

In the News (6 February 2017)

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Featured news: More than half of England's academies lack enough income to cover annual expenditure, West Sussex governors and Trustees write to MPs to refuse signing off budgets because of school funding concerns, think-tank warns that pupils are being managed out of mainstream schools, and LGA is calling for LAs to be given powers to direct academy schools to take in 'hard to place' pupils

[More than half of academies in England have lacked enough income to cover their annual expenditure \(BBC News, 1 February 2017\)](#). The 2014-15 figures have been revealed in response to a parliamentary question from the Liberal Democrat peer Lord Storey, showing that 53% of stand-alone academies were recorded as having "spent more than their income per year", up from 42% in the previous year. Among multi-academy trusts, the proportion was 53%, compared with 25% in the previous year. However, only 4% had a "cumulative deficit". The Lib Dems say that it shows a rising problem with inadequate funding, for academies as well as local authority schools.

[Governors and trustees of 40 schools in West Sussex have written to MPs to warn them that they will refuse to sign off budgets and carry out their supervisory work because of their concerns about funding \(BBC News, 31 January 2017\)](#). The threat to 'strike' has come as result of increased worries about the real term cuts to school budgets.

[Education Datalab is warning that a minority of "pupils are being 'managed out' of mainstream schools... with the effect of boosting the league table performance of the school which the pupil leaves" \(31 January 2017\)](#).

The [Local Government Association \(LGA\) is calling for local authorities \(LAs\) to be given additional powers to direct academy schools to take in 'hard to place' pupils, including those excluded from other schools](#). This is a response to [figures](#) showing that, while the Education Funding Agency (EFA) received 121 requests from LAs for an academy to be directed to admit a child between April 2012 and October 2016, the EFA issued a direction in only 15 of these cases.

Leading Support Services

School leadership and policy

[Sue Freestone, headteacher of Cambridgeshire boarding school King's Ely, argues the government is constantly and needlessly criticising public schools. Writing in the Telegraph, she highlights benefits that independent schools bring to the UK - including the £9.5bn contribution to the GDP \(The Daily Telegraph, 2 February 2017\)](#). She also wants to bust the myth of independent schools' charitable status, noting that there are a number of taxes affecting charities, and adding that if her school ceased to be one, it would have to reduce its means-tested bursaries. Ms Freestone concludes by saying that private schools have been sharing their facilities with local communities schools "for decades" without the pressure of government injunction.

[A senior Ofsted inspector is to take over a chain of academy schools \(The Birmingham Post, 30 January 2017\)](#). Catherine Anwar will become the new chief executive of the Ninestiles Academy Trust, which runs seven schools in Birmingham and Solihull. In her role at Ofsted, Ms Anwar has led focused reviews of multi-academy trusts and inspections of complex academies and free schools.

[Lloyds Banking Group has launched a new programme, StandingOut, which is recruiting senior colleagues into non-executive director roles at multi-academy trusts \(Evening Standard, 30 January 2017\).](#) Experienced staff will also provide pro bono financial effectiveness training to school business managers, as well as volunteering as governors. The skills that are in high demand by school boards include finance, HR, law and marketing.

[PTA UK has published the results of its annual survey of parents \(31 January 2017\).](#) The survey aim is to appreciate how parents feel about educational issues. The main findings were that parents want to be consulted more by government and schools generally, that they have an appetite to be more actively engaged in school-life and that there is a lack of understanding about government education policy.

[Michaela Community School in Brent, London, is advertising for a detention director who believes children need clear, firm discipline \(BBC News, 30 January 2017\).](#) The job specification, public shed in the Times Educational Supplement, offers a salary of up to £35,000 for the role and reads: "This role is for someone who believes children need clear, firm discipline. This role is for someone who believes tough love is what children need to become better people and grow into responsible young adults."

[Education Secretary Kirsty Williams has announced the creation of a new authority to oversee skills, funding for research and the higher and further education sectors in Wales \(Wales Online, 1 February 2017\).](#) It will also encompass work-based learning and adult community learning. The current functions of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales will be transferred to the new authority.

[A school in Brighton is using goats to improve behaviour \(The Times, 4 February 2017\).](#) Varndean School originally bought the five pygmy goats to help keep its lawns in order, but "goat time" has been introduced for pupils who are at risk of misbehaving in class. The school has seen incidents of poor behaviour drop by 29%. Hilary Goldsmith, the school's director of finance, said: "There are definitely students... for whom we have noticed a significant change in engagement and behaviour."

School uniform policy

[Findern Primary School in Derby has relaxed its dress code to allow pupils to wear slippers in the classroom after a study indicated that wearing them creates a calmer school environment, promotes learning and even reduces bullying \(The Times, 31 January 2017\).](#) Head Emma Titchener said: "Our pupils are already very well behaved but there have been some changes. There is less stomping around and the pupils are a lot calmer and seem very relaxed."

