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**311 Academy and School News and Resources Update, March 15-21 2025**

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**The Curriculum and Assessment Review: interim report has been issued. A full summary of its contents can be found in the Appendix to this Update.**

**Worrying financial news for schools**

* DfE has issued “**Information to help schools, academies and others understand costs for schools in England**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-costs-technical-note> The **DfE says it expects school funding to rise by 4.3 per cent next year, while costs will rise by 3.6 per cent. But that headroom only leaves enough to pay for a 1.3 per cent pay rise, when government has recommended teacher pay rises by 2.8 per cent.** Assuming school support staff pay rose by the same amount, it would leave schools having to fund the money for most of the rise from their own budgets. “If schools find a 1 per cent efficiency on their budgets, this would represent a cash saving on the headroom of £550 million, which is equivalent to covering 1.7 per cent of staff pay awards.” To reach its estimates for the increase in schools’ costs, the note confirms that it has factored in falls in pupil numbers. That would still leave over a third of the rise unfunded. The note also confirms schools were under-funded in the current financial year. “For the current financial year, we estimate that the funding that goes to mainstream schools has risen by 7.1 per cent. On average, at the national level, their costs are estimated to be increasing by 7.7 per cent.”

**Possibly more worrying news**

* ESFA has issued:
* **Guidance for institutions delivering post-16 education on the National Insurance contributions (NICs) grant for financial year 2025 to 2026**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-national-insurance-contributions-nics-grant>
* **Guidance for schools and local authorities on the National Insurance contributions (NICs) grants for financial year 2025 to 2026**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-insurance-contributions-nics-grant-and-early-years-national-insurance-contributions-ey-nics-grant-for-2025-to-2026> The government will provide more than £1 billion in funding for schools to cover the rise in employer national insurance contributions. For the first time, the funding for mainstream schools will also include additional grants for those with special units and resourced provision to “support the higher staffing costs”, government said. Overall, £930 million will cover rises in mainstream and high needs settings from April 2025 to March 2026. Another £25 million will be issued for schools with early years provision, and £155 million for post-16 schools and further education colleges. The money will cover increases for both teachers and support staff, and for councils employing centrally-employed teachers. From April 6, employers’ national insurance contributions will increase from 13.8 per cent to 15 per cent. The money will be paid in the form of a grant, although for high needs settings it will go through the core schools budget grant. Allocations for schools will be published in May, for payment in September. Trusts would have to start paying the increased contributions next month, but would not receive funding until September. Updated allocations for new and growing schools will be published next February. Funding for mainstream schools will be incorporated into core budget allocations for 2026 to 2027 by being rolled into the national funding formula.

The government has published **a calculator tool** for mainstream schools and academies to estimate their NICs grant funding, which can be found in the second reference above

Funding rates are in the same document from 4.1 onwards

**ASCL** has heard from its members that Department for Education funding to cover increased NICs will leave some schools facing a shortfall of “around 10 to 35 per cent”. **CST** says some trusts are reporting shortfalls of up to 20 per cent.

NICs funding for **special schools** is calculated based on the number of planned places, and therefore schools that employ more staff where they have pupils with complex needs “might have a significant shortfall

**Pupil Premium**

* ESFA has updated “**Pupil premium: allocations and conditions of grant 2024 to 2025”**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium-allocations-and-conditions-of-grant-2024-to-2025> There are small increases to pupil premium rates for 2025-26. The per-pupil funding rate for primary pupils eligible for free school meals will increase by £35, while the secondary rate will increase by £25. This will not keep pace with rising costs
* DfE has updated “**Information on pupil premium funding, how school leaders can use it effectively and pupil premium strategy statements**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium>

**Attendance**

* **Attendance.** See <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-attendance-in-schools/2025-week-10> **The attendance rate (proportion of possible sessions attended) was 94.0% across all schools in the week commencing 03 March 2025**. The absence rate was, therefore, 6.0% across all schools. **By school type**, the absence rates across the week commencing 03 March 2025 were:
  + 4.3% in state-funded **primary** schools (3.2% authorised and 1.0% unauthorised)
  + 7.8% in state-funded **secondary** schools (4.7% authorised and 3.1% unauthorised)
  + 12.1% in state-funded **special** schools (8.9% authorised and 3.2% unauthorised)

Absence was 0.8 percentage points lower across all schools in the week commencing 03 March 2025 than in the equivalent week in the last academic year (week commencing 04 March 2024). This has been driven by a 0.6 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 93.4%.** **By school type**, the absence rates across the 2024/25 academic year to date were:

* + 5.2% in state-funded **primary** schools (3.8% authorised and 1.4% unauthorised)
  + 8.1% in state-funded **secondary** schools (5.1% authorised and 3.0% unauthorised)
  + 12.8% 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 18.4%, which is a 1.9 percentage point decrease compared to the equivalent point last academic year. For primary it was 14.4%; secondary 22.6%; special 35.6%

