

Ofsted petition

Thousands call for regulator
to be axed. See page 5.

Cleaning classroom air

The many benefits of a box
filter. See page 14.

Anti-racist practices

Taking a whole school
approach. See page 19.

lead.



The magazine for NEU Leadership members

Summer 2022

**“For leaders,
recruitment and
retention is a
massive issue.”**

Incoming NEU president
on bringing new teachers
and leaders together

**Pay ballot
looms**

**Union warning
to the Education
Secretary**

See page 8



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Lead.

Summer 2022

Incoming NEU President

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Welcome

WHEN former Conservative education ministers use phrases such as “power grab” to describe the Government’s Schools Bill (see page 6), it’s clear we’re in troubling times. And such significant criticism from unexpected quarters should worry the Government.

The union has already dealt a blow to the Government’s case for mass academisation by 2030 – a central plank of this bill. Our complaint to the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) that figures used by the Department for Education (DfE) to support its argument were misleading led to an admonishment by the OSR. This was not just embarrassing, but it also exposed to all the non-existent ‘evidence’ for forcing all schools to become academies.

Reading the bill, you would never know that education, like other public services, has been seriously damaged by a pandemic. This draft legislation ignores the many challenges now facing the system (Kevin has more to say on page 22).

But while the Government may be in denial, educators, literally, cannot afford to be. The cost-of-living crisis is hitting members hard. Those on the upper pay spine have lost 21 per cent of their salary since 2010, and, after workload, pay is the second biggest reason teachers are leaving the profession. We cannot afford to lose more teachers.

That’s why Kevin and I have written to Nadhim Zahawi telling him that unless the Government significantly increases its three per cent pay offer, we will ballot for strike action. On 18 June, hundreds of members marched in London as part of the TUC demonstration ‘We demand better’ (see page 8). Please make sure you take part in our campaign to demand fair pay for all educators.

Mary Bousted

Joint general secretary
National Education Union



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The NEU is fighting against the new Schools Bill in Parliament, says Kevin Courtney



Give children ‘nutritional safety net,’ urge unions

EDUCATION unions have written to the Government urging it to provide a “nutritional safety net” for thousands of vulnerable children by expanding the eligibility for Free School Meals to all families receiving universal credit.

In a letter to Chancellor Rishi Sunak and Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi, unions including the NEU, ASCL, the NAHT and NASUWT warn that as the cost-of-living crisis intensifies many more families are struggling to afford food and are falling into school meal debt.

“Now is the right moment for the Government to commit to expansion of Free School Meals.”

England should follow Wales and Scotland and provide universal Free School Meals, they said. But as an urgent first step the Government must expand the offer to those children whose families receive universal credit.

“Excluding so many vulnerable children is a real barrier to learning and must be urgently addressed,” said the letter. “We see the devastating reality of children coming to school unable to buy school lunch because their family circumstances mean they fall outside the restrictive free-meal eligibility criteria.

“Now is the right moment for the Government to commit to expansion of Free School Meals, providing a nutritional safety net that supports all children to learn and achieve.”

The letter tells Government that a quality school meal helps improve children’s concentration and behaviour during lessons, improving school attendance, children’s health, and academic performance.

Data from the charity The Food Foundation shows an estimated 2.6 million children live in households that missed meals or struggled to have healthy food during April.

SCHOOL UNIFORM GUIDANCE

SCHOOL leaders should have reviewed their school uniform policies, removed any unnecessary branded items, and published the new policy on the school’s website ahead of the summer holidays.

These changes are required under the Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms) Act 2021, which places a statutory duty on schools to ensure uniform is affordable for all.

It is expected that schools will have taken steps to adhere to the new guidance before parents buy uniform for the new academic year.

The guidance says schools should engage with parents and pupils when they are developing the new policy, and make sure second-hand uniforms are available to acquire from the school or via an established scheme.

Guidance from the Department for Education on implementing the law says that by December 2022 schools should have a new supplier contract in place, and schools should be fully compliant by summer 2023. It notes, however, that some schools may not be able to meet this deadline without breaching existing supplier arrangements.

Help on school uniform

- neu.org.uk/advice/school-uniform
- www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms/cost-of-school-uniforms
- cpag.org.uk/right-blazer-school-uniform-guides



Members send unhappy birthday cards to Ofsted

GIANT “unhappy birthday” cards and hundreds of others including handwritten messages from educators were delivered to Ofsted’s offices on 6 May to mark three decades of its toxic regime. “You destroy amazing school leaders, teachers and education staff. Not fit for purpose,” said one card. Another wrote: “Russian roulette of judgements has broken my teaching heart.”

Angry members put pen to paper to criticise the lack of fairness and reliability of Ofsted’s judgements, with many scornfully pointing to the 2017 National Audit Office report, which found Ofsted does not know if its inspections raise standards. Workload and stress caused by the inspectorate were cited by many. The

union’s petition calling for Ofsted to be replaced has more than 36,000 signatures, with many more signing daily.

Outside Ofsted’s London office, NEU joint general secretary Kevin Courtney read out many members’ cards from a sack he later delivered to reception. He told the crowd outside the headquarters: “In this country, we talk about policing by consent; we should have inspection by consent and these cards show there is no inspection by consent in England. The system has to change.”

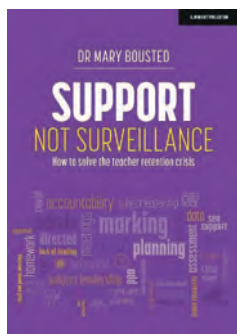
**REPLACE OFSTED: LET TEACHERS TEACH
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Kevin Courtney reads unhappy birthday card messages from members outside Ofsted’s London office

Inspectorate’s powers have had a ‘very chilling effect’ in education, says the NEU’s joint leader



“It is hard to overstate the shadow that Ofsted casts on our schools and on leaders and teachers,” argues NEU joint general

secretary Mary Bousted in her new book, *Support not surveillance: how to solve the teacher retention crisis*.

