

2019 / 2020

SECONDARY EDUCATION

The Parliamentary Review

■ FOREWORDS

The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
The Rt Hon The Lord Blunkett

■ MIDLANDS REPRESENTATIVES

Grace Academy Solihull
Community College Bishop's Castle
Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College
The Hart School
Archbishop Ilsley Catholic School

The Duston School
City of Birmingham School
Holte School
Oscott Academy

■ FEATURES

Letter from Lord Pickles & Lord Blunkett
Commentary from Andrew Neil



The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP

Secretary of State for International
Development

Even by the standards of the day – this has been one of the most exciting and unpredictable years in British politics.

The leadership election we've just seen marks a huge moment in our country's history. This government is taking a decisive new direction, embracing the opportunities of Brexit and preparing our country to flourish outside the EU.

As international trade secretary, I'll be driving forward work on the free trade agreements that are going to be a priority for the government. Free trade isn't just an abstract concept bandied around by technocrats. It is crucial for a strong economy and for the ability of families to make ends meet. Free trade benefits people in every part of our country, as British firms export to new markets and people doing the weekly shop have access to a wider choice of goods at lower prices.

The essence of free trade is in the title – freedom. It's about giving people the power to exchange their goods without heavy government taxation or interference. Commerce and free exchange are the engine room of prosperity and social mobility. I'm determined to tackle the forces who want to hold that back.

One of my priorities is agreeing an exciting new free trade deal with the US, building on the great relationship between our two countries and the Prime Minister and US President. But I'll also be talking to other partners including New Zealand, Australia and fast-growing Asian markets.

And with the EU too, we want a friendly and constructive relationship, as constitutional equals, and as friends and partners in facing the challenges that lie ahead – a relationship based on a deep free trade agreement.

Our country produces some of the world's most successful exports, and the opportunity to bring these to the rest of the world should make us all excited about the future.

It is this excitement, optimism and ambition which I believe will come to define this government.

For too long now, we have been told Britain isn't big or important enough to survive outside the EU – that we have to accept a deal that reflects our reduced circumstances. I say that's rubbish. With the right policies in place, we can be the most competitive, free-thinking, prosperous nation on Earth exporting to the world and leading in new developments like AI.

To do that, we'll give the brilliant next generation of entrepreneurs the tools they need to succeed. Since 2015, there has been a staggering 85 per cent rise in the number of businesses set up by 18 to 24 year olds – twice the level set up by the same age group in France and Germany. We'll help them flourish by championing enterprise, cutting taxes and making regulation flexible and responsive to their needs.

As we do that, we'll level up and unite all parts of the UK with great transport links, fibre to every home and proper school funding, so everyone shares in our country's success.

2019 has been the year of brewing economic and political revolution. 2020 will be the year when a revitalised Conservative government turbocharges the economy, boosts prospects for people across the country, and catapults Britain back to the forefront of the world stage.

“With the right policies in place, we can be the most competitive, free-thinking, prosperous nation on Earth”

The Rt Hon The Lord Blunkett

Former Secretary of State for Education
and Employment (1997-2001) and
Co-Chairman, *The Parliamentary Review*



A new prime minister, a new secretary of state, and, as we're all painfully aware, a deeply uncertain future. It is in this context that the education service continues to deliver for individuals, communities and of course for our nation.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the education service as a whole, schools, post-16 further education, and yes, lifelong learning, need the most enormous injection of cash. Independent analysis shows that there has been at least an eight per cent average reduction in the amount of spend per pupil in our schools. Those damaged most by this have been pupils with special educational needs, whose voices are sadly rarely heard. The necessity of urgent action was underlined in July by the report of the all-party House of Commons select committee on education. They could not have been clearer about the need for substantial funding and a long-term ten-year commitment.

At the same time, there are a number of reviews taking place. One of them, in relation to post-16 qualifications, is in danger of a classic mistake by politicians and officials who have little or no understanding of the complex territory they're dealing with. Namely, the ridiculous proposition that BTEC National Diplomas might be set aside because "T levels are the gold standard"!

I'm in favour of T levels, but in the right context and for the right outcome. They are intended to be extremely focused specialist qualifications in defined areas of employment. When and if they eventually take off – there is predicted to be just a thousand students in 2021/22 taking up the qualification – they will not replace the BTEC, which has been the workhorse providing a general and high-quality education for decades. The BTEC has equipped young people for a variety of opportunities in a very changing employment market where the development of artificial intelligence, robotics, and changed working practices makes confining the choice of vocational pathways to one narrow focus, frankly ridiculous.

Meanwhile, Her Majesty's Opposition continue to throw out titbits which do not give, as yet, a very clear idea of what, if elected, Labour would do in office. What is needed is positive proposals. Abolishing this, that or the other – assessments and tests for those leaving primary school, for

instance – is not the same thing as a very forward-looking agenda for radical improvement in standards and equity between those who can and cannot afford additional help for their children.

There are a handful of Labour Party members, supported by some people who ought to know better, who have decided that a full-frontal assault on private education would be a good idea. For those worried about this, stop worrying. A party that put this in its manifesto wouldn't get elected, and if by some fluke it did, it would be challenged in the courts to the point where all the contradictions would be exposed for everyone to see.

Just contemplate one simple fact. Twenty per cent of secondary schoolchildren in the borough of Hackney attend private schools! Yes, Hackney. This is because a large number of parents, some of whom scrape the money together, are sending their children to private education in London which happens to be the area of England with the best academic outcomes from state education. What's more, very large numbers (again, particularly in London) pay for private tutors. At the last estimate 40 per cent of parents in London had at some point over the last year paid for a tutor for their child!

Perhaps therefore an opposition party, hoping to provide unity rather than division, opportunity for all rather than a futile class battle against educational privilege, would seek ways of ensuring that those who can't afford tutors have the kind of support outside school that would put them on equal terms. One thing is very certain, no government would be able to stop parents buying additional tutoring for their children.

So, a practical agenda for equalising opportunity, for investing where it's needed most, for transforming the pipeline from school through college, apprenticeships, or university, is a goal worth fighting for. A positive way of linking business and education through political decision-making, with the delivery by excellent professionals in the education service, to the children of today and the economy of tomorrow. Surely that is a much more progressive and less negative way forward for both government and opposition.

The Parliamentary Review

A message from Lord Pickles and Lord Blunkett

The ability to listen to and learn from one another has always been vital in parliament, in business and in most aspects of daily life. But at this particular moment in time, as national and global events continue to reiterate, it is uncommonly crucial that we forge new channels of communication and reinforce existing ones.

With ongoing fractures in Westminster, the reverberations of which are being felt across the country, it is essential that politicians have a firm understanding of the challenges with which British organisations must contend; and that leaders in both the public and private sectors are aware of the difficulties faced by those working in all levels of politics, from local government to the national arena.

This is why *The Parliamentary Review* combines political content with stories from a wide range of organisations – small and large; new and old; those at the peak of their powers and those who have peaks to surmount.

It is why these stories seek to inspire and challenge all who read them.

And it is why we, as former Labour and Conservative cabinet ministers and current members of the House of Lords, feel it is important to put aside our political differences and work together to ensure these stories are given the platform they deserve.

In this publication, you will find an insightful take on the past year in politics from the BBC's Andrew Neil and a concise rundown of key events in industry and parliament. Most importantly, you will be able to read in-depth accounts from the individuals and organisations who make *The Parliamentary Review* what it is.

It is our great honour and pleasure to have helped provide the platform for their insights to be aired. We hope that you find these articles – which begin on page 15 with a piece from Grace Academy Solihull – as thought-provoking and informative as we do.



Rt Hon The Lord Blunkett
Co-Chairman, *The Parliamentary Review*



Rt Hon The Lord Pickles
Co-Chairman, *The Parliamentary Review*

A realignment in British politics?

The general election of 2017 saw the surprise return of Britain's two-party system, which had been in decline since the 1970s: the Labour and Conservative parties, between them, took over 80 per cent of the vote, a share they had not won for over a generation (though neither managed enough seats for an overall majority).

The failure to resolve Brexit, three long years after the referendum to leave the European Union, now threatens to blow the two-party system apart: in the latest polls Labour and the Tories can barely muster 50 per cent between them. We live in unpredictable, tempestuous times.

Note that the threat to the two-party system is not Brexit, *per se*. It is the failure to *resolve* Brexit, one way or another. The very existence of the Conservative and Labour parties as we have known them for over 70 years is now in danger. A major realignment of British politics beckons as long as Brexit remains unresolved – and maybe even if it is resolved.

The failure of a weak and divided May government to deliver Brexit has given Nigel Farage a fresh lease of life, this time as head of the Brexit party, which came from nowhere to win the European elections. The reluctance of Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party to be sufficiently anti-Brexit has meant resurgence for the Liberal Democrats, after their near wipeout in the 2015 general election.

Brexit is now the most important dividing line in British politics – more important than social class,

region or economic status. And it punishes parties that are seen to prevaricate over it. So the Brexit party, with its unequivocal promise to leave the EU (deal or no deal), prospers at the expense of Labour and Tory. As do the Lib Dems, with their clear "second referendum and campaign to remain" position.

As a result, by the summer of 2019 there were four parties that hovered around roughly five percentage points on either side of 20 per cent. Given the vagaries of our first-past-the-post voting system, nobody could predict the outcome if we were to go into a general election like that.

Of course the new Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, has been explicit in recognising that the Tories could not risk another election without first delivering on Brexit. But that does not mean, as we head into the most turbulent autumn British politics has known in peacetime, that one will not be forced on him.

Mr Corbyn is being dragged by Labour's left and right to a more pro-Remain position (a move to be consolidated at Labour's annual conference end-September).



But it remains to be seen if it is a convincing conversion.

Labour and the Conservatives could still survive the Brexit threat. If Mr Johnson, one way or another, succeeds in delivering a broadly palatable Brexit then the Brexit party would lose much of its purpose, as UKIP did before it. If Labour morphs into a clear "referendum and remain" party, that would spike Lib Dem guns.

But these are big "ifs". And even if they were to happen, the Brexit scars run deep in the Labour and Conservative parties. They will not be easily healed.

Labour has already moved away from its working class roots and is fast becoming a party of the metropolitan professional and middle classes, especially those who work in the public sector or whose jobs depend on it (much like the French Socialist party until its recent demise).

The Tories see their biggest upside, as they become declining minorities in our biggest cities, in the votes of the working and lower middle classes in provincial towns and suburban spill across the country (a process first begun under Margaret Thatcher).

So, with or without Brexit, we could well be in for the biggest realignment in British politics since Labour replaced the Liberals almost 100 years ago. Nobody saw that coming after either the referendum of 2016 or the general election of 2017. But it is now a real prospect.

Neil believes a failure to resolve Brexit threatens the very existence of the two main parties

Review of the Year

Teacher recruitment and retention strategy



The government's teacher training and retention strategy has been launched

After a long wait, the government finally launched its teacher recruitment and retention strategy in January.

It says it recruited over 2,000 more trainees for this academic year than the last, but the secondary-pupil bulge means more are needed and "we are losing more teachers from the profession than we can afford to, and are operating in the most competitive labour market on record."

The strategy has four priority areas which the government thinks will have the biggest impact: creating the right climate for leaders to establish supportive school cultures, transforming support for early-career teachers, building a career offer which remains attractive to teachers as they develop and making it easier "for great people to become great teachers."

Main points include reforming the school accountability system so the only factor which can trigger forced academisation is an Ofsted judgment of "requires improvement". The new Ofsted framework also focuses on reducing teacher workload: inspectors will consider this as part of their judgment on leadership and management, and will "look unfavourably" on schools with "burdensome data practice".

Ofsted is also launching a helpline which means heads can report inspectors who add to the school's workload unnecessarily.

Support for early-career teachers includes extending the NQT period to two years, with non-teaching time in year 2 for support and training, and phased bursaries with staggered retention payments. It will also be easier for people to become teachers in the first place.

The government is also promising specialist qualifications to create non-leadership pathways for teachers who want to stay in the classroom, and have set up an online matching service for people who want to teach part-time but need to find a colleague who can share the working week with them.

The plan is also to make it easier for schools with surplus land to build homes for their teachers on them.

Fifth of pupils don't get their first-choice secondary school

The proportion of students in England who got a place in their first-choice secondary school was the lowest for a decade this year.

Children offered their first choice dropped from 83.2 per cent in 2010/11 to 80.9 per cent this year, while the proportion with an offer

from any of their preferred schools dropped from 96.6 per cent to 94.8 per cent during the same period. Overall, 93 per cent of applications had an offer from one of their top three choices.

Almost 115,500 children did not get into their first-choice secondary school this September, compared with 104,300 in 2018.

The lower satisfaction figures come as a pupil bulge moves from primary to secondary schooling. Secondary applications were at their lowest in 2013 and have risen by 20.9 per cent since. Applications to local authorities rose by 3.7 per cent this year to 604,500.

However, the proportion of children getting into their first-choice primary school also fell from 91 per cent to 90.6 per cent despite the number of applications remaining virtually unchanged.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, called for additional secondary school places to meet the growing demand. "The fact that more families have missed out on their preferred choice of secondary schools this year is a sign of the pressure on the system as pupil numbers rise. This is likely to intensify over the next five years because the number of secondary school pupils is expected to increase by another 376,000," he said.

UK universities fall in international rankings

Two-thirds of UK universities in the top thousand in an international league table have been downgraded from last year.

