

# SCHOOLS WEEK

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Schools white paper  
special edition:  
News, analysis  
and opinion

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# 'A ONCE IN A GENERATION CHANCE FOR CHANGE'



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SCHOOLS  
WEEK

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If you have a tip-off for the news team, or if your school is doing something new and interesting that you think warrants a visit from a journalist, please email [news@schoolsweek.co.uk](mailto:news@schoolsweek.co.uk).

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After a long wait, the schools white paper and SEND reform consultation have landed.

It will still take some time to digest all the finer details, but our team of journalists has put together a packed edition of initial analysis, reaction and opinion.

What is clear at this stage is that the government and its various advisers have attempted to seriously grapple with an issue many who came before them put in the “too hard” box.

Families are understandably worried about what a move towards new individual support plans, mostly delivered in mainstream schools, will mean for their children.

We hope in the months and years ahead, ministers can reassure them and the schools that serve them that their worries will not be borne out in what is to come.

Critical will be the right training, support and funding for schools to deliver

these reforms.

The fact the education secretary was able to persuade the Treasury to re-open the spending review settlement to provide increases in high needs funding and other investment to pre-empt the reforms shows this is a government serious about getting this right.

But regardless of resources, on the path to meaningful change, there will be countless hurdles. It is important these are tackled head-on, not ignored.

Failure to take the concerns of families, school leaders and other experts seriously risks a repeat of the 2014 reforms, which started with great intentions but ended up creating the mess we are in today, in part because successive governments stuck their heads in the sand when things went wrong.

Labour has so far shown it is willing to listen, willing to invest and willing to have difficult conversations when needed. We hope this continues.

## Most read online this week:



- 1 Schools white paper: The key SEND reform policies**
- 2 Schools white paper: The key schools policies**
- 3 DfE pledges eight weeks full maternity pay for school staff**
- 4 White paper: £1.6bn for mainstream inclusion, £1.8bn for external support**
- 5 DfE wants to ditch ‘average’ labels for school progress scores**

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School leaders' most-read: Teacher Tapp survey in June of 607 headteachers on education media read in past month

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# 'Our moment calls for courage'

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The education secretary has hailed a "once in a generation chance for change" as she published the government's long-awaited white paper setting out widespread reform of the broken SEND system.

Mainstream schools have been thrust into the driving seat of ministers' inclusion push, with proposed new duties to create individual support plans for pupils needing extra support.

Pupils will be eligible for three new layers of support, with education, health and care plans retained for those with "complex needs" following earlier concerns they would be scrapped entirely.

Bridget Phillipson pledged her reforms "were improving support, not removing support".

"We could duck this challenge, ignore the injustice of a postcode lottery in life chances, putting off fixing the SEND system, yet again.

"Our moment calls for courage. Because before us sits a once-in-a-generation chance for change."

Heads' unions cautiously welcomed the reforms, which have been backed by an initial £4 billion in funding over three years.

But Pepe Di'Iasio, ASCL general secretary, was "concerned about the sheer volume of change proposed".

"We urge policymakers to work very closely with the profession over these changes and show empathy and understanding as we work through the detail."

Under the new system, government expects most children's needs will be met under the new "universal" offer, with additional training to help all teachers meet these expectations.

The next layer is "targeted" support for pupils with "ongoing and commonly occurring needs". Schools will have to create digital individual support plans. Support could include small group interventions.

At the "targeted plus" layer, schools will be able to draw on a new "experts at hand" service, which aims to improve access to education and health professionals.

These pupils will have access to a new inclusion base and short-term placements in specialist settings.



Keir Starmer and Bridget Phillipson

In future, only pupils in the final "specialist" tier will be entitled to an EHCP. They will also receive "specialist provision packages" and have access to specialist bases in mainstream schools.

The new tiers will be guided by national inclusion standards, which will set "clear evidence-based" guidance, overseen by an independent expert panel.

All children in year three and above today will retain their existing EHCP until at least the end of secondary school. Younger pupils will begin to be reassessed at transition between primary and secondary from 2029, with some transitioning onto ISPs.

There will be no changes to support received through EHCPs before September 2030.

Ministers will now find out if parents, schools and MPs support their proposals during a 12-week consultation.

Madeleine Cassidy, chief executive at IPSEA legal charity, warned some proposals "seem poised to dilute long-

established, hard-won legal protections that families rely on every day".

Paul Whiteman, NAHT general secretary, said "the success or failure of these plans relies on there being sufficient funding – and on the availability of support services.

"The money announced is significant, and it is good that it is largely aimed directly at schools."

Schools will have until May 18 to respond to the consultation.

Beyond SEND, the white paper pledged reforms to school admissions, a crackdown on illegal exclusions, a new school complaints process, headteacher retention payments and more transparency over pooling of funding and executive pay.

