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## **248 Academy and School News and Resources Update, Dec 16-22 2023**

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### **Attendance**

- **Attendance.** This release covers the 2023/24 academic year up to 8 December 2023. **The attendance rate (proportion of possible sessions attended) was 92.0% across all schools in the week commencing 4 December 2023.** The absence rate was, therefore, 8.0% across all schools. By school type, the absence rates across the week commencing 4 December 2023 were:
  - 6.3% in state-funded **primary** schools (4.8% authorised and 1.5% unauthorised)
  - 9.8% in state-funded **secondary** schools (6.2% authorised and 3.6% unauthorised)
  - 14.3% in state-funded **special** schools (10.9% authorised and 3.3% unauthorised)

**The data shows that the attendance rate across the academic year to date was 93.4%.** The absence rate was, therefore, 6.6% across all schools. By school type, the absence rates across the academic year 2023/24 to date were:

- 5.1% in state-funded **primary** schools (3.7% authorised and 1.4% unauthorised)
- 8.3% in state-funded **secondary** schools (5.2% authorised and 3.1% unauthorised)
- 12.6% in state-funded **special** schools (9.5% authorised and 3.0% unauthorised)

## Teacher pay

- For **the Secretary of State's letter to the School Teachers' Review Body asking for recommendations on teachers' pay and conditions for 2024**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-teachers-review-body-remit-letter-for-2024>

Key points in the letter:

- In 2023/24, pay review bodies across government recommended historically high pay awards for their respective workforces in light of the extraordinary macroeconomic context. Accepting these recommendations, whilst not increasing borrowing, required tough decisions. It is vital that the STRB consider the historic nature of the 2023/24 award and the Government's affordability position that will be set out further in written evidence.
- In 2024-25, the government is continuing to increase investment in schools, but it remains important that the STRB carefully considers the Department's evidence on the impact of pay rises on schools' budgets, alongside consideration of the Department's evidence on a fair pay award.
- DfE requests an assessment of the adjustments that should be made to the salary and allowance ranges for classroom teachers, unqualified teachers, and school leaders in 2024/25.
- DfE asks that they take account of the following:
  - Potential equalities impacts associated with any changes proposed to the STPCD.
  - The cost pressures that schools are already facing and may face over the year (and how they affect individual schools).
  - The need to ensure that any proposals are not too difficult or onerous for schools to implement.
  - Evidence of the national state of teacher and school leader supply, including rates of recruitment and retention, vacancy rates, and the quality of candidates entering the profession.
  - Evidence of the wider state of the labour market in England.
  - Forecast changes in the pupil population and consequent changes in the level of demand for teachers.
  - The Government's commitment to increasing autonomy for all head teachers and governing bodies to develop pay arrangements that are suited to the individual circumstances of their schools.

The STRB should aim to provide a report on this matter by May 2024

The **NEU** said, "it was "clear that the Government is gearing up for a paltry 1 to 2 per cent teacher pay award next year Not only is the remit letter late, but it is also completely inadequate. The government is again

attempting to constrain the STRB by forcing it to work within the existing inadequate funding envelope.” **ASCL** said, “the STRB must not feel “constrained” by the letter, and urged it to recommend pay at a level that will address the teacher recruitment and retention crisis”.

- For **previous STRB reports**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/school-teachers-review-body-strb-reports>

### Children questioning their gender and social transition

- The DfE is seeking views until March 12 2024 on its **draft non-statutory guidance for schools and colleges about children questioning their gender**. This includes requests from pupils for ‘social transition’ which can include requests to change pronouns, names, and uniform. See <https://consult.education.gov.uk/equalities-political-impartiality-anti-bullying-team/gender-questioning-children-proposed-guidance/> The consultation document is at [https://consult.education.gov.uk/equalities-political-impartiality-anti-bullying-team/gender-questioning-children-proposed-guidance/supporting\\_documents/Guidance%20for%20Schools%20and%20Colleges%20%20Gender%20Questioning%20Children%20Consultation.pdf](https://consult.education.gov.uk/equalities-political-impartiality-anti-bullying-team/gender-questioning-children-proposed-guidance/supporting_documents/Guidance%20for%20Schools%20and%20Colleges%20%20Gender%20Questioning%20Children%20Consultation.pdf) and the guidance document at [https://consult.education.gov.uk/equalities-political-impartiality-anti-bullying-team/gender-questioning-children-proposed-guidance/supporting\\_documents/Gender%20Questioning%20Children%20%20nonstatutory%20guidance.pdf](https://consult.education.gov.uk/equalities-political-impartiality-anti-bullying-team/gender-questioning-children-proposed-guidance/supporting_documents/Gender%20Questioning%20Children%20%20nonstatutory%20guidance.pdf)

The guidance sets out five “overarching principles” for schools to frame responses to requests for social transitioning. These are as follows...

