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**308 Academy and School News and Resources Update, Feb 23-28 2025**

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**Public examinations**

* DfE has issued “Information for schools about **secondary school accountability measures**, including Progress 8 and Attainment 8”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/progress-8-school-performance-measure>
* DfE has issued “**Key stage 4 performance 2024 (revised**)”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/key-stage-4-performance-2024>
* Average Attainment 8 has decreased compared with last year and 2018/19. The average Attainment 8 score is 45.9 in 2024, which has decreased by 0.4 points since 2022/23 from 46.3, and decreased by 0.8 points from 46.7 in 2018/19. The decrease in Attainment 8 in 2023/24 has been driven by a decrease in the open bucket, and in particular non-GCSEs i.e. Vocational Technical Qualifications (VTQs). This follows reforms designed to strengthen KS4 Technical Awards awarded for the first time in 2024.
* 45.9% of pupils achieved a grade 5 or higher in both English and maths. This is an increase of 0.6 percentage points (from 45.3%) compared to 2022/23, and an increase of 2.7 percentage points (from 43.2%) in comparison with 2018/19.
* 40.4% of pupils were entered into the full EBacc. This is the highest EBacc entry rate since the measure was introduced. This is also an increase of 1.1 percentage points in comparison with 2022/23. In 2018/19 40.0% of pupils were entered into the full EBacc.
* Average EBacc APS in 2024 has increased by 0.02 to 4.07 compared with last year, and is now the same score as in 2019.

**By disadvantage**

* For the percentage of pupils achieving grades 5 and above in English and maths, the gap increased from 2022/23 (27.2 to 27.3) and also increased compared to 2018/19 (25.2 up to 27.3).
* The average Attainment 8 gap has widened from 13.6 points in 2018/19 to 15.3 points in 2022/23 and to 15.4 in 2023/24. The widening was caused by the disadvantaged group having a larger decrease than the non-disadvantaged group.
* Progress 8 scores for disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils showed that non-disadvantaged pupils averaged a Progress 8 score of 0.16 whereas disadvantaged pupils averaged a Progress 8 score of -0.57

**By sex,** girls still do better than boys

* The gap for the percentage achieving grades 5 and above in English and maths had narrowed from 6.6 percentage points in 2018/19 to 4.3 percentage points in 2022/23 but has now widened to 4.7 percentage points in 2023/24. The widening between 2023 and 2024 was driven by girls seeing a larger increase (0.8 ppts vs 0.4 ppts).
* The average Attainment 8 gap saw narrowing from 5.5 points in 2018/19 to 4.6 points in 2022/23 and to 4.5 in 2023/24; and a similar narrowing is seen for the EBacc APS gap between 2018/19 and 2022/23 (0.48 to 0.38), and continued to narrow to 0.36 in 2023/24.
* Progress 8 scores for girls and boys showed that girls averaged a Progress 8 score of 0.09 whereas boys averaged a Progress 8 score of -0.15.

**SEND, EHCP and pupils with SEN Support**

* The gap for the percentage achieving grades 5 and above in English and maths is now 14.6 percentage points in 2023/24, up from 13.8 percentage points in 2022/23 and 11.3 in 2018/19.
* The gap for Attainment 8 is 18.9 points in 2023/24, the same as in 2018/19 and down from 19.3 percentage points in 2022/23.
* The average Progress 8 score for pupils with an EHCP in 2023/24 is -1.13, whereas pupils with SEN Support averaged a Progress 8 score of -0.45.

