



Clerks' Monthly Briefing

September 2023



Strong teamwork between the headteacher, the chair of the governing body and the clerk is crucial to efficient working.

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The role of the clerk is pivotal to ensuring that statutory duties are met, meetings are well organised and governors receive the information they need in good time. Consequently, governors come to meetings well prepared and with pertinent questions ready so that they are able to provide constructive challenge.

Ofsted, Learning from the Best 2011.



Governor Support Service

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Agenda

➤ Welcome new clerks	➤ Information exchange
➤ Help us to help you	➤ Updates
➤ Clerking vacancies	➤ Your questions

Governor Support Service

We hold a database of maintained school and academy governing boards which helps us to help you. Such information is needed for governor recruitment purposes, in cases of urgency, safeguarding, Ofsted inspections, and schools where there is a cause for concern. All data is stored and accessed in accordance with the Data Protection Act and GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation). The only piece of information we can give out publicly is the name of the Chair of the Governing Board, which is already in the public domain. We do not give out personal contact details or any other information.

With contact details changing each term, please let us have a complete list of all your GB (Governing Board) membership including:

- Category of governor
- Contact phone numbers (mobile & home)
- Who is chair and vice chair
- Term of office
- Email address
- Details of any associate members of the board (inc. contact details and term of office)

Please send your Governing Board membership information to: office@governor.support

Instruments of Government (IOG)

Please send us a copy of any changes made to your IOG.

Get Information About Schools (GIAS)

Please make sure that you keep the DfE (Department for Education) site updated with your governing board membership as well.

Your governing board minutes

Please send us a copy of your draft board and committee minutes once approved by your chair of governors and the final agreed minutes. Email: office@governor.support

School email addresses

Please can you check with your school that our email addresses are on the “White” allowed list? This issue happens more often with “LGFL” school email

Autumn 2023 Term Governor & Clerk Training Courses

Please can you remind your governors of the range of courses that will be available, also that they feedback on the course(s) attended to the governing board and to update your training records.

Please remind new or recently appointed governors to book a place on the New Governors three-part course. Follow this link to [book](#).

Your minutes need to show what learning was achieved and shared with all governors. Check the courses [here](#).

Please ask your colleagues to let us know if they cannot attend after booking a place. A phone call or email.

Agenda reminders

Items to consider

- ✓ Keeping Children Safe in Education, change from 1st September 2023
- ✓ SATs & GCSE results
- ✓ Staff wellbeing charter
- ✓ Providing a 32.5-hour school week from September 2024
- ✓ Budget/Pay award
- ✓ School buildings condition
- ✓ School uniform
- ✓ Pupil Attendance in school
- ✓ Pupil & PE premium/Games Mark
- ✓ Behaviour & Exclusions
- ✓ Special Educational Needs
- ✓ Headteacher appraisal
- ✓ Election of chair/vice chair
- ✓ Review & approve committee structure, membership & terms of reference
- ✓ Review policies and update as necessary
- ✓ Data protection

An overview of key issues for Governing Boards to consider and review over the Autumn Term 2023.

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DfE Updates

Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC)

The start of the new year has been fraught for school settings as the issue of the use of RAAC comes to the forefront of estate management for schools across the country and the potential risk RAAC poses to the safety of school buildings and ultimately that of the school's staff and children.

The Education Secretary has briefed Parliament to state that of the in excess 22,000 schools and colleges in England, the vast majority of them are unaffected by RAAC. Up to the end of August 52 schools and colleges had mitigations in place following the identification of RAAC within their school estate. Many of these 52 schools have been able to continue face-to-face learning for their pupils without any disruption.

The end of August / beginning of September saw the DfE advise a further 104 schools and colleges to take spaces that are known to contain RAAC out of use if they had not done so already. The DfE has stated that most of these settings will remain open for face-to-face learning on their existing site as only a small part of each site is affected. A minority of pupils have been fully or partially relocated to alternative accommodation to continue face-to-face learning while mitigations are put in place.

The DfE has clarified that all schools and colleges that have contacted the department suspecting they might have RAAC will be surveyed within a matter of weeks, in many cases, in a few days. It is thought that most suspected cases will not have RAAC; the Education Secretary has stated that when the DfE has surveyed schools, around two-thirds of suspected cases do not have RAAC.

Each impacted school and college have a dedicated caseworker to help implement a mitigation plan. This includes paying for the emergency mitigation work to make buildings safe, including alternative classroom space, where necessary. The DfE will also fund the longer-term refurbishment or rebuilding projects where these are needed, to remove RAAC.

Subsequent to the Education Secretary's Parliamentary statement, the DfE has now published a list of schools affected; this can be accessed [here](#). The list is expected to be fluid as more schools complete the DfE [questionnaires](#) and surveys are carried out. The DfE has said that it has received responses relating to 95% of schools built in the period where RAAC was used.