The QS league table showed similar declines for the UK's institutions in 2016 and 2017. Its director of research, Ben Sowter, suggested the UK's performance this year was not a surprise, as many universities were making cuts due to financial uncertainty, and because rankings had fallen each year since the Brexit vote.

Mr Sowter told *The Guardian* that UK higher education had been one of the country's finest global exports, producing outstanding research, world-class teaching and transformational links to industry, and welcoming millions of talented young people. He said:

"To ensure that this privileged situation continues, it is essential that those with the power to do so redouble their efforts to improve teaching capacity so as to reduce the burden on passionate but beleaguered academics, reach a clear conclusion about the fee status



of EU students post-Brexit and do their utmost to ensure that the UK remains a part of EU research collaboration frameworks into the future."

The main problems for the UK were falling ratings from world employers and also in the number of students per staff member. The QS rankings are based on employer and academic reputation, class size, research output and international staff and student numbers.

UK universities have fallen down the league table rankings, with academics citing financial strain as an explanation

Oxford was one of 12 UK universities which improved its position, from fifth to fourth overall, as did UCL. Imperial and Edinburgh were also in the top 20, while Cambridge moved down one place to seventh, its lowest-ever

position. This was as a result of declining research performance, measured in the number of citations for each member of its academic staff. Mr Sowter said this reflected a rebalancing of spending from research towards teaching.

Calls for more 16 to 19 funding



The Social Mobility Commission has called for the 16 to 19 education funding cuts to be reversed

The Social Mobility Commission urged the government to raise education funding for 16 to 19-year-olds by “a significant amount” in the spending review, saying that funding had fallen by 12 per cent since the 2011 academic year and was now eight per cent lower than for secondary schools.

Its *State of the Nation* report says this has led to cuts to the curriculum and student support services that harm disadvantaged students.

“Further education provides alternative life chances for all 16 plus age groups,” said Alastair da Costa, a Social Mobility Commission commissioner and chair of the Capital City College Group.

“Consistent budget cuts have made it more difficult to provide opportunities for everyone. But as 75 per cent of disadvantaged 16 to 19-year-olds choose vocational education, the cuts represent a class-based segregation of the school system.”

The report found that twice the number of disadvantaged 16 to 18-year-olds were in further education colleges compared to school sixth forms and that this number had grown in the past five years. It said the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students was growing, and a student premium similar to the pupil premium should be introduced by the government.

Part of the problem was that funding shortfalls and a pay gap between FE colleges and schoolteachers meant recruiting and retaining staff in colleges was “a major problem” which created volatility for students and impacted their attainment.

The report was reinforced less than a month later when the Education Policy Institute think-tank published its own report on 16 to 19 education. It found that funding per student had fallen from £5,900 to £4,960 since 2010 and that 16 to 19 had been the “biggest real-terms loser” of any forms of education.

The EPI found that students lost nine per cent of their learning hours with a teacher between the academic years of 2012 and 2016 and the proportion of colleges with financial deficits had risen five-fold in sixth form colleges between 2010 and 2016.

“The government should urgently review the adequacy of 16 to 19 funding, to understand whether current funding rates are jeopardising the sector’s financial stability,” said the report.

School inspections given new focus

School inspections will be different from September 2019 as Ofsted has shifted the focus of its inspection framework.

Teachers and school leaders were among 15,000 respondents in a three-month public consultation, making it the inspectorate's largest ever.

While Ofsted decided to proceed with most of its draft framework, one major change was a U-turn over plans for inspectors to arrive in schools with almost no notice. It had suggested they could arrive within three hours of the initial phone call: that has been changed to a 90-minute phone call to the headteacher the day before the inspection team arrives.

There are reservations in the teaching profession that the changes are being made too fast, and the National Association of Head Teachers has said the plans were developed "in isolation of reality". Ofsted, however, says schools will be given time to prepare for the new focus on curriculum, that inspectors have been undergoing extensive retraining and that it has been doing pilot inspections.

HM Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman said: "Our goal is really simple: to be a force for improvement through our inspections. We want to provide parents with the assurance they need, support teachers and leaders to excel – and help make sure all children and learners to get the education they deserve."

So what are the changes? One major difference is that inspectors will spend less time looking at exam results and test data, and more time looking at how those results were achieved. They will be looking to see whether the children are being offered a "broad, rich curriculum and real learning, or of teaching to the test and exam cramming."



Ofsted's new inspection framework will see the regulator focus less on exam results and more on the curriculum as a whole

This may concern the high proportion of secondary schools which now teach GCSEs over three years rather than two.

Inspections will include a "deep dive" of some subjects, which would include reading and one other in primary schools and a sample of four to six in secondaries.

There will be a "quality of education" judgment, as well as two new key judgments evaluating children's "behaviour and attitudes" separately from "personal development".

The first will assess whether school and college leaders are creating a calm and orderly environment where bullying is effectively tackled. The second will recognise the work nurseries, schools and colleges do to build resilience and confidence as pupils grow up, including through participation in sport, music and other activities.

Short inspections of schools previously rated as good will be extended from one day to two.

Ofsted says schools will be empowered "to always put the child first and be actively discouraged from negative practices, such as 'off-rolling', where

schools remove pupils in their own best interests, rather than the pupil's ... reports will be redesigned to give

parents the key information they need to know about a school and a sense of how it feels to be a pupil there."

Government questioned over streamlining qualifications



Plans to streamline and replace post-16 college qualifications prompted criticism from both Ofqual and schools

The government has been asking education specialists what they think about plans to replace most college-level post-16 qualifications with A levels, T levels and apprenticeships.

Its premise is that these three qualifications would be the "gold standard" for post-16 education at Level 3 (equivalent to A level) and below. The first T levels (a vocational qualification equivalent to three A levels) will be taught from September 2020.

As a result, all other current qualifications except GCSE are under review, including BTECs and Cambridge Technicals – a move which the government said would help to

"streamline and boost the quality of education".

But many education organisations do not agree that streamlining qualifications in this way is a good move.

Exams regulator Ofqual warned that it could block disadvantaged students from continuing to make progress in education, saying that it was important to keep a broader range of qualifications than T and A levels to ensure "greater equality of opportunity".

Pointing out that many students take applied general qualifications such as BTEC, sometimes with A levels, to go to university, Ofqual said: "If T-level study is not suited to a learner, if they are not ready to specialise in an occupation, or they are unable to access the qualification for any other reason, then there is a risk that a barrier to progress may be created if their alternative choices are unduly restricted."

This might particularly affect disadvantaged groups, and their continuing opportunity to progress should be a crucial factor in considering which qualifications should receive funding alongside T levels, says the submission.

Secondary school pupils "strike" over climate change

Thousands of students joined the UK's first co-ordinated "strike" against climate change in February, with the protests continuing every second Friday since then.

British school pupils were the latest to join a worldwide movement inspired by Greta Thunberg, a 16-year-old Swedish girl, who began a solo protest outside parliament in Stockholm in August.

By February, there were around 270 worldwide protests each week involving up to 70,000 schoolchildren.

The first UK “strike”, on February 15, was estimated to have attracted more than 10,000 children, teenagers and young adults who walked out of school and onto the streets in at least 60 towns and cities.

The largest protests were in London, joined by around 3,000 students, with other major demonstrations in Oxford, Exeter, Leeds, Manchester, Brighton, Bristol, Sheffield and Glasgow. Most of the strikers were secondary students, but some as young as ten joined the marches. University students are also part of the organising UK Student Climate Network, which calls for political and economic transformations to ensure a healthy climate and well-paid jobs.

Jake Woodier of the UKSCN said: “What we’ve witnessed today is thousands upon thousands of students and young people descend on their towns and cities to demonstrate the

urgent need for radical climate action.” Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour leader, said in a Tweet that “it’s inspiring to see them making their voices heard today.”

However, Downing Street said the disruption to lessons was damaging to pupils, citing the increase to teachers’ workload and waste of their time in preparing lessons: “That time is crucial for young people, precisely so they can develop into the top scientists, engineers and advocates we need to help tackle this problem.”

Thunberg replied on Twitter, saying: “British PM says that the children on school strike are ‘wasting lesson time’. That might well be the case. But then again, political leaders have wasted 30 yrs of inaction. And that is slightly worse.”

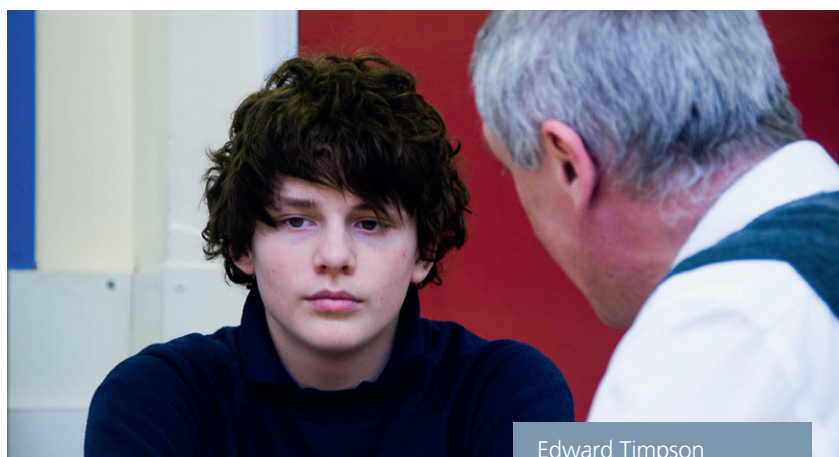
The climate change strikes have continued regularly since February, with around 123 British protests on one Friday in May. In April, Thunberg came to the UK as part of a European train tour, meeting all the political party leaders except Theresa May.

Timpson reports on student exclusions

Rising concern about children missing out on school as a result of exclusion policies led the Department for Education to commission one of its former ministers to review the problem.

Fourteen months later, Edward Timpson delivered his report, complete with 30 recommendations “agreed in principle” by the DfE.

Analysis found 85 per cent of mainstream schools permanently excluded no children in the academic year 2016/17, but 0.2 per cent of schools expelled more than ten. Children in vulnerable groups were more likely to be affected, with 78 per cent of permanent exclusions given to children classified as having special educational needs, being in



Edward Timpson released a report on rising school exclusions and recommended procedural changes

need or eligible for free school meals. There were also different exclusion rates for different ethnic groups, with Bangladeshi and Indian children less likely to be excluded than White British, and those from Black Caribbean and Mixed White more likely.

"No parent sends their child off to school believing they will end up being excluded but when this does happen we all need to be confident we have a well-functioning system that makes sure no child slips through the net. Exclusion from school should never mean exclusion from education," said Mr Timpson.

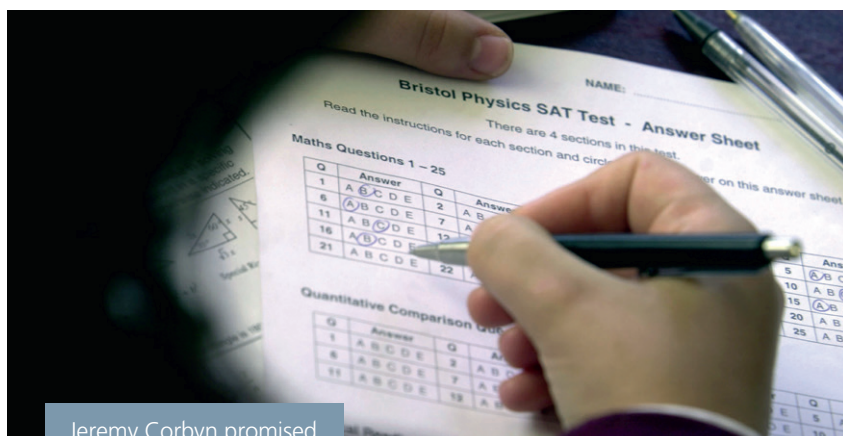
"Throughout this review I have found too much variation in the use of exclusions and too many missed opportunities for children to remain in the education that best suits their needs. Although I did see examples of schools using exclusions appropriately and effectively, there is clear room for improvement and everyone – from teachers and parents, the Department for Education and Ofsted, to local authorities and children's services – has their part to play.

"We need to reward schools who are doing this well and hold to account those who are not. Most importantly there must be safeguards in place for when things go wrong so that we can keep children on the path towards the successful future they all deserve."

The review received almost a thousand evidence submissions and made over a hundred visits during the process, which coincided with increased publicity for the practice of off-rolling – where pupils are removed from registers without being formally excluded, sometimes because of fears that their presence will depress exam results. An investigation by the Education Policy Institute this spring found that more than 49,000 children who started secondary school in 2012 had disappeared from rolls without explanation by the age of 16.

Though off-rolling was not part of the original terms of reference, the review made clear that it had heard enough to make recommendations, including systematic tracking of pupil moves, with local authorities taking action where necessary, introducing a right of return from home education, social workers being notified when a child in need is moved from their school and that Ofsted should give an "inadequate" judgment for schools which off-roll for leadership and management in "all but exceptional cases".

Corbyn pledges to scrap SATs



Jeremy Corbyn promised to scrap SATs, stating that children who do not pass feel like "failures" as a result

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn intensified the debate around SATs tests for seven and 11-year-olds when he promised to abolish them at a teacher union conference.

Telling members of the National Education Union that the tests left

children crying or being sick with worry, he said: "We need to prepare children for life, not just exams."

