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**310 Academy and School News and Resources Update, March 8-14 2025**

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**Early years and primary**

* STA has issued or updated:
	+ **Key stage 2 tests: test administration guidance (TAG**), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-test-administration-guidance-tag>
	+ **Optional key stage 1 tests guidance**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/optional-key-stage-1-tests-guidance>
	+ **Guidance for administering the optional key stage 1 national curriculum tests to pupils with hearing or visual impairments in 2025**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-1-tests-modified-test-administration-guidance-mtag>
	+ **Guidance for administering the 2025 key stage 2 national curriculum tests to pupils with hearing or visual impairments**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-modified-test-administration-guidance-mtag>
	+ **Guidance for completing attendance registers and returning key stage 2 (KS2) test scripts for marking**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-returning-test-scripts>
	+ **Guidance for headteachers, teachers and teaching assistants administering the optional key stage 1 (KS1) national curriculum tests in 2025**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-1-tests-test-administration-guidance-tag>
	+ **Guidance for schools about access arrangements available for pupils participating in the optional key stage 1 (KS1) national curriculum tests in 2025,** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-1-tests-access-arrangements>
* A coalition of education groups is calling on the government to adopt its definition of **school readiness** as it launches a new standard of skills for children starting school. The Starting Reception coalition’s definition of school readiness is an agreed list of suggested skills and activities that the coalition says parents should practise with their children to prepare them for starting school. See <https://startingreception.co.uk/> **For the list of skills**, see <https://startingreception.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Starting-Reception.pdf>

In a recent survey by coalition member Kindred Squared, teachers reported that **only a third of children were school ready**, <https://kindredsquared.org.uk/school-readiness-survey/>

* **Children under eight should not drink slushies containing glycerol, paediatricians have warned**. Public health advice on their safety may need revising after a review of the medical notes of 21 children who became acutely unwell shortly after drinking one of the iced drinks, doctors concluded. See <https://adc.bmj.com/content/early/2025/02/10/archdischild-2024-328109>
* ASCL’s president has criticised the education secretary for promising “parents a nutritious meal and 30 minutes of childcare”, but **expecting schools to deliver breakfast clubs “for less than half the price of a Greggs sausage roll”;** he described the daily funding rate of 60p as “absurd**.**
* A £150 million “arts premium fund” should be set up to develop the existing primary school workforce and train new teachers, according to a report calling for **creativity and the expressive arts to be “at the heart” of the primary curriculum**, <https://www.n8research.org.uk/media/CotN_Arts-Creativity_Report_12.pdf> The Centre for Young Lives think tank and the Child of the North initiative say every primary school should become a “singing school” where music, drama and visual arts are as integral as literacy and numeracy. Teachers should have the time and resources to encourage primary pupils to sing, make music, paint, draw, create, play and act.

