

SESLIP Education Directors Update:

October 13th 2026

From SESLIP:

- September newsletter from the Director of the DfE's Regions Group SE (Dame Kate Dethridge): <https://news.service.education.gov.uk/ph75/Design/m5h-ag7> . It includes named contact by LA / sub-regional area.
- The SE Attendance and Engagement Network: flyer about the Network is attached, as requested. Use the QR link to sign-up and receive more information about future events this term and next.
- The South-east KS3 Alliance had its launch on 1st October (flyer attached). Julia, Matthew, Michelle and Natalie have met with KS3 Alliance team and provided support for the event.

In Today's Update:

- DfE: Ofsted independent evaluation of new education inspections framework, guidance on MAT exec pay cap, latest version of the Academy Trust Handbook, year 1 phonics test results up to pre-covid levels, case studies of RISE grant-funded projects from 2025-26, guidance about secondary funding for books as part of National Year of Reading, NFF guidance for 2027-28.
- Reports: How Young Futures Hubs can help to reduce NEET numbers, latest overview of developed education systems with a focus on workforce, NHS review of ADHD, autism and mental health diagnosis and services, FED's report on stakeholders' views of the current state of education in England.
- Research: Research about secondary school staff attitudes towards attendance, the lives of year 8s in England - first report from DfE longitudinal study, research exploring why risk-taking is an important element of play from a young age.
- News: Are schools with more SEND pupils graded lower by Ofsted? SofS to ask Ofsted to have a greater emphasis on context, schools still unclear about enrichment expectations, DfE considering examples of 'reasonable adjustments', the DfE has approved or deferred all LA local SEND reform plans - early analysis of those published by LAs, profile of specialist MATs, ASCL votes that it has no confidence in Ofsted, early analysis that exclusions and suspensions in secondaries might be heading downwards, reduced employer pension contributions: should schools be allowed to retain the reductions?

1. DfE:

- Ofsted publishes the independent review of its school inspection framework. Positive experiences, in particular a more collaborative approach and the 'secure fit' model, were reported, however there were significant concerns about continuing negative wellbeing difficulties as a result of being inspected: with half (48%) of schools reported that mental wellbeing had been negatively affected a fair amount or a lot. 4 out of 5 early years settings agreed that inspection teams sought to understand their context, whilst the figure was two out of three schools.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6ac76fa5e8ef5609e7c93373/Ofsted_renewed{EIF_and ITE_inspection_frameworks_evaluation_summary_of_interim_findings.pdf
- Guidance for MATs on the new caps for executive pay, and sets out the way MATs will be required to seek DfE approval before advertising roles over the threshold, currently £175,000, or awarding performance-related bonuses of more than £25,000. MATs will also have to seek approval if they want to lift executive pay at a faster rate than that of the trust's teachers, regardless of the amount.
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/senior-pay-controls-for-academy-trusts>
- Latest iteration of the Academy Trusts Handbook, that came into force on 1st Oct. There are updates about certain procurement procedures, including in relation to MISs and to energy.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/academy-trust-handbook>
- The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in year 1 phonics screening test has returned to pre-pandemic levels: 82% were at expected standard. The increases were also mirrored by those for pupils with SEND and the gap between summer-born pupils and their peers also narrowed.

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/phonics-screening-check-attainment/2025-26>

- Summary case studies of projects undertaken under the DfE RISE grants programme in 2025-26. It includes the Portsmouth-led digital futures, and the ESCC reception year project from the South-east, as well as Unity Schools Trust's reception project too. There are a total of 25 projects with published case studies. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-rise-grants-2025-to-2026/universal-rise-grants-2025-to-2026-case-studies>
- Guidance about DfE funding to secondary schools for purchase of books as part of 2026 National Year of Reading. Allocations are weighted by school size and disadvantage, with a minimum entitlement of £450 and a maximum entitlement of £1400 per school, and eligible schools will automatically receive access via the DfE-appointed supplier's platform, Browns Books, and the associated discounts. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/funding-for-books-and-reading-materials-for-secondary-schools/funding-for-books-and-reading-materials-for-secondary-schools-guidance-for-schools>
- Guide about the schools National Funding Formula (NFF) for 2027-28, particularly for LAs. The NFF assumptions are the same as for 2026-27, with additional adjustments for pay awards and pension contributions. LAs continue to be responsible for deciding local funding formulae for mainstream schools in their area for 2027-28, with the expectation they continue to move local formula factor values at least a further 10% closer to the corresponding NFF values. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-16-schools-funding-local-authority-guidance-for-2027-to-2028/schools-national-funding-formula-summary-policy-document-for-2027-to-2028>

