

Schools Speed read

Boy aged five with autism expelled from school

In our diary: Boy excluded from reception just before autism diagnosis. Plus: accounts go awol; a new academy big-earner; costly free school plan lost in the woods

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Adele Beadle's son was permanently excluded from his infants' school last June. He was formally diagnosed as on the autistic spectrum in July. Photograph: Frantzesco Kangaris for the Guardian

How young are children who are expelled from England's schools? We are hearing of worrying cases where pupils may be leaving mainstream education barely after entering it. Among these is the case of Adele Beadle's son. Last week, Education Guardian met this mother whose child was permanently excluded from a reception class, weeks after turning five.

The boy, whom we are not naming, was expelled from Pickhurst infant academy in Bromley, south London, last June, just as he was about to be formally diagnosed as autistic. Nine months on, now aged almost six, he is still out of school, having spent the second half of last year with no education at all.

The boy was excluded permanently, without having had any fixed-term exclusions imposed, says his family, on the day of an incident in which a teaching assistant was left with a damaged thumb and after what the school told his mother were "numerous behavioural incidents".

Beadle argues the behavioural problems were generally minor and that the school should not have permanently excluded the child without a lengthier investigation. He was assessed as on the autistic spectrum by Bromley Healthcare on 1 July last year.

The family challenged the school's decision at an independent tribunal, which recommended governors reconsider because the school had not fully followed procedures. School governors then did so, but stood by their original decision.

The boy was out of education completely until January, when the council in neighbouring Lewisham, where the family lives, placed him in part-time out-of-school provision for excluded children.

His mother says: "It's heartbreaking. I do not know how they can do that to a five-year-old who, because of his autism, was only beginning to learn the rules of behaviour."

The school's headteacher, Leonie Osborne, says: "The school has a number of policies and procedures in place which comply with statutory guidance. In order to comply with the Data Protection Act we ensure that personal information relating to individual pupils ... is kept confidential and therefore do not comment on their individual circumstances."

Where have all the academy accounts gone?

Why is it impossible to find published 2014-15 accounts for some academy trusts on their websites, given that the government's academy accounting rules say they had to be online by the end of January?

We have been trying to access accounts for all the major chains. As of early last week it seemed impossible to find last year's accounts for Bright Tribe, the Stockport-based group that was given a share of £5m by ministers last year to sponsor schools in the north. We also searched in vain for accounts of the Bedfordshire East Multi-Academy Trust (Bemat). Another chain, Christian group Chapel St, was four weeks late with its accounts thanks to "complications" over site valuations and "the failure of certain external bodies to deliver the information that our auditors required".

Bright Tribe tells us its accounts were submitted on time to the DfE's Education Funding Agency but that their publication was delayed by an extension that was granted because "our auditors are now liaising with the technical team at the EFA as we wish to enhance some of the reporting aspects of the accounts".

Bemat did not respond to requests for comment. The DfE said extensions to the January deadline were allowed in "exceptional circumstances". It offered no comment on specific cases.

The issue of accountability for academy trusts continues to be one we will be watching.

High-earners league table: new entrant

Meanwhile, another high earner in education's new league table of well-paid academy chief executives has come to our attention. John Tomasevic, of the seven-school Nottingham-based Torch Academy Gateway Trust, received £270,000-£275,000 in 2014-15, its annual accounts reveal, although the trust said the figure included "retrospective payments" from the previous year, and that his true salary was £249,604.

That figure would still put him in the top five of our unofficial list of top-paid CEOs, ahead of the leaders of all of England's largest chains except Sir Daniel Moynihah, of the Harris Federation. The trust says the remuneration reflects Tomasevic's responsibilities as executive head of seven schools and leader of two teacher training programmes.

Costly free school plans lost in the woodlands

A free school in Bromley, controversially expected to be sited on former woodland despite protests, has been put on hold for a year. This is a setback for a project that, we can reveal, already seems to have cost the taxpayer an eight-figure sum in buying the land.

The Beckenham academy, not far from Pickhurst infants in Bromley, south London, is now scheduled to open in September 2017, rather than this year. The academy trust behind it, Education for the 21st Century, also known as E21C, said the DfE had decided that "due to the necessary planning processes the construction of the site will be delayed".

As we reported in January, the 11-acre site was bought for E21C by the Education Funding Agency. Now we have learned how much it cost: Land Registry records document the princely sum of £16m being paid for the site, in advance of planning permission.

Paul Murphy, E21C's chief executive, tells us: "The trust ... cannot make any comment on free school policy. However, it is worth noting that the deferral is due to local planning issues, not central government policy." Perhaps central government needs to pay more attention to local planning.

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