

# News

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## US researchers to study knowledge networks in north-east England

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EXCLUSIVE



Three US academics will travel thousands of miles across the Atlantic to run a research project in the north-east of England to map how teachers share knowledge.

Michigan State University was invited by schools consultancy firm Evidence Based Education, located near Darlington, to replicate studies in the US on the information networks of teachers.

The Michigan School Programme Information project will now send three researchers to work alongside the Shotton Hall Research School, near Durham, for a year.

Stuart Kime (pictured), director of education at Evidence Based Education, said the new research should help make the north-east much better connected.

"There's certainly a perception in the north-east that there is a London and south focus that leads to policy which doesn't take into account the massive physical differences people have to travel here."

News of the cross-Atlantic project, funded to the tune of more than £20,000 by the university, comes after academies minister Lord Agnew excused his government's track record at a school in the north because of its "remoteness".

In a letter to a union leader, Agnew

said helping the beleaguered Whitehaven Academy, based in Cumbria in north-west England, had been "very challenging due to its remoteness".

The academy had been at the centre of a row with parents and local officials over the state of the school buildings and failing standards by the trust's former sponsor Bright Tribe.

School leaders in the north – particularly the north-east – have long highlighted how they feel some regions have been neglected by the government.

For instance, the north-east does not have an Opportunity Area – 12 regions awarded £6 million each to tackle entrenched inequality.

Others have also pointed out that no schools in Northumberland and only two in Cumbria were successful in the government's latest strategic school improvement funding round. The funding

mostly went to northern cities such as Manchester, Sheffield and Newcastle.

Michael Merrick, deputy headteacher at St Cuthbert's primary school in Cumbria, said: "We have excellent educators in our region but also some significant challenges, and research which can help us map our practice and identify strategies for improvement will be welcomed."

Geography was a big challenge in the region, and stronger networks to help overcome this will prove more useful than "finger-wagging criticisms from afar", he added.

The Michigan project will launch in October and report back in the summer. Shotton Hall Research School has identified three issues – literacy, numeracy and pastoral care – that teachers in the north-east want more information about.

Researchers will contact heads of teaching and learning in the region to collate a list of experts they call on for help, called "knowledge brokers" and "influencers".

Shotton Hall Research School will also produce infographics and videos to explain who schools can contact for information on a literacy, numeracy or pastoral issue.

Kime said the project will reveal where the "dead ends" for information and connectivity are in the region.



## Ofsted taskforce targets 420 'illegal' schools

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The number of potentially illegal schools identified by Ofsted has risen to 420, up from 359 in March.

However, only 55 schools have been closed or ceased to operate illegally since the watchdog established a special team to deal with the issue in 2016.

Of the 55 settings that have closed or ceased operating illegally, 10 have closed and 45 are complying with the current legislation, Ofsted told *Schools Week*.

Under current government guidance, if five or more pupils attend an institution for 18 hours a week, it must be registered as a school and subject to inspection.

The latest data shows that by the end of July Ofsted had conducted 274 inspections of suspected unregistered schools, up from 192 in March, and issued 63 warning notices, up from 50 earlier in the year.

Warning notices are issued at the end of an inspection if the inspector believes the setting is

operating illegally as a school.

The number of schools to have closed or changed their ways rose from 38 to 55 between March and July.

The figures are from the latest management information published by Ofsted's £1 million-a-year illegal schools taskforce.

The team was set up to clamp down on settings that educate children without being properly registered.