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**264 Academy and School News and Resources Update, April 14-19 2024**

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**Attendance**

* **Attendance.** Due to the majority of schools being closed for Easter in the week commencing 1 April, the latest data relates to the week commencing 25 March. This release covers the 2023/24 academic year up to 28 March 2024. Friday 29 March 2024 is excluded from statistics as it is a Bank Holiday**. The attendance rate (proportion of possible sessions attended) was 91.7% across all schools in the week commencing 25 March 2024**. The absence rate was, therefore, 8.3% across all schools. **By school type**, the absence rates across the week commencing 25 March 2024 were:
  + 6.4% in state-funded **primary** schools (4.4% authorised and 2.0% unauthorised)
  + 10.6% in state-funded **secondary** schools (6.0% authorised and 4.6% unauthorised)
  + 13.9% in state-funded **special** schools (10.3% authorised and 3.6% unauthorised)

**The data shows that the attendance rate across the academic year to date was 93.0%.** The absence rate was, therefore, 7.0% 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)
  + 8.8% in state-funded **secondary** schools (5.5% authorised and 3.3% unauthorised)
  + 12.9% in state-funded **special** schools (9.9% authorised and 3.1% unauthorised)

**Persistent absence rate** 20.2% By school type

* **Primary** 15.5%
* **Secondary** 25.4%
* **Special** 37.1%
* **A total of 28 per cent of Year 11 students were persistently absent during the autumn and spring terms, according to analysis by FFT Education Datalab**. The data shows the rate has only slightly fallen from the 29 per cent recorded as missing 10 per cent or more half days of schooling (sessions) for the same period last year, despite government efforts to improve attendance. Persistent absence was only 15 per cent over the autumn and spring terms in 2018-19, before the Covid pandemic lockdowns. Almost half of disadvantaged GCSE students (46 per cent) missed 10 per cent or more of sessions during the autumn and spring terms (compared with 48 per cent last year), and 27 per cent missed 20 per cent or more sessions. Year 11 students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and an education, health and care plan (EHCP) had a persistent absence rate of 47 per cent, while those receiving SEND support had a 43 per cent persistent absence rate, according to the FFT data. Nearly one-third of SEND students with an EHCP missed 20 per cent or more of their sessions across the spring and autumn terms. And more than half of Year 11 students (57 per cent) who were both FSM6 and had an EHCP were persistently absent, according to the data.

**Overall absence after the pandemic** has remained stubbornly high despite the government’s efforts to tackle the issue. Secondary students across all year groups have missed 9 per cent of school sessions so far this year (compared with 9.2 per cent last year and 5.2 per cent in 2018-19). There has been a greater improvement in attendance in primary schools, with pupils missing 5.7 per cent of sessions during the autumn and spring terms, compared with 6.3 per cent last year. However, the rate is still well above the 3.9 per cent recorded pre-pandemic. Authorised absence due to illness is still the most common reason why students are missing school and a slight reduction in this is the main driver behind the improvement in primary attendance, FFT said. However, unauthorised absence among secondary school students has not reduced at all compared with last year (3.5 per cent this year compared with 3.4 per cent). See <https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2024/04/pupil-absence-in-spring-term-2024/>

**RE**

* **Ofsted has published a subject report looking at how religious education (RE) is being taught in England’s schools**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/subject-report-series-religious-education>
* Leaders are keen to improve the quality of education in RE. However, evidence shows that there has been little progress since Ofsted’s last subject report in 2013. The report finds there is still a lack of clarity on the curriculum and recommends that government should provide better guidance about what should be taught and when.
* The RE curriculum is often superficially broad and lacks depth. Where the curriculum tries to cover many religions, pupils generally remember very little. Where the curriculum prioritises depth of study, pupils learn much more. The RE curriculum “often lacked sufficient substance to prepare pupils to live in a complex world”
* In secondary schools, teachers focus too much on what pupils need to know for exams.
* Schools should also “develop manageable assessment methods that move beyond the simple recall of factual information”.
* A significant proportion of schools do not meet the statutory requirement to teach religious education at all stages of a pupils’ journey through school. DfE should “urgently” update guidance for schools about its statutory expectations for RE, to ensure “appropriate clarity” about what is taught and when and where this happens. Schools should ensure the curriculum for statutory non-examined RE at key stages 4 and five is “ambitiously and consistently implemented”. They should also make sure there is a “a distinct curriculum in place for teaching RE at all key stages” which is “rigorous and challenging”.