**EAL** The gaps in attainment between EAL and non-EAL pupils have widened, in favour of EAL pupils.

* The biggest difference is in the percentage achieving grades 5 and above in English and maths where the gap has widened to 4.8 percentage points, compared to 4.3 percentage points in 2022/23, and also changed from 0.6 percentage points in 2018/19. Both EAL and non-EAL pupils had an increase between 2019 and 2024, and between 2023 and 2024.
* The average Attainment 8 gap has widened from 1.0 point in 2018/19 and 2.6 points in 2022/23 to 3.2 points in 2023/24. EAL pupils saw an increase between 2019 and 2024 of 1.0 point, however non-EAL saw a decrease of 1.2 points. Non-EAL pupils also saw a drop of 0.5 points compared to 2023, but EAL pupils saw a small increase of 0.1 points.
* Progress 8 scores for EAL and non-EAL pupils showed that EAL pupils averaged a Progress 8 score of 0.51 whereas non-EAL pupils averaged a Progress 8 score of -0.13

**Ethnicity**

* In 2023/24, pupils from the White major ethnic category made up 71.7% of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 in state-funded schools (of those where ethnicity data was provided). 12.8% of pupils were from the Asian ethnic category, 6.7% were from the Black ethnic category, 6.4% were from the Mixed ethnic category and 2.3% were from Other ethnic categories.
* For the average Attainment 8 measure all major ethnic groups except Mixed have seen decreases of 0.6 (White) , 0.2 (Asian and Other), 0.1 (Black) when comparing 2022/23 and 2023/24. The Mixed ethnic group remained unchanged. However, the Asian and Black ethnic groups have seen increases of 1.7 and 1.6 points respectively compared to 2018/19 – which means they are achieving, on average, more than one and a half grades more across 8 subjects compared to 2018/19. Pupils from the Mixed, White and Other categories have all seen decreases compared to 2018/19.
* For Progress 8 in 2023/24, pupils from the Other category have the highest average score with 0.53. This is followed by pupils from the Asian ethnic category with 0.51 and Black ethnic category with a score of 0.26, while pupils from the Mixed and White ethnic categories are the only groups with negative Progress 8 scores with -0.02 and -0.15 respectively.
* In the light of the amended KS4 results, DfE has updated **“Search for schools, colleges and multi-academy trusts and check their performance**. See <https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/>
* **The exam board OCR has paused its planned changes to a geography GCSE** paper amid “unanswered questions” about the future of qualifications during the government’s curriculum review. A new GCSE geography paper B specification – numbered J386 – was due to be first taught from September and assessed in 2027. But in an update to schools, the exam board told leaders to “continue to teach our current GCSE geography B specification (J384) for the remainder of this academic year and from September 2025”.
* DfE has issued “**GCSE French, German and Spanish subject content**. Subject content, aims and learning objectives for French, German and Spanish GCSEs from 2024”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-french-german-and-spanish-subject-content>

**Early years and primary**

* DfE has issued **“Breakfast clubs early adopters: schools in the scheme. The schools selected to take part in the breakfast clubs early adopter scheme**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/breakfast-clubs-early-adopters-schools-in-the-scheme> The 750 schools start this from April. All primary aged children in early adopter schools will be able to access a free breakfast and at least 30 minutes of free childcare, every day. Schools are encouraged to offer healthy, varied and nutritious breakfasts, with examples from wheat bisks and porridge to fresh fruit and yoghurt. The early adopter schools also provide the perfect setting to host activities including arts and crafts, educational puzzles, reading and more. Of the 180,000 children who will benefit in the early adopter schools, around 67,000 attend schools in deprived areas. It doesn’t say how many of the schools will be replacing existing provision for the new scheme, but says in seven schools involved in the pilot had no before-school provision already in place. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/first-schools-confirmed-for-landmark-free-breakfast-clubs> <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2025/02/free-breakfast-club-roll-out-everything-you-need-to-know/> **The Unions welcomed the expansion of breakfast clubs, which some schools already run, but expressed concerns that funding would fall short of the cost.** There have also been concerns that school breakfast clubs in England ‘will be used to justify keeping the two-child benefits cap’ See <https://www.headteacher-update.com/content/news/can-you-provide-a-nutritious-school-breakfast-for-60p-per-pupil> <https://www.ascl.org.uk/News/Our-news-and-press-releases/Government-must-be-more-realistic-about-costs-of-b>
* ESFA has updated “**PE and sport premium: conditions of grant 2024 to 2025**. Allocations for academic year 2024 to 2025 and the terms and conditions that local authorities, maintained schools and academies must follow. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pe-and-sport-premium-conditions-of-grant-2024-to-2025>
* DfE has updated “**Information for early years practitioners about stronger practice hubs**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-stronger-practice-hubs>
* **The DfE is providing £75 million in additional funding to local authorities in 2025 to 2026 to support early years providers** as they deliver the final phase of expansion to the working parent entitlements from September 2025. This funding will be distributed via the early years expansion grant which will be paid to local authorities in July 2025. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-expansion-grant-2025-to-2026>
* On March 3, Year 6 pupils across the country will find out **which secondary school has offered them a place for September 2025**.

