

DfE updates and changes – January to March 2024

Key Stage 2 attainment (revised): 2023 National Statistics

1. Results for the 2023 national curriculum assessments at key stage 2 [Key stage 2 attainment \(revised\): 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) published 14/12/23
2. Wiltshire's position: The Wiltshire position is clarified by point 4 below, which includes information on the revised attainment data.

Primary school performance tables: 2023 National Statistics

3. Information on the achievements of pupils in each state-funded primary school in England [Primary school performance tables: 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) published 14/12/23
4. Wiltshire's position: Reading is the strongest area of performance at the end of both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 and is in line with National data and therefore a comparative strength compared to other subjects. Writing performance is in line with National at Key Stage 1 but then a gap against National emerges in Key Stage 2. Our area of focus is mathematics, where at the end of Key Stage 1 we are in line with National but where in Key Stage 2 we have declined from the previous year and are now 5% below the national average. Pupils with SEND (EHCP and SEND Support) in Key Stage 1 perform better than National, although this doesn't translate into the Key Stage 2 data set. The most significant gap is for our disadvantaged pupils where the gap in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 has further increased. As a Local Authority, we take this gap very seriously and this is a strategic priority of the Wiltshire Learning Alliance which has participation from both the Academy and Maintained sectors. It will take time to impact change, but there has been significant work undertaken to look more holistically at disadvantaged outcomes and approaches and we are working this year through the Affordable Schools Strategy as a systemwide approach to addressing the gap. At a school level, there is evidence that performance outcomes do correlate with either Ofsted judgments and/or, for our maintained schools, our Council evaluation.

England's first ever kinship care strategy launches Press Release

5. Backed by £20 million, strategy shines spotlight on the incredible extended family members keeping children out of care [England's first ever kinship care strategy launches - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) published 15/12/23

The Kinship Team welcome these recommendations and actions, at both national and local level that raise awareness of kinship arrangements and more importantly provide additional support.

The Wiltshire Council Kinship Team:

- Carry out Viability Assessments of prospective connected persons foster carers and Special Guardians for children Looked After and those in either pre-proceedings or care proceedings.
- Carry out full connected persons foster carer and Special Guardianship Order assessments.
- Provide support and supervision to connected persons foster carers.
- Provide bespoke and individualised support to Special Guardians

- Assess the suitability and provided ongoing monitoring and support visits to Private Fostering arrangements.

The national strategy commits the government to a series of measures to support kinship carers to be better Supported, Empowered and Understood.

Support:

- We will launch a kinship financial allowance, paid at the same rate as the fostering allowance, beginning in up to 8 local authorities.
- We are expanding the Virtual School Head's role to promote the education of children in kinship care.
- We will ensure more eligible kinship carers are aware of their ability to access the Adoption Support Fund, by renaming it to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund, as well as analysing the fund's applications and the therapies provided.
- We will produce government guidance for employers on how kinship carers can be supported at work. This will include advice on adapting HR policies, signposting to existing workplace entitlements, and creating a culture of support.
- We will introduce a kinship leave and pay entitlement for Department for Education staff (subject to discussions on the detailed arrangements between the department and employee representatives).
- We will establish a kinship training, information and advice offer that all kinship carers will have access to.
- We will continue to support the delivery of peer support groups across England for all kinship carers.

Financial:

One of the main headlines of the proposed additional support relates to increasing financial support for kinship arrangements. The proposal is that in 8 Local Authorities, Special Guardians caring for children previously looked after, will be paid the same as the fostering allowance. The longer-term goal is "*exploring the case for mandating a financial allowance for all special guardianship and child arrangement kinship carers, in every local authority, equivalent to the corresponding local foster carer allowance*".

The current policy in Wiltshire Council is that where a Special Guardian was a foster carer for the child immediately prior to the SGO being granted, we will pay the Special Guardians a guaranteed amount for the first 2 years. After the first 2 years, any subsequent SGO allowance payment is subject to a means test and senior management authorisation.

Where the Special Guardian was not a foster carer, there is no guaranteed amount for any period and any SGO allowance payment is subject to a means test and senior management authorisation.

All Special Guardians can and should submit a claim for Child Benefit and the child element of Universal Credit, as SGO allowance payments are not to replace universal entitlements. The SGO allowance rates are based on what used to be the age-related fostering allowances.