- Schools and colleges have statutory duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children
- Schools and colleges should be respectful and tolerant places where bullying is never tolerated
- Parents should not be excluded from decisions taken by a school or college relating to requests for a child to ‘socially transition’
- Schools and colleges have specific legal duties that are framed by a child’s biological sex
- There is no general duty to allow a child to ‘social transition’

The guidance provides clarity on how to approach a range of issues when it comes to supporting gender questioning children and responding to requests for changes known as 'social transition'. This includes:

- Parents' views must be at the heart of all decisions made about their children
- Schools do not have to accept a child's request to socially transition. Where a school considers a request, they should take a very cautious approach, including watchful waiting periods, and ensuring parents are fully consulted before any decision is taken.
- Teachers should consider if a student's request to socially transition to another gender was "influenced by social media or peers"
- The DfE would "expect parental consent to be required in the vast majority of cases". But in "exceptionally rare circumstances", where a school believes involving parents could put a child at "significant risk" of harm, schools do not have to inform them. If no change is being requested, the DfE says teachers can "listen respectfully" to a child's feelings without automatically telling their parents. But for safeguarding reasons, they cannot "promise confidentiality".
- When considering requests for social transitioning, schools are told to consider the impact on other pupils, including safeguarding concerns. Schools may conclude that the impact on the school community "is such that it may not be possible to agree to support a request".
- In exceptional cases where a request to social transition is agreed, children, teachers or staff at a school should not be required to adopt the use of preferred pronouns and there must be no sanction, verbal or otherwise. Where a teacher or child does not adopt the new pronouns, they should use the child's preferred name. Schools should ensure that bullying is never tolerated. No child should be "sanctioned for honest mistakes when adapting to a new way of interacting with another pupil".
- Registration of name and sex – every school must record the name and biological sex of every pupil in the admissions register. It is not accurate to record a male child as female or a female child as male, or to record a male child as a girl or a female child as a boy.
- Safeguarding - in all cases - apart from where the law says schools must do something, for example providing single-sex toilet facilities for children 8 years and older - schools and colleges must consider whether there is a safeguarding or welfare reason to make an exception to the approach outlined for individual issues below.
- Changing names – pupils may be allowed to informally change their names if it is in the best interests of the child and parents have been fully consulted. The new name should be communicated to relevant members of the school.

- Changing pronouns – schools can decline a request to change a child’s pronouns and primary school aged children should not have different pronouns to their sex-based pronouns. Primary children “should not have different pronouns to their sex-based pronouns used about them”. For older children, schools should only agree “if they are confident that the benefit to the individual child outweighs the impact on the school community”. As a result, the government says it expects “there will be very few occasions in which a school or college will be able to agree to a change of pronouns”. Schools and colleges should not compel teachers or pupils to use new pronouns, except where necessary to safeguard and all other options have been exhausted, such as addressing the child by their first name. Schools should also not prevent teachers from referring to children collectively as ‘girls’ or ‘boys’, even in the presence of a child who has been allowed to change their pronouns.
- Single-sex spaces – schools must provide sex-separated toilets for pupils aged 8 or over, and suitable changing accommodation and showers for pupils who are aged 11 years or over at the start of the school year. If a child does not want to use the toilet, changing room or showers designated for their biological sex, schools and colleges may wish to consider alternative toilet, changing room or shower facilities for the child, however schools and colleges cannot allow a child to use a space solely designated for use by the opposite sex.
- Boarding and residential accommodation – sleeping arrangements like dormitories, tents and shared rooms should be sex separated. In the event that a child questioning their gender requests alternative arrangements, these should be considered but should not compromise the safety, comfort, privacy or dignity of the child, or other pupils.
- Uniforms and clothing – in general, a gender questioning child should be held to the same uniform standard as other children of their sex. When making a decision relating to a child’s request to change a uniform, schools may agree changes or exceptions to the standard school uniform for most items, but not for swimwear. Many schools already operate a uniform with some flexibility.
- Physical education and sport – schools and colleges should prioritise the safety and wellbeing of all children when implementing policies. This means for sports, allowing a gender questioning child to participate in sport with the opposite sex will not be appropriate if it risks safety or fairness.
- Single-sex schools – under the Equality Act, single sex schools can refuse to admit pupils of the other biological sex, regardless of whether the child is questioning their gender. A school cannot, however, refuse to admit a child of the same biological sex on the basis that they are questioning their gender.

