Tony Stephens Education Support

http://tonystephens.org.uk

tonystephens856@gmail.com

07977804899

**259 Academy and School News and Resources Update, March 9-15 2024**

*Copyright, Tony Stephens*

***Website references are given where needed in all cases***

**http://tonystephens.org.uk**

**Ofsted**

* Ofsted has issued the **latest further education and skills inspections and outcome**s. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/further-education-and-skills-inspections-and-outcomes-management-information-from-september-2023-to-august-2024>
* Ofsted has issued **its response to the Education Select Committee’s 'Ofsted's work with schools'**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsteds-response-to-the-education-select-committee> MPs called for less frequent, more detailed inspections, a longer five-day notice period for schools and a review of the government’s coasting schools policy.
* The response is clear that implementing **these recommendations needs to be discussed within the context of funding constraints**. It explains that, while Ofsted’s role and responsibilities have expanded significantly since 2005, its funding has fallen significantly over the same period, and is now 29% lower in real terms compared with 2009/10. This squeeze on resources means Ofsted is continually having to make difficult decisions in order to fulfil its statutory duties on inspection and regulation. Salaries “in many parts of the sector exceed the salaries we are currently able to afford”. “Between November 2021 and November 2023, excluding HMI who retired from their roles, 42 per cent of our schools HMI left to join multi-academy trusts (MATs).”
* Ofsted welcomes the committee’s support in **recommending additional funding for more in-depth inspections**, noting that the sooner inspectors can diagnose weaknesses and celebrate strengths, the sooner a school can get the support it needs to improve. One way Ofsted could inspect schools in greater depth is by ensuring that every inspection is led by one of His Majesty’s Inspectors and that the inspection team has an additional inspector on the team. This change would provide a number of additional benefits, including allowing for more time to explore the school’s unique approach. Delivering this additional depth in school inspections would have a direct cost of £8.5 million per year.
* Ofsted warned that it “suspect[s] that a significant amount of fear about Ofsted inspections is driven by organisations and individuals seeking to profit from **inspection preparation**, where this is entirely unnecessary”
* Osted said it continued to receive “more **complaints** from providers that have received the lowest grades”.
* Ofsted welcomed the “committee agreeing with our evidence that **inspection of MATs** is appropriate and inevitable”. But it said it also thought “consideration needs to be given to the wider application of this thinking to groups of education providers, such as dioceses, groups of nurseries, children’s homes, independent schools, and potentially even local authorities and the work of directors of children’s services.”.
* Ofsted said it will review its current **risk assessment model**, which is used to determine which ‘good’ schools get a graded inspection and which get an ungraded inspection. Ofsted does this “so that we can focus our efforts on where we can have the greatest impact within the funding constraints in which we operate”.
* The committee recommended Ofsted consider “a small increase in the **notice period given to schools,** and whether smaller schools could be given a “longer notice period or greater flexibility around deferrals”. Ofsted will consider this, but it is hard to see how different notice periods for different types of school can be implemented fairly
* Ofsted said its “ambition” is to “**match expertise to inspection** wherever possible”. But they acknowledged this was “more difficult, for instance, for types of specialist provision for which there are fewer providers”.
* Ofsted said a number of the committee’s recommendations “fall” to the DfE, including the call for an alternative to **single-word judgments**. Another decision that would rest with the DfE is MPs’ call for a re-assessment of the policy of imposing academy orders on schools **rated ‘requires improvement’ twice in a row.**
* **Alternative provision (AP) leaders have criticised Ofsted for “ignoring” them in its major consultation on the future of inspection**. Ofsted’s Big Listen asks professionals which settings they work in but does not include an option for those working in AP, pupil referral units (PRUs) or hospital schools among the 23 choices provided. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/alternative-provision-leaders-ignored-ofsted-big-listen>
* Ofsted has issued the latest **state-funded school inspections and outcomes**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/monthly-management-information-ofsteds-school-inspections-outcomes>
* The education secretary has been urged to publicly retract her “inflammatory” comments about **punching an Ofsted inspector**. The remarks add to the “difficult” school inspection climate, according to a letter sent to Gillian Keegan today by Dave Penman, general secretary of the FDA union, which represents Ofsted HMI
* Ofsted has issued a collection of official 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>

