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**260 Academy and School News and Resources Update, March 16-22 2024**

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**NPQs**

* DfE has issued: **National professional qualification (NPQ) courses**. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-professional-qualification-npq-courses>

This gives access to details about these courses:

**Specialist NPQs**:

* Leading teacher development - help teachers in your school develop their skills
* Leading teaching - lead the teaching and learning of a subject, year group or phase.
* Leading behaviour and culture - promote a culture of good behaviour and high expectations
* Leading literacy - promote literacy across a whole school, year group, key stage or phase
* Leading primary mathematics - use mastery approaches to lead maths teaching in your school

**Leadership NPQs**

* Senior leadership - develop leadership expertise to improve outcomes for teachers and pupils
* Headship - become an expert school leader and outstanding headteacher
* Executive leadership - develop the expertise to run a multi-school organisation and lead change and improvement
* Early years leadership - manage your staff and organisation to provide high-quality early years education and care
* Special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) – perform a SENCO role effectively and set the strategic direction of special educational needs policy in a school. Courses will begin in autumn 2024.

If you’re in your first 5 years of headship, you may also be eligible for the **early headship coaching offer**, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/early-headship-coaching-offer>

**To apply for a national professional qualification** (NPQ) see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-a-national-professional-qualification-npq>

**For funding**, see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/funding-for-national-professional-qualifications-npqs> As part of its Covid recovery plan, DfE offered £184m for schools to do NPQs for free. The government said it would provide 150,000 qualifications for the sector over three years. It is understood around 100,000 have been completed. But that money will end this year. Instead, a new programme backed by less money has been announced. **Funding for autumn 2024** will target those teachers and leaders who work in the most challenging schools or educational settings, serving more disadvantaged communities. Scholarship funding, i.e no fees, to cover the full NPQ course cost will be available to teachers and leaders from:

* the 50% of schools with the highest proportion of students who attract pupil premium funding
* 16 to 19 educational settings identified as having high disadvantage

For the early years leadership NPQ, highly disadvantaged early years settings will also be eligible. Scholarships will continue to be available to all teachers and leaders from publicly funded schools and 16 to 19 educational organisations for the following NPQs:

* leading primary maths
* SENCO
* headship

For the early headship coaching offer, funding to cover the course fees will be available if you are in your first 5 years of headship in England in a state-funded school or state-funded 16 to 19 organisation. You should also be doing or have done the headship NPQ.

You can only receive scholarship funding for each NPQ once. The scheme is just for the autumn cohort. This scheme commits to just one cohort. Take-up will also be capped at 10,000 places.

**Attendance**

* **Attendance** **The attendance rate (proportion of possible sessions attended) was 93.2% across all schools in the week commencing 4 March 2024.** The absence rate was, therefore, 6.8% across all schools. **By school type**, the absence rates across the week commencing 4 March 2024 were:
  + 5.0% in state-funded **primary** schools (3.8% authorised and 1.2% unauthorised)
  + 8.9% in state-funded **secondary** schools (5.4% authorised and 3.5% unauthorised)
  + 12.7% in state-funded **special** schools (9.6% authorised and 3.1% unauthorised)

**The data shows that the attendance rate across the academic year to date was 93.1%.** The absence rate was, therefore, 6.9% across all schools**. By school type**, the absence rates across the academic year 2023/24 to date were:

* 5.4% in state-funded **primary** schools (4.0% authorised and 1.4% unauthorised)
* 8.7% in state-funded **secondary** schools (5.4% authorised and 3.3% unauthorised)
* 12.9% in state-funded **special** schools (9.8% authorised and 3.1% unauthorised)

**Persistent absence** 20.3%, academic year 2023/24 to date. By school type:

* **Primary**, 15.9%
* **Secondary**, 25.3%
* **Special,** 37%

See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-attendance-in-schools>

* DfE has issued “**Pupil absence in schools in England: 2022 to 2023**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-2022-to-2023>
* Across 2022/23, the overall absence rate was 7.4%, a reduction from 7.6% in 2021/22, but higher than pre-pandemic (4.7% in 2018/19)
* A further 1.0% of sessions were recorded as not attending due to COVID circumstances in 2021/22, therefore overall, attendance in school has increased by 1.2%.
* Absence rate varies across terms; from 7.5% of sessions in autumn, reducing to 7.0% in spring, and increasing to 7.6% in summer.
* The majority of absence was due to illness, which accounted for 3.7% of possible sessions in 2022/23. Illness includes where positive COVID-19 cases were reported.
* 21.2% of pupils were persistently absent in 2022/23 (i.e. missed 10% or more sessions). Persistent absence reduced from 24.2% in autumn term, to 20.6% in spring term, then increased to 23.9% in summer term. In 2018/19, 10.9% of pupils were persistently absent
* The absence rate for pupils eligible for free school meals was slightly higher in 2022-23 compared with a year earlier: 11.1 per cent against 10.8 per cent. And more than one in three pupils in receipt of free school meals were persistently absent in 2022-23 - 36.5 per cent, which represented a slight fall on 37.3 per cent in 2021-22.
* The absence rate in primary schools was 5.9 per cent, compared with 6.3 per cent in 2021-22. In secondary schools the rate stayed the same at 9 per cent. The absence rate for special schools was 13 per cent compared with 13.2 per cent a year earlier.
* DfE has issued a collection of **attendance statistics over recent years**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-pupil-absence>
* **All secondary school year groups had higher absence in the autumn term compared with a year earlier**, FFT Education Datalab analysis shows. Those moving from Year 7 into Year 8 saw an increase of 1.9 percentage points in the number of sessions missed, from 6.1 per cent in autumn 2022 to 8 per cent. For those moving from Year 10 into Year 11 there was an 0.3 percentage-point increase, from 9.5 per cent to 9.8 per cent. At secondary school, absence for girls increased by more than for boys at every transition point. The analysis also reveals that the absence rates for disadvantaged secondary school students were markedly higher as they moved up a year.

