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**323 Academy and School News and Resources Update, June 14-20 2025**

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**SEND, special schools and inclusion**

* **The number of appeals to the SEND tribunal was 36 per cent higher this year than for the same period last year according to the latest figures**. There were 24,000 SEND tribunal receipts in the final quarter of 2024-25 - the highest amount of receipts of cases recorded in the government’s data series, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/tribunals-statistics-quarterly-january-to-march-2025/tribunal-statistics-quarterly-january-to-march-2025> In the same period, between January and March of this year, the number of case disposals also rose to their highest number in the time series, at 19,000, and the number of open cases rose to 12,000, representing increases of 34 per cent and 45 per cent respectively. The overwhelming majority of cases find in parents’ favour - with the most recent statistic at the end of last year showing that 95 per cent of cases found in favour of at least some part of the parents’ appeal.
* **The public accounts committee has again urged government to set out its plans to avoid a “financial cliff-edge for hundreds of councils” next year**. Its inquiry into the state of councils’ finances found that while their core spending power had increased in real-terms since 2015, “the amount per person fell over the same period”. A major problem is ballooning spending on SEND, with government estimating overspending on high needs could hit almost £4 billion a year by 2028. Since 2021, a “statutory override” has kept SEND deficits off councils’ main balance sheets. Over half of authorities say they will go bust when the override ends next March; even if these deficits were written off, local authorities would immediately start to accumulate new deficits due to high levels of demand in SEND. The PAC recommended in January that the government set out its plans for the override by March 2025. Ministers said they could not meet that deadline, setting themselves a new one of this summer. But it was confirmed at last week’s spending review the government’s plans won’t now be fully set out until the autumn. See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jun/18/over-half-of-english-councils-face-insolvency-under-5bn-deficit-mps-warn>
* **The government has been urged to investigate free school meal uptake in special schools after new research revealed a quarter of children are currently missing out.** One in four children in special schools eligible for a free meal are not taking it up due to “unmet dietary and eating needs”, according to the Adapt-Ed study led by the University of Hertfordshire. It also found that 1 in 5 infant children in special schools are also not accessing their universal free school meal. This is compared to 1 in 8 infant children in mainstream schools. See <https://www.herts.ac.uk/about-us/news-and-events/news/2025/shocking-proportion-of-children-in-special-schools-not-taking-up-their-free-school-meals>
* Schools should produce **inclusion** audits and follow “enforceable” national inclusivity standards, suggests a new report that sets out a blueprint for “shaping a system that works for everyone”. The Foundation of Education Development (FED), which advocates for a long-term approach to education policy, said a national inclusion framework would help set “consistent and enforceable” expectations for inclusive practice. Despite a national focus on boosting inclusion, there was no “shared statutory definition” of what it meant, it said. See <https://fed.education/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/National-Education-Futures-2025-Digital.pdf> Overall, this report sets out three strategic priorities, developed through cross-sector engagement, that must underpin long-term education strategy: **Inclusion, the Education Workforce, and MAT, School and Partnerships.**

**School buildings**

* Another 250 schools will join the government’s **school rebuilding programme** over the next decade, in addition to the 500 in the existing programme, with £20 billion from ministers’ new 10-year infrastructure strategy earmarked for rebuilds, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-infrastructure-a-10-year-strategy The Treasury has also confirmed that the annual school and college **maintenance budget** will rise from £2.4 billion this year to £2.9 billion by 2034-35. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/infrastructure-strategy-pledges-rebuilds-for-250-more-schools/>
* The UK’s competition watchdog has extended its investigation **into construction companies suspected to have “illegally colluded to rig bids” on contracts for school repairs.** In an update, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) said it was now gathering further evidence as it continues the probe into construction companies, which is focused particularly on roofing contractors. Last year the watchdog opened an initial investigation into suspected bid-rigging in the government’s condition improvement fund (CIF), which provides cash for building maintenance to around 4,500 academies in small trusts, sixth-form colleges and voluntary-aided schools. See <https://www.gov.uk/cma-cases/suspected-anti-competitive-conduct-in-relation-to-the-supply-of-roofing-and-other-construction-services>
* A government fund that has seen than tens of millions of pounds allocated to schools and academies to replace inefficient heating systems and reduce energy bills is being axed. **The Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS), launched in 2020, has been quietly scrapped** after five years and more than £3.8 billion awarded to schools, colleges, local authorities and other public sector organisations. Schools have used the fund to upgrade their estates by fitting air-source heat pumps, installing solar panels and improving insulation. The fourth and final phase of the PSDS was awarded last month, allocating £940 million across the public sector, including £41.8 million to 36 academies across the country. Tens of millions of pounds was also awarded to local authorities, to help with a range of projects including decarbonising LA-led schools. Those projects are expected to run until the end of the 2027-28 financial year. A parallel initiative, the Public Sector Low Carbon Skills Fund (LCSF), which supported organisations to prepare bids and heat decarbonisation plans, was scrapped in May. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/government-ends-school-decarbonisation-grants-scheme/>

