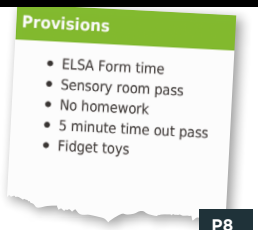
SCHOOLS WEEK

School leaders' favourite newspaper

No bluster, just the facts

SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK | FRIDAY, MAR 6, 2026 | EDITION 422

Most schools already create SEND plans



P8

Upheld SEND complaints up 25% in a year

P12

The DfE's maths on teachers doesn't add up

P22

LESSONS FROM RUSSIA'S NEIGHBOUR ON TACKLING DISINFORMATION

FEATURE | Pages 18-19

RISE up (the M6)

- 'Stuck' schools linked up with advisers based 100s of miles away
- Fears scheme could become 'desktop exercise' in some cases
- 1 in 10 participating schools matched with out of area adviser

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INVESTIGATION | Pages 9-10

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The Department for Education's technical note on school costs is released every year to little fanfare, but it's an important document.

This year we learn that schools (on average) only have the financial headroom to raise pay by 2.7 per cent over two years.

A rise equivalent to 1.35 per cent a year would no doubt put the government on a collision course with unions.

In its evidence to the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) last year, the government suggested a 6.5 per cent teacher pay rise over three years.

If pay only rose by 2.7 per cent over the next two years, that would leave schools having to find money for a near 4 per cent rise in the third year.

It has become a tediously inevitable factor of the system that the DfE makes a low pay recommendation, the STRB ignores it and the government is forced to hand out extra money through grant funding.

This results in a very complicated funding system, and can leave schools with a misleading view of their finances.

The government's decision to seek recommendations for three years of pay rises is a welcome attempt to provide a longer-term view of finances.

But that doesn't help schools if that longer-term view shows they are going to struggle to afford proper pay rises for their staff, nor if other decisions mean an endless stream of additional grants to cover things that, were the sector's finances healthy, could be met from annual rises in core funding.

Ministers are right to say pay has risen a lot in recent years, but this is in part due to the unions' success in the pay dispute in 2023.

The 6.5 per cent increase that year was hard-won, but nobody wants a repeat of the disruption it caused to schools.

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School leaders' favourite newspaper | No bluster, just the facts

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2. Private schools 'left in the dark' over potential academy conversion
3. Schools white paper: The key SEND reform policies
4. DfE eyes private special school veto
5. Schools in 'eye of the storm' of SEND complaints

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

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NEWS

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Trust will make big cuts after falling 500k into the red

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A prominent academy trust that issued six of its central team with Teslas will make huge cuts after plunging almost £500,000 into the red.

Aspirations Academies Trust plans to make more than £3 million of savings by "remodelling" its curriculum and staffing, reducing central support and "reshaping senior leadership structures" after racking up seven-figure losses last year.

The chain of 16 schools in west London, Oxfordshire and Dorset blamed unfunded pay awards and falling rolls for the downturn, as well as "unfavourable government policies".

A spokesperson said it was in regular contact with the Department for Education and had "a clear plan to rebuild reserves", adding: "Our priority remains providing an exceptional education for every pupil, and we are confident in the steps being taken to secure the trust's long-term stability."

Accounts show Aspirations ended the last financial year £486,000 in the red, having been just over £1 million in surplus 12 months earlier. Its policy is to have £3.1 million, equating to 4 per cent of income, in savings.

The board acknowledged "a material uncertainty exists, which may cast doubt on the trust's ability to continue as a going concern".

In its accounts, the trust attributed the

issues to "unfavourable government policies", inflation and increased pressures from external alternative and special needs provisions.

But the spokesperson stated the "small deficit" was mainly due to unfunded pay awards and falling pupil numbers in some schools.

"These are challenges facing trusts up and down the country. The accounts also reflect the write-off of some historic bad debts," they continued.

"We continue to have strong cashflow and a healthy cash balance and are not seeking financial support from the department."

In a bid to address the problem, the trust is planning "curriculum and staffing remodelling", which is expects to save it £1.4 million over the next two years.

It will reduce central support costs "through restructuring, role consolidation and efficiency reviews" to generate £200,000 in the first year, rising to £600,000.

Plans also include "reshaping senior leadership structures". This will involve implementing "benchmarked salary ranges, limits on senior posts, and alignment of school leadership structures to the trust model".

It expects these changes to generate £1.5 million of savings over two years.

Schools Week previously revealed that Aspirations had paid about £90,000 over three years to provide leased Tesla company cars to six of its central team.

The spokesperson did not respond when asked if the trust would continue to provide the cars.

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

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

The accounts also show Aspirations chief executive Steve Kenning's pay rose to between £275,000 and £280,000 in 2024-25.

His salary was the 10th highest in England, according to our chief executive pay audit last year.

Paula Kenning, his wife and deputy, earned £225,000 to £230,000.

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Schools told to stock up on allergy pens in draft guidance

Schools should stock spare allergy adrenaline pens, the government has proposed in new landmark guidance, but unions have warned this should be met with sufficient funding.

The Department for Education has opened an eight-week consultation on draft statutory guidance for allergies and medical conditions.

It follows campaigns to improve allergy safety in schools after the death of five-year-old Benedict Blythe, who died from an anaphylactic reaction at his school in Lincolnshire in December 2021.

Benedict's parents Helen and Peter Blythe said it was a "true turning point" for allergy safety and awareness in schools.

Early education minister Olivia Bailey is reported to have said schools will be expected to pay for the allergy pens out of their core budgets.

But Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the National Education Union, urged the government "to provide additional funding to cover this as the devices need to be bought from pharmacies and regularly checked against expiry dates".

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of school leaders union NAHT, added that the government needs be "confident that there are sufficient stocks maintained across the country".

The DfE said, in general, each school should purchase four spare pens. This works out at about 85,000 needed to cover primary, secondaries and special schools.

It will also put an open call out to businesses that would like to help with costs.

Generally, allergy pens can be bought from a pharmaceutical supplier, such as a local pharmacy, without prescription. A supplier will need a request signed by the headteacher including specific details.

Draft guidance also says that all staff should receive allergy awareness training, while "sufficient" training should be put in place to give teachers the confidence to support pupils with medical conditions.

The guidance will form an amendment to the children's wellbeing and schools bill, which will go to a vote on Monday.

Read a longer guide to the key points **here**.

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Ofqual boss hears pupils' confessions on AI

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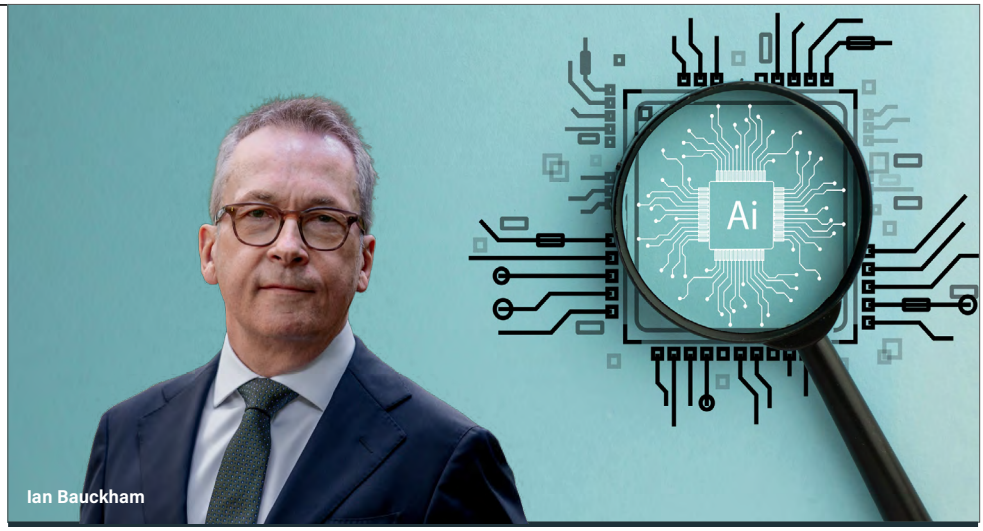

Ian Bauckham

'It's getting harder and harder to detect it'

Pupils have admitted to Ofqual's boss that they use AI in their work but don't tell their teachers, he has revealed as he asks exam boards to clamp down on cheating.

Ian Bauckham warned this week that, while detection rates are relatively low, there was "significant concern" among teachers and leaders about the "real extent" of artificial intelligence misuse in coursework.

Speaking at the FE Week Apprenticeships and Training Conference, he said students had admitted that they used AI in their day-to-day school work.

He said: "When I talk to students and ask them to tell me the truth, not necessarily what they would tell their teacher, but quietly tell me whether they go on to AI when they've got a piece of work to do, they say 'well actually yeah please don't tell my teacher but yes I do'.

"It's getting harder and harder to detect it."

While most GCSE and A-levels are purely exam based now, some coursework remains. For examples, 20 per cent of history and English A-level marks are based on extended writing.

This can include essays of up to 4,000 words.

Ofqual has been investigating the relationship between performance in exams and these longer-form essays.

Boards should now take a "more rigorous approach" to pupil and teacher authentication of work, Bauckham said in a letter to the four boards this week.

He also asked them to "to improve awareness of what constitutes misuse and to strengthen deterrence, detection and prevention measures".

AI use in coursework "deprives students of that intended learning," Bauckham said.

But he told the conference people had warned against defaulting to "the easy option of taking it out".

Bauckham also said there had been a "noticeable long-term" rise in the number of students breaching exam rules.

During the past three years, almost half of the 5,000 malpractice cases have involved students taking phones or other communication devices into the halls.

He asked boards to "strengthen" their arrangements so they "can more effectively identify, control and reduce the incidence of this form of potential malpractice".

The boards have until the end of the month to tell Bauckham their specific steps to respond to his concerns.

He will then evaluate their response and "see whether or not we need to take any further action".

Where there is malpractice, he expects sanctions to "be fully used to give a strong signal that malpractice will not be tolerated".

A Joint Council for Qualifications spokesperson said it would continue to work closely with schools to anticipate risks, strengthen controls and safeguard the exam system's integrity.

