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**314 Academy and School News and Resources Update, April 5-10 2025**

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**Mobile phones**

* The Children’s Commissioner’s School and College Survey <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/statement/press-notice-most-headteachers-restrict-mobile-phones-in-school-hours-but-major-new-survey-shows-online-harms-still-among-their-biggest-concerns/> on **mobile phone use in schools**
* Most schools (90% of secondary and 99.8% of primary schools) had a mobile phone policy limiting students’ use of mobile phones during school hours, in line with the DfE’s non-statutory guidance. This includes the three ‘most restrictive’ policies: not allowing mobile phones onto school grounds, requiring children to hand in phones or leave them in a secure place they cannot access during the school day, or requiring them to be kept out of sight.
* Secondary schools were more likely to allow some phone use. Around 10% allowed pupils to use their phone at some point during the school day, such as during breaks or lunchtime. 5.8 per cent of secondary schools had a policy that allowed students to use their phones when a teacher said they can during lessons, and 3.9 per cent had a policy that either allowed students to use their phones at break or lunch, or allowed students to use their phones at any time in school. Meanwhile, 7.9% of secondaries require pupils to hand in their phones during schooltime
* One in five primary schools (21%) completely ban pupils from bringing phones to school, compared with only 3.5% of secondary schools.
* Secondary schools reporting higher concerns about behaviour tended to enforce stricter phone policies, while concerns over online safety do not appear to influence policy strictness in the same way.
* Exceptions are made for children made for children with additional needs. 34% of secondary schools made no exceptions compared to 74% of primary schools. Medical needs were the most common reason for exemptions.
* A new nationally representative poll of children in England aged eight to 15 also found that 25% spend two to three hours a day using an internet-enabled device such as a computer, smartphone, tablet or gaming console, while 23% spend more than four hours a day on such a device.
* Previous research by the Children’s Commissioner found that 45% of children aged between eight and 17 had seen or experienced harmful content online, including anonymous trolling, sexualised, violent or gory content and pornography.
* The survey found online safety was among the most cited issue of concern for school leaders for children in their communities, second only to mental health services
* Banning phones in schools should be a decision for head teachers and not "imposed nationally by the government", England's children's commissioner says.
* The government should introduce a statutory ban on mobile phones in schools to alleviate the pressure on parents, teachers and headteachers according to **Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the NEU** who warned that children have access to “hardcore pornography” on their phones, which is “damaging” to both boys and girls. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/neu-daniel-kebede-dfe-should-ban-phones-schools-alleviate-pressures>

**ASCL** said “While it’s important to look at how much time children and young people are spending on devices and screens, which can in itself be cause for concern, what is even more important is regulating the content they might be viewing online.

**France** is to tighten its ban on the use of mobile phones in middle schools, making pupils at the ages of 11 to 15 shut away their devices in a locker or pouch at the start of the day and access them again only as they are leaving. See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/10/france-mobile-phone-ban-middle-schools>

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

* More than a third of secondary teachers have reported **misogynistic behaviour** from pupils at their school in the last week, a survey commissioned by BBC News suggests, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5yr0zw65lro> About 40% of the teachers who responded also said they felt ill-equipped to handle such conduct.
* More than a third (39%) of secondary school teachers said they are aware of at least one incident of misogynistic behaviour from a pupil in the last week
* One in 10 secondary school teachers said they were aware of more than three incidents of misogyny by pupils in the last week
* A majority of teachers who have been teaching for at least five years (61%) said they had seen increases in misogynistic behaviour among pupils since they started teaching
* Nearly half of teachers surveyed (45%) want more guidance from the government on tackling misogyny
* A significant proportion of teachers surveyed (40%) weren't aware of what the current government guidance is on tackling misogyny
* **Schools are being reminded about their duties to protect students and staff from the deepfake manipulation of images and videos used on school websites or social media feeds**. In 2023 and 2024, reports from the Internet Watch Foundation documented horrifying ways that AI is being used to create deepfake images – and now videos – of child sexual abuse using real images trawled from the web. The research uncovered thousands of images of abuse on just one single dark web forum. Given that many schools use images of pupils on both school websites and social media feeds, new guidance published by the UK Safer Internet Centre is seeking to help schools to manage this emerging and increasing threat and to ensure the proper management of image and video use online. Social media platforms in particular can be vulnerable to “web-scraping”, which is used to collect public content at scale. The guidance covers key areas including auditing online content, the appropriate use of student images in line with data protection policies, and restricting public access.