Written on behalf of, and in support of, teachers Mary describes its 105 pages as a polemic on the problems facing the profession. She examines the teacher retention crisis, looking at how our teachers work more unpaid overtime than any profession. Ofsted looms large.

Speaking about the book, Mary said: “On that framework so much rests – not only the school’s reputation but the teachers’ careers and reputations also. So it’s not

surprising that if you’re giving an inspectorate so much power, then those powers will have a very chilling effect within the system.”

“Ofsted does not even have any evidence that two inspectors arriving on the same day will come to the same judgement – so what it purports to measure is actually based on the whims of the inspector. Ofsted has big problems.” She proposes an alternative model – Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Schools. “I felt it was incumbent on me to say ‘look, there’s another way.’”

Full of the experiences and views of educators, Mary said: “It was really important to me that members’ voices could speak out loudly and clearly in this book,” adding: “The situation facing teachers right now is so grave. Their working lives are so unnecessarily difficult and exhausting and they are treated so badly by the state. What they are being asked to do is impossible.”

The book’s reception from members has been “remarkable,” she said. “I’ve had teachers coming up and saying ‘thank you for making my reality visible’. I’ve had different reactions from politicians, of course, who are very unhappy.”

As a union leader for the past 20 years, Mary shares stories of her frustrating discussions with politicians and civil servants, including one with former Schools Minister Nick Gibb, which resulted in her banging her head against a DfE desk.

“Over the years, what I have been saying has been so cavalierly dismissed by the Government, and key players in the system, that I wanted this book to be unassailable,” said Mary. “You can disagree with the arguments but you can’t disagree with the evidence.”

Support not surveillance: how to solve the teacher retention crisis by Dr Mary Bousted, is published by John Catt Publications £15

Union exposes misleading DfE data on academisation that undermines Schools Bill

GOVERNMENT plans to force all schools to join, or be in the process of joining, a multi-academy trust (MAT) by 2030 have been undermined by mounting evidence that academisation does not improve outcomes. The union has joined forces with MPs and peers to fight proposals in the Schools Bill, which is going through Parliament.

The draft legislation, published on 12 May, would allow local authorities to apply for an academy order for maintained schools, without consulting staff, parents or the community. A local authority's only duty would be to consult the governing body.

Earlier this year, the Government published alongside the White Paper preceding the Schools Bill, data supporting its case for mass

“It is time for Nadhim Zahawi to withdraw this plan.”

academisation. But the NEU complained to the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) that the data was misleading. The OSR agreed. In May, it wrote to the DfE and said that its figures lacked transparency, quality and replicability. NEU analysis shows, in fact, that schools which join a MAT are less likely to improve their Ofsted rating.

Mary Bousted, NEU joint general secretary, said: “The Government

claims that its plan to force all schools to join a MAT is evidence led.

“However, after months of preparation the document it came up with was so flawed that the Office for Statistics Regulation has agreed with the NEU's complaint that the report is misleading. This shows that there is no evidence that forcing all schools to join a multi-academy trust will improve schools. It is time for Nadhim Zahawi to withdraw his plan, which is now exposed as wholly ideological, and get back to what teachers and parents actually want the Government to focus on. The bill, as it stands, has nothing to say on the most urgent matters facing education.”

See final word page 22.

Research ‘demolishes’ the Government’s claim that joining a multi-academy trust improves school outcomes

FINDINGS from a major report published in June show there is no positive or negative effect for a primary school joining a multi-academy trust (MAT).

The research by the Education Policy Institute and UCL Institute of Education looked at 580 schools that had consistently underperformed between 2005 and 2018.

It concluded: “Academisation is not a silver bullet to deliver school improvement and the Government should consider these results to help inform its future policies around academisation and school improvement.”

Commenting on the findings, NEU joint general secretary Mary Bousted said: “The researchers’ findings demolish the Government’s claim that joining a MAT will improve

schools’ outcomes. Ministers must recognise that a change of school governance is not the magic solution they claim it to be.” She added: “The report makes a number of important conclusions. The most significant, as the Schools Bill makes its way through the legislative process, is that ministers review the impact of academisation on primary schools. Obsessed by structures, ministers are in grave danger of ignoring the factors that really can improve ‘stuck’ schools – including training and retaining enough teachers, funding these schools properly for



the extra challenges they face and radically reforming the Ofsted inspection cycle – so that its judgements are more reliable and fairer.”

Researchers noted the ‘vicious cycle’ between low Ofsted grades and increased turnover. “It is not at all surprising that staff in ‘stuck’ schools have

grave concerns about the fairness of Ofsted inspections – and in particular the ability of inspectors to recognise the work done in ‘stuck’ schools to support pupil progress,” said Mary.

For more details go to epi.org.uk

OVERSEAS TEACHER RECRUITMENT PLAN IS ANOTHER PIECEMEAL SOLUTION TO A DEEP-ROOTED PROBLEM, WARNS THE UNION

A NEW system for recruiting international teachers from 2023 was announced by the Government in June.

Under the plans announced by Minister of State for School Standards Robin Walker, international teachers will no longer need to come from one of 39 countries listed but will instead need to meet a new set of standards to be eligible to work in the UK.

NEU joint general secretary Kevin Courtney said: "The Government is driven less by internationalism than by the desperate state of its recruitment and retention policy. The Government's aspiration to make England the best place in the world to be a teacher will not be realised through a system in which

real levels of pay are falling and workload is intensifying."

He said the latest Government figures show the number of newly qualified entrants to the profession is lower than in every year but one since 2012. The number of teachers leaving within their first year has increased to one in eight, with almost a quarter of teachers leaving the profession within three years and almost a third within five years.



Kevin Courtney

"A succession of Conservative governments have continually made England a worse place to teach, and less attractive to teachers with whom we currently have an existing agreement on Qualified Teacher Status. Numbers of overseas teachers awarded QTS have declined by 57 per cent since 2015/16.

