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**148 Academy and School News and Resources Update, Dec 24-31 2021**

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**Covid related news and vaccinations**

* Last week, the DfE announced **the 2021 Covid workforce fund for schools** has been extended to the February half term, as teacher and leader absence rose by 20 per cent in just a fortnight amid the surge of Covid cases caused by the Omicron variant. Heads' leaders have called for a widening of the "strict" criteria that allows schools to apply for more cash to support increased workforce costs as new data reveals that only around 4 per cent of schools applied to the Covid workforce fund last year. In response to a freedom of information request, the Department said that 974 schools applied to the 2020 Covid Workforce Fund that ran from 1 November to 31 December 2020; 8 per cent of claims (72) were rejected as 67 schools did not meet the absence thresholds, while four schools withdrew as they did not meet the reserves criteria and one school missed the deadline, according to the DfE. The current criteria for accessing the workforce fund are:

**Mainstream schools**:

* A total teacher and leader absence rate at or above 20 per cent on a given day.
* A lower total support staff absence rate at or above 10 per cent but have been experiencing this for 15 or more consecutive school days.

**Special schools and alternative provision schools**:

* A total support staff absence rate (teaching assistants and other support staff) at or above 15 per cent on a given day.
* A lower total support staff absence rate at or above 10 per cent but have been experiencing this for 15 or more consecutive school days.

The following **expenditure is also not permitted** within the scope of this fund:

* enabling schools to maintain their reserves above the 4% of annual limit set out in the financial reserves criteria
* capital costs to support staff delivering education remotely

Government guidance says schools cannot claim for "training or other incidental staff-related costs", as well as "increasing pro-rata pay, unless there is a **commensurate increase in responsibilities associated with undertaking the work**".

See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-workforce-fund-for-schools/coronavirus-covid-19-workforce-fund-to-support-schools-with-costs-of-staff-absences-from-22-november-to-31-december-2021#conditions>

* England could fit an **air purifier** to every classroom for about £140 million, a move which scientists and campaigners say would significantly reduce the spread of Covid in schools according to calculations by the Liberal Democrats. Headteachers have also criticised the cost of the government’s preferred supplier for air filters – one of the units, made by Camfil City M, costs £1,170 and a Dyson model costs £424.82. The Liberal Democrats said schools should not be paying for the units at all. “Failure to act right now will fail our children in the future
* Government sources have said there will be **no delay to the start of the school** term, despite surging Omicron cases, and that any additional restrictions will not include classroom closures. Schools, however, have said high numbers of teacher absences as a result of self-isolation could mean they **are forced to send whole year groups home**. The **NAHT** said it would be “naive” to think Omicron would not have an impact on schools when they reopen. “It does seem as though choppy waters lie ahead and that some form of disruption at the start of next term is looking sadly inevitable.” **ASCL** said secondary school leaders could be faced with the dilemma of prioritising classroom teaching for year groups taking exams ahead of teaching for others, “because GCSEs and A-levels really need to go ahead if possible this year”.
* School students who catch Covid-19 can **end their isolation after seven days following two negative tests taken 24 hours apart**, the DfE has confirmed. There has been confusion over whether the reduction in the 10-day isolation period, announced last week, applies to school pupils. The rules state that it is possible to end self-isolation after seven days, following two negative lateral flow tests taken 24 hours apart, with the first test taken on the sixth day.
* Teachers **suffering the long-term effects of Covid** or who have been subjected to unsympathetic remarks from colleagues regarding their time off sick have revealed they feel they have no choice but to leave the profession. **School staff worried about the health risks** of coronavirus also say they are planning to leave teaching imminently as they believe they are “sitting ducks for reinfection” with the absence of adequate safety measures. See <https://inews.co.uk/news/teachers-quit-covid-treatment-safety-measures-lack-support-1366581>
* A “gap” in safety regulations is blocking schools from **installing ultraviolet technology** which could potentially help curb Covid-19 transmission. Scientists working on a study into the impact of air purification technologies on Covid-19 transmission in classrooms discovered that certain UV (ultraviolet) devices cannot be fitted into schools under current regulations – despite the fact that the machines are used in other settings including hospitals. While regulations allow the systems to be installed into workplaces, the researchers found that “schools don’t count as workspaces”. See <https://inews.co.uk/news/education/schools-covid-safety-rules-hepa-air-purifiers-filters-uv-ultraviolet-1368353>
* There are concerns that **a lack of covid tests will delay the return of children to schools or cause issues for testing once the schools have returned.** The DfE announced in November that secondary schools in England would need to test all pupils twice on site before they can return to the classroom. Schools have been given flexibility over when to carry out the tests, with many expected to spread out returns over the latter half of next week. **ASCL** said: “Schools and colleges are able to order lateral flow device test kits through an online ordering system … These orders are due to be delivered in the week commencing 3 January, and we have not been notified by the government of any issues affecting supply.” Several headteachers said they had stockpiled enough kits to test pupils, but feared that shortages of tests for teachers and other essential school staff such as caterers were likely to be a bigger problem. A DfE spokesperson said the government had delivered 28m test kits to schools in the final two weeks of last term. “Schools and colleges use a different priority supply route to get their lateral flow tests. Most kits have already been received for the start of the new term and we have emergency arrangements in place to make sure every school has the testing it needs”.