It also set out an ambition for all schools to be in trusts, to halve the attainment gap and to boost attendance.

## 'LAYERS OF SUPPORT'



## THE TIMELINE FOR REFORM

### THIS ACADEMIC YEAR



- New behaviour and parental engagement guidance published
- RISE support expanded
- New key stage 3 alliance launched

### 2026-27



- First wave of "inclusive mainstream" and "experts at hand" funding goes to schools and councils
- £200 million SEND training programme begins

### 2027-28



- Maternity pay increases for teachers and leaders
- New national curriculum comes into force.

### 2028-29



- New SEND system is fully implemented
- Government takes responsibility for cost pressures from councils
- High needs budget increases by £3.5 billion

### 2029-30



- Children begin to have their EHCPs reviewed at the end of primary

# Schools white paper: The 11 key SEND policies

The schools white paper sets out ministers' decade-long plan to reform the system of support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.

Here's your trusty Schools Week speed read of the key SEND policies...

## 1. The universal offer

The Department for Education's new system starts with a universal offer for all children. This will set a baseline for mainstream schools, including inclusive leadership and governance planning, evidence-based support, and strong partnerships with families and wider services.

## 2. Three 'layers of support'

The next three "interlocking" tiers are designed to be flexible layers, which can be drawn on from day one.

### Targeted

This will be for pupils with "ongoing and commonly occurring needs" that cannot be met by the universal offer.

Each pupil will have their needs and provision captured in an individual support plan (ISP). These will be drawn up by schools.

The DfE has said new ISPs will be "interactive, accessible and available in a digital format".

### Targeted plus

For pupils who need more specialist support, schools can draw on a new "experts at hand" service, which aims to improve access to education and health professionals.

These pupils will receive an ISP and have access to a new "inclusion base" or time-limited support in a special or AP setting where needed.

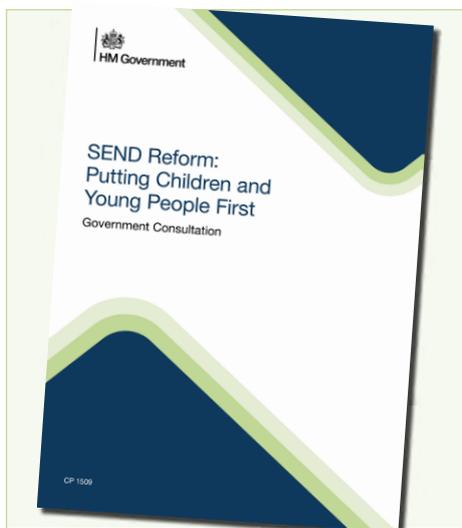
### Specialist

New "specialist provision packages" designed by experts and tested with parents will outline packages of provision based on evidence to support these pupils.

In future only children who need this support will be entitled to an education, health and care plan (EHCP). They will also have an ISP.

## 3. The future of EHCPs

In future, EHCPs will be created after a specialist package and placement decisions have been made, rather than beforehand. The plans will be digitised.



From 2029-30, children with EHCPs will be assessed against the new threshold at the end of their phase of education.

All children in year 3 and above today will retain their existing EHCP until at least age 16. Children in year 2 or below today will be reassessed at transition between primary and secondary.

Those whose needs are best met with additional support in mainstream will move to an ISP.

The DfE expects the number of children with EHCPs to continue rising over the next three years, returning to today's level by 2035.

## 4. Special school curriculum review

The DfE will work with experts to review "good curriculum practice" in special schools. These schools told officials they would welcome national best practice and guidelines.

Special schools and alternative provision will be expected to provide outreach and short-term placement for some children and young people enrolled in mainstream settings.

## 5. National inclusion standards

The new tiers will be guided by new standards to set "clear, evidence-based" guidance for the universal offer, as well as what targeted, targeted plus and specialist layers of support should look like.

An independent expert panel will oversee their £15 million development.

## 6. School 'inclusion strategy' duty

Schools must "proactively plan" the support they provide through a duty to produce an annual

inclusion strategy. This will replace the existing duty to create SEN information reports.

Ofsted will assess how leaders ensure this new strategy is embedded in practice and how staff are equipped to deliver it.

## 7. Updated code of practice

The existing, statutory SEND code of practice will be updated and consulted on.

There will be a new requirement for all settings to ensure staff receive training on SEND and inclusion, and to signpost government funded training.

The DfE will set out what schools should do to support pupils with mental health needs, whether or not they have identified SEND.

## 8. High-needs funding diverted

Schools will be expected to work together on SEND in local groups, with settings eventually expected to pool some of their funding.

The DfE will place conditions on inclusion funding to ensure it is spent on improving the SEND offer.

The government plans to "re-balance" funding, directing more high-needs funding into core budgets for schools and colleges.

The school funding landscape will be streamlined, "clearly identifying each school's share of their core funding for inclusion".

