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# MORE 'SHADOW' INSPECTIONS TO TEST CONSISTENCY

- Ofsted to send in senior inspectors to check more visits
- Ramping up of 'quality assurance' to test grade 'validity'
- Critics welcome 'starting point', but more evaluation needed

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS | @LYDIACHSW

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SCHOOLS  
WEEK

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## SCHOOLS WEEK

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Sir Keir Starmer has pledged to focus on “delivery, delivery, delivery” as he seeks to reboot his troubled government’s reform programme in the face of dire opinion polls and huge economic instability.

As we set out on page 4, education will soon see evidence of that delivery, with big changes to inspection and accountability, schools policy, SEND and more due to be announced this term.

Given that so many in education remain underwhelmed by Labour’s performance so far, it’s crucial that ministers get this right.

Year one has been supposedly spent listening, be it on Ofsted or curriculum.

The sector has also spoken clearly about what it thinks could go wrong (with particular concern over the speed with which report cards are introduced).

There are also worries about how the reforms are likely to be communicated.

If the curriculum and assessment review is not published before the schools

white paper, there is a risk that key policy changes will not be properly joined up.

And then there’s the controversial SEND reforms, which will require lots of consultation and time to change legislation. They therefore need to come sooner, rather than later.

Change is clearly needed, as the SEND status quo is not working for anyone.

But unless the government can bring families and the sector that so diligently serves them along with it, the policy could end the same way as benefit changes – in an embarrassing row back.

Labour has faced flak for apparently having no vision for schools.

Supporters say their manifesto and change missions set out that vision – and the white paper will be the architecture of how it is to be implemented.

Most in education still want Labour to succeed. It must not squander that goodwill by mishandling the most important school reforms in a generation.

## Most read online this week:

- 1** Government names first 21 new ‘behaviour and attendance hubs’
- 2** School staff personal data potentially ‘compromised’ in Intradev cyber attack
- 3** DfE pushes ahead with unregistered AP time limits
- 4** Costs putting poorer pupils off some GCSE subjects
- 5** Ark Schools to set up ‘northern hub’ after MAT merger

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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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# Buckle up for autumn school reforms blitz

JOHN DICKENS

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In July Bridget Phillipson told Schools Week that Labour “laid the foundations” for change in its first year in office. This year, the education secretary added, was the time to “build”.

For school leaders, that has turned into what looks like a pretty daunting autumn term of reforms across inspection, accountability, curriculum and special needs education, among other things.

So here's your Schools Week guide of what to expect from Labour's autumn term school policy blitz...

## Ofsted report cards

**What to expect:** Promised amendments after criticism over the initial proposals are expected to include some grade name changes and fewer evaluation areas.

**When to expect it:** Tuesday. That gives schools just eight weeks to digest the changes before inspections start in November.

However, Ofsted has said only the most senior inspectors will lead inspections, meaning fewer will take place in the autumn term. None will take place in the last week before Christmas to allow for more inspector training.

## School accountability reforms

**What to expect:** Although it somewhat snuck under the radar at the same time as the launch of Ofsted's consultation, the government also consulted on accountability changes.

A key element was extra support for “stuck schools”, which started last academic year.

The consultation also set out how intervention would work under Ofsted report cards and proposed new school profiles, a digital “one-stop shop” for parents to view a ‘broad range of information’ about a school.

One idea was allowing “easy comparisons between schools with similar characteristics”.

**When to expect it:** The government is expected to confirm the plans next week, alongside the final Ofsted proposals. The consultation said a “first version” of the school profiles were expected



to launch this academic year, with further development based on feedback.

## Schools white paper

**What to expect:** Proposals are still being worked on, but Phillipson has said the paper will set out an “ambitious reform agenda”.

This will include policies to raise attainment for white working-class children and tackle bad behaviour and attendance.

Other areas may include literacy, how pupils engage with school and extra-curricular activities. A key component will also be SEND reforms (see below).

**When to expect it:** No date has been set other than “in the autumn”.

In an ideal world, you'd think the government would want it published before the Labour party conference at the end of September – but that deadline seems to have been missed. Indecision over SEND reforms could be holding it up.

## SEND reforms

**What to expect:** Dame Christine Lenehan, a government adviser on SEND, previously said proposals to reform education, health and care plans (EHCPs) would include whether to limit them to pupils in

special schools.

But the government has since softened its tone and said it will not remove “effective provision”. As well as potential EHCP changes, how funding works is also likely to be reformed.

**When to expect it:** Again, the promise is “in the autumn”, but given SEND proposals will be consulted on and likely require new legislation, the push is to get it out sooner rather than later.

But the timeline appears to keep moving, with Downing Street twitchy over the controversial changes following its embarrassing row-back on benefit reforms earlier this year.

## Curriculum review

**What to expect:** An interim report in March gave a few key steers. The volume of content in primary school lessons is being reviewed, as is the EBacc performance measure. Changes look likely for English and maths post-16 re-sits, and options are also being explored to reduce the overall volume of key stage 4 exams.

**When to expect it:** The official line is in the autumn. But it is hoped the review will be published before the promised white paper.

The government has committed to give schools a year's notice for any major curriculum reforms.

Professor Becky Francis, review chair, said bigger changes could also require further review or consultations, and may not happen during this parliament – which ends in 2029.



Becky Francis



Sir Martyn Oliver



## NEWS: OFSTED

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## Ofsted ramps up 'shadow' visits to test consistency

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

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EXCLUSIVE

Ofsted is to deploy senior inspectors to "shadow" inspection teams in a bid to test the consistency of judgments under its new report cards system.

The watchdog has confirmed it will introduce extra quality assurance (QA) visits focused specifically on consistency and reliability when inspections resume in November.

It follows concerns that the introduction of more inspection areas and grades will make judgments less reliable. Academics have already expressed concerns about reliability.

Under existing QA checks, senior inspectors shadow less experienced team members during school visits to observe them working, provide guidance and report back to line managers.

But Ofsted plans to build on this by carrying out more shadow inspections to "assess consistency" and ensure grades are "as valid and as reliable as possible". The watchdog has not said how many more visits it will carry out each year.

Writing for Schools Week, Rory Gribbell, Ofsted's strategy director, and Dr Verena Braehler, its research and evaluation director, said: "We also want to know how consistent our inspections are, through testing."

Critics have welcomed the move as a "good starting point", but have called for regular, "transparent" reporting of the results. They have also called for oversight from an independent, external body.

**What is changing?**

The new measures essentially mean a ramping-up of Ofsted's QA process.

"The senior inspector's role will be specifically to ensure the consistency of inspection outcomes as part of a larger process," said Gribbell and Braehler.

"After each inspection, any initial differences between senior inspectors and inspection teams will be analysed by our research and evaluation team."

Feedback will then be considered alongside "wider consistency activity", which will include inspectors being given simulations of real-world inspections to evaluate their training and judgments.

Inspection toolkits or training could then be tweaked.

**Will shadow visits really show inconsistencies?**

Gribbell and Braehler said that during QA visits, senior inspectors will "advise and guide the inspection team to the right result" before reporting back to Ofsted about areas where they reached different conclusions.

But Dr Tim Leunig, a professor at the London School of Economics and former DfE policy adviser, is concerned junior inspectors will simply "follow" the senior inspector's judgment.

He said a fairer measure would be if junior and senior inspectors filed separate judgments "without having seen the other verdict, and both are revealed together".

**Transparency is key**

University College London academics John Jerrim and Dr Sam Sims, and The University of Southampton's Professor Christian Bokhove, have long argued for greater scrutiny of inspection reliability.

They described Ofsted's move to carry out more shadow inspections as "a real positive".

But while "a good starting point", they warned the watchdog was setting "a low bar".

They fear the process is "likely to only show up really quite major instances of inconsistencies", analogous to "when two referees disagree on whether a player is standing three yards offside".

More work would be needed to prove inspections had a high degree of consistency and reliability.

Crucially, they said "results of research on consistency [must be] transparently reported".

They also called for a "close external overview" of this work, "ideally...conducted by an independent organisation".

**Dearth of reliability evaluations**

But Ofsted has "to start somewhere", they said, adding that "for 30 years we have had pretty much nothing else".

The last evaluation of Ofsted grade reliability was published in 2017, before the latest inspection framework was introduced.

It found two inspectors tended to agree on which grade to award a school, but the report only looked at "short" inspections of schools already rated 'good' or better.

Other studies have shown wider discrepancies. One by Bokhove, Jerrim and Sims in 2023 found that primary schools assigned a female lead inspector were around one third more likely to receive an 'inadequate' judgment.

**'Not a one-off'**

Jerrim and Bokhove stressed Ofsted's new work on consistency must not be "one and done" and "needs to be a much longer-term endeavour."

Ofsted has said results of the new consistency work will be published next year.

It is not clear exactly when, but the watchdog said it was keen to make any necessary updates to the EIF ahead of the 2026-27 academic year.

But Gribbell and Braehler insisted the work not be a "one-off exercise", and that regular reports will be published.



Sam Sims



John Jerrim

Read more about Ofsted's plans  
on page 24

## INVESTIGATION

# Guidance call as scores of schools lock down

**JACK DYSON**
**@JACKYDYS**

Armed intruders, shootings near by and seagulls have forced schools teaching almost 100,000 pupils into lockdown, *Schools Week* can reveal.

Leaders have warned communications during the incidents can be a “difficult balance”. It comes after one incident saw parents storm an academy’s grounds and threaten staff despite emergency measures being in place for just nine minutes.

The NASUWT teaching union is calling on the government to introduce “comprehensive, mandatory lockdown guidance in schools”, amid concerns some schools are ignoring advice and ill-prepared for “a potentially violent intruder”.

## How often do schools go into lockdown?

Lockdown record-keeping is patchy as the government doesn’t collect figures on incidents in schools.

Meanwhile, just 18 local authorities provided figures when asked under the freedom of information act, while more than 100 could not. Most police forces could not provide data either.

We also approached 20 of England’s largest multi-academy trusts. Five held records, three said they did not and 12 did not respond.

In the absence of official data, *Schools Week* analysed news reports on Google.

We found 117 separate incidents of reported lockdowns since January 1 last year. Almost 100,000 pupils attend the affected schools.

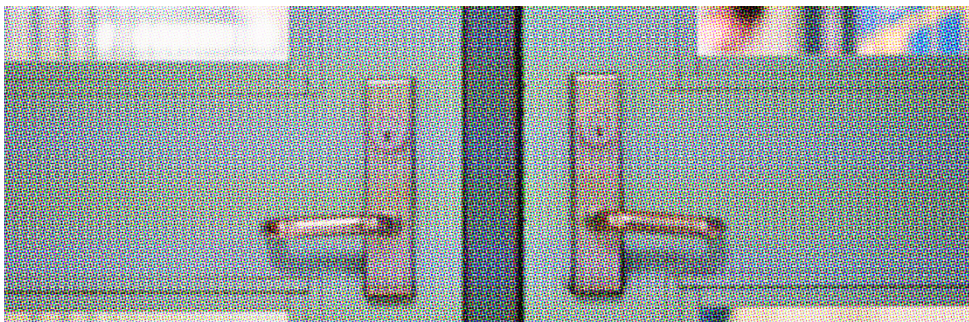
Thirty-eight per cent (45) followed incidents – including attacks, weapon sightings and protests – near schools.

A further 21 per cent (24) followed malicious communications, delivered by email or phone, with a further 18 per cent (21) coming after concerns were raised about intruders.

Wayne Bates, an NASUWT national official, says there seems to be “more media reports”.

But this “could be due to increased reporting, or perhaps reflects an improving situation”, with more schools having emergency procedures in place.

Dan Grant, of Leaders in Safeguarding Ltd, called on the government to launch a “formalised process for gathering data to help



## ‘Social media and media coverage are growing challenges’

the sector identify areas of growing concern, what works well and assist with planning and publishing further guidance”.

