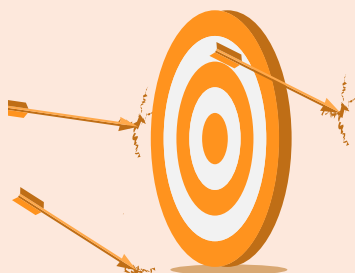




RECRUITMENT RISES, BUT TARGET STILL MISSED



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THE SCHOOLS WITH MILLION POUND DEFICITS



48 maintained schools now over £1 million in the red

Leaders charged six-figure interest for their shortfalls

Revelation comes as DfE launches new cost-cutting drive



JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS

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SCHOOLS
WEEK

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Working in education often feels like groundhog day. Jonathan Gullis is back in the headlines. The government is consulting families over SEND reforms. And the Department for Education is talking about finding cost savings in schools.

There are elements of the new “maximising value for pupils” (MVP) programme that are to be welcomed.

Capping fees charged by supply agencies is sensible. Support to avoid hefty costs for management information systems and other services makes sense.

But our big investigation this week into council school deficits shows any cost-cutting drive is unlikely to shift the dial very much.

The fact that at least 48 council-maintained schools now have deficits of over £1 million, and some have deficits that dwarf those of entire academy trusts, shows the seriousness of the funding situation.

One of the most severe examples we reveal even had three visits from government cost-cutters. They found no fat left to trim.

Some schools may be able to find savings, and it's right the government helps – and even takes the reins – on some of that work. But in reality, for many schools, further cuts are just not realistic.

Leaders are incredibly worried about the future, particularly as they're being told they won't get extra funding for future pay rises.

As the Institute for Fiscal Studies points out this week, falling rolls present an opportunity to increase per-pupil funding in future. This is something ministers must seriously consider.

School closures have always been part and parcel of changing populations. What's important is that they are properly managed and not just a knee-jerk response to a grim financial situation facing many primary schools.

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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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Ministers' SEND listening campaign 'futile', say parents

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

The government's new public engagement campaign on SEND has been labelled a "futile tick-box exercise" by parents, as ministers seek to reassure the sector they are listening.

This week, the Department for Education (DfE) launched "the biggest national conversation on SEND in a generation". It will host nine face-to-face and five online events "putting families at the heart" of its plans.

But the "conversation" only runs until January 14 – and leaves little time ahead of the delayed white paper, expected to be published the same month.

Rachel Filmer, campaigns manager at Special Needs Jungle, said the timescales left parents "sceptical" that it would have "any impact on the white paper".

An online form launched to gather views has about 30 questions, with no word count restriction, for people to give their thoughts on the system.

The DfE said it would review "all responses carefully" and questions are optional. It may use artificial intelligence to identify "themes, trends and patterns".

The "conversation" asks for views on some proposals already put forward by experts and thinktanks, such as the Sutton Trust's suggestion to introduce "SEND hubs" into schools.

But Filmer said many parents already provided testimony to the recent education select committee SEND inquiry.

"Framing questions differently will not lead to different answers. Parents are exhausted, and have lost patience with a system that claims to be listening, while demonstrating that we have not been heard. There is an overwhelming sense that this is a futile tick-box exercise."

The DfE is holding ticketed in-person events in each region, alongside the online events, but attending would mean travelling hundreds of miles for some. For example, the nearest meetings for schools in Cumbria would be in Darlington, Leeds or Manchester.

Madeleine Cassidy, chief executive at the Independent Provider of Special Education



Advice (IPSEA), said this "risks restricting participation for many families and narrowing the range of voices heard".

Pepe Di'lasio, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders union, also wondered "how feasible it will be to analyse responses that come in in the middle of January".

The DfE said a public consultation "on some aspects of our SEND plans" would be launched alongside the white paper.

Georgia Gould, the schools minister, told the first online event "we will work very hard to ensure that is a meaningful consultation and we hear from people around the country".

"We've done a lot of engagement, the expert advisory group has done a lot of work, but we felt it was very important we were having a real dialogue," she said.

"The things that people are saying to me... that is helping shape proposals and we are taking that back directly into policy-making conversation."

Gould said "getting accountability right is a key part of the areas we're looking at".

It comes as a row about how SEND will be funded in the future rumbled on this week.

The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) defended its "reasonable" decision to forecast the impact of a funding shortfall on the schools budget following a backlash from

ministers.

The government announced at the budget last month that in nearly two years, SEND cost pressures would sit on its books, rather than those of councils, estimated to cost £6.3 billion in 2028-29.

The OBR reported that funding this entirely from the schools budget would see mainstream per-pupil funding cut by 4.9 per cent.

But the DfE said this was "fundamentally wrong" and did not "account for the detail" of its planned SEND reforms.

Tom Josephs, a member of the OBR committee, said the government "just told us it would be absorbed within overall government spending, it didn't tell us how it would fund it".

He added: "We have to illustrate risks so we chose to do it, which I think is reasonable, by illustrating the impact that would have on the schools budget."

Susan Acland-Hood, DfE permanent secretary, said this week it was "helpful" the OBR have recognised the funding pressures.

"Although it feels challenging to say it will go on the government's balance sheet, what that does is it recognises that it's a problem that we need to solve together between central and local government. We can't just keep expecting local government to do this all on their own."

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson also told the Commons this week that the future SEND funding shortfall was a "matter for the next spending review", due to be held in 2027.



Georgia Gould

INVESTIGATION

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The council schools £1m+ in the red

JACK DYSON

@JACKYDYS

EXCLUSIVE

Dozens of council-run schools are more than £1 million in deficit, shock figures reveal, with some even charged six-figure sums in “interest” by councils for racking up the losses.

The number of maintained schools in the red across 65 local authorities has leapt by over 70 per cent in just three years, a Schools Week investigation has found, with specialist settings among the worst hit.

Projections for one ailing secondary show its £5.6 million deficit is expected to swell to £7 million in a year's time. The findings shed more light on the hidden world of council school finances.

Reacting to the findings, Julia Harnden, of the Association of School and College Leaders, said: “It's deeply worrying. This is symptomatic of an education system that is hugely underfunded, with schools continually being asked to find further savings.”

More in the red

Schools Week analysis shows the number of maintained schools in deficit across 65 local authorities has leapt by 71 per cent, from just under 720 in 2021-22 to over 1,200 last year. This is despite more and more maintained schools becoming academies..

Our investigation identified 48 local authority schools with deficits of over £1 million.

East Sussex reported an increase from one to seven schools in deficit, while Norfolk had a sixfold rise.

A Local Government Association (LGA) spokesperson said the increases were due in large part to falling rolls and “funding allocated on a per-pupil basis”.

Primary pupil numbers nationally have been falling since 2018-19 as a population bulge caused by the 2000s baby boom has moved into secondary.

Eighty-eight per cent of maintained schools are primaries, compared to 69 per cent of academies.

School with £7m deficit

The school furthest in the red was Monkseaton High School in



‘The current trajectory of increasing deficits is not sustainable for our schools’

Whitley Bay (£5.6 million). North Tyneside council papers show that it is expected to rack up more losses this year, falling into a deficit of £7 million by 2027.

It has not set a balanced budget since 2016. The secondary's situation has deteriorated due to, among other things, falling rolls, “higher than average building and maintenance costs” and admission number increases at a neighbouring high school.

The council said this was despite “significant work” undertaken “over a sustained period of time” to address the issues, including staffing reductions and leadership teams cuts.

Deon Krishnan, its headteacher, noted that “historic factors, some going back more than a decade mean the deficit remained difficult to recover”.

Monkseaton was also “one of the first to accept” the DfE's offer for one

of its cost-cutters to “produce a comprehensive review of their finances”, according to the council.

But despite visiting three times, none were able to identify “any areas of further

significant savings beyond those already made”.

The local authority will close the school next year, having decided it “is not a position that the council can support”.

Special schools rocked

Another North Tyneside school, Norham High in North Shields, ended 2024-25 with a deficit of just under £4 million.

A council spokesperson said the “challenge” headteachers in the area are facing is “driven by a combination of rising costs, declining pupil numbers, increases in complex needs and changes to national government funding formulas”, adding: “The current trajectory of increasing deficits is not sustainable for our schools or the communities they serve.”

Analysis of each of the councils' highest-deficit schools shows 38 per cent of them (25) were primaries.

Thirty-one per cent (20) were secondaries, 26 per cent (17) were special schools. Overall, just 5 per cent of council-run schools are special schools.

Finance expert Micon Metcalfe warned that special schools were “more vulnerable” as their funding “has not kept pace” with costs and they



Micon Metcalfe

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tend to spend “much more” on employees due to their “high staff ratios”.

‘Difficult decisions’

There are 48 local authority schools with deficits of over £1 million. Six of them were in Hackney. Anntoinette Bramble, the authority’s deputy mayor, said the challenges faced in the area are “significant”.

Fewer children are being “being born and living in Hackney”, while a “higher proportion of have greater needs than ever before”.

Bramble added the council had made the “difficult decision to permanently close eight” primaries in the past two years.

Harnden added “all kinds” of schools “are being impacted by the paucity of funding”, with the issues “not restricted to the maintained sector”.

But many of the individual school deficits we uncovered eclipse those seen in some of the most troubled academy chains.

A Schools Week investigation in October found that 75 trusts – running 264 schools – had raised concerns about their ability to continue operating as far back as in 2023-24.

Trust ‘benefits’

The St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi Academy Trust – which oversees 25 schools across Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Derby – posted the largest deficit (£5.9 million).

It was followed by the Arthur Terry Learning Partnership (£3.9 million) and the Sherborne Area Schools’ Trust (£1.9 million). They ran 23 and 18 schools respectively at the time.

National Governance Association deputy chief executive Sam Henson noted that maintained schools “are also less likely to gain from the financial benefits associated with being part of a group of schools, which academies will necessarily have in a multi-academy trust”.

North Tyneside also acknowledged its “ability to provide direct financial support is limited, and unlike academy trusts, we do not have mechanisms to redistribute staffing or running costs across multiple schools”.

Schools Week previously revealed that government officials are also working on white paper proposals to encourage all schools to join a group.

Stephen Morales, chief executive of the Institute of School Business Leadership, has been in “exploratory conversations” with six councils

Across the 65 local authorities...

**1,226 SCHOOLS
ARE IN DEFICIT**
UP 71% SINCE
2021-22

**48 SCHOOLS
ARE OVER £1M
IN DEFICIT**

**26% OF THE
WORST HIT
ARE SPECIAL
SCHOOLS**

**DEFICIT
SCHOOLS
CHARGED UP
TO £340K IN
‘INTEREST’**

Source: Schools Week analysis

SCHOOLS
WEEK**‘Despite schools’ best efforts, this inevitably harms children’s education’**

over how “they can organise themselves into groups”. He said this was a “symptom of a lack of investment”.

£2m interest bill

Some schools are also paying interest to councils on their deficits.

Checks of documents published by 51 local authorities suggest 28 of them (55 per cent) have given themselves the right to charge interest. But only seven are actually doing so.

They received £2.3 million between 2022-23 and 2024-25. Up to 138 schools were charged interest each year.

The Oak Wood School in Hillingdon was charged more than £340,000 over the period. It has a deficit of £2.3 million. Dan Cowling, the secondary’s headteacher, said the payments make it “almost impossible to balance the budget now”.

He’s also unable to “put money away for a rainy day” adding: “The building is starting to look a bit shabby, and we can’t commit to any big spends on things.”

Cowling also believes
it’s “unfair”
maintained

schools can’t receive government bailouts in the way academies do. Instead, they have to go to their local authority for financial assistance.

