

Revealed: DfE's orders to councils as SEND reforms quietly begin

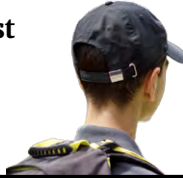
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Backlash over agency's EHCP support offer



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We don't suspend too much, say most school staff



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DFE'S SECRET £1M PFI BAILOUT



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Ofsted plans closer monitoring of impact on heads' wellbeing

- Deal with headteachers will broaden new framework feedback
- Union-led 'independent advisory group' formed to scrutinise data
- Agreement puts talk of industrial and legal action on ice

SCHOOLS
WEEK

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News that the National Association of Head Teachers has struck a deal with Ofsted for better monitoring of the impact of inspection on leader wellbeing is very welcome. As is the new advisory group that will scrutinise the data.

It represents an acknowledgment by Ofsted that it needs better data on how heads are really feeling about the new inspection process and report cards.

It is also an acknowledgment from NAHT that joint working and partnership will probably achieve more for schools and those they serve than industrial action, something leaders are loath to take.

We hope this presents an opportunity for Ofsted to be a bit more realistic about its new framework and inspection process. Of course it is Martyn Oliver's job to promote what the chief inspector sees as good work in improving things.

Feedback from leaders suggest some things have got better. But the pressure

is still there, and it would be a mistake to only consider post-inspection surveys, the results of which often inevitably mirror the grading outcomes of inspection.

It is also welcome that the Association of School and College Leaders and Confederation of School Trusts will be represented on the advisory group alongside the NAHT, as will Ofsted and the Department for Education.

This spirit of partnership working was too often missing at the beginning of the reform journey, and we hope it paves the way for feedback to be provided – and crucially – acted upon.

It's a critical year for schools policy. As rumours of another delay to the schools white paper circulate, it's more important than ever that those running schools have their experiences and expertise taken seriously. They are the experts, and both Ofsted and government should welcome their input.

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

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Recruiter: Hire us and get EHCP applications done free

EXCLUSIVE

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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A recruitment agency is reviewing its adverts after coming under fire for offering schools free outsourced applications for education, health and care plans (EHCP) if they then hire its staff to support the pupils.

Leaflets from Qualiteach Education Group said schools can “outsource the most time-intensive elements” of the EHCP application process to “experienced specialists, without incurring long-term costs”.

Under the deal, schools would pay £450 to its partner, the consultancy Innovate Create Educate, which collects “evidence and documentation” to apply to the council within 30 days.

The leaflet added that once EHCP funding is agreed, the school “engages a suitable agency professional through Qualiteach”.

After they complete the 30 days in post, the agency would refund the £450 to the school.

‘Troubling commodification’

Lacey Cousins, headteacher at Hawley Primary School in Camden, said the offer “appears to target overstretched and vulnerable schools, exploiting systemic failures rather than addressing them”.

She added it “reflects a troubling commodification of statutory SEND processes at a time when schools are already overwhelmed by administrative burden, delays in specialist support, and chronic underfunding”.

However, after Schools Week contacted the firms, they said the decision to employ Qualiteach’s agency staff was “entirely optional and based on the school’s individual needs”.

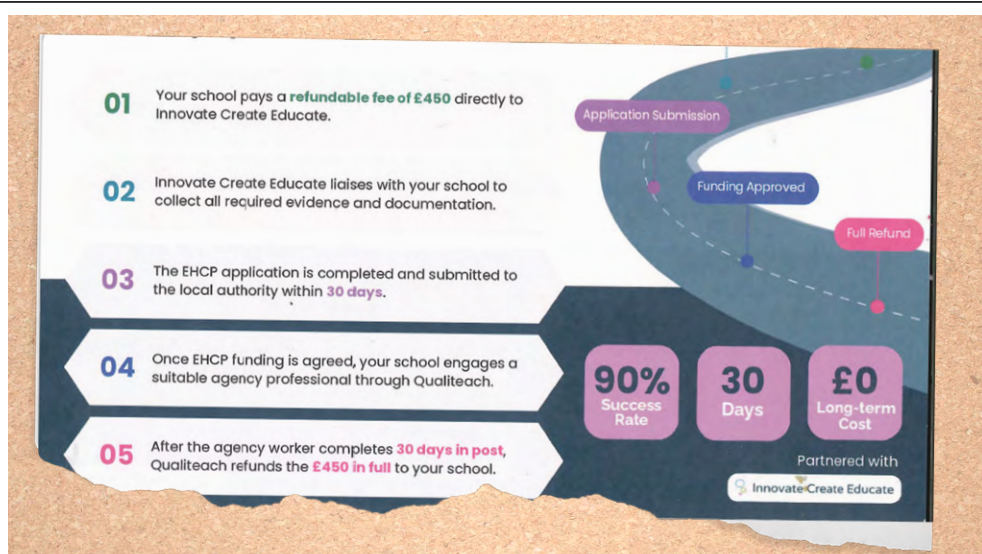
This is despite an FAQ on whether the school is obliged to use the firm stating: “Only if EHCP funding is agreed and specialist provision is required. There is no obligation prior to this point.”

Josh Brandon, Qualiteach’s chief executive officer, recognised the leaflet could imply it was mandatory, but “that was not the intention”.

He added the marketing was designed to “illustrate one possible pathway where, if a school chooses to use Qualiteach to support delivery of agreed provision, the £450 fee paid to Innovate Create Educate would be refunded so that the school is not left out of pocket.”

“It was not intended to suggest a requirement or expectation, and we recognise that this has not been communicated clearly enough.”

They are now “reviewing the leaflet wording



and layout as a result of this feedback to ensure it more accurately reflects the voluntary nature of the arrangement and avoids any implication of conditionality”.

Under the deal, even though schools can get the £450 refunded if they employ an agency worker from the firm, they would still have to pay for that support “through the school’s normal arrangements using agreed funding”.

Brandon also added that schools would still receive the refund if the EHCP application was unsuccessful, but they decided to hire a Qualiteach staff member.

‘Serious ethical and safeguarding questions’

The leaflet states the service would not replace a school’s SENCO, but support them “by removing the most time-intensive administrative elements of EHCP applications”.

Brandon said it was created as heads told Qualiteach about “significant capacity pressures”.

Schools Week has previously revealed SENCOs feeling burnt out and isolated with workload pressures.

But Abigail Hawkins, founder at SENSible SENCO, said: “The EHC process encompasses far more than an administrative function; it requires a compassionate approach. It is unclear what qualifications or training this individual possesses, if any.”

Cousins added the suggestion EHCP applications can be “outsourced to unknown third parties raises serious ethical, professional, and safeguarding questions”.

“EHCP applications are legally significant, highly individualised documents that rely on deep

professional knowledge of the child, sustained observation, and close collaboration with families and services.

“It also signals a profound lack of respect for the expertise and accountability of school professionals who carry statutory responsibility for these processes.”

Brandon said the aim was not to “replace professional judgement or statutory responsibility, but help schools progress applications where capacity constraints risk delaying support for pupils who clearly need it”.

The offer came out of discussions with headteachers and visits to schools, he added.

‘Importance of transparency’

Innovate Create Educate, which said it had helped “several schools” with the process for about two years, does not independently assess children, determine provision or make decisions about outcomes.

The leaflet also called its service the “specialist EHCP application that boasts a 90 per cent success rate”.

National figures show councils proceeded with an EHCP needs assessment for just 65.4 per cent of requests.

Asked for more details by Schools Week, the company said the figure “should be defined more clearly” in its communications, as it recognised the “importance of transparency”.

It said that it referred to “the proportion of supported applications that proceed through the statutory process to either assessment or the issuing of an EHCP, based on Innovate Create Educate’s historical data”.

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Staff unconvinced by internal suspension drive

EXCLUSIVE

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Fewer than one in 30 teachers and leaders say their school uses suspensions excessively, despite fresh government pressure on leaders to keep more pupils in school.

Last week the Department for Education (DfE) pledged a new framework for “internal suspensions” – often called internal exclusions or isolation – as part of its looming white paper.

Guidance will encourage schools to send fewer pupils home, limiting off-site suspensions to “the most serious and violent behaviour”.

But the announcement prompted warnings of greater disruption in schools, and confusion over what the government wants – as suspended pupils cannot currently be kept in school.

While suspensions have increased by a fifth in recent years, just one per cent of 5,020 teachers polled recently by Teacher Tapp said schools use off-site suspensions too much.

Heads were slightly more likely to say the same (three per cent). Far more (31 per cent) said schools use too few, though the biggest proportion (41 per cent) said schools use the right amount.

Data also revealed many teachers' schools already used internal exclusions. Of those, 34 per cent said schools used the right amount. Another 23 per cent said they were used too little.

‘Short-sighted approach to complex situation’

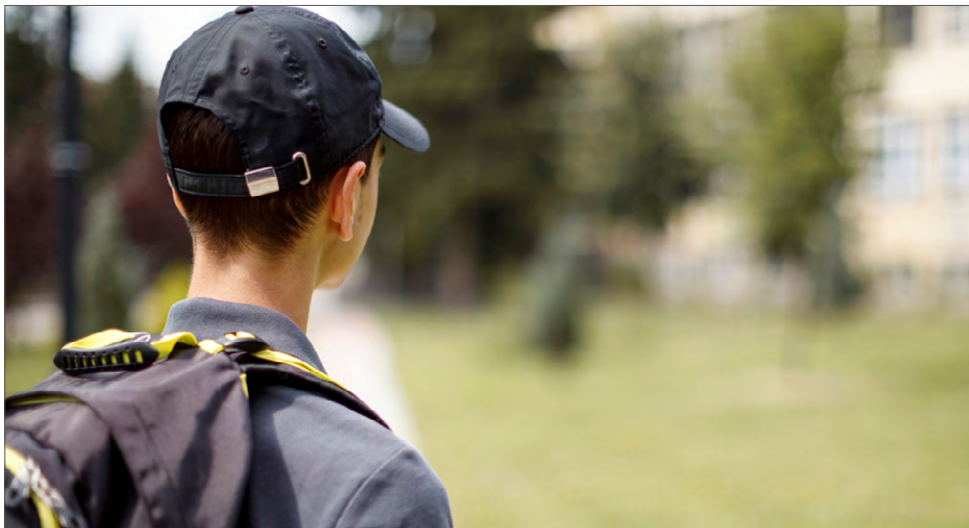
Mike Carter, CEO of Character Education Trust, said it “felt like a complex situation has been met with quite a short-sighted approach” in the new guidance.

“It’s so incredibly complex and individual to each school and headteachers...but this does seem to be just a way of putting off headteachers from making that decision when they have to make it. No-one makes that lightly.”

Last week’s announcement was marred by communications blunders, with actual guidance not due for weeks.

Pepe Di’Iasio, general secretary of school leaders’ union ASCL, agreed it was “poorly handled and lacked detail”.