### Staff left with PTSD

The Bloxwich Academy in Walsall went into lockdown for just nine minutes after an alarm was raised over a potential intruder. They turned out to be a truanting pupil.

But despite the school regarding the exercise as a success, more than 100 parents gathered outside within 30 minutes. Some urged pupils to jump its spiked security fences, placing blankets, bags and coats over the top to aid their climb.

David Lowbridge-Ellis, of the Matrix Academy Trust, which runs the school, said “at least one young person was quite seriously injured and had to go to hospital”.

Others “bashed their way through” the school’s main gate, before “banging on the windows, swearing at us, calling us every name under the sun beginning with the letter c”. Gary Smart, also of Matrix, received death threats.

“It felt like you were going to be attacked. There were people punching the glass next to me and spitting on the glass.”

Leaders decided “the safest thing to do” was to release pupils.

Lowbridge-Ellis said he was one of “quite a few” staff “treated for PTSD”. Traumatized children also required “professional support”.

### Parent and media challenges

“We communicated with parents via text message. We were at pains to make sure our message was reassuring. We can’t really fault our process,” he said.

It is thought pupils’ “lockdown selfies”, shared on platforms such as Snapchat, sparked the parental panic.

Nova Education Trust – which locked down one school in March over the “potential threat of an unknown individual” on a site – described “social media and media coverage” as “growing challenges”.

“Inaccurate or premature information

Continued on next page



## INVESTIGATION

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can spread quickly, creating confusion and anxiety among parents, pupils, and the wider community.

"In what is already a pressurised context, these additional complications can make things significantly more difficult for schools."

Notre Dame Catholic Academy in Liverpool closed off part of its site in May after three seagulls entered the building, "diving" on pupils and "causing a nuisance".

Victoria Taylor, the school's head, said the safest way to remove the birds was to put the school into a partial lockdown.

Notre Dame also went into lockdown following a "police incident 200 metres from the school, where shots had been fired".

The secondary is a "mobile phone-free school", she said, "so our pupils were not aware of what was happening outside".

Edward Vitalis, the chief executive of the Invictus Education Trust, says communications can be a "difficult balance" during a lockdown. Releasing "too much detail... may risk compromising the safety of pupils and staff, while holding back can cause understandable worry".

And if "messages come from a [MAT] HQ or central team, they may lack the full picture", making it "difficult to give parents accurate, timely information".

Concerns over school lockdowns are now being seized-upon by the far right. Campaigner Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (also known as Tommy Robinson) posted on X that he had been "inundated" with parents saying they had received correspondence from their children's schools' regarding lockdown.

The post featured screenshots of an email in which parents were told teachers had talked to their children "about something called 'lockdown'".

It told them they needed to run drills "on an annual basis", with practice scenarios including "a threat from above" and inside the building "with tables turned to barricade toward the corridor".

Yaxley-Lennon asked: "Wtf have schools been told to prepare for?!"

**Schools more prepared?**

Pepe Di'Iasio, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said it was "sensible" to have such plans in place as "sadly, we live in times where threats exist to



Pepe Di'Iasio



## 'We live in times where threats exist to many public venues'

many public venues and institutions".

"It is important to remember that this is a precautionary approach, and that schools and colleges are overwhelmingly safe places."

Earlier this year, 3 per cent of teachers told Teacher Tapp they had gone into lockdown following a "security concern". A further 1 per cent had enacted the policy for "another reason".

A separate poll last September showed 47 per cent of primaries have lockdown drills they practise with pupils, up from 33 per cent in 2022. For secondaries, the figure rose from 38 to 59 per cent.

But the study also suggested 26 per cent of primaries and 19 per cent of secondaries do not have procedures in place.

Bates says the NASUWT has heard "anecdotal evidence of some institutions ignoring the advice, believing they do not need a lockdown procedure", leaving "teachers, pupils and other staff potentially vulnerable to a violent intruder".

He also notes that current guidance "appears to discourage drills in primary and early years settings". Government guidance – which is non-statutory – says it is "relatively uncommon" for such exercises "to involve primary school and early years learners".

Instead, staff in these settings "may hold drills for staff at a time when younger learners are not present".

Bates says there are extensive regulations

for fire safety in schools, which include the requirement to carry out practice evacuations or drills.

"The NASUWT believes there is a need for comprehensive, mandatory lockdown guidance in schools."

Taylor says her school offers mental health support and engages "staff in post-drill conversations to help ease anxiety and answer questions".

Ciran Stapleton, the head of St Joseph's Catholic High School in Slough, urges schools to "prepare, prepare, prepare". In March 2023, a man carrying a knife entered his school – just a few weeks after pupils and staff carried out their annual drill.

The intruder – who was later given a hospital order under the Mental Health Act – claimed he had a gun, saying: "I'm going to take everybody out."

Stapleton confronted him and talked to him as he waited for police to arrive and the school was locked down. Wires could be seen coiling out of the intruder's bag.

"He was really edgy, erratic eyes, erratic behaviour, rocking back and forth. He was talking about the end of the world."

"I was trying to hold him up until police got there. When he realised it wasn't going anywhere, he started saying 'I should have gone to Westminster'."

Police arrived



Edward Vitalis

Continued on next page

INVESTIGATION

25 minutes later. They found a knife in his waistband, but no gun or explosives.

**A 'levelled' approach**

Following the incident at Bloxwich, Matrix tore up its lockdown procedures, replacing them with a five-level approach, dubbed SMART Response, ranging from 0 (monitoring) to 4 (lockdown).

Had the school adopted the strategy before the incident, the trust believes, staff would "could have investigated the situation calmly", with the "emotional and reputational impact... significantly reduced".

Lowbridge-Ellis argues the model offers an alternative to "on-off" lockdown guidance it previously followed "to the letter".

The current non-statutory lockdown guidance means schools do not have to comply.

"Some of the guidance is also vague, lacking sufficient detail to enable schools to put appropriate procedures in place."

He points to the guidance's failure "to highlight the importance of having a secure control room to coordinate a response to a violent intruder".

For some schools, all communications and CCTV "are controlled from reception, which could be the first location to be compromised in an incident".



**"Prepare, prepare, prepare"**

But Lisa Broad, a former DfE counter-terrorism lead who now consults schools, warns the "diversity of school environments" makes it "challenging for government to issue prescriptive guidance".

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**Martyn's Law changes**

However, some of this will change with Martyn's Law.

Also known as the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, the legislation will order schools to have "appropriate" evacuation, invacuation and lockdown procedures in place.

The bill received royal assent in April. The government will publish statutory guidance on it during the 24-month implementation period "to assist those responsible to understand the requirements set out in the legislation".

Broad believes the "critical" impact of Martyn's Law is the mandatory requirement for schools to have effective emergency response plans.

"Although new legislation is specifically about terrorism, it actually makes schools safer from a range of threats – not just those politically, religiously or ideologically motivated.

"Having these plans in place will raise the bar and make our schools safer."

Physical security measures will not be mandated. It is not yet known if the legislation will force schools to conduct lockdown drills, though.

Bates also stresses that "failure to have sufficient and effective policies and procedures in place could result in a penalty" from the regulator, the Security Industry Authority.



Lisa Broad

## Martyn's Law: What it means for schools

Schools with a capacity of more than 200 will have to follow "Martyn's Law" from 2027, with and the Department for Education this week publishing a policy paper on the legislation.

**What is Martyn's Law?**

The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 became law in April, but there is an implementation period of "at least" 24 months.

The law requires venues above a certain size to implement certain policies to follow in the event of a terrorist attack.

It is known as Martyn's law, named after Martyn Hett, one of 22 people killed in the 2017 Manchester Arena terrorist attack. It follows a long campaign by his mother, Figen Murray, for better measures to protect the public.

**Which schools are affected?**

Schools with a capacity of below 200 do not need to follow Martyn's Law, although the

government said it encouraged "all settings to have preparedness plans for the safety of their learners and staff".

All other schools with a capacity of over 200 will be considered as in the "standard tier", regardless of their total capacity.

This is different to, for example, commercial venues, which will be in the "enhanced tier", with greater requirements, if they have a capacity over 800.

**What will schools need to do?**

Schools covered by the law will need to have "appropriate procedures" in place.

These will need to include procedures for evacuation, invacuation (moving people to a safe place), lockdown and communication.

There is "no requirement to put physical security measures in place".

Schools will also need to appoint a "responsible person" and notify the Security Industry Authority (SIA), the regulator.

But this must be a "body or institution", for example the "local authority or the relevant proprietor or governing body", as opposed to a "designated individual such as a safeguarding lead or headteacher within the institution".

**What support is available?**

The DfE has said it is working with the National Counter Terrorism Security Office and the Home Office to help the sector to implement Martyn's Law.

The government will provide "lunch and learn webinars", guidance and factsheets, products and resources for good security practice and updates for the sector.

The government will also publish statutory guidance during the 24-month implementation to help schools "understand the requirements set out in the legislation".



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# Councils ill-prepared for end of PFI deals

JACK DYSON

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EXCLUSIVE

Vital construction work on schools involved in England's biggest PFI deal could be left incomplete, despite a council pumping in £3.5 million of its own money to fill a funding shortfall.

Local authority chiefs in Stoke stumped up the extra funding as they signed off on an extension for the work to be completed by a PFI company, just months before its contract was due to end.

With 43 PFI deals across England set to end in the next seven years, experts say the case underlines the need for councils to adequately prepare for expiry.

## Work 'backstop'

Spencer van der Werf, the managing director of Help for Schools, warned that without preparation, "more and more contracts will end up hastily negotiated".

"[This could] leave schools in a situation where they will have...leaking roofs, cracked windows and the like [because] they won't have the capital expenditure in their budgets to fix these issues."

Successive governments have used PFI to fund new schools since the late 1990s.

Private companies build and maintain sites in exchange for mortgage-style payments, normally over 25-year contracts – which rise beyond inflation – before handing them over to taxpayers.

Stoke has 88 schools built under a PFI contract due to end next month with Transform Schools (Stoke) Ltd. It's the largest school PFI contract in the country.

The council said it entered into a "supplemental agreement" with Transform in May to provide "a back-stop period for works to be completed". This has "helped to avoid a lengthy and costly dispute resolution process".

It will also stump as much as £3.5 million to cover "extra costs caused by the impact of high inflation" since "hand-back condition surveys were carried out".

"Whilst the council has committed to inject a significant amount of additional funding into the project to ensure that as much of the remaining work will be completed, there is no guarantee that all works will be completed within the £3.5 million," a spokesperson said.



## 'Grave concerns'

The council stressed that "a number of disputed work items" have been included in the programme.

Accounts for Transform Schools (Stoke) stated that the agreement, in the opinion of its directors, "reduces" its "ultimate obligation to an amount that is able to be funded".

The council said £7.2 million of "hand-back works" remained outstanding as of August 26. Of this, the "PFI provider has stated £2.3 million are complete and are going through the validation process".

In January, Stoke council officer Paul Gerrard told a meeting "approximately £1.5 million" of work needed to be completed each month before the contract's original end date.

During another meeting, headteacher Mike Whittingham shared "grave concerns regarding...the hand-back works and business as usual works".

He said his school Trentham Academy still had "leaks" and "400 hand-back jobs identified, with just over 100 completed with nine months to go".

## Cost of PFI expiry

Van der Werf added many councils now lacked PFI expertise, as those who signed off on the deals over 20 years ago no longer worked for them.

Information obtained through freedom of information requests shows 10 local authorities have paid out more than £3 million in total on costs associated with expiry.

Most put cash towards condition surveys and legal help, while one established a new team to oversee 13 separate deals.

Ian Denison, the director of PFI consultancy Inscyte, believes the findings show councils "have limited capacity to actively manage these contracts".

"By the time an LA fully grasps the complexity of PFI expiry ... it is often late in the process.