**Academies and trusts**

* One of England’s biggest academy trusts has walked away from a long-planned merger with a struggling chain, **sparking concerns that the worsening funding landscape is going to scupper more schools getting support**. Bath and Wells Diocesan Multi Academy Trust bosses revealed this week it does not have enough funding to absorb Beacon Education’s six schools without impacting its current primaries. “Trusts are having to tighten the belt more and more and can’t take risks any more, they can’t even say ‘for a couple of years, we will subsidise this trust’. They don’t have the flexibility within their budgets.” See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/academy-trust-walks-away-from-merger-with-struggling-chain/>
* DfE has issued “Report on **academy school sector expenditure and performance for the year ended 31 August 2023**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/academies-consolidated-annual-report-and-accounts-2022-to-2023> Trusts will want to read this in full, but some **points of interest** are:
* Trusts estimate they have a total net pension liability of almost £2 billion by the end of 2022-23.
* The number of schools converting to academy status in 2022-23 “continued to be lower than pre-Covid”. Over the period 391 made the switch, compared to 371 the previous year. But initial data for 2023-24 shows “conversions are returning to pre-Covid levels”, the report added.
* Fifty-five trusts racked up cumulative deficits in 2022-23. This represents 2.2 per cent of all academy chains. The figure is up from 1.8 per cent (46 trusts) in 2021-22. Forty of those in the red were standalone trusts, while only one had more than 11 schools. In all, 10 trusts had deficits of more than £500,000. Despite this, 423 chains had surpluses of more than £3 million, equating to just over 17 per cent of the sector. The figure stood at just under 16 per cent the year before.
* The DfE’s “approach to school improvement has developed since 2022-23, with less reliance placed on sponsor bodies to support underperforming schools”.
* The value of fraud reported rose to almost £1.8 million in 2022-23, from £795,000 the year before. But £1.7 million (96 per cent) was recovered. In comparison, the “value of fraud reported to the department… relating to local authority-controlled schools was £2.3 million” for the 2022-23 council year. Meanwhile, the number of academy trust data breaches hit a record high. There were 278 incidents across 130 trusts in 2022-23, the highest since 2018-19.
* The number of trusts with at least one member of staff earning over £150,000 – including pension contributions – climbed to 775, from 594 in 2021-22. The papers also show an employee at an unnamed trust was handed between £200,000 to £250,000 as part of an “agreed” exit package. Two others received a sum of between £100,000 and £150,000 following compulsory redundancies.
* Academy consultancy spend also rocketed up to £412 million. About £70 million went toward “non-educational” advice. The figure was the highest seen over the previous four years, rising from £342 million in 2021-22.
* There were 51 instances where the ESFA provided additional support to 49 trusts and one council. Three MATs received more than £1 million in additional financial support during the year. Additional financial support provided during 2022-23 totalled more than £16 million, in a year that continued to see high energy costs and inflation.
* There were 126 warning notices issued during the year - the majority (73) to converter academies. The previous year, 56 warning notices were issued. The year also saw 163 schools issued with an academy order, up from 63 in 2021-22.
* The number of data breach incidents in the sector grew in 2022-23 to 278, affecting 130 trusts. This was a 50 per cent increase on the previous year, when there were 184 incidents, and a 90 per cent rise compared with 145 incidents pre-pandemic. The National Cyber Security Centre estimated that more than three-quarters of the schools it audited in 2022 had experienced a cyberattack incident.
* For a collection of **previous “Academies sector annual reports and accounts**”, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/academies-sector-annual-reports-and-accounts>
* DfE has issued “**What pupil referral units (PRUs) interested in becoming alternative provision (AP) academies should do**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/pupil-referral-units-converting-to-alternative-provision-academies>
* **Academy trusts have begun to receive letters setting out their final funding allocations for the next financial year**, which begins in April. Leaders have spoken of their surprise that their **budgets will rise by about 0.5 per cent per pupil next year, with some saying they will lose money**; allocations were much lower than they expected, and would not cover anticipated cost rises of 3.6 per cent. Various grants from last year to help schools afford pay rises have now been rolled into the national funding formula’s baseline. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/school-budgets-much-worse-than-we-thought-say-leaders/>
* **Academies in England’s biggest MAT will be made shareholders of its parent charity to “guarantee that they can always make their voice heard**”. United Learning Trust will hand local governing body (LGB) chairs “share certificates” giving them the right to speak and vote on binding resolutions at annual general meetings. Trust CEO Sir Jon Coles said the move would strengthen “the voice of local governance” among his 90 academies “in national decision making”. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/trust-makes-schools-shareholders-so-their-voice-always-heard/>
* **CEO pay rises have sparked “inflationary spirals” in some of the biggest-spending trusts** – as the wage gap between academy chiefs and their next-in-command widens by up to £65,000. Schools Week’s annual executive pay investigation has this year included 1,800 trusts, making it probably the largest ever analysis. More than 60 trusts had leaders paid at least £200,000 last year, with 95 per cent of them awarded rises. For the story, and a chart showing the pay of the best paid CEOs, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/revealed-the-academy-ceo-pay-premium/>

**Teacher recruitment**

* The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) as published its **annual “teacher labour market in England” report**, <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/press-releases/government-spending-review-is-last-chance-to-meet-6-500-new-teacher-target-as-unfilled-teacher-vacancies-hit-record-high/> Teacher unfilled vacancy levels are at their highest rates since records began in 2010. Teacher leaving rates have not improved since before the pandemic and more leavers are of working age rather than retiring. This, coupled with persistently low levels of recruitment into initial teacher training, is leading to widespread teacher shortages, with unfilled vacancies reaching six per thousand teachers in 2023/24 – double the pre-pandemic rate and six times higher than 2010/11. **Other findings**:
	+ Ninety per cent of teachers considering leaving teaching in 2023/24 cited high workload as a factor, and pupil behaviour has become one of the fastest-growing contributors to workload since the pandemic.
	+ Trainee recruitment for all except five secondary subjects was below the respective target in 2024/25, and NFER’s latest forecast for 2025/26 shows only five subjects have a reasonable chance of recruiting at or above target.
	+ The impacts of teacher shortages tend to be more acute in schools with a higher proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.
	+ Last year’s 5.5 per cent pay rise, coupled with the previous Government’s introduction of £30,000 starting salaries, have returned starting salaries to 2010/11 levels in real terms.
	+ A lack of access to flexible working arrangements may be contributing to teachers leaving the profession.
	+ The national roll-out of the Early Career Framework (ECF) has had little impact on retention of early career teachers (ECTs).
	+ Growing teacher shortages are leading to increased reliance on unqualified and non-specialist teachers. Slight improvements to recruitment last year were limited to a few shortage subjects - such as biology and chemistry - driven mostly by higher bursaries.
	+ A key policy change in 2022/23, which expanded the list of countries whose teaching qualifications are recognised in England, has re-shaped the pool of international teachers in the workforce. Countries added include Ghana, Hong Kong, India, Jamaica, Singapore and Ukraine. According to the research, future policymaking should sustain this, as international recruitment can be a small, but important, part of new teacher supply.

