Tony Stephens Education Support

http://tonystephens.org.uk

tonystephens856@gmail.com

07977804899

**309 Academy and School News and Resources Update, March 1-7 2025**

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**Attendance**

* **Attendance**. **The attendance rate (proportion of possible sessions attended) was 92.4% across all schools in the week commencing 10 February 2025**. The absence rate was, therefore, 7.6% across all schools. **By school typ**e, the absence rates across the week commencing 10 February 2025 were:
	+ 5.9% in state-funded **primary** schools (4.4% authorised and 1.6% unauthorised)
	+ 9.5% in state-funded **secondary** schools (5.9% authorised and 3.6% unauthorised)
	+ 14.2% in state-funded **special** schools (10.8% authorised and 3.5% unauthorised)

Absence was 0.5 percentage points lower across all schools in the week commencing 10 February 2025 than in the equivalent week in the last academic year (week commencing 05 February 2024), which was also the week before spring half term for the majority of schools. This has been driven by a 0.2 percentage point decrease in authorised absence and a 0.2 percentage point decrease in unauthorised absence.

**The attendance rate across the 2024/25 academic year to date was 93.3%.** The absence rate was, therefore, 6.7% across all schools. **By school type**, the absence rates across the 2024/25 academic year to date were:

* + 5.2% in state-funded **primary** schools (3.9% authorised and 1.4% unauthorised)
	+ 8.2% in state-funded **secondary** schools (5.2% authorised and 3.0% unauthorised)
	+ 12.9% in state-funded **special** schools (9.7% authorised and 3.2% unauthorised)

The rate of **persistent absence** (pupils who miss 10% or more of their possible sessions) was 18.8%, which is a 1.8 percentage point decrease compared to the equivalent point last academic year. By school type:

* **Primary** 15%
* **Secondary** 22.8%
* **Special** 36%

See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-attendance-in-schools>

* **The DfE attendance tsar urges schools to focus on occasional absentees**. Schools struggling with their attendance rates can make a difference by focusing efforts on those pupils who nearly always attend; a lot of school absence is down to children who miss the occasional day. In the average secondary school, the DfE says, “approaching half of absence can be attributed to pupils who miss 15 per cent or less of their sessions”. “The 1 million children missing between 5 and 15 per cent of school - that is where early intervention can really make a difference”. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/dfe-attendance-tsar-urges-schools-focus-occasional-pupil-absence>
* For an article “**The drivers behind attendance: What we are learning about the importance of belonging, engagement, sanctions and support**”, see <https://my.chartered.college/impact_article/the-drivers-behind-attendance-what-we-are-learning-about-the-importance-of-belonging-engagement-sanctions-and-support/#:~:text=A%20key%20finding%20from%20the,considered%20to%20be%20persistently%20absent> A key finding is that pupils’ **sense of belonging** at school has a statistically significant impact on their attendance rates. Pupils with the highest attendance rates had sense of school membership scores that were six per cent above those considered to be persistently absent. For another article “**Can belonging really help fix behaviour, attendance and outcomes**?”, see <https://www.tes.com/magazine/teaching-learning/general/belonging-in-school-behaviour-attendance-outcomes> Note that **the government has a focus on belonging as the answer to behaviour and attendance challenges**.
* An academy trust has rolled out “**FOMO Fridays” to boost attendance** – running incentives, among other things, including a “golden ticket” scheme with prizes such as laptops at the end of the week. Friday attendance at the nine-school Two Counties Trust in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire has since gone up 1.5 percentage points. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/trusts-fomo-fridays-help-boost-end-of-week-attendance/>