The DfE has also written to a small number of responsible bodies, including Local Authorities and Multi-Academy trusts, who have not yet informed the DfE about the presence of RAAC in their school buildings. The department has asked all responsible bodies to respond to its questionnaire by the end of the week.

Guidance published by the DfE to date can be accessed via <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/reinforced-autoclaved-aerated-concrete-in-education-settings>

Longer term, the RAAC issue has yet again shone the spotlight on the investment, or potential lack of investment, in our school estates. Trust and Governing Boards are likely to need to consider the broader issue of estate management in their financial projections and risk registers.

A Level Results

As was widely forecast before their publication, the proportion of A* and A grades dropped from 35.9% last year to 26.5% in 2023 as grading standards returned to pre-pandemic standards. The level achieved was, however, still slightly above 25.2% in 2019. As a reminder, pupils were awarded centre-assessed grades in 2020 and teacher-assessed grades in 2021

This year, 75.4% of grades achieved were C and above, down on 82.1% last year and slightly below 75.5% in 2019.

The number of students achieving 3 A* grades has dropped by more than half this year – from 8,570 to 3,820. Whilst still above pre-pandemic 2019 – when 2,785 pupils achieved it – but significantly down on the 12,975 pupils achieving 3 A*s in 2021, when teacher grades were awarded.

Whilst grading has mostly returned to pre-pandemic standards at a national level, the regional picture has changed, possibly signalling the impact of covid on children regionally. In 2019, 23% of grades in the north east were A/A* but this was 22% in 2023, meaning the region is now the lowest attaining in the country. Compare this to London where 30% were top grades this year compared to 26.9% in 2019.

There were fears that grade declines would result in more students missing offers for university or college. However, UCAS data shows that 79% of 18-year-olds in the UK secured their first-choice plan, compared to 81% in 2022 and 74% in 2019.

GCSE Results

GCSE results for 2023, the second set of figures since examinations resumed post the pandemic, for pupils in England found:

- The **grade 5-pass rate** (a “strong” pass) has dropped from 60.3% in 2022 to 54.4% this year. However, this is still slightly above the 53.5% in 2019.
- The number of grades that are **4 and above** is 70.3% which is down from 75.3% in 2022. Again, it is marginally above the 69.9% pass rate in 2019.
- The proportion of **top grades** (7 to 9) fell 17% this year. In 2023, 22.4% of grades were 7 and above, compared to 27% last year. It’s now closer to the pre-pandemic proportion of 21.8%.
- The proportion of **top grades (9)** has fallen from 6.8% in 2022 to 5% this year, much closer to the 4.7% seen in 2019.
- The proportion of **top grades** in **English** has fallen 20% since last year; in maths, the fall was 12.1%.
- The **grade 5-pass rate** for **English** was 55.1% compared to 61.1% in 2022 and 53.4% in 2019. The **grade 5 pass rate** for **maths** was 52.4%, down from 56.6% in 2022 but up on 50.1% in 2019.
- More than 167,000 students in England received grade 3 or lower on their maths paper, about 21,000 more than in 2022, while 172,000, failed English language, the highest number in a decade. Last year, only 20% of those retaking their maths GCSEs passed. Head teachers' unions have said this will put more pressure on colleges as students require at least a grade 4 in English and maths in order to qualify for further study.
- **Girls** continue to outperform boys when it comes to top grades, though the gap is smaller this year than in 2022. This year, 25.3% of grades issued to 16-year-old girls in England were 7s and above, compared to 19.5% of those issued to boys, a gap of 5.8 percentage points. Last year, the figures were 30.7% for girls and 23.3% for boys, a gap of 7.4 percentage points.
- The gap in top grades between the **north east and London** has widened from 9.3 percentage points in 2019 to 10.8 percentage points this year. It has been widening gradually during the pandemic.
- The proportion of top grades in the north east was 17.6% this year compared to 16.4% pre-pandemic. This compares to 28.4% this year in London, up from 25.7% in 2019. The north east has also seen the largest percentage drop in top grades since 2022 – a fall of 21.4%. The smallest drop was in London, 12.9%.

SATs Results

Key Stage 2 headline results, which can be accessed [here](#), have been published and highlight that:

- **Attainment in reading, writing and maths combined remained the same as in 2022, with 59% of pupils reaching the expected standard.**
- In **reading**, 73% of pupils met the expected standard, down from 75% in 2022.
- In **maths**, 73% of pupils met the expected standard, up from 71% in 2022.
- In **writing**, 71% of pupils met the expected standard, up from 69% in 2022.
- In **grammar, punctuation, and spelling**, 72% of pupils met the expected standard, unchanged from 2022.
- In **science**, 80% of pupils met the expected standard, up from 79% in 2022.

