Tony Stephens Education Support

http://tonystephens.org.uk

[tonystephens856@gmail.com](about:blank)

07977804899

**263 Academy and School News and Resources Update, April 7-13 2024**

*Copyright, Tony Stephens*

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

[**http://tonystephens.org.uk**](about:blank)

**Early years and primary**

* **Over half of primary schools are planning to run key stage 1 Sats this term** despite the government scrapping the mandatory tests last year, according to a representative survey. A third of primary teachers (33 per cent) who responded to a survey said they will be carrying out the assessment next month as had previously been required. A further 28 per cent of respondents said they will run the assessments for Year 2 pupils at a different point in this academic year. When primary school teachers were asked why they were carrying out the assessments, the most common answer was for benchmarking purposes. Just 15 per cent of primary teachers who responded to the survey said they would be running their own assessments. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/primary/most-teachers-running-optional-key-stage-1-sats>
* DfE has issued “**Findings from the progress in international reading literacy study (PIRLS) 2021**, assessing and comparing the reading attainment and attitudes of year 5 children”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pirls-2021-reading-literacy-performance-in-england> England’s average score in PIRLS 2021 was 558. This is statistically significantly1 higher than the International Median score of 520, though not significantly different to England’s scores in most previous PIRLS cycles. England’s average overall reading performance has not changed significantly compared to most previous PIRLS cycles, including PIRLS 2016. PIRLS uses 4 International Benchmarks (Low, Intermediate, High and Advanced) to describe the reading skills associated with PIRLS scores. Almost all pupils in England (97%) reached at least the Low International Benchmark, compared to an International Median of 94%, while 86% of pupils in England reached the Intermediate Benchmark level compared to an International Median of 75%. More than half of pupils in England (57%) reached the High International Benchmark in PIRLS 2021, compared to an International Median of 36% reaching this Benchmark, and 18% of pupils in England reached the Advanced International Benchmark, compared to the International Median of 7%. Between 2011 and 2016 there was a small increase in the percentage of pupils achieving the Low, Intermediate and High Benchmarks in England. Since 2016, performance at each of the International Benchmarks in England has seen no statistically significant changes. Other points:
* The **gender gap** in reading performance has reduced over time in England. Girls still outperform boys by 10 points on average in PIRLS 2021, but this is lower than in previous cycles. Between 2001 and 2011 the gender gap remained relatively consistent with a 22-point difference in 2001, 19 points in 2006 and 23 points in 2011. The gender gap then narrowed to a 15-point difference in 2016 and narrowed further to a 10-point difference in 2021.
* The **gap between the lowest-scoring and highest-scoring** pupils in England has also reduced over time. In the long term, looking across all cycles of PIRLS, this seems to be the result of increases in performance amongst the lowest-attainers, while high attainers’ average score has remained relatively stable.
* **Fewer pupils in England reported that they enjoy reading than in previous cycles**. Across all education systems pupils who like reading achieve higher on average in PIRLS than pupils who do not like reading. Some attitudes towards reading vary by gender in England; a higher proportion of boys do not like reading compared to girls, however, both boys and girls report similar levels of confidence in reading.
* In England, most pupils attend schools where teachers and headteachers report **high levels of emphasis on academic success; a safe and orderly school environment; and “hardly any” problems with school discipline**. Across all participating education systems, high levels of academic emphasis at schools are associated with higher average performance for pupils in PIRLS 2021. There is also a positive association between higher achievement in PIRLS and a safe school climate, and low reports of discipline-related problems.
* Almost half of pupils who participated in PIRLS 2021 in England report experiencing **bullying** at least monthly at school. Across all participating education systems, pupils who report experiencing bullying more frequently had lower average performance in PIRLS 2021.
* **There is a positive correlation between performance in the year 1 phonics screening check and performance in PIRLS 2021**. The overall correlation between year 1 phonics check and PIRLS 2021 was 0.43, indicating a moderate, statistically significant relationship between performance in the 2 assessments. This is similar to the relationship seen between PIRLS and phonics scores in 2016.
* **Several pupil characteristics significantly predict PIRLS 2021 performance** in England based on a multiple linear regression analysis. The strongest predictor of PIRLS performance was the year 1 phonics check mark, for which a 1-point increase was associated with nearly a 4-point gain in PIRLS 2021 overall reading performance. Number of books at home was the second most powerful predictor of overall reading score, with higher numbers of books associated with higher PIRLS scores. This was followed by eligibility for free school meals (FSM).
* STA has issued “**Key stage 2 teacher assessment data collection: technical specification**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-teacher-assessment-data-collection-technical-specification>
* **Children who were living near Sure Start centres in the first five years of their lives performed better in their GCSEs than those who were not**, according to a report whose author warns that the current government’s family hubs are unlikely to have the same impact. The research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) concludes that access to Sure Start centres - set up to provide support to families with children under the age of 5 in England - “significantly improved the educational achievement of children, with benefits lasting at least until GCSEs”. Impacts were “much larger” for children from the poorest backgrounds and those from non-white backgrounds, according to the IFS report. Children living near a centre in their early years and eligible for free school meals (FSM) had better performance at GCSE by three grades compared with those eligible for FSM who were not living near a centre - equivalent to the difference between getting two Cs and three Ds and getting five Cs, the research shows. The report says that, in contrast to Sure Start, the family hubs have a wider remit rather than just a focus on children up to age 5, a less clearly defined set of services and “much less funding: just over £100 million per year, compared with £300 million per year in the first year of Sure Start”. See <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/short-and-medium-term-impacts-sure-start-educational-outcomes>

