

He's done it again

Hayward, Williams and McCarra on Fergie's triumph **Sport page 1**



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Flu plan to award GCSEs without exam

Exam boards may base grades on coursework alone if virus stops tests

Polly Curtis and Sarah Boseley

Exam boards are working on contingency plans to award children GCSE and A-level grades based on coursework marks if they are unable to attend an exam because of swine flu, the schools minister, Jim Knight, has revealed.

Five schools and a nursery have now closed after children were diagnosed with the H1N1 virus and some have had to urgently reschedule practical tests for art and music GCSEs scheduled for this week. There are now fears for the Sats tests, due to be taken by 600,000 11-year olds next week, and the GCSE and A-level exams, which are scheduled to run through to the end of June.

John Dunford, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said: "Schools are extremely worried about the exams, GCSEs, AS and A-levels. They need to know what to do if one of the pupils or staff is ill. They want to know what the contingency plans are for external examinations."

One further person, an adult living in the south-east who has returned from Mexico, was confirmed to have swine flu by the Health Protection Agency yesterday, bringing the total number of confirmed cases in the UK to 28, with 333 still under investigation.

Knight said exam boards were considering new contingency plans but urged schools not to panic and rush to close unless they had received specific advice from the HPA. It comes after one school, Dolphin school in Battersea, south London and its nursery, closed without taking advice from the HPA.

Knight said: "I would be surprised if schools were to unilaterally decide to close without consulting the Health Protection Agency, who are experts in this matter."

"I don't advocate schools doing anything without reference to the HPA. The HPA has been thorough and professional in advice to schools on swine flu. Heads have a legal responsibility to make sure their children and staff are safe at school. I would encourage schools to take advice from the HPA before they make the decision to close."

He revealed that the exam boards were looking at expanding the system of giving "special consideration" to pupils who are

sick at the time of their exams. Under the system, GCSEs, A-levels and other qualifications can be awarded on the basis of coursework grades and marks from modules already sat. Knight said: "There are already procedures in place if candidates can't sit their exams and are given special consideration. That can be put into action if things get worse. In contingency terms all these things are being discussed by exam boards."

Other options include looking at how pupils can sit exams in isolation even if a school is closed. The exams watchdog, Ofqual, said: "We are looking again at contingency plans to take coordinated action for the exam season if needed." The exam boards are due to meet tomorrow to discuss the situation as it unfolds.

Private schools have been issued with guidance advising them to expand their medical facilities to "quarantine" any infected pupils. The HPA said it was not advising the same to all schools.



Swine flu cases in the UK have been mild but it must be treated differently to seasonal flu, the Health Protection Agency says

It does not advise schools to close automatically as soon as a pupil is diagnosed with swine flu, but recommends a risk assessment to see if it is possible to limit the disruption to other children's education. Most schools affected have called in the local authority's health protection unit to help them decide whether to shut their doors.

"All the schools that have closed did close on the advice of the health protection unit, apart from the Dolphin schools, where the board of governors made the decision to do so," the HPA said.

Though cases of swine flu have so far been mild in the UK, the HPA says it must be treated differently from seasonal flu.

"Although it would be unusual to close a school in response to a single case of flu, in the light of evidence emerging that swine influenza can spread rapidly in the school setting, it is recommended that, if a probable or confirmed case of swine flu occurs

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No contest **United in Euro final**



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Cristiano Ronaldo who scored two goals in Manchester United's 3-1 victory over Arsenal at the Emirates stadium in London last night Photograph: David Davies/PA

Revealed: 77 trafficked children lost by home

Robert Booth

Organised criminal gangs have exploited a children's home beside Heathrow airport for the systematic trafficking of Chinese children to work in prostitution and the drugs trade across Britain, a secret immigration document reveals.

The intelligence report from the Border and Immigration Agency, obtained by the Guardian, shows how a 59-bed local authority block has been used as a clearing house for a trade in children that stretches across four continents.

At least 77 Chinese children have gone missing since March 2006 from the home, operated by the London borough of Hillingdon.

Only four have been found. Two girls returned after a year of exploitation in brothels in the Midlands. One was pregnant while the other had been surgically fitted with a contraceptive device in her arm. Others are coerced with physical threats to work as street-sellers of counterfeit goods. It is thought that many work in cannabis farms.

The report, marked "restricted", reveals that victims of a trafficking network that has agents based as far apart as China, Brazil, Japan, Malaysia and Kenya arrive at the home just outside the airport perimeter, only to disappear almost immediately.

It states: "The absconding may be at the facilitation of organised crime groups and the children may then be exploited for financial gain."

The home secretary, Jacqui Smith, is facing calls from the opposition to explain how the home came to be exploited by traffickers. "This report appears to highlight a scandalous situation in our immigration system," said the shadow home secretary, Chris Grayling. "To have such a large number of children going missing when they are supposed to be in care is unacceptable. We need an urgent explanation from the home secretary."

The report, by the immigration agency's national intelligence unit, was passed to the Guardian by a source concerned that too little action was being taken to tackle the problem. It says Chinese children arrive alone on flights to Heathrow before they are picked up by border officials and taken into local authority care. In two thirds of cases, they disappear quickly - most within a week and many within 24 hours. Many flee during fire drills and 10 have jumped out of windows. Others simply walk out of the front door into waiting cars.

Hillingdon council said the disappearances seemed "planned and coordinated" by criminal gangs. "They

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When is a green activist glad to see 680,000 barrels of oil?

Robert Booth

It was meant to be a carbon-neutral adventure to fire the imaginations of 25,000 schoolchildren.

Raoul Surcouf, 40, a landscape gardener from Jersey, and Richard Spink, 31, a physiotherapist from Bristol, shunned the polluting aircraft normally used to reach Greenland's polar ice cap and instead set sail in Fleur, a 40ft yacht fitted with solar panels and a wind turbine. Schools were poised to follow their green expedition online, and once the duo had skied across the Arctic wastes they had hoped to boast of the first carbon-neutral crossing of Greenland. But on Friday, nature, displaying a

heavy sense of irony, intervened. After a battering by hurricane force winds, the crew of the Carbon Neutral Expeditions craft had to be rescued 400 miles off the coast of Ireland. As if their ordeal wasn't terrifying enough, their saviour seemed chosen to rub salt in their wounds: a 113,000-ton tanker called Overseas Yellowstone with 680,000 barrels of crude oil on board.



"The team are now safely and ironically aboard the oil tanker. The risk was too great to continue" Richard Spink

In a statement from the tanker, Spink said: "We experienced some of the harshest conditions known, with winds gusting hurricane force 12 ... The decision was made that the risk to our personal safety was too great to continue."

In truth, the crew could not afford to be choosy about their rescuer. They were in a life-threatening predicament, and heaped thanks on Captain Ferro, the tanker's skipper, and his crew for being "outstanding in the execution of the rescue". But the rather awkward twist was not lost on Spink, who ruefully noted afterwards that "the team are now safely and ironically aboard the oil tanker" as they headed to Maine, where they are due to arrive in three days. Their ordeal began on Friday morn-

ing. With his vessel blasted by 60-knot gusts, skipper Ben Stoddart deployed the anchor to try and slow the craft down, only for a wave to come over the stern, causing the first of three capsize. With the navigation instruments failing and structural damage, the crew alerted Falmouth coastguard. After two further waves lashed the boat, destroying the solar panels and generator, coastguards were asked to mount a rescue.

"They are extremely relieved to just be alive," said Jess Tombs, a spokeswoman for the expedition. Were they feeling sheepish about being rescued by an oil tanker? "They were just relieved," she said. "We don't want to think about what the outcome would have been if they hadn't."

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