“As this data shows, many schools already use on-site suspensions...what schools really need is investment that allows them to employ appropriately skilled specialist staff and



ensure the right support is in place to prevent behavioural issues from escalating.”

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of school leaders’ union NAHT, highlighted potential “practical barriers” to using more internal exclusion, such as having enough space or staff.

Schools are not expected to receive extra funding to support more excluded pupils on site.

Neil Miller, deputy CEO of London South East Academies Trust, said his schools had suspended pupils involved in social media bullying, and for repeated discriminatory language.

“It isn’t about those percentages and numbers. This is about doing the right thing for the right child for the right time.”

Calls for ministers to trust schools

Persistent disruptive behaviour was the top reason for suspension last year, followed by verbal or physical abuse towards staff.

“We’re not recruiting enough teachers in this country as it is,” Miller added.

“If they’re being physically threatened or verbally threatened by children, and actually those children are still coming into the school... what message are we giving out to those staff?”

The DfE has insisted headteachers will retain autonomy over both suspensions and internal exclusions.

Caroline Lowing, headteacher of Thornden School in Hampshire, said there should be “trust in what we’re doing”. While her school may suspend pupils for swearing at teachers, this “will be different 20 miles down the road”.

Miller agreed guidance “can’t be a one size fits all”, warning that otherwise significant numbers of schools would be “really penalised”.

Despite leaders’ concerns, Philip Wood, principal associate at law firm Browne Jacobson, said he did not expect guidance to “particularly move the dial”, with schools already using internal suspensions.

“We advise a significant number of headteachers on a daily basis - I’m not sure headteachers are giving suspensions without thinking about it.”

DfE weighs data requests but not targets

Schools are not currently required legally to record data on internal exclusions, but many do so through management information systems (MIS).

Schools Week revealed earlier this week the DfE will “seek views on the appropriate requirements for recording and reporting” internal exclusions.

Ane Vernon, partner at law firm Payne Hicks Beach, said this would take isolation room usage “out of the dark murky corners of some practices”.

The government confirmed schools won’t face targets on internal exclusion, however.

Schools Week also recently revealed the widespread use of internal exclusions for the first time, using data from MIS provider Arbor.

Our investigation found the average secondary school using the practice isolates almost a fifth of pupils from their classmates at least once each year.

The DfE was approached for comment



Ane Vernon

NEWS

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Ofsted to monitor wellbeing impact in deal with heads

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Ofsted has agreed to gather more feedback from school leaders on inspections' impact on their wellbeing, as part of a deal with heads that will see a new "independent advisory group" launched.

Unions have repeatedly warned Ofsted's new education inspection framework (EIF), which assesses schools across more areas than before, means more pressure on leaders.

The National Association of Head Teachers had been mulling industrial action over Ofsted's five-point grading scale, after its application for a judicial review was thrown out by the High Court last year. The EIF was launched in November.

But Schools Week understands the agreements reached with Ofsted this week have put plans for further action on ice.

The inspectorate will add further questions on wellbeing to its existing survey of leaders about the new framework. The questions are still being drawn up.

New advisory group planned

The data, collected from a representative sample of schools, will then be scrutinised by an advisory group set up by the NAHT.

Ofsted and the Department for Education have agreed to be permanent members. Representatives are also expected from school leaders' union ASCL and the Confederation of School Trusts (CST).

The chair will be Sinéad Mc Brearty, chief executive of charity Education Support and author of a damning independent wellbeing assessment of Ofsted's reform plans, issued last year.

They will review new data and "identify actions that could further support mental health and wellbeing before, during, and after inspection", the NAHT said.

They will also consider support schools receive post-inspection through the government's RISE school improvement programme, and how this affects leaders' wellbeing.

Martyn Oliver: Tone of inspections 'more positive'

Ofsted's chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver has painted a positive picture of feedback on new



inspections.

Speaking at the Sixth Form Colleges Association's AGM yesterday, he said feedback "paints an encouraging picture of a process that is, in the words of those who have experienced it, 'not softer, not easier, but fairer.'"

"We hear a great deal about the tone of inspections now being more positive."

But NAHT general secretary Paul Whiteman said: "It is crucial that we have independent data that gives clear and honest feedback from leaders who have experienced inspection."

He said NAHT "look[s] forward to working with Ofsted and DfE officials" to "ensure that school leader wellbeing is being prioritised and action taken to support and protect them".

Steve Rollett, CST deputy chief executive, also welcomed Ofsted's and DfE's commitment to "working with the sector to understand the impact of inspection and RISE support on leaders".

Leaders report heightened stress

However, ASCL is concerned the new regime puts "a huge amount of stress on school and college leaders and their staff", according to general secretary Pepe Di'Iasio.

This is "damaging wellbeing and deterring the next generation" of staff, he added.

"It's vital that we work together across the profession to look at ways we can improve the inspection process, and the health and wellbeing of everybody involved must be at the forefront."

Improved leader and teacher wellbeing was supposed to be a focus of Ofsted's reforms, drawn up following the suicide of headteacher Ruth Perry.

But Mc Brearty's independent wellbeing report last year warned new report cards spell more anxiety for leaders with already "concerningly high" stress levels.

Leader anxiety and stress will "in many (though not all) cases, spillover and increase pressure on staff teams to perform well in inspection".

Leaders who have been through new-style inspections have also expressed concerns the new framework – which sees schools graded on a five-point scale across a minimum of six evaluation areas – does not reduce pressure.

Ofsted 'keen to gather independent data'

Oliver said the inspectorate was "keen to gather independent data so we can see where any improvements can be made".

"That improvement works best when inspectors and school leaders are all pushing in the same direction," he said. "We want to hear feedback, make improvements and work together to secure a better future for children."

Ofsted wants to ensure success by "raising standards for children, providing new-look report cards for parents and being fairer to professionals".

The inspectorate already collects leaders' views through post-inspection surveys. It uses this to give "first-hand feedback" to inspectors and their managers, and publicly publishes a summary of responses.

But analysis has previously shown schools awarded higher grades are typically more likely to take part in the surveys, and to be positive about their inspection experience.

Ofsted will continue to run these surveys.



Sinéad Mc Brearty

Big trusts put £££s in piggy banks but plan to raid them

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A two-year run of cash-strapped academy trusts eating into reserves has come to an end, as a new report shows larger trusts averaged surpluses over £1 million last year.

But accountants behind the research warned not to “pop the champagne”, saying it partly reflected stricter budgeting and noting many trusts expect reserves to fall by up to 43 per cent in the coming years.

It comes after a *Schools Week* investigation revealed more trusts bolstered reserves last year – with one seeing a 900 per cent boost.

Here’s what you need to know from the 2026 academies benchmark report by Kreston Global, a network of accountancy firms:

1. Reserves boost

Only 37 per cent of trusts lost money in 2024-25, down 60 per cent year-on-year.

The biggest multi-academy trusts averaged surpluses of £1.1 million, skyrocketing from the previous year’s wafer-thin surpluses, which averaged £28,000.

It contrasts with the “ever-greater proportion” of trusts dipping into reserves in the two previous years.

The study – involving 250 trusts with around 2,500 schools – attributed the turnaround to a “pleasant surprise” from government, which covered “a little more of the [teacher] pay rise ... than expected”.

Kreston also found the proportion of trusts with reserves lower than the bare minimum recommended by government, 5 per cent of income, dropped from 35 per cent to 26 per cent.

2. Don’t ‘pop the champagne’

However, Kreston emphasised that before “we pop the champagne corks”, it was worth noting that surpluses were “still very modest” for standalone and single-academy trusts. Those analysed ranged from £6,000 to £39,000.

All trust types, except medium-sized multi-academy trusts, are also forecasting reserves to fall by up to 43 per cent by 2028.

Kevin Connor, a report author and head of academies at accountancy Bishop Fleming, said continuing uncertainty was “already weighing on confidence and limiting trusts’ ability to plan,



invest and grow”.

While it was trusts’ strongest financial year since 2022 “on the face of it”, he added: “Surpluses have been largely propped up by tighter budgeting and in-year funding trusts were not expecting when they set their budgets, rather than by any easing of underlying financial pressures.”

3. Call for forecast rethink

Despite this, the report stressed trusts’ forecasts “need to be taken with a large pinch of salt”.

The “accuracy” of budgeting “is not particularly reliable”, with trusts tending to err towards caution.

Kreston argues this raises questions over “whether trusts are making poor decisions” based on projections, and if there’s actually “any real value” in the forecasting process.

“We have had a number of conversations with our clients where they didn’t think they could afford to replace a teaching assistant but then went on to make a surplus for the year.

“Had they had reliable financial information then, in many cases, these roles could have been replaced.”

The report urged the Department for Education to give leaders a “longer-term income plan...on a timely basis”.

4. Growth stalls

Thirty-six per cent of trusts expect to expand this year, down significantly from 61 per cent 12 months ago, according to Kreston.

Connor said that low confidence had “dampened growth predictions”. There are “serious concerns” over whether trusts have the funding and resources needed to “turn schools with complex challenges around”.

The falling number of trusts dipping into reserves

	2023	2024	2025
TRUSTS	147	158	92
% OF SAMPLED TRUSTS	49%	60%	37%

Source: Kreston’s academies benchmark report for 2026 **SCHOOLSWEEK**

5. Higher interest boon

The research shows trusts have also gained from “sustained high interest rates over the past four years”.

Trusts’ investment income averaged £33 per pupil last year, up from £29 a year earlier. Large trusts returned the most (£39 per pupil).

6. Staff cost pressures

Almost 90 per cent of trusts listed staff costs as a top-three concern this year, up from 81 per cent.

Kreston analysis shows teaching and support staff salaries cost over 75 per cent of total income, a commonly used benchmark for financial health.

The report said there was “no meaningful gap” between single- and multi-academy trusts on this metric. This suggests that “in absolute terms, size is having little impact on this as everyone is in the same position.”

7. £200k CEO pay average

The report shows chief executive pay at the largest trusts surveyed averaged over £200,000, up from £189,000 last year.

But CEO pay growth has been “consistent” on average across all types of trusts except primaries, with the range “not significantly different to previous years”.

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Secret £1m bailout as PFI windfalls and school woes grow

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One of England's first private finance initiative (PFI) schools struck a secret deal for taxpayers to cover a £1 million "bullet payment" to break free of its contract.

Schools Week analysis also suggests PFI owners of English schools could have recently made as much as £85.7 million in profits in a single year.

Shareholders could have pocketed as much as £48 million in 2023-24 alone, according to our research, extrapolated from the accounts of 71 companies running almost half England's PFI school projects.

Meanwhile new documents show the firm overseeing the largest deal owed over £11 million to contractors when it collapsed. A row continues over repairs.

The revelations prompted calls for ministers to "hold providers to account in cases where large sums of public money have been spent on projects that are not fit for purpose".