**Early years and primary**

* STA has issued:
* **Key stage 2 tests: test administration guidance** (TAG), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-test-administration-guidance-tag>
* **Guidance for administering the 2024 key stage 2 national curriculum tests to pupils with hearing or visual impairments**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-modified-test-administration-guidance-mtag>
* **Key stage 1 and 2 national curriculum tests: information for parents**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-1-and-2-national-curriculum-tests-information-for-parents>
* **Information for parents: optional national curriculum tests at the end of key stage 1** (text only version), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-1-and-2-national-curriculum-tests-information-for-parents/information-for-parents-optional-national-curriculum-tests-at-the-end-of-key-stage-1-text-only-version>
* **Information for parents: 2024 national curriculum tests at the end of key stage 2** (text only version), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-1-and-2-national-curriculum-tests-information-for-parents/information-for-parents-2019-national-curriculum-tests-at-the-end-of-key-stages-1-and-2-text-only-version>
* **Key stage 2 modified test administration guidance: administering modified large print versions**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-modified-test-administration-guidance-mtag/key-stage-2-modified-test-administration-guidance-administering-modified-large-print-versions>
* **Key stage 2 modified test administration guidance: administering to pupils with a hearing impairment**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-modified-test-administration-guidance-mtag/key-stage-2-modified-test-administration-guidance-administering-to-pupils-with-a-hearing-impairment>
* **Key stage 2 modified test administration guidance: administering braille versions**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-modified-test-administration-guidance-mtag/key-stage-2-modified-test-administration-guidance-administering-braille-versions>
* **Primary schools in "hard-to-reach" areas are to get ultra-fast broadband** as part of a government roll-out. The 91 schools across Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Cambridge are mostly in isolated spots that have connectivity issues. Each will have gigabit broadband by December 2025, with some seeing speeds up to 500 times faster, BT said. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-68512058>
* Campaigners studying play and childhood are calling for a major focus on **reviving play in schools** to tackle an “escalating crisis” in child mental and physical health. The “plan for play” launched on Tuesday outlines a vision for the DfE to require every school to have a play plan that would be subject to Ofsted inspection. Under the proposals, teachers would be taught about play-based learning for children of all ages, not only early years. See <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/planning/news/2023/oct/plan-play-affordable-way-wellbeing-every-child#:~:text='A%20Plan%20for%20Play'%20calls,principles%3B%20subject%20to%20Ofsted%20Inspection>
* DfE has issued “Guide for local authorities and schools **submitting early years foundation stage profile data for 2024**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-return>
* STA has issued:
* A collection of documents, “**Guidance for headteachers, teachers and test administrators involved in administering the optional national curriculum tests for the end of key stage 1 (KS1**)”, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum-assessments-key-stage-1-tests>
* **Guidance for administering the optional key stage 1 national curriculum tests to pupils with hearing or visual impairments in 2024**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-1-tests-modified-test-administration-guidance-mtag>
* **Guidance for headteachers, teachers and teaching assistants administering the optional key stage 1 (KS1) national curriculum tests in 2024**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-1-tests-test-administration-guidance-tag>

**ASCL Conference**

* **ASCL conference**<
	+ For **Gillian Keegan’s** speech, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/education-secretary-addresses-the-ascl-annual-conference>
	+ Sir **Martyn Oliver's** speech, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/sir-martyn-olivers-speech-at-the-2024-ascl-annual-conference>
	+ Political parties should commit to keeping school funding at the same level despite falling rolls, and use the headroom to boost per-pupil funding and money for disadvantaged children, **Geoff Barton** has said. Government should “use this money to raise the rate of per-pupil funding, and the pupil premium”. He also called for “learning environments to be fit for learning”, after leaders reported scorching hot and freezing classrooms, poor electrics and leaking ceilings. there is a need to “look again at the substance of education” with a “laser-like review” of the national curriculum. He also calls for an end to the “snobby obsession” with academic versus technical education. The government’s increased focus on targeting international teachers to tackle the country’s recruitment problems makes him feel “queasy”; recruiting teachers from countries that need them doesn’t “morally...feel like the right thing for us to be doing”.
	+ A “change of tone” in the national conversation about education is needed, the **ASCL president** warned, as almost half of leaders reported they had seen pupil absence because of disputes with parents; this is an “extreme – but apparently common – example of the fracturing of [the] unwritten social contract” between schools and families. Other common reasons cited by leaders included families wanting to take term-time holidays (95 per cent), attending family events (88 per cent), and pupils being “too anxious about school” (76 per cent). Politicians and commentators are far too quick to take potshots at schools”. “Whether that’s by leaping on important and sensitive issues – like sex education and trans or gender-questioning pupils – to generate a cheap headline. Everybody in public life must do more to talk up the many good things about schools and colleges, and to talk about teaching as the noble profession it is.
	+ From **Bridget Phillipson** speech: Labour will wait until after the election to set out its full plans to tackle the “enormous” challenge facing the SEND system. It promises an “early focus on reforming the system” The party has also said it will wait to see the state of the nation’s finances after the next election before making any commitments as regards school funding. Labour’s plans to “bring inspection to every part of the system”, including multi-academy trusts. The party planned to make teaching “a much more attractive place for graduates to go”, adding that a “shift of tone” from government is necessary to retain the school workforce.

