

Action Cerebral Palsy

Political & Parliamentary Monitoring Week Commencing 8th October 2018

The Government is [continuing to tighten](#) up the rules on removing pupils' from league table scores. It was announced this week that, in the first move of its kind, a school which took in two mentally ill pupils from a nearby school before their GCSEs has been held accountable for their exam results. The Department for Education, which rejected requests from the school to remove from performance data the results of two pupils who were in police custody on the day of their exams, and another pupil sectioned under the Mental Health Act, is starting to crackdown on schools suspected to be off-rolling.

Schools can apply for exam results of pupils with serious illnesses or who are home educated to be "disapplied" from performance data on the grounds that teachers cannot reasonably be held responsible for their outcomes. The Government now appears to be tightening up the rules over granting such applications. Whilst this has been welcomed by those who claim that the process of "disapplying" exam results amount to the off-rolling of children which schools deem 'difficult', there is a concern that some genuine cases are being overlooked as the Department for Education takes a new, tougher stance.

Sarah Holmes-Carne, Principal of Kenton School, said that the education system is "broken", and that there was a serious problem if Government policy had swung so quickly from rewarding to punishing schools for excluding pupils deemed disruptive. In a statement from the Department for Education, Rebekah Edgar, Deputy Director of the Education Data Division, dismissed schools' concerns and said the Department's decision was "final".

This news will be welcomed by ACP. The process of off-rolling has negatively affected children with SEND. Thus, curtailing this process and ensuring pupils with SEND are able to stay in the classroom, sit their exams and have them count towards the overall result of that school, is a significant and positive move.

Overview

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- [Digital Technology on the rise](#)

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Schools underfunded by £2 billion a year, councils claim

The F40 Group, representing some of the worst-funded educational authorities, has published a report indicating that their schools are being underfunded to the tune of more than £2 billion a year. [Speaking](#) to TES, the Group says that, after reviewing the new National Funding Formula (NFF) for schools, it believes that the education institutions they represent are failing to get the fair funding required in order to produce the standards of education, care, and behaviour expected by Ofsted. Instead, the Group claims that the attempts of NFF to ensure that pupils of similar characteristics should attract similar levels of funding are actually locking in historical differences and inequalities.

Chair of the F40 Group, Ivan Ould, said that whilst the F40 welcomed Government commitments for additional funding and resources, it had “fundamental concerns about the NFF”, adding that the NFF had “failed to deliver the level of fairness of funding allocation that is required” by schools. The unanimous view amongst members, Mr Ould said, was that the Government needed to do far more to recognise ingrained inequalities that existed between schools. The criticism of the new funding arrangement comes just a year after the former Secretary of State for Education, Justine Greening, [said](#) that the current system whereby rich children “who show signs of low academic ability” still manage to outperform those from disadvantaged backgrounds who are bright, must end, and is likely to cause embarrassment for the Department for Education.

The news also comes just days after the current Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds, was warned by the UK Statistics Authority, for using misleading data. The UK Statistics Authority said that, after writing to the Department four times already this year, it did “not year appear to have resolved issues with its use of statistics”. The intervention comes after Mr Hinds was criticised for suggesting that education spending in the UK was higher than in many other industrial and developed countries. However, the data used also included reference student loans and private school fees, and were thus deemed inaccurate.

This news will interest ACP, given its campaign to increase provision for students with SEND. Whitehouse will reach out again to the Department for Education, and chase attempts for a meeting with the Minister for School Standards, Nick Gibb, to discuss both funding arrangements and the need for proper provision for pupils with SEND. Given the Government’s recent commitment to freeze fuel duty, and prior announcement to increase investment in the NHS, the future funding arrangements for schools remain unclear.

Digital technology at the heart of medical research

The Wellcome Trust is [piloting](#) ways in which digital technology can improve medical research and prevent cerebral palsy, it has been announced. Earlier this month the organisation, one of the largest and well-known in the medical research and medical technology industry, announced it would be investing over £20 million of funding through the Innovator Awards, set up to specifically support researchers who want to create digital healthcare innovations that could have a significant impact on human health.

One of those awarded is Professor Geraldine Boylan, whose team are training computers to learn electroencephalogram (EEG) patterns and understand how they relate to brain injury. If the computer can identify the warning signs, this could help more babies to survive, and cut the risks of permanent disabilities such as epilepsy, cerebral palsy or learning difficulties. Professor Moylan says “Machine learning has given us a new tool to improve clinical decision making. These new technologies can transform how we can care for our patients.”

The Innovator Awards offer up to £750,000 for multidisciplinary collaborations, with the aim of making research results available within 3 years. The research into cerebral palsy will better allow health professionals to understand *when* young people develop the traits associated with cerebral palsy, how to minimise the risk of brain injury, as well as how to best treat children. By better identifying those children at risk of cerebral palsy, it is also hoped that the Health Service would be able to better plan and prepare care packages for children from birth.

This news will interest ACP given that new technology, combined with a cerebral palsy register, has the possibility of transforming health care, seeking to ensure that avoidable birth defects are minimised and having interventions and treatments in place to best support development of children with cerebral palsy.

Ofsted to shift focus of inspections

Ofsted has announced that exam results and grades will no longer be the key focus of Ofsted inspections, under new plans. The inspections, which have often been considered by some in the education sector to be precursors for schools to become Academies and thus be granted additional freedoms, have placed too much weight on testing, according to Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman.

In a statement, she conceded that the current inspection model had lead to “excessive workload” for teaching staff.

“For a long time, our inspections have looked hardest at outcomes, placing too much weight on test and exam results when we consider the overall effectiveness of schools” she said, adding that “the consequences that are hung on them, has increased the pressure on school leaders”. Ofsted plans to change the four current categories used for inspections (‘effectiveness of leadership and management’, ‘quality of teaching, learning and assessment’, ‘personal development, behaviour and welfare’ and ‘outcomes for children and learners’) with three new headings (‘personal development’, ‘behaviour and attitudes’ and ‘schools’ leadership and management’).

The proposal was welcomed by teaching staff and unions, who claimed that the change was long-overdue. Nick Brook, Deputy General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, welcomed that announcement, although he expressed concern that the “new framework is due to implemented in less than 12 months” and that “there’s a real risk that not all schools will understand it [the new categories] and not all inspectors will apply it consistently.”

This news will interest ACP. Recently, we have reported on the process of ‘off-rolling’, whereby schools attempt to exclude pupils which could reduce the overall standing of the school in exam league tables. This has included some pupils with SEND, who have been considered “difficult”. This announcement, shifting focus away from exam league tables, will therefore be warmly welcomed as long as it results in the reduction in ‘off-rolling’.