**Recommendations**

* Make sure there is a distinct curriculum in place for teaching RE at all key stages. This should be rigorous and challenging and it demonstrably build on what pupils already know.
* Leaders in secondary schools should design the curriculum to meet or exceed exam board specifications, rather than be driven by them.
* Make sure that all teachers have the subject and pedagogical knowledge that they need to teach RE well. The “overwhelming majority” of teachers had not received subject-based professional development in RE
* Organise the timetable for RE so that gaps between teaching are minimised.
* Provide opportunities for pupils to review and build on important knowledge over time. Pupils should be able to use the knowledge that they gained in previous years as the curriculum becomes increasingly more complex and demanding.

**Public examinations**

* **Ofqual has issued a letter to school and college heads about the 2024 summer exam series**, highlighting the resources available to support students and reiterating the approach to grading in 2024. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-to-schools-and-colleges-april-2024>
* DfE has issued “**Information for schools about secondary school accountability measures, including Progress 8 and Attainment 8**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/progress-8-school-performance-measure>
* DfE has updated “**16 to 18 school, college and multi-academy trust performance data in England: 2022 to 2023**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/16-to-18-school-college-and-multi-academy-trust-performance-data-in-england-2022-to-2023> This has updated performance table data for each institution and trust which you can access at <https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/>
* For a **full collection of all the performance tables back to 2010**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-performance-tables>
* Related to the above DfE has issued “**A level and other 16 to 18 results: 2023 (revised)**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/a-level-and-other-16-to-18-results-2023-revised>
* Average A level result, B- An increase from C+ in 2018/19 (34.01 points to 35.29 points)
* A level retention, 93.6% An increase of 2.3ppts from 2018/19
* Average applied general result, Merit+ This is the same as in 2018/19 (28.91 points to 29.56 points)
* Applied general retention, 87.2% An increase of 0.7ppts from 2018/19
* Average tech level result, Merit+ This is the same as in 2018/19 (28.64 points to 28.52 points
* Tech level retention, 88.3% An increase of 0.4ppts from 2018/19)
* Average point score per entry (APS) is lower than 2021/22, across all cohorts. This is as expected with the return to pre-pandemic grading.
* Gaps between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students have decreased in comparison to last year; the widest gap is seen for the A level cohort.
* Female students perform better than male students for all level 3 cohorts, but gaps have decreased since 2021/22.
* The rank order of attainment by ethnicity has remained almost unchanged at A level through the Covid-pandemic; the Chinese ethnic group have the highest APS and the Black or Black British ethnic group has the lowest APS.
* For A level and applied general cohorts, the decrease in average point score (APS) this year affected all major institution types (other FE sector colleges, sixth form colleges, all independent schools and all state-funded schools), however they remain slightly higher than in 2018/19.
* There was an overall rise in the number of below level 3 entries across both English and maths compared with 2021/22. This follows the return of the summer exam series in 2021/22 and a drop in the proportion of pupils achieving grades 4 or above in English and maths GCSE during key stage 4.
* The percentage of students who completed their main or ‘core’ aim from their study programme, known as the retention rate, decreased across all programmes in 2022/23. The fall in retention is likely linked to the rise in students entering level 3 qualifications following the higher GCSE attainment achieved in 2020 (Centre Assessment Grades, CAG) and 2021 (Teacher Assessed Grades, TAG).
* Ofqual has issued “**Statistics on the number of appeals against results for GCSEs, AS and A levels and Project qualifications for November 2022, January 2023 and summer 2023 exam series**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/appeals-for-gcse-as-a-level-and-project-2022-to-2023-academic-year>
  + Overall, 2,570 (0.04%) of the 6.3 million grades issued for GCSEs, AS and A levels were challenged, a 5.9% increase compared with the 2021 to 2022 academic year when 2,430 grades were challenged
  + Overall, 710 (0.01%) of the 6.3 million grades issued for GCSEs, AS and A levels were changed as part of an upheld appeal, a 15.8% increase compared with the 2021 to 2022 academic year when 610 grades were changed
  + The number of appeals received for GCSEs, AS and A levels in the 2022 to 2023 academic year was 1,840. Of these appeals 1,010 (54.9%) were upheld. To note, as it will be explained in the main report, one appeal may cover more than one grade
  + The most common ground for which appeals were received in the 2022 to 2023 academic year for GCSEs, AS and A levels was ‘review of marking - marking error’
  + For Project qualifications, 15 appeals were received in the 2022 to 2023 academic year of which 5 were upheld. Out of the 395 grades challenged for Projects, 40 were changed in the 2022 to 2023 academic year

For all qualifications covered, 73.7% of upheld appeals were associated with a qualification grade change in the 2022 to 2023 academic year