**Public examinations**

* **Ofqual has asked exam boards to introduce new security measures**, its chief regulator has said. It follows police investigations being launched after cyber attacks at three exam boards last summer. This should include multi-factor authentication for accessing exam sites to make sure that those are only accessed by people who are authorised to access them.”

All exam boards have set timelines to **move towards on-screen examinations**. But AQA announced this week that it has delayed its plans to “get this right and maintain public confidence in our exam system”. Ofqual has to approve the plans. Ofqual says the regulator will make “rigorous checks” to make sure they are fair and the stability to make sure “systems are not going to be at risk of falling over and messing up examinations”.

* Ofqual has issued a collection “**Statistics: vocational qualifications**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-vocational-qualifications> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/vocational-qualifications-dataset>
* The DfE has issued a list of **qualifications approved for public funding**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/qualifications-approved-for-public-funding> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/qualification-funding-approval> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/qualification-funding-approval> and also “**Qualifications with removed funding approval**”, see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/qualification-funding-approval/qualifications-with-removed-funding-approval> and “**ICT and digital qualifications with removed funding approval”**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ict-and-digital-qualifications-with-removed-funding-approval--2>
* AQA will probe **how artificial intelligence (AI) can be used to provide “quality assurance” to human marking** in a trial this summer. It will use data from this year’s GCSE and A-level exams to check to what extent marks given by AI match those of senior markers. The board’s stance on AI remains that it is not good for assessment itself in the short term but has potential in marking the marker.
* **Pen-and-paper exams would be discarded “at our peril**”, the Ofqual interim chief regulator has warned. Sir Ian Bauckham’s concern about introducing online exams without proper planning echoes the caution expressed by others in the exams world. Such a move could exacerbate the disadvantage gap, Sir Ian fears, amid concern that some students lack adequate access to technology. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/secondary/sir-ian-bauckham-interview-ofqual-online-exams>

**Transgender guidance**

* **The government must commit to fighting legal challenges brought against individual schools or trusts that follow its transgender guidance**, **ASCL** has warned. It is “imperative” that schools are confident that they will not be open to legal challenge, “given the uncertainty around the extent to which this guidance aligns with equalities legislation, and the lack of existing case law in this area”. Both the **ASCL** and the **NASUWT** have asked how schools and colleges would be expected to use the guidance in relation to students who have already socially transitioned, <https://www.naht.org.uk/News/Latest-comments/News/ArtMID/556/ArticleID/2358/Consultation-on-draft-non-statutory-guidance-for-schools-regarding-gender-questioning-children> The **NASUWT** has said schools and colleges are unlikely to take full account of guidance that appears to conflict with their duty to “act in the best interests of individual children, <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/article-listing/gender-questioning-guidance-should-be-withdrawn.html>

Children who have gender dysphoria will no longer be given **puberty blockers**, NHS England has said, ahead of a radical change in how it cares for them. “We have concluded that there is not enough evidence to support the safety or clinical effectiveness of puberty suppressing hormones to make the treatment routinely available at this time.” See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/mar/12/children-to-stop-getting-puberty-blockers-at-gender-identity-clinics-says-nhs-england>

**Oak National Academy**

* **Oak National Academy is considering new quality standards for providers who want the quango to signpost their curriculum resources**. While the arms length curriculum body is creating new resources, it also wants to direct teachers to other curriculum sequences on its website. It has proposed four options on how this could work, with varying degrees of quality control:
* providers self-assessing whether they meet a set of criteria.
* build on this but introduce “higher thresholds” for assessment.
* Include a “detailed assessment” which would result in a “limited number signposted”.
* a “phased approach” with an initial lighter touch process, like option one or two, with a detailed assessment later.