Due to the pandemic, it was expected that there would be lower levels of attainment compared to 2019, while children caught up on lost learning. Whilst the combined expected standard (59%) was in line with 2022, it fell from the 2019 when 65% of pupils reached the expected standard.

The DfE point to the increased attainment in maths and writing from last year, coupled with standards in reading reflecting pre-pandemic levels, as indications that progress has been made in recovering from the pandemic.

Given the national media interest in this year's reading test, the School's Minister, Nick Gibb, asked the STA for their assessment of the relative difficulty of the test. Based on evidence gathered throughout the test development process, STA confirmed that the content of this year's test was at the appropriate level of difficulty.

In recognition of the educational importance of reading for students, the DfE will also be launching a new and updated Reading Framework. This is an update to [existing guidance](#) published July 2021, which previously only related to the teaching of reading in Reception and Year 1. This updated guidance has been expanded from reception and Key Stage 1 to cover Key Stage 2 and 3 to help schools improve reading for all pupils so they leave primary able to engage confidently and passionately with reading in all subjects at secondary school. It provides guidance to teachers in Key Stage 2 and secondary schools on how to support those pupils who still need help with reading.

In addition to this framework, the Government will also be launching a review of good practice in the teaching of writing to look at how best to improve attainment in writing. Watch this space!

Updated [guidance](#) on primary accountability measures has confirmed that data on primary pupil progress in 2024 or 2025 will not be published because there are no Key Stage 1 SATs results to provide a baseline. The DfE intend to return to producing progress measures using KS1 assessments in 2025/26 and 2026/27, ahead of the Reception Baseline Assessment progress measures from 2027/28.

Policy Guidance for Transgender Pupils

In a parliamentary statement before the end of the summer term, the Education Secretary confirmed that the deadline was being pushed back which would allow more time to speak to teachers, parents, and lawyers to ensure it "meets the high expectations that these groups rightly have for it".

However national newspapers have reported that the Attorney General for England and Wales has advised part of the guidance may be unlawful, with the Cabinet split on how to proceed.

One of the most controversial matters the guidance was expected to address is what schools should do if a child wanted to change their name, use different pronouns, or change their appearance, hairstyle,

or clothes; what is known as socially transitioning. Ministers were considering advising against allowing social transitioning in schools altogether. However, the Attorney General,

Victoria Prentis has said an outright ban would be unlawful. The Attorney General is also understood to be concerned about the guidance advising teachers that they do not have to use a child's pronouns or chosen name if they do not want to and suggesting that doctors are consulted before a child socially transitions at school.

Ministers now have to work out what to do next: either compile guidance that is lawful or contemplate changing the law which could provoke legal challenges.

The DfE will publish a draft for consultation before the final guidance, which will be non-statutory, or advisory, guidance. However, no new deadline has yet been set for the advice.

There are no official estimates of how many trans, non-binary or gender fluid pupils there are in the UK. But in May [a survey of 7,000 teachers in England for BBC News](#) suggested that about 8% of primary-school and 75% of secondary school teachers taught trans or non-binary pupils.

The Education Secretary has reiterated that, "in the meantime, schools and colleges should proceed with extreme caution" when dealing with such issues. They should always involve parents in decisions relating to their child and should not agree to any changes that they are not confident are in the best interests of that child and their peers. They should prioritise safeguarding by meeting their existing legal duties to protect single sex spaces and maintain safety and fairness in single sex sport."

The need for more Support Staff?

A report commissioned by the DfE (which can be accessed [here](#)) has found that more support staff are needed to prevent teachers from having to spend 380 hours a year on admin. The report found that educators have taken on greater numbers of safeguarding and SEND-related jobs since the pandemic.

It was also reported that teachers are receiving more messages from parents and carers "with unrealistic expectations of response times".

The study, by Cooper Gibson research, found teachers working in both primaries and secondaries spent about two hours a day on admin outside of class. This equates to 380 hours across a school year.

Key findings include:

- The research firm recommended "a curriculum support officer could undertake many tasks", such as photocopying, printing and organising trips, to ease the pressure on teachers. Many participants in the study reported that roles such as a curriculum support or reprographics officer had been lost.
- Admin tasks deemed "necessary but time consuming" included the reporting of safeguarding concerns. Teachers said the need for the job to be completed on the same day could "be challenging if they have duties, meetings or extra-curricular events to run".
- There was still the need for "extensive curriculum planning documentation, and some uncertainty about what is required of schools" during Ofsted inspections.
- Time spent to complete performance management records were said to "not merit the time spent on them". As well as the "stress of being observed", reported by some of the participants, the contribution of the process to, for example, improving practice or maintaining professional standards were queried.
- The report also said there had been an increase in tasks associated with the rise in the number of pupils identified with SEND. Since the pandemic, interviewees noted there had been a sharp growth in referrals for pupils experiencing poor emotional wellbeing and/or mental health. This in turn, meant an increase, in meetings with parents and pupils, for example, which require recording.