## 10. Tribunal as last resort

Disagreements over ISPs will be dealt with through a strengthened, digitised mainstream school complaints process.

For complaints about specialist provision, the government will seek to strengthen independent mediation services.

It expects the "vast majority" of disagreements to be resolved through these routes, but if parents still have a complaint about a council's decision not to carry out a needs assessment, they can still appeal to the tribunal for a ruling.

## 11. Curbs on private special schools

New national price bands will cap the fees charged by private special schools, and the education secretary will be given the power to refuse the expansion or opening of new settings.

Read the longer version online [here](#)



## ANALYSIS

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# Schools in 'eye of the storm' of SEND complaints

SAMANTHA BOOTH

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Schools could face increased workload and become “the eye of the storm” on SEND disputes, lawyers have warned, as more accountability shifts onto headteachers' shoulders.

For the first time, schools will have a legal duty to create digital individual support plans for all children with additional needs in the new “targeted” layer and above.

They will also have to identify needs as early as possible and monitor progress to ensure interventions are working, the Department for Education said.

In routine inspections, Ofsted will look at how well schools are using these plans.

But, in a bid to create faster decision making, parents with concerns about provision will direct complaints to their child's school.

The government will set out “clear expectations and timescales” through a new “digital solution” to simplify the process.

Ministers propose where a school complaint relates to SEND provision, the complaints panel must include a SEND specialist.

This could be a SENCO or inclusion lead, but they must be independent of the school or trust. Governors will be expected to sample a selection of the ISPs.

The government will also explore options for strengthening independent scrutiny over complaints data, and identify patterns such as unusually high numbers and “how patterns might initiate further interrogation of practice”.

Laura Berman, partner at Stone King law firm, said “the concern is that the workload in terms of complaints is going to magnify it significantly if there's no other route to challenge these ISPs.

“Coupled with the SEND reforms in the white paper, it feels like school complaints are going to really escalate significantly, and that's going to be very challenging.”

But Vic Goddard, chief executive at Passmores trust in Essex, said schools “should be held to account for meeting individual needs”.

“Will it leave us more vulnerable to more complaints? Yes, but if you're already inclusive and doing these things, I'm not certain it's as painful.”



Vic Goddard



Several MPs pressed education secretary Bridget Phillipson on the accountability and enforceability of the new plans this week.

Phillipson said we “need to ensure there is accountability” on the plans, including the independent SEND professional, but also that health authorities “must play their full role in delivering better support”.

For the specialist layer of the government's plans, in future the SEND first-tier tribunal will only decide whether a council's school decision is reasonable, rather than name a school. The council will then reconsider the decision.

Phillip Wood, from law firm Browne Jacobson, said parents “may view this as a significant downgrade of their legal rights.

“As a result, they may seek to make further complaints and claims to schools, in relation to their SEND provision, under the Equality Act 2010 instead.

“The eye of the storm on SEND disputes therefore looks set to move from local authorities to schools.”

Schools will also be duty bound to publish an annual inclusion strategy. This will replace the existing SEN information reports.

Staff will have to receive training on SEND and inclusion under a refreshed code of practice.

Pepe Di'Iasio, general

secretary of ASCL school leaders' union, said the “sheer volume of reforms will undoubtedly be a source of concern”.

“Schools must not be put in a position of being given extra responsibilities without being given the tools they need to meet these.

“The ambition is to make the system less adversarial, and reduce conflict – the challenge is turning that into reality.”

The government wants the SENCO role to become “more strategic and less administrative” under the reforms.

It will work with the sector “to redefine roles and responsibilities across the system to drive inclusive practice”.

However, it remains unclear which aspects of the new SEND system will fall to SENCOs, and whether they will be solely responsible for writing support plans.

Abigail Hawkins, director of Sensible SENCO, said to become genuinely strategic schools must ensure protected leadership time, access to administrative support, and “genuine inclusion” in the senior leadership team.

“Without those structural commitments, the rhetoric of strategic leadership risks remaining aspirational.”

The children's commissioner will also be given a new remit to oversee and provide scrutiny of SEND reform implementation.

# £1.8bn fund to boost external support

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The schools minister has issued a rallying cry for expert SEND professionals who quit their jobs to return and staff the £1.8 billion “experts at hand” service.

Georgia Gould pledged staff such as educational psychologists will have “ring-fenced” time on the frontline in schools, rather than “spending all their time doing form filling and administrative work”.

The new experts at hand service aims to boost availability of external support. Schools can then draw from a pool of education and health professionals to fix the current “inconsistent and limited access”.

The Department for Education has said it expects that by April 2029, the average primary school will benefit from 40 days of help a year, rising to 160 days for secondary schools. However, with chronic staff shortages, school leaders are questioning where the staff will come from in an already stretched system.