Kevin also said it was important not to deprive other education systems of much-needed teachers.

"This is the latest in a string of announcements, which ignore such basic problems in favour of attempts at piecemeal solutions. Without fundamental changes the deep-rooted recruitment and retention problem will continue with the obvious detrimental impact on children and young people's education," he said.

Round-up: union's wellbeing webinar for leaders

CHARITY Education Support is offering school leaders fully-funded places on two new pilot programmes. One provides individual supervision for leaders, the other peer support.

Sinead McBrearty, chief executive of Education Support – formerly the Teachers Support Network – told leaders at an NEU wellbeing webinar that individual supervision is now being discussed more in education.

"It can be helpful in providing a safe, supportive space for people to reflect on themselves as professionals and on the impact of the work on themselves," she said. "If you don't have space to reflect and discuss, you can get exhausted emotionally. Supervision is an intervention that can help people stay fresh and in love with the job."

Sinead also described the peer support pilot programme, a virtual, facilitated group allowing participants to discuss issues in their professional lives. "The wisdom of the other heads and deputies is a great source of insight. It's really instructive and helps everybody move forward," she said.

LEADERS play a key role in tackling the stigma around stress and anxiety, which is more prevalent in education than in many other sectors.

The charity Education Support's research involving thousands of teachers over five years has shown that staff often feel unable to reach out to their leader for help when they are experiencing significant stress. Similarly, they do not feel they can disclose a mental health diagnosis.

"People say they feel they will be viewed differently in the staff room if they disclose they struggle with stress and other mental health issues, said Sinead. "There can be parts of the education sector where there is a kind of machoness of 'we've toughed this out for years. It's what we do' and if you're a teacher you just put your head down and get on with it."

People feel less safe to seek support in an education workplace than they do in other workplaces, according to

the research. "Being leaders who are open and willing to discuss these issues is the most important thing you can do to change that sense of stigma," added Sinead. She went on to say that workplace culture and leadership are the most important aspects of creating an environment of strong mental health in the workplace. "There are no silver bullets here. There is no single policy or approach that will do the job overnight. It is about how you lead and the culture in your school. The core of good leadership will make more of a difference to everybody than any specific wellbeing programme," she said.

"Leaders should be able to identify sources of stress for staff, and while they won't be able to remove them completely, they will be able chip away at them and reduce them by between five and ten per cent over time," she suggested.

To find out about the union's CPD offer go to neu.org.uk/national-cpd

Fighting for fair pay for all

A ballot for strike action in the autumn is unavoidable if the Government does not significantly increase its three per cent pay offer.

“WE can no longer stand by while you run both education and educators into the ground.” That was the union’s stark message to Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi in a letter sent just days after thousands of NEU members joined a London demonstration on the cost-of-living crisis.

For those on the upper pay scale, pay has fallen by 21 per cent in real terms since 2010.

“Alongside the decline in teacher pay in real terms against inflation, it has also declined in relative terms against earnings,” says the letter. “Average teacher salaries are at their lowest level compared to average earnings across the economy in over 40 years.” It adds: “A clear and unambiguous signal that educators are valued, with undifferentiated inflation-plus pay increases for all teachers, is urgently needed. And you must fund schools accordingly.”

Government inaction

It goes on to warn that the inaction from the Government is causing real damage to education and to NEU members’ livelihoods, with unsustainable hours and falling pay exacerbating the recruitment and retention crisis.

Schools up and down the country are reporting profound difficulties in attracting applicants for vacancies. The letter adds: “You must respond to the new economic reality of double-digit inflation and the threat this poses to teacher living standards. We call on you to commit to an inflation-plus increase for all teachers.”

With inflation at its highest for decades, the NEU is campaigning for fully funded inflation-plus cost of living increases for teachers, support staff and other educators.

Pay is a crucial part of the NEU’s campaign to Value Education, Value

Educators. Teachers, support staff and other educators have already seen the real value of their pay cut sharply since 2010 under failed austerity policies. Members have shared with us their experiences of being undervalued and underpaid for the crucial work they do.

Education investment is key

NEU joint general secretary Kevin Courtney said: “If there is no significant improvement on three per cent – which will leave an eight per cent gap with inflation this year alone – we cannot avoid a ballot. The mood among teachers has changed. Last year the issue was mainly workload. This year it is workload and pay.”

For teachers in England, the Government is proposing pay increases significantly lower than inflation. Even the Government’s proposed higher increase for starting pay in England would be lower than inflation according to the latest

figures and economic forecasts. Teachers in Wales and Northern Ireland, teachers and lecturers in post-16 colleges, and support staff also face the prospect of seeing any pay increase more than wiped out by inflation.

If the Government gets its way, educators’ pay will continue to go down in real terms as your bills go up. That’s why it’s essential that members join our campaign to Value Education, Value Educators.

“We can no longer stand by while you run both education and educators into the ground.”



Thousands of NEU members joined the TUC We demand better demonstration in London on 18 June calling for action on the cost-of-living crisis

‘Low trust, high stakes’

An independent commission on primary assessment, supported by the NEU, is investigating the value and purpose of high-stakes testing. Commissioner and head teacher **Kulvarn Atwal** explains.

WE have a system in this country based on children sitting formal tests, which then influences the curriculum. I wanted to be part of an independent group that would consider alternatives and review the value of what we have now.

Schools need to be trusted to provide a more rounded assessment of a child. Take the reading test at the end of key stage 2: essentially, it's a writing test because the children have to provide written responses to demonstrate their reading. The average teacher can provide a far more rounded assessment of a child's reading ability. The idea that only a score in a test counts and that then informs progress at key stages 3 and 4, takes autonomy away from teachers and develops an environment in schools of low trust and high stakes.

