

## SESLIP AD Education Network Update:

June 13<sup>th</sup> 2025

### From SESLIP:

- The DfE has confirmed an increased funding for SESLIP for 2025-26, with a focus on SEND and inclusion. We are proposing to extend the remit of the AD Education Network to cover some oversight of AP and that there will be funding for a task-and-finish group of officers to develop a network / community of practice and progress work on data and quality assurance of unregistered AP.
- At this week's meeting it was also agreed to rename the CME Group, the Access to Education (A2E) Group. A copy of the updated terms of reference are attached.

### In Today's Update:

- DfE: School census statistics - total pupil number is falling, school workforce data, Ofsted's review of local area SEND inspections, consultation about the re-establishment of a School Support Staff Negotiating Body, school place applications and offers, numbers of pupils with SEND continues to increase, paper on the use of AI in schools, Prevent training for school coordinators.
- Reports: Independent review of education spending in England, Opportunity Index offering a comparison of attainment and employment for FSM-eligible pupils and their peers, practical barriers to maximising uptake of free school meals and how to overcome them.
- Research: Research into patterns of school absence and non-enrolment across secondary pupils with chronic health conditions.
- News: Ofsted to delay publication of new inspection framework to September, DfE extends criteria for eligibility for FSM, summer edition of Headteacher Update, implications of spending review for schools, high court dismisses challenge against VAT on private school fees, SEND deficits continue to soar in LAs, funding for PINS to continue, SEND tribunal cases grow by a third year-on-year.

#### 1. DfE:

- School and pupils demographics data from the Jan 2025 census. Overall numbers of pupils in schools in England have reduced year-on-year for the first time since 2010. Primary numbers continue to fall and the growth in secondary is slowing, pending the anticipated decline in numbers from 2027 onwards. There are also a significant increase in the numbers of pupils placed in AP, both by an LA and by schools (up by 24% over the year from Jan 2024). <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2024-25>
- Latest schools workforce statistics. Headline findings include that the total FTE of teachers has fallen slightly, but that this is in nursery and primary, whilst secondary teachers have increased. The number of teachers returning to the profession is the highest for 10 years, whilst the retention rates for newly qualified teachers is improving. The number of vacancies fell, although is still higher than before covid, and the number of support staff is at a ten year high. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2024>
- Ofsted publishes its review of the current local area SEND and AP inspections framework. Among the improvements it commits to are: simplifying the data inspectors ask for, making engagement meetings less frequent and more supportive, and specifying more clearly which member of the partnership should take forward areas for improvement. Regarding inspections undertaken, strategic governance is the most frequent area for improvement together with failing commissioning arrangements leading to gaps in provision. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/area-send-review-what-we-heard-and-how-we-are-improving/strengthening-the-area-send-framework-what-we-heard-and-how-we-are-improving>
- Department launches consultation about the re-establishment of a School Support Staff Negotiating Body. Key aspects of the consultation are about certain MAT roles; the proposal is to exclude executives, but include other central team roles in trusts. There is a question about including agency

workers who only work in schools within the Body's scope. The consultation closes on 18 July.

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-support-staff-division/setting-up-the-school-support-staff-negotiating-bo/>

- School place applications and offers for secondary and primary schools. The proportion of first and second preferences in primary were down slightly and in secondary there was a small increase. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/primary-and-secondary-school-applications-and-offers/2025-26>
- Schools SEND data based on January census returns. The % of pupils with an EHCP plan in 2024-25 increased from 4.6% to 5.3%; and the proportion recorded as being at SEN support increased from 13.6% to 14.2%. There was a 15% increase in the number of schools with an SEN unit and a smaller increase in the number with reserved provision on site. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2024-25>
- DfE publishes its position paper on the use of generative AI in schools. The paper includes prompts about the safe and responsible use of AI in schools and how it can be a tool to support formal assessments. There is a set of CPD materials to support teachers equip themselves in the use of AI. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/generative-artificial-intelligence-in-education/generative-artificial-intelligence-ai-in-education>
- Information about Prevent online training sessions available for schools in 2025-26 plus guidance materials. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/regional-prevent-education-coordinators>