Mr Corbyn got a standing ovation for his pledge: union members have called for the tests to be scrapped for many years, arguing that their high-stakes nature turns primary schools into exam factories and skews children's education.

He said ending SATS would help schools struggling with funding cuts and help teacher recruitment and retention. Labour would introduce assessments with "the clear principle of understanding the learning needs of every child." Ending SATS would also end school league tables based on the tests.

Nick Gibb, the schools minister, said the idea was “a terrible retrograde step” and would undo decades of improvement in children’s reading and maths, but it was welcomed by Dr Mary Bousted, joint general secretary of the NEU, and headteachers’ leaders. Paul Whiteman of the National Association of Head Teachers said children’s progress could be measured by everyday classroom tests, adding that SATs do not tell parents or teachers anything they do not already know about their child.

Headteachers are extremely concerned about the effects of the tests, which were toughened up a few years ago. A YouGov poll carried out by the More Than A Score campaign group weeks before this year’s tests for 11-year-olds found that 96 per cent of heads worry that the pressure affects pupil wellbeing, while 94 per cent thought children were being put under stress

unnecessarily. Around 80 per cent said that parents had contacted them to say that the KS2 SATs were making their child stressed and anxious.

Clare Campbell of the campaign group said: “At the behest of the government, our children must sit high-pressure tests under exam conditions. Their teachers and schools are judged on the resulting data, which can’t possibly provide an overall assessment of all that they are capable of, and these results then follow them all the way to GCSE level.”

One headteacher quoted in *Tes*, the education magazine, said: “Over one-third of Year 6 children failed SATs last year. That’s a group of 11-year-olds being sent to secondary feeling that they haven’t achieved. The system of accountability means children are part of a machine. They’re a number, a percentage. Perhaps they’ll feel education isn’t for them.”

Period poverty scheme

Girls in English secondary schools will be able to access free tampons and sanitary towels from September after the government committed to providing funding.

The scheme, announced by Philip Hammond, then-chancellor, in his Spring Statement, is being developed by the Department for Education.

Amika George, a Cambridge university student who began campaigning on period poverty two years ago, was disappointed that the English scheme would not cover primary schools as some girls begin their periods at the age of eight.

She started campaigning from a laptop in her bedroom after hearing that girls were missing school because they didn’t have towels or tampons, and she launched a legal campaign with two other groups, arguing that period



Girls who attend English secondary schools will have access to free tampons from September 2019

poverty was denying some girls a right to an education.

Gemma Abbott from the Red Box Project, which provides free sanitary products for schools in England, said it had been contacted by hundreds of schools for help. Many schools relied on individual teachers to provide tampons and towels, or sometimes charged pupils because they did not have enough funding to give them out. “Schools do their best but it is really important we relieve them of this burden,” she said.

Some girls used toilet roll, newspaper or socks because their families could not provide tampons or towels, she said, adding that this could affect a girl's ability to reach her

potential. "Who is going to be able to concentrate properly in lessons if you are worrying about leaking or spending your lunch money on sanitary products?"

Sex education campaigners target Birmingham primaries



Primary schools in Birmingham were sites of protest after sex education classes covered LGBT values

Birmingham City Council had to apply for injunctions to prevent protests outside one of its primary schools after a consultation on new relationships education guidance turned into direct action.

The injunctions created a zone around Anderton Park Primary after protests – initially by adults with no connection to the school – began to disrupt lessons, attendance and the mental wellbeing of staff and children.

Sex education will be compulsory for primary school children from 2020 after new legislation was passed. It says that teaching must continue to reflect the law "including the Equality Act, as it applies to relationships, so that young people clearly understand what the law allows and does not allow."

However, consultation around the associated guidance appears to have drawn the attention of religious activists to what was being taught in schools in Birmingham and elsewhere.

A focus for many of the early protests was schools teaching the No Outsiders programme created at another Birmingham school, Parkfield Community School, by assistant headteacher Andrew Moffat. It teaches positive values of diversity, tolerance and acceptance as part of a curriculum including same-sex parents, race, religion and colour.

Mr Moffat – who was shortlisted for the Global Teacher Prize in February – found his own No Outsiders lessons suspended in March while talks with parents took place. His programme's backers included Ofsted's Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman, who said it was important that children learned about families with two mummies or two daddies.

Ironically, the school most affected by the protests, Anderton Park – which was dealing with massive protests until the first preventative injunction was granted – was not teaching No Outsiders, or any formal programme. "When the Equality Act came in, we decided not to have a programme: we didn't have one about black people so we didn't want to have one for LGBT," said Headteacher Sarah Hewitt-Clarkson.

"So, when they say you are teaching children lessons about being gay, we are not – we are just using the language of equality. The action-packed primary school day has us teaching English, maths, music, history, PE – it's packed full of activity and learning and every now again when it comes up in conversation we say, yes, some people have two mummies. It's absolutely crazy."

Plans to support the most disadvantaged children

Helping children fleeing domestic abuse get school places more quickly is part of a package of measures announced by Damian Hinds, the former education secretary, in a major speech in June.

"We understand children in care have very poor outcomes," said Mr Hinds, adding: "Actually the truth is the outcomes for children in need of a social worker are almost as bad but there are five times as many of them.

"We also know the effects of this sustain. Overall if you've needed contact with a social worker at any time since year 5, on average you are going to score 20 grades lower across eight GCSEs.

"We need to improve the visibility of this group, both in schools and in the system as a whole ... and improve our knowledge of what works to support and help these children. We must not lower our expectations for them – for these children it is more important that they can do their very best to make the most of their talents when they're at school."

Citing research showing that three children in every classroom have had contact with a social worker and 1.6 million had needed a social worker during the previous three years, the government's package of measures includes:

- » Changing the school admissions code and speeding up the in-year admissions process so vulnerable children get a school place as quickly as possible
- » Ensuring that teacher training and social work standards give professionals the necessary knowledge and skills on mental health



Under new measures, children from abusive households will be able to get placements in schools much more quickly

- » Better information-sharing between councils and schools, so that social workers know if a child they support is excluded from school
- » Working across government to tackle causes of disadvantage including domestic abuse, drug and alcohol misuse, mental health issues and serious violence
- » Ensuring disadvantaged children are in education by taking forward the Timpson Review recommendations and tackling off-rolling, absence and exclusions.

Schools will also receive guidance on how to use the pupil premium – extra funding given for disadvantaged children – most effectively.

Undoubtedly, some of the schools who will receive such guidance are featured in this document. The pupil premium has been a significant focus for *The Parliamentary Review* in years past, and so it is this year for many of the representatives that follow.

Grace Academy Solihull



Our students are confident, well-rounded learners



Principal Darren Gelder

Grace Academy have undergone a remarkable transformation over a short period of time. Originally founded in 2006 to help to improve pupil outcomes in an area of socio-economic deprivation, they were assessed as “inadequate” in 2013. Through an overhaul of the curriculum and a concerted effort to empower their staff, they have been able to significantly improve student performance and have doubled their general attainment level. They were also ranked the most improved academy nationally in a Sutton Trust report released in January. Principal Darren Gelder joined the school in 2013 and explains how they have achieved this change and what they have planned for the future.

The school was established in 2006, supported by its sponsor Lord Edmiston. We are part of a group of academies, with our partners based in Darlaston and Coventry. We are located in an area of high socio-economic deprivation, with roughly 60 per cent of our students entitled to the pupil premium. We have based our provision around a central ethos of grace, respect, integrity, potential and excellence, which is now tangible to anyone who visits the academy. I arrived in 2013, when the school was summarised as “inadequate”. Attainment was at 37 per cent, staff morale was low and it was clear that swift improvements were essential for students and staff alike.

We are now rated as “good” by Ofsted and have doubled our attainment level to 74 per cent. This improvement is particularly evident in English, as 89 per cent of

REPORT CARD GRACE ACADEMY SOLIHULL

- » Principal: Darren Gelder
- » Established in 2006
- » Based in Solihull, West Midlands
- » Type of school: Secondary
- » No. of students: 800
- » solihull.graceacademy.org.uk

“A key part of our role, as well as producing great results, is to ensure that our students have the other skills they need to be successful”

our students now achieve a good pass, placing us in the top group of schools nationally. Our disadvantaged students now outperform non-disadvantaged students across the country. All of our students, regardless of their background and setting, can compete for apprenticeships, university places and jobs on equal footing with any other student in the country. A key indicator of our success is our level of subscription: when I arrived, we were at half capacity, whereas now we are oversubscribed. We have achieved high levels of attendance across the board and are now one of the highest-performing academy schools in the local area. For the first time in some years, many of our students are now continuing on to higher education and university. We view this as a mark of the progress we have made in terms of both higher results and our efforts to engender an appetite for learning. A key part of our role, as well as producing great results, is to ensure that our students have the other skills they need to be successful. A full and well-developed enrichment programme exposes students to a wide variety of experiences.

Encouraging professional development

Pivotal to achieving this rapid growth was focusing on each student as an individual. We ensured that all lessons were thought through and fully differentiated. In terms of our staff, we have focused on both their wellbeing and their professional development. To ensure they can manage their schedules, we have reduced the amount of marking and assessments they must undertake while still improving outcomes. We recognise that the biggest challenge for teachers is time. We have built in an extra hour of continuing professional development each week for every teacher. This takes place alongside a weekly meeting on Tuesdays, in which each teacher engages in professional reflection and talks about the next steps they can take to improve their work. This is followed by an hour to act on these improvements during the day. This opportunity for improvement is fundamental to improve both the curriculum and our teaching standards.

There has also been a marked culture shift. We are continually reflecting

A well-developed curriculum is of paramount importance





Not neglecting
extracurricular subjects

on our practice and constantly check that out our curriculum and wider offer are appropriate for our students. Our school action plan is developed collaboratively, and every person involved in the school is consulted in the formation of our five key points each year.

Our school is situated within a diverse local community, and we have reflected this within our internal environment. The academy has the benefit of an ethos team who work tirelessly to deliver a wide and encompassing enrichment offer to students throughout the year, including hosting events, running food drives for the homeless and performing outreach in Manchester.

Review and refine

As with schools across the country, recruitment presents a challenge. This stems from a dual source of reduced funding and fewer available candidates. Fewer people are choosing to become teachers and while government targets for teacher recruitment are helping, more can be done. By striving to reduce teacher workload and creating an inclusive

culture, we have been able to achieve a low rate of staff turnover. Rather than hiring new candidates, we have focused on making our existing staff the best that they can be. We have also ensured that teachers feel like experts in their respective fields, and we have made a concerted effort to reprofessionalise and empower them.

We have also been working with Teach First and Now Teach and are currently conducting a pilot project for Now Teach in the Midlands. These help to widen our potential recruitment pool, should we need it.

As we look ahead, we are setting challenges for ourselves and our students. We want our pupils to be able to compete with anyone, regardless of background or context. We are developing our extracurricular activities to ensure that each student leaves as a more rounded person, combining academic achievement and experiential development. By continuing to adhere to our central ethos and improve the outcomes of our local pupils, we are confident that we can develop the school into becoming “outstanding”.

“We want our pupils to be able to compete with anyone, regardless of background or context”

Community College Bishop's Castle



Headteacher Reuben Thorley



Instant feedback in an English lesson

REPORT CARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE BISHOP'S CASTLE

- » Headteacher: Reuben Thorley
- » Established in 1922
- » Based in Bishop's Castle, Shropshire
- » Type of school: Secondary
- » No. of students: 461
- » The school motto is "To succeed, to care, to inspire"
- » www.communitycollegebc.org.uk

Community College Bishop's Castle has undertaken a series of strategy-led school improvements that have helped to balance any negative aspects of their rural setting with the advantages their situation brings. Situated in the countryside of South Shropshire, their school is surrounded by stunning scenery but suffers from the issues that can attach to this: older demographics with no children of school age and a reduced pool of potential employees. Despite these factors, they have achieved improved exam results and have developed a strong sense of community. Headteacher Reuben Thorley discusses how they have adapted to these challenges and how changes to national funding structures have affected their budget.

We are a highly successful rural secondary school, nestled in the idyllic countryside west of the Long Mynd in South Shropshire. We serve a very wide geographical area, attracting students from more than 20 English and Welsh primary schools. High-quality teaching and learning is at the heart of everything we do, and students of all abilities do well. Our recent results, with a Progress 8 of +0.4, constitute the school's best ever academic performance.

The college has an excellent reputation for achievement and inclusion, in no small part due to our community ethos. We are a committed and integral part of the local community and seize every opportunity to ensure our students develop not only as learners but also as well-rounded citizens. The school is well supported by parents and we work together to ensure that all students have the best chance in life.

Rural community schools like ours: a double-edged sword

The very strengths that make us indispensable to families and praiseworthy to inspectors also pose, in a time of financial scarcity, the greatest threat to our very survival.

Our breathtaking location provides an idyllic childhood setting, but lack of employment opportunity drives young people away to find work, their numbers replaced by retirees and “downsizers” with children already beyond school age. The result is a constant anxiety around maintaining student numbers and a reduced pool of potential employees, leaning heavily towards older, more experienced teaching staff. Fewer working-age residents also means fewer local employers to draw on for work experience and sponsorship.

An older, more experienced staff pool, a direct result of demographics, are often more capable of multitasking and can draw on years of experience in their classroom practice, but they are significantly more expensive than developing staff. Over 70 per cent of our teaching staff are on the upper pay scale, most already at the top, meaning that the cost of our staff body is disproportionately expensive to the pupil numbers it can serve.