Oak proposed all successful sequences be signposted for three years before requiring “some form” of re-assessment. Its initial trial will include maths, but they are seeking views on other subjects such as English and science. Oak expects to launch the first submission window at the start of the 2024-25 academic year. Schools are invited to give their views until Friday April 12. <https://www.thenational.academy/blog/give-your-feedback-on-how-oak-could-signpost-curricula>

**ITT**

* DfE has issued “**Postgraduate initial teacher training targets: 2024 to 2025**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/postgraduate-initial-teacher-training-targets-2024-to-2025> In order to provide a sufficient supply of new teachers in 2025/26, it is estimated that 33,355 trainees are required to start postgraduate initial teacher training (PGITT) in the academic year 2024/25. This is a decrease of 2,185 (6.1%) on the 2023/24 postgraduate initial teacher training target and includes those to be recruited via the high potential initial teacher training (HPITT) programme.
	+ The 2024/25 target for primary PGITT trainees has increased by 220 compared to 2023/24, from 9,180 to 9,400 (a 2.4% increase). This slightly increased primary target, despite falling pupil numbers, is principally a result of less favourable retention forecasts this year.
	+ The 2024/25 target for secondary PGITT trainees increased by 815 across eight subjects and decreased by 3,220 across ten subjects, resulting in an overall decrease of 2,405 compared to 2023/24, from 26,360 to 23,955 (a 9.1% decrease overall). This is driven by more favourable supply forecasts. For example, recruitment forecasts for both returners, and teachers that are new to the state-funded sector are more favourable for almost all subjects this year. In addition to this, whilst secondary pupil numbers are still growing, they are now growing more slowly; in advance of peaking around 2025/26. This has acted to reduce the rate at which the workforce needs to grow and has helped lead to this year’s lower secondary target.
	+ The 2024/25 target for PGITT secondary STEM [1] trainees has decreased by 210 compared to 2023/24, from 9,195 to 8,985 (a 2.3% decrease).

This means, for example, The DfE has slashed its **secondary** school teacher recruitment targets by almost a tenth, despite missing them by 50 per cent last year. Meanwhile, the primary target has been revised up by 2.4 per cent from 9,180 to 9,400, despite falling **primary** pupil numbers nationally. To see targets by phase and subject, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/dfe-slashes-secondary-teacher-recruitment-targets/>

* DfE has issued “**Collection, statistics: initial teacher training**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-teacher-training>
* For an article about the role of the **National Institute of Teaching** in teacher training, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/institute-of-teaching-hits-target-with-a-little-help-from-its-friends/>

**Attendance**

* **The number of children in England being home educated** increased by more than 10,000 last autumn to 92,000, with mental health increasingly cited by parents as the main reason, according to official figures. In many cases parents are saying that schools had been unable to support complex health needs such as autism or anxiety disorders, a significant number also said they did so because they did not feel a school environment enabled their children to thrive socially, emotionally and academically. Many parents also cited concerns about bullying and poor behaviour of other students as the main trigger for their decision, while many others said they felt the national curriculum no longer prepared their children for the modern world and workplace, or let them explore their interests. For an article with a range of parental examples of those taking their children out of school, see <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/mar/13/children-failed-why-more-english-parents-home-educating>
* DfE has updated “**Toolkit for schools: communicating with families to support attendance**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance/toolkit-for-schools-communicating-with-families-to-support-attendance>