For **guidance for schools**, see:

* UK Safer Internet Centre: Guidance to support school pupil/student image security, 2025, <https://saferinternet.org.uk/guide-and-resource/managing-student-image-and-video-content>
* Rose: AI, deepfakes and safeguarding: Ten ways to keep children safe, [www.sec-ed.co.uk/content/best-practice/ai-deepfakes-and-safeguarding-ten-ways-to-keep-children-safe](https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/content/best-practice/ai-deepfakes-and-safeguarding-ten-ways-to-keep-children-safe)
* DfE: Guidance: Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: Advice for education settings working with children and young people, last updated March 2024, [www.gov.uk/government/publications/sharing-nudes-and-semi-nudes-advice-for-education-settings-working-with-children-and-young-people](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sharing-nudes-and-semi-nudes-advice-for-education-settings-working-with-children-and-young-people)
* DfE has issued “**Statutory guidance on the principles behind children’s social care**, its purpose, factors enabling good practice and what it should achieve.” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-national-framework>

**Public examinations**

* DfE has updated “**Approved key stage 4 qualifications** (GCSEs, Technical Awards, AS levels and graded music exams), discount codes and point scores for reporting in the 2014 to 2027 school and college performance tables.”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-4-qualifications-discount-codes-and-point-scores>
* For the latest **Ofqual: rolling update**, see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-rolling-update>
* Ofqual has issued
* **Explaining how GCSE and A level grade boundaries work: why they change yearly, how standards are maintained, and how final grades are determined fairly**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-and-a-level-grading-what-you-need-to-know>
* **Guide for teachers and heads explaining GCSE and A level grading: how marking works, how grade boundaries are set, and how student grades are determined fairly**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-gcse-and-a-level-grading-works-teachers-and-headteachers-guide> For a useful summary, see <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/secondary/gcse-and-level-exam-grading-6-things-teachers-need-know>
* **A collection, Understanding grading: toolkit for schools and colleges**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/understanding-grading-toolkit-for-schools-and-colleges>
* DfE has issued “**Functional Skills subject content for Entry Levels 1 to 3 and Levels 1 and 2**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/functional-skills-subject-content-english>
* DfE has updated “**Approved 16 to 18 qualifications**, discount codes and point scores for reporting in the 2018 to 2027 school and college performance measures”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-qualifications-discount-codes-and-point-scores>
* Ofqual has issued “**Statistics on the number of appeals against results for GCSEs, AS and A levels and Project qualifications for the November 2023, January 2024 and June 2024 exam series”** See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/appeals-for-gcse-as-a-level-and-project-qualifications-2023-to-2024-academic-year>
* Overall, 2,655 (0.04%) of the 6.8 million grades awarded for GCSE, AS and A levels were challenged at appeal, an increase of 1.8% compared with the 2022 to 2023 academic year when 2,610 grades were challenged
* Overall, 745 (0.01%) of the 6.8 million grades awarded for GCSE, AS and A levels were changed as part of an upheld appeal, an increase of 5.7% compared with the 2022 to 2023 academic year when 705 grades were changed
* The number of appeals received for GCSE, AS and A levels in the 2023 to 2024 academic year was 1,795. Of these appeals 970 (54.2%) were upheld. As explained in the main report, one appeal may cover more than one grade
* The most common ground for which appeals were received in the 2023 to 2024 academic year for GCSE, AS and A levels was ‘review of marking - marking error’
* For Project qualifications, 5 appeals were received in the 2023 to 2024 academic year all of which were upheld. Out of the 200 grades challenged for Projects, 45 were changed. As explained in the main report, one appeal may cover more than one grade
* For all qualifications covered, 73% of upheld appeals were associated with a qualification grade change in the 2023 to 2024 academic year

For a collection, **previous statistics: appeals for GCSE, AS, A level and Project qualifications**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-appeals-for-gcse-as-a-level-and-project-qualifications>