Speaking to *Schools Week*, Gould said: “We have a really strong message to those people who have left the profession and moved out of these roles. What they often say to me is the reason they have is they’re spending all their time doing form filling and administrative work, and not actually intervening to help children.

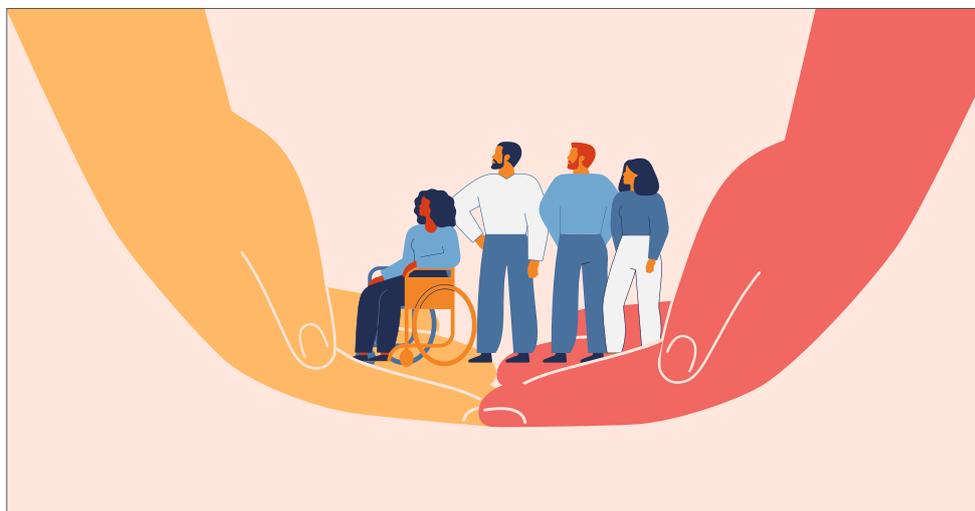
“Under this new system, this support will be ring-fenced to do the actual intervention, to be out in classrooms.”

She added: “That is what a lot of these professionals got into the job to do. So we will be asking them to come back and support these efforts.”

Gould said the government expected the scheme would involve 7,500 experts. When asked for more information on this figure, the DfE said it was a modelling assumption based on the average salaries for support staff, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and EPs.

EPs play a fundamental role in assessing the needs of pupils for education, health and care plans. But a government report previously found they were stuck in a “vicious cycle” preventing early intervention work.

Analysis by *Schools Week* suggests the number of EPs employed by councils has not kept up with workload demands in recent years. While there



has been a 20 per cent rise in full-time equivalent EPs since 2020-21, the number of EHCPs has jumped by 48 per cent. Councils can also pay private EPs to help – but day rates can vary between £350 and £1,000, research has found.

The local government ombudsman has warned the shortage was having a “significant impact” on councils’ ability to meet SEND needs.

Ministers are aware of the challenge and had invested more than £31 million to recruit 200 EP trainees a year on to three-year doctorate courses.

However, the Association of Educational Psychologists, which runs the training application system, said last year it received 1,765 applications. On top of this an average of 300 EPs retire each year, AEP membership data suggests.

Donna Wiggett, AEP’s general secretary, said: “EPs want to be in school, observing children, doing interventions and upskilling teachers and school staff to enable better outcomes for children – we are the best placed people.”

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists’ annual survey found 10 per cent of SALT posts in NHS children’s services were vacant last spring.

Sarah Findlay-Cobb, chief executive at Landau Forte academy trust, said “there’s just not enough experts right now to get the support, so there’s a huge waiting list for all our students no matter what we are trying to get”.

In December, 17,433 youngsters were waiting to see an occupational therapist, who help children overcome challenges with everyday tasks or activities.

Dr Sally Payne, from the Royal

College of OTs, said the test with the reforms would be “whether the funding, workforce planning and local delivery structures are enough to make these reforms a reality”.

Edward Timpson, the children’s minister who rolled out the 2014 SEND reforms, previously told *Schools Week* he wished they had done more “capacity building in the system before the legislation”.

Gould said the DfE was working “closely with the NHS on their workforce planning, and they are really confident that we can meet our ambitions.

“We absolutely recognise that we need to be training more people and bringing them into the system, as well as asking people to come back”

Councils and integrated care boards will work together to establish the experts at hand offer, according to local circumstances, the SEND consultation states.

A total of £1 billion will fund the pool of external professionals, while a the remaining £800 million will fund outreach from “high-quality” alternative provision, special schools and special post-16 institutions into mainstream.

The government’s neurodivergence task and finish group, which informed the SEND overhaul, called for a “robust model” to stop health and education operating in “silos”.

This would include data on prevalence rates, population and demographic characteristics.

Schools North East has called for “regional workforce guarantees” to ensure even access to specialists.