- The DfE says proper use of this guidance means social transition, in practice, should be extremely rare when the appropriate safeguards are put in place and the child's best interest taken into account.

For an article, "**Trans guidance: DfE lawyers said schools face 'high risk' of being sued**. Leaked legal advice shows ministers warned several elements of guidance leaves schools at 'high risk of successful legal challenge". See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/trans-guidance-dfe-lawyers-said-schools-face-high-risk-of-being-sued/>

## Public examinations

- Ofqual has issued "**GCE qualification-level conditions and requirements**", see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-qualification-level-conditions-and-requirements> and "GCSE (9 to 1) qualification-level conditions and requirements", see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-qualification-level-conditions>
- Ofqual has decided to implement the proposals set out in its consultation document concerning **aids for students taking public examinations**. The majority of respondents were in favour of students being given formulae sheets for GCSE mathematics (95% agreement) and revised equation sheets for physics and combined science (96% agreement). Ofqual has changed its rules to require exam boards to provide students with support materials in the form of formulae and revised equations sheets for GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science exams in 2024 only. The support materials will set out the formulae and equations that students must memorise in a normal year, as set out in DfE's subject content and as presented on the sheets provided for 2022 and 2023. Ofqual's updated conditions require exam boards to:
  - publish the formulae and equation sheets in January 2024 so that students may become familiar with them before the exams
  - provide clean copies with their 2024 exam papers

This means the formulae and equation sheets to be used in 2024 exams will be the same as those used for exams in 2023. As such, before the exam boards republish the sheets in January 2024, students and teachers may access exam boards' 2023 sheets for practice purposes, if they wish. The decision relates to GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science exams being taken in 2024 only. For GCSE mathematics this will apply to exams taken in November 2024. DfE has confirmed that 2024 will be the final year for these changes to its subject content requirements. There will be a return to normal exam arrangements for these subjects in 2025.

- **Frances Wadsworth has been appointed by the Secretary of State for Education to serve as interim Chair of the Ofqual Board.** Frances will replace Sir Ian Bauckham CBE, who is standing down to become interim Chief Regulator. The appointment as interim Chair is for a period of up to 12 months from 1 January 2024, during which time a competition to recruit a permanent Chair will take place.
- Ofqual has updated "Guidance for schools, colleges and other exam or assessment centres on **qualifications arrangements for 2024**". See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofqual-guide-for-schools-and-colleges-2024>
- Ofqual has updated "**Ofqual Student Guide 2024**". See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofqual-student-guide-2024>
- For the **latest JCQ Update**, see <https://mailchi.mp/7d0ea46d6354/jcq-update-12-july-5883448?e=0bb0930afc> You will find details on:
  - Key dates
  - The timely delivery of vocational results in Summer 2024 and beyond
  - Resilience guidance
  - Artificial Intelligence (AI) survey update
  - Additional support materials for GCSE exams in 2024
  - Invigilator recruitment
- The DfE has issued "**Guide to post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England**". See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-post-16-qualifications-at-level-3-in-england--2>
- The DfE has issued a **collection of documents for schools about GCSE content**. This covers all subjects and is a good point of reference. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/gcse-subject-content>

## Ofsted

- School leaders have warned they have been "**left in limbo**" over their **legal responsibilities to their staff regarding Ofsted inspections** following the

inquest into the death of headteacher Ruth Perry. The concerns have been raised after the announcement that the coroner at the inquest will be publishing a Regulation 28 report aimed at preventing future deaths; until this report is published, the sector is on an unsure footing about what the risks posed by Ofsted inspection are. Some leaders have said they are considering seeking legal advice on balancing the obligation to allow Ofsted on site and responsibilities under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act to keep staff safe. In addition, the NAHT said "It is abundantly clear that a single 90-minute training session for Ofsted inspectors on spotting signs of distress was never going to be anywhere near enough to begin to address the concerns that the profession, and indeed the coroner, have expressed when it comes to the impact of inspection.