"While malpractice is not widespread, we agree with Ofqual that evolving technologies demand continual review and adaptation of approaches to preventing and detecting malpractice."

Exam aids to continue

Meanwhile, pupils sitting GCSEs in maths, physics and combined science from 2028 will continue to receive exam aids.

Introduced in 2022 to recognise the impact of the Covid pandemic on learning formula and equation sheets are given to pupils.

This has been repeatedly extended. The government confirmed in its response to the curriculum and assessment review that it would consider whether students should be required to memorise and recall each formula and equation, in reformed subjects from 2029 or 2030.

Until then, schools minister Georgia Gould said for the lifetime of these existing subjects students would not be required to memorise these for assessment purposes.

Ofqual has launched a three-week consultation on the adaptation.

On-screen exams push back

Also this week, AQA's chief executive Colin Hughes warned that Ofqual's proposal to initially limit digital exams to only two subjects per board was "unduly restrictive".

Bauckham had said it was "important to start small" and that Ofqual would "have a very close eye to fairness" when assessing proposals.

But Hughes said this could be "counterproductive".

Writing for *Schools Week*, he said: "It means that exam boards like AQA, that have been developing and trialling digital exams for a number of years, will be inhibited in building that all-important base of evidence and experience.

"We would like the regulator to reconsider this two-subject limit, so that we can pilot a broader range of exams and subjects in a wider mix of schools – some in wealthier areas, some in poorer areas.

"That's how we'll build our understanding of subject design and delivery, and thereby maximise the benefits of examining on-screen."

A consultation on the plans closed yesterday (Thursday).

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Schools can only afford 2.7% pay rise, DfE admits

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Schools can only afford to raise staff pay by 2.7 per cent over the next two years, the Department for Education has estimated, with leaders expected to "realise and sustain better value" in their budgets.

The Department for Education recommended in evidence to the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) that teacher pay should rise by 6.5 per cent in the three years 2026-27, 2027-28 and 2028-29. No extra funding for this has yet been announced.

In its annual school costs technical note, published this week, the department forecasts schools will be able to afford an overall pay increase of just 2.7 per cent over the next two years.

The report predicts schools will have around £1 billion of "headroom" in the next two years, saying this "corresponds to an overall pay increase of 2.7 per cent if the increases are to be affordable within each individual year and all staff were to receive the same awards".

That is because every 1 percentage point increase in teacher and support staff pay works out as a cost pressure to schools of about £330 million.

In its report, the DfE said it did not yet have enough evidence to provide a corresponding estimate of affordable pay increases for 2028-29.

The department has not specified how the 6.5 per cent overall rise recommended to the STRB

would be divided across the three years, but said the awards should be "weighted towards the latter" end of the period.

Support staff pay rises have also not yet been agreed.

A 2.7 per cent pay increase over the next two years would mean teacher pay would need to rise by nearly 4 per cent in the year 2028-29 alone to meet the DfE's 6.5 per cent three-year recommendation.

The document said that the DfE judged making savings to fund pay rises "to be a manageable ask", but added: "We recognise it will be challenging".

The DfE said it would work with schools and trusts to "drive better value".

However, National Education Union general secretary Daniel Kebede warned there were "no easy savings to be made".

"The government cannot continue to ask schools to do more with less, especially when the government expect mainstream schools to take greater responsibility for SEND provision," he said. "To call this a 'manageable ask' is not only ludicrous but insulting."

The £1 billion of headroom identified in the document was calculated by looking at how schools' costs and funding will change in coming years.

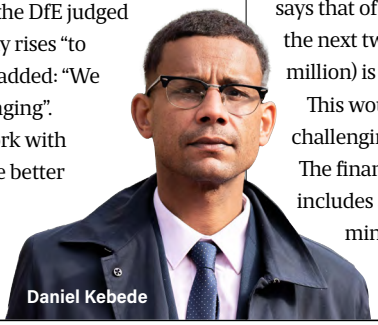
Mainstream schools' costs are expected to rise by 1.9 per cent in total across the next two years, the document says. The modelling excludes future, unconfirmed pay awards.

Meanwhile, schools' core funding is set to increase by 3.7 per cent over the same period, indicating financial headroom "of 1.8 per cent on average", or £1 billion nationally across the two years.

In the schools' costs technical note, the DfE says that of the £1 billion headroom forecast for the next two years, only one-quarter (or £250 million) is expected to apply to 2026-27.

This would make next financial year "more challenging" financially than 2027-28, it adds.

The financial headroom calculation also includes a "level of uncertainty" of plus or minus £200 million.



Daniel Kebede

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New policy sees 1 in 8 inspections deferred

Ofsted deferred or paused one in eight school inspections in the first full year of a new policy aimed at lessening its impact on leaders' wellbeing, data suggests.

The current mechanism that allows school leaders to request an inspection be delayed or put on hold was introduced in January 2024 as part of a raft of reforms that responded to the suicide of headteacher Ruth Perry.

A coroner ruled in late 2023 that an Ofsted inspection of Caversham Primary School in Reading had contributed to her death.

New data released yesterday (Thursday) shows that between April 2024 and April 2025, more than 800 headteachers used the function, and requested their inspections be either paused or deferred.

Of the 786 schools that requested a deferral, 79 per cent (621) were accepted, while all 37 requests for a pause were accepted.

Schools Week analysis shows there were 5,117 school inspections over the same period. This suggests over 12 per cent were deferred or paused.

Ofsted guidance says inspections should only be deferred in "exceptional circumstances".

It lays out examples, which include where a senior leader's wellbeing "would be severely impacted" and there is no other senior leader to step in.

Other examples include major incidents, such as the death of a child, closure due to a staff training day or weather, or if a school has recently converted to an academy.

This week's Ofsted data also shows 61 school inspections were deemed "incomplete", while additional evidence was gathered, in the 12 months up to April 2025.

The policy was introduced in September 2024, and lets inspectors pause an inspection to allow a school to resolve safeguarding "where that is the only issue in the school".

The data shows 18 state schools' overall grades were changed following quality assurance processes in the five months between April and September 2024, when overall grades were abolished.

The data does not detail the reasons deferrals and pauses were requested.

NEWS

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£100m English hubs had 'substantial' impact, researchers say

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A £100 million scheme supporting children who are struggling to read has boosted pupils' outcomes and "broader literacy", researchers have said.

A government-commissioned report, published last week, found the English hubs programme (EHP) has had a "substantial" impact, with more six-year-olds meeting the expected standard in the phonics screening check.

Launched in 2018, the EHP aims to boost phonics teaching, early language and reading for pleasure, particularly for those making the slowest progress.

Each of the 34 hub lead schools was selected for its expertise in teaching early reading.

The evaluation assessed the support provided at selected primaries with high levels of disadvantage and a low proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in the phonics screening check.

The researchers said the two- to three-year course of "bespoke intensive support" is the programme's main focus.

They found this increased the proportion of year 1 children meeting the expected standard by three to five percentage points.

The report called the improvements "substantial" as the screening check gap between the schools receiving the support and those not in the programme stood at six percentage points.

Estimates suggested the EHP's impact increased "with each year of support and is partially (but not fully) sustained after support stops".

The researchers also found that during the programme – which has cost more than £100 million – there has not been a decrease in impact over time.

"This suggests the EHP has been effective both during the pandemic and during post-pandemic recovery," the report added.

It comes after earlier Department for Education research found no firm "causal" link between schools taking part in the hubs scheme and improved phonics screening check results.

But the new study attributed the difference between its results and those of earlier analyses to "a change in methods, mainly an improvement in controls used".

It also stressed the work does not capture the "full benefits" of the hubs' non-intensive support, nor the impact of teachers moving between schools after engaging with the programme.

"The strength of evidence for the effectiveness of phonics as a pedagogy suggests the impact of the EHP on pupils' broader literacy learning is likely to be significant," it said.

The report comes after education secretary Bridget Phillipson set a new "ambition" for 90 per cent of pupils to reach the expected standard by 2029.

This year, like last, 80 per cent of pupils passed the check in year 1.

Phillipson also plans to launch a mandatory year 8 test assessing "reading fluency and comprehension".

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Most schools already produce SEND plans

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Most schools already produce plans for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), data suggests, as government consults on proposals for new "individual support plans".

Under wide-ranging government reforms announced last week, schools will have to draw up ISPs for all pupils receiving the new "targeted", "targeted plus" and "specialist" tiers of support.

Separate education, health and care plans (EHCPs) will continue to be issued, but will be reserved for those on the "specialist" tier.

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson said ISPs should create "EHCP-like support without the fight to get that EHCP".

According to a Teacher Tapp poll of special educational needs coordinators (SENCos), just 11 per cent of 503 respondents said their school did not write individual plans for pupils with SEND, but without an EHCP.

More than half (57 per cent) said plans were created for all SEND pupils, while 27 per cent said plans were created for some SEND pupils.

While leaders have welcomed the move to a more uniform approach, others have warned there should be some flexibility to create systems that work for their specific contexts, with support for a smooth transition of plans.

Flexibility would help smooth transition

Astrea Academy Trust creates support plans for all pupils with SEND across its 26 secondary schools in South Yorkshire and Cambridgeshire through an online portal.

Ryan Purdy, SEND and AP lead at Astrea, said plans were "person centred", beginning with pupils and parents filling out a form outlining their details, specific needs, medical conditions or diagnoses and exam access requirements.

The plans also set out specific targets for the child and evidence-based practice which could help support specific needs.

"There could be hundreds of children on one school's SEND register, so having ready access to evidence-based and additional interventions can really help make the process more effective and efficient for those children," Purdy explained.

At Jeavons Wood Primary in Cambridge, pupil passports are issued to the 15 per cent of pupils on its roll with SEND.

Below: Part of a mock pupil passport at Putteridge High School in Luton

Headteacher Em McMurray said the passports were a "really good way of capturing the needs of a child on a page, that made it practical, personal and something that everybody could use".

As at Astrea, the passports give a breakdown of a pupil's strengths, gaps in learning, the interventions they should have and targets.