Georgia Gould

## ANALYSIS

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# Special school funding clarity call

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Ministers have been urged to clarify how special schools will be funded under their white paper reforms.

The document pledged a “fundamental reset” for special schools, including new funding bandings for provision, a curriculum review and a plan for the institutions to provide outreach and short-term placements for mainstream pupils.

But few details – beyond a £800 million fund to help towards outreach – have been given on how the changing role of special schools will be paid-for.

Government wants education, health and care plans to be reserved for pupils with the “most complex needs” from 2035.

Under the proposed system, a child will be placed on a “specialist provision package”, which will secure the right provision before an EHCP is issued. Funding for the packages will be set by national banding rates.

Pauline Aitchison, deputy director at School North East, which represents the region’s schools, said there were “hundreds of different conditions” that would fit into proposed packages, with “nothing” mentioned on how they will be funded.

Warren Carratt, chief executive of Nexus Multi-Academy Trust said he was “deeply concerned” by the proposed banding rates, which he said were “so far removed from the



needs of children and the schools supporting them”.

“When your funding agency and regulator is also defining what they want your unit costs to be – regardless of what they are – that can lead to a very conflicted space,” he said. “It would be disastrous if that leads to further underfunding of provision”.

Others have been more welcoming of the plans.

Marijke Miles, headteacher at Baycroft School in Hampshire, said: “Schools have been looking for a long time for a more consistent approach across the education landscape and for a less regional variation and postcode lottery.”

Carratt questioned the “logic” of introducing short-term placements in

special schools.

“Surely if a child is assessed as needing a special school place, it’s not something that’s needed for a fixed period.”

However, Simon Knight, joint head at Frank Wise school in Oxfordshire, said placements have “the potential to improve” how the system supports pupils needing additional help.

Heads also have mixed views on the planned curriculum review for special schools.

While Adam Dabin, CEO of Horizons Education Trust said the review has “got potential to be quite a powerful piece of work”, Carratt said “drifting towards prescription will only be harmful for the sector”.

The review proposed that councils will no longer be forced to name a school on a child’s education, health and care plan if it is full, something leaders have welcomed.

“It’s always been a challenge where special schools want to be part of the solution, and we want to take as many pupils as we possibly can... It’s easy to say you can fit an extra pupil here and there, but that doesn’t work on the ground,” said Dabin.

Knight added this would need to be “accompanied by sufficient capacity within the system to enable all children who require a special school place to be able to access one safely and effectively”.



Pauline Aitchison

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## Specialist expansions snubbed in favour of free school builds

More councils are favouring plans to build specialist free schools over scrapping the project to expand existing provision.

Ministers gave town halls the choice to open 59 special or alternative provision schools or take a three-year, £50,000-per-pupil cash alternative to create new places in existing schools.

A further 18 special schools and 28 mainstream schools were cancelled altogether.

Councils had until today (Friday) to submit their decision to the DfE.

Twenty-four schools are going ahead. A further 10 have either been cancelled or had cancellation recommended by officers in

return for alternative funding. The remaining 25 have not been decided or did not respond to our press enquiries.

Councils including Wokingham, Windsor and Maidenhead, Barnsley, Hounslow and Sheffield have opted to scrap the schools in return for expansion funding.

Many argued that cancelling projects will deliver SEN provision more quickly.

Windsor and Maidenhead council accepted £5.4 million funding, with council documents saying their planned 100-place school for pupils with SEMH would be “almost a decade later than originally anticipated”.

Wokingham Borough Council officers

recommended two special schools be cancelled as the “DfE has provided no further clarity in relation to the delivery timetable”, which could have “substantial financial implications” on the council.

Other councils, including Enfield, Birmingham, Darlington, Kent, and Dorset have pressed on with the special school project.

Enfield council documents said it was going ahead with a 96-place school for children with complex and additional needs as “rejecting DfE delivery would mean forfeiting a significant investment and the provision of a modern, sustainably designed high-spec building”.

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# DfE eyes private special school veto

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Bridget Phillipson will give herself the power to refuse new private special schools, after vowing to “clamp down” on private-equity backed firms “sucking money out of our education system”.

Ministers sought to contain expensive independent special school fees in their SEND reforms, proposing tighter regulation and increase financial transparency.

Council spending on these placements has risen to more than £2 billion a year. The growth accounts for almost a quarter of the total rise in high-needs spending since 2018, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

In the white paper, the DfE said it was concerned “placements in the sector are contributing to unsustainable financial pressure” on councils “without clear evidence they are leading to better quality support, outcomes and value for money”.

Schools Week has revealed the soaring spend by councils on independent special schools amid the state capacity crisis in recent years. Our award-winning investigation unveiled the big companies involved making millions, including those backed by private-equity investors and a Middle East sovereign wealth fund.

