

# SCHOOLS WEEK

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P10

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## SPECIALIST SUPPORT GOES MAINSTREAM



# The great SEND bailout

- Leaders welcome move to write off 90% of councils' high needs deficits
- New expectation of 'inclusion base' in every secondary school
- Tsar expects 'criticism', but inclusion can't be in 'too hard' pile

INCLUSION SPECIAL EDITION | Pages 4-7



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The announcement that ministers will write off councils' high needs deficits this year shows the government has seriously grasped the nettle of SEND reform. They deserve credit for that.

Successive governments have put the issue in the "too hard" column, choosing to obfuscate, endlessly consult, to hand money to consultants and to hope for the best.

But the write-off is, until proper reform is realised, a sticking plaster. Councils will continue to accrue deficits in the two years between now and when central government takes over the pressure of SEND provision costs.

These are predicted to reach almost £9 billion by 2028. The government must be ready to step in again when needed.

Ministers must also be ready to properly fund the SEND system they create with the white paper.

Talk of inclusion bases in all schools is all well and good, and many schools already provide such services and do a

brilliant job.

But they are not cheap to resource properly, and leaders cannot be left to fund them from increasingly stretched general budgets.

We suspect this government understands that funding will be an issue.

But the drip-fed nature of announcements and leaks about SEND reform inevitably makes such issues seem like an afterthought and can leave an information void despite the DfE already having a plan signed off.

Writing for *Schools Week* this week, government adviser Tom Rees says that "inclusion can no longer sit in the 'too hard' pile, and we now have an opportunity to change it. It is the central reform – for schools, for this government and for social policy.

"This is about children and the society we want to become. Now is the time to step forward together and build one system with high ambition for all children."

We couldn't agree more.

## Most read online this week:

- 1** [CEO of trust with £8.4m deficit resigns after leave of absence](#)
- 2** [Revealed: DfE's orders to councils as SEND reforms quietly begin](#)
- 3** [Government to write off 90% of councils' SEND deficits](#)
- 4** [DfE expects all secondary schools to have 'inclusion bases'](#)
- 5** [Heads 'on trial': 8 findings from first RISE evaluation](#)

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# Treasury plans £5bn council SEND bailout

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School leaders have welcomed ministers' pledge to wipe nearly all historic SEND deficits, but funding experts warned the bailout could "reduce the incentives" for councils to "contain costs".

In a significant step towards reform, the government will write off 90 per cent of existing black holes racked up by councils on their dedicated schools grant as of 2025-26, worth an estimated £5 billion.

But ministers will have to sign off new "local SEND reform plans" by each council before they can receive a "high needs stability grant" funded by the Treasury and distributed by the Department for Education (DfE) from the autumn.

Councils will have to plug the approximately £500 million remaining gap.

The government announced in December that SEND cost pressures will sit on its own books from 2028.

Deficits have been kept off councils' main books by a statutory override for many years. The budgeting mechanism effectively prevents councils from going bust.

The override is due to end in 2028, at which point councils will have to meet the cost of any leftover deficits not covered by the government write-off.

But the Office for Budgetary Responsibility has also predicted that councils will accrue further deficits of £8.6 billion between this April and 2028.

For these years, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government said councils can expect the government to take "an appropriate and proportionate approach", but help will not be "unlimited".

Luke Sibieta, from the Institute of Fiscal Studies, said the intervention "may now reduce the incentives faced by councils to contain costs, in anticipation that the government may feel compelled to step in again".

Pepe Di'Iasio, general secretary at the Association of School and College Leaders, said it was "important to remember that these deficits were accrued in the first place because there is not currently enough money in the system to meet the level of need.

"This must fundamentally



Luke Sibieta



change if the reforms are to be successful."

The Local Government Association added that councils "work hard to use their finite resources, but "lack the levers to influence schools and health", which makes "it difficult to control spending".

## Safety valve to end

More details about SEND reform are expected in the schools white paper later this month. But Schools Week revealed last week how the government quietly asked councils to begin working up new SEND reform plans last year, ahead of the delayed white paper.

At the same time, ministers have announced that the controversial safety valve programme will end in March.

The government had previously said it would make no new agreements, which involved 38 cash-strapped councils making sweeping SEND reforms in exchange for extra government funding.

These councils will receive at least the same amount of grant they would have got through the scheme.

Ministers are yet to reveal what councils will have to include in their new plans, or whether they will be measured on specific targets. But some leaders are already concerned.

Josh Greaves, deputy chief executive officer at Wellspring Academy Trust, said if the plans required "to trigger these write-offs are simply a national scaling of the safety valve programme, we are in trouble".

He said the scheme was "a fiscal tourniquet" that "didn't heal the system".

Andre Imich, a former government

SEND adviser, said the improvements made by the safety valve "were not huge" and helped "us learn that it wasn't necessarily council actions that were responsible for the challenges in the local system".

But safety valve plans "weren't able to influence other key levers for change, such as the accountability, responsibility and engagement of all parties".

In Bracknell Forest, which predicted a cumulative deficit of £34.5 million by March, Stuart McKellar, executive director, said it expected a large chunk of the £23 million reserve it had to set up as part of its safety valve agreement could be used for other purposes now.

But more information was needed for them "to accurately determine the impact on the council's financial position" before 2028.

The DfE said "any local contributions already made will count as part of the 10 per cent remaining deficit that will fall to local authorities to cover, meaning no safety valve local authority will be expected to contribute more".

## Call for schools to sign plan

It is not yet known which organisations will have to sign off councils' plans before they are submitted to the government. But the DfE will "commission local area partnerships to develop these plans".

Imich predicted councils and local integrated care boards would be signatories but called for schools to have this important role.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary at school leaders' union NAHT, said it was "vital that schools are involved in local plans", and their success would depend on adequate funding.

# 'Inclusion base' for every school – but who will pay?

RUTH LUCAS

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Ministers face calls to clarify how their plan for an "inclusion base" in every secondary school will be funded.

The Department for Education (DfE) announced this week that all secondary schools will be expected to have an "inclusion base", where pupils can "access targeted support that bridges the gap between mainstream and specialist provision".

According to the DfE, "inclusion bases" could be "additional spaces within the school building or refurbishment or repurposing of existing space", like a spare classroom.

Guidance on how to run the bases will be published in the spring, but the DfE said they could be either a school or trust commissioned "support" or council commissioned "specialist" space.

Currently, councils typically fund special resourced provision (SRP) or SEN units within mainstream schools. But many schools can and do set up their own provision.

School census data suggests that around 7 per cent of primary and 15 per cent of secondary schools have either a special resourced provision or "SEN unit".

But figures given by councils differ slightly, suggesting 9 per cent of primaries and 19 per cent of secondaries have an SRP or unit.

The DfE has said it will work to improve data collection. It will also encourage primary schools to develop an "equivalent number of places" in inclusion bases to those in secondary.

This means for every one place in secondary schools across an area, there would be one place in local primary schools too.

## Funding woes

Vic Goddard, chief executive of Passmores Cooperative Learning, runs two additional resourced provisions and one support base for pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs across his schools in Essex.

While the resourced provisions are funded by the council, Goddard said the SEMH unit was "impossible to finance".

"I am now sitting in meetings right this second going, 'if I want to protect that because that keeps the most vulnerable children in school, then what else



Vic Goddard



needs to go?"

"So inherently, which slightly less vulnerable children am I going to let down?"

The DfE said £3 billion in funding over four years for councils will help to support the rollout of the bases. But this funding is capital funding to create the spaces and is available for councils to use in both special and mainstream schools.

It is also not clear whether schools will get more day-to-day funding for teaching or support staff.

## Better accountability and practice

Ofsted has confirmed that it will "take into account" a school's inclusion base during inspections.

Jamie Rogers, from the charity The Difference, said it was a "brilliant opportunity to codify as a country what good looks like".

But schools must "make sure these spaces are not 'dumping grounds for the most vulnerable children", he warned.

Hannah Carter, headteacher of Orchard Academy in Kent, said plans were "formalising something that fundamentally already exists".

Carter's school has an SRP and a school-funded unit for any pupils requiring support.

"I am very fortunate to have a new-build," Carter said, but warned against using "leaky, rubbish-looking" rooms or simply "renaming something they have already got".

The government needs to give schools "the money and the structure and the support and the examples of good practice".

Carter added that it would be difficult to "quality assure" an inclusion base because of how different



Hannah Carter

school contexts can be.

Dr Vasilis Stroglios, associate professor at the University of Southampton Education School, said bases "should not become places where pupils are routinely withdrawn from mainstream classrooms when this is not their preference ... they must not function as 'small special schools' within mainstream settings".

## Councils and schools working together

Questions remain over how it will be decided whether a school opens a "support" or "specialist" base.

Rob Williams, senior policy advisor at school leader's union NAHT, said to "avoid any risk of conflict", bases "should be planned and established through co-production between councils, local school leaders, parents and other key stakeholders to ensure they complement and build upon existing provision".

Speaking at Education Estates SEND Conference last week, Isabel Horner, the head of schools infrastructure at Norfolk County Council, said it "took more time to engage" with secondary schools in setting up SRPs.

Rob Walker, senior strategic development officer from Hampshire County Council, agreed: "It's a different dynamic, but it's a shared challenge that we have, whether it's a maintained school or academy.

"We've spent a lot of time over the last few years building really strong links with those academy trusts so that we can work together and have really positive discussions about how we help them to support children that they already have within their schools."

## OPINION: SEND

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## TOM REES

Chair, DfE expert advisory group on inclusion

## We'll fail a generation if we say SEND reform is too difficult

**Debate is essential, but we must not squander a once-in-a-generation chance to build a truly inclusive education system, writes Tom Rees**

The schools white paper will soon set out plans to reform the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build a truly inclusive education system which breaks down barriers to success for every child.

#### The case for change

The case for reform is overwhelming. Too many children do not receive the support they need, or are not in school at all.

Too many families feel worn down by a system that requires constant advocacy for what should be standard: access to a school place, respite care or even basic facilities such as clean disabled toilets.

Professionals are stretched thin, navigating complexity without sufficient clarity or empowerment. Staff make a difference in spite of the system, not because of it.

Educational outcomes and future destinations remain unacceptably low for too many children, particularly those with additional needs and complexities in their lives. This cannot continue.

#### Why we focus on inclusion, not only SEND

It's been a privilege to chair the Department for Education's expert

advisory group on inclusion over the past year, bringing together diverse expertise from across the system to support the government.

Our focus on inclusion, not only SEND, is deliberate.

For too long, SEND has been treated as separate from mainstream education: a parallel system with its own language and frameworks.

The result has been fragmentation, with support becoming siloed or perceived as someone else's responsibility, and too often revolving around labels and compliance rather than evidence, quality and outcomes.

An inclusive system starts from a different premise. It assumes every child may face barriers to learning at different points and asks how we remove barriers to attendance, participation and achievement rather than how we categorise need.

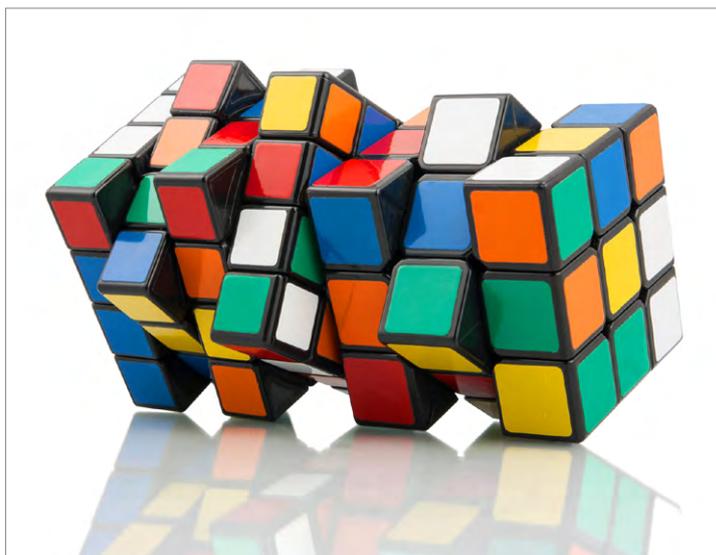
A deficit model leads to lower expectations, segregation and variable provision. Inclusion demands high expectations for all.

Over the past year, we have supported ministers in their engagement through the national conversation on SEND.

We have listened to children, parents and frontline professionals, as well as charities, campaign groups and system leaders.

Through the inclusion in practice project, we have captured strong examples of inclusive practice in action.

There is clear consensus on the need for change.



“ A deficit model leads to lower expectations, segregation and variable provision

#### From fragmentation to one system

Building a more inclusive system requires thinking beyond individual institutions towards a continuum of high-quality support in local areas.

Mainstream, specialist and alternative provision must operate as one system, with expertise shared rather than siloed.