**Ofsted**

* Ofsted has issued “**Area SEND inspections**: information about ongoing inspections”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-area-send-inspections-information-for-families>
* **An alternative consultation on the future of Ofsted inspections** has been launched to ask if the watchdog’s plans for school report cards are fit for purpose, launched by two former senior Ofsted His Majesty’s Inspectors (HMI). See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/alternative-ofsted-survey-asks-if-report-cards-are-fit-for-purpose> The Alternative Big Consultation runs until Friday 4 April, <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LQ7KG25>
* **Ofsted is to test how well its new inspection toolkits support inspectors** to gather evidence as part of its plan to launch inspection report cards later this year. The inspectorate announced in a blog <https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2025/02/26/testing-our-proposals-to-improve-education-inspections/> that Ofsted inspectors will visit around 240 education providers, including schools, to explore “how the new approach and toolkits feel” for both inspectors and providers. Ofsted said that this testing - carried out on voluntary visits - will also focus on how well the toolkits for different inspection areas work together. It will look to “make sure that they cover the right areas, include all that they need to, and avoid unnecessary or unhelpful repetition”. And some of Ofsted’s test visits will include more than one inspector in order to establish whether inspectors “follow the same process” and have “shared views on the strengths and areas for improvement”. Ofsted said the testing will comprise:
  + Thematic visits, which it describes as limited visits to “test the feasibility and validity of specific aspects of the methodology and toolkits”.
  + Paired thematic visits, where more than one inspector will be involved to test whether inspectors follow the same process, and have shared views on the strengths and areas for improvement.
  + End-to-end visits, where the whole inspection methodology and toolkits will be tested.

Around half the visits will be thematic or paired thematic visits, and around half will be end-to-end visits.

* Ofsted has issued “**Ofsted Parent View**: management information”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ofsted-parent-view-management-information>

**PE and play**

* **Ofsted should measure school performance based on the amount of time pupils have to play**, a new report suggests, <https://www.centreforyounglives.org.uk/play-commission/news> The Raising the Nation Play Commission said the “sufficiency” of playtime should be included as a “measure of school performance to encourage schools to boost play in school time and reward those schools who value play highly”. The year-long independent inquiry’s interim “state of play” report, published today, suggests children are spending less time playing both at school and outside education. It found that on average, break times fell in the last 25 years by 23 minutes a day for the youngest primary pupils. This equates to almost two hours a week. Meanwhile break times fell by an average 18 minutes a day for older primary school children, and 17 minutes for children in key stage 3. The interim report also found break times had fallen most sharply in primary schools in the most deprived parts of England. Schools with a higher proportion of children in receipt of free school meals had shorter break times. While state secondary schools have seen a significant fall in break time, there has been “no discernible decline” at private schools since 1995, it found. The report suggests an “overbearing” national curriculum and “highly pressurised” accountability system has led many schools and teachers “to see break times as nothing more than a loss of valuable teaching time”. The DfE should discourage “punitive withdrawal” of school breaktimes as a way of punishing poor behaviour. It recommends that the DfE issue guidelines in the revised national curriculum on how “primary schools can and should employ play-based learning in the classroom”. b Other recommendations include opening school playgrounds for wider community use outside the school day and ensuring that breakfast and after-school activities are predominately play-based. It also calls for a “requirement for and guidance to support schools to develop their own play plan”. The commission suggests that the government create a cross-departmental national play strategy to “set out a clear, long-term vision to ensure children can easily access and enjoy places to play in public, at school and at home”.
* **Teacher training in primary-level physical education is “woefully inadequate**”, the chief executive of the Youth Sport Trust has warned a committee of MPs; primary classroom teachers who deliver PE today predominantly have, on average, four to six hours of training in PE”. She called for PE to become a core curriculum subject so that it commanded a “higher status”, which would “bring with it a level of accountability which would drive up standards and commitment”. Training problems were exacerbating a situation where there were 41,000 fewer hours taught in PE in 2023-24 compared with 2011-12. Britain has 7,000 fewer PE teachers than when London hosted the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics. Less than half of children are getting what the chief medical officer recommends as the minimum amount of activity a day; 30 per cent of children get less than 30 active minutes a day.

