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Ofsted

- **Sir Martyn Oliver has begun his 5-year term as His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills.** He introduced and immediate package of training for inspectors on mental health awareness, meaning a later start to routine school, FE and ITT inspections as from January 22nd. Emergency inspections will continue where they are "about ensuring that people and children are safe" At the beginning of next week, Sir Martyn will lead initial training for all inspectors. The session will also include training and support from Mental Health First Aid England, who will then lead a rolling programme of further mental health awareness training for all inspectors. Details of this training will be published, ensuring it is embedded throughout the professions. By 22 January, all lead inspectors working in schools and further education will have completed both sessions. Every inspector working for Ofsted will have completed the training by the end of March. There will also be later this term "Sir Martyn's Big Listen" to follow Ofsted's response to the Ruth Perry inquest, marking a determination to hear from parents and professionals; he has already begun meetings with education leaders. Sir Martyn will respond in full to the coroner's findings on Jan 19, building on the work already done. Oliver will lead Ofsted inspectors in observing a minute's silence for Perry during training on Monday to mark the first anniversary of the headteacher's death. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/sir-martyn-oliver-begins-term-at-ofsted-with-mental-health-awareness-training-for-inspectors>

He has also promised the sector a "fresh start", with more "empathetic" inspections and a "less defensive" inspectorate that is more "of the system". He

doesn't think a new framework is required, but if the sector thinks required changes are "untenable" under the current inspection model then "nothing is off the table" including the grading system. He pledged to look at the workload impact of any changes, and to consult the sector on major proposals. Expanding on his pledge to get more school leaders inspecting, Oliver said he wants to create a "faster track" so it becomes "part of the golden thread" of teacher development. He also promised not to just release training materials used by inspectors, but also open up the watchdog's vast database for "researchers and academics to look at Ofsted's working performance". He said the inspectorate could do more to explain how certain grades are reached in published reports and also do more to "highlight" the sub-criteria judgments that sit under the overall effectiveness grade. He also suggested a move away from Ofsted's role under Spielman of publishing research, such as subject reviews. His vision is for inspection to be recognised as something that is done with schools rather than to them. He says he understands the challenges that schools currently face: attendance, behaviour, teacher recruitment and retention, and the cost-of-living crisis. And he wants to "make sure that our inspectorate workforce understands" these issues, too. "And so I look at attendance, I look at behaviour, I look at the mental health challenge that we've got. You throw into that the cost of living crisis, the recruitment and retention challenge for teachers. You put all of that into the mix and, yes, it's really hard right now for teachers." The new chief inspector adds that this openness should also include working with researchers and academics to review the inspectorate's performance, "and if that means there are critical judgements [about Ofsted] then in a non-defensive way we should accept that". He is happy to be clear on his support for Ofsted inspecting MATs. His idea is that MATs, and other bodies responsible for groups of schools, such as local education authorities, should be inspected at group level by Ofsted.

- Ofsted has issued "**Ofsted's framework and guidance for inspecting local authority services for children (ILACS) in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers**". See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-from-2018>
- **Ofsted inspections of schools are used in "too blunt a way" by ministers to fire headteachers**, and "careful reform" is needed to reduce the risk of teachers shunning leadership, a report from an ex-government adviser has warned. The paper by Sam Freedman for the Institute for Government found large cuts in Ofsted's funding had "put the quality of inspections at risk, even though ministers are more reliant than ever on these judgments to make decisions about firing headteachers". Freedman called for an immediate halt to

intervention based on two 'requires improvement' judgments, and said ministers should provide "much more detailed criteria for intervention to give some reassurance to school leaders". Ofsted should commission independent studies on the reliability of inspection. The new chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver should issue a comprehensive response to the Ruth Perry inquest findings. Ofsted should include more contextual information about schools - such as SEND support and exclusions data - in its inspection reports, so that any interventions could be targeted more effectively. See <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/ofsted-schools-inspection>

Early years and primary

- The DfE has issued a document which summarises the 2023 Spring Budget announcement on **early years entitlements** and sets out further details on funding. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-education-entitlements-and-funding>
- The DfE has issued "**30 hours free childcare: local authority and early years provider guide**". How local authorities and early years settings should provide the entitlement for 2, 3 and 4-year-olds. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/30-hours-free-childcare-la-and-early-years-provider-guide> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-early-years-provision-and-childcare-model-agreement>
- **Working parents in England can start applying for 15 hours of funded childcare for their two-year-old from 2 January.** For a guide on this, see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-62036045>
- The DfE has updated "**Early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework**". See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2> There is a summary of changes
- The DfE has updated "The **qualifications that staff must hold to be included in the specified staff/child ratios at levels 2, 3 and 6 of the early years foundation stage (EYFS)**". See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-qualification-requirements-and-standards>