**Early years and primary**

* The government named 754 “early adopter” schools that will test new breakfast clubs. Within days of the announcement, one school said it **had considered pulling out of the pilot because participating would hamstring its existing club and force it to lose income**. The government plans to make the clubs mandatory for all primary schools next year. But six in seven of the early adopter schools already have some form of breakfast provision, and some face challenges in how the new scheme will interact with and replace what they’re already doing. For example, schools that already run longer paid-for provision with charges above the government funding rates face losing income. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/snap-crackle-and-flop-breakfast-clubs-have-rocky-launch/>
* DfE has issued “How early years providers can implement **the experience-based route for staff who do not hold full and relevant qualifications**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/experience-based-route-for-early-years-staff>
* DfE has updated:
* **Lists of qualifications that meet DfE's criteria for counting in the early years foundation stage framework staff/child ratios**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-qualifications-achieved-in-england>
* **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), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-qualification-requirements-and-standards>
* STA has issued “Report detailing the **maladministration allegations reported to the Standards and Testing Agency (STA) in the academic year 2023 to 2024**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2024-maladministration-report> For all these reports back to 2012 , see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/maladministration-reports>
* For an article, “**Inside the London reception class where kids are taught to talk to help them stay out of gangs**”, see <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/mar/02/inside-the-london-reception-class-where-kids-are-taught-to-talk-to-help-them-stay-out-of-gangs>
* For an article “**Bog standard? Study seeks most effective toilet training methods**”, see <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/mar/04/most-effective-toilet-training-methods-study>
* For **Martyn Oliver's speech at the Nursery World Business Summit**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/martyn-olivers-speech-at-the-nursery-world-business-summit>
* **Poor pupil behaviour is now a bigger concern for primary school teachers than workload**, according to a new Teacher Tapp survey. Some 48 per cent of 3,419 teachers questioned by Teacher Tapp in February this year selected poor behaviour as a top-three issue facing their school, up from 36 per cent of 2,534 teachers questioned in February 2023. Workload was seen as a top-three issue by 43 per cent of primary teachers - representing a marked drop from 57 per cent in 2023. Funding is still the top concern, cited by 65 per cent of primary teachers in both 2025 and 2023. This was followed by the social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs of pupils - seen as a top-three concern by 61 per cent, compared with 55 per cent two years ago. Behaviour was next, followed by workload.

Some 61 per cent of teachers questioned in the latest poll cited **SEMH** as one of their biggest worries. The latest figures from the DfE for 2022-23 show 2.8 per cent of primary school pupils were identified as having SEMH needs. SEMH needs are now the second most common category of special educational needs and disabilities relating to more than one in six of the total number of pupils with SEND, according to the DfE. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/primary/behaviour-overtakes-workload-top-concern-primary-teachers>

* Children in the most deprived areas of England will get access to a programme to help protect them from tooth decay, the government has announced. Official data shows as many as six in 10 children in some areas have rotting teeth by the age of five, with clear differences between poorer regions of England and more affluent areas. The supervised **toothbrushing programme** will be rolled out in early years settings and primary schools, with funding available from April, helping hundreds of thousands of children aged between 3 and 5 years old to develop positive brushing habits. The scheme will be launched in collaboration with Colgate-Palmolive who are providing free Colgate toothbrushes, toothpaste and educational materials to continue good work at home. To deliver the scheme, the government is investing a total of £11 million in local authorities across England to deploy supervised toothbrushing in schools and nurseries that voluntarily sign up. The money will be used for “teacher training, local staffing costs and the costs of providing take-home brushing packs, including toothbrushes and toothpaste,” the government has said. Local authorities will work to identify early years settings in target areas and encourage them to enrol. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/supervised-toothbrushing-for-children-to-prevent-tooth-decay> The DfE has not named the areas that will take part, and has not said if any of this funding will be available to cover staffing in schools, with leaders fearing an additional burden. Teachers will not be physically brushing the teeth but instead leading a supervised session where the children are shown what to do. NAHT said we “cannot keep loading increasing expectations on schools…Nor can we keep looking to schools to fix all of society’s ills. Most people would see tooth brushing as a basic part of parenting, and we must be careful not to shift what is ultimately a parental responsibility onto the shoulders of schools.”
* **Tens of thousands of children in migrant and refugee families in the UK are being denied access to government-funded childcare** because of benefit restrictions linked to their parents’ immigration status, a report says. Having “no recourse to public funds” (NRPF) means parents are not entitled to 30 hours of free childcare and are having to stay home to look after their young children instead of working. This is pushing families into poverty and denying their children the benefits of the early years education available to their peers, the report finds. See <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/mar/07/migrants-and-refugee-families-in-the-uk-denied-childcare-funding-report-finds>

**Ofsted**

* Ofsted has updated “**School inspection data summary report (IDSR) guide**”, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-inspection-data-summary-report-idsr-guide> and “**IDSR: news and updates**”, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/idsr-news-and-updates>
* Ofsted has published an evaluation **assessing the role that the current education inspection framework (EIF) has played in improving curriculum quality in schools**.

