Tony Stephens Education Support

http://tonystephens.org.uk

tonystephens856@gmail.com

07977804899

**301 Academy and School News and Resources Update, Jan 6-10 2025**

*Copyright, Tony Stephens*

***Website references are given where needed in all cases***

**http://tonystephens.org.uk**

**Attendance**

* **Attendance.** The most recent week, commencing 16 December 2024, was the last week of the autumn term for all schools. **The attendance rate (proportion of possible sessions attended) was 90.5% across all schools in the week commencing 16 December 2024**. The absence rate was, therefore, 9.5% across all schools. By school type, the absence rates across the week commencing 16 December 2024 were:
	+ 7.8% in state-funded **primary** schools (5.4% authorised and 2.4% unauthorised)
	+ 11.3% in state-funded **secondary** schools (6.7% authorised and 4.6% unauthorised)
	+ 15.7% in state-funded **special** schools (11.6% authorised and 4.1% unauthorised)

**The attendance rate across the 2024/25 academic year to date was 93.5%.** The absence rate was, therefore, 6.5% across all schools. By school type, the absence rates across the 2024/25 academic year to date were:

* + 5.2% in state-funded **primary** schools (3.8% authorised and 1.4% unauthorised)
	+ 8.0% in state-funded **secondary** schools (5.0% authorised and 2.9% unauthorised)
	+ 12.7% in state-funded **special** schools (9.6% authorised and 3.2% unauthorised)

**The absence rate for the 2024-25 autumn term at 6.5 per cent, is down from 6.8 per cent in the same term last year**. The overall absence rate for the autumn term in the 2022-23 academic year was 7.8 per cent. Unauthorised absence decreased by 0.1 percentage point last term, from 2.2 in the autumn term of 2023 to 2.1 per cent in 2024. While the unauthorised absence rate for secondary dropped (from 3.1 per cent to 2.9 per cent), the primary rate remained the same at 1.4 per cent.

See <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-attendance-in-schools>

* FFT Education Data Lab has produced a report on “**Part-time tables and flexi-schooling in the Autumn Term**” See <https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2025/01/part-time-tables-and-flexi-schooling-in-the-autumn-term/> Based on its analysis of school attendance registers for the Autumn term, it thinks that there were something like 39,000 to 43,000 pupils who had a part-time timetable. These figures cover (almost) the whole of the term rather than being a snapshot of the number on a part-time timetable on any given day. There were between 29,000 and 32,000 pupils whose absences are coded as C2. This is the code the official guidance suggests is used where the part-time timetable is intended to be a short-term measure to meet a pupil’s needs. 12,000 to 14,000 pupils had what it calls a C pattern, that is to say their absences were recorded using code C. Some of these will have flexi-school arrangements in which they remain in full-time education but only attend school part-time. These numbers are much smaller than it might have expected.

**Ofsted**

* Ofsted has updated “**Area SEND inspections**: information about ongoing inspections”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-area-send-inspections-information-for-families>
* **Ofsted chief inspector Sir Martyn Oliver met with the parliamentary education committee**:
* A consultation on introducing **school report cards** in September will launch this month. Schools will retain their one-word judgements until they have been re-inspected under the new report card system. Leadership and governance will form a key focus of the report cards; the curriculum, how well teachers are being developed to deliver it, and pupil outcomes, will also be key areas. Behaviour and attendance are important areas that should feature, but should not necessarily be grouped together as one. Inclusion and supporting disadvantaged and vulnerable children will also be a key focus
* Under the new report cards, **safeguarding** will become a separate criteria. However, Labour has promised to introduce annual safeguarding “spot checks”. Oliver said government has not said whether Ofsted would conduct these. While Ofsted has the expertise to do so, he said it would cost £45 million per year. “It’s really expensive, and [with] tightening public finances I think it’s right that we ask ourselves ‘is this the best spending of the money?’”
* “We do not see safeguarding as the biggest issue in schools. I would say that, by far the needs of **SEND** children is a much bigger need in schools.” The SEND system is broken. . I think we can direct schools to be more inclusive and reward those that are doing the difficult job.”
* Focusing on **vulnerable pupils** and mapping a child’s experience across education and services were his “two clear priorities”
* Ofsted wants to have a greater understanding of **the contexts in which schools work**, while continuing to hold them to account. The new inspection report cards will allow the government and the watchdog to hold schools to “**higher levels of account** than ever before” and will also provide more nuanced findings.
* Oliver was asked why he has resisted putting in place a “truly independent **complaints process**”. He responded by saying an entirely independent complaints process would be a burden on schools, as it would mean independent investigators would have to return schools to carry out their own inspections.
* Oliver stressed his determination for Ofsted to be given powers **to inspect multi-academy trusts,** and all other institutions and bodies that are responsible for children, as proposed by Labour. Sir Martyn admitted that he has a “lot of work to do” to employ more inspectors with trust experience so that Ofsted can “match our expertise to the expertise of the people in the system”. He also raised concerns about creating an “additional burden” through inspecting MATs, and said the idea of schools and trusts having two different types of inspections “bothers me a lot”.
* Oliver said currently 95 per cent of reports are being published within the **30-working day timeframe**, Ofsted’s target. A further two per cent have been published outside that window because inspectors needed to gather additional evidence, with the remaining three per cent late