[A primary school in South London is making pupils take their shoes off before class in an effort to reduce bullying \(Daily Mail, 3 February 2017\).](#) West Thornton Primary School headteacher Di Pumphrey said the school has seen vast improvements since pupils first suggested they would like to take their shoes off in lessons four years ago. It comes after research by Bournemouth University found a range of benefits, including better behaviour and noise reduction. Mrs Pumphrey added: "Talk to any one of our children and they will all say they feel more relaxed, more comfortable and more focused on their learning."

[A transgender teenager is taking legal action against his former school for discrimination \(BBC News, 2 February 2017\).](#) Aidan, 16, claims he was effectively excluded because Hereford Cathedral School refused to let him wear a boy's uniform. A letter from Aidan's mother to the school's chair

of governors says she had no choice but to remove her son from the school after being told the school was "inadequately prepared to accommodate Aidan's needs".

School holiday policy

[The father fighting school term-time holiday fines, Jon Platt, has told the Supreme Court that the government risks criminalising parents of successful children who miss school to partake in national sports tournaments or receive awards at prize ceremonies \(The Daily Telegraph, 1 February 2017\).](#) Clive Sheldon QC, counsel for Mr Platt, argued that the DfE's policy to fine parents for any "unauthorised absence" means parents will be criminalised on an "unprecedented" scale. James Eadie QC, appearing for the education secretary, said legislators did not intend that "a parent has a right to take their child out of school during term time for any reason they judge appropriate," adding that "undermining the authority of the school and headteacher and those responsible for running the school is likely to be a thoroughly bad thing."

[Travel experts say school summer holidays should be staggered to stop parents taking children away during term-time to avoid high prices \(Sunday Express, 5 February 2017\).](#) Travelzoo's Richard Singer said: "Regional staggering is in place in Europe and it would mean our holiday period could stretch from early June to mid-September." Malcolm Bell, CEO of Visit Cornwall, added: "Staggering holidays would help make them more affordable, ease the strain on infrastructure, and get people active earlier in the summer." A DfE spokesman said: "Schools and local authorities already have the power to vary term dates, including for individual schools. We encourage local authorities to listen sympathetically to arguments for changes to term dates."

[Stoke City Council is consulting with schools and parents about plans to reduce the six-week summer break by a week, and moving the spare days to October instead from 2018-19 \(BBC News, 1 February 2017\).](#) Janine Bridges, cabinet member for education, said the idea was mooted after parents called for holiday periods "in the off-peak periods". Local mother Kelly McArdle backed shortening the plan as it would make looking after children easier for families.

School places and admissions

[Parents have won a battle over Nottinghamshire County Council's decision to stop giving priority places to children with an older brother or sister at school \(BBC News, 2 February 2017\).](#) Parents from High Oakham Primary School in Mansfield appealed to the Schools Adjudicator who ruled the admission rule was unfair and should be revised. The council said the policy would be revised for all county schools, but that existing arrangements would remain in place.

[A project aimed at giving disadvantaged children free places at top boarding schools has been scrapped \(The Daily Telegraph, 3 February 2017\).](#) Buttle UK, the charity leading the project, said it was unable to proceed with the scheme as local authorities were not willing to refer children. "There's an ideology that people think boarding isn't right for these children," said CEO Gerri McAndrew. "All of that is based on an assumption. Not many social workers have actually visited a boarding school, so there's a real lack of knowledge about boarding schools," she added. It is understood both the DfE and the Education Endowment Fund have pulled their funding from the project.

[Muslim pupils outnumber Christian children in more than 30 church schools, including Church of England primary St Thomas in Werneth, Oldham, which has no Christian pupils \(The Sunday Times, 5 February 2017\).](#) The Church estimates that about 20 of its schools had more Muslim pupils than Christians and 15 Roman Catholic schools had majority Muslim pupils, according to the Catholic

Education Service. The *Times* notes how some church schools include Islamic prayers in their services and observe both Christian and Muslim festivals. Alan Smithers, director of the centre for education at the University of Buckingham, said it would be “logical” for some of these schools to become secular institutions.

New schools and school closures

[A headmaster says the first new grammar school could be open by September 2019 \(The Daily Telegraph, 30 January 2017\)](#). Jonathan Wilden, head of Wallington County Grammar School in Sutton, is in talks with the DfE about opening a new campus in Croydon, which would create places for around 1,000 students in a previously non-selective borough.