The government is proposing new statutory standards for private special schools, which



Claire Dorer

would require them to offer placements based on new specialist provision packages and bandings. They will have to report their costs to councils.

The education secretary would have the power to refuse the expansion or opening of new private special school where there is limited evidence of demand from councils.

These settings “fill gaps where local capacity does not exist,” said Claire Dorer, chief executive of the National Association of Special Schools, which represents state and private schools.

“The independent sector is currently the only part of the system able to create new specialist places quickly and without upfront capital risk to the public purse. A policy designed to shrink provision before providing real alternatives is not strategic, it is negligent.”

Pepe Di'Iasio, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said price bands seemed “sensible and logical”. But he said the government “must ensure that prices are

set at a level which is sufficient to meet the needs of children who require significant support”.

Phillipson told parliament this week she would act “to clamp down on the massive expansion in private equity-backed, independent specialist provision that is sucking money out of our education system into profit when it should be focused on outcomes for children”.

DfE analysis found of the 15 private equity funds that own independent special schools, five are based outside of the United Kingdom. This includes Jersey, Guernsey, USA, Qatar and Abu Dhabi.

Collectively, these own 170 schools with 9,000 pupils, the DfE said.

The schools charge an average of £63,000 per child a year – more than twice the £26,000 cost of a state special school, according to government analysis. Fees vary but some charge more than £100,000 a year.

The DfE expects the average fees councils can “pay will be lower in cash terms from 2028-29”.

Outcomes First Group, one of the largest providers, welcomed the proposals and said it had been “calling for these measures for some time, including outcomes-focused commissioning and stronger progress tracking for pupils with SEND that aligns closely with our own framework”.

However, it is “critical to have clarity and further detail quickly to ensure any new policy is implemented effectively”.

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## Government tsar advises private SEND firm

The government's SEND adviser Christine Lenehan advises one of the largest private-equity backed independent special school providers, Schools Week can reveal.

Lenehan took up the chair role of Outcome First Group's safeguarding and quality committee after retiring from the Council for Disabled Children.

She told Schools Week she agreed to take on a specific role which ensures “children in their services were safe”. But she also was a key adviser to the Department for Education on their SEND reforms.

Asked how conflicts of interest were managed, she said: “I am always aware of conflicts of interests in all the roles I take and am transparent with all parties.

“I am known for my credibility and professionalism, and would do nothing to

undermine this.”

She added: “My views on independent special schools and their need to deliver high-quality education with a transparent funding base, and in partnership with local authorities is well known.”

André Imich, the DfE's former SEND adviser, also sits as an independent member on the panel. He took up the role six months after leaving the DfE in 2024. He said the position was cleared by the DfE.

The DfE said it considers any potential conflicts of interest in “great detail” and take them “very seriously”. It takes “all necessary precautions”.

Outcomes First Group made an operating profit of £7.1 million on turnover of £264.3 million in 2023-24. It was acquired by USA-based private equity firm TPG in 2023. Its

profits have been reinvested to strengthen provision, and all UK taxes are paid, a spokesperson said.

They added it ensures no conflicts of interest and that “our working arrangements are transparent and appropriate”. It is “proud to have sector-leading experts on our safeguarding and quality committee. They help ensure the highest standards for the children and young people in our schools.

“The chair is an independent advisor supported by other independent education specialists. Together they help hold the organisation to account. The committee has operated effectively for more than eight years, playing a significant role in driving exceptional standards for children with SEND, reflected in the group's consistently high Ofsted outcomes.”

## ANALYSIS

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# Funding 'rebalanced' towards schools...

**CHAMINDA JAYANETTI**  
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Funding for special educational needs will be overhauled with schools at the centre under government reforms.

However, critics fear extra cash announced by ministers may not go far enough.

The government announced this week it will hand schools £1.6 billion over three years to become more inclusive, and will bolster high needs funding by £3.5 billion – new cash from the Treasury – from 2028, though it is not clear how much of this will go to schools.

Under the new system, schools will be expected to deliver the new universal, targeted and targeted plus layers of support, including through inclusion bases. This is to reduce the bureaucracy and delays in the EHCP system by allowing schools to respond swiftly and flexibly within a mainstream setting to commonly occurring SEND needs.

However, the £1.6 billion in initial funding over three years across the country would equate to only small increases in budgets for individual schools, prompting concerns it won't go far enough.

Pepe Di'Iasio, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said there are "a lot of questions to answer" over funding, particularly how the published figures "translate to individual schools and their additional responsibilities for SEND provision" given the financial pressures many schools are under.

Jo Hutchinson, director for SEND and additional needs at the Education Policy Institute, said there was "no way that it's going to add up to the kind of money per setting in every setting that would enable them to think about a different staffing model".

The SEND reforms consultation paper said conditions would be placed on the inclusion funding to ensure it is spent on an improved inclusion offer, with settings and trust held accountable for it.