**Ofsted is facing criticism for basing the finding on just 20 school visits**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/curriculum-quality-evaluating-the-impact-of-the-education-inspection-framework> The evaluation found that, in the schools revisited from 2018:

* + curriculum quality has improved in schools, and that the education inspection framework (EIF) played a part in influencing these improvements. However, the improvements were fundamentally driven by school leaders and staff.
	+ the intent, implementation and impact structure of the EIF had influenced school leaders’ thinking about the curriculum
	+ the curriculum was more likely to be ambitious across all subjects
	+ while the quality of reading was high in the initial study, school leaders had further prioritised reading
	+ the focus on reading in Ofsted’s current school inspection framework could have resulted in other areas such as maths getting less attention
	+ inspectors found that schools were weaker in 2024 than in 2018 in terms of whether they regarded mathematical fluency and numeracy confidence as preconditions of success across the national curriculum. Ofsted says this was the only area of the curriculum that was weaker in the most recent visits.
	+ inspectors also found that while implementation for foundation subjects had improved since 2018, it was still weaker than for core subjects.
	+ leaders reported that, under the EIF, subject leaders had greater levels of ownership and responsibility
	+ the curriculum was more purposefully sequenced and mapped​
	+ the quality of education judgement under the EIF evaluates schools on intent, implementation and impact of their curriculum. The research found that schools did not always fully understand these concepts in the early stages of the EIF - particularly “intent”, which evaluates how the curriculum is constructed to give all pupils the knowledge they need, its planning and sequencing and the extent to which learners study the full curriculum. Some schools produced statements of intent for their subjects rather than setting out clearly what pupils should learn in a logical order, inspectors found.
* **More than a thousand complaints were made following Ofsted school inspections in England over the last three years**, figures show. A freedom of information (FOI) request response from the inspectorate shows 1,018 complaints were sent to Ofsted following school inspections in England between the 2021-22 and 2023-24 academic years - including 397 last year. It means the number of complaints made has increased by 60 per cent over the last three years, from 248 in 2021-22. But headteachers’ leaders have warned that these figures are likely to only be “the tip of the iceberg” in terms of schools’ unhappiness with inspections. Of all complaints, 17 were upheld and 216 were partially upheld, though a school leaders’ union has criticised the lack of an independent body to investigate complaints about Ofsted. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/more-than-a-thousand-complaints-made-after-ofsted-school-visits>