On average, pupils in all **primary year groups** had lower absence rates in autumn 2023 than autumn 2022. The biggest drops were seen among the youngest pupils. Those moving from Reception into Year 1 saw a drop in absence of 2.3 percentage points (from 7.9 per cent in autumn 2022 to 5.6 per cent in autumn 2023). Among primary pupils, although boys tended to have slightly higher rates of absence than girls, the change from one year to the next didn’t seem to have any relationship with gender at all. See <https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2024/03/how-does-absence-change-as-pupils-get-older/>

FFT has released a new **FFT Attendance Tracker report** for schools in England. See <https://fft.org.uk/fft-aspire/attendance-tracker/>

* A £2.3 million **mentoring scheme to reduce absence** reached less than half of the intended children in its first year, and only half of those reached saw attendance improve. An official evaluation of the first year of the Watchtower Project pilot by York Consulting found just 223 pupils progressed to receive support through the scheme. Launched in 2022, the Department for Education said its mentoring pilot would support “500 to 1,000 pupils” in its first year across Middlesbrough. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-the-attendance-mentors-pilot>
* **Attendance officer** vacancies in secondary schools and colleges have soared by 146 per cent above pre-pandemic levels. 1,601 attendance officer jobs have been advertised up to 8 March so far this academic year, a 146 per cent leap on the 431 recorded in the same period in 2018-19.

**School capacity**

* DfE has issued “**School capacity in England: academic year 2022 to 2023**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-capacity-in-england-academic-year-2022-to-2023>
* There were almost 9 million state-funded school places reported in 2022/23: just under 5 million primary places and 4 million secondary places.
* The rate of primary places being added has slowed dramatically due to the reduction in birth rates since 2012. The rate of secondary places being added has slowed, as the peak in school age population is now in secondary having moved from primary.
* Around 18% of state-funded schools were at or in excess of capacity in 2022/23, this is similar to 2021/22. The majority of these exceeded their capacity by less than 10 pupils, with around 7% of schools exceeding their capacity by 10 or more pupils.
* Net change in number of school places since 2010, 1,187,401. Increase of 721,718 primary and 465,683 secondary places
* Primary schools at or over capacity, 17%. Down from a high of 23% in 2016/17 and similar to 2020/21 and 2021/22
* Secondary schools at or over capacity, 23%. Up from a low of 14% in 2015/16 and similar to 2021/22
* Around two thirds of special schools are full or over capacity with approximately 4,000 more pupils on roll in special schools than reported capacity.
* DfE has issued a collection of **school capacity statistics back to 2010**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-school-capacity>

**Ofsted**

* **Ofsted has now extended its Big Listen consultation to hear directly from children**, seeking their views on how Ofsted can improve. The online consultation gives children (up to age 18) the chance to tell Ofsted what they think inspectors should look at when they visit their school or social care setting, and how Ofsted can do its job better. The children’s consultation asks a series of short questions for children to answer anonymously, without revealing any personal details. The children’s survey includes an introductory video which explains it is anonymous and asks youngsters not to share personal information such as their name, school, or address. Adults can fill in the consultation on behalf of children, and it will take just a few minutes to complete. Like the wider Big Listen consultation, the children’s version will close on 31 May 2024, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/ofsted-big-listen> Alongside the consultation, Ofsted is partnering with a number of organisations to hold a series of Big Listen focus groups with care-experienced children and young people, including those in the youth justice system.
* Analysis reveals **that three in five leaders had moved on a year after an ‘inadequate’ Ofsted judgment**. 61 per cent of headteachers of schools rated ‘inadequate’ in 2021-22 were no longer in the position 12 months later. In contrast, only 23 per cent of ‘outstanding’ schools, 17 per cent of ‘good’ schools and 23 per cent of ‘requires improvement’ schools had different heads one year on. There is also concern about the practice of signing **NDAs** as part of the departure of headteachers. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/ofsted-chief-told-of-ousted-heads-gagging-clause-ordeals/>
* Ofsted is “keen to understand” how it could “reconsider” aspects of its inspector role to boost expertise as it battles **with staff being poached by academy trusts and the “highest ever” level of apathy towards joining the inspectorate**. Between November 2021 and November 2023, excluding those who retired, 42 per cent of schools’ inspectors left to join multi-academy trusts. Asked last month if they would “ever consider becoming an Ofsted inspector”, nearly half of teachers said they “definitely would not”. It was the highest proportion saying they had no interest in the role since the question was first asked by Teacher Tapp four years ago. Also, a study by UCL’s Institute of Education and the University of Southampton looked at more than 30,000 school inspections in England between 2011 and 2019. It found both primaries and secondaries had visits from inspectors who appeared to be **specialists in the other phase**.
* Ofsted has issued “**Guides for parents: how early years settings are inspected**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guides-for-parents-how-early-years-settings-are-inspected>
* Ofsted has issued **“Ofsted inspections: what EY providers and practitioners need to know**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-eif-inspections-and-the-eyfs>
* Ofsted has issued **Five-Year Ofsted Inspection Data**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/five-year-ofsted-inspection-data>