Children and families experience the whole system and don't see organisational boundaries or blockages. We, as professionals, need to see this too.

The white paper is not the conclusion of this debate, but the beginning of the next chapter. It will require a significant system shift, and sustained focus from the government and school system alike.

#### Education and inclusion are rightly emotive

There will be criticism. Education and inclusion are rightly emotive, and contested areas. Few issues matter more for social justice and the society we want to build, and the government is right to make this its focus.

Within the expert advisory group, we have committed to respectful disagreement, recognising

that understanding different perspectives is necessary to progress.

Debate is essential. Much of the variation in SEND practice exists because we have not applied the same intellectual rigour to inclusion as we have to areas such as reading, curriculum or teacher development.

#### Inclusion can't be 'too hard' pile

The white paper represents a pivotal moment for policy and system leadership.

Policy sets direction, but change happens from the ground up. We have a collective responsibility to make this work. Another generation of children cannot be failed because reform proved too difficult.

Inclusion can no longer sit in the "too hard" pile. We now have an opportunity to change it. It is the central reform - for schools, for this government and for social policy.

This is about children; it's about how we treat the most vulnerable and it's about the sort of society we want to become. Now is the time to step forward together and seize this moment to create one system with high ambition for all children.

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## Looking overseas for SEND policy lessons

**The different approaches in 14 countries provide valuable insight for English policymakers ahead of white paper, say Loic Menzies and Taylor Hughson**

If you push too strongly towards inclusion, you will run into political resistance, and you are doomed to failure.”

This was the stark warning issued by a policymaker in one nearby country, interviewed as part of the Centre for Education System's (CES) study of SEND policy in 14 countries.

It's a stark warning to those in Whitehall girding their loins in anticipation of the white paper's launch.

I am not sure anyone in Westminster is looking for more warnings right now. But the great thing about looking overseas is that you soon realise there is nothing new under the sun.

### Important lessons

Most countries are trying to improve their approach to special needs, and several have introduced major reforms against tough odds. There are therefore important lessons we can learn from our neighbours, without falling into the trap of “policy borrowing”.

Firstly, it seems that countries get in trouble when they focus too much on where pupils are taught, rather than what support they

receive once there.

Pressure from the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has encouraged many countries, such as Estonia and Ireland, to reduce their dependence on specialist settings.

But when they do, it is often parents of pupils with SEND who end up pushing back against “inclusion in name only”.

Demand for separate provision in England might therefore be reduced, but only if specialist support in areas such as speech language and communication needs and dyslexia becomes more widely available within mainstream schools.

### Regional alliances

A short hop across the grey North Sea affords a glimpse of how that could happen. In 2012, the Netherlands passed the “education that fits” act, to ensure pupils could access support wherever they were taught.

SEND funding was decentralised and handed to new collaborative regional alliances.

Although there have been challenges, and it would be a mistake to copy the country's approach wholesale, a 2020 evaluation of the reforms shows that cross-school, localised decision-making can be in pupils' – as well as the public purse's – interests.

It is also an approach that would



“ You soon realise there is nothing new under the sun”

be in keeping with the original intent behind “local offers” – a much neglected element of England's 2014 SEND reforms that are set for a reboot as new “local inclusion support offers”.

Even closer to home, Wales has been attracting English policymakers' attention recently, following a trend-bucking drop in the proportion of pupils identified as having SEND – or additional learning needs (ALN) as they are now called.

What is striking is that, despite the change in terminology, it is identification practices that have shifted – not definitions. On the other hand, this has not actually translated into a drop in costs, though spending may have increased at a lower rate than would have been expected.

### Definitions aren't magic

So, while speculation about England's white paper has tended to centre on definitions of SEND, particularly the status of EHCPs and changes to tiering, the government should be under no illusions: definitions aren't magic.

Finland is one place where changes to SEND policy do seem to have driven big changes.

In 2010 the country shifted from a primarily using a “backpack-based” model, in which funding follows individual pupils, to a “census based” approach, in which municipalities are allocated a block of funding, based on likely need.

There has also been a shift towards early support. A 2020 study suggests that this drove a significant drop in full-time special education, as well as in the proportion of students taught in separate SEND classrooms.

Despite these changes, Finland continues to face difficulties with uneven interpretation of national norms and variation in support, often linked to disparities between local budgets.

Indeed, it seems that none of the 14 countries we studied have yet managed to ensure that all pupils with SEND get the support they need.

But perhaps countries would stand a better chance of success if they spent a little more time sharing the lessons learned. And that is exactly what our recent study aimed to do.

# Take care over social transition, draft gender guidance says

RUTH LUCAS

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Schools should take a “very careful approach in relation to social transition”, new draft government gender guidance states, with “particular caution” urged in primary settings.

The Department for Education is consulting on draft guidance on supporting children who are questioning their gender, which if signed off would form part of the statutory keeping children safe in education (KCSIE) guidance.

It states that parents should be involved in the “vast majority” of cases in which a child questions their gender.

This comes after the landmark Cass review of gender care services for under-18s, which found “remarkably weak” evidence around medical interventions in gender care, with a lack of research available.

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson said the proposed guidance should “give teachers the clarity they need to ensure the safeguarding and wellbeing of gender questioning children and young people”.

## ‘Very careful’ approach

The guidance states that schools should take a “very careful approach in relation to social transition”.

“The Cass review acknowledged that there is a lack of good evidence on the long-term impact of social transition on young people, but it is clear that social transition should be viewed as an active intervention that may have significant effects on the child or young person in terms of their psychological functioning and longer-term outcomes.”

It adds that primary schools should “exercise particular caution”, and the government would “expect support for full social transition to be agreed very rarely”.

What is in the best interests of the child may be different to the child’s wishes, the draft guidance adds.

**Schools “should not initiate any action** regarding social transition”, and the guidance only applies where a child or their parent has made a request.

Parents should be involved in the “vast majority” of cases where a child is questioning their gender,



Bridget Phillipson

and schools should “engage parents/carers as a matter of priority and treat their views with importance”.

In a rare circumstance where involving parents would pose a greater risk to the child than not involving them, the school should involve its designated safeguarding lead.

The first step for schools is to consider what is in the best interests of the child and other children.

“Schools and colleges should consider everything that could be affecting a child, including whether they have any wider health issues or neurodiversity,” the draft guidance states.

**Schools must provide separate toilets for** pupils aged 8 and over, and separate changing rooms for those aged 11 and over.

The draft guidance states there are “no exceptions” for single-sex facilities in schools, including toilets and changing rooms.

Schools should “take time to sensitively explain” that supporting social transition “will not include allowing access to toilets, changing rooms or boarding or residential accommodation designated for the opposite sex”.

Children undergoing social transition will not be allowed to join PE classes for the opposite sex where there are safety reasons for single-sex classes, the draft guidance adds.

But schools have some flexibility over the use of children’s names.

“Supporting social transition might consider discussing options with pupils and staff such as using names instead of pronouns,” the guidance says.

Phillipson said the draft guidance will “give teachers the clarity they need to ensure the safeguarding and wellbeing of gender questioning children and young people.”

“This is about pragmatic support for teachers, reassurance for parents, and above all, the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.”

It has also been backed by Dr Hilary Cass, who led the government review into gender care services for under-18s in 2024.

“The updated guidance is practical and reflects the recommendations of my review, giving schools much needed clarity on their legal duties so they can support children with confidence,” Cass said.

The guidance has also been welcomed by school leader unions. Pepe Di’lasio, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said schools have “done a very good job in dealing with this complex and sensitive issue over the course of many years, striving to create inclusive environments” in an “often-polarised public debate”.

NAHT general secretary Paul Whiteman added that schools “remain focused on ensuring that every child in their care is safe and treated with compassion and humanity”.

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**Professor  
Haili Hughes**



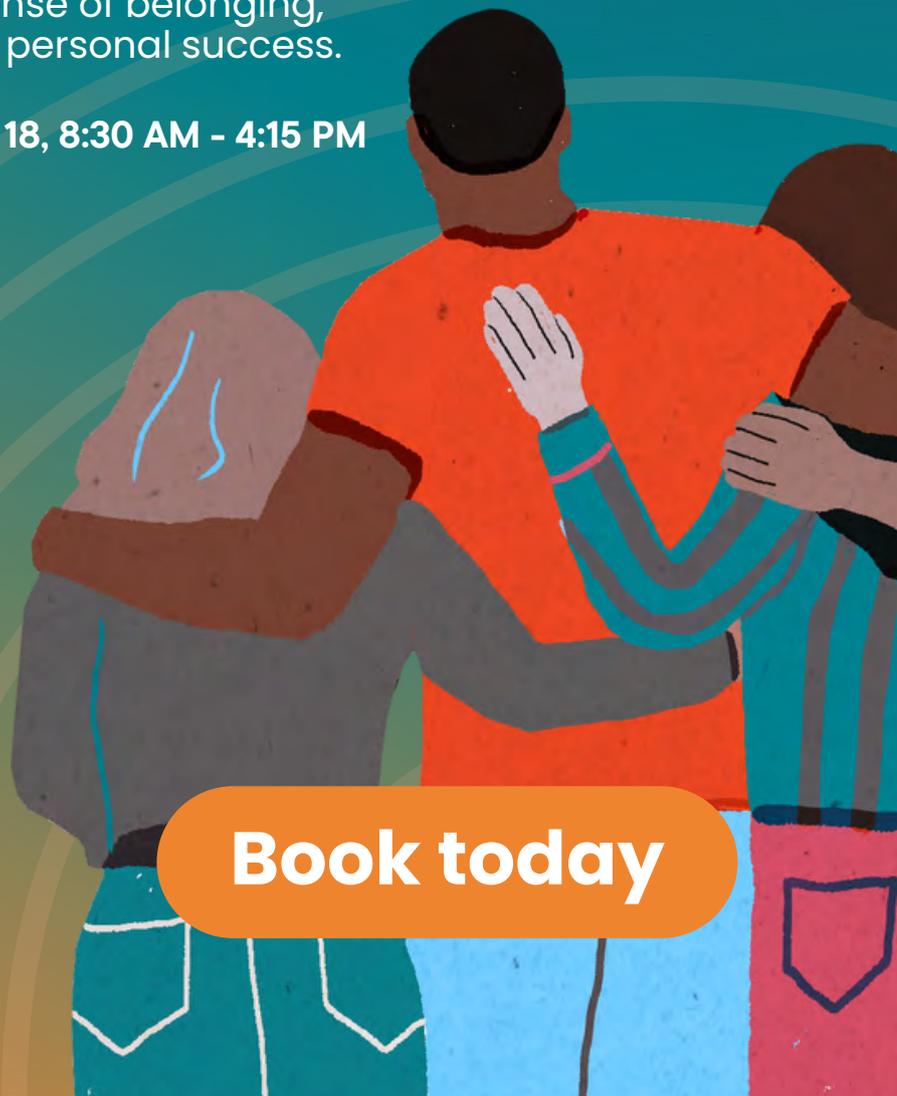
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# Ofsted achievement data doesn't add up

EXCLUSIVE

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

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Ofsted's use of the national average when grading schools on achievement could be "extremely unfair" to those serving disadvantaged communities, leaders have warned.

The watchdog has made inclusion a key focus of its reformed inspections. But leaders say the framework could penalise schools with high levels of poverty, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or large numbers of children who speak English as an additional language.

The watchdog stressed that inspectors consider a school's context, using both data and information gathered on site to "form a holistic view of achievement". But to reach the 'expected standard', inspectors must be satisfied that "on the whole, pupils achieve well".

"Typically, this will be reflected in their attainment and progress in national tests and examinations, which are broadly in line with national averages, including for disadvantaged pupils," the grading toolkit said.

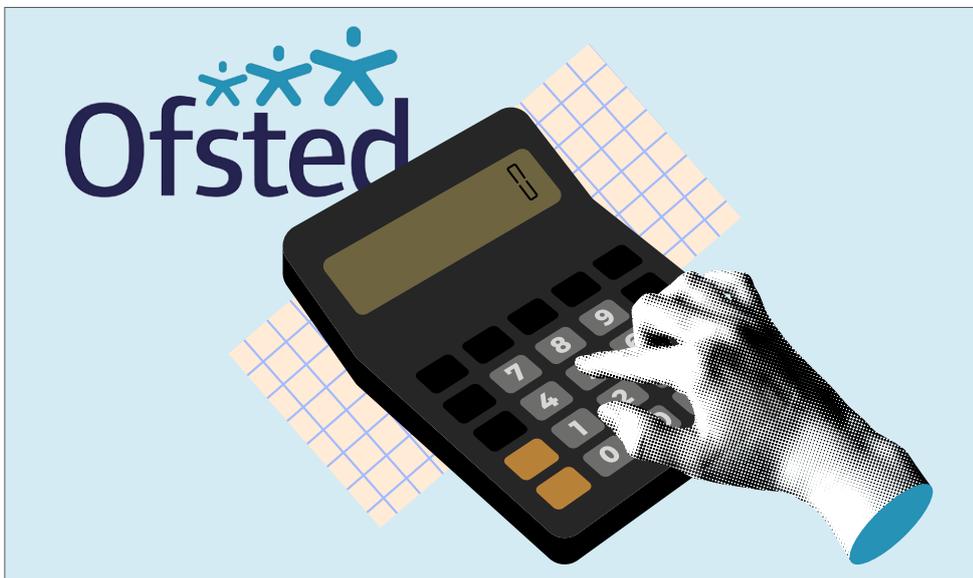
NAHT general secretary Paul Whiteman said the union was "very concerned" this could "unfairly mark down" schools with larger proportions of disadvantaged pupils, or those with SEND.