**The Youth Sport Trust also wants to see changes to bring clarity to what the GCSE PE syllabus entails**. At present, she said, the GCSE is a GCSE in sports science. “It is not a GCSE in being physically educated or having got to a certain level of physical education. If we are going to have a GCSE PE, let’s change that syllabus, or let’s be really clear this is a GCSE in sports studies or sports science.” She called for some form of qualification that demonstrates a student’s physical capabilities. “It’s really important that children experience some sort of benchmarking, or there’s some sort of passport at the end of school education - a summary of what I can do, what I’ve learned, where I’m going to continue to be active next.” See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/primary-school-pe-training-woefully-inadequate-mps-told>

**SEND**

* **The Commons Education Select Committee held its latest session today as part of its ongoing inquiry into solving the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) crisis**. Points made by contributors:
* The government’s commitment to spend £740 million on providing extra specialist places in mainstream schools is unlikely to tackle the main challenges facing the system. The funding was mostly about providing capital adaptations and more accessible places in mainstream schools. “What is lacking at the moment is proper support and funding to provide training for both teachers and teaching assistants to provide better support - that would better help provide good-quality provision in mainstream settings.”
* The system needed to find a way of getting specialist provision up quickly. Delays are caused by councils having to bid to the DfE to open special free schools, wait on a decision and then discover they have been unsuccessful. The government needed to get money into local authorities to provide places directly.
* Most councils say they would face insolvency if their high needs deficits are put onto council books from March 2026, when a statutory override which is keeping them off their accounts is due to expire. A decision on renewal is needed soon.
* Plans to bring down council deficits through the Safety Valve and Delivering Better Value programmes tried to find local solutions to a national problem. “Trying to fix financial issues at a local level is not going to work because it’s a national issue.”
* Spending on SEND transport was a key factor in the financial difficulties being discussed. A dramatic increase in costs had been driven almost entirely by the growth of home-to-school transport. What was needed to reduce transport costs was for councils to be given the capital investment to create more special school places. Creating a policy where parents over a specified income are required to make a financial contribution could be considered.
* The cost of private school placements for pupils with SEND are so much higher than state school provision. “One of the things that I think perhaps would be helpful is this idea of a price cap mechanism.”
* **The Confederation of School Trusts has set out 10 priorities for a new special educational needs and disabilities system**. The CST wants mainstream schools to be “given the resource, guidance and flexibility” to meet the range of needs in their communities. One key criticism is that SEND itself is a “blanket term that hides complexity and leads to seeing children as a series of labels rather than individuals”. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/cst-call-reset-send-funding-schools-can-meet-local-needs>

**Special Schools**

* **Schools for children with special educational needs employ teachers without qualified teacher status more often than mainstream schools**, research suggests, <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/iyimbox2/exploring_the_special_schools_workforce_whats_the_current_picture_embargoed.pdf> The NFER calls for work to be done to understand why 10 per cent of teachers in special schools do not have QTS, compared with the national average of 3 per cent. Special schools in England face “more severe” teacher shortages than the average state school, with the worst shortages concentrated in alternative provision (AP) settings. The research also shows that special schools in England face workforce challenges because they need a higher staff-to-pupil ratio, and they are likely to be “particularly affected” by teaching assistant shortages. Special schools have around 41 TAs on average, which is considerably more than both the average primary (11) and secondary school (14), the NFER says. On average, special schools have one member of staff for every two children, compared with the average ratios of 1:11 and 1:12 in primary and secondary schools respectively. School spending data shows support staff made up 33 per cent of all spending in special schools in 2023-24, compared to 19 per cent across all schools.