**The Cass Report**

* **Children have been let down by a lack of research and "remarkably weak" evidence on medical interventions in gender care**, a landmark review says. The **Cass Review** by paediatrician Dr Hilary Cass, <https://cass.independent-review.uk/> calls for gender services for young people to match the standards of other NHS care. She says the "toxicity" of the debate around gender meant professionals were "afraid" to openly discuss their views. Clinicians were concerned about having "no guidance, no evidence, no training". She said "we don't have good evidence" that puberty blockers are safe to use to "arrest puberty", adding that what started out as a clinical trial had been expanded to a wider group of young people before the results of that trial were available. "It is unusual for us to give a potentially life-changing treatment to young people and not know what happens to them in adulthood, and that's been a particular problem that we haven't had the follow-up into adulthood to know what the results of this are," she said. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-68770641>

In 2009 the NHS’s gender identity development service (Gids) saw fewer than 50 children a year. Since then, **demand increased a hundredfold,** with more than 5,000 seeking help in 2021-22. “So about 15 years ago, the service was seeing perhaps 50 predominantly birth registered boys in childhood. And over the last 10 years or so it’s switched to over 3,000 young people, and it’s mainly birth-registered girls presenting in early teens … often with quite complex additional problems.” **Various factors may explain the increase in predominantly birth-registered females presenting to gender services in early adolescence**:

* “Biology hasn’t changed and adult biology hasn’t changed in the last few years,” Cass said this week. “So it’s not that that’s changed things.
* Social media
* Information on gender dysmorphia and gender expression found online and especially that which” describes normal adolescent discomfort as a possible sign of being trans and where particular influencers have had a substantial impact on their child’s beliefs and understanding of their gender”.
* Peer pressure
* Dangerous online influencers
* The striking increase in young people presenting with gender dysphoria should be seen within the context of increasing rates of poor mental health and emotional distress among the broader adolescent population, particularly among girls
* The relationship between sexuality and gender identity is “complex and contested”, and that although a trans identity does not necessarily determine a person’s sexuality, it was “important to consider the relationship between sexual identity and gender identity given that sexuality contributes to a person’s sense of identity, and both may be fluid during adolescence”.

See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/apr/10/what-cass-review-says-about-surge-in-children-seeking-gender-services>

* **Almost one in five young transgender people in Scotland say they left education as a result of homophobia, biphobia or transphobia**, according to research by charity LGBT Youth Scotland. In a survey of 1,279 Scots aged between 13 and 25, of whom 49 per cent identified as trans, 80 per cent of trans participants said they felt that homophobia, biphobia or transphobia had a negative impact on their educational experience. And 47 per cent said this bullying and discrimination had a negative impact on their attainment. See <https://lgbtyouth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Trans-Report-2024-digital-final-V2.pdf>

**ITT and teacher recruitment**

* DfE has issued “**Recruit trainee teachers from overseas: accredited ITT providers**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/recruit-trainee-teachers-from-overseas-accredited-itt-providers> and “**Check what you need to do to employ teachers who are non-UK citizens**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/recruit-teachers-from-overseas>
* DfE has issued “Information about **subject knowledge enhancement (SKE) support for initial teacher training (ITT) recruitment**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/subject-knowledge-enhancement-an-introduction> and “Subject knowledge enhancement **(SKE) course directory**”, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/subject-knowledge-enhancement-course-directory/subject-knowledge-enhancement-ske-course-directory>
* **Scouts will develop “teaching skills” as part of attaining their badges under a new government scheme to boost flagging recruitment by “inspiring the next generation of teachers**”. The Scout Association has won a contract worth up to £129,000 over three years to provide 40,000 ‘explorers’ – those aged 14 to 18-years-old – with the “skills and knowledge they need to consider pursuing a career in teaching”. DfE will work with the Scouts to “create age-appropriate activities that inspire young people to consider a career in teaching by linking to relevant badges and awards”. The department clarified there are currently no plans for a teaching badge. The contact will also include engaging with the organisation’s 120,000 adult volunteers to “raise awareness of teaching as a potential career choice”. The policy is part of the department’s Get into Teaching “candidate pipeline strategy” which aims to “elevate the status” of the profession and “drive motivation and relevancy for new audiences who have not yet considered it as a career”. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/scouting-for-teachers-dfes-latest-recruitment-plan-revealed/>