**SEND**

* **Labour is preparing major changes to special educational needs provision in English schools**, as individual councils raise the alarm over debts running into hundreds of millions of pounds that have pushed many to the brink of bankruptcy. It is understood ministers are preparing a white paper due to be published in late spring setting out details of what one insider called a “complete recalibration” of the special educational needs and disabilities system. The government is believed to be considering changes to existing SEND legislation that councils hope would ease the deficits, alongside a series of measures designed to prioritise state school provision and cut council spending in costly private specialist needs schools. See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/mar/03/ministers-plan-major-changes-to-send-education-in-england>
* For an article “**Ticking timebomb’: how Send spending could bankrupt English councils**”, see <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/mar/03/a-ticking-time-bomb-the-neglected-crisis-of-send-education-in-england>
* For an article “**Policy must better promote local SEND collaboration**”, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/the-send-system-must-incentivise-more-collaborations-like-ours/>
* The cross-party campaign group, f40, <https://www.f40.org.uk/> are encouraging governors and trustees to **write to their local MP to highlight the urgent action that is required to fund the rise in children and young people with additional needs**. f40 is a cross-party campaign group set up by the lowest funded councils for education in England with the aim of securing fairer funding for schools and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Use this template to write to your MP on behalf of your governing board, <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nga.org.uk%2Fmedia%2Fmqdgg4pa%2Flt21-kw-letter-from-governorstrustees.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK&utm_source=Master+Audience&utm_campaign=26970d4f1d-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2024_10_25_09_57_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-1e2b793773-52671983>
* For an article “**Why SEMH support is schools’ biggest challenge**”, see <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/send-support-why-semh-needs-is-schools-biggest-challenge> Pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs have been found to fare the worst in terms of getting SEND support. Why is this, and what can schools do with constrained resources?
* Schools Week has published a major investigation, “**Investigation: How EHCPs are failing our most vulnerable children**”, in these sections:
	+ Introduction, <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/investigation-how-ehcps-are-failing-our-most-vulnerable-children/>
	+ Fidget spinners and learning styles: EHCPs’ interventions exposed, <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/fidget-spinners-and-learning-styles-ehcps-questionable-interventions/>
	+ Copy and paste: Poor quality EHCPs shortchange schools, <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/wrong-names-and-rule-breaking-poor-quality-ehcps-shortchange-schools/>
	+ Schools pick up the pieces of absent health and social care providers, <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/schools-pick-up-the-pieces-of-absent-health-and-social-care-providers/>
	+ Feature: The case for a SEND evidence ‘custodian’, <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/feature-the-case-for-a-send-evidence-custodian/>
	+ Comment: SEND provision is the last bastion of unevidenced practice, <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/send-provision-is-the-last-bastion-of-unevidenced-practice/>

**Special schools**

* **Special school leaders fear the government’s plans to ensure all teachers have qualified teacher status (QTS) could limit the curriculum and worsen the recruitment crisis**. State-run special schools employ significantly more teachers without QTS than mainstream settings. About 10 per cent of teachers in special schools do not have QTS, compared with 2 to 3 per cent in primary and secondary schools. “This isn’t about SEND and AP being more willing to appoint unqualified staff,” said Nic Crossley, the chief executive of the Liberty Academy Trust. “Right across the sector, recruiting QTS teachers is a constant challenge.” As well as staffing issues, she said there was no established QTS pathway for many of the vocational subjects taught in her schools. Instead, she employed industry professionals and higher-level teaching assistants who “bring valuable real-world experience and can do an excellent job”. Staff without QTS are “less a preference, but more a necessity driven by the structure of teacher training and the limited availability of QTS staff in relevant disciplines.” Schools might “appoint candidates with strong experience in areas such as autism, speech and language difficulties, or severe learning difficulties” even if they did not hold QTS Some special academies ensure that all teachers without QTS are on a pathway to qualification. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/special-school-leaders-fear-qts-plan-could-worsen-recruitment-crisis/>
* **Special schools take in fewer staff directly from teacher training streams and instead “rely” on teachers gaining experience with SEND pupils in mainstream settings**, a report has found, <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/chcnik50/embargoed_blog2_special_school_teachers.pdf> The NFER has published the second in a two-part series of reports looking at staffing challenges faced by special schools. It found just under 20 per cent of teachers joining special schools in 2022-23 came straight from a recent initial teacher training (ITT) route, compared to an average of about 30 per cent joining primary and secondary schools. Instead, the system “seems to rely on teachers developing experience with SEND pupils in the mainstream sector before moving to special schools,” said the NFER. The analysis of 2022-23 data showed that 79 per cent of trainees in special schools had done a primary ITT course, with the remaining 21 per cent in secondary. The DfE does not have a target for ITT recruitment for special schools, nor do existing targets “explicitly account for the needs of special schools”. The blog recommends that the DfE should conduct more deliberate workforce planning for special schools and AP.

**The study also found teachers leaving special schools are more likely than other teachers to leave the state system entirely**. Sixty-nine per cent of special school teachers who leave their jobs appear to leave the state system, according to the study’s data, compared to 60 per cent at primary and 56 per cent at secondary schools. NFER found special schools had lower teacher turnover rates than other schools, which it called “encouraging”. However, it found alternative provision (AP) settings had “much higher” turnover rates than other schools, and that teachers in these settings are also more likely to leave the state system. Teachers in AP settings generally have more teaching experience than average, at just under 16 years compared to the state school average of just over 13. But their average tenure is five-and-a-half years, “substantially” less than the national average of seven years.