**ITT and teacher recruitment**

* NFER has predicted **secondary recruitment** will improve this year, based on applications up to February, but still miss its target by about 40 per cent, with 10 out of 17 secondary subjects likely to have shortfalls. Last year, the target was missed by 50 per cent. It comes after the DfE slashed its secondary school teacher recruitment targets by almost a tenth, prompting concerns it was attempting to make next year’s recruitment figures “look better”.
* **Subjects** such as biology, English, religious education, geography, MFL, and physic are on “track for slight improvements in recruitment this year”. But the NFER said target reductions in several subjects, including geography, design and technology, English and physics, have “also contributed to this improved outlook”.
* Recruitment in shortage subjects had “improved slightly due to more generous **bursaries**”, the report noted. Bursaries in eight out of 17 subjects increased this year and eligible maths, physics, chemistry and computing trainees are able to receive the maximum of £28,000.
* In March 2023, ministers introduced **international** relocation payments, worth £10,000, to attract trainees and qualified languages and physics teachers from abroad to train or work in England. Non-UK physics and languages trainees are also eligible to receive training bursaries, worth up to £28,000 in 2024-2025. NFER said these policy changes helped generate a boom in applications from outside the UK in 2023-24, particularly in physics, where the number of applications was up 253 per cent on the previous year. But the surge in applications “only led to a 41 per cent increase in acceptances, almost certainly because of a higher than average rejection rate” and there were just 13 per cent more physics enrolments. The changes also applied to MFL applicants, sparking an 87 per cent increase in applicants, but this only translated to a 33 per cent increase in registration
* **Primary recruitment** is forecast to be about 17 per cent below target, far worse than the 4 per cent seen last year. This is “driven in part” by the DfE’s primary target having been revised up by 2.4 per cent from 9,180 to 9,400, despite falling primary pupil numbers nationally.
* **Teacher leaving rates** increased in 2021/22 (the latest year of available data), in a return to pre-pandemic levels. In 2022/23, 44 per cent more teachers said they intended to leave teaching than in the previous year, which suggests that leaving rates may continue rising.

See <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/teacher-labour-market-in-england-annual-report-2024/?web=1>

* Further points from the **NFER Labour Market report**:
  + NFER said “little progress” had been made on reducing **teacher workload** since the pandemic and this is still the “main reason” teachers leave the profession. Teachers reported pupil behaviour was “driving higher workload, and behaviour management and pastoral care are key priority areas for workload reduction”. The report called for “more support from outside agencies for specific pupil needs such as SEND support, mental health and safeguarding” to help slash teachers’ workloads.
  + “**Teacher supply** is in a critical state that risks the quality of education that children and young people receive. We urge the current Government to take action to improve teacher recruitment and retention, and the political parties to develop long-term plans for after the election. NFER noted **teachers’ pay** had grown more slowly than pay in the rest of the labour market since 2010-11. It said the 2024 pay award should exceed the 3.1 per cent rise in earnings expected in the wider labour market this year, and be fully-funded.
  + NFER said remote and hybrid working remained “out of reach for most teachers”, despite such arrangements becoming common in other professions. A “**frontline workers pay premium**” would compensate teachers, they said. “We estimate this pay premium for teachers should be 1.8 per cent, which would need to be awarded on top of the pay rise needed to match teachers’ earnings growth with the wider economy.”
  + Flexible working has become more common in teaching.