But McMurray said an important aspect of the plans was how easily they can be adapted.

"This is very much a live document that influences what we do on a daily basis, and I think that's where the power is," she said.

At Endeavour Learning Trust, which has 10 schools across the north west, SEND pupils have a "targeted learning plan" as well as a pupil passport.

While the targeted learning plan involves all information on the child, the pupil passport constitutes the "student voice" and is put together by the pupil and school's SENCo.

Letting pupils voice interests

Here, a pupil may be able to voice their interests on a specific topic, which teachers can then use in the classroom.

Donna Waring, the trust's director of SEND, said the plans had "raised the profile of SEND", particularly for their secondary school teachers.

"Where they may see 300 children in a week, we just need to be really specific at what their targets are and how that can be translated into the lessons," she explained.

Warring said ISPs could help with transitions between phases too.

"A secondary school could have 30 feeder primaries, and if they've all done something different, you've got parents coming and saying 'have you got all about my child yet? Or have you got my pupil passport?'

"And I think having that universal document would be really useful."

But she added that government should make it clearer how ISPs are going to look, and that there should be "the option for individual schools to add on specifics that they want to make it relevant to the context of their schools".

McMurray said standardising practice would be useful for her school, and sharing good practice between schools "might take some of the fear" out of the prospect of creating the new plans.

"It might be a few functional boxes changing but I think the bones of it would be consistent with what we're already doing."

Purdy added: "There will be an administrative task in transferring across the data for each child on to a new system, but also some benefits such as in portability or transferability of plans which will share a uniform format across the country."

Donna Waring

INVESTIGATION

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DfE advisers RISE to the challenge (269 miles away)

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Dozens of struggling schools enrolled in a £20 million turnaround scheme have been paired with experts based up to 269 miles away.

Schools Week analysis found around one in 10 schools in the government's Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) programme have been paired with advisers based in different parts of the country.

The findings have sparked concerns that the support provided through the flagship school improvement scheme risks becoming "a desktop exercise with a Zoom call".

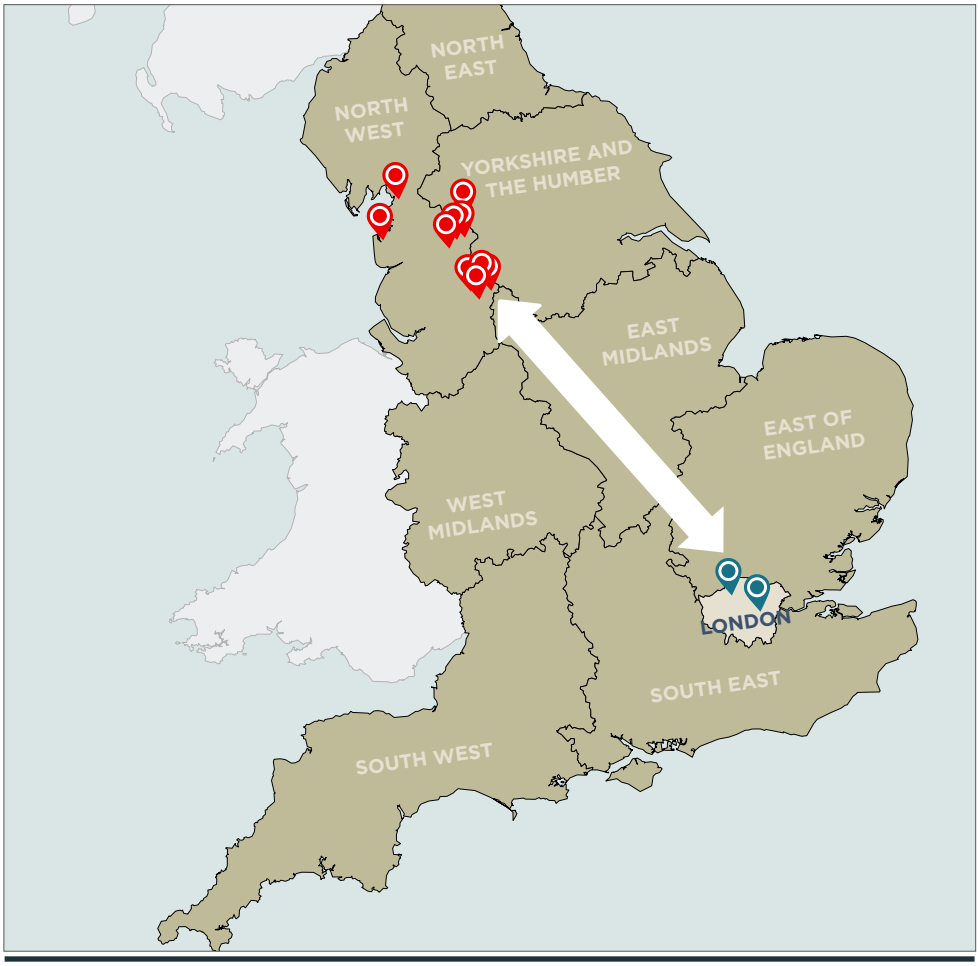
The "targeted RISE" scheme was launched last year and Its 65-strong team of advisers – leaders seconded to work alongside officials – are appointed to specific schools, usually in their region, to identify priorities and propose an outside organisation to provide support.

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

Schools Week analysis of Department for Education data, obtained through the freedom of information act, shows that of the nearly 430 schools enrolled in the RISE intervention programme, 46 have been matched with an adviser outside their region.

Twelve of the 46 are more than 100 miles from their RISE adviser's school or central team offices, our figures suggest. Three are over 200 miles away.

St Chad's Roman Catholic Primary School in Manchester (269 miles) is the furthest from its adviser. It is over four hours away by car, according to Google.



'Where distance is an issue the support becomes a desktop exercise'

'Desktop exercise with a Zoom call'

Sir David Carter, the former national schools commissioner, noted that "where distance is an issue the support becomes a desktop exercise with a Zoom call to present the challenge".


Sir David Carter

He added: "Whilst the role may be a diagnostic one, I fail to see how you can build the confidence of the leaders and governors at the school being supported if you cannot get a glimpse of the culture and the daily typicality of how the school works."

Our analysis shows 19 advisers are working with schools in a different region. Four of those advisers are based in London.

London has the most advisers (nine) and the fewest RISE schools (11).

Policy expert Loic Menzies argued the "education system has long suffered from geographic disparities in improvement capacity".

He said "one of the biggest tests for RISE" would be its "ability to work with trusts to nurture expertise and capacity in every corner of the country".

Department for Education guidance says

Continued on next page

INVESTIGATION

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targeted support "will be bespoke and tailored to the specific challenges facing each school".

RISE teams will coordinate with leaders to "arrange interventions from a high-quality organisation, such as a strong local trust and will have access to funding to facilitate improvement activities". The divisions will monitor progress termly.

And speaking last year, the then director of regions group John Edwards said RISE would draw on capacity "through a national team framework to make sure we can achieve the most locally, to improve those schools who need it most".

Oliver Burwood, chief executive of the Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust, said that a "fresh perspective from outside your region may not be a bad thing. But what you do probably need is a knowledge of feasible, quality local providers.

"If you do not know who those organisations are, are you in danger of suggesting people who may be contextually very different?"

Timing, travel and knowledge difficult

A government-commissioned evaluation of the RISE targeted support service, focusing on the first 223 stuck schools given help, merely identified "a few cases" where advisers were matched with schools outside their geographic patches.

It accepted this made "made timing, travel and aspects of contextual knowledge more difficult".

One adviser didn't "know anything about the two trusts" as they were in a different county, and found it "really hard" to know whether their suggestions were right. The adviser was left "hoping the DfE and their regional teams know that a little bit better".

Victorious Academies Trust said the support one of its schools, Wild Bank Primary in Tameside, Greater Manchester, receives has been "very positive". Its adviser, Inspire Partnership CEO Rob Carpenter, is based over 200 miles away in London.

Despite this, he has "always" travelled to the school in person and "arrives early in the morning, ensuring we have ample time for meaningful discussion and guidance", Victorious said, adding: "His commitment has meant that the physical distance has never been a barrier."

Rob Carpenter

'We deliberately draw on expertise from across England to ensure the best match'

'Not meant to answer everything'

One adviser, who did not want to be named, argued the distance of some advisers from the schools was "not a big issue".

They reasoned advisers are not meant to be the "answer to everything and working in isolation" as they simply provide recommendations to civil servants in the regional teams.

The RISE evaluation said the early evidence suggests "targeted intervention was broadly successful in terms of engaging schools and partners", with a "range of lessons" learned during its full academic term.

A DfE spokesperson said the advisers "are among the most skilled school improvement professionals in the country", adding the department's staff "deliberately draw on expertise from across England to ensure the best possible match".

"Spreading advisers geographically means schools benefit from a breadth of experience and fresh perspectives, rather than being limited to their local area," the spokesperson added.

The evaluation report found that "a few supporting organisations raised the issue of distance".

In one case, a trust chief executive said they had been asked to work with a school that was "more than a two hours' drive away". They subsequently decided "they would not be able to adequately support this school".

Other supporting organisations said a one-hour journey "was the maximum".

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

This precluded "the selection of the ideal match" as other MATs in the area would "kick off".

As part of the programme, advisers can pair schools with supporting organisations, usually academy trusts.

However, government data on where trusts are based is patchy. It also does not stipulate whether chains operate across a number of areas.

A trust chief executive, who asked to remain anonymous, added: "School improvement is most effective when it understands local context – communities, labour markets, and the challenges schools face in different parts of the country.

"London clearly has a deep pool of experienced system leaders, but the success of RISE will depend on drawing on expertise from across the country so that support feels credible and rooted in place rather than centrally directed."

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Upheld SEND complaints rise 25% in a year

CHAMINDA JAYANETTI
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The number of SEND-related complaints upheld by the councils watchdog has leapt by a quarter in just one year.

In 2025, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) upheld 1,315 SEND complaints, 26 per cent more than the 1,044 upheld in 2024. It is also more than five times the 236 upheld in 2021.

The figures include cases where the Ombudsman decided not to investigate because the council had already admitted fault and provided a remedy.

