

The schools white paper: Every child achieving and thriving

A summary for governing boards in schools and trusts

The [schools white paper](#) sets out the government's long-term plan to reform the education system so that high standards and inclusion are better delivered. It responds to challenges facing the sector in key areas such as attainment, disadvantage, SEND and attendance.

This summary explains key proposed changes outlined in the schools white paper. The proposals represent the long-term direction of travel; changes and targets will roll out in stages following consultation with the sector.

Overall ambitions for pupils

The government has established national targets to ensure every child is encouraged to achieve their potential. These include:

- **Better academic standards:** the goal for children to leave secondary school with an average grade of 5 or higher across their GCSEs.
- **Halving the disadvantage gap:** supporting children from low-income backgrounds to achieve roughly a full grade higher in each GCSE than they do today.
- **Recovering learning time** through an increase to the national attendance rate, with an ambition to see children attending 20 million more days of school each year from 2028/29.
- **Increasing pupils' sense of belonging at school:** by 2029, every school will be expected to monitor children's sense of belonging and engagement.

The paper recognises that these ambitions can only be delivered by an expert workforce. As such, plans also contain a package of reforms to boost teacher recruitment and retention, including improving maternity pay and a scheme to incentivise headteachers to work in high-need areas.

SEND system reform

To better support mainstream settings and earlier intervention, the government has announced a series of initiatives and significant changes to the current approach, including:

- **Inclusive mainstream fund:** in addition to existing core SEND funding, all schools can expect to receive additional funds to support targeted and small group interventions for children with additional needs.
- **'Experts at Hand' service:** schools will be able to draw on a multi-agency support offer overseen by local authorities, bringing together specialists from speech and language, educational psychology and occupational therapy. This support will be available to all children, even those without an EHCP.

- **National inclusion standards:** an evidence-based digital library of resources to guide how schools are meeting the needs of children by 2028.
- **Schools will be required to publish an inclusion strategy** which explains how resources are deployed to benefit children with SEND. This document will replace the current SEN Information Reports.

How pupils access personalised support is also changing, with the government proposing that education, health and care plans (EHCPs) be reserved for only the most complex cases.

- **Individual Support Plans (ISPs) for all children with additional needs:** schools will be legally required to develop a plan that describes a pupil's day-to-day provision and the support required. ISPs will be created in collaboration with parents.
- **EHCPs for pupils that require more complex support:** EHCPs will be based on a 'Specialist Provision Package' that sets out the evidence-based interventions and resources required. For pupils with EHCPs, their ISPs will explain how the specialised support will be delivered by the school.

These changes are expected to take effect from 2029, and all existing duties and rights of pupils with SEND will remain in place until new legislation begins.

Full details on the proposed changes to the SEND system can be found in the government's open consultation: [SEND reform: putting children and young people first](#).

Support for disadvantaged pupils

- In Summer 2026, the DfE will consult on a new model for targeting disadvantage funding, moving away from the current measure of Free School Meal eligibility, with a view to adopting a household income-based measure in future. There is also an ambition to make use of centralised data to trigger funding, removing the requirement for manual parental application.
- White working-class children have been identified as one of the largest and lowest-performing groups that require further support. Together with measures to reduce the attainment gap, the DfE plans to use findings from the Independent Inquiry into White Working-Class Educational Outcomes to support engagement with these communities.
- Recognising that some challenges are concentrated in specific geographic regions, the government has launched two area-specific programmes: Mission North East and Mission Coastal, which aim to tackle barriers to progress.
- The pupil premium strategy statement will be redesigned to provide more accessible information for governors and trustees to support better oversight and accountability.

Formal collaboration and MATs

The DfE encourages more structured collaboration to promote best practice and resource sharing.

- There is an expectation that all schools will join or form a high-quality multi academy trust (MAT), with local authorities also able to establish trusts.
- The DfE has confirmed it will develop a new set of trust standards which will focus on inclusion, standards, value for money and community collaboration. Ofsted will use these standards to inspect MATs.

- There will be a consultation on requiring all trusts to maintain local governance structures for every school in their organisation to ensure trustees hear directly from their parents and communities.
- The government is proposing that every school should be part of a local grouping to collaborate on SEND. In the long term, all schools would pool a minimum level of funding to support needs fairly across their specific group, which would include sharing expertise and commissioning of shared resources like specialist staff.

Parental collaboration and engagement

The government describes a system where families are treated as partners in their child's education.

- **Best Start Family Hubs** will provide a single point of access for parents to get advice on supporting learning at home and identifying emerging needs sooner
- **School Profiles:** a new digital service will bring together Ofsted report cards, attainment data, attendance, and enrichment offers in one place.
- **Engagement in trusts:** the government will consult on requiring academy trusts to have local governance structures that include all their schools, hold annual parental forums, and ensure boards hear directly from parents and school communities.

An improved complaints process

The white paper also acknowledges that the current complaints system needs to work better for parents and staff. The DfE has said it will:

- develop a new digital solution for handling complaints which will be launched to simplify the process and to stop parallel escalations
- publish new guidance that sets out clear and consistent timeframes for resolving issues, helping to manage expectations for both schools and families
- consult on requiring maintained schools to include an independent member on complaint panels to increase fairness and objectivity
- produce advice and case studies to help schools identify and handle vexatious complaints
- require the complaints panel to include an independent SEND expert where there are concerns around a school granting an ISP or the content of the ISP

Exclusions and behaviour

The white paper sets out high expectations for behaviour, while ensuring that sanctions do not result in pupils losing learning time or being removed from settings without appropriate oversight.

- Schools will have flexibility to require children to complete suspensions on-site in a supervised environment rather than be sent home, ensuring they remain in a learning environment.
- The government will consult on a new duty requiring schools to set work for excluded children to mitigate lost learning.
- Increased scrutiny with a new internal dashboard to identify school-level trends. Ofsted and the DfE will use the dashboard to identify patterns in pupil movement that could suggest off-rolling or other practices, including unlawful uses of off-site directions and managed moves.