The report explains that teacher supply policy actions, such as pay rises or workload reductions, typically take a year or two to improve staffing levels, and another year or two to show up in reporting data. It adds that the severity of the teacher supply crisis therefore means **the Spending Review is the Government’s “now or never” opportunity to meet its recruitment pledge of 6,500 new teachers during its five-year term.**

**The report calls for:**

* The School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) to recommend that the 2025/26 teacher pay award exceeds three per cent, and/or strongly signals that it intends to make future recommendations exceeding forecasted rates of average earnings growth.
* The Government to ensure that the Spending Review delivers pay rises in the Schools Budget necessary to increase teacher pay by at least 6.1 per cent from 2026/27 to 2028/29.
* The Government to supplement pay rises with increases in spending on financial incentives targeting shortage subjects.
* The Government to develop a teacher workload reduction strategy to improve retention, that is fully integrated with the wider policy reform agenda.
* Schools to consider whether and how generative AI tools such as ChatGPT could help improve their teachers’ planning workload.
* The Government to develop a new approach for supporting schools to improve pupil behaviour, reinforced by improved external school support services and backed with additional funding in the Spending Review.
* School leaders to consider adopting a wider range of flexible working practices in their schools to improve teacher retention.
* For an article “**Why schools resist flexible working** **(and how to change their minds)**”, see <https://www.tes.com/magazine/teaching-learning/general/how-to-make-flexible-working-work-in-schools>
* DfE has updated “**The organisations accredited to provide ITT courses from September 2024**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/accredited-initial-teacher-training-itt-providers>
* **Teacher retention payments are failing to reach schools in areas facing some of the worst shortages**; in some districts facing specialist teacher shortages, only half of secondaries are eligible for any targeted retention payments, amid criticism that the system is far too restrictive in scope. Some experts want the payments to be better targeted at the schools that are struggling the most rather than relying on the current criteria. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/secondary/teacher-retention-payments-miss-schools-worst-hit-areas>

**SEND**

* Councils across England are paying families thousands of pounds after failing to provide SEND support set out in education, health and care plans (EHCPs). But experts say the **costs can be less than providing the special educational needs provision children are entitled to** – meaning services “rarely improve” The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) investigates complaints from parents about councils’ administrative actions, and can request that councils pay “financial remedy”. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/cheaper-to-pay-fines-than-provide-send-support/>
* **Councils in England urgently need more money to help them pay for school transport for children with special needs.** Many councils say that their obligations under the wider SEND system are financially unsustainable, with the rapid increase in pupil transport costs becoming a particular issue. The number of children travelling has risen by a quarter since 2019, with 31,000 going by taxi, according to the County Councils Network. See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/mar/09/english-councils-spending-twice-as-much-on-send-pupil-transport-as-fixing-roads>
* The education committee **has demanded government set out its plans and timescales for major SEND reforms** after reports a white paper is on the table.
* **Special Needs Uk** provide Parents and educational professionals with in depth information on the schools/colleges/education centres and support groups for children and young adults with special educational needs. See <https://www.specialneedsuk.org/>
* For the report “**Special education schools and colleges in England: Policy and challenges in the special educational needs sector**”, see <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/special-education-schools-and-colleges-in-england-policy-and-challenges-in-the-special-educational-needs-sector/>
* For details about **The National Association of Special Schools**, see <https://www.nasschools.org.uk/> NASS is a membership organisation working with and for special schools in the independent, voluntary and private sectors within the UK.
* **Councils have been given ministerial approval to seize more than £82 million funding from their mainstream schools to prop up widening SEND deficits**. Councils must get approval from the DfE if they want to transfer more than 0.5 per cent from their core schools budget to their high-needs block, or up to 0.5 per cent without schools forum approval. Freedom of information data shows 23 councils requested to “top-slice” funding for 2024-25. Just two were refused – despite nearly half being opposed by school forums. Last year, 23 councils were given approval to slice £67 million. In 2020-21, just three councils were granted no more than £17 million. For details, and a list of the councils transferring money, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/devastating-and-dangerous-schools-hit-by-82m-budget-raid-for-send/>
* **CEOs and school leaders are turning away SEND pupils and the practice “needs calling out**”, the ASCL union head has said. Pepe Di’Iasio said that, while wide-ranging SEND reform was needed, leaders had a “part to play” in creating a “culture that is more inclusive and more open”. Ofsted’s proposed new inspection framework would require pupil attainment in national tests to be “broadly in line with national averages” in order to get a ‘secure’ rating for achievement. “What that will immediately do is put a barrier up to headteachers wanting to have students with SEND and emotional and mental health needs coming into their school.”