Schools Week investigates...

Trust's 'secret' deal

Successive governments have used PFI since the 1990s.

Private firms build and maintain sites in exchange for mortgage-style payments, normally over 25 years, before buildings are handed over to taxpayers.

Barnhill Community High School in west London was one of the earliest school deals agreed, and the second to expire in 2024. Negotiations continued with Bellrock, its PFI operator, even after expiry, however.

The contract obliged the secondary to pay a £1 million "bullet payment" in monthly instalments to leave Bellrock as facilities manager - even after the main deal ended.

Ben Spinks, chief executive of the Middlesex Learning Partnership Trust which runs Barnhill, revealed the Department for Education had stepped in to cover it. They decided together not to tell Bellrock this, however.

"We didn't want it to impact on the wider commercial negotiation that was still going on."

Contract vagaries

Spinks had warned government it would



'The identities of many PFI firms are unknown'

Payments to England's school PFI companies	
Year	Total unitary charge
Pre-2024	£18.2bn
2024-25	£1.3bn
2025-26	£1.3bn
Post-2026	£11.9bn
Total	£32.9bn

Source: Analysis of Treasury stats

SCHOOLSWEEK

have been a "very serious financial burden", representing more than its "total pupil premium funding" over two years.

The case highlights "how complicated any PFI contract is and that some of the earlier ones were less tightly defined for both parties", he said.

"There were times where vagaries in the contract made life difficult for [Bellrock] as well as us. There were certain matters on which the contract was just silent or not specific."

Matthew Wolton, a partner at law firm VWV, said Tony Blair's



Labour government lacked "experience of these projects" when striking early deals.

"Some of the problems that we're seeing now are because the first wave of contracts are not as good for the public sector as the contracts that came later."

Stoke firm collapsed owing £11m

Stoke has 88 schools built under a PFI contract that ended in October with Transform Schools (Stoke) Ltd (TSSL). It is the largest school PFI deal nationwide.

Last year it was revealed some construction work could remain unfinished however, despite the council pumping in £3.5 million to fill a shortfall.

In December, TSSL went into liquidation. Company documents show it owed just over £11 million to 14 firms – some of which it was linked to – when it collapsed.

One creditor is recruiter 300 North. Paul Connolly, its CEO, said his firm is "going through the legal process of trying to recover the debt" of just under £21,000 after it "supplied a temporary worker onto the contract".

A Stoke council spokesperson encouraged contractors to get in touch. They also stressed the authority intends "to complete the remaining

INVESTIGATION

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works", having retained around £8 million to do so.

Joint liquidator Jeremy Karr, of firm Begbies Traynor, said he will "seek the best possible outcome for creditors". A "thorough review" of TSSL's records will be conducted.

"We will also seek to comply with any reasonable requests from the council insofar as possible, with the assistance of the directors of the company, to assist the council in ensuring handover of warranties for school works carried out by subcontractors."

Gaps in government data

Government financial secretary Spencer Livermore admitted last year the identities of many PFI firms are unknown.

He said there were 77 projects, with a combined public debt of £5.2 billion, where councils either "do not know who the equity holders are" or have not given the Treasury the data.

Schools Week analysis of the accounts of 71 PFI companies, each operating an English school contract, shows they received over £620 million in mortgage-style payments in 2023-24.

They reported combined profits of £35.6 million, while shareholders received almost £20m in dividends. The profits of many will come purely from PFI, though others may have other income sources.

The firms behind PFI

Part of a complex web of organisations, the 71 firms appear to be overseen by five larger investment companies. One of them is International Public Partnerships (INPP), which is responsible for 23 school contracts.

Amber Infrastructure, which advises INPP, said the companies are "focused on supporting the long-term stable operation of the schools and delivering critical infrastructure and sustainable value".

"Private investors including INPP are not guaranteed a return when investing in social infrastructure PFI companies and are paid dividends only where circumstances allow.

"INPP's own investors include those that benefit the wider public, such as pension funds and insurers."

Another is Innisfree, which has 14 English school projects, including Stoke. Its website says it has provided "modern infrastructure to 260 schools with a combined capital value of £1.5 billion".



'We would like to see more done to hold providers to account'

The firm told MPs in 2011 it aims to achieve returns of 8 to 10 per cent every year for investors, mostly UK pension funds. It did not respond to requests for comment.

Dozens set to expire

So far, six PFI contracts have expired. Thirty-nine more will by 2030.

Jon Ward, estates director for an academy trust, said PFI does mean you "know the standard you're supposed to be getting", as it is written into contracts. But the challenge is, "typically that could be more expensive".

"Where it becomes difficult for some is the funding model has changed ... with other financial burdens, so any margins you had you could be losing that in a PFI contract."

In 2021, the Cabinet Office started running health checks on contracts set to expire within seven years, at which point authorities are told to start preparing.

Lost documents

Schools Week analysis two years ago showed just two of 41 councils assessed were deemed on track.

Speaking last year, Mark Fallows, of the DfE's private finance team, said some authorities "have more resource and skillsets than others". A number buy in support.

"On some of the projects, it's been quite difficult to find all of the documentation. These contracts... are very complicated, but there probably, in a lot of cases, hasn't been enough

contract management."

Despite this, the Treasury's 10-year infrastructure strategy stated government "will work with the private sector to harness the potential for private finance".

PFI is a form of public-private partnership, and the Treasury said it will keep using these where "value for money for taxpayers can be secured".

Union's 'deep concern'

Julia Harnden, of the Association of School and College Leaders, argued it is "deeply concerning that, for a variety of reasons, so many schools with PFI contracts are in very difficult positions financially".

"The government must continue to support schools with PFI contracts who have been negatively affected through no fault of their own, and ensure they are not left to carry this burden on their own.

"We would also like to see more done to hold providers to account in cases where large sums of public money have been spent on projects that are not fit for purpose."

However, Wolton said that the fact "contractors and their lenders would be able to make a profit" was one of the key principles of PFI. Without this, they "wouldn't get involved".

"In later contracts, PFI contractors were incentivised to make savings (which would generate higher profits) on the basis that a proportion of these savings would be shared with the public sector, which would lower the overall cost."



Julia Harnden

Guidance update on worship looms after human rights case

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The government will update guidance on collective worship in English schools, after the Supreme Court ruled that Christian-focused worship and religious education (RE) in Northern Irish schools was unlawful.

However, the UK's Department for Education (DfE) said it had "no plans to change the law", which requires daily collective worship that is "broadly Christian".

The UK's highest court had ruled in November that mostly Christian-centred RE and collective worship in Northern Ireland breached the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). It said they were not delivered "in an objective, critical, and pluralistic manner".

The DfE has now confirmed plans to "update" its own guidance on collective worship in English schools "to reflect the current legal framework", including ECHR requirements.

All state-funded schools in England are required to run "a daily act of collective worship which is broadly Christian in nature", albeit with some exemptions.

Current guidance is over 30 years old

The DfE does plan to "update the guidance", which dates back to 1994.

"Collective worship plays an important role in schools and helps encourage pupils to reflect on the concept of belief, and the role it plays in



the traditions and values of this country," a DfE spokesperson said on Wednesday.

They said the government has "no plans to change the law", but added: "However, we recognise the need to update the guidance to make expectations clear and the need for collective worship to be objective, critical and pluralistic.

"We understand this is sensitive and will be working closely with partners and stakeholders to get this right."

The department has not specified what changes it plans to make.

Currently, non-faith schools can seek an exemption from the requirement for daily worship to be Christian in nature, while faith schools can provide collective worship in line with their religion.

Parents also have an "unconditional right" to withdraw their children from collective worship, while sixth-formers can withdraw themselves.

NI case raises questions over English law

Some argue that in an increasingly secular society, daily acts of worship should no longer be required in schools.

Stephen Evans, chief executive of the National Secular Society, said: "Objective, critical and pluralistic worship is a contradiction in terms.

"The legal requirement for a daily act of broadly Christian worship in schools conflicts with children's freedom of belief and is a relic of a bygone age that should be removed from the statute book."

The Northern Ireland case involved a pupil from a non-religious family in Belfast, who took part in her primary's Christian RE and collective worship.

The girl's parents "did not wish her to be taught that Christianity was an absolute truth", according to the judgement.

But her father reported she began to believe that "God made the world, and she repeats and practices a prayer...taught at school". He grew concerned that his daughter was "learning Christianity and not learning 'about' Christianity".

Her father launched a judicial review against the province's Department of Education, challenging the legality of the RE and worship.

JACK DYSON | JACK.DYSON@SCHOOLSWEET.CO.UK

Star fell victim to 'historic fraud' over several years

One of the biggest academy trusts fell foul of a "historic fraud" over a number of years, accounts reveal.

Star Academies, which runs 36 schools, uncovered the "significant financial irregularity" last year.

But the trust stressed it "acted swiftly and appropriately, commissioning an independent investigation, reporting the matter to the relevant authorities". It said the full amount had been recovered.

A Star spokesperson said: "We can confirm that a historic fraud was identified and fully investigated.

"Internal controls have been strengthened. There is no ongoing risk to public funds."

The trust's accounts for 2024-25 show

the "significant financial irregularity" was identified during the financial year, but it had taken place "over a number of years".

"The trust continues to operate in accordance with the principles of regularity, propriety and compliance, and has taken all reasonable steps to ensure the issue has been fully addressed," accounts added.

The academy trust handbook states trustees must inform the Department for Education (DfE) "as soon as possible of all instances of fraud, theft or irregularity exceeding £5,000 individually, or £5,000 cumulatively in any financial year".

Fraud deemed "unusual or systematic" must also be reported, "regardless of value".

The handbook also says the DfE can

investigate "actual or potential fraud, theft or irregularity in any academy trust".

Last year, *Schools Week* revealed the Wembley Multi-Academy Trust lost almost £400,000 through a cyber-scam.

Micon Metcalfe, a school business expert, said the case was a "warning and reminder" of the risk posed by fraudsters.

"Anybody can be susceptible to this type of fraud. The only way to avoid it... [is] to be very vigilant around your controls for changing bank account details."

The department's academies sector annual accounts show 43 fraud allegations were reported by trusts for 2022-23, the latest year available, down from 55 a year earlier.

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Pilot reveals 'shocking' unmet speech and language needs

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

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A screening pilot has found "large numbers" of young children with previously unmet needs for speech and language support, with need in one area three times higher than previously realised and staff left 'shocked'.

The Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) programme was launched by the Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England in September 2023, trialling more universal screening and early support in several areas.

It funds "innovative workforce models" to better identify and help children with speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN).

An interim report on its first full year found its more universal approach "is successfully addressing previously unidentified speech and language needs and helping to prevent escalation".

However, it also revealed "the scale of previously unidentified need is greater than anticipated", adding: "Targeted interventions may need to be further 'universalised' to meet demand."