- Interestingly, those surveyed by Cooper Gibson struggled to identify any “unnecessary tasks”. Teachers felt most of the jobs “either fully, or in some part, needed teacher involvement”.
- In addition to recruiting more curriculum support officers, Cooper Gibson recommended that “the time required for admin jobs should form part of any review of planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time at a national level”.
- Senior leaders could seek to review flexible working practices in schools, such as grouping PPA time to allow teachers to work from home on one occasion during the week; whilst not directly addressing the specific time sensitive challenges of many of the administrative tasks described, this may contribute to reducing the overall effect of the workload burden.

The School Sport and Activity Action Plan

The Government has set out plans to increase its monitoring of how primary schools spend PE and sport premium funding and to give schools awards for equality.

The summer saw the DfE publish its [school sport and activity action plan](#). This was pledged earlier this year alongside new targets for schools to offer at least two hours of PE and sport a week and provide equal access to girls and boys.

Key points include:

New mandatory reporting tool for PE premium

Whilst funding through the primary PE and sport premium has made a difference, the DfE argues there is potential for schools to use this funding more effectively.

To improve accountability, the Government will introduce a new digital tool for schools to “report on spending of their allocation of the premium”. The tool is expected to be available in May/June 2024 and schools will be expected to test it by the end of next academic year. It will become a mandatory condition of grant funding for the 2024-25 academic year.

Information gathered will include figures on the overall spend, what the funding has been spent on, whether there is any unspent funding and swimming and water safety attainment.

Use funding to meet 2-hour target

The Government has also published updated guidance on the premium for next year to steer schools towards the most effective uses, drawing on the experience of the schools who use their premium well. The guidance states that the premium should be used to fund “high-quality PE and sport for at least 2 hours a week, complemented by a wide range of extracurricular sport and competitive opportunities”.

It should also be used for providing or improving equal access to sport for boys and girls.

The guidance also states that funding for next year must be used within the academic year it has been allocated for. This follows several years in which schools have been allowed to carry forward unused funding, a relaxation put in place during the Covid-19 pandemic but withdrawn from September 2023.

New ‘evaluation template’ for schools

The DfE will also promote the use of a planning, reporting and evaluation template created by the Youth Sport Trust and Association for PE. This can be completed by schools alongside the digital tool and will provide opportunities for schools to plan their premium spend to effectively deliver the premium’s objectives.

It will also allow schools to be more transparent with their premium spend and will offer the opportunity for schools to record more information to support the data submitted through the digital tool. There will still be a requirement for schools to publish this template or a similar report on their websites.

Schools should give equal access ‘where wanted’

The DfE said it was right that schools should continue to decide which sports they offer so that they can meet the needs of their pupils. Whilst stating that schools will often separate sporting experiences for boys and girls on the grounds of safety and fairness, they should take the time to reflect on how this affects girls and boys accessing the same sports equally. The Government expects the “starting point for schools should be to give girls and boys access to the same sports where they are wanted”.

New equality criteria in School Games Mark

The Government announced earlier this year that it would update the School Games Mark to recognise equal opportunity. The Mark currently rewards schools for their commitment to the development of school sport. Now equality criteria will be added covering both curricular and extracurricular provision. These will be phased in from September 2023 and will become a mandatory requirement to get the mark from 2024.

Schools will be awarded either bronze, silver, gold or platinum, and data will be published annually on how many schools are achieving the award.

Fresh guidance coming this year

New non-statutory PE and sport guidance will be published by the end of 2023, drawing on best practice from schools that offer equal access for girls to sport during the school day and additional extracurricular activities.

The DfE will look at independent schools and the best examples in the state sector as a comparison. This guidance will include detailed case-studies outlining examples of good practice, to help support teachers and senior leaders to deliver good PE and sport in schools.

Financial Impact on Schools

The latest school and college panel omnibus surveys highlight the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on school budgets, including on school meals.

In March 2023, 77% of schools said the amount they were paying per meal had increased since the last academic year. This marked a large 14 percentage point increase from 63% of schools in January. Schools were also passing on the increased costs to parents and carers, with nearly two-thirds (62%) saying they had done so in March, compared to 53% in January.

The costs have also had a trickle-down effect on the quality of meals, with more than four-in-ten schools reporting a drop in the quality of food and portion sizes in March 2023.

The findings also show over a quarter of schools identifying that support with energy bills made no real difference to their financial position.

The findings follow the Education Secretary’s admission in the summer term that the extra funding for schools announced at last year’s spending review “didn’t go far enough” to meet “additional pressures”.

