

Governors' Agenda

Edition Seventy-Three

Summer Term 2019

*A Governors' Journal produced by David Sassoon for Governors of Schools associated with **Schools Support Services Ltd***

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Editorial: Autonomy vs Accountability

For as long as I can remember, education has been vexed with the twin rivalries of autonomy and accountability. They appear to be in constant strife with each other. There was a time when the nation accepted that educationists, especially teachers, knew best, and left them to get on with the job of educating our children – i.e. to be autonomous. However, there were problems.

I The downside of autonomy

All was not well in “the secret garden”. This unease was given body during an epic moment when the late Prime Minister Jim Callaghan, in 1976, spoke at Ruskin College, Oxford. He referred to “legitimate public concern about trendy teaching methods, to “unease felt by parents and others about the new informal methods of teaching, which seem to produce excellent results when they are in well-qualified hands but are much more dubious when they are not”. In other words, Callaghan wished to introduce a measure of accountability.

His speech sparked off the Great Debate. Parents were to be given more information and rights. Ultimately the national curriculum for England and Wales was imposed on schools and central government began to assume considerable educational powers and control on what was taught, including the pedagogy deployed, and how the impact was to be measured.

Central government acknowledged that it needed local authorities to police the system. Some LAs, such as Haringey and Brent, abused their powers leading to the creation of the Education Reform Act of 1988, which ensured that they (the LAs) were side-lined. The Department of Education and Science took over their powers - prescribing a national curriculum and testing regimen. School governing boards and headteachers (through LMS - the Local Management of Schools) were authorised to deliver in ways they thought fittest the national curriculum.

There were unintended consequences. The country was down on the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) league tables. So, government turned the screws on schools by creating the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and appointed Chris Woodhead – the teachers’ *bête noire* – as the Chief Inspector. Examinations were reformed and then reformed again.

However, schools were offered the opportunity to flee the local authority nests (which some described as cages) and allow them to become grant maintained. The freedom they were given, they soon discovered, was severely circumscribed – i.e. just larger cages. Ofsted continued to bring down the cosh on schools – local authority and grant maintained ones – that failed to perform well. With LMS, schools realised that they were in the marketplace. They had to perform well in the league tables and with Ofsted otherwise parents would not opt for them. Parents would withdraw their children and schools would lose money as children came with “prices on their heads”.

Ex-Education Secretary David Blunkett tried to do what he could to lift the sights of those schools that were failing by creating academies and bestowing on them dollops of money. This led to limited improvement. However, it was not until Michael Gove took up the educational reins and enabled all schools to become academies did the education system truly open up. There was a Gadarene-like stampede as some headteachers (governors were led by their noses and exercised little influence, it appears) led the charge out of local authority control because at the beginning there was considerable money in the conversion.

Academies spawned Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs). Government's covert rationale behind this move was to weaken the powers of the LAs by freeing schools from their controls. However, not only did Ofsted identify some academies in large MATs failing but also that Chief Education Officers (CEOs) in MATs were manipulating their trust boards to pay them salaries two or three times that of the Prime Minister.

In 2017/18, Sir Dan Moynihan of the Harris Federation Trust (which runs 44 academies) has an annually salary of £440,000. (The Prime Minister's is £150, 402.)

Warwick Mansell, the journalist, wrote in November 2017 that in 2010/11 on average, a local authority's children's services director was paid £132,000. S/He was responsible for (on average) nearly 50,000 pupils. For the same number of pupils (in 2015/16) in eight MATs, on average, the CEO was being paid £143,000. Put another way, the LA director was costing the nation £2.67 per pupil compared to £23 per pupil for a MAT CEO.

The autonomy given to MATs – deregulation by another word – meant that there was no cap on the salaries of their leaders. This resulted in large salaries for relatively small numbers of pupils. Mansell added that the academies' programme "has had the effect of vastly increasing the number of organisations overseeing state-funded schools". In addition to the 152 local authorities there were now more than 3,000 MATs each needing a leader. If MAT leaders were paid similar salaries to the Directors of Children's Services, the overall bill to lead such organisations would be much higher. In the event, tax payers are having to cough up more and, more seriously, our children are given fewer resources.

Schools and academies are today finding their budgets severely constrained. Yes, the government has turned off the resources tap, but are CEOs contributing to financial shortages by drinking deep of the budget wells?

Tensions between accountability and autonomy continue. Ed Dorrell, the Deputy Editor of *The Times Educational Supplement (TES)*, describes this situation as "an impossible paradox". He states the issue has political connotations. This, I would add, is because of two factors.

First, the funding of education comes from tax-payers – you and me. We elect our political leaders. Consequently, it is right and proper that control has to be political.

Also, education, unlike medicine, is not a precise science. Consequently, from time immemorable, there has been debate of what is the best education we can give our children. The NHS is lucky in this respect as it's prescriptions for good health are rooted in unbiased research.

II Problems with accountability

Both, former education secretaries, Kenneth Baker in 1988 and Michael Gove in 2010, legislated to give headteachers and governors more freedom, but not freedom for its own sake. The thrust was to weaken the powers of LA and the teacher unions.

Nick Gibbs, Schools Minister, averred (from one side of his mouth) that he wanted to give headteachers and governors more freedom through academisation. However, from the other side of the mouth he promoted a set curriculum and a model of pedagogy that resonates with the one captured by Charles Dickens in *Hard Times*. In a passage, a visiting official asks Thomas Gradgrind's pupils: "Suppose you were going to carpet a room. Would you use a carpet having a representation of flowers upon it?" Sissy Jupe, a student, replies, ingenuously, that she would because, "If you please, sir, I am very fond of flowers."

"And is that why you would put tables and chairs upon them, and have people walking over them with heavy boots?"

"It wouldn't hurt them, sir. They wouldn't crush and wither, if you please, sir. They would be pictures of what was very pretty and pleasant, and I would fancy....."

"Ay, ay, ay! But you mustn't fancy!" cried the gentleman, quite elated by coming so happily to his point. "That's it! You are never to fancy."

"You are not, Cecilia Jupe," Thomas Gradgrind solemnly repeated, "to do anything of that kind."

"Fact, fact, fact!" said the gentleman.

"Fact, fact, fact!" repeated Thomas Gradgrind.

Ministers interest in school/academy autonomy is ingenuous. Witness Gibb's obsession with phonics and times tables, which today hold so much sway over what primary teachers do in their classes.

The government, in one sense, is keen to increase the number of MATs giving CEOs, headteachers, governors and trustees more powers. On the other hand, while academies are not required to follow the national curriculum, they ignore it – especially those elements that lead to good test and examination results – at their own peril. And as for finance, that is another story where there is never enough.

In many cases, the constrictions on powers has impacted negatively on schools and academies. Equally, where freedom has been given wings, schools and academies have gamed the system with off-rolling difficult pupils. Also (as mentioned earlier), the CEOs of MATs have run riot on the salary front, and some governors/trustees have engaged in financial transactions which have been unethical if not dishonest. A few have ended up in the courts.

III Have educational reforms worked?

The English education system has gone through two decades of reform. Young people are more literate and numerate. There is no place for a failing school/academy to hide. Parents know about the poor performance of schools/academies – through both, inspection reports and examination and test results, and they are savvier about what works in the classrooms.

But Tony Blair’s strategy of “naming and shaming” downgraded the status of the teaching profession. It smacked more of the reformation of medieval miscreants who were condemned to the stocks. Failing schools/academies need both, challenge and support, not naming and shaming. Teachers have been driven out of the profession. There are now more teachers in other professions or teaching in other countries than ever before. This has created a national shortage.

There is no doubting the government’s good intentions. However, this is often the way to hell. There are so many variables in education, the chief of them being the children who are unique and deserve the best. What is good for one child and works for her/him may not be suitable for another. Good teachers, consequently, keep adapting their methods of passing on the wisdom of previous and the current generations to the next, to give children the best education possible, rather than stuff them with “facts, facts, facts”.

Also, as many people as there are on this planet who are associated with education – teachers, headteachers, parents, governors, trustees, politicians - so many opinions are there about what constitutes a “good education”. The upshot has been that the problems associated with Brexit takes a poor second place when considering what makes good education for young people fit for the 21st century.

The last words must be those of Dorrell when he wrote: “Teachers must first embrace the political and then help to develop, and project, a collective voice – one that is loud and proud – in the political bun-fight that is education. They must be powerful protagonists in the fight, rather than trying end it.

“Perhaps then the profession can push back against the worst excesses of political meddling and help to build an accountability model – make no mistake, there will always be one – that is as near to fit for purpose as possible. Such steps forward might, for example, help to arrest the hemorrhaging of senior staff from leadership as part of the heavy-handed and knee-jerk phenomenon now known as “football manager syndrome”.

“As always with education debate, when one drills down into it, this is largely about the failure, over generations, to build a profession bursting with self-confidence and self-efficacy.

“Schools and teachers will always have politicians watching over them, prodding them, using accountability to direct them. But instead of this being done to them, perhaps we can reach a situation where it is done with them.”

Prior to Callaghan’s Ruskin’s speech, the English education scene was dominated by high autonomy and low accountability. Over the last 40 years, the balance has tilted so that we now have high

accountability and low autonomy. There have been many benefits that have flowed. But one of the serious downsides has been an exodus of teachers and a shortage of trainees coming through the system.

Ultimately, education needs both, autonomy and accountability – bringing about the right tension - like the wire on a violin to enable the maestro to make good music.

Changing the metaphor, autonomy and accountability are two sides of the same coin. Freedom – of which autonomy is an aspect – is not licence to do whatever one wants to do, but rather, within an educational context – doing what is right for the child. That calls for accountability. Autonomy and accountability are not incompatible, but complementary – and that’s as it should be.

Ofsted Inspections: All Change in September 2019

(1) Ofsted’s Deputy Director heralds changes to inspections

Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman has signalled a radical change to how school/academy inspections are to be carried out from 1 September 2019. Consultations on the [draft inspection handbook](#), which began on January 16, 2019, closed on 5 April 2019.