Small student numbers enable a much more personalised service to our students’ wellbeing. However, the consequent low school income makes too little allowance for the unavoidable overheads of maintaining and developing a school of any size. The expert pastoral support of a small school is offset by financial constraints that do not allow for a wider, more personalised curriculum. Moreover, reduced school funding requires nearly all staff to fulfil multiple roles within the school with little or no additional reimbursement.

Beating the odds

Our consistent improvement and examination success results from strategic planning that recognises this reality, exploits its strengths and mitigates its threats.

A total curriculum staffing restructure accomplished both a reduction in staffing costs and clearer lines of direction and accountability for all subject areas. This necessitated the removal of nearly all subject lead teaching and learning responsibility roles to provide a flat structure with only three heads of faculty who combine a role leading all of their subjects with one on the senior leadership team. This was essential to balance our in-year budget, but the smooth link from management to front-line teacher has also resulted in a more consistent approach to a whole-school focus and developments therein.

A concentration on student autonomy and challenge, led by the faculty heads, has ensured that students are given opportunities to articulate

“Low school income makes too little allowance for the unavoidable overheads of maintaining and developing a school of any size”

Our school is grounded on an inclusive ethos





Visiting our partner school in Tanzania

“Ongoing investment in the school infrastructure has been an unaffordable luxury”

the limits of their learning, and are confident in taking risks and making mistakes. This is still ongoing, and we are looking very closely at ensuring that students respond effectively to feedback so that improvements in understanding are embedded.

A focus on students' mental health was a natural progression of our staff's genuine passion for their wellbeing. Pastoral leaders have taken on additional responsibilities, particularly our mental health lead. We have prioritised funding a school counsellor; created a designated and staffed student support area for students during unstructured time at breaks and lunchtimes; provided activities to enable students to better understand conflicts in friendships; and worked closely with the local medical practice to assist students to access the correct mental health support.

The challenges for the future

As a small rural secondary school our budget is very limited, despite our success in bucking the local trend and increasing our student numbers each year.

Budgets have been very tight for a number of years, necessitating

staffing restructures and numerous redundancies to balance the in-year budget. With teachers being the most critical cost, any ongoing investment in the school infrastructure has been an unaffordable luxury. Our IT infrastructure is now so outdated that it is not fit for purpose, incapable of operating with Windows 10. The first phase of upgrading and futureproofing the ICT infrastructure has been costed at over £178,000. This will require mammoth community fundraising efforts and budgetary creativity, as our projected budget has no capacity for this, even with the chancellor's "little extras".

Changes in national and county funding processes have reduced the annual school budget by £120,000, a massive percentage of a small school's budget. Of this reduction, £66,000 is directly linked to changes in the National Funding Formula sparsity allocation, which was created to help schools like ours where the average distance that students travel is over nine miles. The new NFF sparsity formula, at just three miles, makes nearly every school in Shropshire eligible for sparsity funding, splintering our previous allocation into many insignificant smaller pots across the county.

Next academic year, we are oversubscribed for applications to year 7: this is the first time this has happened and is a real indicator of the successes of the college over the last few years. It is troubling that this increase in numbers will not provide an increase in budget sufficient to prevent further cuts in provision – potentially in staffing and the curriculum being offered. It is disappointing that the main challenges demanding our time, effort and creativity as we move into the future are financial rather than educational.

Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College



From “requires improvement” to “outstanding”



Principal Tony Day

Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College have achieved a remarkable turnaround, moving from “requires improvement” to “outstanding”. Key to this change has been the implementation of two key strategic plans: the first designed to transform the college and the second intended to build on the successes they had already achieved. With these changes in place, they have managed to achieve the best examination results in their history. Principal Tony Day explains this programme of change.

In the academic year 2012/13, the college had been in steady decline for a number of years. In response, a restructure took place, and a new senior and curriculum leadership team was appointed. Eight months after the restructure, the college was inspected by Ofsted and graded as “requires improvement” in every aspect. The outcome meant that the college would have to be inspected again within 18 months.

In that first year, we had to put a lot in place. The college hadn’t been inspected for nearly eight years. It had lost its direction: results were declining year on year, and the structure and leadership were not able to halt the decline. We had to ensure that the new leadership team focused on our core business, teaching and learning, and that all functions supported this effectively.

“Establishing Excellence for Every Student”

We introduced an ambitious strategic plan, Establishing Excellence for Every Student 2013-2016, that aimed to transform the organisation. The starting point was an overhaul of the culture, systems and processes. This included setting high

REPORT CARD JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

- » Principal: Tony Day
- » Established in 1983
- » Based in Birmingham
- » Type of school: Sixth-form college
- » No. of pupils: 2,300 16 to 18-year-olds and 600 adult students
- » 99 per cent pass rate at A level
- » Ofsted: “Outstanding” overall, for 16 to 18 provision and for adult provision
- » www.jcc.ac.uk



"The students' conduct in lessons and around college is impeccable" – Ofsted inspection report

“We instigated rigorous yet supportive assessments of teaching”

expectations for staff and students, increased and targeted professional development, and team and individual accountability. Alongside this, we instigated rigorous yet supportive assessments of teaching, staff recognition and reward systems, and effective support for students, including timely, accurate student data recording. These had to be fit for purpose and ensure that students' needs were at the forefront of all of our activities.

Establishing Excellence for Every Student was vigorously implemented, and we received our required reinspection in September 2014. We were graded "good" overall and, because of the rapidity of improvement, "outstanding" for the "effectiveness of leadership and management". It was a remarkable turnaround.

Our new ethos would not allow us to rest on our laurels. Following the successful completion of Establishing Excellence for Every Student, the 2016-2019 strategic plan, "Raising Aspirations for Successful Futures", was launched.

Raising aspirations

Raising Aspirations for Successful Futures unambiguously set out our ambition to build on the successes already achieved, aiming for our college to be "recognised for excellence in academic achievement, exceptionally high standards of teaching and learning and its capacity to raise the aspirations and ambitions of all its staff and students". Through our collaboration with other schools, we also aimed to be a model of exemplary practice.

We had done the basics in teaching and learning, refocusing on what had the greatest impact; a kind of "teaching essentials". We now needed something that would enable us to achieve the aims of the new strategic plan.

Drawing on the latest educational research and working closely with a variety of educational organisations, our Vice Principal, Damian Brant, led an exciting programme of enhanced professional development, which included a strand titled "Developing Subject Expertise".

DSE and the other professional development strands adopted an individualised, subject-based approach that enabled us to recognise and build on the good practice that already existed until exemplary practice was the norm across the whole college.

In 2017, with results increasing year on year, the college was inspected again. The inspection was part of Ofsted's policy of monitoring "good" providers to confirm that they were still "good". It should have been a short inspection, lasting only two days, with a minimal inspection team. It quickly became apparent that the college might have improved beyond "good". The inspection was converted to a full inspection.

After a week of rigorous and intensive scrutiny, Ofsted concluded that the college was "outstanding" in every

Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College is situated less than a mile away from central Birmingham in an area that has high levels of deprivation, ranking 18th out of 355 for the highest levels of multiple deprivation in England. The unemployment rate in Birmingham is well above the national rate at 7.2 per cent. Some 12 per cent of the local working population do not have any qualifications, compared with that seen nationally at 7.6 per cent. In terms of young people, around 18 per cent of children aged 0 to 15 in Birmingham are in households with no adults in employment, compared with 12 per cent in the West Midlands region and ten per cent in England. Around 11 per cent of learners aged 16 to 24 in Birmingham have no formal qualifications. This is a higher proportion than seen for the West Midlands and England.



"Leaders, managers and staff have created a culture of high aspiration, harmonious relationships and mutual respect that is highly evident through all aspects of the college." Ofsted inspection report

aspect. Following such a glowing report, many colleges might have relaxed. We continued to work. When formal lesson observations recommenced, the overall grading profile saw an 11 per cent increase in "outstanding" lessons and the eradication of "inadequate" sessions.

Our academic results were the highest in our 36-year history. For a fifth consecutive year, the A Level pass rate was 99 per cent. The AS pass rate rose to 92 per cent, four per cent above the sixth-form college national average of 88 per cent. At 98 per cent, the vocational pass rate was an incredible 23 per cent higher than in 2012. Meeting the needs of the community, the adult learner achievement rate was 94 per cent, against a national average of 83 per cent.

The proportion of high grades was the highest ever: half of all A Level students achieved A*-B, 12 per cent up on 2014. Vocational high grades were 86 per cent, an unbelievable 72 per cent higher than in 2012. The value added, the measure of the progress that students make relative to their starting points, showed A Levels and vocational provision in the top ten per cent of the country for the first time ever and AS in the top 20 per cent.

Helping other colleges

Moving forward, and constantly striving to build on our achievements, our excellent practice is now impacting other colleges that have recently been graded as "requires improvement". We have been able to identify the causes of underperformance and to provide some training and strategies for improvement.

We have been on a remarkable journey, and even greater things are on the horizon. Applications are up 17 per cent, and we are planning innovative building works to update and expand our facilities. Beyond this, we have been shortlisted for the Times Educational Supplement sixth-form college of the year, we have introduced higher education and teacher training programmes to our portfolio, and our work in supporting other educational providers continues to grow.

The greatest satisfaction for the leaders and staff at the college is the knowledge that their exemplary leadership and teaching expertise has led to many more young people and adults benefiting from the transformational opportunities created by exceptional education.

“Our academic results were the highest in our 36-year history”

The Hart School



Headteacher Mr Chris Keen



The Hart School, Rugeley, Staffordshire

REPORT CARD THE HART SCHOOL

- » Headteacher: Mr Chris Keen
- » Opened as The Hart School in 2016 on two sites, upper and lower, following the merger of Hagley Park Academy and Fair Oak Academy
- » Merged into one site in September 2018
- » Based in Rugeley, Staffordshire
- » Type of school: Secondary for students aged 11 to 18
- » No. of students: 1,130
- » No. of teachers: 77
- » www.hartschool.org.uk

The Hart School is an 11 to 18 secondary school in Rugeley, Staffordshire. The school is an amalgamation of two predecessor schools, Fair Oak Academy and Hagley Park Academy, both members of the Creative Education Trust. In 2015, Ofsted judged Hagley Park as “requires improvement” but within 18 months of the merger, judged The Hart School to be “good”. Chris Keen was appointed as Executive Headteacher in January 2015.

While there remains plenty to do following the challenge of a merger, continuous academic improvements in the sixth form have grown our reputation. Average grades at A-level have increased to a C+ in 2018 from a C- in 2015. Vocational qualification grades increased from Distinction to Distinction* since 2017. Trust and confidence in this new school has been demonstrated year-on-year by growing pupil numbers.

The number of students being accepted into Russell Group universities has increased 16 per cent since 2015 to 22 per cent.. Students attending other universities has increased 20 per cent since 2015 to 65 per cent in 2018.

Progress 8 scores for the combined schools have improved from “below average”, 0.24, in 2015, to near the national average in 2017 at a score of -0.05.

Managing the merger

Support from Creative Education Trust and governors provided a strong platform to lead the change:

- » Creating a clear and compelling vision for a single school, providing excellent education at the heart of its community

- » A name for the new school with historical and cultural links to the community
- » Consultation with parents and pupils, keeping them aware of the changes that were being made and, more importantly why they were being made, stressing the educational benefits
- » Establishing a rigorous and robust performance management process, in order to provide clearer accountability for all staff
- » Developing a culture of high expectations for all, including student behaviour inside and outside the classroom
- » Improving the quality of CPD for staff, so that it had a positive impact in the classroom

Honesty

During 2015 and 2016, working closely with Creative Education Trust in anticipation of the merger, we quickly gained an honest view of the schools and presented a detailed analysis of the findings. We shared with staff the key areas for improvement: raising standards through better learning in the classroom and the imperative to raise pupil expectations.

We were candid with staff about the amount of money we were spending on supply staff. Following an intake of breath, there was a resolve and a will to "change". Now our supply budget has reduced to around ten per cent of the previous expenditure.

Changing cultures

A number of members of staff left the school on account of these higher expectations and we were able to appoint new staff who were excited by our vision. Now we have a stronger and more stable team. Many are involved in the Ambition School Leadership development programmes,

in partnership with the trust, and we offer regular CPD opportunities for staff to develop their careers. Creative Education Trust also offers experiences of working collaboratively with other teachers to develop and plan learning programmes which are delivered across trust schools. Staff retention is at its strongest ever with, in 2018, fewer than ten per cent of staff leaving.

Learning in the classroom improved through staff engaging with relevant CPD. Learning expectations were explicitly shared and we introduced "Action Impact Logs" to support faculty development and "Typicality Trawls" to ensure classroom practice was typically good. We also provided a systematic framework for effective learning to inspire and stretch learners, meet their individual needs and develop their independence. As a result, our recent inspection noted that "teachers have high expectations... lessons are planned so that pupils work at a challenging level... teachers inspire their pupils."

Previously, pupil expectations had been inconsistent, exclusions high and attitudes to learning variable, including levels of uniform and equipment compliance.