Two new surveys, taken in January and March this year, also highlight a gap in schools complying with new uniform guidance, as well as the extent of non-specialists in secondary lessons.

Key findings from the survey of school leaders include:

- **Two-fifths had or would cut support staff**

In January, schools were asked about broader measures to mitigate soaring costs. The vast majority (88%) had or planned to “take action”, with the most commonly reported action being turning the heating

down or off (60%). The second most common method was cutting back on the use of course materials or using cheaper alternatives (58%). But 44% said they would or had cut non-teaching staff numbers, whilst 19% said the same for teaching staff.

- **Non-specialists see workloads increase**

Amid much documented and ongoing teacher shortages, nearly two-thirds of teachers (61%) surveyed in January said they had taught outside of their subject specialism within the last year. Nearly two-fifths of those teachers had done so every or most weeks. 60% had also taught a subject that was not closely related to their specialism.

History and design and technology teachers were more likely than average to be non-specialist teachers in other departments (78% and 81% respectively).

Despite the frequency of non-specialist teachers, 54% of those responding to the survey said they had not received any training or support to help them teach outside of their specialism.

In general, most teachers who reported taking classes they weren't specialists in had negative attitudes towards the role; 78% said it increased their workload, 68% found it stressful and 65% felt unprepared.

- **Schools lag behind climate change strategy**

The DfE set out its climate strategy last April in which it pledged to start rolling out carbon literacy training for at least one person in each school by 2023.

Among the policy's aims was that trained staff would understand how to develop a climate action plan to share with others in their school. But in the March survey, one-in-ten schools said they had a formal plan for sustainability or climate change in place; a further 32% were in the process of developing a plan.

61% of schools without a plan said a lack of time was a barrier. Other common reasons were being unsure how to develop a plan (37%) and not seeing a requirement to do so (26%).

In its strategy, the DfE also set out its aim to have all schools reporting their carbon emissions via a standardised framework by 2024. However, in March, 53% of schools said they did not monitor emissions and 47% of those schools were unsure how to monitor them.

- **SEND pressures worsened throughout the year**

Responses to the January survey show a decline in the support schools were able to offer pupils over recent months. Nearly seven in 10 of schools said they were able to effectively support pupils with SEND. This marked a fall of 10 percentage points from February 2022 with the most frequently reported barrier (87%) being a lack of funding. This was followed by insufficient access to other specialist services or professionals (82%).

Just over half (52%) of teachers felt equipped to support pupils with SEND, a small fall from 59% in September 2022.

And Remember

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023 (accessed [here](#)) and updated statutory exclusions guidance (accessed [here](#)) came into effect from the 1st September 2023. As a reminder:

- The key change to KCSiE 2023 focuses on internet filtering and monitoring – standards for filtering and monitoring have been published by the DfE;
- **KCSiE section 203-205 Children who are lesbian, gay, bi, or trans (LGBT)**

- 203. The fact that a child or a young person may be LGBT is not in itself an inherent risk factor for harm. However, children who are LGBT can be targeted by other children. In some cases, a child who is perceived by other children to be LGBT (whether they are or not) can be just as vulnerable as children who identify as LGBT.
- 204. Risks can be compounded where children who are LGBT lack a trusted adult with whom they can be open. It is therefore vital that staff endeavour to reduce the additional barriers faced and provide a safe space for them to speak out or share their concerns with members of staff.
- 205. LGBT inclusion is part of the statutory Relationships Education and Relationship and Sex Education and Health Education curriculum and there is a range of support available to help schools counter homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic bullying and abuse.
- **The exclusions guidance has been updated** with respect to the headteacher's ability to cancel an exclusion before it has been considered by the Governing Board; and
- Both in-school exclusion/suspension Governor Panel Hearings and Independent Panel Review Hearings can now be heard virtually rather than in person, as long as this has been requested by the parents and certain criteria has been met for a virtual hearing to take place.

Ofsted Updates

New Ofsted Chief Inspector

Sir Martyn Oliver, the CEO of Outwood Grange Academies Trust, has vowed to work “closely with the whole sector” to “create the best system” for children after being confirmed as the DfE’s preferred candidate for Ofsted Chief Inspector.

He will now appear before the Education Committee in September; if approved, he will begin his initial five-year term on 1st January 2024.