[Two Greater Manchester free schools are to be broken up. Collective Spirit in Oldham and Manchester Creative Studio in Ancoats, both set up by charity boss Raja Miah in 2013-14, will be handed over to a different provider \(Manchester Evening News, 31 January 2017\)](#). Last year, Ofsted placed CS in special measures after finding “every aspect” of the school to be failing, including leadership. While MCS has not yet had an Ofsted inspection, the government has ranked it in the bottom 10% of schools nationally, and issued it with a financial notice to improve within 18 months of opening.

[Councillors in Neath Port Talbot have approved plans for three school projects \(Wales Online, 1 February 2017\)](#). The investment of nearly £50m is part of the Council’s Strategic School Improvement Programme which aims to raise school standards and enhance the quality of the learning environment in both English and Welsh medium education. It includes new premises for Ysgol Gyfun Ystalyfera, and two wholly new schools.

[One of the highest achieving schools in the UK, North London Collegiate, is opening a branch in Dubai \(The Daily Telegraph, 3 February 2017\)](#). Opening in September 2017 to 1,800 students aged three up to 16, NLCS Dubai will operate as a coeducational day school teaching International Baccalaureate programmes, with the view to expanding to sixth form by 2019. NCLS has been ranked the number one school for IB results since 2004. The all-girls school already established a school in Jeju, South Korea, in 2011, and also plans to open a school in Singapore. Dan Lewis, the new head of NLCS Dubai and currently deputy head of the London school, said the school will have a strong academic focus.

Health and wellbeing

[A new exercise regime for schools has been launched across the country \(The Daily Telegraph, 31 January 2017\)](#). The Health Active Schools Systems (HASS) is open to all primary schools through their sports premium funding and will provide schools with a daily breakdown of physical activity levels for each child, class and year group in order for teachers to be able to see which areas are in need of improvement. HASS will also check how effective schools are at investing and implementing new sports initiatives with additional funding.

[A fifth of children, some as young 11, are skipping meals to lose weight thinking it is healthy to do so \(Daily Mirror, 31 January 2017\)](#). The same number of 11 to 14-year-olds turned to vloggers and Instagram users for advice about food, the Sainsbury’s Active Kids scheme has found. Four in 10 said they followed trends such as cutting out carbohydrates, while one in four only exercised at school.

[The health and wellbeing of teachers is being threatened by “overwhelming” pressures in schools, according to the founding chief of a new ruling body for teachers \(Independent i, 4 February 2017\)](#).

Dame Alison Peacock, head of the Chartered College of Teaching, says overwork and stress is pushing many into ill health - particularly mental illnesses and even suicide, while others are feared to suffer heart attacks as a consequence of work-related issues. The membership body, which will eventually become the Royal College of Teaching, has been established to support educators. "The current situation is one where it feels very, very hard to be a teacher," Dame Alison says, adding: "What do we do about that?... We need to listen to teachers and understand what the pressures are."

[A charity is warning that brain tumours in teenagers are going undiagnosed because the symptoms - such as mood swings, tiredness and headaches - are sometimes mistaken for adolescent angst and exam stress \(The Mail on Sunday, 4 February 2017\).](#) While children under 12 are diagnosed within seven weeks, diagnosis time for teenagers is 10 weeks, according to The Brain Tumour Charity. Hayley Epps from the charity said it was imperative to tackle the problem, adding: "Brain tumours kill more teenagers in the UK than any other form of cancer."

[Children as young as seven are suffering from back problems, a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association Paediatrics shows \(The Times, 6 February 2017\).](#) One in 100 seven-year-olds suffer from lower back pain, rising to 6% of 10-year-olds and 18% of those aged 14 to 16. Girls are more prone to the aches and pains, the research found, with common causes including over-exertion in sport and growing pains. Heavy backpacks and sitting down in front of a computer or TV were also blamed.

Health and safety

[Teachers and school staff in Wales have been the victims of more than 1,500 physical and verbal attacks by pupils every year \(BBC News, 30 January 2017\).](#) The figure comes from NUT Cymru, which had responses from 17 of Wales's 22 local authorities to Freedom of Information requests.

[The Scottish government is to push for a UK-wide crackdown on the sale of knives online, recommended by a review into the stabbing of Aberdeen schoolboy Bailey Gwynne \(BBC News, 31 January 2017\).](#) However, Education Secretary John Swinney rejected proposals to give teachers a statutory power to search pupils without permission, as this would "place teachers on the same footing as police officers" and "radically change the pupil-teacher relationship".

[The number of teachers wearing body cameras in UK classrooms is expected to increase, as schools are considering measures to tackle poor behaviour \(Yorkshire Post, 2 February 2017\).](#) Two schools have already adopted the technology, and the industry is developing more products suitable for classrooms. Feedback from teachers found they felt more confident dealing with situations when they had an "independent witness", and that they felt the cameras improved trust and accountability between the parents and the school.