- The DfE has issued “Statutory guidance for local authorities on **the provision of early education and childcare**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-education-and-childcare--2>
- Labour is considering **creating thousands of nursery places inside existing primary schools in England** and has tasked the former Ofsted head Sir David Bell with finding new ways to increase levels of childcare. The plans could include integrating nurseries into schools, meaning parents could take their children to the same site from the end of parental leave until the children are old enough to start at the school itself. See <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/dec/28/labour-plans-thousands-nursery-places-english-primary-schools>
- **Babies born in England during the Covid crisis have been slower at developing key language, cognitive and social skills**, and the veteran education policymaker Sir David Bell is warning that rapid intervention is needed to stop those children being left further behind. More than 80,000 children born in 2020 or 2021 did not reach one or more of the key measures of progress for their age group last year, according to official data. Bell said nursery closures and “eye-watering” childcare costs meant many two-year-olds were unable to receive high-quality early years education to make up for the “crucial experiences” they missed during the Covid crisis. “It’s no wonder that headteachers have spoken of children arriving at school who are still wearing nappies, whose communication abilities are limited, or who are still unable to use a knife and fork”. See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/jan/05/rapid-help-needed-for-covid-babies-who-fell-behind-says-former-ofsted-chief>

Turing scheme

- The DfE has issued a research report on the findings and methodology following an evaluation of the **first year of the Turing Scheme**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/turing-scheme-evaluation-of-year-1> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/turing-scheme-boosts-global-placements-beyond-europe> Now in its third year more than 40,000 students are set to benefit in 23/24 academic year, 60% of which are from disadvantaged background or underrepresented groups. The report also highlights how the scheme has supported universities, colleges and schools across the country to strengthen existing partnerships and develop links with a wider range of countries such as the USA, Japan and Canada.

However, students taking part in the government’s post-Brexit replacement for the EU’s Erasmus+ student exchange scheme were forced to drop out because

places were confirmed too late, while others failed to receive funding until after their return. Four out of five universities (79%) had difficulties with the application process which was overly complex, repetitive and "tedious" They also complained that the window for applications was too short. "There was a general view that some delivery issues raised had a greater impact on participants from a disadvantaged background and may have created barriers to many participating". Schools, FE and VT settings were more positive about the scheme: nine out of 10 (89%) agreed the Turing scheme was "satisfactory" in providing placement opportunities. Fewer than half (45%) of higher education (HE) providers said it was satisfactory, and nearly a third (31%) said it was unsatisfactory. Providers and participants said Turing scheme funding "went some way" to cover costs, but additional funds were needed. Less than half (45%) of university students felt the funding covered at least half of their costs on placement, compared with 86% of FE-VT participants. The report said: "This was particularly challenging for participants who needed upfront costs to secure housing or for initial travel, which could be expensive. "Many described worrying a lot before funding (and the amount they would receive) was confirmed, and then struggling with day-to-day living costs while waiting for funding to come through." See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/jan/03/students-find-erasmus-replacement-scheme-inadequate-analysis-finds>

- The DfE has issued "**Turing Scheme: apply for funding for international placements**. Information on applying for funding for international study and work placements for schools, further education providers and higher education providers". See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/turing-scheme-apply-for-funding-for-international-placements>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/turing-scheme-international-study-and-work-placements>

RAAC

- **There are now 231 schools and colleges with Raac, according to the latest government figures released in December.** As the autumn term came to an end, many of the schools affected have still not been told when their buildings will be fixed. It is said that the DfE is refusing to commit to funding or even give any timescales for starting work, with building experts estimating that schools will be waiting years for new safe buildings. See <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/23/raac-concrete-schools-england-repairs-latest-figures>

- Pupils at schools in England that are partially closed because of RAAC say the **disruption has left them fearing for their futures**. The DfE said it was "not possible to make changes to exams and assessments for only some groups of students". See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-67781489>

Teacher recruitment

- The government is looking at how it **could boost schools' international recruitment** to plug teacher gaps amid a deepening teacher supply crisis. The DfE wants to discover how it can help schools boost efforts to recruit more overseas teachers, and is seeking advice from experts on how it could make that happen.
- The DfE has issued "Information for ITT providers and schools about **international relocation payments for trainee teachers and teachers of languages and physics from outside the UK**". See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-relocation-payments>