* DfE said it had explored alternative options for producing a progress measure at key stage 4 for 2024-25 and 2025-26 due to the lack of SATs data from the pandemic. But officials have concluded there will be **“no replacement” to the progress 8 measure**. It will instead continue to “publish the remaining headline attainment, entry and destination measures and return to publishing time-series”. But they will continue to provide the most recent available progress 8 scores – so for 2023-24 and 2022-23. DfE said it intends to return to progress 8 in 2026-27, when key stage 2 data is available again. Ofsted will continue to consider a range of data provided in the inspection data summary report, including about the school’s cohort. There is “no single piece of data will determine the outcome of any Ofsted judgement”. Grading will continue to take place as normal next summer.
* Ofqual has updated “**Ofqual guide for schools and colleges 2024.** 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>
* DfE has issued its manual “**Qualifications funding approval manual**: from August 2025”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/qualifications-funding-approval-manual-2025-to-2026>
* Ofqual has issued “**Summer awarding data: guide to the data submission process**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/summer-awarding-data-guide-to-the-data-submission-process>

**Exclusions**

* The DfE has issued “**Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England**: **spring term 2022 to 2023**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/suspensions-and-permanent-exclusions-in-england-spring-term-2022-to-2023>

**Suspensions number and rates increased compared to previous terms**

* There were 263,904 suspensions in spring term 2022/23. This is an increase compared to both the autumn term 2022/23, when there were 247,366 suspensions, and the previous spring term 2021/22, when there were 201,090 suspensions. Suspensions are typically higher in autumn term than in spring and summer so spring 2022/23 is a change from that trend and the highest recorded number of termly suspensions.
* The rate of suspensions was 3.13, equivalent to 313 suspensions for every 10,000 pupils. The rate in the previous spring term, 2021/22, was 2.40.

**Permanent exclusions increased in comparison to the previous year**

* In spring term 2022/23 there were 3,039 permanent exclusions. This is a decrease compared to 3,100 in the autumn term 2022/23, but an increase on the previous spring term 2021/22 when there were 2,200 permanent exclusions.
* Permanent exclusions are typically higher in autumn term each year than the subsequent spring and summer terms so spring term 2022/23 is consistent with that trend.
* The rate of permanent exclusions is 0.04, equivalent to 4 permanent exclusions for every 10,000 pupils. This is similar to rates seen before the pandemic, which remained around 0.03 and 0.04.

The most common reason for suspensions and permanent exclusions was **persistent disruptive behaviour**. This is in line with previous terms and years where this reason was the most commonly recorded.

* You can see **exclusion data back to 2010** at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-exclusions> and an **Exclusions statistics guide** at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/exclusions-statistics-guide>

**RSE**

* **The annual Young People’s RSE Poll finds that the quality of provision in schools has improved but many young people are still not learning about key issues**. The results show that 50% of the respondents said that their RSE at school was “good” or “very good” Broken down by issue, a majority of the respondents reported good coverage of topics including puberty (79%), sexual consent (71%), sexual harassment (64%), STIs (62%), and sexual orientation (57%). However, many report not being taught enough about key issues including pornography (49%), power imbalances in relationships (49%), how to access local sexual health services (46%), healthy and unhealthy/abusive relationships (40%), STIs (35%), sexual harassment (33%), sexual orientation (38%). Within this, 23% of the students said they were taught nothing at all about pornography at school. While “school” still ranks as the main source of information across all topics, 16% of young people said they learnt about pornography while watching it, while 22% said their main source of information about pornography was social media and other websites. When it comes to consent, 14% said they turned to social media or other websites for information. Indeed, social media and websites were the main source of information on a number of topics for a significant minority of the respondents including for healthy and unhealthy relationships (18% and 21%), sexual health (18%), and LGBT+ issues (34%). Nearly four out of 10 of the respondents (39%) said that it would have been better if RSE had started earlier in their life with the introduction of key topics at primary school including consent (81%), the harms of pornography (73%), questioning and challenging stereotypical ideas about how girls and boys should behave (69%), and examples of same-sex relationships (56%). See <https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/resources/evidence/young-peoples-rse-poll-2024>