Inspection Handbooks

The Inspection Handbooks have been updated for the new academic year. The changes include:

- a new ‘conduct during inspection’ section for Ofsted inspectors;
- confirmation of the likely date of the next inspection for schools;
- confirmation that inspectors will protect the anonymity of individuals when drawing on evidence;
- clarification that evidence from pupils, parents and staff will always be considered in a proportionate way, alongside other evidence gathered by inspectors;
- updates to the ‘behaviour’ and ‘attendance’ sections;
- clarity about what Ofsted means by ‘capacity to improve’ and ‘culture of safeguarding’;
- a new section on schools raising concerns;
- clarification that in trusts of over 40 schools the Chair of the Board of Trustees may delegate some meetings (no more than half) to another Trustee; and
- clarification regarding the DfE’s minimum expectation of at least 32.5 hours for the length of the school week (that is has now been ushered back one year to September 2024).

Ofsted have also included new definitions that clarify the following:

- what is meant by the terms ‘school’, ‘maintained school’ and ‘academy’;
- what is meant by the terms ‘board of governors’, ‘governors’, ‘board of trustees’ and ‘trustees’;
- what is meant by the terms ‘leaders’ and ‘trust leaders’

The September 2023 Inspection Handbook can be accessed [here](#) and the summary of changes can be accessed [here](#)

Complaints to Ofsted

Complaints to Ofsted about schools rose by a quarter last year, but more than two-thirds were deemed not to warrant further investigation. According to its annual report, Ofsted received 14,900 complaints about schools this year. The increase comes amid reports from schools that they themselves are facing a rise in parental complaints post Covid. One Academy Trust has previously estimated the volume of complaints from parents this year to be two or three times 2019 levels.

Its Chief Executive explained that whilst parents used to “go up to a teacher to complain...Now they skip that stage and go direct to thermo-nuclear war, and email Ofsted, copy in the MP, for things that wouldn't have met the threshold before”.

Less than 1% of the complaints received by Ofsted led to follow-up inspections. Ofsted's National Director for Education, Chris Russell, acknowledges that whilst parents should be able to complain to Ofsted if they've gone through their school's internal process and not found a resolution, there is a perception that the increase in complaints is prompting more snap inspections.

Of the complaints received this year, just 16% qualified for investigation, meaning they raised serious, whole-school issues. Ofsted will then either conduct a snap inspection or take the issues into account at the school's next inspection.

Most of the complaints received are about leadership and management of a school or pupils' wellbeing. Most qualifying complaints (2,240) this year also contained safeguarding matters.

This year marked a big rise in complaints. There were 10,300 about schools from April 2019 to March 2020, 45% lower than this year. In 2018-19, a total of 12,200 complaints were made to Ofsted about schools. In both years, again less than 1% of complaints led to snap inspections being conducted.

Inspection Deep Dives

New Ofsted data reveals that English, maths and history are among the most common subjects for Ofsted deep dives during school inspections. Music, computing and design and technology were among the least likely to be scrutinised by Inspectors.

Under the Education Inspection Framework, which places a greater focus on curriculum, Inspectors carry out 'deep dives' into a sample of subjects to interrogate a school's curriculum. This will involve gathering evidence on curriculum intent, implementation, and impact through talking to leaders, conducting visits to lessons, and looking at pupils' work.

In primary settings:

- As set out in the school inspection handbook, Inspectors must look at reading in all primary school inspections.
- Besides reading, the most common subjects for deep dives were maths (97% of inspections), history (46%), geography (27%) and science (23%).

Just 3% per cent of inspections saw Inspectors conduct deep dives in French, Spanish or German.

In secondary settings:

- The picture is broadly similar with English the most common subject for deep dives (86% of inspections).
- Maths (77%), science (60%), history (55% per cent) and, this time, languages (51%) followed.
- The least likely subject to be investigated was RE at just 5% of inspections. Computing (7%), music (8%) and design and technology (18%) were also among the least common subjects for deep dives during secondary inspections.

Ofsted points out that its inspectors were somewhat restricted in their capacity to scrutinise RE in some schools; the Education Act sets out that the watchdog cannot inspect the subject in voluntary-aided maintained schools with a religious character or academies that were formerly voluntary-aided schools with a religious character.

This year, the average number of deep dives carried out by inspectors per inspection was four for primaries and five for secondary schools. Special schools and alternative provision are not included within this data.

Subject Reviews

The summer term saw Ofsted add to its suite of subject reviews with detailed reviews on history and maths published.

The full suite of subject reviews can be accessed [here](#)

Academy Updates

Academy Trust Handbook 2023

The end of the summer term saw the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) publish the [Academy Trust Handbook 2023](#), which came into effect on the 1st September 2023.