See <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/teacher-labour-market-in-england-annual-report-2024/?web=1>

* Secondary schools in England have said they are **turning to PE teachers to plug gaps in maths,** as research warns of teacher shortages. The government only reached 63% of its target number for new maths teacher trainees this year. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-68602435>
* **Secondary school teacher vacancies** are still more than a third higher than pre-pandemic levels in some regions despite an overall improvement nationally. Despite the slight fall in overall advert numbers year-on-year, vacancies are still above levels seen before Covid in 2018-19. For full details, see <https://www.schooldash.com/blog-2403.html#20240321>
* **Subject knowledge enhancement (SKE) courses** will only be available in five subjects with the “greatest sufficiency challenges” from next month after the government cut funding. The DfE announced that programmes will only be funded for maths, physics, chemistry, computing and modern foreign languages. Existing commitments for the four axed subjects – primary maths, D&T, English, biology and RE – will be “honoured for those candidates expecting to start” programmes up to and including April 10. However providers are now no longer able to recruit for those subjects. SKEs are designed to top up teacher trainees’ subject knowledge. They can be taken prior to or alongside initial teacher training, and can last anywhere between a fortnight and nine months.
* The chief executive of the National Institute of Teaching has called for an **NHS-style long-term workforce plan** to boost recruitment and retention. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/we-need-nhs-style-long-term-school-workforce-plan-says-niot-boss/>

**Early years and primary**

* DfE has issued “**Validated systematic synthetic phonics programme providers: contact details**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/choosing-a-phonics-teaching-programme/contact-details-for-the-validated-systematic-synthetic-phonics-ssp-programmes>
* **Childcare applications for parents of 9-month-olds to open 12 May**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/childcare-applications-for-parents-of-9-month-olds-to-open-12-may>
* **The availability of places at nurseries and childminders** has worsened for pre-school children across all age groups in Great Britain, a report says. Fewer than one out of every three (29%) councils have enough spaces for children under two, down from 42% last year, Coram Family and Childcare found. Parents say they are having to travel longer distances and even borrow money to meet childcare costs. It comes as the government in England expands its funded-hours offer. Government plans to expand childcare provision in England are at risk of not living up to parents’ expectations as nursery costs surge and available places dwindle. The cost of 25 hours a week for a child under two has risen by 7% on 2023. A total of 34% of English councils reported having sufficient childcare places – a decrease of 14 percentage points on the previous year – while 35% reported having enough spaces for children under two. The survey also pointed to a drop in childcare places for children with disabilities, with 6% of councils reporting sufficient spaces, down 12 percentage points from 2023. See <https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/sites/default/files/Childcare%20Survey%202024.pdf>
* STA has issued;
* **Phonics screening check: structure and content of the check**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phonics-screening-check-sample-materials-and-training-video/phonics-screening-check-structure-and-content-of-the-check>
* **Guidance for schools about access arrangements available for pupils participating in 2024 key stage 2 (KS2) national curriculum tests,** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-access-arrangements>
* **Key stage 2 tests: special consideration guidance**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-special-consideration-guidance>
* **Key stage 1: phonics screening check administration guidance**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-1-phonics-screening-check-administration-guidance>
* STA has issued **“Guidance for completing attendance registers and returning key stage 2 (KS2) test scripts for marking**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-returning-test-scripts>

**AI**

* **The majority of teachers say they need more training to boost their confidence in using artificial intelligence**, according to a survey exploring how it could change education. Three-fifths (61 per cent) of teachers believe that they would feel more confident and use AI more if they were trained in how to use it effectively, a YouGov study has revealed. A similar proportion (63 per cent) of teachers think that generic AI tools are too unreliable for them to be effectively used in the classroom. And half (54 per cent) of the 1,012 teachers who took part in the study think it is unlikely that every classroom will use a personalised AI assistant. Less than a quarter (23 per cent) of teachers say they have used AI tools in their teaching in the past term but, such has been the interest in tools such as ChatGPT and Google Gemini, only one in five (19 per cent) now think AI shouldn’t be incorporated into the curriculum by the DfE. Over half (54 per cent) of the teachers who took part in the study said pupils should be taught the “ethical implications” of using AI. More than a third (38 per cent) of teachers think students should be given a foundational understanding of how AI works. More than a quarter (27 per cent) say that AI should be integrated into maths and science classes, 16 per cent think it should be integrated into all compulsory national curriculum subjects, and 13 per cent think the schoolwork grading should be reformulated to consider the assumed use of AI by students doing out-of-class tasks. However, only a minority of respondents (4 per cent) believe that students should have access to AI tools during exams. Only a third (34 per cent) think all teachers should be encouraged to use AI to mark, give feedback and grade student work. A similar number (32 per cent) of teachers reported that, in the next five years, they expect to rely on AI to customise lesson planning and resources for individual students in the future. At present, 10 per cent of teachers said they used AI to help produce lesson plans or resources. Many teachers see potential benefits, with almost half (46 per cent) believing that better use of AI in the classroom would improve educational outcomes by allowing them to spend more time working directly with students. Only 22 per cent think AI wouldn’t improve student performance, and a fifth (21 per cent) think students should be encouraged to use AI as a homework “co-pilot”. Around 3 in 10 (31 per cent) teachers say students should be encouraged to use AI to develop their problem-solving and critical thinking skills. The report also found that less than a third (29 per cent) of teachers now think students should be banned from using AI in the classroom.

