

## News links from April 2021

### ***The Covid Generation - APPG Report***

#### **The All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy**

**Childhood** published its latest report in April. Lead author, **Helen Clark**, said, *“I hope that the Government will find this work useful in helping to prevent what Dr Adrian James of the Royal College of Psychiatrists said could be ‘The greatest threat to mental health since the second world war’ with ‘1.5 million children predicted to need new or additional mental health support as a result of this crisis.’*

*This mental health crisis is a ticking time bomb and yet the UK has some of the best scientists, academics, and health, education and childcare experts in the world today! Working with them, our Government could avert what is gathering momentum in front of us and really ‘build back better’ by creating mental health services for children and young people for the benefit of a UK that is the sum of its parts – not just part of the whole.”*

**[Download the Report Here](#)**

## **Steve McCabe MP, APPG Chair:**

“What the best available research shows is that mental illness is common in even our youngest children; that one child in every seven in a primary school class will have a diagnosable mental illness and that a shocking 75% of mental illnesses begin before the age of eighteen. According to the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the greatest challenge facing children in 20 years time will be mental health problems.

Unless the Government uses all the information thrown up by the pandemic about the state of children and young people’s mental health and then discerns, learns and acts – we will be walking, ‘eyes wide-shut’ into the type of long-lasting communal health disaster that will not be capable of a fix via two jabs in the arm, a mask and a booster.”

[Download the Report Here](#)

## Child Abuse

Various announcements were made following last month's disturbing reports about sexual abuse in educational settings. Ofsted has been asked to carry out a [review of safeguarding policies](#) to see whether appropriate processes are in place to allow pupils to report concerns freely, knowing these will be taken seriously and dealt with swiftly and appropriately. The Government also [launched a dedicated helpline](#), 0800 136663, which is being run by the NSPCC and will offer support and advice to victims, their parents and teachers.

The NSPCC [reported record call numbers](#) to its core helpline during the pandemic: nearly 85,000 contacts from April 2020 to March 2021, a 23% increase on the previous year. The top concerns:

- *adult health and behaviour (including worries about parental alcohol and substance misuse, domestic abuse and parental mental health), which increased 42% to more than 20,400 contacts*
- *neglect, which increased 15% to more than 12,800 contacts*
- *physical abuse, which increased 18% to more than 12,600 contacts*
- *emotional abuse, which increased 40% to more than 11,600 contacts.*

In the world of online abuse, the [Internet Watch Foundation](#) launched [a campaign](#) to combat self-generated sexual abuse, following their finding of a 77% increase in imagery from 2019-20. 80% of victims are girls aged 11 to 13. Aimed at parents and carers, the campaign will raise awareness and offer guidance on preventing online grooming.

## ***The Impact of the Pandemic on Childhood Fitness and Obesity***

TES online investigated children returning to school and reported teachers saying that some pupils had returned overweight or unfit and many had lost their enthusiasm for physical activity as a result of the latest lockdown. This is not surprising considering the Youth Sport Trust's finding earlier this year that almost 70% of parents said their children were less active during lockdown, and 10% said their children had been *completely inactive*. Schools and teachers, mindful of the importance of good physical health for academic attainment, are introducing innovative ways of re-engaging children, TES reported.

Youth Sport Trust  
TES Online  
NHS Elearning for Healthcare

# Play

Play was in the news in April, with the [SNP's election promise](#) to renew every playground in Scotland and [a call by the API](#) (Assc of Play Industries) for the Prime Minister to match that pledge, considering the big decrease in play areas seen in recent years. Parents have been resorting to crowdfunding to save their local playgrounds, according to a [Guardian article](#), and [a report from the University of Reading](#) confirms the importance of playgrounds with its finding that, away from home, the most common place for children to play is in a playground or green space.

[The same report found](#) that today's children are 11 years old before they are allowed to play out unsupervised - 2 years older than their parents were. Reasons cited were safety concerns and increased traffic. Risk-averse parents were also behind a reduction in the amount of adventurous play children now engage in, according to [Nursery World](#).

Related to this, [The Guardian](#) reported on the creeping "scholarisation of childhood" as evidence grows that free play at school and home is being eroded in favour of academic, sporting and cultural activities. In an editorial, the paper called for us to ["Help Kids Be Themselves"](#)

## ***Special Educational Needs and Disabilities***

**The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities** (SEND) reported on the experiences of young people with SEND during the pandemic in the context of their educational transitions. Entitled “**Forgotten, Left Behind, Overlooked**” the report found that the pandemic had amplified the problems that were already present in the SEND system and said that the Government and DfE did not do enough and “*our most vulnerable children were failed and schools and families were left to pick up the pieces.*”

**[Download the Report](#)**

**[Government announce extra SEND funding](#)  
**[SEND Support \(England\) and Dispute Resolution](#)  
**[Early Day Motion 1728: Effect of the Covid-19](#)  
**[Outbreak](#)  
**[on Disabled Children and Families](#)**********

## The Big Ask

**Dame Rachel d'Souza**, the Children's Commissioner for England, launched a month-long survey in mid-April for children aged 4-17 to find out:

*“what your life is like, what you want in the future, and anything you think is holding you back. We'll use what you say to tell the people who run the country or your local area what you think needs to change to make your life better.”*

The results will inform a review - titled the Childhood Commission - which will propose solutions to barriers facing children and set targets to monitor improvements.

[The Big Ask Survey](#)

## Testing in Primary Schools

Due to be introduced in Autumn 2021, the RBA (reception baseline assessment) will involve teachers spending 20 minutes assessing language, communication, literacy and mathematics in reception pupils within six weeks of starting school. The Government description includes the assurance that *“It will not be used to label or track individual pupils. No numerical score will be shared and the data will only be used at the end of year 6 to form the school-level progress measure. However, teachers will receive a series of short, narrative statements that tell them how their pupils performed in the assessment at that time. These can be used to inform teaching within the first term.”*

According to a survey carried out by the More Than A Score coalition, only 6% of parents are in favour of formally testing 4-year-olds as they start school. The coalition of parents, teachers and experts in education and child development calls for reform of the present system and advocates for a better alternative for assessment and accountability. Their recent report has more information.

## ***The Kids Aren't Alright, says the Guardian***

Repeating many of the figures and trends that we regularly feature in this newsletter, [this article](#) bemoans the loss of policies implemented from 2000-2010 in the decade of “Every Child Matters”, and asks why we can't give every child the start in life they deserve.

## ***Cut Poverty to Cut Crime***

Merseyside's outgoing Chief Constable, **Andy Cooke**, believes that the best crime prevention is increased opportunity and reduced poverty, and calls for a build up of community cohesion.

[Read More](#)

## ***Data Protection***

TikTok, the video sharing site favoured by teenagers, is facing a legal challenge brought about by Anne Longfield (the former Children's Commissioner for England) about how it collects and uses children's data.

[Read More](#)

## Catching Up

The Children's Commissioner for England Dame Rachel d'Souza urged that children should not be panicked about how much learning they have lost, saying: *"It's so important children are given opportunities to rediscover play, sport, clubs, activities, and just spending time with their friends will make a huge difference"*. [Read More](#)