"These pupils may have low prior attainment, but nevertheless make considerable progress," he said.

Averages also factor into grading decisions for 'attendance and behaviour', where to meet the expected standard, overall attendance must be "broadly in line with national averages or shows an improving trend over time".

Andy Jordan, inspection and accountability specialist at leaders' union ASCL, said Ofsted's secure fit model and use of averages risk making it harder for schools in more deprived areas to attain middle or top grades.

He said the new model appears to be "unfairly judging schools for issues that go beyond the front gates" and called for Ofsted to "reconsider their methodology and ensure they avoid penalising schools that are doing good work in tough circumstances".



## 'How on earth can you use a national average against a population that's clearly in no way average?'

### What does the data show?

Schools Week analysis of the first 62 routine, non-voluntary inspections under the new system shows around one in three received 'needs attention' for achievement – more than any other evaluation area.

The 20 schools appear to be split across deprivation levels. Nine were "above" or "well above" average, four "close", and seven "below" or "well below".

The split was similar for free school meal eligibility, with five "close", eight "above" or "well above", and seven "below" or "well below".

But the sample is still small, and leaders remain concerned.

### Lack of 'wriggle room'

Richard Sheriff, CEO of Red Kite Learning Trust, has been through two inspections under the new framework. He fears a school's context "is not influencing any of the grade" and the approach "feels extremely unfair".

One Red Kite school in Leeds was judged 'needs attention' for achievement.

Inspectors acknowledged that many pupils joined part-way through schooling and the school supported them to catch up. But pupils "achieve less well than could be

expected" in tests and exams.

Sheriff said the local area has "generations of ... compound disadvantage and school non-attendance".

"Last year just over 21 families lost a parent ... It's just profoundly different.

"How on earth can you use a national average against a population that's clearly in no way average? It's just statistic nonsense."

He warned that schools in similar areas risk slipping automatically into 'needs attention', while staff "serving in these schools brilliantly are being underserved by a draconian and basically out-of-touch inspection."

### Context must be reflected

Two E-ACT schools are also among those rated 'needs attention' for achievement – E-ACT Nechells Academy, a primary in Birmingham, and City Heights E-ACT Academy in Tulse Hill, south London.

Both sit in areas of "well above average" deprivation.

At City Heights, 24 per cent of pupils receive SEN support, almost 6 per cent have an EHCP, and 61 per cent are eligible for free school meals (FSM).

At Nechells, SEN support is above average at (18 per cent), while FSM is 71 per cent.

## LONG READ: OFSTED

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CEO Tom Campbell said he welcomed Ofsted's focus on attainment and progress, "but national averages don't always reflect the context of many of our academies".

"Schools with high proportions of disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND, or high mobility can see headline figures affected by factors beyond the control of teaching and leadership," he said.

He pointed to Nechells, which was praised by inspectors for improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, and phonics and multiplication. But several pupils joined in year 5, leaving too little time to "get them fully up to speed" for SATs.

"As a result, the school was graded 'needs attention' for achievement."

Campbell said he hoped this "teething issue" can be "ironed out, so judgments can fully reflect both attainment and progress in context."

**Oliver: Inspectors are looking at context**

One audience member raised similar concerns to Ofsted chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver, during a Q&A at BETT UK last month.

"We work within deprivation, and people come to us with very low reading ages," he said. "The work we do with them is extraordinary, and the progress that they make is excellent". Yet the school is "judged against" other schools including local grammars.

Oliver responded that he was "watching very carefully" but "can already see that there are schools with low achievement getting beyond 'expected', 'strong' and 'exceptional' grades".

"I can tell that my inspectors are taking the context into account," he said.

He said removal of headline grades means the system can show weakness in achievement while recognising excellence elsewhere.

But Wolverhampton headteacher Philip Salisbury fears many parents will still judge schools closely on achievement and warned the system risks "setting schools up to be either ... inclusive or academic".

He also worries that schools could be deterred from admitting pupils who could dent results.

Salisbury leads a primary where more than 55 per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Around 80 per cent speak English as an additional language.

"If you are comparing across national averages, a school like us is always going to struggle," he said.



Sir Martyn Oliver

## 'We work within deprivation, and people come to us with very low reading ages'

"Achievement becomes the weakest-looking area, even when the provision could be strong."

Education consultant Steve Wren said he also has "significant concerns" that the achievement toolkit "is biased against" schools working within more difficult contexts.

"It is self-evidently more challenging for schools with low prior attainment to have exam outcomes in line with national averages."

**Inclusion tsar welcomes raising outcomes**

But not all leaders have been critical. Wodensborough Ormiston Academy, whose trust is led by government inclusion tsar Tom Rees, has also been rated 'needs attention' for achievement, while achieving 'expected standard' in all other areas.

Disadvantage and SEND levels at the secondary are "well above average".

Its report stated pupils' outcomes in exams at the end of KS4 "remain below the national average".

Work to improve this, including for pupils facing barriers to learning, "is beginning to show some positive improvements", but "too many pupils still do not achieve as well as they should".

Rees said: "We are proud of the improvement at Wodensborough in recent years.

"We welcome the greater emphasis this new inspection framework places on inclusion, alongside a continued focus on raising outcomes."

**Averages 'just one part of picture'**

An Ofsted spokesperson said: "Pupil achievement is at the heart of our report card because outcomes matter.

"It is vital that every child is provided with the tools they need to thrive, no matter their local context. To be truly inclusive means setting high standards for all children."

Performance in national tests and exams, and how this compares to national averages in the IDSR, "is just one part of the rich picture of achievement in a school", they added.

"Inspectors use a range of data, including national averages for disadvantaged pupils, to understand achievement better. In forming grading decisions, they discuss each school's context in detail with school leaders."

Some leaders have suggested that the use of averages means half of schools would not be able to meet the expected standard. But Ofsted has said that won't be the case.

For each achievement measure, schools are placed in one of three bandings depending on where they sit on a national distribution range. Performance near the average range is banded "close to average", while others will be "above" or "below".

Ofsted said inspectors "never look at a single measure for a single year in isolation", and instead look at data over multiple years and measures to "identify consistent and comprehensive patterns" and smooth out year-on-year variations.

# Special report card data under review

EXCLUSIVE

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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Ofsted is considering removing national data comparators for special schools from its report cards, following concerns that labelling them “well below average” for pupil numbers could confuse and mislead parents.

The report cards provide contextual data about schools to parents, but for metrics like school capacity and pupil demographics Ofsted compares special schools to mainstream schools within the same age phase.

For instance, the report for Rotherham-based The Willows School shows 100 per cent of pupils have EHCPs. But it is unusual for pupils to attend a special school without a plan.

Yet the report card claimed this is “well above” a national average of 3.1 per cent.

Special schools tend to be considerably smaller than mainstream schools, especially at secondary phase. Analysis of government data shows that an average state special school has 156 pupils.

But the report card for The Willows, part of the Nexus academy trust, claimed its 190-pupil school is “well below” an average of 1,067, which relates to secondary schools overall, including mainstream.

Nexus chief executive Warren Carratt wrote to

## School and pupil context

Total pupils

190

Well below average

▼ [What does this mean?](#)

The total number of pupils currently at this sc  
England.

National average: 1,067

[Hide](#)

Ofsted during the fact-checking process post-inspection about this “unhelpful and misleading” issue. “We should be compared to the special school average,” he said.

While the inspectors understood the school’s context, the issue lies in the published report card, he added.

“It’s frustrating that something that was supposed to be about more transparency and simplicity for families will now confuse them further.”

Steve Rollett, Confederation of School Trusts deputy chief executive, said: “This is an area where there is room for the report cards to be improved.

“Things like proportion of EHCPs and pupil

numbers will clearly be quite different for specialist provision, and so, while the current phase-wide comparisons on report cards may be technically correct, they are perhaps of limited use to parents in these cases.”

Schools Week flagged the issue with Ofsted this week, questioning its approach.

In response, Ofsted said it will “review what data is included in the report cards from published sources, including potentially removing national comparators for special schools”.

The watchdog said: “We include this data in report cards to mirror the published DfE data available to inspectors during inspections.

“We do not generate this data, but we do ensure that our reporting of it is consistent with how it is reported elsewhere, for example on ‘compare school performance’.

Carratt said the response “assures me – and will assure other special school leaders – that Ofsted are listening and are willing to continue to make common-sense changes to the report card in these early teething phases.

“This is a much-needed change that will help families more clearly understand special schools.”

Ofsted had already excluded performance data from special school and alternative provision report cards.

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## Most schools happy with broadband upgrade

A government scheme to upgrade broadband in schools increased speed and reliability, but the cost of hardware and software and a lack of devices still hold back the use of tech in classrooms.

The Department for Education announced a further £300 million for the “connect the classroom” programme this week as it published an evaluation of the iteration of the scheme that ran between 2022 and 2025.

Of the schools surveyed, 76 per cent were satisfied with the process.

Where challenges were experienced, they were “typically related to the time required for the installation process, which was exacerbated by supply chain delays and slow supplier responses for some”.

Ninety-one per cent reported increased satisfaction with internet speed and reliability.

Four in 10 schools said they had increased their use of cloud-based storage as a result of the upgrade.

The scheme was “often described as a catalyst for expansion of technology use, and in some cases freed or redirected budgets towards new devices and classroom technologies”.

But the report also found that “future plans to upgrade, replace or invest in technology appeared to reduce after the intervention, which may be due to schools perceiving there to be a reduced need for investment due to the upgrades received”.

Other benefits reported included increased teacher confidence in using technology, smoother lesson delivery and greater flexibility.

This allowed “integration of real-time

collaborative activities into lessons, increased use of technology in non-classroom spaces, and adaptation of technology use for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities”.

However, the “cost of hardware and software, followed by lack of devices, continued to be perceived as the greatest barriers to technology use”.

This was because “limited budgets and outdated devices restricted pupils’ consistent access to technology and limited the potential benefits of the intervention”.

The report found that some schools “also still experienced areas of poor connectivity, particularly in older buildings where the physical structure made it difficult to ensure consistent signal distribution”.

# Building fund will go full bid-free from 2027

**RUTH LUCAS**

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The government's school condition improvement fund (CIF) will be replaced with a new programme that will not require full bids, and a new framework will govern the use of surplus school land amid falling rolls.

The Department for Education (DfE) has published its 10-year education estates strategy.

It said it marked a "shift to more proactive management, long-term strategic maintenance and renewal that prioritises condition need, risk and resilience alongside delivering high-quality new buildings where they are needed".

The DfE will introduce a new programme by autumn 2028 to replace the condition improvement fund, which was placed under review by the Labour government in 2024.

CIF is the mechanism for standalone academies or trusts with fewer than five schools to apply for funding for projects aimed at keeping buildings safe and in good working order.

Currently, the fund works through competitive



bidding on an annual basis.

In 2024, just 35 per cent of schools which applied for the funding received cash, with the DfE spending a total of £460 million.

The government is replacing this system "to make it easier for eligible responsible bodies to access this maintenance funding so they will no longer need to submit full bids".

It says this will be "enabled by data transformation with more granular and timely data on the estate", with trusts and councils "collecting their own data in line with common standards and sharing data with the department".

The strategy also set out plans to improve data collection and sharing between responsible bodies – trusts and councils – and the DfE.

The "managing your education estate" database

will be launched this month.

It will "bring together estates-related guidance, tools, support, programmes, funding and data in one place" in an accessible format.

In April, the government will release new technical standards guides to help schools and councils to collect data.

It will also ask schools and councils to make an annual return from autumn 2026 on how they are meeting the expectations of the government's school estate management standards.

The government will also develop a "decision-making framework" for schools and councils to "better utilise their surplus land and buildings" during "demographic change".

Empty land or classrooms could be used to join up with family hubs, housing, neighbourhood health services and youth centres.

The DfE will develop the framework by the end of 2026.

This will "recognise that the school estate must remain flexible to respond to local need as it changes over time" and "optimise our collective resources".