In response the NAHT has called for government **to fund pay rises for teaching assistants**, given that support staff play a vital and rewarding role in helping children in special schools and recruitment is difficult. See <https://www.naht.org.uk/News/Latest-comments/Press-room/ArtMID/558/ArticleID/2650/Call-for-government-to-fund-pay-rises-for-teaching-assistants>

Government data also appears to under-state the extent of **teacher vacancies** in alternative provision because it combines data with that of special schools, and the NFER calls for this to be separated. The NFER calls on the government to report separately the vacancy rate for special and AP schools in its national workforce statistics, which are published annually. The latest figures show state-funded special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) had an average vacancy rate of 0.8 per cent – or 0.8 per 100 posts – higher than the total figure for all state-funded schools of 0.6. But analysis of school-level data by the NFER found that special schools “have a substantially lower rate of teacher vacancies, on average, than PRUs and other forms of alternative provision” In fact, the average vacancy rate is twice as high in AP (1.4 per cent) than in special schools (0.7 per cent).

**Reading**

* **The government should broaden the variety of reading formats - including audio - in its upcoming curriculum and assessment review to help stem the “reading for pleasure crisis”,** a charity has said. The number of young people who say they enjoy listening to audio, such as audiobooks and podcasts, in their free time has risen in the past year, according to research by the National Literacy Trust. More than two in five children and young people aged 8-18 (42.3 per cent) said they enjoyed listening to audio in their free time in 2024, compared with 39.4 per cent in 2023. It comes after the charity warned in November that children’s reading is at “crisis” point as the number of young people who said they enjoyed reading in their free time plummeted to 34.6 per cent. With audio, however, more boys (43.4%) than girls (40.4%) said they enjoyed listening, and the NLT said it hoped audiobooks and podcasts could offer a gateway into reading for pleasure for boys and girls. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/podcasts-could-tackle-reading-crisis> Other experts warn that there is a difference between reading, which can be described as animating, and listening, which was passive and reading helps develop essential skills.

**Buying for schools**

* DfE has updated its manual “**Buying for schools: things to consider before you start**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/buying-for-schools-things-to-consider-before-you-start>
* DfE has updated its manual “**Buying for schools: how to buy what you need**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/buying-procedures-and-procurement-law-for-schools>
* DfE has issued:
* **Buying for schools**, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/buying-for-schools--2>
* **Buying for schools: get free help from procurement specialists**, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-help-buying-for-schools>
* **Buying for schools: find an approved framework agreement**, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/find-a-dfe-approved-framework-for-your-school>

**ITT**

* DfE has issued “**Find out about eligibility and how to become an accredited provider of ITT 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> It is open exclusively to providers that were previously accredited, are a lead partner currently and have not received two consecutive ‘requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’ ratings. All applicants must complete an “apply for ITT accreditation” form by March 16 <https://submit.forms.service.gov.uk/form/5620/apply-for-initial-teacher-training-accreditation/19347>

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

* Ofsted has issued “Good decisions: **supporting children aged 16 and 17 who need help when they are homeless**”. A study of the local authority response to homeless children and young people. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/good-decisions-supporting-children-aged-16-and-17-who-need-help-when-they-are-homeless> Key findings:
* Children and young people need more information about their options, including becoming a looked-after child, when they present as homeless.
* Only 9% of homeless children and young people surveyed said they had been offered an advocate to help them understand their rights.
* Pressures on resources mean some children are not getting admitted to care when they should be.
* Some local authorities are still using bed and breakfasts and hostels as temporary or emergency accommodation for homeless children.