**Special schools**

* For an article “**SEND and special school provision: the capacity crisis**”, see <https://www.tes.com/magazine/analysis/specialist-sector/send-and-special-school-provision-the-capacity-crisis> As of 2024, there are 188,426 pupils in special schools, including state and independent settings. This is an increase of 66,772 pupils from 2016 when 121,654 pupils attended these schools, representing a rise of 54.9 per cent. As of 2024, there are 1,830 special schools in England, an increase of 335 compared to 2016, when there were 1,495 schools. This represents a 22.4 per cent rise in special schools - which is less than half of the percentage rise of pupil numbers in special schools. The article gives much more detail on the problem

**Ofsted**

* **Ofsted will “think again” if there is sector-wide opposition to its report card plans** – including another consultation if necessary, the watchdog’s national director has said.
* Concerns have been raised by ASCL that **Ofsted’s plans to inspect inclusion do not include an assessment of how representative a school’s intake is of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in the local area**.

**The National Association for Special Educational Needs** said “To have a whole-school approach that is fully inclusive does mean working against the tide sometimes with the current accountability measures that we have in the system. “It means being a brave leader and doing what is right for the school, rather than what might be seen as the approach that would be favoured if there was an inspection.” See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/ofsted-inclusion-plans-lack-focus-school-admissions-mps-told>

* For “**Martyn Oliver at the SEND and Inclusion Conference: getting it right for everyone**”, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/martyn-oliver-at-the-send-and-inclusion-conference-getting-it-right-for-everyone> He said a school’s leadership cannot be of a high standard unless inclusion is ingrained into its culture. A school is not serving its community if it engages in off-rolling or never takes on disadvantaged or vulnerable children. “Everything we look at will include a consideration of how it works for disadvantaged and vulnerable children.”
* Ofsted has appointed academy trust leader Mark Vickers as an “**external adviser for inclusion**” to help it implement its proposed reforms and boost inspector training. Vickers is CEO at Olive Academies, which runs five alternative provision academies in London and the east of England.
* For an article “**Why Ofsted isn’t serving disadvantaged children**”, see <https://www.tes.com/magazine/analysis/general/why-ofsted-isnt-serving-disadvantaged-children>
* Ofsted’s proposals for school inspection report cards will be **a “sledgehammer” to the government’s efforts to improve teacher recruitment**, the general secretary of ASCL warns. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/ofsted-plans-will-hit-teacher-recruitment-says-ascl-leader-pepe-diiasio>
* Headteachers have voiced concerns that **education consultants are advertising courses costing hundreds of pounds to prepare schools for the proposed Ofsted inspection framework before it has even been finalised**. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/education-consultants-offer-training-on-new-ofsted-system-under-consultation>

**School finances**

* **The School Cuts Coalition** has held a Parliamentary briefing <https://www.ascl.org.uk/News/Our-news-and-press-releases/School-Cuts-coalition-to-hold-parliamentary-briefi> on the parlous state of school finances ahead of the Spring Statement later this month. The coalition’s analysis <https://schoolcuts.org.uk/story/majority-of-schools-to-face-cuts-next-year/> suggests that **increases in funding for 2025/26 will not be enough to cover rising costs for a large majority of schools** – including 76% of primary and 94% of secondary schools. The campaign group forecasts that schools’ costs for 2025/26 will rise by 3.4% – including the government’s proposed unfunded 2.8% pay rise for teachers from September 2025. At the same time, it calculates that mainstream school funding is currently set to increase by just 2.2%.
* ESFA has updated “Guidance for schools and local authorities on **the teachers’ pension employer contribution grant (TPECG) 2024 for March 2024 to April 2025”**. See [https://www.gov.uk/search/all?organisations[]=education-and-skills-funding-agency&order=updated-newest&parent=education-and-skills-funding-agency](https://www.gov.uk/search/all?organisations%5b%5d=education-and-skills-funding-agency&order=updated-newest&parent=education-and-skills-funding-agency)
* ESFA has issued guidance documents:
* **Teachers’ pension employer contribution grant 2024 for schools, high needs settings and local authorities: 2024 to 2025**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-pension-employer-contribution-grant-2024-for-schools-high-needs-settings-and-local-authorities-2024-to-2025>
* **Teachers' pay additional grant 2024 to 2025**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-pay-additional-grant-2024-to-2025>
* **Core schools budget grant (CSBG) 2024 to 2025**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/core-schools-budget-grant-csbg-2024-to-2025>