The council said charging interest on cash advances to schools in deficit “was an approach that was carefully considered and discussed with the Schools Forum and was agreed as a fair way of maintaining the support provided, without disadvantaging schools in surplus, or the local authority”.

Education ‘harmed’

In response to a survey conducted by the National Association of Headteachers earlier this year, 98 per cent of leaders said their school “did not have sufficient funding to fully meet the needs of its pupils”.

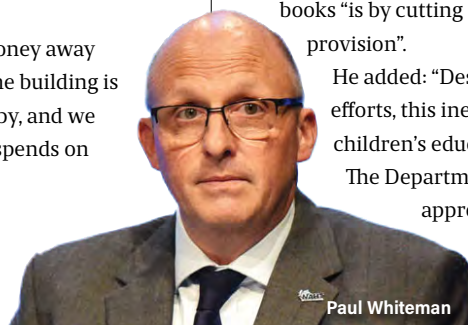
Paul Whiteman, the union’s general secretary, stressed the “only way” for some to balance the books “is by cutting staffing, resources or provision”.

He added: “Despite schools’ best efforts, this inevitably harms children’s education.”

The Department for Education was approached for comment.



Anntoinette Bramble



Paul Whiteman

NEWS

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Absence crisis is wrecking behaviour, warns Oliver

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

Too many children are “falling out of step with the expectations of school life” through absence, making them “more likely to cross boundaries, challenge teachers” and disrupt learning, the head of Ofsted has warned.

Sir Martyn Oliver also said he was concerned by commentary from education professionals “describing the impact of behaviour and the part it plays in driving too many teachers out of the profession”.

In Ofsted’s annual report, social media and smartphones were highlighted as other causes of disruptive behaviour.

In the watchdog’s new report cards, attendance and behaviour sit together. Oliver said that “in many ways, they are two sides of a coin.”

“Too many children are spending too long out of school and falling out of step with the expectations of school life, which makes them more likely to cross boundaries, challenge teachers and disrupt the learning of others.”



Oliver said Ofsted “more often than not” saw schools with “good, consistently applied behaviour policies and approaches – and that is reflected in our historical judgments of behaviour and attitudes.

“Where we see schools taking good steps to tackle behaviour issues, we have tended to judge them ‘good’ or better. So, we need to ask the question: if the school is doing all the right things, why is behaviour such a growing concern among teachers?”

He added that “perhaps the answer lies in the

prevalence of lower-level disruption”.

Oliver told a press briefing “we’re starting to see green shoots” of recovery when it comes to attendance.

But “hidden within that is the absolute scandal of severe absence... 166,000 pupils are severely absent. That is a real issue.

“On top of that... children missing education has risen by 19 per cent – or a fifth – in one year.

“How can that be right? How can children missing entirely from education have risen by a fifth in one year? If that’s not a scandal of attendance, I don’t know what is.”

Oliver warned that vulnerable and disadvantaged children are “over-represented in the ranks of the severely absent”.

Pupils with SEND and those known to social care are over four times more likely to be severely absent, for example.

He said that under the new framework, he would like to “strike a better balance between evaluating the policies and processes of the school and understanding the realities on the ground for pupils and teachers”.

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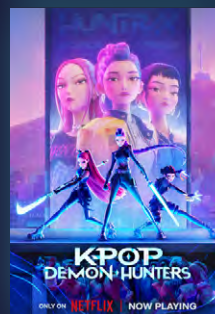
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Children slipping from schools' reach

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

Ofsted has warned of “multiple missed opportunities” to identify pupils’ SEND needs and arrange support to keep them in school.

In his annual report, chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver also expressed deepening concerns about the number of children only attending school part-time and those missing it entirely.

Here’s what we learned from Oliver’s update for the academic year 2024-25...

1. Missed opportunities to keep SEND pupils in school

Each year Ofsted carries out thematic visits with the Care Quality Commission, as part of area SEND inspections. This time, the theme they explored was children who are not in school.

On these visits, Ofsted found “multiple missed opportunities to identify children’s needs early” and arrange support.

Some areas “lacked robust processes or capacity to oversee children who were not in school”, particularly those without an education, health and care plan (EHCP).

Meanwhile, children who were out of school “struggled to access health services to meet their needs”, such as mental health support or speech and language therapy.

Ofsted will publish a full report on findings from these visits soon.

2. Professionals ‘trying their best’...

In his report, Oliver said it was “hard to disagree” that the SEND system is “broken”.

But “to describe it as such doesn’t do justice to the professionals who are trying their best to support some of the country’s most vulnerable children”.

“Nor does it give confidence to the parents and carers who are navigating – and often ‘fighting’ – the system for the best possible support for their child,” he added.

In 29 SEND area inspections undertaken, positive experiences and outcomes “were the norm in just four areas of the country”.

In 16 areas outcomes were “inconsistent”, while another nine had “systemic failings”.



3. ... but long waits for provision

In the first two years of inspections under its revised framework, Ofsted found delays in producing EHCPs “remained widespread and many plans were poor quality”.

It also found “long waits for health services, including child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and speech therapy, were common”.

Early help and identification of children’s needs was “inconsistent, leading to missed opportunities for early intervention”.

Preparation for adulthood was “often weak, and children received limited support with transitioning to education, employment or independence”.

4. More concerns over part-time timetables...

Ofsted remained “concerned that high numbers of children do not attend school on a full-time, permanent basis”.

Last year, the inspectorate raised concerns about a rise in “flexi-schooling” – pupils educated in school for part of the week, and at home for the rest – and part-time timetables.

This time, it is “concerned even more children are in some of these arrangements”, including “a rise in flexi-schooling”.

Figures show children recorded as home educated had jumped 21 per cent, to 111,700, while the number in local authority-commissioned alternative provision was up 24 per cent, to 59,700.

Another 27,900 are in AP placements commissioned by schools. An estimated 41,000 pupils are on part-time timetables.

5. ... and pupils out of school entirely

“Most concerning of all, 19 per cent more children are missing education entirely,” said Ofsted.

That figure had risen to an estimated 39,200 as of autumn term 2024-25 – up from 33,000 a year earlier.

The watchdog stressed the impact of missing school “can be huge” and it “can take years” for children who have been out of school to catch up with peers.

6. Rise in referrals to illegal schools taskforce

Ofsted set up its illegal schools taskforce in 2016. Since then it has carried out just under 1,680 investigations of nearly 1,500 suspected unregistered schools.

There have been over 990 inspections, and Ofsted issued around 220 warning notices and successfully prosecuted seven settings, resulting in 21 convictions.

In the report, Oliver warned that “in the last three academic years, the number of referrals received has been higher than previous years.

It received almost 330 referrals in 2024-25, up from around 210 in 2022-23 and 2023-24 and less than 150 a year between 2015 and 2022.

7. Inspectors saw AI’s ‘negative impact’...

“Very few” inspectors who had seen the use of AI during inspections felt “the way providers were using it was improving outcomes”, a July survey found.

Ofsted said it was “concerning” some said AI was having “a negative impact” and only a “small minority” of inspectors had seen safeguarding concerns relating to the technology.

8. ...and school leaders have their concerns too

Some school and college leaders “have concerns about maintaining educational integrity” with the rapid pace of AI development and the number of tools being developed.

Ofsted said there was an “abundance of tools that can promise solutions to the challenges they and their staff face” but leaders told them in some cases products are “over-sold and under-developed”.

Ofsted warned leaders need “robust governance to manage” the ethical risks of AI and to “keep users safe”.

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Phillipson's dismay at phone ban spitting attack

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

The abuse of headteachers over phone bans in their schools is "completely unacceptable", the education secretary said, after an MP reported one leader was "spat and sworn at".

But Bridget Phillipson insisted leaders already had the power to ban phones, as she continued to resist calls for a national statutory ban.

The education secretary appeared in front of the Parliamentary education committee, alongside Department for Education permanent secretary Susan Acland-Hood.

Here's what we learned at the meeting...

1. Head abuse over phone bans 'unacceptable'

The government has repeatedly resisted calls for a statutory ban on phones in schools, with non-statutory guidance already encouraging schools to restrict their use.

Lib Dem MP Caroline Voaden said heads had described the "transformational effect" of a total phone ban.

But she said they experienced "a vocal pushback from a minority of parents".

"One said that he'd been spat and sworn at by parents for his decision to do this."

Phillipson said the incident Voaden described was "completely unacceptable" and something "no one in education should face".

But she added that leaders "do have the powers" to ban phones, adding: "There are different ways of schools implementing that. The evidence we have is that phones are already [being] prohibited. Schools should enforce that."

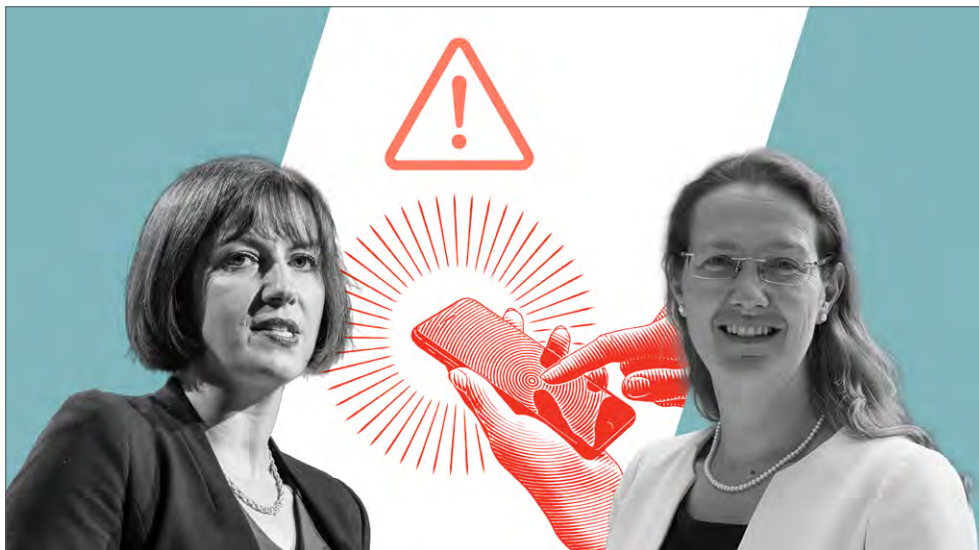
A report by the Children's Commissioner recently found that almost all schools – 90 per cent of secondaries and 99.8 per cent of primaries – restrict phones in some way. Only 3.5 per cent are imposing total bans.

2. Officials advised ministers on 6,500 teachers target 'definition'

Labour has come under fire for repeatedly moving the goalposts on its manifesto pledge to recruit 6,500 new "expert teachers in key subjects".

They ditched the word "expert" from the commitment last year and the target has been broadened to include all subjects.

But Acland-Hood told MPs this week civil



servants had looked "quite carefully at how to advise ministers on how to define the target" after Labour formed its government.

They have since "landed on" a definition of "secondary, special [schools] and... FE".

"Because we're seeing demographic growth... we do need more teachers, even in non-shortage subjects," said Acland-Hood.

But she stressed the Department for Education will "keep looking at the individual subjects as well" and will be "tracking very carefully to make sure we aren't recruiting them all in areas where we've got... less need."

"We really want to make sure that we don't hit the target and miss the point."

3. Is prevalence of English blocking language take-up?

While entries to Spanish GCSE increased this summer, they fell for both French and German GCSE. Languages saw a similar trend at A-level.

The government's decision to scrap the EBacc as part of the curriculum and assessment review has also prompted concerns it could cause a dip in language take-up.

Phillipson told MPs the fact English is so widely spoken poses "a challenge".