Writing in the March/April 2019 of *Governing Matters*, the National Governors’ Association (NGA) magazine, Matthew Purves, Ofsted’s deputy director of schools, gave schools/academies a pat on the back when he stated: “England’s schools have made real improvements over the past two decades, thanks to the hard work of teachers, leaders, governors/trustees and many others. The accountability system has played its part in the improvement.” He added, however, that this accountability had become a slave (my word) to performance data, spawning a school improvement industry around scores and outcomes. Schools and academies have expended too much time on performance data “rather than focus on what is really going on in the classrooms”.

You can sense that the pendulum is now set to swing in the opposite direction from outcomes to processes. Matthew Purves empathises with teachers because of the excessive workload they have been under obsessing with data as they “generate, upload and analyse” outcomes endlessly. This focus, he avers, has been “a barrier to further improvement”. Attending to pupil scores has drawn attention away from the substance of education – i.e. “what is taught, how it is taught and the impact”. This remark is a bit puzzling. It is precisely because schools and academies have been focusing on impact that they have placed so much store on data.

I will return to Matthew Purves at the end of the article. Meanwhile, there is merit in outlining what will be different in inspections.

(2) What is changing?

(a) The quality of education will be under the microscope

The curriculum in a school/academy will become the beating heart of an inspection. It will replace the 'quality of teaching, learning and assessment' and 'outcomes' from the current framework.

Inspectors will look at

- ⇒ the extent to which the school's/academy's curriculum sets out the knowledge and skills pupils will gain at each stage;
- ⇒ the way school/academy staff teach and assess the curriculum, to support pupils to build their knowledge and to apply that knowledge as skills; and
- ⇒ the outcomes pupils achieve because of the education they've received.

Ofsted says this judgement will "place more emphasis on the substance of education" and less on performance data.

(b) Pupils' behaviour and attitudes

Ofsted will have a separate behaviour judgement to reassure parents about how well behaviour is managed in the school/academy.

Inspectors will assess

- ⇒ whether school/academy leaders are creating a calm, well-managed environment free from bullying and
- ⇒ the impact this has on the behaviour and attitudes of pupils.

(c) Personal development

The 'personal development' judgement will recognise the work schools/academies do to build pupils' resilience and confidence in later life. Inspectors will evaluate

- ⇒ the school's/academy's intent to provide for the personal development of pupils and
- ⇒ the quality with which the school/academy staff implement this work.

Ofsted is of the view that separating these judgements will help to

- ⇒ enhance the inspection focus on each area and
- ⇒ enable clearer reporting in both areas.

(3) How will the inspection run?

On-site section 8 inspections of 'good' schools (formerly 'short inspections') will be carried out over two days because Ofsted hopes that inspectors will have enough opportunity to gather evidence that a school/academy remains 'good' under the new criteria.

A section 8 inspection of a 'good' school will focus on aspects of the school's provision, as a subset of the full framework criteria.

- (a) For every inspection, the plan is for Ofsted to call the school/academy no later than 10.00 a.m. **on the day before** the (full-blown) inspection is scheduled to start, to notify the headteacher and governors formally about it. The lead inspector will arrive at the school/academy by 12.30 p.m. **on the day on which the institution has been notified that the “storm-troopers” will follow the day after.** The purpose is to study the school/academy documentation which will guide the inspection.

Ofsted said this would allow inspectors and school leaders to carry out preparation collaboratively wherever possible.

The lead Inspector will use the afternoon to gain an overview of the school's/academy's recent performance and any changes since the last inspection plus

⇒ check documentation and

⇒ talk to the leaders about

- how the school/academy has built on its strengths,
- the weaknesses leaders have identified,
- the action leaders have planned or have in progress to address those weaknesses,
- practical arrangements for the inspection, and
- documentation or other evidence that inspectors will need to see during the inspection.

The on-site preparation will be completed no later than 5.00 p.m. on the day before the main inspection starts.

- (b) Inspectors won't look at non-statutory internal progress and attainment data. This is to help make sure the inspection doesn't create unnecessary work for school/academy staff.

However, inspectors **will**

⇒ gather direct evidence of the quality of education and

- ⇒ have meaningful discussions with school/academy leaders about how they know the curriculum is having an impact, why they're collecting the information they are, and how they're using it to inform their curriculum and teaching.

(4) What remains unchanged

The consultation documentation shows

- ⇒ the existing 'overall effectiveness' and 'leadership and management' judgements will remain;
- ⇒ the 'outstanding' grade will be retained, and the current four-point grading scale will continue;
- ⇒ 'Outstanding' schools (other than special schools, pupil referral units and maintained nursery schools) will continue to be exempt from routine inspections; and
- ⇒ The full inspections of multi-academy trusts (MATs) will not be carried out by Ofsted and there will be no separate framework for inspections of MATs.

(5) Reflections on the proposed inspection model

There is no equivocation about the importance of the quality of education being at the heart of what goes on in a school/academy. Therefore, Ofsted deserves praise for resetting the balance away from performance data reminiscent of the approach of the school board superintendent, Mr Thomas Gradgrind, in Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* who was obsessed with cold facts and numbers. Further, Ofsted will not be looking at pupils' internal progress and attainment data when inspecting.

Rather, the inspectors' attention will be directed at the quality of education, how the school/academy decides what to teach and why, "how well they do it and whether it leads to strong outcomes for young people" according to Matthew Purves.

During that one day when the team will be on site, "inspectors will meet those responsible for planning the curriculum...both, overall and at subject or topic level". Discussions will focus on the "end points" the school/academy "wishes pupils to achieve and the key concepts and skills pupils must grasp in order to reach those". This is a "big ask" of the inspectors, and, indeed the school/academy if the inspection is to last for one day only.

The problem with this approach is that it would undermine one of the Secretary of State's, Damian Hinds's, chief priorities – i.e. reducing teachers' workload. Staff will have their work cut out providing information on what and how they teach and how they measure impact. The teaching profession is already haemorrhaging members. Would this inspection model make an already bad situation worse?

The aims of HMCI Spielman are noble, i.e. to get a handle on the real substance of education, which performance tables cannot capture. But how will this be done if an inspection lasts for only two days – including the first day of preparation? Were the number of days inspecting a school/academy increase, will that not be placing more pressure on already stressed (and occasionally burnt-out) teachers?

Besides, any increase in the number of inspection days will either mean that the Secretary of State will have to augment Ofsted's budget.

Keeping the number of days down to two, will inevitably mean that for a school/academy to do well during an inspection, the headteacher and governors will have to "talk the talk" but will not be evaluated on walking the walk, simply because their will not be enough time to do so. And the eloquent leaders could get away with 'murder'.

In education, there are many models of what constitutes a "good, suitable curriculum" for the pupils. Schools are restricted to the National Curriculum. If Mrs Spielman rules that only one model constitutes a good curriculum, will that not be incompatible with the freedom that the government is giving to academies? The legislation prescribes that schools/academies have to offer a "broad and balanced" curriculum. "Broad and balanced" is open to interpretation and not something that Ofsted can prescribe.

Mrs Spielman is correct about wanting to tackle the pressure on headteachers and teachers and proscribe a system that places emphasis on outcomes – test and examination results - to the detriment of processes – i.e. the quality of education. However, she will need to consider very carefully what measures she wishes to put into place to redress this balance and ensure that in doing so, she does not add to the stress levels of headteachers and teachers.

Let's end with some comforting news. Professor Daniel Muijis, head of research at Ofsted, speaking at the Westminster Insight Conference in London in late March 2019, said that schools/academies could be granted an extension to the planned "transition period" of 12 months to allow them to develop curriculum plans.

"We appreciate," he said, "that because there hasn't been a particularly strong focus on curriculum in the accountability system over the last decade or so, a lot of people are going through the process now. Therefore, what we are not expecting is that in September 2019, when we start inspection under the new framework, everybody has got that fully ready.

"We are expecting to see school/academies that are on a journey of curriculum development and, therefore, we are building in a transition period where inspectors will be expected to make a judgement based on where you are in the journey of curriculum rather than expecting you to be fully ready with that. We will review that after one year and look at our overall evidence from the system and make a decision as to whether we need to extend the transitional period."

He also hinted, in a tangential reference to the curriculum at secondary level, that the watchdog would take intake into account when looking at what progress schools/academies make towards the government's EBacc target of 75% of pupils studying the necessary subjects by 2022.

If schools and academies expect inspection pressures to ease, they may be whistling in the wind. Inspectors will continue to make judgements on impact – i.e. how what trustees, governors, headteachers, teachers and support staff do for children benefits the children. Despite what Matthew Purves writes, schools and academies will have to produce results. However, they should view these pressures creatively and deploy them in children's best interests.

Campaign for better education funding gathering momentum

Over the spring term 2019, barring Brexit and the NHS, everything – including education – took a back seat in government business. However, several bodies used strenuous efforts to get government to keep education in focus – especially the funding of it.

The Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) calculated that [total school/academy spending per pupil fell by 8% between 2009/10 to 2017/18](#). This included a 55% cut in the allocation made to local authorities to help them discharge their educational responsibilities and another 20% cut to sixth-form funding. Funding per pupil to primary and secondary schools/academies fell by 4% since 2015.

The six school/academy-based unions claimed that schools and academies face a shortfall of £5.4 billion despite the extra funding that the Chancellor made available for an increase in teachers' pay and (for the first time) a pupil premium grant for young people from the ages of 16 to 19.

“School budgets are at absolute breaking point,” warned the general secretary of the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) Paul Whiteman. “School leaders have made all the obvious savings. Now, class sizes are rising and the range of subjects schools can offer is shrinking as they desperately try to balance the books.”

The general secretary of the Association of Schools and College Leaders (ASCL), Geoff Barton, added: “Schools across the country have had to make severe cuts and there are more on the way as reserves are drained and deficits increase.