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# Behaviour expert plays down restorative practice trend

EXCLUSIVE

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Government behaviour adviser Tom Bennett has played down the role of restorative practices in the behaviour hubs scheme he helped to develop, after an evaluation report found around half of participating schools had shifted towards the approach.

Bennett, who led the development of the behaviour hubs programme under the last Conservative government, is critical of relying on restorative practices to manage pupils' behaviour and has publicly defended strict approaches to discipline.

But, at the end of last month, a government-commissioned evaluation of the original hubs scheme found that an "increased focus on positive behaviour was often accompanied by a shift to restorative rather than zero tolerance behaviour management".

The evaluation's survey of participating schools found 52 per cent of those that responded had shifted towards restorative behaviour management while on the programme.

## Rewarding good behaviour

Schools also adopted clear behaviour standards and increased their focus on preventing misbehaviour and rewarding good behaviour, the evaluation found.

But, speaking to *Schools Week*, Bennett denied that the hubs programme leaned towards restorative practice.

"The evaluation does not conclude that behaviour hubs leaned away from so-called 'zero tolerance' approaches or towards restorative practice," he said.

"For starters, I have publicly campaigned for years against zero tolerance policies... You can be strict (as in highly consistent rather than highly punitive) without being zero tolerance."

The survey defined restorative approaches as "strategies that focus on repairing harm and restoring relationships rather than simply punishing individuals for their actions".

Restorative measures adopted by participating schools included "restorative conversations with pupils following a behaviour incident, as well as, or instead of, punishment".

## Reframing detentions

Schools also reframed detentions as a chance for pupils to reflect on their behaviour, reducing



the frequency or length of suspensions, and considering external circumstances such as home life when deciding how to deal with misbehaviour.

Just 18 per cent of participating schools shifted towards zero tolerance measures – defined in the survey as "the strict enforcement of rules, often with immediate consequences for even minor infractions".

Bennett said: "None of the schools that were assigned as lead schools operated on a zero-tolerance model, not did any of the partner schools.

"The behaviour hubs actively encouraged schools to adopt greater levels of consistency, rigour and predictability, as ways to build healthy cultures, alongside pastoral and proactive strategies."

Bennett has often defended high-profile schools with strict disciplinary policies. He denounced a safeguarding review of the Mossbourne Victoria Park Academy, launched in response to reports of abusive disciplinary practices, as a "hit job".

## Zero tolerance

However, he is critical of zero-tolerance policies that do not make exceptions, though he said this week that none of the schools he has visited took such an approach.

He told *Schools Week* the evaluation survey used categories based on "self-reported staff perceptions".

"They are not independently verified measures of practice, nor do they map neatly onto defined models such as restorative justice or zero-tolerance frameworks."

For example, he said that

"increasing behaviour standards", "prevention activity" and "rewards" were "all entirely consistent with schools operating highly structured, rules-based systems.

"They are not philosophical alternatives; they are complementary components of effective behaviour cultures.

"Similarly, the report does not define or measure a specific restorative model. References to restorative practice are inferred from reported shifts in activity, not from programme design or anything directly measured."

Restorative actions were not the most frequently adopted strategy among schools participating in the hub programme. Seventy-two per cent of schools created behaviour standards, 66 per cent increased activities aimed at prevention, and 57 per cent increased rewards for good behaviour.

## Biggest improvements

The schools that saw the biggest improvements commonly focused on rewarding good behaviour and increasing teachers' responsibilities.

The behaviour hubs evaluation said that several schools had relied on punishing misbehaviour rather than rewarding good behaviour before joining the hubs programme, and in some cases used de-escalation techniques that "appeared to focus on shame".

Bennett's 2017 report on school behaviour, *Creating a Culture*, described both sanctions and rewards as "essential" parts of school behaviour policies.

He told *Schools Week* the hubs programme sought to help schools build "coherent, sustainable behaviour systems" rather than seeking to "move schools away from firm sanctions".

"I think the evaluation shows many schools strengthening systems, expectations and supports," he said. "It does not evidence a shift away from structured discipline, boundaries, high expectations, nor a move toward purely restorative models."

Overall, the behaviour hubs evaluation found "consistent positive change in the behaviour of pupils" in participating schools, but with difficulties for schools facing substantial external challenges.

The Labour government has introduced integrated attendance and behaviour hubs as a successor to the Conservatives' separate hubs programmes, with Bennett continuing in a lead role.



Tom Bennett

# Job cuts loom at trust with £9m deficit

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An academy trust loaded with a £9 million deficit has been ordered to slash costs, as it banks on government bailouts to keep it afloat.

The St Ralph Sherwin Catholic MAT also broke academy rules after signing off on a £5,000 payout, accepting a £200,000 loan and misusing buildings cash.

This week, ministers tightened up their oversight of the 25-school chain by issuing it with a second notice to improve (NTI) over its “weak financial position” and “continued” breaches.

This comes amid upheaval at the under-fire Arthur Terry Learning Partnership, which is also millions of pounds in deficit and the subject of government scrutiny.

## Ballooning deficit

Schools Week revealed in October that St Ralph in Derbyshire was one of 75 trusts which raised concerns about their ability to continue operating in 2023-24, after registering an overall deficit of £5.9 million.

Government data suggested this was the largest deficit in the country.

The MAT had already been given an NTI in 2023 over “financial management, compliance and governance concerns”.

But after latest accounts, published last month, showed St Ralph ended 2024-25 with a £9.2 million deficit, it was issued with a new one on Tuesday.

The document stated that officials have assessed its “continued breaches of the academy trust handbook relating to financial management are significant enough to warrant a revised notice”.

## ‘Blunt’ NTIs

They also remain concerned “about the trust’s weak financial position”.

The notice ordered St Ralph to add “new independent trustees” with “suitable skills and experience” to its board.

Just days earlier, Arthur Terry, which runs 24 academies in the Midlands, announced that Richard Gill, its CEO, had stepped down.

Despite being issued with an NTI two years ago, its finances have continued to worsen. It is now £8.4 million in the red.



Stephen Morales, CEO of the Institute of School Business Leadership, called the notices a “blunt instrument” which “fails to address the structural problems that have caused trusts to be in such a bad place”.

## Work with ‘finance experts’

St Ralph CEO Kevin Gritton said all his employees were “aware that collectively... we are in a financially challenging situation”.

The new NTI said St Ralph “must ensure all financial recovery proceeds at pace”. It has been told to “provide evidence it is expediting efficiencies to bring in-year savings, including staff restructuring”.

Gritton said the changes have been proposed for “some schools and our central team”. The trust is consulting with those affected.

Compulsory redundancies “would always be a last resort”, Gritton stressed.

## Loans and breaches

Research by the Kreston group, a network of accountancy firms, found all trust types except medium-sized MATs are forecasting reserves to fall by up to 43 per cent over the next two years.

The Confederation of School Trusts’ annual survey revealed many CEOs were looking at cutting classroom staff and leadership redundancies to balance the books.

Auditors noted that St Ralph’s ability to continue running is “predicated on the expectation that additional funding and cash flow support from the DfE would be made available”.

Accounts suggest the trust has already received

£468,000 in government “cash-flow loans”. It was given a further £200,000 loan – which is “interest-free and with no fixed repayment term” – by the Diocese of Nottingham last year.

However, accounts show that St Ralph broke academy rules after failing “to obtain the prior approval” of the DfE for the payment.

Previously unspent and current year capital funding was used to support “its operational activities and cash flow” – which is not allowed. It has received over £3.5 million over the last two completed financial years.

St Ralph also broke the terms of its NTI after making “a special severance payment to a member of staff for £5,000” without government consent.

## Trusts too big to fail?

Like St Ralph, Arthur Terry has been given additional funding to stay afloat. In all, it has been loaned £3.5 million. It has also struck an agreement in principle with officials for “an additional £1 million of repayable funding”.

School business manager Hilary Goldsmith previously said the Arthur Terry case highlighted that some trusts have become too big to fail, as trying to re-broker so many schools at once “would be virtually impossible”.

Morales agreed it was “more likely” that smaller trusts would be re-brokered, with larger MATs instead primed for leadership and governance changes, “particularly if pupil outcomes are where they need to be”.

“[But] no trust should ever be too big to be dismantled if it is not serving the community of learners well and others could do a better job.”

# RISE scheme 'successful' despite concerns

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Bosses of under-performing schools given targeted support through the government's RISE improvement scheme have felt "on trial" and ignored during the first few months of the programme.

Others reported feeling stigmatised and reduced staff morale after their schools were branded 'stuck' by the Department for Education (DfE).

Despite this, a government-commissioned evaluation of the RISE targeted support service found the programme has been "successful".

The scheme was launched last year, with a 65-strong team of advisers – leaders seconded to work alongside officials – appointed to specific schools in their region to identify priorities and propose an outside organisation to provide support.

The programme focused on 'stuck' schools, those rated 'requires improvement' by Ofsted following an earlier inspection that resulted in a grade below 'good'.

The study focused on a sample from the first 223 RISE schools. Here's what you need to know...

## 1. 'Clunky' and anxiety-inducing

The report said RISE teams would kick off the process through "informal initial contact" with the school's responsible body (RB), its local authority or trust. They would then send an official email.

This "generally worked well to effectively engage the RB and the school". But some called it "clunky", pointing to "slow formal communication [and] short timescales for responses".

A handful of heads also "reported receiving the communication on a Friday before the end of term, which they described as creating added anxiety".

Meanwhile, a "few" leaders "expressed disappointment about being publicly labelled a 'stuck school' and being listed on the DfE website". They "felt this was stigmatising" and impacted staff morale.



## 2. Matching schools with advisers

The process of matching schools with advisers "was considered successful by the majority of schools".

However, DfE staff in a "few regions" found it "more challenging" as they had fewer advisers to make the right match.

There were "a few isolated cases where relationships did not work out initially, but these were resolved", the report said.

## 3. Heads 'on trial'

Most advisers interviewed for the evaluation "referenced timescales, IT set-up and communications as the main challenges" during the process to establish schools' needs and eligibility for support.

They felt deadlines for the initial diagnosis "were unnecessarily tight and this was compounded by their own ability to respond in a timely manner".

However, early on, some heads "had concerns that too many people were visiting the school as part of RISE targeted intervention".

"In some cases, multiple people visited at once. Some headteachers felt as if they were 'on trial' and other headteachers and RBs noted how the number of visitors could be intimidating and hard to explain to staff."

Despite this, the report said this was "a necessary part" of the RISE intervention work.

## 4. 'Frustration' over support choices

In half the cases analysed, selecting a supporting organisation was "a smooth process". But "challenges were experienced in the other half".

A "few" schools believe "their needs were ignored". One school said it "clearly requested

targeted SEND and nurture provision support" – but its plan "focused on areas like pedagogy and initial teacher training".

A handful of advisers "expressed frustrations with the matching process, feeling that the supporting organisations were chosen in a disorganised way".

## 5. Advisers operating in new areas

There were "a few cases where the school was outside of the geographic patch of the RISE adviser and/or supporting organisation" with which they were matched.

One adviser did not "know anything about the two trusts [one of their schools] asked to be matched with" as they were in a different county. This made it "really hard" for the adviser to "know whether [they were] right".

Another told of how one of their schools "was based across a regional boundary, where there was a complex, competitive relationship between trusts".

## 6. Timescale issues

The "majority of supporting organisations, RBs and headteachers were critical of the short timescales" to develop improvement plans.

Leaders "felt this rushed process constrained the due diligence activity that they would normally undertake" before agreeing to help a school.

## 7. 'Slow' DfE sign-off

Securing the DfE's approval for improvement plans "was considered by the majority of stakeholders to be slowing the process down... and threatening timescales".

Some heads said this left them feeling "on hold", while in a few instances supporting organisations "questioned the changes made" by the DfE to the plans.

## 8. Report recommendations

The researchers have told the DfE to consider "clarifying communications around the role of RISE adviser[s]".

They also argued that the department "should carefully monitor the capacity of the system" to ensure supporting organisations can help increasing numbers of schools in future RISE rounds.

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## MAKE THIS YOUR SCHOOL'S YEAR TO SHINE

# Grammars shine in 'unfair' MAT rankings

EXCLUSIVE

JACK DYSON

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Academy chiefs have railed against new MAT league tables for failing to “reflect the progress students make in non-selective schools”, after dozens dropped places amid changes to the way trusts are ranked.

Two of the top three-ranked trusts in newly published tables run grammar schools, *Schools Week* can reveal, up from zero last year.

The analysis also shows that a number of serial high performers suffered after the progress 8 performance measure was put on pause for two years. Meanwhile, others climbed the table despite posting worse results.

## Who's at the top?

Progress 8, which measures the progress between the end of primary school and GCSEs, cannot be calculated this year and next because SATs were cancelled during the pandemic.

Instead, the government's performance website now defaults to ranking MATs by attainment 8 scores. The measure scores pupils across eight GCSE subjects, including English and maths.

