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**253 Academy and School News and Resources Update, Jan 27-Feb 2 2024**

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**Public examination results**

**16-18**

* The DfE has issued “**A level and other 16 to 18 results: 2023 (revised**)”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/a-level-and-other-16-to-18-results-2023-revised> **Headlines**:
* Average A level result, B- An increase from C+ in 2018/19 (34.01 points to 35.29 points)
* Average applied general result, Merit+ This is the same as in 2018/19 (28.91 points to 29.56 points)
* Average tech level result, Merit+ This is the same as in 2018/19 (28.64 points to 28.52 points)
* Average point score per entry (APS) is lower than 2021/22, across all cohorts. This is as expected with the return to pre-pandemic grading.
* Gaps between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students have decreased in comparison to last year; the widest gap is seen for the A level cohort.
* Female students perform better than male students for all level 3 cohorts, but gaps have decreased since 2021/22.
* The rank order of attainment by ethnicity has remained almost unchanged at A level through the Covid-pandemic; the Chinese ethnic group have the highest APS and the Black or Black British ethnic group has the lowest APS.
* For A level and applied general cohorts, the decrease in average point score (APS) this year affected all major institution types (other FE sector colleges, sixth form colleges, all independent schools and all state-funded schools), however they remain slightly higher than in 2018/19.
* There was an overall rise in the number of below level 3 entries across both English and maths compared with 2021/22. This follows the return of the summer exam series in 2021/22 and a drop in the proportion of pupils achieving grades 4 or above in English and maths GCSE during key stage 4.
* For Statistics: **16 to 19 attainment back to 2010**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-attainment-at-19-years>
* The DfE has issued a **guide on how the 16 to 18 performance measures** **are calculated**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-accountability-headline-measures-technical-guide>

**Key Stage 4**

* The DfE has issued “**Key stage 4 performance 2023 (revised**)”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/key-stage-4-performance-2023> Headlines:
* 39.3% of pupils were entered into the full EBacc. This is an increase of 0.6 percentage points in comparison with 2021/22. In 2018/19 40.0% of pupils were entered into the full EBacc.
* 45.3% of pupils achieved a grade 5 or higher in both English and maths. This is a decrease of 4.5 percentage points (from 49.8%) compared to 2021/22, and an increase of 2.1 percentage points (from 43.2%) in comparison with 2018/19.
* Average Attainment 8 has decreased compared with last year, and 2018/19. The average Attainment 8 score is 46.3 in 2023, which has decreased by 2.5 points from 48.8 in 2021/22 and decreased by 0.4 points from 46.7 in 2018/19.
* Average EBacc APS in 2023 has also decreased compared with both last year and 2019, decreasing by 0.22 points from 4.27 to 4.05 between 2022 and 2023, and down by 0.02 points from 4.07 in 2019.
* The KS4 disadvantage gap index has widened compared to 2021/22, from 3.84 to 3.94. It is now at its highest level since 2011. Before the pandemic, the gap index had widened going from 3.66 to 3.70 between 2017 and 2019, before narrowing slightly in 2020 to 3.66 when centre assessed grades were used.

Users need to exercise caution when considering comparisons over time. This is due to the changes in approach to grading between 2022 and 2023. It is expected that performance in 2023 will generally be lower than in 2022. The more meaningful comparison is with 2019, the last year that summer exams were taken before the pandemic, as 2023 saw a return to pre-pandemic grading, with some protections. In 2022 outcomes broadly reflected a mid-point midpoint between 2019 and 2021, to take account of the impact of the pandemic and in line with Ofqual’s approach to grading in 2022 The changes seen in the headline attainment statistics likely reflect the changes in approach to grading in different years and resulting methodology changes for calculating the measures rather than demonstrating changes in standards. As such, year on year comparisons should be treated with caution. However, the trends data can show whether attainment gaps for pupils with particular characteristics or within certain school types have changed between years.

