



Be Connected - October 2023

 16 October 2023  Mark Blois

Welcome to the first edition of the 2023-24 school year of Be Connected - for schools, academies and trusts.

As always, this issue is packed with the latest legal updates, sector insights and support and guidance from our expert team.

Remember, Be Connected is your space; what would you like to see in future editions?

[Get in touch and let us know](#) →

Legal and regulatory updates

School building safety and the RAAC issue

The new school year got off to a shaky start when the Department for Education (DfE) published a list of 156 schools and colleges where it was confirmed that the presence of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) put buildings at risk of closure.

RAAC was used in construction between the 1950s and 1990s as a cheaper alternative to standard concrete but its short usable lifespan (estimated to be as low as 30 years) means that its use in permanent buildings is now causing deterioration to the fabric of those buildings and, indeed, the risk of collapse.

School leaders will be keen to know whether this issue affects their settings and what to do if it does. We've collated all of the articles, advice and guidance we've published in relation to this issue for you to access the support you need.

[Read more](#) →

Ofsted's early monitoring programme: ineffective safeguarding

Further changes to Ofsted's latest School Inspection Handbook have provided much-needed clarification on the new monitoring process for schools judged as having serious weaknesses (inadequate) solely due to safeguarding.

The latest changes introduced new sections into the School Monitoring Handbook which resolved many uncertainties. The Handbook now sets out in detail the criteria a school must meet in order to be eligible for early monitoring inspections, the process that will be followed in these cases and the possible outcomes for schools as a result.

[Read more](#) →

Academy Trust Handbook 2023: a short sharp focus

Academy leaders should ensure they are up to speed with the latest edition of the Academy Trust Handbook.

The new Handbook seeks to bring greater transparency to governance so those Academy Trusts looking to merge and grow their organisations will need to review, strengthen and improve their governance arrangements.

[Read more](#) →

Admissions consultations underway: what do you need to know?

Under the School Admissions Code 2021, the annual process for changing and determining admission arrangements begins on 1 October 2023 with determination on 28 February 2023 and publication of the arrangements on 15 March 2024 for entry in September 2025.

Whilst it is not necessary to consult every year on a school's admission arrangements, where an admission authority chooses to do so, it must consult for a minimum of six weeks between 1 October and 31 January.

In this short article we explain the minimum requirements you're expected to meet and address common causes of confusion.

[Read more](#) →

Guidance

Pupil attendance: still a lingering issue

Following the pandemic pupil absence has risen more than 50% and persistent absence has doubled. Reports show that there is now a disconnect between school and home and the focus on attendance has shifted to other priorities for some parents, for example, youth mental health, term time holidays or the cost of living.

In this article we consider the importance of attendance, when schools can permit absence and share strategies and tools for increasing attendance.

[Read more](#) →

Introducing the Estates Competency Framework

The DfE has recently published the 'Estates Competency Framework' – a highly timely tool aimed to assist anyone involved with the management of education estates.

Effective estate management of education sites are a key factor in promoting an environment that encourages high quality learning. The Framework provides guidance to education institutions on meeting their requirements and obligations to maintain safe amenities and facilities in line with good estate management for schools (GEMS) principles – all the more important in light of the recent RAAC issues that many schools have faced.

[Read more](#) →

The role of Ofsted in school complaints

The volume and complexity of parental complaints that schools and trusts are dealing with has risen dramatically. Whilst it is not much comfort if you are experiencing challenges in this area, it is worth remembering you are not alone. This is a trend impacting the entire sector.

It's also clear that many parents seek to fast-track or escalate their complaints via external agencies such as local authorities, local MPs and Ofsted, although more often than not, this can further complicate the process and cause delays.

Complaints about schools to Ofsted increased by a quarter last year to 14,900. Yet, of all of the complaints received by Ofsted this year, only 16 per cent qualified for investigation.

In this article we clarify the role of Ofsted in relation to complaints, consider the lack of clarity and need to streamline complaints processes and offer some immediate, practical support.

[Read more](#) →

Learning, development and insight

The #EdInfluence podcast is back! Hear from inspiring leaders

This term sees the return of #EdInfluence – a new series of our popular podcast featuring conversations with inspiring leaders.

Hosted by leading education lawyer and executive coach Nick MacKenzie featuring influential guests from across the education sector and beyond, exploring the human side of leadership.

The first few episodes are available now.

Read more →

</insights/edinfluence-podcast-series-3>

Future episodes feature guests ranging from the chief executive of NHS Providers Dr Julian Hartley to John Murphy, former CEO of Oasis Community Learning – one of the country's largest MATs.

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New training and support to handle complaints effectively

It seems apt, if rather disheartening, to categorise the 2022/23 school year as “The Year of the Complaint”. Schools widely reported a surge in the number of complaints from parents with increasing complexity causing concern about the impact this then had on staff time and resources.

We certainly experienced a sharp rise in the number of schools looking for support with complaints management, including a large uptake of.

So what support is available to schools to reduce the overhead that parental complaints can cause?

Over 400 schools are already benefitting from our Complaints Management Support Pack and since the terms started we've been publishing resources such as FAQs, case studies and guidance videos. We also have limited places available on our new continuous professional development programme to boost your expertise in this area.

Support pack →

</products/complaints-management-support-pack>

CPD training →

</products/complaints-management>

Achieving Excellence in Trust Safeguarding

It's less than a month until the next cohort of Trust Safeguarding Leads begin the 'Achieving Excellence in Trust Safeguarding' course and there are a few places still available.

This programme provides Lead DSLs of Multi-Academy Trust (MATs) with the opportunity to engage in high-quality, interactive training over the course of four months to support their ongoing development.

Led by safeguarding expert lawyer, Dai Durbridge, the course is tailored to the needs of MAT DSLs already in post and provides opportunity for engagement with other delegates, with plenty of time built into the course to allow for reflection, your questions to be answered and concerns to be discussed.

[Read more](#) →

School leaders to share views on the issues of the day

The Autumn term's School Leaders Survey is now open, with leaders of the nation's schools and academies invited to share their views.

The questions have been updated with new sections to capture perspectives on Ofsted inspections and more, whilst retaining a tight focus so it'll still only take ten minutes to complete.

The results from last term proved to be really interesting, so do make sure you have your say and we'll share the findings in November.

[Read more](#) →

Employment

Changes to flexible working webinar: opportunities for schools

With changes proposed to legislation around flexible working, join us as we explore what this means for schools and consider how it could be a catalyst for change in the sector.

This webinar will be held on Thursday 16 November and will focus on the proposed legal changes and how these will impact the process for handling flexible working requests and decision-making at schools and trusts.

[Read more](#) →

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