**Advanced British standard qualification**

* **Government plans for a new** **advanced British standard qualification will create a “blunt choice” between academic and vocational routes for pupils and add to uncertainty over post-16 options**, leaders have warned. NAHT and ASCL have published responses to the government’s consultation on proposals, as has the Sixth Form Colleges Association. The **NAHT** warned the proposals hold “tightly to the traditional system in place now – a repackaging of the current A-level and T-level content, blunt choices for 16-year-olds, a focus on knowledge and assessment by examination”. The creation of two routes “undermines” the parity of esteem between academic and technical education. **ASCL** said said the principle of a “high-quality menu” of options for young people “already exists in the 16-19 landscape in the form of over 60,000 students who mix and match A-levels with applied general qualifications”. It also “seems clear that, under these proposals, a majority of students would continue to take three majors, with some additional English and maths”. “This does not, despite claims to the contrary, appear to represent a significant broadening of their curriculum.” **OCR** urges the DfE to keep A-level qualifications intact and has warned there are not enough teachers or school space to deliver its planned creation of the Advanced British Standard (ABS).
* **The DfE has 40 civil servants working to develop prime minister Rishi Sunak’s post 16 Advanced British Standard qualification project** even though it is unlikely to see the light of day. The reforms are expected to take at least a decade to implement and, with the Conservatives down in the polls and Labour focused on early maths education rather than post-16, the policy is unlikely to come to fruition.

**Governors**

* Last year, the government encouraged leaders to collect information on governing boards and make the figures “widely accessible” to **make boards “increasingly reflective of the communities they serve**”. New governance guides tailored separately for maintained schools and academy re-emphasised the push. A National Governance Association survey in 2021 found 93 per cent of respondents were white. Just 1 per cent were from mixed or multi-ethnic groups, 3 per cent were Asian and 1 per cent were Black. But analysis of the websites of the largest trusts, as well as a random sample of smaller chains and local authority maintained schools, found very few have published data so far. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/schools-and-trusts-slow-to-publish-governors-diversity-data/>
* **Government has pulled the plug on a governor recruitment scheme despite record-high vacancies**. The National Governance Association said ditching the last remaining government-funded governance scheme means boards are now “left entirely to their own devices, with past support for governance recruitment, development, and training now all removed”. Inspiring Governance has helped recruit 8,000 school governors and trustees since it launched with Department for Education funding back in 2016. Despite this, an NGA survey in 2022 found two-thirds of school or trust governing boards had at least one vacancy as the number of empty posts hit a six-year high. But government will end funding for Inspiring Governance in September. See <https://www.nga.org.uk/news-views/directory/no-government-funding-for-governance-open-letter-to-the-secretary-of-state/>

**Learning Recovery**

* **Girls’ reading and maths results were more negatively impacted by the pandemic than their male peers, new analysis has shown**. Although girls still outperform boys in reading, a report from the Education Policy Institute (EPI) and Renaissance has revealed that the pandemic appears to have had a bigger effect on girls’ outcomes than on their male peers. There are significant regional variations in these results. The report also reveals the extent to which the attainment of poorer pupils and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) was more affected than their peers.
  + Outcomes for girls have fallen in **secondary reading** while outcomes for boys are largely the same, meaning the attainment gap has narrowed by 1.2 months to 4.4 months, the research showed. However, in **primary reading**, outcomes for girls were largely the same as they had been prior to the pandemic, but there had been an improvement in boys’ attainment This led to a narrowing of the attainment gap between boys and girls by 1.0 months, meaning that girls’ lead over boys has narrowed to 3.1 months.
  + In both **primary and secondary maths**, results have fallen for both boys and girls, but in primary maths, girls have fallen further, widening the gap by 2.0 months to 2.9 months in favour of boys.
  + The research also showed that **disadvantaged students** are further behind in primary maths than their more advantaged peers, with the disadvantage gap having widened from 6.9 to 10.9 months. It also widened for secondary reading between poorer students and their peers, from 18.8 to 21.2 months, the report showed.
  + In **primary reading**, the gap between pupils with **SEND** and their peers narrowed by 1.0 months, to 19.4 months, the report said. Meanwhile, the gap between pupils with an educational health and care plan and their peers narrowed by 0.2 months to 26.6 months.
  + Among **primary-**age pupils, all **ethnic groups** have seen improvements since the start of the pandemic in reading, the research found. Black primary-aged pupils closed the gap with white pupils in primary reading and are now slightly ahead, according to the report. However, while most ethnicities saw their reading outcomes improve, **secondary reading** outcomes for both white and Chinese heritage students have fallen since before the pandemic.

See <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/measuring-the-outcomes-of-different-pupil-groups-using-star-assessments-2022-23/>

**Young carers**

* **Young carers** in England and Wales are being blocked from staying in education and going to college or university by benefit rules that unfairly penalise them, according to a coalition of charities and education providers. The group of more than 200 organisations and representatives is lobbying ministers to exempt young carers – those aged 16 to 24 who often look after relatives – from the rule that makes them ineligible for the government’s carer’s allowance if they study for more than 21 hours a week. The rule means young carers cannot take a full course of A-levels, BTecs or T-levels like their peers, because it would require supervised study for more than the permitted 21 hours. An estimated 37,000 young people in England and Wales provide more than 50 hours of care each week, most often to a family member. Few of them are able to go on to further study after leaving school. See <https://learningandwork.org.uk/news-and-policy/open-letter-young-adult-carers-and-the-21-hour-rule/>

**Families and technology**

* **Almost half of UK families with children lack the online skills or access to devices, data and broadband required to participate in today’s digital society, research shows**. 45% of households with children did not meet the threshold. A **minimum digital standard of living** includes, but is more than, having:
  + accessible internet
  + adequate equipment
  + and the skills, knowledge and support people need.
  + It is about being able to communicate, connect and engage with opportunities safely and with confidence.