"The ease with which we can all travel around the world and speak English, that does sometimes make it a bit trickier to persuade students that it might be for them," she said.

4. No date for trans guidance

The education secretary was unable to say when final guidance on supporting trans pupils for schools would be published, despite having previously said it would be out this year.

Draft guidance was published under the previous Conservative administration.

Schools Week revealed at the time that the government's lawyers had warned schools faced a "high risk" of successful legal challenges if they followed several elements of the guidance.

Phillipson said the Labour government had been looking at the draft guidance "very carefully", adding: "This is an important and obviously delicate area. We do intend to publish this guidance."

But when pressed by MPs for a "ballpark", she said: "I'm afraid I'm not able to give you a date for it."

"I do recognise its importance, but I also believe it's important that we get this right for young people, for their wellbeing, but also for schools, so that they're confident and clear about the guidance that's set out."

5. DfE 'should have spotted' AI reports gaffe

Phillipson and Acland-Hood were also quizzed on the DfE's recent error, which resulted in AI-driven attendance reports being suspended just days after their launch when school leaders noticed errors.

"When you try and do something new, you run a little bit more of a risk of making those difficulties," said Acland-Hood.

"We should have spotted it before they went out. We really tried to correct it very quickly."

She added the DfE had "looked at what caused those errors, and are learning the lessons for the future".

Schools Week revealed last week that heads were still facing problems with the re-issued

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Recruitment boost, but secondary target still missed

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

Trainee teacher numbers have grown by 11 per cent this year, with the government over-recruiting would-be primary teachers but still missing its target for secondary.

New data released by the Department for Education (DfE) this week shows there were 32,175 new entrants to initial training in 2025-26 – up from 28,898 in 2024-25.

It comes as the government works to fulfil its election pledge of growing the teacher workforce by 6,500.

The number starting postgraduate training – the most common entry route – rose by 10 per cent to 26,620, while undergraduate entrants also rose by 16 per cent, to 5,555.

Last year, the government met just 90 per cent of its target for postgraduate primary teacher recruitment. This year it over-recruited, hitting 126 per cent.

The postgraduate target for secondary has not been met since 2012-13, except for a spike during the pandemic in 2021-22. This year 88 per cent of the DfE's target was met – up from 61 per cent last year.

Boost after targets cut

Across secondary and primary, postgraduate initial teacher training (PGITT) hit 99 per cent of its target. This is up from 69 per cent last year.

This is driven both by an increase in PGITT entrants, and a 19 per cent reduction in the target, which was cut from 33,355 in 2024-25 to 26,920 in 2025-26.

The DfE cut targets in April citing falling pupil rolls and better teacher retention forecasts.

Jack Worth, education workforce



lead at the National Foundation For Educational Research, said: "Improved recruitment to postgraduate teacher training in England is welcome after years of severe under-recruitment."

But he said while targets for core subjects including English, maths and sciences had been met, "overall secondary recruitment still falls short of the numbers required".

"Further policy efforts to improve teacher recruitment and retention will be needed to maintain the stronger recruitment, reverse the impacts of previous persistent under-recruitment and deliver on the government's objective to recruit 6,500 new teachers," he added.

How have subjects fared?

Just eight of 18 secondary subjects hit their target: art and design (128 per cent), biology (151 per cent), chemistry (118 per cent), English (106 per cent), geography (111 per cent), history (125 per cent), maths (113 per cent) and PE (202 per cent).

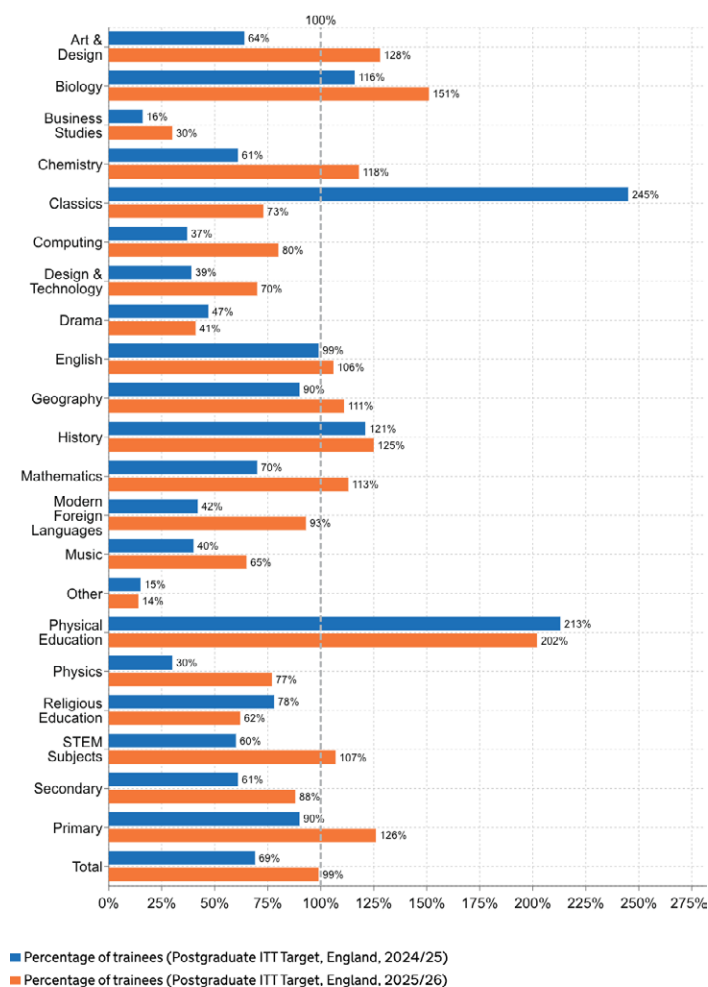
Art and design, English, geography and maths had all under-recruited last year.

Business studies was the worst-performing subject against its target, hitting just 30 per cent.

Nonetheless, this marks an improvement on last year, when

Percentage of postgraduate ITT recruitment target reached by subject for 2024/25 (revised) and 2025/26 (provisional)

Percentage of target by subject



just 16 per cent of its target was hit, with an increase in trainees from 214 to 271.

The raw number of trainees grew in every secondary subject except English, where trainees fell from 2,316 last year to 2,059 this year, and classics which fell from 54 to 44.

Design and Technology (DT) trainee numbers increased by just 58 this year (from 622 last year to 680) while music trainees rose by just 22 (from 345 to 367).

Pepe Di'Iasio, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders union, said that while there were "some positive signs...the target has been missed

in around half of all secondary subjects, despite targets being substantially reduced in many cases".

He added: "The reality on the ground is that school leaders are struggling with staff shortages in many subject areas."

He said the government "cannot afford to rest on their laurels and think that one year of slightly better recruitment can fix such a widespread problem".

The DfE recently faced criticism after reducing bursaries and scholarships designed to help attract applicants to shortage subjects, following signs of improved recruitment.

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Just half of primaries received full neurodiversity support

SAMANTHA BOOTH

@SAMANTHAJBOTH

Only half of primary schools on a £22 million flagship government inclusion programme were given all the support on offer, an interim evaluation has found.

There was “strong support” from those involved for the “partnerships for inclusion of neurodiversity in schools” (PINS) programme.

But evaluators at CFE Research, Cordis Bright and the University of Exeter highlighted implementation challenges with the programme’s first year in 1,669 schools.

PINS aims to bring together education and health workforces to offer “bespoke, whole-school support” to mainstream primary schools, to help them better identify and meet the needs of neurodivergent pupils and improve their outcomes.

It is frequently referenced by the government as an example of work it would like to roll out further as it reforms the SEND system.

Here’s what you need to know...

1. Only half of schools had all support hours

Integrated care boards (ICBs), which organise local healthcare, had commissioned the “required volume of support” – 37.5 hours or more per school – in just 48 per cent of schools.

The reasons behind this include tight implementation timescales, lack of capacity among specialist staff – especially those in health roles – and limited capacity of schools to receive the training and support.

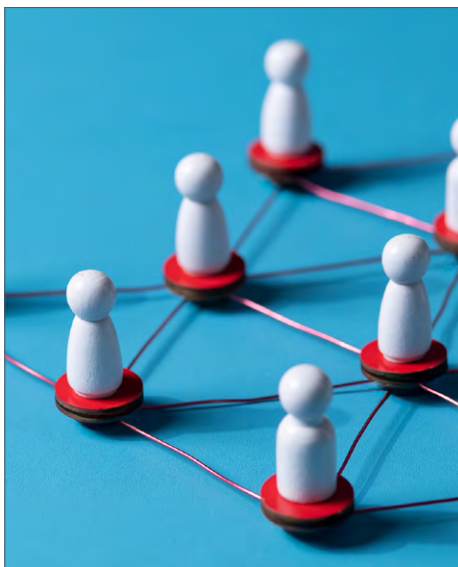
“Creative solutions” were used in some cases to overcome these challenges, but these often “relied on the strength of existing relationships”.

Evaluators found schools that received closer to the full hours “reported greater improvements”.

More formal commissioning and “a better understanding of local workforce opportunities” would be required in future.

The main issues the programme sought to address – wellbeing, attendance and behaviour – were the focus of commissioned support in a minority of schools (18 per cent, 12 per cent and 29 per cent respectively).

The main focuses were neurodiversity,



classroom strategies and sensory.

Four out of five respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that “the timescales for delivery had been sufficient to implement PINS”.

But most schools – 93 per cent – remained “active” throughout the programme through 2024-25.

2. ‘Perceived’ improvements in pupil outcomes ‘limited’

After a year of the programme, evaluators said evidence of “perceived improvements” in pupil outcomes was “currently limited”. But some teachers and practitioners said these “may emerge in the longer term”.

Evidence from case study schools highlighted some “positive changes” on wellbeing, attendance, attainment and behaviour. These were attributed “at least in part” to PINS.

Evaluators said measurable impacts on pupil outcomes were “not anticipated at this stage of the evaluation”.

3. ‘Overloaded’ SENCOs and specialist capacity issues

But evaluators said at this stage, it remained “unclear” what lasting impact PINS will have “on demand and pressures within the wider system”.

They found “ongoing challenges” related to “the level and complexity of SEND support needs” and “resource constraints and attrition among staff” doing PINS training, particularly SENCOs.

There were concerns about “overloading” SENCOs, who already have teaching responsibility and struggled to find time to pass the learning on to other staff.

Forty-three per cent of schools reported difficulties releasing staff for training, while a lack of staff had “inhibited the number of pupils who could be supported through small-group work”.

“To compensate, teachers built quiet zones in their classrooms, such as tents or wigwams, so they could still supervise the children.”

Health boards also struggled.

The scheme relied “heavily on strong existing relationships between ICBs and health practitioners and on practitioners’ goodwill – several examples of practitioners delivering support outside their contracted hours were given.”

4. Disagreement over which schools need help

Schools were selected through a range of methods, including direct approaches from ICBs, expressions of interest or geographical clusters.

Only 16 per cent of schools identified by the Department for Education with the highest potential need for PINS took part in the programme.

Just two-fifths (39 per cent) of schools in the first cohort had above-average proportions of pupils with SEND and free school meal eligibility (43 per cent).

Evaluators said it led to concerns about “whether the programme was reaching the schools that could benefit most”.

5. Only 1 in 5 leaders said training and support ‘fully’ helped

Just 21 per cent of school leaders and SENCOs believed the PINS training and support “fully” addressed their priorities. But 58 per cent reported it met their needs to “to some extent”.

But the support received by schools “was judged to be of high quality”. Direct access to health practitioners was seen as “particularly impactful”, given “the challenges schools typically face in accessing these practitioners outside the programme”.