**Speech and language skills**

* **Teaching has become more difficult because of a rise in pupils starting school with poor speech and language skills since the start of the Covid pandemic**, new polling suggests, <https://reports.gl-assessment.co.uk/lost-for-words/> School staff also fear a lack of such skills are incorrectly identified as problems with maths or literacy, or as behaviour issues. Polling by YouGov for GL Assessment found 89 per cent reported a decline in speech and language skills since the start of the pandemic in 2020, and of those, 92 per cent said this had made teaching more difficult. Almost all teachers surveyed (93 per cent) believe the public do not understand or comprehend the “crisis” in schools, while 76 per cent believe parents are often in denial about any speech and language issues their children may have. Half of primary teachers think up to one in five of their pupils have speech and language issues. They report speech and language issues tend to become apparent as soon as children start school (48 per cent) or beforehand (33 per cent). When asked what they blamed for the decline in speech and language, 58 per cent blamed the deterioration of conversation at home, 47 per cent blamed increased time watching virtual content and 44 per cent cited more time spent online or on social media. In addition, the pandemic, cost of living crisis and cuts to early years funding had likely played a significant role in the decline of children’s early language and communication skills that they need to have the best start in school.

**Energy**

* **Over half of primary and secondary schools’ annual gas and electricity consumption occurs outside of school hours**. This is according to the latest research by Energy Sparks investigating school energy management., <https://blog.energysparks.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Energy-Efficiency-in-School-2023_24.pdf> Common problems included boiler and hot water usage not being scheduled correctly, inefficient security lighting, inefficient fridges and freezers, temporary swimming pools, ICT equipment left on overnight and immersion heaters running constantly The report recommends schools track their energy usage, use timers and controls, empower pupils to use energy saving behaviours and create an energy saving action plan.

**There is a lot of very useful energy saving advice on the Energy Sparks website**, <https://energysparks.uk/>

**From the DfE**

* **From education questions in parliament**:
	+ The curriculum and assessment review panel would publish its interim report in the spring
	+ Curriculum review chair Becky Francis has said “if we’re putting things in, we also need to find things to take out”, acknowledging complaints that it is “overstuffed” in some areas. The DfE gave no ‘reassurance’ that core subjects won’t be cut back
	+ DfE doesn’t give a guarantee that SATs will be kept
	+ The government has appointed a panel of experts to make recommendations on reform of the system. Asked for the timescale for this, DfE told MPs “we will be announcing more details of reform plans this year”. The Guardian has reported a SEND white paper is being planned.
	+ Labour’s policy of introducing VAT on private school fees has prompted warnings it could push pupils out of the system and into state schools that lack capacity. The education secretary said “contrary to all of the scaremongering that we have seen from the private schools lobby more children at national offer day last week got their first choice place”.
	+ At the autumn budget, the government announced a £1.4 billion extension to the school rebuilding programme, which will rebuilt or significantly refurbish 518 schools. But the programme has been slow getting off the ground. The DfE said now that “all projects have been given indicative timelines for delivery based on prioritisation of need, and around half have been commenced various stages of delivery activity so far”.
	+ The Guido Fawkes blog reported last month that the DfE had issued a £90.7 million one-year contract for “advertising and media services” to agency Manning Gottlieb, with a focus on teacher recruitment. It comes after the DfE announced plans last year to “immediately resume – and expand – its teacher recruitment campaign, Every Lesson Shapes a Life. It will also restart its further education recruitment campaign, Share Your Skills.”

**Teacher pensions**

* For details of **changes to Teachers’ Pension Scheme regulations following consultation**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/teachers-pension-scheme-regulations-2024-proposed-amendments> **Pension contributions for most teachers will increase next month under new regulations**. All teachers apart from those on £34,289.99 or lower will see their contribution rate increase by 0.3 percentage points from 1 April. Those earning £34,290 to £45,158.99 will now contribute 8.9 per cent - the increase being equivalent to around £8 per month. For teachers earning £110,000 or more, the increase will be around £17 per month. Currently, employers contribute 28.6 per cent of an employee’s salary to the TPS. See also <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/teacher-pension-contributions-increase-next-month>

**Mobile phones**

* **The government is doing “too little, too slowly” on the issue of mobile phones for children**, the chair of the Commons Education Select Committee has warned. Helen Hayes urged the government to “put a framework in law which can help parents, schools and professionals with mobile phone use”. Her comments came as the government was criticised over a “watered down” second version of what is more informally known as the Safer Phones Bill, which was first introduced by Labour MP Josh MacAlister in October 2024. The Private Members’ Bill initially called for the government to consider a statutory ban on mobile phones in schools, should the non-statutory guidance introduced by the Conservative government be found ineffective. However, Bridget Phillipson dismissed more recent Conservative calls to introduce a complete ban on phones in schools, saying that the “vast majority of schools” already enforce phone bans. Mr MacAlister said that this aspect of the bill had been dropped so that his draft proposed legislation could “secure explicit government backing”. If the bill is passed, it will instruct UK chief medical officers to publish advice for parents on children’s use of smartphones and social media. It will also compel ministers to say within a year whether they plan to raise the age at which children can consent to their data being shared without parental permission. Teacher Tapp research last year showed that only 1 per cent of schools allowed the use of mobile phones at any time, and just 6 per cent of secondaries allowed it at breaks and lunch. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/government-criticised-over-mobile-phones-in-schools> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cq8y7dvw9ddo>