In Wiltshire, we have approximately 330 SGO households, caring for approx. 430 children, of who approximately 220 were previously looked after. The current projected SGO allowance spend for 01/04/2023 – 31/03/2024 is £2,794,120. With regards to allowance payments to those that hold a

Child Arrangement Order, this is considered on a case-by-case basis and subject to senior manager approval. The current projected Child Arrangement Order allowance spend for 01/04/2023–31/03/2024 is £26,520.

Other support:

Wiltshire already actively raises awareness of the funding available via the now named Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGAF). This is achieved via discussions during the assessment stage, within SGO support plans, and through our Kinship Support Workers.

Wiltshire Council holds a monthly Kinship support group that is open to all connected persons foster carers and Special Guardians. This provides an opportunity for crucial peer support. We also signpost to the support groups facilitated by the charity Kinship, as well as linking our out of county connected persons foster carers and Special Guardians to support groups in their home LA.

Connected persons foster carers have access to the same training offer as all foster carers. We are actively expanding the training offer to Special Guardians and Private Foster carers. This includes Responding to Distressed Behaviour training, which has proven very popular. The team is currently developing a course looking at supporting family time contact arrangements. Other training opportunities that have been sent to Special Guardians have also included topics such as Understanding School Avoidance, Supporting My Teen and Helping my Child with Anxiety and Worry.

Empowered:

- We will create a new Kinship Care Ambassador role, to work with local authorities and kinship carers to raise standards and share best practice.
- We will improve the availability of advocacy services for children in kinship care, by updating guidance and standards.
- We will establish the National Kinship Care Advisory Board and extend the Kinship Carer Reference Group.
- We will partner with Foundations - the What Works Centre for Children & Families and the sector to work towards every family being offered high quality family group conferences at pre-proceedings stage.
- We will use digital innovation to help social workers have a greater understanding of kinship families.

Understood:

- We will improve the visibility of kinship carers through a new definition of kinship care that will be used in statutory guidance.
- We will publish an updated version of the 2011 Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities. This will be called Kinship Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities and will clarify to local authorities how they should support kinship families.
- We will create trust between kinship carers and practitioners by improving social worker training and developing a knowledge and skills statement for family help lead practitioners.
- Ofsted are updating their inspector training and guidance, so kinship care is well

embedded in inspection practice.

- The Law Commission will review legal orders and statuses for kinship carers and understand how we can both simplify and streamline these.
- We will work with the Ministry of Justice to improve our understanding of kinship care through better data join up.

Improving practice with children, young people and families **Guidance**

6. Advice for local areas to embed working together to safeguard children and the children's social care national framework in practice [Improving practice with children, young people and families - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-practice-with-children-young-people-and-families) published 15/12/23

7. Wiltshire's position:

Working Together 2023 and the National Framework are central to setting the national direction for children's social care practice and underpin government's vision for children's social care and wider safeguarding structures. The revisions in Working Together 2023 supported by the National Framework are focused on strengthening multi-agency working across the whole system of help, support and protection for children and their families, keeping a child-centred approach while bringing a whole-family focus, and embedding strong, effective, and consistent multi-agency child protection practice. In response Senior Managers in Wiltshire Children and Families have attended seminars run by the DfE to support the Government Strategy Stable Homes Built on Love including Working Together 2023 and the National Framework.

To support embedding Working Together 2023 and the National Framework a Task and Finish Group of Heads of Service and Senior Managers across children's social care, SEND and Education has been set up to consider where service delivery and practice in Wiltshire is aligned to Working Together 2023 and the National Framework and the wider government strategy. This task and finish group will also consider areas that might be developed to come more in line with the Working Together 2023 and the National Framework and the wider government strategy.

In addition, the SVPP are developing a workplan setting out the action that will be taken to support partner agencies including children's social care to respond to and comply with Working Together 2023 and the National Framework. This will include:

- Review of the multiagency policies and guidance
- Updates to multiagency training as relevant
- Identifying any assurance that will be required from partner agencies about how they are embedding the new guidance, including the new multiagency child protection practice standards
- Publication of the Annual Report for 2023-24 in September 2024
- Updating the Safeguarding Plan and publishing by December 2024

The Lead and the Delegated Safeguarding Partners have met with the DfE funded National safeguarding Partnership Facilitators to understand their roles and responsibilities as set out in the new guidance. The work plan is an evolving document and to further support partners a virtual briefing is being held on February 20th outlining key changes.

