

Ward Hadaway – Lawyers for Education

Insight: Education

Your monthly education sector news roundup

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Welcome

Welcome to the March edition of our monthly newsletter for those working in the education sector. We hope you will find this a useful summary of latest developments in schools, further and higher education and the training and apprenticeships arena. If you have any comments on the format or want more detail about a particular subject, [please do not hesitate to contact any of us](#).

Controversy raised over Damian Hind's commitment to lifting the cap on faith schools

Education Secretary Damian Hinds has pledged to lift the current cap on faith schools which prevents schools admitting more than 50 per cent of pupils on the basis of faith. Currently, faith schools which are oversubscribed must keep at least 50 percent of their admission places open. At present, the ban has the largest effect on Catholic schools.

The lifting of the ban could see the number of faith schools increase, with one diocese in East Anglia poised to build up to eight new schools if the ban is lifted. The diocese has justified this by explaining that the influx of migrants from Catholic countries has increased the demand for their schools and that these parents should be allowed to freely choose where they send their children.

The Controversy

There have been calls that allowing schools to be even more religiously selective will make a bad situation even worse. There are concerns that children in care and children from disadvantaged backgrounds remain at a disadvantage compared to those with more affluent parents.

In a letter to the Daily Telegraph, a group of 70 faith leaders, politicians and academics including the former Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams and co-leader of the Green Party Caroline Lucas have warned that removing the cap would be "deleterious to social cohesion and respect". They argue it would only serve to strengthen social divisions and entrench differences in the minds of young people which is particularly detrimental when children are blind to differences and immune to society's prejudices.

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Round up

Sixteen Northumberland schools at risk of closure

The decision made earlier this month by Bright Tribe to pull out of taking on the 'inadequate'-rated Haydon Bridge High School has prompted discussions at Northumberland County Council about other schools within the County which are failing and at possible risk of closure. Sixteen schools have been identified as at risk due to a number of problems that they are currently face including: undersubscription; withdrawal of sponsors; and a lack of capital investment to complete much needed building repairs. The council has estimated there is around a 30 per-cent surplus of local authority school places in the county with around 5,000 pupils taking up places for 7,000 pupils.

Consequently, the council has released a consultation into the possible future of the county's schools, with three different possible future models; however only under one model is it proposed that Haydon Bridge remains open.

Northumberland is one of the few counties which still operates a three-tier system of education, with first, middle and high schools. The Council is proposing to close and merge some of these schools and move towards a two-tier system in line with the rest of England.

Whilst sounding like a relatively straightforward and beneficial idea, councillors in Northumberland have been quick to point out the potential problems moving forward with this proposal. Northumberland is a county with a sparse and scattered population, particularly in the west of the county. The nature of the population means that a three-tier system can be more beneficial and if it is removed, some children who live in more remote parts of the county may face over an hour of travel time to get to school.

Local parent Helen Yates said that in particular, losing first schools in remote villages would be devastating for the whole community and would lead to young families moving away from the area.

Ofsted has backed school involved in hijab dispute

A primary school in the London Borough of Newham has been at the centre of controversy after making the decision to ban younger pupils from wearing a hijab. The school has since reversed the ban following backlash from the community. In the wake of the controversy, Ofsted made an impromptu visit to the school to investigate concerns about leadership and management.

Ofsted were firm and said the school maintained its 'outstanding' rating and that senior staff at the primary school were still 'outstanding'. The regulator went further stating that the council had failed to provide adequate support to the school and to the senior leadership of the school at the time, who faced negative comments and "abusive postings" on social media following the ban.

Ofsted commended teachers and leaders at the school for managing to maintain an atmosphere where children are encouraged and supported, the pupils remain enthusiastic about learning and they are extremely enthusiastic about their school.

Response

The dispute has led to comments from Sir Michael Wilshaw, the previous Chief Inspector for Ofsted, calling for Government to implement an official policy for primary schools on the wearing of hijabs. He commented that neither head teachers nor Ofsted are in a position to make policies of this nature and further it is the Government's duty to decide on policy here to help prevent discrepancies between schools and incidents like this happening in the future.

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18th Studio School set to close this year

The Studio School system has recently been brought into question following announcements that the 18th school will close at the end of this academic year. Manchester Creative Studio will close its doors this summer after failing to get the necessary pupil numbers and experiencing "significant financial challenges".

The School which opened in 2014 has a teaching focus on digital and creative industries currently has only 40 pupils. Last year the school went into special measures after an 'inadequate' rating in every category from Ofsted, inspectors criticised the school's "serious and widespread failures" in almost every aspect of the school, including leadership and in safeguarding. There are also problems of low attendance and poor behaviour as well as low pupil attainment at the school.

Martin Shevill, Chair of the School's Trust Board said that in light of the challenges the school was facing, and despite efforts made by the Board and the School to improve, closure had become the only viable option.

This school along with many other studio schools have received a cash injection from the Government but similar to the other 17 closed schools, it has made little difference. This closure will leave only 34 schools left open but serious questions are still being asked about their viability and future.

Commentary

Liberal Democrat David Laws who served as schools minister in the coalition government has criticised the whole UTC policy which studio schools sits under. He has stated that his main concern and problem with the system is the age range of these schools and that "trying to inject a 14 to 18 solution into a system which isn't 14 to 18 and is not one the Government wishes to be 14 to 18" will fundamentally not work as a system. It is too difficult to recruit pupils at age 14 to join these schools because our education system does not complement schools which begin at 14.

Need to know – your policy and guidance quick read

[Department for Education releases their Multi-academy trust performance measures for 2016-2017](#)

Performance measures for Multi-academy trusts (MATs) have been released by the Department for Education. To be recognised as a MAT, and therefore be included in the measures, a Trust must have three or more academies that have been part of the MAT for at least three full academic and have results in the 2017 school performance table.

[Health protection in schools and other childcare facilities](#)

Public Health England has updated its guidance for schools and other childcare settings. It includes guidance on what teachers and care providers should do to prevent and control infections and guidance on what to do if there is a suspected outbreak of infection. It also sets out the importance of a clean environment and of teachers being up to date with immunisations and being in good health.

[New Advanced Maths Premium can open more doors for young people](#)

The Government has doubled the amount of money on offer to schools to encourage more pupils to study A-level maths. From September 2018, schools and colleges will receive an extra £600 for each additional pupil studying maths A-level or further maths, doubling the existing premium of £600 to £1,200. This has come about from data which shows that pupils who do well in maths at school have better skills for future success and earn higher wages.

[Measures announced to ensure talented trainees get into teaching](#)

Aspiring teachers are set to benefit from a number of changes designed to allow them to begin training and make a difference in the classroom more quickly. The changes involve removing some of the financial and administrative barriers that prevent some trainees getting into teaching.

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Meet the team

Meet the Education Team

As the evolving educational landscape continues to open up new opportunities and present challenges, you need to be confident that you are getting the right legal advice, at the right time and, of course, at the right price. Ward Hadaway's Education Team is recognised as a leading national player. Our friendly, commercial and pragmatic approach allows you to be reassured that you are in safe hands.

Whether you are a maintained school, academy, multi academy trust, free school, studio school or UTC, our team have an in-depth, up-to-date knowledge of the sector, making us ideally placed to offer the best possible advice to all those involved in the delivery of educational excellence for pupils, students and their communities. [Click here](#) to read about how we can work with you.

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