**Holiday pay for part time workers**

* The government is reviewing guidance on **holiday pay for term-time-only workers** after law firms warned a mistake could leave schools and trusts out of pocket. The non-statutory advice, which comes into effect in April, follows a court ruling in 2022 which means holiday pay for term-time-only workers must be calculated based on the hours they work in a normal week, not pro-rated based on the weeks worked in a year. Government guidance, published in January, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/simplifying-holiday-entitlement-and-holiday-pay-calculations/holiday-pay-and-entitlement-reforms-from-1-january-2024> focuses on two types of worker affected by the change. Irregular hours workers are those whose paid hours are “wholly or mostly variable”. Part-year workers, according to the guidance, are those for whom there are periods of at least a week “which they are not required to work and for which they are not paid”. It gives an example of a worker who is paid “an annualised (flat) salary over 12 months but has periods of time that last more than one week where he is not working”. He “would not qualify as part-year worker if his contract reflects that there are weeks where he is not working and there are no weeks where he does not receive pay”. It is this section of the guidance that has caused confusion, law firms said, because it appears to suggest term-time only workers who are paid in 12 instalments throughout the year do not count as part-year workers. In guidance published on its website, Browne Jacobson said: “Put simply, we think the non-statutory guidance has got this wrong.” <https://www.brownejacobson.com/insights/how-do-holiday-pay-reforms-affect-the-education-sector> The confusion “could result in education employers providing, and paying, term-time-only [workers] for more statutory holiday than they otherwise need”. **For full details**, also see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/holiday-pay-guidance-reviewed-amid-fears-schools-could-be-left-out-of-pocket/>

**Academies, free schools and trusts**

* DFE has updated” Details of **successful applications for free schools and university technical colleges (UTCs**) in the pre-opening stage”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-schools-successful-applications> and “Information on all **academies, free schools, studio schools and university technical colleges (UTCs) open in England,** and those in the process of opening”, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-academies-and-academy-projects-in-development>
* Since the government unveiled its blueprint to expand, merge or create multi-academy trusts in 55 priority areas, **single-trust declines** in these towns and counties have outstripped national falls. Some leaders have argued the push for larger academy chains has helped protect the most “vulnerable” schools from financial peril. But others worry smaller MATs have been side-lined over England’s largest trusts instead of expanding into new areas. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/academy-trust-development-statements-boost-decline-of-standalone-schools/>
* ESFA has issued information for academies about their **annual revenue funding**. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academies-funding-allocations>
* DfE has updated “Lists of local authorities **seeking academy and free school proposers**, and of all academies and free schools already set up”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-school-proposals>
* ESFA has updated “**Choosing a trust's financial management system** (FMS)”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/choosing-a-trusts-financial-management-system-fms>
* ESFA has updated “**Academies chart of accounts and automating the accounts return**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/academies-chart-of-accounts>

**Mobile phones and social media in schools**

* Schools minister **Damian Hinds** evidence to the education committee:
	+ Hinds said he was “sure all schools have some degree of restriction on using **mobile phones**”. But he said the government was trying to “create a new norm…we want to make the whole school day free of mobile phones and all that comes with that”. The prohibition that we have talked about is during the school day, it’s not to and from school. I’m not anticipating there being a problem implementing this. But if there were, the option remains to make it statutory.” Hinds said the government had “thought about” timetables, but “to be honest, we don’t think it is insurmountable to copy out a timetable”. He said there were “bigger questions about access to digital learning resources and so on”, but added that “typically a phone isn’t the best way to do that actually. Typically, you need a bigger screen, the way you sit is different”.
	+ Hinds resisted calls to commission guidance from the chief medical officer, Sir Chris Whitty, on **“safe” levels of screen time** for children; he warned of difficulties in setting a cap. Even very small amounts of very harmful activity could be just as bad as relatively quite large amounts of, say, educational, prosocial activity.
	+ Hinds was also quizzed about why the education technology used in schools was not covered by the new **online safety act**. Hinds said it did not apply because there was “already a set of statutory requirements around child protection and child safety, safeguarding in schools”.

**School meals**

* A head teacher has asked "how difficult is it to bake a potato?" in a despairing letter to parents about the **state of food at his own school**. Jason Ashley, head of Redbridge Community School in Southampton, said meals served in its canteen were "completely unacceptable". He blamed caterers Chartwells for the issues and said he had no control over what was on offer to pupils. The school was built under a PFI contract and was converted to an academy in 2013. The firm has apologised and promised an "immediate action plan". See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hampshire-68551949> School leaders and experts have also sounded an alarm over schools’ inability to intervene on meals contracts that were **tied into private finance initiative (PFI) deals** when their premises were built.