[Pupils at a London school could be given face masks to protect them from toxic air \(The Times, 4 February 2017\).](#) Governors at Archbishop Sumner Primary in Lambeth are to discuss the measure at their next meeting. The masks would be for pupils to wear to and from school, with parents rather than teachers deciding if they should do so. Chairman of governors and parent Adam Matthews added that parents were considering taking direct action and blocking roads after school because they are "so frustrated at the lack of action to address pollution from diesel cars."

[A five-year-old who died after reportedly choking at school during lunch hour has been named as Theodore Silvester \(Daily Mail, 5 February 2017\).](#) The boy died after becoming ill at Anlaby Primary

School in Hull on Friday. The police are not treating his death as suspicious. Headteacher Gareth May said the school community was left "deeply saddened by this tragic event."

Safeguarding

[More than 60 institutions, including several top private schools, are being investigated by the Scottish child abuse inquiry \(BBC News, 31 January 2017\)](#). The new chairwoman of the inquiry, Lady Smith, said they were among 100 locations where abuse is alleged to have taken place, confirming that a number of boarding schools, including Fettes College, Musselburgh, Loretto School and Gordonstoun, were being investigated. Other institutions being investigated include those run by faith-based organisations and major care providers like Quarriers and Barnardo's.

[A Conservative MP claims teachers are referring children to the Government's anti-terror programme, Prevent, because they fear their schools will otherwise be marked down by Ofsted \(The Daily Telegraph, 1 February 2017\)](#). Leading a Westminster Hall debate on the topic, Lucy Allan, a school governor at Telford Primary School, said: "There is an incentive to make referrals, because if you don't there's a sense that you might get into trouble, or that might have a negative impact on your school, or as a teacher it might have a negative impact on your career." Home Office Minister Ben Wallace argued that whilst Prevent could be "fine-tuned", overall it had successfully combated radicalisation amongst school children.

[The number of children being investigated by police for sexual offences has almost doubled \(The Daily Telegraph, 3 February 2017\)](#). Last year there were 9,290 reports of such cases to forces in England and Wales, a jump of 78%, according to figures obtained by Barnardo's under Freedom of Information rules. In total since 2013, there were 32,452 reports of alleged sexual offences by children on other children, an average of more than 20 every day. The National Police Chiefs' Council said the increases could mainly be attributed to more awareness and greater victim confidence. Javed Khan, Barnardo's chief executive, said the results are a wake-up call to the extent of the problem.

[One case of FGM is either discovered or treated at a medical appointment in England every hour, according to analysis of NHS statistics by Plan International UK \(The Daily Telegraph, 6 February 2017\)](#). Between April 2015 and March 2016 there were 8,656 times when women or girls attended doctors' surgeries or hospitals and the problem was assessed. Among those who attended, a case of FGM is newly recorded every 92 minutes on average.

A new teaching [resource](#) has been developed by the PSHE Association with the Home Office and Government Equalities Office to support the Disrespect NoBody campaign. The campaign builds on the Government's previous [This is Abuse](#) campaign, and is aimed at preventing abusive behaviours within relationships.

Finance

Education funding and efficiencies

[The NUT says budget cuts are causing teacher redundancies across Essex, where 98% of schools will have their funding significantly cut as part of government reforms \(East Anglian Daily Times, 3 February 2017\)](#). Jerry Glazier, NUT general secretary in Essex, said: "This has to have an impact on the service. The effects can only be fewer teachers, fewer support staff and larger classes." He said regulations on keeping infant classes to 30 were being waived and secondary school teachers were

being asked to teach subjects they had not been trained in. In Colchester, Hamilton School is cutting three jobs as it needs to save at least £375,000 by 2020.

[A Coventry Observer article suggests some schools in the city will lose nearly £1,000 per pupil under the NFF proposals \(31 January 2017\).](#)

[An analysis of accounts by the TES has found a number of academy trusts have paid hundreds of thousands of pounds into fake bank accounts after being targeted by fraudsters \(Independent i, 3 February 2017\).](#) Bright Futures Educational Trust paid a "valid, appropriately approved invoice for £15,999" and is still working to recover £5,297. The Griffin Schools Trust in London paid £10,734, but the money has been recovered in full. United Learning was conned out of £240,800, and is missing £19,917. Mary Bousted, general secretary of the ATL, said the problem was down to a lack of checks and measures in the academies system. "The Government has no idea how these academies are spending their money, and this type of problem is just the tip of the iceberg," she added.

[Several Conservative MPs have gone public with frustrations over the Government's education funding reforms, saying not enough has been done to boost support for rural schools \(The Daily Telegraph, 30 January 2017\).](#)

[The Confederation of British Industry, which represents around a third of the UK's private sector workforce, is demanding that the Government place a greater focus on boosting regional growth and productivity through education and skills \(The Independent, 6 February 2017\).](#) "We know that improving schools is the best long-term growth strategy a nation can have," Neil Carberry, the CBI's director for people and skills policy said. "While in many areas schools have made impressive improvements in recent years, too many regions are left behind and too many young people still don't get the education they need."