“The reality of budget cuts is that schools have to operate with reduced staffing and this impacts on educational provision, such as less additional support for children and fewer curriculum choices. Schools are in the invidious position of having to decide on the least-worst option of where to make cuts or they will become insolvent.”

Government statisticians were severely criticised by the union pressure group, *Schools Cut*, after they (the statisticians) were forced to correct a significant blunder in their figures in 2018. The DfE said the School Cuts analysis was “misleading” but didn't expand on why. A spokesperson added: “The Secretary of State has made clear that as we approach the next spending review, he will back headteachers to have the resources they need to deliver a world class education.”

However, the School Cuts coalition, which runs a [website](#) allowing schools to calculate the impact of funding cuts on their own budgets, isn't the only organisation to have been criticised over its use of funding statistics.

Last October, United Kingdom Statistics Authority (UKSA) chief, Sir David Norgrove, wrote to the education secretary Damian Hinds, DfE permanent secretary Jonathan Slater and chief statistician Neil McIvor with “significant concerns” about the department's use of data.

A DfE spokesperson said: “We believe these figures are misleading. While we recognise that schools have faced budgeting challenges, this government has prioritised school funding, while taking difficult decisions in other areas of public spending – protecting the schools’ budget overall for 5-to-16-year-olds in real terms since 2010. School funding in England is at its highest ever level and since 2017 we have given every local authority in England more money for every pupil in every school.”

I National Governors’ Association leading the charge

In the forefront of the campaign to increase the budgets of schools and academies is the National Governors’ Association. In May and June 2018, the NGA carried out a survey of governors and trustees. Altogether, 5,218 responded. The findings on the parlous state of school/academy finances became obvious.

- (i) Half said that they were unable to balance their income and expenditure with a little under a third drawing on reserves. The respondents also revealed that within two years their school/academy reserves would run out.
- (ii) In relation to high-needs funding, 74% said that the income was insufficient.
- (iii) Early years provision was under considerable financial pressure.
- (iv) The sixth form curriculum was under huge strain because of inadequate finance.
- (v) Schools and academies have already made significant reductions in provision because of reducing budgets, including cuts to staffing. The secondary sector has suffered more than the primary.
- (vi) Schools are feeling the impact of cuts to local authority services.
- (vii) Only 20% of respondents thought that funding pressures could be managed without negatively impacting on the quality of education schools and academies provide.

The NGA urged governing boards to write to their MPs and the Chancellor before the nation’s autumn budget is announced on 29 October 2019. They have asked governors to invite their MPs to see for themselves the impact on children.

- ⇒ The NGA has suggested that governors download its [template letter](#) to MPs – amending it to suit their needs before posting it on to their MPs.
- ⇒ Governors can find their MPs [here](#).
- ⇒ After they have written, they should email Fay Holland of the NGA at fay.holland@nga.uk to let her know.

The Fair Funding for All Schools is a national network of parent activists of independent parent-led groups attached to schools and academies in their local area. It is campaigning for better funding for education. Parents, governors and trustees can contact the organisation at info@fairfundingforallschools.org.

II Councillors petition Education Secretary

In April 2019, more than 1,000 councillors in England organised by the F40 group wrote to the Education Secretary, Damian Hinds, urging government to give schools and academies billions of pounds extra in funding. The letter asked him to end the spending cuts and release more money for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

They wrote, "The funding crisis has become so overwhelming that according to the Education Policy Institute, almost a third of all council-run secondary **schools are now in deficit**, and eight in 10 academies are in deficit according to last year's [Kreston UK report](#)."

"Many schools are now desperately overwhelmed as more and more students are competing for fewer and fewer resources. Compounded by biting cuts to local council services, in addition to the teacher recruitment and retention crisis, the current settlement is not tenable."

Chairman of the f40 group and Conservative councillor in West Devon, James McInnes, said: "It's clear that elected representatives are unhappy with the government's handling of school funding and are demanding an increase in budgets, as well as adjustments to the way funding is allocated."

Headteachers across England also protested about their budgets, saying they had been forced to ask parents for extra cash for basic supplies.

The DfE's replied: "In the last year, we have also announced an extra £400m of capital funding for schools from the Treasury. Nonetheless, we do recognise the budgeting challenges schools face. That is why the education secretary has been making a strong case for education spending across government ahead of the next spending review."

"We are also aware of the funding pressures faced by local authorities on high needs - that's why we recently provided the £350m in revenue and capital funding, on top of increases we had already promised."

III Parental Contributions

According to an investigation carried out by *The Times*, state schools and academies were being asked to donate hundreds of pounds annually to cover the salaries of staff, buy textbooks and equipment and repair leaking buildings.

For instance, through parental donations, one school raises £100,000 annually. The highest (among those that responded) request was for £1,260 a year per family. This was at Rosh Pinah, a Jewish primary school in Edgware, Middlesex. However, some of this covers the salaries of teachers who teach Hebrew as a modern language and Jewish Studies.

Sir Thomas Rich's Grammar School in Gloucester, said it received parental donations totalling £96,000 last year, which it spent on building maintenance and staffing minority subjects. It appealed to alumni as well as current parents to raise £120,000 in 2017/18 and urged those connected with the school to set up

regular donations. Donors were invited to target their giving to specific projects including sport, music and science equipment.

Henrietta Barnett, a grammar in north London, said: "All costs above the basics are passed on to parents as voluntary contributions, including all trips, additional activities, even music and drama opportunities. Only essential maintenance is done; school buildings are falling into disrepair. We will have to use our reserves (from parental donations) in order to survive. We ask parents to fund science equipment and are getting parents to buy sixth-form textbooks for the first time."

Swimming lessons are statutory. However, *The Times* discovered that many schools/academies had been asking parents to pay for the lessons and/or the transport costs to and from the pools. Others had asked children to bring their own stationery, glue sticks, exercise books and boxes of tissues.

Many are depending on parents to help them repair leaking roofs and broken-down heating systems, installing stair-lifts for disabled children and replacing obsolete computer servers.

Several schools/academies are adopting a four-and-a-half-day week. The number is growing.

IV Situation on the ground

Despite the actions taken by schools and academies across the nation, many cannot rely on parents and carers, who depend on support from the Department for Social Security. In fact, schools and academies have had to find the wherewithal to provide many parents with financial succour. In England, these educational institutions are having to put together the broken pieces of troubled families in poverty, by giving food and clothes to children, according to Headteachers. Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Lecturers, said that schools and academies have become the "unofficial fourth emergency service for poor and vulnerable children".

He remarked: "A decade of austerity has wreaked havoc with the social fabric of the nation and schools have been left to pick up the pieces." He accused politicians of having a "fixation with Brexit" while failing to address the struggles of impoverished families and the lack of investment in schools.

Sarah Bone, headteacher of Headlands School, in Bridlington, said she saw "too many children with no heating in the home, no food in the cupboards, washing themselves with cold water, walking to school with holes in their shoes and trousers that are ill-fitted".

Edward Conway, head of St Michael's Catholic High School in Watford, observed: "Pupil poverty has increased significantly over the past eight years, with us providing food, clothing, equipment and securing funds from charitable organisations to provide essential items such as beds and fridges."

V Reflections

One of the main aims of Parent Associations linked to schools and academies is to raise funds for them. Nothing new. Also, since the provision of state education in this country has had to be free at the point of delivery, it is not unusual for schools/academies to request parents to make voluntary contributions for educational trips and pay for instrumental lessons when they are organised for individual pupils. But

schools and academies are mindful of those children who come from poor backgrounds and find help to provide them with financial support. More than one school/academy has, for instance, arranged for the children to have free breakfasts at the start of their working days.

What is alarming is that some parents are now being approached to pay for text books, stationery and building repairs and make contributions to offset the cost of staff. I, personally, am aware that one (religious) voluntary aided school “requested” parents to pay for their children’s education because the cost of staff exceeded the income it was receiving from the local authority. What was even more startling was this was happening eight years ago. I have moved away from the area and dread to think what parents are being asked to do now. These are not voluntary parental contributions but rather the creation of a dependency culture.

In its investigations, *The Times* discovered that 200 schools/academies out of the 700 respondents to its survey revealed that schools/academies sought donations but reduced their services, cutting out mental health support and reducing the number of music lessons. These institutions also asked parents to pay for swimming lessons – or at least contribute to the cost of transporting pupils to and from swimming pools.

When this is pointed out to the government, the response inevitably is that government has increased the funding of schools and academies by 50% in real terms since 2000. However, that increase occurred under the Labour government from 2000 to 2010 and then was frozen in real terms ever since – because of the international collapse of the financial markets in 2008. Add to that a cut of 55% in local authority funding and a reduction by 20% of sixth form spending per student. Schools and academies have been left to hang out to dry.

As mentioned earlier, total spending per pupil fell by 8% since 2009, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies. School/academy funding has been frozen, but costs are rising – a double whammy. Inflation is also up.

But there is some good news. From September 2019, the employer rate for teachers’ pension scheme will increase from 16.48% to 23.6%. The government has stated that it will provide [funding](#) for this rise for maintained schools to March 2020 and for academies through to August 2020. Whether or not this will extend to the financial year 2020/21 will depend on the government’s spending review which is due on 29 October 2019.

Schools and academies had a decade plenty under Labour but since 2009 have had to cope with shrinking budgets – a decade of famine. Many have done what they could to improve efficiency. This included doing away with School Crossing Patrols (SCPs) – i.e. the lollipop persons – and not replacing certain staff, such as teaching assistants (TAs) and School Meals Supervisory Assistants (SMSAs). They have had to cope with leaking roofs either by putting up with them or carrying out patchwork and some have even shortened the working week from five to four-and-a-half days.

