

## SESLIP Education Network Update: May 29<sup>th</sup> 2026

### From SESLIP:

- DfE South-east regions group is inviting **applications for grants to its Universal RISE fund**, from LAs, MATs and research schools. The online application form and summary information are here: <https://www.find-government-grants.service.gov.uk/grants/rise-universal-grant-1> They are looking to fund projects that seek to progress impacts against one or more of the 4 national priorities during the financial year 2026-27 and the closing date for applications is 26th June. Attached to the update is a further guidance document from the DfE which provides an overview of the information applicants should assemble and more guidance about themes of interest. Additionally, we have been advised that projects which are a collaboration and that seek to impact school practice in areas of deprivation (e.g. coastal or pockets in larger areas of affluence) are of interest.

### In Today's Update:

- DfE: South-east RISE updates, Ofsted analysis of its first two terms of school inspections, new guidance on processes and procedures for new schools and closing maintained schools, updated exclusions and suspension guidance, Milburn report into increasing numbers who are NEET, analysis of LA school funding formulae, KS4 & KS5 destination data, evaluation of attendance mentors pilot, post-16 transition plans, free breakfast club guidance, the use of AI in education, study about risk factors for becoming NEET, King's Speech briefing incl Education for All Bill.
- Reports: Five year overview of the positives and challenges in education (from staff and students), inside the minds of 16-year olds - qualitative study of what matters to them - and partner study inside the minds of NEET young people.
- Research: Large study from England about the interconnectedness of student mental wellbeing and belonging at school, challenges of RCT design for school absenteeism research.
- News: LGR and SEND, changes in education for 2026-27, school leaders concerns about scale of SEND reforms, lessons Missions Coastal and other DfE 'Missions' should learn, schools will not be statutory safeguarding partner, concerns about lack of scrutiny of SEND reform plans, HoL launches inquiry into falling school rolls, stopping parents vaping on school sites, Mission 44 campaign to reduce exclusions, discussion about LA-established trusts, school readiness in Reception, summary of current evidence about internal exclusions.

#### 1. DfE:

- RISE updates: a. behaviour & attendance - guidance and expectations for schools seeking to access support from B&A lead schools (either light-touch regional or enhanced): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rise-attendance-and-behaviour-hubs-guidance-for-partner-schools/attendance-and-behaviour-hubs-guidance-for-partner-schools> and reminder of lead B&A hub schools including in SE: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rise-attendance-and-behaviour-hubs-programme-lead-schools/schools-leading-attendance-and-behaviour-hubs> .
- Ofsted analysis of over 900 inspections and school report cards under the new framework. Among its findings are that schools with above-average free school meals rates are almost three times as likely as those with below-average levels to be graded 'needs attention' or 'urgent improvement' for achievement. It has committed to amending its inspections from Sept to strengthen how a school's context, including pupil disadvantage, is factored in. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspections-statistical-commentaries-2025-to-2026/the-achievement-grade-attainment-data-and-schools-in-challenging-circumstances>
- New guidance on opening schools and closing maintained schools, in line with the law in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act. This includes the 'free school' presumption no longer applying from 1st Sept 2026 as well as alterations to maintained school closure procedures to apply from that

date (if a process to consult on a school closure has already started before this date, then old guidance continues to apply. For opening / closing maintained schools:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-organisation-local-authority-maintained-schools>

and for opening a new school (whether LA or another proposer):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/opening-new-schools>