Hutchinson questioned how schools would get to decide on spending, or whether money would get "eaten up" on staffing the new inclusion bases.

Benedicte Yue, chief financial officer at the Oxfordshire-based River Learning Trust MAT,



welcomed the reform package's principles, but warned the additional funding could "quickly disappear" if the reforms are not implemented "at pace".

The government has announced high-needs funding will rise by £3.5 billion in 2028. Over time, more funding will be "rebalanced" from high-needs budgets to schools to reflect that they will be expected to deliver more provision themselves.

Yue told *Schools Week* that increasing schools' core funding to deliver a more inclusive offer for children with moderate needs without an EHCP "provides greater stability in funding for schools to invest in the workforce and in their inclusion strategy". But she added that there weren't enough details yet to assess if the funding would be sufficient.

By making schools the primary financial focus of the SEND system, there is a risk they could face the same financial challenges councils have.

"Unless the reforms are genuinely successful in meeting need earlier and better to the extent that fewer kids have needs that escalate, then there's no particular reason why schools would have a better shot at balancing budgets versus rationing than local authorities," said Hutchinson.

The SEND reform consultation set out the government's desire for all schools to become part of a local SEND group.

"We propose in the long term all schools will be required to pool a minimum level of funding within a local SEND group for inclusion, to support needs fairly across a group of schools,"

the consultation said. "This pooled funding will be used collectively to meet the needs of children with SEND including through sharing expertise, resourcing, staffing, support bases and commissioning of shared resources, such as specialist teachers."

The proposal resembles local SEND "clusters" that have grown in popularity. However, SEND policy consultant Dr Peter Gray, who has helped councils introduce the cluster model, told *Schools Week* what the government is proposing is subtly but critically different. While clusters are funded collectively above the level of individual schools, the government's plans involve schools putting their own funds into a pooled pot.

"The idea they seem to have is devolve to individual schools and then pool and reassemble," he said. "Once money goes to individual schools, they feel they own it and they're sort of giving it back, and they're doing other schools a favour."

"I think the psychology of giving schools money and then making them pool it is a bit unlikely in some ways."

Yue also expressed concerns over the government's pooling model. "Pulling back funding from schools to pool resources locally to buy-in collective services could lead to all sorts of disagreements."

"Devolving a proportion of the high-needs block directly to local clusters would, in my view, remove the perception that that money belongs to specific schools, and better support local collaboration and peer support."

## ANALYSIS

# ...but councils aren't out of the woods yet

Some councils will remain in financial trouble even after government SEND deficits intervention, and may face a clamour from families and schools to get statutory support before reforms.

After pledging to wipe 90 per cent of high-needs deficits and take on new cost pressures from 2028, the government this week effectively transferred financial responsibility for SEND children with all but the highest needs from councils to schools.

Proposals to end tribunals' power to specify placements for SEND children and cap costs charged by independent special schools are aimed at reducing the financial pressures on councils.

Local government reaction has been broadly positive. The f40 group, which represents councils that receive the lowest levels of school funding, "strongly welcomed" the reforms. The Local Government Association (LGA) said it was "pleased" the government had acted on its calls for reform, describing the plans as "ambitious".

Luke Sibieta, a research fellow at the Institute for Fiscal Studies, told Schools Week that shifting many of the SEND system's responsibilities and funding from councils to schools is "unambiguously" good news for councils' finances. However, he added the reforms created incentives that could see councils' high-needs deficits rise quicker in the run-up to reform implementation.

The government's consultation on SEND reforms stated all children and young people with a special school place in September 2029 can remain in specialist education until the end of their education if they want to. From 2029, children with an EHCP can keep it until at least the end of their educational "phase".

By contrast, the government said it expects EHCP numbers to fall once reforms have bedded in.

"This creates a strong incentive for parents and schools to push for assessments under the existing system rather than the new one," former Department for Education senior policy adviser Sam Freedman wrote this week. He predicted a rise in EHCP requests and possibly a spike in tribunal claims, "which would put even more pressure on a system already close to collapse".

"There is a real risk that will



happen," Sibieta told Schools Week. "I suspect the government is aware of that risk."

He said the bailout of councils' high-needs deficits meant local authorities might not "fight tooth and nail" against EHCP applications and special school placement requests, but added the government could step in if demand does surge.

"They could change some guidance," he said. "For instance, put in more specific expectations about the conditions that need to be satisfied for pupils to go to a special school. They could try to change some of the codes of practice or guidance in advance."

The government's projections of EHCP caseloads rising and then falling back by 2035 are not explicitly based on factoring in a rise in demand sparked by the white paper.

Asked in parliament this week whether councils would be properly funded to any short-term surge in EHCP applications, education secretary Bridget Phillipson did not directly address the issue.

