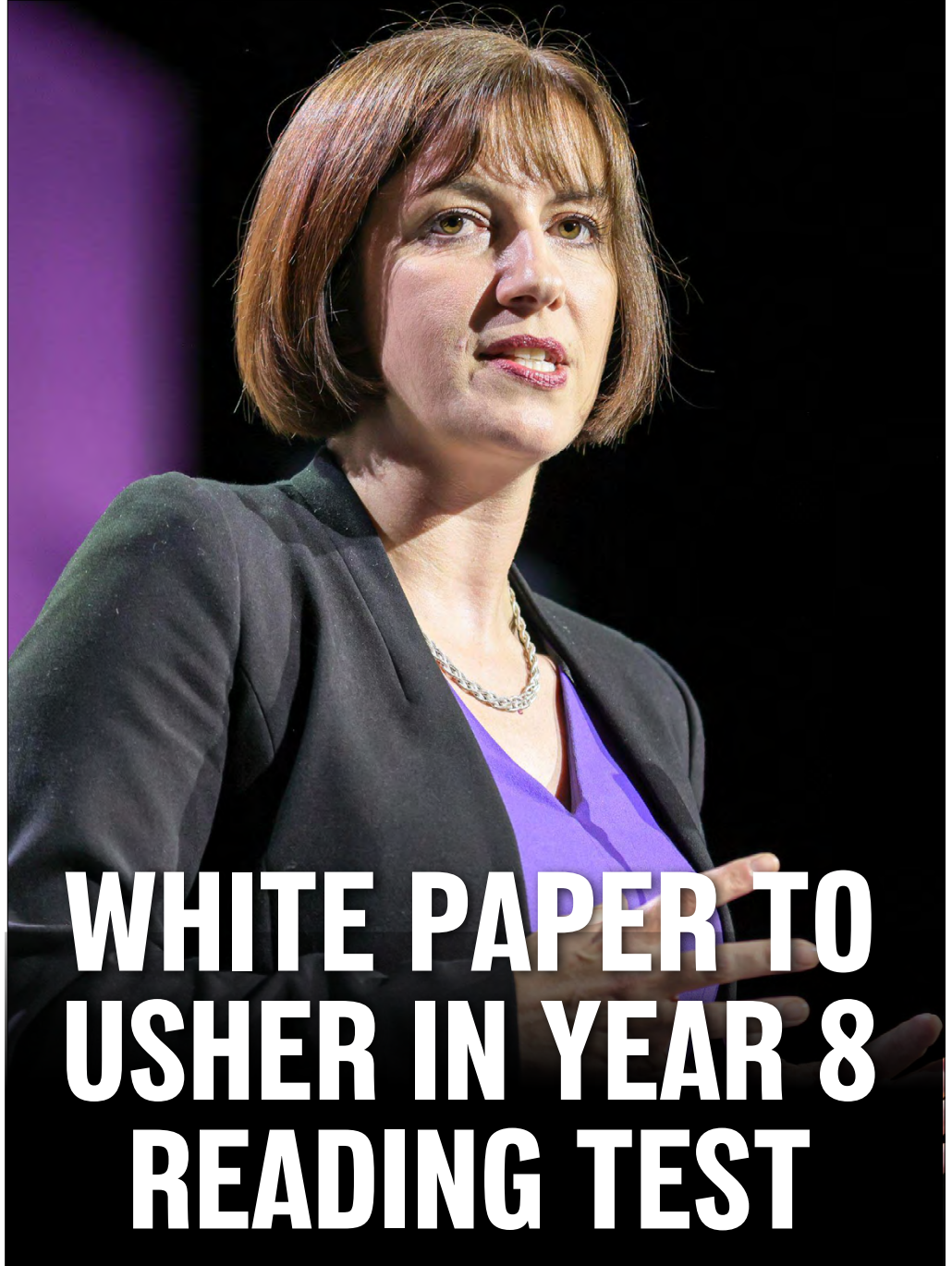


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CONFLATING SEN AND SEND IS AT THE HEART OF OUR CRISIS



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WHITE PAPER TO USHER IN YEAR 8 READING TEST

- Move to ensure poorer pupils are not shut off from wider curriculum
- Results published at national level only, and no intervention trigger
- Comes as SEND concerns emerge over new detail discussions

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

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SCHOOLS
WEEK

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Labour says its schools white paper will set out a 10-year vision for schools.

Introducing a reading test in key stage 3 (see pages 4 and 5) hits two of the government's priorities – boosting literacy and improving outcomes for working-class children.

Youngsters who struggle to read don't just fall behind in English – they are shut out from accessing the rest of the curriculum. And youngsters from poorer families are those most likely to fall behind

It's a worthy focus. Plus, many schools already run their own key stage 3 tests, so a national check would support a consistent approach.

The government would also only publish the reading check data at national level, and it would not trigger wider intervention, sources familiar with the proposals say.

However, any test preparation will always become a new pressure for

teachers, so the checks must be straightforward to administer and not create any new curriculum expectations.

Another key element of the white paper is its SEND reforms.

Ministers have long promised to set out their proposals in the upcoming paper. But concerns have resurfaced this week, sources say, over new discussions about how much of the SEND reform plan should actually be included in the white paper.

Department for Education sources insisted the white paper will set out a clear vision for an inclusive mainstream system.

But given the expectation levels, a white paper lacking crucial SEND reform details would likely be met with disappointment from the sector.

It also does not inspire confidence that potentially big changes are being considered so close to the white paper's publication.

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

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Labour to set out mandatory reading test for year 8s

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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EXCLUSIVE

The government plans to introduce a mandatory reading test for year 8 pupils in its upcoming schools white paper, amid fears poorer children are disengaging in the early years of secondary school.

The introduction of the check would mark the first statutory testing for key stage 3 pupils since SATs for 14-year-olds were scrapped in 2008. It would mean England's pupils taking a compulsory national test in seven of their 14 years at school.

Schools Week understands the test would be administered at the end of year 8 and that ministers hope to put it in place from the 2028-29 academic year, however plans are still being finalised.

While government and Ofsted will have access to schools' data, it would only be published at a national level – like the phonics check.

It is also understood a school's performance in the test would not trigger intervention by the Department for Education's regions groups or improvement teams, nor an early inspection.

'Must not be another accountability measure'

Pepe Di'Iasio, general secretary of the ASCL leaders' union, said many schools already assessed year 8 pupils for learning gaps, and a "standard test may help to support a consistent approach".

"If done well – straightforward to administer and without creating new curriculum expectations – it could be helpful in that respect."

But he said it was "important that this does not end up becoming another accountability measure – either through the publication of



Bridget Phillipson

'It's important this does not become another accountability measure'

results or as part of Ofsted inspections.

"Even if there are assurances from this government, school leaders may well be uneasy about what future governments might do with these tests once they're established. They've been bitten too many times."

Concerns poorer pupils held back

The policy has been prompted by concerns poor reading is holding pupils back from accessing the curriculum in other subjects.

Ministers are particularly worried about pupils – particularly the disadvantaged – disengaging during their first years at secondary school.

There are also concerns that many pupils leave primary school unable to read properly and then go on to fail their GCSE English.

This year, 25 per cent of pupils in year 6 did not meet the government's expected standard

in reading in their SATs tests. Almost 30 per cent of GCSE pupils fell below a grade 4 in English, considered a "standard pass" by government.

Progress between key stage 2 and key stage 3 has not been measured nationally since 2009. A 2011 research report from the Department for Education found pupils eligible for free school meals "make less progress during key stage 3".

Dave Thomson, of FFT Education Datalab, said the progress measures were "often useful in identifying pupils who were at risk of making poor progress to key stage 4.

"Although it is more than likely that schools will be aware of these pupils in any event," he added.

The government maintained a national assessment framework for key stage 3, but it was scrapped by the coalition in 2014 when it axed curriculum levels.

This has left schools to develop their own

Continued on next page

NEWS: POLICY

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internal assessments to check progress during key stage 3, or buy in standardised tests from external providers.

Current testing 'a black box'

Schools often run baseline testing in year 7, but "we don't know if that information is used very well," said Alex Quigley, head of content and engagement at the Education Endowment Foundation.

"It is a bit of a black box. And you can see why as a policy ... if there's almost a nationalisation of standardized reading assessments, that's a really interesting proposal. It might save schools a huge amount of money and time."

Officials are still considering what form the check will take and what it will assess.

They are also still deliberating whether – like the phonics check in year 1 – it will be administered on-screen or with pen and paper. But it will be externally marked.

Quigley added there was a case for the check to be targeted at "more foundational reading skills, like decoding and fluency".

"You've got to create a test that both helps diagnose children who are really struggling, and that might be [with] some foundational skills, whilst not being so far away from the secondary curriculum that teachers don't know how to support children through it or after it."

The final design will also depend on the outcome of the curriculum and assessment review, which is due to report later this autumn.

However, there was no mention of any key stage 3 testing in its interim report, published earlier this year.

The policy is set to be revealed as part of the government's white paper, due this term.

Questions over timing of tests

However, government also faces questions over the plans to introduce the tests in year 8.

It is understood ministers want to allow time before the start of key stage 4 for support to be put in place.

But Geoff Barton, a former English teacher and



'Doesn't year 8 test reinforce idea KS3 can be done in two years?'

former general secretary of ASCL who led the recent Oracy Commission, said it was "surprising a child would have a reading assessment less than two years after they've had one at key stage 2".

He pointed to Ofsted's 2015 report "Key stage 3: the wasted years?", adding: "Doesn't taking this test in year 8 just reinforce the idea that it can be done in two years? Wouldn't it be better to do the test in year 9?"

Ofsted has also previously criticised schools who started their GCSEs in year 9.

Quigley also raised workload fears, adding: "Any sort of test preparation becomes a stress and a pressure on teachers, that's just the reality."

Concerns over SEND plans

Ministers have also promised to set out their plans for SEND reform as part of the white paper.

But several sources told Schools Week officials are now considering how much of their SEND reform programme should



be set out in the white paper.

The education select committee, in a report last week, urged to "fully engage" parents in an "active and meaningful" way. Government is already facing a backlash from parents of children with SEND after reports EHCPs could be scrapped.

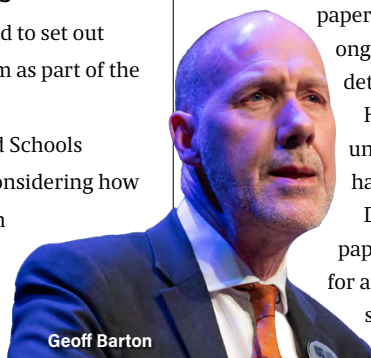
Ministers are expected to publish a consultation on the SEND plans after the white paper – and conversations are ongoing around whether more details should be saved for that.

However Schools Week understands that no decisions have been made.

DfE sources insisted the white paper will set out a clear vision for an inclusive mainstream system.



Alex Quigley



Geoff Barton

NEWS: ADMISSIONS

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Watchdog sides with school over fair banding row

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

The admissions watchdog has thrown out a council appeal to prevent a school from introducing fair banding over fears that it would “deter vulnerable” youngsters from applying.

Bosses of the Carlton Bolling, in Bradford, have now introduced the controversial practice for next year’s admissions. Under fair banding, schools admit a proportion of pupils from different ability groups based on a test.

The ‘outstanding’ school said the move would boost the number of disadvantaged pupils it admits, but neighbouring heads said the change “systemically discriminates against certain groups” – forcing others in the area to take on more complex cohorts.

‘Correcting anomalies’

Under Carlton Bolling’s plans, pupils will be split into nine ability bands. The number admitted from each band will match the proportion of applicants in that band.

Over 40 per cent of the school’s pupils are entitled to free school meals (FSM), “significantly above” the national average (25.7 per cent), but below the rate in its local community.

This results in its intake “not fully reflecting the socio-economic, academic and cultural diversity of the community we serve”, the school said.

Carlton Academy Trust CEO Adrian Kneeshaw, whose chain runs the secondary, said the school would normally receive “900-plus” applications for “300 places”.

This meant places were issued in line with its oversubscription criteria, which “disproportionately favoured those living very close to the school”. Those based elsewhere in the catchment area missed out.

“Fair banding is an attempt to correct these anomalies which disadvantaged [FSM] students in the school’s catchment,” Kneeshaw said.

The school said applicants will instead be “considered in relation to their peers within the same ability banding, rather than primarily determined by proximity”.



Adrian Kneeshaw



‘Unfair’

However, Bradford council said the arrangements would “reflect the ability levels of those who apply” and “not necessarily” those living locally.