[Ministers in Scotland are giving head teachers across the country direct access to £120m in Pupil Equity Funding, in addition to the funding schools receive from their local council \(BBC News, 1 February 2017\).](#) The money is being divided according to how many children in primary classes and the first three years of secondary school are entitled to free meals, and a list reveals that 2,513 primary, secondary and special schools will benefit from the scheme.

[Ilkley Grammar School has asked parents to donate up to £180 a year in a bid to support the school's budget \(BBC News, 1 February 2017\).](#) Head Helen Williams told parents the school could lose a further £330,000 each year by 2019-20 due to proposed changes to the National Funding Formula. The Grammar School Heads' Association warned in January a majority of grammars would be left worse off by the proposed funding changes.

[Closing the education gap with the rest of the country should be the main focus of a drive to grow the North economy by £100bn \(Yorkshire Post, 3 February 2017\).](#) The first report from George Osborne's Northern Powerhouse Partnership thinktank says: "There is now overwhelming evidence that attainment at age 16 is too low in the North, particularly amongst certain groups, lagging behind other parts of the UK and international competitors." The former chancellor said: "Now we are at a turning point for the North of England. We can either make use of the momentum behind the Northern Powerhouse to really close the North-South gap - or we can let the moment pass."

[The state must stop it's "nannying" of British parents and do away with universal free childcare \(The Times, 6 February 2017\).](#) The Institute of Economic Affairs says families most in need of help are not getting it because Government subsidies are poorly targeted. Many families on average earnings are

spending more than a third of their net income on childcare, the report found, as too much regulation in the sector has hiked prices. Attempts to improve the quality of childcare only increased the amount of regulation, while failing to produce better outcomes, and system has also limited choice as alternative forms of care are priced out of the sector, the report said.

HR

Recruitment, pay and conditions

[The General Teaching Council for Scotland is to invite trainee teachers from countries where there is a surplus to instead apply for positions in Scottish schools \(The Herald, 4 February 2017\)](#). Trainees in Australia, Canada, Ireland and Northern Ireland will be targeted, and the council's registers will be scoured to entice back home-grown talent that has emigrated to lucrative tax-free jobs in Gulf states such as Dubai and Saudi Arabia. Retired teachers in Scotland will also be encouraged to return to the profession and further moves have been made to relax tough entry requirements for teaching staff from the rest of the UK.

[The Royal Society of Edinburgh suggests publicly-funded bursaries of up to £30,000 should be offered to encourage leading science graduates into teaching \(The Herald, 1 February 2017\)](#). It notes that such incentives are already available south of the Border. In its submission to a Scottish Government strategy on the future of science education, the society welcomed the commitment to increasing teacher numbers, but added it was important new routes did not result in a lowering of standards. Its report also reiterated concerns about the current focus on testing of literacy and numeracy.

Industrial action

[Teachers belonging to the NASUWT in the Derry City and Strabane, Mid Ulster and Fermanagh and Omagh council areas staged a one-day strike on Tuesday over pay, jobs and workload \(BBC News, 31 January 2017\)](#). In October, BBC News notes, all five main teaching unions in Northern Ireland rejected an offer that would have seen their pay frozen last year and a rise of 1% for 2016-17.

[Strike action at New Charter Academy in Ashton has been called off \(Manchester Evening News, 1 February 2017\)](#). Three consecutive days of strike action had been due to go ahead over alleged "oppressive working conditions". Principal David Shaw said: "Having met with the unions several times now we're happy that an agreement has been reached." Peter Middleman, NUT regional secretary, said: "It's a partial breakthrough. We are meeting with the school again on Friday."

Disciplinary and legal action

[A teacher phoned Childline posing as a 14-year-old girl in order to falsely accuse a male colleague of sexual assault \(Daily Mail, 31 January 2017\)](#). Sheena Boll, a teacher at a school for children with special needs in Newham, east London, was also discovered to have made several fraudulent compensation claims. She has received an 11-week prison sentence and been suspended for two years.

[A maths teacher who called a special needs student "thick" and others "ugly" and "gay" has been banned from classes \(The Times, 3 February 2017\)](#). Helen Rosenberg also pushed students, stood on one pupil's foot and pulled another's hair. Her role at Bourne End Academy, Bucks, was her first in the UK after more than 20 years' experience in Australia. The National College for Teaching and

Leadership found her guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and said: "She had not expressed any remorse, regret or a willingness to engage cooperatively."