Secretary of State, Damian Hinds, is doing what he can to bring to bear pressures on his fellow MPs, especially the Chancellor Phillip Hammond. It is right and proper to boost the NHS budget and extend people lives. However, the nation’s future depends on the quality of education, so, in a sense, spending on education is not spending, per se, but rather an investment in the future. However, the government is

also mindful of the nation's debt, that is now running at £1.8 billion and rising. This too will impact on the nation's future – detrimentally. Therein lies the government's dilemma..... and those not having to make painful choices, in more senses than one, are fortunate.....

DfE signals its intent to tackle teacher shortages

I Some hard facts

Schools and academies are suffering budget reductions in real terms causing trustees, governors and headteachers to consider staff reductions. These difficulties are being exacerbated by teacher shortages.

Recent recruitment and retention statistics showed that the teaching profession was a profession in crisis. In 2017, nearly 35,000 teachers left the profession for reasons other than retirement, with four in 10 teachers quitting within their first year of qualification.

It's not hard to see why. Horror stories continue to proliferate of dedicated teachers suffering burnout and leaving the profession. Here are some facts.

- (1) 20% of teachers feel tense about their jobs most or all the time compared with 13% of those in similar professions.
- (2) 41% of teachers are dissatisfied with the amount of leisure time they have compared with 32% of those in similar professions.
- (3) 23% of full-time teachers would like to reduce their working hours even if it meant taking a pay cut, compared with 17% of those in similar professions.
- (4) The pay of average teachers fell by 12% since 2010 in real terms.

II Causes of the teacher crisis

In its annual report published on 25 February 2019, the National Foundation for Education Research revealed the following.

- ⇒ The secondary school system is facing a substantial teacher supply challenge over the next decade.
- ⇒ Retention rates of early-career teachers (between two and five years into their careers) have dropped significantly between 2012 and 2018.
- ⇒ Alternative sources of teacher supply, such as returners and overseas-trained teachers, have not increased despite the growing supply challenge.
- ⇒ One in five teachers (20%) feel tense about their jobs most or all the time, compared to 13% of similar professionals. Two out of five teachers (41%) are dissatisfied with the amount of leisure time they have, compared to 32% of similar professionals.

⇒ Teaching's traditional 'recession-proof' advantage over other professions has eroded over time due to a relatively strong graduate labour market. High job security for graduates outside of teaching makes it harder to attract them into teaching and retain them.

The Office for National Statistics reported that the risk of suicide for primary and nursery schoolteachers in England between 2011 and 2015 was 42% higher than the national average.

These statistics, and the resultant recruitment and retention crisis, were unsurprising given that we have had government involvement in education creating

- ⇒ a standards-driven approach,
- ⇒ an increasingly narrow curriculum and teaching to the test,
- ⇒ Ofsted ratings and
- ⇒ the relentless promotion of results and performance in league tables.

Dr Sarah Charles, Head of Discipline for Initial Primary Teacher Education at the University of Derby, was commissioned to look at the crisis and advise on how to improve teacher recruitment and retention. She identified the following barriers to teacher recruitment and retention.

Barrier 1: The wider context in which headteachers operate can create pressure that leads to excessive workload that distracts teachers from teaching.

Barrier 2: Not enough early career teachers receive the high-quality support they need to build the foundation for a successful career.

Barrier 3: A career in teaching does not always adapt to the expertise and lives of teachers.

Barrier 4: The process to become a teacher is too complicated and burdensome.

III The action that the Department for Education is taking

In its [Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy](#), which the Department for Education (DfE) published at the end of February 2019, it set out its priorities, challenges and the action it would be taking, which in brief were as follows.

First Priority

Establish more supportive school/academy cultures and reduce workloads.

Problem: The DfE acknowledged that the current system of school/academy accountability could be confusing for leaders, which sometimes leaves teachers unsure about what they need to do creating extra pressures.

Action: Accordingly, the DfE plans to work with Ofsted to simplify the accountability system and reduce any unnecessary pressure it places on teachers. This includes clarifying when a school/academy will receive an offer of support and consulting on removing the floor and coasting standards. In addition, the new Ofsted framework will have an active focus on reducing teacher workload.

Second Priority

Transform support for early career teachers

Problem: At the start of their careers, teachers don't always get the support they need to build successful careers and, at the moment, too many end up leaving.

Action: The DfE intends to transform the support for early career teachers introducing (according to the government) the "most significant reform to teaching since it became a graduate profession". The Early Careers Framework will underpin an entitlement to a funded two-year support package for all new teachers, providing them with the support enjoyed by other top professions. This will include a dedicated mentor and a reduced timetable for early career teachers giving them the time and sustenance to focus on their professional development.

Third Priority

Make sure teaching remains an attractive career as lifestyles and aspirations change

Problem: As their life circumstances change, many teachers wish for more flexible working patterns and career journeys, but these opportunities can be hard to find within teaching.

Action: Help expand flexible working by launching a new job-share service to assist those interested to find opportunities and work with the sector to make sure that quality tools exist to support workforce flexibility. Also create new specialist qualifications for those who want to develop their careers and progress without going down the usual leadership route.

Fourth Priority

Make it easier for great people to become teachers

Problem: Many people want to become teachers, but several don't have opportunities to try teaching out and many are put off by the long and complicated application process.

Action: The DfE is in the process of simplifying the route into teaching by introducing a new 'one-stop' application system for initial teacher training (ITT). The DfE will also launch new 'Discover Teaching' initiatives later in 2019 so that more people get opportunities to try out teaching before they apply.

According to a DfE bulletin, "The education secretary Damian Hinds has made it a priority to attract and keep great teachers through our new recruitment and retention strategy. The strategy includes the Early Career Framework which will be backed by £130 m a year in extra funding when fully rolled out. It will also support teachers in their career progression and reducing workload."

For starters, the Department for education has opened a finding a teacher's job [website](#) both, to help unemployed teachers and schools and academies ensure that our institutions are appropriately staffed.

School and academies governors and leaders hope that the strategy works. The children are our future and these institutions and the teaching profession are in the front line to secure it.

Is the exclusion of pupils adding to knife crime?

I The school/academy dilemma

Children's welfare is of paramount importance to schools and academies. Happiness and safety are the twin conditions required to promote their growth mentally, physically, morally and spiritually – enabling them to develop and flourish during the compulsory stage of their education. They keep them grounded for the rest of their lives. Were a school/academy to be wanting by Ofsted in its safeguarding arrangements it is peremptorily placed in special measures. This does not negate the requirement that a school/academy is expected to demonstrate that its pupils are achieving.

Regarding the last requirement, schools and academies are caught between a rock and a hard place. It is imperative that governors, headteachers and staff give children every opportunity to succeed – but at what cost? In a number of egregious cases schools/academies are “off-rolling” the “problematic children to twinkle in the firmament of academic achievement”. Funding difficulties heighten the dilemma for them, making it that much more daunting to educate problematic children in the same classrooms as the better-behaved ones, disrupting their education too.

The evidence is stark: in the Autumn Term of Year 11, several “turned off” youngsters are excluded – often permanently – so that they will not bring their schools/academies shame by doing badly in their GCSEs.

And when that happens, there are drug gangs out there ready to capitalise on these “turned off” youngsters who feel education's “discarded” outsiders, causing their lives to spiral downwards. To defend themselves and/or prove they are macho (most of them are boys), they resort to knife crime.

II RSA study

Laura Partridge of the Royal Society of Art (RSA) carried out a [study](#) on pupil exclusions and published her findings in March 2019. Her research revealed that there was a “spike in admissions to Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) in the Autumn Term of Year 11, the final term before the census deadline”. Were a pupil to be excluded after the school census date, i.e. the third Thursday in January of the GCSE year, he/she would be included in the GCSE league table. Consequently, secondary schools/academies exclude their difficult pupils in the Autumn Term prior to the Spring one when the census is taken.

The data shows that there is a significant increase in the PRU numbers in the first term of Year 11, accounting for nearly 15% of the total admissions according to those local authorities who provided returns to the RSA.

A survey of almost 80 local authorities found that 1,328 teenagers were admitted to PRUs in the Autumn Term of their GCSE year. Only 748 were admitted the term after and 676 the term before. The figures cause the casual observer to suspect that some headteachers are using exclusions to “game” the system.

During the academic years 2015/16 the number of permanent exclusions was 6,685 and in 2016/17 - 7,720 – an increase of 1,135 over the two years. On average, 41 pupils are permanently excluded from English schools every day.

The most vulnerable pupils are the ones most likely to be excluded, i.e. those eligible for free school meals, with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and/or from certain ethnic minorities—such as of Caribbean heritage.

This is by no means the end of the matter. An investigation in 2018 revealed that 13,000 pupils did not have results recorded in league tables in 2017, despite appearing on their schools’/academies’ rolls a year earlier.

According to a recent report by the independent children’s commissioner, Anne Longfield, “the act of excluding a child in itself makes that child more vulnerable to gang violence”. Schooling gives a child structure, a regular routine, relationships with responsible adults and a relatively smooth route to accessing other public services. Her report stated that excluding or off-rolling was “repeatedly identified” as the trigger for membership of a gang.

PRUs do a splendid job - putting together the broken pieces of young people’s lives. But then, only problem pupils should move to the PRUs in the first place – not children who are likely to mar a school’s/academy’s position in the league tables.

III Ofsted’s findings on London

Following a [study](#) it carried out on knife crime in London among young people, Ofsted reported in March 2019. Its research concentrated on 29 schools, academies, colleges and PRUs. The inspectorate ran focus groups with parents and children.

It concluded that “no single agency, including schools and academies, can solve knife crime on its own”. However, our institutions can do more to keep children and young people safer. These areas including the following.

- Improve partnership working and strategic planning in London.
- Share and promote good practice in relation to exclusions and managed moves.
- Coordinate early help and prevention.
- Involve information-sharing.
- Teach the curriculum and support children to achieve.