Families complain to the Ombudsman about how councils deal with services and provision for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.

The LGO upheld 71 per cent of SEND complaints in 2025, a similar proportion to the previous two years.

Forty-three complaints were not upheld, while a further 489 were closed after initial enquiries.

Just 25 of England's 153 councils with SEND responsibilities made it through 2025 without having any LGO complaints upheld against them.

Catriona Moore, policy manager at SEND legal charity IPSEA, said: "These statistics expose the extent to which local authorities continue to fail children and young people with SEND.

"The fact that the LGSCO upholds most of the complaints it investigates about SEND provision is clear evidence that the system isn't working as it should, meaning that children and young people have to wait far too long for the support they need.

"We need meaningful local accountability for decisions about children and young people as a matter of urgency. The LGSCO has an important role to play in this, and IPSEA has long advocated extending the Ombudsman's remit to schools as well as local authorities, so it can investigate complaints about how schools support children with SEND."

Essex explosion

Essex, in the east of England, has seen an explosion in the number of upheld complaints, from nine in 2022 to 113 in 2024 and 219 in 2025.

Its upheld complaints accounted for one in six of all those upheld nationally.

Most of the cases upheld against Essex last year concerned delays.

In one case the council took 16 months to allocate an educational psychologist for an education, health and care needs assessment.

The LGO report said the council attributed the delay to "shortages in educational psychologists (EP) and its ongoing struggle to recruit EPs".

It also said that "assessment requests were at an all-time high causing a backlog in allocating EPs". The LGO ordered the council to pay a minimum of £2,000 to the complainant.

Council delays and failings also meant a child missed out on nearly two full school years of speech and language therapy and therapeutic alternative education stipulated in their EHCP, with the LGO instructing the council to pay £5,500 to the child's mother

Another case involving a shortage of educational psychologists was exacerbated by the council's SEND team twice failing to pass on to the council's education welfare service the information that a SEND child was not receiving education.

It meant the child went without education provision for 15 months. The LGO ordered a payment of at least £4,000 to the complainant.

'Most relate to delays'

Tony Ball, Essex council's cabinet member for education, put the 219 upheld complaints in the context of the county's 16,000 young people with EHCPs.

"The majority of these complaints relate to delays in issuing EHCPs, specifically where we have not been able to meet the 20-week timescale," he said.

"The LGO has acknowledged these delays are primarily due to the national shortage of education psychologists and are classed as 'service failures', which means something impacting a council but not entirely within its control."

He added that the council was "seeing progress" in its SEND system "because of the changes and investments we have made.

While some county councils saw the number of upheld SEND cases plateau or tail off in 2025, others saw continuing year-on-year rises – from 16 to 46 in Buckinghamshire, from 25 to 38 in Staffordshire, and from 26 to 66 in Lancashire after just seven upheld cases in 2023.

Bromley saw its cases double from 14 in 2024 to 29 in 2025, but large city councils such as Liverpool and Sheffield saw relatively few cases, while five London councils had no upheld cases at all.

An LGO spokesperson said: "The number of complaints we receive about special educational needs provision continues to rise year on year, and represents a major part of our work.

"We are in ongoing dialogue with Essex County Council about the volume of complaints we have received."

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Beer raises a glass to 11 years at DfE

EXCLUSIVE

JACK DYSON
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The Department for Education's longest-serving regional director is set to leave the role after 11 years in post.

Senior civil servant Vicky Beer revealed that she had made the "really hard decision" to retire at the end of April, despite being "energised" by recent policy developments.

Beer was appointed the regional schools commissioner (RSC) for Lancashire and West Yorkshire in 2015.

A restructure of the RSC system saw them rebadged as regional directors, with Beer responsible for the north west. She has been in the role longer than anyone else.

The Department for Education has launched its search for a replacement to move into the job and help shape the government's strategy.

Beer told *Schools Week*: "There's still lots to do in the region, but I think the way the sector works is a particular strength of the area and I feel some personal pride in helping to shape that."

Vicky Beer

Before joining the civil service, Beer was an executive principal at the Dean Trust, which ran four schools across Trafford and Knowsley at the time.

She was also a national leader of education and chaired one of England's first teaching schools. She says she will fill her time travelling, gardening, paddleboarding and volunteering after retiring.

"It was a really hard to decision to make because there's so much about the role I absolutely love," Beer added.

"I've been excited and energised by the direction of travel of some of the reforms as well."

A page advertising the £125,000-a-year role says the successful candidate will help "shape policy... to better reflect local needs and regional variation".

They will lead intervention in schools "where needed", work with councils to ensure areas have sufficient pupil places and work "effectively" with ministers.

The department is on the lookout for people with "excellent system leadership skills gained within the education or care sector, local or national government".

They should also have "demonstrable experience of leading change inclusively with your team, including delivering system improvement and transformation".

The selection process will involve shortlisted applicants being invited to a "partnership engagement conversation", with Tim Coulson, the DfE's director general of regions group, in April.

A council director of children's services and academy trust boss will also attend.

This comes after it was announced Mulberry Schools Trust chief executive Vanessa Ogden will take over as the London regional director this year.

In 2024, West Midlands regional director Andrew Warren also left the department after almost six years in the position.

RUTH LUCAS| RUTH.LUCAS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

Restricting toilet access means girls skip school during periods

Ministers have been urged to investigate schools that are restricting toilet access, after a parliamentary report suggested some girls are choosing to miss school while on their period.

A report by the women and equalities committee into the menstrual health of young girls said updated relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) curriculum guidance is a "crucial first step towards ensuring all girls have an adequate understanding of their menstrual cycle".

The guidance will be mandatory for schools from September.

But the committee said the government should take more steps to ensure access across schools.

New guidance mandates secondary schools to include specific mentions of menstrual health conditions, but witnesses told the committee that schools are increasingly restricting access to toilets to tackle bad behaviour, vandalism, bullying and vaping.

Some giving evidence suggested that girls were consequently missing schools during their periods.

A poll of 500 teachers by washroom services provider PHS Group and menstrual charity Irise International, found 16 per cent had prevented a pupil who had periods from using the toilet during class, with reasons including students wanting to skip lessons or meet friends.

The committee report said reports of restriction were "troubling", adding: "The government should investigate the extent to which this is happening and request that school leaders take alternative approaches."

The report also recommended that government encourage schools to use part of their planned RSHE grant funding to train teachers on menstrual health, though funding details have yet to be released.

MPs also said government should produce guidance on teaching pupils from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as disabled pupils, about menstrual health.

The DfE said the new sex and relationships guidance "responds to the realities facing children today" addressing reproductive health, endometriosis and fertility. It did not confirm whether it would investigate schools restricting toilet access.

Margaret Mulholland, SEND and inclusion specialist at the ASCL leaders' union, said: "As the committee has heard, there are a number of behavioural issues that can occur in school toilets.

"These include vaping, bullying and truancy. As a result, there may be times when schools are put in a position where some restrictions are necessary to ensure the safety and wellbeing of their pupils.

"This must be carefully balanced against the need to ensure pupils can access toilets when they need to, and schools will be particularly mindful of the needs of girls with periods."

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Support staff recruitment woes deepen

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS
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Three-quarters of school leaders are struggling to recruit teaching assistants, while support staff are leaving at the highest rate since records began, a report has warned.

Support staff make up more than half of England's school workforce and "are essential to delivering high quality education", said National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) education workforce lead Jack Worth.

But NFER analysis suggests exit rates have risen in the past three years, peaking with one in five support staff leaving the school system between 2023-24 and 2024-25 – the highest level since records began in 2011-12.

The research showed "feeling undervalued" was the most common reason (47 per cent) that support staff gave for considering leaving. Low morale, staffing shortages, lack of progression and financial reasons were also frequently cited.

The majority of school leaders are also encountering difficulties hiring them, NFER found.

This was particularly true for hiring teaching assistants. TAs and learning support staff make up 49 per cent of support staff roles, and 75 per cent of leaders said recruiting them is difficult.

'Revolving door' of support staff

Jo Rowley, deputy headteacher at Walton High School in Staffordshire and president of the ASCL union, said her school is "constantly" advertising for teaching assistants, and has been since the pandemic. She said: "It is a revolving door."

Those who might previously have taken TA roles opt for jobs which are "better paid" or offer home-working, she said, while the role seems to attract more younger people as "a stepping stone for graduates".

She said issues around pay and flexibility were exacerbated by the fact TA work is often demanding, and means working "with some quite challenging children".

High turnover affects vulnerable pupils who rely on familiar TAs for consistency, she added.

Kathryn Morgan, the ASCL's leadership and workforce specialist, said support staff "are worth their weight in gold".

But workload pressures mean TAs "are taking on increasing responsibilities, often in more complex and high-needs settings" and "unfortunately pay has not kept pace with these growing demands".

Department for Education data suggests seven in 10 TAs, one-third of health and pastoral staff, and a quarter of midday supervisors already spend all or most of their time supporting pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The NFER said the drive for mainstream schools to support a wider range of needs is "likely to [mean] an expansion in demand for support staff".

Better pay in supermarkets

Simon Kidwell, headteacher of Hartford Manor Primary School in Cheshire, noted many support staff are on term-time-only contracts.
His school has lost "really strong, experienced teaching assistants" who "can't really afford to do the role" he said.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of school leaders' union NAHT, said some leaders were having to reduce their number of TAs "to balance the books", while some TAs have "to take second jobs, or even leave their jobs in schools because they know they can be paid more in the local supermarket."

High turnover raises concerns about the capacity to build a steady, experienced workforce.

"It is hard to develop and sustain quality practice and provision when recruitment of support staff is so challenging, and staff change with increasing frequency," said John Camp, chief executive of the Compass Partnership of Schools in Essex and Greenwich.

It also raises concerns about how the workforce will cope with planned SEND reforms.

Georgina Durrant, national inclusion lead at educational provider Twinkl, told a recent Westminster Education Forum that "any reform that sidelines [TAs], doesn't recognise their value and fund them... will fall short before it even begins".

"Ministers and schools must properly recognise and reward the vital role support staff play," said Mike Short, head of education at support staff union Unison.