* **Academic year 2023/24, Pupil absence in schools in England**. See <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england/2023-24>
* Across 2023/24, the overall absence rate was 7.1%, a reduction from 7.4% in 2022/23, but higher than pre-pandemic rates (4.7% in 2018/19).
* The overall absence rate varied across terms, increasing from; 6.7% in autumn, to 7.2% in spring and to 7.6% in summer.
* The majority of absence was due to illness, accounting for 3.5% of possible sessions in 2023/24.
* 20.0% of pupils were persistently absent in 2023/24 (i.e. missed 10% or more sessions), a decrease compared to the previous year when it was 21.2%. Secondary was 25.6%, special was 37.2% and primary 14.6%. In 2018/19, 10.9% of pupils were persistently absent for all types of school
* Across school phases, overall absence between 2022/23 and 2023/24:
  + decreased in primary schools from 5.9% to 5.5%
  + decreased in secondary schools from 9.0% to 8.9%
  + remained stable in special schools at 13.0%
* 2.3% of pupil enrolments were severely absent in 2023/24, (50% or more of possible sessions are missed). This is an increase from 2.0% in the previous year and equates to 171,000 pupil enrolments; this is a record high. Increases in severe absence rates were seen across all school types compared to last year.
* The overall absence rate for pupils who are eligible for free school meals was 11.0% in 2023/24, a slight decrease from 11.1% in the previous year. This compares to 5.8% for those pupils who were not eligible for free school meals, a decrease from 6.1% in the previous year. Of pupils eligible for free school meals, 34.8% were persistently absent in 2023/24, a decrease from 36.5% in the previous year. This compares to 14.1% of pupils who were not eligible, which decreased from 15.6%.
* Last academic year, 6.8 per cent of children with an education, health and care plan were severely absent – meaning they missed 50 per cent or more of their lessons. This is up from 5.9 per cent in 2022-23, and more than double the pre-pandemic rate of 3.3 per cent. The proportion of those receiving SEN support who were severely absent also rose from 3.8 to 4.4 per cent.
* Absences from alternative provision also increased from 41.7 to 42.5 per cent
* DfE has issued a collection of “**Fortnightly pupil attendance statistics, and autumn, combined autumn and spring, and full year pupil absence statistics**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-pupil-absence>
* DfE has issued “**The link between attendance and attainment in an assessment year” See** <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67c96d7dd0fba2f1334cf2ed/The_link_between_attendance_and_attainment_in_an_assessment_year_-_March_2025.pdf>
  + Pupils in year 11 with an attendance rate of over 95 per cent were 1.9 times more likely to achieve a grade 5 in English and Maths GCSEs, compared to pupils who only attended 90 to 95 per cent of the time. Missing just ten days of year 11, the report said, halved the chance of achieving a grade 5 in the subjects.
  + Pupils in year six with an attendance rate of over 95 per cent were 1.3 times more likely to achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths when compared to pupils who only attended 90 to 95 per cent of the time. Missing just 10 days of year six reduced the likelihood of reaching the expected standard by around 25 per cent.
  + At year 11, only 14 per cent of pupils with attendance above 95 per cent were eligible for free school meals, compared to 21.3 per cent of year 11s nationally. Pupils eligible for free school meals also had a lower likelihood of reaching the expected standard at key stage 2 or getting a grade 5 at GCSE.
  + Pupils eligible for free school meals are “under-represented in the higher attendance bands”, accounting for only 20 per cent of year 6 pupils in the 95 to 100 per cent attendance band but 69 per cent of those in the 65 to 70 per cent band. 27.3 per cent of year 6 pupils nationally are eligible for free school meals.
  + Children with SEND also had lower attendance rates and were less likely to reach the expected standards.
* DfE has updated “**Monitor your school attendance: user guide”.** See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/monitor-your-school-attendance-user-guide>

**Early years and primary**

* STA has issued:
* **Guidance for schools whose pupils were affected by extremely distressing circumstances during or before the key stage 2 tests,** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-special-consideration-guidance>
* **Guidance for headteachers, teachers and school staff administering and scoring the phonics screening check in key stage 1**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-1-phonics-screening-check-administration-guidance>
* DfE has issued “**How managers can check an early years qualification is approved by DfE and see if the holder can count in staff/child ratios in an early years setting in England**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/check-an-early-years-qualification> and “**UK qualifications that meet the Department for Education (DfE) criteria for counting in the early years foundation stage statutory framework staff/child ratios”**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-qualifications-achieved-in-england>
* DfE has issued “**How you make an application for recognition of non-UK qualifications to work in an early years setting in England**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-qualifications-achieved-outside-england>
* DfE has issued “**Information for early years providers, childminders and nurseries including guidance** on the early years foundation stage (EYFS), funding, training and qualifications”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/early-years-and-childcare-guidance-for-providers>
* **Madrid plans to limit computer and tablet use in primary schools to two hours a week**. See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/mar/20/madrid-plans-to-limit-computer-and-tablet-use-in-primary-schools-to-two-hours-a-week>
* **Coram's annual Childcare Survey 2025** <https://www.coram.org.uk/news/childcare-survey-2025/> shows that annual nursery costs for a child under two in England have fallen for the first time in 15 years. It also shows that disadvantaged children and those with SEND least likely to access early years provision. The report finds that families who are not eligible for the new entitlements for children under three in England – because they are not in work, do not earn enough or do not meet other criteria – pay £105 per week more than eligible families for a part-time nursery place for a child under two, meaning that disadvantaged children are being priced out of accessing the same early education as those in working families. Also, only 29% of local authorities in England who responded to the survey report having enough childcare for at least 75% of children with SEND in their area

**Ofsted**

* Ofsted has issued “**State-funded schools inspections and outcomes as at 31 December 2024**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/state-funded-schools-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-december-2024> More schools have been graded good or outstanding across the majority of Ofsted inspection areas since headline grades were ditched. While schools are not given overall grades, inspectors have continued to rate them outstanding, good, requires improvement, or inadequate across four key judgment areas. Overall, the proportion of schools judged good or outstanding by Ofsted was:
  + 84% for quality of education, compared to 84% last year. At primary, 86 per cent of schools were rated good or outstanding for quality of education, compared to 74 per cent in secondary.
  + 94% for behaviour and attitudes, compared to 93% last year
  + 97% for personal development, compared to 95% last year
  + 89% for leadership and management, compared to 87% last year

The findings are based on 2,149 inspections that were carried out between the start of the year, and December 31, including 1,218 that were graded. Of these, 62 per cent of schools received the same grade for all four judgements. In 90 per cent of cases, schools received the same grade for both quality of education and leadership and management – making these the most likely judgements to correlate. Just 67 per cent of schools received the same grade for both quality of education and personal development, making them the most likely to differ.