"With limited time remaining, the only viable option is frequently to bring in external expertise in an effort to influence outcomes and better manage risks."

## Was PFI worth it?

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

To support this, it will explore the use of public-private partnerships (PPPs) for projects where "value for money for taxpayers can be secured". PFI is a form of these partnerships.

But during a talk at the Schools and Academies Show earlier this year, Dan Rudley, deputy director of the DfE's private finance team, admitted officials "don't know" if PFI has saved public money.

"What there isn't right now is any kind of retrospective study that shows the outcomes and whether or not what was expected has actually transpired.

The DfE confirmed the ongoing expiry programme will provide additional data on the condition of buildings at hand back.



## NEWS

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# Staff want compensation after summer cyber-attack

JOHN DICKENS

@JOHNDICKENSSW

EXCLUSIVE

Schools are facing compensation claims from distressed staff who have been told they face increased risk of identity theft after their personal details were “compromised” in a cyber-attack over the summer.

Investigations have been launched into whether criminals have seized the names and addresses, and phone, national insurance and passport numbers of staff.

They follow a “malicious” attack on the software supplier of Single Central Record (SCR). The company says it manages more than 350,000 staff records at 1,500 schools.

Schools are required by law to keep a single central record of data gathered in checks made on staff before they take up jobs. These can be maintained by external providers, such as SCR, also known as Online SCR.

## Criminals claim ownership

SCR was informed of the breach by its software supplier Intradev on Sunday, August 17.

Steve Cheetham, Intradev's managing director, said the company “identified unauthorised activity within our systems” on August 4 after a “significant IT security” incident.

Speaking on Thursday, he said a “criminal group has claimed to have taken some data from our systems. We are investigating this as a matter of priority and are coordinating with the relevant authorities.”

The breach has been reported to Action Fraud and the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

SCR said it was unable to say how many schools have been hit, but it has provided schools with a list of affected staff.

## 'Identity theft risk'

“Breach management” documents sent to schools by SCR say the incident “may increase the risk of phishing, fraud attempts, and identity theft for affected individuals”.

Concerned teachers have taken to social media forum Reddit to ask for advice.

One said they were “feeling very overwhelmed and worried about the potential impact that this could have”.

They also claimed they were informed a month



after the breach happened on July 31.

Under GDPR rules, organisations must report data breaches to the relevant authority within 72 hours, with those affected by high-risk incidents also informed “without undue delay”.

SCR said the breach was a “moderate to high risk due to the sensitivity of the data involved”, but no financial or criminal checks were compromised.

In a blog post, Lucas Atkin, the head of information law at Stone King, said if criminals seized data, “it is common [they] threaten to release information on the dark web for auction unless a ransom is paid”.

Schools have been told to inform staff to be “aware” of suspicious emails, phone calls, messages and phishing or impersonation attempts.

They should also avoid “clicking on unusual links” and have been advised to “consider identity protection measures” and to change passwords, including enabling two-factor authentication.

## 'Staff asking for compensation'

SCR also told schools to consider registering affected staff to CIFAS, a fraud prevention membership organisation, as a “risk mitigation action”. Membership costs £30.

Claire Archibald, legal director at Browne Jacobson, said staff were asking schools and trusts for compensation, and to pay for new passports.

But she warned employers “must be careful” as there was “no duty on schools and trusts to make such payments”.

They would also likely qualify as “novel, contentious or repercussive transactions”, which required government approval.

Atkin advised schools to put Online SCR “on notice for any expenses of losses which may be incurred or suffered due to the breach”.

## Attack a 'stark reminder'

Jay Ashcroft, a director of School SCR, another provider of record services, and a former trust data protection officer, said schools should “immediately undertake” a comprehensive Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) review of their contracts with Online SCR.

But one expert, speaking anonymously, said they had spoken to trusts who had not completed a DPIA before entering into the contract – which could leave schools open to legal action.

Atkin also claimed “most” of the schools Stone King was advising “were not aware that Intradev was involved in the provision of Online SCR's services”.

Neither company responded to a request for comment about whether schools were told Intradev would have access to their personal data.

Ashcroft said the incident was a “stark reminder that schools can no longer afford to take a casual approach to data protection”.

SCR said its systems “remain incredibly secure” and it has since revoked access from Intradev.

Cheetham said the “swift response” of its IT team meant systems were “successfully secured and recovered... which meant we were able to minimise operational disruption”.

## NEWS

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# DfE cuts funding for Mandarin programme

## SCHOOLS WEEK REPORTER

@SCHOOLSWEEK

Funding for schools that offer Mandarin lessons has been cut by a quarter, with flights to China and enrichment trips to Chinese universities no longer paid for.

A Department for Education update this week confirmed schools taking part in the Mandarin Excellence Programme will now receive an annual £15,000, down £5,000.

A flagship initiative launched by the Conservative government, pupils received eight hours a week of "intensive" Mandarin lessons, with trips to China and retention payments to stop them dropping out.

Funding will continue this academic year, but has fallen from £4.1 million to £2.4 million.

The government said it wanted to ensure "every child gets access to brilliant opportunities... [with the scheme] supporting more than 8,000 pupils to continue to



benefit from high quality Mandarin language education".

Seventy-six schools and 20 sixth forms offer the lessons.

But the support was "reshaped" after evaluation so schools could "more easily timetable" Mandarin lessons.

From this month, the programme will instead offer six hours a week of teaching. Funding will also no longer cover flights to China and

enrichment trips to Chinese universities.

Retention payments will be reduced, but "financial support" will continue to help pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds attend a year 9 trip to China.

The programme, run by University College London, will also continue to fund professional development for teachers and online resources.

A Latin scheme for state pupils had been axed, with funding pulled for computing hubs and scaled back for modern foreign language hubs.

The government said continuing the Mandarin scheme was "part of wider efforts to boost the UK's capability to manage the risks and opportunities of our relationship with China in the national interest".

UCL did not want to comment, but said earlier this year the programme has supported more than 16,000 pupils. More than 4,000 have sat Mandarin GCSEs, with the same number visiting China.

FREDDIE WHITTAKER | @FCDWHITTAKER

## Holiday scheme extended for three years

The government's holiday activities and food programme has been extended for another three years, with £600 million of funding.

The scheme, which was piloted between 2018 and 2020 and rolled out in 2021, pays for free clubs and lunches for poorer pupils during school holidays.

Ministers gave the provision a three-year funding settlement in 2021. But there had been uncertainty after the scheme was only extended for a year in March, and after the programme was not specifically mentioned in the spending review.

However, the DfE has said it will run until at least March 2029, with £600 million over the three years coming from the department's recent settlement.

Bridget Phillipson, the education secretary, said: "Giving every child the best start in life is my number one priority, which is why we are delivering on our commitment to provide hundreds of thousands of children with 30 hours government-funded early education."

Funding is handed to councils, and although the clubs are not directly overseen by schools many are held on their premises.

Amanda Hopgood, the chair of the Local Government Association's children and young people board, said: "We are pleased the government has acted on our call to extend the holiday activities and food programme.

"This has been essential in supporting vulnerable children, offering healthy, nutritious and affordable food while also providing vital

wraparound, holistic support for families."

The programme had "proven highly effective by encouraging children to engage in higher levels of physical activity, improving their diets, as well as increasing their confidence, wellbeing and feeling of social connection, in particular reaching pupils who are persistent school absentees or at risk of absence.

"Councils would not have been able to replace this funding ... which would have impacted on the most vulnerable children and risked losing experienced staff without adequate time to plan for future provision.

"Extending the funding provides much-needed certainty and safeguards valuable support and expertise."



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# Economics teacher numbers just don't add up

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

**More pupils are signing up to study economics and business studies, but recruitment of specialist teachers in the subjects is worsening. Lydia Chantler-Hicks investigates**

Ministers should introduce a teacher training bursary for economics and business studies to ease a "chronic" shortage of teachers at a time when the subjects are growing in popularity.

A-level entries for economics rose 5.5 per cent this year, the biggest increase amongst the 10 most popular subjects.

Meanwhile, entries in business studies overtook history to become the fifth most popular A-level. Entries also rose by 3 per cent at GCSE.

But analysis by FFT Education Datalab shows that just over half of state schools offer economics A-level.

Yet recruitment for would-be teachers hit just 15 per cent of the government's target last academic year (2024-25). This compares with an average of 62 per cent across all secondary subjects.

Experts say a financial incentive could attract more staff to the increasingly popular subject, boost pupil take-up and help to address "major inequality".

Leighton Chipperfield, the chief executive of the Royal Economic Society, told Schools Week he was "deeply concerned" about the shortage of economics teachers in UK state schools.

"Too often, young people are denied the chance to study economics because of this shortage — a problem felt most acutely by pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds."

He urged the government to take "every possible step" to improve the supply of qualified teachers, including a bursary at least equivalent to those offered in other shortage subjects.

The DfE offers bursaries of between £5,000 and £29,000 for chemistry, computing, maths, physics, languages, biology, DT, geography, art and design, music, RE, and English.



## 'Young people are too often denied the chance to study economics'

Gareth Taylor, the head of professional development at The Economics, Business and Enterprise Association (EBEA), which represents economics teachers, said the subject's rising popularity could partly be because "the message is getting through" about its financial benefits.

But the "chronic shortage" of qualified staff in state schools "created a 'major inequality', with limited access 'hard-wiring income inequality into society'".

"If the government chose to fix this by introducing the kind of ITT bursary it offers in other subjects, numbers would rise still further."

### Bursary system not perfect

Emma Hollis, the chief executive of the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT), said new bursaries would "always be welcomed", but the system had flaws.

A NASBTT member survey in spring said it "sometimes attracts candidates who are more interested in the financial incentive than in teaching, which may lead to lower-quality applicants".

Meanwhile "fluctuating" bursaries – such as for English which has been slashed from

£10,000 to £5,000 – created uncertainty and delayed applications.

Hollis said providers also argued varying bursaries felt inequitable, "implying that certain subjects are more valued than others."

"If there is a specific need emerging for an economics/business studies ITT bursary, then of course we would support all efforts to attract additional candidates – but these issues need to be recognised and addressed."

### Major disparities in access

A Social Mobility Commission report in 2023 found economics graduates were second only to medical sciences in terms of potential lifetime earnings.

Yet it had a low "access rate" with "relatively few" 16-year-olds on free school meals studying the subject.

Adrian Lyons, a former national lead HMI for economics, business and enterprise, said schools offering economics "represent too narrow a socio-economic segment". Pupils were "disproportionately male and from high socioeconomic groups".



Emma Hollis

Continued on next page



## LONG READ

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"This is then reflected at undergraduate level, postgraduate level and professional level in terms of those who give advice to politicians and policy-makers."

A report by FFT Education Datalab, commissioned by the Bank of England in spring, found economics was offered at just over half of non-selective state schools, compared with 90 per cent of selective and 82 per cent of private schools.

It found while the cohort of pupils taking economics A-level had become more diverse, disadvantaged pupils were still less likely to take the subject.

There were also "very large" regional disparities. At GCSE, 43 per cent of pupils taking economics in 2023 were from London schools, compared with just 1 per cent in the north east. At A-level, the split was 29 to 2 per cent.

There was also a large gender difference. This year, only 30 per cent of pupils taking A-level economics, and 39 per cent taking business studies, were girls.

Lyons said there were "far too few specialist economics and business teachers to match the demand".

"The lack of bursaries for ITE in the subjects directly contributes to the massive under-recruitment where business vies with physics to win the under-recruitment league."

There have been growing calls for better financial education in schools. Just last year, a group of MPs said ministers should "urgently" review the maths curriculum to expand financial education and make it compulsory in RSHE lessons.

### Recruitment well below target

In 2024-25, recruitment for postgraduate initial teacher training (PGITT) in business studies achieved just 15 per cent of the DfE's target – a fall from 17 per cent the year before.

Chemistry and drama had increased targets but similar entrant numbers, with business studies entrants falling from 198 to 183.