- **Ofsted and the government have been given 56 days to set out what actions they will take in response to a prevention of future deaths report following the death of headteacher Ruth Perry**, with the coroner having issue a regulation 28 report, aimed at preventing future deaths. The recipients must respond by February 7 and include details of "action taken or proposed to be taken, setting out the timetable for action. See <https://www.judiciary.uk/prevention-of-future-death-reports/ruth-perry-prevention-of-future-deaths-report/> **School inspections by the watchdog should cease until the government and Ofsted have published the plan requested by Ruth Perry coroner, say both ASCL and the NAHT**
- Ofsted has issued "**Explanation of terms used in Ofsted's official and national statistical releases**". See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/glossary-of-terms-ofsted-statistics>
- **A key policy aide to Gillian Keegan will become new Ofsted chief Sir Martyn Oliver's lead adviser**. Rory Gribbell, a senior policy adviser who also previously led on education issues at Downing Street, will take up the role on secondment from the DfE early next month. Oliver will take the reins at Ofsted from Amanda Spielman on January 1.

## BSL

The DfE has issued "**GCSE British Sign Language (BSL). Subject content, aims and learning objectives for the British Sign Language (BSL) GCSE**". See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-british-sign-language-bsl> With the aim to have exam board syllabuses approved from September 2025, the



BSL GCSE will teach students to effectively communicate using BSL and provide an understanding of the history of BSL in the UK. In line with all qualifications, the GCSE is open to all pupils and will be recognised and accepted in school and college performance tables. This **follows a consultation** by the DfE, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcse-british-sign-language-bsl-proposed-subject-content> For a **useful summary** of the content of the new GCSE, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/british-sign-language-gcse-what-schools-need-to-know/>

## Early years and primary

- **Primary schools are being closed, merged and shrunk** as councils across England respond to falling numbers of pupils due to the falling birth rate as well as family upheaval triggered by rising costs, Brexit and Covid. Analysis found that 88 primary schools in England were more than two-thirds empty last year, leaving them in danger of closure. Overall there were more unfilled places than at any time since 2010, the equivalent to 570,000 missing pupils or 11.5% of school capacity .London boroughs are among the hardest hit, with thousands of school places being lost, but the closures and cuts extend to other cities and areas as they adjust to fewer children being born or moving into their catchment areas. In the past week, the London boroughs of Hackney and Lambeth have announced proposals for substantial cuts and closures, with Lambeth’s plan amounting to more than 4,000 fewer primary school places in the borough after seven years. London Councils says almost 15% of school places in the city are now unfilled. It is forecasting a further 7% decrease in new pupils between now and 2026-27, equivalent to about 243 classes of children. See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/dec/16/primary-schools-in-england-close-merge-and-shrink-as-pupil-numbers-fall>
- The DfE has updated “Statutory guidance, **Early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework as from Jan 4 2024**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>
- The DfE has updated “Information for early years practitioners about **stronger practice hubs**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-stronger-practice-hubs>

## Disadvantaged students

- **Disadvantaged pupils' struggles at school have "little to do" with them lacking the character, attitude or self-belief of their wealthier peers**, according to a new report. A global study, by researchers at Cambridge, Zürich and Tübingen universities, challenges the view that the academic achievement gap between rich and poor children can be tackled by addressing differences in disadvantaged students' mindset, work ethic and self-belief. The researchers argue that the emphasis put on social skills by politicians and educators "risks blaming" disadvantaged children for their own misfortune. The researchers calculated that if disadvantaged children had the same social and emotional skills as wealthier children and their academic effects were consistent, the learning gap between them would reduce by no more than 9 per cent. The researchers argue that investment should be focused on supporting poorer children's access to quality education, better resources and equal opportunities. Politicians should focus on the structural reasons for lower attainment among poorer children, including the difference in the quality, resourcing and funding of the schools they attend and fewer out-of-school opportunities compared with their wealthier peers.