**The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill**

* **The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill** has begun being debated in Parliament as of Jan 8. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/childrens-bill-to-keep-children-safe-from-exploitation> The Conservatives brought forward an amendment to the bill to call for ministers to establish a national statutory inquiry into historical child sexual exploitation, focused on grooming gangs, but this was defeated. Ministers have said they want to roll out the recommendations of the previous inquiry led by Prof Alexis Jay, rather than open a new national one. Prof Jay said that victims want action and do not need a new national inquiry. The Conservatives are already vowing to continue to amend the bill at every opportunity if - or when - Wednesday's gambit fails, meaning this issue is likely to crop up again before long. **The Liberal Democrats** said the party would be putting forward its own amendment to the bill, calling for the recommendations of the Jay Review to be implemented in full.

**The Conservatives** also called the bill “a significant attack on academies and free schools”. These same schools had helped “drive up standards” In addition they claim more than 20,000 teachers working in academies exceeding national pay scales could see their benefits put at risk, because the DfE says no teacher will see their pay cut, but has declined to confirm that trusts will be able to continue offering enhanced pay and conditions to new staff. They also express concerns that academies will lose freedoms that can help to recruit teachers and improve pupil outcomes in challenging areas. They also criticise scrapping Ofsted headline grades and not automatically converting failing schools into academies, as well as giving councils the power to force schools to expand and stop ‘good’ schools from growing if it “presents a competitive challenge to weaker schools in the area”, and the ending of the free schools programme

Labour says plans in the bill to cap the number of **branded uniform items** schools in England can require to three, plus a tie, could save families more than £50 a child. The government says 24% of primary and 70% of secondary schools still require five or more branded items, while some parents claim they have been asked to provide 10 or more for their child. See <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2025/01/childrens-wellbeing-and-schools-bill-saving-parents-money-on-school-uniform-costs/>

A London council is likely to become the first in England to offer a “universal” payment towards school uniform costs to households on an income of less than £50,350 Tower Hamlets intends to offer payments of up to £150 for each child See <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/jan/09/london-tower-hamlets-council-aims-to-become-first-in-england-to-offer-universal-school-uniform-payment>

**For a report on the first day of debate about the bill, when it passed its second reading**, see <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/schools-bill-wont-cut-pay-and-restores-academies-core-purpose/> <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/labour-schools-bill-second-reading-vote-parliament>

**School finances**

* **Increases in school costs will outstrip the government’s recent funding boost**, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has said, warning that leaders again face making more cuts to provision, <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/annual-report-education-spending-england-2024-25> The schools budget is due to rise by about £2.3 billion next year (2025-26), but about £1 billion of this is for high needs. That leaves a 2.8 per cent rise in per pupil funding for mainstream schools, IFS said, which is below the estimated 3.6 per cent rise in school costs. Most of the latter is driven by teacher pay rises, which were 5.5 per cent this year and 2.8 per cent for the next academic year. The report states that school budgets will feel “very tight” next year, adding some may “struggle to cover their costs without making savings”. Schools can only afford a 2 per cent pay rise next year, IFS said. It says the “challenging state of the public finances means that most departments, including schools and education, will need to make savings of 1-2 per cent per year”. Pupil numbers are projected to fall by 2 per cent between 2025 and 2027, meaning government could save £1.2 billion by freezing spending per pupil. However, the projected rise of more than £2 billion on special education needs spending is “likely to wipe out any realistic opportunities for savings in the schools budget”.