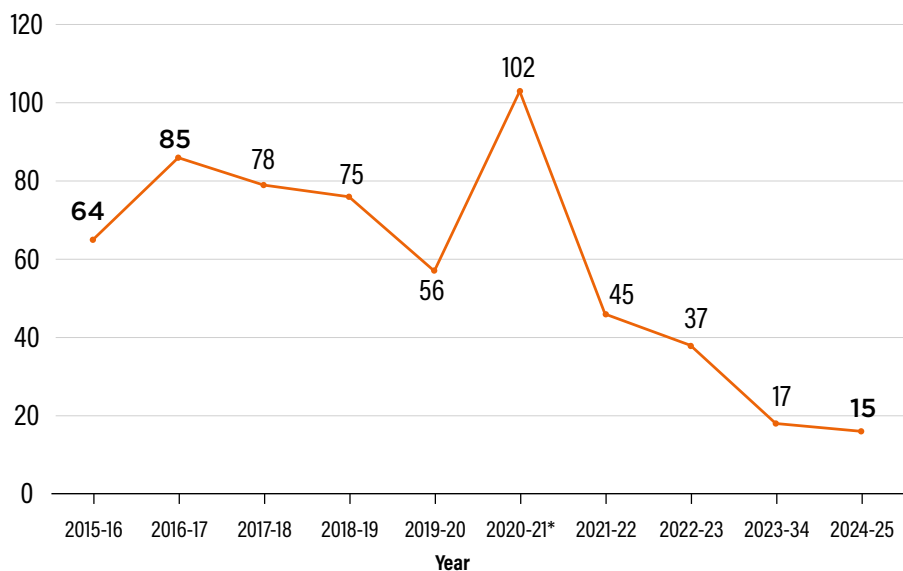
Recent analysis by Jack Worth, the lead economist at the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), shows ITT recruitment in England has broadly improved this year, "especially in some of the most hard to recruit subjects".

NFER's forecast, based



Clare Lombardelli

## % of postgraduate ITT target hit for business studies and economics



Source: DfE

SCHOOLS WEEK

## 'There are far too few specialist teachers to match demand'

on applications made up to July, shows recruitment "closer to target and back up to the relative levels seen before the pandemic". He said "a slowing wider labour market" was "likely to be a significant driver".

There has been a 28 per cent rise in accepted entrants for business studies this year – which includes economics in DfE metrics – with the DfE slashing its target by 25 per cent from 1,200 to 900.

Yet the NFER predicts it will still hit just 26 per cent of that target, the lowest of any subject. The foundation predicts overall secondary recruitment will hit 85 per cent, while primary will be oversubscribed by 16 per cent.

### Initiative to boost take-up

The Bank of England (BoE) recently launched a partnership with the University of Manchester to increase access to economics in state schools.

The free, one-year programme due to begin in September will train existing

teachers to deliver A-level economics as a second subject.

Clare Lombardelli, the bank's deputy governor for monetary policy, said she hoped the programme would help "tap into a broader range of talent" and help more people "benefit from the opportunities that come from studying economics".

The BoE said there had been "high" interest with all 25 places for the first year allocated. Applicants from the north west have been given priority.

Bob Hindle, a lecturer at the university and lead for the scheme, said a training bursary for economics and business studies would be "an easy fix" for recruitment issues.

He also criticised the way the DfE collected data on economics teachers. Currently, economics recruitment was included under business studies in the workforce census, but Hindle said this failed to give a clear picture of the number training to teach economics.

The DfE was approached for comment.

# DfE presses on with unregistered AP time limits

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

The government is pressing ahead with plans to limit the time pupils can spend in unregistered alternative provision, despite widespread concerns.

It has also revealed that new national standards for unregistered AP will be “voluntary”, with plans to introduce statutory standards at a later date.

The Department for Education last year ran a public consultation on plans to crack down on unregistered AP.

It followed a Schools Week investigation that revealed children as young as 5 are increasingly sent to unregulated institutions, which are not inspected by Ofsted or properly overseen by local authorities.

Here's what schools need to know...

## 1. New 'voluntary' standards, but legislation coming

New “voluntary national standards” for AP have been drawn up in response to the consultation.

The government “intends to legislate to introduce mandatory national standards... when parliamentary time allows”. Until then, it “encourages local authorities” to adopt the standards voluntarily.

## 2. Time limits for unregistered AP placements...

It will push ahead with its plan to cap the length of time children can be placed in unregistered AP.

Its figures show 24,325 children were educated in unregistered AP last year, with placements from councils almost doubling to 11,436 since 2019.

As of spring 2023-24, the average placement lasted 276 days – equivalent to more than 39 weeks – according to a recent Children's Commissioner report.

But under standards the government hopes to make mandatory, children can be placed in AP for “short, intensive periods of support, for a maximum of 12 weeks”, before returning to full-time education in mainstream or specialist schools.

Alternatively, they can be given longer-term,



part-time placements for up to two days or four sessions a week, alongside attending school.

## 3. ...despite widespread opposition

Sixty-five per cent of respondents opposed the plan for time limits.

While 63 per cent of local authorities agreed, parents overwhelmingly disagreed (90 per cent), as did 77 per cent of providers and half of schools.

Some said 12 weeks was not long enough for “effective” interventions, and that time limits “might impede successful reintegration”, while length and type of support should depend on individual needs.

There were particular concerns for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), who are often placed in unregistered settings because mainstream and special schools “do not have sufficient capability and capacity” to meet their needs.

## 4. Government acknowledges 'legitimate concerns'

The government acknowledged these “legitimate concerns”, but said: “Too often vulnerable children are being placed in non-school settings indefinitely with no plans for transitioning back to mainstream education.”

It said there would be flexibility “in exceptional circumstances”, where there was “clear evidence” extra time in unregistered AP “would support sustained re-integration and regular attendance in school in the future”.

The government also said commissioners may place children on a part-time AP placement after their full-time placement ended, if needed, to “ease the transition” back to full-time in-school education.

## 5. Pupils must be registered with schools

Children in AP must also be registered with schools, so they are “connected with a school throughout their placements”, to support re-integration.

## 6. But 'education otherwise' plans on hold

Some SEN pupils receive what's called “education otherwise than in a school”, often abbreviated to EOTAS. This is sometimes delivered in unregistered AP.

The consultation included proposals to improve oversight of AP delivering EOTAS special educational provision, but the government has now scrapped these plans while it examines broader systemic issues.

The DfE said it planned to “examine the use of EOTAS holistically and contextually as part of wider reforms to the SEND and alternative provision system”.

It will confirm its plans “in due course”. For now, EOTAS special education provision is not included in the new voluntary national standards.

## 7. Local authorities to quality assure alternative provision

Local authorities are to be made responsible for quality assuring AP against the new national standards, to ensure interventions “are meeting individual needs”.

The government says it intends that Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission will evaluate a local authority's quality assurance process.

The measures “are subject to DfE securing the necessary resources and producing an assessment of the impact on local authorities”.

The department will work with local authorities, schools and providers “to determine the most cost effective way of delivering the proposals”, including exploring whether local authorities “may charge schools or providers to access the frameworks”.



## NEWS

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# Teachers to get training on impact of parents in prison

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS

@LYDIACHSW

Teachers are to receive in-person training on the impact a parent in prison can have on children.

Documents show the Department for Education is looking for “a bespoke package of high-quality multidisciplinary training on parental imprisonment”.

This would be available to professionals across England, including teachers, social workers and family hub staff.

A contractor will design and deliver the scheme, which will include information on prisons and the criminal justice system, the impact parental imprisonment can have on children and families, and the tools available to support them.

School and local authority staff will receive training in-person, while other professionals, including Ofsted inspectors, police and prison officers, will access online training.

The DfE has published a preliminary market engagement notice to gauge interest and hopes to publish a tender early next month.



“We want this training to upskill professionals on the impact parental imprisonment can have on children and families, reduce the stigmatisation ... and break down barriers to support,” the department said.

The contract is expected to run over three years from April next year to April 2029, with the possibility of a two-year extension.

It comes after Labour pledged in its election manifesto that it would support children of prisoners as part of plans to “reduce reoffending”.

“The children of those who are imprisoned are

at far greater risk of being drawn into crime than their peers,” said the manifesto. “We will ensure that those young people are identified and offered support to break the cycle.”

Government figures estimate that, as of last July, just shy of 193,000 children in England and Wales had a parent in prison. Of about 140,000 people in prison, 53 per cent (74,275) were thought to have children.

The Charity Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) works to educate teachers on this, through work funded by charitable donations.

Andy Keen-Downs, its chief executive, said it was “vitally important” teachers and other professionals working with children understood the impact it could have.

“Every school in the country will at some time or another include children whose father or mother have been arrested, put on trial, and sent away to prison.

“But these children’s circumstances are often invisible to staff, and the shame and stigma involved means that many children are left unsupported.”

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# Poorer schools prioritised for £45m nursery cash

FREDDIE WHITTAKER

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Schools with poorer intakes and top Ofsted grades will be prioritised for funding in the second phase of a government project aimed at turning empty primary classrooms into nurseries.

The Department for Education allocated £37 million last year in capital investment to create 300 new or expanded nurseries on primary school sites in England. The government said this week that 189 of the 300 were “set to be up and running this month”.

Now ministers are inviting more schools to bid for up to £150,000 in funding from a £45 million pot to create a further 300 new or expanded nursery classes, which they said will offer “up to 7,000 more places” from next September.

However, the eligibility criteria has been updated, and bids will now be assessed on the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and Ofsted inspections.

For example, in the points-based assessment used by the DfE, schools in the 10 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods will get a top score on the disadvantage criteria. Those with an ‘outstanding’ Ofsted rating will also score highly.

Previous applications were assessed mainly on value for money and local need, both still factors in the second phrase.

Bridget Phillipson, the education secretary, said: “School-based nurseries can offer a nurturing and stable environment for children that carries through into primary.

“Delivering more school-based nurseries ...



means more choice and convenience for parents, and more opportunities to target parts of the country where families are most in need of additional support.”

Schools can apply between September 22 and 5pm on December 11.

The government has also revealed that in phase three, local authorities “will be invited to develop multi-year funding proposals” covering 2027 to 2030.

“The DfE will publish separate guidance to support this process in early 2026 and will engage with local authorities and schools in autumn 2025 to provide further details.”

The government has also published a series of case studies of nursery provision that has been opened as part of the programme, either through school-led or governor-led routes, or through a partnership between schools and the voluntary or private sector.

Scargill Infant School in Essex, which used the school-led model, said it now offered 48 places for children aged 2, 3 and 4, “having doubled our original capacity”.

“We’d considered expanding our nursery for a long time, but lacked the funding. Our decision was informed by parent and carer feedback, local authority engagement and our own experience with transition challenges.

“With children coming from 28 different feeder nurseries, we saw the value in offering a consistent, high-quality early years experience in our own setting.”

But they said launching a nursery “is not the same as running a school.

“We learned the importance of having a strong, dedicated team and a clear written plan. Our EYFS lead played a crucial role, bridging nursery and reception, which has already improved attendance and outcomes in reception.”

RUTH LUCAS | @RUTHLUCAS\_

## Schools less calm, while parents shun behaviour rules

Heads and teachers have reported their schools are less calm and orderly, while parents are now less likely to support school behaviour policies, according to a government survey.

The DfE’s latest behaviour survey report records a “statistically significant” decrease in the proportion of teachers reporting their school was calm and orderly “every day” or “most days” in the week before the survey was conducted, from 59 per cent in May 2023 to 53 per cent last year.

The proportion of parents who said they were supportive of their school’s behaviour

rules has also “statistically significantly decreased” from 87 per cent in June 2023 to 83 per cent in May 2024.

Pupils are also now more likely to report being bullied because of the way they look or because of their race or ethnicity.

It comes as the DfE named the first 21 of 90 new integrated behaviour and attendance hubs set to open in September.