The Girls' Learning Trust – which runs three schools in London – topped the league table. It rose from fourth last year, even though its attainment 8 score reduced slightly.

It was joined in the top three by the Twyford Church of England Academies Trust and King Edward VI Academy Trust Birmingham.

CEO Dr Thomas Flynn said he didn't believe league tables were a “particularly meaningful way” of comparing trusts.

His trust's results are “a testament to the skill, commitment and hard work of our teachers and staff, and to the ambition and dedication of our students”. But he acknowledged being a “relatively small” chain “with [two] selective schools in it inevitably shapes headline measures”.

## Selective schools better off?

Of the trusts in the top 10, four run selective schools. The figure stood at two last year, with none coming higher than fourth.

This time, Twyford was the



Adrian Rogers



only trust in the top three that did not run a grammar.

Alice Hudson, its CEO, would “welcome the return of a measure which affirms and encourages students by celebrating the distance travelled as well as recognising the different contexts in which schools and MATs are working”.

Our analysis shows 21 of those within the 50 highest trusts this year registered lower GCSE results than 12 months ago. Fourteen improved their position in the table despite this.

## 'Superficial'

Twenty-two of the MATs in last year's top 50 have dropped out. The South Lincolnshire Academies Trust slipped to 158th.

CEO Jemma Curson argued that the use of attainment 8 data “does not reflect the progress students make in non-selective schools”.

The trust included a new school which joined the chain after being rated ‘inadequate’ by Ofsted.

It has since been rated ‘good’, but Curson added that the “exceptional progress students have made [there]... has not yet been recognised”.

Adrian Rogers, CEO of Chiltern Learning Trust, said using the measure “to compare school



Jemma Curson

performance and league table schools is inappropriate and superficial”.

“This comparison is too crude to help school leaders or parents. Schools with lower pupil attainment on entry will be judged unfairly.”

His MAT went from traditionally being “in the top 20, and often top 10,” to 60th this year.

## Biggest jumps

Our findings show 17 MATs entered the top 50 this year. The Bright Futures Educational Trust witnessed the largest rise, leaping from 188th to 28th.

The Bishop Fraser Trust moved from 109th to 48th. Dr Tuesday Humby, its CEO, said this was despite the prior attainment of her pupils being “close to national” across her academies.

Our analysis also shows more trusts from the South-east made their way into the top 50. Twenty per cent were based there, compared to 12 per cent last year.

The South-east, London and East of England had the joint highest number of MATs in the list. Meanwhile, Yorkshire and the Humber witnessed the biggest drop (six percentage points). It came joint bottom with the West Midlands.

## Fairer measures?

In the absence of progress 8, Dave Thomson, chief statistician at FFT Education Datalab, said the government had two options that would have been fairer than attainment 8.

One would have been to use the previous year's estimated attainment 8 score and compare it with results for 2024-25 to “create a proxy” progress 8 figure. The other would involve “each school's A8 score with the average of a set of similar” secondaries.

Thomson noted that “60 per cent of the variation in pupils' attainment 8 scores can be explained by their prior attainment”.

In 2016, progress 8 replaced five A\*-C including English and maths as the main performance metric for secondary schools.

The government has pledged to “reform” the measure – which could return in two years' time. But previous FFT analysis suggests the changes will make “little difference” to the scores of most schools.

# Funding and staffing challenges for 'highly valued' music hubs

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

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New-style music hubs are "highly valued", but face issues around funding and access, an evaluation report has found.

Music hubs are groups of schools, councils, community groups, music organisations and others that support schools to develop "high quality" music education through teaching and help with sourcing instruments and professional development.

Arts Council England delivers the scheme on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE). Its operation is due to move to the oversight of the government's new National Centre for Arts and Music Education from September 2027.

There were previously 114 hubs, but in 2024 the system was restructured into 43 music hub partnerships covering larger areas.

A new interim report, carried out by NatCen for the DfE, has evaluated the first year of that new model, up to last July.

It found the hubs "continue to deliver services that are highly valued by schools, teachers, parents, and pupils."

But it also highlighted challenges including around "funding, workforce capacity, and geographical access".

Three-quarters of parents reported satisfaction with the scheme, highlighting affordability and quality, while around 80 per cent of teachers said music hubs provided useful professional development.

## 'Most significant risk'

But rising costs and tight budgets remain "the most significant risk", the report said, affecting schools' ability to pay for the scheme and hubs' capacity to deliver it.

Affording music provision was difficult "due to wider school budget constraints", schools said.

Meanwhile hubs reported difficulty meeting demand, in terms of both affordability of support and availability of staff. More than three-quarters said recruiting music teachers was "difficult".

Awareness also appeared limited. Only 35 per cent of parents and 30 per cent of pupils said they knew about their local music hub.

Cost was one of the main barriers to taking part in extra musical activities, according to parents



and pupils.

In some areas, pupils and music teachers reported difficulty getting to hubs for music lessons due to distance. The report noted this issue also existed under the previous model.

The report looked at how hubs have found sourcing funding from a £25 million capital grant, which has been available since September 2024 to help buy musical instruments and other equipment.

Staff said that, while the grant has improved access to instruments, there was "administrative complexity, poor timing, and lack of flexibility in how the funding could be spent once allocated".

## 'Sustained investment'

Overall, the report noted signs of "stabilisation and improvement" of the scheme, but it warned that the next few years "will be critical".

It said music hubs "require sustained investment", monitoring and a focus on equal access to make sure they have the desired effect.

It recommended "sustaining investment" and "strengthening the workforce" through investment in professional development and "long-term workforce planning".

The report's publication comes as the government opened the bidding process to run its new National Centre for Arts and Music Education, which will oversee the hubs programme in the future. Plans for the new centre were announced last spring.

In tender documents for the £13 million contract, the DfE said it was seeking a delivery partner to "establish and operate" the centre, which is supposed to open in September.

The centre "will aim to ensure every child in England has more equitable access to high-quality arts education by supporting excellent teaching, developing sustainable partnerships between schools and cultural organisations, and promoting arts education opportunities".

It will offer online continuing professional development for teachers, foster collaboration between schools and cultural organisations and "promote arts education to school leaders, teachers, parents and young people".

The provider will be responsible for oversight of the music hubs network, "assuming responsibility as fundholder from September 2027", as well as monitoring hubs' performance and delivery.

According to the DfE, the centre will be established with a phased implementation plan for its work from September. It will have a year to transition from existing oversight arrangements for the hubs with Arts Council England.

Existing capital funding for hubs will also be extended to the end of April 2027. The centre "will not therefore need to assume responsibility for this grant".

Future funding for the music hubs revenue grant "will be confirmed in due course and is separate to this contract value".

## MOVERS AND SHAKERS

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# Movers & Shakers

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



## Sue Robb

**Best start in life champion, Department for Education**

**Start date:** February

**Previous role:** Chief children's officer, Goodstart Early Learning in Australia

**Interesting fact:** Sue spent 14 years as a teacher, including three years at the British School, Athens, and six years as early years and infant lead at the British School in Manila, Philippines.



## Reza Schwitzer

**Principal consultant, Avencera**

**Start date:** April

**Current role:** Director of assessment reform, AQA

**Interesting fact:** When Gavin Williamson became education secretary, he walked into Sanctuary Buildings perhaps expecting a royal welcome. Instead, he caught Reza and the rest of the delivery unit sneaking out of the seventh floor in full PE kit.



## Ben Gadsby

**Interim head of policy and external affairs, Skills Builder UK**

**Start date:** February

**Current role:** Head of policy and research, Impetus

**Interesting fact:** At weekends, Ben referees American football games. A career highlight was the 2023 European U17 girls' final, which saw Great Britain beat Italy.



## Grace Healy

**Director of education, Chartered College of Teaching**

**Start date:** April

**Current role:** Education director

(secondary), David Ross Education Trust  
**Interesting fact:** Grace became unusually familiar with some of London's rooftops, from King's College London to Trellick Tower, while looking after weather equipment as a research assistant.



## Kelly-Leigh Kulyk

**Headteacher, Gloucestershire Academy for Inspirational Learning**

**Start date:** April

**Current role:** Headteacher, High Point Academy

**Interesting fact:** Kelly-Leigh loves animals. She has an animal room in her home which houses a chameleon, gecko, bearded dragon, axolotl, fish and a tortoise.



## Adam Wynne

**Director of strategy, policy and governance, Camden Learning**

**Start date:** January

**Previous role:** Policy lead, Cabinet Office and Department for Education

**Interesting fact:** Adam has a collection of rare 1980s vintage fragrances. He apologises in advance for over-spraying these.



## Karl Edwards

**Chief operating officer, Nottingham Forest Community Trust**

**Start date:** February

**Current role:** Managing director, ImpactEd Evaluation

**Interesting fact:** Karl started his career as a science teacher at Djanogly City Academy in Nottingham and is excited to be getting back to having an impact locally.

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# Sharing not siloed: The special schools bringing inclusion into the mainstream

RUTH LUCAS

RUTH.LUCAS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

**Some schools are anticipating the SEND reforms and working together to ensure one system can operate for all**

As the sector awaits the long-delayed SEND reforms, many schools have already started doing what they expect to be asked to do in the white paper – learn from each other.

Schools minister Georgia Gould recently told *The Guardian* that the government wants “a system that works together, so mainstream schools are learning from the best that happens in special schools and children are in the right place for their education”.

And, writing for *Schools Week*, Tom Rees, chair of the Department for Education’s inclusion expert advisory group, said “mainstream, specialist and alternative provision must operate as one system, with expertise shared rather than siloed”.

As ministers announce they expect all secondary – and eventually primary schools – to cater for SEND pupils within “inclusion bases”, how can mainstream schools learn from their special and AP colleagues?

*Schools Week* speaks to three schools leading the way...

## Complex needs

More than two-thirds of initial teacher training providers believe trainees are not adequately prepared to support complex needs in mainstream settings, according to a survey by The National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers.

While the government looks to provide more training through a huge £200 million investment, one special school has started to share its expertise with mainstream schools within its wider trust.

Danecourt School in Medway, Kent, supports a huge cohort of 293 pupils with complex learning difficulties, autism and social emotional mental health needs across its main site and two satellite schools at Bligh Primary and Featherby Primary School.



Cathryn Falconer,  
headteacher of  
Danecourt School

## ‘Helping mainstream leaders to understand that thought process is one of the most revolutionary things’

Many MATs have opted not to take on special schools, with some leaders arguing they are “impossible” to accommodate. Lift Schools recently announced it was handing over its two special schools, which would be “best supported within a specialist trust”.

But Danecourt School, part of the Maritime Academy Trust, says its approach has proved successful.

What started as ad-hoc continuing professional development sessions has now led to a comprehensive outreach programme led by two dedicated staff members.

This involves setting up specialist hubs across the trust schools, a library of training resources for teachers and a peer-review network for SENCos.

There are in-year reviews for SEND pupils with Danecourt’s educational psychologist and

termly in-reach days for partner schools to visit Danecourt and observe its classes.

“It’s moving away from that deficit model, so really focusing on what the children can do, because those measures are now in place,” says headteacher Cathryn Falconer. “You are able to celebrate what they can do.”

At nearby mainstream Bligh, Featherby and Barnsole primary schools, around 30 per cent of pupils have an education, health and care plan.

Most of these pupils have autism spectrum disorder (ASD), or a range of communication and interaction, social and emotional needs.

Sophie Gosnell, one of the two outreach team members, says work was not aimed at removing children from mainstream classrooms, but equipping schools with “strategies to help them and support them in different environments”.

## LONG READ

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK**Upskilling and supporting teachers**

While many teachers have completed the specialist training run by Danecourt, they are free to contact the outreach team with further questions at any time.

Pupils on an education and health care plan are placed on a “track”, which offers a bespoke developmental path depending on their level of need.

Teachers can also request an in-year review with Danecourt’s educational psychologist for struggling pupils.

This comes in the context of a long-term national shortage of educational psychologists. Medway Council has reduced its own service to “meet statutory work”, the council said.

It costs £1,800 for three in-school reviews, which is divided between Bligh, Featherby and Barnsole Primary Schools.

“We go in with a really friendly approach,” outreach team member Emma Cotton explains. “We’re not just sat there taking notes, and we don’t just hand them their write-up and walk away.

“We see the process through, and we go back and check, ‘are you OK? Is that working? Do you need any tweaks? Is there something else that we can support with that you need?’ So, it’s that continual process that we have been offering.”

Emma Pape, headteacher at Featherby Primary, says the track system provides staff with the “reassurance and confidence to know what they are doing is right, because every teacher wants to do the right thing, but you haven’t had that experience, or you haven’t been trained”.

Christian Markham, Bligh’s headteacher, agrees. “It’s already started to solidify what progress for certain children looks like, and to celebrate that with parents, to celebrate that with the children and the staff.”