* For guide to “**Secondary accountability measures** (including Progress 8 and Attainment 8), see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/progress-8-school-performance-measure>
* For statistics on **key stage 4 results, including GCSEs, back to 2010**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-gcses-key-stage-4>
* Leaders have welcomed a government decision to **pause plans announced just five months ago to shake up the EBacc accountability measure to “incentivise” take up**. Last September, the DfE said it would “explore making changes to the headline EBacc attainment measure” The DfE said it wanted to “move to a headline EBacc attainment measure that incentivises full EBacc” for this September. But in a guidance update – just five months later – the department said it was “pausing this work and the current EBacc APS will remain the headline EBacc attainment measure”.
* **Headteachers’ leaders have urged ministers to put secondary school progress scores P8 on hold for the next two academic years** because there is no national test data for how pupils performed at the end of primary school to use as a baseline. The DfE has published guidance that said it is considering an alternative method of producing progress scores for secondary schools in 2024-25 and 2025-26. The cohorts who will be in Year 11 in the next two academic years did not carry out these Sats because of the disruption to education in 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Last year the DfE confirmed that it will not be publishing primary school progress measures for 2023-24 or 2024-25 because it does not have data from KS1 to use to provide a baseline for these pupils’ attainment.

**Performance Tables**

* **To search for 16 to 18 school, college and multi-academy trust performance data in England: 2022 to 2023 as per individual institution**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/16-to-18-school-college-and-multi-academy-trust-performance-data-in-england-2022-to-2023> The data also reveals multi-academy trust results for the first time - showing results for converter and sponsored academy pupils compared with performance for schools overall.
* **To search for the achievements of pupils at key stage 4 in England at school level, multi-academy trust level and local authority area, i.e performance tables for each individual institution**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/secondary-school-performance-data-in-england-2022-to-2023-revised> The data also reveals multi-academy trust results for the first time - showing results for converter and sponsored academy pupils compared with performance for schools overall. Across all the eligible MAT schools, 42.8 per cent of pupils achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths at GCSE, down from 47.3 per cent in 2022 and in line with the overall trend this year, which saw a drop in students achieving higher GCSE marks owing to the reset of grading boundaries to pre-pandemic levels. When all MAT schools are included, 44 per cent of pupils achieved grade 5 or above, compared with 48.8 per cent in 2022. Across all school types, 45.3 per cent of pupils achieved grade 5.
* For **a collection of performance tables all the way back to 2010**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-performance-tables>

**Training for early year teachers**

* **The DfE has announced a new initial teacher training and early career framework (ITTECF) which combines and updates the initial teacher training core content framework (CCF),** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-itt-core-content-framework> and the early career framework, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-career-framework> (ECF), as from September 2025. It will ensure that all new teachers receive three or more years of training underpinned by the best available evidence. For details on the new framework, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-and-early-career-framework> The framework has been updated to ensure it’s based on the latest evidence, including new and updated content on how teachers should support pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), high quality oral language, and early cognitive development and children’s mental health. The DfE has admitted the workload of new teacher mentors is “too high” Ministers are now “shortening ECF mentor training to one year and providing ready-to-use resources” that will let them “focus on nurturing new talent”. To support early career teachers to “relate their training to their context and subject”, providers will “develop enhanced subject-specific materials, and Oak National Academy will collaborate” with them “to further enrich their subject-specific materials”. Later this year, the DfE will be procuring updated training programmes for early career teachers (ECTs) based on this new framework. They will be designed after an evaluation of the national ECF reforms since September 2021. The updated programmes, to be rolled out from September 2025, will be better designed to take ECTs’ learning from initial teacher training into account, provide more tailoring based on their level of development, subject and context, and streamline the training and support for mentors so they can better focus on supporting their ECTs. For a useful summary, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/dfe-combines-two-flagship-schemes-into-new-initial-teacher-training-and-early-career-framework-after-ecf-review/>

The **University of Cambridge** has said it “lacks confidence” in the government’s new teacher training framework and wants its rollout delayed by at least a year The Russell Group institution, which runs a teacher training programme, said the initial teacher training and early career framework (ITTECF) unveiled by the DfE “falls short” of what is needed. The Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (**UCET)** said the framework “should be developed by relevant professionals from across the education sector rather than being imposed by government”.

**Ofsted**

* **The Parliamentary education committee has issued its report on the impact of Ofsted**. See <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/7761/ofsteds-work-with-schools/> Its **recommendations**:

**DfE and Ofsted** should…

* Work together ‘as a priority’ to develop an alternative to single-phrase judgments that ‘better captures the complex nature of a school’s performance’
* In the short term, Ofsted, DfE and school websites ‘should always show the full list of judgments’
* In the short term, work to reduce the frequency of inspections to approximately every five to six years for ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ schools and three to four years for schools judged ‘requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’
* In the longer term, DfE should back Ofsted in lobbying the Treasury for extra funding to allow for “more in-depth inspections, without compromising on frequency or the principle that all schools are subject to periodic inspection”
* Ensure there is an efficient and independent process for schools to challenge the findings as well as the conduct of an inspection
* Publish separate complaints data for each sector in its remit in its annual report and accounts
* Carry out research to “fully understand the causes of inspection-related workload pressure and assess what changes would be genuinely helpful in reducing this”