Behaviour and attendance hubs are being merged, with the scheme receiving £1.5 million – a significantly lower investment than the two schemes it replaces.

In May, the DfE said it was seeking 90 “best

of the best” schools “with a track record of improving attendance and behaviour standards” to apply to lead hubs.

Twenty-one have been announced in the first wave, with more set to be opened throughout the year.

Over time, 500 schools in the most need will receive “intensive, targeted help”, while 5,000 schools overall will have access to hubs.

You can find the full list online [here](#) and read the full story about the latest behaviour story [here](#).



## NEWS: SUMMER RECAP

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# That was the summer that was...

Schools Week's team of journalists has been working over the summer to keep you up to date. Here are five stories you might have missed over the break.

## 1. Pensions contract handover delayed

The handover of the administration of teachers' pensions to new provider Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has been delayed to next year.

Capita, which has run the Teachers' Pension Scheme for almost three decades, was due to hand it over to Indian IT firm TCS in October. Capita missed out on the £233 million, 10-year contract when the government re-tendered in 2023.

But the DfE has confirmed the handover has been pushed back to next summer.

Its spokesperson would not give further details, but said it was "vital that after almost 30 years of running the Teachers' Pension Scheme, Capita's handover to Tata Consultancy Services, is a smooth one.

"The change in handover date will not impact any pensions or benefit entitlements."

## 2. New school cadet units planned

The government is to invest £70 million into expanding cadet forces, pledging to increase capacity by 30 per cent by 2030 while creating a "balance" between school and community-based units.

The expansion of the cadets, which have 139,000 young members across all forces, was recommended in the government's defence review, and comes less than a year after the DfE cut its contribution to school-based schemes.

Al Carns, the minister for veterans and people, said the Ministry of Defence would "thin out" the bureaucracy for adults wanting to train cadets and give them opportunities for qualifications.



He also suggested cadet training could give young people growing up "with perhaps slightly looser boundaries" better discipline and principles for adult life.

## 3. DfE seeks commercial breakfast club sponsors

The government is looking for businesses to sponsor its free breakfast club scheme and support schools "make a greater impact", with chosen partners getting "promotional rights" in return.

The clubs are being piloted in 750 primary



schools across England. However nearly 80 "early adopters" dropped out before the start of the trial worried that a lack of funding could leave them out of pocket.

The government is now considering offers from food providers to enable participating schools to "maximise the value of their food spending through deals" and ensure securing meals is as "easy, reliable and flexible as possible".

But unions have warned a sponsor "should

not be relied upon to make the government's programme work", and a food campaign group said free breakfast "should be provided in a way that protects children from commercial marketing and promotion".

## 4. Young offenders pulled out of first secure school

Young offenders will be pulled out of England's first secure school because "vulnerable" doors that "can't withstand somebody trying to barge their way through" won't be replaced for months.

Schools Week revealed in June how the problems at Oasis Restore, in Kent, meant youngsters could move "more freely" around the site, prompting some to make "weapons out of everyday items" for fear of their safety.

Ofsted inspected after receiving "concerns over children's safety and wellbeing" at the school, run by the charity that sponsors the Oasis academy trust.

Now Oasis intends to move youngsters to other youth custody settings until the safety issue is resolved. It will also pause any new placements.

It is the latest blow to the prototype scheme, opened just 12 months ago and dubbed "a revolution in youth justice",

## 5. Review to tackle behaviour and 'preventable' exclusions

The government is launching an "expert and evidence-based review" to find the best ways to improve behaviour, reduce "preventable" exclusions and cut bullying in schools.

The DfE is seeking an organisation or consortium to oversee the review, which will lead to "best practice" toolkits for schools.

Union leaders have welcomed the "timely" review, recommending more work be done to understand the rise in challenging behaviour since the pandemic and look at its root causes.

A government tender to oversee the work, costing at up to £750,000, describes it as "an expert and evidence-based review of the best practice for supporting good pupil behaviour, reducing preventable exclusions and tackling and preventing bullying".

The evidence obtained during the review and "related insights" will be used to draft a "practical and user-friendly resource to be used by schools", documents state. The toolkit will be tested in "select schools".





# Feature

LYDIA CHANTLER-HICKS | @LYDIACHSW

## 'Let's give teachers the curiosity and judgment to make good decisions'

**Centralising control has cost teachers control of their profession, says Gareth Conyard. After all, ministers wouldn't tell surgeons how to do an appendectomy. Lydia Chantler-Hicks meets the boss of the Teacher Development Trust**

It's estimated to be a half-billion-pound industry in England, but all is not well in the world of teachers' professional development, warns Gareth Conyard.

The experienced civil servant-turned Teacher Development Trust CEO worries schools too often feel they have little choice but to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach, and many teachers are not confident the CPD they receive is effective and boosts outcomes.

When we meet in a bustling coffee shop near London Bridge, the impressively bearded Conyard warns of a "gap between what leaders think

professional development is achieving, and what teachers think it is achieving".

Part of the issue is that schools struggle to find the time to make informed decisions about the CPD teachers should be doing, he says.

An upcoming TDT report includes an alarming example – a substantial proportion of teachers are using a simple Google search to find CPD courses rather than seeking specialist advice (such as via their teaching school hub or MAT CPD lead) to make context-specific choices.

Too often, says Conyard, good intent does not translate into the best approach.

"We just assume that because someone's a teacher, they could lead a CPD session for other teachers. But that takes specific skills and knowledge and it is a lot to ask a teacher to do - being an excellent Year 3 teacher doesn't mean you're automatically good at training other teachers.

'The teaching of teachers' should be established as a discipline in its own right, he says.

"Pedagogy" covers the teaching of children, says Conyard, so shouldn't we have a "gogy" for the teaching of teachers?

Conyard lives in Hither Green, south east



## Profile: Gareth Conyard

London, with his wife, their two children and cocker spaniel Jed Barklet (named after Martin Sheen's character in *The West Wing*).

He enjoys walks, birdwatching, knitting, cooking, and is passionate about history.

He also has more experience than most of the inner-workings of education policy, having spent two decades as a civil servant at the Department for Education, and having written a book about it with fellow education policy expert Nansi Ellis.

Born and raised in Kent, Conyard studied history at the University of Warwick before moving to London in 2002 to join the civil service.

In 2015, he was placed in charge of managing the department's relationship with teaching unions, a "wonderful" job and perhaps his favourite to date.

"There's a permission to speak slightly differently with ministers in that circumstance," he chuckles over his coffee.

"You could sit in a room and say to Nick Gibb 'that's an awful idea – that's the worst thing anyone could ever do and you're an idiot for thinking that. Not my words minister... just what Mary Bousted's going to say tomorrow at the ATL conference.'"

The role gave him a behind-the-scenes glimpse at discussions between government and unions, and he enjoyed observing the "presentational politics".

"[There were] lots of occasions where we'd have really good, constructive meetings... and then the next day a minister would be in the press calling them a bunch of Neanderthal knuckle-draggers. And the unions would say that ministers wanted to murder children and stuff.

"But it was good to do the nuts and bolts of actually making things better... realising we could find a constructive way forward."

Conyard's focus on teacher development began in 2017, when Justine Greening became secretary of state.

He was at the DfE for the introduction of the early career framework and through the reform of national professional qualifications.

He left in 2022 to join the TDT as director of education, then became co-CEO with founder



### 'We assume because someone's a teacher, they could lead CPD'

David Weston. He took sole charge of the charity earlier this year.

The question of how to improve CPD still weighs heavily on Conyard in his current role. A more coordinated approach is needed, he says.

"People talk about 'wicked' policy problems. This is a brilliant policy problem.

"Because you can probably, through some really clever thinking and very little actual investment, make really significant improvements to school performance and pupil outcomes."

Conyard says he would like to see the government "convening conversations" around improving CPD, and "provid[ing] some guidance and structures and maybe some statutory basis for some of it".

The TDT's upcoming report is a major "state of the nation" look at CPD, including YouGov polling and analysis of spending. The charity will release the document at its annual conference next month.

"It's an attempt to try and get together in one place, a comprehensive look at what's actually happening in this space," explains Conyard.

It comes at what should be an exciting time for

teachers' professional development.

During last year's election campaign, Labour pledged it would introduce a teacher training entitlement for continuous CPD and ensure teachers stay up-to-date.

But more than a year from the election, there has been no further word on this.

Conyard believes there is "no realistic prospect of this being taken forward anytime soon", given the tight fiscal situation.

"I'm not sure even I would say it's the priority, when you look at funding needs for SEND and other issues in the system," he adds.

But he believes there is much the government and sector could be doing to think about CPD differently, which wouldn't necessarily need more funding.

Conyard estimates "north of half-a-billion pounds" is already spent annually in England on teacher development by schools, INSET provision, and government investment in NPQs and the early career framework.

This, he reasons, is already akin to an entitlement in all but name.

But the issue is how this money is being spent.

# Profile: Gareth Conyard



Conyard as Henry VIII for his fortieth birthday

"Even if Labour were to announce hundreds of millions of pounds to be spent on entitlement, I'd really worry that it wouldn't be spent well," he says. "Because there are some things in the system that just feel too confused."

There is also a bigger question facing the education workforce. Conyard says the profession needs to decide "what it actually means to work in education".

"Right now the things that we are asking schools to do, do not match the structures or the funding or demands that are placed on the workforce."

"People often talk about schools being the front line of social care... and I'm sort of ambivalent about this being a good thing or a bad thing. It could be positive in all kinds of ways."

But Conyard says if this is expected of the profession, it must be properly supported. "[Otherwise], you end up with a system that's just not resourced or structured to respond. At worst, it feels like a kind of gaslighting."

Conyard acknowledges the "difficult place" government and unions are in, but says "broader understanding of the system" is needed, and he cautions against a sole focus on teacher pay.

This year's STRB report estimated teachers' earnings in 2023-24 were 18.2 per cent below their level in 2010-11 in real terms (not taking account of last year's 5.5 per cent pay rise).

Unions have repeatedly called for teacher



Conyard with his family in Venice

## 'We don't have a fully professional teaching workforce'

salaries to be raised to 2010 levels. But Conyard says this "still wouldn't solve the issue".

"Because the job is not what people understand it to be, not until we talk about it honestly."

"The conversation around pay or bursaries or supplements of particular subjects ends up feeling like a conversation which is about bribing someone to do something crappy, rather than saying 'actually, we should make this a really good job'."

To this end, Conyard wants to see the "professionalism of teachers" bolstered.

"We don't have a fully professional teaching workforce," he says, arguing some hallmarks one might expect from a profession "aren't present in teaching".

"Architects don't get governments to tell them what the standards are around being an architect. Surgeons don't ask Wes Streeting how to perform appendectomies. But teachers are reliant on the state for so many things."

"What we've seen increasingly over the last



Young Conyard

40 years or more, is an attempt to centralise control over the profession in the name of driving up standards... but at the cost of saying this profession isn't really a profession anymore."

Conyard uses the example of "highly prescribed" CPD, and refers to the early career framework and national professional qualifications.

TDT has stopped delivering NPQs, partly because it felt the content "wasn't aligning with what people need". He welcomes the government's review of the qualifications.

Conyard says teachers must not be treated "like robots, to learn stuff and then regurgitate it".

Instead they should be given "the curiosity and the judgment they need to make good decisions."

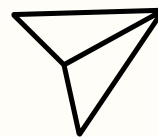
"And that's a bigger prize for me, because that means that when they're alone for the 90 per cent of the time, you have more faith that they will be making effective decisions."

"That just looks like a much happier place for us all to get to."



# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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



## Letter of the week



I was saddened to hear that *Schools Week's* legendary cartoonist Stan Dupp is "hanging up his pencil".

I came across him on Twitter many years ago, and I was immediately impressed with his ability to capture the absurdity of working in education with wit, warmth and humour. We quickly became friends and 'Stan' would send me little sketches.