**Drugs and alcohol**

* **The NASUWT teaching union has carried out a survey of nearly 4,000 members which warns that drug and alcohol use by students is contributing to disruptive behaviour**. Of the teachers responding to the survey, 13 per cent said they were aware of students using nicotine pouches, also called “snus”, within school, 9 per cent said the same for spice, and 7 per cent said students were drinking alcohol. In addition, 5 per cent of teachers said they were aware of students using other drugs in school, such as cocaine and ketamine. Similar proportions said they were aware of students gambling or using nitrous oxide at school. A much higher proportion of teachers said they were aware of students using these substances outside of school. More than half of teachers (57 per cent) said this for cannabis and alcohol (55 per cent), 30 per cent for nicotine or snus, 25 per cent for nitrous oxide and 16 per cent for other drugs. Nearly three-quarters of teachers said they were aware of students consuming energy drinks at school. See <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/article-listing/drugs-alcohol-pupils-violence-disruption.html>

**School toilets**

* More than one in 10 parents said their children have asked to miss school because of **concerns about school toilets**, a survey has found. A poll of 2,000 parents of school-aged children in the UK found that 17 per cent of parents rated the toilets at their child’s school as unclean. Some 31 per cent of families said they have raised concerns about toilets with school staff, according to the survey for the charity Parentkind. However, when parents do complain about the state of the toilets at their child’s school, 43 per cent say nothing changes. While 12 per cent of primary school parents told the pollsters that their child’s school toilets were unclean, this jumped to 25 per cent of parents with a child at secondary school. Parentkind estimates that about 4,300 schools are struggling to maintain toilet cleanliness, with 42 per cent of parents saying they are worried that the state of some school toilets is affecting their child’s ability to “concentrate” in class. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/horror-toilets-make-pupils-ask-miss-school-parents-say>

**From the DfE**

* Facing **education questions in the House of Commons**, education secretary Bridget **Phillipson did not rule out the government restricting education, health and care plans (EHCPs) to just special schools**, when asked about this by the opposition. Other issues raised:
* DfE defended that primary school teachers would not be included in the government’s pledge to recruit 6,500 new teachers. The DfE said that the government is more a “third of the way” towards achieving its 6,500 new teachers pledge. There are now 2,300 more teachers in schools and over a thousand more in training. However, it did not shed any new light on the “baseline” against which the 6,500 extra teachers target is being measured
* The plan to publish a SEND White Paper in the autumn was criticised for being too late
* DfE said that increased space in rural primary schools is an “opportunity” to deliver more specialist provision in mainstream setting
* The opposition criticised the government for allowing primary school pupils to use computers and tablets for tests, which she said is “normalising screen time for young children”. The Reception baseline test is going digital from this September.
* DfE reiterated the government’s position that it is up to schools to decide whether they ban mobile phones.

See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/bridget-phillipson-does-not-rule-out-restricting-ehcps-special-schools-send-reform>

**Climate change**

* The DfE has reviewed how **climate change risk** could impact education delivery. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/impact-of-uk-climate-change-risk-on-the-delivery-of-education>
* Nearly 60 per cent of secondary school sites are at high risk of **flooding** from surface water, as well as nearly two in five secondary school buildings. Primary schools are slightly less likely to be flooded - a third are on sites that are at high risk of flooding, while 20 per cent are at high risk of seeing buildings flood. The risk from river and sea flooding is much lower, with only 6 per cent of secondary school sites at high risk of this. The DfE has previously committed to reducing the flooding risk in 800 schools by 2026 The DfE said it had invested in reducing flooding in 573 schools by the end of the 2023-24 financial year.
* Global **temperatures** are already 1.2C above those seen between 1850 and 1990. This is estimated to be causing some pupils to lose 6.7 days of learning a year “due to more subtle increases in temperature resulting in a decreased ability to learn over the course of a typical academic year”. If temperatures increase to 2C above the baseline by 2050, that would result in an estimated 8.2 days of lost learning a year, the analysis says. And if temperatures increase by 4C above the baseline by 2100, there would be on average of 7.8 extreme heat days per year, where temperatures could reach or exceed 35C in some schools, according to the findings. This would result in an estimated 11.4 days of lost learning “In the longer term, without the implementation of any adaptation measures, students could potentially lose up to 12 days of learning per year on average, as result of generally warmer temperatures and not just from extreme heat,” the DfE said