**Ofsted** should…

* Consider a small increase in the notice period given to schools before inspections. The committee heard five working days would be “appropriate”
* Consider whether smaller schools could be given a longer notice period or greater flexibility around deferrals
* Ensure inspectors fully take account of factors such as a school’s size, the number of its pupils from disadvantaged groups and with SEND, recruitment and retention challenges
* Review its policy on ‘inadequate’ judgements due to ineffective safeguarding and ensure that schools are only being judged ‘inadequate’ in cases where they are fundamentally failing to keep children safe
* Increase the length and depth of analysis provided in inspection reports to ‘ensure that they are genuinely useful’
* Allow schools access to the evidence used to reach a judgment when making a complaint
* Ensure, as a minimum, that a lead inspector has expertise in the type of school they are inspecting and in larger teams the majority of inspectors visiting a school should also have that relevant experience
* Publish data on inspectors’ expertise regarding phase of education and subject, and the proportion of inspections led by at least one inspector with the relevant phase expertise
* Commission an independent assessment of the factors affecting retention of experienced HMIs and act to address the issue
* Report to the committee on a six-monthly basis on progress in addressing the “significant concerns” raised in the coroner’s prevention of future deaths report
* Explore how it can boost its engagement with parents, pupils, governors, and trustees before and during the inspection process
* Regularly survey parents, pupils and staff “outside the inspection process” to help identify “schools most or least in need of inspection”
* Publish its planned evaluation of the Education Inspection Framework “as soon as possible” and review its implementation

**DfE** should…

* Look into setting up an independent body with the “powers to investigate inspection judgments through scrutiny of the evidence base”
* Assess whether its policy of forced academisation of schools with two ‘requires improvement’ “judgments is proportionate”
* Conduct a “full audit” of support available to schools to help them improve
* Improve the transparency and accountability of the work of the regional directors
* Provide an annual report to Parliament setting out the scope, detail and impact of their work
* Make regional directors available to give evidence to the committee
* Ensure regional directors “genuinely take into account the views of local stakeholders when taking a decision and should also publish guidance setting out in more detail the criteria for academy orders”
* Consult on the best approach to increasing the regularity of safeguarding inspections through a less intensive compliance audit, carried out either by local authorities or an independent body
* Authorise Ofsted to develop a framework for the inspection of MATs as a “matter of urgency” and set out a plan for building the appropriate expertise and capacity in this area
* Ofsted has updated “**Additional inspections of independent schools**: handbook for inspectors”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/conducting-additional-inspections-of-independent-schools>
* Ofsted has updated “What schools, registered early years providers and childminders need to know about **delivering the early years foundation stage (EYFS), and Ofsted inspections under the education inspection framework (EIF)**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-eif-inspections-and-the-eyfs>
* After successfully crafting some very careful messaging in his first few weeks in the top job at Ofsted, **Sir Martyn Oliver’s comments on behaviour in a recent interview with The Times caused concern** among some of the sector’s school leaders. Oliver spoke of “no go” areas for teachers, schools where staff locked themselves in rooms for their own safety, and staff striking as behaviour had grown “so bad”. ASCL pointed out these situations were incredibly rare and that worsening behaviour included “many forms” other than violence. One “disappointed” trust leader said they believed Oliver’s comments “did nothing for schools in the grip of a recruitment and retention crisis”. “Why on earth would anyone want to come into teaching when one of the most senior voices in education is talking this way?” they asked.
* Ofsted has issued “**Ofsted pen portraits of HM Majesty's Inspectors** (HMIs)”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-pen-portraits-of-her-majestys-inspectors-hmis>
* Ofsted has updated “**Area SEND: framework and handbook**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/area-send-framework-and-handbook> and “**Area SEND inspections: information about ongoing inspections**”, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-area-send-inspections-information-for-families>
* Ofsted has issued “**The risk assessment process that Ofsted uses to assist in scheduling inspections of early career framework (ECF) and national professional qualification (NPQ) programmes**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/risk-assessment-methodology-early-career-framework-and-national-professional-qualifications>
* Ofsted has issued “Ofsted’s guidance on **quality assurance of online providers under the Online Education Accreditation Scheme**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/accreditation-visits-to-online-providers-handbook>
* Ofsted has issued “**Inspecting local authority children's services**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-from-2018>
* Ofsted has issued guidance on how Ofsted inspects **boarding schools and residential special schools**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-care-common-inspection-framework-sccif-boarding-schools-and-residential-special-schools>
* **Ofsted’s system for recording inspection evidence has for years suffered glitches** that wipe data and force inspectors to re-record their findings, sometimes from memory after a visit has ended. Ofsted has admitted that on at least one occasion, an inspection was deemed “incomplete” because of technical problems, forcing inspectors to return. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/ofsteds-digital-inspection-system-glitch-revealed/>
* **Scores of trust leaders have been told they face having “coasting” schools re-brokered** despite improving their Ofsted grades – with many others issued warnings despite just having one inspection. Calls are growing for the DfE to ditch its “coasting” intervention powers. Introduced in September 2022, the powers mean schools with two or more consecutive Ofsted ratings below ‘good’ can be academised or re-brokered. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/schools-given-coasting-warnings-despite-raising-ofsted-grades/>
* Ofsted inspectors are undergoing **new training on understanding small schools** that they will need to complete before being able to inspect settings with 150 or fewer pupils. Ofsted said it has developed the training to ensure that its inspectors “make adaptions to their thinking and practice” when visiting smaller schools. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/ofsted-inspectors-new-training-inspect-small-schools>