**Staff welfare**

* From the **Tes Schools Wellbeing Report 2024**, <https://www.tes.com/en-gb/for-schools/content/tes-wellbeing-report>
	+ Almost three-quarters of school staff (74 per cent) say that they considered leaving education completely over the last 12 months. Six in 10 (60 per cent) TAs say they considered leaving education in 2023, compared with 77 per cent of teachers, 78 per cent of middle leaders, 73 per cent of senior leaders and 76 per cent of SENCOs Meanwhile, almost half of trainee teachers (46 per cent) who responded to the survey say they considered leaving education completely over the last 12 months.
	+ There has been a jump in confidence in staff’s ability to do their jobs. Three-quarters (75 per cent) say they felt this in 2023 compared with just 58 per cent last year.
	+ Six in 10 (61 per cent) of UK teacher respondents to the survey reporting they do not have a manageable workload, although this is a fall on the 68 per cent who reported this in 2022.
	+ More schools are implementing time-saving behaviour management software; 36 per cent of staff say this was happening at their school compared with 32 per cent the year before.
	+ Over half (52 per cent) of UK school staff are proud to work at their school.
	+ There was a 14 per cent rise in the proportion of school staff who feel they have the autonomy to make decisions within their role, with just under half (45 per cent) reporting this.
	+ 11 per cent more school staff (37 per cent) say they feel their leadership team makes good decisions than they did last year.
	+ Almost half (47 per cent) of school staff respondents feeling they don’t have enough resources to do their job - up from 43 per cent last year - and just a quarter (24 per cent) agreeing their school is well-funded
	+ Half of school staff (50 per cent) say they do not get the opportunity to work flexibly. Just over one in 10 (11 per cent) say they got this opportunity in their current role, while 18 per cent say they did get the opportunity to work flexibly but would like this improved.
	+ Just 5 per cent - of all school staff who responded to the survey say they thought about recommending teaching to a friend or family member in the last 12 months, while just 4 per cent say the same about the education sector as a whole.

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

* **Girls aged between four and 11 who are overweight or obese are more likely to see a GP at least once about musculoskeletal problems than their healthy weight peers**, research suggests. Pupils in reception year who had a body mass index considered overweight were 24% more likely to see a doctor at least once for a musculoskeletal issue while their peers who were living with obesity were 67% more likely to do so than girls with a healthy weight, the study found. And girls in year 6 with obesity were 20% more likely to see a GP for musculoskeletal problems, while boys with a BMI considered underweight were 61% less likely to do so than children with a healthy weight. Knee and back symptoms or diagnoses were those most often recorded, according to the findings. See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/mar/12/overweight-girls-more-likely-to-see-gp-about-musculoskeletal-problems>
* **Suspended secondary school pupils are about a year behind their peers on average by the time they take their GCSEs**, new research has found, putting a number on the “suspension grades gap” for the first time. However, researchers warned they “cannot be sure” that suspension itself caused the difference in GCSE grades, as there could be other “unmeasured characteristics”. The Education Policy Institute found suspended pupils were, on average, not achieving a grade 4 pass in GCSE English and maths. Their average grade was 2.78 compared, to 4.72 for their non-suspended classmates. The EPI said nearly half of the effect of suspensions on attainment appears to be driven by other factors such as demographics, socio-economic disadvantage, prior attainment and school characteristics. But the gap remained “significant and stark”. The think tank made policy recommendations, including that schools should “proactively” identify pupils at risk of suspension for early intervention. See <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/outcomes-for-young-people-who-experience-multiple-suspen/>
* The DfE has issued “**Holiday activities and food programme 2023-2024**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/holiday-activities-and-food-programme/holiday-activities-and-food-programme-2023> and **2022-2023** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/holiday-activities-and-food-programme/holiday-activities-and-food-programme-2021>
* The government should appoint a **poverty tsar**, have a children’s minister attend cabinet and extend free meals to all children in settings with the greatest need, a former children’s commissioner has said. A new report from Anne Longfield’s Centre for Young Lives think tank and Child of the North project also called for a government plan to support schools to **reduce the impact of poverty** and a child poverty unit in Downing Street. See <https://www.centreforyounglives.org.uk/news-centre/government-must-support-schools-to-take-the-battle-against-child-poverty-inside-the-school-gates>
* **Tens of thousands of children and young people are waiting years for mental health treatment**, the office of the children’s commissioner has warned. Data obtained by de Souza’s office using its legal powers shows 949,200 children and young people had active referrals to mental health services in the 2022-23 financial year. This can’t be compared to previous years due to a change in methodology. Of those with active referrals during that year, almost 305,000, or 32 per cent, entered treatment and 373,000, or 39 per cent, had their referrals closed before accessing treatment. But 270,300, or 28 per cent, were still waiting to receive their second contact with services at the end of the year. Those still waiting at the end of the year waited on average 142 days for their second contact. Children with suspected autism had the longest average wait time – at 216 days – while those with other neurodevelopmental conditions waited on average 111 days and those with obsessive compulsive disorder waited 86 days. See <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/childrens-mental-health-services-2022-23/>
* **Violent online content is now “unavoidable” for children in the UK**, with many first exposed to it when they are still in primary school, research from the media watchdog has found. Every single British child interviewed for the Ofcom study had watched violent material on the internet, ranging from videos of local school and street fights shared in group chats, to explicit and extreme graphic violence, including gang-related content. See <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0026/280655/Understanding-Pathways-to-Online-Violent-Content-Among-Children.pdf>
* The UK Council for Internet Safety has updated its document, “**Sharing n\*des and semi-n\*des**: advice for education settings working with children and young people”. Within it is some information on the scale of the issue and new guidance around artificial intelligence. See <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65d62b02188d770011038855/UKCIS_sharing_nudes_and_semi_nudes_advice_for_education_settings__Web_accessible.pdf>

