

Focus

on Education

How to celebrate diversity and build an inclusive environment in your school

We team up with Stonewall to stamp out discrimination in schools



- Also:
- >> Educating children about "sexting"
 - >> My school story: Ian Kelsey
 - >> Helping children with autism reach their full potential

CONTENTS



- 3 Welcome
- 4 What is in force or expected to come into force this year?
- 6 News in brief
- 7 Educating children about “sexting”
- 9 Is the academisation of all schools still on the cards despite the apparent u turn?
- 10 Spotlight: On the additional legal responsibilities owed by academy head teachers
- 12 How to celebrate diversity and build an inclusive environment in your school
- 14 My school story: Ian Kelsey
- 15 Pupil attainment gap in Northern England needs to be tackled for Northern Powerhouse success
- 16 Helping children with autism reach their full potential
- 18 Think it Create it: A new approach to delivering the computing curriculum
- 20 Taxation considerations for educational establishments providing living accommodation - Part 2
- 22 Can Acivico Energy cut your school energy costs?
- 23 Case law update
- 25 ACAS Schools Forum

Welcome...

... to the summer edition of Focus on Education

This term we examine the issue of educating children about the risks of “sexting”. We believe that most children simply do not understand the legal and wider social issues that can arise from sexting and need information and guidance to help them make appropriate choices. You can read more on this topic on **page 7**.

We unpick rhetoric surrounding the government’s aim to convert all maintained schools into academies and examine whether their recent “u turn” will, in fact, make much of a difference. Read our views on **page 9**. We also provide guidance on the additional duties owed by academy head teachers arising under the Company Act which include additional disclosure obligations and the overriding duty to act in the best interests of the school trust. Find this on **page 10**.

We are delighted to feature articles from Stonewall and the National Autistic Society written exclusively for schools.

Stonewall, the charity campaigning for the equality of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people across Britain, have provided valuable advice to help schools champion diversity and build an inclusive environment. Read about their campaign on **page 12**.

On **page 16** The National Autistic Society explains their campaign to train teachers about autism and provide advice on the steps schools can take to help autistic children integrate and become accepted members of the class.

Actor Ian Kelsey (of Emmerdale and Doctors fame) also tells us his school story on **page 14**.

I hope that you find this edition interesting and if you would like any further information on any of the topics covered, please get in touch with one of our experts.



Surinder Dhillon

Head of School Legal Services (Midlands & South)

T: +44(0)121 203 5338

M: +44(0)7894 807 918

E: surinder.dhillon@irwinmitchell.com



Jenny Arrowsmith

Head of School Legal Services (North)

T: +44(0)113 218 6446

M: +44 (0)7718 668 646

E: jenny.arrowsmith@irwinmitchell.com

What is in force or expected to come into force this year?

1 January 2016	Whistleblowing	“Prescribed persons” are required to produce annual reports of whistleblowing disclosures (without identifying the worker who made the disclosure, their employer or other person about whom the disclosure was made).
11 January 2016	Zero hours contracts	Regulations came into force providing the right to unfair dismissal protection for employees working under a zero hours contract who are dismissed because the employee has failed to comply with an exclusivity clause.
1 April 2016	National Living Wage	Introduction of the National Living Wage for workers aged 25 and over paid at the rate of £7.20 per hour.
1 April 2016	Penalties for failing to pay the National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage	Penalties for failing to pay the appropriate rates doubled from 100% of the shortfall in wages to 200% of the shortfall, capped at £20,000 per worker.
6 April 2016	Increases to ET limits	Increase in the maximum compensatory award for unfair dismissal to £78,962 (from £78,335). Increase in the maximum amount of a week’s pay used to calculate statutory redundancy payments and various awards including the basic award for unfair dismissal claims to £479 (from £475).
6 April 2016	Statutory payments for SMP	No increase in the weekly rates. These will remain as follows: 1. SMP, SAP; PP and ShPP - £139.58 per week 2. Sick pay - £88.45 per week.
Expected October 2016	Gender pay reporting	Employers with over 250 employees will have to publish details of their gender pay gap. This will not apply to public sector employers yet.

Date to be confirmed	Repayment of public sector exit payments	<p>Qualifying individuals will be obliged to notify their new and previous employer where they propose to return to any part of the public sector (as an employee, self employed contractor or office holder) after they have received a public sector exit payment within the previous 12 months.</p> <p>Public sector exit payments include those paid for loss of employment, including enhanced redundancy payments, discretionary payments to buy out actuarial reductions to pensions and severance payments. It does not apply to payments in lieu of notice, contractual bonus payments or those made in connection with incapacity, or payments awarded to the individual by a court or tribunal.</p> <p>Qualifying individuals are those who earned £80,000 or more within 12 months of receiving their exit payment.</p> <p>Repayment will be tapered, so for example, an employee returning within two months of receiving an exit payment will repay more than an employee returning nine months after receiving the payment.</p>
Date to be confirmed	Exit payments and apprenticeships	<p>The Enterprise Bill 2015-16 will introduce:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A £95,000 cap on exit payments made to public sector workers to end six-figure payoffs. • Regulations to restrict the use of the word “apprenticeship” to Government-accredited schemes and to increase the number of public sector apprenticeships offered.
Date to be confirmed	Trade unions	<p>Changes to balloting rules for industrial action including enhanced rules for “essential public services”, removing the prohibition on using agency staff to cover striking employees, measures on picketing, facility time, political donations and additional powers for the Certification Officer.</p>
Date to be confirmed	Tax treatment of termination payments	<p>Proposals include treating all payments in lieu of notice as taxable. The Government’s response to the recent consultation is expected later this year.</p>
Date to be confirmed	Company directors	<p>All company directors should be natural persons (not corporate entities). There will be a 12 month grace period after which corporate directors will cease to be directors by operation of law.</p>



The High Court backs father who refused to pay a fine for term-time holiday

The High Court has said that a father who took his child out of school for a seven day holiday did not commit a criminal offence and found that parents whose children attended school “regularly” could be allowed family absences. The Department for Education (DfE) has said that its zero tolerance approach to attendance is “non-negotiable” and has indicated that it may change the law to close, what it considers to be, a loophole. It also plans to strengthen statutory guidance to schools and local authorities. Read more on the case on the [BBC website here](#).

Enquiry into sexual violence in schools

A Commons committee will look into the scale of sexual harassment and sexual violence in England’s schools following fears that the number of cases are rising and that sexualised behaviour among pupils is a social norm. In September 2015, a BBC News report based on freedom of information requests revealed there were 5,500 sexual offences recorded in UK schools between 2011 and 2014. Within these figures, there were 4,000 alleged physical sexual assaults and more than 600 rapes, according to the information from UK police forces. [Read the findings in more detail here](#).

Controversial safeguarding rules may be scrapped

The DfE has launched a consultation on disqualification by association rules which currently require staff working with young children to apply to Ofsted for a waiver if they live with anyone with spent convictions for certain types of crime.