**Alternative provision**

* **Ofsted has issued the report from its review to assess how alternative provision (AP) commissioning and oversight is currently working and the impact of arrangements on children and young people**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision-in-local-areas-in-england-a-thematic-review> Key points:
	+ While good registered AP plays an important role in providing high quality support, care and education to vulnerable children, the report finds that too many children and young people’s experiences are negative, and the overall picture is of a system in desperate need of reform. Many attending AP experience a highly disrupted education, with one parent describing the situation as “soul destroying”. One child also spoke about feeling abandoned by their home school.
* Good registered AP provides high-quality education, but too many children’s experiences are negative.
* A lack of national standards around the commissioning and oversight of AP is leading to inconsistent outcomes for children and young people.
* Local areas are unclear on roles and responsibilities, leading to an inconsistent picture nationally.
* Currently, not all AP needs to be registered or inspected, meaning there is lack of oversight of children and young people in unregistered AP; after 12 years of calling for the mandatory registration for all AP, it is clear that the need for reform is more urgent than ever.
* Decisions about placing children and young people in AP are not always considered thoroughly enough and the effectiveness of placements is not properly monitored
* There is a lack of clear purpose for the use of AP and poor strategic planning. Inspectors also found that agencies do not always collaborate, and health partners often are not involved in decision making about individual AP placements.

**Recommendations**

* better guidance on the purposes of AP and potential indicators of success
* clearer roles and responsibilities for different local area partners, with more clarity on how health and social care partners should be involved in strategic planning for AP and the commissioning and oversight of individual placements
* improved oversight of certain groups of children and young people in AP, including through the introduction of a proportionate registration and inspection regime for all AP
* greater consistency and rigour in decision making around individual AP placements and subsequent monitoring and evaluation arrangements

**T-levels and BTECS**

* **A provisional list of qualifications that have been assessed to overlap with wave 4 T Levels** in:
	+ agriculture, environmental and animal care
	+ craft and design
	+ legal
	+ media, broadcast and production

Subject to the appeals process, these qualifications will have 16 to 19 funding approval withdrawn for new starts from 1 August 2025. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wave-4-t-levels-overlapping-qualifications>

**Ministers have scrapped plans to introduce T-levels in hairdressing and barbering after two years of development** – **with proposals for a beauty therapy qualification pushed back to at least 2025**. Two awarding organisations, NCFE and VTCT, will now conduct a scoping exercise with the beauty sector to test whether a standalone T-level is viable. The government now believes the best routes for students in the hairdressing and barbering sector are existing level 2 and 3 apprenticeships and level 2 classroom qualifications. ASCL said this will leave many schools and colleges “in limbo who have spent time and money getting ready for teaching these qualifications this year, and will have offered places to students as a result”.