The ESFA has worked closely with a range of trusts and sector bodies to ensure that the financial oversight framework within the Handbook remains easily understood and straight forward to use and reflects the development and maturity of the academy sector. As a result, the 2023 Handbook is a considerably shorter and sharper document, removing what the ESFA refers to as unnecessary detail and prescription. The main changes include:

- **Related Party Transactions:** the threshold for the ESFA's prior approval for RTPs has been increased from £20K to £40K.
- **Annual Reporting:** Trustees are no longer required to provide an explanation in their governance statement within the Trust's audited annual accounts if they have held fewer than six Board meetings within the year. That said, the ESFA is keen to highlight that this in no way reduces the ESFA's expectation that Trusts have regular and effective Board meetings.
- **Budget Monitoring:** More discretion has been provided with respect to the distribution of a Trust's management accounts. Whilst the management accounts must still be shared with the Chair of Trustees each month, there is no longer the requirement for the other Trustees to consider the management accounts six times a year. Instead, from 2023 onwards, the ATH simply states that the Board must consider these when it meets.

A full list of the changes for 2023 can be found on [page 7 of the handbook](#).

There are a very small number of places where the 2023 Handbook more strongly emphasises Trusts' existing responsibilities, most notably the critical importance in ensuring the ongoing safety of the Trust's school estate. Whilst there are no new requirements in relation to estates, the Handbook emphasises and explains the existing responsibilities

Alongside the complete Handbook, the ESFA has also published a [Schedule of Musts](#), collating all of the Handbook's requirements as a checklist for Trusts to use. Whilst not a substitute for the Handbook itself, the tool is hoped to be another small step in making Trusts' life simpler. The tool is an entirely optional resource, and there is no requirement to submit this to the ESFA.

Moving forward, the ESFA is considering:

- what can be done to improve and streamline the financial returns which Trusts are required to submit;
- how best to develop the ESFA's suite of financial management good practice guides as a means of maximising support without setting additional requirements; and
- improving the joining-up of information from the DfE and ESFA with respect to funding and finance.

Watch this space!

News in Brief

Teachers' Pay Award

The Government has accepted the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) recommendations for 2023-24 teacher pay awards in full, meaning teachers and leaders will receive a pay award of at least 6.5%.

Schools will be expected to fund 3.5% of the rise from their own budgets, which the DfE argues is "affordable" given the increase in school funding announced last year and which many schools should have budgeted for given the evidence the Government submitted to the STRB. The DfE will provide funding for the remaining 3% from reprioritisation within its own budgets.

The Government has also committed to other measures to promote recruitment and retention across schools, including convening a workload reduction taskforce.

Members of the four education unions (ASCL, NAHT, NASUWT and NEU) have accepted the STRB'S recommendation; however, it remains unclear whether all four Unions will be calling off the planned strike action for the Autumn Term. Watch this space!

Change at the DfE

The end of August saw former Education Committee Member, David Johnston, appointed to the role of Children's Minister, after his predecessor, Claire Coutinho, was promoted to Cabinet as the Energy and Net Zero Secretary. Johnston becomes the fifth Children's Minister in just under two years, a post which has the responsibility for the SEND reforms.

Pearson's 2023 School Report

More than two thirds of teachers say that pupils with special educational needs and disabilities or additional needs are being ineffectively supported by the current education system. This is according to Pearson who recently commissioned a national survey of primary and secondary school teachers. Its findings have been published in the [Pearson's School Report 2023](#).

Many stated that the biggest barrier to enabling support was a lack of funding, either for teaching assistant support or to facilitate smaller class sizes.

The report cited five key challenges that teachers expect schools and trusts to manage over the next 12 months:

- Budget pressures (59%);
- Teacher and school leader workload (52%);

- Teacher recruitment and retention (48%);
- Supporting pupils with SEND (37%); and
- Staff and pupil mental health and wellbeing (34%).

National Funding Formula (NFF)

The DfE has announced [details](#) of the 2024-25 NFF which determines how schools will be funded.

Overall, core schools funding for both mainstream schools and high needs, and including the teachers' pay additional grant, is increasing by over £1.8Bn in 2024-25 compared to the previous year. This is on top of a £3.9Bn increase in 2023-24.

The minimum per pupil funding levels will also increase by 2.4% compared to 2023-24 – at least £4,655 per primary pupil, and £6,050 per secondary pupil.

Local Authorities will be allocated funding in 2024-25 on the basis of falling rolls, as well as growth. This funding can be used to support schools which see a short-term fall in the number of pupils on roll.

School Week Guidance

The DfE has published new non-statutory [guidance](#) on the expectation for all state funded mainstream schools to deliver a school week of at least 32.5 hours by September 2024 (this deadline has been pushed back from September 2023).

The guidance sets out steps for increasing time beyond the minimum school week and includes case studies where schools have seen positive outcomes from having a school week of 32.5 hours or more.

Value for Money Report on School Buildings

700,000 pupils are learning in a school that the DfE or the responsible body (usually the relevant Local Authority, Academy Trust, or Voluntary-Aided body), believes needs major rebuilding or refurbishment.