Three options are proposed:

1. Exempting schools
2. Introducing a right to make representations to Ofsted before disqualification takes effect
3. Reducing the scope of the rules.

It has been reported that no applications have been rejected since the guidelines changed.

Government’s £8 million academy and free school bail out

Freedom of information figures show that since 2013-14 the DfE has paid out a total of £8.2m in deficit funding to help schools balance their books. The largest single payment of £700,000 was made to The Business Academy Bexley, one of the first flagship academies.

Mental health champion for UK schools axed after criticising Government

The Government has ended its partnership with Natasha Devon, its mental health champion for schools, after she publicly criticised current education policies, in particular the testing regime, which Devon claimed is detrimental to children’s mental health. [The Guardian covers this in more detail here](#).

ACAS report highlights increase in bullying

ACAS says that its helpline took over 20,000 calls last year on bullying and harassment and believes that this might mean that workplace bullying is on the increase. A public debate will begin on workplace bullying to help identify better solutions and ACAS is considering introducing a new code of practice on unwanted behaviour in the workplace - [Workplace Trends 2016](#).

Advice on potential employment implications of Brexit

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has published advice, written by Michael Ford QC, on the potential implications of Brexit on employment and health and safety law. The advice states: “All the social rights in employment currently required by EU law would be potentially vulnerable” and that there would be years of uncertainty for workers and employers if the UK votes to leave the European Union. You can read more on [TUC’s website](#).

Flexible hiring could help improve performance

A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in a study of 3.5 million job advertisements found that only 6.2% of vacancies for “quality” jobs (those paying at least £10.63 per hour) were advertised with options to work flexibly. This rate was considered to be the amount parents, older people and disabled people need to earn to meet basic minimum income standards. It found a wide gap between flexible working (which is widely available) and flexible hiring (which is relatively rare). The report suggests that this cuts employers off from a proportion of the skilled market and is particularly damaging for those sectors with skills shortages such as IT and engineering. You can read the full report on [Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s website](#).



Educating children about “sexting”

The word “sexting” has been in common use for less than seven years, but it is already an established part of our lexicon. It is used to describe the sending of sexually explicit messages or images usually via smart phones.

Data disclosed by West Midlands Police in December 2015 revealed that its force had investigated 70 children under the age of 18 over the previous three years for making, possessing or distributing indecent images. These involved children as young as 10 years old. The NSPCC believes that these figures are ‘the tip of the iceberg’ and that sexting is becoming a normal part of teenage behaviour.

What is also clear is that, despite a few well-publicised cases, most children simply do not understand the legal and wider social issues that can arise from sexting and need information and guidance to help them make appropriate choices.

The law

Under the Protection of Children Act 1978 as amended by the Sexual Offences Act 2013, it is an offence to take, make, distribute, show, possess or advertise any indecent photographs of a person below the age of 18 years old.

As a result of effective child protection programmes, children often understand what is/is not appropriate behaviour in the context of adult behaviours towards them, but many do not know that the laws around sexting apply equally to photographs taken or shared by their friends and other children under the age of 18 and that they can be guilty of an offence simply by taking indecent photographs of themselves.

The Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 legislates against so called ‘revenge porn’ where private sexual photographs and videos are shared with others with the intention of causing distress to the victim. In addition, the Serious Crime Act 2015 also created a new offence of ‘sexual communication with a child’

(a child is defined for these purposes as someone under 16 years of age and the offender aged 18 or over).

Prosecutions

The legal risks were made clear last year when a 14-year-old boy was told that his details will be held on a police database for 10 years for the crime of making and distributing an indecent image of a child. He had sent a naked image of himself to a classmate.

Another case involved a girl under the age of 18 sending her boyfriend an explicit photograph of herself, which her boyfriend forwarded to others after an argument; both received police cautions.

Which children are more likely to ‘sext’?

Andy Phippen, Professor of Social Responsibility in IT at Plymouth University believes sexting is a cultural reality for many children and that there is no such thing as a typical sexting teenager. He argues that the technological advances made over the last few years have changed children’s behaviours and have normalised what might be unacceptable in an offline context.

His research indicates that children engage in sexting for a number of different reasons, such as to attract a partner, gain popularity and to shock or cause offence. Most do not reflect on the long-term implications.

Teenagers interviewed by Mr Phippen told him that they might forward indecent images 'for a laugh' rather than out of malice. There also appears to be a high degree of self-justification and victim blaming amongst those who do share images of others with one boy commenting "she shouldn't have sent it in the first place if she didn't want it to go further".

Fear of being judged is one of the key reasons why children do not report incidents to adults.

- This means that the child is often left trying to cope with the fall out themselves.

Education

- Schools are ideally placed to provide children with guidance and help and many, particularly in secondary education run regular sessions to reinforce key messages. Children need to understand the kinds of images that are unlawful. Many will not understand what is meant by "indecent" and may consider the images themselves to be acceptable.

Schools – legal responsibilities

- Schools should have written policies setting out what teachers should do if they suspect that children are sexting. A designated safeguarding

- lead officer or teacher should be available to provide assistance and to make decisions on any issues which may need referring to the Local Authority's Safeguarding team and/or the police.

- Generally, schools are not required to inform the police of all incidents involving sexting, but that may change. A Government select committee is looking into this area and has indicated that new guidance will be available to schools soon. It also recommends that schools should have a compulsory obligation to report sexting to the police on the basis that this will act as a "disincentive" for children to engage in this sort of behaviour.

Schools should record all incidents of sexting and set out details of the actions it took or didn't take and the reasons for this. Relevant factors that might determine whether the incident needs to be reported to the police include:

- A significant age difference between the sender/receiver
- Any external coercion involved or encouragement beyond the sender/receiver
- The child is more vulnerable than is usual
- The image is of a severe or extreme nature
- The situation is not isolated and the image has been more widely distributed
- This is not the first time children have been involved in a sexting act
- Other knowledge of either the sender/recipient may add cause for concern.

Advice and information is available from a number of sources

ChildLine

ChildLine's free app, "Zipit", has good one-liners children can use if they are asked to send naked or semi-naked pictures of themselves to others.

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP)

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection's (CEOP) Thinkuknow programme has some excellent age appropriate videos and provides a 24-hour service for individuals to report abuse.



Is the academisation of all schools still on the cards despite the apparent u turn?

The Chancellor announced in his March 2016 Budget statement that the Government intended to convert all state-funded schools in England to academy status by 2022. This represented a major reform of the English school system and provoked furious debate and widespread opposition which resulted in an announcement by the Secretary of State, Nicky Morgan, that she was abandoning plans to force all schools to convert.

The Queens Speech unveiled plans to target underperforming schools and, more controversially those maintained by cash strapped, unviable or underperforming local authorities.