**School funding and finance**

* **School funding could plunge by over £1 billion in five years as the falling rolls crisis bites** – prompting warnings that more budget cuts would be “catastrophic” to the sector. As school funding is closely linked to pupil numbers, the demographic change presents “imminent challenges to the education system and the financial health of schools”, the Education Policy Institute said. It urges government to commit to maintaining funding levels in cash terms. This means they could “reinvest” the excess cash to boost per-pupil funding rates. Projections suggest pupil numbers will fall by 818,000 between 2022-23 and 2032-33, following a national birth-rate slump. The number of children in primary classrooms has been dropping from a peak of 4.7 million five years ago. EPI forecasts show it will drop to 4.06 million in 2028-29. Secondary numbers will also tumble “at an increasingly faster rate” over the next five years. Total funding for primary schools is currently 5.9 per cent higher than secondaries. But the EPI projections show as their numbers drop, primary funding will be overtaken by secondaries in 2026-27, before both start a “downward trend”. See <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/school-funding-model-effect-of-falling-rolls/>
* ESFA has issued “**Section 251: 2024 to 2025**. Information for local authorities, schools and the general public about local authority education funding and expenditure plans for 2024 to 2025”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/section-251-2024-to-2025> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/section-251-2024-to-2025/section-251-budget-guidance>
* ESFA has issued a collection, “Guidance, allocations and conditions of grant for **pre-16 schools funding**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-authorities-pre-16-schools-funding>

**Social care**

* DfE has issued “**Families first for children (FFC) pathfinder programme and family networks pilot (FNP**)”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/families-first-for-children-ffc-pathfinder-programme/families-first-for-children-ffc-pathfinder-programme-and-family-networks-pilot-fnp> The FFC pathfinder was announced in February 2023 as part of the government’s children’s social care implementation strategy, stable homes, built on love. From July 2023 to March 2025, the programme is investing over £45 million to design and test reforms in a number of local areas, across the following policies:
  + family help
  + child protection
  + family networks
  + safeguarding partners

The pathfinder draws on evidence and existing good practice, including from other government programmes:

* **family hubs and start for life,** <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/family-hubs-and-start-for-life-programme>
* **supporting families**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-families-programme-guidance-2022-to-2025>
* **reducing parental conflict,** <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/reducing-parental-conflict-programme-and-resources>
* **strengthening families, protecting children**, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strengthening-families-protecting-children-sfpc-programme>

**More from the NEU conference**

* **The NEU has put the potential incoming Labour government “on notice” that it “won’t tolerate” cuts to education**, its leader has said. Labour has promised “welcome reforms”, Kebede said, including recruitment of more teachers, free school breakfasts, replacing single-phrase Ofsted judgments and a review of assessment and curriculum. But they are a “long way from the scale of change that we need to see in education”
* The **NEU** is to lobby for **menopause training** to be made mandatory for all school leaders, saying women with symptoms are being penalised for sickness absence and disciplined on competency grounds. See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/apr/06/school-leaders-should-all-have-menopause-training-says-teaching-union>
* The **NEU** conference was told that **boys and young men needed support and guidance as they grappled with ideas about masculinity**, rather than being punished and silenced. The status of men and boys had suffered “giant crushing blows” owing to the collapse of traditional industry such as steel, mining and construction, which had had a devastating impact on the job opportunities and ambitions available to working-class boys. “We still have boys in our classrooms that orient more closely around their masculinity. They cherish their physical excellence and they are proud of the things that they think will make them a man,” she said. “What a confusing state of being it must be for our education system to contradict that, to not be proud of them, to not offer them any support and guidance for these needs. This holds the door open for online misogyny. It’s left boys feeling demonised and inadequate and they will seek out an Andrew Tate or a Milo Yiannopoulos who is ready to exploit that disillusionment and alienation. The manosphere is a place that provides hope for lots of our boys.”
* The **NEU** conference carried a motion that called on members to **support and protect transgender and non-binary students,** and campaign against key proposals in the government’s draft guidance that says there is no general duty to allow pupils to socially transition in school. Delegates also opposed any compulsory “outing” of pupils to parents or carers.