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London mayor still weighing up the cost of a free lunch

RUTH LUCAS

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EXCLUSIVE

The Mayor of London is still assessing how the government's expansion of free school meals could create savings for his own scheme, which offers lunches to all primary pupils, as he faces an "unprecedented level of uncertainty" in his budget.

Exclusive analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows the Greater London Authority could save a third of its total expenditure on Sadiq Khan's universal primary free school meals scheme, which has been in place since 2023.

It was initially planned as a "one off" emergency measure paid largely through business rate receipts.

Draft budget documents for 2026-27 have dedicated £148m for the scheme, representing more than a third of the total mayor's budget. This would run from the start of the 2026-27 academic year.

However in June this year, the government announced it would remove a cap and extend free school meal eligibility across England to all



Sadiq Khan

children whose families claim universal credit from that same year, benefiting half a million more children.

But the mayor's staff told the GLA's budget and performance committee in November that they were still assessing how the move would affect their budget.

The committee wrote to Khan following the meeting: "This announcement was made over four months ago, so this committee was disappointed to hear the financial impact had not yet been assessed".

Documents said the mayor's budget is facing an "unprecedented level of uncertainty", with a £19.2 million funding gap.

According to analysis from the IFS, the mayor's budget pays for an additional 265,000 key stage 2 pupils who would otherwise not be eligible due to means testing to receive free school meals.

Between 75,000 and 100,000 pupils in the capital would become eligible for the government's expanded means-tested scheme from September 2026, the IFS said.

This would represent a saving of between £40m and £50m – a third of the mayor's spending on free school meals.

Chair of the budget and performance committee Neil Garratt said it was "concerning that the funding details are yet to be finalised, given the need to balance budgets".

Money saved "could help fill budget gaps across the mayoral budgets, including funding the vital modern firefighting training programme at the London Fire Brigade, or investment into Met staffing costs", Garratt said.

A spokesperson said the mayor "has been very clear that funding for his historic programme will remain in place for as long as he is mayor".

They added the government's funding will be considered at the next stage of the budget in January.



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DfE dodges data transparency as it plans new pupil register

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

@FCDWHITTAKER

The Department for Education has refused to release the full report of a damning audit that found it broke the law in its handling of pupil data – claiming it “may distract” from plans to collate even more information on children.

In 2020, an audit by the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) found the DfE failed to meet several articles of the general data protection regulations (GDPR), which govern the management and use of data across Europe.

The investigation, prompted by concerns about the national pupil database and a revelation that gambling firms accessed children’s data, found that data protection “was not being prioritised” at the DfE.

However, the DfE has only ever published a summary of the report.

In 2021, the DfE refused a freedom of information request from *Schools Week* requesting the full report. It argued it was “currently in the process of responding to the audit recommendations”, and said ministers and



officials “need space in which to develop their thinking”.

The DfE also refused the request on the grounds that the information was “due to be published in the future”. But it never materialised.

In an update in June, the DfE said its information security action in response to the audit “will now be closed and future work will be undertaken as ‘business as usual’ and will be monitored accordingly”.

The digital rights organisation Defend Digital Me requested the full report again in July, given the DfE’s work was complete.

But the DfE has again refused. The department said publishing the full report could now “lead to a disproportionate focus on past failings that

have since been addressed to the satisfaction of the ICO”.

It added publication “may distract from the department’s current priorities, particularly the progression of the children’s wellbeing and schools bill”.

The bill will, among other things, create a national register of children not in school for the first time, adding even more data on children to the DfE’s vast information vaults.

Defend Digital Me director Jen Persson said: “The DfE already holds detailed statistics on every home-educated child local authorities track, but now wants their names and vast amounts more detail too – yet is refusing to be open about how well it handles the data it already has”.

She also questioned how “public access to a past audit about data protection policy [could] reasonably prejudice a new and unrelated law today.

“If it does, this underlines the importance of the contents being made public. And as it affects over 28 million people in England, how can it be in the public interest to keep secret indefinitely while the government is allowed to carry on ‘business as usual’?”

The DfE was approached for comment.

SAMANTHA BOOTH | @SAMANTHAJBBOOTH

Million-pound SEND initiatives kept under-wraps

Ministers have been urged to be transparent after the government withheld information on SEND reforms and finances.

Under the freedom of information (FOI) act, *Schools Week* requested details on initiatives brought in by the Conservatives linked to SEND system changes.

However, the Department for Education (DfE) has partly or entirely rejected these, arguing withholding the information outweighed the public interest in releasing it.

Warren Carratt, chief executive of Nexus multi-academy trust in Sheffield, said: “Withholding key information – that has come at the cost of tens of millions of public money – is really concerning, and my sincere hope is that this is about, and only about, the sequencing of information being shared and not about cloak and dagger practices from DfE.”

The first FOI was about the “change programme” set up two years ago to test the

Tories’ SEND reforms. The programme has since changed its focus to test new initiatives under Labour. We asked what these changes were, when they were made and why.

While some details of the programme’s current activities were included in a newsletter by REACH, the consultant consortium running the scheme, specific information about changes made was withheld.

The DfE said this was because “it relates to the formulation or development of government policy”.

In 2023, the DfE committed in an FOI request to publish meeting “summaries” from the SEND and alternative provision (AP) implementation board online in early 2024.

However, when *Schools Week* asked for the board minutes this year, the department said that while the board no longer exists and hadn’t met since summer last year, its content “pertains to current government

policy formulation”.

The DfE also said the information was also “provided in confidence” to them.

The third request was for an update on the SEND and AP roadmap the previous government published, which included milestones for implementation.

Despite releasing this in October last year, when asked again in September, the DfE refused, saying its content “pertains to current government policy formulation”.

Finally, the DfE refused to release reports on how cash-strapped councils are meeting their “safety valve” agreements. Thirty-three councils receive millions of pounds of bailouts in exchange for sweeping SEND reforms.

The DfE said the scheme “can only function if a truly frank and honest change can occur” with councils and releasing it “would prejudice our ability to provide advice... and the effective conduct of public affairs”.

The DfE was approached for comment.

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New DfE framework to cap supply agency fees

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

Schools will be “expected” to use a new government framework for supply teacher agency spending, which will include new caps on the rates companies can charge, ministers have announced.

The Department for Education (DfE) has launched a “maximising value for pupils” (MVP) programme – a wide-ranging scheme aiming to “maximise value from the investment in the school system, so every pound delivers for children”.

The scheme aims to tackle spending and improve value for money across four areas: commercial, assets, workforce deployment, and developing capabilities including digital and technology.

The DfE has urged “every school, trust and local authority” to use the support to “implement proactive steps”.

It comes after the government said schools would need to find savings to fund future staff pay rises.

Reducing agency staff spend

As part of the programme, the DfE said the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) will launch a new framework in June 2026, which will include “negotiated rate caps” on teacher supply agency fees and “provide significant value for money”.

The DfE has said this will cap rates paid to suppliers, and is not meant to reduce or cap the rates paid directly to supply teachers. The government will be able to see how much goes to the teachers under the terms of the deal.

Suppliers are being invited to apply to be part of the new framework. Once it is launched in June, schools will be expected to source agency staff through the framework, unless they are achieving better value for money through another route.

The government said the plan would “crack down on unacceptable practices and excessive supplier margins within the teacher supply market, to help reduce school spend on agency supply teachers”.

Schools and trusts spend an estimated 80% of their budgets on staff. Spend on agency supply teachers alone reached £1.4bn in 2023-24, according to the DfE.



Trusts urged to rethink CEO pay

The DfE said looking for savings on staff spending “includes looking at the very top”.

It said trusts should ensure “that pay and rewards for multi-academy trust executives are proportionate and justified”.

“It also means looking at the long term, including ways to address long-term vacancies, reduce high turnover rate and support overall retention.”

The department said it would be publishing a toolkit in 2026 with further research and resources and case studies sharing best practice.

Energy savings

The government said it is also “harnessing the collective buying power of around 22,000 state-funded schools, taking on key areas of spending and helping secure better deals and maximise value from budgets”.

In a recent pilot of the government’s “energy for schools” scheme – which gives schools access to special energy rates – participating schools saved an average of 36 per cent on bills, the DfE said.

The DfE said it planned to develop new services, including for the procurement of agency supply teachers, tech and learning resources.

As revealed by Schools Week, the DfE will also seek to shield schools from the £200m management information system (MIS) turf war by drawing up a new framework through which leaders can purchase the educational technology.

A new banking comparison tool will allow schools to compare interest rates, and find out if

they can get better return on their cash holdings.

In one case study shared by government today, Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust said it was previously generating £16,000 in annual bank interest, but this has risen to more than £1.1m after “optimising” its approach to banking.

Nationally, reserves in the school system totalled more than £6bn in 2023-24 – nearly 10 per cent of the value of the core schools budget.

Optimising assets

The DfE said there was “significant potential in under-utilised assets”, and will engage with schools and trusts to help “maximise use” of these.

It highlighted that many schools and trusts are “using their assets for community benefit”, adding: “We want to ensure this social value is maintained while supporting opportunities to maximise value and reinvest savings where they matter most.”

The DfE will also launch updated guidance for academy trusts in 2026, aimed at helping them manage reserves “effectively”.

‘Lifting pressures off schools’

Schools minister Georgia Gould said the MVP programme “will lift some of the pressures that have built up on schools in recent years and builds on major steps we have taken outside the classroom, like scrapping the two-child benefit cap.”

“I know just how hard schools and trusts are already working to seize opportunities to maximise value from their budgets. We want to share that best practice and support them to go even further.”

Advertorial

Equitas: ASDAN's new digital platform putting skills at the heart of learning

As schools and colleges look for ways to meet increasingly diverse learning needs, the push for provision that is flexible, motivating and genuinely skills-led has never been stronger. **ASDAN** – the education charity known for more than 30 years of experience in skills-based curriculum – has recently launched **Equitas**, a digital platform designed to make personalised learning easier to deliver and to evidence.

A digital system built around learner agency

Equitas brings ASDAN's familiar *plan, do, review* pedagogy into one coherent digital workflow. Learners complete tasks and upload evidence in the format that suits them, from photos and documents to audio or links, and track how each activity builds their skills. Teachers gain an instant overview of progress, with tools for quality assurance, assessment and downloadable offline versions for blended delivery.

Michael Shaw, lead of the Equitas product experience team, says the platform was designed on "principles of simplicity and flexibility", ensuring it adapts to the varied approaches schools use to build engagement and independence.

Behind this simplicity sits a structured skills framework. Every Equitas challenge is mapped to ASDAN's six core skills: learning, communicating, decision making, thinking, teamwork and self-awareness. Learners can see which skills they are strengthening, while teachers can generate visual diagrams and portfolios that demonstrate impact across a cohort.

ASDAN CEO **Melissa Farnham** emphasises the importance of this visibility: "Learner agency is built when learners understand the value of their own contributions and can communicate their growth to the world."

Accessibility has also been built in. Adjustable fonts, options to hide images and downloadable alternatives support a wide range of learners, ensuring the shift to digital removes barriers rather than creating them.



Updated Short Courses for modern learners

Eleven refreshed Short Courses launch on Equitas, covering areas from **Animal Care** and **Expressive Arts** through to **History** and **Citizenship**. Content has been updated to reflect current priorities such as wellbeing, sustainability and employability. The **Environmental Short Course**, for example, has been redeveloped with climate educator **Liz Newbon** to help learners connect global issues with local action.

More subjects will follow during 2026, including ASDAN's qualifications range and a new **Esports Short Course** developed with sector specialist James Fraser-Murison.