Safeguarding children with disabilities in residential settings: government response **Policy Paper**

8. Government response to the review into safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel [Safeguarding children with disabilities in residential settings: government response - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-children-with-disabilities-in-residential-settings) published 18/12/23

9. Wiltshire's position:

Following the National Review – Children with disabilities and complex health needs living in residential settings In April 2023, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (the Panel) published their Phase 2 report reviewing safeguarding children with disabilities and complex needs in residential settings. This was in response to the appalling abuse suffered by children and three residential special schools dual-registered as children's homes run by the Hesley Group in Doncaster. The report set out recommendations for providers, central and local government, health and other partners for changes to policy and practice to improve the safety, support, and outcomes for children with disabilities and complex health needs. There were a number of recommendations that the Panel directed to providers of residential education and care for disabled children with complex health needs. These centred on safeguarding procedures within homes, safer recruitment, responsibility in recruiting, retaining and developing a skilled, stable, and compassionate workforce that can provide safe, excellent quality, culturally sensitive care to all children. Providers have been asked to review your policies and procedures to ensure that these are as robust as they can be and are being fully implemented across all your settings.

The local authority leads on sufficiency of residential and education provision. Commissioners work closely with Residential Home Providers to support increased market sufficiency and are an active participant in the Southwest Sufficiency Project. Additionally, the council have committed to developing opportunities with external providers to deliver services (both residential and educational) in Wiltshire Local Authority owned properties. Recent examples of this approach have been the commissioning of a block contract for 12 bed residential placements, and cabinet agreement to tender of a provider to deliver 45 primary SEMH and up to 25 secondary placements.

Families and Childrens commissioning and children's brokerage service work closely with operational teams when considering placements to ensure the right provision for children and young people and there are a number of assurance checks in place as part of compliance, such as current gradings, references etc.

Families and Childrens commissioning, as part of their contract management activity, review practice and procedures with residential providers to ensure that they are meeting requirements as set out in phase 2 of the report including: safeguarding policies, whistleblowing activity; ensuring the voice of children and young people.

Wiltshire Local Authority Commissioners in conjunction with education colleagues regularly undertake quality assurance visits to ensure provision is of high quality and safe.

Gender questioning children: draft schools and colleges guidance **Open Consultation**

10. We're seeking your views on our draft non-statutory guidance for schools and colleges about children questioning their gender [Gender questioning children: draft schools and colleges guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/gender-questioning-children-draft-schools-and-colleges-guidance) published 19/12/23

11. Wiltshire's position: In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of children questioning the way they feel about being a boy or a girl, including their physical attributes of sex and the related ways in which they fit into society. This changing picture has required schools and colleges to navigate a highly sensitive and complex issue alongside polarised views; for example, conflicting views between parents and children. As a result, for the first time, the Department for Education, working closely with the Government's Equality Hub, has worked to produce this draft guidance with a view to providing clarity for schools and colleges, and reassurance for parents. The consultation on the guidance applies to schools and has been shared with our schools.

GCSE British Sign Language (BSL) Guidance

12. Subject content, aims and learning objectives for the British Sign Language (BSL) GCSE [GCSE British Sign Language \(BSL\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/gcse-british-sign-language-bsl) published 21/12/23

13. Wiltshire's position: This information and guidance is signposted to our schools through the Heads Bulletins and regular updates we provide.

Major national drive to improve school attendance Press Release

14. Attendance hubs to more than double to support 1,000 more schools and £15 million investment to expand the attendance mentor pilot programme [Major national drive to improve school attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/major-national-drive-to-improve-school-attendance) published 08/01/24

15. Wiltshire's position: An increase in access to further attendance hubs is welcomed, as we continue to support schools to improve attendance. We continue to provide a School Attendance Support Team offer through the Education Welfare Service in line with the DfE guidance 'working together to improve attendance' (2022).

Support strengthened for children with SEND Press Release

16. Families who have children with SEND will soon receive further support with short breaks, supported internship opportunities and recognition of Down syndrome [Support strengthened for children with SEND - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/support-strengthened-for-children-with-send) published 19/01/24

17. Wiltshire's position: Wiltshire Council have recently completed a commissioning exercise for our Short Breaks offer, with Barnardos confirmed as the provider of respite activity, including holiday clubs and youth clubs until 2026. In conjunction with stakeholders, including parents and carers, children and young people and the Wiltshire Parent Carer Council, we are now embarking on a wholesale review of our offer to ensure that it meets the needs of families from April 2026.