The **NEU** has called for teachers to be among the groups given priority, amid these concerns about whether sufficient tests will available as the new term starts next week. “If schools are the top priority, as Boris Johnson has said they are, there is a case for teachers being a priority group so that they can test themselves, so they can be in school educating pupils.”

* Many schools will not be able to afford to employ the **ex-teachers the government has encouraged to come back to classrooms** to "plug gaps" caused by surging Covid absences, headteachers and supply teacher leaders have warned. Headteachers say that the costs of such a scheme may be unattainable for many schools with supply budgets already stretched, as the Omicron variant is expected to create even further disruption next term. There have also been concerns about delays and backlogs to the application process, amid claims that it could be up to 25 days before ex-teachers have been cleared and are ready to go back to the classrooms. Heads also say, "it isn't just a matter of strolling back in". Schools have "really evolved in the last couple of years" and returning to the classroom in January will be "really challenging", because of changes in school culture during the pandemic.

**Student welfare**

* Almost 16,000 children in the UK could be exposed to **domestic abuse** this Christmas, a leading research charity, The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF), has estimated, calling on ministers to commit to funding specialist support services in the new year. It is estimated that 3.2% of under-11s and 2.5% of 11- to 17-year-olds are exposed to domestic violence, which EIF said equated to 15,948 over the two-week festive period, which would be a rise from 15,006 the previous Christmas. See <https://www.eif.org.uk/press-release/rising-costs-put-extra-financial-pressure-on-families-this-christmas>
* An estimated 200,000 children are **at risk of being left homeless** this winter, charity Shelter said. A poll carried out by YouGov for Shelter found that 104,000 families in privately rented homes received eviction notices in the last month, or were behind on their rent and were in danger of losing their homes. Shelter estimated that 55,000 children, along with their families, have already been evicted in the last three months. Shelter’s research also showed that 71% of renting families would struggle to find another home this winter, and 21% say their children knew they were struggling to pay the rent. Of those surveyed, 11% said their children worried about becoming homeless.
* **Teenagers taken into care** in England to safeguard them from exploitation are being put at more serious risk in the care system itself, a report warns. The Commission on Young Lives report said children were moved from their local areas to live in unregulated accommodation targeted by criminals. It said the system was "unfit for purpose" and was letting down the rising number of over 16s in care. See <https://thecommissiononyounglives.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/OUT-OF-HARMS-WAY-CYL-DEC-29-2021-.pdf>
* Analysis has shown the close correlation **between children living in poverty and air pollution** in the UK. See <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/dec/28/labour-highlights-link-between-child-poverty-and-air-pollution>
* Hundreds of **unregistered and illegal schools** known to inspectors are only the “tip of the iceberg”, according to the Ofsted director charged with clamping down on the problem. Unregistered schools operate within a legal loophole that prevents them from being inspected like other schools, which campaigners say makes them a haven for physical and sexual abuse. Victor Shafiee, deputy director of unregistered and independent schools at Ofsted, said the watchdog did not have the resources to handle the problem, nor the legislative backing.

**Education news for schools**

* The DfE has issued “**Join the Mandarin Excellence Programme**” This programme funds and supports schools to deliver intensive Mandarin study, and to develop teachers and help them increase the number of pupils studying Mandarin. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/join-the-mandarin-excellence-programme>
* The DfE has issued “How teachers can **apply for modern foreign language (MFL) curriculum design and pedagogy courses**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/modern-foreign-languages-curriculum-design-courses-apply-now>
* Post-Brexit changes to Britain’s immigration rules have triggered an unprecedented **collapse in bookings for school trips from the continent**, organisers say, with countries such as Ireland and the Netherlands now more popular than the UK. While the pandemic has depressed European school travel in general, the number of short-stay educational visits planned in 2022 to alternative EU destinations where English is widely spoken is significantly higher than inquiries for UK visits. See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/dec/26/school-trips-to-uk-slump-brexit>
* 31 of the 102 multi-academy trusts that function secondary schools have a **two-week October half-term vacation**, in addition to 30 of the nation’s 149 native authorities. This contains three – Kent, Peterborough and Bromley – that are introducing the fortnight break in 2022 for the first time. A head said, “The rationale is quite simple. Without a two-week half-term break, one of the terms is likely to be eight weeks long and to be quite frank everyone is shattered. The first part is the mental wellbeing of teachers. When we ask staff what is the most important thing for their wellbeing, they say the October half-term break. It also gives the opportunity to have more time with families at a time when they can probably afford a holiday without hitting the peak period”
* The DfE has issued “**Accreditation for online education providers**” What the government is doing to make sure that online education providers are of the appropriate quality and meeting the correct standard. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/accreditation-for-online-education-providers>
* The DfE has issued “**Early years foundation stage profile return**: how to submit data. How local authorities should submit data from early years providers to complete the early years foundation stage profile (EYFSP) return”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/early-years-foundation-stage-profile-return-how-to-submit-data>
* For Ofsted **pen portraits of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs),** see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-pen-portraits-of-her-majestys-inspectors-hmis>

**Post 16**

* ESFA has updated its **College financial planning handbook and financial plan**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/financial-planning-handbook>

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