Department for Education data suggests the number of pupils with prior low attainment in year 11 at Carlton Bolling is more than double that of high attainers.

By moving its admissions away from prioritising locality, more high-attaining pupils from outside the catchment area could win places – changing the current balance.

Bradford also added that making pupils do a test on a Saturday would also “deter applicants from vulnerable groups”, something which it labelled “unfair”.

The authority also raised concerns that parents “may not receive timely information to access the test” and that it could “have a negative impact” on other schools nearby.

The plans were referred to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA).

However, adjudicator Philip Lloyd said the school has “taken steps to ensure the banding arrangements are accessible to all pupils. I find that there is no evidence to suggest that children within the catchment area will be disadvantaged.”

He also said the council provided “no evidence” substantiating fears that the assessments will discourage vulnerable applicants.

Headteacher fears

But the case reignites concerns over the fairness of fair banding.

One Bradford headteacher said it is “such a big thing for schools to do [because] the people it keeps out are the parents who can’t go to an open evening and get more information”.

“A child whose parents can’t read or write [and] isn’t engaged with school is a small number, but it has a massively disproportionate impact on your progress scores,” they added. “[Fair banding] systemically discriminates against certain groups.”

However, a similar OSA report last year ruled that Trinity Multi-Academy Trust’s use of fair banding at a secondary in Halifax was “both reasonable and fair”, dismissing Calderdale council’s concerns “about unfair discrimination”.

A number of other schools in Bradford already use fair banding, including two that are run by Dixons Academies Trust. However, the trust removed fair banding at one of its schools last year.

It said this “will result in there being an increased chance of gaining a place for children who live in the local area”.

Meanwhile, Bradford Girls Grammar School is “consulting on the removal of fair banding”.

Carol Dewhurst, CEO of Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust, which runs the school, said the arrangement dates back to when it “operated as an independent”.

Removing the tests will bring it “in line with all the other academies in our trust”.

Datalab analysis produced for TES earlier this year found schools using fair banding had more pupils with higher attainment than their neighbouring schools that did not use it.

Jonny Uttley, CEO of the Education Alliance academy trust, said: “Fair banding is a barrier to the government’s goals to have children attending their local school because it introduces factors other than locality.

“If the government wants to deliver real inclusion, then it must give consideration to how admissions currently work and should ... give local authorities greater power around admissions.”

NEWS: EXAMS

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Try rest breaks before asking for extra exam time, schools told

RUTH LUCAS

@RUTHLUCAS_

EXCLUSIVE

Schools have been warned that they must “trial and exhaust” supervised rest breaks for pupils who need additional help to complete exams before applying for 25 per cent additional time.

Newly published exams guidance on adjustments for pupils with disabilities and learning difficulties adds that supervised rest breaks are “often more effective and appropriate” for a variety of candidates, and that extra time “may not address the underlying issue”.

Previous Ofqual data had shown the proportion of pupils with access arrangements had soared in recent years – which includes things like pupils getting 25 per cent extra time, or the help of a reader or scribe.

The government intervened after data showed that 42 per cent of private school pupils had access arrangements, compared to just 27 per cent of pupils in state schools.

However, the exams regulator pulled its analysis in July – saying the data had been “significantly overstated” for a decade.

The overall number of pupils getting access arrangements is actually closer to 19.5 per cent, Ofqual said. This is broadly in line with the proportion of pupils with special educational needs, the regulator added.

‘Right candidates awarded right arrangements’

However, the new guidance warns schools against over-applying for 25 per cent extra time.

It states: “Where a candidate has an impairment other than a learning difficulty, special educational needs coordinators must have trialed and exhausted the option of supervised rest breaks through timed internal tests and/or mock examinations before making an application for 25 per cent extra time.”

It said supervised rest breaks were “often more effective and appropriate” for candidates who experience anxiety or attention difficulties, neurodivergent pupils and those with medical conditions or mental health needs.

“Allocating extra time simply extends the period a candidate must remain in a potentially stressful environment, which can intensify anxiety and reduce productivity,” the guidance said. “Extra



time may not address the underlying issue, which is often related to difficulties with attention or emotional regulation.”

Schools have also been reminded that it is their responsibility to produce evidence on an application, and that a parent’s request should not form the basis of one.

A Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) spokesperson said that, while the requirement has existed since 2021, it has been reiterated this year.

The guidance said SENCOs must consider arrangements “that will prepare candidates for the workplace”.

“This was to make sure that schools and colleges are not awarding 25 per cent extra time when it may not be appropriate to a candidate,” the spokesperson said.

“We want to ensure that the right candidates are being awarded the right arrangements.”

Schools must produce the evidence

The JCQ has also reminded schools it is their responsibility to provide evidence for when 25 per cent extra time is needed.

Applications should not only include parents’ views, but a SENCO must summarise the candidate’s current difficulties and learning, how they impact in the classroom, how they impact when the candidate completes timed assessments and teachers’ feedback.

It is “not sufficient” to say parents have requested the extra time on the application with no other evidence, a spokesperson said.

But Sarah Hannafin, head of policy for school leaders’ union NAHT, said

schools can be put in a “conflicting situation” as they must “meet student’s needs” while “navigating parents’ requests for their child’s access arrangements, which do not always match a student’s normal way of working”.

Hannafin added that “any improvements to the system must not disadvantage those students nor add to the workload of school staff”.

Schools can now decide if pupils need to doodle during exams

Schools will now be able to decide whether to allow children with concentration difficulties to doodle while sitting an exam.

The JCQ said that doodling, which can help pupils with “persistent and significant concentration difficulties”, has now become a “centre delegated arrangement”. Previously, individual settings had to apply for approval at the JCQ.

Those with the access arrangement are given a separate piece of blank paper to doodle on. This “doesn’t give any advantage” to the pupil with the arrangement, a JCQ spokesperson said.

Research has shown that doodling can improve focus and help individuals to remember more information.

A study carried out in 2009 by the Journal of Applied Cognitive Psychology found those who doodled while listening to a voice message recalled 29 per cent more information than those who did not doodle.

SENCOs will now be able to use their “professional judgment” in approving the arrangement which “reduces the administrative burden on them”, the spokesperson added.



Sarah Hannafin

LONG READ: TECHNOLOGY

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Schools demanding parents fund laptops leave Oliver 'really shocked'

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

EXCLUSIVE

Ofsted's chief inspector has criticised schools that require parents to buy technology for their children – saying they have “a duty” to deliver the curriculum without expecting families to shoulder additional costs.

Parentkind's annual national parent survey, published last week, revealed that four in 10 pupils are required by their school to have a laptop or tablet.

Nearly one-third (31 per cent) of primary-aged pupils are required to have an electronic device, the survey of 5,800 parents found, while half of children eligible for free school meals have been told they need a laptop or tablet by their school.

In last year's survey, 27 per cent of parents cited technology as a leading cost concern.

Ofsted chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver told a Parentkind event last week that he was “really shocked” by the findings.

“You cannot and must not expect, as a headteacher, to ask for additional resource of parents to buy something to deliver the state's free education system.

“And that is guidance that all headteachers are well aware of... schools have a duty to make sure that's entirely accessible.”

Parentkind chief executive Jason Elsom said that “expecting [parents] to provide laptops, tablets and other devices for learning” amounted to “a technology tax”.

He added: “Families already stretched to the limit are being pushed into heartbreaking choices between buying the tech their child needs and putting food on the table or keeping the heating on.”

Schools 'bridging the gap'

Thorpe St Andrew School, in Norwich, asked parents last year to buy £300 Chromebooks for new pupils, but scrapped the request following a backlash.



Owen Jenkins, CEO of the school's trust, Broad Horizons Education Trust, said the idea was proposed amid an “extremely volatile school funding climate”. His trust was offered a government loan after posting an overall deficit of £670,000 last year.

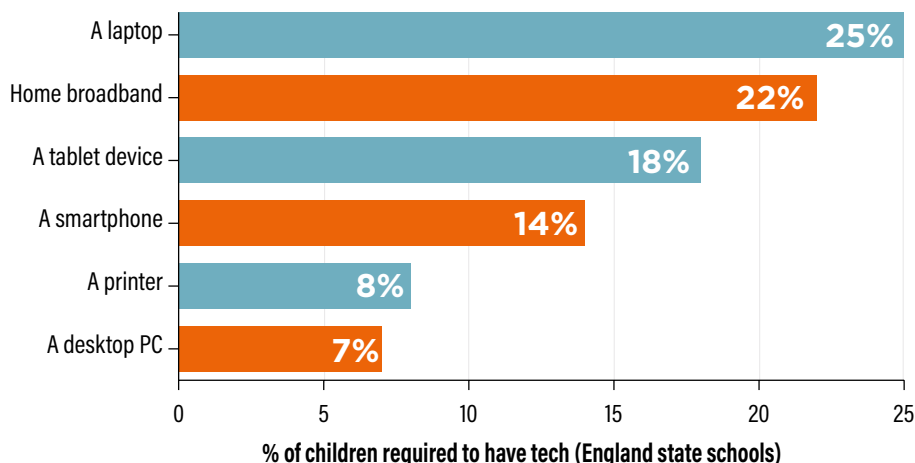
But Jenkins agreed that schools “have a duty to make sure every child can access the curriculum”, adding: “That increasingly includes access to technology.”

Ninety per cent of teachers use technology for homework, according to research published by the Department for Education in 2023, with 48 per cent using it “a lot of the time”.

Elizabeth Anderson, CEO of the Digital Poverty Alliance, said requiring pupils to own tech to study “asserts digital access and connectivity as the metric for academic success”.

But James Bowen, assistant general secretary of school leaders' union NAHT, said that, as

Technology required by schools



Source: Parentkind National Parent Survey 2025

SCHOOLS WEEK

Continued on next page

LONG READ: TECHNOLOGY

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technology is now “a common feature” in most homes, “it is understandable that schools will look to harness that to support with homework and schoolwork”.

However, he added that schools “are acutely aware of the financial challenges many families face, and many have schemes in place to support pupils who may not have easy access to a device at home”.

Shadow education secretary Laura Trott raised the issue of schools “charging parents for mandatory laptops or IT equipment used during school hours” in parliament in July.

The MP for Sevenoaks, in Kent, was approached about a school that was requiring pupils to have Chromebooks, her office said.

These were being supplied for those on pupil premium, but not for other students. It is understood the idea was later scrapped.

Responding, former early education minister Stephen Morgan said guidance on the issue “is clear that there should be no charge for state-funded education”.

He said the Education Act “prohibits schools from charging...”



Laura Trott

for the supply of materials, books or other equipment, like laptops or IT equipment, that are required for education during school hours”.

However, Morgan added that schools “may ask parents to make a voluntary contribution towards the cost of equipment but must make clear that these are voluntary”.

Jenkins said that schools were “facing significant and ongoing unfunded pressures” and are “constantly having to look at all possible options to balance budgets while still providing the best opportunities for our pupils”.

He added: “Our focus now is on ensuring that all children have access to the technology they need, but the reality is that, when funding does not stretch far enough, schools are left trying to bridge the gap.”

Calls for government to do more

Pointing to the government’s steps to limit the cost of school uniforms, Elsom said: “Technology must be next.”

Pepe Di’lasio, general secretary of leaders’ union ASCL, called for a “far more ambitious” strategy for digital investment in education.



Pepe Di’lasio

Current funding to close the digital divide is “nowhere near enough to ensure that every child is supplied with a device in the future”, he said.

Anderson added that policy and funding “must ensure device access [and] reliable connectivity... are built into how the education system delivers curriculums, with offline options offered until that happens”.

Kate Anstey, head of education policy at Child Poverty Action Group, warned that “the government must also deliver on its promise to spread opportunity by ensuring families have enough money to give kids a good start”.

Oliver also cited schools he had taken over while previously leading the Outwood Grange Academies Trust that had “an iPad for every child” but were “always in special measures”.

He said such schools were “putting too much attention” into a “nirvana toy rather than [delivering a] high-quality, knowledge-rich curriculum”.

The DfE was approached for comment.



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Admission appeal fund axe falls hard on grammars

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

Grammar schools are set to be the biggest losers after ministers axed funding for academies to fight admission appeals.

The government announced earlier this year it would no longer give academies the cash to fight appeals heard after October 31.

The funding of £180 per appeal had been available for many years, but the move brings academies in line with council schools.

Figures obtained through a Freedom of Information request show more than £880,000 was paid to 141 schools to support them with admission appeal costs in 2024-25.