Teaching and learning

Curriculum, standards and testing

[Education Secretary Justine Greening has pledged to modernise sex education in schools \(The Daily Express, 2 February 2017\)](#). Responding to questions in Parliament, she said the world has "changed immeasurably" since the last Government guidance was published in 2000, adding it was important fresh guidance reflected the world as it is today – however stopping short of pledging making PSHE compulsory. Meanwhile, fellow Tory MP Philip Davies said there was a "worrying trend" from left-wing politicians to ban things or make them compulsory, as he stressed the importance of choice for parents.

[The Archbishop of York has warned creative subjects are at risk of being squeezed out in primary schools \(Yorkshire Post, 2 February 2017\)](#). Dr John Sentamu said the Church had asked some of their headteachers about the challenges they are facing, and many felt under pressure to sacrifice "the most imaginative opportunities that school could offer, in favour of meeting inflexible measures," he said. "Too many children are missing out on the chance to learn through wider and extra-curricular experiences which provide the kind of learning opportunities needed to foster positive mental well-being and personal growth," Dr Sentamu added.

[The crime writer Val McDermid has criticised the divide between arts and sciences within the UK's education system, saying she fears it does not leave room for students to be creative and investigate things "for the joy of it" \(The Guardian, 30 January 2017\)](#). "Science is clearly something that we need to be focusing our energy on, because that is where the economic future of the country lies, and we really should be driving our education towards it - but that does not mean we should turn our back on the arts," she said.

[The number of visitors to the UK's major museums and galleries fell by more than 2m last year \(The Times, 3 February 2017\)](#). A report by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport found that one of the most significant declines was in the number of young people visiting museums for educational purposes, down by over 6%. The wider group of under-18s also saw a decline of 3.1%. Alistair Brown of the Museums Association said: "Schools... are finding it harder to devote time to out-of-class activities. Children are increasingly missing out on valuable experiences that expose them to new ideas." The *Guardian* suggests the drop could be attributable to a national education system that was recently found to be "systematically" removing arts and culture from the curriculum.

[Wounded veterans are being trained in theatrecraft by National Theatre actors to tell their stories and inspire teenagers \(Evening Standard, 30 January 2017\)](#). The scheme, organised by military charity Blesma, The Limbless Veterans, hopes to run workshops for 7,000 children. Alice Driver, head of the Drive Project, said: "It has been such a success with fantastic feedback from the veterans and the schools. It has been particularly successful when the veterans work with pupil referral units or with challenging students."

[Scottish Government statistics show pupils taught in Gaelic are doing better at reading, writing, listening and talking at nearly every stage of primary compared to their mainstream peers \(The Herald, 4 February 2017\)](#). Shona MacLennan, Bòrd na Gàidhlig CEO, commented: "Many studies have proven that pupils in bilingual education are on a par with, or outperform, children educated in just one language as well as gaining other benefits." Fiona Dunn of Glasgow University added: "The

kind of parents who choose this are very engaged and motivated which has a positive impact on their children's learning." The results come as academics from Edinburgh and Heriot-Watt universities are set to embark on a study of how Gaelic is perceived by secondary pupils and its effects on their development.

[A food writer and an actor have joined forces to launch a website that that teaches children to eat and cook healthy food \(The Observer, 5 February 2017\).](#) The Table of Delights website, which goes live on Friday, was developed by Bristol cook Claire Thomson and Spaced actor Katy Carmichael, and is based on a theatre show they put on last year. Ms Thomson says they wanted to create something energetic and interactive. "Cooking should empower children but they need to participate in order to enjoy experience," she says. "That's what we're aiming for with this site. We wanted a mix of silly and educational."

[Teachers in Greece have criticised plans by the government to scrap the mandatory study of Ancient Greek tragedy in high schools \(The Times, 3 February 2017\).](#) The government says it is trying to update the "antiquated" curriculum and devote more time to teaching modern Greek and new subjects, including gender equality and sex education. Academics have described the plans as "preposterous".

[New research has found that pre-school children who spend time together take on one another's personalities \(Daily Mail, 3 February 2017\).](#) "Our finding, that personality traits are 'contagious' among children, flies in the face of common assumptions that personality is ingrained and can't be changed," said Dr Jennifer Neal of Michigan State University and co-author of the study. "This is important because some personality traits can help children succeed in life while others can hold them back." The researchers saw that children whose friends were hard-working or extroverted gradually took on these personality traits, while children whose peers were anxious or easily frustrated did not take on these traits.