**Early years, childcare and primary**

* **Almost two-thirds (64 per cent) of pupils excluded in primary school were persistently absent once they reached secondary**, according to research from children’s mentoring charity Chance UK. The report found **88 per cent of pupils who were permanently excluded in primary school don’t go on to achieve a grade 4 in English GCSE,** compared to 25 per cent of pupils without a suspension or exclusion. In **maths**, 80 per cent of pupils permanently excluded in primary **don’t go on to achieve a grade 4 in GCSE**, compared with 27 per cent of their peers. The charity’s report warned that exclusions “**start a devastating never-ending cycle of difficulties for the child**”. The study found that almost all (97 per cent) of pupils excluded at primary school had a special educational need or disability (SEND). More than two-thirds (67 per cent) of pupils with an exclusion or suspension at primary school had also been on free school meals. And almost six in 10 pupils were identified as a ‘Child in Need’ by social services during their school life, the report found. See <https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2024/04/the-consequences-of-primary-school-exclusions/>
* **England’s childcare system is failing and falling behind those of much of the rest of the world**, a UK charity for gender equality and women’s rights has said. The Fawcett Society said childcare in England was failing on several fronts: affordability, quality and levels of public spending. The charity looked at early childhood education and care (ECEC) provision in Australia, Canada, Estonia, France, and Ireland – all countries that have recently completed or are undergoing government-led transformation in the sector – and found England’s childcare fell short in ambition and delivery. “Our childcare is some of the most expensive in the world and it isn’t working. Research shows that 85% of mothers struggle to find childcare that fits around their work and one in 10 have quit jobs due to childcare pressures”. See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/apr/15/childcare-in-england-failing-and-falling-behind-much-of-world-charity-says>
* **This month, eligible working parents of 2-year-olds were given 15 hours of government-funded childcare**. The latest data reveals that 195,355 two-year-olds are already benefitting from these government-funded places, with 79% of codes issued having now been validated by providers so far. Neil Leitch, from the Early Years Alliance, says what the figures do not reveal "is whether families have been able to access all the days and sessions they need". "A parent who has been given one day a week at their local setting - but needs five - may technically have a funded place, but not one that meets their needs," he explained.

**The government has also published projections for the additional places and staff needed for the wider rollout**. The policy has a phased rollout, with 15 hours per week for 38 weeks a year offered to eligible two year-olds from April 2024 and to eligible children under two from September 2024. The new entitlement will be offered in full from September 2025, when the offer expands to 30 government-funded hours for children from 9 months old to when they start school The DfE estimates that just 15,000 additional places – an increase of 1% - will be needed for this September. Around 70,000 further places are likely to be needed for September 2025. A total of 40,000 additional staff compared with 2023 are required by September 2025. Parents with a preferred provider are urged to secure their place for September now, ahead of when applications open for eligible working parents of 9-month-to-23-month-olds on 12 May. Parents will be able to apply for codes for September until 31 August. The government has today updated the process to make sure all eligible working parents can apply, regardless of whether they are in work or on parental leave.

To further increase capacity, a new pilot is also beginning this summer to **explore how unused school space could be repurposed to support childcare settings to offer more places.** The school space pilot this summer involves matching a small number of private, voluntary, or independent childcare providers with surplus school and college space. If the pilot is a success, the government will roll it out widely ahead of September 2025, helping fast-track the process for schools, colleges and childcare providers. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-childcare-rollout-on-track> For “**Early education entitlements and funding**”, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-education-entitlements-and-funding> For a research report, “**The impact of childcare reforms on childcare and early years providers**”, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-impact-of-childcare-reforms-on-childcare-and-early-years-providers>

* STA has issued “**Pre-key stage 1 standards**”. Pre-key stage standards are for pupils who are working below the overall standard of national curriculum assessments, but who are engaged in subject-specific study. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-key-stage-1-standards>
* STA has issued “**The engagement model**. For teachers to use as an assessment tool for pupils working below the standard of national curriculum tests”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-engagement-model>
* DfE has issued its manual “**Early years census**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complete-the-early-years-census>
* **Capita will no longer manage SATs tests** after exam board Pearson won the contract worth up to £180m; Pearson will be the preferred supplier from September 2025
* STA has issued “**Primary school progress measures: information for schools and parents**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/primary-school-progress-measures-information-for-schools-and-parents>

**School funding and finance**

* Any teacher pay rise above 2-3 per cent will be “unaffordable” for many schools this year, MAT leaders have warned after receiving letters setting out **“deeply troubling” and “spectacularly inadequate” funding levels for next year.** The warning has come after trusts recently received their general annual grant (GAG) statements for 2024-25 - which leaders say won’t be enough to fund a satisfactory pay award for teachers. Some trusts have warned that awarding a pay rise of just 1 per cent would leave some schools in the red and facing making staff cuts - but they believe the level set needs to be higher or teacher strikes will be “unavoidable”. Leaders have said the government will have to issue a teacher pay funding grant again this year to ensure schools can survive without having to make “further cuts in provision to balance the books”. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/any-pay-rise-unaffordable-mat-chiefs-warn-dfe>
* In a poll by the NFE on behalf of the Sutton Trust, 74 per cent of primary school senior leaders reported having to **cut TAs this year**. And 41 per cent of leaders in secondary said their school has had to cut teaching assistant roles. More than one-third of secondary senior leaders surveyed said they had to cut **teaching staff** (38 per cent), compared with 31 per cent of primary school leaders. Many respondents also reported having **used their pupil premium funding** to plug gaps in their budgets. Half of primary school leaders said their school had done this - an increase from 42 per cent last year. See <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/school-funding-and-pupil-premium-2024/>
* **Nearly one-third of parents think school funding cuts are having a negative impact on their children’s education**, a poll shows. And two in three parents believe that cuts have had a big impact on schools, according to the survey commissioned by the charity Parentkind. More than three-quarters of parents surveyed said they would like spending on schools to be a priority for the next government, behind only funding for the NHS. Furthermore, six in 10 said they would prefer to see school spending increased rather than having their taxes reduced. More than half of the parents felt that schools were getting a bad deal in terms of public spending. This number included 40 per cent of the parents surveyed who said they vote Conservative. A majority of parents reported they would support a windfall tax, increasing the 45p rate of income tax or a one-off wealth tax to raise money for schools. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/3-10-parents-say-school-funding-cuts-hitting-childs-education>