Whilst much of the detail remains hazy, this is what has been announced:

1. A new Bill be will be published, entitled Education for All
2. Schools that are judged to be failing to meet “minimum performance thresholds” (not yet defined) will have to convert to academy status

3. Schools that are judged to be “good” or “outstanding” may be able to stay under local authority control, unless the local authority is underperforming or unviable. These concepts have not been explained in detail. Viability is likely to depend on how many schools within the area have already converted; where a critical mass of schools have converted, the local authority will not be considered to be viable. The concept of performance standards is likely to be linked to whether the local authority can bring about meaningful school improvement.
4. The Bill will legislate to ensure “all schools are funded fairly”, aiming to redress “historical unfairness” in school funding by introducing a national funding formula. This will, apparently, make sure that money is allocated to schools fairly and efficiently, but no detail has been made available yet.

Will all schools have to become academies?

Despite the much publicised u turn on forced academisation, the education think-tank CentreForum believe that the vast majority of schools will still be forced to convert. It has made predictions about academy status based on two assumptions. These are that a local authority is:

- Unviable: if less than half of the pupils in the area attend local authorities maintained schools
- Underperforming: if the performance of its maintained schools at either key stage 2

or key stage 4 is below the current national average for state-funded mainstream schools. Although these levels appear to be high, both are below the attainment element of the Department’s proposed coasting measure for schools, and assessment at both key stages is set to get tougher with the introduction of new assessment in primary and the introduction of new GCSEs.

If the Government used the same methodology, CentreForum argue that around 12,000 schools will be forced to convert under the local authority approach to school conversion. Currently, 15,000 schools have not yet converted to an academy, leaving just 3,000 under this analysis. Of these, around 640 are rated as outstanding.

It argues that “given the combination of voluntary conversion, academisation under the Education and Adoption Act and direction at local authority, it is possible that full academisation (or very close to it) could be achieved without forcing schools one at a time.”

If correct, the Government may well still achieve its published intention to see all schools become academies in the next six years.

You can read more on the report here.



Spotlight:

On the additional legal responsibilities owed by academy head teachers

Head teachers who are appointed as Directors of their Academy Trust owe important legal duties under the Companies Act 2006 which can easily be overlooked and land them in deep water if breached

Duty to act in the best interests of the academy

Under the Companies Act 2006, directors have a duty to act within the powers granted to them and in the best interests of the academy. Whilst head teachers must be able to demonstrate that they genuinely believe they are acting in the best interests of their school, they must also show that their actions are within the powers conferred on them by the Act. If actions taken are outside of this, they cannot be in the best interests of the academy, no matter how well intentioned the head may be.

Duty to act in good faith

This means that a head must act in a way that is most likely to promote the success of the academy and the children. This means that the head should consider:

- The likely long-term consequences of any decision
- The interests of the academy staff
- The need for the academy to foster good relationships with children, parents and other interested parties
- The impact the academy has on its community and environment
- Maintaining a reputation for high standard of conduct and academic achievement
- The need to act fairly between members of the academy's trust board.

This duty applies to all decisions made by the head and not just the formal decisions made by the whole board.

A good rule of thumb is that a decision will only be deemed to be in good faith if it is one that a reasonable and intelligent head could have concluded would promote the success of the academy. Head teachers therefore always need to have the best interests of the academy at the forefront of their decisions.

Duty to exercise independent judgment

This requires heads to exercise their own powers independently and exercise independent judgment. The head can delegate some decision-making responsibilities provided these are authorised by the constitution of the academy. If the head obtains professional or other advice, they are still expected to exercise their own judgment before deciding whether or not to follow it.

Duty to exercise care, skill and diligence

A head must demonstrate that they acted in a way that could be expected of a reasonable head teacher (with a similar general level of knowledge, skill and experience). Plus head teachers with specialist knowledge will be expected to demonstrate skills commensurate with their own expertise.

Duty to avoid conflicts of interest

A head teacher must avoid situations in which they have, or can have, a direct or indirect interest that conflicts with, or may conflict with, the academy's interests.

Duty not to accept benefits from third parties

Head teachers must not accept any benefit (including a bribe) given to them in an attempt to influence their decision, particularly in circumstances where there is a conflict of interest between what is in the academy's best interests, as opposed to the head's personal interests.

Duty to declare an interest in a proposed transaction or arrangement with the academy

A head must declare to other board members if they have any interest (direct or indirect) in any arrangement with the academy. This might occur where a family member of the head has applied for a role or a contract, or where the head has a personal financial interest in a company providing services to the academy.

What happens if a head breaches any of these duties?

The academy can bring a civil claim against any head that breaches these duties and, if it has suffered financial losses it could seek to recover these from the head. Plus, if the breach was sufficiently serious, the head can be dismissed with or without notice.

Any contract or other arrangement entered into by the head on behalf of the academy in breach of a duty would be void, though it could be open to the academy to ratify the agreement if it wished to do so.

Options open to academies

Some academies will prefer to agree terms where the new head has breached these obligations and set these out in a settlement agreement. The academy can agree not to pursue the head for any claims it may have against them in exchange for the head resigning and going "quietly". This mechanism can also be used to reinforce or introduce restrictive covenants and protect sensitive information being disclosed to others by the head.

The decision to litigate must be taken by the board and it will have to weigh up the time and cost involved in bringing a civil claim and the likelihood of success and of recovery of damages from the head. It may also wish to avoid adverse publicity that these sorts of cases generate. That said, Irwin Mitchell has had success with pursuing and recovering money for organisations previously and can help you reach the best result for your school.

To find out more contact:



Jane Anderson

Associate Solicitor, Commercial Litigation

T: +44(0)121 214 5447

E: jane.anderson@irwinmitchell.com



How to celebrate diversity and build an inclusive environment in your school



Stonewall and Metro Youth Chances research have found that nine in ten secondary school teachers say students in their schools are bullied, harassed or called names for being – or perceived to be – lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Three quarters of trans young people say they have experienced name-calling and 99 % of lesbian, gay or bisexual young people hear the phrases ‘that’s so gay’ or ‘you’re so gay’ in school. One in three lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans young people change their educational plans because of the bullying and discrimination they experience at school, and 32 % of trans young people say they have missed lessons due to discrimination or fear of discrimination.

Lots of schools are tackling homophobia, biphobia and transphobia and instead celebrating diversity and creating school environments that are inclusive of all young people.

If you're new to this work, here are 10 top tips to get you started, based on best practice from Stonewall members.

1. Get your policy right: An up-to-date school policy (such as an anti-bullying or equality policy) sends a clear signal that bullying on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity will not be tolerated and derogatory language is unacceptable in your school. Develop a pupil-friendly version so that pupils understand the different types of bullying that can occur.

2. Train staff: Whole-school training is the best way to ensure that all staff feel confident in challenging these issues in school. Stonewall runs Train the Trainer courses, which equip one member of your school staff with the tools, confidence and knowledge to train their colleagues. Following the course, your school automatically becomes a member of the School Champions programme, a network of 1,400 schools across England dedicated to celebrating diversity and building inclusive environments.