2. Reports:

- Report about Young Futures Hubs and how they can make an important contribution to addressing the levels of NEET presently. The Government's Young Futures programme includes funding 50 open-access Young Futures Hubs by the end of this parliament. The report sets out support and programmes via these Hubs can be effective and it is vital that they are well-connected to schools, in particular APs, and employers and key agencies, from mental health to DWP. Examples are provided from the 8 Hubs currently open (including Brighton & Hove). https://media.cfyl.org.uk/6a4f7d5923a278132614b14f_cfyL-LostGeneration-Briefing.pdf
- OECD's overview of education systems across Europe and developed countries for 2026. This year's report includes a focus on workforce, the largest category of expenditure for all education systems, although the percentage varies from 79% of the budget in Belgium to 56% in Finland. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/education-at-a-glance-2026_b4968bbc-en.html
- Final report of the Fonagy review of mental health, ADHD and autism and states the evidence shows the drivers for the increased levels of need are, in the main, social and cultural. Among its recommendations are to move away from separately commissioned ADHD, autism and mental health assessment and services towards outcome-based commissioning of integrated neuro-developmental and mental health assessment and support. It calls for a cross-governmental mental health strategy and to implement through action within 12 to 24 months. The report recognises that the numbers of children diagnosed with ADHD, for example, had rocketed: for 12 to 17 years by more than 15-fold (from 0.26% in 2000 to 3.88% in 2025); and even more so for autism: prevalence has increased among those aged 6 to 11 years by more than 20-fold (0.24% in 2000 to 4.58% in 2025) and among those aged 12 to 17 by more than 40-fold (0.10% in 2000 to 4.06% in 2025). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-into-mental-health-conditions-adhd-and-autism-final-report/independent-review-into-mental-health-conditions-adhd-and-autism-executive-summary>
- Foundation for Education Development's annual report of stakeholders' views of the education system. The central risk identified: without a clear, coherent implementation strategy, the

Government's recent White Papers risk becoming a wish list. Fragmentation remains the system's deepest structural problem, whilst there are workforce capacity constraints across the system, but most acutely felt in early years, where funding is almost at crisis point. <https://fed.education/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/2026-National-Education-Report.pdf>

3. Research

- Qualitative research with secondary school staff to better understand how they think about attendance, the factors they believe shape pupils' attendance patterns, and the strategies schools use to improve attendance. The recruitment particularly engaged with those from schools with higher levels of FSM. The teachers did not view school attendance as among their top education priorities and view its key driver being able disengagement from education, either from the family or the student. In terms of solutions, the importance of being able to offer better enrichment and sense of belonging is key and the government should link its new technical education and employment reforms directly to attendance so that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds see a clearer link between attendance and securing a future worth having. <https://impetus-org.files.svdcn.com/production/assets/publications/Report/FINAL-Attendance-Report-2026.pdf>
- First report from the DfE funded study to explore the experiences of young people growing up in the 2020. This baseline report takes a representative group of nearly 8,000 young in year 8 of secondary school and draws on information from young people, their parents/carers and teachers, plus cognitive assessments and school-level data. In many aspects of life the large majority of (>90%) young people reported feeling positive /neutral about life, family and friends, whilst, overall, just half reported enjoying at least some learning at school. The experiences, life-challenges and potential mental health concerns were higher for students with SEND or on FSMs. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6abbbf29c3fe1a15db6aff2b5/Growing Up in the 2020 s first survey research report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6abbbf29c3fe1a15db6aff2b5/Growing_Up_in_the_2020_s_first_survey_research_report.pdf)
- Children have fewer opportunities for independent, adventurous outdoor play (down by 50% in a generation) and fewer chances to make their own decisions and shape their own experiences including the extent of their own risk taking. The findings from this research about pre-school play suggest that when young children hold back and resist risky or messy play outdoors, it is rarely because they lack confidence or even access, rather they are responding to the subtle messages adults convey about risk, mess and safety. However, practicing risk taking matters because it is central to how children develop confidence and build problem-solving skills and a sense of who they are. When children get few chances to test their ideas, push their bodies or make small mistakes, they miss out on experiences that build resilience and agency. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03004279.2026.2678308>