Families from low socioeconomic backgrounds in deprived areas and households outside London were among those who were less likely to meet it. Households from minority ethnic backgrounds and those with disabled parents were twice as likely to fall below it. Ofcom figures show 28% of households are having difficulty affording the cost of broadband and other communication services. Almost four in 10 (38%) of households struggled with online skills, with parents or children, or both, having inadequate functional or critical digital abilities. For parents who lacked functional skills (17%), it could mean being unable to create an email account or make online payments. The research found that 27% of households were led by parents missing critical digital skills, such as those needed to protect their family from online harms such as scams, bullying and grooming, raising concerns for children’s online safety. A smaller proportion (18.5%) did not fully meet the equipment and services threshold, lacking one or more of broadband, TV or devices. See <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/what-we-do/news/minimum-digital-living-standardgroundbreaking-research-launches-today/>

**Family and child poverty**

* A poll released by the Children’s Food Campaign (CFC), which gathered the views of 2039 parents, has found that 9 in 10 parents (89%) want to see immediate **expansion of free school meals (FSM) to every child living in poverty**. More than 7 in 10 parents (75%) said they would like all children of all ages to have access to a FSM, regardless of their background. Parents also expressed their support (81%) for the automatic registration of eligible pupils to FSM, instead of the current application system. See <https://www.sustainweb.org/news/mar24-parents-support-healthy-school-meals/?utm_source=Master+Audience&utm_campaign=f225e1a002-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2024_03_15_08_44&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-f225e1a002-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D>
* More and more young women and girls are struggling to afford **period products**, according to groups that give them out. Charities in England, Scotland and Wales told BBC Newsbeat they struggled to keep up with demand in 2023. They've urged the UK government to confirm it will extend its scheme providing free period products in English schools and colleges past July. A DfE spokesperson said 99% of England's secondaries have used the service since 2020. The DfE did not directly respond to questions about whether it would continue the scheme past summer 2024. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-68563763>
* Schools are finding beds, providing showers for pupils and washing uniforms as **child poverty spirals out of control**, headteachers from across England have reported School leaders said that as well as hunger they were now trying to mitigate exhaustion, with increasing numbers of children living in homes without enough beds or unable to sleep because they were cold. They warned that “desperate” poverty was driving problems with behaviour, persistent absence and mental health. See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/mar/16/desperate-neglect-teachers-washing-clothes-and-finding-beds-as-poverty-grips-englands-schools>

A report by the Child of the North campaign, led by eight leading northern universities, and the Centre for Young Lives thinktank, warned that after decades of cuts to public services**, schools were now the “frontline of the battle against child poverty**”, and at risk of being “overwhelmed”. It called on the government to increase funding to help schools support the more than 4 million children now living in poverty in the UK. Anne Longfield, founder of the Centre for Young Lives and the government’s former children’s commissioner, said: “The government has dismantled public services over the past decade and schools are the last people standing. They need proper support to tackle child poverty.” See <https://www.n8research.org.uk/child-of-the-north-and-centre-for-young-lives-report-urges-government-to-take-the-battle-against-child-poverty-inside-school-gates/>

* About 300,000 more children were plunged into **absolute poverty** in a single year at the height of the cost of living crisis amid soaring levels of hunger and food bank use. In 2022-2023, More than two-thirds (69%) of UK children in poverty lived in families where at least one parent works, while 44% of children in lone-parent families were in poverty. An estimated 2.9 million children were in deep poverty, meaning their income was at least 50% below the poverty line. Nearly half (46%) of all families with three or more children were in poverty. See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/mar/21/poorest-uk-families-hardest-hit-cost-living-crisis-official-figures>