**Maths and Science**

* DfE has issued “**England’s Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study 2023 results**, with an international comparison of performance of pupils in years 5 and 9”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/trends-in-international-mathematics-and-science-study-2023-england> The two reports have much more detail, but these are some of the **key points**
* In 2023, pupils in England performed, on average, significantly3 above the TIMSS centrepoint (500) in mathematics and science in both years 5 and 9. They also performed significantly above the 2023 international mean in both subjects and both year groups. Comparing England’s pupils’ overall performance in 2023 with 2019, year 5 pupils’ performance remained stable in mathematics and improved significantly in science. Year 9 pupils’ performance in mathematics improved but not significantly; in science it improved significantly, following a significant decrease in performance in 2019. Between 2003 and 2023, the mathematics performance of year 5 and year 9 pupils in England improved significantly. The performance of year 5 pupils in science has been more varied but has still seen significant improvement over the 20-year period, while in year 9 science performance has remained broadly stable except in 2019 when it decreased significantly. England’s pupils’ performance in 2023 placed them in a group of countries whose pupils performed below the highest-performers but significantly above the TIMSS centrepoint in mathematics and science in both years 5 and 9. In most of the 5 East Asian comparator countries pupils performed significantly above their peers in England across both subjects and year groups (Chinese Taipei, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Singapore), except for year 5 peers in Japan who performed similarly. In comparison with Hong Kong’s pupils, pupils in England performed significantly below them in mathematics in both years 5 and 9, while in year 5 science they performed significantly above them and in year 9 similarly to them.

**There are worrying difference in gender performance**

* In 2023 the average score for year 5 boys (561) was significantly above that for girls (543) in mathematics in England. This was in contrast to 2019 when, although boys’ average score was above that for girls, the difference was not significant (560 and 552 respectively).
* In 2023, the year 9 boys’ average score (538) was significantly above the year 9 girls’ average score (512) in mathematics in England. This performance of pupils in England was in contrast to 2019 when boys’ and girls’ scores were similar (516 and 514 respectively). The 26 point gap at year 9 “was the largest for any of the countries participating in 2023”.
* There was also a statistically significant gap in science at year 9, with boys achieving an average score of 538 (up from 515), while the average score for girls was 524, up from 515 in 2019.
* The report also found that pupils eligible for free school meals had a lower average score (490 points) than those not eligible (540 points). Again, the gap is “statistically significant”.
* For a useful summary **of other general education findings from the report**, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/teachers-bogged-down-by-admin-and-7-other-timms-2023-findings/>

**Boys**

* The Centre for Social Justice has produced a report,” **Lost Boys”** <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/CSJ-The_Lost_Boys.pdf> What they have uncovered is stark. Boys are struggling in education, more likely to take their own lives, less likely to get into stable work, and far more likely to be caught up in crime. From the day they start primary school, to the day they leave higher education, the progress of boys lags behind girls. The proportion of young men compared to young women failing to move from education into employment or training has been steadily growing for thirty years. 1 Since the pandemic alone, the number of males aged 16 to 24 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) has increased by a staggering 40 per cent compared to just seven per cent or females. 2 For those young men who are in work, the much-vaunted gender pay gap has been reversed. Young men are now out-earned by their female peers, including among the university educated. The growing divergence in boys’ and girls’ outcomes does not only apply to education and employment. We are also seeing a growing divide in the social and political attitudes of the sexes. In Britain, as in countries across the developed world, young men are increasingly drawn to conservative, traditionalist or right-wing political movements, whilst young women become ever more liberal and left-progressive. In an increasingly online existence, boys and girls no longer walk the same path from childhood to adulthood, with their interests, values and aims in life increasingly incompatible with each other. 3 As Britain grapples with an epidemic of family breakdown, millions of boys are deprived of any positive model of manhood. For a very useful article about the report, see <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/mar/09/jobless-isolated-fed-misogynistic-porn-where-is-the-love-for-britains-lost-boys>