In 2017, there was an outcry from the early years community when Ofsted published *Bold Beginnings*. I led the social media charge to some extent, and 'Stan' took the opportunity to send me a portrait depicting me as Merida, from Disney's *Brave*. I really felt like I had arrived in the education world!

Malcolm (his real name) went on to draw the cartoons for our Firm Foundations conferences. He was generous with his time and work and became a valued and trusted colleague.

Over the years I've featured in a few of his cartoons, and it's always a huge honour, but nothing will beat the thrill of that first "Brave" moment. I wish him a long and happy retirement.

**Ruth Swailes, Educational consultant and early years strategy lead, Wirral Council**



School staff data being compromised by a cyber-attack over the summer is shocking, but more breaches are inevitable. ([School staff personal data potentially 'compromised' in Intradev cyber attack](#), 28 August).

According to the government's [Cyber Security Breaches Survey 2025](#), nearly half of primaries and 60 per cent of secondaries reported cyber incidents last year.

What's at stake is some of the most sensitive data imaginable: medical records, safeguarding logs, EHCPs and details about looked-after children. A single breach could expose vulnerable pupils to real-world harm.

Yet many schools still lack the understanding of risk, sufficient budgets, training and support to defend themselves.

Sadly, professional organisations which offer (often free) cybersecurity training to staff and students remain under-utilised.

We desperately need every educational leader to recognise that cybersecurity isn't a nice-to-have or tick-box exercise but fundamental to their duty of care.

Likewise, policy makers and the cybersecurity sector must ensure protection comes before profit so that safety is accessible to all.

**Jo Starsmeare, Director, [Evolve-IT Ltd](#)**

*Schools Week's* coverage of the government's annual behaviour survey reveals teacher perceptions that behaviour remains a significant challenge, and one that is getting worse, not better. ([Schools more disorderly and parents less supportive of behaviour rules](#), 1 September)

Meanwhile, however, inspection outcomes for behaviour and attitudes have been "Good" or better in more than 90 per cent of schools over the same period.

Is there any other aspect of the inspection framework so apparently out of sync with stated frontline experience?

Either feedback from the profession is unrepresentative, or the inspection process

is failing to capture the reality of behaviour in schools.

If the former, then we would do well to have more robust data with which to counter the claims being made.

And if the latter, then it must lead us to question the value of including a behaviour grade in the framework at all.

Either way, such a gulf in perception between those within the profession and those who inspect it cannot be ignored.

**Michael Merrick, Diocesan schools commissioner, Diocese of Lancaster**

Whilst I love the idea that the responsibility for administering the Teachers' Pension Service is going to anyone rather than Capita ([Handover of £233m teachers' pensions contract to Tata delayed](#), 26 August), as someone who is already in receipt of a teacher's pension I can tell you that it's already digitalised and automated, and I can already access any data I choose to. The DfE should know this, so why is this the big selling point for giving Tata Consultancy Services the contract instead? Something fishy here for sure. As usual.

**Johanna Smith, Retired English teacher, Newcastle upon Tyne**



This is the reason I stopped being a team leader for an exam board ([Examiners deserve better than the tech problems they face](#), 20 August). Too much time was being spent trying to help examiners with IT issues and not enough time on the discussion of the answers to questions on the paper.

**Neil Peter Fazackerley, Former head of music and music examiner**

**Send your letters here:**

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Opinion

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RORY GRIBBELL

Director of strategy and engagement, Ofsted



DR VERENA BRAEHLER

Deputy director of research and evaluation, Ofsted



How we’re going further to ensure inspection consistency

**Roll-out of the new framework will be complemented by measures to ensure inspection outcomes are valid and reliable, explain Rory Gribbell and Verena Braehler**

Later this month we will be setting out the full suite of changes we are making to education inspections. We have carefully considered the thousands of thoughtful responses received from parents, teachers, inspectors and other education professionals, and that feedback is helping us to make improvements to our proposals.

As we expected, we heard how important it is to ensure school inspections are conducted as consistently as possible, resulting in grades that are both valid and reliable.

This is something we take incredibly seriously at Ofsted. Over the past few years, we have introduced structural changes to ensure consistency and quality-assurance run through how we work.

Notifying all routine school inspections on a Monday (which will continue from November) has been received positively by schools. As well as reducing unnecessary pressure on headteachers

anticipating “the call” on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, it allows us to gather His Majesty’s Inspectors (HMI) on Fridays for reflective practice and consistency sessions.

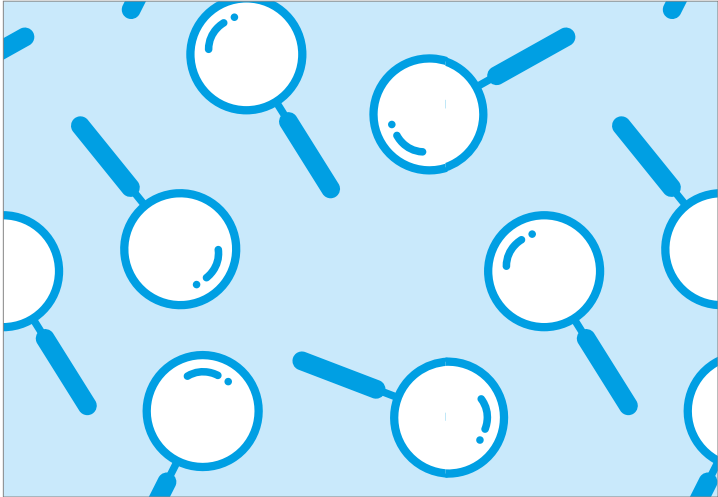
Indeed, consistency is such an important issue for Ofsted that it involves senior colleagues gathering every week to ensure we are meeting our own high expectations.

In addition, creating an internal consistency improvement hub, introducing HMI-led inspections and better matching of Ofsted inspectors’ backgrounds to providers are all designed to drive higher consistency, as is the way in which we will use context information and data in inspections.

But we know there is always more to do because this is such a knotty and complicated area.

As Tim Leunig wrote recently, validity and reliability don’t always go hand in hand. A set of bathroom scales that tells us we are 5kg heavier than our true weight every time we use it is reliable, but it’s not telling us anything valid about our weight (it’s reliably wrong!).

Given the importance parents give to our grades and the regulatory action the Department for Education takes on the back of those grades, we know how important it is to ensure our



“ This is something Ofsted takes incredibly seriously

inspection grades are both as valid and as reliable as possible.

Ultimately, we also want to know how consistent our inspections are through testing. There are no easy ways to do this, but we have listened to feedback from our consultation, including from John Jerrim and Christian Bokhove in these pages among others.

That is why, when we introduce our renewed education inspection framework in November, we will begin a programme of work to assess consistency in school inspections.

As part of the quality assurance (QA) process, senior inspectors will shadow a sample of live inspections.

We will treat the inspection as we treat a normal QA visit: schools will know that an additional, senior inspector will be on site, and that their role is to advise and guide the inspection team to the right result.

The senior inspector’s role will be specifically to ensure the consistency of inspection outcomes as part of a larger process.

After each inspection, any initial differences between senior inspectors and inspection teams will be analysed by our research and evaluation team. This information will be then considered alongside wider consistency activity (including giving inspectors scenarios simulating real-world inspections to evaluate training) so that we can update and improve our training and inspection materials.

Importantly, this won’t be a one-off exercise. This will be an ongoing mechanism to understand how consistent we are and how we can improve.

We expect to find high levels of consistency as we have done in the past, but if we uncover areas where further tightening is possible, we will make changes. Next year we will publish what we find.

Together with the structural changes we have already made to the way we work, this testing will ensure we create a feedback loop to drive continuous improvement in our work.



## Opinion

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LIZ  
ROBINSON

CEO, Big Education

## Six priorities for Labour's second year at the helm

**Bridget Phillipson has set out the outcomes that matter to her. Here's how we can now ensure every child can 'achieve and thrive', writes Liz Robinson**

At Big Education, our goal is to deliver a big, fat, juicy, enriched, meaningful, inclusive and purposeful education. Labour has begun to shift the system in this direction, so as the government heads into its second year, here's how they can build on those foundations.

When I became head of Surrey Square in Southwark in 2006, we were held to account for five outcomes under the *Every Child Matters* framework: stay safe, be healthy, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and achieve economic wellbeing.

It wasn't perfect. I remember having to work hard to articulate to Ofsted the extent to which we were supporting children in a primary school to achieve economic wellbeing. But there was very much that was good.

Post-2010, we lurched from five outcomes to one: achievement, and a very narrow definition of achievement at that. One type of academic learning, assessed in one way.

I might have been more supportive if it had been accompanied by substantial investment in wrap-around services, but this was clearly

not the case.

Meanwhile, the challenges pupils face have changed and the expectations of parents and families have evolved. I see it every day, and I am in no doubt that our narrowed, reductive view of school has played a significant part in it.

Bridget Phillipson has been clear about the two outcomes that matter to her: 'achieve and thrive'. Five to one to two. I'll take two; it is a big step forward.

As she builds out her policy agenda and in the forthcoming white paper, I hope that 'achieve and thrive' will support us to deliver on six priorities:

### Back to core values

The current emphasis on 'choice' often inadvertently fuels a competitive environment that works against the very children who need our support the most. Instead, we must dial up 'equity' as the underpinning value of our system.

### Aligning accountability

It's fundamentally wrong for the inspectorate's primary purpose to be "informing parent choice". Its role should be to support all schools in becoming great, an objective it currently undermines by reinforcing competition through a high-stakes, often punitive inspection culture.

Adjusting what is inspected isn't enough. We need to rethink how inspection happens and what it means.



“None of this is radical. It used to be our system's ambition

### A compelling narrative

A moderate, modern and clear narrative about our ambition is essential. This must include a knowledge-rich, high-standards approach, but it must go beyond it.

Ideas such as 'joyful rigour' and 'head, heart and hand' could be instrumental in shifting our mental models of what education is all about.

### Greater coherence

Let's carefully align everything behind Phillipson's twin goals: our definitions, our metrics and our incentives. A proper "retro" on *Every Child Matters* would be a smart thing to do, to ensure we are taking the learnings from that work and building on everything that was great about it.

### Redefining achievement

Success can no longer be defined by what is easily measurable. Making it accessible to all young people and ensuring it celebrates diverse talents and pathways requires a sophisticated approach to measurement, incorporating student-level and system-level

metrics, and using proxies as well as direct indicators.

The Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) and Higher Project Qualification (HPQ), nuanced teacher assessment in arts subjects and in KS2 writing, and the Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of reception all show what's possible. Let's dial that up.

### Rewiring incentives

Similarly, incentives must make it demonstrably easier for leaders and educators to do the right thing by our most vulnerable and underserved learners, fostering genuine inclusion and collaboration.

None of this is radical. It used to be our system's ambition, and many of us just kept working towards it. Twenty years on, the potential to deliver it has never been stronger.

With the focus on the 'best start in life', SEND reforms and a review of curriculum and assessment, there is plenty to feel optimistic about. As we head into this Labour administration's second year, let's ensure every child matters to every one of us.

## Opinion

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# RICH ATTERTON

Honorary secretary, ASCL

## This is our chance to build a smart accountability system

**With a two-year pause on Progress 8, the sector must make its voice heard about how best to replace it, writes Rich Atterton**

Like the accountability measures it was designed to replace, Progress 8 (P8) has had its day. With a two-year pause, we now have a golden opportunity to design something fit for our changed times, but what might that look like?

P8 was built on a simple principle: a school should be judged on the difference it makes, not the postcode of its pupils. By structuring the measure around eight subjects, it also signalled a commitment to a broad and balanced curriculum.

In its early years, the measure had some positive effects. Teachers began tracking progress across the full range of abilities (not just pupils at the C/D grade boundary); leaders widened subject availability; and in disadvantaged areas some schools finally saw their hard work recognised.