The case for dropping tests

“Since the writing test was dropped, and teachers stopped teaching writing to the test, the quality of children's writing has improved. I was a key stage 2 marker until 2010 and schools would train children to write a narrative piece and perform those skills in a test. Since that test stopped, children now have to show

“We're also crushing children's enjoyment of so many subjects.”



Kulvarn Atwal is head teacher of two primary schools – Highlands and Uphall in the east London borough of Redbridge

they are proficient writers in a range of formats. Children's writing has improved since that test stopped so why wouldn't it improve in other areas if tests were dropped?

Children regurgitating knowledge

"All we're doing is giving more and more tests and, at the age of 16, we are producing young people who are very good at passing written tests but who haven't developed their creativity, critical thinking, teamworking and their ability to argue. Children in primary now do more tests than in secondary.

"We're also crushing children's enjoyment of so many subjects. They're just regurgitating knowledge, which is boring for them.

"Then there is the pressure. As a school, we try to minimise the impact of the tests on children. With low-stakes testing throughout the year, children

"With low-stakes testing throughout the year, children aren't worried about being tested at all."

aren't worried about being tested at all. They aren't worried about being tested in other areas of their lives either – in football matches or computer games, for example. The testing itself isn't the issue. The issue is that statutory tests put significant pressure on staff, and they are stressful for children because they know

the tests are high-stakes, even though we try our best to minimise the stress.

"At Uphall our children speak, between them, 60 languages, and we have large numbers of children with special educational needs, but we will still be judged in line with a school in Kensington, with 20 pupils, who have all been there since reception and who are from literate environments. How is that fair?

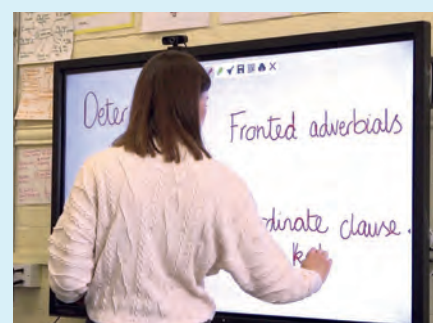
"The Baseline test in reception has absolutely no value. I don't mind doing a phonics test but why does it have to be reported in the way it is? And now we have Nadhim Zahawi saying he wants 90 per cent of children reaching the expected standard in those tests in year 6, when nationally it is now 65 per cent. Twenty-five per cent of primary head teachers leave their jobs within five years, 40 per cent of teachers within four years. The pressure on schools is intolerable."

THE COMMISSIONERS

- **Co-chair Alice Bradbury** – professor of sociology of education at the IOE, UCL's faculty of education and society, and co-director of the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Pedagogy (0-11 years)
- **Co-chair Dominic Wyse** – professor of early childhood and primary education at the IOE, UCL's faculty of education and society. Founding director of the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Pedagogy (0-11 years)
- **Dr Kulvarn Atwal** – head teacher of Highlands and Uphall primary schools in London
- **Professor Mary Richardson** – professor of educational assessment in the department for curriculum, pedagogy and assessment at the IOE
- **Liz Robinson** – co-director and founder of Big Education, a multi-academy trust and social enterprise
- **Megan Quinn** – primary school teacher, London
- **Michelle Murray** – CEO of Education Learning Trust
- **Hollin Butterfield** – primary teacher in Bath
- **Dr Rachel Marks** – principal lecturer in primary education
- **Dr Marlon Lee Moncrieffe** – former primary teacher and principal lecturer at the school of education, University of Brighton
- **Dr Fiona Maine** – associate professor of literacy at the University of Cambridge
- **Professor Bill Lucas** – director of the Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester
- **Ken Jones** – head of policy (education, equality and social justice) at the NEU and former secondary teacher

- **Dr Sarah Earle** – former primary teacher and reader in education at Bath Spa University

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Back together again

How one school is using the NEU's Leading into belonging training to tackle the sense of isolation among staff and students created by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Words: Sally Gillen

"THE pandemic totally upended how we worked for quite a while," says Mike Owen, a teacher at Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee, a special school for pupils aged four to 19 in Westminster. "The school was split into three groups, each staffed by three teachers. It meant that for more than a year you only saw a much smaller group of colleagues."

This enforced separation had some positives, allowing teachers in each cluster to collaborate more and forge closer working relationships, but being apart from the rest of the school also created isolation. Staff churn, combined with high numbers of agency staff over the last two years, has also affected the cohesiveness of the staff community.

Students, too, have had a mixed experience at school throughout Covid, says Mike. For some of his pupils, who are aged seven to 13, the changes have been positive. Moving the whole school assembly from in person – too busy, noisy and overwhelming for some – to online was a positive, for example. But for those whose needs make learning via a screen impossible it has, of course, been a more difficult and isolating time.

Now, as the staff and students begin to reintegrate, Mike and one of the assistant heads are looking at how to bring the school back together. Starting this term, they will be investigating how much staff and students feel they belong at Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee. It is the next step on from the low arousal approach introduced at the school before the pandemic. "It was felt that the low arousal approach, which has a focus on de-escalation and prevention of stressful situations before they arise,



Mike Owen supporting one of his learners during a dance workshop for disabled people, delivered by the Flamingo Chicks

can prove helpful and beneficial across the school to everyone's wellbeing and feelings of inclusion and belonging and so when we saw the NEU's Leading into belonging

course it seemed a natural progression," explains Mike. "The pandemic has been incredibly difficult for everyone, but we had also come through to a place where

A BELONGING APPROACH - ASKING THE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do staff feel they are respected and have a voice?• Do staff stay in school and discuss the learning of the pupils with each other?• Do the learners | <ul style="list-style-type: none">understand what is expected of them?• Do they believe what they say matters?• Do they think their teachers listen to them?• Do the learners feel | <ul style="list-style-type: none">safe physically and emotionally?• Do they feel connected and that what they do makes a difference?• Do their families feel accepted and heard at the school? |
|--|---|--|

the importance of school as a place of belonging was even more pronounced. We want to build on that positive feeling and embed it throughout the school.”