The NFER made a number of other recommendations to government, including for more support with recruitment, SEND training for TAs, and action on low pay and limited career progression.

It also called for the DfE to improve data it collects on support staff, and vacancies.

The Department for Education was approached for comment.

Separate new research for the DfE by Government Social Research dissatisfaction with salaries "is widespread" at 72 per cent, rising to 85 per cent among TAs.

The report also found formal flexible working arrangements "are uncommon", linking this to lower job satisfaction".

The survey found 22 per cent of support staff said they were considering leaving the state school sector within a year, for reasons other than retirement.

This compares with 29 per cent of teachers and leaders.

NEWS

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SEND reforms won't stem rising transport costs, warn MPs

SAMANTHA BOOTH
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The government's promise to write off almost all of councils' historic SEND deficits fails to consider "burgeoning" home-to-school transport costs, MPs have warned.

The parliamentary public accounts committee has asked ministers to explain how their SEND reforms will affect these costs, previously predicted by the National Audit Office to reach £3 billion by 2030.

It comes as the Office for Budgetary Responsibility (OBR) warned special educational needs and disabilities costs could actually increase ahead of reforms.

In a report, the committee said that even if reforms announced last week are successful, it is "likely to be some time" before they translate into transport savings.

The government plans to write off 90 per cent of historic high needs deficits up to March, with costs to be met from central departmental budgets from 2028-29.

But MPs warn there are "still unanswered questions" about the new deficits councils are expected to rack up in the years before the government takes on the cost pressures. These are expected to reach £9 billion.

The government previously said that for these years it would take an "appropriate and

proportionate approach, though it will not be unlimited". But no further details have been released.

The new funding arrangements should address SEND cost pressures, but they wouldn't cover transport costs, MPs added.

The DfE expects demand and distances travelled to fall when children's needs are identified and met earlier and closer to home.

But Rachel Gilmour, a member of the public accounts committee, said "a problem this chronic and severe demands a response that does not leave any unanswered questions for children and families".

The Liberal Democrat MP for Tiverton and Minehead added: "Unfortunately, our inquiry has identified a number of glaring ones for home-to-school transport – a problematic system for parents on which government spends multiple billions a year not covered by government's recent announcements."

MPs also warned that the DfE "does not understand" how access to transport is affecting attendance and doesn't "yet have the data it needs to oversee home-to-school transport effectively".

They argued for better local transport options and integrated education and transport planning, especially rurally.

The OBR said this week that the proposed SEND reforms and extra £4.1 billion in announced funding had reduced spending pressure, but "uncertainty around the impact of the reforms represents a continued risk to the forecast".

They said the DfE's modelling of new education, health and care plans "assumes that the rate of increase will slow" between now and 2029-30. It projects it will then fall.

But the OBR said the government "has not set out specifically how the reforms will deliver this or provided estimates of any cost savings", adding: "Previous changes to the eligibility for public spending programmes, such as the replacement of disability living allowance with personal independence payment for extra-cost disability benefits, did not achieve the savings planning".

There is a risk "reforms could increase spending in the short term if the volume of assessments increases ahead of September 2029 when EHCP assessments are due to change".

The government was approached for comment.

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David Bell to lead review into how schools handle antisemitism

Former Ofsted and Department for Education boss David Bell will lead an independent review into how schools identify, respond to and prevent antisemitism, the government has announced.

Bell will examine support through schools' own policies and government guidance, looking at processes for when incidents are "not handled well" and how external campaigning organisations "influence institutional decision making", the DfE said.

External factors that can "contribute to antisemitism within education settings", such as protests outside school gates and wider geopolitical events, will also be explored.

A call for evidence will open in the spring, with Bell's recommendations following in the autumn. It will cover all schools, including independent schools.

Bell, who is vice chair of Skills England and was DfE permanent secretary from 2006 to 2011 and chief inspector of schools from 2002 to 2005, said he would have "an open and independent mind". He added: "I will review both policy and practice to ensure that everyone can learn free from prejudice and hate.

"I am also keen to know more about those institutions who are tacking antisemitism effectively so that lessons can be shared widely across the education system."

He said antisemitism is "a scourge and no child or young person or teacher should be subject to it, not least when attending school or college".

The Community Security Trust recorded 204 school-related antisemitic incidents in 2025. This was lower than 266 in 2024 and 325 in 2023, but above the 98 in 2022.

A NASUWT teachers' union survey last year found 51 per cent of surveyed Jewish teachers had experienced antisemitism in the workplace.

The DfE is also carrying out an internal review of the decisions and recommendations framework of the Teaching Regulation Agency.

It followed a decision to not ban Ronan Preston from teaching. The religious studies teacher was dismissed by Ursuline High School in Wimbledon after he posted on social media "glory to Hamas", whom he called "defenders of humanity".

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Movers & Shakers

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

Julie McCulloch

Chief executive, Education Policy Institute

Start date: May

Current role: Senior director of strategy, policy and professional development, Association of School and College Leaders. On secondment as head of policy at the Education Endowment Foundation.

Interesting fact: Julie started her career editing primary reading books, and one of her now neglected skills is the ability to come up with stories based on no more than eight phonemes.

Juliette Cammaerts

Principal private secretary to the health and social care secretary

Start date: March

Current role: Executive director, children's commissioner's office

Interesting fact: Juliette's dedication to improving children's lives extends into her personal life as well as her professional. She is a kinship carer and chair of the local governing board at Reach Academy Feltham.

Craig Holden

Deputy chief executive, Achievement through Collaboration Trust

Start date: February

Previous role: Chief operating officer, Achievement through Collaboration Trust.

Interesting fact: Craig once auditioned for the BBC's The Apprentice, a move that could have taken his career in a completely different direction.

Gina Cicerone and Sam Butters

New roles: Gina, chief executive, The Fair Education Alliance.

Sam is spending the summer with her children and then will be exploring opportunities.

Start date: May

Current roles: Co-chief executives, The Fair Education Alliance

Interesting facts: Gina successfully did the lift from the end of Dirty Dancing with a stranger on the Oxford Circus tube platform and then tumbled down and sprained her ankle.

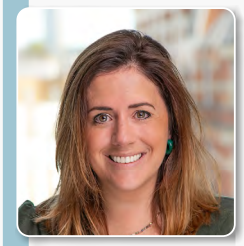
Martin Fitzwilliam

Chief education officer, Infinity Academies Trust

Start date: September

Current role: Director of education, Birmingham City Council

Interesting fact: Last winter Martin jumped into a Norwegian fjord with his three sons after a sauna.



Cathy Walter

Deputy editor of education, The Girls' Day School Trust (GDST)

Start date: March

Previous role: Assistant director of education, GDST

Interesting fact: Cathy used to compete in big air skiing competitions and freestyle slope events. However, her journey as a parent to two beautiful kids (and the survival instincts that come with it!) made her step away from competitive skiing for good.

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

Feature

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS | LYDIA@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK

Children's minister, Josh MacAlister, in Tallinn with British ambassador to Estonia, Ross Allen.

Citizenship lessons from the frontline of the propaganda war

With the curriculum in England being updated to better tackle the growing problem of mis- and disinformation, ministers are looking overseas for inspiration. *Schools Week* joined Josh MacAlister on a fact-finding trip to Estonia

As a former citizenship teacher, children and families minister Josh MacAlister is familiar with standing in front of a class of teenagers.

This particular classroom – familiar right down to the chairs and posters on the walls – could be in any English secondary school. Except outside it is -8C, and snow lies in deep drifts.

We're in the Õismäe district of Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, in a Soviet-era secondary school nestled in a huge 70s housing estate.

MacAlister is explaining to the pupils why he, along with British ambassador Ross Allen and a host of other smartly dressed delegates, are here on this particular February morning.

"We've got a lot to learn from Estonia," he tells the class.

Covering an area about a third of the size of England, and with a population of just 1.4 million, Estonia's education system ranks high in international league tables.

Perched beside the huge mass of Russia, the small Baltic state has been on the frontline of the Kremlin's propaganda war for decades.

It has had to embed resilience to mis- and disinformation into its education system. So it seems a natural place to turn as the issue grows in England.

"We are also, in the UK, at times attacked by Russia: cyber warfare, misinformation, disinformation, and the attempts to interfere with our political processes," MacAlister tells pupils.

"So there's lots for us to learn about what you're doing in classrooms."

Misinformation (information that's wrong or inaccurate) and disinformation (incorrect information intended to deliberately mislead) do not, of course, come solely from Russia.

Nor are they solely political. For example, conspiracy theories can cover anything from beauty and wellbeing trends to the effect of vaccines.

Half of English pupils and teachers affected

The Commission into Countering Online Conspiracies in Schools was set up in 2024 to tackle the growing problem. It is run by Public First and the Pears Foundation.

Research by the commission suggests that over half of young people in England have encountered someone in class or online who believes in a conspiracy theory.

Meanwhile half of teachers said they were at least moderately worried about a pupil who had expressed a belief in a conspiracy in class.

The impact can be seismic. In 2024, online misinformation helped fuel far-right protests and riots across the country following the Southport stabbings. Over 1,500 people were arrested, many of them children.

But it's likely that a lot of misinformation is more insidious, going unidentified and unchallenged.

An Ofcom report last spring found the proportion of English teens who feel confident judging what is real or fake online has fallen from 82 per cent in 2022, to three-quarters.

It's against this backdrop the commission

Continued on next page

Feature: Estonia

organised the three-day research trip to Estonia.

I joined them as they visited schools across Tallinn and in Kohtla-Järve, near the Russian border, and met those working to address the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy content among young people.

The first school we visit is Pelgulinna Riigigümnaasium, an upper secondary in western Tallinn.

The vast new building is mainly timber and beautifully designed, more like a modern art museum than a school.

Inside, warm lighting, exposed wood, high ceilings and cushioned seats set in nooks around the building give it a pleasant, soothing atmosphere.

"We have been in the information war since at least the 2000s," principal Indrek Lillemägi tells us as he shows us around.

"Misinformation, the Kremlin influence – it has been here I think longer than in most European societies."