The IFS’ annual education spending report sets out how, since 2019, school spending per pupil has risen by 11 per cent in real terms. This finally takes back spending to 2010 levels after a decade funding squeeze. Yet within that 11% growth, over half of the increase is due to the rapid growth in the number of pupils identified as having special educational needs. After accounting for planned spending on high needs, mainstream school funding per pupil only grew by 5% in real terms since 2019, the IFS says. Historically colleges and sixth forms have been particularly hard hit, and even with recent funding increases they remain so. According to the college funding per student aged 16 to 18 in 2025 will still be about 11% below 2010 levels, and about 23% lower for school sixth forms.

IFS also warns the DfE that the plan to deliver an additional **3,000 school-based nurseries** is unlikely to provide enough nursery places by September 2025.

**The IFS also said students in England are likely to face further tuition fee increases**, as universities struggle to meet increased staff costs at the same time as income from reduced international student recruitment continues to fall. Unlike schools and colleges, universities will be not be compensated for the rise in employer national insurance contributions, announced in last year’s budget. To ease the pressure in the sector, the government announced in November that tuition fees would go up for the first time in eight years in line with inflation, taking annual fees up to £9,535. It was, the IFS said, “a brief reprieve for university finances, and further tuition fee rises seem likely.”

* DfE has issued “Find out how much local authorities receive for **DSG funding in the 2024 to 2025 financial year** and how it is calculated”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2024-to-2025>
* ESFA has issued “Guidance to support billing authorities with **the national non-domestic rates (NNDR) claims payment process**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-non-domestic-rates-guidance-for-billing-authorities>
* ESFA has issued “**Dedicated schools grant assurance: guidance for local authorities for 2023 to 2024**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-assurance-guidance-for-local-authorities-for-2023-to-2024>

**Early years and primary**

* STA has issued:
* **Information about the statutory requirement on selected schools to participate in national curriculum test trials**, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/statutory-participation-in-trialling-of-national-curriculum-assessments>
* **Key stage 2 national curriculum tests and results: information for parents**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-national-curriculum-tests-and-results-information-for-parents>
* **Optional key stage 1 national curriculum tests: information for parents**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/optional-key-stage-1-national-curriculum-tests-information-for-parents>
* **Information for parents about the pre-key stage standards used for primary school children working below the standards of the national curriculum assessments**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-key-stage-standards-information-for-parents>
* **Phonics screening check: information for parents**, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phonics-screening-check-information-for-parents>
* **Information for parents about the engagement model teacher assessment** tool, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-engagement-model-information-for-parents>