* For **Martyn Oliver's speech at the ASCL Annual Conference**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/martyn-olivers-speech-at-the-ascl-annual-conference>
* He accused the “most vocal critics” of proposed inspection reforms of seeking a “low-accountability system”, as he insisted report cards “are not and never were going to bring about the end of grading”
* The proposals have been met with some “really encouraging” feedback, along with “a small number of rather surprising responses” which he claimed were “seemingly built on a misunderstanding of what report cards are”.
* He said the proposed framework will help “move from low quality information and high-stakes inspection to a much richer, more nuanced set of information and sensible, supportive and proportionate accountability”.
* Inspectors and leaders have reported “that they found the new approach to be more flexible and more collaborative.” But he acknowledged concerns over a lack of clarity in the toolkits and said Ofsted is working to rectify this; “we have more work to do on defining the differences between grades, particularly between secure and strong.
* The standards proposed by Ofsted “should be a surprise or require extra work” from school leaders
* Ofsted “want[s] inspection to be a collaborative dialogue on an equal footing”. “We want you and our inspectors to be able to openly discuss where you are and where you’re heading,” he said.
* Asked about concerns inspectors would struggle to assess against least nine areas, he said the “methodology is very different now”. He said now instead of doing deep dives into certain subjects, inspectors could look across the curriculum while also asking about teacher development, achievement, behaviour, attendance. “You don’t inspect each one of the areas in silo.”
* For **Ofsted’s monitoring reports on commitments made in the Big Listen** and its response to Dame Christine Gilbert’s independent learning review, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/big-listen-action-monitoring-reports>
* It seems Ofsted is considering **quizzing schools on inspectors’ “empathy, courtesy and respect**” and the organisation’s wider culture after inspections. : “This will include our openness, our organisational integrity, and whether inspectors and all of our staff are demonstrating our values of professionalism, empathy, courtesy and respect. “We are also exploring asking post-inspection survey questions as part of the same survey.”
* Ofsted has been told it may need separate toolkits for **special schools** amid concern that its inspection plans will not work outside of mainstream. There are also concerns that the way the watchdog has written its toolkits for how it plans to grade schools could lead to SEND becoming a “low-risk” area to fail in. See also <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/specialist-sector/ofsted-inspection-toolkits-lack-coherence-on-send>
* For an article “**Why we fear Ofsted is not really listening**”, see <https://www.tes.com/magazine/analysis/general/why-we-fear-ofsted-not-really-listening>
* Ofsted has issued “**Ofsted pen portraits of HM Inspectors (HMI**)”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-pen-portraits-of-hm-inspectors-hmis>
* Ofsted has issued a **collection of statistics on the inspections and outcomes of maintained schools and academies in England**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/maintained-schools-and-academies-inspections-and-outcomes-official-statistics>

**Inclusion, SEND and Special Schools**

* **Government reforms will fail to curb spending on independent special schools**, experts are warning, as analysis reveals one in five councils more than doubled their outlay over the past four years, amid an acute shortage of places for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in the state sector. SEND spending on independent education has risen overall from £1.5 billion in 2020-21 to £2.4 billion in 2023-24, figures show. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/specialist-sector/send-plans-will-fail-stop-private-school-costs-soaring>
* **The government is launching a call for evidence to unearth the best school inclusion practice to help shape major SEND reforms**, <https://inclusioninpractice.org.uk/> The call for evidence submission window opened on March 16 and closes at midnight on Thursday May 1. Findings will be published in the summer term. Researchers from ImpactEd will facilitate the survey. The project, called ‘Inclusion in Practice’, aims to “identify and share practical, scalable solutions for inclusion in mainstream schools”. The government said examples will include schools and trusts that have added special education units, offered mainstream classes with support from specialist learning assistants, and provided specialist equipment for sports. Approaches to early identification of need, strategies for building workforce expertise and working with families, and system-level “enablers” such as funding or leadership initiatives are also sought. The overall aim is making mainstream schools more inclusive. A website has been launched as a “national resource to share examples of strong practice showcasing what works in inclusive education, helping to build capability across the sector and to better understand what good looks like”, <https://inclusioninpractice.org.uk/> Government will pump another £1 billion into high needs budgets next year, with councils encouraged to set up more mainstream school specialist places from £740 million of capital funding.
* For an article “**How to solve SEND? 13 sector solutions**”, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/how-to-solve-send-13-sector-solutions/>
* For an article” ‘**I’d like to see SEND label retired’**, says inclusion tsar Tom Rees”, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/id-like-to-see-send-label-retired-says-inclusion-tsar-tom-rees/>
* For an article, “**The lens of leadership: the transformative power of coaching in special schools**”. See <https://www.nasschools.org.uk/the-lens-of-leadership-the-transformative-power-of-coaching-in-special-schools/>
* ESFA has issued **“Core schools budget grant (CSBG) 2025 to 2026 for special schools, special post-16 institutions and alternative provision**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/core-schools-budget-grant-csbg-2025-to-2026-for-special-schools-and-alternative-provision>

**Technology; Data**

* **The DfE has announced a new £25 million investment in its ‘connect the classroom’ programme to improve internet speed in schools**. About 1,000 schools are set to benefit from £45 million in total to help get classrooms online in a bid to narrow the digital divide in education. The remaining £20 million is the latest round of funding from a three-year pot announced in 2022 to complete the delivery of fibre upgrades to 833 schools. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/no-child-left-behind-in-plans-to-narrow-the-digital-divide-in-education>
* **The DfE is consulting on a strategy for all schools to meet a set of six core digital standards by 2030 to narrow a technological divide**, warning that only 16 per cent report meet them currently, including ensuring essential technology infrastructure and connectivity, as well as digital security. **For the consultation,** see <https://consult.education.gov.uk/reliable-and-safe-technology/narrowing-the-digital-divide-in-schools/> The core standards outlined in the consultation, which will run for eight weeks, are broadband internet, wireless networks, network switches, digital leadership and governance, filtering and monitoring and cyber security. The DfE originally launched 11 digital standards for schools and colleges in 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/meeting-digital-and-technology-standards-in-schools-and-colleges> Schools will be asked how ready they are to meet the six standards and what additional support they might need. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/no-child-left-behind-in-plans-to-narrow-the-digital-divide-in-education>
* **The government has announced £80 million to equip 200 schools with solar panels by the end of this summer**. As part of the first project of Great British Energy, schools have been selected based on their level of deprivation. Most solar panels will be in the North East, West Midlands and North West of the country, as well as at least ten schools across the remaining regions. A school could save up to £25,000 per year through the panels, according to estimations by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. About 20 per cent of schools currently have solar panels. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/great-british-energy-to-cut-bills-for-hospitals-and-schools>
* DfE has updated its **Data protection in schools manual**. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/data-protection-in-schools>
* For an article “**What schools need to get right on AI**”, see <https://www.tes.com/magazine/teaching-learning/general/what-schools-need-to-get-right-artificial-intelligence>