Turning skills into opportunities

To ensure learners' achievements travel with them, ASDAN has partnered with **globalbridge**. The integration allows students to share verified evidence with employers, colleges and training providers through secure digital profiles, helping them articulate not just what they've studied, but what they can do.

Practical support for busy schools

In a context of rising accountability and resource pressures, Equitas aims to give schools a clear, workable digital solution: reduced planning time, straightforward monitoring, flexible online/offline delivery and skills evidence that supports careers guidance and transition.

With more courses moving onto the platform in 2026, Equitas is set to become a comprehensive digital home for skills-first learning.

To explore how Equitas could support your learners, visit the [ASDAN website](#) and get in touch via a short [expression of interest form](#).



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AP schools 'do not know their pupils well'

RUTH LUCAS

@RUTHLUCAS_

One in three alternative provision schools can only estimate the number of pupils on their rolls, the children's commissioner for England has warned.

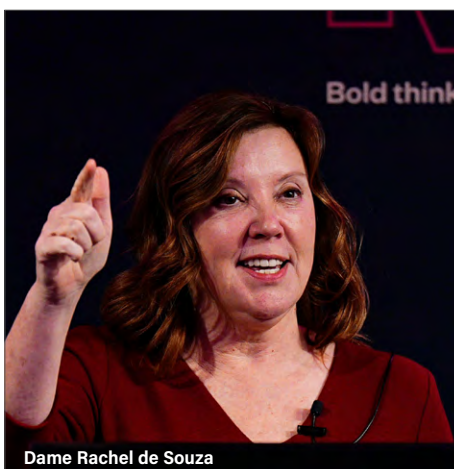
Dame Rachel de Souza's report on the special and alternative provision sector found AP settings "do not know their pupils well – and know them less well than special and mainstream school settings".

The sector is also "shouldering the burden of deep-rooted social problems without being given the full information or support they need", she warned.

About 2 per cent of England's pupils are educated in special schools and alternative provision in England. There are 334 AP settings in England.

Information obtained by de Souza's office from schools found almost a third of APs (29 per cent) could only estimate the number of pupils on their rolls.

Seventy per cent could only estimate the



Dame Rachel de Souza

number of pupils on waiting lists for mental health support, while 67 per cent could only estimate the number of pupils living in unsuitable accommodation.

While this could be because many children attend temporarily, the report says, "given the crucial role of AP in helping children re-engage with education, they need to know their children and share information to provide the support they need to achieve this".

The children's commissioner has called for

poverty and social care support to be embedded in AP settings, as well as improved data integration through a "pupil unique ID system".

"Despite the efforts of the brilliant and skilled professionals who work there, special schools and alternative provision settings are shouldering the burden of deep-rooted social problems without being given the full information or support they need," said de Souza.

"Too many assumptions are made about these children, and too little is known about the challenges they face beyond the school gates."

Of the settings surveyed, 67 per cent listed poverty as their top concern, with a third operating in the most deprived school areas in England.

These schools are more likely to provide food, as well as mental health counselling, to their pupils, but have fewer enrichment activities, outdoor spaces and childcare facilities than mainstream schools, the report found.

A further 44 per cent of AP settings identified local area safety as a top issue, while 36 per cent said they were concerned about the aspirations of children in the area.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

Hard maths for ministers as pupil numbers set to fall 6%

The government must decide whether to cut teacher numbers and close schools – or increase per-pupil funding as the number of children entering the system declines, a thinktank has said.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies said the number of children under 16 in England is due to decline by 6 per cent over the next decade.

The thinktank said that in the face of these changes, the government "has so far chosen to protect total schools spending in real terms up to 2029".

"This will increase per-pupil funding in real terms. In the future, policymakers will need to decide whether this remains the right judgment as pupil numbers continue to fall.

"Choosing instead to maintain per-pupil funding and allowing total funding to fall would generate savings, but require a reduction in the number of teachers and schools."

The IFS's report found that during previous historic reductions in pupil numbers,

policymakers made "different choices".

When pupil numbers fell in the 1970s and 1980s, there were cuts to teacher numbers.

But in the 2000s, when numbers declined, "there were actually increases in teacher numbers".

The report found that falling pupil numbers mainly reflected reduced fertility levels.

The Office for National Statistics "currently expects fertility to stabilise" in the future.

But the IFS said previous forecasts over the past 10 years "have also predicted stabilisation in fertility and it has instead continued to decline.

"It is therefore possible that falls in pupil numbers could be even larger than current forecasts," it added.

Luke Sibbets, a research fellow at the IFS and author of the report, said: "Falls in the number of children will dramatically reshape the make-up of the UK population.

"That will have big implications for the

education sector. Policymakers will have to decide how to respond – will they look to make financial savings through employing fewer teachers or closing schools?

"Or will they protect education spending and deliver smaller class sizes? In practice, previous governments have gone for a mix of policies, which were often shaped by the economic and fiscal situation of the time."

He added that while closing a school can be "problematic for local communities", maintaining school numbers as they are "might not be the best thing for pupils either".

"With a dramatic fall in pupil numbers, some schools might struggle to offer a full breadth of curriculum options," he said.



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JACK DYSON | @JACKYDYS



'Internal AP can work - here's how we do it'

Can internal alternative provision help schools avoid exclusions? Or do they replicate the very punishment they seek to prevent? We visited a school that believes its approach is a 'beacon' of what's possible

While experts warn that internal alternative provision in mainstream schools risks morphing into “costly” pupil “holding pens”, perpetuating cycles of exclusion, one academy trust believes it has a model for children at risk of exclusion that will allay the concerns.

A report by education charity The Difference earlier this year found more schools are using internal alternative provision (IAP) – on-site support for struggling youngsters to help reintegrate them into mainstream classes – to get a grip on exclusions, absences and growing SEND needs. But it said some risk replicating the very exclusions they aim to prevent.

However, the City of London Academies Trust (CoLAT) believes the Apprenticeship Academy,

based in the sixth form centre at the Highbury Grove academy in Islington, north London, is a “beacon” for what can be achieved.

Reduced exclusions

The trust's chief executive, Mark Emmerson, said of AP: “If it could be done more effectively across the country, we'd have far fewer young people not engaged in education. That's the big picture.”

Launched five years ago, the Apprenticeship Academy has taught dozens of children so far.

While the facility doesn't actually offer apprenticeships, pupils are given workplace coaching or placements one day a week.

The bulk of its pupils are in years 10 and 11, but it does provide small numbers of children in key stage 3 periods of “respite” before being “reintegrated” back into their school.

“If you've got 18 months to get the best GCSE results you can, you've got to stay,” Emmerson says of keeping key stage 4 pupils in the trust. “You've got to stick.”

Forty-two children have “graduated successfully”, sitting their GCSEs at the end of their stint at the unit. Just one has been permanently excluded.

Figures provided by CoLAT show that, on average, attendance improved by 58 percentage points over the two years at the provision. It registered 80 per cent attendance last year, compared with a national average of 58 per cent in AP more broadly.

“We can watch them very closely,” Emmerson adds. “Whilst they're here, they're still on the school roll. We've dramatically reduced the need to use permanent exclusion.”



Mark Emmerson, chief executive

Who are the pupils?

Sixty per cent of the IAP students attract pupil premium funding, meaning they have been eligible for free school meals at some point in the past six years. Fifty-three per cent are on the SEND register.

Apprenticeship Academy head Rachel Halpin believes more have undiagnosed needs. There are currently 13 pupils on roll, with its year 10 cohort expected to “build up over the next couple of months”.

Children can be referred to the unit following “a really big, serious one-off incident” that could potentially result in a permanent exclusion. In such cases, they will be given the option of instead going to the Apprenticeship Academy.

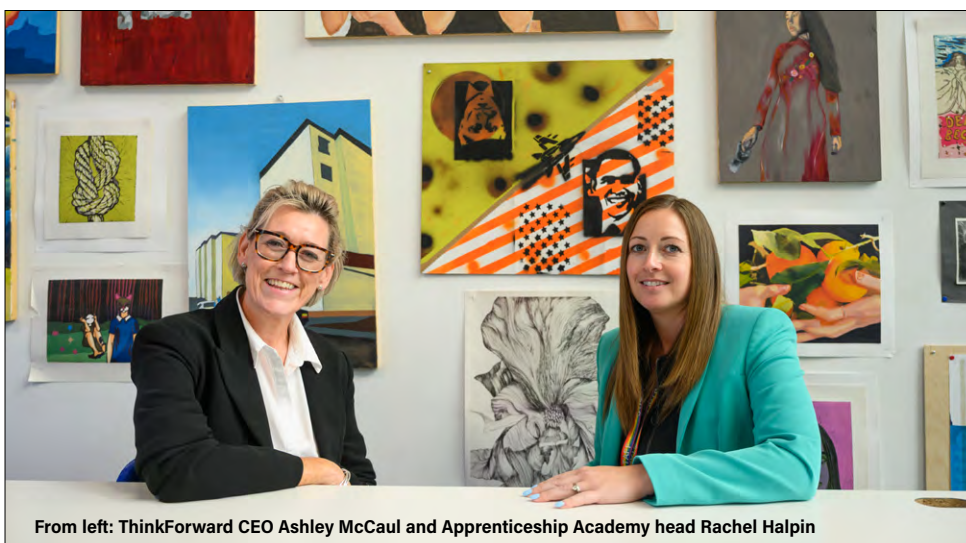
Halpin will also receive a referral for pupils before “we get to the point of this completely falling off the cliff and then being permanently excluded”.

Emmerson adds: “It’s really important to us that it’s actually properly an option, because we don’t want people to come here and think they’ve just been forced to come here. That’s not what it’s about.”

He also doesn’t want pupils coming to the provision “under the illusion” that it’s a “soft option”.

‘Holding pens’

All but one of the provision’s most recent 25 pupils were still in education six months after leaving.



From left: ThinkForward CEO Ashley McCaul and Apprenticeship Academy head Rachel Halpin

‘If you’ve got 18 months to get the best GCSE results you can, you’ve got to stay’

The other is considered to be not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Government figures, published in June, show 16- and 17-year-old NEET rates rose to 6.2 per cent in 2024, a 12-year high.

There is currently no data on how many schools have IAP. Unlike other specialist units, which require education, health and care plans or high-needs funding, schools are not required to report their use.

Kiran Gill, chief executive of The Difference, said many schools were developing IAPs “to help keep children thriving in the mainstream”.

However, she said these efforts were too often “unfolding without clear guidance, and despite best intentions, some risk replicating the very exclusions they aim to prevent, creating costly holding pens rather than inclusive support”.

Handpicked teachers

But Emmerson says some of the provision described as holding pens “may not even have teachers”.

“There wouldn’t be handpicked teachers. They might have one teacher with children all day, and that’s really difficult.”

Pupils at the Apprenticeship Academy follow slimmed-down curriculums. They take English, maths and science GCSEs, as well as BTECs in



A pupil attending the Apprenticeship Academy

business and PE.

If any of the students excel in another subject, that is added to the core offer. Those fluent in another language are often put forward to take a GCSE in that, too.

Lessons are led by Highbury Grove teachers, with timetables aligned to ensure availability.

“Where teachers are full time [in PRUs and AP], if they’re not well led and well recruited, they can be ground down. We know the teachers are coming here fresh,” Emmerson continues.

“If I look at what we’ve achieved in comparison with the children who have not wanted to take up the offer...and have opted for other alternate provision...then we see our outcomes are much better.”