A report from the National Audit Office has found that underinvestment has led to a decline in the condition of these school estates. Whilst an improved understanding of the general condition of school buildings from the DfE has helped to target schools assessed to be in the poorest condition, there is a significant gap between the funding required and what is available. Funding is also often used for urgent repairs rather than planned maintenance which risks not offering good long-term value for money.

The full NAO report can be accessed [here](#)

Permanent Exclusions

The latest data on suspensions and permanent exclusions was published at the start of the summer and covers the 2021-22 academic year. Key findings include:

- There were 6,500 permanent exclusions in the 2021-22 academic year. Although an increase from 3,900 in 2020-21, the comparative year did include a period in the Spring term when schools were only open to key worker and vulnerable children. The number of permanent exclusions was lower than the last full academic year before the pandemic (7,900 in 2018-19).
- The 2021-22 figures are the equivalent of 8 permanent exclusions for every 10,000 pupils.
- There were 578,300 suspensions in the 2021- 22 academic year. Again, this is an increase from the prior year, when 352,500 suspensions occurred, and is also higher than pre-pandemic levels (438,300 in 2018-19).
- The 2021-22 figures are the equivalent of 691 suspensions per 10,000 pupils.

- Persistent disruptive behaviour, 47% of permanent exclusions and 50% of suspensions, was the most common reason for the sanction being issued.

Further details can be found [here](#)

Free School Meals

All London primary school pupils will receive free school meals for the 2023-24 academic year in an initiative funded by the London Mayor. Schools will need to ensure that they:

- have the capacity to meet an increase in demand as a result of the initiative, including sufficient lunchtime staffing and basics such as utensils.
- still reach out to parents whose children are eligible for pupil premium funding which is funding in addition to that being provided through the Mayor's initiative.

The ESFA has also confirmed that the per-meal rate for universal infant free school meals has been agreed, increasing from £2.41 to £2.53 for the 2023-24 academic year.

Cyber Security

Given the increase in recent cyber security incidents, the Education and Skills Funding Agency is reminding educational settings of the importance of "good cyber security hygiene". For extra protection, schools/Trusts should:

- ensure that all staff are following password policies;
- stay vigilant against [phishing emails](#)
- familiarise themselves with the [department's Cyber Standards](#) and NCSC's [infographic](#)

The ESFA has also updated the [ESFA cyber crime and cyber security guidance](#) on GOV.UK.

Uniform Guidance

Statutory guidance came into force September 2022 to ensure school uniform costs were "reasonable" and secured "the best value for money". A poll by The Children's Society appeared to suggest the Government rules have had little impact. More than one-in-10 school leaders said, in a Government survey, that they were not aware of the guidance. Of the 87% who were aware of it, 50% knew very little of the guidance.

Just under two-thirds (62%) of school leaders said their school was fully compliant with the rules.

Under the guidance, schools must ensure arrangements are in place, so second-hand uniforms are available, such as through swap shops.

Net Capacity Assessment Programme

From 2023 to 2025, the DfE's Net Capacity Assessment (NCA) programme will ensure that accurate, up-to-date information on pupil capacity for secondary and special schools in England is available. The Valuations Office Agency (VOA) will visit 4,500 schools, collecting data on pupil capacity, and will

- measure rooms;
- record room types; and
- use the NCA tool and methodology to calculate the number of children a school can accommodate, based on the size and use of spaces available.

The benefits of the programme are expected to include:

- identifying spare capacity where demand for places is high;
- providing a complete record of pupil capacity in special schools for the first time;
- more effective use of space and curriculum planning; and

- independent verification of capacity for admissions / appeals.

The programme's reports will be shared with schools, Local Authorities, Dioceses and MATs.

Governor Training and Development Programme

Headteacher appraisal for governing boards	26 th September 2023	6.30pm-8.00pm
New Governors-Core Induction Course-Part 1	4 th October 2023	6.30pm-8.30pm
New Governors-Core Induction Course-Part 2	12 th October 2023	6.30pm-8.30pm
New Governors-Core Induction Course-Part 3	18 th October 2023	6.30pm-8.30pm
Clerks briefing	31 st October 2023	10.00am-11.00am
Did you become a governor in 2022/3?	1 st November 2023	6.30pm-8.00pm
Managing concerns & complaint hearings	2 nd November 2023	6.30pm-8.00pm
Governor Safeguarding Responsibilities & Keeping Children Safe in Education (Updated)	7 th November 2023	6.30pm-8.00pm
Budgeting & Human Resource Solutions for governing boards	23 rd November 2023	6.30pm-8.00pm
Clerks briefing	30 th November 2023	10.00am-11.00am
Meeting the inspector	17 th January 2024	6.30pm-8.00pm
Understanding school finance for academy & maintained school governors	31 st January 2024	6.30pm-8.00pm

Follow the [link](#) to find out more about the courses and to book a place.