3. Challenge language and bullying consistently: Only 10% of lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils report that teachers challenge homophobic language every time they hear it. Make sure staff are equipped and confident to do so through training and check in with anyone who may need extra support. Developing a script or a set of template responses will equip staff to respond confidently and consistently. Use Stonewall's eye catching posters to raise awareness among pupils.

4 Take a whole-school approach and celebrate diversity: Provide ways through which everyone in the school community can get involved and celebrate your pupils, staff and families, including those who are lesbian,

gay, bisexual or trans, to make it clear your school accepts everyone without exception. Use assemblies, workshops, speakers and events to raise awareness and celebrate diversity.

5. Develop an inclusive curriculum: A better understanding of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people and issues will prevent homophobia, biphobia and transphobia from happening in school and help pupils to understand why it is hurtful.

6. Survey staff and pupils: Send out a survey to staff and pupils anonymously on their experiences of the bullying and language. This will help your school to see the areas which need improvement.

7. Create an action plan: Using the results from the survey to identify key priorities, draw up an action plan to tackle homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. Be sure to include actions to challenge gender stereotypes as well – as this helps prevent bullying.

8. Record and monitor bullying: Record and monitor incidents of homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying and language so you can identify any particular problem areas and measure progress over time.

9. Run a campaign: Use a campaign to raise awareness of the importance of tackling these issues and derogatory language in school. Use Stonewall's NoBystanders or Rainbow Laces campaigns for inspiration and provide ways for different groups to be involved.

10. Link up with others and celebrate success: Share experiences, tips and ideas with other schools on tackling these issues and celebrating diversity. Being a member of the School Champions programmes allows you to share best practice through regional seminars and events. Work with other organisations in your local community – such as the local authority, NHS services, sports clubs, local businesses, youth charities or religious centres – to promote LGBT equality. Contact Stonewall's Information service to find other organisations in your area.

Stonewall campaigns for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) people to be accepted without exception, by empowering individuals, transforming institutions, changing hearts and minds and changing laws.

To book onto a Train the Trainer course (and become a School Champion), please visit www.stonewall.org.uk/teachertraining

To access free educational resources, visit www.stonewall.org.uk/educationresources

For general information and guidance, please contact Stonewall's Information Service on **08000 50 20 20** or info@stonewall.org.uk

For questions about Stonewall's work in schools, please email education@stonewall.org.uk

My school story:

Ian Kelsey



Ian Kelsey is a well-known actor who has starred in Emmerdale, Blue Murder and Doctors. He has also had leading roles in theatre productions of Chicago, Shawshank Redemption and Legally Blonde. We catch up with Ian to ask him about his education and ambitions as a young, aspiring actor at theatre school.

What schools did you attend and what lessons did you enjoy most?

At Lowfields Secondary Modern in Acomb, a district of York, I loved anything practical, including woodwork, metal work and chemistry. History was also a big favourite learning about the industrial revolution.

A little later in life I found myself at Tech college, where I completed my three year apprenticeship as a vehicle builder at BREL building trains where I learned how to fabricate metal into different forms and rivet, braze or weld them into place.

My last educational experience was Guildford School of Acting where I loved everything that involved a large “jazz hand” and led me into my love of acting.

What were your aspirations as a child?

I can't remember having specific career aspirations – I was enjoying my childhood too much and in no rush to grow up.

Did you have any inspirational teachers and what impact did they have on you?

It was the English teacher at Lowfields who spotted the first twitching of a jazz hand and cast me as Widow Twanky in the school pantomime. I was given free reign and at one point during the show I can remember having the teachers in stitches, so I guess that's where the seed to my eventual career choice was sewn. Funnily enough, it was the very same English teacher that called me a 'cretin' because I used to have, and still do, a deep fear of reading, especially out loud.



What job did your teachers think you would be best suited for?

I was never asked what I wanted to do in later life - career advice seemed to be non-existent. I wish someone told me “the world is your oyster”. Children today have far more guidance available to them, which I envy.

When I'm watching TV with my six year old and there's a person picking oranges for Waitrose I say to him “now that's a job"! You may need a degree in chemistry to get there, but you can do whatever you want to do in life.

In my early career I built trains for six years and then moved to joinery work for a couple of years. This experience working on the trains on shifts has helped me to cope with working long hours in front of the camera. I enjoy keeping the energy up on set and bantering with the crew.

I only started drama school because I developed an allergy to cedar wood and was told that I would have to wear a mask or change my career. I thought that only people from London went to drama school and only applied when someone I knew from my local amateur theatre got in!

What is your role/job now?

I am an actor having played parts in Emmerdale, Blue Murder and Doctors. I'm currently taking some time out of the spot light to spend time with my young family and consider my next step in the acting world.

Ian Kelsey

 @iankelseyactor



Pupil attainment gap in Northern England needs to be tackled for Northern Powerhouse success

Study shows that schools in the North of England are below average

Improving school standards whilst giving businesses a greater say in education policy is vital to bridge the gap between the North and South if the Northern Powerhouse is to be a success. Our recommendation follows a new study published by the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR), which reveals that exam results in schools in the North of England lag behind those in the rest of the UK.

The study echoes an earlier Ofsted warning that without better education, the Government's Northern Powerhouse plan to create an economic hub in the North will "splutter and die".

The IPPR report said the percentages of pupils achieving the benchmark five GCSEs at grades A*-C were 55% in the North compared to 57.3% in England as a whole. In London the level was 60.9%.

The report says that annual funding per secondary school pupil is roughly £5,700, compared to £7,000 per pupil in London, and backs the Government's plan to improve Northern schools through a new national funding formula.