**ASCL** said, "Nobody in UK education thinks disadvantaged children struggle because they lack the 'character' or attitudes of wealthier children. They struggle because of the lack of basic amenities - food, warmth, clothing, secure housing, a space in which to study, lack of access to the books and technology resources that are available to other children, and many other factors which are intrinsically wrapped up in poverty". See

<https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/disadvantaged-childrens-school-struggles-not-about-character-attitude-or-lack-of-growth-mindset>

- After analysing 2022 attainment data for the second phase of its 2023 report, the Education Policy Institute (EPI) has found **the disadvantage gap at the end of 16-19 study** is the widest it has recorded since 2017. At 16-19, disadvantaged students were 3.5 grades behind their more advantaged peers across their best three subjects in 2022. For persistently disadvantaged students, that gap widened to 4.5 grades. Sam Tuckett, EPI associate director for post-16, said: "These findings show that the government must take bolder steps to tackle widening inequalities in post-16 education. These should include a new 'student premium', like the pupil premium available in secondary school, to support the most disadvantaged students." The report found there has been some progress in closing the SEND gap at 16-19 since before the pandemic, from 5.2 grades to 5 grades.

**Girls were ahead of boys across all educational phases in 2022**, the EPI found. The gap was narrower at the end of primary school than in Reception before widening again at secondary. By the end of key stage 2, girls were 5.5 months ahead in reading and boys two months ahead in maths. Girls were found to be five months ahead of boys at GCSE across English and maths in 2022 - this is the narrowest gender gap that EPI has found since 2011. That gap is mostly driven by girls being nearly 10 months ahead in English with a more negligible gap for maths, which the EPI said showed girls tended to catch up with boys in maths at secondary. See <https://epi.org.uk/annual-report-2023/>

- The DfE has issued details about the Local authorities' funding for the children's **social care strengthening families, protecting children (SFPC) programme**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strengthening-families-protecting-children-programme>
- **Virtual school heads** were originally responsible for promoting the educational achievements of youngsters who are, or have been, in care and managing their pupil premium funding. Since 2021, their remit has included championing those who have, or previously had, a social worker – which included many who are being cared for by loved ones other than their parents. Now to support kinship carers, the role of virtual heads will be extended to supporting every child in the care of friends or family.
- **Half of teachers surveyed at state schools in England work with pupils who are or have become homeless in the past year**, according to research published today. YouGov polling found that 49 per cent of teachers said their school had children who are homeless or who had become homeless in the previous 12 months. The latest statistics published by the government in November showed 138,930 children in temporary accommodation - a form of homelessness - in England at the end of June. The vast majority (91 per cent) of teachers working with children who have experienced homelessness in the past year said children's housing issues are resulting in them coming to school tired. The charity said children can find it difficult to sleep in temporary accommodation if it is overcrowded and they are sharing beds with siblings or parents. Of these same teachers, 87 per cent said that children have come to school hungry, 91 per cent said that children's living situation had negatively affected their mental health, and 81 per cent reported it had a negative impact on physical health. And 78 per cent reported friendship breakdowns among children struggling with homelessness and bad housing. See [https://twitter.com/Shelter/status/1738143090903241038?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Etweet](https://twitter.com/Shelter/status/1738143090903241038?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Etweet)

- More than 800,000 patients were admitted to hospital with **malnutrition and nutritional deficiencies** last year, a threefold increase on 10 years ago, according to NHS figures that have prompted warnings about the devastating health impact of food insecurity. Admissions with a diagnosis of iron deficiency more than doubled from 196,685 in 2013-14 to 490,005 in 2022-23, including thousands of child admissions last year. Cases of patients being treated for vitamin B deficiencies (B12, folate and other B vitamins) tripled from 57,406 a decade ago to 167,562 last year. Protein energy malnutrition, caused by insufficient calories or protein, rose from 5,746 to 9,390 cases. In total, there were 824,519 admissions with a diagnosis of at least one of these conditions in 2022-23, up from 293,686 a decade ago. Nutritional deficiencies are particularly concerning in children, with iron and B12 being critical for brain development; calcium and vitamin D (from sun exposure and dietary intake) are crucial for bone development. "They're going to have health problems further down the line, like brittle bones when they're older," said a paediatrician. "We're storing up health problems for later in life." See <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/21/surge-in-number-of-people-in-hospital-with-nutrient-deficiencies-nhs-figures-show> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/21/malnutrition-england-wales-hospital-diet> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/21/children-have-bowed-legs-hunger-worse-than-ever-says-norwich-school>