**Early years and primary**

* DfE has updated **“Information for early years practitioners about stronger practice hubs.**” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-stronger-practice-hubs>
* STA has issued a collection, **National curriculum assessments: key stage 2 tests**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum-assessments-key-stage-2-tests>
* There were almost 20,000 reports of **serious childcare incidents in England's nurseries** in the past five years. That is an average of about 75 "significant events" reported to Ofsted each week - including incidents of serious injury or significant harm. There have even been rare cases involving deaths. The latest figures for serious incidents in the year 2023-24 are 40% higher than five years previously. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx2641weqego>
* **The government risks missing its target of ensuring that 75 per cent of children are “school-ready” by 2028** unless it commits to overhauling the “precarious” funding system for children’s centres and Family Hubs. A report from the Centre for Young Lives reveals that almost half of local authorities in England (49 per cent) expect cuts to their children’s centre and Family Hub budgets between 2023-24 and 2024-25. A report from the Centre for Young Lives <https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/659fd56cbd8d3f4a80aaac76/67f3d073d59b04bbd92d608c_Fresh%20Start%20for%20Children%20and%20Family%20Support%2007.04.pdf> reveals that almost half of local authorities in England (49 per cent) expect cuts to their children’s centre and Family Hub budgets between 2023-24 and 2024-25. In December Sir Keir Starmer announced a target of 75 per cent of five-year-olds reaching a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage assessment by 2028 as part of the government’s Opportunity Mission. This is equivalent to between 40,000 and 45,000 additional pupils reaching that level. See also <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/early-years/school-ready-target-risk-because-family-hubs-support-funding-cuts>
* DfE has issued “**Early years teacher degree apprenticeship**: guidance for training providers.” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-teacher-degree-apprenticeship-guidance-for-training-providers>
* For an article “**We should celebrate Labour’s good news on nurseries – but it needs to be bolder**”, see <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/apr/04/celebrate-labours-good-news-nurseries-schools-spending>

**School management**

* DfE has updated “**Move to the UK if you’re coming from Ukraine**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/move-to-the-uk-if-youre-from-ukraine>
* DfE has updated “**Buying for schools**. Resources to help you buy goods and services for your school, get better value and be compliant with procurement regulations.” See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/buying-for-schools--2>
* Hard-pressed schools are warning of extra pressures from **the rising cost of outsourced catering contracts** as companies grapple with national insurance hikes, minimum wages and food costs. Caterers say they may have to stop serving smaller schools or make redundancies, and that a return to the school meal standards of the 1990s is on the cards if funding for free meal is not increased. It is said trusts will be “really hammered” with any people-heavy contracts such as IT, catering, or cleaning. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/outsourced-contract-rises-hit-school-catering-budgets/>
* **The true cost of bringing the school estate up to scratch is “almost certain” to be more than official estimates of £13.8 billion**, warn senior civil servants. According to the National Audit Office (NAO), the DfE requested £4 billion a year between 2021 and 2025, but was allocated £3.1 billion. An NAO report, published in January, estimated that the maintenance backlog – the value of work that has been deferred or not carried out – in schools stood at £13.8 billion. This was calculated using condition data collected between 2017 and 2019. But, because of further deterioration, the discovery of RAAC and spiralling construction costs, the Cabinet Office permanent secretary and civil service chief operating officer, said: “It is almost certain that that number is higher”.
* The government has issued “**Workplace recycling in England changed on 31 March 2025**. Guidance for all businesses, charities and public sector organisations on separating recyclable waste.” See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/simpler-recycling-workplace-recycling-in-england>
* The government has issued a collection “**Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025**.” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/terrorism-protection-of-premises-bill-2024>
* **State and private school partnerships** can struggle to reach those who could benefit from their activities the most, according to research by the Education Policy Institute, <https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/EPI_ISSP-deep-dive_report_V3-1.pdf> It recommends that partnerships should include outreach to students and parents who are “initially less motivated to participate”. The 2024 Independent Schools Council (ISC) census recorded 9,248 state and private partnerships, with two-thirds of ISC member schools (76 per cent) involved in at least one partnership with a state school. The report says partnerships offer pupils opportunities “beyond the core curriculum, fostering personal and academic growth”. And it adds that teachers in partnerships report benefitting from CPD opportunities, with knowledge and expertise being shared across sectors. The challenges with partnerships identified include pupil integration and staffing and resource constraints. The report also identifies challenges in running partnership activities both during school time and outside of it.
* For the **latest DfE update**, formerly ESFA Update, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfe-update-9-april-2025>
* **Pupil wellbeing** is more important than Ofsted ratings or academic achievement for most parents when it comes to choosing a secondary school. YouGov polling of almost 1,100 parents and carers found that 64% of them said that the wellbeing of pupils was more important to them than academic achievement. The poll found that 66% believe pupil wellbeing to be a key factor in school choice – ranking higher than things like location (62%), facilities (61%), school culture (56%), Ofsted ratings (52%), and even exam results (43%). The survey also found that 49% of the respondents believe that schools need to do more to support student wellbeing. See <https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/content/news/child-wellbeing-more-important-to-parents-than-grades-and-ofsted-ratings>
* DfE has updated “**Consistent financial reporting (CFR) framework**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/consistent-financial-reporting-framework-cfr>