“Support from Creative Education Trust and governors provided a strong platform to lead the change”

A strong focus on all areas of the curriculum





Changes following the merger have set us on our journey to become an exceptional school

“We remain fully focused and determined to remove barriers and make The Hart School an exceptional school”

In order to raise expectations of pupils we did the following:

- » Implemented a formal uniform – previously sweatshirts
- » Introduced Chromebooks for pupils from year 7
- » Implemented class charts to reward and sanction pupils
- » Introduced “zones” where pupils line up at the beginning of the day and after lunch; they are met by their teacher and escorted to the classroom. We increased our pupil population from 650 to 1,130 between the two sites overnight, and we therefore reviewed the need to provide our pupils with increased structure at key parts of the day
- » Implemented a year 7 to year 13 customised careers programme to further extend pupils’ horizons and ambitions

Money matters

We have been fortunate to receive additional funding from Creative Education Trust to bring about some of the changes needed in the school to accommodate our pupils. Using existing space, we created three

additional classrooms, a new reception area, an open-plan leadership hub, sixth-form entrance, common room and teaching spaces. In addition, we have new staff and pupil entrances.

In September 2019, the trust will support the construction of a “Leisure Dome” for indoor PE activities.

The improvements to the school building and learning environment provides staff and pupils with distinctive markers, reflecting our now-established higher expectations.

Challenges

As a new school, as with many schools, there remain prohibitive factors: financial constraints, the recruitment and retention of high quality staff and the sustained building of relationships with parents.

We remain, however, fully focused and determined to remove barriers and make The Hart School an exceptional school, the school of choice for staff, parents and pupils in our community and beyond.

The Duston School



The ethos and culture of the school are positive and underpinned by a well-understood set of values



Principal Sam Strickland

The local authority in Northamptonshire has gone bankrupt in recent times. In this environment, schools in the area have faced some challenges – among them is The Duston School, a mixed all-through school and sixth form. Principal Sam Strickland has decided to implement a series of measures which have improved the school in all areas. He tells *The Parliamentary Review* more about these processes and what sort of challenges he and the school must surmount in order to continue their journey of progression.

We're a large all-through school, with almost 1,700 students on board. Upon my assuming responsibility in April 2017, the school had just suffered a blow from Ofsted – it went from being "outstanding" to "requires improvement". Immediately upon my arrival, it was my ambition to bring the school back up to "outstanding". Things were not in a good state: culture, behaviour and the curriculum called for significant improvements if the school was to have any chance of reaching its former status.

A culture of improvement

Over the last couple of years, it has been my ambition to create a cultural climate and to forge an ethos that provides the school not only with a strong sense of identity, but also makes behaviour impeccable. This, we have every reason to believe, the school has gone a long way in achieving. Ofsted, for example, has commented on how favourably things have progressed in the areas of welfare, leadership, behaviour, among other things. Across the board, we have made

REPORT CARD THE DUSTON SCHOOL

- » Principal: Sam Strickland
- » Founded in 2007
- » Located in Duston, Northamptonshire
- » Type of school: Mixed all-through school and sixth form
- » No. of pupils: 1200 main school, 210 sixth form, 270 primary phase and a total 1680
- » The school converted to become an academy in 2012 and opened a new primary phase in 2015
- » www.thedustonschool.org



Pastoral care is a strength of the school. Pupils say they feel safe, supported and cared for

“There is a new wave of optimism at the school”

Ofsted 2018

Our primary curriculum is well-planned and aspirational, and expectations are high. Consequently, pupils attain highly in early years and Key Stage 1



significant improvements, with four out of six Ofsted judgements being either “good” or “outstanding”.

For this academic year, the focus is on strengthening the pedagogical culture. We want to ensure that the delivery of the lessons is nothing short of optimal, and to meet this goal we are redesigning the curriculum. The hope is that we can alter the balance away from it being overly skills-based and instead add more emphasis on knowledge acquisition.

One of the measures we introduced to change the school culture was the strengthening of the pastoral system,

ensuring every child is catered for and that no issue is left unresolved. Another step we took was changing the mission statement, basing it around raising aspirations for the school. It now reads: “Our core aim is to help students climb the tree of knowledge.” Part and parcel with this effort has been a focus on excellent leadership and integrity. The results of this general effort have been increased morale and better outcomes.

Ultimately, we want the children at The Duston School to be the very best that they can be. To help achieve this, we had to bring in a series of non-negotiables to improve behaviour. Our rules centre around the concepts of resilience, aspiration and respect. For example, we want all our children to complete all of their work to the best of their ability, and we let the children know this whenever we can, be it in assembly, in form or through other visual depictions throughout the school.

Bringing out the best in our children

However, this transformation is not a wholly top-down process. We wanted to ensure that in doing this we also formed a bond with the children. To this end, we make sure teachers engage in high-end training that allows them to be personable and friendly form tutors for the pupils, helping them wherever and whenever they may have problems. In some sense, we’re aiming for them to become in-house parents. To foster this, we’ve ensured that the children have the same form tutor throughout their entire school journey.

The house system is also a success in transforming the culture. It’s based around trees that run vertically from primary to secondary, all the way through to sixth form. These trees are called Maple, Chestnut, Oak and



The leadership of the sixth form is effective. Students receive good-quality teaching and support, enabling them to achieve well

Willow. The heads of the houses, who are teachers, report to an assistant principal, and each house also has an assistant head of house who assists in overseeing the whole system. Each house, moreover, has their own sixth form house captain and a vice captain from year 11, which encourages responsibility as they grow older. All of this goes a long way in promoting a culture of togetherness and aspiration, as the houses that perform well receive recognition for their efforts.

Lacking in provision and difficulties in recruitment

We face a number of challenges in terms of the provision that's now available to us. Wider services that were once useful to us are now becoming less and less available. For example, educational welfare officers or counsellors for students are all decreasing in number. Being in Northamptonshire, as one may have read in the news recently, is also challenging, as the local authority has undergone serious financial difficulties – which has had not insignificant knock-on effects for us. For us, therefore, we have to look out for ourselves and be smart with our budgets. We would prefer, however, that more support was available.

Recruitment is also challenging – not just for us, but for schools around the country. Retention, too, is something of a national issue, so we have done what we can to improve the situation at school so that teachers don't feel put off by the profession. Part of this involves looking at how we can reduce the burden for teachers without negatively impacting the children's learning. Smart feedback and marking systems, as well as centralised detention systems, a sensible approach to emails and lashings of faculty meeting time, help teachers sleep at night. CPD has also been a crucial component of this effort.

More and more, we are seeing the fruits of our labour. Significant progress is being made by all groups, particularly in GCSE. As far as we're concerned, the sky is the limit. We're improving our processes, finding efficiencies and making children proud of being here, and we will continue improving in this fashion for as long as it's possible. Once we have achieved what we have set out to, we will begin looking into joining a multi-academy trust, rather than being the single one that we are today. Exciting days lie ahead for The Duston School.

“Significant progress is being made by all groups; as far as we're concerned, the sky is the limit”

City of Birmingham School



Headteacher Steve Howell



At City of Birmingham School, we focus on raising aspirations

REPORT CARD CITY OF BIRMINGHAM SCHOOL

- » Headteacher: Steve Howell
- » Based across 8 sites in Birmingham
- » Type of school: Pupil referral unit
- » No. of staff: 162
- » No. of pupils: 492 aged 5 to 16
- » SEN: 99.6 per cent
- » Free school meals: 68 per cent
- » cityofbirminghamschool.com

City of Birmingham School changes children's lives. In September 2017, Steve Howell stepped up from deputy head to headteacher with one single goal in mind: raising aspirations for a generation of excluded pupils in the city. Each year, between 800 and 900 children attend, and they are some of the most vulnerable in the city. As excluded children, their life chances are already at risk: they are more likely to become caught up in crime and suffer from substance addiction, while being less likely to achieve in school. Steve elaborates on the challenges they face and talks about the changes they have implemented over the past two years.

We identified that the key to improving our pupils' life chances was to set high expectations for academic achievement and raise their aspirations for the future. A year on from taking up the headship, I am proud of the changes we have put in place, and the impact they are having. Our dedicated team is more committed than ever to creating transformational experiences for every pupil that comes through the school.

Evolving our offer

We have completely reinvented our curriculum, and are passionate about providing a broad and rich offer along with extracurricular opportunities that they would not otherwise experience.

The real key to raising aspirations is convincing excluded young people that they have a bright future. We have created a range of pathways for our Key Stage 4 pupils

to ensure that they leave school with multiple meaningful qualifications that equip them for the future and provide them with the same opportunities as their peers in other schools.

Each of these pathways is grounded in high individual expectations. GCSE English, maths and biology are a minimum expectation for every single pupil. Some pupils will add up to six more subjects to their portfolio by the end of year 11; others will undertake a programme of GCSE qualifications alongside more vocational courses, such as health and social care.

Many pupils will couple GCSE English and maths with vocational qualifications in areas including motor mechanics, construction, catering and hairdressing. This pathway is particularly important; it helps to provide inspirational opportunities for pupils who may be disengaged or disillusioned with more traditional subjects.

Evolving our team

We have taken a multifaceted approach to ensuring that staff across the school have the right skills to deliver our new curriculum.

Firstly, we have developed close working relationships with a number of teaching and mainstream schools. These partnerships have enabled us to access specialist support for teachers and TAs to enhance their specialist subject knowledge. Staff who haven't delivered GCSE qualifications for several years now feel a greater level of confidence, and the progress pupils are making towards gaining qualifications is evidence of the early success we are experiencing.

Secondly, we are investing in our own outstanding practitioners by having them undertake specific training. This has improved our approach to teaching and learning for many groups of staff in the school. The initial results of this initiative

have been extremely positive, and work has begun on training a second and third cohort. We sincerely believe in creating excellence from within and investing in staff development.

Finally, we have focused our attention on a comprehensive recruitment strategy, which has proven to be successful for key positions within the school. For example, we identified head of maths as being a vital role within the new curriculum and utilised a wide range of tools to secure an outstanding candidate with a strong track record. Working with a recruitment agency, starting a social media campaign and getting our name recognised across the country has revolutionised the way we recruit staff.

“We have completely reinvented our curriculum, and are passionate about providing a broad and rich offer”

Data difficulties

We don't fit into national data comparisons. Our pupils are in a very unique situation, and measuring them by traditional metrics provides progress results that are wholly unrepresentative. We recognised the importance of high-quality and meaningful data early on in our journey, and set about building our own framework to utilise and analyse

The right staff, delivering effectively





Outdoor learning is key to self-improvement

“We had to empower staff to become leaders”

the wealth of information we had. Our new approach to assessing pupil progress is now based on keen data analysis, ongoing assessments and identifying both areas of strength and areas for development.

The information we gather informs leaders about pupils' progress, but the true value of our new framework becomes apparent after more comprehensive data analysis. It provides teachers with an intricate breakdown of what each individual pupil needs, and how best to support them academically. Using this system, our teachers are now able to appropriately plan interventions where necessary and deliver exceptional lessons.

Distributed leadership

A typical leadership structure in education is based around a top-down model, where one headteacher distributes and delegates appropriately to their senior leadership team and other members of staff. With eight separate sites across Birmingham, however, we recognised that such a model would not

fit our school, logistically or practically, and set about designing our own.

We had to empower other staff to become leaders. This new method of distributed leadership places a real focus on the importance of informed decision-making and accountability. I believe that the most effective way to improve is to constantly collaborate on a shared, strong and strategic vision, and to enable other staff to implement new developments. With this new model, we are now able to create an environment of trust and co-operation that was not previously possible.

External scrutiny

When I first began my headship, I identified a lack of operational scrutiny. Without being challenged as a headteacher and a school, we would not be able to grow or develop. I thus sought external scrutiny and challenge. We have since worked with a strong school improvement advisor, engaged in local peer-to-peer reviews, undertaken joint quality assurance activities with external specialists and started to externally moderate all work and assessments.

These activities have all driven a process of constant improvement. We know that scrutiny is vital, and we will continue to seek different ways to incorporate it in our drive for improvement.

Continued excellence

Our priorities for the future are clear. We want to provide an aspirational and inspirational curriculum that meets the complex needs of our students, prepare them for the future.

We will focus on further staff development by working with external partners, and ensure that our teachers are at the cutting edge of educational pedagogy.

Archbishop Ilsley Catholic School



Year 11 students preparing for examinations



Headteacher Helen Burrows

Archbishop Ilsley Catholic School, based in Acocks Green, Birmingham, have undertaken a programme of change to consolidate and improve their “good” Ofsted rating. Having instigated a new uniform policy, they have seen a corresponding improvement in pupil behaviour and are working to adapt their curriculum to ensure that it is rigorous and challenging. Helen Burrows became headteacher after working as assistant head since 2014 and discusses how they have instigated their programme of change and the need for the government to support teacher retention.

In September 2018, Archbishop Ilsley Catholic School started the next phase of our journey. Judged as “good” in our two previous Ofsted inspections, with sound prior leadership, the school was already working on solid foundations, but if we were to make further improvements, change needed to happen. We could not afford to stand still for one moment.

As the incoming headteacher, I was fortunate enough to have sufficient working knowledge of the school, having previously been assistant head at the school since January 2014. This enabled me to start the academic year with a focused plan on what we needed to do in both the present moment and the future. We had to hit the ground running.