There are measures that the government can take too, the most important being to reduce the pressures it places on schools and academies to ensure that all their pupils achieve in one year only. Would it not be

better to average out youngsters' performance over several years? Ms Partridge writes that providing institutions with support rather than punishment can improve the situation. After all, that is how governors are supposed to operate – i.e. be “critical friends” by challenging and supporting their schools and academies.

Schools/academies can also help one another by sharing success stories to enable those less successful to replicate good practice. In this regard, local authorities (LAs) can help, but are they able to in the current, financially straitened positions?

IV Police call for resources to tackle knife-crime

In mid-February 2019, three teenagers were fatally stabbed in Birmingham. Hazrat Umar, 18, whose uncle, Nazir Afzal, oversaw prosecutions in the Rotherham sex-grooming case, Abdullah Muhammad, 16, in Small Heath and Sidali Mohamed, 16, in Highgate, Birmingham. In Birmingham (at the time of writing) nearly 300 knife crimes were recorded in 2019. The second largest city in the United Kingdom is on the cusp of overtaking the capital on knife crime. Most of the victims and many of the perpetrators are young people of school/academy age.

This caused David Jamieson, the police and crime commissioner for the West Midlands, to state at a press conference that he would request a special Home Office grant to deal with this spike of violence from the Home Office, money normally set aside for terrorist attacks and disasters.

Jamieson informed the home secretary, Sajid Javid, and education secretary, Damian Hinds, that many of the children involved had been excluded or “off-rolled”. He added: “Nationally 19,000 have been off-rolled. Many of those children are here in the West Midlands. This is a national emergency. Many of those children are on an immediate path into crime and violence.”

He implied that schools and academies were using their “strong arms” to persuade the parents of poorly performing or disruptive pupils to remove these children from the institutions – or else they would be permanently excluded. This off-rolling results in children being lured and sometimes shanghaied into drug gangs, because they have time on their hands. Education in PRUs is generally less than full time, so that the devil always finds mischief in idle youngsters' hands.

The Metropolitan Police has said that 41% of those caught for knife crimes in London are from the ages of 15 and 19, and 8% from 10 to 14. Excluded pupils are 200 times more likely to have been involved in knife-carrying offences. Additionally, 50% of prisoners were expelled from schools/academies when of statutory school age. The statistics are sobering – revealing that children expelled from school for fighting were more likely to become violent adults. This is a vicious circle that needs to be converted into a virtuous one.

Glasgow may have some answers. Young people thought likely to become perpetrators of knife crime were helped with housing and employment. Recorded knife crime fell dramatically in that city because this help was coupled with tough sentencing for those involved in carrying knives.

Meanwhile, the Metropolitan Police will be doubling the number of officers working in schools to 600 from 280 a year-and-a-half ago because concerns over knife crime grows. Seventeen police forces in

England deploy officers in schools, often within safer school partnerships (SSPs), an initiative implemented in 2002. However, will this be enough?

A government working group with police representatives stated in its report that police officers gather and share intelligence on young people and their possible gang or extremist affiliations in the work they do in schools. What we don't know is what happens to the intelligence, how it is stored, who accesses it and the implications for young people.

Evaluations of the SSPs' work show small improvements in reducing truancy but there is insufficient data about improvements in school-level offending, albeit pupils say that they feel safer when the police are in their institutions.

V Ofsted's recommendations

[Ofsted suggested a way forward](#). The watchdog made 11 recommendations, as follows.¹

- (1) Local community safety partnerships should fully involve schools, colleges and PRUs.
- (2) All schools and academies in London should ensure that their exclusion policy reflects the practices set out in the Department for Education's (DfE's) statutory guidance. Local authorities should have a strategic response to permanent exclusions. They should also, in conjunction with the schools' commissioners, challenge schools and multi-academy trusts if exclusions do not appear to be in line with statutory guidance.
- (3) The DfE should collect data from schools/academies about managed moves in the same way in which it collects information on permanent and fixed-term exclusions.
- (4) Safeguarding partners should involve school/academy leaders at a strategic level in assessing the needs of children and young people in their areas, and in planning and delivering early help services in response to those needs. Schools/academies need to participate actively in local arrangements as required under [Keeping children safe in education](#) statutory guidance.
- (5) Local safeguarding partnerships should facilitate all agencies including schools/academies and colleges in challenging one another's practices if they believe any agency is failing to contribute to the local strategy to protect pupils from knife crime.
- (6) Schools and colleges should share full information with one another when pupils and learners move schools/academies, PRUs or alternative provision or move to further education (FE) to safeguard them and other pupils and learners.
- (7) Pan-London safeguarding partners should provide challenge to schools/academies and colleges and, when necessary, drive improvement in how well schools/academies and colleges share information with others to promote children's safety when those children move

¹ While these recommendations were made in relation to London schools, academies and multi-academy trusts (MATs) they could apply to institutions all around the country.

schools/academies or into further education, including via managed moves or when they are permanently excluded.

- (8) The Metropolitan Police Service needs to establish a clear and consistent protocol and memorandums of understanding with schools/academies that ensure that it and the schools/academies routinely share information about children for the purposes of safeguarding.
- (9) School/academy leaders should consider how their personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE) curriculum reflects local safeguarding issues and trends, including knife crime.
- (10) Pan-London bodies should consider ways in which they can support schools/academies in ensuring that external organisations that are delivering anti-knife crime and gang affiliation sessions can provide a high-quality and impactful contributions to the school/academy PSHEE curriculum.
- (11) Safeguarding partnerships and school/academy leaders should raise awareness of the dangers of grooming and criminal exploitation among both, parents and children.

Government to open register for home-educated youngsters

Education Secretary Damian Hinds is planning to create a register for home-educated children of compulsory school age. He said that this was to “identify and intervene” where the standards of home education were either not good enough or non-existent or if they were receiving solely a religious education.

Nearly 60,000 children in England were being home educated at any one time in 2018. However, the precise figure remains unknown because parents do not currently have to register home-educated children. New data produced by Children’s Commissioner, Anne Longfield, on 4 February 2019 showed that many pupils who were being home-educated were off-rolled.

She hinted that this was happening in a “small number” of schools and academies. The 11 councils that were scrutinised showed that there was a 48% rise in the number of children disappearing from schools/academies to be educated at home between 2015/16 and 2017/18. A few schools and academies “off-rolled” pupils who were disruptive, threatening them with exclusions because they could spoil their institutions’ positions in the test and examination league tables. More children were moving out of academies than schools to be home-educated, but schools were catching up.

Longfield is now calling for a compulsory register of “off the grid” children, stronger measures to tackle off-rolling, more support for families who home-educate and decisive action against unregistered schools.

Later this year, the children's commissioner's office will also collect data from all councils in England and publish it, school/academy-by-school/academy, identifying which have high numbers of children being withdrawn into home-education.

A [survey](#) of local authorities in late 2018 showed that the number of home-educated pupils rose by 27% in the academic year 2017/18. Council chiefs warned that many more were possibly "hidden from sight".

When the legislation comes onto the statute books, parents will have to register their home-educated children. Councils will be empowered to use existing school attendance orders to force parents to enrol their children in mainstream education if they deem that the education is unsuitable. Other sanctions will be considered.

The Education Act 1944 (known as the Butler Act), states that parents have the responsibility of educating their children "at school or otherwise". "Home-education" is "otherwise" by another name. This provision has been incorporated into [Section 7 of the Education Act 1996](#). The current position is that parents are not obliged to register their home-education which is not inspected or monitored.

Many parents (out of concern for their children and/or because of their convictions) educate their children at home. Some of these children have special educational needs; others have had negative experiences at schools/academies such as bullying.

Mr Hinds has tried to reassure the great British public that plans for a register were not being advanced to crack down on "dedicated parents doing an admirable job" in their homes to educate their children but rather to safeguard those children who were not receiving their education desserts.

However, many parents/carers educate their children at home for suspect reasons. For instance, such outfits have been known as unofficial "schools", i.e. unregistered ones – mainly of a religious persuasion. Children are subjected to corporal punishment, something that was banned in state schools in 1987, private schools in 1999 in England and Wales, in Scotland in 2000 and in Northern Ireland in 2003.

The government is consulting on proposals where local authorities will pay for some teaching resources and contribute towards GCSEs and other examination fees. Anne Longfield welcomed the plans. She said: "For some families, education at home will be a positive choice but many more children are falling out of school and their parents struggle on their own. It is vitally important that we know that all children are safe and that they are receiving the education they deserve to help them succeed in life."

Home education, per se, is not necessarily "a bad thing". At some points in their lives, outstanding public figures – Abraham Lincoln, Albert Einstein, Florence Nightingale, Joseph Priestly and John Stuart Mill - were educated at home. But there is evidence that children, who are in the care and control of their parents, could well be neglected and their parents in breach of their responsibilities. Intervention is necessary to safeguard them from that neglect or sometimes, indoctrination.

While parents may wish to home-educate their children, some may not necessarily have enough know-how about what is "good education" and in their children's best interests. Quality-checks are necessary,

in the way in which Ofsted checks on the quality of education in the nation's schools and academies. If schools and academies are not permitted to teach creationism, neither should parents who home-educate their children. Children have the right to receive reliable information rather than be subjected to dogma.

In a democratic nation, parents have the right to freedom, but so also do their children. The freedom to receive the best from generations past must be available – not just to parents but also their children. For parents, freedom must not be tantamount to licence.

Is children's welfare being undermined by the twin obsessions of academic success and social media?

I Children's Well-Being

There was a time not so long ago when young people, particularly boys of an ethnic group, hated to be told that they had mental health problems. School leaders and teachers fuelled this loathing when they (the youngsters) behaved badly with remarks such as: "You are crazy and mad!"

The pendulum has now swung the other way. It is now quite "cool" for a young person to aver that s/he has mental difficulties. And it is not just the "snowflake" generation.

This apocryphal story epitomises this splendidly. One man, in a conversation with his friend, said: "My health is being ruined because of worry."

"What are you worrying about?" asked his friend.