**Behaviour**

* **Difficulties accessing appropriate alternative provision (AP) have been a barrier to reducing suspensions**, a multi-academy trust has said. In a survey in January 2024 by the National Organisation of Pupil Referral Units and Alternative Provision, often known as PRUsAP, 62 per cent of AP leaders said their setting was full by 6 December 2023. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/astrea-academy-trust-accounts-school-suspensions-ap>
* A behaviour lead has expressed concern **that behaviour hubs are being disbanded “without any other lever” to replace them**. The hubs see high-performing schools and trusts working with schools facing challenges with behaviour and were launched under the previous government in 2021 with £10 million in funding. The DfE has previously confirmed that behaviour hubs will end in March, but not how or whether their work will continue in another form. An evaluation of the behaviour hubs programme published last year <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/673e1768b3f0df6d2ebaef69/Evaluation_of_the_behaviour_hubs_programme_interim_report.pdf> found that pupils did not report significant changes before and after the introduction of the hubs. However, staff reported feeling more supported after the behaviour hubs programme than before. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/concern-behaviour-hubs-disband-no-replacement>

**Abuse of staff by parents**

* **Over 80 per cent of school leaders have been abused by parents in the last year – with one in 10 having been the victim of an assault**, a new poll suggests, <https://www.naht.org.uk/News/Latest-comments/Press-room/ArtMID/558/ArticleID/2653/Abuse-towards-school-staff-must-stop-says-NAHT> prompting calls to review complaints procedures. The NAHT is urging ministers to review “complaints procedures to deter vexatious use of the existing system by parents” – which can involve referrals to the misconduct agency and Ofsted before school processes have been followed.

A poll of 1,600 NAHT members revealed some have been pushed to the brink of quitting the profession by the vitriol, threats and violence, while others now suffer from anxiety and depression. Just over a third said they experienced such abuse on a monthly basis, with 16 per cent saying this typically happened every week. Verbal attacks were the most common, with 85 per cent of those reporting abuse overall having experienced it in the last year. This was followed by threatening behaviour (68 per cent), online abuse (46 per cent) and discriminatory language (22 per cent), including use of racist, sexist or homophobic terms. One in 10 had suffered physical violence. 22 per cent reported discriminatory language, including the use of racist, sexist or homophobic terms. The NAHT said the results exposed “widespread reports of trolling on social media and in parent groups on Facebook and WhatsApp – as well as appalling instances of hate campaigns and harassment and intimidation”. Eighty-six per cent of those polled said parental abuse had increased in the last three years. Only one per cent thought it had decreased. More than four in 10 said that, in response to abusive behaviour, they had banned parents from the school site in the past year, and around a third said they had reported parents to police or the local authority. Some 80 per cent said they had arranged a meeting with parents, while 72 per cent had issued a warning letter or email.

**16-19 funding**

* **ESFA has issued a collection of all16 to 19 education and skills funding documents**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/16-to-19-education-and-skills-funding> **These can be seen individually as well at**:
* 16 to 19 funding: allocation calculation toolkit guides. Helps you understand how we have calculated your 16 to 19 funding allocation, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-allocation-calculation-toolkit-guides>
* 16 to 19 funding: allocation statement guides, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-allocation-statement-guides>
* 16 to 19 funding: large programme uplift, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-large-programme-uplift>
* 16 to 19 funding: information for 2024 to 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-information-for-2024-to-2025>
* 16 to 19 funding: programme cost weighting changes, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-programme-cost-weighting-changes>
* 16 to 19 funding: in-year growth for 2024 to 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-in-year-growth-for-2024-to-2025>
* 16 to 19 funding: maths and English condition of funding, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-maths-and-english-condition-of-funding>
* 16 to 19 funding: English and maths funding, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-english-and-maths-funding>
* 16 to 19 funding: core maths premium, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-core-maths-premium>
* 16 to 19 funding: advanced maths premium, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-advanced-maths-premium>
* 16 to 19 funding: how it works, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-how-it-works>
* Information about how we allocate 16 to 19 funding to institutions, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-funding-allocations>
* 16 to 19 funding: high value courses premium, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-high-value-courses-premium>
* 16 to 19 funding: information for 2025 to 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-information-for-2025-to-2026>
* DfE has issued “List of the **qualifications that attract the high value courses premium in the 16 to 19 funding formula**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/qualifications-attracting-high-value-courses-premium>
* ESFA has issued “**Guidance for maintained schools and academies with 16 to 19 provision on the teachers' pension scheme employer contribution grant**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-pension-scheme-employer-contribution-grant-for-maintained-schools-and-academies-with-16-to-19-provision-2024-to-2025>
* ESFA has issued “**Condition of funding interactive tool. Check if your students are compliant with the maths and English condition of funding**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/condition-of-funding-interactive-tool>
* ESFA has issued “**Funding guidance for T Level providers**.”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/t-level-funding>