Establishing a clear vision and direction of travel was critical in helping staff and students to understand that there was going to be change. Not change for the sake of it but for the purpose of taking the school forward. Our vision is based

REPORT CARD ARCHBISHOP ILSLEY CATHOLIC SCHOOL

- » Headteacher: Helen Burrows
- » Established in 1957
- » Based in Acocks Green, Birmingham
- » Type of school: Catholic secondary
- » No. of pupils: 1,165, including the sixth form
- » www.ilsley.bham.sch.uk

“We want our students to be academically successful but also kind and resilient citizens who can make the world a better place”

around both academic and character education: we want our students to be academically successful but also kind and resilient citizens who can make the world a better place. Our school ethos is rooted in Catholic virtues, and this vision very much reflects those virtues of love, compassion, curiosity and truth. In order for us to achieve our vision, we needed to make changes and develop some of the existing excellent practices in our community.

Back to basics

It is my fundamental belief that if you get the simple things right, you create the best platform for sustainable excellence. We started with a focus on uniform. Through clear and regular communication with families before and during the summer break, we started the term with the vast majority of students fully compliant with our revised policy. By the end of the second week, we had 100 per cent compliance, and this has remained the case since. Consistency of expectations is key: all staff are accountable for basic standards in the school, and the

leadership team offer their full support in ensuring that these standards are met. Our approach is to “sweat the small stuff” but with compassion and kindness: we believe you can have high standards without alienating students and stakeholders.

We could not have anticipated the positive effect on behaviour that resulted from this focus on uniform. Suddenly, the insistence on being smartly presented and held to account for their uniform allowed students to have a greater focus on their lessons and learning. The atmosphere in our school has always been warm and friendly and behaviour has always been good, but now students, staff and visitors regularly comment on how calm and orderly the school is. The introduction of micro-scripts to deal with low-level disruption is improving consistency of message and helping staff to use the right tools at the right time.

A key factor in driving improvement is the review and development of our curriculum. It is our intention that the students in our school should participate in a challenging and rigorous curriculum that will enable them to enjoy and thrive in their learning, leaving with the qualifications they need to be successful in the next phase of their lives. In order to realise this intention, we have adapted our curriculum model, have reviewed how we structure each cohort of students and are now working closely with middle leaders to transform radically what is taught in the first three years. We have had very honest conversations about the content of our curriculum and have not been afraid to share with each other that some aspects were no longer fit for purpose. Middle leaders are visiting other schools that have embedded a knowledge-rich curriculum, and there is genuine excitement about developing this in our own setting.

We ensure our lessons are both challenging and engaging





A strong Catholic ethos runs through our school

Ground-level leadership

There is no doubt that the current recruitment and retention rates for secondary school teachers are a worry. More needs to be done at government level to ease the crisis, but there are things we can do in school to help staff retention.

I have never been someone who subscribes to the idea that you have a preferred leadership style. To be an effective and ethical leader, you need to be different things at different times, but there is an absolute insistence in my senior and middle leadership teams that we lead by example and from the front. High visibility and presence around the school contribute to the calm and orderly atmosphere, as well as help to support staff. We have worked hard to reduce the amount of bureaucracy and pressure that our staff experience by streamlining our calendar of school events, getting rid

of formal, lengthy lesson observations and reviewing systems. We have no doubt that reducing their workload, without compromising on quality experiences for our students, is making a difference. This year, we have concentrated on pedagogical research as part of our professional development for staff, and we are already identifying changes to our practice that will have a positive impact on our students.

At the very heart of our school is the success and happiness of our students. Our motto is "Just and firm of purpose", and before we make any important decisions in school, we always consider whether we are living out the school's motto and vision. As we move forward with changes to the structure of the school day, the curriculum and the quality of teaching in the school, we are confident that our school can only get better.

“There is no doubt that the current recruitment and retention rates for secondary school teachers are a worry.”

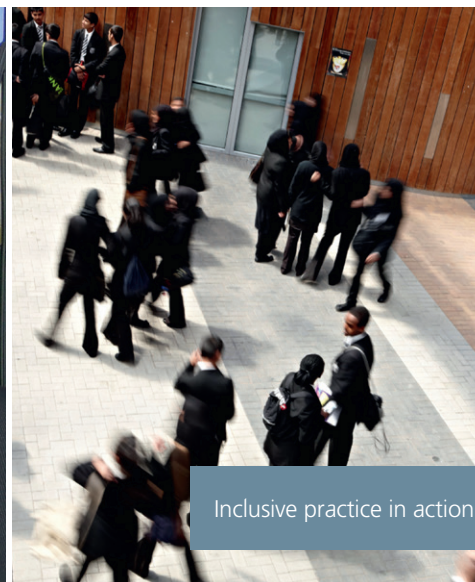
Holte School



Left: Assistant Headteacher and Pastoral Lead, Lee Farmer



Right: Deputy Headteacher and Inclusion Lead, Andy Oliver



Inclusive practice in action

REPORT CARD HOLTE SCHOOL

- » Deputy Headteacher and Inclusion Lead: Andy Oliver
- » Assistant Headteacher and Pastoral Lead: Lee Farmer
- » Established in the 1960s
- » Based in Birmingham
- » Type of school: Secondary
- » No. of pupils: 1,140
- » www.holte.bham.sch.uk

Located in the heart of Birmingham, Holte have adapted their provision to meet the pressing demands of their local community. Rated “outstanding” by Ofsted, they focus on developing a restorative approach to conflict and work closely with local providers to prevent and address issues around violence and radicalisation. Students are intimately involved with these programmes, and Holte was the first school in the country to provide college-accredited mediation training for both staff and pupils. Deputy Headteacher Andy Oliver and Assistant Headteacher Lee Farmer tell *The Parliamentary Review* more.

We are an “outstanding” secondary school set right in the heart of an ethnically diverse and culturally rich community. Unfortunately, a prevalent gang and drug culture, poor housing, and high levels of violent crime all have an impact on our students and their families. The area is classed as one of the most deprived in the country and is a first point of settlement for many economic migrants, refugees and displaced persons. The demographic trend is for economically successful families to move out of the area, leaving the most vulnerable behind. This leads to huge challenges for our inclusion team.

The mental health and wellbeing of pupils are a high priority, and we strive to demonstrate how they can keep themselves and others safe both in school and in the wider community. It would be very difficult to rely on the expertise of our own staff to deliver everything we need in terms of achieving these aims. That is why we have built up a huge range of partnerships, which have enabled us to provide a highly effective service to the young people of Lozells and Newtown.

Our strategy incorporates key aspects of the Pivotal programme for behaviour management. We are a national Pivotal hub school, and all newly qualified teachers and trainees undertake a four-week training programme in the Pivotal principles. Training is also offered throughout the year to any other member of staff who may need it, including middle leaders. As part of this training programme, the school, in conjunction with Dr Hilary Cremin, has embedded an “iPeace” approach to resolving conflict. This innovative approach focuses on establishing a culture of peace through systems, processes, procedures, relationships and the curriculum.

Developing a restorative approach

A core part of this is a restorative approach to managing conflict. Restorative language is used in classrooms, with examples of effective statements including “that has frustrated me because”. The core components of our restorative approach involve looking at what has happened, its impact and how it can be resolved. This year alone, we have held 104 restorative sessions between a staff member and a pupil, and the vast majority have been very successful.

Additionally, we have implemented a peer mediation programme where student mediators work with their peers to help to resolve low-level conflicts, address bullying and prevent fights. Students undertake a two-day course, which is accredited by the College of Mediators. We are the first school in the country to provide college-accredited mediation training for students and staff. Pupils have presented at national conferences and supported schools in the introduction of restorative approaches within their contexts.

Working alongside local authorities

We have also built up a very close link with West Midlands Police. Such strong links with the police ensure that we are at the forefront of work to tackle issues such as county lines, drug dealing and gang-related violence. Indeed, the pastoral leaders within the school have provided support both locally and nationally in dealing with these issues. The relationship also led to us hosting one of only two police cadet groups across the city. We are also working closely at present with our local councillor, Waseem Zaffar, who has set up a Lozells Young People’s Forum, with our pupils at its forefront. These young people are aiming to get their voices heard and detail what they want to see in their community in the future.

We take our safeguarding responsibilities incredibly seriously. We use metal-detecting wands on a regular and timetabled basis to conduct searches of pupils to ensure that there are no weapons in the school. As a result, we have not undertaken any permanent exclusions for weapons possession in recent years.

Beyond this, the Department for Education recently used the school as a case study and filmed the work we do around our attempts to address radicalisation and extremism. We have developed great partnerships with Craig Pinkney, Ray Douglas and

“This year alone, we have held 104 restorative sessions between a staff member and a pupil, and the vast majority have been very successful”



Our homegrown peer mediators



West Midlands Police
Chief Constable Dave
Thompson meets pupils

“Our approach has put relationships at the heart of everything we do”

Tanayah Sam – all experts in the field of youth and gang violence – who have delivered enlightening sessions to pupils, staff and parents alike. Our personal, social and health education and citizenship curriculum teaches year 7-13 students what peaceful conflict resolution looks like and how to manage conflict. We focus on the social, emotional, spiritual and cultural development of students – this is embedded within all subject areas.

Supporting the wellbeing of our students

Finally, we have also made the most of award schemes that are available for schools; as a result, we are a flagship school for the Inclusion Quality Mark and

recently achieved the Equalities Award. We recently became the first school in the UK to receive a Mentally Healthy School Award from the Centre for Child Mental Health and Trauma Informed Schools UK. Such awards ensure that the school regularly evaluates the effectiveness of its provision, that we are innovative and creative in our approach and that we are always at the forefront of national best practice.

As an IQM Flagship School, we work collaboratively with primary, secondary and special schools across the Midlands to share and develop good practice in terms of inclusion. All interventions implemented at the school are evidence based, with proactive use of the Education Endowment Fund's research as just one example. For the past three years, the school has developed a metacognitive approach to learning, including growth mindset, to improve outcomes and the wellbeing of our staff and students.

Our approach has put relationships at the heart of everything we do. Our behaviour blueprint and restorative conversations centre on building positive relationships with our students and shifting the dynamic away from “us” and “them” towards “working together” to improve behaviour and resolve conflict.

What results has this work garnered? Attendance has been consistently above the national average for a long time and this year is well above it at 96.24 per cent. Persistent absence is also significantly better than the national average, with only 7.5 per cent of pupils currently under 90 per cent attendance. We feel that this represents a huge achievement in the face of the challenges we have.

Fixed-term exclusions have decreased significantly over recent years. In 2006/7, there were 217 fixed-term exclusions, which reduced to 90 in 2017/18. Only one pupil was permanently excluded in 2017/18, and only one pupil has been permanently excluded this year. This means that our fixed-term exclusion and permanent exclusion rates are significantly better than national averages, which, again, is impressive in the context in which we work.

Oscott Academy



Graduation ceremony 2018, celebrating success



Headteacher Stewart Dance

Oscott Academy is a Key Stage 4 independent school that supports students for whom mainstream education has not worked. It works with students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, alongside those with special educational needs and looked-after children. The school receives referrals from mainstream schools and Birmingham local authority, offering a lifeline to these vulnerable students and providing them with an opportunity to complete their educational journey in a unique family environment. Headteacher Stewart Dance elaborates.

After many years of working within alternative education, I accepted a position managing a behaviour centre in a mainstream setting with a view to preventing school exclusions. After 18 months, I realised that this was unrealistic and discovered that much of the alternative provision used by schools simply wasn't meeting the requirements of excluded students. As a result of this, Oscott Academy was opened to address the needs of the most vulnerable students.

One size does not fit all

In modern Britain, a one-size-fits-all approach to education can be unrealistic for some children. The experience of children who join us, and that of their parents, in terms of the education system can result in them feeling disillusioned by mainstream schooling and let down by their previous schools, who were unable to meet their needs, empathise with them or treat them as individuals.

REPORT CARD OSCOTT ACADEMY

- » Headteacher: Stewart Dance
- » Founded in 2014
- » Located in Erdington, Birmingham
- » Type of school: Independent school specialist working with students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and those at risk of permanent exclusion
- » No. of students: 20
- » www.oscottacademy.co.uk

“The role of staff is to help our students to realise and release their potential”

Our approach to education fosters a family culture, working on the principle of mutual respect, whereby staff believe that every student is valuable and has great potential. In fact, our motto is “potential”, and the role of staff is to help our students to realise and release that potential. Ofsted noted that “The headteacher works hard to instil a culture based around family values of respect and supporting one another. Parents recognise this culture as one of the reasons that pupils settle quickly and form trusting relationships with staff.”

Although many of the students have displayed poor behaviour in their previous schools, our caring and unwavering approach to raising attainment among the cohort has led to increased progress and subsequent achievements that have enabled the students to move forward into positive post-sixteen options.

