

SESLIP AD Education Network Update: September 13th 2024

From SESLIP:

- Welcome back and I hope the new school year has started well for you. The update reflects a return to business as usual for the DfE and Ofsted with announcements of important review reports and plans for change for Sept 2025, and much more!
- The Children's Commissioner is using statutory powers to direct all schools to complete a long survey about support provision, partnership working and vulnerable learners. The survey can be viewed here: https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/cco_school_survey. This is quite a demanding information grab from the Commissioner and is worth reviewing prior to discussions with schools and trusts about it.

In Today's Update:

- DfE: Ofsted publishes its Big Listen report and response and the independent learning review from the death of Ruth Perry and its response, 2023-24 KS2 SAT statistics, latest list of statutory guidance documents.
- National reports: Good Childhood 2024 paints a worrying picture of life for 15 year olds, school admissions and social selection and separation, lost learning due to exclusion, suspensions and unauthorised absence continues to increase: setting the agenda for solution-focused responses, school leaders survey highlights concerns about increasing complaints.
- Research: Students' self-reported approaches to learning, retrieval and exam preparation, review of evidence of effectiveness of 'stop and search', analysis of trends in spending on children's services by LAs.
- News: SEND funding raised in HoC questions to SofS, interview with SofS for Education, opinion pieces in response to Ofsted's announced plans following the Big Listen, Ofsted and the challenge of measures of inclusion, membership of DfE's panel advising the curriculum review, more discussion about DfE regional school improvement teams, survey of parents who EHE, ESFA to close, Labour-commissioned early years report's findings, childcare deserts in England often in poorest areas, the ABC of equity and inclusion: A is for attendance, what if there were no specials schools?

1. DfE:

- Ofsted publishes the analysis of its Big Listen exercise and its response to the findings: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-big-listen-supporting-documents/findings-of-ofsted-big-listen-public-consultation> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/ofsted-big-listen/outcome/hearing-feedback-accepting-criticism-and-building-a-better-ofsted-the-response-to-the-big-listen>. Among the changes listed are a greater focus on inclusion, with this being reflected in the report cards, which will aim to summarise what a school is doing well and areas for improvement (all part of a new inspection framework that will be ready for Sept 2025). Inspection notifications will all happen on Mondays (to be piloted this term) and a pause will be an option where there are safeguarding concerns in an otherwise high performing school.
- Ofsted publishes its independent learning review from the inspection at Caversham Primary that was criticised as contributing to the death of Ruth Perry. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66ce24201aaf41b21139cf94/Independent_learning_review_for_ofsted_by_Dame_Christine_Gilbert.pdf. The report is particularly critical of the immediate response from Ofsted, that was defensive and had a narrative that 'inspectors are never wrong'. Ofsted also made no attempts to contact relatives which was very insensitive. Ofsted's response to the review is here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-big-listen-supporting-documents/ofsted-response-to-the-independent-learning-review-by-dame-christine-gilbert>. It largely accepts the recommendations, which will inform an external review and reform for changes and an improvement plan for the year ahead.

- National KS2 data: overall attainment against expected standards has largely plateau'd, or a very small increase, and the gap between boys and girls has remained static. The disadvantage gap has also reduced somewhat, although is still wider than pre-pandemic. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-2-attainment/2023-24>
- Latest up-to-date collection of statutory guidance for schools and LAs: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statutory-guidance-schools>

2. Reports:

- Good Childhood Report for 2024, by The Children's Society, portrays a concerning picture of wellbeing and life satisfaction among UK 15 year olds. The report includes information from their own 2024 survey that sheds light on the financial pressures being faced by many families and the effect this has on young people. There are certain caveats for the report: chapter 1 focused on happiness data from 2021-22 which would still be affected by covid restrictions and chapter 3 re-presents PISA data on comparative wellbeing from 2022 (however UK 15 year-olds were lowest among 27 countries for life satisfaction and wellbeing and ranked 3rd highest for long-term school absences). <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-08/Good%20Childhood%20Report-Main-Report.pdf>
- Report analysing the extent secondary school pupil profiles reflect their local area, as a means to assess the level of social selection in place allocation. These are then ranked by LA area, despite mainstream admissions being increasingly school and trust defined. The report states that faith schools (in particular Catholic) and grammar schools increase social selection and argues for pupil premium status to be added to school admission criteria. <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Social-Selection-on-the-Map-Brief.pdf>
- Using school-level data from 2023-24, the report highlights the continuing increase of suspensions and exclusions and unauthorised absences in English schools, approx 20% increase on the same period in the previous year. This disproportionately involves pupils from low socio-economic backgrounds and those with SEND. The case is made for a focus on inclusion in mainstream to reduce costs to LAs for AP, reduce risk of participation in crime and to reduce unemployment. https://ippr-org.files.svdcdn.com/production/Downloads/Who_is_losing_learning_Sept24.pdf. And coverage of the solution-focused expert group that has been formed to explore the challenges and make recommendations. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/new-council-seeks-solutions-to-lost-learning-from-absence-and-exclusions/>
- An annual snapshot survey of school and trust leaders' views on key areas of education policy and day-to-day pressures (completed in March 2024), carried out by an education law firm. Section 3 highlights parental complaints: that this is impacting on staff wellbeing and retention and that significant resource is being deployed to train staff and governors about complaints and the need for greater clarity from DfE and national bodies. <https://www.brownejacobson.com/BrowneJacobson/media/Media/education/SLS-findings-Spring-2024.pdf>