Yet, as the measure bedded in, challenges became clear. P8 was a value-added measure in all but name, but one that took account only of pupils' prior attainment, not other important factors like disadvantage, special educational needs or pupil mobility.

Meanwhile, schools serving communities with higher levels of need often found that even strong

teaching and support translated to scores that appeared average or below.

The measure also proved volatile, particularly in smaller schools, where a disrupted exam season could swing a school's score from "well above average" to "below average" in a single year. In larger schools, the wide confidence intervals meant that small shifts were often statistically meaningless but still caused anxiety among staff, governors and parents.

Crucially, because schools give more attention to those subjects that are emphasised in accountability measures, over time P8 caused a noticeable decline in entries for arts, design and technology, and creative subjects.

In short, its unintended consequences mean P8 is no longer fit for purpose. The good news is that smarter accountability models are already in reach, so here are three suggestions for a better, fairer model.

### A contextual progress measure

This would keep the focus on pupil growth while levelling the statistical playing field.

Research by statisticians George Leckie and Harvey Goldstein at the University of Bristol showed that such an Adjusted Progress 8 is feasible. They found over one-fifth of schools moved 500+ places in the national rankings once pupil background was accounted for.



“ Progress 8 has warped practice and eroded trust

Such a model would make judgements fairer without lowering expectations.

### A curriculum balance index

This would reward schools that protect subject breadth, encouraging investment in arts, design, and technical pathways.

A school that maintains strong enrolment in creative and technical subjects while also offering rigorous academic courses would score higher than one that pushes all students into a narrow set of subjects.

The aim is not to dictate what subjects each pupil take, but to recognise schools that keep doors open to all fields.

### A multi-metric dashboard

Instead of a single volatile number, a dashboard could show progress, attainment, curriculum breadth, destinations and wellbeing.

Scotland's online dashboard includes statistics such as literacy and numeracy levels or leavers' destinations, but without reductive league tables. Likewise, many US states have moved to dashboard-

style report cards. California's provides colour-coded ratings on academic achievement, student growth, graduation rates, chronic absenteeism and school climate.

The DfE already collects much of this data, but it remains buried deep in the school performance website with little attention drawn to it.

The public deserves to know how well schools are serving pupils, and schools need honest feedback to improve. But a single blunt metric has warped practice, eroded trust and failed to celebrate the full richness of school life.

Now, with P8 paused until 2026, there is not only a rare opportunity to build something better, but time to consult properly and to test new models thoroughly.

Other systems show this can work. The shifts in Scotland and the US came after involving educators and communities in their design.

If we seize the moment, by 2026 we could have a framework that is fairer, broader and more stable, that shines a light on excellence without casting a spotlight of blame. If our aim is for every child in every school to thrive, then we must start shaping it now.



## Opinion

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## Our challenging times demand a new model of local leadership

**Today's challenges demand that we stop seeing ourselves as leaders in a locality and start being the leaders of that locality, explain Jill Messham and Nicole Reid**

As trust and school leaders, tightening budgets and the rising tide of complex societal challenges play on our minds daily. Too often, it feels like we are fighting these battles in isolation. What we've learned this year is that we are more effective when we choose collaborative endeavour instead.

Forum Strategy's latest CEO system leadership programme has led us to a powerful, shared conviction: the most profound solutions to some of our most complex issues are not found in top-down directives but within our communities themselves.

As leaders, we must keep finding ways to encourage, grow and implement these local solutions. To that end, we are sharing a new paper focused on the power of place and the role of locality leadership in system- and community-led change and improvement.

It represents a fundamental shift in mindset from being a leader in a place to becoming a leader who is part of the fabric of that place.

As leaders of institutions at the heart of communities, we have a unique power to convene and connect. This means we also have a

unique responsibility to step beyond our own organisational boundaries, because our schools cannot succeed if our communities are struggling.

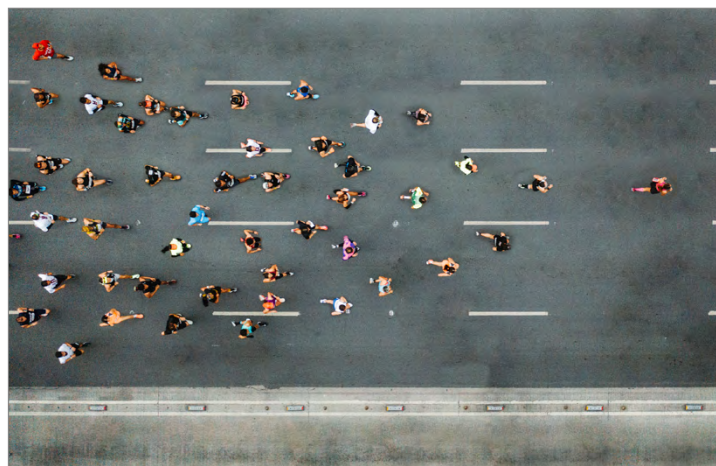
Locality leadership means reframing our role from being solely accountable for our schools to being architects of local change and improvement. It means bringing together local businesses, public services, charities, community leaders, volunteers, and families to rally around a shared vision and defined outcomes for children and young people.

This kind of leadership demands a deep-seated professional generosity and a unique set of skills: curiosity, empathy, and humility; the honesty to admit we don't have all the answers and the willingness to truly listen to the lived experiences of, and partner with, our families.

It takes courage, to challenge the status quo and pursue what is right for our community, even when no one has asked us to. We call this 'pure accountability', a commitment driven by a sense of collective endeavour locally, going beyond standardised national performance tables or frameworks.

And it isn't easy. It requires unwavering resilience to build robust networks and see complex, long-term projects through despite barriers.

The most common of these is the feeling that we simply don't have the time or resources. But when we



“ Schools cannot succeed if communities are struggling

frame this work as crucial to tackling issues like attendance, wellbeing, engagement and attainment, it ceases to be an add-on and becomes central to our core purpose.

Other common barriers include a fragmented system where competition can stifle collaboration, and a churn of national politics that can discourage long-term local work.

To overcome these, we have learned to focus on enablers: a shared, positive narrative with our partners, recognition of our community's strengths, strong relationships built on trust and clear governance to ensure we maintain momentum and deliver on our promises.

Every trust and school leader can contribute, and this work can happen now without the need for a government directive. Here are six steps to get there:

### Make it part of your DNA

Make your commitment to community core to your strategic vision, with clear, measurable goals.

### Champion 'pure accountability'

Work with your community to define success on your own

shared terms and hold yourselves accountable to those shared ambitions.

### Build a community-focused culture

Weave this ethos into the roles and responsibilities of your staff, empowering them to contribute.

### Map and nurture your network

Identify your key partners and skilled volunteers, investing the time in building deep, focused, and impactful partnerships.

### Governance must reflect community

A board that understands local nuance is one of your greatest assets.

### Use your voice

Advocate for the system to better recognise and reward this vital place-based work.

Our trusts and schools thrive when they are at the heart of equally thriving communities. To transform one, we must transform the other. This is the challenge, but also the great opportunity, of locality leadership.

## Opinion

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## JAGDEEP PABLA

Founder, National Education Diversity Awards

## How our new awards will drive workforce inclusion

**We all know about the recruitment and retention crisis. It's time we all knew about the great people in our system who are bucking the trends, writes Jagdeep Pabla**

Education recruitment, retention and representation trends have been a cause for concern for years now. While national efforts have struggled to reverse these trends, some within the system have managed to buck them. What if we listened to them instead?

We all know that too many teachers leave and that too many talented individuals are discouraged from entering the profession.

We also know that this affects more than just those who give up on their calling. It leaves those who remain with fewer, less diverse colleagues to rely on, and means pupils experience impoverished teaching and disrupted learning.

There is no shortage of research to back this up, or of recommendations to support decision-makers.

The New Britain Project and The MTPT Project revealed how far too many women leave teaching between the ages of 30 and 39 years old.

The National Foundation for Educational Research has evidenced the profession's lack of diversity, and then, supported by Mission 44, gathered evidence about best

practice in tackling that.

Education Support researched the mental health and wellbeing of ethnic-minority teachers. The Education Policy Institute recommended the need to retain experienced subject specialists. And statistics consistently show high workload and lack of flexibility are key drivers of attrition.

Crucially, beyond all this quantitative research, we've all surely read enough personal accounts to understand that behind every data point is a person: someone who entered the profession to make a difference, only to burn out, be overlooked or quietly leave.

But important as those stories are to humanise the problem, the ones we don't read enough of are the stories of people working every day to make things better. We need more stories to help us to humanise the solutions!

Across the country, there are changemakers rethinking recruitment, championing inclusion and building a workforce that looks like the world it serves. From trusts implementing flexible working policies, to leaders supporting returning parents, to schools embedding cultures where colleagues of all backgrounds can thrive, the seeds of a stronger workforce are already being planted.

Celebrating those who are building inclusive, representative and sustainable working cultures



“ More than a celebration, this is a call to action

matters. For a start, they're often doing it in spite of the system and in the absence of any recognition. Just as importantly, it's a vital way to share what's possible right now, and how.

This is why we have launched the National Education Diversity Awards: to shine a national spotlight on those already driving positive change and turn their local impact into momentum to build a more inclusive and sustainable education system.

In this, our growing movement is guided by three principles: to shine the light, share the story and shift the system.

### Shine the light

There are individuals doing brilliant work to make education more inclusive but too often go unrecognised. When we shine a light on what is working, we do more than celebrate it; we give it the platform to influence others and show that meaningful change is already happening.

### Share the story

When we share the journeys of those who are transforming culture, we turn local impact into national

momentum. These stories remind us that inclusion is not an abstract goal, but lived experiences that can be shaped every day.

### Shift the system

Sustainable change happens when inclusive practice becomes part of how the system works. By elevating what is already happening, we move from isolated efforts to a collective movement. When the sector sees and celebrates a workforce that is valued and supported, it becomes something others can believe in, build on and embed.

The initiative has already received genuine warmth, encouragement and endorsement, including from this publication. Every time we speak with organisations and individuals, the community supporting this movement grows.

The National Education Diversity Awards is more than a celebration. It is a national call to action to drive change from the classroom to the boardroom.

When we get recruitment and retention right for our staff, we get it right for our children. Together we can honour those already leading the way and build the momentum for lasting change.



## Solutions

DO YOU HAVE A STORY?  
CONTACT US [NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK](mailto:NEWS@SCHOOLSWEEK.CO.UK)



JOHN YARHAM

CEO, The Careers &amp; Enterprise Company

## Four ways to get your students career-ready this academic year

**With the new Gatsby benchmarks now enshrined in government guidance, here's how schools can move careers education from add-on to core offer, writes John Yarham**

This year, schools face a significant shift in how they support their students' career-readiness. From this week, the updated Gatsby benchmarks, adopted into government guidance, take effect; careers education is no longer an optional addition but is to be woven into the fabric of every school's learning culture.

Over the summer, I joined year 10 students in Liverpool for a one-day workplace experience with a housebuilder. When asked to calculate the materials needed for a building task, students saw maths come to life.

In London, I spent time with year 9s who worked alongside accountancy and construction consultants, giving them a cross-sector experience through a project based on real challenges both companies faced.

Both experiences were eye-opening, not just for the students but for all of us who saw how quickly young people engage and develop essential skills for employment when learning is connected to the real world.

Both also confirmed the findings of our survey of more than 300,000 students, which we will be publishing

later this term.

Early insights indicate encouraging gains in creativity and problem-solving skills, which drive innovation, resilience and adaptability.

However, confidence in teamwork and leadership is decreasing, suggesting that young people are becoming less assured in how they work with others.

This is a gap that concerns me, and one I believe can and must be closed through schools and employers working even more closely together.

The evidence is clear that great careers education transforms futures, so here are my top four tips for making the most of the new framework and ensuring every young person benefits from it.