"I am worrying about my health!" came the riposte.

Notwithstanding, research reveals that mental ill-health is on the rise. People (especially in the West) live longer than ever and cures have been found for an increasing number of maladies. But the Cinderella of the Health Service is mental health. It is, therefore, unsurprising that children's suicide rates are up 67% since 2010. A quarter of those referred for help were denied treatment. Despite the need, according to the Care Quality Commission, 23% of child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) were rated "inadequate" or "required improvement".

Of all the causes of young people's mental ill-health two stand out.

- (i) The first is the pressure they are under to perform academically so that
 - ⇒ their schools/academies shine in league tables,
 - ⇒ Ofsted extols the virtues of these schools/academies,
 - ⇒ schools/academies find it that much easier to attract more pupils/students and their leaders and

⇒ the managers of schools/academies breathe sighs of relief because they become stronger financially as they attract more pupils.

- (ii) The second is the way young people allow themselves to be manipulated by social media. There is now a government realisation that it should be enacting laws to curb the worst excesses of social media.

II Schools and Academies need to step up and lead

Every school/academy could take the first tentative steps by recognising that the problem of mental ill-health exists before acting to do something about it by instituting a policy signed and owned all governors and staff members. The policy should address the following matters.

- ⇒ Developing pupil resilience
- ⇒ Enabling pupils to support one another and enhance good social relationships
- ⇒ Teaching social and emotional skills
- ⇒ Instituting systems to identify and address the problem of pupils' mental ill-health as early as possible
- ⇒ Working effectively with parents/carers
- ⇒ Engaging in training

Matters, despite a school's/academy's best efforts, could go pear-shaped. Despite the best efforts of staff, children may, in the process, become mentally disturbed. When such instances arise, staff and governors need to identify signs of distress.

Young people

- ⇒ keep away from friends and family and becoming socially withdrawn;
- ⇒ exhibit changes in mood or eating/sleeping habits;
- ⇒ perform poorly in their work;
- ⇒ talk or joke about self-harm or suicide;
- ⇒ express feelings of failure, uselessness or loss of hope;
- ⇒ engage in secretive behaviour;
- ⇒ are late or absent;
- ⇒ do not want to do Physical Education (PE) or get changed for PE;
- ⇒ wear long sleeves in hot weather;
- ⇒ take drugs or alcohol;
- ⇒ show sign of physical harm that are repeated or appear non-accidental; and

⇒ experience repeated physical pain or nausea with no evident cause.

Schools/academies may wish to ease up on the pressures they bring to bear on pupils to achieve. This is difficult, given the pressures placed on governors, school/academy leaders and staff to score well in the national league tables.

A University College of London study showed an enduring relationship between mental health and verbal scores, with those who have low verbal ability having worse mental health outcomes than those with higher verbal ability. This finding is true when one considers children from the 1970 British Cohort Study as well as children from the more recent Millennium Cohort Study.

The report (published in 2018) was based on findings from the eighth Annual Literacy Survey of 49,047 children and young people aged 8 to 18 in the UK. It explored the link between reading, writing and mental wellbeing, by developing two new measures.

- (i) In the **Mental Wellbeing Index**, researchers quantified children's responses to questions on life satisfaction, coping skills and self-belief on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 was the highest level of mental wellbeing and 1 the lowest
- (ii) In the **Literacy Engagement Score**, the researchers analysed children's responses to questions on how much they enjoyed reading and writing, how often they read and wrote outside school, what they thought about reading and writing, and how good children thought they were at reading and writing. Scores were then given out of a total of 52, where 52 is the highest level of engagement with literacy practices.

The study revealed the following.

- 1) Children and young people who were the most engaged with literacy had better mental wellbeing than their peers who were the least engaged (Mental Wellbeing Index scores of 7.9/10 vs 6.6/10).
- 2) Children who were the most engaged with literacy were three times more likely to have higher levels of mental wellbeing than children who were the least engaged (39.4 vs 11.8).
- 3) Conversely, children who were the least engaged with literacy were twice as likely to have low levels of mental wellbeing than their peers who were the most engaged (37.4 vs 15).
- 4) Children with above expected reading skills were three times more likely to have higher levels of mental wellbeing than their peers with below expected reading skills (40.3 vs 13.1).
- 5) As children move from primary to secondary school, their levels of literacy engagement and mental wellbeing both begin and continue to decline.
- 6) Boys who were the most engaged with literacy had higher levels of mental wellbeing than girls who were equally engaged (Mental Wellbeing Index scores of 8.1/10 vs 7.6/10).

III Social Media

A *Sunday Times* investigation found several cases of self-harm on [Pinterest](#) that can be viewed by children as young as 13. The images include blood-spattered arms showing self-inflicted wounds, a picture of a teenage girl hanging and many “mottos” that normalises suicide.

The site is a virtual scrapbook driven by algorithms. It is hugely popular with young women. It sent a personalised email to 14-year-old Molly Russell’s email address a month after she took her own life in November 2017, with self-harm images including a slashed thigh. The email said: “I can’t tell you how many times I wish I was dead.”

Molly’s father, Ian Russell, said at an NSPCC Parliament event in March 2019 that technology giants had been allowed to regulate themselves for far too long.

'The tech captains still seem to be heading in the wrong direction, driving ever deeper into Silicon Valley,' he said. 'Up until now they have chosen their own course. Governments have allowed social media platforms to be self-regulated but remember this really is a matter of life and death and it’s getting worse.'

'Now is the time for the UK Government to bring effective internet regulation, with strong sanctions as back-up. Now is the time for the UK to lead the world in making the online world a safer place, especially for the young.'

Russell is calling for the creation of an independent regulator to ensure that “distressing content can be removed from social media and online within 24 hours”. He was dismayed by the refusal of tech companies to give him access to Molly’s accounts so that he could see the content she was looking at in the hours before her death.

A head of steam is developing, both, among the public and in government, to compel social media sites to curb the negative effects their materials. Facebook has been severely criticised for allowing terrorists to engage their worst excesses. Facebook together with other social media sites are again under the spotlight for causing young people to spiral downwards into depression and self-harm.

Thirty families (in line with Ian Russell’s call) accused technology giants of abetting in their children’s suicides following the death of 14-year-old Molly Russell. [Papyrus](#) (telephone: 0800 068 4141 or email pat@papyrus-uk.org), a charity that works to prevent youth suicides, said it had been contacted by the 30 families.

The health secretary, Matt Hancock, requested social media bosses to take responsibility for the effect their sites are having on young lives. He criticised their complacency in relation to the impact they are having children’s health and happiness and wrote to Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest, Apple and Google, asking them to remove disturbing material or face legislation.

The Sunday Times found multiple graphic images of self-harm on Pinterest (founded in 2010 with 250 million users 81% of whom are women) which can be viewed by children as young as 13, including bloodied arms showing self-inflicted wounds, a cartoon of a young girl hanging and quotations that

normalised suicide. An image showed a girl sitting in a sink of blood with the caption: “She closed her eyes and found relief in a knife. The blood flows as she cries.”

Underneath one of the most graphic images of self-harm was a discussion about how to make the best cut. “How do you get them to open like that?” a user asked. “Do you go really deep or do you get them to open it in some way?” The poster replied explaining the method for cutting herself. Another user added: “Wish I had the guts to go that deep.”

After *The Sunday Times* created a pseudonymous account for a child aged 14 and began storing these images, Pinterest suggested further “ideas for this board”. These included pictures relating to suicide, including a fist holding white pills and several images of blood and cuts. Pinterest claims that it contacts users who appear to be “experiencing emotional distress”, but *The Sunday Times* reporters had received no such message from the site.

Pinterest removed the graphic images in late January 2019 after *The Sunday Times* flagged them to the company.

(1) How can parents/carers keep children safe?

Parents and carers have a responsibility to keep their children safe. For starters they

- ⇒ should first ask their children what they are viewing online;
- ⇒ control their children’s phones to limit applications and features on the devices or to add passwords; and
- ⇒ restrict the settings for explicit content, purchases and downloads.

(2) Government Initiative

During Children’s Mental Health Week in early February 2019, education secretary Damian Hinds announced that 370 schools in England would take part in a series of trials testing different approaches to support young people’s mental health.

They were to benefit from mindfulness exercises, relaxation techniques and breathing exercises to help them regulate their emotions. The study would run until 2021. Hinds also confirmed the nine areas across the country which would trial new high-quality mental health assessments for young people entering care, helping them get the support they need at times when they were vulnerable.

Health education would become a requirement in schools/academies. Children were to be introduced gradually to issues around mental health, wellbeing and happiness.

Teams of trained mental health staff will work with and in schools/academies. The initiative is to be led by the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families in partnership with University College London. The study is now in its second wave and recruiting more primary and secondary schools/academies to join.

The trials are designed to explore the impact of different approaches, in recognition of the significant time children spend at a school/academy and the important role teachers can play in recognising changes in pupils' behaviour or mood.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

“I want to see all children and young people have the opportunity to flourish – and protecting their mental health is vital to this. To explore what works in schools/academies to support young people's mental wellbeing, the trials will test five different approaches.”

- ⇒ Two approaches will focus on increasing awareness in secondary schools through short information sessions either led by a specialist instructor or by trained teachers. These will include a set of tools to increase understanding of mental health and mental disorders among both pupils and teachers.
- ⇒ Three approaches in primary and secondary schools will focus on lighter-touch approaches such as exercises drawn from mindfulness practice, breathing exercises and muscle relaxation techniques and recognising the importance of support networks including among their own peers.

The areas selected include two of the Government's Opportunity Areas - Doncaster and the North Yorkshire Coast - where the programme will examine which professionals should be involved in the assessment and develop best practice that ensures every child's individual needs are at the centre of the process.

IV Concluding Thought

Schools and academies do amazing work to grow our future generations. As in all sectors of life, there are rogue elements. A few engage in off-rolling placing inordinate pressures on parents, fellow professionals and, worst of all, the children, who become victims. Sadly, all schools/academies then get tainted with society's critical brush.