The figure was down from a record £1.4 million the year before and the lowest since 2016-17. A breakdown of the figures shows 22 schools were handed over £10,000 each last year.

Of these, eight (36 per cent) were grammars. Across England, just 164 of the country's 22,000 schools (0.7 per cent) are selective.

Dr Nuala Burgess, of Comprehensive Future, said



it was a "ridiculous irony" grammar schools "make money out of families who appeal against their decision-making".

She added: "It is hardly surprising that grammar schools dominate appeal numbers. Conducting admissions by means of a highly controversial test is intrinsically unfair.

"When admissions are fairer and simpler, there are fewer appeals. Complex admissions create bureaucracy and disputes.

"Comprehensive schools are less likely to generate such high numbers for the simple reason that their admissions are essentially fairer."

Denbigh High School in Luton – which is not selective – received just under £39,000, more than

any other school, last year.

Adrian Rogers, CEO of the Chiltern Learning Trust, which runs Denbigh, said it was "common" for the academy "to receive around 1,000 requests" for its 224 year 7 places.

But in the four years prior, grammar schools topped the list.

Langley Grammar School, in Slough, said the loss of the fund – through which it was given £15,300 in 2024-25 – "will increase the financial pressures on schools such as ours, which deal with a large volume of appeals every year".

Dr Mark Fenton, CEO of the Grammar School Heads Association, said the government's decision not to "sanction the expansion of selection has inevitably generated a high number of appeals".

The cost falls "on schools' budgets which are already under immense strain since grammar schools receive among the lowest level of funding of any schools in England".

He added: "As many grammar schools operate a catchment area, it is also quite wrong to suggest that the high volume of appeals is wholly due to issues around the test. Many parents simply live too far from a grammar school to qualify for a place."

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Ofsted considers 176% rise in private school inspection fees

Private schools face paying thousands of pounds more to be inspected by Ofsted under reforms set out by the government this week.

Annual fees for schools with more than 100 pupils will rise by around 50 per cent, while a 176 per cent rise in pre-registration inspection fees is under consideration.

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's fees ranging from £400 to £2,750 a year.

Schools Week revealed last week that the government was considering raising the charges, because Ofsted currently recoups just 34 per cent of the £6.5 million annual cost of inspection.

In a consultation released on Thursday, the

Department for Education said it aimed to "get closer to full cost recovery in the level of fees charged for the inspections covered by this document, but we intend to take a gradual approach".

The smallest private schools – those with fewer than 100 pupils – currently pay a fixed charge of £400, plus £16 per pupil.

The government is proposing to raise the fixed charge to £420 and the per-pupil charge to £21 by 2030.

It then plans to raise the annual fee for larger schools by around 50 per cent by 2030. Those with 100 to 120 pupils would see their annual fee increase from £2,200 to £3,300, while those with 600 pupils or more would see rises of more than £1,500 – from £2,750 to £4,300.

The consultation also sets out plans to increase the fees which schools pay for pre-registration inspections – those conducted when a new private school opens.

The DfE said that "in recent years, a small

number of schools have been found to be unsafe at their first standard inspection after opening.

"We can reduce this risk with more robust pre-registration inspections, which have additional resources committed allowing inspectors to focus more on leadership capacity and capability at the pre-registration stage."

The DfE said the fixed charge of £2,500, introduced in 2019, "covers approximately 50 per cent of the actual cost at 2024 levels".

Officials are consulting on two options. One would see the fee increase sharply to £4,000 next year before rising gradually to £4,600 by 2030.

However, the consultation said this option "does not allow for additional resources to be committed".

The second option would involve increasing the fee to £6,000 next year, with it gradually increasing to £6,900 by 2030, an increase of 176 per cent.

The DfE is also proposing to raise fees for progress monitoring inspections.

RISE divisions name new targets and reveal regional priorities

JACK DYSON
[@JACKYDYS](#)

The government’s RISE school improvement divisions have unveiled their regional priorities, including “ensuring children feel a sense of belonging”, boosting outcomes in coastal communities and delivering “inclusive schools that set high expectations”.

Last week, the Department for Education also named the next 170 “stuck” schools in line for the teams’ targeted support, where advisers will focus their attentions and the priorities for each region.

Here’s what you need to know...

Reception targets and coastal focus

Earlier this year, education secretary Bridget Phillipson announced that the school improvement teams will offer universal support services based around the government’s four priorities.

These included improving English and maths attainment, the quality of reception education, attendance and inclusion.

On Friday, the government also published further details outlining each area’s specific local priorities.

Dame Kate Dethridge, regional director for the **South east**, revealed that RISE advisers will focus on improving “attainment for disadvantaged pupils across all phases” and “boosting reception-year outcomes, especially in coastal communities”.

They will also look to raise attendance for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND and foster “inclusive mainstream schools that set high expectations for every learner”.

West Midlands regional director Sue Lovelock noted that her area’s challenges include “increasing the number of children reaching a good level of development in reception from 67 per cent to 75 per cent”.

Sense of belonging

She also wants to boost attainment at key stages two and four, boost “inclusion in mainstream schools” and continue “gains made in school attendance, especially at key transition points.

In **Yorkshire and the Humber**, RISE will focus on “ensuring children feel a sense of belonging to their school and attend every possible day they can”.

Advisers also hope to close “the disadvantage gap at every stage of children’s education” and have

RISE: Which region has the most advisers?

Region	Schools getting RISE support	RISE advisers	Schools per adviser
London	11	9	1.2
West Midlands	51	11	4.6
South east	45	9	5.0
Yorkshire and the Humber	34	6	5.7
North east	23	4	5.8
South west	47	7	6.7
East of England	44	6	7.3
East Midlands	48	6	8.0
North west	64	7	9.1
Overall	367	65	5.6

Source: DfE

SCHOOLS WEEK

inclusive schools.

Meanwhile, **North west** regional director Vicky Beer said her team will work to enhance the “quality of reception year by focusing on improving oracy, reading and writing fluency at key stage 2”. At key stage 4, it will aim to raise maths outcomes.

Attendance and attainment gaps

Beer added that there will be a focus on “enhancing pupil transition into secondary from key stage 2 to 3” and “earlier, more accurate identification of special educational needs in mainstream settings, with the right support in place”.

Meanwhile, Katherine Cowell, regional director for the **North east**, said advisers and the rest of her team were “working across our region to support schools to raise standards and close the disadvantage gap from early years to key stage 4”.

In the **East Midlands**, RISE will work with schools to “address the challenges we face” including “attainment gaps, especially for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND”.

Increasing the “number of children reaching a good level of development by the end of reception” and continuing to “focus on secondary attendance, particularly at key stage 3” make up the rest of the region’s targets.

And for RISE teams in **London**, the South west and **East of England**, their attentions will be in line with Phillipson’s national priorities.

170 more RISE schools

Two weeks ago, the Department for Education announced that RISE teams will “nearly double their reach” this term, with the number of schools supported set to rise from 220 to 390.

Of these, 23 are now considered no longer eligible for help, having received improved Ofsted grades. On Friday, the 170 new RISE schools were named.

Forty-eight per cent (81) are primaries, with 46 per cent (79) secondaries. The rest are either AP or special schools.

Just 2 per cent (4) are in London, while the North west accounted for the most (32 schools). The majority are academies, with 31 under local authority control.

An adviser gap?

The government also announced in which regions each of its 65 RISE advisers will focus their efforts. The West Midlands has the most (11), followed by the South east and London (both 9).

But, with the capital having only 11 schools in line for targeted RISE support, it means the city has just over one RISE school per adviser.

This compares to nine advisers per school in the North west and eight in the East Midlands.

When asked about this, the DfE said advisers would have a “home region”, but they will be able to work flexibly across the country. It hopes this will spread expertise across the system.

NEWS: OFSTED

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More schools say Ofsted inspections are worth the trouble

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

The proportion of schools which said the benefits of their most recent Ofsted inspection “outweighed any negative aspects” jumped considerably in the year when headline grades were ditched, new data shows.

But the proportion feeling positive about the way inspectors handled inspections has risen only marginally – despite huge efforts from Ofsted to boost inspectors’ awareness of wellbeing and mental health while on visits.

Post-inspection surveys carried out by Ofsted between last April and the end of March this year show 84 per cent of state schools felt the benefits of their inspection “outweighed any negative aspects” – up from 77 per cent the previous year.

Meanwhile 97 per cent said inspectors “carried out the inspection in a professional manner” and 94 per cent were “satisfied” with how their inspection was carried out – both increases of



just one percentage point.

A number of significant changes have taken place at Ofsted in the time period covered by the survey.

The inspectorate ditched headline grades last September, after a damning coroner’s report found an Ofsted inspection had “contributed to” the suicide of headteacher Ruth Perry.

As part of Ofsted’s plans to improve, all inspectors were given mental health training in January 2024. That same month, a policy to pause inspections if there were serious concerns about the wellbeing of leaders was also introduced.

However, the number of schools taking part in the survey plummeted by more than half in the last year to just 1,500, compared to almost 3,500 the previous year.

The survey also did not provide response figures broken down by the school’s rating. Schools Week has previously reported that schools given higher grades are more likely to take part in surveys and be more positive about their experience.

Meanwhile, an ASCL survey published today found that nearly two-thirds of school and college leaders believe Ofsted’s new inspections will be more damaging to their wellbeing than the system they are replacing.

The survey of 1,080 leaders shows 65 per cent believe the new five-point grading system will be worse for wellbeing than headline grades. Fewer than 5 per cent feel it will be better. Almost one-third said it would make no difference.

Asked how they feel about Ofsted’s new inspection system, 75 per cent said they were dissatisfied, with around half of those “very dissatisfied”. Just 6.5 per cent were satisfied.

EXCLUSIVE

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS | @LYDIACHSW

Government promises details of 6,500-teacher manifesto pledge

The government has finally committed to publishing the full details of how it will deliver on its pledge for 6,500 more teachers – a year and a half after being elected.

The House of Commons public accounts committee (PAC) said in June that it remained “unclear” how the Department for Education would honour its pledge or measure its progress, or the impact this would have on resolving workforce shortages.

Now, in its response to the report, the government has said that the DfE will publish a full delivery plan by December.

“This will include: the definition of the pledge, how the department will track progress over the duration of this Parliament, progress to date, and the levers it will use to deliver the pledge (including how it will focus on both recruitment and retention).”

The response adds that the DfE has “made strong initial progress” on recruitment. The workforce grew by 2,346 full-time employees between 2023-24 and 2024-25 in secondary

and special schools – schools “where they are needed most”.

The government said it is seeing “positive signs” that the 5.5 per cent and 4 per cent pay rises over the past two years are “starting to deliver”.

The DfE has come under repeated criticism for failing to publish details of the pledge, which formed a part of Labour’s 2024 election manifesto. It initially promised 6,500 “expert teachers in key subjects” as one of its six “first steps for change”.

Over the summer, the government revealed that primary teachers would not be included in the targets. Schools Week then revealed that not all of the teachers will be “new”.

Instead, the target will reflect how much the workforce has grown overall – meaning it will include increases in retention rates.

The government said it agrees with all six of the PAC’s recommendations and is providing implementation dates for them. Among the recommendations was for the DfE to

work with schools to understand why those in deprived areas have bigger workforce challenges.

The government said it will “continue to invest in evaluation and understanding of the workforce” and set an implementation date of August next year.

The PAC report also recommended that the DfE develops a “whole-system strategy” for recruitment and retention, saying it had “no clear or coherent approach bringing together its various initiatives” for the two.

The government responded that it is now investing in analysing policies to understand their impact, and “continues to review the balance between recruitment and retention”.

Another recommendation was for the DfE to “work to better understand why teachers leave” and better support schools in addressing these factors.

The schools white paper and the 6,500 teacher plan will provide the detail on this.

Councils to test 'local offer' as part of new SEND inclusion plans

RUTH LUCAS

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EXCLUSIVE

The government has asked councils to test a new "local inclusion support offer" to "bridge the gap" between mainstream schools and the SEND system as part of its "reformulated" change programme.

But the fate of some initiatives which were being tested by the programme remains unclear, although it is understood that councils are no longer being asked to digitise education and health care plans (EHCPs).

The change programme was launched in 2023 to test the Conservative government's SEND reforms. Labour has extended the government's contract with councils across England to test new initiatives.

The Department for Education is now testing a local inclusion support offer (LISO) while it evaluates the outcomes of previous initiatives. While the LISO appears new, it brings together initiatives already announced by the government which focus on early intervention and support in mainstream schools.