Teacher training is also where the story began for Addington Valley Academy’s outreach programme 18 months ago.

A new free school built in Croydon in 2021, Addington Valley supports 150 pupils with autism and complex needs.

But, unlike Danecourt, the majority of schools Addington Valley has been helping are not part of its sponsor, the Orchard Hill College Academy Trust.

Principal John Reilly describes a “trickle” of



## ‘We go in with a really friendly approach’

requests from neighbouring mainstream schools to look around the school or participate in training.

“We’re quite unique here because, unlike many special schools, the environment here was built for the cohort rather than you’ve got a building and you have to make do.”

Another unusual feature of the school is training. All members of staff at Addington Valley – regardless of seniority – must complete three to four weeks of training on using specialist approaches before entering the classroom.

These features piqued the interest of local leaders and, 18 months later, Reilly and vice principal for primary Anna Huzzey have supported more than 20 schools with teacher training or in setting up their resourced provision.

Huzzey remembers visiting schools and highlighting ways in which spaces could be made more SEND inclusive.

“Do we need all this furniture? What is it you actually need? What sort of resources do you have? Are they easily accessible so students aren’t having to communicate to get them?” are among the questions they asked.

“It’s all of those little things that, until you’ve done this job for a while, you don’t think about,” she says.

**Individual pupil support**

While much of Danecourt’s outreach has focused on upskilling teachers, it also provides individual pupil support.

The outreach team has run 20 in-year reviews for pupils struggling in mainstream settings at the request of their teacher.

The Maritime Trust has even commissioned its own educational psychologist to conduct the reviews, now in their second year.

The outreach team and teacher attend and have a conversation around the barriers and concerns around that pupil’s learning.

Focusing on individual pupil support has had some transformative outcomes. Team member Gosnell recalls a girl at Bligh Primary who spent most of her time in the specialist hub at the start of the academic year. She is now accessing around three-quarters of mainstream classes.

At Christmas, teachers didn’t think the pupil would cope during nativity rehearsals.

“On the day that all the parents were in, she saw what was going on. She just went in, got on stage and did this performance out of nowhere,” Gosnell explains.

“I think that was the first sign for them that she does want to be involved, but it’s knowing how to be and what’s appropriate. She still does need her time, and she’s got her visuals that she can ask for in her time out.”

## LONG READ

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

Focusing on how to support pupils within mainstream settings before they may need to be removed has been “revolutionary” at St Helen’s Alternative Provision service, according to its headteacher Michael Power.

Power, who took over as headteacher in September 2024, began offering visits to local mainstream schools to observe pupils who were struggling with their behaviour.

His team looks at “how we would work to keep that child in a lesson in our school”.

This includes observing pupils within class before having a “proper case discussion” around them with relevant parties.

They discuss the child’s background and home life, their behaviour presentation and what interventions could be put in place to support them.

Power recalls one of his own pupils sleeping for two hours in the morning because he had witnessed his family members arguing the night before.

“If we force him, [say] ‘you’ve got to be in class, you’ve got to learn’, we’re not coming off to having that, and then actually we’re going to have a day of lost learning.

“Helping mainstream leaders to understand that thought process, I think it’s one of the most revolutionary things.”

Pupils who have been referred to his AP are more likely to return to mainstream, Power says.

Since January 2025, he has successfully reintegrated 80 pupils from his AP back into their original schools. Before, he estimates less than five pupils were reintegrated per year.

The government has been testing a similar model of early intervention in mainstream setting with support from APs in its change programme. It is unclear whether it will seek to build on those pilots in the white paper.

### The key to success – and challenges

One theme became clear through each outreach example: trust between leaders.

John Smales, head of Maritime’s Barnsole Primary, says: “We’ve got very similar schools, not just in size, but the demographics. We do work very collaboratively.

“We share good things that are happening – successes. But we are also quite open and feel



confident to talk about some of the barriers and the challenges we face.”

Power also wants to see leaders working closely together in St Helen’s, rather than the system seeming “desperate and different depending on where you live in the borough”.

“There can be a real habit of mainstream heads and AP and SEND heads almost being worlds apart,” he says.

“But actually, when we sit around the same table and say ‘actually, we’ve all got the same aim and it is to educate children to the best of our abilities, how could we work together to make that happen?’”

But according to Falconer, capacity is a key challenge in sharing expertise.

“It would be great if we could offer even more training and people within mainstream school, but it comes down to capacity ... and we’re a big special school so we need staff in here as well.

“So that is a barrier, but I think, as we develop, we are looking at how we can overcome those barriers.”

Some benefits come from being part of a larger trust with more resources. Gosnell’s outreach role is paid for by the trust, and all services – other than the educational psychologist – are free of charge for the mainstream schools.

At Addington Valley Academy, Reilly and Huzzy only charge for bespoke requests that require preparation. Formal training packages over one to three days are given for free.

“We believe in our advocacy role, and that is very much a thread that runs through everything that our schools do,” Reilly adds.

Falconer adds: “These children aren’t going to go anywhere, and so I suppose we’ve got more confidence to try different things as well, because we are a team. So, we are happier to try different things, and we know it’s right for the children.”

# THE BOARDROOM LEADER

The governance view on education's top priorities



## Boards are too critical to only think about when crises hit

### Sam Henson

Deputy CEO, National Governance Association



Governance rarely makes the headlines. But it sits at the centre of almost every school and trust success story.

Across England, governing boards provide the stability, scrutiny and long-term thinking that organisations rely on.

The evidence is clear: where governance is strong, leadership is better supported, organisations are more resilient and improvement lasts.

In many ways, governance in schools and trusts has never been stronger, with more skilled and diverse boards and greater confidence among governors and trustees.

Yet often it goes unrecognised. The system overall continues to treat governance as secondary. It is under-utilised where it should be central; tolerated where it should be treasured.

### Fewer trust scandals doesn't mean governance is perfect

In the early years of multi-academy trusts, governance was firmly in the spotlight. Ministers, inquiries and the media focused on failures and lessons learned.

As boards improved and major crises became rarer, the conversation gradually faded.

I am by no means mourning the lack of high-drama governance failures, but we shouldn't confuse silence with safety.

When we stop actively examining if things are not right, we stop preventing failure.

Cross-sector evidence shows that even the most sustained, principled organisations can allow governance to meander quietly until crisis arrives.

Governance failure is rarely sudden. It's gradual. Weak challenge goes unchecked. Unclear roles create confusion. Oversight gaps widen slowly. By the time intervention arrives, the damage has often already spread.

The evidence that the National Governance Association (NGA) has collected and written about in our new report – [The Case for Governance](#) – shows governance in England is largely



succeeding.

Yes, in some places it could be better, but it is making a huge difference.

Yet we could get more from it. It's just not yet fully enabled. The Case for Governance is a pitch to let governance benefit the sector even more.

### Other sectors treat boards as key infrastructure

Around 230,000 people currently govern schools and trusts, contributing more than 35 million hours annually. Yet the sector still doesn't talk universally about governance as indispensable infrastructure.

Other sectors do. In big companies, charities and the NHS, governance sits at the heart of organisational life. It is invested in, respected and treated as fundamental. When governance fails, the consequences are taken seriously.

What makes education different? Nothing in principle. But in practice, we haven't given governance the prominence it commands elsewhere. We acknowledge it matters without organising the system around that reality.

### Four unique capacities of governance

The case we have built rests on what governance uniquely provides - four core capacities no other part of the system replicates.

1. Governance as leadership - not support to leadership, but leadership itself. The board is a collective sense-maker, with a generative function probing assumptions and shaping how problems are understood before solutions are proposed.
2. Governance as responsiveness - unlike inspection, governance is embedded within organisations and operates continuously.

When budget pressures intensify, or workforce challenges emerge, good boards don't just react - they anticipate, interpret and adapt.

3. Governance as answerability - decisions are explainable, justifiable and transparent. In an increasingly centralised system, boards anchor schools in the communities they serve. When governance provides this well, trust is maintained. When it fails, legitimacy erodes.
4. Governance as stewardship - careful, ethical care of public resources and long-term sustainability. Boards have no self-interest, making them focused on the bigger picture.

### Weak boards mean risks go unnoticed

Our research is clear. Where governance is strong, organisations are more strategic, more resilient and better-equipped to navigate leadership change and complex decisions.

Where it is weak, leaders become isolated, risks go unnoticed and intervention becomes inevitable.

The real question is not whether governance matters, but whether the system is willing to treat it as essential infrastructure.

That means investing in capability, designing policy with governance in mind and building accountability systems which integrate boards rather than bypass them.

This is a pivotal moment. Not because governance is failing, but because its importance is growing while recognition lags behind.

Governance is not a safety net. It is the foundation of sustained success, and foundations only hold when they are deliberately built, maintained and valued.

## Opinion

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## DEVON OAKLEY-HOGG

English lead, Avanti Grange  
Secondary and  
co-founder, One Full Round

## We need to end the silence and stigma for staff undergoing IVF

**Teachers are one of the more affected groups when it comes to infertility. So why are adequate and supportive policies few and far between, asks Devon-Louise Oakley-Hogg**

It's been nearly two years since I undertook three rounds of egg collection for in vitro fertilisation (IVF) in the hope of having the baby we were desperate for.

While I have certainly tried futilely to forget it, every appointment, every disappointment still lives within me, on a cellular level.

Every phone call taken in-between lessons. Every smile fixed in place so my students wouldn't see the cracks. Every cover lesson put hastily together, still there. Worst of all, the guilt of leaving my classes to fend for themselves while I was fighting to create life.

### A quiet crisis in schools

My experience is far from unique. Around one in six adults globally are affected by infertility, and research suggests those working in education are more likely to experience subfertility than many other professions.

Yet despite this, teachers undergoing fertility treatment have no legal entitlement to fertility leave, and paid policies in schools crop up once in a blue moon.

The result is a quiet crisis. Many

teachers are already paying tens of thousands of pounds to try to start their families.

At the same time, they risk lost income when attending unavoidable medical appointments, building insurmountable financial and professional pressure that only further contributes to stigma and silence.

A recent workplace infertility stigma survey found that one in four teachers would rather call in sick than disclose fertility treatment, while only 17 per cent reported their workplace had a supportive policy.

One in five even feared career consequences if their employer knew they were trying to conceive.

For a profession already facing recruitment and retention challenges, this should concern every school leader.

The MP Alice Macdonald's recent fertility workplace pledge recognises the need for employers to provide paid time off for treatment. Schools should see this not simply as a compassionate gesture, but as a strategic investment in staff wellbeing and retention.

If roughly 17.5 per cent of adults are affected by infertility, that equates to tens of thousands of teachers who may require support at some point in their careers.

So what can schools realistically do?



“No one chooses this journey. But schools can choose compassion”

### Consider adopting this model policy

Fertility treatment sits in an awkward grey area. It's medically necessary, yet often excluded from medical leave policies.

The physical and emotional toll is significant, and appointments are rarely predictable.

Schools need policies that reflect this reality. A supportive policy should allow flexibility for short-notice appointments and include paid leave covering a full round of treatment, from initial investigations to embryo transfer.

Free model policies, such as those developed by One Full Round, offer practical starting points grounded in lived experience.

Clear guidance reduces uncertainty for staff and managers alike, making open conversations possible without fear of financial or professional penalty.

### Awareness and training are key

Fertility treatment is complex. Teachers should not have to educate their managers while navigating one of the most stressful experiences of their lives.

Training for line managers

and human resources staff can foster informed, compassionate conversations about scheduling, medication storage and reasonable adjustments.

Access to reliable resources, and opportunities for peer support, helps normalise fertility discussions, reducing stigma and isolation.

For many, treatment involves grieving a future they assumed was guaranteed.

A supportive workplace cannot remove that pain, but it can prevent work becoming an added burden to someone already so weighed down by fertility issues.

Teachers spend their days shaping the futures of other people's children. Those facing infertility often do so while quietly carrying grief, shame and longing for their own.

They should not have to choose between protecting their livelihood, pursuing their vocation and trying to build a family.

No one chooses this journey. But schools can choose compassion and support and send a clear message that the people who give so much of themselves deserve workplaces that stand beside them as human beings, not just employees.

## Opinion

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## CAROLYN ROBERTS

Secretary, The Ethical Leadership Alliance

## Resist the panicky zeitgeist, be brave curriculum makers

**We can shape the curriculum to broaden horizons and ensure young people find work or training, but it takes time and courage, says Carolyn Roberts**

How do leaders think when they make choices? Could they be helped to resist the panicky zeitgeist and think about what's best for children in the longer term?

The Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education was designed to encourage us all to understand our responsibilities as public servants, so it starts with the seven values of the principles of public life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

School leaders were never meant to be robots, but role models for the young. How they behave is as important as what they do.

Leadership is rooted in personal characteristics and these are the virtues of the framework: trust, wisdom, kindness, justice, service, courage and optimism.