**Teacher recruitment**

* DfE has updated “**Routes to QTS for those with non-UK teaching qualifications or experience and UK citizens with teaching experience who live overseas.**” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-qualified-teacher-status-qts-if-you-teach-outside-the-uk>
* DfE has issued “**Find out how to obtain qualified teacher status (QTS) to teach in a maintained school or non-maintained special school in England**.” See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/qualified-teacher-status-qts>
* DfE has issued “Find out what a **teacher reference number (TRN)** is and how to find or request one.” See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teacher-reference-number-trn>
* DfE has updated “**Apply to provide international qualified teacher status**.” See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-to-join-the-international-qualified-teacher-status-pilot>
* The DfE asked teacher trainers in April to “respond” to a “high level of interest” by **considering more offers and expanding training cohorts**. The government is under pressure to deliver on its flagship promise to recruit 6,500 more teachers. But a poll of 182 school-based teacher training providers (SCITTs) this month found nearly 90 per cent “concerned” about applicant quality. More than 70 per cent said quality was “decreasing”, while 22 per cent said it remained the same. NASBTT, which represents SCITTs and which ran the poll, said pressuring trainers into accepting unsuitable applicants “risks swapping a **crisis of quantity for a crisis of quality**”. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/teacher-quality-warning-over-dfe-recruitment-boost-plea/>

**School management**

* DfE has updated “**Local authorities planning calendar 2025 to 2026**.” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authorities-planning-calendar-2025-to-2026>
* DfE has issued a large collection of documents, “**Buying for schools: things to consider before you start**.” See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/buying-for-schools-things-to-consider-before-you-start>
* DfE has issued “**Use a Department for Education (DfE) approved framework agreement to help you buy goods and services for your school**.” See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/find-a-dfe-approved-framework-for-your-school>
* DfE has updated “**Lists of local authorities seeking academy and free school proposers, and of all academies and free schools already set up**.” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-school-proposals>
* For the latest **DfE Update**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfe-update-18-june-2025>
* DfE has issued a guide, “What children should learn about **water safety** at school.” See <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2025/06/drowning-prevention-week-what-children-learn-about-water-safety-at-school/>
* DfE has issued “**Hot weather and heatwaves: guidance for schools and other education settings**.” See <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2025/06/hot-weather-and-heatwaves-guidance-for-schools-and-other-education-settings/>
* DfE has updated “Guidance for schools and local authorities on funding for the **breakfast club early adopter schools from April 2025**.” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/breakfast-club-early-adopters-grant-2024-to-2025-academic-year>
* Information on the **sport and enrichment offers** of every state school in England will be published on the government’s **School Profiles tool** that is expected to be piloted in the 2025-26 academic year. The DfE described School Profiles as a “one-stop shop” for school information and said the tool would bring together Ofsted report card information alongside “a range of up-to-date performance data and other information that matters to parents”. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/sport-and-enrichment-offer-every-state-school-be-published>

**Academies and trusts**

* Two multi-academy trusts are proposing to merge to create the largest primary and special school trust in England, made up of 47 academies. If approved, the plan would see **Ebor Academy Trust and Nexus Multi Academy Trust** come together, with a new MAT formed by September 2026.
* DfE has updated “**Academies chart of accounts and automating the accounts return**.” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/academies-chart-of-accounts>
* **The DfE is inviting leaders to join a multi-academy trust CEO reference group to advise the government**. The group will be “supported” by the Confederation of School Trusts (CST. The first meeting is set to take place on 15 July. We await more details on the group and how many CEOs will be on it.
* Pupils who spent up to half a year in **isolation rooms** are challenging a trust’s use of a behaviour policy that they claim failed to consider the impact on their wellbeing. But lawyers for the GORSE Academies Trust have defended its “positive discipline” policy, and insist the use of isolation rooms has helped to improve the behaviour of the pupils now challenging the practice in court. The High Court in Leeds is considering a judicial review against the “repeated isolation and suspensions” of three pupils at John Smeaton Academy when they were aged between 12 and 14. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/trust-legal-challenge-over-child-in-isolation-for-half-a-year/>