- The interim report of the Milburn inquiry into concerns about young people and worklessness and the increasing number who are NEET, with the UK having the highest rates who are NEET compared to all EU countries except Romania. The growing number of young people assessed as having significant health conditions, in particular mental health, is a concern and that the majority of these young people are economically inactive; with criticism of an NHS culture too willing to categorise young people as incapable of work. This combined with a social security system which does too little to support young people into (back into) work: of young people who first claim a health or disability benefit nearly half are still not in work 10 years later. There is also criticism of insufficient support / learning at school in preparation for work and adulthood whilst job opportunities are harder for young people to access. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/young-people-and-work-interim-report>
- Updated guidance about suspensions and exclusions for schools and LAs. Changes include that schools cannot exclude if a parent refuses a managed move and they should not prioritise admitting pupils via managed moves, over those on their waiting lists unless they are a better fit for their admissions criteria. Off-site direction guidance is consistent across all types of school and it stipulates that parents must be information of the address of the 'off-site provision' and reasons. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-suspensions-and-permanent-exclusions>
- Analysis of LA funding formulae for schools across the country. Nearly 90% of LAs are mirroring the NFF in the funding that is allocated to mainstream schools, and nearly all provide at least the minimum per pupil amounts in primary and secondary. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-block-funding-formulae-2026-to-2027>
- Destination statistics for KS4 and KS5 students (largely updating for those who finished year 11 in 2022-23). Broadly these data suggest there might be a small trend downward in terms of not being NEET. Those with SEND (SEN support and EHCP) have significantly lower levels of sustained destinations (both 85%) whilst for those finishing year 11 in AP, just over half were in an education destination whilst 1 in 5 were NEET and, for another 1 in 5, there was no data. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/destinations-of-key-stage-4-and-5-students-2024>
- Evaluation of years 2 and 3 of an attendance mentors pilot in 5 LAs areas in the North and W Midlands. Contracts were let with voluntary sector organisations to provide intensive support / mentoring for up to 20 weeks. The report illustrates the challenges of intervening when absence is severe and entrenched and there were process issues, such as delays in referrals contributing to further reduction in attendance. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a16fc7865bc5f798327f3df/Attendance\\_mentors\\_intervention\\_year\\_2\\_and\\_3\\_evaluation.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a16fc7865bc5f798327f3df/Attendance_mentors_intervention_year_2_and_3_evaluation.pdf)
- Post-16: following consultation, the final list of L2 and L3 qualifications to be withdrawn from 2027, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/qualifications-due-to-have-funding-removed-from-august-2027>, together with guidance and format for institutions to submit post-16 pathways strategic transition planning statements. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/submit-your-post-16-pathways-strategic-transition-planning-statement>
- Guidance for the free Breakfast Clubs programme and the transitional arrangements for those schools currently on the national school breakfasts programme (NBSP) that will be replaced from September. There is also a specific grant for 2026-27 for secondary schools on the NBSP, due to the new programme being solely for primary schools. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-school-breakfast-club-programme>

- A suite of CPD materials about using AI in education and for leaders in education, that have been developed with the Chartered College for Teaching. Themes covered include the safe use of AI, understanding what it is and how to make use of it at school.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/using-ai-in-education-settings-support-materials>
- Using cohort studies to analyse risk factors for young people becoming NEET. Broadly the more of the vulnerability risk factors that a young person has experienced, even more so if a young person with SEND, the more likely the young person is to become NEET from age 17. Those eligible for FSMs and/or with SEND are most at risk, but this is compounded when facing other challenging circumstances. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a05bb3a5f39105e0848a27f/risk-factors-for-becoming-neet-a-statistical-analysis-using-linked-data.pdf>
- Information about the legislation proposed for the forthcoming session of Parliament in the King's Speech. It includes a summary of proposals for an Education for All Bill (p49) which will enact changes proposed in the DfE's SEND Reforms consultation.  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a046665c0cc74b4523e4d3b/The\\_King\\_s\\_Speech\\_2026\\_-\\_background\\_briefing\\_notes.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a046665c0cc74b4523e4d3b/The_King_s_Speech_2026_-_background_briefing_notes.pdf)

## **2. Reports:**

- Infographic-heavy report about the current challenges in education, from primary through to post-16, and solutions, and aspirations of children and young people. Drawing on 5 annual surveys from 2022 to 2026, the report discusses:
  - aspects of school life where there is improvement (even if still challenging): these include mental health of students, hunger / poverty and prior learning
  - sustained areas of pressure: education budgets, challenges of school attendance and student disengagement and SEND; concerns that school works less well for more vulnerable learners
  - learner views about what helps them to learn: teachers being the number 1, plus extra-curricular activities, and access to digital resources and to staff in lessons.[https://url.uk.m.mimecastprotect.com/s/tV\\_5CpkrZin9Gz8UVS8UGwbhU](https://url.uk.m.mimecastprotect.com/s/tV_5CpkrZin9Gz8UVS8UGwbhU)
- Inside the minds of 16-year olds: a qualitative report exploring with year 11s how their lives are and what matters to them, particularly online. It shows young people who are often well informed, who want guardrails and controls put in place on social media and certain other online content (pornography), and desire opportunities for social connection and place to meet. There is a sense that many adults, in particular politicians, are not interested in young people, whilst they highlight schools have become scared of debating thorny issues and teachers shut them down too quickly.  
[https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Inside-the-mind-of-a-16-year-old\\_2025\\_report\\_final-Nov.pdf](https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Inside-the-mind-of-a-16-year-old_2025_report_final-Nov.pdf) Plus a sister qualitative paper talking with 400 young people who were NEET and exploring their experiences of entering the jobs market (like a cliff edge) and their reflections of how far school experience had equipped them for work (too little practical life skill and preparation). <https://onemillionfutures.substack.com/api/v1/file/beb0a432-5f7e-4d5b-bcf9-4ad65a97937f.pdf>

## **3. Research**

- Large scale study of students from years 8 - 10 in schools in England finds that poor mental health can drive disengagement from school, while strong relationships and a sense of belonging protects mental wellbeing and help to reduce student absence. The authors indicate that there are clear patterns in the ways that mental health and wellbeing and school experience one another in young people's lives.  
[https://www.jaacap.org/article/S0890-8567\(26\)00142-5/fulltext](https://www.jaacap.org/article/S0890-8567(26)00142-5/fulltext)
- Four evaluations of programmes designed to increase school attendance have been published by the EEF. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/evaluations-improve-attendance-and-prevent-persistent-absence>