### Let's become curriculum makers

We hold trust for children when we think hard.

How can we take advantage of reduced prescription? What local opportunities open up, especially for those who cling onto academic expectations by their fingertips?

More arts and PE? Learning

outside the classroom? With local employers? What about tackling real-life challenges collaboratively: racism, poverty and the climate emergency?

We can show wisdom in a principled response to the transition challenge, planning curriculums smoothly and collaboratively, ending the own-goal repetition at secondary transfer which is particularly disastrous for disadvantaged higher-attaining students who switch off by the end of year 7.

We can demonstrate kindness in the practicalities of enabling teachers to become curriculum makers rather than other peoples' curriculum-deliverers. They'll need time to think in a new way.

### NEET prevention

Justice runs through the curriculum and assessment review (CAR). It aims to stop so many of the forgotten third dropping into NEET (not in education, employment or training).

It seeks to broaden horizons through music, and for young people to see themselves in the revised curriculum and take their proper place in the world. And it aims for a better approach to enrichment.

Service means we take our responsibility to sustain a national high-quality education system seriously, rebuilding curriculums



“Many will be wary of their own curriculum thinking capacity”

thoughtfully and resisting any pressure to be the first or the best to do it, take shortcuts or adopt others' oven-ready solutions.

Curriculum-making teachers are expected to “innovate and respond to local needs”, using “flexibility to extend the curriculum and draw out its relevance for the young people in their classrooms”. They'll need principled support from their leaders. It is hugely important.

We can show courage as we embrace this chance to rebuild a broad, effective and creative education for all children and young people, trusting that our hard work now could effect a better future for them.

That's how we stay optimistic.

Despite difficulties and pressures, we are developing excellent education to change the world for the better.

We are moving from the closed, static “best that has been thought and said” to “an entitlement to the most important knowledge that we expect children and young people to learn, both for their benefit and for the benefit of the nation”.

### We need courage

The Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education is not a manual. It requires a leader to scrutinise motivations and choices though personal, professional reflection before any decision.

It expects a commitment to consistent self-analytical thinking and a level of scepticism about simple solutions.

School leaders are battered by blunt accountability measures, and many will be wary of their own curriculum thinking capacity.

The CAR's vision of each school offering better engagement, enrichment and place-based learning alongside the best of all knowledge will indeed need trust, wisdom, service, and optimism.

A bit of justice and kindness from the Department for Education wouldn't go amiss either, because none of it can happen without time. Time, as ever, is money.

Most of all, we need courage. Courage to allow ourselves to think big about what we can do with a bit less prescription and a bit more time. It's time to be brave enough to make a difference.

## Opinion

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CHRIS  
MORRIS

CEO, Full Fact

## Misinformation is a challenge teachers can't face alone

**Teachers need help defending evidence-based debate, or they may shy away from challenges or inadvertently spread misinformation themselves, writes Chris Morris**

Every day, teachers share a challenge that we face as fact checkers: the rapid emergence of an online world in which notions of objective reality are under threat, and a shared understanding of truth is being eroded.

It presents a profound challenge for the profession. Teachers are increasingly expected to act not only as subject specialists, but also as arbiters of reliable knowledge.

Pupils, and indeed teachers, arrive in classrooms exposed to a constant stream of information from social media, influencers and online communities that often think opinion is the same as evidence.

This can make teaching established scientific, historical or civic knowledge more contentious, particularly when facts don't support narratives that individuals have absorbed at home or online.

Some teachers may find themselves navigating accusations of bias or indoctrination simply for following the national curriculum or a broad scientific consensus.

The pressure is intensified by the bewildering pace and volume of information which circulates in our

24/7 society.

This leaves little time for careful verification, and it is essential to recognise that teachers - just like the rest of us - can be vulnerable themselves.

### Teachers aren't immune from misinformation

Teachers already face heavy workloads which reduce opportunities for engaging properly with emerging research or media literacy training.

In such conditions, even well-intentioned teachers may sometimes rely on oversimplified sources or outdated materials, or persuasive but unreliable content shared within personal or professional networks.

This creates a real risk that misinformation can seep into lessons, assemblies or classroom discussions without being recognised as what it is.

This should not come as a surprise. Teachers are members of society too, and can fall victim to the same fears, and the same algorithmic biases, as everyone else.

### 40 per cent of pupils say relatives believe conspiracy theories

Conspiracy thinking and mistrust of institutions do not stop at the school gate. One of the first steps in dealing with them effectively is to recognise that misinformation is an all-of-society problem.



## Teachers may find themselves navigating accusations of bias

Some 40 per cent of pupils had encountered relatives believing information they would consider a conspiracy theory, in research by the Commission into Countering Online Conspiracy Theories in Schools, supported by the Pears Foundation.

Meanwhile 27 per cent of pupils had experienced a relationship with a relative becoming difficult because of the older adult's opinions.

Teachers are not always immune from this. When professional judgement is constantly scrutinised by parents, senior leaders, inspectors and the wider public, there is also a temptation to cling to clear-cut answers or popular narratives rather than engage with uncertainty and complexity.

Without structured support and high-quality continuing professional development, some teachers may also unconsciously reproduce misleading claims, particularly in fast-moving areas such as health, technology or climate science.

### We must help teachers defend evidence-based debate

Ultimately, this poses a danger not only to educational standards but to the civic role of our schools.

If teachers themselves lose confidence in the idea of shared

facts, it becomes far harder to build the critical thinking and respect for evidence that pupils need.

The curriculum and assessment review's commitment to strengthening media literacy through citizenship and English provides an important foundation for this, creating space for pupils to learn how evidence is constructed, tested and debated.

This work must be woven into everyday classroom practice rather than treated as a standalone discipline.

Teachers should be supported as defenders of evidence-based debate, not left to navigate misinformation alone, which is why the direction set out by the review is so welcome.

To that end, it is essential that schools and the wider education system provide consistent, high-quality support for all their staff.

Only then will they feel confident and well-equipped to respond to conspiracy beliefs wherever these arise, whether in the classroom or across the wider school community.

Creating a culture of trust, openness and learning recognises a simple truth: we're all human.

Like pupils, teachers need support rather than sanction to navigate these complex issues effectively.

## Opinion

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

**Keeping support staff and unqualified teachers by helping them upskill on the job has been transformative, write Luke Dootson and Jackie Barbera**

Continuity matters when it comes to improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged children.

For pupils who experience exclusion, instability, or long stretches of disrupted learning, trust is hard-won, routines fragile, and progress can evaporate if familiar adults move on.

For teacher trainees in settings where pupils need support with their social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH), the most appropriate path to becoming a high-quality teacher is often one that allows them to stay with the pupils they have come to know.

That is why the postgraduate teacher apprenticeship (PGTA) is so valuable in specialist settings like ours at EdStart, where relationships underpin everything.

Being able to employ unqualified teachers, support staff and teaching assistants and help them qualify as teachers has been transformative for our schools.

Edstart supports pupils with complex social, emotional and mental health needs across a network of centres in the north west. Behaviour can be volatile, so positive learning outcomes depend on composed staff and consistent relational work.

#### **Predictable adults, predictable lessons**

Predictable adults support predictable lessons, which lowers anxiety and increases engagement, especially for pupils with neurodiversity or high levels of school-related stress.

Staff who know their pupils' triggers, histories and ambitions can de-escalate issues quickly and keep learning on track.

The PGTA route helps our schools preserve that stability while growing a pipeline of qualified teachers who truly understand our context.

## Postgrad teacher apprentices give our pupils the stability they need

LUKE  
DOOTSON

Early career  
English teacher



JACKIE  
BARBERA

Director of  
professional  
development at  
Edstart Schools



The model works because it blends evidence-informed study with immediate application. Apprentices learn a strategy one week and test it the next, with pupils they will continue to teach after they qualify. In an SEMH

#### **Filling the specialist workforce gap**

Mentoring is the hinge that makes this work. Our relationship as trainee and mentor has been collegiate rather than remedial.

Conversations are frank, rooted

“Staff who know pupils' triggers, histories and ambitions can de-escalate issues

classroom, that tight theory-practice loop is crucial.

In specialist settings, techniques that read well on paper are different in practice, such as when a “minor disruption” is not a whisper across a desk, but a shouted interruption that risks tipping the room.

The immediacy and context-specific training that apprenticeships provide make it easier to adapt practice quickly and see what sticks with the pupils in front of you.

in shared knowledge of pupils and underpinned by trust which we started building before the apprenticeship year started.

In our experience, this kind of mentorship is not about telling trainees what to do. We are constantly working together.

Senior leaders understand this and protect the time and space trainees need to excel, including by ring-fencing study time and external training commitments.



The PGTA also helps schools with workforce planning. Many specialist settings struggle to recruit teachers who want to – and are ready to – succeed in such an environment. Training strong internal candidates who already show the right values and resilience reduces risk.

#### **Returning to pupils who already trust them**

The route provides trainees with a contrasting placement in a mainstream school, too. Exposure to other settings is vital, and apprentices benefit enormously from an alternative placement that stretches subject pedagogy and behaviour repertoires in a different context.

Bringing back ideas, on areas including curriculum sequencing and literacy routines, strengthens practice in the home school as well.

Crucially, the apprentice returns to pupils who already trust them, so new strategies are embedded faster and with fewer false starts.

There are, however, conditions for success. Schools must invest in skilled mentors with time to observe, coach and champion their trainees. Leaders need the confidence – and clout – to ring-fence study time and protect release for weekly training.

And the apprenticeship should sit within a whole-school development culture, so that a trainee's gains are shared across departments and cohorts rather than locked in one classroom.

Stability changes what pupils believe is possible. When a trainee trains, qualifies and remains, trust grows and learning follows.

Our message to school leaders considering the PGTA is simple. When training is rooted in continuity and backed by great mentoring, pupils feel it – and outcomes follow.

# Opinion

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

**Research shows those closest to the frontline worry more over issues like finances. The authors argue it shows building shared understanding is vital**

Leadership and governance are experienced differently depending on where you sit. Understanding how those perspectives align, and where they quietly diverge, matters more than ever as schools and trusts operate under sustained pressure. We have spent time over the past year asking people who govern and lead schools and colleges how governance is experienced in practice.

Not in theory or in board papers, but in the everyday business of running increasingly complex organisations.

ImpactEd Group's Beyond the Agenda research reflects the experiences of those collectively responsible for around 40,000 learners. It draws on responses from more than 500 governance and leadership stakeholders across schools, trusts and post-16 settings.

The overall picture is positive. What was heard was rarely dramatic. But alongside effective relationships and systems that broadly work, pressure is being absorbed unevenly across organisations.

**Less senior figures are less confident**

Those closest to delivery often compensate for stretched structures, holding things together through resilience and goodwill. When organisations rely on individuals to absorb strain, risk becomes normalised and early warning signs are dulled.

This matters because confidence is not evenly distributed. Across the dataset, confidence declines the closer a role is to day-to-day delivery. Those with governance responsibility tend to feel more confident about feasibility and sustainability. Leaders closer to delivery are less so.

The clearest illustration of this is on financial sufficiency. Asked to rate their

## Leaders and boards see things differently. Aligning takes work

DR RAJBIR HAZELWOOD

Director at ImpactEd Group



KAMAL BODHANKER

Head of leadership faculty at National Institute of Teaching



confidence out of 10 that they have the financial resources to deliver strategic goals, trustees' responses averaged 7.1.

Executive leaders scored the same question at 6.44. School governors scored 5.26. School leaders reported the lowest confidence of all, at 4.44. The resulting 2.66-point gap between

Boards judge confidence based on information and perspectives available to them. Leaders closer to delivery judge feasibility based on what it takes to make decisions work in real conditions.

When those judgments are not aligned, governance can look settled

“ Alignment is not about agreement on everything

trustees and school leaders is the largest divergence in the dataset.

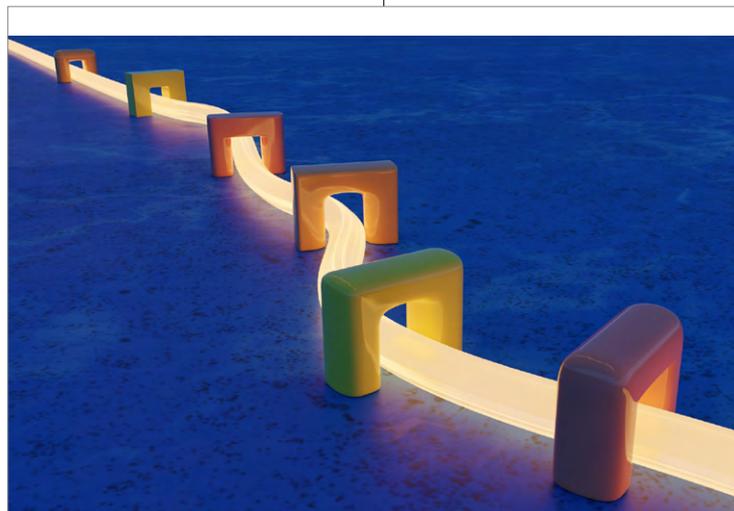
**Seeing the full picture**

This might look like a difference of opinion, but it raises a harder question about how assurance is formed.

from one position while becoming quietly fragile from another.

