

News links from September 2021

Online Safety

In the week before the [Online Harms and Disinformation subcommittee](#) met to hear its first oral evidence (see [here](#) for meeting notes) the Wall Street Journal published a series of articles exposing, among other things, the extent of Facebook's knowledge of the harmful effects of its social media platforms, especially on teenage girls. Leaks from insiders revealed internal documents that said, "*Teens blame Instagram for increases in the rate of anxiety and depression. This reaction was unprompted and consistent across all groups.*" Internal studies showed that, among teens who reported suicidal thoughts, 13% of British users and 6% of American users traced the desire to kill themselves to Instagram.

[Read more.](#)

[Original article \(behind paywall\).](#)

Babies

There was a Commons debate about [Baby Loss Awareness Week](#) (9-15 Oct), where MPs raised the need for more staff, resources and action. [Read transcript.](#)

A research briefing from the House of Commons library on how stillbirths are investigated in England and Wales was published. [Read more.](#)

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published the results of its national review into babies seriously harmed or killed by their father or male carer. [Read more.](#)

Free School Meals

The [Child Poverty Action Group](#) made the case for extending free school meals to all low income families because, according to its research, there are still a million children missing out because of the eligibility criteria.

According to their estimates, the children in poverty who are missing out are:

- * England 37% (900,000)
- * Wales 42% (55,000)
- * Scotland 17% (25,000)
- * Northern Ireland 22% (20,000)

[Read more](#)

[Read the report](#)

The Big Answer

September saw the results of the Children's Commissioner's [Big Ask](#): over half a million English children and young people responded to the survey earlier this year and gave "remarkably consistent" responses regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, family income, location and so on. The report makes policy recommendations across six areas: *Families, Children and Community, Health and Wellbeing, Schools, Work, and Children in Care.*

[Read the report](#)

Reception Baseline Assessment

Primary school children starting school for the first time this term are legally required to take the Government's new Reception Baseline Assessment, postponed from last year, in their first few weeks of joining. The assessment is controversial with many teachers and campaigners opposing it. The DfE plans to use the data to measure progress when the children leave primary school in seven years' time.

[Read more.](#)

Funding for SEND Pupils

In a poll by the National Association of Head Teachers, 97% of school leaders polled said that funding for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) was insufficient. A third of headteachers were forced to slash their budgets last year and will make further cuts this year. A quarter predicted a budget deficit in 2021-22. [Read more.](#)

Child Poverty and Inequality

Poverty and inequality are never out of the news and September saw the publication of a number of reports showing the worsening situation. [The Nuffield Foundation](#) has found that families with at least one child under five are facing the steepest rise in poverty. Child poverty rates have fluctuated since 2000 but there has been a sustained increase since 2013, largely due to changes to the benefits system and the growth of the private rental market. [Read the report.](#)

[Buttle UK](#), a charity dedicated to helping children and young people who have experienced crisis, published their third annual “State of Child Poverty” report looking at the effect of the pandemic on children who had been exposed to adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs. Commenting that the Government’s response to disrupted schooling seems to have been created with children’s stability in the home as a given, the CEO said these children will need a different kind of support to get back to the starting line. [Read the report.](#)

Poverty is expensive, and Prof. Donald Hirsch of the University of Loughborough has calculated that it costs £38bn a year. [Read more](#) and [read the research.](#)

The [Work and Pensions Committee](#) has been looking at child poverty all year and in September published its first findings which focussed on measurement and targets. The committee called for a commitment to developing a long-term, cross-departmental strategy to address child poverty and for clear objectives to be set to reduce it. [Read the report.](#)

Mental Health - Everything is Worse

NHS Digital released the results of a follow-up survey comparing the mental health of English children in 2021 to an earlier survey in 2017. Rates of probable mental disorders have increased: from 1 in 9 children in 2017 to 1 in 6 children in 2021. Read more [here](#) and [here](#) and [read the full report.](#)

School-anxiety cases are on the increase too: [read more.](#)

In September a Parliamentary [POSTnote](#) was published about the effect of the pandemic on children’s mental health. [Read the note.](#)

The [Pharmaceutical Journal](#) reported a steady increase in antidepressant prescriptions to children since 2015, up more than 40% in the age range 5-12. [Read more.](#)

Not only are cases rising, but waiting times are too: read more [here](#) and [here.](#)

Mental Health - Making things better

In September the Department for Education announced funding grants for up to 7,800 primary and secondary schools and colleges to pay for training for senior leaders to roll out an effective ‘whole school’ approach to mental health and wellbeing. [Read more.](#)

Read [8 principles of a whole school or college approach to promoting mental health and wellbeing.](#)

Government guidance has also been updated to reflect current needs. [Read more.](#)

Over 50 Charity leaders endorsed a children’s letter-writing campaign and called for early intervention hubs to provide mental health support for youngsters before problems hit crisis points. [Read more.](#)

The benefits of 5-a-day

News came in September that UK children with healthy diets have better mental health. Data collected from nearly 11,000 children in Norwich was analysed by researchers who found that higher combined fruit and vegetable intake was significantly associated with higher mental health scores; the higher the intake, the higher the score. The findings prompted calls for nutrition to be included in public health strategies. [Read more.](#)