The two-year pilot up to last May cost DfE and



NHS £2.2 million each annually, and then saw a year-long extension.

Ministers previously said ELSEC "paves the way for a reformed SEND system" and "forms one part of the government's work testing SEND reforms". The white paper outlining wide-ranging SEND reforms is expected in the coming months.

Staff 'shocked' by demand

The programme involved nine areas, six of which coded children's needs using a traffic light system. Overall, 6,300 pupils were screened.

Schools Week analysis of data for those six areas shows six in 10 pupils had speech and language needs, with 31 per cent needing additional support,

and 23 per cent in the highest needs category.

Many project leads "highlighted the scale of previously unidentified need uncovered".

In one area, two-thirds of children found to need support had not previously been identified. One project manager was "shocked at the amount of children flagging as needing targeted support".

By last July, ELSEC had reached more than 17,000 children across almost 600 nurseries and primaries. Around 4,600 benefitted from targeted interventions. Around 3,800 staff received training.

'Measurable progress'

Early outcomes data shows children made "measurable progress".

But the report leaves a question mark over the scheme long-term, noting "challenges in relation to sustainability".

Continuing screening and interventions without the support of specialist teams "is expected to be challenging" for many settings, given "competing demands and heavy workloads".

Recruiting and retaining support workers remains "challenging", despite progress. Meanwhile "short-term funding cycles can hinder long-term planning".

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MPs and Lords face off over trust admissions and phone bans

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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The House of Lords is gearing up for a showdown with MPs over academy admissions and school phone bans, after peers passed a slew of Conservative amendments to the government's landmark education bill.

The children's wellbeing and schools bill, which proposes sweeping reforms to academies, children's social care, home education and Ofsted powers, passed in the House of Commons with ease last year.

But Keir Starmer's party lacks a majority in the Lords. Conservative peers have seized the opportunity to water down some areas and strengthen others.

Any peers' amendments passed in the current 'report' stage then return to the Commons, in a process known as "ping pong". The two chambers will pass the bill back and forth until agreement is reached. Labour's Commons majority means most opposition amendments will ultimately fall, however.

The Conservative amendments come as David Cameron, who oversaw many of the Tories' flagship school reforms as prime minister, criticised the "totally destructive attitude of Keir Starmer's government to the education reforms that Tony Blair started and under which I put rocket boosters".

Cameron warned the unamended bill would place "much of the remarkable progress we made in peril without any evidence that the changes will improve a single school".

"They are undoing the freedoms that made academies and free schools great, bowing to the union demands I helped Tony Blair fight all those years ago."

Beefed-up schools adjudicator riles Lords

The original bill proposed to not only align rules between academies and council-maintained schools, but also let the schools adjudicator set published admission numbers (PAN) for all schools.

They would have powers to reduce any school's PAN, including academies - for instance if a council objects to an academy keeping numbers fixed or expanding while rolls fall elsewhere.

Many government critics fear this would stop



Barran in House of Lords

stronger schools expanding.

The Lords this week passed an amendment blocking adjudicator intervention if the school "is not operating at or above" its PAN, and has been judged as high-quality by Ofsted.

The adjudicator would also have to consider "the desirability of giving effect to parental preferences" and avoid measures that "unduly restrict access to schools that are providing high-quality education or that are in strong demand".

Diana Barran, shadow education minister in the Lords, acknowledged this week a "practical problem in some areas of falling pupil numbers".

"But the way to sort this out is not by requiring the most popular, highest-performing schools in an area to cut their PAN. It pays no regard to the interests of children nor to the rights of parents to choose a high-performing school."

Skills minister Jacqui Smith told the Lords school quality "will always remain a central consideration, while allowing for flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances".

But Labour was defeated, and the amendment passed.

Peers back ban on phones and cap on uniform costs

Fresh from voting for a ban on social media for under-16s last week, the Lords also passed an amendment this week that would force schools to ban phones during the day.

The government has resisted a statutory ban, but many Labour MPs support one. Ministers may therefore struggle when the amendment reaches

the Commons.

It comes after peers also passed a Liberal Democrat amendment last week that would change a proposed cap on the number of branded uniform schools can require. It backed a cap on uniform costs instead, passing with Tory support.

Meanwhile Labour faces further battles over the bill's reforms to home education. One would require families of children currently subject to a protection plan or enquiry to seek council permission to educate at home.

The Lords voted last week to extend the clause to all children ever been subject to enquiries or on the child protection register previously.

But Smith said it would be "disproportionate in its impact", drawing many people within scope.

"Do we really want to treat disabled children differently simply because their parents have asked voluntarily for some help, or because they were in care before adoption?"

"I know of cases where children were taken into care at the request of the wife during proceedings against an abusive husband."

Laura Trott, shadow education secretary, told Schools Week the Conservatives' upper-house victories would "restore some common sense".

"As the bill returns to the Commons, there is still time to reverse some of the damage that will be caused.

"Labour should put ideology aside and back measures that protect children, support families and uphold standards, because the cost of getting this wrong will be felt by the most disadvantaged."

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Schools lack staff and space for extra nursery care

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School nurseries lack the staff, space or demand to offer more wraparound, holiday or pre-school childcare, particularly in poorer areas, research shows.

The government has promised £400 million towards “tens of thousands of places” in school-based nurseries (SBNs), focused mainly on poorer areas.

Now its own research has found school-based nurseries are already more common in deprived areas, but they typically offer far less holiday, before- and after-school or under-three childcare than other nurseries.

Such additional provision is particularly limited in poorer places, attributed to lower demand from parents, despite this extra care offering “specific benefits” to disadvantaged children.

Fewer school-based nurseries offering extra care

IFF Research, which was commissioned to do the report, analysed the government’s 2024 sector survey, with 1,900 school nurseries participating, and interviewed 22 representatives.

It found just 27 per cent of school-based nurseries accepted children under three, versus 95 per cent of other nurseries.

Among school nurseries accepting under-3s, most only accepted two-year-olds. Just 8 per cent admitted under-2s.

Only one in five offered out-of-hours childcare, compared to almost four in five in other settings.

Just 6 per cent opened during holidays, versus 66 per cent of other providers.

Poorer areas have least out-of-hours and holiday care

Most said they offered ‘non-typical’ provision - care during holidays, before or after school or for under-threes - to meet demand from parents, particularly working ones.

Nurseries also said this additional provision had “specific benefits” for disadvantaged children and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Caring for under-3s helped with “earlier identification and intervention” on SEND and disadvantage.



School-based nurseries were more common in poorer areas, “showing they are in a particularly good place to support these families,” researchers said.

However, in less deprived areas, nurseries were less likely to offer out-of-hours and out-of-term provision, “likely reflecting the working status of and therefore demand from the parents.”

Shortages of staff and space

Recruitment and retention were a “major barrier” reported to expanded care, however.

For under-3s, the main challenge was staffing ratios, which are 1:3 for under-2s, 1:5 for two-year-olds and 1:8 for over-3s.

There were also “logistical barriers”, like “not having sufficient or suitable space”.

For out-of-hours and holiday care, nurseries had concerns about changing staff contracts and rotas, and getting consent from leaders.

Some nurseries lack parental demand

Some nurseries also described a lack of demand. Some suggested extra provision was not financially viable.

The report concluded school nurseries “would need to be reassured that they would be supported financially”.

They would need an “external push” as expansion is “not...currently a priority” for some.

It said any funding “would likely need to be explicitly tied to non-typical provision”, and should come with “clear guidance” around delivery and staffing requirements.

New phase targeted at the most disadvantaged
The first phase of the government’s programme

saw £37 million allocated for 300 new or expanded primary school nurseries.

Phase two involves £45 million for 300 more nurseries, targeting disadvantaged communities.

This week, the government is inviting councils to develop multi-year funding proposals for school-based nurseries as part of a third phase.

The Department for Education (DfE) said applicants will be ranked on both affordability and disadvantage, based on free school meal eligibility and the income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI).

Ofsted rewrites its homework

It comes just as Ofsted republishes its analysis of childcare availability in different areas nationwide, painting a markedly different picture.

Its data previously omitted school-based nurseries, despite them making up almost a quarter of places. It had lacked the data as they do not register with the inspectorate, but now has it from the department.

Revised data shows the north east has the third highest nursery availability when school provision is included in the calculations - whereas before it was the bottom-ranked region.

On a local authority level, Hartlepool sees the biggest change. Its childcare accessibility ranks in the bottom 5 per cent of LAs when measuring Ofsted-registered provision alone, but including schools elevates it into the top 25 per cent.

Meanwhile Leicestershire and the Isle of Wight both fall from the top 30 per cent of areas for availability to the bottom 20 per cent.

Ofsted has been approached for comment.



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Councils begin sweeping SEND reform

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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A government letter just before Christmas provides far more detailed clues about reforms than media briefings to date. Schools Week investigates....

With a schools white paper expected within weeks, leaks to national newspapers offer only a piecemeal glimpse at what might happen with SEND reform.

Much of the national debate has focused on what will happen with education, health and care plans (EHCPs), which set out pupils' legal rights to support.

But in the background, council and health officials have been quietly instructed to start the wheels in motion now for a reformed system...

'We must begin this work now'

Ten days before Christmas, the Department for Education (DfE) and the NHS England wrote to council and health officials asking them to start work on a "local SEND reform plan".

These plans will reflect five principles for the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system already announced by education secretary Bridget Phillipson: early, local, fair, effective and shared.

But councils were warned not to wait for the white paper, or further information on dealing with historic funding deficits, to get started.

The letter, seen by Schools Week, came from Tim Coulson, director of the DfE's regions group and Amanda Doyle, the NHS's SEND lead.

It told officials to start assessing their current plans, to "ensure they are realising best outcomes and value for young people".

"System-wide change will take time, and our children and young people only get one chance. We must therefore begin this essential work now and your leadership and partnership is critical to this."

Coulson and Doyle warned it was "crucial" areas agreed "key actions that you will take now to prepare your system for change".



'We must begin this essential work now and your leadership and partnership is critical to this'

It was also "crucial you are working with education providers" to ensure "your offer is high quality".

It's not clear whether schools nationwide have yet been alerted. But Coulson and Doyle said full "expectations of these plans" will be published alongside the white paper.

The letters revealed some detail, though. Areas will be asked for "more regular data submissions, focused on the key indicators of improvement".

There is little further information on these indicators, but they will "form a vital foundation for implementing SEND reforms in a way that reflects the unique contexts of local areas and is underpinned by data and evidence".

SEND and financial advisers will visit councils and share "priority metrics" recommended to "baseline performance".

New tools to evaluate provision

In the meantime, the DfE and NHS have provided a "local partnership maturity assessment tool" for councils and health bodies to evaluate current provision.

One council official told Schools Week some authorities already had detailed self-evaluation processes, but that this push was about DfE trying to create consistency.