**Meanwhile, the government has published a third provisional list of qualifications that face the axe to pave the way for T-levels**. The further 71 subjects to be scrapped include popular creative media practice and animal management BTECs. For full details, see <https://feweek.co.uk/71-courses-face-the-axe-in-favour-of-wave-4-t-levels/>

* ESFA has issued “**T Levels: next steps for providers**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/t-levels-next-steps-for-providers>
* ESFA has issued “**T Level resources for universities**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/t-level-resources-for-universities>

**Ethnic diversity in the teaching workforce**

* The ‘ethnic diversity in the teaching workforce’ evidence review, published by the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER), states **“people of colour are considerably under-represented in the teaching workforce**, especially among school leaders”. The report found around 60 per cent of schools in England had all-white teaching staff in 2021-22, with 86 per cent having an all-white senior leadership team. “Teachers of colour report being socially excluded, stereotyped, rejected for promotions or professional development, and experience overt racism.” Four times as many teachers of colour would need to be promoted to headteacher positions – around 2,500 more – for the role to become representative of the wider population. Meanwhile, non-white teachers are less likely to be accepted onto teacher training than their white counterparts, NFER research published in 2022 found. See <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/py4nu3eq/ethnic_diversity_in_the_teaching_workforce_embargoed.pdf> Recommendations:

**Recruitment to initial teacher training (ITT)**

* • Strategies (such as advertising, job experience, events and tasters) to make a career in teaching more attractive to high achieving graduates of colour
* • Alternative pathways to enter ITT for people of colour who do not have the currently required qualifications to apply.
* • Strategies (such as name-blind applications, contextualised recruitment and conditional offers) to increase ITT acceptance rates for applicants of colour
* • Structured support for applicants of colour/from disadvantaged backgrounds to provide help with their applications
* • ITT organisational strategies (including course content on racial justice in education, EDI policies, careful selection of school experience venues and teacher educators of colour) to improve qualification rates of trainees of colour.

**Retention in teaching**

* • Whole-school initiatives (such as EDI policies; and training for staff and leadership teams; an understanding of culturally responsive teaching and charter marks)
* • Support and challenge for schools to diversify their teaching and leadership teams
* • Career advice, development and support for teachers of colour.

**Leadership progression and retention**

* • Training programmes tailored to the needs of aspiring leaders of colour
* • Bursaries to enable teachers of colour to undertake leadership development
* • Mentoring support from same-race teachers and leaders and access to professional support networks of same-race aspiring/practising leaders
* • In-school coaching for newly-appointed headteachers of colour
* • Autonomy for headteachers of colour to pursue their moral purpose with support from governing bodies and academy boards.

**SEND**

* **Cash-strapped councils falling behind on their SEND deficit bailout plans** – just months after they were signed off – have now been placed under “enhanced” monitoring by ministers. Cambridgeshire and Norfolk signed government “safety valve” agreements in March, where they got £119 million combined in bailouts to help balance their high needs deficits over five and seven years respectively. But by September, both were already off track, which means they must submit revised plans and join the “enhanced monitoring and support (EMS)” scheme. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/councils-with-send-bailouts-increasingly-monitored-by-ministers/>
* **The majority of teachers have had no more than half a day of autism training**, according to findings released today. The findings are contained in a report by the NFER for the National Autistic Society, which is calling for training to be made mandatory. The report found that just 39 per cent of primary teachers and 14 per cent of secondary teachers have had more than half a day’s autism training. Despite the lack of training, 87 per cent of teachers said they feel confident supporting autistic pupils. In comparison, seven in 10 autistic pupils felt teachers do not understand enough about autism, according to the research, which also included 30 interviews with autistic children, parents and teachers at mainstream schools. Research has found that the number of autism diagnoses has increased by 787 per cent in the past 20 years. And statistics from the DFE show that the number of pupils with autism as their primary special educational need rose from 50,000 in 2009 to around 163,000 in 2020-21. However, mainstream schools often report struggling to support children who may have been waiting for years for an official diagnosis. And there is a huge squeeze on specialist places, with special schools under pressure to meet rising demand. See <https://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/news/education-report-2023>
* The **shortage of educational psychologists (EP)** is having a “significant impact” on councils’ ability to meet SEND needs, the council ombudsman has warned. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/educational-psychologist-shortage-having-significant-impact/>
* The DfE said that by April, the high-needs funding given to councils to support pupils with special needs will have increased by 60 per cent – to £10.5 billion – in five years. In 2023–24 the funding rose by £970 million alone. The money goes to councils, which then distribute the funding to “top-up” funding for pupils with additional needs where extra support is required. However, research by Special Needs Jungle shows that **the top-up funding levels for schools to deliver provision for children with education, health and care plans (ECHPs) has remained stagnant in a third of councils between 2018 and last yea**r. Further analysis revealed almost half of 136 council areas that provided the data did not increase their top-up bands – different levels of support based on a pupil’s need – between 2022–23 and this year. See <https://www.specialneedsjungle.com/send-fact-check-wheres-funding-gone/>