### Prepare for change

Work experience is no longer confined to a single block placement in year 10. From September 2025, students should be accessing one week's worth of experience across years 7 to 9, and a further five days in years 10 and 11.

This means structured activities, employer projects, visits or virtual encounters in key stage 3 must give insight into real work so that by key stage 4, students have experienced multiple placements across different sectors.

This earlier and broader exposure allows young people (particularly those unsure of their career path) to explore more industries while



“ Schools and employers are well placed to seize the moment

developing confidence in teamwork, communication and problem-solving.

CEC has developed a flexible approach, including a framework of learning outcomes for pre-16s, to support schools in embedding this shift.

### Make encounters meaningful

The new guidance places an emphasis on the quality of employer encounters. These go beyond merely observing. Students should understand the purpose of the experience, interact with a range of employees, take on real tasks, receive feedback and, crucially, have space to reflect on what they have learned.

Done well, these experiences build both insight and aspiration, linking classroom learning to the skills and behaviours that underpin success in life and work.

### Put parents and carers at the heart

Parents and carers remain the most influential voices in career choices, and the updated guidance positions them as active partners.

You can embed this into your strategy by hosting careers-focused parent evenings, sharing family quizzes, conversation guides and classroom-ready resources for

educators.

The goal is to ensure families are confident, informed partners in guiding young people's choices.

### Tap into your local Careers Hub

Engagement with Careers Hubs is now at record levels; 93 per cent of schools and colleges participate, and those that do deliver almost double the amount of careers activity than those that don't.

Careers Hubs link educators with employers, training, resources and peer support, making it easier to meet statutory guidance and ensure no young person misses out.

Encouragingly, schools and colleges have significantly increased their Gatsby Benchmark-related activities, with a quarter now achieving all eight.

The benchmark measuring students' experiences of workplaces rose by 8 percentage points last year. This progress is contributing to lower NEET numbers, delivering an estimated £150 million saving to the economy annually.

Supported by now well-established national and local structures, schools and employers are well placed to seize the moment and ensure every young person is equipped to take their best next step.

# THE KNOWLEDGE

What we've learned about schools and their communities this week



## How much does Ofsted really value outdoor learning?

**David Scott**

**School governor and  
former headteacher**



Over several decades, governments of all stripes have encouraged schools to adapt and enrich their curricula with regular opportunities for outdoor learning. Schools have done so in droves, but an analysis of Ofsted reports shows accountability has not kept pace.

As far back as 2006, the then-Labour government published its *Learning outside the classroom manifesto*.

This was followed two years later by an Ofsted report with the same title, but adding the question 'how far should you go?' This concluded that, when planned and implemented well, outdoor education contributed significantly to raising standards and the quality and depth of learning.

In 2011, a senior HMI confirmed publicly that this report was the most compelling piece of evidence he had ever seen because learning was improved in all cases.

The following year, the coalition government published *Leadership For Embedding Outdoor Learning Within The Primary Curriculum*, encouraging primary school leaders to 'develop a learning culture with the outdoors at its heart'.

Given all this positive endorsement, one might expect an analysis of 300 Ofsted primary school reports (covering schools with 3-11, 3-9 and 3-7 age ranges) published this year to highlight evidence of improvements in outdoor learning.

But the reality is that fewer than 5 per cent of the reports make any reference to subject-based outdoor learning experiences and outcomes.

Residential visits are mentioned in 15 per cent of these reports, comprising mainly lists of activities undertaken.

Even worse, some of the report statements make outdoor education sound pedestrian.

This begs two questions: what value is outdoor learning providing across the primary sector? And how are the best schools delivering on all of its promise?

Ambitions for outdoor learning for all year groups often feature on primary schools' websites and in their brochures.



It's not untypical to read statements like this, for example: "We prioritise hands-on learning experiences and real-world applications within the classroom and outdoor spaces to seamlessly integrate the various skills encompassed in all subjects."

The comments in Ofsted reports, on the other hand, are at best superficial. They link outdoor learning to enrichment and engagement, but seldom to deep curriculum connections:

*Outdoor learning is an important, effective contributor to pupils' personal development, for example growing vegetables, building dens and toasting marshmallows over an open fire, which pupils enjoy considerably."*

*"Themed trips outdoors provide pupils with the excitement of new places and experiences, such as dipping their toes in the sea."*

*"There is "a 'buzz' of learning and excitement, for example in the class where children demonstrated what they are learning about bees from a visitor to school."*

*"Pupils enjoy a sleepover on the school grounds."*

*"Pupils look after frogs, chickens and fish which helps to increase their independence."*

The jury's out on whether the last one refers to the pupils' independence or that of the creatures, but at least outdoor learning in these schools is noticed.

Staff in 95 per cent of the inspected schools

I reviewed received no recognition at all. Many of these will have implemented a meticulously planned and resourced curriculum underpinned by meaningful outdoor learning.

This is unsurprising. After all, they were encouraged by Ofsted to do so as recently as 2021. The subject-specific Research Review Series bemoaned: 'a paucity of meaningful fieldwork' in geography; the need for pupils to encounter 'laboratory' and 'fieldwork' in science; and in history, 'the importance of understanding [...] historical context'.

Provision for outdoor learning has increased exponentially since the start of this decade. A plethora of organisations now support schools with training and guidance on planning and resourcing curriculum delivery outdoors.

Statistically, therefore, it is highly unlikely that the vast majority of schools in this sample had no subject-based outdoor learning during the inspection or no evidence of its central place in their curriculum.

Schools that have implemented meaningful outdoor learning deserve reports which clearly articulate the range and depth of pupils' learning outside of the classroom, in it, and across both contexts.

The result of Ofsted's failure to recognise best practice in this space can only be to stifle improvement. The new inspection framework must put this right.



Week in

## Westminster

The week that was in the corridors of power

## SUNDAY

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson was back in the national newspapers today telling parents they need to do more to ensure their kids are going to school.

But what about her own attendance record?

There have been six DfE board meetings since she took office last July – with minutes published over the summer showing she has been late to the last four!

The meetings, held just once every two months, involve senior management talking strategy and policy. The department's performance is also scrutinised.

But important decisions on "top-tier risks" during a February meeting couldn't be made because Phillipson and her skills minister Baroness Smith were missing and the meeting wasn't quorate.

## MONDAY

We won't hear any grumbles that Labour isn't doing much, though. As Phillipson unveiled today, the party has set up a shiny website ([beststartinlife.gov.uk](https://beststartinlife.gov.uk)) to "bring family services to your fingertips".

It includes information on their 30 hours of children, free breakfast clubs and family hubs.

Very good!

## TUESDAY

Although ... figures published today on early take-up of the free breakfast clubs show that – despite much back-slapping

of how well they are doing – the policy still has a way to go.

Labour has promised to rollout clubs to all primary schools, but started with a small trial in 750 early adopter schools to test stuff out.

Uptake from one week of the scheme show that 224,790 pupils got a free breakfast, which amounts to just 5 per cent of all primary pupils.

\*\*\*

Meanwhile, at an event to launch Sir Nick Gibb's new book, the edu reform gang of old got back together for lots of backslapping about how fantastic they all did.

As well as peers and politicians such as Lord Gove, Baroness Spielman and Damian Hinds, there was a smattering of attendees with current government roles such as curriculum chair Becky Francis and Ofqual boss Sir Ian Bauckham.

Meanwhile, sector bods included super-strict head Katharine Birbalsingh, former Oak National Academy boss Matt Hood, former Tory special adviser Mark Lehain, Ark Schools chief executive Lucy Heller and EEF co-CEO Chris Paterson.

The (ex) forever-schools-minister Gibb was in good spirits. We're told one particularly crowd-pleasing moment came when, after listing tens of people who had provided advice and support along the way, he suggested that current secretary Phillipson only had ... union boss Paul Whiteman. Ouch!

## WEDNESDAY

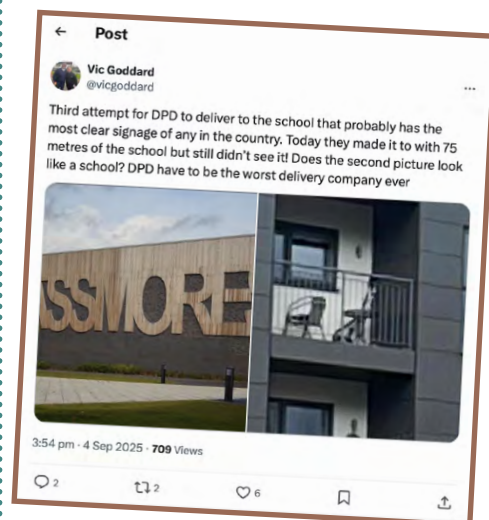
Amid much furore about comedian Graham Linehan's arrest over tweets relating to trans people, former Ofsted chief Spielman revealed today how she stopped the watchdog's London landlord from relabelling its office toilets as gender neutral.

She asked for an anonymous poll of mostly female staff in the office and about 80 per cent opposed the change. The toilets remained single sex.

\*\*\*

Spare a thought for Vic Goddard, the executive head at Passmores Academy. He tweeted about delivery troubles at the Essex school, with DPD making three failed attempts to deliver a package.

Despite being within 75m of the school, Goddard says the driver still managed to miss it – which given the signage (see attached) – makes it all the more remarkable.





We are seeking exceptional school leaders for two unique opportunities within the Lift trust.

## VACANCIES



### Head of School

The first role is for a Head of School at Lift Hamford, a welcoming two-form entry primary school in the coastal town of Walton-on-the-Naze. The successful candidate will be a senior leader with a proven background in primary education, ready to step into a headship role with the support of an experienced Executive Principal. This is an exciting time to join the school, as it prepares to open a new 40-place nursery and continues to expand its modern facilities, which include an Autism Support Centre and extensive outdoor grounds.



### Principal

The second position is for a Principal at Lift New Rickstones, a vibrant secondary school with a thriving sixth form located in Witham, Essex. We are looking for a strategic and ambitious leader with a track record of improving student outcomes. The Principal will work closely with the Regional Education Director and central team to drive excellence and shape the future of a high-performing school. Lift New Rickstones focuses on preparing students for the future through its core values of "Ambition, Character, and Opportunity," offering a tailored curriculum and a rich extra-curricular program.

Both roles require inspirational leaders who can develop staff, foster a positive school culture, and deliver outstanding results for every student. If you have the vision and drive to lead a school into its next chapter of success, we encourage you to apply.

[CLICK HERE TO APPLY](#) ➔



## Principal - Saint John Fisher Catholic Primary School Coventry



### Lead with Faith, Vision & Purpose

Saint John Fisher Catholic Primary School in Coventry is seeking a faith-driven leader to take up the role Principal from January 2026. Rooted in Gospel values and part of the Romero Catholic Multi-Academy Company, this vibrant, inclusive school serves children aged 3–11 and is committed to nurturing every child academically, spiritually, and socially.

This is a rare opportunity to shape the future of a thriving Catholic school with a strong foundation and a clear mission: "Through Christ we live, love and learn, in our caring community." The successful candidate will be a practising Catholic with a deep commitment to Catholic education, bringing proven leadership experience, strategic vision, and a passion for inclusion and excellence.

You will lead with compassion and clarity, embracing a trauma-informed approach where every child is respected and loved. Your role will involve strengthening the school's ethos, driving high standards in teaching and learning, and fostering strong relationships with parents, parish, and the wider community.

In return, you'll join a faith-filled, supportive environment with dedicated staff/governors, engaged pupils, and a collaborative leadership network. You will benefit from centralised MAC services, a strong School Improvement Team, and opportunities for personal and professional growth.

If you are ready to lead with heart, purpose, and impact — and help shape lives through Catholic education — we invite you to apply.

**Salary: £78,702 – £91,158**

**Closing Date: 9am, 19th September 2025**

**Interview Date: 26th September 2025**

**Start Date: 1st January 2026**