Compulsory media and influence course

To help tackle this, all upper secondary (year 10 or 11) pupils in Estonia have, since 2010, had to take a compulsory "media and influence" course.

It teaches them about different media outlets, how to differentiate fact from fiction or opinion, and to engage with information with a critical eye.

Lillemägi leads us to a classroom where we meet media literacy teacher Gertrud Kasemaa.

She teaches pupils "about different media genres... how to how to spot misinformation, how to recognise fake news".

Media organisations also get involved, she says, by visiting Estonian schools and hosting school visits.

This works well for both, as media outlets are keen to raise their profile and establish "a new generation of newspaper readers".

On top of this, "digital competence" is one of eight key competencies the Estonian national curriculum says teachers are expected to weave through every subject.

At Rae Gümnaasium in Jüri, 10 miles south-east of the capital, history and social science teacher Roman Kasak tells us he does this constantly.

Each lesson, a different pupil is tasked with finding an article in the media that's relevant to what is being covered, then to "look for its credibility, analyse who is the author, what's their background, and how can this influence what they're saying?"

One pupil tells us how her Estonian class was recently asked to use ChatGPT to write "wrong articles", to "teach us how easy it is to have misleading information".

'We have been in the information war since at least the 2000s'

Her article was on a classic Estonian film. "But everything was wrong about it, the characters, the plot," she said. "It is so easy to give misleading information."

Another pupil told us how his science class had tested out the so-called "plastic snow" conspiracy which recently made headlines in the US, after people tried burning snow but found it appeared to char. (Reader, it was not plastic.)

Differing levels of teacher enthusiasm

Teachers say the success of the approach depends on individual educators, and their own enthusiasm for – and knowledge of – the area. One said younger teachers appear "more open to it".

"There are teachers who have worked in their subjects for 20 years, and they're not changing all that much," he added, though he said even those teachers are "trying to integrate it" and "recognising where the curriculum is moving."

Research by the Pears Foundation commission showed that young people, parents and teachers in England feel teachers are well placed to intervene on conspiracy theories and misinformation, yet many teachers described occasions when they had felt ill-equipped to do so.

When asked by MacAlister if teachers generally feel "comfortable" challenging disinformation in class, one young teacher at Rae Gümnaasium agreed it can be tricky.

"It's a little difficult if you have students with very different beliefs about a topic," he said. "I find it most difficult if I have to give my own opinion without trying to influence anyone in the classroom."

To help address this, an association of media literacy teachers was set up last year, with a long-term aim of supporting all teachers to integrate media literacy into their lessons.

But digital literacy is not rigorously assessed, and the Estonian school system is highly autonomous.

Public First's Sally Burtonshaw asked Lillemägi how the government checks that everybody is delivering media literacy.

"It is not checked," the headteacher shrugged.

"But this is the story of Estonian education," he added. "Most things are not checked. We just trust schools. We just trust that schools try to fill in the national curriculum."

He said foreign visitors often seem interested in how the government decides if money has been well spent, but said this was not something he has otherwise considered, and the government "doesn't ask".

"Sometimes the quality is not good, but often it is," he said.

It's certainly a very different approach to that in the UK. But it seems to be working.

Pupils confident at spotting disinformation

At the school in Õismäe, MacAlister, the ambassador and commission joined pupils in a discussion around mis- and disinformation.

They agreed it was widespread, but said while their parents – the majority of whom are Russian speakers – struggle to work out what's real and what isn't, they generally can.

Continued on next page

Feature: Estonia

"I think it's, like, our skill right now that we can like identify the disinformation," one girl told me.

"We are taught to check the facts, find the data," her classmate chimed in.

"Our teacher teaches us to check all the information you get from different sources. You should check, like, twice, or many times."

Of course, they can't always tell the fake news from the real. They laugh and agree when I say I've been fooled more times than I care to admit, by videos of dancing babies and cats doing things they have no business doing.

But they appear to be approaching the information they're encountering – whether through social media, adverts, or partisan news outlets – with an appropriate level of cynicism.

The story was the same at each of the four schools we visited.

Posting on LinkedIn after the trip, MacAlister said "there are lessons we can learn" from Estonia, "to better equip our own children to spot conspiracy theories and improve media literacy."

Schools Week was not permitted to interview the minister during or after the trip about what he had learned.

However, the Department for Education said it had been "interesting to note that there is little public debate in Estonia regarding phones in schools or social media use".

"Minister MacAlister explored with ministers, teachers, pupils and experts how Estonia builds resilience to mis- and disinformation and conspiracy theories," the DfE said. Referring to protests over the moving of a Soviet-era statue, it added: "Education Minister Kristina Kallas explained how Estonia had 20 years' experience in this area, dating back to the 'Bronze Soldier' riots and cyber-attack in 2007. Estonia has used the time since to build resilience.

"She noted a constant need to adapt, referencing wide-spread misinformation during Covid, and AI's impact."

But to work in a country like England, with about 50 times as many schools and a far more rigid curriculum, a different, less hands-off approach is likely to be needed.

Will it work for England?

Summing up its findings from the trip, Public First pointed out that for Estonia, particularly since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, media literacy "is seen as a genuine line of defence".

The need to tackle mis- and disinformation online and protect young people from it "feels tangible" and is widely understood.

Young people appear "highly informed" and, like their teachers, see mis- and disinformation "as a threat which they should and could manage".

Pelgulinna Riigigümnaasium, in Tallinn

Inside Tallinn Õismäe Gymnasium

'Most things are not checked. We just trust that schools try to fill in the national curriculum'

But the autonomous nature of the Estonian system means "there is not one consistent approach" and "as a result it was hard to draw conclusions from any one intervention or approach".

Currently in England, media literacy is covered in in citizenship (KS3 and 4), RSHE, computing, English, and in the optional GCSE media studies.

But the curriculum and assessment review, in recommendations accepted by the government, said this should be strengthened.

It said citizenship should be added to the national curriculum for primary, and media literacy "better specified" in its primary and secondary curriculum.

The government says the new RSHE curriculum will also cover "how advertising and information is targeted at children and young people, and how to be a discerning consumer of information online", and to understand the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation online.

"At home, we're taking action," said MacAlister in a statement after the trip.

"Our updated curriculum will ensure every child learns to identify mis- and disinformation from an early age and our Educate Against Hate website continues to provide schools and parents with free, high-quality resources as part of the government's wider work to build social cohesion."

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Opinion

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BOBBY SEAGULL

Maths teacher and fellow of the Academy of Mathematical Science

DfE maths teacher targets don't add up when demand is growing

The goal for new teachers appears to have been shifted to ensure the ball hit the net, but you can't fool a mathematician with statistics, says Bobby Seagull

Next month, the government will unveil its latest teacher recruitment targets.

Last year they trumpeted progress in filling vacancies and achieving their goals. In my subject, maths, they overshot their own target of 2,300 new teachers by over 10 per cent.

I want more specialist maths teachers and those with a passion for the subject in classrooms, passing on wonder and energy for a topic too often wrongly characterised as dull and dusty.

When my class is fully immersed in a rich mathematical problem, such as how everything on our phones – the apps, the pics, their friends' contact details – are all stored as binary numbers, you can see the moment it clicks.

Maths isn't just all around us, it's the foundation of our technological future.

Maths is the fuel on which AI runs. It's the key to mobile phone technology, driverless cars and contactless payments. And the advent of quantum computing rooted in the mathematical sciences will unlock innovations that we can't even conceive of yet.

All of which is why the nation is going to need maths skills, perhaps more than any other, to succeed in the remainder of the 21st century and beyond.

And it's why the Campaign for Mathematical Sciences (CaMS) that I support did some digging into those teacher targets.

Hitting the bullseye

The results reveal some worrying thinking at the DfE. They ought to have known better than to juggle the numbers when dealing with mathematicians!

In 2025-26, some 2,588 new maths teachers started in schools, 288 more than the government target of 2300.

But this was 477 fewer than the previous year's target of 3,065. It looks like the target was moved to ensure a bullseye.

Now, that's fine if there is a diminishing demand for maths in school and maths skills at large. But nothing could be further from the truth.

For a start, maths remains the most popular subject at A-level and the numbers sitting the exam continues to grow.

Over 112,000 pupils sat A-level maths last May, a four per cent year-on-year increase.

Young people want maths skills because they know how important they are going to be in securing satisfying and well-paid employment, and to understanding the world around them and its new technologies. Policy has to keep up.

> "Maths is the foundation of our technological future

Too many children

Secondly, maths classes are too big. CaMS carried out research through Teacher Tapp that showed 53 per cent of A-level classes in state schools contain more than 20 pupils.

Research by the Education Endowment Foundation found that significant improvements to teaching quality from class size reductions only begin once classes are smaller than 20 pupils.

For mathematics this effect is especially pronounced, amounting to an average improvement equal to two months of additional learning.

And the relationship between outcomes and class sizes is especially pronounced for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

If we need further evidence that smaller class sizes are best for pupils and for results we can look to the private sector. The same Teacher Tapp survey for CaMS found that just one in 10 private school classes exceeds 20 pupils.

Finally, we need maths skills. Separate research for CaMS into the number of job adverts citing maths skills showed a six percent increase in the five years to 2023.

That trend will only accelerate as AI, and quantum technologies in particular, are embedded everywhere, including the classroom and staff room.

I hope the government sets a target for maths teacher recruitment next month that is ambitious and appropriate.

We need to ensure the growing number of pupils taking maths A-level are taught in classes that give them the best chance to succeed and to develop not just the skills they want and the nation needs, but to generate the greatest outcome for any teacher – a genuine love and appreciation for the subject.

Opinion

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DANNI FOTHERGILL
Head of marketing, Edurio

If middle leaders are crushed schools have no one to step up

An Edurio staff experience survey found heads of year and their middle-leader peers reported badly on physical and mental health, and it's due to workload, says Danni Fothergill

Middle leadership was never meant to carry this much weight. Yet in many schools, it has quietly become the role where accountability, implementation and pastoral responsibility collide, often without the time, authority or protection to match.