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

* **School allergy management failings** have been identified in a study. The research, carried out in partnership with The Institute of Clever Stuff, found a "postcode lottery" in terms of English schools adopting suggested safeguards. Almost half of the 2,198 schools analysed did not have life-saving medication on site and about a quarter did not provide training on allergy symptoms and what to do in an emergency. It is suggested that schools should have an allergy policy, individual healthcare plans, medication on site and training for staff. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-68598555>
* A senior counter-terrorism officer has warned that children and **young people are increasingly being radicalised online after spending long periods on the internet during the pandemic.** Home Office figures showed that the number of children arrested on suspicion of terror offences reached a record high last year. Forty-two people aged 17 and under were detained under the Terrorism Act in the year to December 2023, nearly a fifth of the total number of terror suspects. Most of the arrests have been of young people accessing extreme rightwing material Police have warned that “terrorist groomers” are exploiting the amount of time children spend online unsupervised by their families, schools, social workers or mental health services. See <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/mar/18/young-people-radicalised-online-counter-terrorism-officer>
* **Something is going wrong for young people between the ages of 15 and 24** in the UK, across Europe, the US and Australia. The latest **World Happiness Report** shows that while not all teenagers and young adults are suffering, a large and growing number cannot cope with being left adrift with few qualifications on an economic sea that is more testing with each passing year. Social media is believed to play a part in driving down self-esteem and robbing young people of their wellbeing. But it is the lack of education, skills training and affordable housing that underpins the decline in the positive outlook. University is less of a guarantee of financial and psychological wellbeing, and those that do not go into higher education are left to fend for themselves with only limited access to apprenticeships and further education courses that might lift their social standing, income and self-respect. “Young adults are being hit from all sides by a toxic combination of government policy, a housing affordability crisis, stagnating wages, and a high cost of living”. See <https://worldhappiness.report/>
* **Every new school in England is being built in an area with unsafe levels of air pollution**, according to a report that says thousands of children will experience “alarmingly poor” air quality. Children are particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of air pollution because their bodies, organs and immune systems are still developing. An analysis has found that almost nine in 10 planned new school sites exceed three World Health Organization (WHO) targets on major air pollutants. And every single one of the schools breaches at least one of the guidelines. See <https://adc.bmj.com/content/early/2024/02/01/archdischild-2023-325947>
* **Tens of thousands of children are at risk of being groomed and coerced into crime by organised gangs**, according to a leading child-protection expert. Prof Alexis Jay, who revealed the extent of sexual exploitation in Rotherham, said there was an "urgent and preventable crisis". She said there was no national plan to deal with criminal exploitation of children, calling for new legislation. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-68615776>

**SEND and inclusion**

* A recent report commissioned by Teach First looks at how is **inclusion** best achieved in secondary schools. See <https://www.teachfirst.org.uk/belonging-schools?utm_source=Master+Audience&utm_campaign=f225e1a002-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2024_03_15_08_44&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-f225e1a002-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D>
* The government has come under pressure over fears that its £2.6 billion expansion funding for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision may have been raided as part of a **switching of capital funds to revenue budgets.** Robin Walker, the Education Select Committee said he had “concerns” about the “progress of this much-needed capital investment” and called on the DfE to provide “detailed insights” into how many new places for pupils with SEND had been created using the funding. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/specialist-sector/ex-minister-fears-over-ps26bn-send-funding>
* DfE has issued “**How alternative provision (AP) and special schools in England currently use reasonable force**, including physical restraint and other restrictive practices”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/use-of-reasonable-force-in-ap-and-special-schools>
* Ministers have withheld £18 million from five councils with high needs funding blackholes, with their **bailout agreements now officially “suspended**”. Cambridgeshire, Dorset, Hillingdon, Norfolk and Bath and North East Somerset’s safety valve agreements are “currently subject to review”, a DfE update has stated. Payments of grants to help plug SEND deficits have been “suspended, but will be made up if a revised agreement is reached”. Ministers have rejected Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole’s 15-year safety valve plan to get its £64 million deficit under control. Bury and Kirklees – have had their agreements extended so they are now both nine years long. Ministers have also agreed four new agreements – taking the total of safety valve deals up to 38- Devon, Wiltshire, Bristol, Bracknell Forest. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/ministers-withold-17m-from-five-safety-valve-councils/>

**School finance**

* 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>
* ESFA has issued **“High needs: allocated place numbers**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-allocated-place-numbers>
* ESFA has updated “**Dedicated schools grant (DSG): 2023 to 2024**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2023-to-2024>
* ESFA has issued “**Dedicated schools grant (DSG) management plan**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-deficit-management-plan> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-deficit-management-plan/dsg-deficit-management-plan-template-guidance-for-local-authorities-2022-to-2023>
* ESFA has issued “Documents to help local authorities comply with **section 251** of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/section-251-materials>
* High needs reforms and savings targets have been agreed for local authorities with the highest dedicated school grant deficits. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-very-high-deficit-intervention>

**Academies and Trusts**

* Multi-academy trusts could be doing “a lot more” to solve the problem of **teacher retention** Leora Cruddas, chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts (CST) has said. She highlighted three areas from the review that could help trusts to improve retention - by focusing on “how you build relational trust in an organisation, how you pay attention to working conditions and what good professional development looks like.”
* DfE has updated “**Convert to an academy: guide for schools**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/convert-to-an-academy-information-for-schools> and “**Academy conversion: support grant forms**”, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/academy-support-grant> and “**Academy conversion: important dates**”, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/academy-conversion-important-dates> Local-authority schools choosing to academise will no longer be able to access a £25,000 grant unless they join or form a multi-academy trust. But special and AP schools “will continue to be eligible to receive it as part of a single-school conversion process”. Those wanting to leave local authority control under the current eligibility criteria for the grant should register their interest by April 26 and apply by June 7.
* **Forty-four academy trust CEOs have now crossed the £200,000 pay threshold amid wage rises of up to 50 per cent in five years** – as leaders argue that salaries may now match those in private firms. Three more leaders now earn over £300,000. Trust leaders received, on average, a 5.2 per cent hike in 2022-23, taking them out of a period of wage “stagnation”. Analysis has found the best paid are getting better paid, but there is also a £14,000 gender pay gap. Meanwhile the DfE will resume its policy of naming and shaming the trusts under government scrutiny over high pay. For more details, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/rise-in-200k-academy-trust-ceos-as-pay-stagnation-ends/>