In its guidance for the tool, the government

said: "We believe that having a consistent, shared framework with common language will support a national conversation in a complex system."

The i newspaper recently reported that pupils will receive "tiers" of support depending on their needs.

The government's tool sets out seven key "pillars" that will underpin reform. Local areas will be asked to rate themselves across four measures: not yet emerging, emerging, developing and maturing.

Pillar four focuses the most on schools. This looks at "high quality service delivery at universal, targeted and specialist" levels to promote inclusion.

It is these three labels – universal, targeted and specialist – that will form the "tiers" mentioned in national reports, a source told Schools Week.

The "targeted" tier will also include an option for schools to receive specialist external support.

Currently there are two categories of pupils with SEND: those receiving SEN support, and those with statutory education, health and care plans (EHCPs).

These were created in 2014, replacing three old categories: school action, school action plus and statements.

An insider said the "targeted" support could look like the old "school action plus", an enhanced level of support where schools bring in specialist external help.

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Stephen Kingdom, the DfE's deputy director of SEND in 2014, said the last reforms mainly reflected problems with the "school action" tier. There had been concern it was "too easy for schools just to label a child as SEN as a kind of excuse for failure".

"Possibly we did lose something because there was a clear expectation of support from external organisations."

More EHCPs in mainstream schools

Under plans put forward to councils, practice deemed "maturing" under the pillar most closely related to schools includes seeing a "high percentage of EHCPs in mainstream".

"Quality-first teaching" in mainstream schools, combined with "evidence-based SEN support and early engagement with parents, is helping to build knowledge and confidence in mainstream schools and SEN provision," documents state.

This would lead to fewer EHCPs, they add.

In "maturing" practice, schools "use all available resources across education and health to build capacity and have embedded specialist support within their systems at a whole-school level".

Margaret Mulholland, SEND and inclusion specialist at school leaders' union ASCL, said the local SEND reform plans were "reasonable" and many members would "welcome further opportunities to work locally in this way".

"However, we really need to see the full detail of the white paper to understand how realistic these new expectations are.

"If schools are to play a key role in delivering local provision, as has been suggested, then they clearly have to be resourced accordingly."

The specialist capacity challenge

The new model will require having enough specialist staff.

The DfE and NHS have told councils to "build a shared understanding of local workforce capacity and development needs across partners".

Edward Timpson, the Conservative children's minister who led the 2014 overhaul, reflected previously how he "wished we had done more capacity building in the system before legislation".



Margaret Mulholland

The SEND and AP partnership should jointly consider the 7 pillars:

Pillar 1: Co-production with parents and carers and Children and Young People

Pillar 2: Effective system leadership and governance

Pillar 3: Accurate understanding of needs through effective use of data (Understanding and evidencing the needs of children and young people with SEND and children and young people who may benefit from AP)

Pillar 4: High Quality Service Delivery at universal, targeted and specialist level to promote inclusion

Pillar 5: Effective partnerships working across education, health and social care

Pillar 6: Skilled workforce across the partnership

Pillar 7: Targeted, judicious and sustainable use of resources including sufficiency, place planning and capital

Several government-funded SEND intervention programmes have been piloted around schools, such as Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) to address speech, language and communication needs through early intervention and "innovative workforce models".

An evaluation last week found recruitment and retention of support workers "remain challenging", despite "significant progress".

ELSEC's future beyond April is unclear, but Coulson and Doyle said they would "continue to support learning from partnership projects such as ELSEC".

The toolkit suggests EHCPs will survive, but it's clear the system will eventually feature fewer.

A Teacher Tapp poll commissioned by the Social Market Foundation this week found 58 per cent of teachers wanted EHCPs reduced and money shifted elsewhere.

Standardised EHCPs here to stay

The Conservatives launched a "change programme" in 32 council areas to test its own SEND reforms several years ago.

A council official involved told Schools Week Tory reforms were "tinkering around the edges" of a broken system. But a pilot of a standardised EHCP template had worked well, they said.

It is understood these are likely to be continued.

The standardised template removed

variation between councils' EHCP documents and made it easier when children moved between council areas, the official said.

"It was probably one of only a few parts of the first phase where something beneficial came out. But it's not going to correct problems with the system."

An evaluation of the programme last week found these made the process "less overwhelming" for parents and "aided consistent decision-making".

Another success showing "positive early impact" was the use of alternative provision specialist taskforces.

This involved basing teams of experts, like therapists and family support workers, in schools, working directly with youngsters.

In several areas they "have played a key role in supporting reintegration from AP back into mainstream settings and preventing escalation into exclusion".

In 2024, the programme was re-nosed with more focus on inclusive mainstream practice. The programme will continue until the end of the academic year, and a final evaluation will follow.

As Schools Week revealed, councils were asked to test a new "local inclusion support offer" to "bridge the gap" between mainstream schools and the SEND system.

It's not clear how this will marry up with the local SEND reform plan.

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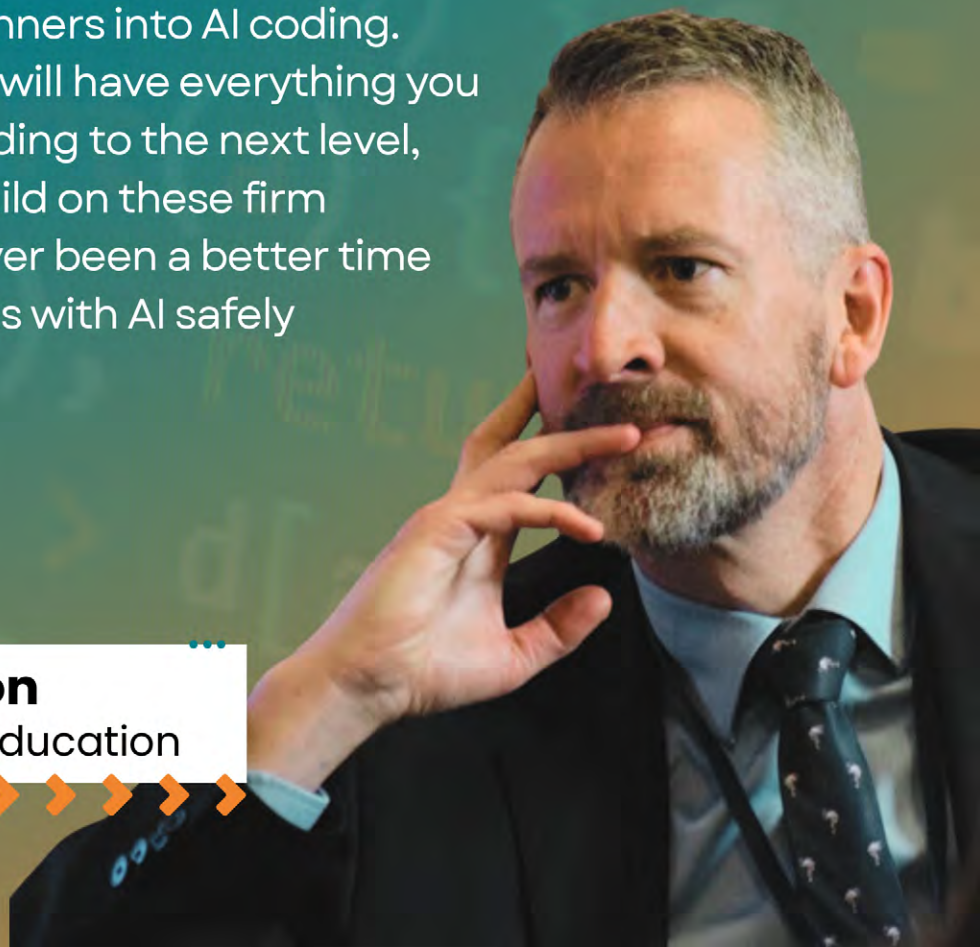
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LAURA
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Tech jobs feel out of reach to students, but we can change that

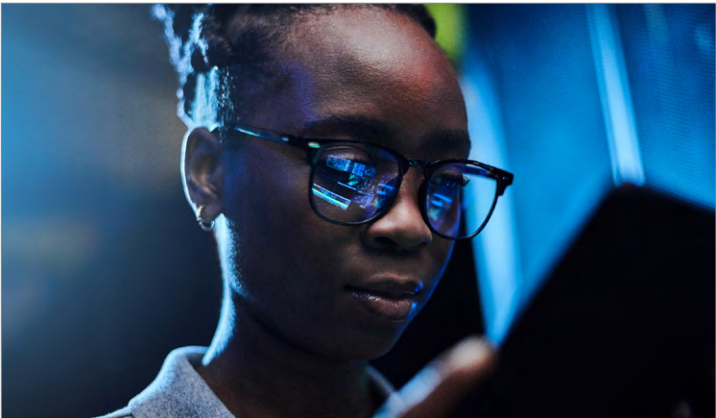
Teaching AI literacy and providing mentoring helps disadvantaged students like mine envision themselves working in top tech firms, says Laura Flynn-Coley

At the London AI Campus, everything begins with “connecting the dots”. How does knowledge in the classroom link to real-world careers? How do skills in coding or AI literacy translate into opportunities in top tech companies? And how can young people from disadvantaged backgrounds see themselves thriving in industries that, on the surface, feel out of reach? For our students, these connections are no longer abstract. Prime minister Keir Starmer himself has highlighted a long-ignored challenge. Students walking past some of the world’s most innovative tech and knowledge-based companies rarely envision themselves working inside. The challenge, he said, is to change that, giving young people the skills, opportunities, and connections to step into those offices and shape the future of AI.

We’re partnering with Google
The campus is the result of a partnership between Camden Learning, Camden Council and Google, designed to boost AI skills and opportunities for local young people.

Camden Learning plays a central role, co-ordinating with schools, designing enrichment programmes and linking students with mentors and industry projects to reach those who might otherwise never see themselves in the tech workforce. This mission has become more urgent. The curriculum assessment review aims to rebalance the curriculum to refresh the computing GCSE, and explore level 3 qualifications in data science and AI, alongside the introduction of new V-levels. We are a step ahead, mentoring years 12 and 13 through our extracurricular programme, attended alongside A-level studies. It shows students how learning translates into real opportunities.

Our motto is ‘see it, believe it’
Our flagship programme AI Connect is built around the motto “see it, believe it”. Students are taught core AI literacy, including AI fundamentals, robotics, machine learning and the critical reflection skills needed to understand both the potential and limitations of AI as a tool. Students develop essential skills throughout, including creativity, analytical and critical thinking, ethical awareness and problem-solving. Most importantly, they are supported to see that they belong in tech, and that a future in AI is both



“ They are supported to see that they belong in tech

achievable and exciting. Mentorship is central. Every student is paired with an industry mentor from Camden’s business community and national science, technology, engineering, arts, and maths (STEAM) organisations. These mentors model routes into AI, giving students guidance and belief in their potential.