[Brighton College is to introduce a number of "creative learning" techniques. Its new director of creative learning, Thomas Godber, said: "Simple mindfulness techniques will allow \[children\] to concentrate and feel more relaxed" \(The Sunday Telegraph, 4 February 2017\).](#) The school has also bought chairs on wheels, introduced in a new block of classrooms specially designed for creative learning. "We are throwing out some of the old, traditional notions that children have to sit in straight lines and listen for hours on end," Mr Godber said. Cameras will also be installed in the new classrooms so that teachers can watch their lessons back. The changes come following a delegation of teachers, led by headmaster Richard Cairns, touring schools in Finland, California and Singapore to research learning techniques.

[An article in The Mirror article features the Pybus family, whose three children are being home schooled – by allowing them to play video games up to 12 hours a day \(Daily Mirror, 2 February 2017\).](#) Mother Katie, an engineer, says she has never taught Sapphire, 12, Orin, 8, and Etienne, 5, any formal English or maths – and doubts they could even recite the alphabet. "I'm led by what they want to do and I don't restrict screen time.... they've learned lots about spelling and number manipulation through games," she says. The *Mirror* notes that while all children must receive an education from the age of five, home educators are free to teach children however they see fit.

[More Welsh schools have moved into the top category in the latest annual ratings \(BBC News, 31 January 2017\).](#) In this year's colour-coded ratings, 425 primary and secondary schools made the top green category - up from 333; a five percentage points increase in the primary sector and a seven percentage points rise in the secondary sector. Overall, 84.4% of primary and 64.6% of secondary schools are now in the green and yellow categories. Those in the lowest red category fell to 46 - compared to 58 in 2015.

The government has dropped plans to extend the phonics screening check re-takes to Year 3 pupils. The change of policy comes after [a pilot of the phonics screening check](#) by the Standards and Testing Agency (STA). The STA commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to run a pilot of the phonics screening check with Year 3 pupils who had not met the required standard by the end of Year 2.

[Helen Kirwan-Taylor, explores the lives of the children of the top 0.1% richest people in the UK \(The Daily Telegraph, 31 January 2017\)](#). According to the psychology professor Suniya S Luthar, serious levels of anxiety, depression and somatic symptoms occur twice as often among boys and girls of the affluent compared with national levels. The reporter argues that these children's lives are blighted by their parents who use their wealth and influence to steer them through school without responsibilities for their behaviour or even homework. Secondly, she says these parents neglect their children emotionally, compensating with money. Ms Kirwan-Taylor concludes that those wealthy children whose parents make them work for their school and career success, fare much better in life.

[A document published earlier this month by the DfE shows it is considering introducing tests, understood to have been rejected by countries such as Sweden \(The Daily Telegraph, 31 January 2017\)](#). The tablet-based tests, run by the OECD and described as a "pre-school PISA", assess four aspects of pupils' development: literacy, language and verbal skills; numeracy and mathematics; "self-regulation" and ability to pay attention; and "empathy and trust". In England, some 3,000 five-year-olds, in 200 schools, could take part in a pilot scheme in autumn 2018. Peter Moss, emeritus professor of early years education, said there was concern that the tests could create pressure on teachers to narrow the curriculum to what was tested.

[Analysis of GCSE figures claims some schools are not being correctly represented for their level of success \(BBC News, 31 January 2017\)](#). Data from Education DataLab shows about 20,000 secondary pupils left before they sat their GCSE exams. If the students had remained, some schools would not have scored as highly on the official league tables.

[Teachers fear the Scottish Qualifications Authority's new guidelines for National 5 qualifications will lead to additional workload \(The Times, 2 February 2017\)](#). There are also concerns examiners intend to make changes to final exams without proper consultation with teachers.

[The number of children getting extra time in exams has reached a record high \(The Times, 6 February 2017\)](#). Over 410,000 "access arrangements" were granted for GCSEs and A-levels last year, a 77% increase in five years. Academics suggested the system was unfair because some of those granted extra time may have no greater need than their classmates. One headteacher, speaking anonymously, said their hands were tied if parents paid for a private diagnosis of, for example, dyslexia, as it had to be considered. Tom Bennett, a government adviser on behaviour, said greater awareness of special needs partially explained the increase, but added: "...this might be a case of parents understanding how to access this provision more." Robert Coe, of Durham University, added: "There's definitely an issue about how you define some of these conditions that might make you eligible."

Careers and higher education

[Young people who have regular contact with employers while at school are much less likely to become so-called Neets - "not in education, employment or training", according to research from the Education and Employers charity \(BBC News, 2 February 2017\)](#). [The research overall emphasised long-term benefit of links with business](#). The research found if students had four or

more contacts with employers before they left school they would be 86% less likely to become a Neet.

[An experiment to recruit more trainee accountants from working-class backgrounds by banning any details of qualifications has been deemed a success \(The Times, 2 February 2017\).](#) In 2016, Ernst and Young scrapped requirements to disclose the school or university attended, class of degree and A-level grades. The number of recruits from state schools rose by 10% to 49% for graduates and to 59% for school leavers. There was a seven-point rise in the number of recruits who were the first in their family to go to university.