**Academies and trusts**

* **A Catholic archdiocese has been accused of subjecting leaders to “inappropriate pressure” and threatening to force out obstructive governors in its bid for “universal academisation**”. In a letter, the NAHT revealed members in the Archdiocese of Southwark say they have been “met with hostility” and fear “negative repercussions” for questioning the conversion plans. They have also claimed the body representing the Catholic bishops’ national education policy has hinted that those fighting proposals to join one of five religious multi-academy trusts could be downgraded during Catholic inspections. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/fears-catholic-school-heads-coerced-into-mega-mats/>
* Teach First chief executive **Russell Hobby** will become CEO of The Kemnal Academies Trust from September.
* DfE has updated “**Information on all academies, free schools, studio schools and university technical colleges (UTCs) open in England, and those in the process of opening**.” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-academies-and-academy-projects-in-development>
* Rowena Hackwood, the chief executive of Astrea, revealed her academy chain was **“exploring growth”, including “innovative” routes that did not involve joining forces with another trust**. She suggested this could be done by launching a community interest company offering back-office services to local schools. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/mat-mulls-action-short-of-merger-with-other-trusts/>
* Councils are “not interested in making life difficult for academies just for the sake of it” with new powers to oppose expansions, a senior local authority official has insisted. But Rachael Wardell, the new president of the Association of Directors of Children’s Services, said **schools needed to be “where the children are**”, and that it was not helpful for any school to “expand beyond its local community”. See [https://schoolsweek.co.uk/interview-were-not-interested-in-making-life-difficult-for-academies/#](https://schoolsweek.co.uk/interview-were-not-interested-in-making-life-difficult-for-academies/)

**Ofsted**

* Ofsted has issued “**Submit a complaint** about an inspection, activity or incident involving Ofsted.” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complain-about-ofsted>
* Ofsted has issued “**Initial teacher education (ITE) inspections and outcomes: management information**.” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/management-information-ofsteds-initial-teacher-education-ite-inspections-outcomes>
* Ofsted has issued a collection **of Ofsted inspection statistics for initial teacher education (ITE) provision and early career framework (ECF) and national professional qualification (NPQ) provision in England.** See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/initial-teacher-education-inspections-and-outcomes>
* Ofsted has issued “**Ofsted Parent View**: management information”, See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ofsted-parent-view-management-information>

**School finances**

* **A surge in schools making cuts shows they are “rapidly heading towards the brink” and is threatening the government’s promise to break down barriers to opportunity in education** More schools are cutting teaching staff, support staff and teaching assistants than any time since 2020, a survey for the Sutton Trust has found., <https://www.suttontrust.com/news-opinion/all-news-opinion/new-poll-reveals-major-increase-in-cash-strapped-schools-cutting-staff/> Nearly half of secondary school leaders polled said they are now using pupil premium cash to plug gaps – the highest since the annual poll started in 2017, and 13 percentage points up on last year. More than half of secondary school senior leaders surveyed in March reported making cuts in teaching staff, up from 38 per cent last year. Half reported cuts to TAs, up from 41 per cent. Fifty-five per cent of secondary heads reported cutting support staff, the highest figure since 2020. Meanwhile, cuts at primary schools are their highest since polling began in 2017. More senior leaders are also reducing the subject choices they offer at GCSE (33 per cent) and A level (29 per cent) compared with last year due to funding pressures. 53 per cent reported cutting spending on trips and outings, while 33 per cent reported cuts to sports and other extracurricular activities, which were both increases on last year.