Expert Opinion

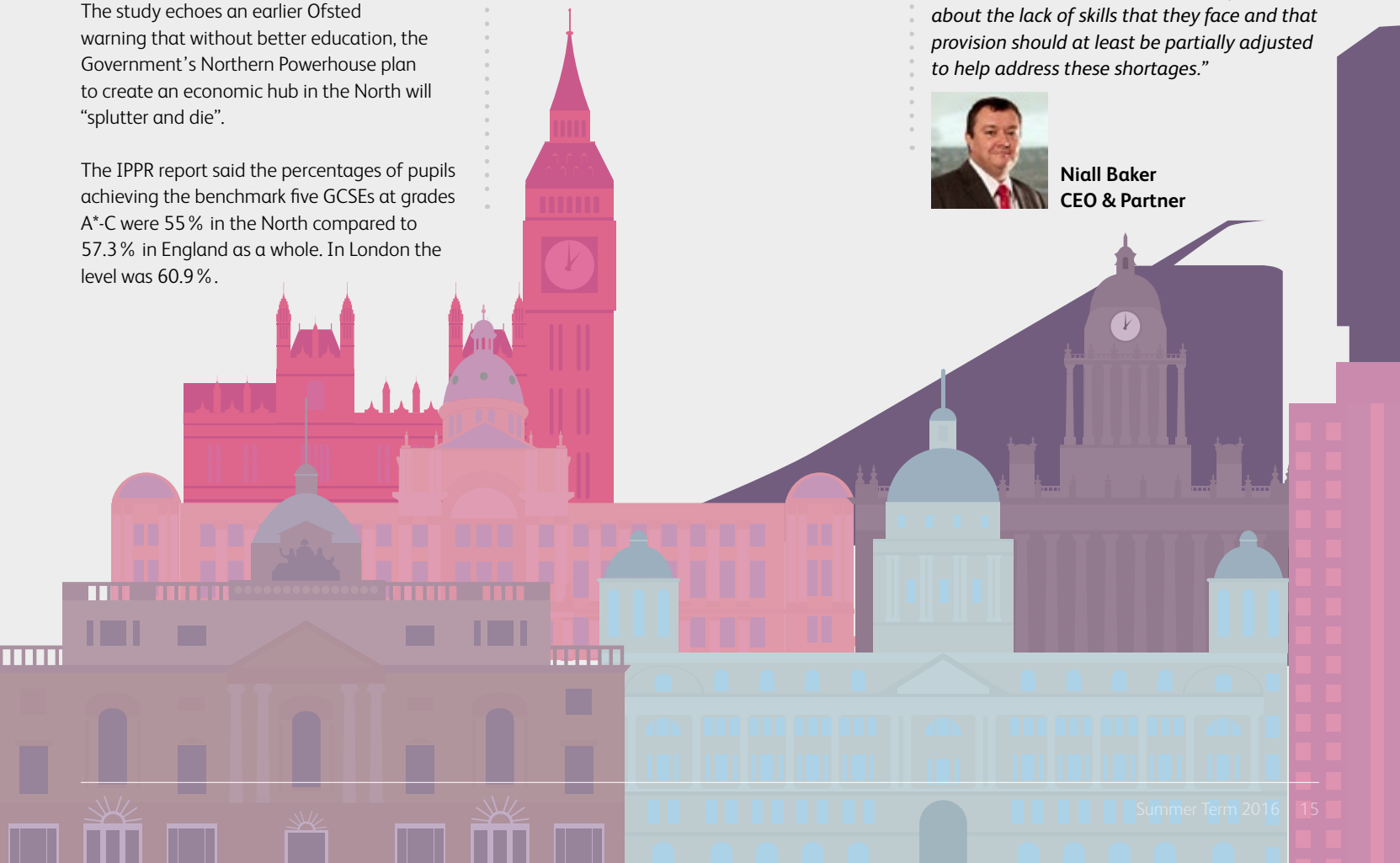
"The Northern Powerhouse and other economic wealth spreading initiatives should be about more than just devolution and investing in new and improved infrastructure. It's about the future of cities and in order to make a difference, it must start with young people.

"Last year our UK Powerhouse report made a number of policies in relation to education as part of our call for a radical rethink by the Government into how it rebalances the UK economy. Education is vital and not only do we need to improve attainment in secondary schools, businesses also need greater involvement in policy."

"According to our report, over a third of businesses stated that changes to the current education policy would boost economic growth in the region that they are based in. The study also recommended that businesses should be able to inform education providers about the lack of skills that they face and that provision should at least be partially adjusted to help address these shortages."



Niall Baker
CEO & Partner



How to help autistic children reach their full potential



Earlier this year, the National Autistic Society held its first ever Schools' Autism Awareness Week and wrote to the Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, calling for all teachers to receive autism training. Mark Lever, Chief Executive of the National Autistic Society, explains why it's so important that schools, including both teaching staff and students, understand autism.

With more than 1 in 100 children on the autism spectrum, and over 70% in mainstream schools, every teacher and student will encounter autistic people in their classes.

How well do schools really understand autism?

Over 99% of people in the UK say they've heard of autism, but autistic people and families say that knowing there's something called autism doesn't mean they are understood – 87% of them say the public don't understand autism in a meaningful way.

This lack of understanding is clearly having an impact in schools, with surveys indicating that 63% of children on the autism spectrum have faced bullying, often due to fellow students misunderstanding their behavior. This can have a devastating impact on their self-esteem, in some cases creating problems that last into adulthood.

What is autism?

Being autistic means you see, hear and feel the world in a different, often more intense, way to other people. There are roughly 120,000 school-aged children on the autism spectrum in England and none of them will experience autism in the exact same way. Some people may be skilled in certain areas while others find social situations and change such a challenge that they face almost unbearable levels of anxiety.

Understanding autism

Awareness sounds like a relatively small thing but it can have a transformative effect. Autistic people and their families don't expect or want people to be experts. But having some knowledge about the situations autistic people might find difficult and how they may respond will make a huge difference. It would reduce instances of misunderstanding and bullying, help autistic people feel more accepted and to reach their full potential.

Our role

To make this happen, the National Autistic Society encouraged schools across the country to get involved in their first ever Schools' Autism Awareness Week and help their students and staff improve their understanding of autism and raise vital funds for the charity. We were overwhelmed by the response, with almost two thousands schools signing up to get involved.

We know how busy schools are so we created a range of resources and activities so they could do as little or as much as they like – from Early Years Foundation Stage right up to Key Stage 4. Some schools adjusted their lesson plans to include autism, making use of our resources, autism word searches and book lists.

It was a brilliant week and truly remarkable to see the sheer range of activities. None of this would have been possible without the commitment of staff within each school to improve understanding of autism.

Every teacher should have autism training

But autism awareness shouldn't be a thing that happens just once a year. We believe that all teachers, from their first day, should be given the training they'll need to teach autistic students. Yet, autism training is not mandatory for teachers and some start school without any autism or even special educational needs training at all. People are often shocked when we tell them this. How can a teacher help an autistic student if they don't understand the basics about autism?

Of those surveyed, 58% of children and young people on the autism spectrum said that the single thing that would make school better for them is 'if teachers understood autism'. Research by Ambitious about Autism found that over half of parents of children with autism have kept their child off school because of a lack of appropriate support in the classroom.

It's not only children on the autism spectrum and their families who think compulsory autism training would make a huge difference. A survey of teachers by the teachers' union NASUWT also found that 60% believe that they haven't had the training they need to teach students who are on the autism spectrum. And 11,500 teaching staff have signed up to get regular updates, tips and

resources on autism through the National Autistic Society's award-winning **MyWorld** service.

We have asked the government to help

This is why, this Schools' Autism Awareness Week, the National Autistic Society has teamed up with Ambitious about Autism and wrote an **open letter** to the Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, calling on her to include autism in the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) framework for England, which the Government is currently reviewing. Over 7,000 people signed our letter, including MPs, autism experts and education professionals, in just a couple of weeks. We have asked the Education Secretary to listen to their voices and take action.