**Education news for schools**

* For a list of **all those involved in education who received honours in the King’s birthday honours list**, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Kings-Birthday-Honours-2025-Schools-Week-List.pdf>
* Edurio has issued a “**Pupil Happiness at School Guide**”, <https://home.edurio.com/resources/insights/pupil-happiness-at-school/> In Edurio’s Pupil Experience survey, with responses from over 130,000 pupils, it has identified a troubling national trend: happiness is falling, particularly in secondary and sixth-form settings. This guide reveals what those award-winning schools do differently and how you can adapt their practices to your context.
* For the winners of the **silver Pearson National Teaching Awards**, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/teachers-heads-and-schools-among-93-pearson-national-teaching-awards-silver-winners/>
* For those planning a **school trip to the RSC**, for details of future shows, see <https://www.rsc.org.uk/whats-on/>
* For the latest **SecEd Best Practice Bulletin**, see <https://email.sec-ed.co.uk/q/12Jpfhcqlf7ctd5PODS0Qkob/wv>
* Children with a **lazy eye** are being increasingly missed for treatment, experts say, in areas where early screenings are not available in schools. Some councils are unable to offer the service due to capacity or budget constraints, according to the Local Government Association (LGA), which is calling for increased funding. The British and Irish Orthoptic Society (BIOS) says screening for amblyopia, the medical name for the lazy eye condition, should be provided in all schools in England, as it is in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The condition, where one eye is weaker than the other, is corrected using patching, but treatment works best before the age of seven. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cgq78y8w234o>

**Public examinations**

* Exam boards are to explore taking action over the “emerging issue” of social **media influencers claiming they can predict exam questions**. A snap poll by Student Room of around 200 youngsters showed more than half had adjusted their revision after viewing social media prediction videos. Some of the social media accounts also sell predicted papers. Teacher Tapp figures show 27 per cent of 4,500 teachers had heard of pupils buying “predicted” papers or what they believed were leaked copies of upcoming exams. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/exam-boards-consider-action-over-social-media-predictions/> for more detail on this issue
* The number of students entering **GCSE statistics** has almost doubled since 2021, the latest data reveals. Some 35,175 students will sit GCSE statistics exams this summer - a 96 per cent increase since 2021 The trend comes amid a surge in popularity for **A-level maths.** Last year A-level maths surpassed 100,000 entries - the first subject to do so - with more than 107,000 students taking the subject. However, between 2020 and 2024, the number of state school students who entered maths increased from 72,287 to 80,922, while the percentage achieving grades A\* to C dropped from 84 per cent to 74.6 per cent. Last year the proportion of students who did not achieve **a grade 4 in maths at GCSE** increased to 40.4 per cent, up from 33.6 per cent in 2020. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/gcse-statistics-exam-entries-almost-double>
* AQA has advocated for a gradual shift to **digital invigilation** using AI-enhanced cameras, a system whereby AI-enhanced cameras flag up concerns to human invigilators watching via a monitor. AQA foresees cost savings for schools by allowing students to sit in multiple smaller rooms during exams (known as “rooming”), all invigilated via an AI-camera feed, requiring fewer invigilators. However, there is much opposition to the idea, see <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/is-ai-exam-invigilation-the-future-for-gcses-a-levels>

**Post 16**

* **Thousands of university students in the UK have been caught misusing ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence tools in recent years, while traditional forms of plagiarism show a marked decline**, an investigation reveals. A survey of academic integrity violations found almost 7,000 proven cases of cheating using AI tools in 2023-24, equivalent to 5.1 for every 1,000 students. That was up from 1.6 cases per 1,000 in 2022-23. Figures up to May suggest that number will increase again this year to about 7.5 proven cases per 1,000 students – but recorded cases represent only the tip of the iceberg, according to experts. See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/jun/15/thousands-of-uk-university-students-caught-cheating-using-ai-artificial-intelligence-survey>
* DfE has issued “**Dance and Drama Awards guide**.” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dance-and-drama-awards-guide>
* DfE has issued “**Introduction to Qualification Achievement Rates (QARs**). A comprehensive set of QAR resources to offer information and support for training providers.” See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/introduction-to-qualification-achievement-rates-qars> and “**Explains how qualification achievement rates (QARs) are calculated**”, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/qualification-achievement-rates-2024-to-2025>
* **Students in England are finishing their degrees with government loans averaging £53,000**, a jump of 10% in a year, as they increase their borrowing to meet the rising cost of living. The Student Loans Company (SLC) has released figures showing individual loan balances were £5,000 higher in 2024-25 than a year earlier, when the average in England was £48,270. Rising costs also mean **more students are taking on paid work** during term time. A survey published by the Higher Education Policy Institute found 68% of full-time students worked for an average of 13 hours each week, the highest rate in the decade the survey has been conducted. See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/jun/20/students-in-england-graduate-average-debt-increase>

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