**EPI report on school grouping and organisation**

* An **EPI report** has found that:
* **Large MATs have the highest teacher turnover rates**, and a higher rates of workforce turnover than local authorities. The difference is starkest among secondaries, with annual turnover rates standing at 16.9 per cent in academies, compared to 14.4 per cent in council-run schools. For larger MATs with 10 or more schools, this rose to 19.5 per cent. 37.4 per cent of teachers working in secondary academies in 2016-17 left their positions by the end of 2019-20. The figure local authority-maintained schools stood at 32.7 per cent. However big trusts are more likely to take over failing schools, have larger numbers of disadvantaged pupils and may have more schools in urban areas – which could all have an impact. The research suggested that outcomes are lower overall where turnover is higher. However, disadvantaged children tended to “achieve similar progress” in schools where staff movement was high. And there was no such correlation found with turnover and outcomes in primary schools. EPI also says “teacher turnover isn’t necessarily a bad outcome, if for example schools are adept at identifying and retaining only high-quality” employees.
* **EPI also found that larger MATs (with 10 or more schools in a phase) have, on average, higher rates of persistent absence, suspension, and unexplained exits than smaller MATs and local authorities**. However, these larger MATs admit greater rates of disadvantaged pupils and have higher attainment outcomes for low prior attaining and disadvantaged pupils. Primary school groups linked to dioceses (MAT and non-MAT) have intakes that are less representative of their local area. However, they have relatively low levels of persistent absence and relatively high overall attainment.​ Internal exclusions are not captured in national data collections but findings from the DEEP survey indicate the use of internal exclusion is more prevalent in secondary schools – less than 3 per cent of sampled secondary schools reported not using internal exclusion at all, in comparison with almost a quarter of primary schools.
* **School groups with the highest overall attainment receive a lower proportion of applications from disadvantaged pupils**, and have lower rates of absence and suspension. On average, small MATs tend to outperform other MATs in terms of both key stage 2 and key stage 4 attainment and attendance, and have lower suspensions. However, they do not perform as well as larger MATs at progressing attainment for disadvantaged pupils in secondary, the report finds.
* The study also showed **academies seem to be in a better financial position than local authority-maintained schools**. Not only are MATs “more likely” to in-year surpluses, but when they do, their balances “tend to be … larger as a fraction of expenditure”. Almost 50 per cent of trusts reported that the reserves from one of their schools had been used to aid another in their chain, with 90 per cent of MATs in the survey used top-slicing; on average they top-sliced around 6 per cent of school budgets. The report said: “At primary, local authorities have in-year balances between -2.5 per cent and +2 per cent, whilst trusts have balances ranging between -8 per cent and 23 per cent of expenditure.”
* The EPI says: “This report shows **there is no identifiable general optimal organisational structure for school groups**. We cannot conclude that, based on performance alone, the MAT structure should be preferred to the local authority model, or vice versa.” The analysis finds that there are often larger differences between two different MATs than between the average MAT and the average local authority. See <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/the-features-of-effective-school-groups/>
* **The EPI has also unveiled the completed version of its online benchmarking tool**. It is designed to compare the performance of individual academy trusts, local authorities, federations and dioceses across four key indicators – pupil attainment, inclusion, workforce sustainability and financial management. See <https://epi.org.uk/epi-tools/>