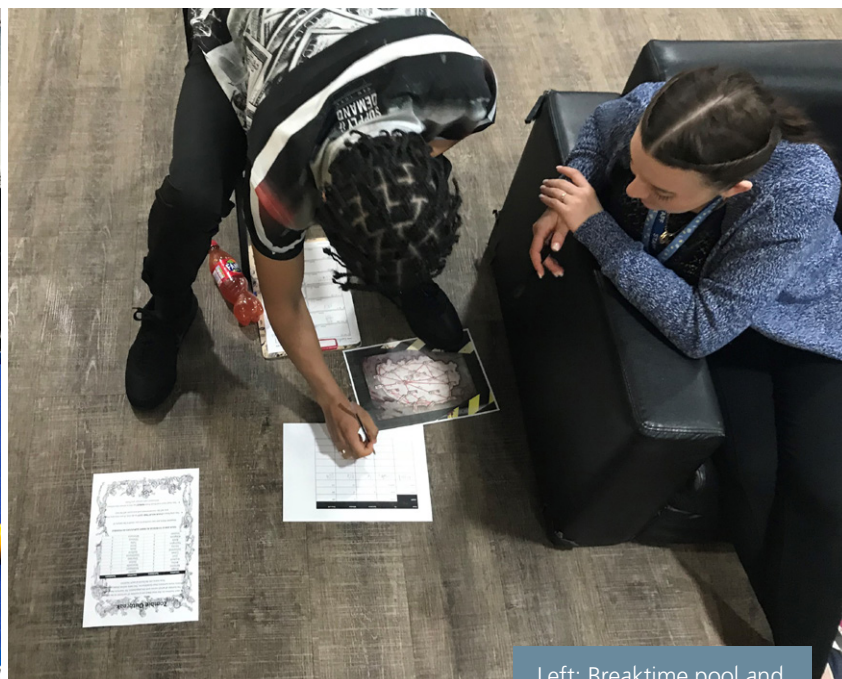
Alternative Christmas dinner, serving foods from around the world



Barriers

Some of our students face significant barriers outside school, which has previously hindered their ability to access education. Those range from being a LAC to socioeconomic factors or low aspirations. Some years ago, while discussing a potential apprenticeship with a student and their parent, the parent’s response was “that there was no point in him applying for an apprenticeship as his brother had tried one and now hasn’t got a job”. She mentioned that she worked as a cleaner and that his uncle worked in a factory and she didn’t see the point. At Oscott Academy, we believe that children can break the cycle of poverty and underachievement and be successful in life, achieving their dreams.

As much as academic achievement is important, pastoral support is a fundamental part of the school. Students at the school know that they can talk to the staff about anything that concerns them and that they will be listened to. When the barriers are removed, students can focus on their school work. Our family environment and highly pastoral approach enables students to thrive in a safe environment. When one of our first students was asked by their mentor to sum up Oscott Academy, they did so in one word – safe. Our students thrive in an environment in which they can be themselves, without the fear of bullying, violence or intimidation. During lessons, a culture of zero tolerance for putting other students down because they do not understand a particular topic has been established. Consequently, children are able to master topics they had previously found difficult to understand. Staff work hard to make subjects relevant and engaging for our students, which means that students are able to retain and apply their learning.



Left: Breaktime pool and
Right: Functional maths
– problem solving

Often, a student's frequent lack of attendance during their mainstream education meant that they had persistent absence status. Parental engagement was also poor; however, we now work closely with parents to support them in addressing barriers to strong school attendance. In a recent student poll, students were asked how they would describe their behaviour at Oscott Academy and whether it had improved. One student said, "my behaviour has changed significantly. My attendance has gone from 28 per cent at my previous school to 100 per cent at Oscott Academy and I no longer get into trouble."

Success

Staff enjoy working at the school and as a result, students enjoy coming to school and engaging in lessons. The school has a relatively high staff-to-student ratio and at least three members of staff support a class while a member of staff is teaching. In 2017, Ofsted rated Oscott Academy as a "good" school, stating that "pupils join the school with low starting points; some having missed significant amounts of formal education. Pupils make good progress

across all areas of the curriculum from their starting points. On average, students make between one and four levels of progress, often within one academic year."

For the past four years, students at Oscott Academy have achieved a 100 per cent pass rate in functional English and maths at Levels 1 and 2, helping them to progress to college courses that they would have previously been unable to access. Although functional skills were part of our initial offer, having wanted the very best for our students, we improved our curriculum to include GCSEs in English and maths.

On GCSE results day, we hold a graduation ceremony to celebrate our students' success. A local councillor presents students with their results and certificates of achievement. There is no greater feeling of success than to watch a student open their envelope and to see the student and their parent cry tears of joy because their child has achieved a grade 4 in GCSE maths. Running Oscott Academy is an honour, and having the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of our young people is a privilege.

“On average, students make between one and four levels of progress, often within one academic year”

In Perspective

The story of *The Parliamentary Review* and the UK

Each of the articles you have just read is an individual story. It has fascinating characters. It has an exposition that could fill several articles of its own. It has a beginning that was characterised by difficulty and doubt. It has a middle, filled with sinew-straining victories and didactic defeats. And it has an ending, with its cast of characters dreaming of the stories to come.

Taken together, these articles tell an even bigger story. Of a nation who, despite uncertain political times, keeps on working, creating and developing.

This story provides the perfect context for what follows in these final pages: a concise summary of the key events from the past months in parliament. Speak to any parliamentarian and they will tell you how vital it is, when hauled up in the cloisters of SW1, to keep a keen eye on the world outside, on the business owners and employees who will be directly affected by the legislation they pass. For almost every bill approved or rejected by parliament, there is a business that is invigorated or stymied as a result.

The final pages of *The Parliamentary Review* will give you a solid overview of recent legislation and debates but, to truly understand this country, it is essential to read the best practice articles first. Any MP who finds themselves at this point would be well served by flicking back through the publication and taking a closer look at those articles before venturing on. The Review of Parliament will remind you of what you already know but the best



practice articles will show you what the United Kingdom is.

A country divided by many political issues but firmly united by a sense of duty and that all-encompassing, liberating force called innovation. Whatever challenges are thrown up by the political forces of the day, the organisations, whose articles you have just read, will need to respond to them every bit as much as any parliamentarian.

Our best practice representatives are not always household names. Indeed, many of them are the organisations and individuals who quietly keep the country going.

As you read the following pages, and as you encounter the familiar characters of ministers and other politicians, ask yourself if it is really them, or if it is the daring entrepreneur, the considerate manager and the dedicated, self-sacrificing worker who are the true protagonists of this country's story.

A matter of time



How long will the prime minister's tenure last?

As regular readers will know, the final pages of *The Parliamentary Review* look back on the most significant parliamentary incidents of the past year. Consider our frustration, therefore, at the fact that our early September publication date coincides with what is likely to be one of the most momentous weeks in parliament's history.

By the time you read this, you will either be in the midst of the mayhem or you'll be reflecting on it from a safe distance. At the time of writing, Boris Johnson has been prime minister just shy of a month. But it's not until September that his premiership truly begins. And, if certain pundits are to be believed, this may also be the month when it ends.

A confidence motion is expected to be tabled by the leader of the opposition shortly after parliament returns on September 3, with a small handful of Conservative MPs said to be seriously considering voting against their own government; such is their desperation to thwart Mr Johnson's promise to take Britain out of the EU "come what may".

If the government to lose the vote, we will all be dusting off our copies of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011.

The Act, which was passed by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, aimed to transfer the power to control the electoral timetable from the prime minister to parliament by requiring the former to have the agreement of two-thirds of the house in order to call an election.

Crucially, the Act also allows the prime minister a stay of execution in the event of a lost confidence vote. Rather than having to call an election immediately upon defeat, as was the case prior to 2011, there is now a 14-day period during which he or an alternate leader has a chance to secure a majority of support in the Commons.

Normally, this would be incidental. At present, with the clock ticking towards October 31, the date on which it is legally mandated for Britain to leave the European Union, 14 days could make all the difference.

Once the two weeks are up, if no new government has been formed, an election must be called and the power for choosing the date rests entirely with the prime minister.

Rather than limiting Mr Johnson, this Act, at this particular moment in time, has provided him with an unexpected source of strength. Even if he is defeated in a confidence motion on September 3, an election will not be announced until October 17. At this point, Mr Johnson can announce that the election will take place on October 31, or a date shortly

thereafter, with parliament closed in the interim, thereby guaranteeing that the United Kingdom does indeed leave the EU without a deal, which is exactly what those who vote the government down would be hoping to avoid.

According to *The Daily Telegraph*, this is exactly the strategy being employed by Mr Johnson's most senior aide, Dominic Cummings, who is said to believe that MPs are powerless to prevent a no-deal Brexit.

Mr Cummings' namesake, the Tory MP Dominic Grieve, responded to this suggestion by claiming "there are a number of things which the House of Commons can do, including bringing down the government and setting up a new government in its place."

Without the whole-hearted support of the Labour Party, however, this remains purely hypothetical, with shadow home secretary Diane Abbott tweeting that a national government "didn't work for Ramsay McDonald and won't work now".

It is apparent that Labour MPs will not, in any serious number, back any government not led by Jeremy Corbyn, and it remains desperately unlikely that any Tory MP would ever countenance supporting a Corbyn-led government, even temporarily.

A no-confidence vote against Mr Johnson's government would therefore lead inexorably to a general election at a time of the prime minister's choosing.

By the time you read this, much of the above may already have been rendered irrelevant. Whether the political picture looks any clearer, however, is another matter altogether. As the following articles and indeed previous editions of *The Parliamentary Review* demonstrate, unpredictability has been a key component of our politics for quite some time. Expectations have been subverted on a regular basis.

If we can predict anything with confidence, it is that this is likely to continue. For how long? Time will tell.

Backbenchers take back control

Lenin allegedly said that in politics "there are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen." Yet, even he might have been surprised by the sheer pace of events in the British parliament on April 3, 2019.

It was a battle for control of Brexit. Against the background of the offer of talks with Labour to end the parliamentary deadlock over leaving the EU from Theresa May, then-prime minister, a cross-party backbench alliance seized control of Commons business and then rammed through a bill to postpone Brexit day. Their aim was to prevent Britain from leaving without a trade deal, but the manoeuvre by which they achieved it



Yvette Cooper spearheaded the charge to postpone Brexit with an emergency bill

was unique and unprecedented in the modern era.

With the prospect of a no-deal exit on April 12, those opposed to that eventuality had been cornered into decisive action – but it was a close-run thing, with the Business of the House



Brexit secretary Stephen Barclay declared the bill to be "constitutionally irregular"

motion which allowed the bill to be pushed through won by a single vote, 312 to 311. MPs gasped – but that vote meant that the European Union (Withdrawal) (No. 5) Bill would be put through all its stages of debate in the remaining time available that day – before being sent off to the Lords.

A law was essential to compel the government to obey because a mere resolution of the House would not carry sufficient force, but many regarded it as unconstitutional. Moving the bill, Yvette Cooper, the former Labour cabinet minister, said the group were acting "for fear of the damage that no deal would do to all our constituencies." She quoted the warning from Sir Mark Sedwill, the cabinet secretary, that no deal would make the UK "less safe" and increase food prices by ten per cent. And she added: "I could never have imagined we would be in a situation where, nine days from Brexit day, nobody knows what is going to happen. That is causing huge concern and anxiety for businesses, families and people across the country."

She was challenged by a series of Brexiteers; the former minister Andrew Percy warned that the manoeuvre would be seen as a "massive stitch-up" by Remainers. Mrs Cooper reminded MPs that she had proposed a cross-party commission to oversee the negotiations, immediately after the referendum,

precisely because she feared this kind of gridlock. Mrs May's failure to reach out across the parties had left MPs "trying to squeeze into a few days a process of consensus building that should have taken two years."

The Conservative Brexiteer John Baron wondered if fears of the impact of a no-deal exit were exaggerated. He reminded MPs that the warnings of half a million jobs lost if the UK voted to leave in the 2016 Referendum had proven unfounded: "What has happened since? We have had record low unemployment, record inward investment and record manufacturing output."

And another Conservative, Bob Seely, warned the bill meant "delay without end" and that the "chaos" was "self-induced by people who do not want Brexit".

He accused hard Brexiteers of seeking a perfect Brexit – which brought a shout of "Rubbish!" from the veteran Eurosceptic, Sir Bill Cash. But Mr Seely added: "I do not think the deal is too bad, and a vote on alternatives in a Strictly Come Brexit dance-off next week would be another well-meaning shambles. It is truly obvious – at this stage, mind-numbingly, stupefyingly obvious – that if we want to leave with a deal, we should vote for one."

For the government, Stephen Barclay, the Brexit secretary, said the bill was being passed in haste and was "constitutionally irregular", and could even increase the risk of an accidental no-deal exit, if there was a last-minute disagreement over the length of a postponement offered by the EU.

But a few moments later MPs did back the bill, approving a second reading by 315 votes to 310. As the process continued, a series of amendments were seen off at committee stage, before the bill received its third reading, again by a single vote – 313 to 312.

The Speaker rewrites the Commons rulebook

This constitutional irregularity on the part of backbench MPs was partly inspired and enabled by the actions of the Speaker three months earlier.

In what may turn out to have been the biggest decision of his Speakership, John Bercow defied Commons precedent to make a novel ruling on framework for MPs' "meaningful vote" debate on Theresa May's Brexit deal.

With the government apparently heading for certain defeat, the planned vote on the deal had been abandoned, just before Christmas 2018. And when MPs finally resumed their debate, the Speaker decided to allow an amendment to be proposed to the Business of the House motion. This was, most MPs believed, flatly against the Commons rules, both because the motion would be voted on "forthwith" – a term normally seen as foreclosing any possibility of an amendment – and because the existing Business of the House motion said that changes could only be proposed by a minister.

This seemingly technical step allowed a combination of opposition MPs and Conservative rebels to vote through an important change; in the event of its deal being voted down, the government would now be required to put down a motion within three sitting days which would allow MPs to debate what happened next.

The effect was to sharply reduce the grace period the government would otherwise have had – and to bring forward the moment when MPs might seize control of Brexit. And the result was a furious backlash against the Speaker in the chamber.

The first to question the decision was the Speaker's long-term ally, the



Speaker John Bercow was widely criticised by MPs

Conservative Brexiteer Peter Bone. He complained that he too had wanted to amend the Business of the House motion, but he had been told by the clerks of the Commons Table Office that it would be "totally out of order" to do so. The Speaker said he had been unaware of that.