One authority participating in the scheme, Brighton and Hove, wrote in council documents that it anticipates that the LISO will be rolled out for all councils as part of the government's white paper on SEND.

What is the LISO?

In a recent newsletter, the REACH consortium, which also holds a contract to support the change programme, said the LISO will "prioritise early identification of needs, effective use of specialist resources and delivery of high-quality teaching across early years, primary and secondary settings".

The offer would be "shaped by local need and context" but consist of three core components of training, advice and direct delivery.

REACH said: "Crucially, the LISO represents a cultural shift towards embedding whole-setting inclusion, ensuring that every setting across the local area has access to high quality, equitable support"

It follows Labour's manifesto commitment to take a "community-wide approach" to SEND, improving "inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools, as well as ensuring that



special schools cater to those with the most complex needs".

What is being tested?

Councils including Gloucestershire, Bradford, Wakefield, Telford, Brighton and Hove and East Sussex have published what areas will be tested under the extended phase of the programme, under the umbrella of the LISO.

This includes creating and expanding SEN units in mainstream schools – a key tenet of Labour's SEND strategy – as well as developing a three-tiered alternative provision model.

The LISO also involves pilots for earlier support for pupils to overcome speech and language challenges and training to boost teachers' understanding of SEND in mainstream settings.

East Sussex council documents state that local areas will "create an inclusion support offer that creates or strengthens provision to bridge the gap between mainstream settings and specialist placements and services".

What's been dropped?

Previously, the SEND change programme was testing initiatives including developing national standards, strategic partnerships and inclusion plans.

In March 2023, the government said the programme would make EHCPs "digital first", making the system "quicker and simpler

wherever possible".

Also being tested were tailored lists of schools, a national and local inclusion dashboard and multi-agency panels.

A REACH spokesperson said findings from the first phase of testing were either under consideration or being carried forward by the DfE. The DfE did not respond to requests to confirm which other initiatives have been dropped.

However, the DfE said in July that it had "decided to pause this digital project while we collate a significant amount of information" to support changes outlined by the new government.

This month, advocacy group Special Needs Jungle also reported that the DfE had said it was "no longer commissioning" LAs to standardise EHCP templates, although "some of them may have chosen to continue its use within their local areas".

The DfE said the template and supporting guidance was "due to be revised" in summer 2024, but this was "never completed due to the change in government".

The LISO is not being tested as a potential replacement for EHCPs or SEN support, a DfE spokesperson said, and is intended to support mainstream inclusion.

New advisers

The DfE is looking for new SEND advisers for all English regions to help deliver its upcoming reforms.

A tender notice said advisers would be driving an "inclusive mainstream system, with specialist support for children that need it, and improved, efficient and effective local delivery".

Although SEND advisers are nothing new, wording for the role has changed slightly.

Advisers should "provide tailored advice and support to local authorities and help them improve readiness for and effectively implement the SEND reforms such that they sustainably deliver the best possible outcomes for their children and young people with SEND", the tender said.

The contracts are still open to bids and will run from November 2025 to March 2029. The DfE said it expects to announce its wider reforms later this year.

NEWS: CLIMATE CHANGE

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Climate strategy confusion as two-thirds of schools still have no one in charge

RUTH LUCAS

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EXCLUSIVE

Two-thirds of schools do not have a sustainability lead as required by new climate change rules, a poll of teachers suggests. Unions say the wider strategy is now under review.

The Conservative government's climate change strategy, first published in 2023, set out requirements for every school to nominate a sustainability lead from this month. They were to be responsible for developing a climate school change plan.

Since Labour won power, however, little has been said about the plan. And a new survey shows that progress has been limited.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents to a Teacher Tapp poll this month said their school did not have someone in the sustainability lead role. This proportion has not shifted much since 2023, when the number was 68 per cent.

Just 24 per cent said they were aware that their school had a sustainability lead, up from 18 per cent two years ago.

Emma Harrison, business leadership specialist at ASCL, said schools were facing a "staff recruitment and retention crisis" which "may be why there's a gap in appointed nominated sustainability leads".

But she added that the wider strategy was "currently under review and we await to see how expectations on schools shift as we head towards 2026 and beyond."

"It's important that schools and colleges are supported with the funding they need to meet these responsibilities."

Policy delivery 'inconsistent'

The Conservative government's sustainability and climate change strategy made wide-ranging pledges for schools in 2023.

As well as sustainability leads and climate plans, this included a new natural history GCSE by 2025. Schools were required to report their carbon emissions by 2024, and an annual climate literacy survey was introduced to understand progress among school leavers.

Once appointed,



Emma Harrison



sustainability leads would receive carbon literacy training, which would help them to develop a climate action plan for their setting.

But a report from the Ovo Foundation in September 2024 found the delivery of the policy had been "inconsistent".

"The remit for these leads is very broad, ranging from operational functions such as monitoring energy/water use and reducing carbon emissions to more educational purposes," the report states.

"In some schools, sustainability leads are given adequate time and resources to carry out this additional role properly, whereas in other schools people are nominated to do the role alongside other competing demands, so they are less able to be effective."

Henry Greenwood, from the Green Schools Project, said he was "surprised, but not surprised" at the polling.

Greenwood, who delivers teacher training on climate change in schools, added: "One thing I like to do is ask teachers if they know the DfE has a strategy. Sometimes I get no hands up at all."

"Quite often, I get one or two hands up, which is normally the person leading on our programme, who is likely to be the sustainability lead."

He estimated that around 10 to 15 per cent of schools are "keen and interested" in tackling climate change, while there's a "big proportion of schools that just aren't doing very much".

But Alex Green, from Let's Go Zero, said there may be "many schools where the

individual doing the survey doesn't know they have a sustainability lead, or doesn't know who it is".

He said leaders were "trying really hard and battling in amongst all the other things they have to do". But "enthusiasm and demand for a sustainability plan of action is increasing at an extraordinary place".

Strategy update

Natalie Highfield, senior equalities officer for school leaders' union NAHT, said leaders were committed to delivering sustainability as "a core part of their school culture", but government support "is lacking and funding is very limited".

"It's unsurprising that schools have not been able to fully engage with the strategy, among all the competing priorities they have to juggle," she added.

A Department for Education blog published in January said the Labour government's climate strategy was "preparing schools for the climate issues we face".

It reiterated that they "hope to have all schools implementing their own climate action plans by 2025".

Government guidance, last updated in March this year, still sets out that sustainability leads as a requirement. However, the January blog did state that the strategy was being "updated".

The DfE did not respond to a request for comment.

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New responsibilities for ministers as Starmer shuffles pack

SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER

@SCHOOLSWEEK

New children's minister Josh MacAlister has been handed a beefed-up brief, taking responsibility for safeguarding, counter-extremism in schools and maintenance of the education estate.

The Department for Education has updated its ministerial policy responsibilities following the reshuffle, which saw the appointment of new ministers for school standards, children and families and early education.

MacAlister, a former teacher who led the previous government's children's social care review, has picked up an expanded brief after taking on the children and families minister role.

He will now oversee 17 policy areas, instead of the 13 that fell under previous children's minister Janet Daby.

The new additions include safeguarding, prevention of serious violence and counter-extremism in schools and the maintenance and environmental sustainability of the education estates.

These responsibilities previously fell under the brief of Stephen Morgan, the early education minister, who was replaced by Olivia Bailey in the reshuffle. The "online safety" responsibility is no longer listed, however.

Bailey's portfolio now includes best start family hubs and parenting, which have moved from the children's brief. She also picks up school uniform, which was previously the schools minister's responsibility.

A new responsibility also appears to have been added – for the holiday activities and food (HAF) programme. The government recently extended the scheme's funding for another three years.

But it appears that the "use of research, science and evidence within the Department for Education" responsibility has been ditched from the early years brief.

Georgia Gould was named school standards minister in this month's reshuffle. Apart from losing the uniform brief, her portfolio is unchanged.

Phillipson's responsibilities also remain unchanged, as do those of the only other remaining minister with responsibility for some schools issues – skills minister Jacqui Smith.

Here is the full list of minister responsibilities, with any new briefs for the position in bold.

**Bridget Phillipson, secretary of state**

- Early years and childcare
- Children's social care
- Teacher quality, recruitment and retention
- The school curriculum
- School improvement
- Academies and free schools
- Further education, apprenticeships, skills, higher education

Georgia Gould, school standards minister

- School improvement, intervention and inspection
- Regional improvement for standards and excellence (RISE) teams
- SEND and high needs, alternative provision
- Initial teacher training and incentives
- Teacher retention including the ECF
- School leadership and governance
- Teacher pay and pensions, school support staff
- Core school funding and pupil premium
- Qualifications, curriculum and assessment
- Access to sport, arts and music
- Admissions
- Faith schools
- School transport

Josh MacAlister, children and families minister

- Children's social care
- Children in care and children in need, care leavers
- Looked-after children
- Child protection
- Adoption, kinship care and foster care
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
- Single unique identifier for children
- Local authority improvement
- Family support

- Safeguarding
- **Prevention of serious violence and counter-terrorism in schools**
- **Maintenance and improvement of the education estate**
- **Environmental sustainability**

Olivia Bailey, early education minister

- Early years education and workforce
- Childcare and the home learning environment
- Early communication skills and early intervention
- **Best start family hubs and parenting**
- Breakfast clubs, school food, free school meals
- **Holiday activities and food (HAF) programme**
- Attendance
- Mental health support
- Behaviour, preventing bullying and exclusions
- **School uniform**
- Independent schools
- Use of data, digital technology and AI

Jacqui Smith, skills minister

- Technical qualifications, including T Levels
- Higher technical education (levels 4 and 5)
- Adult education
- Careers advice
- Apprenticeships
- Technical excellence colleges
- Local skills improvement plans
- Governance, intervention and accountability of FE colleges
- Funding for 16 to 19-year-olds
- FE funding, financial stability and workforce
- Access to HE and lifelong learning
- Quality of higher education
- Student finance
- International education

Fewer staff want to resign – but more think pay is unfair

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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EXCLUSIVE

School staff retention is improving for the first time since the pandemic, with fewer people saying government policy makes them want to resign.

But a survey released this week by Edurio also shows that school employees are less likely to report having fair pay or adequate flexible working opportunities, and just 7 per cent of school staff reported they were rarely or never overworked.

The organisation surveyed 85,176 workers across 1,627 schools and 163 trusts.

Here's what we learned:

1. Fewer teachers want to resign ...

The report found that, "for the first time since the pandemic, retention is improving".

This backs up a trend seen in official government statistics, which showed the number of teachers leaving the profession dropped by around 1,700 last year.

Edurio said its survey found the proportion of staff considering resignation fell to 41 per cent in the 2024-25 academic year, down from 43 per cent in the previous two years.

"The drop is most notable among teachers and middle leaders, traditionally the groups at highest risk," the report continued.

2. ... and government policy improvements help

The top reasons for considering resignation remained unchanged last year – they were teachers feeling undervalued, having an overwhelming workloads and low morale in the workplace.

Interestingly, the proportion citing government policy as a reason for wanting to leave dropped from 15 per cent in the 2023-24 academic year, to 11 per cent in 2024-25.

The current Labour government was elected at the end of July last year, but Edurio said it was not able to draw a "causal link" between its findings and the change in administration.



3. But concerns over middle leaders and admin staff remain

The report found teachers "still report the least positive experiences, but resignation risk has fallen, narrowing the gap with other colleagues".

Teaching assistants were "more positive about workload, stress and excitement, but below average on appreciation from leadership and overall wellbeing".

TAs also recorded a two percentage point reduction in those reporting feeling well.

Middle leaders "lag behind national benchmarks on workload, stress and wellbeing but feel more valued and excited than teachers". Just 4 per cent said they rarely or never felt overworked, compared to 7 per cent of all staff.

Administrative staff were the only group with a higher proportion considering resignation than last year. They were also "least excited about their work".

4. And worsening view of pay and flexible working

The survey also found staff views on pay and flexible working were going backwards.

The proportion of staff reporting that their pay was fair compared to similar roles in their organisation fell from 52 to 48 per cent.

And the proportion reporting flexible working opportunities met their needs fell from 67 to 65 per cent – despite a big flexible working push from the government.

5. Improving relationships with parents

The upcoming white paper will establish "clear expectations of schools" for parent engagement and "improve how school complaints are made and resolved".

Edurio's survey of 72,480 parents of pupils at 585 schools and in 70 trusts actually suggests the picture is already improving.

It found engagement and communication "have improved over the last three years". Satisfaction with schools' efforts to engage parents rose from 58 to 61 per cent last year, though there was a slight drop in parents reporting that it was easy to contact school.