Figures provided by CoLAT show 88 per cent of students improve by two or more grades in English while attending the Apprenticeship



Academy. The figure stood at 66 per cent for maths.

Overall, 66 per cent secured a grade 3 or above in English. In maths, it was 44 per cent.

Work experience

Lessons are held over four days each week, with Wednesdays devoted to careers work delivered by organisation ThinkForward. Years 10s receive coaching preparing them for work, touching on areas such as CV writing and how to behave in an office environment.

The following year, their Wednesdays are spent in work placements.

"They'll do work experience, they'll do business mentoring, insight days, all of that," says ThinkForward chief executive Ashley McCaul. "We're really looking after the careers pathway piece."

But Emmerson says it was "very difficult to get good work experience placements" for year 10s, despite people being "very supportive at the top level".

He doesn't "know whether they were concerned about their backgrounds or how they'd be or whether they didn't feel confident".

Placements have included working in the departments such as HR, facilities and procurement at the City of London's Guildhall. Students have also worked at a recruitment consultant, a charity, local estate agency, advertising firm and even the Barbican arts centre.

Halpin is "constantly reaching out, cold calling businesses to get more people on board".

'High status'

According to The Difference's IAP best practice guidance, published today, the units should not be seen as a place to "fix" the child, and real success is more likely if provision is underpinned by "strong whole-school inclusion".



Youngsters at the academy are taught GCSE English, maths and science

'We don't want people to think they've just been forced to come here'

It outlined four key tenets of effective IAP: that provision is "unified" with the mainstream school, it identifies and balances learning and wellbeing, and is "shaped by measurable pupil outcomes".

Emmerson says his aim was for the Apprenticeship Academy to be "unashamedly academic and unashamedly work focused". He has found that when students are "on work experience, all of the children step up in an adult environment".

The facility – which has a capacity of 20 children – occupies three rooms in the school's sixth-form centre.

Emmerson says one of the academy's "key principles" is "the quality of the facilities". It's not a "prefab, onsite cabin, which is often the case in AP – it's high status".

The youngsters also follow the same rules as those attending Highbury Grove.

After-school detentions are issued for lateness, and children have to wear school uniforms.

This ensures there is "no lowering of expectations", Emmerson explains, and that students aren't under the illusion "they are in a lesser place".

The Difference recommended IAPs be seen as "a place of support not sanction" which balance

academic progress and wellbeing, rather than a "fluffy place" where no serious learning takes place.

The charity also urged schools to try and dispel the notion that IAP is a last chance saloon before exclusion, or a place for "naughty children".

Could others follow suit?

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

Much of this is paid for by the excluding school.

The Apprenticeship Academy receives £160,000 a year from the trust's schools. The amount is matched by the City of London Corporation, CoLAT's sponsor.

"If you think about the costs of normal AP, in order to be effective they have to create a space, they have to have a head, a school keeper, they have to have separate catering. They have to have all of those fixed costs," says Emmerson.

"I don't see why a six- or seven-school model couldn't work [elsewhere]," he said, adding the children have "continuity, standards they understand, approaches they understand and quality teaching".

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Opinion

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SAM
FRENCH

Assistant Director,
Harris Federation

How we tackled misinformation in our primary curriculum

Schools need to approach difficult topics in a sensitive, age-appropriate way, writes Sam French

By the time they leave primary school, many have already come across online narratives that blur the line between fact and fiction.

The curriculum and assessment review called for primary pupils to be taught media literacy and to understand the techniques used to distort information.

In a similar vein, the latest keeping children safe in education guidance explicitly highlights conspiracy theories, misinformation and disinformation as safeguarding concerns.

This shift in the policy climate creates an important responsibility for schools. We need to equip pupils for the online world they already inhabit, while introducing these ideas in a way that is age-appropriate rather than alarming.

There is a strong imperative for teaching this in primary schools.

The Pears' Commission Into Countering Online Conspiracies in Schools found that 91 per cent of 11-year-olds have a smart phone and 77 per cent of 11- to 12-year-olds use social media, despite the minimum age for many platforms being set to 13. If we wait until secondary school, it is already too late.

During our recent inset days, we looked at the issues raised by conspiracy theories, misinformation and disinformation through a safeguarding lens.

Primary colleagues had meaningful discussions within the context of their own settings, exploring key terminology, how these topics can be introduced sensitively in classrooms, and what to do if a child presents with related safeguarding concerns.

Raising whole-staff awareness is an important first step, and we will continue to return to this area as the year progresses.

Unlike curriculum areas that focus on factual information, such as knowing capital cities or how electricity flows around a circuit, this topic is much more complex in that it can touch on the personal beliefs of family members or other trusted adults, or the types of content they are seeing online.

In isolation this work could be seen as tokenistic and superficial. But there are many areas of the curriculum where pupils can develop the skills they need around media literacy.

We are embedding teaching of this topic into Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE), RE and computing classes.

For example, year 4 pupils learn about fake news, clickbait, and what is appropriate to share on



“ We need to equip pupils for the online world they already inhabit

social media.

This is built upon in year 6 when pupils learn about the influence of social media in more depth – how different news outlets report on conflict, how social media has an impact on our lives, and how what we see online can affect our personal views.

From Early Years Foundation Stage onwards, PSHE lessons are tailored to develop independence of thought in each child, to support a confidence in one own's view whilst respecting the views of others who may have a different belief.

Our RE curriculum has been written to be a mix of theology, philosophy and sociology to explore the substantive concepts we have chosen to teach.

In addition to discrete units about world religions, pupils also study how religion may affect a person's view of what is right and wrong, and how people of no faith navigate moral and ethical dilemmas.

These lessons contribute to educating respectful, open-minded, well-informed pupils.

Our computing curriculum has been planned in such a way that the

final lesson of each half term has an online safety focus, so pupils learn how to keep themselves safe online and how to report any worries they might face when using technology.

As school leaders, we are also continuously looking to develop and improve our curriculum so that it evolves in line with what the children might be exposed to outside school.

This is frighteningly challenging within the realms of the ever-evolving online world.

While we can do our best to shield our pupils from conspiracy theories, misinformation and disinformation, we cannot pretend they will not be exposed to potentially harmful things online.

To offer the best possible support and protection, early teaching in primary schools is likely our best defence.

We mustn't shy away from difficult topics but instead we should approach them in a sensitive, age-appropriate way – this is why we are so delighted to see the government take proactive steps in its response to the curriculum and assessment Review.

Opinion

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STUART GARDNER

CEO, Thinking Schools
Academy Trust

Good might not be good enough under new inspection framework

Experience of an inspection suggests Ofsted's system is clearer and fairer, but hard work is needed to attain 'expected standard' says Stuart Gardner

The new Ofsted framework has been discussed for months, but nothing brought it into reality like inspectors arriving on the doorstep of one of our schools.

Being among the first to experience the new format has been illuminating – the process is clearer, and in many ways fairer.

But with the need to evidence every criteria within an evaluation area to meet the 'expected standard', the bar has certainly been raised.

So, there may be fewer surprises, but the framework demands considerably more from leaders, particularly in the breadth and clarity of the data and evidence they provide.

One of the immediate positives was how closely inspectors followed the handbook.

That gave the visit structure and meant we largely knew what to expect. The tone felt more like a professional dialogue than a rapid audit, with space to explain decisions and set out context.

The nominee role also contributed to a steadier process when filled by someone who knows the school well but is not essential to its day-to-day operations.

That clarity in process, however, sat alongside a much higher level of expectation, which became clearer as the inspection unfolded.

To meet the 'expected standard', schools must evidence every part of the criteria. The level required, from my initial experience, feels closer to the upper end of the old 'good' grade.

Trusts can draw additional capacity together at short notice to support this during an inspection, allowing the school team to focus on ensuring appropriate evidence is provided.

However, smaller or standalone schools may not have the same resources.

We also saw variation in how inspectors interpreted the criteria and the evidence needed to meet them.

We were grateful for the role of the senior inspectors (HMI) overseeing the inspection, who seemed to provide a sensible benchmark when interpreting criteria and assessing evidence.

National attainment averages carried considerable weight in discussions. Context was recognised, but only up to a point.

For schools serving lower-attaining or more deprived communities, the raised benchmark may be harder to meet unless judgment continues to evolve in line with the stated ambition of Ofsted's chief inspector, Sir Martyn Oliver, that schools are assessed on what they can reasonably deliver.



Schools once 'good' may find themselves working harder

Our experience also highlighted several areas where schools will need to adjust their preparation. The first was around pupil groups. The pupil groups you flag early shape case sampling and follow-up lines of enquiry, so this needs careful thought.

Impact has also clearly become the central lens of this framework. Inspectors were not interested in process alone. They wanted to see what difference decisions had made and how consistently that difference was being felt.

The inspection data summary report was used to identify themes, and we were expected to explain individual data points. Inspectors wanted alignment between leadership narrative, documentation and what they observed.

Unsurprisingly, the scrutiny of inclusion also intensified. Inspectors compared classroom practice directly with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) support documents, education, health and care plans and provision maps.

Inspectors wanted to see that what was written on paper was being put into practice.

During our visit, we found it important to guide inspectors towards pupils whose needs were

less visible, or the picture risked narrowing to those with more obvious adaptations.

This meant staff with inspectors during learning walks needed to know every class and every student with an adaptation to ensure appropriate adaptations were highlighted.

Curriculum planning also came under scrutiny. Inspectors asked for medium-term planning, even though it was not requested beforehand. But we found that having this to hand showed coherence and avoided unnecessary pressure.

Ultimately, while it is still early days, the Ofsted framework seems to bring welcome clarity, but it also brings intensity.

Schools that once sat comfortably at 'good' may now find themselves working much harder to reach the 'expected standard'.

That does not mean the framework is flawed. But it does mean leaders must adapt quickly and help our communities understand what has changed.

Thoughtful preparation and a clear, honest narrative will be essential to navigating a framework that sets a higher bar but gives schools the chance to show their best work when the call comes.

Opinion

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JOHN BARNEBY

CEO, Oasis Community Learning

Education starts at home, so we bought 20 of them for families

Short-term lets and instability wreck a child's likelihood of succeeding academically – we cannot ignore what goes on outside the school gates, says John Barneby

We are in one of the most active cycles of education reform in a decade.

The curriculum and assessment review is reshaping pupil entitlement. The children's wellbeing and schools bill is progressing through Parliament. And a long-awaited white paper promises to tackle the broken SEND system.

These are significant milestones. But they also share a blind spot.

Policy gravitates towards curriculum, assessment and accountability because they are technical, familiar and measurable.

Yet children do not live in policy silos. They live in families, homes and communities that shape everything they bring into school.

For too many of the pupils we support across Oasis, those wider conditions – housing, stability, safety, wellbeing – make learning infinitely harder long before a lesson begins.

In Sheffield and Scunthorpe, we see decades of uneven investment have left deep marks on the communities we serve. Too many of our families are caught in the churn of short-term lets and overcrowded flats.

Our teachers see the impact with

painful clarity. Children who want to do well but come into school tired, unsettled and unable to concentrate. Attendance and engagement falter for reasons far outside of their control.

This is the backdrop to a decision some may see as unconventional. Oasis has bought 20 homes within a mile of our academies to provide stable, affordable accommodation for vulnerable families.

Supported by £2.1 million from Social and Sustainable Capital and £420,000 from Oasis fundraising, the investment will give families the physiological stability on which education depends.

Some will argue that housing is not in our remit. But the evidence is undeniable.

Research from the children's commissioner this year found that children who stay in the same location from reception to year 11 are 65 per cent more likely to achieve five GCSEs including English and maths. For those who move three times, the figure falls to 50 per cent. For those who move 10 times, it collapses to 11 per cent.