**The disadvantage gap**

* **The growth in the attainment gap between poorer 16-year-olds and their better-off peers between 2019 and 2023 can be “entirely explained” by higher absences for disadvantaged pupils** a report by the Education Policy Institute suggests <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/breaking-down-the-gap/> In 2023, poorer year 11 pupils were 19.2 months behind their peers, up 0.5 months since 2019. Disadvantaged children are already 4.6 months behind when starting school. The EPI said poverty was the main reason for this inequality. Almost 60 per cent of disadvantage gaps among 11-year-olds had already emerged by the time the pupils were seven, the EPI said. The gap then widened by 0.5 months at age 16 between 2019 and 2023.
* Pupil absence is a key, and growing, driver of the disadvantage gap. If disadvantaged pupils had the same level of absence as their peers in 2023, the attainment gap at age 11 (of 10.1 months) would have been almost one month smaller and the gap at age 16 (of 18.6 months) would have been over four months smaller
* The growth in the disadvantage gap at age 16 by 0.5 months since 2019 (to 18.6 months in 2023) can be entirely explained by higher levels of absence for disadvantaged pupils.
* At each key stage, more than half of the gap is explained by the size of the gap in earlier phases. Our analysis finds that by age 7, nearly 60% of the gap at age 11 has already developed.
* Disadvantaged students fall even further behind when they attend schools and colleges with lower-attaining intakes – this peer effect adds over 1 month to the GCSE gap in 2023, and a third of a grade to the 16-19 gap.
* The attainment gap is widening for the youngest pupils with special educational needs, with pupils on SEN support in reception year falling 0.7 months behind their peers between 2019 and 2023. A lack of early intervention and the inability of many families to access adequate SEND and mental health support for their children have led to an unacceptable and unnecessary widening of inequalities.
* The gender gap for GCSE students has narrowed during this period as boys are catching up, but this also reflects slower progress of girls during secondary schools.

**The report recommends that**:

* + The government should prioritise early intervention to improve school readiness and reduce gaps throughout schooling, by increasing the early years pupil premium to match the pupil premium in later years, ensuring a high quality workforce and improving childcare accessibility for disadvantaged children in particular.
  + As part of wider SEND reforms, the government should prioritise training in child development and different types of SEND, making it a mandatory part of initial teacher training and early career development.
  + The government should develop a new absence strategy which addresses its root causes and includes improved SEND identification, better mental health support in and outside of schools, and fostering pupils’ sense of school belonging.
  + The government should introduce a student premium in the 16-19 phase, similar to the pupil premium at key stage 4.
  + The government is due to publish its Child Poverty Strategy in Spring 2025. This should specifically consider centralising auto-enrolment for free school meals to ensure wider coverage, as well as abolishing the Two-Child Limit and the benefits cap.
  + Given the need to reduce segregation in the education system, school admissions should be reformed to level the playing field for disadvantaged pupils and better information, advice and guidance should be provided to support high-attaining disadvantaged students in particular
  + The 16-19 disadvantage gap has changed little since 2019 but disadvantaged students have become less likely to continue education after the end of key stage 4.

**Lost learning**

* A study, from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) and education charity The Difference, <https://the-difference.com/> said **children lost 11.5 million days’ worth of learning in the autumn term of 2023**. This is a huge rise on the 6.8 million days lost in the same term in 2019, as suspensions, exclusions and children leaving mainstream schools to be home educated has soared post-Covid. For every child permanently excluded, 10 other children experience an “invisible” move that isn’t recorded in national data, the report found. This includes “managed moves” – informal agreements between schools and families – as well as the illegal practice of off-rolling. One third of these children go to an “unknown destination” – meaning government has “no idea where or whether they are still being schooled”. Elective home education has increased by over 20 per cent and absence levels are double pre-pandemic levels. The scale of lost learning disproportionately impacts children who already face barriers to opportunity: those living in poverty, with identified special educational needs, known to children’s social care, and children experiencing structural racism, such as those from with Black Caribbean or Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller heritage. **Recommendations** 
  + 1. The sector needs a shared definition of measurable school inclusion. The DfE, local government, trusts and schools should adopt this report’s definition of whole school inclusion – “all staff supporting the learning, wellbeing and safety needs of all children, so that they belong, achieve and thrive” – together with our four principles for success.
  + 2. Schools’ cohorts should reflect their local community. The DfE, local authorities and school trusts should take an active role in identifying and improving non-representative schools.
  + 3. School accountability should support all children. The DfE should reform headline measures by introducing multi-year averages, and revisit which subjects are included in Progress 8 scores. Additional measures reflecting children’s longer-term outcomes and schools’ context should also be developed.
  + 4. The vast majority of children’s needs should be met through a combination of timely universal and targeted support, rather than being locked behind legislative thresholds. The DfE should provide £850 million of additional funding for whole school inclusion over the next five years.
  + 5. Every school needs leaders with inclusion expertise to set the culture. Trusts, local authorities and the DfE should support this in their professional development offers.
  + 6. The most underserved schools should be able to recruit and retain the best teachers. The DfE should further tilt funding towards underserved schools and encourage spending on incentives for teacher recruitment and retention.
  + 7. Working with families and local communities should be seen as a domain of professional practice in schools. The DfE should make sure this is reflected in its suite of professional IPPR and The Difference | Who is losing learning? Finding solutions to the school engagement crisis 11 qualifications, and trusts and local authorities should prioritise professional development in this area.
  + 8. Government must address the fragmentation of services for children and families, beginning with the development of a shared outcomes framework and the establishment of a governance strategy to monitor progress. As a first step, the government should publish a plan to radically improve access to children’s mental health and speech and language support.
  + 9. Every school should use data on student experience and lost learning across the continuum to develop a strategic response to all children’s needs. Ofsted should increase its focus on the strategic use of student experience data and lost learning data in school improvement.
  + 10. All pupil movements should be equally visible and accountable. The DfE should introduce legislation that provides oversight of pupil movements off site and off roll.