However, the proportion of parents reporting the role of the trust that runs their child's school was clear has fallen from 46 per cent two years ago to 43 per cent last year.

6. 'Meaningful' improvements in pupil experience ...

A survey of 231,259 pupils at 608 schools has also been released, showing "small but meaningful improvements in pupils' experience".

The survey found the proportion of secondary pupils reporting feeling very or quite happy to be studying at their school rose from 42 per cent last year to 44 per cent, but that remains below the 46 per cent in 2022-23.

7. ... but some issues remain

However, the report warned that "some issues remain". For example, primary pupils' happiness "declines as they progress through year groups" and clarity of instruction in secondary schools "continues to worsen".

Inclusion also "remains a concern, with very few pupils recognising themselves in the curriculum".

In a conclusion to the report, Jack Worth, education workforce lead at the National Foundation for Educational Research, said the data "shows some clear signs of positive progress in addressing key challenges".

But "national recruitment and retention challenges remain nonetheless", and many of the positive signs of progress are "modest".

He added: "Much more work is needed to improve working conditions in the school workforce and make it an attractive and desirable workplace to build a long-term career."

RESEARCH ROUNDUP

Your digest of the most interesting studies from this week



More pupils leaving London state schools

The government is being urged to “examine more closely” the reasons why pupils leave state schools after analysis found a surge in departures in London.

The Education Policy Institute (EPI) issued the calls in a new report analysing the movement of primary pupils in the capital.

It found that 23 schools have already closed across the 10 local authorities worst hit by falling rolls and that some parts of London will see pupil numbers fall by as much as 30 per cent.

But the city’s falling rolls issue has not just been caused by a dip in birth rates.

Of the cohort that started reception in 2017, 10.1 per cent were recorded as having left the state sector. For the cohort that started in 2012-13, the figure was 8 per cent.

The increase meant reception children who started school in 2017-18 “were more likely” to leave the education system than move within the capital.

This “could reflect the higher proportions of international families in London who are more likely to leave England” and that, for those living in the city, “independent schools are more of an option than elsewhere”.

“This underscores the need to examine more closely the role of emigration, independent



schooling, home education, and the prevalence of ‘unexplained exits’ and how these patterns interact with other socio-economic challenges pupils may face,” the report added.

National Association of Headteachers general secretary Paul Whiteman said: “Unpredictable pupil demographic changes are making long-term school place planning increasingly difficult.”

The introduction of the two-child limit on benefits had “no significant effect” on the development of third and subsequent children in England, a report has found.

Introduced in 2017, the limit means families on universal credit only get a payment uplift for their first two children. There have been sustained and growing calls to scrap the cap, which could lift 500,000 children out of absolute poverty.

Two-child benefit cap ‘does not harm other children’

New research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, funded by Nesta, found the introduction of the two-child limit has had “no significant effect on the proportion of third and subsequent children in England achieving a good level of development at age 5”.

The Labour government has set a target to have 75 per cent of pupils reach that benchmark by 2028.

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson, who is running to be the party’s deputy leader, recently confirmed that the government was considering scrapping the “spiteful” cap.

“Lifting more children out of poverty is why I came into politics,” she told The Guardian. “I am thinking every day about how to turn the tide on child poverty. Everything is on the table, including removing the two-child limit.”

“I want the mandate to go further. The mandate, as deputy leader, is to make tackling child poverty the unbreakable moral mission of this Labour government.”

The IfS concluded that lifting the benefit cap may be a “useful tool for a government focused on reducing child poverty itself.”

“But the research suggests that scrapping the two-child limit would not be a cost-effective policy specifically for improving children’s early educational performance, compared with other policies that have proven cost-effective positive effects.”

Teachers say they lack external support

Most teachers lack the support from other public services they need for their pupils, prompting warnings that schools cannot “shoulder the burden alone”.

A study by the National Foundation for Educational Research also warned that more than seven in 10 teachers reported a less than good level of support from councils, health services, specialist SEND teams and mental health services.

More than half of classroom teachers reported receiving “little or no help” from mental health services. The figure was 67 per cent for primary teachers and 55 per cent for

secondary.

The report found “widespread reliance on external services where needs are unmet by the wider support system around schools”.

Four in five secondary leaders commissioned counselling support for pupils, while more than three in five did it for teaching staff.

While schools appear to be commissioning external services to fill gaps, “this may not be sustainable in the longer term as financial pressures on school budgets and wider public services stretch resources further”, the report warned.

Jenna Julius, researcher director at the

NFER, said: “Schools are taking significant steps to support pupils and staff, but they cannot shoulder the burden alone.”

“Seven out of 10 teachers report they lack the support they feel they need from key services, and more than half report receiving little or no support from mental health services. This shows that the wider support available to schools remains strained.”

“As financial pressures on school budgets and wider public services stretch resources further, there is a real risk that children’s wellbeing and learning will be affected by the strain on support services.”

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

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Movers & Shakers

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



Gareth Harris

Education director for the North, Ormiston Academies Trust

Start date: September

Previous role: Principal of Beamont Collegiate Academy, Warrington

Interesting fact: Before beginning his career in education, Gareth was an apprentice footballer with Swansea City FC. When his aspirations in professional sport came to an end at the age of 19, he chose to pursue a career in teaching.



Reza Schwitzer

Director of assessment reform, AQA

Start date: September

Previous role: Director of external affairs, AQA

Interesting fact: Reza's wife would not take his surname after she found out it literally translates as "sweaty one" in Yiddish



Kenji Batchelor

Partner in Stone King's education team

Start date: September

Previous role: Partner at VWV law firm

Interesting fact: Kenji once accidentally landed a solo part in an amateur musical after misunderstanding an invitation to "join the company" – he thought it meant to be a backing singer off-stage (his missed vocation), not in the cast, and felt too embarrassed to pull out.

Teacher pay review board welcomes new additions

FEATURED

A former trust CEO is among four new appointees to the influential body that makes recommendations on teacher pay.

Dr Tim Gilson, a former secondary school head who led the Athelstan Trust, has been appointed to the school teachers' review body – which provides the government with proposals on teacher pay and conditions each year.

Gilson has also served as a school improvement adviser and Ofsted inspector, and has mentored other heads.

He is joined on the board by Alison MacLeod, a trustee at the Anthem Schools Trust and a member of the Education Development Trust.

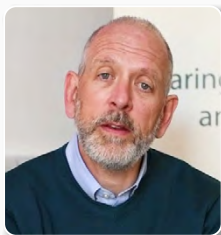
The other two new appointees are Josephine Grunwell, chair of Minstead Trust – a charity for adults with learning disabilities – and Lena Levy, head of public health and healthcare covid inquiry lead at the British Medical Association.

The quartet will all serve on the board for three years.

In its remit letter sent in July, the

government asked the board to make a multi-year recommendation, advise on whether to reduce salary safeguarding and allow maintained schools to pay bonuses.

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson also ordered a review of directed time, which she said is "potentially creating a constraint on schools' deployment of teachers".



Dr Tim Gilson



Alison MacLeod



Josephine Grunwell

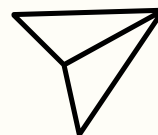


Lena Levy

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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



Letter of the week



Reading your investigation into pupils being refused places felt painfully familiar. ([Shut out: How schools are turning away vulnerable pupils](#), 19 September). As a secondary headteacher I sat in meetings where a child needed a place urgently and every local option was already stretched.

Families can wait weeks while councils and schools debate responsibility, and the families with least influence often wait the longest.

Meanwhile, confidence ebbs away, routine disappears and work piles up. By the time a place is found, the child is behind, anxious, less trusting of adults. The damage can take years to repair.

That's why I'm so passionate about leading Queen's Online School. That experience has

convinced me that well-run online schools should be part of the admissions safety net.

I'm not arguing for sending large numbers of children out of mainstream schools to learn online.

But we need to use every tool in our armoury to keep young people learning. Online schooling is a particularly rapid and powerful one, and we can no longer afford to ignore it.

**Lisa Boorman, Headteacher,
Queen's Online School**

It is deeply disappointing to see that no minister has been assigned oversight of our commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. (Again.) ([Children's minister gets beefed-up schools brief as portfolios revealed](#), 22 September).

We became a ratifying state party to the convention in 1991, yet there is not even a token mention of it in ministerial briefs.

And no, the fact that the children's commissioner's primary statutory function is the promotion and protection of the rights of the child doesn't count. That role exists to hold ministers to account for the rights we have signed up to.

Before the end of the decade, we will (again) be examined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

And regardless of children's commissioners' best efforts, we will no doubt (again) be found wanting on poverty, wellbeing and mental health, SEN/D, citizenship, youth justice, the voice of the child in just about anything to do with what power does in their lives, and indeed the presence of children in any thinking about policy and its implementation.

**Maggie Atkinson, Former children's
commissioner (2010 -2015)**

On a five-point scale from cat's whiskers to dog's breakfast, I don't need an NAHT ballot to reliably say how most leaders judge Ofsted's new framework. ([NAHT to consider industrial action over Ofsted reforms](#), 18 September)

After the mauling their initial proposals received, you'd have thought they would have used the time more effectively than switching the middle point on their own contrived scale from 'attention needed' to 'needs attention'.

Meanwhile, the wildly subjective and often impenetrable language they plan to use to place schools on that scale requires its own 'urgent improvement'. (What on Earth are "astute decisions about how the curriculum and teaching should adapt and evolve"?)

No wonder the unions are baring their teeth.

Tom Richmond, Education policy analyst and Host, *Inside Your Ed* podcast

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.



Since the removal of funding for Sure Start centres, there's been a huge gap in local community provision for supporting children and families.

Surely, now is the time to think creatively rather than simply repeat the previous approach?

([SEND funding must align with the government's inclusive vision](#), 21 September)

How about introducing a community premium of ring-fenced funds to provide a programme of support and nurture for children and families from an early stage, hosted in schools which are already at the centre of their locality?

This proactive approach could cross-link funds from education, health and social care to give children the best possible start, rather than the current reactive method, which costs far more.

Early support and intervention wouldn't just bring cost-savings to the system by delivering programmes in an already-established location; it would also ensure the longer-term benefits of reinforcing community cohesion and creating positive associations with school from an early age.

**Al Kingsley, Chair,
Hampton Academies Trust**

Send your letters here:

LETTERSTOHEEDITOR@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

Feature

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

G'DAY MAT

Trust reforms go down under



After visiting English trusts to hear ‘warts and all’ accounts of academisation, education minister Jo Palmer tells Freddie Whittaker how her Australian state is launching its own version to boost stubbornly weak educational outcomes

Trusts running almost 100 schools, chief executives paid over £500,000 and a litany of high-profile collapses weren't really what Michael Gove envisaged for his “letting a thousand flowers bloom” academy reforms.

While there have been many notable successes, the journey from 2010 to today is one also stacked full of financial scandals, of trusts growing too quickly and of getting governance wrong.

But what if you could design a new system, based on the same principles, without having to drag everyone through those tough lessons?

That's what Tasmania, an Australian island state thousands of miles from England, is now embarking on.

While it may have a fraction of the number of schools in England, the state government hopes creating “multi-school organisations” with joint

executive leadership and aligned curriculum, teaching and operations will help it overturn entrenched low outcomes.

Many of the features will be similar to the English system. Ministers believe grouping schools will allow them to pool resources, reduce administration and improve teaching through collective expertise. Appointment of executive leaders will boost accountability, they say.

But unlike our academies, Tasmanian schools will not go through the complicated “academisation” process.

‘It isn't hitting the mark’

Jo Palmer, Tasmania's minister for education, told Schools Week reform was needed because, although things like phonics and its “lifting literacy” campaign have prompted some improvements,

“we just are not seeing the outcomes that we want to see”.

Tasmania has a year 12 achievement rate of just 53.1 per cent, the worst of any Australian state. It means almost half of pupils do not complete the final year of their secondary education.

“We've never seen so much resourcing in the education space, but it just didn't seem to quite be hitting the mark,” says Palmer.

A government-commissioned review concluded earlier this year there was “merit in trialling multi-school organisations in schools and communities that are interested in, and will be supported with, this approach”.

That trial will begin in January, with three primary schools in Tasmania's capital, Hobart, forming “MSOI”. That organisation will expand throughout the five-year trial, and ministers plan

Feature



Jo Palmer, Tasmania's minister for education

to open two more MSOs in 2027.

Schools not yet in an MSO will be placed in less formal groupings from January, led by newly-recruited "executive leads".