**Social care and children**

* DfE has issued **“Outcomes for children in need, (CIN), including children looked after by local authorities, (CLA), in England: 2022 to 2023, reporting year ending at March 31 2023**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/outcomes-for-children-in-need-including-children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england-2022-to-2023>
  + Average Attainment 8, 18.3 for CIN
  + Sustained destination, 75% for CIN
  + Persistent absentees, 44.4% for CIN
  + Average Attainment 8, 19.4 for CLA
  + Sustained destination, 79% for CLA
  + Persistent absentees, 20.0% for CLA
  + Pupils in all social care groups were over twice as likely to have a special educational need (SEN) than the overall pupil population. For all children in need (CIN) at 31 March, half had SEN compared to 17.1% of the overall pupil population.
  + 59.8% of CIN at 31 March were eligible for free school meals. This compares to 23.9% for all pupils.
  + Children on a child protection plan (CPPO) and in each of the CIN social care groups at 31 March were half as likely to achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics (combined) at Key Stage 2 compared to the overall pupil population.
  + Children in the key social care groups perform less well than their peers across all Key Stage 4 measures (with their overall average Attainment 8 score being broadly less than half of that of the overall pupil population). Children with SEN have been recorded to have lower average attainment compared to the overall population. As such, the higher prevalence of SEN amongst children looked after (CLA) and CIN in part explains the difference in attainment compared to all pupils.
  + 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 who were looked after for at least 12 months was 20.0%, which was lower than the percentage for the overall pupil population (21.5%). However, as with overall absence, this rate was higher for the other key social care groups.
  + Around one in 10 pupils in 2022/23 have been a child in need in the last 6 years.
* Dating back to 2010, DfE has issued **statistics for CIN**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-children-in-need> **and CLA**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-looked-after-children>
* **Hundreds of extremely vulnerable school-age children in England are being sent to illegal, unregulated homes every year because of a chronic shortage of places in secure local authority units**. An investigation has established that councils placed 706 children, the majority of them under the age of 16, in their care in homes that were not registered with Ofsted, the children’s social care watchdog, in 2022-23. Most of the providers that staff or operate unregulated homes are private companies. The investigation found that providers received nearly £105m from English councils last year – equating to almost £150,000 a child. It is an offence under the Care Standards Act 2000 to operate a children’s home without an Ofsted registration, which the watchdog says prevents unsuitable people from owning, managing or working in homes. But it has been discovered that Ofsted did not prosecute a single provider in 2022-23, despite launching 845 investigations into suspected illegal children’s homes. See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/apr/13/vulnerable-children-illegal-unregulated-care-homes-england>
* One in every 52 children in Blackpool are in care compared with one in 140 across England. **Nine in every thousand children are in care in the north**, compared with six in the rest of England, according to a report by Health Equity North. Child poverty was the main factor in the disproportionate figures, with the north-east having the highest overall care rates, followed by the north-west, West Midlands and then Yorkshire and the Humber. The review of existing research, compiled for the child of the north all-party parliamentary group, found a 27% increase in the number of children’s homes between 2020 and 2023 disproportionately affected the north of England. The north has 1,176 children’s homes – more than 40% of the children’s homes in England – with just 1,704 in the rest of England. There were more than 83,000 children in care in England in 2023, with the report warning the risk of that number rising was high as health inequalities continued to widen and more and more families were falling into poverty, particularly in the north. The rise in child poverty between 2015 and 2020 led to more than 10,000 additional children entering care – equivalent to one in 12 care entries over the period. See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/apr/17/one-in-52-blackpool-children-in-care-as-poverty-soars-in-north-of-england>

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

* **Intensive mentoring for troubled schoolchildren using football kickabouts** can significantly enhance wellbeing, increasing happiness equivalent to an unemployed adult getting a job, a study has found. A project involving more than 2,000 pupils in dozens of secondary schools in Greater Manchester showed that instead of wellbeing declining among pupils at risk of exclusion who had behavioural issues and special educational needs, their happiness scores increased. The charity behind the approach, Football Beyond Borders (FBB), sends mentors, or “coaches”, into schools to act as trusted adults for at-risk children. Part of the coaches’ work is using aspects of football games – such as dealing with anger at being fouled or the pressure of taking a penalty – to teach children how to cope and build better relationships. See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/apr/17/football-based-mentoring-found-to-boost-wellbeing-for-at-risk-pupils-in-england>
* **Young people who spend too much time online are more likely to miss school through illness or truancy**, a study has suggested. Teenage girls appear to be more likely than teenage boys to score highly on excessive internet use, the findings indicate. But a good amount of sleep and exercise and a trusting relationship with their parents appear to go some way to reducing the effects of extreme web use on classroom absences. See <https://adc.bmj.com/content/early/2024/03/12/archdischild-2023-326331>
* Parents in England and Northern Ireland should be **banned from smacking their children** because doing so is unjust, dangerous and harmful, leading doctors have urged ministers. It was “a scandal” that Scotland and Wales had outlawed smacking but not the other two home nations, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health has said. Smacking children made them much more likely to suffer poor mental health, do badly at school and be physically assaulted or abused, it added, condemning the practice as “a complete violation of children’s rights”. The paediatricians want the education secretary, Gillian Keegan, to change the law before the general election expected later this year. All political parties should include a commitment to do so in their election manifestos, they added. See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/apr/17/ban-smacking-children-in-england-and-northern-ireland-say-doctors>
* **Nearly a quarter of UK five-to-seven-year-olds now have their own smartphone**, Ofcom research suggests. Social media use also rose in the age group over last year with nearly two in five *using messaging service* WhatsApp, despite its minimum age of 13. The percentage of children aged between five and seven who used messaging services had risen from 59% to 65%. The communications regulator warned parental enforcement of rules "appeared to be diminishing." See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-68838029>
* Women and girls should be routinely asked about their periods during GP appointments to help improve treatment, health campaigners have said**. Large numbers of girls get such painful and debilitating periods that they cannot eat or sleep, have to miss school or end up bedbound**, according to a new survey by the leading charity Wellbeing of Women. More than 90% of those surveyed said that they had to change their plans due to heavy bleeding. Their sometimes crippling experiences of symptoms show that current advice – for example, that period pains will “settle” as girls get older – is inadequate and needs updating, the charity said. Too many women and girls have symptoms dismissed by health professionals, it added. See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/apr/14/period-problems-gp-advice-uk>
* DfE has issued “Guidance on information sharing for people who provide **safeguarding services to children**, young people, parents and carers”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-practitioners-information-sharing-advice>