How a shy student flourished
AJ, one of our students, impressed a chief people officer at Google with his curiosity and drive at a recent symposium - so much so that she said she would hire him on the spot if she could. She’s keen to follow his progress. Eric, another student, described participating as “an utter privilege”. But he was quick to point out that it shouldn’t be: opportunities like these should be available to all. One student, newly diagnosed with autism, arrived extremely shy and reluctant to speak. Within our supportive environment, she flourished, culminating in a hackathon presentation where she confidently answered challenging questions from industry judges. The combination of practical learning, specialist teaching, and mentorship helped her connect the dots between who she is, what she

can do, and where she can go. Billy, who had never coded before, learned to debug and programme a robot, igniting a passion for problem-solving. Amyrah, initially uncertain about her post-school ambitions, is now applying to University College London’s Master’s programme in AI and robotics. **Representation is key to confidence**
Representation and inclusion are central. Our intake is 40 per cent female, well above typical figures for tech education. Students from diverse backgrounds are gaining confidence. Camden students are learning in the shadow of some of the world’s most innovative tech companies. Yet rather than being excluded, they are gaining access. They are learning to see it, believe it and achieve it. Connecting the dots is the foundation of everything we do, from AI fundamentals to mentorship, from robotics projects to industry experiences. Every element is designed to link learning with opportunity. As our first cohort prepares to graduate this summer, they will be joining together AI knowledge and practical skills with the confidence and networks to shape their own futures.

Opinion

WANT TO WRITE FOR SCHOOLS WEEK? CONTACT US
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JAMES
STUART
Principal school effectiveness
adviser, West Berkshire council

Siloed trusts are the elephant
in the room on inclusion

Competition between trusts,
disconnected resources and no
duty to collaborate mean it's no
surprise children fall through
the cracks, says James Stuart

I've just returned from an inclusion conference, and I'm frustrated. It was full of committed people, but missing the one conversation we urgently need about the system.

After years as a teacher, head of a pupil referral unit (PRU), Ofsted inspector and now in local government, I've seen inclusion from every angle. And right now, the system is crying out for something we still lack: a way to work together.

Suspensions are rising. More pupils are out of school. The SEND system is in crisis. And everyone is rightly calling for "inclusive schools". But we avoid the elephant in the room - fragmentation - and its impact on inclusion.

Academisation has created a landscape of silos. In one authority I've worked with, eleven secondary schools were run by ten MATs.

Resources are disconnected. Competition shapes decisions. Trust-level policies, however well meant, can create environments which push some children out of learning.

Every headteacher describes their

school as "inclusive". But in reality, inclusion varies.

As a result, pupils in PRUs, in home education or in education otherwise than in school experience inclusion very differently.

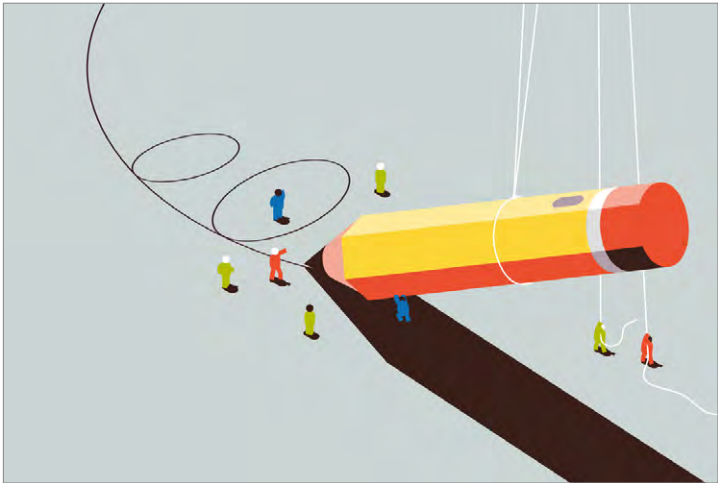
Some receive every intervention, while others drift through rigid systems until they reach the exit - or leave via the back door.

So how do we keep pupils in learning before they leave us and encourage them back after they've left?

The answers are systemic, not school-based. To keep pupils in learning, partnerships should set shared standards and take collective responsibility. But without expectation or accountability, too few do.

Schools that are already working at the limits of inclusion don't need more lectures, local authority guidance documents or therapeutic mantras. They need a local system with earlier assessment and intervention. They need multi-agency, place-based support and high-quality alternative provision.

But these are place-based, not trust-based. And because multi-academy trusts control the microphone - in policy, leadership culture, in the endless stream of books and podcasts - this reality isn't being addressed.



“Inclusion cannot be delivered
by individual schools or trusts

Meanwhile local authorities, the only organisations legally responsible for the whole picture, are overstretched, underfunded, and expected to hold everything together on a shoe-string.

Partnerships are the answer. Proper collaboration can reconnect capacity.

Between those 11 secondaries, 10 trusts and a local authority, it might be possible to create strong education outside schools for pupils with emotionally-based school avoidance, vocational KS4 pathways, shared specialist teams, and consistent early intervention models.

Inclusion cannot be delivered by individual schools or trusts. It is a system responsibility, and systems only work when the parts connect. But there is no incentive, legislation or regulatory expectation requiring the system to work together.

However, there is hope. Partnerships like Portsmouth Education Partnership and Raising Wiltshire are already working towards this. They prove this can be done.

So why isn't everyone doing it? Official guidance talks of "working together to safeguard children". Perhaps we need to similarly talk of "working together to include".

A national framework for inclusion partnerships

If we are serious about inclusion, we need a framework that:

- Defines inclusion locally, with shared expectations
- Creates collective accountability across all providers
- Tracks and supports children who disappear from view
- Enables MATs and LAs to pool capacity
- Requires collaboration, not just encourages it

We need a national expectation that compels partnership, aligns accountability and reconnects the fragments of our system for the children who need us most.

Without it, well-intentioned guidance will remain beyond the reach of schools and beyond the capacity of LAs. More children will continue to lose learning.



DR MARY
BOUSTED

Labour peer and chair,
The Teaching Commission

The gulf between ambition and reality on curriculum reform

Studies show professional development’s critical for any new curriculum, but one in five staff get under a day a year, warns Dr Mary Bousted

The wind of change is blowing in the world of education. After a long period in which not much seemed to change in staff’s working lives, beyond increases in workload and decreases in funding, there’s a lot going on. The question is whether teachers and leaders will be energised by the breeze, or hunker down to avoid the worst gusts and eddies of policy reform.

There’s a lot going on
The new Ofsted inspection framework has landed. The previous focus on curriculum has diminished, and there’s an increased focus on inclusion, particularly of pupils with SEND.

A white paper is keenly awaited which is also likely to advocate for greater inclusion of these pupils in mainstream schools. Most recently, the government announced a £200 million national training programme for teachers, leaders and support staff to help adapt teaching to meet a wide range of needs in the classroom. Into this mix enters the prospect of the revised national curriculum, due to be implemented in 2028. This seems a long time away, and

the temptation will be to think about that later in a profession which is over-worked and time-poor. But there are dangers in delay.

Welcome ambitions on the curriculum
The curriculum review recognises that teachers have a fundamental professional interest in, and responsibility for, the successful delivery of a revised national curriculum. Teachers, the authors suggest, act as “curriculum makers”, interpreting and transforming the content to “author” instructional events with students in the classroom. The review supports the innovation and professionalism of teachers, enabling them to adapt how they teach to reflect their students’ lives and experiences. These are highly aspirational, welcome ambitions for the profession.

The question is: how are they to be achieved in the context of excessive workload, which drains creativity and confidence?

Some staff get less than a day’s CPD a year
A recent report from the Teacher Development Trust report on continuing professional development (CPD) reached very concerning conclusions. Nearly 40 per cent of the teachers and leaders surveyed said the



“ Highly aspirational, welcome ambitions for the profession

professional development they had undertaken had not improved their ability to perform their role. Most shockingly, one in five teacher respondents said they spent less than one day in the year on formal professional development. There is clearly a gulf between the ambition of the curriculum review committee led by Professor Becky Francis, and the reality in schools, where teachers and leaders are dissatisfied with the quality and quantity of the professional development they experience. International studies have looked at the conditions required to successfully introduce a new curriculum. They identify professional development as the most important. Five key questions for curriculum reform That’s why the second inquiry of the Teaching Commission will ask what teachers and leaders need to be able to fully engage with and implement the revised national curriculum. In particular the commission will investigate:

- What do the curriculum and assessment review and government requirements mean for teacher supply and the workforce, in terms of secondary

subject specialists at secondary level and primary subject generalists?

- What are the time resources the profession needs to implement the revised national curriculum well?
- What professional training and development will be necessary to engage, inform and upskill teachers and leaders to be involved, to inform the revisions, and to be confident teaching and leading the revised curriculum?
- What additional financial resources must be made available to schools to support implementation?
- What forms of evaluation should be developed to gauge the success or otherwise of the reforms?

The curriculum and its assessment lies at the heart of teachers’ professional practice. It is central to pupils’ experience of school. It is really important – which is why the commission’s next inquiry is so important.

We want teachers and leaders to get involved with our inquiry. We are developing a survey to gauge the profession’s views on curriculum reform and its preparedness. There is further [information on our website](#).



DAVID
SCOTT

Retired headteacher of
two first schools

First reports under new framework
show it still requires improvement

Ofsted’s greater nuance in the first 100 reports published is welcome, but the new framework’s hardly the fairer grading system promised, says David Scott

Reports are now out on the 100 schools which volunteered to be inspected first under Ofsted’s new framework. Some 659 grades have been awarded.

Four per cent of grades awarded since November are ‘exceptional’, mostly issued to secondary schools. Secondaries made up a quarter of those inspected, with 69 primaries and six special schools. Overall, thirty-five per cent are ‘strong standard’, 56 per cent ‘expected standard’ and 5 per cent ‘needs attention’.

No volunteer schools have yet received an ‘urgent improvement’ grade. One recent report for a ‘non-volunteer’ school, inspected because of concerns, shows us what the lowest end of the grading spectrum looks like on paper, though.

While overall grades have been scrapped, it is usually obvious where the balance lies from a quick calculation of the individual evaluation area grades.

Are inspectors playing it safe?

The neutral option of a five-point scale or any odd number can lead to

inspectors playing it safe.

It is unsurprising therefore that the third, middle grade is the one used most frequently in this analysis, at well over half. It also has the highest distribution of the same grade across all evaluation areas per school.

Ofsted claims ‘expected standard’ signifies a “high-performing school doing everything it should”.

On current trends, thousands of schools currently rated ‘good’ are likely to fall into this category. It won’t please them. According to Ofsted’s rubric, the next grade up, ‘strong standard’, marks out “excellent, consistent work that’s making a real difference for children and learners”.