**NEET**

* DfE has issued “**NEET age 16 to 24: 2024**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/neet-age-16-to-24-2024>
* **16-24 year olds NEET**, 13.6% Up 1.5 percentage points compared to 2023, that is 1 in 7. 14.5% of all male 16-24-year-olds were NEET, compared with 12.6% of females, both increasing in 2024. The increase in NEET has been driven by less in employment. Over half of those NEET had a health condition in 2024 with over 1 in 6 of those NEET currently report having a mental health condition.
* **16-17 year olds NEET**, 4.6% Up 0.7 percentage points compared to 2023. A fall in those in employment (not in education and training) to 1.4% of the age 16/17 population has led to a 0.7 percentage point increase in the NEET rate. The fall in employment has been partially offset by an annual increase in the proportion in education and training to 94.0%. The latest NEET estimate is comparable to levels seen prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
* **18-24 year olds NEET**, 16.2% Up 1.7 percentage points compared to 2023. This was driven by falls in proportions in employment with proportions in education and training remaining relatively stable.
* For a **collection of statistics: NEET and participation**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-neet>

**From and about the DfE**

* For the **Education Secretary's speech at the ASCL conference**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/education-secretarys-speech-at-the-ascl-conference>
* The government’s new school-improvement squads will prioritise English and maths attainment, the quality of the reception year, attendance and inclusion. They’ve also been charged with brokering support for struggling schools. They will also have a universal service for primaries and secondaries with minimal issues.
* The first 20 RISE advisers have gone into schools for targeted intervention for the 600 schools the DfE has categorised as “stuck”.
* She expects all schools to keep phones out of the classroom, and that she has commissioned officials to examine “how we can more effectively monitor what’s happening on the ground”. Technology secretary Peter Kyle “has commissioned a study led by the University of Cambridge to assess the impact of social media and smartphones, strengthening the evidence base on their impact on children’s wellbeing”.
* “There is proof that the inclusion versus standards compromise is no such thing. They go together.”
* “You see it every day, children turning up still in nappies, not able to speak, absences, stubbornly high, vacancies up, the SEND system creaking after years of neglect. The damage of 14 years cannot be undone in simply eight months.”
* The department is “thinking about what more we can do to provide support for schools” around parental complaints”, particularly “overlapping” complaints to multiple agencies”.
* She wanted to get to a SEND system “with much earlier identification of need, much more timely intervention and support” with more specialist support in mainstream. Asked about when a decision will be made on whether to extend the statutory override that is keeping high-needs deficits off councils’ books, Ms Phillipson said she could not currently put a timescale on a decision. Parents will need to “think very differently” about government funding for children with special educational needs. The 2014 Children and Families Act needed to be changed to reform the current system in England that was driving local authorities towards insolvency.
* “They [special schools] will be a central part of any reform that we drive forward in this area. I know the pressures that they’re facing around increasing demand and lack of places,” she said. Special school heads have raised concerns previously that efforts to make schools more inclusive risk ignoring the huge amount of expertise in the specialist sector.
* Asked if DfE quangos the Oak National Academy and LocatED property company were safe, Phillipson said: “We have no plans to make any changes there.”
* The government has announced it would spend £2 million to increase support for reading and writing. This will include publishing a framework this summer setting out a “common approach” for teaching writing.
* The DfE would be setting out more detail in “the months to come” the approach it will be taking to tackle behaviour concerns in schools
* DfE has updated “**Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill: impact assessments**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-wellbeing-and-schools-bill-impact-assessments>
* **The former head of Ofsted, Amanda Spielman, has criticised the education secretary and accused her of giving "a great deal of time and attention" to the teaching unions**. Ms Spielman claims "effective reforms are being reversed" - referring to potential changes to academy schools' powers in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cgq9kdvv24ko>
* **The government has blocked an attempt by the Conservatives to ban pupils from having mobile phones in school**. Labour MPs defeated a Conservative amendment to the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which would have forced headteachers to introduce a policy that stopped the use and carrying of phones by pupils in schools. The DfE said measures were already in place to allow schools to ban phones**. But Bridget Phillipson is to begin an in-depth scrutiny of smartphone bans in schools in England** as pressure grows from MPs to act on the effect of social media on teenagers. See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/mar/20/uk-government-to-look-again-at-a-smartphone-ban-in-schools>

**Creative education**

* The DfE has announced plans <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/young-people-to-benefit-from-creative-education-boost> which include:
* The appointment of a **new National Centre for Arts and Music** Education, expected to be established in September 2026, to support the delivery of high-quality arts education through a new online training offer for teachers, promoting opportunities for children and young people to pursue their artistic and creative interests in school - including through the government’s network of Music Hubs - and boost partnerships between schools and cultural providers.
* To support schools to offer pupils high-quality creative and other extra-curricular activities, a new **Enrichment Framework** will be developed in collaboration with a panel of experts, to be issued by the end of the year. The Framework is expected to cover a wide range of activities which could be anything from sport to gardening, board games to school bands, or debating to volunteering.
* **A new Digital, AI and Technology Task and Finish Group made up of sector and digital experts** will also be established. The group will advise the government on what changes can be made to improve the AI and digital skills talent pipeline, prepare children and young people for the jobs of the future, and drive better teaching and learning through the use of AI and Technology. The group will report to the Education Secretary before the end of the academic year.