One aspect of educational life that governors, headteachers and staff are currently engaged in is promoting both, children's academic progress and achievement and their well-being. Both may, seemingly, appear to be antithetical. Doing more of one can be detrimental to doing more of the other.

However, it does not have to be so, as we have seen from the UCL research. When children succeed academically, they feel good about themselves. What about those that don't succeed. If they exert themselves and fail, children should not be slated and placed in dog-houses. (This is not to say, as the journalist Melanie Phillips consistently avers, that all must have prizes.) Rather, the staff in schools/academies need to find ways of using children's failures as springboards to their future successes, getting them to learn from their mistakes, to become more resilient so that they don't give up but persevere. After all, one of the aims of education is to help young people to convert their vicious circles of failures into virtuous ones of successes. To do this, they need to learn how to “fail well”.

Our responsibility for vulnerable pupils: landmark exclusion cases

I Duty of care for vulnerable pupils

The ground on which bulls fight suffers the most. Bulls may damage each other, but it is the battleground that is smothered. This is what happens when it comes to caring for and educating children, especially the vulnerable ones: the bulls are the adults, the ground the children. We adults often forget that, we have a profound duty of care for our youngsters and sometimes fall well short of discharging our responsibilities towards them.

While battles rage about how schools and academies should be judged, and they are compared to one another by the Department for Education (DfE), Ofsted, the politicians, school and academy governors, education leaders, parents, academics and consultants (the bulls), the children (the ground) suffers. The most vulnerable children – those with special educational needs and disabilities – suffer more than most. In the academic year 2016/17, the latest year for which these statistics are available, SEND pupils constituted nearly 50% of permanent exclusions. These children were six times more likely to be permanently excluded than those without special needs. Often, the covert reasons for excluding them is so that the schools and academies can raise their positions in the test and examination league tables.

Because schools/academies are in the frontline of promoting children's all-round development, they witness directly the damage they can cause to them. Consequently, though they are concerned with league tables, they are more likely to offer them care and protection than other bodies. However, the reality is that there has been a rise in exclusions.

There are three key reasons for this –

- ⇒ a squeeze on funding and resources,
- ⇒ perverse incentives caused by the accountability hokum and
- ⇒ curriculum reform making learning less accessible to children.

So, whatever the intentions of schools and academies, some are in breach of their duty of care for children and need to take close account of the [Statutory Guidance on Exclusions issued by the DfE in September 2017](#).

But complying with the law is daunting. This is because schools and academies must balance the rights and interests of different pupils. Acting to promote the welfare of one group may well be incompatible with the provision they make for another. Disruptive pupils require extra support for which schools/academies may not have the resources. Then what? Should the headteacher allow disruptive pupils continue – despite everything done for them? Won't the education and welfare of others suffer?

The bottom line is that the governing board and the headteacher must comply with the law. This is predicated on the school/academy having a robust behaviour policy that stands up to scrutiny. The board and headteacher are required to operate in accordance with it. Such a policy will provide the disruptive pupil with support and include incremental punitive action – with support again – before the headteacher takes the ultimate sanction of a permanent exclusion.

Following a permanent exclusion, a committee of the governing board, which comprises no fewer than three governors, is required to review the decision of the headteacher. The governors ensure that the exclusion is “lawful, rational, reasonable, fair and proportionate” (Section 3, paragraph 6 of the [guidance](#)). They also must comply with statutory duties related to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), having regard to the SEND Code of Practice (Section 3, paragraph 12). Governors and staff must not be in breach of the Equality Act 2010 by not making reasonable adjustments to the school environment (for instance, in the case of an autistic child).

A key action that a school, academy or local authority is required to take is to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate a child with SEND. If one or more of them fail to act in accord with statutory requirements and the child then behaves in a detrimental manner which triggers an exclusion, the school/academy could fall short and be in breach of the law.

II Landmark cases

Two landmark cases bear scrutiny.

(a) C & C v Governing Body

On 8 August 2018, Judge Rowley of the Upper Tribunal ruled in the *C & C v Governing Body* in which the Autistic Society was party that government regulations were in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Secretary of State now is in the process of amending the regulations. The point is not that a school/academy cannot exclude a child for serious misbehaviour, but rather that before doing so, it must make reasonable adjustments to the environment. Only if a child misbehaves in such a way that he/she is in danger of causing damage to the environment, others or him/herself can an exclusion be justified. In this case, nothing was done to make the environment suitable for the child.

(b) Medway Council found wanting

In February 2019, the High Court ruled that Medway Council breached the law when it changed an autistic pupil’s Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) forcing a mainstream primary academy to admit him. The academy alleged that the Council had “eviscerated” details of the boy’s EHCP, which included the provision for a sensory room for him, which it had refused to finance. The sensory room would have cost £40,000 (circa). The academy maintained consequently, that the placement was “unsuitable”.

Judge Philip Mott QC said Medway had “no proper basis for explaining and justifying its decision”. He ruled that the deletions from the pupil’s statement were “considerate and deliberate”. He added: “I am bound to conclude that Medway’s removal of so much, without any change in the evidence, was irrational and unlawful.” Accordingly, the High Court quashed the EHCP.

In April 2018, this eight-year-old boy (called X in the ruling) and his parents moved from Greenwich to Medway. He has severe communication and sensory difficulties. In Greenwich he was educated in a mainstream primary with a specialist resource unit. Medway placed the child in the academy (which the Court did not name). However, the academy had refused to admit him, stating it was unsuitable to meet the pupil’s needs, because the EHCP stated he needed to use a sensory room for one hour a day. The academy pointed out it had no space for one. This apart, none of the teachers knew how to use a picture exchange communication system or British Sign Language and the academy had never delivered a P-level curriculum, which is for pupils working below national curriculum assessments.

Rather than looking elsewhere for a temporary placement, the Council decided to amend the Greenwich plan and name the academy. In “eviscerating” the special educational provision set out in ... the Greenwich plan” (according to the academy), the Council had removed the need for a sensory room, ruled illegal by the High Court.

The academy had appealed to secretary of state, Damian Hinds, to intervene. However, the Education and Skills Funding Agency, on Hinds’s behalf, agreed with Medway’s argument that the SEND Code of Practice says councils must work on the “presumption of mainstream” provision for high needs pupils. The academy averred in its case to the High Court that the boy’s “personal safety” could not be promoted as there was not a suitable room for him to operate. It requested £40,000 additional funding to accommodate the pupil. Medway only offered financial support totalling £21,151, plus the £6,000 of core funding for extra provision.

The High Court ruled it was likely the school was unsuitable and quashed the Medway plan. It has ruled the pupil’s original EHCP from Greenwich will remain in place until reviewed properly by Medway Council. Meanwhile, Medway must find suitable provision for the pupil until an alternative appropriate school/academy can be found.

A Medway Council spokesperson said: “We are aware that the judgement has been published and we will be reviewing the outcome.”

III The financial conundrum

Good practice is driven by governors and school/academy leaders who are efficient, effective and, most important, acting with humanity. Sometimes, however, patience is in short supply and what the headteacher does is create a special unit housed generally in a “hut” away from the school/academy where problematic pupils are confined to purdah. The children are not excluded, because they are still on-site. But they are internally excluded by being placed in isolation.

Other headteachers inform the parents of disruptive pupils that they should withdraw their children otherwise they (the children) will be excluded. The parents then whip out their children and transfer them to other schools/academies. A school/academy that engages in such under-the-radar practices then has a cleaner record on exclusions than it would otherwise and receives a pat on its collective back. Ofsted has begun to examine schools/academies with high levels of internal exclusions and in-year pupil moves/off-rolling.

Many question the humanity of a school/academy. However, it is not possible to operate reasonably if they are financially legless. Local authorities and schools/academies are being financially squeezed. Both groups are now calling upon reserves and if nothing is done to ease the financial pain, will be running deficits.

The Chancellor’s largesse last year was limited to an extra £250 million to support pupils with SEND. However, local authorities, schools and academies need £1.5 billion extra to provide for vulnerable children. Funding “high needs” was one of the “asks” of the National Governors’ Association in March 2019 in its campaign. There will be merit if governing boards were to contact the [NGA](#) at 36 Great Charles Street, Birmingham, B3 3JY or 0121 237 3780 to see how they can help to turn the screws on the Chancellor to loosen the public purse and provide more help for educating the country’s future – our children.

Relationships and sex education guidance updated after nineteen years.

The updated [draft](#) guidance on sex and health education was published on 25 February 2019 following the first draft on which the government consulted over 2017 and 2018. This includes minor changes. The [public's response](#) to the government's consultations elicited widespread opposition to some Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) elements in its guidance.

From 2020, relationships, sex and health education will be compulsory in all secondary schools and academies, while all primaries will have to teach relationships and health education. Currently, academies are not compelled to teach this subject because they don't follow the national curriculum.

Schools and academies “must have regard” to the guidance, and “where they depart from those parts of the guidance which state that they should (or should not) do something they will need to have good reasons for doing so”.

The document includes several aspects of the subject pupils should know by the end of certain stages. There are too many to go into here.

The rest of the article is based on the briefing that [The Key](#), a governors' services organisation, has given to its members, for which I am deeply grateful.

1. General requirements for schools and academies

Much of the guidance covers what schools and academies should teach pupils at different stages. However, when and how these issues are taught will be left up to heads and teachers. But there are a few actions in the guidance which schools and academies **MUST** take to be compliant with the law.

New regulations were laid before parliament stating that “pupils receiving primary education must be taught relationships education”. Those “receiving secondary education must be taught RSE and all primary and secondary pupils must be taught health education”.

Schools and academies must have a written policy setting out plans to teach relationships and sex education and consult parents when developing and reviewing their policies. They must make copies of the policies available to all who request them and put them on their websites.