Andrea Leadsom, then-leader of the Commons, asked the Speaker to confirm the decision had been taken on the advice of his chief procedural expert, Sir David Natzler, clerk of the Commons at the time, and asked him to publish that advice – and she was backed up by shouts of "publish it" from Conservative MPs. The Speaker said he took advice in private and there was no written document. Another Conservative, Shailesh Vara, asked if the clerks had agreed with his decision – the Speaker said only that he had discussed it with them.

The Conservative James Cleverly suggested that such a precedent should not be set on such a contentious matter, and Andrew Percy, a former minister, said many of the public suspected a conspiracy and a "procedural stitch-up" against Brexit. Mr Bercow retorted that his role was to facilitate the Commons in deciding what it wanted to decide.

The exchanges continued, noisily and angrily. Crispin Blunt, another Conservative ex-minister, said many on the Tory benches now had “an unshakeable conviction that the referee of our affairs, not least because you made public your opinion and your vote on the issue of Brexit, is no longer neutral.” And another, Adam Holloway, provoked more angry shouts when he complained that one of the Speaker’s cars had an anti-Brexit sticker (it said “Bollocks to Brexit”) and asked

if he had driven it with that sticker still on. The Speaker answered that the car and the sticker belonged to his wife – who was not his property or chattel and was entitled to her views.

Just as Mr Bercow was unable to control his wife’s car, it was now clear that parliament would not work as an effective vehicle for Mrs May. Stymied by the Speaker, the opposition and her own backbenchers, her days as prime minister were numbered.

Crisis at British Steel



British Steel went into liquidation in May 2019, putting 25,000 jobs at risk

The government faced calls to renationalise British Steel, once a giant of UK industry, after the company was put into liquidation, placing 25,000 jobs at risk. In a statement to the Commons, on May 22, Greg Clark, then-business secretary, told MPs he had been unable to agree a £30 million emergency loan to keep paying wages to company staff.

He said the government could only act within the law and any financial support must be made on a commercial basis. “The absence of adequate security, no reasonable prospect that any loan would have been repaid and the shareholder being unwilling to provide a sufficient cash injection itself meant that this did not meet the required legal tests,” he said. He promised to “pursue remorselessly every possible step to secure the future” of vital steel-making operations, saying “Britain and

the world will continue to need high-quality steel, and British steel is among the best in the world.”

For Labour, Rebecca Long-Bailey said the government should “move heaven and earth” to ensure the business continued: “This is indeed very worrying news for the workers, their families and the communities who rely on British Steel directly in Scunthorpe, Skinningrove and Teesside and all the way through the supply chain. At least 25,000 people will be worried sick this morning, wondering whether they will have a job this time next week.”

She said steel manufacture was critical to the UK’s manufacturing base and asked if the possible options included bringing British Steel into public ownership, as Unite the Union and the Labour Party had called for: “The truth of the matter is that the cost of British Steel collapsing is far greater than any short-term outlay the government must make now. The Institute for Public Policy Research has estimated that British Steel’s collapse could lead to £2.8 billion in lost wages, £1.1 billion in lost revenue and extra benefit payments and that it could reduce household spending by £1.2 billion over ten years.”

Restoring parliament's Victorian home

It had, said Andrea Leadsom, leader of the Commons at the time, been a very long time coming. The deteriorating state of the Victorian Palace of Westminster, the home of parliament, had been obvious for decades, but governments and successive generations of MPs had always been wary of a public backlash against committing not millions but billions of pounds to a decade-long mega-project to restore and modernise the building.

But amid fears of a catastrophic failure in the infrastructure of the palace – a flood, a fire, a collapse – the government and the parliamentary authorities brought forward the Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Bill, which would create the administrative structure for what promised to be a massive project, under which MPs and peers would move to new temporary chambers for several years, before returning to a restored building in the 2030s.

Moving the second reading of the bill on May 21, Mrs Leadsom (who was to resign as leader the following day, over the government's approach to Brexit) said it was time for MPs to take decisive action to protect parliament for future generations: "The tragic fire at Notre Dame has served as a stark reminder of the risks to this historic building. There is no doubt that the best way to avoid a similar incident here is to get on with



Work has already begun on restoring the Elizabeth Tower, which is expected to finish in 2021

the job of protecting the thousands of people working here and the millions who come to visit."

She said there had been three significant incidents of falling masonry – and it was only luck that no one had been killed or injured. The parliamentary authorities had been running round-the-clock fire patrols, and there had been 66 fire incidents since 2008.

She described the continuing problems: "Countless water leaks, floods, sewage leaks, and lighting and power outages, and these incidents are about much more than inconvenience... my concern is that the pace of deterioration is now much faster than our ability to patch and mend."

Davis questions defence secretary over torture

Newspaper allegations that the Ministry of Defence had sought to bypass laws designed to prevent the UK becoming involved in torture prompted an urgent question in late May to Penny Mordaunt, then the

newly-appointed defence secretary, from one of the most dangerous Commons questioners – David Davis, the Conservative ex-cabinet minister. Mr Davis, a longstanding human rights campaigner, wanted reassurance about



Davis stated that “there can never be a reason or justification for torture”

reports in *The Times* suggesting that ministers could share intelligence with allies even if that led to someone being tortured. Under the rules, information could be passed on if the benefits justified it.

Mrs Mordaunt offered a firm assurance: “The UK government stand firmly against torture and do not participate in, solicit, encourage or condone the use of torture or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment for any purpose.”

In reply, Mr Davis said the prohibition of torture was an “absolute incontrovertible right... there can never be a reason or justification for torture; what is more, it does not work. It leads to bad intelligence and bad decisions. The decision to undertake the Iraq war, which led to hundreds of thousands of

deaths, the destruction of the stability of the region and the destruction of the reputation of the West, was based on so-called evidence obtained on the basis of torture.”

He said MPs should not ignore a Ministry of Defence policy document which in his view presumed that ministers could overrule the law, even international law, including that on the prohibition of torture. “They cannot, they must not, and I hope that my right honourable friend will ensure that they do not,” he added.

Mrs Mordaunt agreed “100 per cent” and insisted that ministers could not overrule or disregard the law. But her Labour shadow, Nia Griffith, said it was time to scrap the policy: “Today’s reports suggest that, according to the Ministry of Defence, torture is acceptable if, and I quote from the policy document, ‘ministers agree that the potential benefits justify accepting the risk and the legal consequences that may follow’. Will the secretary of state confirm what the government consider those ‘potential benefits’ to be?”

The defence secretary insisted that it was not government policy to condone or facilitate torture, saying that no ministers had been involved in decisions that would have led to torture. “That is the assurance that I have received from the department,” she added.

The Whorlton Hall scandal

The emergence of a new scandal over the abuse and mistreatment of vulnerable adults at Whorlton Hall, a specialist hospital run by a private company, Cygnet, on behalf of the NHS, prompted an urgent question in the Commons on March 23 to Caroline Dinenage, the minister for social care. Undercover filming by the BBC’s

Panorama programme had produced what the minister told the Commons was “very disturbing footage” revealing the “incredibly traumatic experiences of vulnerable people with learning disabilities and autism at Whorlton Hall”.

She said: “The actions revealed by the programme are simply appalling –

there is no other word to describe them – and I condemn any abuse of this kind completely and utterly.”

She apologised on behalf of the care system to the victims and their families. Immediate steps had been taken to ensure the safety of patients, a significant number of staff had been suspended and a criminal investigation had been opened, she told MPs. There remained questions over the regulatory and inspection framework, and over the official response, after whistleblowing concerns had been raised. And there were also broader questions about whether such institutions were appropriate for vulnerable people.

The urgent question had been put down by the Lib Dem MP Norman Lamb, a health minister under the coalition government. He too had found the *Panorama* footage

deeply shocking: “We saw people with learning disabilities and autism mocked, intimidated, taunted and provoked, and care workers admitting to deliberately hurting patients – behaviour appropriately described as psychological torture.” He said those responsible must be held to account, but also wondered about the possibility of criminal prosecution against the provider.

Mrs Dinanage said that societies were judged on their treatment of the most vulnerable citizens: “This is not just about reviewing a few individual cases in which things went wrong; it is about a system across health, education, social care and criminal justice – it all needs to change. We are adamant that no stone should be left unturned in identifying problems, poor practice and care that falls short of what we would expect for our own family members.”

“Breathing space” for people in debt

Plans to help people facing crisis debt, by adopting a system already operating in Scotland, won cross-party support in the Commons on June 19.

Under the new breathing space scheme, hundreds of thousands of people in England and Wales with high levels of debt will be able to freeze interest, fees and charges for 60 days. During that time enforcement action against them by creditors and bailiffs will be suspended. In return they’ll have to consult debt advice services to work out a plan to fix their finances.

Announcing the plan, John Glen, the Treasury minister, said this was a cause close to his heart. Many people ran into debt, not because they’d spent too much, but because they couldn’t pay essential bills. “For people who are just getting by, even a small income shock can provoke a cycle of debt



The scheme will enable those with high debt to freeze interest, fees and charges for 60 days

dependence that can be difficult to escape. If then faced with invasive debt enforcement, it is no wonder that many people in problem debt simply disengage.”

He added that the first step was to ensure that consumer credit firms did

not make loans to people who could not afford to repay them. The Financial Conduct Authority had been instructed to make certain that firms lend responsibly, protecting consumers from overborrowing. And the government was also seeking to increase access to affordable credit and to support people to make good financial decisions.

For Labour, Jonathan Reynolds welcomed the plans, but he thought they could go further: "There has been a growing consensus for some time about the need for something less dramatic than formal insolvency proceedings which offers hope to people with problem debts that there can be a way out. That is what the breathing space scheme should be – a space to let people get back on their

feet, perhaps overcoming a health issue, a period of unemployment or something else that has adversely affected their lives."

For the SNP, Kirsty Blackman was pleased to see the UK government picking up the scheme "trailblazed" in Scotland. It had resulted in over £200 million of debt being repaid, and Scotland now had the lowest proportion of overindebted people of any part of the UK.

While most MPs welcomed the plan, the Conservative Sir Edward Leigh urged ministers to tread carefully "because there are unintended consequences of governments, in their dying days, trying to virtue-signal and regulate more but actually doing more damage than good."

Immigration after Brexit



Sajid Javid told MPs Britain would not abandon its "proud history of being an open and welcoming nation"

Perhaps the single most politically sensitive policy issue flowing from Brexit is immigration; one of the major themes in the Leave campaign in the 2016 Referendum was taking back control of the UK's borders and ending the freedom of movement which allowed EU citizens to move to Britain. But that had to be balanced with concerns about the impact on industry if vital international talent, and seasonal workers who could not easily

be replaced by British workers, were no longer allowed to work here.

And on December 19 last year, the day Sajid Javid, then-home secretary, prepared to unveil the new policy in a Commons statement, it became clear that the government's internal debate on this issue was far from resolved.

During a BBC interview that morning, he was repeatedly asked if he was sticking to the Conservatives' longstanding target of reducing net migration to the tens of thousands, and he repeatedly declined to answer "yes" to that question. That did not go unnoticed. During the session of Prime Minister's Questions immediately before the statement, a Labour MP, Chris Elmore, put the same question to Theresa May, and she responded with the unequivocal "yes" the home secretary had pointedly failed to deliver. The contrast was not lost on anyone.

In his statement the home secretary reminded MPs that he was the son of

immigrants, as he announced plans to end freedom of movement and introduce a policy based on people's skills. He said leaving the EU meant for the first time in 40 years the government would be able to control who could enter the UK. But he added that Britain would not abandon its "proud history of being an open and welcoming nation."

He promised a new system giving priority to people with skills the UK economy needed: "We are taking this approach to ensure we can attract the brightest and the best people to the UK – those who can help our economy flourish. There will be no cap on numbers and no requirement for the

highest-skilled workers to undertake a resident labour market test, and there will be a minimum salary threshold of £30,000." The plan also included a short-term workers scheme, enabling seasonal and low-skilled staff to come to the UK.

Damian Green, the Conservative former immigration minister, picked up on the home secretary's phrase about the "brightest and best". Such people were not always in highly paid professions, and sectors like social care needed them but did not offer salaries above the proposed cap. Mr Javid replied that there could be some flexibility to set lower salary thresholds in shortage occupations.

The last word

At *Review HQ*, we often express our relief that our job is to look back on the recent past, rather than make predictions about the future. But this year, more than ever, we have no idea what happens next.

Will the new prime minister face a confidence vote? Will he lose it? And what happens then? A snap election? A no-deal Brexit? A new-deal Brexit? An extension?

Our honest, considered opinion is that we do not know.

We are well and truly on unexplored terrain and, for the world's oldest parliament, this is quite an achievement. But, throughout this voyage through the political unknown, there has been a constant, familiar life raft to which we at the *Review* have clung.

It is our privilege to be able to work with leaders from every part of the British economy; something that affords us a unique perspective on the country as a whole. And we have come to the realisation that we



Lord Pickles addresses the Parliamentary Review gala in the House of Commons

understand the country better than we do parliament. While the latter offers uproar and unpredictability, the former simply gets on with the job. It motivates staff, inspires students and creates the products and services from which we all benefit.

We can't tell you what will happen in parliament. But we can cast an unequivocal vote of confidence in the United Kingdom.

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