Analysis of Edurio's national staff experience survey from 2024-25, drawing on responses from more than 85,000 school staff in England, reveals a stark pattern.

When asked, "Overall, how well have you felt lately, physically and mentally?", positive responses were given by 60 per cent of senior leaders, 46 per cent of admin staff, 38 per cent of teaching assistants, 35 per cent of teachers and 34 per cent of middle leaders.

The wider context matters. Schools are operating under sustained and compounding pressure, shaped by the legacy of Covid, funding constraints, workforce shortages and relentless policy change.

Middle leaders are where much of this pressure lands.

Extra responsibilities

Department leads, heads of year and phase leaders are expected to implement reform, manage people, raise outcomes, support staff wellbeing and continue teaching, often without additional time, authority or structural protection.

This pressure is not accidental. As instructional leader and coach Cat Stephens observes, "middle leaders absorbing all the pressure is usually an indication that senior leaders don't have the balance right between being on the balcony and getting onto the dancefloor".

Middle leaders are more likely than any other group to feel stressed frequently. And they are among the most likely to say they feel overworked often, reflecting the reality of holding significant leadership responsibility alongside a full or near-full teaching load. Very few report feeling overworked rarely or never.

However, middle leaders are not disengaged. Sixty-one per cent say they feel excited by their work, and 51 per cent say they feel appreciated by leadership. Both figures are higher than for classroom teachers.

And yet only 34 per cent report feeling physically and mentally well.

Headteacher Tom Kennedy Fowler points to workload as a key factor, noting that the similarity between teacher and middle leader responses is "indicative of the pressures of a full or almost full teaching load".

> "Middle leaders are the future supply of senior leaders

It is also hard to ignore how closely middle leaders' wellbeing mirrors that of classroom teachers.

Both groups often carry full or near full teaching timetables, with limited control over their time. Senior leaders may face intense strategic pressure, but they typically have greater autonomy and headspace to manage it.

These findings reflect a broader global pattern in which the middle layer consistently reports poorer wellbeing than both senior leaders and those they manage.

But there is some good news. For the first time since the pandemic, overall resignation risk has fallen, and middle leaders are less likely to be considering leaving than last year.

However, 45 per cent still report having considered resigning in the past three months.

Their most common reasons are overwhelming workload, poor work-life balance and feeling undervalued. They are also more likely than other roles to cite dissatisfaction with senior leadership and government policy.

Unsustainable strain

Middle leaders are the engine room of school improvement and the future supply of senior leaders.

If the role is experienced as a prolonged period of unsustainable strain, fewer people will step up.

Where organisations treat middle leadership development as a strategic investment rather than a perk, the impact can be significant.

At Temple Learning Academy, a structured programme combines leadership training, internal professional development and external learning opportunities.

This programme certainly seems to be having an impact on workload as the school scored highly against national benchmarks for managing workload.

The most important question this data raises is not whether middle leaders are struggling.

The better question is who owns the design of roles that remain sustainable under sustained pressure, and what we can learn from the places already getting it right.

Because if we want schools that can thrive, not just cope, middle leadership has to be supported by design, not sustained by endurance alone.

Opinion

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DAVID BOYLE
CEO, Dunraven Educational Trust

We don't yet know if new SEND roadmap gets us off road to hell

The plan seeks to solve a problem not of this government's making – and in the meantime we must support the professionals tasked with turning things around, says David Boyle

The education white paper sets out the most ambitious reform to SEND provision in England since the children and families act of 2014.

It deserves a fair hearing, not least because the crisis it seeks to address is not of this government's making. Like the road to hell, the current situation is the accumulated paving of (mostly) good intentions over many years.

Each subsequent reform added complexity, each funding settlement fell derisibly short of rising demand, and the people caught most painfully in the middle were the children themselves and the remarkable professionals who work alongside them every day.

To understand the proposed new system, it might help to recall what came before.

Certain logic

For those with long enough memories (I was appointed as a headteacher in 2004), the old framework of statements, school action and school action plus had a certain logic to it.

School action was the school's own response. The SENCO and class teacher identified a child, wrote an individual education plan (IEP) and provided additional support from within existing school resources.

School action plus brought in external specialists such as educational psychologists or speech and language therapists to advise and help. Neither stage carried any statutory guarantee of resources.

The legally binding entitlement came only with a statement of special educational needs, issued by the local authority, and the process to reach it was often slow, adversarial and exhausting for families.

The 2014 Act replaced this with education, health and care plans (EHCPs) and merged the two school-based tiers into a single category of SEN support.

The intention was a more integrated, child-centred system. In practice, demand outstripped capacity, tribunal appeals multiplied, local authority high-needs deficits ballooned and the number of EHCPs more than doubled nationally.

The system has been held together by leaders using wider budgets to subsidise the real cost of inclusion and the dedication of SENCOs and their teams.

Their effort deserves to be recognised, because it is easy to critique a system without acknowledging those who have kept it functioning, in partnership with the most effective local authorities.

> "The ambition is real, but the challenge is equally real

Three tiers

The white paper's new model works across three tiers beyond the universal offer: targeted support, targeted-plus and specialist provision for the most complex needs.

Its centrepiece is the individual support plan (ISP), a digital, legally mandated document that every school must produce for any child with identified SEND, with no requirement for a prior diagnosis.

The echo of the old IEP is clear, but the difference matters: the ISP would carry legal force, whereas the IEP carried only professional expectation.

EHCPs are retained for children with the highest levels of need, though their scope is hoped to narrow as the new tiers absorb more of the work.

The funding headline is £4 billion. £1.6 billion paid directly to schools. £1.8 billion for establishing local cadres of educational psychologists, speech and language therapists and specialist SEND teachers. £200 million for what is described by the DfE as the "the most ambitious and comprehensive SEND training offer ever seen".

The ambition is real, but the challenge is equally real.

Recruiting specialist professionals in many parts of the country is already a serious problem.

And school leaders will be managing both old and new systems simultaneously through a lengthy transition period while also meeting new requirements to publish an inclusion strategy subject to Ofsted scrutiny.

The long-term goals of the white paper are admirable: closing the gap between those with plans and those without, investing in specialist support as a routine resource rather than a contested prize and committing to genuine mainstream inclusion.

In the meantime, the professionals who have always done the most with the least deserve every support the new system can offer them.

Critically, whether the funding or the workforce capacity will match the ambition is the question that matters most and it remains, as yet, unanswered.

Opinion

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LIZ ROBINSON
CEO, Big Education

ALI GELLETT
Big AI Project lead

We're ready to train leaders to shape AI use in schools

Big Education's free training and pilot phase report seek to guide teachers through an environment drowned in marketing but short on evidence, say Liz Robinson and Ali Gellett

The scope, impact and speed of artificial intelligence is unintelligible to most. For school leaders, that creates both urgency and unease.

When we were approached about doing a project on AI, our initial reaction was "why would we do that, we don't know anything about AI!".

In fact, that insight was the start of this work. The vast majority of school leaders feel they don't know enough about the issue to navigate this within their organisations.

Hence the Big AI Project was born, with the aim being to equip all schools in the UK and the Republic of Ireland with the skills needed to approach an AI-infused world safely, ethically and strategically.

At its heart, this project is about more than technology, it is about fulfilling Big Education's broader mission to ensure school remains relevant to the needs of today, equipping young people with the agency to navigate a world transformed by AI.

Today we are formally launching our pilot phase report and the national rollout of our free training programme.

From wild west to professional agency

Research released by the Education Policy Institute with support from the Nuffield Foundation in January 2026 (Wielar & Andrews, 2026) found that a lack of evidence on AI impact leaves multi academy trusts navigating a "wild west" market.

Leaders are being asked to make decisions about procurement, safeguarding, pedagogy and data security in an environment saturated with marketing and short on independent evidence.

The Big AI Project responds directly to this challenge. The materials do not tell schools to adopt AI. Nor does it urge them to reject it.

Instead, the project has designed and piloted materials which seek to provide a balanced view that places the human and society at the centre of the discussion.

The project, made possible through philanthropic funding from Salesforce, is underpinned by leading voices from, amongst others, the Good Future Foundation, AI in Education at Oxford University, and Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

AI expert Professor Rose Luckin from UCL/Educate Ventures, academic evaluation partner to the project, captures its distinctive contribution: "What Big Education has done here is something essential: it has put

> "It places the human and society at the centre of discussion

schools and trusts at the centre of the conversation. Not as passive recipients of technology, and not as cheerleaders or critics of AI, but as active, thoughtful agents working out what this technology means for their communities, their staff, and their young people."

Practical, grounded insights

The holistic approach encompasses content ranging from safety and data security through to environmental impact, misinformation and impact on the world of work and employment.

We worked with schools nationally and internationally to co-design resources for different audiences. These have been piloted and evaluated, and we are delighted to be rolling this out nationally.

This includes training for school and trust leaders in person, training and resources for teachers, and age-appropriate AI literacy curricula for early years, primary and secondary students up to key stage 3.

One pilot school headteacher reflected: "The impact of the training was massive, opening my eyes as a school leader to AI, its uses and downfalls.

"This has made me have a far more cautious approach to 'letting the cat out of the bag' and making sure that we have everything in order before we introduce AI into the curriculum."

There are significant risks here, including poor pedagogical application, a growing digital and skills divide and mis/disinformation.

We hope that this project, which is completely aligned with the stringent DfE best practice guidance, can play a role in empowering our sector to be on the front foot with our thinking and decision-making.

This is an opportunity not simply to learn about AI, but to shape how it is understood and governed in our schools.

As Luckin puts it: "The question is no longer whether AI will shape education, but whether education will shape how AI is used."

The national rollout is happening across 10 locations in the coming weeks and months.

You can register for the free training **here**.

Opinion

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MEG POWELL-CHANDLER
Director, New Schools Network

Councils' support of AP schools is proof they play a crucial role

Local authority leaders defied DfE pressure to swap AP free school projects for spending on mainstream provision because they know some children need a specialist setting, says Meg Powell-Chandler

This school has changed his life," says Elliot's mum as she tearfully describes how St Wilfrid's Academy in Doncaster rescued her son from bullying, misunderstanding and misadventure at his previous mainstream school.

