

News links from March 2022

Children's Alliance online petition reaches 5,000 signatures

We are delighted to report that our [online petition](#), calling for a **Cabinet Minister for Children and Young People**, has arrived at the 5,000 mark. We're asking that:

- A cabinet minister responsible for the health and wellbeing of children and young people be appointed immediately
- Government must recognise that the first 1001 days of a child's life impacts their physical and mental wellbeing for life and monies must be spent here
- All children are given the best start in life
- Every child deserves a voice

Please sign and share the petition if you haven't already done so: <https://www.change.org/cabinetminister4children>

Education

The Schools White Paper was released at the end of March ([read the details here](#)), heralding ambitious levelling up plans, although the [Youth Sport Trust](#) lamented 'a missed opportunity' to recognise the crucial role of play and sport in schools: [read more](#).

On the subject of Physical Education in schools. Edward Timpson MP, who led a Westminster Hall Debate, stated that making PE a core subject could bring "a very real prospect of changing the trajectory of so many young people towards a healthier and more fulfilling life": [read the debate](#).

Ofsted published their own review of PE, identifying factors that contribute to high-quality school PE curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and systems: [read the review](#).

Early Years

The [National Day Nurseries Association](#) reported that a recruitment crisis in the sector is leading to lower Ofsted ratings and partial closures: [read more](#). The NDNA has also been investigating Local Authority spending of early years funding and has found underspending totalling £115 million over the past three years: [read more](#).

At the same time, the sector has expressed its disappointment over inaction on funding, feeling that the Chancellor's Spring Statement 'ignored' early years: [read more](#).

Nursery World reported that a recent [TUC](#) survey found that around one in three working parents with pre-school children spend more than a third of their wages on childcare. [Read the article](#) or [read the survey report](#).

The importance of early years provision was highlighted in a report published by the educational charity [KindredSquared](#) which found that an alarming 50% of children starting primary school were not "school ready": [read the report](#).

In good news, the Welsh Government is to begin its expansion of free childcare for disadvantaged two-year-olds from September: [read more](#).

SEND

The Government has published [a green paper](#) on the future of the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and alternative provision (AP) system and is undertaking a public consultation on the green paper's proposals. The consultation, which closes on 1 July, can be accessed [here](#).

Obesity

The [latest figures on obesity](#) have been released showing that 14.4% of reception age children (age 4-5) are obese, with a further 13.3% overweight. At age 10-11 (year 6), 25.5% are obese and 15.4% overweight. This data is from 2020/21 and is gathered as part of the National Child Measurement Programme. NHS Digital says that results are "broadly comparable" to previous years.

Mental Health

The Government has responded to the [Health and Social Care Committee report](#): 'Children and young people's mental health' with a focus on increasing access to support with reduced waiting times whilst acknowledging the impact of the pandemic on young people: [read the response](#). The response outlines the funding and strategies including the implementation of mental health support teams (MHSTs).

The impact of the pandemic on children in care was starkly apparent with the release of the news that a fifth of children in care self-harmed during the pandemic due to a lack of access to support. The Guardian outlined the research from the University of Bristol where researchers surveyed more than 1,300 11- to 18-year-olds in care from 18 council areas in 2020 and 2021. Worryingly, the findings showed that young people in care were more than twice as likely to have mental ill-health than the wider population: [read the article](#) or [read more about the study](#).

Children are increasingly concerned about financial matters ([read more](#)) and almost two thirds of them never speak to their parents about mental health, according to a survey carried out by [Comic Relief](#) : [read more](#).

Children & Families Act 2014

The Lords Select Committee on the Children and Families Act 2014 launches its post-legislative scrutiny inquiry into the Act and is inviting written evidence contributions. The Committee will explore whether the Act has achieved its aim of improving the lives of children and families and encourages people from all backgrounds to contribute. Deadline for submissions is Monday 25 April 2022.

[Make a submission](#)

[Read more about the Act](#)

Online Safety

After lengthy delays (a white paper was first introduced in 2019), The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP, finally introduced the Online Safety Bill: [read the ministerial statement](#).

Some additional aspects were added to the Bill as it was introduced:

- cyber flashing (sending unwanted sexual images to people)
- a right of appeal for people whose posts were removed
- online scams, including fraudulent adverts, investment and romance scams
- the requirement of pornography websites to verify users' ages

In related news, the BBC reported on a study that found the more time girls aged between 11 and 13 spend on social media, the less likely they are to be satisfied with life a year later. [Read the article](#) or [Read the report](#).

Social Care

The BBC reported on a study undertaken by the [Competition and Markets Authority](#) (CMA) into social care costs. It was undertaken in response to major concerns raised with the CMA about how the system was operating in terms of finding appropriate placements and the strain on budgets resulting from increased numbers of children and the high prices being charged. The researchers found prices and profits of the largest private providers were materially higher than would be expected if the market was working well. [Read the news report](#) or [Read the CMA report](#).