120,000

School-aged children on the autism spectrum in England

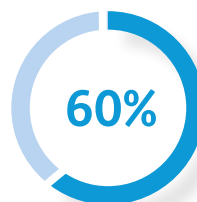
1 in 100

children are on the autistic spectrum

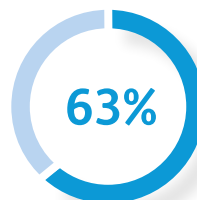


70%

of autistic children are in mainstream schools



of teachers believe that they haven't had the training they need to teach students who are on the autism spectrum



of children on the autism spectrum have faced bullying



7,000

People signed the National Autistic Society's open letter calling for autism to be included in the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) framework



11,500

Have signed up to get regular updates, tips and resources on autism through the National Autistic Society's MyWorld service.

87%



of families affected by autism say the public don't understand the condition in a meaningful way

99% of people in the UK say they've heard of autism





Think it Create it

A new approach to delivering the computing curriculum

We recently met Jon Bromhall of Think it Create it to find out more about his exciting approach to delivering the computing curriculum for KS1 and KS2.

What is Think it Create it?

Think it Create it is a community interest company supporting schools to deliver computing in a fun and interactive way. This is done through the use of hands-on practical activities using a wide range of hi-tech equipment. The programmable Lego is certainly a great hit with the pupils and we also use Raspberry Pi computers which allows greater interaction with our surroundings.

Why Think it Create it?

The name came about from a simple philosophy: think of an idea then create it. Children come up with wonderful and sometimes slightly wacky ideas and it was clear there was an opportunity to develop this into an exciting service offering for schools. Even with very limited programming skills, children create some really amazing programs or animated stories.

What services are offered?

Our main service is to come to schools and run a full half-day session with a class. This could be a Lego WeDo activity where the children work in pairs and build a Lego model and then program it to move and make noises or react to external interaction. These sessions are great

because they appeal to all academic levels including those for whom English is not their first language due to the visual nature of the task.

The activities are often tailored to the school's themed subject. For example, if creative writing is on the cards, the activities are adapted to stimulate story telling or the topic being covered.

As well as running sessions directly with pupils, we also provide training for teachers in areas such as computer programming in Scratch. The additional requirement to teach computer programming can be daunting and certainly time consuming. The introductory programming course gives teachers enough confidence to teach the basic principles of programming.

What areas do you cover?

We cover all areas of the national computing curriculum. This means programming, sound recording, making and editing music, understanding algorithms, controlling and reacting to the world around us, simple circuits, blogging, websites and apps.

What age range is it aimed at?

The new computing curriculum covers Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 so all of our activities focus on supporting this and other areas of the national curriculum.

Lego WeDo and Scratch programming is aimed at year 3 and upwards but we do have simpler activities for years 1 and 2 and more complex ones for year 6.

What motivated you to set it up?

IT, especially programming, is a very dry subject but it doesn't need to be. I think if we are to inspire our next generation of engineers and programmers, we need to get to children early and show that it can be good fun, rewarding and relevant.

What skills do these sessions help develop?

When you observe a class carrying out a practical activity such as Lego WeDo, it is fairly difficult to identify the pupils who are at the top of the class academically. In fact those who struggle academically often flourish when given such a hands on, visual task to complete.

However, regardless of ability, all activities allow for many skills to be honed; team work, communication, motor skills, visualisation and problem solving skills can be seen to be demonstrated during these activities and are evidenced-based.

Not all pupils will be academic wiz-kids but the next great app developer or mechanical engineer might be amongst them.

How does all of this fit in with the national curriculum?

The introduction of the new computing curriculum takes children back to the basics of computing and understanding how we interact with technology in our everyday lives. At Think it Create it, we believe computing is an enabler subject, not a stand-alone one. It can be adapted to support many areas of the wider curriculum such as English, maths, foreign languages and design technology.

For this reason, we have designed a curriculum matcher, which links all of our services to different parts of the national curriculum.

What do children and teachers make of it?

We've had great feedback and never tire of hearing the excited shriek of a child when a Lego model they programmed and built comes to life.

“The children got way more than we bargained for out of the sessions. They collaborated on the activities working together to build a Lego alligator. The children had a really fun session, the learning was top draw and it fitted wonderfully with the curriculum.”

- Mark Currell, Head of Roade Primary School, Northamptonshire

To find out more, contact:



Jon Bromhall

Founder & Director

M: +44(0)7746 905 302

E: jon@thinkitcreateit.co.uk

W: www.thinkitcreateit.co.uk





TAXES

Tax considerations for educational establishments providing living accommodation

Part 2

In our previous edition of **Focus on Education (Spring 2016)** we looked at the provision of living accommodation and the available exemptions from a tax charge where the employee satisfies the “job related” rules. **Part 1** explained how HMRC calculates the benefits where the provision of living accommodation does not meet the exemptions.

There are a number of benefits that can be associated with the provision of living accommodation that need to be considered separately.

1 Living accommodation

The benefit in kind charge on the provision of living accommodation is dependent on the cost of the property to the employer. There are two ways in which the benefit can be calculated and which one is used depends on whether the accommodation cost greater than £75,000 or less.

The cost of the living accommodation for this purpose is calculated on the following basis:

- The amount spent by the person/organisation providing the property in acquiring it, plus
- The amount spent by that person/organisation on improving it prior to the relevant tax year, less
- Any amount paid by the employee to reimburse any of the above costs or for the grant of a tenancy agreement.

It is necessary for the employer to review the situation each year to determine if any improvements have taken the property cost to above £75,000. Repairs and decorating would not normally be regarded as improvements.

Once the cost of the property has been determined it will be necessary to calculate the taxable benefit on the following basis.

Cost less than £75,000

Where the cost of the property is less than £75,000 the benefit is the greater of:

The annual value of the property, or the rent paid less any rent paid by the employee.

In the vast majority of cases where the employer does not own the property the benefit will be equivalent to the rent paid by the employer. However the “annual value” of the property will generally be used if the property is owned, because for property situated in the UK the annual value is based on the rental values that were established back in the 1970’s. For newer properties it is necessary to estimate the rateable value as if the property existed back in the 1970’s. These amounts are significantly lower than the current rental value.

Cost greater than £75,000

Where the property cost greater than £75,000 the benefit is calculated on the same basis as those under £75,000 however an additional charge is levied on costs over £75,000. This additional charge is calculated by applying the official rate of interest at the beginning of the tax year (currently 3%) to the excess over £75,000.

Example

If a property cost £200,000 and had a rental value of £500 (based on the 1970 figures) the living accommodation benefit would be:

Step 1 - calculate the original benefit as if the property was less than £75,000. This would be £500.

Step 2 – calculate the additional charge (£200,000 less £75,000 = £125,000 x 3%). This would be £3,750. The benefit would therefore be 4,250.

Please note – the calculation is based on “cost” and not market value. So if an employer bought a property in the 1950’s for say £60,000 this may have a current market value today of say, £500,000. This increase in value would not affect the benefit calculation provided the “cost” to the employer at the beginning of the tax year was less than £75,000.

However, there are special rules that can apply if the property cost more than £75,000 that result in the properties market value being used to calculate step 2 above. These rules apply if, at the date the employee first occupied the property, the employer had an interest in the property throughout the previous six years.