The government says these groupings will deliver "clearer reporting structures, create peer learning groups for educators, and provide greater accountability while preparing the foundations for the expansion of MSOs".

"All of our other schools will be in their groupings, [and] will have already been on the journey," says Palmer.

"They will have been watching how this plays out with our MSOs, and then, my hope is that we will see this transform and be implemented across the state."

Education is devolved to state level in Australia, allowing Tasmania to proceed with the reforms without central government approval.

'Increase the odds of school improvement'

Tasmania's interest in England's school system was piqued by a 2024 Grattan Institute report, which found that MATs in England and their equivalents in New York "increase the odds of school improvement".

"Leading strong families of between 10 and 100 schools, these MSOs have a mandate to maintain high standards, and are accountable for doing so," the report continued.

"Each has a clear blueprint for running an effective school, and the authority to enact this blueprint across multiple schools, including turning around schools that have under-performed for decades."

The report concluded that trusts' "Goldilocks" size helped, making them small enough to



Palmer (centre-right) and Hood (third from left) at Castle Carrock Primary School

'You are so many years down the road in this model'

understand specific challenges, but big enough to "marshal the resources and expertise their schools need".

Grattan commissioned Australian charity McKinnon to organise visits to UK trusts, including United Learning, Star Academies, Dixons and Delta.

The charity in turn hired Brits Will Bickford-Smith, a former DfE adviser, and Matt Hood, a trust chair who also set up England's Oak National Academy, as advisers.

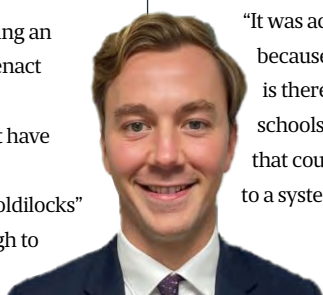
Visiting trusts over here, Palmer says she saw "kids in love with learning and teachers in love with teaching.

"And it's almost as simple as that, isn't it. If you've got those two things, you've actually got a robust and aspirational education system."

One of the benefits of visiting England was the "fact that you are so many years down the road in this model".

"What was incredible was the enormous generosity of the teachers and the leaders that we met, who were so open and honest about 'look, this worked. This wasn't great. If we did it again, we'd probably look at this', warts and all.

"It was actually quite an emotional trip, because we came away thinking, wow, is there something that is happening in schools on the other side of the world that could actually make a real difference to a system here in Tasmania?"



Will Bickford-Smith

No CEO pay freedoms

But the huge expansion of the academies system in England over the past 15 years has not been without its flaws.

Some trusts expanded far too quickly, affecting their ability to improve schools. And a lack of oversight in the early years of expansion led some high-profile chains to collapse following financial mismanagement.

England's approach has involved creating separate legal entities and allowing trusts to deviate from established national pay and conditions for staff. This has often led to clashes with unions.

Perhaps reassuringly, Tasmania is not choosing to emulate those complicating aspects of academies. Although they will have their own executive leadership, new MSOs will not become new legal entities, and they won't deviate on pay and conditions.

Academy executive pay varies hugely and has been a controversial topic here. Tasmania will adopt a simpler approach, using existing pay scales for senior government employees.

MSOs will be given autonomy, but the state is still deciding exactly what will be delegated to schools. The state will continue to set rules over things like safeguarding, will hold schools to account, and support priorities such as literacy and wellbeing.

Tasmania is also still deciding what governance structure the MSOs will have. Although schools have parent and teacher councils, they are

Feature

currently directly run by the state.

Bickford-Smith, an adviser to the DfE between 2023 and 2024, said England's trusts had "led the way" in tackling education issues, but the country "stumbled into the model and still lacks a clear vision for where the system is heading.

"Tasmania, by contrast, has taken the bold step of intentionally rebuilding its system through trialling MSOs – drawing on what has worked in England, and adapting the model for Tasmanian schools."

He said this meant each MSO "starting small, embedding high standards, and scaling only at the pace that allows those standards to be maintained".

Evaluation lessons

Another lesson learned from England's journey is the importance of early evaluation, Palmer says. "That was a little bit of feedback that we got from a number of people, is that they waited for a period of time, and then they went in and evaluated.

"And they said, 'well, if we could have our time again, we would start that evaluation straight up'. So that's one of the things where we've gone, okay, day one, the evaluation begins."

Palmer says "everything that we've taken from your model is actually all about uncomplicating things.

"It's actually very much about stripping out the complications that I think, as government, we have put into schools and saying, you know what, our teachers just want to teach. It's what they want to do.

"And our school leaders and our principals, they want to be working on inspirational professional development and curriculum. And everything about this model is saying, you know what, that is your area of expertise.

"You go do that and let us manage some of the things that are not meant to be part of being a principal in a school or being a teacher in a school."

Another criticism of the expansion of England's model is that some trusts ended up with groups of schools that were geographically incoherent.

Palmer thinks geography will "certainly be part of what schools we bring into MSOs...I think there's some obvious advantages to that.

"But it won't be the only thing that we're looking at."

She said she had been particularly impressed by so-called "turnaround schools" in England – those with entrenched failures taken on and improved

Tasmania's Multi-School Organisation (MSO) approach in 2026



'The teachers and leaders we met were so open and honest'

by trusts.

Palmer was "blown away" by a visit to Lowry Academy in Manchester, she says. The school became famous under its previous name, Harrop Fold, when it featured on the Channel 4 documentary Educating Greater Manchester.

It was subsequently rated 'inadequate', closed and reopened as an academy under United Learning. Last year, its former headteacher Drew Povey was banned from teaching for failing to prevent off-rolling. It was rated 'good' in early 2024.

As they have been in England, union leaders are wary of Tasmania's plans.

Union concerns

The Australian Education Union criticised Palmer for implementing the MSOs trial without consultation, while ignoring other recommendations in the government's education review.

David Genford, AEU Tasmania president, said: "We need smaller class sizes, more time to prepare, and more in-school support for students. We're bargaining for a new teachers' agreement and we won't be ignored again.

"It's insulting that we have an education minister who has gotten distracted by a shiny new toy and has completely dropped the ball on fixing the crisis in schools."

But Palmer is defiant.

"I think wherever there's change, people become uncomfortable, and that's okay. Sometimes it's so much easier just to go, 'oh, well, it is what it is'.

"But that's not what we're elected to do. When you're in that situation where you're well-resourced, you've got a hard-working workforce who are exceptional with what they do, but still you don't have the educational outcomes, you have to look at the system."

The state is now seeking the MSO system's "founding CEO". Their search is international, including in England.

"We are looking for a rock star educator. And we're excited to see who may put their hand up and step up to this. It will be a very exciting position. You'll be right at the forefront of shaping something pretty extraordinary."

She points out Tasmania isn't the only Australian state looking to England's system for inspiration. Schools Week understands delegations from other areas have visited trusts including Ark, Trinity and Twyford.

"We know that there are eyes around Australia who are watching what happens in Tasmania. I don't know. You might have some Aussies who want to come home, maybe, and take up a challenge?"

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Opinion

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SUFIAN SADIQ

Director of talent and teaching school, Chiltern Learning Trust

Labour must not let parental expectations lower standards

Ministers must reinforce high expectations when they set out their home-school contract or they will make an already tough job impossible, writes Sufian Sadiq

The government has recognised the importance of parental engagement and intends to enshrine it further in forthcoming white papers. This is welcome, provided engagement doesn't translate to appeasement.

At present, headteachers are spending an inordinate amount of time firefighting complaints, many of them trivial or vexatious. This diverts energy from the central task of improving teaching, learning and outcomes.

Moves to capture such complaints in one place through a central platform should help to reduce some of the burden associated with this. But if the promised guidance on what schools and parents can expect from each other doesn't deliver the "clear expectations" the education secretary has promised, then we will rapidly reach a new state of overwhelm.

Trust in public institutions has been waning for years, and the erosion of confidence in education carries real, lasting consequences. When trust between staff, pupils and parents breaks down, the delicate balance that underpins strong school cultures begins to unravel.

Constructive parental challenge is essential. It keeps schools accountable, encourages transparency and ensures children receive the education they deserve.

But the seldom-discussed truth is that some communities instinctively trust schools and teachers more than others. This disparity is quietly acknowledged in education circles, but it is rarely confronted openly at system level.

Improving a school is never easy. Real change often requires radical transformation: challenging entrenched norms, raising expectations and shifting culture. This inevitably provokes resistance.

The onus is rightly on schools to consult, explain and build consensus around change. Yet even with strong communication, we are increasingly seeing local and national headlines and viral social media posts stoking uproar about relatively innocuous school rules.

Take uniform. Debates about footwear, jewellery or make-up seem superficial, but cultural decline in schools rarely happens in dramatic fashion. It is usually gradual: shoes become trainers, trainers become any footwear. Acrylic nails, heavy make-up, piercings: each unchallenged step signals that standards are negotiable.

Those who work in school improvement often argue that you can judge a school by its uniform. While not universally true, there



“ Some communities trust schools more than others

is substance to the claim. How pupils present and whether a school enforces its rules are strong indicators of culture and expectations.

I helped to establish a school uniform charity and I serve as one of its trustees. I know the importance of affordability and equity. But the issue is not simply about cost; it is about consistency. A rule unenforced is not a rule at all.

The problem is that more parents are pushing back. Few openly oppose high standards or improved outcomes, yet many resist the enforcement of the very measures that make improvement possible.

In one case, a school faced hundreds of complaints (some laced with abuse and appalling racism) because it insisted on banning trainers. The leadership team was forced to divert enormous amounts of time and energy into managing the fallout.

Faced with such hostility, many heads simply relent. They compromise. Exceptions become norms. Then, whole policies collapse, and the consequences can be ugly.

This is not a matter of shoes or hairstyles. When a school cannot secure compliance with its most

basic policies, it becomes much harder to command focus in the classroom, encourage attendance or ensure participation in interventions.

What some parents see as a victory against unnecessary strictness often undermines the very school improvement they demand. In some cases, progress stalls altogether.

The challenge, then, is to rebuild trust without compromising on standards. To achieve that, ministers must approach their reforms with clarity, fairness and consistency – just like school leaders do.

That means ensuring that parents understand that high expectations are not punitive, but protective. And it means being clear about what constitutes a valid complaint, not just where to take your complaint.

If we continue down the current path, where every rule is up for debate and every enforcement provokes outrage, schools will find it increasingly difficult to deliver the improvements society demands of them.

Standards matter. Culture matters. And above all, trust matters. Without it, schools will be paralysed by conflict rather than empowered to drive change – just like political leaders often seem to be.

Opinion

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LOUISE
LEE

CEO, The Howard
Partnership Trust

The select committee's SEND report lacks practical answers

The 95 recommendations in *Solving the SEND crisis* are expensive, time-consuming and won't put us on a path to sustainable provision, writes Louise Lee

The education select committee's new report, *Solving the SEND crisis*, makes a stonking 95 recommendations. Many have considerable merit, but the report fails to grasp that the very way the system is structured is compounding problems for the future.

The report makes for grim reading. A system in crisis. Children underserved. Parents feeling let down and unheard.

This will come as little surprise to those on the ground, who pour their efforts into making things work as well as possible. If it comes as a shock to policymakers, let's hope it's one that leads to action.

The key barrier is that the committee's 95 recommendations for change each require money or time. The first is rarely forthcoming; the second is in short supply.

What we need are solutions that meet need earlier, before issues escalate.

Reforming EHCPs is seen as a silver bullet by some, but this comes with a very high risk of alienating parents. Our best chance of empowering schools to deliver a life-changing education for all

our young people remains broadly unexplored.

Time and again, longitudinal studies show that paving the way to a truly inclusive educational experience begins with identification and support of need in the earliest years of a child's life.

Here are three practical ways we could strengthen early identification and support, and thereby put the SEND system on a more sustainable footing:

Increase early years training

The government has rightly prioritised expanding nursery provision, and it's important that we make the most of this opportunity. If we're serious about building an inclusive mainstream experience, early investment is crucial.

Yet early years staff are among the least-trained and least well-paid in the system.

With extra investment in training, we can improve existing provisions' ability to intervene early. This will halt a pattern of escalating need. For example, a focus on speech and language training could help plug the shortfall in qualified speech therapists.

We need to train and develop SENCOs at early years level too, ensuring they have the skills to identify needs and signpost families to support.

It's crucial that early years provision is also joined up with



“ **These three policies are immediately actionable** ”

wider services that engage with children at this age, particularly health visitors. My early years colleagues have felt the severe reduction in health agency capacity in recent years. The “multi-agency” approach that schools are familiar with is something that we should foster among those supporting families in the first years of a child's life.