These figures confirm what our academy staff see daily. You cannot build aspiration on instability. You cannot build confidence on constant dislocation.

And bills, white papers or curriculum reform, however thoughtful, cannot compensate for the chaos created by insecure



“ Attendance falters for reasons outside of their control

housing.

A child's learning sits on top of everything else in their lives – their sleep, safety, relationships, their sense of belonging, and the predictability of their routines.

When those foundations are weak, learning becomes harder.

Our decision to buy homes is a natural extension of the Oasis model. A belief that education is strongest when it is part of a wider, coherent system of community support.

Across the country, Oasis operates community spaces and services that work alongside schools to connect youth work, family support, mental-health provision, food programmes, volunteering and local partnerships.

These hubs do not replace public services; they utilise the intrinsic relationships schools have with families to help them work in alignment.

A stable home restores continuity, dignity and the potential for children to imagine a future beyond their next move.

This is the lesson the national debate now needs to grasp. We make education about schools. We improve regulation, we introduce

policy and tools.

But something we forget is education is really about children, and if we believe this then we have to think – and care – about the whole child, their family and their community.

The problem is not everything a child needs can be delivered by schools alone. We are already at capacity.

However, if we are prepared to work across sector boundaries – to integrate our efforts and intentions with housing providers, investors, health services, youth workers, charities and community groups – then a holistic offer can exist and sustainable things like attendance can improve, anxiety can fall and achievement can grow.

If we want education reform to endure, we cannot confine our efforts to the school gates and hope the rest will follow.

And if our schools can play even a small part in creating that stability, then the future we are building will not only be academically ambitious. It will be human, rooted in place, and strong enough for every child, in every community, to flourish.

Opinion

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CATHERINE BUCKLER

Edtech lead and head of geography,
Sydenham High School

How big tech's AI marketing rewrites the future of education

If we passively consume and believe big tech's vision for AI we'll be tricked into ceding control of our profession, warns Catherine Buckler

Big tech's AI in education narratives aren't neutral information sources – they're persuasive texts designed to shape how we think.

Through carefully chosen words, packaged in slick websites, "research" reports and glossy marketing materials, companies like Google and Microsoft don't just inform us about AI. They shape how we think about it.

Much of this happens below our immediate consciousness, making it hard to notice, let alone question. And that matters. How we understand AI's role in education will ultimately shape decisions in schools and influence policy.

Edtech marketing isn't always easy to spot. It's wrapped up in authoritative-looking research, school success stories, teacher training materials and blog posts fronted by thought leaders with impressive credentials.

Presented across multiple formats, these messages feel accessible, trustworthy and even benevolent.

But the variety and polish also mask the commercial imperative woven through these carefully crafted stories, disarming readers into assuming they're encountering

neutral, informative educational resources.

Neutrality is impossible when huge profits are at stake. The global AI in education market is set to grow from \$9.7 billion in 2025 to \$92.5 billion by 2030 (ResearchandMarkets.com 2025).

With that kind of money on the table, every carefully-chosen phrase serves a purpose. The strategies embedded in these materials quietly work to normalise AI in education, gently shifting society's thinking about its adoption and influencing decisions in schools and at policy level.

One of the most common tactics is to position AI as the solution to deep-rooted problems.

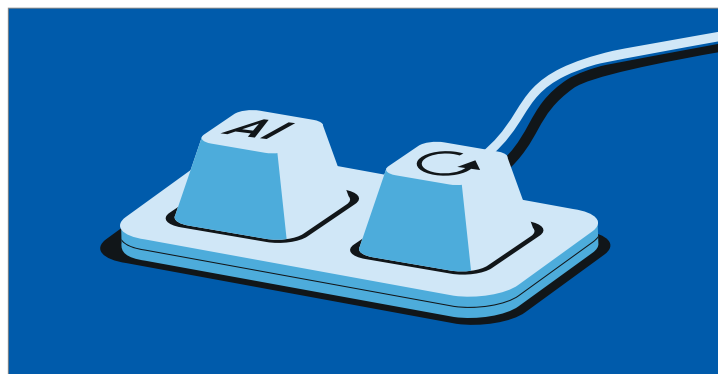
These narratives are attractive to busy school leaders because they reduce complex social and pedagogical challenges into neat technical problems with straightforward answers.

And if something sounds too easy, it probably is. But once we can recognise the strategies used, we can begin asking better questions about where AI genuinely adds value.

So, what should we look out for?

First, students. You often have to work quite hard to find them in big tech's education narratives. When they do appear, they're rarely cast as creators or decision-makers, but rather as passively waiting for AI to adapt or improve their learning.

AI, meanwhile, is positioned as the



“ Once we recognise the strategies we can ask better questions

agent of progress, subtly replacing student agency with the lure of algorithmic optimisation.

If we absorb stories where students are acted upon by AI, we risk designing a future where young people have less ownership of their learning.

Teachers fare only slightly better. They are typically positioned as beneficiaries of AI rather than professionals wielding it.

Compare: "AI helps teachers differentiate resources" (a classic edtech line) with "Teachers use AI to differentiate resources." A quick skim and they read the same.

But read them slowly: who is driving the action? A tiny grammatical shift makes AI the capable agent and teachers the assisted.

Another powerful linguistic move is to present AI adoption as something that simply happens.

Metaphors like "education must evolve" position schools as living organisms reacting to inevitable environmental change.

Phrases such as "as AI transforms education" frame technology as a force of nature: external, unstoppable, unquestionable. Swap "AI" for a company name, e.g. "as Google transforms education" and the powerful force becomes

glaringly obvious.

When we accept AI as "the future," we stop asking whether it's the future we actually want.

But educators are not powerless. Developing awareness is a practical first step. When reading AI-related materials...

- Look for who has agency. Who is doing the learning and making the decisions – the student, the teacher, or the technology?
- Watch for metaphors of inevitability. If change is presented as natural or unstoppable, ask who benefits from that framing.
- Examine the problem definition. Has a complex educational issue been reframed as a technical problem only a product can solve?
- Notice what's missing. Where are the students? Where is teacher judgment? Where is the pedagogy?

AI will play a role in education's future, but that future should not be written solely by the companies that stand to profit from it.

By examining the language used to sell AI, educators can reclaim the narrative and ensure our decisions serve learners, teachers and our wider communities, and not commercial agendas.

THE REVIEW

ANSWERLANDS

BY JOSEPH MINDEN

Publisher: Carcanet

Published: 27 November 2025

Reviewed by: Stephen Lockyer

I couldn't resist

Starting this review

With a broken Haiku

So, a review of a poetry collection by a teacher. A mirror to today in education, perhaps? A reflection of the challenges posed at the chalkface (school idioms need dragging into the 21st century), by a practitioner?

The danger of a completely new anthology thrust into your hands, by an unknown author, is that you arrive with your expectations befuddled.

If I see a poem by Carol Ann Duffy, Kae Tempest or Brian Bilston, I know what I am getting from each of these writers, so to review a new (to me) writer brings its own challenges.

Added to which is that I have taught poetry for the past 25 years. Or rather, untaught.

We use rhyme to make poetry accessible, then watch our spirits die as children shoehorn literally any vaguely-matching word in order to create a bunch of rhyming couplets.

My favourite was a set which featured both 'Pokemon' and 'thong' in a year 2 class.

Mindful of this, I have leaned heavily into exposure to as much spoken word, varied length poetry and form as possible, repeating the adage that poetry is the best words, in the best order.

The bell goes and suddenly the room is empty, folded up and slid into the soul. 'Paddock Calls'.

Answerlands by Joseph Minden is written as a year-long collection of poems about the harmful potential of school.

They are clearly playful and reflective by turns, and he uses a range of formats, from sparse staccato verses to long missives, sentences

widowed and punctuation jarring.

To some this varied format will appeal, to others it may feel obtuse and inaccessible.

The book itself begins with 'Paddock Calls,' a 23-page piece with poetry on one side and prose the other, ostensibly about the start of the year, where our punctilious narrator greets all and sundry with, "All Hail" – quite different from the government-issued back-to-school greeting for September of 'wasn't it lovely/awful weather', 'we did bits and pieces', and 'it went by so quickly'.

The writing is at times melancholy, at other times urgent, but has the air of wanting to be studied rather than enjoyed.

Phrases leap out at times, but they have to almost be sought out, rather than presenting themselves.

This leads to a deeper question; should enjoying poetry feel like work? Should the reader be mining for gold, or be drawn in and then captivated by a group of words, a concept, an image, which you had never considered to put together before?

With masks back, their eyes come forward harder from around the room, but widen with what they can't say. 'w/c 3 January'

These are narrative reflections in the main, and some – once you allow yourself to be indulged by the flight of fancy – build flesh with rereading.

Dr Fox, for example, is a 16-page tale of a conversation between a man and a fox, ostensibly about a cabbage.

Vowels of grief forced open his mouth, veering uselessly to howls, not words. 'Dr Fox'.

There is a mini collection of poems under the

ANSWERLANDS



JOSEPH MINDEN CARCANET POETRY

title 'Dreamland' which are different to the others – sparser, more visual and accessible, and on reflection, if I had started reading with these, I'd have had more measure of the poet's voice by the end.

That Minden chose to begin this book with 'Paddock Calls', such a dense and hefty opening gambit, sadly put me off feeling I could access his writing.

While I enjoyed this collection, it isn't one I've folded corners over, or screenshotted for posterity. Perhaps I'm not the right reader, however?

I want poetry to make me think freshly about something mundane, to break me with familiar words in an unfamiliar order, or to simply to put into words how I am feeling.

I haven't enough empathy to 'put the work in,' which I am mindful this collection might need you to do, in order to get the richness of ideas and language buried within.

Get in touch

Want to write a review for us?

Contact:

opinion@schoolsweek.co.uk

In tribute

Nigel de Gruchy

Teachers' champ who savaged with a soundbite



By **Dr Patrick Roach**,
former general
secretary of the
NASUWT

It is with sadness, pride and a smile that I remember Nigel de Gruchy, who served as general secretary of the NASUWT between 1990 and 2002 and who passed away on Saturday.

I first met Nigel in 1998 after my appointment as a NASUWT staff member to lead on the union's education and equalities work.

Back then, Nigel's name was synonymous with education. For more than a decade he was instrumental in reshaping the language of industrial relations and in firing the national debate on education.

Above all, throughout his life, Nigel was passionate about the need for workers to stand together to "insist upon fairness".

While the fight for justice at work – for fair pay and conditions for teachers – was a driving force in Nigel's time as NASUWT general secretary, he also believed that "partnership is preferable to the traditional and confrontational ways of the past but [that] trade unions can only adopt such an approach in a context where employees are treated with dignity and justice".

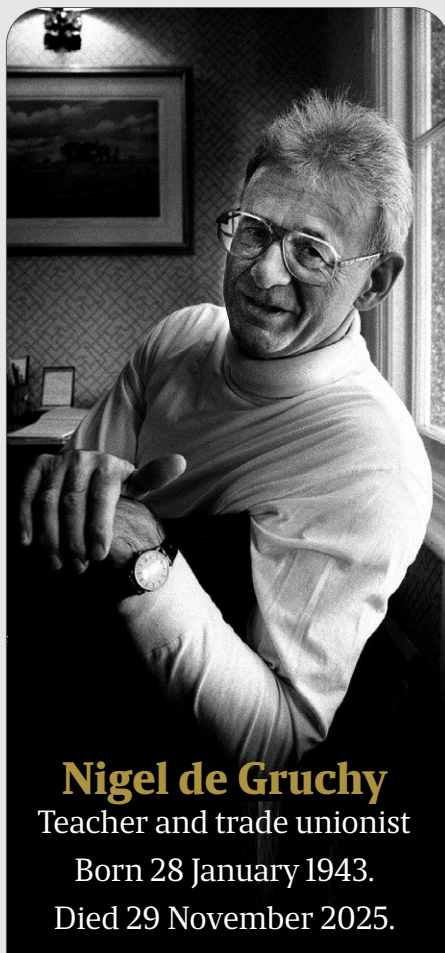
Nigel was a pivotal figure in education and beyond.