Public examinations

- **Pearson Edexcel is planning to give students the option to take all GCSEs on-screen by 2030, starting with English next summer**. The exam board announced today that up to 125,000 students could choose to take GCSE English language and English literature on-screen in summer 2025. This is subject to Ofqual approval. Schools would still have the option to offer paper-based exams. Pearson added an on-screen component to its GCSE computer science in 2022. It has also been piloting on-screen tests in international GCSEs. In October, England's largest exam board **AQA** set out its timeline to move some exams on-screen, with a large-entry subject like English going digital by 2030. **Ofqual** is currently undertaking a feasibility study alongside the government on "what it would take" to make GCSE and A-level exams "fully digital".
- For information on **International Baccalaureate 2023 results for the UK**, see <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/secondary/international-baccalaureate-2023-results>

Attendance

- **The first UK-wide hybrid school, teaching children up to sixth-form age both from home and in person**, will open in September 2024. Duke's Education schools will expect students to come in for at least one day a week for practical subjects, and to take part in sporting and social activities. For the rest of the week, it will offer four live lessons and two independent study sessions a day. Designed for school refusers, those with anxiety or those whose parents feel there are no suitable local schools, and students who want to fit their education around sporting or other extracurricular commitments, the school has ambitions to open its doors to children across Europe. See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/dec/26/first-uk-wide-hybrid-school-offering-home-and-class-learning-to-open-in-2024>

See also how the **Royal Free hospital children's school** is running programmes for school refusers at the renovated Konstam Centre in Camden, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/jan/01/less-daunting-inside-the-new-education-unit-in-north-london-supporting-school-refusers>

- The government is to make a new effort to repair low school attendance figures in England, with the education secretary to announce funding for **"attendance mentors"** in some of the worst-affected areas. There are plans for caseworkers to offer one-to-one support for pupils in 10 areas including Blackpool and Walsall, where rates of unauthorised absences remain far above national levels. A pilot involving attendance mentors is already being run in five areas by the children's charity Barnardo's, including in Middlesbrough, Stoke-on-Trent and Knowsley, with Keegan's announcement expanding the programme to groups of schools in 15 "priority education investment areas". See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/jan/05/government-fund-school-attendance-mentors-worst-hit-areas-england>

Education news for schools

- For details of **New year's honours 2024 and Education**, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/New-Years-Honours-2024-Schools-Week-list-v2.pdf>
- Almost half of British teenagers say they feel **addicted to social media**, according to research. When the surveyed cohort aged 16-18 were asked about social media use, of the 7,000 people who responded, 48% said they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I think I am addicted to social media". A higher proportion of girls (57%) agreed compared to boys (37%), according to

the data. See <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2024/jan/02/social-media-addiction-teenagers-study-phones>

School and academy management

- ESFA has issued guidance for academy trusts looking to provide employees with the option to enter a **salary sacrifice for electric vehicles**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/electric-vehicle-salary-sacrifice-guidance-for-academy-trusts>
- The DfE has updated its manual, "**Buying for schools**: how to buy what you need". See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/buying-procedures-and-procurement-law-for-schools>
- The DfE has updated, "Technical specification and validation rules for submitting **2023 to 2024 school census** data". See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-census-2023-to-2024-technical-information>
- **The DfE's property firm** missed a key performance indicator (KPI) in 2022-23 after taking nearly five years to secure a permanent site for a specialist maths school. However, LocatED hit its remaining seven KPIs and awarded its chief executive a bonus of between £35,000 and £40,000 last year, the organisation's annual report and accounts reveal. See https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/657b1eee0467eb001355f87b/LocatED_annual_report_and_accounts_2022-23_web.pdf
- Five more local authorities are in talks to join a controversial Department for Education **special educational needs and disability funding bailout programme**; Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, Cheshire East, Wiltshire, Devon and Bracknell Forest. There are currently 34 local authorities (LAs) that have agreements under the Safety Valve programme with the DfE. The Safety Valve programme is an intervention targeted at the LAs with the highest Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficits. Under the deals, the DfE gives LAs capital funding and cash to wipe out their deficits in return for agreed measures aimed at reforming their SEND provision. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/dfes-5-new-send-funding-council-bailout-deals>

Post 16

- The DfE has issued “**Higher education short courses** currently available for learners across England”, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-short-courses> and “Courses included in the higher education short courses (HESC) trial”, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-short-courses-trial-courses-included>
- The DfE has issued “**Skills campaign toolkits**”. Find information and resources for the skills campaigns currently running. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/skills-campaign-toolkits>
- ESFA has issued “**16 to 19 tuition fund for academic year 2023 to 2024**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-tuition-fund-for-academic-year-2023-to-2024>
- ESFA has issued “**Advanced learner loans facility requests**” Use the form to submit requests for a new facility or loans bursary for the 2023 to 2024 funding year”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/24-advanced-learning-loans-facility-adjustment-request-form>

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