

News links from February 2022

Mental Health

As everyone knows, children's mental health is in crisis and there was no shortage of news and reports to remind us of that, from MPs debating in the Commons (see [here](#)) to the Minister for Care and Mental Health, Gillian Keegan, announcing plans for a "new, long-term, cross-Government mental health strategy in the coming year". Ms Keegan said: "*The Government will launch a public discussion paper this spring to inform the development of the strategy . . . We will be engaging widely, especially with people with experience of mental ill-health, to develop the strategy and build consensus. I will be calling on all parts of society – including teachers, businesses, voluntary organisations, and health and social care leaders – to set out their proposals for how we can shift the dial on mental health*". Read more [here](#).

The Children's Commissioner published her findings on the state of children's mental health services following consultation with over half a million children. She found that in spite of some progress in some areas, children and young people are still struggling to access the support they need. Read more [here](#).

Mental Health in the news

- [The Guardian reported that teenagers are at risk due to lack of tailored mental health services](#)
- [The BMJ warned that a generation is at risk of being left behind because of soaring waiting times and the pandemic](#)
- [Schools Week said that parents were being pitted against schools on mental health issues due a lack of funding and expertise](#)
- [English children face a postcode lottery for mental health support. . .](#)
- [. . . while in Scotland, Government was urged to spell out precisely how they plan to meet their own target of directing 1% of the health budget to Camhs](#)
- [The BBC reported a 77% rise in severe cases requiring specialist treatment](#)
- [95% of school staff have witnessed increased levels of pupil anxiety, according to research published by Place2Be and the National Association of Head Teachers](#)

Education

The [Education Policy Institute \(EPI\)](#) reported on the disadvantage gap in education in England and found that the gap in GCSE grades between students in long-term poverty and their better off peers has failed to improve over the last ten years, and more students have now fallen into longer-term poverty. [Read the report.](#)

The House of Commons Library issued [a briefing](#) on testing in English primary schools.

Rt. Hon. Robert Halfon MP, the Chair of the Education Committee, was concerned that the £5 bn education recovery funding was not reaching the most vulnerable children. [Read more.](#)

MPs Sarah Champion and Maria Miller wrote about the poor provision of relationship and sex education: [read more.](#)

Equal Play

The [Association of Play Industries](#) launched an **Equal Play** Campaign in February. Some areas of the UK have almost five times the number of children per playground as others and the API is calling for the Levelling Up agenda to ensure equal access to public play spaces throughout the UK. [Read more about the campaign.](#)

Obesity

It is 30 years since the first obesity targets were set and Channel Four ran a two-part investigation ([see here](#)) into why we are losing the battle.

The celebrity campaigner Jamie Oliver, alarmed that the obesity strategy might change, [wrote in The House](#) that the PM should stop “playing politics” with children’s health.

The London Transport junk food ban was credited by researchers with families consuming 1,000 fewer calories per week: [Read the news report](#) or [Read the study.](#)

Sexual Abuse

Sexual exploitation of children continued to make headlines as it was reported that two thirds of Scottish pupils have been sexually harassed at school: [read more.](#)

The House of Commons Library issued a briefing concerning sexual harassment in English schools, providing an overview of the policies schools should have. Links are given to relevant policies in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. [Read more.](#)

The Independent Enquiry into Child Sexual Abuse [published its report](#) into child sexual exploitation by organised networks, and a [Westminster Hall debate](#) followed, discussing the report’s findings.

Inequality

In October last year the Education Committee produced a report entitled “*The forgotten: how white working-class pupils have been let down, and how to change it*”. Read the Government’s response [here](#).

As part of the Levelling Up agenda, plans were announced for a register of children not in school so that no child can “*fall though the cracks*”. Extra investment will be offered to 55 local authority areas in England to level up education: [read more.](#)

The [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) published a report on households that fall below a minimum income standard (MIS). One quarter (25.7%) of children are living in households with very low incomes (below 75% of MIS). [Read more.](#)

The [Office for National Statistics](#) (ONS) has been examining earnings outcomes for people who received free school meals. Read their findings [here](#).

State of the Nation Report

The Department for Education issued its third **State of the Nation** report in February. The report aims “*to provide a shared evidence base for everyone - in government, services, schools & colleges, parents & families, communities, and employers - to reflect and build upon to deliver better wellbeing outcomes for all children and young people*”. [Read the report.](#)

Northern Ireland

Smoking in cars with children is now banned in Northern Ireland, bringing it into line with the rest of the UK: [read more.](#)

Also new to Northern Ireland is the option for parents to defer primary school start. The legislation will allow children born between April 1 and July 1 to start school a year later than normal if their parents request to defer.

It will also permit premature birth children who, had they not been born prematurely, would have been born between those dates to defer their school start in the same way. [Read more.](#)

Physical Activity in Disabled Children

The **Office for Health Improvement and Disparities** and the **Department of Health and Social Care** published a review in February into the health benefits and potential risks of physical activity for children and young people who have disabilities. [Read the review.](#)