**Health and welfare od children and young people**

* DfE has updated “**Move to the UK if you’re coming from Ukraine**. Check what you need to do before you travel to the UK and what to do after you arrive. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/move-to-the-uk-if-youre-from-ukraine>
* **Families of children and young people with cancer are struggling financially for several months waiting for benefits to help cover extra costs caused by the illness**, according to a charity. Young Lives vs Cancer says families need "immediate" help with additional living costs, which amount to £700 a month on average - and is calling for quicker access to the funds. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cr422y4evx0o>
* **TikTok is to be investigated by the UK’s data protection watchdog, which is looking into whether social media algorithms are serving up inappropriate or harmful content to children**. Growing concerns over how social media platforms are using data generated by children’s online activity have prompted the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) to launch an investigation into the Chinese platform, along with the forum site Reddit and the image-sharing site Imgur. It will look at how TikTok uses the personal information of 13- to 17-year-olds to deliver content recommendations to them, and also examine Reddit and Imgur’s use of age assurance measures, such as how they estimate or verify a child’s age, which can then be used to tailor their experience on the platform. See <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/mar/03/uk-information-commissioner-to-investigate-tiktok-reddit-children-data>
* **The number of UK children experiencing harm online remains “stubbornly high**” and there is a “growing sense of unease” about the safety of online life. Research findings from Internet Matters <https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/research/childrens-wellbeing-in-a-digital-world-index-report-2025/> reveal that 27% of the 1,054 children said they have been contacted by strangers online, while 22% have encountered violent content, 19% have received bullying, abusive, or upsetting messages and comments from people they don’t know, and 41% have had to deal with false information. Children have experienced more bullying from strangers online this year (17%), more unwanted sexual attention (7%), and more in-game and in-app spending (8%). The charity’s Children’s Wellbeing in a Digital World Index research warns that there has been “no reduction in children’s experiences of harm online” since last year and that children seem to be finding it harder to “navigate and recover from the challenges of the digital world”. It warns that fewer children are feeling safe online this year compared to last year (77% vs 81%) – this picture is worse for vulnerable children, only 70% of whom say they feel safe online. On the plus side, parents are becoming more aware of their children’s activities and children themselves are becoming more open with their parents about what they do online, the study finds. Ultimately, however, 38% of the parents still believe that excessive time online is negatively affecting their child’s health.
* Leading child doctors have joined calls for a **complete ban on smacking children** in England, saying there is no evidence it has any positive effect on their wellbeing. Currently, smacking is unlawful in England, except in cases where it amounts to a "reasonable punishment". Now the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) wants that legal defence to be removed, using an amendment to a law which is currently making its way through Parliament. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c9q4x9d9xgpo>