**Children in need and Looked after children**

* DfE has issued “**Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities, in England: 2023 to 2024**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/outcomes-for-children-in-need-including-children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england-2023-to-2024>
	+ The percentage of pupils in the key social care groups that have a special educational need (SEN) is over twice that for the overall pupil population. For children in need (CIN) at 31 March, over half have SEN compared to 18.1% of the overall pupil population. Pupils with SEN have been recorded to have lower attainment outcomes compared to the overall population. As such, the higher prevalence of SEN amongst children looked after and children in need accounts for some of the difference in attainment compared to the overall pupil population.
	+ The percentage of pupils in most of the key social care groups meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics (combined) at Key Stage 2 is roughly half that for the overall pupil population where 61% met the expected standard.
	+ Pupils in the key social care groups have lower attainment than the overall pupil population across all Key Stage 4 attainment measures.
	+ CLA in long term care have higher Attainment 8 scores than pupils whose most recent period of care is much shorter.
	+ The percentage of persistent absentees for CLA for at least 12 months was 20.8%, which was only slightly higher than for the overall pupil population (20.3%). However, as with overall absence, this rate was much higher for the other key social care groups.
	+ 61.6% of CIN at 31 March were eligible for free school meals. This compares to 24.6% for all pupils.
	+ Around one in 10 pupils in 2023/24 have been a child in need in the last 6 years. This has been stable since this measure was introduced in the publication in 2019/20.

**Summary**

* The 2023/24 average Attainment 8 score for children in need at 31 March 2024 17.6
* The percentage of children in need at 31 March 2022 who were at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2021/22 and were in sustained education, employment & apprenticeships in 2022/23 73%
* The percentage of children in need at 31 March 2024 who were persistently absent from school in the 2023/24 academic year 44.0%
* The 2023/24 average Attainment 8 score for children looked after continuously for at least 12 months at 31 March 2024 18.3
* The percentage of children looked after continuously for at least twelve months at 31 March 2022 who were at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2021/22 and were in sustained education, employment & apprenticeships in 2022/23 77%
* The percentage of children looked after continuously for at least 12 months at 31 March 2024 who were persistently absent from school in the 2023/24 academic year 20.8%
* For collections:
	+ **Statistics: children in need and child protection**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-children-in-need>
	+ **Statistics: looked-after children**. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-looked-after-children>

**SEND**

* For “**Special-school heads in Kent welcome halt to redesignation plan**”, see <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/specialist-sector/special-school-heads-welcome-halt-redesignation-plan>
* **Mounting council deficits on special educational needs and disabilities (SEND**) spending will keep growing without new government education reforms, a leading director of children’s services has warned. Rachael Wardell, the new president of the Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS), said it was a “true scandal” that lots of money was being spent without getting better outcomes for children with SEND. Ms Wardell has suggested that the government is likely to extend the statutory override in the short term, rather than move it back into central government debt or leave councils at risk. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/specialist-sector/council-send-deficits-will-keep-rising-without-reform>

**NEU**

* For “**Eight interesting motions that will set the agenda at the NEU conference**”, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/strikes-maternity-pay-and-sats-boycott-neu-conference-preview/> In addition, the NEU leader says “Unless we receive a pay award that takes steps to address the crisis in recruitment and retention, and unless that is fully funded to ensure there’s no detriment to education provision, I think the **system really risks grinding to a halt** now.” Speaking on Ofsted’s proposals for its new report cards, Mr Kebede said: “The secretary of state started with the best intentions of getting rid of that single phrase judgement, and now my analysis is that the chief inspector has created something much worse**.” The NEU has previously raised concerns that Ofsted’s plans for its new report card will “exacerbate existing issues of inconsistency and unreliability”.**

**Education News for schools**

* The payment provider **sQuid**, which provided parents with online accounts for funds for school meals and trips and which has ceased operating in the UK, will now hand parents back more of their money. sQuid said it would aim in the first instance to work with schools to arrange a full refund with no charge. The child’s school would contact parents directly, which meant they would not need to apply for a refund through sQuid’s website. Where a school could not manage the refund, the £10 charge would be reduced to a maximum of £2.50, with parents able to request a refund through Squid’s online portal. The charge would vary between 20p and £2.50, depending on the refund amount. They would be refunded automatically if they had already paid the higher £10 fee as first proposed by the company.
* **Oli de Botton** has been appointed as prime minister Sir Keir Starmer’s “expert adviser on education and skills”. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/7-key-facts-about-oli-de-botton-labours-new-education-adviser/>
* For the latest **Sec Ed Bulletins**, see <https://email.sec-ed.co.uk/q/12JpfhcqeKiJLVTJUbZplOUB/wv> <https://email.sec-ed.co.uk/q/12JpfhcqfAqMnikTghtAgPry/wv>

**Post 16**

* DfE has issued “**16 to 19 education: financial support for students**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-financial-support-for-students>
* DfE has issued **“A report on T Level and level 4 and 5 learners outcomes, destinations, future plans and course experiences**.” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/technical-education-learner-progression-survey-2024>
* DfE has issued “**National Careers Service: course directory, 16-18**.” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-careers-service-course-directory>

**Tony Stephens**