For example, if an employer bought a property for Glenn to occupy at a cost of £200,000 in July 1999 the benefit calculation for him at step 2 will be based on £125,000. However, if Glenn left employment in 2015 and the company then provided the property to Paul, when the current market value is £500,000, the benefit calculation at step 2 for Paul will be based on £425,000. This is because when the property was first provided to Paul it cost the employer more than £75,000 and the employer had owned it for at least the previous six years.

2 Furniture

The most common scenario that arises is where an employer provides furniture because the property is let furnished from a landlord. The provision of the furniture is therefore within the rent paid and no additional benefit applies.

If an employer furnishes the property, it is necessary to work out the value to the employee of being allowed to use this which will depend upon whether the employer retains ownership of the furniture or if it belongs to the employee. If the employee simply buys new furniture and the employer reimburses the cost on the understanding that the furniture belongs to the employee, then a benefit in kind will arise on the amount paid by the employer.

Where the employer retains ownership and allows the employee to use it a benefit in kind arises on the market value at the time it was first provided to an employee. The benefit is 20% of this value per annum. So if the employer provided furniture with a value of £5,000 the taxable benefit would be £1,000 per annum. This applies, even if the employee is provided with the furniture for more than five years. It may therefore be worthwhile reviewing any furniture provided to an employee for a number of years to ascertain if it would be cheaper to actually gift the furniture to the employee.

Where furniture has been provided to an employee an additional tax charge can arise if the furniture is then sold/gifted to either the same employee or another employee.

3 Payment of household costs

Where the employer pays for household costs, such as utilities, they are taxed as additional benefits in kind based on the cost to the employer, unless they can be specifically identified as business costs. Where an employee is provided with job-related living

Example

If a desk was purchased at a cost of £1,000 and used by employee 1 at their home for two years and then sold to employee 2 for £50 the benefit position would be:

Employee 1 – the benefit would be two years at a value of £200 (£1,000 x 20%)

Employee 2 – the benefit would be the original cost, less the amount paid and less the value of benefits already charged to employees.

That would be £550 (£1000 less £50 and £400). This would apply even if £50 was the true market value at the time of the purchase.

accommodation that does not attract a benefit on the provision of living accommodation this exemption also extends to the employer paying the employees Council tax and water rates. If the employee is required to work at home under a homeworking arrangement then the employer may be able to pay for additional household costs that arise whilst working at home. HMRC will allow an employer to reimburse up to £4 per week (£18 per month) without requiring supporting documentation of the additional cost.

For additional information on the taxation of living accommodation, please contact:



Paul Spenceley

Tax Manager

T: +44(0)113 220 6207

M: +44(0)7885 228 35

E: paul.spenceley@irwinmitchell.com

Can Acivico Energy cut your school energy costs?



Need to cut costs – take control of your energy

For many years, schools have controlled heating systems manually through programmers, time clocks or simply through the judgement of site managers & supervisors.

As the size and complexity of schools increases and with energy now accounting for a significant proportion of the schools budget, the management and control of energy use within the building is important. Creating and retaining comfortable learning conditions, reducing waste and making savings on energy costs are becoming important priorities for schools.

How Acivico can help your school

Managing and monitoring energy consumption through Acivico's Building Energy Management System (BEMS) can achieve 10%-20% saving compared to individual controllers such as time clocks.

The continuous monitoring of the building through BEMS enables the building operator to have a greater understanding of energy usage, which often leads to highlighting problem areas where plant is operating out of hours resulting in unnecessary energy being used. Acivico's BEMS service can help to improve management information, benefiting forward planning and costing. It can also encourage staff awareness.

An important part of BEMS is weather compensation and optimisation. Weather compensation is a popular form of controlling wet heating systems where radiators are fitted and system designed. It is an automatic and continuous element of control which varies the flow temperature generated by the boiler as the weather gets warmer thus maintaining a constant space temperature whilst minimising the amount of energy being used.

The “thinking” clock

Optimisation could be described as a thinking clock. It controls the time at which the heating system is started so that the preheat period is only as long as it is required, based on the desired internal temperature at occupation, the thermal efficiency of the building and external conditions. This function is also applied to the finishing time of occupation and the heating turning off.

Both situations provide considerable energy savings and a function, which is difficult to manage by hand.

In monitoring plant & equipment, BEMS now has the capability of providing alarms to alert site personnel of failure or that conditions are outside of limits.

With improvements in technology BEMS has the ability to communicate with a remote 'Front End' which can be monitored 24/7 by trained staff who can respond to the alarms and in a large number of cases remotely resolve the fault without the need of site attendance by a field engineer and the subsequent call-out charge, thus saving downtime and cost to the school.

Together with regular energy health checks Acivico's knowledge and expertise in this area has made the BEMS service a popular option with many schools.

To talk to an Acivico energy expert please contact **Ian Simpson** on **0121 303 6456** or email **bems@acivico.co.uk**

CASE LAW UPDATE

Can criticising a teacher give them grounds to resign and claim unfair dismissal?

Yes, if it is unjustified according to the EAT in *Bethnal Green v Shoreditch Education Trust v Dippenaar*.

Facts

Ms Dippenaar was employed as a PE teacher from 2006 until 2013. She was promoted on a number of occasions and her teaching had been consistently highly rated. However, immediately following the appointment of a new Head of Faculty/Director of Learning, Ms Dippenaar's teaching was criticised and she received negative assessments. She resigned from her job, at which time she was aged 39 and had reached the top of her salary scale through length of service progression.

She brought claims in the Employment Tribunal for constructive unfair dismissal and age discrimination, alleging that she had been forced out because the school had a practice of replacing experienced teachers with cheaper, less experienced employees.

The Tribunal found that Ms Dippenaar was entitled to resign in response to criticism of her work. It said that the school's recent assessments of her teaching were in stark contrast to those that went before and, in the absence any reasonable explanation, meant that she had been subjected to an unjustified performance management process with a view to securing her resignation or dismissal. It also upheld her complaint of age discrimination. The school appealed against both findings.

Decision

The EAT rejected the school's appeal against the finding of constructive dismissal. Subjecting an individual to a performance management

process without cause was easily capable of being a repudiatory breach of contract which damaged the relationship of trust and confidence between employer and employees.

However, the appeal against the finding of age discrimination was upheld. Although there were rumours around the school that younger staff were being appointed because they were cheaper, there was no evidence that this was a "practice" (something that required more than one incident).

Tips for schools

The school was always going to face an uphill struggle defending the claim of constructive dismissal because there was no evidence that this teacher's performance had in fact declined. In the absence of a reasonable explanation, the Tribunal was entitled to believe that performance had been raised in the hope that it would demoralise the teacher and cause them to leave. This is simply bad practice and could also give rise to complaints of bullying and harassment and potentially also to personal injury claims if the individual becomes ill.