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

* DfE has issued “Guidance on how **to provide supported internships for young people with special educational needs and an education, health and care (EHC) plan”**. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supported-internships-for-young-people-with-learning-difficulties>
* **Vulnerable children are being jailed many miles from their families at record levels**, an investigation has found, prompting warnings that the government is breaking the law. The proportion of young people being detained in young offender institutions (YOIs) more than 100 miles from their home has doubled over the last decade to 15% – the highest ​since its peak at the height of the Covid pandemic. More than one in 10 of the young people in custody in England are being held at least 75 miles from their families, the highest since the Ministry of Justice began publishing the figures in April 2015. See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jan/06/record-numbers-of-children-in-england-jailed-many-miles-from-their-families>
* A Cambridge professor says **the interests and voices of children and young people should be respected** after they were "dropped down the agenda" during the Covid lockdown. An article by Prof Tamsin Ford in the British Medical Journal said efforts should be made to bring children and young people on board, even during an emergency situation like the pandemic. It followed findings that 200,000 research studies on mental health impacts were carried out at the height of the pandemic, but only 35 concerned children. Prof Ford said big decisions were made about children and young people, but they were barely involved. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c205qrr09kpo>
* **Sugary drinks** are responsible for more than 2.2m new cases of diabetes and 1.1m new cases of heart disease a year around the world, according to a new study. See <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-024-03345-4>
* The UK is facing a **fostering crisis** where retiring carers are not being replaced by younger people, while the number of children entering care homes is rising, Barnardo’s charity has warned. “Today thousands of children in care are waiting for safe, happy homes and there simply aren’t enough foster carers to accommodate them. This means these children may be placed in an environment which doesn’t meet their needs, and we know that they can feel as if they are being passed from pillar to post with their lives in a constant state of upheaval.” Out of the nearly 12 million children living in England, just over 400,000 (3%) are in the social care system at any one time. Since 2014, the number of children’s homes has increased by 70%, from 2,057 to 3,491. Increasingly, children are fostered by family and friends – at the end of March 2023, these accounted for 19% of all active fostering households, an increase from 16% in 2019. Since 2019, the number of approved mainstream fostering households has fallen by 7%, while applications are 18% lower than in 2018. See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jan/07/shortage-of-foster-carers-causing-very-real-uk-crisis-barnardos-warns>
* The Home Secretary has announced a package of measures to **better protect the public and young people from youth radicalisation.** See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-outlines-new-action-to-tackle-radicalisation>

**School and academy 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>
* DfE has updated “Information for eligible academies, sixth-form colleges and voluntary-aided (VA) schools about the **Condition Improvement Fund (CIF**)”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/condition-improvement-fund>
* DfE has issued “How to complete an existing application for a **senior mental health lead training grant** before 31 January 2025”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/senior-mental-health-lead-training>
* DfE has issued “**Find resources to help you develop a whole school or college approach to mental health and wellbeing**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-and-wellbeing-support-in-schools-and-colleges>
* DfE has issued “Guidance for academy trusts on how to **request approval for appointing an off-payroll accounting officer or chief financial office**r”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academy-trusts-off-payroll-appointments>
* DfE has issued guidance for parents, “**Get a place for your child at a primary or secondary school** - applications, deadlines, admission criteria, appeals and complaints”. See <https://www.gov.uk/schools-admissions>
* For the latest **ESFA Updates**, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/esfa-update-8-january-2025>
* DfE has issued “**Cost of school uniforms survey 2023**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-of-school-uniforms-survey-2023>
* DfE has issued “**Use this framework to buy musical instruments, equipment and technology from DfE approved suppliers**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/buy-musical-instruments-equipment-and-technology>
* DfE has updated its manual, “**Complete the school census**”. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complete-the-school-census>
* For the latest **Education Support Newsletter**, see <https://mailchi.mp/edsupport/your-october-newsletter-9371610?e=4c833362b8>

**Public examinations**

* The proportion of students passing **November resits in GCSE English language** has fallen sharply, <https://www.jcq.org.uk/gcse-november-2024/> Just over a third (34.9 per cent) of students aged between 17 and 19 secured the grade 4 or better needed to pass English language - down from 40.3 per cent achieving this in November 2023. For students aged 17 and 18, today’s resit results also show a slight narrowing in the gender gap in English language pass rates. In November 2023, 47.5 per cent of female candidates aged 17 passed English language, compared with 42.7 per cent of male candidates. Meanwhile, the percentage of candidates passing **GCSE maths resits** has risen slightly - from 22.2 per cent in November 2023 to 23.6 per cent. See also <https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2025/01/09/gcse-english-language-and-maths-results-from-the-november-series-2/>
* **The International Baccalaureate (IB)** has warned schools they face unannounced visits during the 2025 exam season to ensure they are adhering to new rules designed to tackle the “time-zone cheating” that affected its summer 2024 exams. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/specialist-sector/ib-unannounced-visits-stop-time-zone-exam-cheating>
* Schools need far more clarity and reassurance over how they will be judged in the **absence of Progress 8 data**, experts are warning. The call comes as survey data reveals the huge array of different approaches being taken by secondaries to measure progress over the next two years, when P8 will be unavailable. There are also concerns about how Ofsted inspectors will view attainment data for the school without a nationally used progress measure. See <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/tell-schools-how-progress-judged-dfe-warned>