**Free school meals**

* Eligibility for free school meals and the pupil premium, paid to schools for any child eligible for meals at any time in the last six years, are frequently used by policymakers and researchers as a proxy for disadvantage. But the EPI says in a new report <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/who-has-been-registered-for-free-school-meals-and-pupil-premium-in-the-national-pupil-database/> that **the makeup of children who receive free school meals is becoming “more diverse and uncertain**”, while at the same time the system excludes many children who live in poverty. Protections introduced by the DfE following the roll-out of universal credit meant children newly out of scope did not lose their eligibility until the end of their current phase of education. But the EPI says this meant “some children are in the group because of protections… while contemporary peers whose families have a similarly low income are not. The EPI found that across all years, fewer children are registered for free school meals than estimated in poverty, due to low family income thresholds at £7,400 per year. This is “partly by design”, because the £7,400 annual family income threshold for registration “is so low”. “Among children recorded as Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Indian ethnicities, estimated poverty rates are far higher than the percentage of children registered for FSM, and, to a lesser but still large extent, for PP.” This is in part because poverty estimates “equivalise for family size, while FSM-eligibility does not”. The EPI said the government should “expand the coverage of FSM eligibility” by increasing the salary threshold for families, and “provide sufficient funding”. And the DfE should also “consider centrally automatically enrolling eligible children for FSM to ensure better coverage”.

**Public examinations**

* Ofqual has issued “**Guidance on collecting evidence of student performance to ensure resilience in the qualifications system**”. This guidance is for centres delivering GCSE, AS and A levels, Project qualifications and the Advanced Extension Award in maths (AEA) to provide resilience in the exam system in the unlikely event that government determines that exams are not able to go ahead. The arrangements are not designed to be used to award grades in circumstances where there has been localised disruption to teaching and learning. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-collecting-evidence-of-student-performance-to-ensure-resilience-in-the-qualifications-system>
* Ofqual has issued “**Vocational and other qualifications quarterly**: October to December 2024”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/vocational-and-other-qualifications-quarterly-october-to-december-2024>
* Ofqual has updated “**How to make a complaint, raise a concern (whistleblow) or report malpractice about an exam board, awarding organisation or qualification regulated by Ofqual**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual/about/complaints-procedure>

**Pupil Premium**

* The government is seeking to “improve” **the way schools report on pupil premium spending.** At the same time, the chair of the public accounts committee, warned that “for too many schools, the government is not sighted on how money that ought to be spent on helping disadvantaged children overcome their circumstances is actually being used”. NAO found that one in five schools had failed to meet their duty to report how they spend the pupil premium – which makes up £2.9 billion of disadvantage funding – in 2023. It says the DfE should collect data on where schools use disadvantage-focused funding for interventions such as tutoring. The DfE should also stress the need for schools to publish pupil premium spending plans, and follow up with any schools that do not. The PAC’s inquiry heard evidence from existing research showing that pupil premium funding is increasingly being used for whole-school interventions or to budget plug deficits. Research by charity The Sutton Trust found 47 per cent of senior school leaders were using pupil premium to plug budget gaps last year. This was more than double the 23 per cent that were doing so in 2019. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/dfe-seeks-to-improve-school-reporting-on-pupil-premium-spend/>

**School management**

* DfE has issued “Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers about **opening, closing or making organisation changes to local-authority-maintained schools**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-organisation-maintained-schools>
* A **free cyber security service aimed at protecting schools from online threats**, including malware, ransomware, and phishing attacks has been launched by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/blog-post/pdns-for-schools-provide-cyber-resilience-for-more-institutions?utm_source=Master+Audience&utm_campaign=26970d4f1d-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2024_10_25_09_57_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-1e2b793773-52671983> Following a successful initial rollout, the Protective Domain Name Service (PDNS) for schools, is now accessible to multi academy trusts and academies subject to certain conditions. For those interested and eligible, you can register by requesting your DNS provider to sign up through MyNCSC, <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/information/myncsc> Schools uncertain about their provider should consult their IT or internet manager.
* The DfE has changed the way it awards **qualified teacher status (QTS) to teachers from overseas**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/awarding-qualified-teacher-status-to-overseas-teachers>
* For the latest **ESFA Updates**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-update-5-march-2025>
* ESFA has issued “Guidance for schools and local authorities on the **teachers' pay additional grant: allocations for 2024 to 2025 financial year**.” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-pay-additional-grant-2024-to-2025>
* A UK-wide petition to put **school minibus safety** on the political agenda has been launched. It is the latest stage of a campaign by the parents of a child killed in a minibus crash and NASUWT. NASUWT is calling on parents, teachers and the public to sign the petition on the House of Commons website and call on their MP to back the campaign to ensure all schools with minibuses are required to have a full public service vehicle operator’s licence. “Teachers can be expected to work for a full day in the classroom and then be asked to drive pupils often for hours at a time. This is completely unacceptable and must not be allowed to continue”. See <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/article-listing/minibus-safety-petition-launched.html>
* DfE has issued “**Choosing a school management information system (MIS**)”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/choosing-a-school-management-information-system-mis>
* **The sustainability and climate change strategy for education**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainability-and-climate-change-strategy/sustainability-and-climate-change-a-strategy-for-the-education-and-childrens-services-systems> states: “By 2025, all education settings will have nominated a sustainability lead and put in place a climate action plan”. For non-statutory guidance and the support now available to help you get started or take the next step, see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/sustainability-leadership-and-climate-action-plans-in-education>