## Teacher recruitment measures

- The DfE has issued
  - **"Eligible chemistry, computing, mathematics and physics teachers can now apply for levelling up premium payments"**. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/levelling-up-premium-payments-for-teachers>
  - **"Eligible biology, chemistry, physics, computing and languages teachers can now claim back student loan repayments"**, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teachers-claim-back-your-student-loan-repayments>
  - **"Eligible chemistry, languages, mathematics and physics teachers can now apply for early-career payments"**, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/early-career-payments-guidance-for-teachers-and-schools>
- The DfE has issued "Check what you need to do to **employ teachers who are non-UK citizens**". See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/recruit-teachers-from-overseas>

## Pupil Premium

- The DfE has updated information on **pupil premium funding**, how school leaders can use it effectively and pupil premium strategy statements. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium>

### Pupil premium funding, 2023-24 to 2024-25

| Criteria                | Primary |         |            | Secondary |         |            | Paid to  |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|------------|-----------|---------|------------|----------|
|                         | 2023-24 | 2024-25 | % increase | 2023-24   | 2024-25 | % increase |          |
| FSM in last 6 years     | £1,455  | £1,480  | 1.7%       | £1,035    | £1,050  | 1.4%       | Schools  |
| Previously looked-after | £2,530  | £2,570  | 1.6%       | £2,530    | £2,570  | 1.6%       | Schools  |
| Looked-after            | £2,530  | £2,570  | 1.6%       | £2,530    | £2,570  | 1.6%       | Councils |

Source: Department for Education

**SCHOOLS**  
WEEK

The rise of between 1.4 and 1.7 per cent is far below the current rate of inflation, which stands at 3.9 per cent. It follows a rise of 5 per cent for the current financial year. It comes after the Institute for Fiscal Studies warned that pupil premium funding had eroded in real-terms by 14 per cent since 2015, because increases have not kept pace with inflation.

## Exclusions

- An Observer analysis of the latest DfE annual data on suspensions has found that **dozens of multi-academy trusts had suspension rates that far exceeded the national average in a number of their schools in 2021-22**. Two of the country's biggest trusts, Astrea and Outwood Grange Academies Trust (OGAT), had schools with a suspension rate of about 200% of their pupil numbers – although some pupils were counted several times because they were suspended repeatedly – compared with a national average of 6.9%. Meanwhile, new analysis has shown that suspensions across England hit a record high in autumn term 2022, with nearly a quarter of a million suspensions involving some 135,000 pupils. Exclusion rates were nearly back to pre-pandemic highs, with 3,104 pupils permanently excluded from school that term, according to analysis of DfE data by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) thinktank. The CSJ also uncovered data using the Freedom of Information Act showing that pupil referral units (PRUs), where excluded pupils are often placed, are over-subscribed. This summer there was an excess of more than 800 pupils enrolled in PRUs than there were places. See

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/dec/16/strictest-academy-schools-in-england-suspend-30-times-more-pupils-than-the-national-average>

## Safeguarding and the welfare of children and young people

- The DfE will explore whether **to increase schools' role in safeguarding** arrangements through a pilot programme. The government has consulted on whether education providers, including schools, should become statutory partners in safeguarding, which would require making changes to legislation. In its consultation response, the DfE said the guidance has been updated to "highlight and strengthen" the role of education in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASAs). "We are exploring possible legislative changes alongside the publication of guidance, but like many respondents, we agree that careful consideration needs to be given to how this would be delivered in practice, and what the impact and potential burdens would be on education settings and other partner agencies," the DfE said. "We want to be certain that making schools a fourth partner would bring about the desired change in MASAs and that this could not be achieved via other routes." The DfE has established a group of education leaders who will develop proposals on a strengthened role of education in safeguarding arrangements. These will then be tested through the Families First for Children pathfinder programme. One in five referrals of at-risk pupils to children's social care comes from schools, according to the latest data. The DfE advertised in September for a national child safeguarding facilitator to strengthen the role of education in early help and MASAs. ASCL said, "Given the shortages of resources and current recruitment and retention challenges in schools and colleges, ASCL believes that now would be the wrong time to propose that education becomes a statutory safeguarding partner."
- For the government response to the review **into safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings** by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-children-with-disabilities-in-residential-settings-government-response>
- Labour has called on the government to **reduce mental health waiting lists for young people**, after publishing an analysis showing that more than 270,000 young people waited longer than three months for care or had their referrals closed. The party said that almost one in three children and young people referred by a professional did not access any NHS mental health treatment. Its analysis of 2021-22 data shows that 232,000 of the children and adolescents

referred received no treatment before their referral was closed. The average time that a child who was treated by child and adolescent mental health services (Camhs) waited to receive care was now 41 days.