**For a more detailed summary**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/homeless-children-need-better-information-and-independent-advocacy-to-help-understand-their-rights>

* Charity Parentkind found **31 per cent of parents said their child had refused to go to school more than once in the last year**, with the top reasons cited as their child not enjoying school, their child having a special educational need or disability (SEND) or a mental health problem, and bullying. Of the parents who said their children refused more than once in the last year to go to school, 1 in 10 missed two or more weeks of school. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/nearly-third-of-children-refused-to-go-to-school-in-past-year>
* DfE has issued “Guidance for the 75 pre-selected local authorities on the **Family Hubs and Start for Life programme**, for the 2025 to 2026 financial year, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-hubs-and-start-for-life-programme-local-authority-guide-2025-to-2026> and for 2022 to 2025, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-hubs-and-start-for-life-programme-local-authority-guide>
* Thousands of children in England have been accused of **witchcraft** over the past decade, according to new figures. Faith-based abuse is a worldwide phenomenon but experts found 14,000 social work assessments linked to witchcraft accusations since 2015. In the year running to March 2024 alone, there were 2,180 assessments linked to witchcraft. See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/feb/24/thousands-of-children-england-falsely-accused-witchcraft-kindoki-witch-boy>
* DfE has issued “Reports which explore how systems of support may protect young people from, or expose them to, involvement in **serious youth violence**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-youth-violence-research-programme>
* The children’s commissioner has set out a raft of measures for schools to help **keep young people out of the youth justice system**, <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/blog/press-notice-children-in-youth-custody-failed-before-they-arrive-trapping-them-in-a-cycle-of-disadvantage/> Schools should be made statutory safeguarding partners alongside local authorities, health services and police. She says all school exclusions should lead to an intervention. “When a child is removed from the classroom, whether through internal exclusion, suspension, permanent exclusion, a managed move or implementation of a ‘part-time timetable’, this should be an opportunity to learn about the child’s underlying needs.” Schools should be required to outline how sanctions, including suspensions, permanent exclusions and isolation, “will be a trigger point for additional support”, the report says. This would involve setting out how schools will work with the child and their family to understand any underlying challenges that have led to their behaviour, and to put in place extra support where needed.

Dame Rachel proposes a single-child plan to coordinate all multi-agency support for young people, to be regularly reviewed at least every year and always when a child moves local authority. The plan should give schools the ability to commission support services from health and social care when children’s attendance starts to deteriorate. Alongside this, the commissioner calls on the government to invest in mainstream schools “to create more inclusive learning environments”.

**EEF**

* **The Education Endowment Foundation is seeking 1,500 schools to take part in 11 research projects aimed at boosting maths, writing, communication and language**, <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/11-new-research-projects-to-build-evidence-base> They will test different approaches to improving outcomes. These include peer-to-peer coaching to build maths skills in secondary school pupils, and professional development for reception class teachers to support skills through play and structured activities. Each project “has been selected because of its potential impact on the attainment of socio-economically disadvantaged pupils and will be independently evaluated to give a reliable estimate of its impact”, the EEF said. Signing up “gives schools the opportunity to access promising education approaches at a heavily reduced cost, many of which include high-quality professional development and resources”. To check eligibility, see <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects-recruiting>