**ITT**

* DfE has updated “**Initial teacher training (ITT): accreditation for the academic year 2026 to 2027**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/initial-teacher-training-itt-accreditation-for-the-academic-year-2026-to-2027>
* DfE has issued “**The department’s annual target for trainees to start postgraduate initial teacher training in 2025/26, in England, by subject**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements/postgraduate-initial-teacher-training-targets-2025-to-2026>
* DfE has issued “**Mandatory guidance on the criteria that organisations must meet to provide initial teacher training in the 2024 to 2025 academic year**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-criteria>

**Academies and free schools**

* DfE has updated “**Academies chart of accounts and automating the accounts return**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/academies-chart-of-accounts>
* DfE has updated “**Free schools and UTCs: successful applications**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-schools-successful-applications>
* DfE has updated “**Information for academy trusts to complete their accounts** return”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academies-accounts-return>
* ESFA has issued a collection **“Letters sent from the accounting officer of EFA/ESFA to academy trusts**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/academy-trust-accounting-officer-letters-from-efa>
* DfE has issued “**Information for academies about how to claim for national non-domestic rates (NNDR)**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academies-funding-claims>
* More than 200 academy trusts bid for £44 million of government funding to help them grow and often take over struggling schools – **before the trust capacity (TCaF) and establishment and growth (TEG) funds were ended** by the government. One MAT revealed that the loss of the funding has left it having to claw back up to £300,000 from reserves. Another said it may have to make redundancies. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/academy-trusts-bid-for-44m-growth-cash-before-scheme-axed/>

**Boys**

* **Schools need to develop a “boy positive” learning environment to tackle educational underachievement,** a report says. This could include encouraging more men to become teachers and for school inspections to look closely at gender disparities, according to “Boys will be boys: The educational underachievement of boys and young men”, <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Boys-will-be-boys-The-educational-underachievement-of-boys-and-young-men.pdf> The report by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) calculates that differences in educational achievement have meant that half a million young men have missed out on higher education over the past decade. In 2024-25, around 44,000 fewer UK young men than women accepted a place at a UK higher education institution, It says that an Asian girl in receipt of free school meals (FSM) is 63.6 per cent more likely to progress to higher education than a white boy on FSM. 24 per cent of parents think that boys in their child’s school are made to feel ashamed of being male. Males dominate diagnoses for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism, dyslexia and stuttering, and that colour blindness is almost exclusively male. boys do not have enough male role models in school, with men comprising just 24 per cent of the teaching workforce. At nursery and primary level, only one in seven teachers are male, it says, although this rises somewhat to 35 per cent at secondary level. 30 per cent of primary schools have no male teachers at all.

**School management**

* DfE has updated “**How to access senior mental health lead training**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/senior-mental-health-lead-training>
* DfE has issued “**Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges.** Find resources to help you develop a whole school or college approach to mental health and wellbeing”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-and-wellbeing-support-in-schools-and-colleges>
* **Eligible schools still have time to claim a non-competitive grant of up to £10,000 to help children and young people connect with nature through their education setting**. Applications for the grant need to be submitted by Thursday 27th March at 5pm. Eligible schools are listed on the DfE website as ‘Group 3’ and will have be notified via post and email with a direct link to their application form, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nature-park-and-climate-action-awards-funding-allocations?utm_source=Master+Audience&utm_campaign=4ad37693c9-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2024_09_20_08_36_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-6a99ad5c7c-52432659>
* The School Food Review coalition has launched the updated Superpowers of **School Food evidence pack**. The report highlights current evidence that free school meals (FSM) improve children's health, academic performance, and well-being while also delivering long-term economic benefits, <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-03/FSM%20Evidence%20Pack_A4_2025_FINAL.pdf?utm_source=Master+Audience&utm_campaign=ec2bf93f14-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2024_10_25_09_57_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-1e2b793773-52671983>
* For the latest **ESFA Updates**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-update-19-march-2025>
* ESFA has issued “**Guidance to support billing authorities with the national non-domestic rates (NNDR) claims payment process**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-non-domestic-rates-guidance-for-billing-authorities>
* The government is still mulling over its strategy around **school behaviour,** education minister Stephen Morgan has admitted, amid rising concern from leaders and teachers. Mr Morgan said that there was a need to “share good practice” between similar schools to “improve the national picture”. It is expected that regional improvement for standards and excellence (RISE) teams will take on some of this work, although it is unclear to what extent this will involve attendance hubs. Mr Morgan called on leaders yesterday to have a “sharp and consistent focus” on **attendance**, including using school data to “design your strategy” and “target your support and interventions effectively”. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/stephen-morgan-interview-dfe-thinking-through-behaviour-strategy>
* DfE has issued **“Make a claim through the risk protection arrangement (RPA)”.** See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/make-a-claim-through-the-risk-protection-arrangement-rpa>
* DfE has issued “**Political impartiality in schools**. Explains schools’ legal duties on political impartiality to help school leaders, teachers and other staff consider these in teaching and extra-curricular activities. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/political-impartiality-in-schools>

**Health and welfare of children, young people and families**

* DfE has issued **“Families First Partnership programme**. Guidance for safeguarding partners on implementing family help, multi-agency child protection and family group decision-making reforms”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/families-first-partnership-programme> New guidance sets a clear expectation on all councils and their partners to reform family support services to enable earlier intervention and better protect children from harm. Key reforms include introducing a single ‘front door’ to support services in every local area. This will make it clear to families struggling with complex needs such as mental health issues, disabilities and substance misuse, where and how they can access help. This could mean embracing digital services or bringing different teams and services into an existing setting, such as a family hub. Bringing help from health visitors, housing support teams and mental health specialists into one place, will make it clear to parents where to access help and improve join up with existing universal support. Thousands more family help leads will be matched with families to coordinate support and resources, taking responsibility for getting them the support they need to stop issues escalating. This will importantly end the frustrating experience of vulnerable families being passed from team to team, forced to tell their story time and time again. These reforms are all backed by over half a billion pounds for councils in 2025/2026 – double their allocation in previous years
* In 2024, more than 110,000 minors aged three to 17 in England and Scotland were estimated to have **long Covid**, with more than 20,000 of them severely affected. At a time in their lives when they should be running around the playground, these children can barely make it out of bed. In some cases, parents of children with long Covid are threatened with being taken to court for truancy. See <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/mar/17/long-covid-pandemic-britain-power-lockdown-disease>
* For an article “**How Covid changed children in Britain**”, see <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/mar/18/how-covid-changed-children-britain>