St Wilfrid's is an alternative provision (AP) free school that the Department for Education highlighted as providing best practice when it launched the 2022 wave of special and AP free schools.

Yet previously approved specialist free school projects like St Wilfrid's were thrown into uncertainty in December when the government told local authorities that had co-bid for 59 special and AP free schools that they had two months to decide whether to proceed with the projects.

Alternatively, councils could take per-place funding to create "specialist places" themselves by expanding existing special schools or creating inclusion units in mainstream settings.

Private provision costs

Demand for specialist provision has been rising for years. Around two thirds of special schools are over capacity. Our recent report into AP free schools highlighted that only 37 per cent of AP placements are in state-funded alternative provision, with unregistered and independent provision increasingly filling the gap.

The consequences are clear. In the scramble to secure specialist places, public spending on private provision has dramatically increased. Sometimes this is driven by parental preference enabled through EHCPs. Sometimes it reflects highly complex needs. But too often it is the result of a system that has failed to provide sufficient capacity in the first place.

Against this backdrop, the government's announcement – which also cancelled 18 special free school projects – emphasised that inclusion units in mainstream schools would make education "inclusive by design", while free schools would take years to build.

Some MPs welcomed the alternative funding as additional investment secured for their local area. The DfE's estates strategy has since established that "in time" all secondary schools will have an inclusion base. In a political environment driven more by signals than delivery, the message was clear: mainstream inclusion should take priority over new specialist schools.

> "Pupils have lower absence rates and stronger post-16 outcomes

Despite the pressure to reconsider, the majority of councils have chosen to press ahead with their special or AP free school projects.

That is because framing this as a choice between mainstream inclusion and specialist provision was always misguided.

Re-engaging with education

First, additional specialist capacity is desperately needed. Demand for specialist provision continues to outstrip supply. Without new state provision, councils will remain reliant on independent placements or sending pupils out of borough at significant cost.

And inclusion should not mean insisting every child must succeed in the same setting. For some pupils a different environment is exactly what enables them to re-engage with education.

Special schools and alternative provision exist because some children need smaller settings, specialist staff and a more tailored approach. That is not a failure of inclusion. It is what meaningful inclusion looks like.

Nor are specialist schools somehow separate from the communities they serve. High-quality special and AP schools do not isolate pupils; they create environments where children who have struggled elsewhere can thrive, rebuild confidence and access the support they need to succeed.

Improving outcomes for these children requires a focus on quality, not just capacity.

Special and AP free schools are already demonstrating what that quality can look like. In AP free schools, pupils have lower absence rates and stronger post-16 outcomes than in other state-funded AP settings. These schools are not simply providing a place for pupils who cannot be supported elsewhere – they are offering a chance to re-engage with education and build a positive future.

The support of the free school projects among councils should send a clear signal. Local leaders understand that meeting the needs of vulnerable pupils requires both stronger inclusion in mainstream schools and high-quality specialist provision.

This was never an either-or choice. It was always both.

Until the system plans properly for both, too many children will continue to fall through the gaps.

Opinion

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RACHEL DE SOUZA
Children's commissioner for England

Don't leave children to grapple with fears about the war alone

The attack on Iran and resulting conflict will raise questions from children. Though as adults we don't have all the answers, we must be there to provide guidance, says Rachel de Souza

Many children will have seen the distressing news and horrifying images from the conflict in the Middle East.

For some this may feel especially close to home if they have family members in affected areas or connections through wider communities.

For others, it is a crisis that creates a feeling of uncertainty and instability and reminds them of the fragile nature of world politics today.

As children's commissioner, I know just how acutely aware they are of the world around them.

Through my national surveys – The Big Ask and The Big Ambition – I have heard directly from a million young people.

The responses on a wide range of issues were striking but all underpinned by their strong desire for the world to be a fair and space place, especially for children, whoever they are and wherever they live.

Sadly, too often the world is not always fair, and even in the earliest days of violence and war it is children who are among the first to suffer through injury, displacement, trauma and loss.

It is impossible to deny that children here will also be feeling that pain. That is why we must always answer children's questions. They deserve far more than our silence.

Shocking images

It may feel natural to want to shield children from the frightening realities of the world, perhaps out of concern they might not understand what they are seeing.

But avoiding these conversations altogether can leave children alone with their fears, or worse, turning to the online world for answers.

If we leave our children to find out for themselves online we risk them facing an unfiltered world, leaving them exposed to the most shocking or disturbing content and images, without appropriate context or reassurance.

That's why supporting children through challenging moments like this starts with honest, age-appropriate conversations.

It means allowing children the space for questions, even when we do not have the answers ourselves. It means acknowledging the uncertainty, rather than pretending it does not exist.

> "Remind them they are not alone in their feelings

Practical support matters for young people too.

I want all adults working with children to remind them they are not alone in their feelings and they always have trusted people they can turn to, whether that is parents, carers, teachers, or other adults in the community.

Having worked with children for 35 years, I know what a vital role school and communities play in providing children with stability and a sense of understanding during difficult times.

Some children may need additional support for processing how they feel.

Age-appropriate news

Organisations like Childline with their free helpline offer young people the chance to speak with trained counsellors, while YoungMinds offers advice and guidance for young people.

For some children, watching news updates designed specifically for children and young people might also be a helpful starting point for conversations. Outlets like Newsround and Children United Today provide clear, age-appropriate updates that children can easily understand.

Ultimately, it is important that children feel they have the space to process their emotions. For some children, talking will be the solution. Others might find it easier to express themselves through other mediums like art, writing or music.

All these responses are valid. What matters most is that as adults in children's lives we are there for children, so every child feels heard, supported and safe.

We cannot promise children a world without conflict, but we can promise them they will not face the world alone and the adults around them will listen, explain and support them through uncertainty and fear.

Above all else, we must not lose sight of the fact that our support has never mattered more.

Week in Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

FRIDAY

Attendees at a well-timed Westminster Education Forum on SEND were eagerly waiting to hear from the DfE's strategic SEND adviser, Christine Lenehan, days after the release of the government's landmark reforms.

And wait they did, as Lenehan's microphone was not working for at least five minutes... cue the awkward silence.

She then only spoke for five minutes before having to leave for another event. The wonders of modern technology...

TUESDAY

It's hard not to notice how peculiar some of the Department for Education's social media posts have become in recent months.

The latest on the schools white paper gave us whiplash.

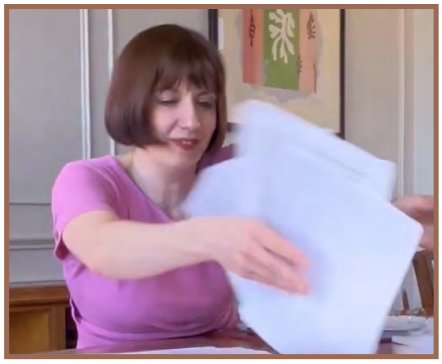
Out of nowhere, it begins with Bridget Phillipson shoving a big pile of paperwork off the desk... before the camera cuts back to the same pile of documents sitting right next to her.

It then vanishes out of shot again.

We stayed tuned in case she explained why she needed to despatch the paperwork, or if there was some hidden metaphor.

The video seemed to be about summing up the white paper, so who knows? Please write in with suggestions.

Anyway, our overriding thoughts were with whoever had to pick up the papers off the floor.



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Helen Hayes, chair of the education select committee, hasn't held back on criticising the government for so far not responding to its SEND inquiry report.

The meagre response before the white paper publication was only considered to be an "interim" document by Hayes in December.

But the DfE has committed to providing a full response to the report and its recommendations before recess in a few weeks' time. Finally.

***

Ofqual top boss Ian Bauckham has gone full Poirot to find out how artificial intelligence is being used by students (see page 5).

He's also requesting the exam boards explain how they will strengthen controls on its misuse, asking them to write back by the end of the month.

Asked whether he would use AI to help him determine if the boards' responses were enough, he said: "Of course not, we'll use our old-fashioned human brains."

WEDNESDAY

Among the campaigners we expected to see at Parliament after the white paper, these took us by surprise.

We received a press release to tell us that celebrity chefs Prue Leith, Delia Smith and Stanley Tucci would be at Parliament to call on government to make sure all kids have access to regular practical cookery lessons.

Wish we could've shown them our year 7 fruit salad.

THURSDAY

Ministers were very chuffed to announce some schools will have solar panels installed by summer.

How many, you ask? A lofty 250 schools and colleges, nationwide.

Apparently it will save an estimated £220 million over the lifetime of the solar panels. A huge figure which raised our eyebrows.

Ah – thankfully the government provided some details on how it came to this figure.

But hang on, the government said the estimates are "undiscounted and calculated net of operating costs" and "remain uncertain, as they are sensitive to key input assumptions, particularly future electricity retail prices".

So far, so unconvincing. But then it went on: "Lifetime energy bill savings estimates are calculated on the total project value (including match-funding), using DESNZ assumptions agreed with delivery partners."

All gobbledygook to us, and probably everyone else. We'd like to see more of those receipts, please.

Wycliffe C E Primary

bdat Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust

HEADTEACHER

Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust (BDAT) is seeking an exceptional and visionary Headteacher to lead this dynamic and forward-thinking school. The successful candidate will build on the strong foundation already established, ensuring the school continues to deliver an outstanding education to all students. Our ambition is to transform the lives of our students, staff, and the wider community, fostering a culture of continuous development and improvement.

Set within Bradford and on the edge of the picturesque World Heritage Village of Saltaire, Wycliffe Primary is a bustling and lively primary school packed full of determined and individually amazing children. The school prides itself on serving a diverse community, with children from a wide range of backgrounds, ethnicities, faith and life experiences, representative of the community it serves. It is exactly this rich tapestry which makes our school so special. Visits to the school are warmly welcomed and actively encouraged.

Click here for more info

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Excelsior Multi Academy Trust

GREEN MEADOW PRIMARY SCHOOL

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: 11th March 2026
Interview Date: 24th March 2026

Great Place To Work. Certified MAY 2024-MAY 2025 UK

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

CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO

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