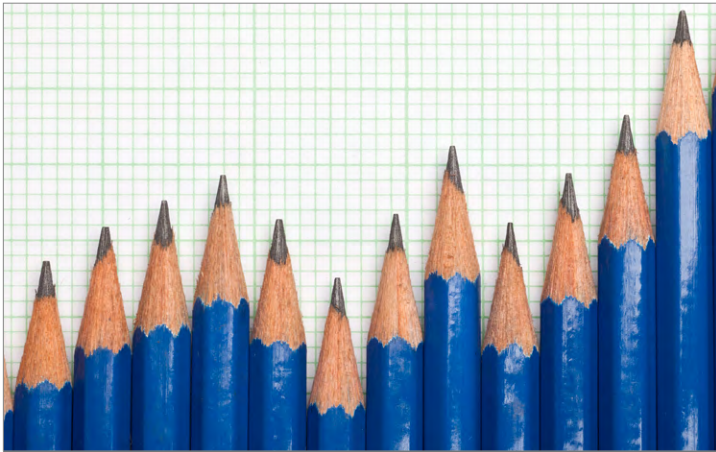
Given that schools strive to be the best they can be, those with the lower ‘expected standard’ grade will be disappointed at the idea they are failing to make a real difference.

Considering that ‘expected standard’ is a “high bar”, a surprising range of criticism also appears in reports at this grade.

Meanwhile previously exempt ‘outstanding’ infant and first schools, already systematically downgraded four years ago when the exemption was lifted, will feel particularly aggrieved if they drop down two grades in four years.

Hardly the fairer grading promised

Whatever spin put on it, this is



“The jury is still out on how inspections are conducted

hardly the fairer grading claimed by the watchdog.

The better news is that report cards are more “granular” and “nuanced”, as promised. They are informative and well-written, despite the occasional propensity to cut and paste text.

Renewed emphasis on pupils’ achievements is welcome, notably the use of published outcomes, attainment data and comparisons with national averages.

Inclusion is another new, discrete, expansive evaluation area which many schools will appreciate.

The schools in the pilot were inspected solely by professional inspectors. These inspections are reported to have been well received and conducted appropriately.

Yet there are only 277 full-time staff, when more than 20,000 schools need inspecting every four years.

The big question is, how will standards be sustained when 1,000 freelance inspectors join inspection teams?

The training implications for freelance inspectors are challenging but crucial in the next phase.

Therefore the jury is still out on how

inspections are conducted, an area where reform is most needed.

Inspections must be humane

The reality is that inspections will continue to be high stakes. They carry the same risks as they did before, despite the new clarity around judging safeguarding.

We cannot forget reforms were prompted by the death of headteacher Ruth Perry. A coroner said that at times, the inspection of her school was “rude and intimidating”, lacking “fairness, respect and sensitivity”. Ofsted must above all prioritise the safety of staff and children.

Inspections must be more honest, humane, accurate and considerate. Opinions will differ regarding the content, pros and cons of the new grades and report cards. However, a consistently high conduct of inspections is non-negotiable.

Despite Ofsted’s grandiose claims, it is dedicated staff and leaders who are at the front line of “improving lives” and “raising standards” every day, not the watchdog.

They deserve unwavering support, maximum encouragement, recognition

Opinion

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ANDY
JOHNSON
Director of education,
Maiden Erlegh Trust

Mixed-setting trusts are a smart choice, not a messy compromise

Far from being incoherent, trusts spanning mainstream, AP and special schools can teach other trusts and ministers a thing or two about inclusive, first-rate education, says Andy Johnson

Debate about the future shape of multi-academy trusts has sharpened, particularly around where special schools and alternative provision should “fit”

Recent calls for ministers to settle the question of academy trust make-up reflect a system grappling with whether trusts should specialise by phase or setting, or remain generalist.

We are a mixed-setting trust, including mainstream primaries and secondaries alongside special schools and alternative provision. Far from being a compromise, we made a deliberate choice. We believe this model points towards a more inclusive, coherent, resilient education system.

We have 11 schools across Berkshire and south Oxfordshire: four primaries, four secondaries, two special schools and a pupil referral unit. This blend reflects our organisational values: aim high, be inclusive and work together.

Our schools’ diversity mirrors our communities’ diversity. It means a breadth of expertise that no single-phase or single-setting trust could replicate.

Expertise is shared, not isolated

One clear advantage is how expertise

is shared, not isolated. Too often, special schools sit at the margins, while mainstream schools operate separately despite facing increasingly complex needs. Within mixed trusts, knowledge flows both ways.

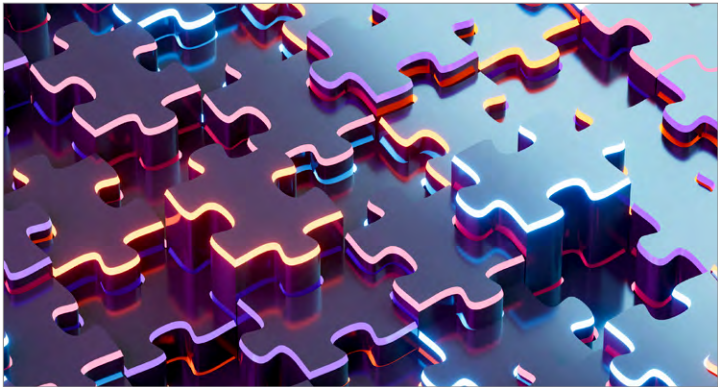
Our autism specialist school informs trust-wide practice in communication, sensory regulation and structured learning. Our school for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs shapes thinking about relationships, behaviour and trauma-informed approaches. Our pupil referral unit and alternative provision team offer vital insight as behavioural complexity increases across mainstream settings.

This specialist knowledge is embedded into professional development, curriculum design and pastoral systems. Equally important, our special schools benefit from the curricular and pedagogical strength of our successful mainstream schools.

Subject expertise, curriculum sequencing, assessment practices and approaches to high-quality teaching have been shared and adapted. This strengthens curriculum ambition and coherence within specialist settings, while remaining responsive to individual need.

Staff move between setting types

The impact is tangible for staff. Mainstream teachers develop confidence and skill supporting diverse learners. Specialist staff see expertise valued, while gaining access



“Structures make collaboration inevitable rather than optional

to wider curricular and pedagogical networks. Increasingly, staff move between setting types within the trust as part of their professional development, strengthening trust-wide practice.

Additionally resourced provisions within our mainstream schools further blur boundaries. They enable pupils with additional needs to remain part of local school communities, while accessing targeted support. Special school staff, including our therapist team, have been invaluable supporting these provisions.

Mixed-setting trusts also challenge the assumption inclusion requires lowered expectations. Specialist and alternative provision schools have long excelled at building ambitious, personalised pathways that recognise success in its broadest sense.

Combined with strong mainstream curriculum design, this thinking strengthens outcomes. “Aim high” does not mean identical experiences. It means high-quality teaching, coherent curricula and meaningful progression for all.

There are organisational benefits, too

Shared systems, economies of scale and operational expertise from larger schools can be transformative for smaller or specialist settings. Parents

gain confidence from a trusted local brand, offering continuity and quality across different settings as children’s needs change.

Of course mixed-setting trusts aren’t without challenge. Leadership and governance require more wide-ranging expertise. Balancing priorities across very different settings requires sustained effort. Funding pressures, particularly for special schools and alternative provision, remain acute. Being part of a financially sustainable trust offers some protection, but doesn’t remove systemic strain.

Lessons for SEND reform

Mixed-setting trusts are no silver bullet for deep-rooted SEND challenges. But they offer something the system urgently needs: structures that make collaboration inevitable, not optional.

As we await further detail on SEND reform, the direction of travel is clear: stronger inclusion within mainstream schools, earlier intervention and better use of specialist expertise. Success requires not just new policy, but new organisational thinking.

By design, mixed-setting trusts dissolve the boundaries between “mainstream” and “special.” Mixed-setting trusts show how to build the future: deliberately, inclusively and at scale.

Opinion

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REBECCA
LEEK

Director, Suffolk Primary
Headteachers' Association

Guessing why more children may
have complex needs isn't complex

SEND capacity challenges go beyond 2014 reforms, and everything from more early-born children to more screen time could play a part says Rebecca Leek

I was bumped from the Today programme recently. I don't blame the BBC, though. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) had reported, yet again, that the burden of the current SEND system on school capacity and finances was driving us off a cliff.

I was probably going to be asked whether this was felt at school level. Yes. And was this something we recognised - an increasingly complex cohort of children coming through? Yes. And what, they would no doubt have asked, are the reasons for this?

How long is a piece of string...

This curiosity and head-scratching fascinates me. Why is there a boom of children struggling to regulate their emotions? Why are there so many children with arrested physical or language development?

How is it that the number of EHCP assessment requests have sky-rocketed? The reasons are not that difficult to unpick.

Why needs are more complex

Fine motor activity undertaken by

very young children has reduced. How many times did you tie your shoelaces in the 1980s, and how many children tie shoe laces today?

Screens incrementally take up more of children's time than they did a couple of decades ago, when they barely existed.

One in four children finish primary school obese, so let's take a bet that children are less active.

Not to mention the fact that there is a societal expectation for us parents to launch ourselves back to work as quickly as possible.

None of this makes for especially happy children.

There have also been some changes in clinical care for babies born at 22 weeks.

In 2019 new guidance was issued that led to more pre-term infants being given survival-focused care.

Consequently, there are now more children who are very early born, and who have an increased risk of various health conditions and learning difficulties.

And we within education are just expected to handle this change. Well done us.

Heads buckle under strain of EHCP case loads

Add to this a general confusion around providing boundaries for children clearly and calmly (which they need) versus overly



“Heads are buckling under the complexity and administrative strain

permissive approaches which don't help anyone. Not to mention a neurodivergence free-for-all. Do I want to say that? Yes I do.

The system that we currently have - formulated in around 2014 is completely unworkable.

When I was a secondary school SENCO in 2015, of an albeit quite small secondary, I had four students with EHCPs.

I did not have excessive amounts of time but I had enough. Just.

I speak with headteachers of primary schools now who are buckling under the complexity and administrative strain of an EHCP caseload of over 40.

The system is the same - the expectation of careful reviews, termly meetings, co-production conversations and detailed planning.

If the process of seeking advice, evaluating, collating, writing up, monitoring and so on takes about three days per pupil across the year (and that's conservative) - you don't need a maths GCSE to work out that it is completely unsustainable.

Why I might start praying

So we are told reform is on its way. I hope it is radical and bold.

If there is going to be a central electronic system for each child's specialist documentation (alleluia), I hope it will be built with insight and input from the people who will be using it.

I also hope it is built with the sole aim that it will lead to better outcomes for these children. In fact, I think I might start praying. Because we have all been presented with “clever new systems” that meet neither of these criteria.