- The challenges of researching interventions to address school attendance / absenteeism; a review of published RCT studies and methodologies highlights the risk of bias and inconsistent reporting in at least half of the papers, including the challenge of how to account for context-specific factors. The findings underscore the need for clearer operational definitions and improvement in the standardisation of outcome reporting.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1747938X26000308>

#### **4. News:**

- Article discussing pros and cons of LGR through possible effects for SEND provision and SEND reform. There is a particular look at changes underway in Surrey and across Hampshire / Portsmouth / Southampton. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/will-local-government-reorganisation-improve-send/>
- Helpful overview of policy changes for schools due in 2026-27. Many start from Sept, such as updates to KCSIE, updated RSHE guidance, enrichment benchmarks, and access to allergy pens. Others include publication of Inclusion Strategies (Dec), RISE targeted support eligibility defined by summer attainment data (Jan) as well as Ofsted, and Inclusive Mainstream funding made available (Apr). <https://www.tes.com/magazine/analysis/general/whats-changing-education-2026-27-your-school-ready>
- Article pulling together points made in their responses to the SEND Reforms consultation by national education associations and unions. Overall there is a positive welcome to a greater focus on inclusion, together with concerns about funding, lack of clarity about experts at hand and inclusion bases and about the scale of change (capacity and funding in schools to cope). <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/send-reforms-risk-smothering-schools-government-warned/>
- Details of the DfE's plans for 'Missions' to turnaround areas of educational underachievement, including Missions Coastal for which Hastings has been identified as a location, have still not been published or consulted upon. The article reviews previous government attempts to intervene and invest in deprived areas to improve achievement and lessons that should be taken from these. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/missions-impossible-the-flagship-policy-due-in-september/>
- Schools will not be made as a statutory fourth safeguarding partner. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act instead called on partners to automatically include schools in safeguarding arrangements, but not as a statutory partner. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/schools-will-not-be-added-as-safeguarding-fourth-partner/> The notes on implementation of the Act state this would ensure schools are sufficiently represented. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/695e578a8ab0677c14afdfc9/childrens\\_wellbeing\\_and\\_schools\\_bill\\_2024\\_policy\\_summary\\_notes.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/695e578a8ab0677c14afdfc9/childrens_wellbeing_and_schools_bill_2024_policy_summary_notes.pdf)
- Concerns that the timing and the tight timescale set by the DfE for local SEND reform plans will result in a lack of public scrutiny of these plans at local level. Since these have been set out by the DfE as the basis for reaching agreement about SEND deficit allocations, members in particular have expressed concerns. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/council-send-reform-plans-could-dodge-public-scrutiny/>
- House of Lords committee is to carry out an inquiry into falling school rolls and how negative impacts can be avoided. The NAHT welcomed the inquiry and both seeks a more strategic approach from Government and for funding measures to protect schools and staff. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/primary/heads-welcome-falling-school-pupil-rolls-inquiry>
- As the DfE is considering its measures to require school site to be vape-free (as well as tobacco free), a survey shows that over 90% of schools already operate bans, but that between 1 in 10 and 1 in 5 headteachers have had to ask parents to stop vaping on site. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/primary-leaders-tell-parents-stop-vaping-school-site>

- Information about the Mission 44 campaign to reduce the levels of exclusions from schools and to tackle some of the root causes. It seeks to work with schools and trusts to reduce the higher levels of exclusion among Black and Gypsy/Roma/Traveller pupils, including to work with partners to support prevention outside of school, and to improve the support for vulnerable learners through mentoring and better AP, both internal and external referred AP. <https://preventingexclusions.com/about-the-campaign.php>
- Discussion about LA-established trusts, drawing on evidence from previous preliminary discussions with the DfE under a different Government. It highlights that none of the legal limitations have changed since those exploratory discussions and questions the capacity of LAs to take on such a role. <https://schoolsworld.co.uk/can-council-run-academy-trusts-actually-work/>
- Article exploring what school readiness looks like in school. There is also increasing divergence with parents, with teachers saying a quarter of new Reception child are not toilet trained, whilst 1 in 5 parents expressed a view this is not necessary to be considered school ready. The article describes practice in a couple of primary schools, which emphasise building relationships with the family and encouraging routines and independence at home. <https://www.headteacher-update.com/content/best-practice/school-readiness-supporting-early-years-transition>
- Blog article exploring the evidence about the use of internal exclusions in secondary schools and some of its impacts on young people. Recognising that the evidence is uneven, the piece calls for more data standardisation, schools and trusts having clear purposes set out and for more guidance for schools about environment and learning during internal exclusion. <https://beewellprogramme.org/understanding-internal-exclusion-in-english-secondary-schools-what-the-evidence-tells-us/>