

Primary Perspectives

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This short newsletter is published once a term bringing you recent policy news, reports, research updates and the latest developments in Primary education. I hope you enjoy it.

Key headlines

- **Schools across the UK have shut their doors as measures are set to protect the population as the coronavirus pandemic continues to spread**
- **Every school in England currently rated as "outstanding" is to be inspected in the next five years under new proposals from the DfE**
- **There have been calls that recent policy interventions in early years have been ineffective and for the government to develop a more effective long-term strategy**
- **It is claimed there is 'a haphazard' approach to school admissions with parents not always able to exercise genuine choice**

Policy

Covid-19. The Department for Education closed schools on Friday, 20 March and announced they will remain closed until further notice except for children of key workers and vulnerable children, as part of the country's ongoing response to coronavirus. The wide-sweeping closures, which also include A Levels and GCSE exams being cancelled, affect the majority of schools, although staff are being asked to provide care for vulnerable children and those whose parents are key workers whose jobs are vital to public health and safety during the coronavirus lockdown. Because their work is so vital, the Government is keen to ensure that they are able to carry out their jobs with as little restriction as possible. The list includes:

- Health and social care
- Education and childcare

- Food and other necessary goods
- Key public service

Skills. The UK has fallen five places in global education rankings with some analysts blaming the political focus on Brexit for side-lining education initiatives. The research evaluates how school systems prepare pupils for later life through developing these skills. The UK, which came in at 15th out of 50 nations, was one of a number of leading economies to drop down the Index for developing future-orientated skills, such as critical thinking and entrepreneurship. Rob Halfon MP, previous Chair of the Education Committee, in what is fast becoming a significant mantra, spelt out the four 'S' pillars (skills, standards, social justice, support for the profession) of the government's education agenda.

Schools. Ofsted

Ofsted's latest Annual Report pointed to the fact that 86% of schools in England were deemed Good or Outstanding in inspections last year but highlighting concerns about curriculum balance at KS3, primary science, pupil off rolling and unregistered schools.

Ofsted consulted on ending the inspection exemption currently in place for Outstanding schools and colleges. Every school in England currently rated as "outstanding" would be inspected in the next five years, under proposals

It announced that it was extending the transition period for schools to determine their future curriculum arrangements giving them two years rather than one .

Early Years

The Education Endowment Foundation has published an evaluation of a programme to train early years teachers to improve children's language outcomes. The Using Research Tools to Improve Language in the Early Years (URLEY) intervention is an evidence-based professional development programme for early years teachers. Teachers took part in five day-long professional development workshops in which they are introduced to evidence-based learning principles and research tools to evaluate and refine pedagogy and practice. The teachers were taught to use Environment Rating Scales (ERS) – research-validated observational rating scales known to predict aspects of children's development, with higher scores linked to improved maths and English achievement. They watched videos of effective practice and were supported to use the language principles and ERS to "tune in" to language-supporting practice.

Nearly 2,000 children from 120 schools from the West Midlands, Liverpool and Manchester participated in the study. The results of the trial found that children in schools receiving

URLEY did not make additional progress in language development compared to children in control schools, but the programme showed a positive impact on the quality of teaching.

Higher Education

Staff who belong to the University and College Union at 74 universities across the UK undertook a 14-day strike over pensions and pay, the gender pay gap and increased casualisation of staff.

A new report on the future of assessment for further and higher education argued that it needs to become 'smarter, faster, and more accessible,' has set out five principles in areas like security, accessibility, and authenticity, to help achieve this over the next five years.

UCAS reported on university applications this year as of the important mid-January deadline point noting totals up generally (1.2%) against the same point last year with record numbers applying both from outside the EU and from 18 year olds in the UK.

The gap in access between poorer and more affluent students at university "remains stark" and there is little evidence on which interventions work best, a new report has warned. Research by the Education Policy Institute (EPI) think tank said the sector had failed to establish a programme which clearly boosted the number of disadvantaged students attending universities. Students from the most affluent areas are still more than twice as likely to enter higher education than those from the most deprived areas – and for the top universities, six times more likely, the research found. Gaps persist despite £250m being spent each year on widening access, according to the think tank.

And let's finish with some numbers.....

69%. The percentage of researchers in higher education employed on fixed-term contracts

453,400. The number of full-time equivalent teachers in state funded schools in England in 2018, according to the latest official figures submitted to the Teachers' Pay Body

87%. The number of primary schools judged Good or Outstanding compared to 76% secondary schools, 92% of special schools and 83% of alternative provision providers, according to the latest Ofsted Annual Report

110. The number of MATs now with 13 or more schools, according to the latest Ofsted Annual Report

May I take this opportunity to hope you and your family remain safe and well in these unprecedented times.

**Jonathan Doherty
(Chair of NaPTEC).**