Rarely off our TV screens or radio news broadcasts, and well before the advent of social media, Nigel had a knack of being able to communicate directly to teachers, parents and the public in a way that many politicians could only dream of.

The politics of the soundbite was something Nigel claimed as his own. His choice of words may not always have been comfortable, but it was always memorable.

Nigel was born in 1943 on the Channel Island of Jersey, then under the occupation of Nazi Germany.

He was educated at De La Salle College and was a graduate in economics and philosophy



Nigel de Gruchy
Teacher and trade unionist
Born 28 January 1943.
Died 29 November 2025.

from Reading University in 1965.

He briefly taught in Spain and France where he gained political fire in the belly witnessing the 1968 student riots and general strike.

That political courage and voice was nurtured, challenged and sustained throughout by his patient and wonderful wife, Judy.

It was in London that Nigel got hooked on trade union activism.

He rose rapidly through the ranks of the NASUWT, before being elected deputy general secretary in 1983 and general secretary in 1990.

Nigel was instrumental in establishing the international coalition of education trade unions – Education International – which today represents more than 32 million teachers and educators worldwide.

President of the TUC in 2002-03, Nigel retired from trade union life in 2003. But

politics was forever in his blood and he stood as the Labour Party candidate in the Orpington parliamentary seat at the 2015 general election at the grand age of 72.

Nigel's adage throughout his trade union career was "putting teachers first".

In groundbreaking industrial campaigns pursued against the Conservative and Labour governments of the day, Nigel brought the issue of teacher workload to the fore, helping to forge the conditions for the historic national agreement between unions, employers and the Labour government on raising standards and tackling workload.

Nigel's tireless campaigning on pupil behaviour culminated in a precedential victory in the High Court in 2001 (P vs NASUWT), securing the legal right of all teachers to refuse to teach violent pupils and resisting the misapplication of the human rights act.

Nigel understood the art of capturing public opinion in support of teachers, pioneering industrial action "with a halo" by utilising action short of strikes to win industrial disputes without disrupting children's education.

A thorn in the side of numerous education secretaries, Nigel was the trade unionist who told it straight. His sharp turn of phrase may have offended some, but his skill of getting to the heart of the matter was unrivalled.

Amongst many of his qualities was his sense of humour.

I remember his chairing of the TUC Congress in September 2003 where proceedings had to be suspended as Nigel and the great Bill Morris (former leader of the Transport and General Workers' Union) collapsed into a fit of giggles.

Even in the midst of the serious business of the day, Nigel still found something to smile about.

Like him or not, Nigel de Gruchy was a public figure who demanded and secured attention.

An irritant to many a politician, and unafraid to say whatever he was thinking, he will be remembered as a gifted, determined and influential trade union leader, whose sharp words were often the spur for action.

Week in

Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

SATURDAY

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson showed she's more down with the kids than her boss the PM at the Teaching Awards over the weekend.

Sir Keir Starmer was forced to apologise for recently leading primary school children in a version of the 6-7 dance meme, a viral sensation that has caused no end of behaviour issues in schools as children randomly shout the phrase during their lessons.

Phillipson shared a joke about the situation, which happened during a school visit she too attended.

"I didn't join in! I've got a child...I know a lot about the 6-7. I know it can cause some problem in our classrooms..."

That's Keir told!

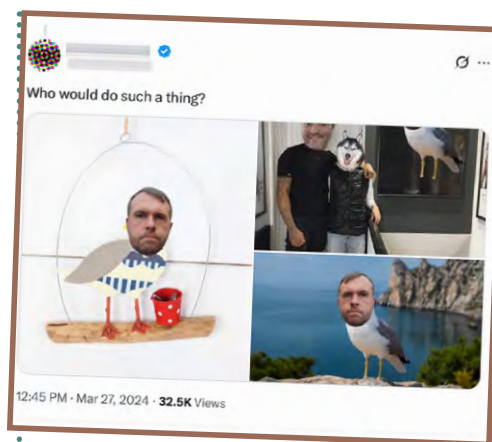
MONDAY

Like many of his ex-Tory MP colleagues, former schools minister Jonathan Gullis has defected to Reform UK.

News of the defection won't have come as a surprise to many in education, but it did resurface an amusing story about his time as a teacher.

Last year, in a Reddit thread, a user recalled how "a guy in our English language class photoshopped his head on to a seagull's body and put the caption 'Jonathan seagullis' on it". It's claimed Gullis was not best pleased.

The thread did not include a picture. But some X users have taken matters into their own hands...



TUESDAY

With little fanfare this week, Sir James Cleverly was replaced as one of two Tory MPs on the education select committee by his colleague Rebecca Paul.

Readers who weren't aware the former education secretary served on the committee should not chastise themselves. He only joined in June.

Still, his tenure was at least longer than the roughly two months he spent at the Department for Education during the Tory government chaos of 2022...

"The National Behaviour Survey slipped out during a busy news period, but look at the progress that we've made – with school staff and parents – over the past year," Bridget Phillipson posted on X this week.

By "busy news period", does she mean the week in which the Department for Education (DfE) set fire to its own social media with its silly "apology letter" PR stunt?

The government also doesn't help

itself. DfE reports – positive or otherwise – are often published as part of a great slew of government documents, leaving policymakers, schools and (won't someone think of the) journalists having to read hundreds of pages of nonsense to find out what's actually going on.

WEDNESDAY

Baroness Barran, the former academies minister, told the upper house this week that she "genuinely wishes the government every success" in their SEND reforms.

We don't doubt her sincerity, but we can't help but wince every time the Conservatives talk about the SEND crisis, which stems largely from their own botched 2014 reforms, chronic underfunding of the system during austerity and an issue they couldn't be bothered to tackle during their many years in office.

Still, like Barran, we're all still eagerly awaiting the government's actual plans for fixing the issue. Meanwhile, children are still being failed...

Tom Rees, the chief executive of Ormiston academies and the government's inclusion tsar, revealed this week that two of his schools have already been inspected under Ofsted's new report cards regime.

Coincidence? Or is Ofsted going out of its way to ensure those close to the government are held to account first?

Headteacher, Iveshead School, Leicestershire

L24 - L29



Are you an inspirational leader who has the creativity, courage and commitment to enable staff and students to achieve and who has a track record of leading change and improvement?

We are delighted to be appointing an experienced aspirational leader to join our trust secondary leadership team as Headteacher of Iveshead School at this exciting time for Mowbray Education Trust.

Our vision is to deliver first-class teaching and learning with integrity. Meaning that everyone attending our schools, regardless of background or ability, receives a first-class education. Our common values of inclusivity, aspiration and collaboration underpin all that we do.

The Headteacher of Iveshead will play a crucial role in supporting the development of our secondary phase, working collaboratively across the secondary leadership team within the culture of the Trust and sharing accountability for the performance and success of the secondary schools.

Contact us:
futuretalent@mowbrayeducation.org

For more information,
please visit our careers portal.

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Bradford Forster Academy



HEADTEACHER

Leadership Salary L30 - L36 (£105,595 - £122,306)
Start date: April 2026

BDAT is looking to appoint an inspirational Headteacher for this exciting leadership role. Our goal is to transform the lives of our students, staff and community and to inspire each other to keep on developing and improving.

This post is a fantastic opportunity for an ambitious leader looking either to extend their experience of headship or to start their first headship in a highly supportive and rewarding environment.

We offer access to high quality personal and professional development for all our staff, with a great emphasis of supporting and developing the lives of everyone in the academy. You will also benefit from the close partnership working with the four other secondary academies within our multi-academy trust and the support of our colleagues in the Diocese of Leeds Education Team.

We need from you

- A commitment to ensuring our children achieve their biggest and bravest ambitions.
- A love of teaching and learning.
- A passion for developing your team.

- Strong, innovative and strategic leadership and management.
- A firm commitment to achieving success through partnership and teamwork.
- Excellent interpersonal and communication skills.
- Drive, ambition and high expectations.
- Commitment to the vision and values of the school and trust.

We can offer you

- A supportive and forward-thinking leadership team in an inclusive academy and trust.
- A stimulating, attractive and welcoming learning environment.
- An approach that supports and stimulates professional growth, with a bespoke CPD package.
- Cross-trust opportunities for collaboration and development.
- The opportunity to make a positive difference to the lives and careers of pupils and colleagues.
- A career in a forward thinking trust.

Visits to the academy are welcomed and actively encouraged,
please contact jill.geering@bdac-academies.org

BDAT (Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust) 2nd Floor, Jade Building, Albion Mills, Albion Road, Bradford, BD10 9TQ

[Click here
for more info](#)



SENIOR CO-CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Scholars' Education Trust

**Salary range: £167,800 to
£181,000 (5 point scale)**

Required for September 2026



Scholars' Education Trust (SET) is seeking an exceptional leader to join our Executive Team as Senior Co-Chief Executive Officer, guiding our diverse family of schools into the next stage of growth and excellence. This is a rare and exciting opportunity to shape the future of a successful and expanding multi-academy trust.

SET is a cross-phase trust of thirteen schools across Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and West Essex, educating nearly 10,000 pupils from nursery through to sixth form.

Our vision is clear: to work collaboratively so that every young person in our care achieves more than they ever believed possible. Our values: Achievement, Care and Excellence (ACE), underpin everything we do.

We are looking for a strategic and inspirational leader who shares our commitment to improving standards and outcomes for all pupils. The successful candidate will have a proven track record of leadership at scale, with the ability to drive educational excellence, foster innovation, and build strong relationships with stakeholders.

They will bring the vision and resilience to lead a complex organisation, ensuring sustainability and growth while maintaining the highest standards of governance and accountability.

As Senior Co-CEO, you will:

- Provide strategic leadership across the Trust, working in partnership with Trustees, Headteachers and civic partners.
- Champion educational excellence and inclusion, ensuring every child receives a high-quality education.
- Lead the School Improvement Team and act as the Trust's Accounting Officer, upholding probity and compliance.
- Shape and deliver a people strategy that attracts, develops and retains outstanding staff.
- Represent SET nationally and locally, influencing policy and promoting our civic mission.

The job description and responsibilities of the current Senior Co-CEO of SET will form the basis of the role. We are, however, willing to be flexible and would be open to a discussion with the successful candidate about the exact scope of the jobs, its responsibilities, and its hours.

You will be supported by a highly experienced Executive Team and a committed Board of Trustees, as well as a collaborative network of schools that share best practice and innovation.

If you are a visionary leader with the ambition to make a lasting impact on thousands of young lives, we would love to hear from you.

For more information about the Trust and the role, please see the Senior Co-CEO Information Pack, including job description and person specification.

Applications

Please download the SET application form from our website: : Current Vacancies - Scholars Education Trust
Applications should be sent to Geoffrey Payne, Chair of the Board of Trustees, via Hazel Wale at h.wale@scholarseducationtrust.co.uk.

A conversation with our Chair and/or a visit to our schools can be arranged – please contact Hazel Wale on the above email or call 01727 734420.

Closing date: Friday, 09 January 2026 at 9am

Interview date: WC 02 February 2026