[The National Cyber Security Centre has announced a new student recruitment drive to find future online security experts \(The Times, 4 February 2017\).](#) The programme, part of the CyberFirst scheme, will also involve a national schools encryption competition aimed at recruiting girls into the sector. Ciaran Martin, head of the NCSC, said he hoped to find 1,000 graduates by 2020, adding: "These are skills we desperately need." Successful applicants will receive a £4,000 bursary to study a relevant degree, and will undertake eight to ten-week placements within GCHQ, at a GCHQ cyber academy, at GCHQ cyber summer schools, or with industry partners.

A new [analysis by the Institute of Fiscal Studies \(IFS\)](#) warns that the government's apprenticeship policies "risk poor value for money" (31 January 2017). The IFS found that the government has "failed to make a convincing case for such a large and rapid expansion in apprenticeships" and identified a number of risks, including downward pressure on wages and increasing quantity at the expense of quality.

[Half of the 10 most international universities in the world are in Britain, according to the ranking by the Times Higher Education \(1 February 2017\).](#) Overall, Britain has 13 universities in the list of 150 institutions, making it the third most represented country after America and Germany. The ranking measures the proportion of international staff, students and research papers published with an international co-author, combined with an academic reputation survey.

[A freedom of information request by the Times shows how leading universities are increasingly filling undergraduate places through Clearing, after a cap on applicants was scrapped in 2015 \(The Times, 1 February 2017\).](#) Topping the list was Queen Mary, University of London, which admitted 26.9% of its undergraduates through the system. Others with high clearing rates include Sheffield (17.7%), Cardiff (16.1%) and Manchester (11.4%). A higher education expert at PA Consulting, Mike Boxall, said some Russell Group universities were using profits from expanding undergraduate teaching, in some cases lowering entry grades, to support loss-making research. "The subsequent experiences of many of these students have not been good: they have crowded lecture halls, reduced access to academic staff and overloaded services," he added.

[The number of university applicants has dropped for just the third time in 15 years \(The Times, 2 February 2017\).](#) Figures from Ucas show that around 30,000 fewer people had applied to start degree courses this autumn by January 15. A breakdown reveals that the number of EU students applying dropped by 7%, but there has also been a 5% decrease in UK applicants. The number of international students remained similar to last year.

[Cambridge University now has fewer privately-educated students than universities such as Bristol, Durham and St Andrews \(BBC News, 2 February 2017\).](#) Among mainstream universities, Oxford has the fewest state school pupils, the Higher Education Statistics Agency figures show. The overall proportion of state school pupils entering UK universities has reached a record high - up from 89.8% to 89.9%. Of the regions, the highest level of state pupils is in Northern Ireland (99.2%), the lowest in Scotland (87%).

[The take-up of apprenticeships among ethnic minorities is still low, and more needs to be done to raise awareness of the opportunities that apprenticeships can provide, according to a Leeds city councillor \(Yorkshire Post, 1 February 2017\).](#) Councillor Mohammed Rafique said: "There's still a myth that apprenticeships are related to the construction industry. Well that's not the case." He continued: "We need to make sure that everybody benefits... We need to work with our partners, particularly businesses and the education sector - universities and schools - to make sure that young people when they're leaving school they've got skills to take up those opportunities."

Government announcements, guidance, consultations and funding

[The EFA has updated its '16-19 funding: how it works' guidance.](#) The update includes a video explaining the allocations process for academic year 2017-18 has been added (6 February 2017).

[The SFA has published updated apprenticeship funding and performance management rules for 2017-18 that will apply from 1 May 2017 \(2 February 2017\).](#) [The apprenticeship technical funding guide has also been published \(1 February 2017\).](#)

[The SFA has updated the employer apprenticeship factsheet \(2 February 2017\).](#)

[The EFA has published the high needs change request outcomes for 2017-18 \(31 January 2017\).](#)

[The Schools Commissioners Group has published the latest transparency data from the Headteacher Boards \(2 February 2017\).](#)

[The DfE and EFA has published an update to the Dedicated Schools Grant \(DSG\) allocations 2016-17 financial year spreadsheet \(1 February 2017\).](#)

[Eleven projects have received funding of up to £30,000 to carry out collaborative research projects into efficient and effective approaches which reduce unnecessary workload \(NCTL, 30 January 2017\).](#) The research projects will build on the principles and recommendations from [3 independent reports into workload](#).

The Department for Education is redesigning the two financial benchmarking websites: [Academies financial benchmarking](#) and [Maintained schools financial benchmarking](#). The DfE wants to hear from stakeholders including business managers. If you are interested in helping to improve this service, you can fill out the user research survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/5C65FTS>