Leading into belonging

Mike signed up for the three 90-minute webinars, led by Professor of urban education at the Institute of Education, Kathryn Riley.

Kathryn has been researching belonging in schools for more than 20 years. She defines it as “that sense of being somewhere you can be confident you will fit in and feel safe in your identity: a feeling of being at home in a place”.

In 2019, her NEU-commissioned research, *Place and belonging in school: why it matters today*, found that in schools where staff and students feel a sense of belonging, there is increased student motivation, increased staff wellbeing, motivation and retention and a greater sense among staff and students that they can make a difference (see box below, left).

Broadly, Kathryn’s course, which Mike attended alongside a number of NEU Leadership members, covers ways of seeing belonging; ways of finding out if your staff and students feel they belong; and ways of acting to make a difference in terms of belonging.

Originally, he and the assistant head intended to attend the training together and then devise a work plan for the school, but work commitments meant Mike attended alone and then shared the learning and the resources provided on the course with senior leaders.

“This work might feel more staff owned if it comes from an experienced teacher, rather than from senior leadership,” he says. “We are looking at whether our school is a place where everybody feels they belong and, if not, what we are going to do about it. It’s easy to assume staff and students feel they do, but you won’t know for sure until you start talking to people. Asking these questions is a really important way to start the process, but it’s just the beginning, not a solution.” He anticipates there will be some challenges in implementing the approach in a school whose 76 pupils have a range of special needs.

“We are looking at whether our school is a place where everybody feels they belong.”

“Because of the nature of some of our learners, a lot of them are less cognitively able to understand some of the issues around belonging, but they do understand that feeling of security, the feeling of being in a place they are familiar with – so more from an emotional perspective of belonging,” explains Mike. “Our learners are very in tune with that, but less able to express that feeling that your voice is heard and that you are respected. These sorts of questions are going to be more important for staff.”

Staff reluctance

Mike’s initial impressions from the pilot he has undertaken with his staff group indicate newer staff can be a little more immediately receptive to the work. Perhaps suffering from ‘fad fatigue’, more experienced members of staff might think “I’ll let this one go past – it’ll soon be gone,” suggests Mike.

“It’s understandable. In education you get a lot of stuff imposed, whether from the local authority, academy trust or the Department for Education, and you quite often feel you are having things done to you.

“Helping everyone take part in it properly will be one of the hurdles. But it’s really easy to show to staff the benefits they can tangibly experience. They can see how much happier the children feel, how much easier their working day can feel and how much less stressful the day is when people are working together and feeling like they belong.”

School mapping

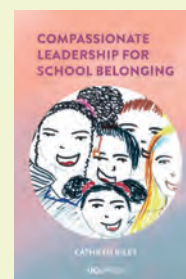
This term, work will begin on one of the most important parts of the belonging

approach – school mapping. “Kathryn did quite a lot of work with young people where they did drawings about how they felt about where they were. We discussed the mapping exercise in our own school, where you would draw a map of school and ask students and staff to fill it in in different colours to show where they feel like they belong in the school, areas they don’t like being, the spaces in which they feel good, those in which they don’t, where they feel creative, where they feel unsure”.

He adds: “We are being slow and careful about how we implement this because we would rather do it properly than try to squeeze it in before the end of the year. This work will be ongoing.”

In part two, which will be published in the autumn issue of *Lead*, Mike will explain the changes he and the senior leadership team have started to introduce to create a sense of belonging at Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee.

FOR MORE INFORMATION



COMPASSION is the super-glue that brings schools and communities together, argues Professor Kathryn Riley in her new book, *Compassionate*

leadership for school belonging. Published in April, it offers ways to identify how leaders can create the conditions for school belonging.

For research materials from the NEU visit:

neu.org.uk/place-belonging



Inside the magic box

A low-cost, DIY air filter that removes viruses and allergens from classrooms could have huge health benefits for staff and students, and improve pupil concentration. **Sally Gillen** finds out more.

AIR quality in classrooms has been in the spotlight as part of measures to reduce the spread of Covid-19 in schools. As the virus continues to cause high rates of staff and pupil absence – and chaos for leaders – some schools have been investing in air filters educators can build themselves.

The Corsi-Rosenthal filter (CR), invented in the US and used with great success in schools, has now been adapted by Welsh consultant Dr Rhys Thomas

at Glangwili Hospital in Carmarthen. He worked with pupils at the Ysgol Bro Pedr on building his Corsi Rosenthal Thomas box. In March, Ceredigion Council announced that it will fund components for the box filters in schools, which the children will build.

Hilda Palmer at Hazards Campaign has delivered training for the NEU on ventilation in classrooms throughout the pandemic. She describes the CR box as “a bit of magic”.

NEU rep Jess Dunn tells secondary head Robin Bevan more about Spinney, the Corsi Rosenthal filter she built for £150



Simplicity works

Its design is simple. Four filters, a cardboard bottom and a fan on the top. “Air circulation in classrooms is often very poor. Better ventilation and HEPA filtration will not only remove Covid but all flu viruses, allergens and pollen that cause hay fever and asthma and particulate pollution, so it could have a huge effect on the health and wellbeing of children,” says Hilda. “Research shows that if you can reduce the carbon dioxide level and improve ventilation, it improves children’s attainment, concentration, cognition and test scores. It also reduces staff and pupil sickness absence.”

With demand for HEPA filters hugely outstripping the Department for Education’s supply – and many schools finding them too costly to purchase themselves – the CR box is a low-cost alternative, says Hilda.

A US study published in the Science of the Total Environment journal concluded the performance of DIY models, such as the Corsi-Rosenthal, compared favourably with three commercial HEPA filters on clean air delivery rate and noise and were five to ten times cheaper. Its four components can be purchased for between £100 to £150 and the box costs 7p a day to run over a school day of five hours.