## School buildings and sites

- The DfE has updated "**Schedule of accommodation tools for schools and colleges**". Tools and templates to help identify the internal spaces needed in mainstream schools and colleges. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mainstream-schools-schedule-of-accommodation-tools>
- The DfE has issued a collection of documents, "**School and Further Education College Design and Construction**". See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/school-design-and-construction>
- Leaders of **schools affected by RAAC** are facing long waits to be reimbursed hundreds of thousands of pounds spent on mitigations. Trusts and councils were told earlier this year that the government would cover both capital and "reasonable" revenue costs incurred after they had to vacate buildings affected by the crumbly concrete. But schools that scrambled to put plans in place after the emergency announcement to shut some buildings in August have reported delays and uncertainty in how their claims are processed. See <https://schoolweek.co.uk/raac-schools-wait-and-wait-for-refunds-from-dfe/>
- **LocatED, the DfE's property company has come up with new ideas for how schools can make use of unused land.** This includes "creative and entrepreneurial" projects - such as arranging "pop-up offices, film and TV locations, guardianship arrangements and various community or social short-term uses". See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/unused-school-land-film-locations>

## School and academy management

- The DfE has updated "Technical specification and validation rules for submitting **2023 to 2024 school census data**". See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-census-2023-to-2024-technical-information>

- DfE has issued “**How we assess the need for a new mainstream school in a local area when we receive applications to open new free schools**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-school-applications-assessing-the-need-for-more-schools>
- ESFA has issued a comprehensive collection, “**Pre-16 schools funding. Guidance, allocations and conditions of grant for pre-16 schools funding**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-authorities-pre-16-schools-funding>
- The DfE has updated “The Department for Education’s strategy for **sustainability and climate change for the education and children’s services systems**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainability-and-climate-change-strategy>
- The DfE has updated “How public sector schools can join **the risk protection arrangement (RPA)**, an alternative to commercial insurance, which may save time and money”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-risk-protection-arrangement-rpa-for-schools> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/risk-protection-arrangement-rpa-summary-provisioning-analysis>
- For the latest **ESFA Update**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-update-20-december-2023>
- ESFA has updated “**Academies budget forecast return: guide to using the online form**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/academies-budget-forecast-return-guide-to-using-the-online-form>

## Education news for schools

- Reminder. DfE is seeking views on the most appropriate approach for delivering **minimum service levels in education** services and evidence on the impact of strike action. Closes Jan 30 2024 See <https://consult.education.gov.uk/industrial-action/minimum-service-levels-mls-in-education/>
- The sector has paid tribute to “education giant” **Sir Tim Brighouse**, remembered as “a towering beacon of light for schools” whose legacy will “last



forever". See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/tributes-paid-to-education-giant-sir-tim-brighthouse/>

- **Seven councils have issued section 114 notices** – which mean they are unable to set a balanced budget – since 2020, with the Local Government Association (LGA) warning that 17 per cent of authorities think it is likely or very likely they will issue such a notice in 2024-25. As a result, some councils may be proposing increases to school catering fees, cuts to educational psychology costs, the replacement of school crossing patrol workers with volunteers. And increasing transport costs. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/bankrupt-councils-eye-education-budgets-for-savings/>
- The DfE has issued "How schools can buy, install and maintain an automated external defibrillator". See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/automated-external-defibrillators-aeds-in-schools>
- For the latest **STEM learning Update**, see <https://email.stem.org.uk/q/11oBrIRpqw6Yms4a9CR1BDJ/wv>

## Post 16

- For the course directory contains information on **courses offered by learning providers who are contracted with the Education and Skills Funding Agency** (ESFA), See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sfa-course-directory>
- ESFA has updated "**T Level resources for universities**". See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/t-level-resources-for-universities>

**Tony Stephens**