**Disadvantaged children and young people**

* **Schools have increasingly stepped in as a fourth emergency service and are now the biggest source of charitable food and household aid for families struggling with the cost-of-living crisis**, a new report suggests. There are more than 4,000 school-based food banks in primary and secondary schools across England, which equates to one in every five schools running one, research shows; it indicates that food banks exist in more than one-fifth (21 per cent) of schools, and this rises to one-third (33 per cent) in schools with high numbers of students from deprived backgrounds. “Teachers and support staff see the devastating effects of poverty and the cost-of-living crisis daily, so they have felt compelled to act. The result is a flourishing patchwork of food banks, pantries and food clubs, which have become well-established, are often highly organised operations distributing more than just food and are an indictment of this country’s retreating welfare state”. See <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/news/2024/april/school-food-banks.html#:~:text=The%20survey%20data%20used%20in,of%20students%20from%20deprived%20backgrounds>.
* **Nationally, 142,000 homeless children are living in places like commercial hotels, converted offices and dingy hostels**, an all-time high, after rents and no-fault evictions have soared across the country. Some children living in dire housing conditions have been woken up by chesty coughs caused by damp, others by the smell of sewage leaking down their walls. Toby\* was woken by rats on his chest. A NEU survey found that 59% of teachers in England and Wales had seen their students experience frequent ill health due to poverty, with housing a major factor. See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/apr/17/rat-bites-and-chronic-asthma-schools-on-frontline-of-uk-housing-crisis#:~:text=Some%20children%20living%20in%20dire,by%20rats%20on%20his%20chest>

**Gender**

* Schools in England and Wales have been warned by one of the country’s leading equality and human rights barristers that **the “toolkit” many of them use to support gender-questioning children is unlawful**. The toolkit, introduced by Brighton and Hove council in 2021 and subsequently replicated by a number of other local authorities, says schools should “respect” a child’s request to change their name and pronoun as a “pivotal” part of supporting their identity, as well as other changes such as switching to wearing trousers or a skirt. See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/13/schools-in-england-and-wales-using-gender-toolkit-risk-being-sued-by-parents>
* For an **article supportive of the Cass report**, see <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/apr/14/hilary-cass-review-gender-trans-young-people-children-nhs-evidence> For a **critical review of the report**, see <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/apr/11/trans-children-in-england-worse-off-now-than-four-years-ago-says-psychologist>

**Financial education**

* Only 1 per cent of primary school teachers believe their pupils have adequate financial skills, a poll shows. **Financial education** should become a statutory part of the primary school curriculum, the Social Market Foundation (SMF) says in a report. The SMF is also calling for financial education to be integrated into initial teacher training. In a survey of primary school teachers for the report, 81 per cent said they did not have enough time to teach financial education. Other barriers to teaching financial literacy in primary school that teachers cited included a lack of resources (43 per cent of respondents), low prioritisation (42 per cent) and lack of expertise (37 per cent). Only 12 per cent of primary teachers and 19 per cent of secondary teachers surveyed said they had taught more than one lesson on financial skills in the past year. A significant minority of teachers said they would not be very confident teaching financial education (36 per cent at primary and 33 per cent at secondary). See <https://www.smf.co.uk/only-1-of-primary-teachers-think-their-students-have-adequate-financial-skills/>

**Climate education**

* **The next government should commission an independent expert review on climate education which is currently “undervalued and underrepresented**”, an exam board has said. Cambridge University Press and Assessment said the expert-led review should collect evidence on the climate knowledge youngsters need, then work out how to embed that into the education system. They claim climate education is “undervalued and underrepresented in the curriculum”. A Teacher Tapp survey commissioned by the organisation found about 35 per cent of 6,100 secondary teachers did not believe they spent enough time teaching the issue. About 40 per cent of these teachers said they required more resources. The DfE previously said the core concepts are taught in primary school, while climate change is covered in science, citizenship and geography in secondary schools. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/clw0jl9l5j2o>