The age discrimination claim is interesting as it was brought as an indirect age discrimination claim which requires individuals to demonstrate a group disadvantage, something that is more difficult if only one person is affected. Where an individual believes that they have been discriminated against because they are of a certain age, they may be able to bring a direct discrimination claim. Generally, schools will not be able to cite cost alone to justify employing a cheaper teacher, even if they are in financial difficulties.

Was the dismissal of a Christian teacher who stood by her sex offender husband an act of religious discrimination?

Yes on the facts in *Pendleton v Derbyshire County Council and The Governing Body of Glebe Junior School*.

Facts

Ms Pendleton, a practising Anglican Christian, was employed as a junior school teacher. Her husband was the headmaster of another local junior school which was part of the same cluster group meaning there was a degree of collaborative working between them.

Mr Pendleton was arrested on suspicion of downloading indecent images of children and voyeurism. The voyeurism involved using a camera hidden in a pen to photograph boys in a state of undress in the school changing rooms. There was no evidence that Ms Pendleton knew about her husband's activities but the head teacher of her school said that she would not be able to support her if she remained with him and he was convicted (which he later was).

Ms Pendleton decided to stay with her husband. She was satisfied he had demonstrated unequivocal repentance and remaining married was consistent with her marriage vows. She said that she would not condone or give the impression that she condoned his actions.

After Mr Pendleton's conviction, Ms Pendleton was called to a disciplinary hearing and dismissed for gross misconduct. The Chair of Governors believed that Ms Pendleton's decision to maintain a relationship with her husband had eroded her suitability to carry out the safeguarding responsibilities of her role and that the choices she had made in her personal life were in direct contravention to the ethos of the school. Her internal appeal was unsuccessful.

She brought a successful claim of unfair dismissal, but her claim for discrimination, initially failed. She appealed against the finding in respect of her discrimination claim.

Decision

To succeed, Ms Pendleton had to show that the school would have dismissed anyone who refused its instruction to divorce their spouse in the same circumstances, but that this instruction caused her "particular disadvantage" because of her faith. As a staunch Christian, she argued that it was more difficult for her to divorce because of the commitment made to God than it is for another who made that commitment only to him/herself.

The EAT found that the policy to dismiss Ms Pendleton was an act of indirect discrimination which put people of who believed in the sanctity of marriage at a particular disadvantage.

Tips for schools

Alleging that a member of staff has exercised poor judgment in relation to relationships outside of school will not normally constitute misconduct, let alone gross misconduct. It might however, be fair to dismiss on the grounds of "some other substantial reason". It is important to set out carefully what grounds are being relied upon as mistakes at this stage can render, what might otherwise have been a fair dismissal, unfair.

Guidance issued by the Department of Education makes it clear that the behaviour of a partner or other family members may raise concerns and require careful consideration by an employer as to whether there may be a potential risk to children and young people in the workplace. That does not, of itself, give a school the right to dismiss a member of staff before properly examining whether there is a risk. Schools must be able to demonstrate why they have reached the decision to dismiss and, why there is a risk in continuing to employ the individual. In this case, had the school considered alternatives to dismissal and been open minded during the course of the investigation and disciplinary then there may have been a different outcome.

These are highly unusual facts and the issue finding of indirect discrimination is problematic, not least because many people may consider that they have responsibilities towards their marriage vows, unaffected by any religious ethos. Equally, others with the same religious ethos as Ms Pendleton might have chosen to have divorced their husband in the same circumstances.

Can an employee blow the whistle about a cramped workstation?

They might be able to according to the EAT in *Morgan v Royal Mencap Society*, but only if the employee can demonstrate that they reasonably believed that their complaints were in the public interest. This can only be determined at a full hearing.

Facts

Ms Morgan worked for the charity for almost three years. During her employment she injured her knee and complained on three separate occasions to senior staff that her working area was cramped and that this was adversely affecting her knee. We don't know how Mencap reacted to these complaints but clearly, whatever steps they took were not to Ms Morgan's satisfaction and, she resigned claiming both constructive unfair dismissal and that she had suffered a detriment as a result of having made a protected disclosure.

In order to get past the post on her whistle-blowing complaint, she had to demonstrate that she had a reasonable belief that the disclosure of wrongdoing (in this case her lack of desk space) was in the public interest. When pressed on this point, she said that she believed the public would be "shocked" by her working conditions and that these presented a health and safety risk to others. She then went on to say "the public ought to know about charities that behave in this manner". Mencap, not unreasonably, thought that her complaint could not be said to be in the public interest as it only affected her and it made an application to strike out this part of her claim at a preliminary hearing.

Mencap was initially successful and Ms Morgan appealed to the EAT.

Decision

The EAT said that the case should proceed to a full hearing to determine if Ms Morgan did reasonably believe that her complaints were in the public interest. This is because there is a high threshold which must be satisfied before a claim can be struck out before hearing any evidence.

Tips for schools

This case again demonstrates that tribunals will not strike out claims, of even seemingly hopeless cases, at an early stage. Tribunals will be expected to test by evidence whether the individual bringing the claim a) did believe that their disclosure was in the public interest and b) whether that subjective belief was a reasonable one to hold. We can only hope that common sense prevails when the case is heard. The "public interest" test introduced in 2013 to prevent individuals being able to bring whistle-blowing claims on the basis of a breach of their own contractual rights is creaking at the joints. The case of *Chestertons*, which involved an estate agent who complained that profit figures had been manipulated to reduce the bonus paid to him and around 100 of his peers, is due to be heard by the Court of Appeal in the autumn. We hope that the Court of Appeal will take the opportunity to clarify what is meant by the "public interest".



ACAS Schools Forum **acas** **IM** irwinmitchell

The next few years will be an interesting and challenging period for the education sector as the Government progresses with its academies and free schools programmes. For many school leaders this means becoming employers for the first time.

ACAS provide free and impartial information and advice to employers on all aspects of workplace relations and employment law. They give advice and guidance to 800,000 callers a year via a telephone helpline and promote good practice through training.

They keep up to date on the latest developments through links with the Department of Education, schools, education Trade Unions and advisors of organisations in the education sector. The breadth and depth of our expertise puts ACAS in a unique position to help schools establish and maintain good employment relations from the start.

In September 2016, in partnership with Irwin Mitchell's specialists in the education sector, ACAS are launching the ACAS Schools Forum as part of our continued commitment to supporting the education sector.

The Schools Forum will be a free networking group for School HR, School business managers and School bursars. Membership is open to all types of education establishments e.g. maintained schools, academies, free schools and colleges.

The Schools Forum will hold quarterly meetings and members will have access to an ACAS Schools

Forum blog to share their views, experiences and insights on the world of employment relations, including areas such as conflict management, health and wellbeing, employee engagement and sector news and updates.

Events cover topics from within the HR/ Employment law field and presentations will be given from specialists within the education sector. The Forum is designed to share best practice and support HR professionals in their role.

The Schools Forum is free to join. To register your interest please email **Gino Greco** at ACAS on ggreco@acas.org.uk.

 0800 056 2487

 www.irwinmitchell.com

 @irwinmitchell

For a list of our offices visit our website