Hilda and her 12-year-old grandson made a box filter in under ten minutes,

“Air circulation in classrooms is often very poor.”



L-R: Barnet NEU district secretary Keith Nason, Barnet NEU rep Jess Dunn, Hilda Palmer from Hazards Campaign and Barnet Council equalities officer Bahir Laatoe show box filter Spinney at the NEU annual conference

“If you can reduce the carbon dioxide level and improve ventilation, it improves children’s attainment, concentration, cognition and test scores.”

with parts sourced on the internet for £125, she says. In April, she joined NEU rep Jess Dunn (pictured) at a packed fringe session at the NEU’s annual conference in Bournemouth where the box generated significant interest among members including former NEU president and secondary head Robin Bevan.

Go forward with caution

For leaders interested in commercial HEPA filters, Hilda has a note of caution. “Because this whole area isn’t well-regulated, there are a lot of snakeoil salesman out there, claiming all sorts of amazing results

for products that have not been tested independently. So watch out for that. The websites fullplasticscientist.co.uk and cleanairstars.com/filters may be useful. Also, filtration doesn’t replace ventilation. You need to have clean air coming in, bringing in more oxygen, taking the carbon dioxide away. It is important head teachers don’t think a room is fine if it has no ventilation but has a filter. If you don’t have masks in class, you need filtration even more.”

The noise produced by the fan is also an important consideration. Too loud and it will disrupt teaching and learning. Hilda advises purchasing one which operates at under 50 decibels. It is also

FIND OUT MORE

For safety at work

Hazards Campaign is a UK-wide network of resource centres and campaigners hazardscampaign.org.uk. For more information tinyurl.com/bdzc9fk5

For CR box advice

To compare the price, performance and efficiency of the CR box components, go to fullplasticscientist.co.uk

To learn more

Jess Dunn has a package of information on CR boxes including a risk assessment that she can share, at crboxneu@gmail.com

How to build a Corsi-Rosenthal Thomas box
www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4uCRuO-Ayo&t=4s

key to know the clean air delivery rate of your box filter. To be effective, you need six changes of air every hour.

An important investment

With budgets tight, investing in filters may seem unnecessary when the pandemic may soon be over, says Hilda, but, with one in four schools located in a heavily polluted area, she stresses that ensuring the air in classrooms is clean is important generally. “Some head teachers bought filters months ago and found they are having an incredible effect,” she says. There are examples of teachers turning off filters and saying they aren’t needed because there is no Covid in the school. “Of course they don’t have any Covid, because they have the filters,” laughs Hilda. “They are a victim of their own success”. Beyond the pandemic, she says: “It’s important that unions tackle this issue and, since we have been abandoned by the Government, we also all need to take more control and empower ourselves to do something about the filthy air we’re working in.”

The path to president

Incoming NEU president Louise Atkinson discusses how her love of school helped during a volatile childhood, and outlines her plans for the year ahead.

Words: Sally Gillen Photos: Jess Hurd

SOON after joining the union as a trainee teacher eight years ago, Louise Atkinson attended her first ever union meeting. Nothing unusual in that – except it was annual conference and Louise found herself up on stage addressing almost two thousand members on the value support staff bring to the classroom.

By anyone's estimate it was an in-at-the-deep-end start to union life. Now, as she prepares to take over as NEU national president in September, Louise says she is keen for the union to capture the enthusiasm of students.

"It is important to get new members involved in the union as early as possible", says Louise, who teaches at a primary school in Carlisle in north Cumbria. "The student year is a good time because you're not too bogged-down with work." She laughingly concedes, however, that they may opt for a gentler start than her own.

It was at her first annual conference – where her speech sparked a lively debate – that she joined what was then ATL Future, a union group for new professionals. From there she became Cumbria branch treasurer and chair of ATL Future's steering committee. As part of ATL Future, she and the other members worked closely with leaders, a partnership that benefited both.

Ethical leadership works

Louise is keen to replicate this work in the NEU by building the relationship between new teachers and leaders. "What came out of the work ATL Future did with the leadership section was some of the ethical leadership work," she explains.

"That is something I'd like to do in my year as president – create a forum in which leaders and newly qualified teachers can have conversations that will help support both groups. As a union, we must fight politically to change structures and systems, but actually, a good school leader, an ethical school leader, can protect staff and new professionals from some of those outside pressures.

"For leaders, recruitment and retention is a massive issue. I see it in my school and in the secondary where I'm a governor. Recruiting good quality staff is a struggle. If we make sure we're supporting our new professionals in the workplace at the start, hopefully they will stay within the profession for longer."

A difficult journey

Louise's own path into teaching – she knew aged ten it was what she wanted to do – has had its twists and turns. "Education was so important to me

as I had a very volatile home life," she explains. "We were homeless, living in temporary accommodation including bed and breakfasts. Growing up in poverty, school opened up opportunities and offered me experiences that I would never have been able to have at home. I really wanted to be able to do that for other children and young people. I know how education can change lives."

At 16, though, she left home to live independently in a homeless hostel, and while she signed up for A-levels, the pressures of working night shifts to support herself meant she could not complete them.

"I then did various jobs. I sold carpets, I qualified as a hairdresser, I was a nightclub manager for a time. I had two children in my early twenties and took five years out, and then we decided as a family that I would do what I had dreamed of since I was ten," she says.

Just missing the application deadline for the BEd course, she opted instead to do a support staff course, which was run by the Workers' Education Association and had the added bonus of a creche.

Next up was a job as a teaching assistant at a small primary, and enrolment on a part time Open University course, which meant she could mix and match a variety of modules that best fitted her work. It took seven years. "I was very busy," she laughs. "I'd be in the staff room reading during my lunchbreak. I remember being on the bike in the gym and having a book balanced on the bars, just trying to get through the reading."