**School management**

* DfE has updated its manual, “**Meeting digital and technology standards in schools and colleges**”, see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/meeting-digital-and-technology-standards-in-schools-and-colleges/digital-leadership-and-governance-standards>
* DfE has issued “**Holiday activities and food programme**. Information for local authorities that will receive funding to support disadvantaged children during the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/holiday-activities-and-food-programme>
* DfE has issued “**Managing asbestos in your school or college**”, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-asbestos-in-your-school-or-college> and “**Findings from the asbestos management assurance process (AMAP**), which asked schools and responsible bodies about their asbestos management practices”, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asbestos-data-collections>
* DfE has updated “Access support from **school hubs**. How school leaders can get support from other schools in their locality to improve a specific area of teaching or leadership”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-support-from-school-hubs>
* DfE has updated “**Statutory teacher induction: appropriate bodies**. Find an appropriate body to assure the quality of your teacher induction”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statutory-teacher-induction-appropriate-bodies>
* **SuDS schemes reduce flood risk** by temporarily storing rainwater; reducing its flow and surface water runoff. Three primary schools have benefited. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/primary-school-suds-schemes-finished-by-the-preston-flood-scheme>
* For the latest **ESFA Updates**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-update-12-march-2025>
* For the **Education Support March newsletter**, see <https://mailchi.mp/edsupport/your-october-newsletter-9371709?e=4c833362b8>

**Male and female leadership pay gap**

* Figures, released to coincide with International Women’s Day, show that **the average pay gap between female and male headteachers in 2023-24 rose by nearly 6 per cent compared with 2022-23, now standing at £8,648**. For secondary heads, women earned £4,938 less on average than men in 2023-24 compared with £3,908 in the previous year. This was a rise of 26 per cent and it represents the biggest gap for 13 years. The gap for primary heads has also risen again: women now earn £2,608 less on average than their male counterparts. The pay gap widens with age and seniority: for female headteachers aged 60 and over, the pay gap has reached an average of £14,352. The pay disparities are set against the backdrop of an education workforce in which 77 per cent of teachers and 68 per cent of headteachers are women. Last month an analysis of chief executive pay at multi-academy trusts with 25 or more schools revealed that there were just three women in the top 10 highest-paid CEOs. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/gender-pay-gap-for-headteachers-widens>

**Attendance**

* **Children taking term-time holidays represent “a very small percentage of the attendance problem**”, with the government focused on those missing “significant amounts of school on a very regular basis”, the schools minister has said. In the year to date, unauthorised holidays make up 0.4 percentage points of an overall absence rate nationally of 6.7 per cent. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/term-time-holidays-small-part-of-attendance-woes/>
* Bridget Phillipson calls on schools to use “old-fashioned graft” to help improve pupil attendance**; some schools are “not making enough progress” on absences** and that she will not accept the “damage” caused by children missing school.
* DfE has issued two reports
* “**Link between attendance and attainment**” See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/link-between-attendance-and-attainment>
* **“The impact of school absence on lifetime earnings**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-impact-of-school-absence-on-lifetime-earnings>

Some 3.6 million children missed 10 days or more of school last year, and 1.6 million - more than one in 10 - missed a day every fortnight. Children in Year 11 who miss 10 days of school are half as likely to achieve a grade 5 in English and maths. The reports gives a lot more detail

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

* **Children as young as 11 to 13 are being targeted by s\*xtortion criminals for the first time**, according to data. The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) said the “worrying” trend showed that criminals behind extortion attempts were casting their nets wider in an attempt to trap victims. See <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/mar/09/children-in-uk-as-young-as-11-targeted-by-sextortion-criminals-data-reveals>
* Teenagers with incurable conditions are among hundreds a week being **stripped of disability benefits after their 16th birthdays**. Nearly a third of those who received Disability Living Allowance (DLA) in childhood had claims for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) rejected when trying to move to the adult benefit, BBC analysis has found. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ckgn1w1jvl9o>
* Parents who are worried about their children being on **Roblox** should not let them use it, the chief executive of the gigantic gaming platform has said. The site, which is the most popular in the UK among young gamers aged eight to 12, has been dogged by claims of some children being exposed to explicit or harmful content through its games, alongside multiple reported allegations of bullying and grooming. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5yrjkl7dd6o>
* **Since September, one in five teachers say they have seen more children turning up to school too hungry to learn**. survey of around 10,000 teachers also found that 25% admit using their own money to feed students, while 67% would support the introduction of FSMs for all children It comes as separate polling has revealed that one in five parents are forced to buy unhealthy food for their children at least once a week because healthy options are too expensive. Survey findings featuring 2,239 parents and published by Barnardo’s in its Nourishing the Future report reveal that 12% say are buying unhealthy food once a week due to the unaffordability of healthier options; a further 7% are buying unhealthy food more than once a week. The calls for universal free school meals are growing louder. See [www.barnardos.org.uk/research/nourishing-future](https://www.barnardos.org.uk/research/nourishing-future) <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publication/free-school-meals-evidence-pack-update> [www.schoolfoodmatters.org/school-food-review](https://www.schoolfoodmatters.org/school-food-review)
* A survey conducted by Teacher Tapp on behalf of ASCL <https://www.ascl.org.uk/News/Our-news-and-press-releases/ASCL-President-calls-for-an-end-to-the-chaos-cause> asked school teachers and leaders in England what **social-media related issues** they had noticed since the start of the academic year in September. ASCL says Social media platforms are “being weaponised” against schools and teachers and need to be brought to heel,
	+ Nearly three-quarters of secondary school teachers (73%) reported that students had been bullied by peers on social media.
	+ Almost half of secondary school teachers (46%) said that students had recorded teachers or other pupils without permission.
	+ Nearly a third of secondary school teachers (30%) noticed signs of students having accessed pornographic or violent content.
	+ Four in ten (43%) teachers – in both primary and secondary schools – said that parents had made negative comments about their school or staff online.
	+ And nearly three-quarters (71%) said students were using social media below the minimum age requirement.