**SEND**

* **Plans to deliver thousands of new special school places by 2026 are falling seriously behind**. Last March, the DfE announced that 33 local authorities had been awarded funding to build a new special school, and most of these were expected to open by September 2026. However, insiders say the procurement process is already very delayed, and they are doubtful that schools will open on time. See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/mar/09/building-work-delayed-33-new-special-schools-england-autistic>
* More than 20 councils have been given ministerial approval to quietly **slice £67 million from schools budget to prop up gaping SEND funding black holes**. For the first time in recent years, all councils that asked for approval were given the green light to move millions between the core schools and high needs funding pots. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/send-high-needs-revealed-councils-slice-67m-from-school-budgets-to-prop-up-deficits/>
* DfE has issued “**Mandatory qualifications for specialist teachers of pupils with hearing impairment, vision impairment or multi-sensory impairment**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mandatory-qualifications-specialist-teachers>

**School management**

* DFE has updated “**School resource management self-assessment checklist**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-resource-management-self-assessment-checklist>
* ESFA has issued “Guidance for schools and local authorities on the **teachers’ pension employer contribution grant** (TPECG) 2024 for March 2024 to April 2025”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-pension-employer-contribution-grant-2024-for-schools-high-needs-settings-and-local-authorities-2024-to-2025>
* The DfE last week announced successful applicants to become **Teaching Hubs** from September until August 2028, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-school-hubs> Eighty-seven hubs were established in 2021, but applicants had to bid last year to continue when their funding runs out in August. Three of the original hubs lost out. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/teaching-hub-claims-dfe-favours-larger-trusts/>
* For the latest **ESFA Update**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-update-13-march-2024>
* ESFA has updated “**National non-domestic rates: guidance for billing authorities**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-non-domestic-rates-guidance-for-billing-authorities> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-non-domestic-rates-guidance-for-billing-authorities/national-non-domestic-rates-for-billing-authorities-form-guidance-2023-to-2024>
* ESFA has issued “**Change to the business rates payment process for schools: guidance for billing authorities**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-non-domestic-rates-guidance-for-billing-authorities/change-to-the-business-rates-payment-process-for-schools-guidance-for-billing-authorities>
* ESFA has updated “**Teachers' pay additional grant for 2023 to 2024**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-pay-additional-grant-2023-to-2024>
* Just two of the 41 councils given “health checks” by the government over their preparedness to **exit private finance initiative (PFI) school deals** were deemed to be on track. Sector leaders fear schools will be left to “shoulder the storm” of councils not being ready to take back public control of the schools, as contracts start to come to an end. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/warning-sounded-as-schools-not-ready-to-exit-pfi-deals/>