Once qualified, Louise chose to work in primary education. "It sounds selfish,

"An ethical school leader can protect staff and new professionals from some of those outside pressures."

“Three quarters of our membership are women, yet they are not represented at every level of the union.”

1.7 million children growing up in families on universal credit, some surviving on less than £20.50 a day, are not eligible to receive the support of FSM,” she argues.

As well as No Child Left Behind, Louise has also been involved in developing the NEU’s toolkit to tackle sexism in schools and the anti-racist framework. As a mixed heritage woman growing up in the predominantly white Cumbria, racism and sexism are issues she’s been affected by all her life, says Louise. “I’ve also done the training to deliver the anti-racism course, which is excellent. I’m the chair of the BAME Labour north network, so I have used the training there, too. Other organisations have taken our union training and adapted it for their organisations. It’s a really good document.”

As Louise prepares for her year-long sabbatical from school so she can focus on her role as president, she is looking forward to the privilege of visiting colleagues at schools and colleges. She also wants to hear from women leaders. “Three quarters of our membership are women, yet they are not represented at every level of the union,” she says. “We have some amazing women leaders nationally as part of our officers’ group and our executive body as well as our national councils and organising forums and locally as branch and district officers. I’m keen to find out how they got into those positions, but also what the barriers have been to those women who haven’t taken on a senior role. Please get in touch.”

Louise Atkinson says it’s an honour to be involved in young people’s lives

but I wanted a class for myself. I wanted to bond with those children in a way that I don’t think you can in secondary. What’s important to me is to build our good, solid citizens of the future. It’s a real honour to have that involvement in young people’s lives,” she smiles.

That can be made more difficult under the shadow of the statutory assessment regime in schools. But Louise believes that while that “impacts massively on staff and students,” leaders can do a huge amount to shield staff and pupils from the pressures. “I’ve worked for a number of school leaders.

Some are very focussed on data, whether that’s internal assessments or statutory assessments, others are more focussed on wellbeing and doing education properly, as I would say. They view data and assessments as secondary to wellbeing, and know if you get everything else right, the results will come.”

Help for children and teachers

Within the union Louise is heavily involved in the child poverty campaign No Child Left Behind. “I was a Free School Meals (FSM) kid all the way through. It’s criminal that more than

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Assistant principal Dwain Brandy at Oasis MediaCityUK

Tackling racism within schools

As the anti-racist ambassador for Oasis Community Learning, NEU member **Dwain Brandy** ensures its 52 schools follow an anti-racist programme.

Words: Sally Gillen **Photos:** ABNM Photography

Masterclass

LIKE many schools across the country, Oasis Academy MediaCityUK, in Salford, experienced a huge spike in race hate crime in 2020. Tensions arising from Covid and the murder of George Floyd – prompting Black Lives Matter protests – were further fuelled by the arrival of far-right activist Tommy Robinson, who held nationalist rallies in the city.

“It was this increase in race hate crime at the school that really drove the development of our holistic anti-racist approach,” explains assistant principal Dwain Brandy, whose remit covers equality and diversity, inclusion and behaviour. “It’s upsetting that it took a death for people to open their ears to the discrimination against Black people, but I made sure I capitalised on the attention it got, not just in my school but trust-wide.”

Dwain began building on the work he had started at the school three years earlier. In 2017, as a masters graduate of Manchester University, he had focussed on social justice in education and began to share with colleagues reports and

RACISM INTERRUPTERS USED AT OASIS MEdiAcITy

“That’s not ok with me”
“I find that offensive”
“What you have just said is harmful”
“I’m not comfortable with that”
“We don’t say things like that here”

RESTORATIVE QUESTIONS

“What could you do differently in the future?”
“What needs to happen to put this right?”
“What were you thinking and feeling at the time?”
“What have you learned?”

research he came across. That generated discussions on the barriers in education for Black and global majority students and staff. Dwain’s interviews with Black and global majority students revealed they had plenty to say. Their concerns included the school’s hair policy, which they felt was discriminatory, and some of the offensive English GCSE texts.

“There were books such as *Of Mice and Men* that created trauma by repeating the N word again and again and again, and they were being read out mainly by white teachers in the English

department,” says Dwain. “It was not well-received by students, so we removed it.”

Broader representation

Across the school, Dwain worked with colleagues to look at how broader, more positive representations of Black and global majority people could be included in all subject areas, and on those days dedicated to the study of Black history, students began to learn not just about slavery and the abolition of slavery but, more positively, about Black British history.

Much of it had a local theme. PhD students at Manchester University worked with seven schools including students at Oasis MediaCityUK on developing some Manchester-centric learning resources, among them one on the history of the annual Manchester Carnival founded by Dwain’s grandmother Locita Brandy.

So, when 2020 arrived, Dwain was already in a good position to expand his thinking and ambition for an anti-racist approach that went beyond decolonising the curriculum – although that, of course, remains a key part of the school’s plan – and everyday firefighting of racism. He started to develop a whole school anti-racist strategy. “There was nothing out there at the time – and then the NEU put out the Anti-Racist Framework (see box below). It was really helpful in terms of thinking about the different categories,” he says. “It is a useful tool as a starting point, and a school or trust will then also need to do some deep research and soul-searching about its values and the direction it wants to take.”

His own plan covers: curriculum reviews and adaptations; leadership and management; staff training and CPD; student education and community. It has become a template for rolling out an anti-racist approach across the other 51 schools in the trust.

Keeping momentum alive

While Dwain senses the 2020 momentum to tackle racism has waned in some places, at Oasis the work continues to grow. In July, every senior leader will attend an introduction to anti-racist practices, and the autumn term will begin with an Inset on anti-racist approaches for the trust’s

“Racism must be seen through the lens of safeguarding.”

NEU ANTI-RACIST FRAMEWORK

MORE than 2,500 people have been trained in the NEU’s Anti-Racist Framework, which is designed to support a whole school approach to anti-racism, working with children, young people and staff. It is split into five themes: leadership, teaching and learning, voice and power, wellbeing and belonging and community.