**Early years and primary**

* The DfE has updated “**Lists of qualifications that meet DfE's criteria for counting in the early years foundation stage framework staff/child ratios**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-qualifications-achieved-in-england>
* The 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 has issued “A list of schools by academic year that are registered to deliver the NELI programme,(**Nuffield Early Language Intervention programme**)” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/neli-nuffield-early-language-intervention-programme>
* STA has updated “**Latest information and deadlines relating to primary school assessments**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/sta-assessment-updates>
* STA has issued “**Statutory guidance for assessing and reporting the national curriculum at key stage 2 (KS2**) in the 2023 to 2024 academic year”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2024-key-stage-2-assessment-and-reporting-arrangements-ara>
* STA has issued “**Key stage 2 teacher assessment guidance**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-teacher-assessment-guidance>
* A major new national recruitment campaign, <https://earlyyearscareers.campaign.gov.uk/> has been launched by the DfE alongside a trial of £1,000 cash sign-on bonuses, to give nurseries and early years providers the workers they need and offer more childcare places for parents. The “**Do Something Big**” recruitment campaign is to encourage people to start a career working with small children. A £1,000 sign-on bonus for childcare workers is also being launched today to increase capacity, tackle unemployment, and offer more childcare places. The trial – which will cover 20 local authorities across the UK – will give new-starters and returners a tax-free cash payment shortly after they take up post. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/childcare-recruitment-campaign-launched> Nursery leaders say recruitment drive to get more workers into early years sector comes too late and doesn’t go far enough

**Industrial action**

* The government plan to **impose minimum service levels (MSLs) during teacher strikes** could worsen the recruitment and retention crisis in schools, teachers’ and heads’ leaders have warned. The DfE plan is to keep up to around three in four pupils in schools during teacher strikes ,And the proposed legislation, which would require a minimum number of staff to work in classrooms during strikes, would mean around £36 million in extra costs for schools, ASCL has warned**. ASCL** and the **NEU**, have issued their warnings as part of responses to the government consultation on its proposed MSL plan for schools. See <https://www.ascl.org.uk/News/Our-news-and-press-releases/Children-and-young-people-will-not-benefit-from-mi>
* The **NEU** has said that teacher “engagement and anger” will need to be “ramped up” for its **campaign on teacher pay and school funding** to succeed. In a briefing to members, the NEU says it plans to “agitate” when the School Teachers’ Review Body (STRB) submits its report to the education secretary, which is expected in mid-May. The NEU said its indicative ballot - set to launch on 2 March - will conclude ahead of the union’s annual conference in spring. Members would then vote on a formal ballot for strike action, the union has said. The briefing says the NEU would aim to “secure a strike mandate before the end of summer term”.

**Local authority issues affecting schools**

* **A falling rolls crisis that has forced London councils to consider closing and merging primary schools is making its way into the secondary phase**, a new report has warned. Research by London Councils found the capital’s secondary schools could have 4,000 fewer pupils joining in the next four years, equating to 134 classes and a 4.3 per cent drop in demand for year 7 places between 2024 and 2027. See [https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/jan/29/london-schools-may-be-mothballed-as-student-numbers-fall/](https://schoolsweek.co.uk/londons-falling-rolls-crisis-moves-into-secondary-schools/)
* A dozen councils have been forced to update records from key meetings with headteachers after an audit **found they were breaking their legal duty to keep them up-to-date**. The law requires local authorities to have a schools forum, made up of leaders, governors and trade unions, which is consulted on key funding decisions. Councils are also required to “promptly publish all papers considered by the forum and the minutes of their meetings on their website.” But research found 12 councils whose records were either non-existent or not up-to-date. This equates to around eight per cent of all councils with education responsibilities. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/councils-forced-to-update-key-records-after-audit-finds-legal-breach/>
* **Councils face a “cliff-edge” of effective bankruptcy notices without accounting immunity and extra SEND funding which is currently “far from sufficient**”, a cross-party group of MPs has warned. The Levelling-Up, House and Communities committee has urged ministers to agree “realistic” steps and additional cash with councils by April to eliminate high needs budget deficits. These deficits have soared to £1.58 billion, but councils have been allowed to keep them off their books as part of a “statutory override” due to expire in March 2026. Thirty four councils have also been subject to safety valve agreements, where the government offers bailouts totalling nearly £1 billion in exchange for sweeping reforms. The committee also looked at wider council costs, such as social care and homelessness, urging government to “fix” a £4 billion hole in funding for 2024-25. School funding for local authorities is “far from sufficient” to meet the huge rise in demand for special educational needs and disability (SEND) support, and the government needs to create a “realistic” plan to resolve growing deficits Clive Betts, the committee’s chair, said there was an “out-of-control financial crisis” as councils are “hit by a double harm of increased demands for services while experiencing a significant hit to their real-terms spending power in recent years”. See <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/43165/documents/214689/default/>