3. Research

- Insightful exploration of what learning and revision techniques are used by secondary-age students: ways teaching can reinforce and practice more effective approaches and counteract less effective techniques (such as rote learning). Exam anxiety is found to correlate more with the use of ineffective study techniques (like low elaboration methods) and revision in environments with distractions, whilst students who used spaced practice showed a negative correlation with exam anxiety, possibly because it helps students feel better prepared. <https://cognitiveresearchjournal.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s41235-024-00567-5>

- Evidence review about the effectiveness of 'stop and search' in reducing crime, from the Youth Endowment Fund. Whilst stop and search does have some suppressing effect on crime figures, it is less effective than other options available to the police for the way they deployment resources. It incontrovertibly affects Black people more than other ethnic groups and there are worrying correlations with those with mental health issues. <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/stop-and-search/>
- Analysis of the trends in Children's Services spending for 2011 - 2023. Report finds that Children's Services now makes up about 26% of LA spending, on average, and that spending on early intervention has more than halved over this time. At the same time, late intervention spend has increased by 57%, including spend on residential placements up by nearly double. <https://www.probonoeconomics.com/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=e1fc0925-e816-437a-bfc1-1f7b7afa1a27>

4. News:

- During first HoC education questions, SofS says that SEND deficit overrides (due to end 2026) are being reviewed and that the use of safety valve agreements is being looked at, although there are no plans to change the 37 that are in place. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/phillipson-faces-first-education-questions-from-mps/>
- Interview with the SofS Bridget Phillipson; more hints than announcements. She cites SEND and children's social care as priority areas for attention, continues to downplay trusts and wants the proposals for Ofsted reforms to result in better learning for disadvantaged pupils. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/analysis/general/bridget-phillipson-interview-quiet-revolution-education>
- A couple of short opinion pieces offering reflections and views about some aspects of Ofsted's response to its 'Big Listen'. Firstly, does too much focus on process risk repeating mistakes of previous reforms? Christine Gilbert's report includes the recommendation that the DfE should consider the wider accountability framework for schools, that Ofsted is only a part of, and how to rebalance it. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/ofsted-reforms-are-looking-for-solutions-in-the-wrong-places/>, second, a welcome to more phase specific inspection frameworks, with a view that infant schools and those with school nurseries are at a disadvantage under the current framework: <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/some-early-concerns-about-ofsted-proposed-framework-changes/>. Finally reaction to Ofsted's plan to review its local area SEND inspection framework and pause monitoring inspections: <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/pause-in-ofsted-send-inspections-opens-accountability-gap/>
- As part of its work to develop an inclusion criterion for report cards, Ofsted has commissioned the NCB and EEF to research and advise it. The article highlights that there are big challenges for the robustness of data and to avoid building in perverse incentives. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/ofsted-enlists-charities-help-as-it-plans-inclusion-criterion/>
- Membership of the panel that will oversee the DfE's curriculum review has been announced. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/revealed-12-member-panel-to-lead-labour-curriculum-review/>
- DfE regional school improvement teams will be able to offer support to any school, but with additional capacity for schools identified as most in need of improvement. No further details about how the process might work, but these new teams will start to be rolled out from early 2025. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/school-improvement-teams-will-offer-support-to-all/>
- A series of articles about elective home education (EHE) from a home education activist based on her own online survey completed by self-selected sample of parents. Even with limits in methodology (which the author acknowledges) and some issues with the analysis used, the survey offers some helpful insights from parents largely committed to providing EHE for their child. Among these are the proportion of children with low attendance prior to deregistration (75% of secondary age being

severely absent) and the role of threats to fine for poor attendance.

<https://learnwhatyoulive.substack.com/>

- The ESFA is to be closed as a separate agency and its functions absorbed into DfE regions offices from March 2025. The Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education is also being wound down, with some functions moving to Skills England from April 2025. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/esfa-to-close-as-regions-group-take-over-school-finance-oversight/>
- Findings of Sir David Bell's review of early years that was commissioned by Labour before coming to power at July's General Election. In addition to a robust national strategy for early years, he calls for increased funding to achieve the expansion ambitions, including an increase to the early years pupil premium, more regulation of the early years market and a new 0 - 7s QTS. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/early-years/labour-early-years-review-findings-revealed>
- Concerns about so-called "childcare deserts" and that families in many of our poorest areas have access fewer childcare places, with as many as 3.5 children for every place that is available. <https://www.itv.com/news/2024-09-12/estimated-15-million-children-in-uk-live-in-a-childcare-desert>
- First of a series of five articles on equity and schools: how schools can work to reduce disadvantage and promote inclusion. The first focuses on attendance and the need to convince many parents that being at school every day is in their child's best interest. A challenge for all school staff and children's professionals. <https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/content/best-practice/the-abc-of-equity-in-schools-a-is-for-attendance/>
- Article to promote discussion: what if there were no more special schools and all schools? What adaptations would we need to realise such a dream and what might the positives be that would result? Thought provoking! <https://www.tes.com/magazine/leadership/strategy/what-if-there-were-no-special-schools>
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