Schools and academies are required to consider the religious background of all pupils when planning their teaching. They also must ensure they comply with equalities legislation, make the subject accessible for all pupils and not discriminate against anyone based on age, sex, race, disability, religion or belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity, marriage or civil partnership, or sexual orientation.

They will need to ensure teaching and materials are “appropriate to age and background of their pupils”. While teaching about sex, sexuality, sexual health and gender identity, they must recognise that young people “may be discovering or understanding their sexual orientation or gender identity”.

2. The Primary Phase

In relationships education at primary level, pupils are to learn about “characteristics of healthy family life” and that other people’s families “sometimes look different” from theirs. Materials are to cover how to recognise if relationships are making them feel unhappy and unsafe, and how to seek help if needed. They must respect others, even when they are different. The school/academy must apprise pupils of the rules and principles for keeping themselves safe online.

One change since the draft guidance was put out last year is the inclusion of content on how to “report concerns or abuse” and the “vocabulary and confidence needed to do so”.

Health education at primary school will cover physical health content like basic first aid, diet and nutrition, drugs and alcohol, puberty and the need for exercise and good quality sleep, alongside mental health issues. The subject must cover the “range and scale” of human emotions and how to talk about them. Pupils should learn the benefits of exercise and time outdoors, as well as “community participation, voluntary and service-based activity”, along with “simple self-care techniques” like the importance of rest.

The impact of bullying, including cyberbullying, must be discussed, and schools and academies will be expected to teach pupils about the benefits of rationing time spent online.

Teaching about menstruation has been added since the draft guidance was published last year, as has a line requiring schools to teach “the facts and science relating to immunisation and vaccination”.

3. The Secondary Phase

When pupils move on to secondary school/academy, they will learn about “different types” of relationships, the legal status of marriage, the roles and responsibilities of parents and how to determine whether other children, adults or sources of information are trustworthy.

They will be briefed on how stereotypes can be damaging, on criminal behaviour in relationships such as violence or coercion, what constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence and “why they are always unacceptable”.

Pupils will be taught about their rights and responsibilities online, and how sexually explicit material like pornography presents a “distorted picture of sexual behaviours”. The content will cover sexual consent, exploitation, abuse, grooming, coercion, harassment, rape and domestic abuse. Information on forced marriage, honour-based violence and female genital mutilation are included.

There is content on reproductive health and fertility, managing sexual pressure, the range and efficacy of contraception, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and facts around pregnancy, including miscarriage.

Pupils are to be taught that there are “choices in relation to pregnancy”, using “medically and legally accurate, impartial information on all options, including keeping the baby, adoption, abortion and where to get further help”.

At a later stage in the secondary phase, pupils are to learn about the “benefits of regular self-examination and screening”.

Health education must cover common types of mental health issues, the unrealistic expectations about body images shown online, the science relating to blood, organ and stem cell donation and the risks associated with alcohol, drugs and tobacco consumption.

Personal hygiene and dental health are to be covered and the teaching of basic first aid will become more advanced than at primary school, to include cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and other life-saving skills.

4. The right to withdraw

Parents will have the right to request that their children are withdrawn from “some or all” of their sex education at the secondary stage under the new guidance, [but the final decisions will lie with headteachers](#). Headteachers are being encouraged to grant such requests “except in exceptional circumstances” and should discuss parents’ wishes with them before making decisions.

Once a child is three terms away from her/his 16th birthday, [s/he can choose to opt back in to sex education](#).

At primary level, sex education is optional. Headteachers “will automatically grant a request to withdraw a pupil from any sex education other than as part of the science curriculum”.

However, there is no right for parents to withdraw their pupils or for pupils to withdraw themselves from any part of the relationships or health education curriculum.

5. Teaching about LGBT relationships

The government has strengthened its guidance on teaching about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues slightly, insisting that it “expects” all pupils to have been taught LGBT content “at a timely point” during relationships and sex education. The draft guidance issued last year simply said that the DfE “recommends that it is integral throughout the programmes of study”. The operative word is “recommends”, as this aspect inflames passions.

However, ministers have also sought to clarify that it will be up to schools and academies when they teach about this aspect of the curriculum. Such content will be taught only “at the point at which schools consider it appropriate”, the updated guidance said.

LGBT content was included in the draft guidance after years of lobbying by charities and campaign groups, which warned the new guidance was out-of-date and failed to prepare young people for the world around them.

But the move angered religious and conservative bodies, whose members have demanded the right to opt their children out of the lessons.

In teaching about LGBT issues, schools and academies should ensure all teaching is “sensitive and age-appropriate in approach and content”. The content should also be “fully integrated” into schools’/academies’ programmes of study for this area of the curriculum “rather than delivered as a standalone unit or lesson”.

6. Modifications for SEND pupils

The new guidance explains that in special schools and for some Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) pupils in mainstream schools, there “may be a need” to tailor content and teaching to “meet the specific needs of pupils at different developmental stages. As with all teaching for these subjects, schools should ensure that their teaching is sensitive, age-appropriate, developmentally appropriate and delivered with reference to the law.”

The government has, in addition, explained how schools and academies should process requests to withdraw SEND pupils from sex education, stating that there may be “exceptional circumstances” where the headteacher may want to take “a pupil’s specific needs arising from her/his SEND” into account when ruling on such a request.

The approach outlined above “should be reflected in the school’s policy on RSE”, the guidance said.

7. Public Response

The public’s response to the consultation is not supportive of many of the proposals. For example, 64% of respondents said the proposed content for relationships and sex education at secondary level was not “age-appropriate”, while 58% raised the same concern about relationships education at primary.

A “large proportion” of respondents disagreed with the position on teaching about LGBT issues set out in the guidance, but ministers have added a clause making it clear it’s up to schools and academies to decide when LGBT issues are taught. The government believes that this is the right approach.

Character education to be brought centre-stage

On 7 February 2019, secretary of state Damian Hinds pledged that the government would develop benchmarks for character education. Schools and academies will be invited to assess themselves against these criteria. The first step he will take is to appoint an advisory group to make proposals to grow “character and resilience” in pupils and propose benchmarks against which schools/academies will be rated in the area.

The benchmarks are to mirror the Gatsby ones for careers guidance.² Gatsby benchmarks are statutory. Schools/academies must use them to rate their own work on careers. However, no action – punitive or otherwise – will be taken by the government against institutions that fail to comply with them.

Addressing the Church of England’s Foundation for Educational Leadership conference, the education secretary said he expected the advisory group to report its recommendations in September, “with a view to implementing next year”.

“I’m going to be setting up an advisory group on how best we can support schools in their efforts to build character, and that group will be made up of leaders and experts in the field, people from the arts, from sport, from the voluntary sector, and, of course, from schools themselves. One key area that I want that group to focus on will be developing a set of benchmarks for schools to use so they can deliver their own approach to developing character and assess themselves on how they’re doing.

“We already have something similar for careers guidance called the Gatsby benchmarks, and I would like this advisory group to work out something similar to do the same job on character.”

Hinds also expressed his desire to reintroduce the government’s national character awards, which were introduced by Nicky Morgan but shelved in 2017 by Justine Greening. It follows [calls from Morgan for the return of the awards last year](#). In 2014, Morgan [launched a £3.5 million fund for schools](#) to expand or set up character education projects. In 2016, [the scheme was expanded, with £6 million made available for such projects](#).

The education secretary set out his [“five foundations” for character education](#), i.e. sport, creativity, performing, volunteering and the world of work, and pledged to improve access to extra-curricular activities for poorer pupils.

The government ran character education awards [in 2015](#) and [2016](#) to recognise schools, academies, youth projects and pupil referral units which demonstrate commitment to the government’s character education aims. Nine regional winners received £15,000 prizes, and a national victor got an additional £20,000.

² See Annex to learn more about the Gatsby benchmarks

What are the Gatsby Benchmarks?

The Gatsby Benchmarks originated in a research report ([Good Career Guidance](#)) from the Gatsby Foundation in 2013. The report was commissioned by Lord Sainsbury.

Sir John Holman was appointed to lead a research team to focus on international evidence for ‘what works’ in career development. The research provided a comprehensive study of career development exploring key elements of good career development, the cost per school/academy for good career development and the economic benefit of career development to the economy.

PricewaterhouseCooper (PwC) was commissioned to provide the latter. In its summary, PwC mentioned that the cost of every NEET (a person Not in Employment, Education and Training) individual to the government is the same amount required to provide the benchmarks to 280 pupils. The overall annual cost to the government for implementing a good careers guidance strategy is £207 million in the first year and £173 million per year thereafter. The study explored international evidence from The Netherlands, Germany, Hong Kong, Ontario- Canada, Finland and Ireland.

The report found eight benchmarks of best practice, which are now more commonly known as ‘The Gatsby Benchmarks.’ They are:

1. a stable careers programme;
2. learning from career and labour market information;
3. addressing the needs of each pupil;
4. linking curriculum learning to careers;
5. encounters with employers and employees;
6. experiences of workplaces;
7. encounters with further and higher education; and
8. personal guidance.

Glossary

ASCL	Association of School and College Leaders
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CEO	Chief Education Officer
CPR	cardiopulmonary resuscitation
DfE	Department for Education
EBacc	English Baccalaureate (which is a basket of five subjects – i.e. English Language or English Literature, Mathematics, a Science, Geography or History and a Foreign Language)
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
FE	Further Education
IFS	Institute of Fiscal Studies
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
LAs	Local Authorities
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
LMS	Local Management of Schools
MP	Member of Parliament
NEET	Not in Education, Employment and Training
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NGA	National Governors' Association
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PE	Physical Education
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
PSHEE	Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education
PwC	Price Waterhouse Cooper
RSA	Royal Society of Arts
RSE	Relationship and Sex Education
SCP	School Crossing Patrol
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SMSA	School Meal Supervisory Assistant
SSPs	Safer Schools Partnerships
STIs	sexually transmitted infections
TA	Teaching Assistant