**Education news for schools**

* The NAHT has warned of a “**naive undervaluing” of arts in the education system** amid fears that creative subjects are being ”squeezed out” of the school timetable. Entries to many GCSE and A-level arts subjects have seen a significant decline in recent years. The latest findings from FFT Education Datalab reveal that schools with more disadvantaged pupils are less likely to enter pupils for creative subjects, particularly music. FFT found that the percentage of pupils doing any qualification in art and design fell from 31 per cent in 2015 to 27 per cent in 2023. A decline was also seen in music (dropping from 9 per cent in 2015 to 7 per cent in 2023), and in performing arts (20 per cent to 12 per cent respectively). See <https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2024/03/how-has-access-to-creative-subjects-changed-over-time/>
* Sir Kevan Collins has called for tighter admissions rules, warning that the **intake of some top-performing schools does not reflect the disadvantage in their surrounding communities**. Also, Are we allocating our staff and our resources to teach the hardest-to-teach children? It doesn’t look like it.” He also voiced his regret at the government’s decision not to continue tutoring funding beyond this year. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/sir-kevan-tighten-rules-so-top-state-schools-take-poor-pupils>
* **Subject matter specialists** provide invaluable advice to Ofqual as it carries out its role in regulating qualifications. Find out how to apply to be one. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/subject-matter-specialists-for-ofqual>
* There is to be a **commission on oracy** to build a blueprint for a “national entitlement” across “all stages” of education in England. The commission “has been set up in response to the growing recognition of the importance of spoken language to children’s learning and life chances”. It will report in September and outline an “evidence-based framework for oracy education. See <https://voice21.org/> for the background

**Post 16**

* ESFA has updated “**16 to 19 funding allocations supporting documents for 2024 to 2025**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-allocations-supporting-documents-for-2024-to-2025>
* ESFA has issued “**16 to 19 non-maintained special school (NMSS) revenue funding allocation guide: 2024 to 2025**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-allocations-supporting-documents-for-2024-to-2025/16-to-19-non-maintained-special-school-nmss-revenue-funding-allocation-guide-2024-to-2025>
* ESFA has issued “**16 to 19 special post-16 institution (SPI) revenue funding allocation guide: 2024 to 2025**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-allocations-supporting-documents-for-2024-to-2025/16-to-19-special-post-16-institution-spi-revenue-funding-allocation-guide-2024-to-2025>
* ESFA has issued “**16 to 19 funding: high value courses premium**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-high-value-courses-premium>
* The DfE has issued “It all starts with skills: brand guidelines and social assets. These guidelines will help you understand how the ‘It all starts with skills’ campaign creative works and how to use it alongside the ‘**Skills for Life’** brand. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/it-all-starts-with-skills-brand-guidelines-and-social-assets>
* DfE has issued a collection, “Data and research to help understand current and emerging **skills gaps and the type of jobs people take after training**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/job-and-skills-data>
* The DfE has updated “**T Levels capital fund**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/t-levels-capital-fund>
* ESFA has updated the **course directory** contains information on courses offered by learning providers who are contracted with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sfa-course-directory>
* ESFA has issued **tolerance examples 2024 to 2025 for T levels**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/t-level-funding/tolerance-examples-2024-to-2025> and **2023-2024**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/t-level-funding/tolerance-examples-2023-to-2024>
* ESFA has issued “**Dance and Drama Awards guide 2024 to 2025** academic year”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dance-and-drama-awards-guide-2024-to-2025-academic-year>
* **The University of Cambridge looks set to drop admission targets for undergraduates coming from state schools**. It currently aims to admit at least 69% of students from non-private settings. The university said it was working on a new access plan that would take a wider range of factors into account. A university spokesperson said its decision took into account guidance from OfS, the independent regulator of higher education in England. They said the focus of the OfS was now on individual students and likely outcomes rather than broader categorisations such as school type. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-68545303>
* The DfE has issued “Guidance **for FE ITE providers about bursary funding for the 2024 to 2025** academic year”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fe-funding-initial-teacher-education-ite-bursary> and “FE ITE bursary funding manual: 2024 to 2025”, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fe-funding-initial-teacher-education-ite-bursary/fe-ite-bursary-funding-manual-2024-to-2025>

**Tony Stephens**