Commit to early interventions

There is an increasing presumption that children with SEND should start their school career in mainstream education and only move to specialist provisions when it becomes unavoidable.

If this stems from a desire to build a truly inclusive mainstream education, the ambition is admirable but misguided. Stronger support from specialist provision at an early stage makes it more likely that young people will be able to participate in mainstream education as they get older.

Schools with SEND centres are particularly well placed to help young people in this position and provide life-changing support to

remove educational barriers.

Build the approved special free schools

Ministers have pressed pause on special free schools that are currently in the pipeline in a bid to ensure value for money. While this is understandable, it is flawed for at least two reasons.

First, the children that need the support simply cannot wait. Delays mean more barriers to opportunity, so they make no educational sense.

Second, delays only compound problems, and remedial action is always more expensive than early intervention, so they make no financial sense either.

Meanwhile, as the report notes, lack of specialist provision only forces local authorities to pay for expensive private school places – a situation some private providers exploit.

There are no quick fixes to get us out of this crisis, but these three policies are immediate, actionable and reasonably low-cost. They won't solve the problems overnight, but they are crucial in putting SEND on the path to a sustainable future.

Opinion

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EMMA
SMITH

Director,
ESC Management Services

Labour's SEND reforms must put the onus back on the NHS

Conflation of 'SEN' and 'SEND' in the last set of reforms has contributed to shifting nursing responsibilities onto schools, explains Emma Smith

The 2014 special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) reforms promised an integrated system across education, health, and social care. A decade on, schools are filling ever-growing gaps in NHS provision. How has it come to this?

Instead of integration, schools face fractured services, diminishing NHS input and, as *Schools Week* recently highlighted, increasing pressure to provide medical care themselves.

In educational settings, several factors lie behind this, including the absence of a national model for NHS clinical nursing services, delegation missteps and a failure to recognise healthcare activities.

But subtler influences have also played a part. In particular, a lack of clarity and misuse of the SEN and SEND terms have quietly skewed the SEND landscape.

At the time of the reforms, academics raised concerns about how special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities had been brought together, as well as the lack of practical guidance for the new SEND concept.

The Children and Families Act 2014 tightly defines SEN, which is linked to the requirement for

special educational provision (SEP). Within SEN, "disability" relates very specifically to the use of facilities, likely to be physical facilities such as classrooms or toilets.

Crucially, health provision can only be deemed SEP in specific and narrow circumstances associated with education, health and care plans (EHCPs) and provision that functions to educate or train. Therefore, health-related needs will only be classed as SEN in limited cases.

The problems arise because the term SEND covers SEN (and SEP-eligible disability within it) as well as disability more widely, defined in line with the Equality Act 2010's broad definition of disability as an impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on daily activities.

As a result, SEND is associated with SEP but also with disability access, adjustments and services across education, health, and social care. And this conflation of the SEN and SEND terms means they are often used interchangeably to this day.

Examples are easy to find: Section 69 of the Children and Families Act 2014, labelled 'SEN information report', covers SEN and general disability.

In 2019, the National Audit Office presented 'SEND' numbers using SEN data.

Just last year, a senior department for education official defined 'SEND' using the Children and Families



“ Misuse of SEN and SEND has skewed the landscape

Act 2014's 'SEN' definition in parliamentary evidence.

And today, Oxfordshire County Council (and it is not alone) carries a webpage about its SEND local offer which describes 'SENDCO' as a statutory post.

This is more than a technicality. Language shapes beliefs and understanding. In turn, this shapes policy and practice. Repeated misuse normalises error.

It's unsurprising, therefore, that treating SEND as equivalent to SEN has correlated with increased focus on schools and a sidelining of health and social care.

The consequences are considerable: unrealistic expectations, compromised care standards, schools carrying healthcare risks, gaps in NHS-commissioned services hidden and resources diverted from education.

Significantly, following legal concerns, the Equality and Human Rights Commission removed examples of schools providing nursing care as reasonable adjustments from its technical guidance to the 2010 act.

From a social model perspective, societal factors are disabling. And the truth is that current NHS commissioning arrangements are one such factor, because they are creating barriers to children

accessing education.

Schools have stepped in to mask the gaps, but even with the best intentions, schools cannot replace the quality and safety of NHS-commissioned clinical services.

As the next phase of SEND reform is drafted, clarity must come first. SEN and SEND must be explicitly distinguished and applied consistently.

Where needs require health provision falling outside SEN/SEP and reasonable adjustments, responsibility should remain with the NHS.

Delivering this will require that compliant NHS services be embedded in educational settings, including an equitable model for NHS-commissioned clinical nursing services in schools.

This is essential not only for SEND but also for wider inclusion and attendance agendas, which rely on pupils being able to access the NHS services they need to stay well and fully participate.

The vision of 2014 was right: integration is the goal. But it cannot be achieved through a confused and inconsistent narrative or misplaced responsibility.

Precision, compliance, and ownership of responsibilities are needed to ensure children receive the services they are entitled to.

Opinion

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PROF SAM TWISELTON

Emeritus professor,
Sheffield Hallam University

Naming the missing piece of the teacher training puzzle

Despite progress in recent years, we're still getting teacher and leader development wrong too often, writes Sam Twiselton. A new concept hopes to put that right

This week's report from the Teacher Development Trust could and should have significance for all who support teacher and school leader development. Among its far-reaching conclusions, it proposes that teacher training is a distinct discipline that demands its own language.

Put simply, the report considers what it means to teach teachers. A cross-sector working group has deliberated over the course of this year on the question of whether there is something unique about teaching teachers which should impact on how training and development is designed and delivered.

Many of us working in the field instinctively recognise this uniqueness. Consciously or unconsciously, we weave our ideas about how to deliver effective teacher and leader training into our practice.

But the report makes a compelling case that we must systemically be more thoughtful and intentional about it. Being more explicit in this regard would not only change our

individual approaches but, over time, build a stronger evidence base, iron out discrepancies in practice and inevitably improve outcomes.

Take NPQs, for example. This is a suite of qualifications backed by clear evidence, every bit of which is signed off by the Education Endowment Foundation to ensure high fidelity to the best research. However, this has sometimes led to a focus on content at the expense of a coherent theory of change regarding how teachers learn.

While we should celebrate the increased focus on evidence in designing professional development over the past decade and more, that progress has not been matched by deeper consideration about how to convey that content most effectively to teachers and leaders.

Teachers' and leaders' own experiences, identities and contexts shape their engagement with learning. That means we need to give as much (if not more) thought to the methods we use to teach the teachers undertaking NPQs as to the content of these programmes.

At its worst, focusing too much on content at the expense of the broader context of teacher learning can lead to unengaging approaches that are hard to apply in an impactful way.

CPD delivered this way can lack contextual relevance and does not empower teachers and leaders to



“ There is now a name for what we do: didagogy

improve the quality of their thinking and decision-making to solve their own complex problems of practice.

The report reflects the diverse nature of the working group, with members from academia, teacher training, sector organisations and those working on CPD in schools and trusts.

Between them, they propose three elements that are necessary to ensure effective professional development for teachers:

Practices: the content of the offer, based on evidence and implementation.

Conditions: the culture of the school or trust and the support on offer to turn theory into practice.

Identity: ensuring the development responds to what teachers and leaders are motivated to understand.

More than that, the report proposes a new term to capture the craft of teaching teachers: didagogy.

Perhaps most importantly, the report is deliberate in avoiding a reductive view of what constitutes effective didagogy.

Just as we argue over the latest evidence on pedagogy, so too should we create space for new research

and different ideas on didagogical approaches. In this way, we will be continuously learning and turning words/ideas into meaningful practice.

There is no claim here that we are creating something new other than a term that seeks to codify the existing-but-disparate work of so many people. We hope it's a term around which all involved in the professional development of teachers can coalesce.

With it, we have an opportunity to elevate professional development practice and to ensure all who shape it – from practitioners to policymakers – recognise the importance of how teachers are trained as much as what they are taught.

Whether you are an academic involved in research or leading initial teacher training, a course designer for a CPD provider or a school or trust lead developing and planning a CPD programme, there is now a name for what we do: didagogy.

Take that word. Make it your own. And wear it as a badge of honour.

Read the full report [here](#)

Solutions

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**MONISHA
JEF CUT**

Training manager,
Anna Freud

Six steps for delivering a mental health peer support programme

Getting students to support each other's wellbeing can be highly effective, but getting it right requires time and effort, explains Monisha Jefcut

School leaders looking for effective ways to improve mental health and wellbeing are increasingly turning to students themselves. The evidence shows this can be highly effective, but it is not without risks.

Based on my work training staff across the country, here's what I've learned about helping students to become confident peer supporters and find space to talk, share problems and build connections.

Involve the right people

A common mistake when developing peer support in schools is trying to do it too quickly, or assuming it will be easy. There's a lot to consider, and it takes time to ensure your programme is a safe and powerful support mechanism.

In the first instance, buy-in from senior leadership is vital. However, it isn't enough. You will need a dedicated staff member with the capacity to take on the responsibility and the ability to provide suitable training for mentors.

It's also important to establish a screening process to ensure that peer mentors are suitable for the role. Be clear about the many benefits of being a mentor (from

developing communication and coaching skills to supporting their own wellbeing), but also about the level of responsibility and commitment the role demands.

Work where young people already are

Peer support programmes come in all shapes and sizes: online or in-person, one-on-one or group-based, and targeted or universal.

Before setting up a programme in your setting, ask students what type of support would work for them, including how, where and when it should be delivered, to help identify the right model for them.

This can be done through focus groups and surveys for everyone in the school community, including parents and carers.

Focus on relationships

Young people often find it easier to ask each other for support and open up to people of a similar age. This is one of the reasons peer support can be so beneficial.

To harness this, however, peer support programmes need to build trust and connection between mentors and mentees.

To develop mentors' confidence, create scenarios to roleplay during training. This could cover common issues, such as how to support someone who is being bullied or experiencing issues with their friendship group. The more



“ This can't be a stand-alone initiative

prepared mentors feel, the easier it will be to build trust.

Helping them find a designated safe space for sessions is part of this too. For example, finding a quiet area where sessions won't be disturbed outside of lessons may be challenging, but it will make a difference.

Encourage ownership

Peer support programmes are more likely to be successful if young people are fully engaged all the way through. This means co-designing, co-producing and co-delivering the programme with students, which fosters a sense of agency and ensures it meets their needs.

Encouraging peer mentors to reflect on what can make relationships positive is a powerful way to embed co-production. By exploring their own experiences, mentors co-create understanding and develop the skills to build meaningful, supportive connections with others.

Establish safe and clear boundaries

One of the biggest risks with any such programme is the chance that mentors will face safeguarding challenges, including urgent mental

health disclosures.

Appropriate training, ongoing support and supervision (including access to a trusted adult throughout the session or at the end to debrief) are key.

As part of this, there need to be clear lines of communication for addressing safeguarding concerns, along with processes for staff on referring to wider support services.

Mentors also need to understand the limits of confidentiality, how to maintain clear boundaries with their mentee, and have space to reflect on the emotional impact supporting others can have on them (along with support where needed).

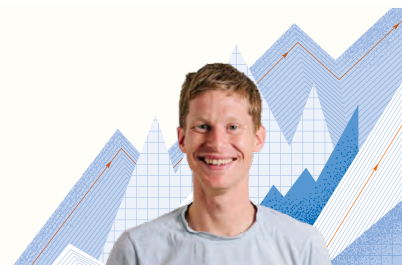
Build into a whole-school approach

Finally, it's important that schools address mental health and wellbeing needs holistically. A peer-support programme can't be a stand-alone initiative. It should be built into a whole-school approach to belonging and wellbeing.

This means everyone in the school community working together to support mental health, including strengthening partnerships with families, and supporting staff wellbeing.

STAT OF THE NATION

DATA DEEP DIVES TO SURFACE FRESH PERSPECTIVES



What's really behind white low-income pupils' underperformance?

John Jerrim

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

Data reveals a genuine problem for this cohort, explains John Jerrim, but it also points the way to solutions

Few groups in England's education system attract as much political and media attention as white low-income children (WLIC). It is easy to dismiss all this as political grandstanding, but the data shows there is a real problem here.

My new research adds a new, more fundamental dimension to a discussion that until now has centred on exam results by looking at how engaged WLIC pupils are with school in the first place.