This is not just about money. Similar differences appear elsewhere, including around stakeholder engagement.

In schools, governance stakeholders



are consistently less confident than leaders that engagement with children, families and communities is systematic and informing decision-making.

This does not mean engagement is not happening. It means governance is less sure it is seeing the full picture. Uncertainty matters for assurance.

**Alignment is about shared understanding**

Leading a trust is complex and demanding, and the relationship between chief executives and boards plays a significant role in the quality of decision-making.

Emphasis on how governance is experienced in practice aligns closely with research on the National Institute of Teaching's (NiOT) CEO programme, where governance is treated as inseparable from executive leadership rather than as a technical or compliance function.

To further build awareness and understanding of the importance of board relationships and alignment, NiOT is now building the Beyond the Agenda research and benchmarks into the next wave of the School Trust CEO Programme.

Data collection will be facilitated by The Engagement Platform (TEP). Without cost, it offers all schools, trusts and colleges the opportunity to assess leadership and governance alignment, and compare their patterns with emerging benchmarks, as we build out the national dataset.

Alignment is not about agreement on everything, but about shared understanding of pressure, trade-offs and sustainability in practice. We are both committed to this work because governance that embraces and acts on this self-reflection stands the greatest chance of being resilient in choppy waters, not just calm seas.

## Opinion

WANT TO WRITE FOR SCHOOLS WEEK? CONTACT US  
OPINION@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



## SIMON LIGHTMAN

Educator and researcher  
in sustainability and global  
citizenship education

## Why many schools ignore the climate, and how to fix that

**It's not that staff don't care, but sustainability always gets squeezed unless you find ways to embed it in decision-making, writes Simon Lightman**

If sustainability really matters to schools, why does it so often slip down the priority list the moment accountability pressure rises?

That question feels especially pressing right now. 2025 was the warmest and sunniest year on record in the UK, and globally the past two years sit at the very top of historical temperature records.

These are not neutral statistics. They reflect accelerating climate change and its growing negative impacts, from extreme weather to the wider social and economic conditions young people now grow up in.

### Sustainability is treated as optional

Yet in many schools, sustainability lives at the edges. It appears as enrichment: a student group, a themed week, or a cluster of projects driven by committed staff.

Often these initiatives are thoughtful - but fragile. When timetables tighten, exam pressures intensify, or inspection looms, sustainability is usually squeezed.

This is not because school leaders do not care. The problem is that sustainability is still treated as optional, not essential.

Schools are not neutral containers into which new priorities can simply be dropped.

What is timetabled gets protected. What is assessed gets taken seriously. What is inspected gets prioritised. Anything outside these structures struggles to endure.

When sustainability depends on individual champions rather than institutional design, it remains exposed.

Staff move on, leadership priorities shift and initiative fatigue sets in. It may be visible or even celebrated, but sustainability rarely becomes sustainable.

### Sustainability can learn from safeguarding

It cannot be solved through better projects alone. It is not primarily a curriculum problem. It is a leadership and governance problem.

This is a question of purpose. It is not simply what students know about climate change or sustainability, but rather what kind of people schools are quietly shaping them to be in response to ecological and social uncertainty.

When sustainability is treated as peripheral, the implicit message is it matters less than the real business of schooling. That in turn is too often reduced to individual attainment and personal success.

Schools do not exist only to produce qualifications. They are places where young people learn



“Sustainability needs to follow the same path safeguarding has taken”

how to live with others, exercise responsibility and relate to the world beyond themselves.

In that sense, schools help sustain social cohesion, democratic life and the conditions in which both human and non-human worlds can flourish.

An analogy is useful. Sustainability needs to follow the same path safeguarding has taken over the past two decades.

It was once seen as a narrow concern. Today, safeguarding cuts across leadership, policy, training, and culture. No serious leader would describe it as optional.

Sustainability should be understood the same way - not as a project or bolt-on, but a responsibility that informs decisions across the institution. That does not mean schools suddenly doing everything differently. It means doing ordinary things with wider consequences in mind.

### Let's appoint sustainability leads

In practical terms, this could begin by ensuring nature has a seat at the leadership table. Some schools are beginning to do this through a designated sustainability lead working with senior leaders,

students, staff, and governors.

Their role is not to run projects, but to help ask better questions, ensuring environmental and social impacts are considered in curriculum planning, estates decisions, partnerships and strategy.

None of this removes the pressure school leaders operate under. Inspection, accountability, parental expectation and progression routes remain real constraints.

But pretending sustainability can thrive without engaging those structures is wishful thinking. If sustainability is to move beyond symbolic inclusion, it must be aligned with leadership, governance, curriculum and accountability, not left at the margins.

If schools are serious about long-term educational purpose, leadership and accountability, sustainability cannot remain an optional extra. It needs to be understood as part of the core work of education.

The question, then, is not whether schools can afford to embed sustainability more deeply. It is whether we can afford for them not to.

## Opinion

WANT TO WRITE FOR SCHOOLS WEEK? CONTACT US  
OPINION@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK



## LISA-MARIA MÜLLER

Associate director: research and policy, Chartered College of Teaching

## Teachers need agency to thrive - we're exploring how and why

**Agency is often misinterpreted and overlooked, but giving teachers themselves more capacity to act would bring wide-ranging benefits, writes Lisa-Maria Müller**

Teacher agency is an important concept, yet often misinterpreted and overlooked.

The Chartered College of Teaching's new working group aims to address this.

Teacher agency is pivotal to developing confident, expert practitioners who feel empowered within our profession, as one member of the group, Tracy Goodyear, has said.

**Agency is key for wellbeing,** recruitment and retention England continues to face substantial teacher shortages. Many important initiatives across research and policy aim to understand and address the problem.

Yet they fail to address a core issue - the eroding trust in, and status of, the teaching profession.

Being trusted as a professional, and having agency over one's teaching and professional development, positively impacts job satisfaction, wellbeing and intention to stay in the profession.

Having agency over instructional decisions can also help teachers to adapt teaching and assessments to

meet the diverse needs of students in their classrooms.

This makes it particularly timely, given the focus on inclusion in the updated Ofsted inspection framework - as well as the curriculum and assessment review and the upcoming white paper.

### **Standardisation, centralisation and restrictive accountability**

Yet in England, policy decisions have largely been characterised by increased autonomy at the structural or school level - as with the creation of free schools.

This has happened alongside decreasing agency at the individual teacher level, due to centralisation, standardisation and restrictive accountability systems.

Standardisation can be helpful, and accountability is essential.

But these need to leave sufficient freedom for teachers to exercise their professional judgment - based on a combination of their professional expertise, the latest available evidence and knowledge of their contexts and students.

Essentially, teacher agency describes teachers' ability to act, which can be helped or hindered by the system they operate in.

### **Teachers need agency over CPD**

We know that using evidence is key to improving teaching.

For research to truly inform practice, teachers must actively



“ Policy decisions have largely been characterised by increased autonomy

understand, interpret and apply evidence in their different classrooms and contexts, as well as analysing and reflecting on the outcomes. This requires agency to make choices over practice.

Teachers also need agency over their continuing professional development (CPD) so that they can adapt it to suit their needs.

While whole-school CPD has its place, approaches that allow teachers to focus on areas of particular importance to them can positively impact their motivation to stay in the profession.

Teacher agency is not static. It emerges and evolves according to different contexts, and in relation to teachers' experience and expertise.

Too much agency too early on may be overwhelming, and may actually be counterproductive.

For teachers to exercise agency, they need to be adequately supported. Our working group will draw out what that could look like.

### **We will show why agency matters and what it looks like**

The new group brings together practitioners, academics and other key organisations.

We have already started work to develop a shared definition of teacher agency - which is no mean feat - and address prevailing misconceptions.

We aim to highlight why teacher agency matters for curriculum implementation, inclusion and job satisfaction.

We aim to illustrate what it looks like in practice, and show how policy-makers and school leaders can support it.

As Lekha Sharma, another member of the working group, puts it - we will develop a clear focus on teacher agency, and explore practical ways schools can actively foster it, creating supportive cultures of continuous improvement.

You can find out more about the group's aims and members on The Chartered College of Teaching's [website](#).

We will be publishing regular updates in a blog series, and sharing insights from the discussions on social media.

So make sure to follow The Chartered College of Teaching on LinkedIn and BlueSky, and let us know what you think.

Week in

# Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

## MONDAY

Cabinet ministers and Labour MPs lined up to post their support for the prime minister as the government entered another week of crisis entirely of its own making.

But some put more effort into their display of support than others...

Instead of composing a written post on X, education secretary Bridget Phillipson posted a screenshot of a pre-typed statement, leading to speculation that her team simply copied lines sent by Downing Street.

It doesn't help that the font in the screenshot is very similar to that used in Labour communications, such as on the party's website...

Early education minister Olivia Bailey posted something similar ... again with a similar font ...



\*\*\*

Education traditionalists and Tory politicians were bleating about a school's uniform update which went viral on their favourite hellsite, X, this week.

Admittedly, the new uniforms featured in the video clip from a BBC news item are an unconventional choice, but they are hardly an attempt to "erase our culture", as the account that went viral with the video claimed.

But we suspect many posters, including the shadow education secretary Laura Trott, didn't check the page of the account they were re-posting, which is littered with anti-immigrant rhetoric and anti-vax conspiracies.

\*\*\*

After months of arguing, the children's wellbeing and schools bill passed at third reading in the House of Lords.

However, much argument awaits as the Lords, mostly those on the opposition benches, had quite a bit of success in amending the bill, much to the chagrin of Labour.

Starmer's party still commands a stonking majority in the Commons, which will now consider Lords amendments under a system called "ping-pong".

Expect this stage to go on for some time as the two houses bat the bill back and forth until an agreement is reached.

Baroness Barran, the shadow education minister, issued her own weather report at the third reading.

"If this bill had been a weather forecast," she told peers, "I think it might have been for the west coast of Scotland in November.

"It has felt at times quite depressing, with a lot of rain and clouds, and only rare glimpses of sunshine."

A new career at the Met Office awaits...

## TUESDAY

Much of the debate around smartphones and social media has focused on the harm caused to children. This is obviously right, but the debate often overlooks the fact that many adults also spend too long glued to their devices.

Schools minister Georgia Gould admitted in the House of Commons this week that she "would not really like to consider my own screen time", praising another MP as "brave" for doing so.

One way the DfE could limit screen time for its ministers and officials would be to stop issuing press releases at around 5pm for the next day, forcing all concerned to work on their screens into the night (this entry definitely wasn't written by a journalist who spent their Tuesday night writing about inclusion bases...).





## Chief Executive Officer

Contract type: Permanent

Pay Scale: £154,061 – £167,321 per annum

Location: Olympus central offices- Winterbourne

At the Olympus Academy Trust, our ambition is for every school to deliver an exceptional education for children and young people. We are committed to ensuring that all students benefit from the highest standards of teaching, strong resources and rich learning opportunities. Although the educational landscape is demanding, it creates exciting opportunities for talented and inspirational professionals to make a significant impact and shape a powerful legacy.

We seek applicants who share our vision and possess the drive, talent and determination to realise it. Our central team provides comprehensive support across leadership, school improvement, legal services, finance, administration, admissions, marketing, premises, safeguarding and HR. We believe the roles within our Trust are uniquely rewarding, supported by a collaborative and expert Olympus team. Contributing to the evolution of modern, forward thinking education is a privilege, and we welcome the ideas and aspirations of all who join us.



We are now seeking a Chief Executive Officer who leads with authenticity, champions inclusive and high quality education, and builds strong, collaborative relationships across the Trust and with wider partners. Working closely with a committed Board, a skilled Executive Team and exceptional school leaders, the CEO will drive our shared ambition for every learner to thrive.

The Chief Executive Officer will be an outstanding strategic leader, able to articulate and model the Trust's vision, values and ethos with clarity and conviction. They will inspire and empower others to embed these principles across all schools. Bringing a proven track record in successful school leadership, the CEO will take overall accountability for the performance and development of every academy within the Trust.

**Closing date: 11th March**

**Interviews: w/c 16th march**



## 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](#)



## 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](#)



seeat

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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## HEADTEACHER GREEN MEADOW PRIMARY SCHOOL

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

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

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

### They will:

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

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

We welcome applications from talented and experienced Head Teachers.

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

**Closing Date: 23rd February 2026**

**Interview Date: 10th March 2026**



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

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO](#)