**School management**

* DfE has updated its manual, “**Good estate management for schools**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/good-estate-management-for-schools>
* ESFA has issued “**Allocations and guidance for schools and local authorities for the core schools budget grant (CSBG) for September 2024 to March 2025**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/core-schools-budget-grant-csbg-2024-to-2025>
* For the latest **ESFA Update**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-update-26-february-2025>
* Bridget Phillipson is being urged to ensure that **climate change** is more comprehensively included in the school curriculum, in an open letter being sent by subject experts, <https://www.globalactionplan.org.uk/news/open-letter-to-the-secretary-of-state-for-educationsustainability-and-climate-change-education-in-the-national-curriculum> The letter warns the education secretary that preparing young people for a future affected by climate change is one of the most critical tasks facing the government’s curriculum and assessment review.
* **Schools are at risk of breaching data protection laws because they could be processing personal data using AI tools that are not suitable for education**, <https://www.brownejacobson.com/school-leaders-survey> “It appears that personal data is being processed in AI tools by schools, with personalised learning, assessment and feedback, virtual tutoring, handling parent enquiries and complaints all being listed as uses. AI is being used to address recruitment processes as well, which suggests that tools are being used in a way that may pose additional risks to individuals”. “Of the 40% of leaders who use AI, the majority said that they were using readily-available tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini and Copilot, with only a minority using tools that were specifically designed for the UK education sector”. See also <https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/content/news/schools-ai-data-protection-and-compliance-warning>
* **NAHT has created two posters for use in schools to help make sure everyone is clear that schools are safe, kind and inclusive places**, and that there is no excuse for abuse. See <https://www.naht.org.uk/News/Latest-comments/News/ArtMID/556/ArticleID/1785/No-excuse-for-abuse-free-posters-for-schools>

**Academies and trusts**

* ESFA has issued “**Academies and dedicated schools grant: recoupment**. Information about how we calculate the adjustment of the dedicated schools grant allocation” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/academies-and-dedicated-schools-grant-recoupment>
* **The salaries being paid to the leaders of the biggest multi-academy trusts** are revealed in a new analysis. The findings cover the 59 academy trusts that ran 25 schools or more in the 2023-24 year and are based on the trusts’ latest published accounts. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/revealed-what-biggest-mats-paid-their-ceos> <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/urgent-call-for-consistency-on-mat-leaders-pay> Unions are calling for the School Teachers’ Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) to be extended to include a new national framework for executive salaries, so that there can be consistency on MAT leaders’ pay, based on a clear framework which trust boards could use in making pay decisions.

**Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill**

* **The Commons Education Select Committee has called for a number of improvements to the government’s Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill to support the most vulnerable children**. The bill’s timetable has been “rushed and inadequate”, making it more difficult to conduct “proper scrutiny”, according to a report published by the committee today. It has called for all pupils entitled to free school meals to be automatically enrolled to receive them in order to alleviate hunger and improve the health and educational outcomes for the poorest children. The committee has recommended that the inclusion requirements of school breakfast clubs should be strengthened to ensure pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) do not miss out. The report added that the government should strengthen the requirement for the mental health and wellbeing of children in the care system to be assessed, and improve support for care leavers as part of the bill. See <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/203/education-committee/news/205506/schools-bill-should-autoenrol-children-for-free-school-meals-education-committee-report/>

**Mobile phones**

* **Denmark is to ban mobile phones in schools** and after-school clubs on the recommendation of a government commission that also found that children under 13 should not have their own smartphone or tablet. The government said it would change existing legislation to force all folkeskole – comprehensive primary and lower secondary schools – to become phone-free, meaning that almost all children aged between seven and 16-17 will be required by law not to bring their phones into school. See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/25/denmark-to-ban-mobile-phones-in-schools-and-after-school-clubs>
* **Restrictions on the use of smartphones in schools can heavily reduce pupils’ overall screen time, suggests new research**. Polling also seems to show tougher policies aren’t harder to enforce – contrary to claims. The research by The New Britain Project and More in Common for the National Education Union has prompted fresh calls for a national ban on phones during the school day. The polling also found most parents of children under 16 wanted tighter restrictions in schools. The polling also suggests schools with tighter restrictions “face fewer challenges related to phone use”. Thirty per cent of parents reported frequent issues with phones in schools with the strictest policies, compared with 40 per cent in those with the most lenient rules. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/school-smartphones-bans-reduce-overall-screen-time-poll-suggests/>