**Ofsted**

* Ofsted has **updated “Inspecting schools: guide for maintained and academy schools**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/inspecting-schools-guide-for-maintained-and-academy-schools>
* Ofsted has issued “**Area SEND inspections**: information about ongoing inspections”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-area-send-inspections-information-for-families>
* Ofsted has issued **a collection of all the reviews by Ofsted looking at the research evidence currently available about different curriculum subjects**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/curriculum-research-reviews>
* Ofsted has issued a reminder of its **Ofsted Big Listen**, which ends on 31.5.24. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/ofsted-big-listen>

**Academies and trusts**

* **The Confederation of School Trusts has issued a report on reforming the funding system,** and suggests government must revamp the national funding formula (NFF) See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Funding-futures-2024-04-1687.pdf>
* ESFA has updated “**Academies chart of accounts and automating the accounts return**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/academies-chart-of-accounts>
* ESFA has updated “**Choosing a trust's financial management system** (FMS)”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/choosing-a-trusts-financial-management-system-fms>
* **Multi-academy trusts should create a “director of SEND**” role to help inclusion, with trusts’ “full potential” to support pupils with additional needs “still to be unlocked”, a new report has found. Interviews with 19 MATs by the NFER found trust SEND leaders play a “pivotal role” by centralising work and providing support to individual schools. NFER said these leaders tend not to mandate particular approaches but provide a framework across the trust’s schools and help SEND co-ordinators (SENCOs), who warned of soaring workload. It also **highlights six key ways in which trusts can better support staff and deliver SEND provision**. See <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/ndrdkvcj/the_mat_factor_embargoed.pdf>

**School management**

* DfE has issued “**Inspection reports on providers of international qualified teacher status (iQTS)**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/iqts-providers-inspection-reports>
* **The government has ended funding for the sector body set up to oversee the teaching schools hub network**. The DfE said it would be “re-purposing” the cash for the Teaching Schools Hub Council and its central team from September. The council, made up of 13 school leaders, supports the national network of 87 hubs, including facilitating networking and collaboration to “enable the sharing of development of best practice”. However, the government made clear in the letter that funding for the teaching school hubs will “continue as planned”. After a reaccreditation process, DfE confirmed last month which teaching school hubs would continue to run from September.
* DfE has issued “**School land: decisions about the disposal of playing field land**. A register of decisions about the disposal of school playing field land”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-land-decisions-about-disposals>
* DfE has issued “**Appropriate bodies guidance: induction and the early career framework.** Guidance on the roles and responsibilities of appropriate bodies”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/appropriate-bodies-guidance-induction-and-the-early-career-framework>
* DfE has issued “How employers and training providers can find **an end-point assessment organisation (EPAO) for their apprentic**e”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/finding-an-end-point-assessment-organisation>
* DfE has updated yet again “**Complete the school census**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complete-the-school-census>
* For the latest **ESFA Updates**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-update-17-april-2024>
* **NGA’s Annual Governance Survey 2024 is now open**. See <https://mailchi.mp/e74e36e479fe/nga-member-newsletter-22-march-164535?e=00b098de7c>
* The cost of expanding academy commissioner teams has risen by 40 per cent in just 12 months, from £24.35 million in 2021-22 to £33.9 million last year. They now cost more than £3,000 for each of England’s academies. Unions are demanding a review of the effectiveness of the **regional director teams**. These civil servants decide on new free schools, trust mergers and intervene in underperforming primaries and secondaries. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/academy-commissioner-costs-soar-by-40-in-a-year/>
* **A Muslim student at a London school has lost a High Court challenge against its ban on prayer rituals**. Michaela School in Wembley was taken to court by the girl over the policy, which she argued was discriminatory. In an 83-page written judgment dismissing the student's case, Mr Justice Linden said: "The claimant at the very least impliedly accepted, when she enrolled at the school, that she would be subject to restrictions on her ability to manifest her religion." See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-68731366>

**Post 16**

* ESFA has issued a non-mandatory audit guide for local authorities to gain assurance that institutions are administering the **16 to 19 Bursary Fund** correctly. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-bursary-fund-audit-guide-for-local-authorities-2023-to-2024-academic-year>
* DfE has issued “How the government will support and intervene to improve **financial resilience and quality in colleges**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/college-oversight-support-and-intervention>
* DfE has updated “**Lifelong Learning Entitlement** (LLE): overview”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lifelong-learning-entitlement-lle-overview>
* DfE has issued “**Post-16 intervention and accountability**. Information about the intervention framework for post-16 education and skills providers”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-intervention-and-accountability>

**Tony Stephens**