Go to neu.org.uk/anti-racism-charter





Dwain Brandy at Oasis MediaCityUK has developed "racism interrupters" to help staff address racist incidents

5,600 staff. It will be led from a student perspective on how they are impacted by racism within school. "It's paramount to truly understand what is going on in your school if you are going to move forward with an anti-racist approach," says Dwain. "Racism must be seen through the lens of safeguarding, so you really need to find out what's going on and then decide what you are going to do about. It can't be brushed under the carpet."

Dwain has brought in two anti-racist organisations to work with pupils: Wisdom Against Racism, and Kids of Colour, both of which also deliver staff training.

Mentors from Wisdom Against Racism, whose mission is to empower people to navigate, challenge and disarm racism, has worked with students on recognising their self-worth, and Black professionals, including dentists, property developers, and architects, have given talks to students on the strategies they have developed throughout their lives for

dealing with racism. It's very important for schools to understand the needs and wants of their students, says Dwain, so when Wisdom Against Racism came in, they worked with the students on sharing their experiences, which they did in a range of ways – by simply recording their voice, completing a survey, producing some art, writing a poem or a monologue. Many said they repeatedly experienced racist micro-aggressions, otherwise known as everyday racism, at school.

"Micro-aggressions are that every day scratch," explains Dwain. "It's been described as a death by a thousand cuts or as racial fatigue syndrome. It wears you down, it's draining. For me, it's people's reaction to me when I'm wearing a tracksuit, compared to when I'm not, for example. Someone comparing their arm to mine and saying they're tanned like me. In the classroom, it might be a student or students touching a young Black woman's hair and commenting on its texture, and

"You can't challenge discrimination unless you know what discrimination looks like."

them not being challenged or corrected by a teacher."

To encourage staff to be confident in challenging and correcting the racist comments or suspected micro-aggressions they witness, Dwain has developed "racism interrupters", a set of short scripts printed on laminated cards, which slot into staff lanyards (see box on page 20). They are used alongside a "restorative conversations" help script. "You can't challenge discrimination unless you know what discrimination looks like. That's why the staff training is so important," says Dwain. "You can't automatically assume that everyone is in touch and in the know because there are a lot of teachers from leafy suburbs who haven't experienced any other cultures."

"They might join a multicultural school and do whatever is familiar to them in their everyday life, which is no excuse because teachers who choose to work in these schools need to make sure they are in tune. There's so much information out there. Start reading and find out how to support students."

FIND OUT MORE

leadingequality.com

Wisdom Against Racism
wisdomagainstracism.com

Kids of Colour kidsofcolour.com

blackteachersconnect.co.uk

leedsbeckett.ac.uk/research/centre-for-race-education-and-decoloniality

Should we accept the new Schools Bill?



Kevin Courtney
Joint general
secretary, National
Education Union

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THE first Schools Bill since 2016 has no ambition for our children; and offers little help for school leaders. It offers nothing to help you deal with the mental health crisis facing our children, nothing to help with the mounting recruitment and retention crisis, and nothing to reform school accountability or assessment.

Instead, it obsesses about structural change. The Government wants all schools to join multi-academy trusts (MATs) and schools in small MATs to join bigger ones. But it offers nothing on the lack of autonomy for schools in MATs or the lack of democracy in them. Plus they have no evidence to justify these moves: the Office for Statistics Regulation, responding to a complaint from the NEU, has written to the Department for Education to say its data lacks “transparency, quality and replicability”.

The bill represents an attempt to break up national systems of pay and conditions of service and to significantly move the running of schools away from the public sphere at local level. But it simultaneously provides for a huge centralisation of power at national level.

Regional directors

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi’s newly renamed regional directors will have significant powers – determining which MATs are strong and directing moves of schools between them. But these people won’t know their schools other than through data. And they will be central Government emissaries to the regions rather than in any sense local authorities.

The Government is proposing a combination of deregulation, boosting private interests and a simultaneous significant centralisation:

- Deregulate teacher and support staff pay. All pressures down; they call this “efficiency”.
- Deregulate chief executive pay. Lots of pressure up; they say “reward success”, “rate for the job”.
- Centralise curriculum, pedagogy, assessment. They say their experts “know what works,” despite contrary evidence over, for example, synthetic phonics.

This bill represents the worst of worlds. We need the reverse: more freedom on pedagogy, a national, fair system for pay, responsive local decision-making. It is partly

responding to the very low rates of academisation – in each of the last three years about 300 schools converted per year – at that rate it will take 40 years for all schools to become academies.

So it seeks to offer guarantees to faith schools and grammar schools that their status will be protected in MATs – but this won’t give them the right to leave a MAT that turns out to be unsupportive or highly centralised. And while the White Paper presented a narrative that local authorities could set up friendly MATs, the bill itself proposes something very different – that local authorities can decide to make schools into academies – a significant further reduction in the rights of schools and governing bodies.

Rejecting the bill

The NEU is fighting the bill in Parliament. We are working with parliamentarians to put down amendments and to hold the Government to account over its fake data. We are working with our councillors network to seek to persuade local authorities to reject proposals to force schools into MATs – given the total lack of evidence to justify such a move and the significant loss of autonomy for schools that it entails.

“The NEU is fighting the bill in Parliament. We are working with parliamentarians to put down amendments and to hold the Government to account over its fake data.”

We are also working with other unions – in particular NAHT – to resist attempts to force schools into MATs: we recently won a legal challenge to the Hallam Catholic Diocese, which was trying to force its schools into MATs.

We do believe that this campaign can slow the conversion rate – and that this will eventually lead to Government proposing a better system.

If you are coming under pressure to academise or to join a MAT you don’t like – please do get in touch.

**"We need a
responsive and
constructive
observation and
monitoring system."**

NEU member, summer 2022



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