**Education news for schools**

* DfE has issued “**How we handle your complaints**, and advice on how to complain about a school, an early years provider or a children's social care service”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/about/complaints-procedure>
* For a **list of advisers for the DfE’s edtech evidence board project**, which will look at how to build evidence around artificial intelligence tools in schools, see <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/revealed-advisers-dfe-edtech-evidence-board>
* **More young people were not in work, education or training at the end of 2024 than at any point in the past 11 years**, new data suggests. The latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures suggest 987,000 16-24-year-olds were not in work, education or training between October and December. That is 13.4%, or almost one out of every seven people in that age range. In October to December 2024, an estimated 14.4% of all male 16-24-year-olds were Neet, compared with 12.3% female. But numbers overall are rising too. The October to December 2024 figure of 987,000 was up by 110,000 in a year. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5ymvnrn0deo>
* March is **Women's History Month**. Saturday 8 March is **International Women’s Day**. For both, see <https://www.naht.org.uk/News/Latest-comments/News/ArtMID/556/ArticleID/2648/Womens-History-Month-2025>
* For an article, “**How one trust closed its disadvantage gap**”, see <https://www.tes.com/magazine/analysis/primary/how-one-trust-closed-its-disadvantage-gap>
* For the latest **SecEd Best Practice Bulletin**, see <https://email.sec-ed.co.uk/q/12JpfhcqbD5ADOiE3DmyNq7a/wv>
* **Councils across the country are routinely failing in their legal duty to provide full-time education for excluded pupils within six days**, an investigation has found, with some youngsters waiting two years for provision. In some areas, not a single excluded child was placed in suitable education within six days – despite laws that councils must deliver this. The average time for finding provision for excluded pupils also worsened in many areas, as exclusions hit record highs. Of the 58 councils that provided figures for last year, just over three quarters failed to place all excluded pupils in full-time education within six days. Seven had at least one child waiting six months or more for suitable education last year, 30 times longer than the law demands. Two had pupils waiting two years. But it wasn’t just the odd pupil waiting longer. In 12 areas, three quarters of the excluded pupils that year were not in suitable education within six days. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/councils-failing-duty-places-excluded-children-pupils-exclusions/>

**Post 16**

* DfE has issued “Find out about the role of **national leaders of further education** and how they support college improvement”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-leaders-of-further-education-guidance-for-potential-applicants>
* DfE has issued “Find out about the role of **National Leaders of Governance** (NLGs) for further education and how NLGs support college improvement”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-leaders-of-governance-for-further-education-guidance>
* DfE has updated:
* **Turing Scheme: international placements, 2024 to 2025**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/turing-scheme-international-study-and-work-placements>
* **Turing Scheme: international placements, 2025 to 2026,** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/turing-scheme-international-placements-2025-to-2026>
* **Turing Scheme: apply for funding for international placements**, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/turing-scheme-apply-for-funding-for-international-placements>
* DfE has issued “**Digital Inclusion Action Plan**: First Steps. The Digital Inclusion Action Plan aims to close the digital divide in the UK, ensuring that the benefits of technology can be felt by all”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-inclusion-action-plan-first-steps>
* ESFA has issued “Information **allowing colleges established or designated under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 to compare their financial data with national totals and other organisations**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/esfa-financial-management-college-accounts> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/financial-benchmarking-tool-for-colleges>
* DfE has issued “**Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE**): overview. Find out what the LLE is and how this new post-18 student-finance system will work from academic year 2026 to 2027”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lifelong-learning-entitlement-lle-overview>
* DfE has issued “**Participation measures in higher education up to the academic year 2022 to 2023**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/participation-measures-in-higher-education-2022-to-2023> This statistic measures higher education (HE) participation by school cohorts. It calculates the proportion of the population aiming to complete a qualification at HE level.
* **The University of Edinburgh is facing a £140m black hole** that demands radical actions including job cuts, according to its vice-chancellor, as it becomes the latest higher education institution to reveal its financial turmoil. See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/feb/26/university-edinburgh-staff-cuts-financial-deficit>

**Tony Stephens**