4. News:

- Analysis by School Dash raises the question why schools with high proportions of pupils with SEND are less likely to be judged by Ofsted as having strong standards (or exceptional) across the different judgement areas even inclusion, than other schools with lower proportions of students with SEND. The analysis highlights that the sample is still relatively small, but it has raised further questions about the extent that contextual factors are taken into account. <https://www.schooldash.com/blog-2609.html#20260911>
- The Secretary of State calls for Ofsted to have a greater emphasis on context in its schools inspections and that she plans further reforms to the way Ofsted works over coming months. She expects to go 'further' on the curriculum review to allow for deeper learning experiences for students and for technical qualifications to be set on a par with academic ones. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/powell-ofsted-needs-much-stronger-focus-school-context>

- Schools are still unclear about what expectations there will be under the DfE's enrichment framework and the Dept states that it will be drafted and available to schools to 'feed into planning' for Sept 2027. Chair of the Education Select Committee urges the Dept to clarify expectations for schools and trusts as soon as possible. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/schools-in-dark-over-enrichment-expectations-labour-told>
- Article reporting on examples of 'reasonable adjustments' for SEND that are being considered by the DfE as it develops its guidance for schools. The draft refers to a school, as part of its universal offer: "embedding inclusive practices using the national inclusion standards to remove barriers to learning and participation associated with sensory needs", without a clear indication of the timeline for the national standards. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/dfe-tests-expectations-for-schools-send-inclusion>
- DfE announces that more than 90% of Local SEND Reform Plans (LSRPs) have been cleared by the Dept, leaving the door open for high need stability grants to be allocated. In an article about 40 LSRPs that had been published already, key themes for LAs included: workforce challenges around experts at hand, targets for increases to the numbers of inclusion bases and proportions of pupils with an EHCP on-roll in mainstream schools, risks due to challenges elsewhere in the system (e.g. small school sustainability) and uneven admissions arrangements (e.g. around designation for specialist academies vs maintained specials). <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/expert-staff-shortages-are-key-threat-to-1-8bn-send-reform-plans/>
- As most LAs have received their feedback on their local SEND reform plans, the article focuses on those whose plan approval had been deferred, several of whom have significant high needs deficits. There is also discussion of one or two LAs that currently have small high needs surpluses, but are forecast to move into deficit in future years. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/councils-told-to-have-another-go-at-send-reform-plans/>
- Article exploring the profile of MATs including special schools. For the first time, in 2025, there were more specialist academies than maintained specials. There is discussion, from trust leaders, about the pros-and-cons of special academies within a mixed trust (which is the largest proportion of MATs), vs those in solely or largely special trusts. Trust leaders expressed concerns that the government's focus on inclusive mainstream schools was a risk for them; their view was the DfE had underestimated the demand and importance of special schools. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/specialist-sector/mat-tracker-what-is-the-future-special-school-trusts>
- ASCL has voted that it has no confidence in the Ofsted leadership, citing that there has been too little progress on addressing the adverse wellbeing effects of school inspections despite undertakings to do so. The motion further states its concerns that schools serving disadvantaged communities are penalised by Ofsted's current methodology. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/ascl-passes-motion-no-confidence-ofsteds-leadership>
- From using data received from over 9,000 schools, analysis suggests that the levels of suspensions and exclusions in secondary schools in 2025-26 has fallen in comparison with previous years. Rates in primary schools have remained about the same or slightly higher. <https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2026/09/exclusions-and-suspensions-in-2025-26/>
- Pension contributions from employers for the teachers pension scheme are estimated to fall by £3.3bn, but the DfE has decided to reduce funding to schools and colleges by the equivalent amount. The NEU is calling for the Government to allow schools and colleges to retain the savings and some schools and trusts are concerned that there is a mis-match between DfE changes to funding formula against their own pension contribution costs. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/pensions-funding-row-truth-about-33-billion-savings>
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