**Education news for schools**

* DfE has issued “A review of complaints received by the DfE about **academies admissions appeals in the academic year 2024 to 2025**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/academies-admission-appeals-complaints-review-2024-to-2025> Hardly any complaints about appeals to discuss academy admissions were upheld last year The DfE’s School Complaints Compliance Unit received 216 complaints of maladministration by admission appeal panels from April to October 2024 and considered 123 of these under its remit. Of those, 39 were upheld. Just 16 of the complaints about admission appeals for 2024-25 entry resulted in the DfE instructing the admission authority to offer another appeal.
* **NEU has launched its preliminary strike ballot over the government’s recommendation of a 2.8 per cent pay award for teachers**. The NEU ballot asks teachers if they accept the DfE’s pay rise recommendation, and whether they are willing to take strike action to secure a higher, fully funded pay rise.
* DfE has updated “Information on all **academies, free schools, studio schools and university technical colleges (UTCs) open in England, and those in the process of opening**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-academies-and-academy-projects-in-development>
* The Work Your Proper Hours Day campaign is run every year by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to raise awareness of just how much free work UK workers put in. In 2024, the TUC’s analysis – which is based on the Labour Force Survey statistics – shows that UK workers put in £31bn of unpaid overtime, with an average of 7.2 unpaid hours a week. This would be the equivalent of £8,000 in wages going unpaid. **And as so often in this annual research, teachers topped the list of professions putting in the most unpaid overtime**. The TUC estimates that 38% of those working in teaching/education put in unpaid hours – the most of any profession. See <https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/content/news/teachers-top-list-for-unpaid-overtime-once-again>
* Schools are recognised for their exceptional commitment to creativity with the **Artsmark Award**, accredited by Arts Council England – the only award for arts and culture provision in England. Artsmark is open to primary, secondary and special schools, as well as hospital schools, pupil referral units, youth offending teams, virtual schools and sixth form colleges in England. See <https://www.artsmark.org.uk/>
* For the latest **SecEd Best Practice Bulletins**, see <https://email.sec-ed.co.uk/q/12JpfhcqbDa4bwyAr16MtHht/wv> <https://email.sec-ed.co.uk/q/12Jpfhcqchnu46QpQ1sAV03e/wv> <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?tab=rm&ogbl#inbox/WhctKLbVgfRmLhQPffLftwZJkHrPtfPgzfvGrRcghHPcNlZLkjvDLXLMlFspRbZmcVzcsTB>
* For an article “**The English schools looking to dispel ‘doom and gloom’ around AI**”, see <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/mar/06/the-english-schools-looking-to-dispel-doom-and-gloom-around-ai>

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* **Up to 10,000 university jobs could be at risk this academic year because of the "unprecedented crisis" in higher education**, the union representing staff has said. The University and College Union (UCU) said 5,000 job cuts had already been announced, but thousands more roles could be at risk because of gaps in university funding. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cddy2l9lmjpo>
* DfE has issued “**National Careers Service: course directory**. The course directory contains information on courses offered by learning providers who are publicly funded to deliver courses in England.” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-careers-service-course-directory>

**Tony Stephens**