**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>
* **Dame Christine Gilbert**, former leader of Ofsted, is to lead an independent review into Ofsted’s response to Ruth Perry tragedy See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/dame-christine-gilbert-to-lead-independent-review-into-ofsteds-response-to-ruth-perry-tragedy> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-reviewer-of-ofsteds-response-to-the-death-of-ruth-perry-terms-of-reference>
* Ofsted has issued its 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>

**CPD**

* DfE has issued a collection of documents “**Professional development for school teachers and leaders**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/professional-development-for-school-leaders>
* DfE has updated “**Apply for a national professional qualification (NPQ**)”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-a-national-professional-qualification-npq>
* **One of the government’s lead providers of national professional qualifications (NPQs) has said it will drop out of the scheme** after it was significantly scaled back. The Education Development Trust reached the “regrettable conclusion” after the DfE announced its offer of free NPQs for all schools will be replaced by a less generous scheme from Autumn.

**School management**

* DfE has issued “**Flexible working in schools**”, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flexible-working-in-schools/flexible-working-in-schools--2> and “**Get help with flexible working in schools**”, see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-help-with-flexible-working-in-schools>
* DfE has updated “**16 to 18 qualifications, discount codes and point scores**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-qualifications-discount-codes-and-point-scores>
* For the latest **ESFA Update**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-update-10-april-2024> and for **the ESFA Academies Update**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-update-10-april-2024/esfa-update-academies-10-april-2024>
* DfE has issued “Digital form for organisations and individuals to **notify the Department for Education (DfE) of their bank account and payment details**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/provide-information-about-your-banking-and-payments-to-dfe>
* DfE has issued “**How schools can share daily attendance data**.”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/share-your-daily-school-attendance-data>
* The DfE is inviting organisations to bid for a contract worth at least £7 million to supply schools with advisers to help manage their resources. The new contract offers between £7 million and £9.2 million for up to three organisations that will “identify, supply and manage” a cohort of **school resource management advisers** (SRMAs) and school business professional (SBP) mentors. SRMAs go into schools and provide advice on how to best use revenue and capital resources. The contract will start on 1 September this year and last for three years until 31 August 2027, with an option to extend for a fourth year. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/dfe-could-spend-ps9m-cost-cutting-advisers-SRMA-school-budgets-funding>
* DfE has issued a number of resources, “**Improve workload and wellbeing for school staf**f”. See <https://improve-workload-and-wellbeing-for-school-staff.education.gov.uk/?utm_source=Master+Audience&utm_campaign=72cb7a29ed-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2024_04_12_07_44&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-72cb7a29ed-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D>

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

* **The number of “honour-based” abuse offences recorded by English police forces has increased by more than 60% in two years**, figures suggest, with concerns voiced that increased polarisation is partly to blame. Data from 26 out of 39 constabularies approached showed that there were 2,594 cases of “honour-based” abuse – which includes forced marriage, rape, death threats and assault – in 2022, compared with 1,599 in 2020. See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/apr/07/honour-based-abuse-in-england-increases-60-in-two-years>
* A campaign for a **school nurse** in every school has been launched in a bid to reverse a ‘steep decline’ that has seen a 33% fall in the number of school nurses since 2009. The number of qualified school nurses has fallen by 33% in the last 13 years from 1,135 to 852 – many of whom it is feared will no longer be practising in schools. Likewise, the number of NHS professionals working in school nursing (including qualified school nurses) has fallen from 2,915 to 1,945. A consequence of the lack of school nurses is that “an increasing number” of schools are now employing their own nurse. The report warns: “This is usually in response to the reduced visibility of school nurses from the local authority. However, these school-employed nurses tend not to be qualified school nurses and are often professionally isolated, which can be problematic.” See <https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/content/news/a-significant-loss-of-expertise-report-calls-for-action-to-reverse-decline-in-school-nurses>
* Campaigners have reacted with anger to the social media company Meta **lowering the minimum age for WhatsApp users from 16 to 13** in the UK and EU. The change was announced in February and came into force on Wednesday. The campaign group Smartphone Free Childhood said the move “flies in the face of the growing national demand for big tech to do more to protect our children”. See <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/apr/12/anger-from-campaigners-as-whatsapp-lowers-age-limit-to-13-in-uk-and-eu>

**Post 16**

* DfE has issued “**Local skills improvement plans (LSIPs) and local skills improvement fund (LSIF)”.** See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/identifying-and-meeting-local-skills-needs-to-support-growth/local-skills-improvement-plans-lsips-and-strategic-development-funding-sdf> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/identifying-and-meeting-local-skills-needs-to-support-growth>
* **Half of state school students lack access to work experience, putting them at a “double disadvantage” when applying to top universities,** a new report warns. One-third of universities take work experience into account when assessing applications, according to a report by the Speakers for Schools charity. And students from disadvantaged backgrounds are disproportionately missing out because they often lack this experience, the report says. University applicants from affluent areas are six times more likely to have an offer from a prestigious university, such as a Russell Group institution, compared with those from disadvantaged areas, the research shows. This disparity in access to work experience “creates a double disadvantage for young people educated in the state sector”, the report says. See <https://www.speakersforschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Double-Disadvantage-Report-FINAL-2302.pdf>

**Tony Stephens**