**Education news for schools**

* **Pepe Di’Iasio used his speech at ASCL’s conference** to address the issue of pupil absence and criticise Ofsted’s proposals, calling for three inspection grades, not five. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/ascl-chief-schools-left-looking-villains-pupil-absence-school-attendance>
* For the latest **STEM Update**, see <https://email.stem.org.uk/q/11oBrIRtw199vl4Iln3QKmi/wv>
* For the latest **SecEd Best Practice Bulletins** see <https://email.sec-ed.co.uk/q/12Jpfhcqd4PTy3PCsTuEgMIG/wv> <https://email.sec-ed.co.uk/q/12JpfhcqdxhDNitU85J56zrW/wv>
* **A “sizeable proportion” of teachers would prioritise an immediate salary increase at the expense of reduced retirement benefits**, according to new research, <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/what-pensions-do-teachers-want/> which found that 15 per cent of teachers were willing to trade 20 per cent of their pension income for a 10 per cent salary increase, which the TPS does not allow; teachers value a 10 per cent increase in their retirement income only as much as a 6 per cent increase in their current salary.
* For an article “**Why some schools will be hit harder by planned QTS change**”, see <https://www.tes.com/magazine/analysis/general/why-qualified-teacher-status-qts-requirement-will-hit-some-schools-harder>
* Schools are demanding a payment provider which has ceased operating in the UK refund their parents in full amid accusations that cash is being “withheld”. **sQuid** provided parents with an online account where funds could be uploaded to pay for school dinners and trips – but shut up shop last Friday. Around 600 schools used it. However, the firm will only refund parents for balances over £10, and those wanting to withdraw their cash must pay a £10 “administration fee”. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/squid-give-us-back-our-money-parents-tell-closed-payment-provider/>

**Post 16**

* DfE has issued “**Turing Scheme: international placements, 2025 to 2026**”, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/turing-scheme-international-placements-2025-to-2026> and “**Turing Scheme: apply for funding** for international placements”, see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/turing-scheme-apply-for-funding-for-international-placements>
* DfE has issued “Information on reviewing procedures and ensuring best practice for **the appraisal of senior further education post holders and the performance of governing body chairs**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/effective-senior-post-holder-appraisal-and-chair-performance-review>
* For an article “**T-levels are a disaster – and young people are suffering because ministers won’t admit it**”, see <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/mar/17/t-levels-vocational-education-disaster-students-realism>
* ESFA has issued a collection “**Letters sent to the accounting officers of college corporations**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/college-corporation-accounting-officer-letters>
* DfE has issued a manual, “**Further education estates planning**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/further-education-estates-planning/strategic-estate-planning> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/further-education-estates-planning> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/further-education-estates-planning/understanding-the-estate> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/further-education-estates-planning/buying-selling-and-leasing-property>
* DfE has issued “**FE funding: initial teacher education bursary, 2025 to 2026**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fe-funding-initial-teacher-education-bursary-2025-to-2026>

**Appendix**

**The Curriculum and Assessment Review interim report**

* **The Curriculum and Assessment Review interim report has been issued**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/curriculum-and-assessment-review-interim-report> The interim report sets out four key areas of focus for the review until its final report in the autumn. In its second part, the review will focus on ensuring the system works well for all, subject-specific issues, making the curriculum fit for the future and looking at post-16. This interim report does not include recommendations, which will be published in the final report in autumn. Instead, it diagnoses issues and strengths with the existing system and focuses on going forward. There were over 7000 responses to the consultation. The review is focusing on evolution, not revolution.

**Schools and academies will need to read the whole 45 page report, and the following summary only picks out the major issues raised**

**The interim report identifies four key areas needing improvement**:

* Ensuring high standards for all - exploring how curriculum and assessment can be more inclusive and equitable, to ensure excellence for all.
* Addressing subject-specific challenges, and ensuring curriculum is consistently achieving depth and breadth – including an in-depth analysis of individual subjects to ensure appropriate depth and mastery of knowledge, and that subjects are cutting edge.
* Responding to social and technological change - examining how education can better prepare students to grasp the opportunities of the future, for example heightened digital skills and media literacy to address trends in digital information and the rise of AI, and scientific and cultural knowledge to meet the challenges of climate change.
* Ensuring pathways beyond GCSE work for all - examining the current pathways to ensure they work for all young people in supporting successful routes to further study or employment, especially those from less privileged backgrounds.

**The next stage of the curriculum and assessment review will develop analysis in the four key areas,** considering questions that have been raised across different subjects about the specificity, relevance, volume and diversity of content. work will include:

* considering questions that have been raised across different subjects about the specificity, relevance, volume and diversity of content;
* conducting deeper analysis to diagnose the specific issues affecting each subject and explore and test a range of solutions;
* continuing to consider the impact of current performance measures on young people’s choices and outcomes, and their impact on institutional behaviours;
* continuing to consider how best to equip children and young people with the essential knowledge and skills which will enable them to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing and AI-enabled world;
* exploring level 3 pathways, with the aim of building on the successes of existing academic and technical pathways, with particular attention paid to how best to support learners who do not study A levels or T Levels;
* considering how best to develop strong occupational pathways at level 2 and examining how to strengthen progression routes from level 2 to level 3;
* considering how best to ensure learners who did not achieve the required standard in English and maths at GCSE are best supported to do so by age 18; and
* conducting further analysis of assessment at key stages 1 to 4 and considering any necessary improvements.