**Teacher and staff pay and recruitment**

* Writing to the School Teachers’ Review Body (STRB), ASCL, the Community Trade Union, NAHT, and the NASUWT and NEU said that the review body’s recommendations “**must address the reality of pay cuts, sky-high workload and the recruitment and retention crisis**”. The unions have called on the STRB to reject “the government’s attempts to limit it to working within the existing inadequate school funding envelope”. The unions warned that the chancellor’s Spring Budget, which confirmed no additional funding for schools, will result in further cuts to pay, jobs and support for pupils. The joint statement also called for significant improvements in workload for teachers. See <https://www.ascl.org.uk/News/Our-news-and-press-releases/Education-unions-ASCL,-Community,-NAHT,-NASUWT-and>
* The DfE has updated “**Statutory guidance on pay and conditions for teachers in England**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-teachers-pay-and-conditions>
* The DfE is wielding the axe on schools-related schemes as it faces up to a **potential £1.5 billion budget black hole to fund teacher pay rises**. The DfE used one-off capital and tutoring underspends to pay its near £500 million contribution to the 6.5 per cent pay deal reached with unions last summer. The department must now find nearly £850 million savings to fund the impact of that pay rise in the 2024-25 financial year. On top of this, the DfE is working on a pay deal for 2024-25, which experts say must be at least 3 per cent. But the money must come from within the DfE’s own budgets. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/cuts-start-to-bite-as-dfe-faces-1-5bn-budget-blackhole/>
* **Supply teachers** are stuck on “stagnating” pay rates and “treated like second-class citizens”, fuelling a shortage amid booming demand the NASUWT has warned. Fifty-five per cent of supply teachers surveyed by the union said their pay rates had not improved last year. Another 16 per cent of the 697 surveyed said their pay was actually lower. Just 29 per cent said their pay had increased despite teachers getting a 5 per cent pay rise that year. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/supply-teachers-second-class-citizens-as-pay-stagnates/>
* According to SchoolDash data, there was a 79 per cent increase in the number of adverts recorded for all **support and auxiliary staff** this academic year up to 8 March (16,145), compared with 9,043 recorded in the same period in 2018-19.

**Education news for schools**

* STEM has issued a document on **Science Leadership Benchmarks**. See <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?tab=rm&ogbl#inbox/WhctKKZWhgrvlWmvvmjLvtVBgrmjtVzSGKdkZgLHmFVwpRfFsGjGpvRvsbSFsmnnXxfTrFl>
* **Teaching hubs will no longer provide continuous professional development next year**. The 87 hubs will now just play a role in delivering school-based initial teacher training, national professional qualifications, the early career framework and appropriate body services, but will signpost CPD opportunities that are available through DfE approved training programmes.”
* **Schools fear they are "stuck" with leaking roofs and decades-old temporary classrooms, after the final spots to receive rebuilding cash in England were taken by those with dangerous concrete**. Most of the last places on a scheme to rebuild schools went to those with reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (Raac), which closed schools this year. One union said the government had "cut corners" by using the existing scheme. For examples, see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-68606577>
* For the latest **STEM Learning** newsletter, see <https://email.stem.org.uk/q/11oBrIRqEtp1hbzucEnFPh0/wv>

**School management**

* For the latest **Education Support newsletter**, see <https://mailchi.mp/edsupport/your-october-newsletter-3176620?e=4c833362b8>
* Ofqual has issued “**Ofqual guide for schools and colleges 2024**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofqual-guide-for-schools-and-colleges-2024>
* For the latest **ESFA Update** see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-update-20-march-2024>
* DfE has issued “Details of the **September Guarantee**, which requires local authorities to find education and training places for 16- and 17-year-olds”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/september-guarantee-offers-of-education-or-training-for-16-to-17-year-olds>

**Post 16**

* ESFA has issued a manual “**College financial handbook**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/college-financial-handbook>
* Rishi Sunak is promising to **create up to 20,000 more apprenticeships** with a series of reforms including fully funding training for young people and cutting red tape for small businesses The government will pay the full cost of apprenticeships for people aged 21 or under at small firms from 1 April. To enable this, it is pledging £60m of new investment for next year. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-68592905>
* DfE has issued “Find out how you can **become a further education teacher**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teach-in-further-education>
* ESFA has issued “**ESFA college and local authority accountability agreements**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-college-and-local-authority-accountability-agreements>

**Tony Stephens**