Drawing on data from more than 100 secondary schools and 70,000 pupils through [The Engagement Platform](#), the answer is stark: WLIC pupils are consistently the least engaged across nearly every measure and often start secondary school on the back foot.

Educational outcomes are not only about ability or teaching quality. They are also about how much pupils value school (cognitive engagement), how much effort they put in (behavioural engagement), and whether they enjoy being there (emotional engagement).

High levels of all three types of engagement are linked to faster rates of academic progress and better attendance. Conversely, low levels are early warning signs of underperformance.

What our data shows is that WLIC children report among the lowest levels of engagement across all three.

Cognitive engagement

WLIC children have the weakest sense of academic agency. Around one-quarter (26 per cent) of WLIC secondary pupils do not believe that putting in more effort leads to better grades.

Low-income white girls fare particularly poorly here, reporting the lowest interest in lessons of any group. They award an average score of 4.4 out of 10, compared to 5.0 for white girls not from low-income backgrounds and 5.2 for low-income Asian boys.



Emotional engagement

Among this group, enjoyment of school is alarmingly low. WLIC pupils score just 2.6 out of 10, compared with 3.7 for disadvantaged Asian pupils and 3.4 for disadvantaged Black pupils.

Girls again stand out as the most disaffected. WLIC girls award an average school enjoyment score of 2.4 out of 10, compared to 2.8 for WLIC boys and 3.0 for white girls that are not from low-income backgrounds.

Behavioural engagement

Sadly, but perhaps unsurprisingly given the above, effort is especially concerning. Only half of WLIC pupils say they work hard at school, compared to around 70 per cent of disadvantaged South Asian pupils.

Homework is a major issue: WLIC pupils are far less likely to hand it in on time.

Another striking finding relates to timing. While many groups show a big drop in engagement during year 7, WLIC pupils begin secondary school already behind. The problem is not that they disengage faster, but that they start secondary school less engaged to begin with.

The disadvantage penalty

Our data suggests that disadvantage and ethnicity are additive rather than multiplicative. In other words, being disadvantaged lowers engagement, and being white lowers engagement, but these factors combine rather than amplify one another.

One exception seems to be effort at school:

here, the 'disadvantage penalty' is much sharper for white pupils than for their Black or South Asian peers.

Recommendations

If we want to improve outcomes for WLIC pupils, we must focus on three priorities:

Start early: Since WLIC pupils arrive in Year 7 already disengaged, interventions need to begin in primary and continue through the secondary transition.

Tailor strategies by gender: WLIC boys are most likely to undervalue education and put in little effort. For them, initiatives that link schoolwork to concrete goals and future opportunities could be key. WLIC girls, by contrast, suffer from low agency and low enjoyment. For them, building confidence, peer networks and positive experiences of school life may be more effective.

Work with parents: Many ethnic minority families instil high aspirations despite disadvantage. Schools and policymakers need to find ways to encourage similar parental engagement among WLIC families, so children receive consistent messages about the value of education.

Engagement is far from perfect for other disadvantaged groups, and our data offers lessons for better supporting them too.

But when it comes to WLIC, boosting life opportunities will remain elusive until we address what is evidently a deep issue of early disengagement across the board.

THE LEGAL LEADER

Expert advice on education and the law



What does new anti-fraud legislation mean for schools?

Kamal Chauhan

Partner,
Shakespeare Martineau

Charlotte Cassells

Senior associate,
Shakespeare Martineau



The Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023 (ECCTA) comes into force this month, introducing legal responsibilities aimed at improving corporate accountability and fraud prevention.

While originally designed with corporate entities in mind, the act has important implications for schools that are incorporated bodies, such as academies which are set up as charitable companies limited by guarantee.

Managing fraud risks is not new for schools. Indeed, the Academy Trust Handbook and the master funding agreement contain obligations on fraud prevention.

However, the act does create a new layer of obligations and risks which schools will need to feed into their processes.

Key changes

Senior management offence

Schools could now face criminal liability if a senior manager (such as a principal, finance director or senior leadership team member) commits a specified economic offence (such as false accounting or fraud) while acting with the authority of the institution.

If this occurs, the school itself could be found guilty of the same offence.

This offence applies to all schools and there is no defence available, meaning everyone needs to be alive to this risk.

Failure to prevent fraud offence

Schools that meet the definition of a 'large organisation' may also be held criminally liable and receive an unlimited fine if someone associated with the school (e.g. staff, trustees, contractors or agents) commits fraud with the intention of benefiting the school, even if the school was unaware of this.

A school is considered 'large' if it meets two of the following three criteria:

- It has more than 250 employees



- Its turnover exceeds £36 million
- It has assets greater than £18 million

If a school is part of a multi-academy trust, note that these thresholds apply to the entire trust.

Even if a school is not classified as 'large', the Home Office and the Department for Education recommend that all education providers adopt good practice in fraud prevention.

Unlike the senior management offence, there is a defence if the institution can demonstrate that it was or was intended to be a victim of fraud, it had reasonable fraud prevention measures in place, or it was not reasonable to expect such prevention procedures to be in place.

How can schools prevent fraud?

Risk assessments

Undertake and regularly review risk assessments. Identify areas of vulnerability, such as procurement, payroll, funding and sub-contracting arrangements.

Due diligence

Have proportionate and risk-based due diligence procedures in place to vet third-party providers, agents and contractors (especially those involved in financial transactions).

Policies and training

Ensure anti-fraud and whistleblowing policies are up to date and clearly communicated, and that staff receive regular training.

Contracting

Make sure that relevant contracts contain clauses to protect the school as far as possible.

Culture

Ensure staff are comfortable to speak up about concerns and that reporting channels are clear and accessible.

Governance and oversight

Ensure senior managers understand their responsibilities and that oversight mechanisms are in place.

Fraud-prevention plan

The DfE has issued sector-specific guidance on fraud prevention which outlines common risks and provides useful templates.

Schools are encouraged to develop a fraud response plan, use the DfE's fraud indicators checklist, and align with cyber security standards to prevent digital fraud. Schools should review this guidance in detail.

The Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act marks a significant shift toward greater transparency and accountability. As such, it raises the bar in terms of how schools are expected to manage fraud risk.

Whether or not your school or trust is a 'large' organisation, adopting recommended procedures is a proactive step toward safeguarding the school's reputation and finances and protecting against possible criminal liability.

Now is the time to review policies and staff training, update internal processes and seek professional support where necessary to ensure you meet the evolving regulatory requirements.


Week in

Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

TUESDAY

Minutes from an Ofqual board meeting in March, published today, show it had been a “challenging process to be able to present a balanced budget in line with limits set at phase one of the 2025 spending review”.

“This had involved a high level of collaboration across the executive team and much scrutiny of areas to prioritise and de-prioritise within Ofqual’s work programme,” the minutes added.

But one thing that did help was badly behaved exam boards.

The minutes note that Ofqual had to get Treasury approval to increase its “retainable income threshold” from £62,000 to £115,000 in “recognition of the recovery of increased legal costs from awarding organisations that have been subject to enforcement action”.

Recent exam board error lowlights include WJEC being fined £350,000 after more than 1,500 students got the wrong exam results last year. Meanwhile, Pearson was fined £250,000 for failing to identify conflicts of interest among nearly 200 examiners.

Still, at least those exam paper errors are keeping Ofqual’s balance sheets happy!

Ofqual board minutes also reveal the board “unanimously agreed” to appoint Chris Paterson as its deputy chair.

Paterson, currently interim co-chief

executive of the Education Endowment Foundation, was a senior policy adviser to various Conservative party secretaries of state.

He was employed as a civil servant and was not a party-political appointment. But his appointment at Ofqual is yet another example of a key figure of the Tory reform years now in a prominent position under a Labour government.

It comes after Bridget Phillipson stuck with Sir Ian Bauckham as her pick for Ofqual chief regulator. The former MAT CEO, who led several government reviews under the Tories, was originally selected by her predecessor Gillian Keegan.

WEDNESDAY

Talking of senior education figures under the Tory administration, Sir Martyn Oliver was anointed the most influential person in education in the annual Education Business’s list.

This will no doubt make up for his inspection reform getting panned from several different corners.

But frustrating for Oliver will be the inclusion of Dame Christine Gilbert, the former chief inspector parachuted in as Ofsted chair by Phillipson to keep an eye on his reforms, in the number two slot!

Meanwhile, rumours surfaced today about government officials apparently considering pulling lots of information about their proposed SEND reforms from

the, er, SEND white paper.

Sources maintain that it is full speed ahead on the reforms and the issue is over “sequencing” when details are communicated.

But ministers have been saying for months that their white paper will reveal the long-awaited SEND plans. So, any movement on this will most likely disappoint many people.

It is also worrying that this is even being considered just a couple of weeks away from the paper potentially being published.

A SEND white paper without SEND would be quite the policy triumph for Labour.

The education secretary’s campaign for the leadership of the Labour Party has helped her to find her voice on some important issues. Usually a cautious politician, the need to garner support means Phillipson has become more outspoken.

Last week she was calling for the end to the two-child benefit cap. This week she was writing for *Schools Week* insisting that workers’ rights reforms won’t be watered-down following the resignation of former deputy prime minister Angela Rayner.

We look forward to seeing Phillipson continue as a tireless campaigner for the needy and working class once the contest is over!



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PRINCIPAL – ASHTREE PRIMARY ACADEMY

Location: Stevenage | **Salary:** Leadership scale £67,898 - £75,050 | **Start:** January 2026

Ashtree Primary Academy, part of Future Academies, is seeking a dynamic and visionary Principal to lead our school into its next chapter. This is an exciting opportunity for an experienced leader with ambition, creativity, and a passion for raising aspirations and life chances.

As Principal, you will:

- Provide strong and strategic leadership, shaping the academy's vision within its local context.
- Inspire staff and pupils to achieve excellence in teaching, learning, and wider school life.
- Champion high expectations, inclusion, and opportunity for every child.
- Recruit, retain, and develop talented staff, ensuring a culture of collaboration and professional growth.
- Work in partnership with Future Academies' central team to realise the ambitions of trustees and the executive team.

About Us

Future Academies is a flourishing multi-academy trust, founded to improve life chances and raise aspirations for young people. We deliver a knowledge-rich curriculum, rich cultural and

extracurricular opportunities, and a strong pastoral system. Our ethos is underpinned by our values of Knowledge, Aspiration, and Respect, and by our motto *libertas per cultum* – "freedom through education".

Staff Benefits

We recognise our colleagues as our most important asset and offer:

- Excellent CPD and career progression opportunities.
- Employer contributions to Teachers' Pension Scheme.
- A supportive ethos and strong focus on staff wellbeing.
- Access to Mintago benefits, Virtual GP, and Employee Assistance Programme.

We warmly welcome visits to the school. To arrange this, or to have a confidential discussion about the role, please email HREnquiries@futureacademies.org. Alternatively, contact Oliver Wimborne, Director of Education, via oliver.wimborne@futureacademies.org.

Join us in shaping the future of Ashtree Primary Academy.



Director of Impact and Growth

At ASDAN, we are driven by a clear purpose: to engage, elevate, and empower learners whose life chances are too often constrained by poverty, exclusion, or systemic barriers. We believe education should be a force for equity, enabling every learner to discover their abilities, build confidence, and take control of their future. That belief has guided ASDAN since our foundation, and today it feels more urgent than ever.

ASDAN is seeking a **Director of Impact and Growth**, a senior leadership role responsible for driving the delivery, quality, and expansion of ASDAN's programmes and qualifications. You will ensure effective project management of strategic priorities, the growth and support of a diverse and international membership, and the quality assurance of all delivery functions. This role also supports the CEO in building ASDAN's external profile and influence.

Applications close: **24 October 2025**

[CLICK HERE TO APPLY](#)



Headteacher



Spaghetti Bridge are seeking an experienced and inspiring Headteacher to lead and shape the development of Valley Bridge School, for pupils with needs associated with SEMH and Autism.

Now in its second year, Valley Bridge offers a rare chance to shape a dynamic and innovative school with further developments and play a central role in unlocking the schools full potential.

We're looking for a leader with substantial experience in SEN education, a deep understanding of evidence-based practice, and a passion for developing both people and pedagogy.

Guiding a talented team, you will bring ethical and relational leadership to everything you do and will lead on Spaghetti Bridge's pioneering Enterprise Learning curriculum—designed to equip learners with the skills for tomorrow.

This is your opportunity to shape the future of inclusive education while enjoying exceptional professional support, development, and wellbeing within a forward-thinking organisation.

[CLICK HERE TO APPLY](#)



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](#)

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