The review expects to recommend a phased programme of work across the subjects listed in the national curriculum. This will allow reforms to be made incrementally in a way that does not destabilise the system.

**Key sections of the report**

* **The curriculum** is, broadly, a good one that most parents back. It “is a knowledge-rich offer, and international comparisons suggest that the present arrangements have had a positive impact on attainment”. However, excellence “is not yet provided for all: persistent attainment gaps remain, and the current system is not delivering for every child, The review will “consider the positive impact we can make on the outcomes for socio-economically disadvantaged young people and those with SEND with the levers that are at our disposal, while remaining aware of the wider challenges the sector faces”.
* There is positivity about the breadth of the curriculum at key stages 1 to 4, but many respondents “cited the trade-off between **breadth and depth**, noting that while the curriculum has a large variety of subjects, there can be a challenge to address them all adequately”. Meanwhile, advocates for the arts and some other subjects “maintain that some subjects have been squeezed, either in relation to curriculum time, take-up by students, or both”.
* The review heard that the **curriculum at key stages 1 and 2** is not effectively balancing depth and breadth. This is reported to lead to a struggle to cover all content with sufficient depth and negatively affects pupils’ ability to master foundational concepts.
* The curriculum is “at its broadest in terms of the number of subjects studied at **key stage 3**”, but many schools begin preparing pupils for GCSE in year 9…which narrows the curriculum offer and may curtail learning in curriculum subjects not selected for further study. Transitions “are not always well-aligned between key stages, particularly between key stage 2 and key stage 3, and that there is repetition in the key stage 3 curriculum, which can cause learners to become disengaged.
* The report said it had heard “**two main barriers to achieving breadth and balance at key stage 4**”. The first is a “question of volume which is reported to challenge adequate curriculum depth and to squeeze the curriculum time available for mandatory but non-assessed subjects such as PE, RE and RSHE”. The second challenge “frequently noted relates to the EBacc performance measures”. Responses “have highlighted that the EBacc performance measures may unnecessarily constrain student choice (and, consequently, their engagement and/or achievement)”. The review remained “strongly committed to the progress performance measures which focus on the difference a school makes”
* Responses demonstrate a continued support for a high-quality, **knowledge-rich curriculum**, but “rapid social, environmental and technological change necessitates that the curriculum keep pace; including a renewed focus on digital and media literacy, and a greater focus on sustainability and climate science”. Polling suggests young people want a greater focus on “the applied knowledge and skills that will equip them for later life and work”, for instance; pupils also want more to be taught on financial education, careers knowledge, politics and climate science and sustainability
* The review heard that in “some subjects the current construction and **balance of content appears to be inhibiting” mastery**. “Lack of specificity can, counter-intuitively, contribute to greater curriculum volume, as teachers try to cover all eventualities in demonstrating the quality of their curriculum; or repeat material due to a lack of clarity about what has previously been covered.”
* The review “heard compelling arguments that the curriculum needs **to do more in ensuring that all young people feel represented**, and that it successfully delivers the equalities duties to support equality of opportunity and challenge discrimination”. But as well as making sure that children and young people can see themselves represented in the curriculum, “it will be important that we also make sure they encounter the unfamiliar, and have their horizons stretched and broadened” Representation “does not and must not mean restriction to only some frames of reference for particular children or groups of children”.
* The report noted **religious education and relationships, sex and health education** were compulsory, but not part of the national curriculum. With RE, they said evidence suggested a “lack of national agreed content standards has led to national disparities in the quality of provision.
* The report found that **A-levels** are “working well” and **T-levels** are “becoming an established brand”. They heard concerns “clearly expressed about the **technical and vocational** parts of the system”, which serve over 40 per cent of young people. The high number of “differently branded and graded qualifications means that learners and employers are unclear about the purpose and value of some study programmes”.
* We think the expectation for **study of maths and English post 16** if at least grade 4 has not been achieved should remain, but with greater nuance in measures to ensure that as many learners as possible can achieve positive outcomes”. At present there are “indefensible” outcomes
* **KS1 and KS2. Assessments** “rightly focus on the core skills of reading, writing and maths. End of key stage 2 statutory assessments, including the multiplication tables check and phonics screening check, “are an important tool in holding schools to account for the progress and attainment of their pupils, and to ascertain whether pupils have learned the national curriculum” However, the review also heard concerns that the standalone end of key stage 2 assessment on grammar, punctuation and spelling “might lead to the teaching of textual features in isolation at the expense of a sound understanding of reading and writing”. The review also heard concerns that the writing assessment at the end of key stage 2 “does not validly assess pupils’ ability to write fluently and does not incentivise effective teaching of writing”. The next phase “will examine how the assessment of writing at key stage 2 can be improved to support high and rising standards”. There were also concerns raised over the consistency of judgements in writing assessments. Performance in writing at the end of KS2 is reported as a teacher assessment judgement. As a result, in the next stage of its work the review will examine how assessment of writing at KS2 can be improved.
* **KS4.** We will not fundamentally change the number of subjects that students study or are assessed in at GCSE” “Given all of the evidence, we are clear that traditional examined assessment should remain the primary means of assessment across GCSEs.” The impact of exams on pupil wellbeing was a “frequently raised concern”. Polling found 41 per cent of last year’s GCSE cohort found it difficult, while 10 per cent found it “very difficult” to cope with stress during that period.
* Another theme in responses was the “**volume of assessment undertaken by students at key stage 4**”. The next phase of the review will “consider carefully whether there are opportunities to reduce the overall volume of assessment at key stage 4 without compromising the reliability of results. The review will “consider potential risks and trade-offs with non-exam assessments. The review will look at assessment fitness for purpose on a subject-by-subject basis and the impact of different assessment methods on both teaching and learning.

**Tony Stephens**