Additionally, we continue to offer our capital funding via our Small Grants Scheme to providers of activities for children and young people with SEND to support a broad cross-county offer.

Wiltshire Council welcomes the additional support published by the Department for Education in relation to supported internship opportunities and recognition of Down Syndrome and will ensure that this is built into the development of our long-term offer.

Education secretary approves Dyson STEAM donation **Press Release**

18. £6 million donation for advanced facilities at Wiltshire primary school accepted by department for education, as education secretary approves school expansion [Education secretary approves Dyson STEAM donation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) published 22/01/24

19. Wiltshire's position: Wiltshire Council has responded to the Department for Education's announcement that it has approved the Sir James Dyson's donation to Malmesbury Church of England School. Sir Dyson wants to provide a £6m donation to the school to build a centre for science, technology, engineering, mathematics (Stem) and arts, seven classrooms and a school hall.

While Wiltshire Council welcomes the contribution to these key areas as a whole, Council leaders have raised concerns around having all the investment in one location and the impact that the creation of a significant number of additional school places could have on the survival of neighbouring schools. The application will also need to go through the usual planning process.

Home-to school travel **Statutory Guidance**

2. Local authorities' responsibilities when making home-to-school travel arrangements for children of compulsory school age. Change made, updated the guidance to make minor clarifications. This includes updates about schools that arrange home-to-school travel for their pupils, children with education, health and care plans, and how local authorities should determine a child's nearest school [Home-to-school travel - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) updated 25/01/24

21. Wiltshire's position: Following the issue of the recently amended guidance and previously the new guidance from June 2023, there were no changes required to Wiltshire's existing mainstream or SEND transport policies and these will be reviewed and updated accordingly for the coming academic year

A Level and other 16 to 18 results: 2023 **National Statistics**

22. The attainment of students at the end of their 16 to 18 study in England [A level and other 16 to 18 results: 2023 \(revised\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) published 01/02/24

23. Wiltshire's position: The 'Average A Level' result for Wiltshire students in 2023 was C+; this is in line with the South West and England and the same as it was in 2019, the last time that A Levels took place without adaptations due to the pandemic. For Disadvantaged Learners, the average grade has increased from a C- in 2019 to a C in 2023. This the same as the South West; England has remained the same at a C.

In terms of Average Point Score (APS) for A Levels, Wiltshire (34.72) performed higher than the South West (33.97) and England (34.16) in 2023. This is an increase from a pre-pandemic APS of 33.5 in 2019 (SW was 32.79 and England was 32.87). In 2019 the APS gap for Disadvantaged Learners in Wiltshire was -6.92, significantly greater than that of the South West (-5.31) and England (-4.88). In 2023 the gap has closed significantly to -4.95 for Wiltshire compared to -5.4 for the South West and -4.93 for England.

Applied

The average applied general result for Wiltshire (Merit +) is the same as in 2019, this is in line with the South West and England. The average result for Disadvantaged Learners (Merit) has also stayed the same, however in the South West and England the average result was a Merit+.

The APS for applied general entry in Wiltshire was 28.02, this is below the figures for the South West (29.67) and England (29.52) however there is an increase of 1.06 points from the pre-pandemic figure. This increase is greater than that in the South West (0.69) and England (0.63).

For disadvantaged learners, the gap with non-disadvantaged peers in 2019 (-2.88) has closed to -2.55 in 2023, whereas this gap has widened in the South West (-2.21 to -3.06) and England (-1.54 to -2.4).

Tech Level

The average tech level result in Wiltshire was a Merit +, the same as pre-pandemic results and the South West and England. For Disadvantaged Learners the average result decreased from a Merit to a Merit -, whereas in the South West the performance of Disadvantaged Learners has improved and nationally it has stayed the same.

The APS for tech level in Wiltshire was 28.33, this is below the figures for the South West (29.66) and England (28.50) and is a decrease of -0.39 points from the pre-pandemic figure. The figure is also lower for England, with a decrease of -0.14 but the South West saw an increase of 1.67 points.

For disadvantaged learners, the gap with non-disadvantaged peers in 2019 (-3.61) has significantly increased to -8.75, this gap has also widened in the South West (-2.92 to -3.68) and England (-2.4 to -2.72) but not as significantly.

In summary, Wiltshire has performed well in A Levels and has closed gaps since pre-pandemic results but has not performed as well in Applied and Tech Level, especially in terms of DL for the latter.