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

* **Disposable vapes are set to be banned** as part of plans to tackle the rising number of young people taking up vaping, the government says. Measures will also be introduced to prevent vapes being marketed at children and to target under age sales. Figures from the Action on Smoking and Health (Ash) charity suggest 7.6% of 11 to 17-year-olds now vape regularly or occasionally, up from 4.1% in 2020. It is already illegal to sell any vape to anyone under 18, but the government said disposable vapes - often sold in smaller, more colourful packaging than refillable ones - were a "key driver behind the alarming rise in youth vaping". See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-68123202>
* Inspired by social media, particularly TikTok, it appears **children are adopting strict anti-ageing skincare regime**s. It’s mainly girls, and some are as young as eight. Dermatologists report young people appearing with complex, inappropriate skincare routines, not to mention heightened anxieties, with one consultant dermatologist in London fielding teenage concerns about “crow’s feet”. See <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/jan/27/joyless-children-fixated-on-anti-ageing-skincare>
* The DfE has issued a collection of all the documents relating to the UK government’s **10-year drugs strategy**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/from-harm-to-hope-a-10-year-drugs-plan-to-cut-crime-and-save-lives>
* **Tooth decay** is the biggest primary cause of NHS hospital admissions for children in England aged between five and 17, as 40% of children no longer have access to regular dental appointments. Between April 2022 and May 2023, 30,000 children and more than 70,000 adults in England were admitted to A&E with tooth decay. A 2023 survey of school nurses and dentists found that nearly four out of five had seen higher rates of tooth decay. See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/jan/30/pliers-abscesses-and-agonising-pain-britains-dental-crisis-as-seen-from-ae>

**Post 16**

* **More than half of undergraduates say they consult artificial intelligence programmes to help with their essays**, while schools are trialling its use in the classroom. A survey of more than 1,000 UK undergraduates, conducted by the Higher Education Policy Institute (Hepi), found 53% were using AI to generate material for work they would be marked on. One in four are using applications such as Google Bard or ChatGPT to suggest topics and one in eight are using them to create content. Just 5% admitted to copying and pasting unedited AI-generated text into their assessments. See <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/feb/01/more-than-half-uk-undergraduates-ai-essays-artificial-intelligence>
* The DfE is to investigate allegations of **bad practice by agents who recruit international students to study at British universitie**s. It follows claiming that overseas students are being admitted to prestigious institutions while subject to lower entry requirements than domestic students. See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/jan/29/department-education-investigate-recruitment-international-students-uk-universities>
* **Unemployed young people are having to turn down jobs because they cannot afford associated costs such as clothes and transport**, a Prince’s Trust study has found. The research found that the rising cost of living for young people was “threatening the aspirations of an entire generation”. It found that a third of those aged 16 to 25 said they could not afford to get the qualifications they needed for the job they wanted. One in 10 had had to turn down a job because of costs. Almost a fifth of the 2,239 young people who took part in the YouGov survey said they planned to finish their education early so that they could start earning money. About 5% admitted missing school or work in the past 12 months because they could not afford transport, rising to almost one in 10 of those from poorer backgrounds. More than two-fifths said worrying about money had made them unable to concentrate at school. See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/jan/28/young-people-in-uk-having-to-refuse-jobs-due-to-high-costs-report-finds#:~:text=Unemployed%20young%20people%20are%20having,aspirations%20of%20an%20entire%20generation%E2%80%9D>
* The DfE has issued an **overview of capital funding for post-16 education providers**, the type of funding available, what it can be used for and when to apply. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/fe-capital-funding>
* Ofqual has issued “​​**A review of the assessment of reformed Functional Skills qualifications in English and maths​**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-review-of-the-assessment-of-reformed-functional-skills-qualifications-in-english-and-maths>
* The DfE has issued “How awarding organisations can ensure the **transfer of their level 4 to 6 qualifications funded in Advanced Learner Loans to the Lifelong Learning Entitlement**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transfer-advanced-learner-loans-to-lifelong-learning-entitlement>
* The DfE has issued “Guidance for further education providers that have successfully registered recruits to **Taking Teaching Further (TTF) 2023**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-teaching-further-programme>