**Public examinations**

* For the **latest JCQ Update**, see <https://mailchi.mp/jcq/12-march?e=0bb0930afc> This covers:
* Contingency arrangements
* Updated checklists and infographics
* Terminal rule declaration
* JCQ webinars
* Fake exam papers
* 2026 provisional timetables
* Getting your entries right first time
* The Exams Office - virtual conference
* The Exams Office - contingency resources
* Briefing candidates ahead of the summer series

**Education news for schools**

* **Application figures for places in year 7 show more families receiving their first choice of school this year**. See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/mar/10/no-exodus-to-state-sector-after-vat-added-to-private-school-fees-say-english-councils>
* **Sir Hamid Patel** has been appointed to serve as interim Chair of the Ofsted Board until a successor is found for Dame Christine Ryan, who announced in November that she would be stepping down this year.
* To nominate for the **Good School Food awards**, see <https://www.jamieoliver.com/schoolfoodawards/apply/>
* For the latest **SecEd Best Practice Bulletin**, see <https://email.sec-ed.co.uk/q/12Jpfhcqd4Lq0lzMuYWgUbKt/wv>
* Responding to reports that the Government has accepted the principle that those experiencing the loss of a baby before 24 weeks should be entitled to **bereavement leave**, NASUWT said: “It is a welcome and positive step that Ministers are accepting the principle that those who lose a baby before 24 weeks of pregnancy are entitled to take bereavement leave. “We will be seeking assurances from the Government that the specific legislative measures to come will allow those who experience pregnancy loss to get the support they need to deal with their bereavement.”
* For **ASCL President's speech to ASCL Annual Conference 2025**, see [https://www.ascl.org.uk/News/Our-news-and-press-releases/ASCL-President-s-speech-to-ASCL-Annual-Confere-(2)](https://www.ascl.org.uk/News/Our-news-and-press-releases/ASCL-President-s-speech-to-ASCL-Annual-Confere-%282%29) For an **interview with ASCL general secretary Pepe Di’lasio**, see <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/ofsted-plans-will-hit-teacher-recruitment-says-ascl-leader-pepe-diiasio>
* For the latest **EEF News Alert**, see <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=fcc9300ee3&view=lg&permmsgid=msg-f:1826492024828294497>

**Post 16**

* The government has **revealed it won’t fully cover growth funding for the “unprecedented” rise in the number of post-16 pupils**. Instead, DfE will only cover two-thirds of what schools and sixth-form colleges expected as student increases have leapt above the levels ministers had budgeted for. The DfE noted that while the “very large” increase in 16 to 19-year-olds in education this year was “positive”, it was “significantly above the budget for in-year payments”. “The current growth is significantly above the budget available for in-year payments, and so we cannot fully fund this growth. The department did, though, confirm a 3.78 per cent post-16 funding rate rise, worth about £250 million. Schools will be informed of their growth payments by the end of this month, before receiving the cash in May. Meanwhile, this year’s 10 per cent T-level funding uplift has not been applied for 2025-26. The DfE said it would “confirm the position” on the uplift “in due course”. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/dfe-wont-fully-fund-unexpected-post-16-pupils/>
* ESFA has updated “**16 to 19 funding: allocation statement guides**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-allocation-statement-guides>
* ESFA has issued “**Guidance for maintained schools and academies with 16 to 19 provision on the teachers' pension scheme employer contribution grant**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-pension-scheme-employer-contribution-grant-for-maintained-schools-and-academies-with-16-to-19-provision-2024-to-2025>
* DfE has issued a collection ”**Turing Scheme**, Funding application guidance for providers of international study and work placements, funding outcomes, and evaluation”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/turing-scheme>
* DfE has issued “**Help and support for colleges**” See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/help-and-support-for-colleges>

**Tony Stephens**