## **2. Reports:**

- IFS review of education spending in England for 2025 points out that DfE spending, other than for childcare, is 'unprotected' and potentially subject to a 1% real terms reduction over the next three years. Potential consequences include: only committing to protecting per-pupil funding would build in a £2 billion or 3% cut to school spending; mainstream school funding per pupil is expected to grow by 5.8% but costs are expected to grow by 6.5% (including the pay offers); although additional funding has been allocated to FE in recent years, spending in 2024-25 remained 13% below 2009-10 levels. <https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/Schools-and-colleges-in-the-2025-Spending-Review-IFS-Report.pdf>
- The Opportunity Index for England compares the attainment and progress into employment and higher education of children and young people eligible for FSM with their peers. The report provides an overview of the patterns across England whilst there is also an online map that breaks down these data by Parliamentary constituency. The areas with the smallest gap between those on FSM and their peers are all in London, whilst some parts of Kent and coastal Sussex feature in the areas with the widest gap. <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/The-Opportunity-Index.pdf>
- Report into important detailed variations between how different LAs and some MATs deliver the process of children accessing free school meals. Although based on survey responses from a third of LAs and some interviews the insights are helpful about ideas to overcome barriers. In particular the report makes the case for auto-enrolment, but GDPR and access to personal data from the DWP are significant obstacles to overcome. [https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Updated-FSM-registration-report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Updated-FSM-registration-report_FINAL.pdf)

## **3. Research**

- Study using data from NHS records and school census exploring the extent secondary students with a chronic health condition have higher rates of absence from school (measure being persistent absence) or reduced school enrolment. Overall absence rates were about 50% higher on average for those with a chronic condition compared to their peers. When broken down by conditions, those with chronic mental ill-health displayed the highest levels of absence. <https://academic.oup.com/jpubhealth/advance-article/doi/10.1093/pubmed/fdaf064/8155220>

## **4. News:**

- The SofS publicly rebukes Ofsted about its delay to its response to the consultation about its new framework for school inspections including the school report card. Both Ofsted and the DfE publish their respective letters, where the Chief Inspector sets out a plan to retain the original timeline of starting inspections with the new framework from November 2025.  
<https://www.tes.com/magazine/analysis/general/ofsted-delay-sir-martyns-and-bridget-phillipsons-letters>
- Headlines for education from the spending review include: additional funding for SEND with a new white paper due in September, increased funding for Ofsted to help it to resource developing an inspection regime for MATs and a small 'real terms' increase in the overall schools budget but details of the funding for teachers' pay awards and free school meals have not yet been made clear.  
<https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/spending-review-2025-what-it-means-schools>
- The DfE announces that the eligibility criteria for free school meals have been extended to include families on universal credit. This could increase the numbers of pupils on FSMs by up to 500,000. There will be no additional allowance for pupil premium.  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cdr5mr5l2d1o>
- Headteacher Update: newsletter for school leaders. Summer edition includes useful articles on: moving into executive headship, the growing number of SEND resources bases in schools (often informal rather than commissioned) and exploring the challenge of improving school attendance.  
<https://htu.mydigitalpublication.co.uk/summer-2025/page-1>
- The Condition Improvement Fund for 2025-26 has been announced and increases from £424 million to £470 million in 2025-26. The DfE says a greater proportion of the approvals are for voluntary-aided schools and schools in smaller MATs. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/school-repairs-funding-announced-condition-improvement-fund>
- Although lacking in specifics for education, early analysis of implications of the comprehensive spending review for schools. Because pupil numbers are expected to fall between 2025 and 2028, the real-terms freeze in the schools budget equates to a 3% rise in spending per pupil, however much of this is dependent upon how SEND reforms are rolled out which is not yet clear.  
<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/what-the-spending-review-really-means-for-schools/>
- The High Court has dismissed a number of claims against the government for adding VAT to independent school fees. None of the grounds, including religious freedom, parental choice and SEND, were accepted as the basis for a challenge.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/jun/13/high-court-dismisses-challenges-vat-uk-private-school-fees>
- Local government organisations criticise the lack of information about SEND funding following the comprehensive spending review. With the statutory override finishing in March 2026 and LAs with an accumulated overspend in the region of £5bn, there are warnings about more LAs being pushed into effective bankruptcy unless this addressed by the government.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/jun/13/councils-in-england-warn-of-mass-bankruptcies-as-send-deficits-soar>
- The DfE commits to further funding for the PINS programme, to support primary schools with strategies and expertise with children with neurodiversity. The funding has been reduced so would be expected to engage with around 1,200 further primary schools. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/dfe-extends-neurodiversity-support-scheme-but-with-less-funding/>
- The number of SEND tribunal appeal requests received is up by over a third on last year to accompany the continuing increase in the number of new EHCPs issued.  
<https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/send-tribunal-appeals-reach-highest-level>