**School buildings**

* Almost 90 per cent of schools containing reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete **(RAAC)** are yet to have work carried out to remove the collapse-prone building material, it has been revealed. RAAC has been identified in 232 schools and colleges across England. A total of 122 need extensive work involving one or more buildings being rebuilt or refurbished, which is to be carried out under the government’s schools rebuilding programme (SRP). In the other 110, smaller-scale work is needed, and will be funded by government grants. The DfE says RAAC has successfully been removed from just 30 schools. Work is yet to be carried out on 207 schools with RAAC, meaning the “crumbly concrete” remains in place in 87 per cent – around nine in 10 – of schools affected; it could take another “three to five years” for RAAC to be removed from all affected schools.

**Curriculum**

* **Stripping back “less vital” curriculum areas** will give schools the “flex” to develop a more “bespoke” offering for pupils, the lead in the government’s review of curriculum and assessment has said. This will give “more flex back to individual schools to address the basic curriculum” and make the curriculum “more bespoke for the local community and local needs”. Small schools have voiced concerns about the challenges some of them experience in delivering the current curriculum.

She also said the review is happening in a “frustrating period” when many **digital advancements in the education sector** have not progressed enough for the review to fully consider them. As a result, the review “may not be able to confidently recommend” new technologies, she explained, beyond suggesting “further exploration”.

**Education News for schools**

* Many teachers are still not able to go ahead with divorce because of long delays **working out the value of their pensions** because of delays at TPS. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cn08nvpl50no>
* For an article “**The road to 6,500: Will pay snub and poor ITT recruitment jeopardise new teacher pledge**?”, see <https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/content/news/the-road-to-6500-pay-snub-and-poor-itt-recruitment-jeopardise-new-teacher-pledge>
* **The Cyber Explorers Cup**, a free cyber security competition led by the UK Government, is back for its second year, offering students aged 11-14 the chance to win exciting prizes, while building vital cyber security skills that will set them up for success in the digital age. See <https://www.cyberexplorers.co.uk/knowledge-hub/2024/12/cyber-explorers-cup-2025?utm_source=SecEd&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Cup2025>
* For the latest **SecED resources**, see <https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/content/best-practice?utm_campaign=SecEd%20-%20090125&utm_content=BEST%20PRACTICE&utm_term=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.sec-ed.co.uk%2Fcontent%2Fbest-practice&utm_medium=email&utm_source=SecEd>
* Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves confirms the **Spring spending forecast** will take place on Wednesday 26 March.
* For an article, “**Dyslexia: the myths, the facts and how teachers can help**”, see <https://www.tes.com/magazine/teaching-learning/general/dyslexia-defintion-how-teachers-and-schools-can-help>
* **The NEU will hold an indicative strike ballot over pay**, after branding the government’s planned rise an “insult” to the profession. Members will be balloted on their “willingness to take industrial action” if ministers do not “commit to a significant and fully funded” increase beyond what has already been proposed. The indicative ballot will take place at the beginning of March. This comes after the DfE told the School Teachers’ Review Body (STRB) a 2.8 per cent pay award “would be appropriate” for 2025-26 last month, but that most schools would have to find efficiencies to fund it. See <https://neu.org.uk/latest/press-releases/neu-announce-indicative-ballot-pay>
* **Hubs** were set up to allow teachers to help colleagues in other schools by sharing “best practice” and developing expertise. Six were created: maths, English, computing, science, music and languages. Now the funding for computer hubs will finish at the end of March. Funding for the Language Hub will be cut and the programme re-shaped. See <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/labour-scraps-computing-hubs-with-languages-scheme-scaled-back/>
* **Matt Hood**, the co-founder and chief executive of Oak National Academy, is to set to leave his role.

**Tony Stephens**