**Education news for schools**

* For the EDSK report on education, “**20 YEARS OF MUDDLING THROUGH**”, see <https://www.edsk.org/publications/20-years-of-muddling-through/>
* The Education Endowment Foundation will trial **whether ChatGPT can help teachers cut workload** in one of the first such research projects. Secondary schools are wanted to take part in the trial, which will investigate whether ‘Teaching with ChatGPT’, an online toolkit that explains how to use the technology, can reduce staff working hours. Schools can sign up here, <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects-recruiting>
* The Archbishop of Canterbury is launching a new education programme today to help secondary school students learn to “disagree well” in an increasingly “polarised world”; the new **Difference in Secondary Schools scheme** will be rolled out this year. The scheme is described as a free, six-session resource. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/archbishop-scheme-bids-help-pupils-disagree-well>
* **LGBT+ History Month** is celebrated every February as an annual commemoration of the history, achievements and contributions of LGBT+ people in the UK, as well as promoting equality and diversity for the benefit of all. This year the theme is Medicine – #UnderTheScope, and it celebrates LGBT+ peoples’ contribution to the field of medicine and healthcare, and encourages you to ‘look under the scope’ to listen to LGBT+ peoples’ lived experiences. See <https://lgbtplushistorymonth.co.uk/>
* For reports of **higher pay increases for Trust CEOs**, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/highest-earning-academy-chiefs-annual-pay-nears-500k/>

**School and academy management**

* The British Heart Foundation offers a free, game-changing**, digital CPR training** tool for educational settings, teaching 11–16-year-olds, which requires no experience, special equipment, and only minimal planning. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/british-heart-foundation-bhf-helps-take-the-stress-out-of-teaching-cpr-with-classroom-revivr/>
* **Ministers have promised schools worst-hit by the RAAC crisis extra money so their teachers can run out-of-hours catch-up lessons** – but who gets the extra funding is unclear. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/raac-schools-get-extra-cash-for-out-of-hours-lessons/>
* The DfE has issued guidance on “**Condition Improvement Fund**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/condition-improvement-fund>
* ESFA has issued “**Payments made to institutions for claims made to ESFA for various grants** including, but not exclusively, coronavirus (COVID-19) support grants”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-data-on-funding-claims-by-institutions>
* The DfE has issued “**School census 2023 to 2024: technical information**”, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-census-2023-to-2024-technical-information> and “**Early years census: technical specification**”, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-census-technical-specification>
* The DfE has issued “**Sustainability and climate change strategy: evaluation framework**”. How the DfE will approach monitoring and evaluation of the initiatives in the sustainability and climate change strategy. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainability-and-climate-change-strategy-evaluation-framework>
* ESFA has updated “**Academies accounts return**”, see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academies-accounts-return> and “Academies accounts return: **guide to using the online form**”, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-academy-financial-returns-accounts-return>
* ESFA has issued “**The school resource management advisers (SRMA**) **programme**”. Information about the SRMA programme and the hands-on support and tailored advice available to schools, academy trusts and local authorities. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-school-resource-management-advisers-srma-programme>
* For the latest **ESFA Update**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-update-31-january-2024>
* ESFA has issued “**National Tutoring Programme (NTP) allocations for 2023 to 2024 academic year**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-tutoring-programme-ntp-allocations-for-2023-to-2024-academic-year>
* ESFA has issued “**National non-domestic rates**: guidance for billing authorities”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-non-domestic-rates-guidance-for-billing-authorities>
* **The government should provide clearer guidance over back-dating of pupil removals from a register when persistently absent pupils stop attending school**, a MAT leader has warned. The move is needed to clear up “unnecessary confusion” that has led to different practices across trusts and local authorities. The trust said it “operates according to legal advice which prohibits the back-dating of removals from a school’s register after a child has ceased to attend”. It adds that “this practice is not observed by all local authorities and all other schools, meaning that the trust schools carry a higher proportion of leavers’ absence data”. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/trust-calls-clarity-pupil-register-removal-rule>

**Tony Stephens**