I am glad to read about the idea that some children's plans will be initiated at birth. This will save a lot of unnecessary “proof creation” when we already know that a child has a complex health condition.

What I am already not glad about is delays. We were told it would come last term. And then January. No wonder the IFS is quaking in its boots.

We are all on the edge of our seats. Change cannot come soon enough.

Week in

Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

MONDAY

Being a minister is a tough gig, but there are certain facts and figures you should always keep written down in case pesky journalists ask for, you know, a basic level of detail.

The government recently re-announced its expansion of its free breakfast clubs scheme. Early education minister Olivia Bailey (pictured) was sent on a media round to sell it.

But she was stumped when LBC's Nick Ferrari asked her how many primary schools there are in England.

"I don't have the exact number to hand..." she said.

It was up to Nick to remind her there are around 16,000.



WEDNESDAY

Ofsted chief inspector Martyn Oliver addressed sixth form college leaders this week. His message? Don't expect as many top grades.

Noting that 96 per cent of sixth form colleges are currently rated 'good' or 'outstanding', Oliver turned his attention to Ofsted's new, top 'exceptional' grade.

"Not everyone can be exceptional," he told the Sixth Form Colleges Association annual conference. "If everyone were, the word would lose all meaning."

He's not wrong, but we suspect the drop many settings will experience from 'outstanding' to 'strong standard' or

'expected standard' will still stick in the craw.

"The 'exceptional' grade is where learners go beyond grasping, retaining and applying knowledge to truly mastering it," Oliver added.

"I understand that that represents a shift in thinking. For years, the system has conditioned us to see anything less than 'outstanding' as somehow disappointing. That was never healthy, and I don't think it was ever fair."

THURSDAY

Policy wonks were left scratching their heads last autumn. First, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) published an eyebrow-raising estimate of what SEND pressures could do to mainstream school funding if – and it's a big if – the schools budget had to absorb all the pressure.

Government has said it will cover new SEND spending from 2028, to prevent councils falling even further into the red.

The OBR initially said that if all that pressure – which it estimated at around £6.3 billion a year – fell on the schools budget, mainstream school spending would fall by 1.7 per cent per pupil.

But it then issued a correction. It changed the figure, instead projecting a far steeper 4.9 per cent fall.

Now, the OBR has finally explained the revision. "The initial draft...calculated the scenario fall in mainstream school spend per pupil from an incorrect base year, and did not adjust the baseline plans for mainstream school spending per pupil

for inflation."

This is all academic of course – as the government has said the pressure will be met across wider departmental budgets...

Good news everyone. Exams regulator Ofqual has worked out that ceremonial county borders might be a little out of date!

The organisation said it was "working to improve the presentation of our GCSE grade outcomes by county and A Level outcomes by county interactive visualisations".

It added: "We recognise that the current use of ceremonial counties (as defined by the Lord Lieutenancies Act 1997) may not be the most suitable for users.

"It also does not always support coherence with other sources of information, such as those produced by the Department for Education."

Bit of an understatement. Going by ceremonial counties alone means lumping very separate and very different local authorities together.

The regulator is now "currently exploring other options, such as administrative counties (local government areas responsible for public services).

"We hope to be able to make this change ahead of the next update of these visualisations in August 2026, or if not, in August 2027."

In other news, they will be moving from abacuses to calculators imminently.





EXECUTIVE HEADTEACHER (TRUST-WIDE SEND)

This is a rare opportunity for a transformative leader to shape SEND provision across a growing Trust while continuing to lead a school and making a meaningful difference to children and young people.

The Legacy Learning Trust (TLLT) is a vibrant and growing multi-academy trust in the Tees Valley, comprising a large secondary with an ASD specialist provision and 6 mainstream primaries, one with an intervention provision for pupils with identified SEMH needs.

We are responding to a growing need for dynamic and inclusive practice and provision and are seeking an experienced and visionary executive leader with expertise in SEND to join our Central Education Team (CET) as part of the role as the new Head Teacher at Beverley School.

Beverley School, a specialist all-through school serving pupils whose primary need is ASD, is in the process of joining TLLT, with the transfer expected to complete in Summer 2026. During this period of transition and beyond, the appointed Executive Headteacher will operate in a dual leadership role, holding statutory Headteacher responsibility for Beverley School while also providing

Trust-wide executive leadership for SEND. This appointment is central to securing leadership stability, supporting a smooth conversion to academy status, and aligning the school's strategic direction with the Trust's vision for high-quality SEND provision across all settings.

You will:

- Lead the Trust-wide SEND strategy and ensure statutory compliance
- Support, challenge and develop leaders to secure excellent SEND provision
- Use data, research and evidence to drive improvement and innovation
- Work closely with Trustees, Local Authorities and external partners

We seek an experienced senior leader with:

- Strong SEND expertise and a track record of improving outcomes
- Experience of leading people, change and school improvement
- Credibility at senior and executive level
- A strong commitment to inclusion, safeguarding and equity

[Click here to apply >>](#)



SOUTH EAST ESSEX ACADEMY TRUST

CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER

We are now seeking a brilliant Chief Education Officer with a passion for the possible to help us accelerate improvement, raise achievement across all phases, and ensure that every child - regardless of their background - benefits from consistently excellent teaching.

We are a local trust where collaboration is at the heart of everything we do. We believe in visible leadership. We know our schools well and you don't need to go through multiple management layers to speak to the CEO.

As Chief Education Officer, you will be the strategic guardian of educational quality across our nine schools; but you will also roll up your sleeves, walk corridors, visit classrooms, and work shoulder-to-shoulder with leaders where capacity or momentum is needed. This role reports directly to the CEO and sits at the heart of the SEEAT Executive Team.

Closing date: 27th Feb at 8.00am

IT'S BECAUSE IT'S
IMPOSSIBLE THAT
IT'S POSSIBLE.



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CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER – EXCELSIOR MULTI ACADEMY TRUST

With the forthcoming retirement of our founding CEO, Excelsior Multi Academy Trust is seeking an exceptional leader with a proven record of driving and sustaining improvement. This is an exciting opportunity to shape the next chapter of a thriving, values driven trust.

Excelsior Multi Academy Trust is a well established and growing organisation, currently comprising eight primary schools across the West Midlands. Our new CEO will provide inspirational, strategic, and operational leadership across all aspects of the Trust. Working closely with our Board of Trustees, you will refine and advance our shared vision, uphold our values, and ensure that each school continues to strive for excellence – improving life opportunities for our pupils and strengthening the communities we serve.

The successful candidate will be someone with integrity, ambition and drive. They will have a deep belief that every child will succeed. They will be relentless in their pursuit of organisational and operational excellence and will be innovative and courageous.

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO](#)

Closing Date: 1st March 2026 | Interview Date: 20th March 2026



Principal – Specialist Provisions

Education Village Academy Trust

Location: Darlington

Salary: Leadership salary scale L30 – L34 £105,594 – £116,455 (more may be available for an exceptional candidate)

Who we are

The Education Village Academy Trust is more than a multi-academy trust; we are a community where learning has no limits and our mission is to deliver exceptional educational experiences that inspire and challenge all learners to achieve their potential.

Our specialist provisions play a central role in meeting the full range of needs of children and young people with EHCPs. Our schools cater for all four broad areas of SEND: Communication & Interaction; Cognition & Learning; Social, Emotional & Mental Health; and Sensory & Physical Needs.

About the role

The Executive Principal – Specialist Provisions is a key executive leadership role with responsibility for the strategic direction, performance and development of EVAT's specialist schools. The postholder will have strategic oversight of our specialist provisions and ensure that the schools are delivering high-quality, holistic education and care. The postholder will ensure there is accurate

academy self-evaluation, impactful school improvement planning and ongoing curriculum development, for specialist settings

Who we are looking for

We are seeking an experienced senior leader with a strong track record in education including successful leadership as a headteacher or equivalent, and credible knowledge of SEND practice, curriculum pathways, assessment, transitions and commissioning. You will have a detailed understanding of the demands of specialist provision and the importance of high-quality teaching, safe practice, and well-organised leadership. The role requires strong people leadership skills, including experience of mentoring, managing and developing senior colleagues. Above all, we are seeking a leader who is committed to continuously improving provision and outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Closing date: 9 a.m. Monday 2nd March 2026

[Click here
for more info](#)



Headteacher Vacancy

We are seeking an exceptional Headteacher who shares our values and has the vision, drive, and resilience to lead Hob Green Primary School into the next phase of its development. This role offers a unique opportunity to secure continued and rapid school improvement, while also contributing leadership capacity across drb Ignite Multi Academy Trust, enabling schools to learn from one another and beyond.

Hob Green Primary School is a one-form entry primary school serving pupils aged 3-11 years, located in Dudley. The school is widely recognised for its deeply embedded inclusive culture and holds Centre of Excellence status for the Inclusion Quality Mark.

The school provides exceptional specialist provision, including:

- A well-established Speech and Language Resource Base
- A newly opened SEND Unit for pupils with a primary need of Communication and Interaction, providing specialist support to meet the complex communication and cognition set out in pupils' Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

In its most recent Ofsted inspection in February 2025, the school was judged Good in all areas, with Early Years achieving Outstanding. We are now seeking an inspirational leader to build on this success and take the school to the next level in its improvement journey.

We are looking for a Headteacher who will:

- Demonstrate the resilience, experience and creativity, with a strong commitment to improving the quality of teaching and learning, through continuous school improvement.
- Have proven leadership experience across the primary phase.
- Value every child and promote high aspirations for both pupils and staff.
- Act as a positive role model, with the ability to motivate children, staff and the wider community, inspiring all to reach their full potential.
- Champion a deeply inclusive ethos and show a genuine passion for ensuring every child thrives, regardless of background or ability.
- Be an active and influential member of drb Ignite Multi Academy Trust, contributing to trust-wide collaboration and improvement.
- Show a strong commitment to nurturing the development, wellbeing and professional growth of all pupils and staff.

What we can offer

- CPD opportunities which will support your career development
- Strategic support
- Collaborative networking
- An enthusiastic, skilled and dedicated staff team
- Clear pathways for professional growth and career development
- A strong commitment to staff wellbeing and in investing in our people

The post will be of interest to experienced and high-performing Headteachers, or Deputy Headteachers ready to take the next step, who are dynamic, emotionally intelligent, and resilient leaders. The successful candidate will value collaboration and embrace the mutual benefit of being part of a strong and supportive Multi Academy Trust.

Interested candidates can have an informal discussion about the role by contacting James Hill, our Executive Director of School Improvement at jhill@drbignitemat.org

Closing date: 9am Friday 13th February 2026

Interview date: w/c 23rd February 2026

Safeguarding

The Trust is absolutely committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults through its safer recruitment processes. An enhanced DBS check will be required for this post. All shortlisted candidates will be subject to online searches.

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