There is also the issue of councils' remaining high-needs deficits, which mostly start increasing again between this year's 90 per cent bailout and 2028, when councils must incorporate those deficits into balanced budget commitments.

The LGA wants all dedicated schools grant deficits written off, plus more funding for SEND transport.

"If I was a council, I would be assuming there will be a similar bailout for the next two years," said Sibieta. "The bigger problem is how to manage councils in the meantime, because their incentives to

keep costs down are now going to be very low."

Phillipson was keen this week to emphasise that the bailouts are conditional, telling MPs they would only happen "if local authorities produce SEND plans that will deliver accountability and the places and support for children". She pointed to "affluent councils in affluent areas delivering incredibly poor-quality provision".

Even if the 90 per cent bailout is extended to cover all accumulated deficits up to 2028, Schools Week analysis shows some councils will remain in financial trouble.

Based on freedom of information data from 73 councils – calculated before this week's reform plans – a 90 per cent bailout would leave five councils with a cumulative deficit of more than £20 million. A further 10 councils would face remaining deficits of between £10 million and £20 million.

Some would face bigger post-bailout deficits in 2028 than they were projecting pre-bailout for 2025-26. Bradford, for example, is set to fall into a cumulative deficit for the first time this year, forecast at about £500,000 pre-bailout. However, it is projected to grow from there, so even if 90 per cent of its entire forecast cumulative deficit to 2028 is wiped out, it would still be £8.2 million in the red in two years' time.

Hampshire council would face the biggest post-bailout deficit in 2028, at £44.8 million. A spokesperson said the council expected it would not have sufficient reserves to cover such large deficits by 2027-28, and added that until the 2026 bailout money is paid, it will lose about £14 million a year in lost investment income.

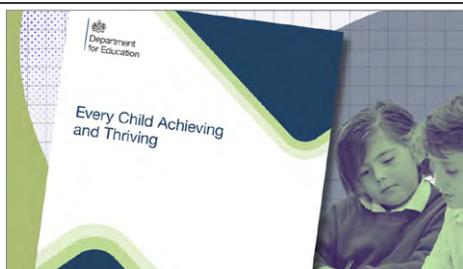


Sam Freedman

# White paper: The 15 key schools policies

A crackdown on off-rolling pupils, a call for standalone schools to join or form MATs and changes to the admissions code are among major plans unveiled in the schools white paper.

Here's your speed-read of the key schools policies...



## 1. Fair banding must be more transparent

Labour will consult on changes to the admissions code to “promote fairness for all families, particularly the most disadvantaged and children with additional needs”.

Schools must give parents more information about in-year admissions. There will be reforms to fair access protocols.

The DfE will tighten rules around fair banding for admissions and make schools give more details about the arrangements.

## 2. Off-rolling crackdown

A new dashboard will track pupil movement and identify school-level trends suggesting off-rolling or other “concerning practices”.

Officials will “pay particular attention to schools where SEND, free school meal or demographic trends appear significantly out of sync with their local context”.

Data will be shared with Ofsted, which will likely issue ‘urgent improvement’ grades if unacceptable practice is found.

## 3. Standalone trusts ‘challenged’ to defragment system

The government wants all schools to join or form trusts. Councils and local area partnerships will be given the power to launch chains.

Pointing to the number of single-academy trusts in deficit, the document poses a “challenge to our best standalone schools” to partner with others and make the system less fragmented.

The government will prioritise “quality over pace” when moving schools into trusts.

## 4. Inclusive governance

The government will consult on requiring trusts to have governance structures that “include all their schools, hold annual parental forums, and ensure boards hear directly from parents and school communities”.

The government hopes upcoming multi-academy trust inspections will “reduce the burden of school-level inspection”.

## 5. Pooling transparency and executive pay clampdown

The DfE has pledged to “improve arrangements for transparency” where resources across a group of schools is being pooled.

It vowed to “tighten” rules around executive pay in the academy trust handbook by requiring “proportionate and justified” wage hikes.

## 6. New targets

The government has set the sector the target of improving attendance to more than 94 per cent. This is 1.3 percentage points over levels seen in 2023-24.

Ministers want to halve the attainment gap.

## 7. Reintegration after suspensions

Guidance on behaviour in schools will be updated.

Reintegration support partnerships will be launched. These involve a formal meeting between parents and schools following a suspension “leading to an agreed plan and responsibilities”.

The DfE will consult on a proposed model.

## 8. New model for measuring disadvantage

The DfE is looking at using income data, rather than the “binary metric” of free school meals eligibility, to assess which pupils attract disadvantage funding.

It added that a “stepped model” could “take into account how low family income is, and for how long this has been the case”.

The government is considering targeting funding “based on the place a child lives, as well as their individual family economic circumstances”.

## 9. Pupil engagement framework to be drawn up...

A new pupil engagement framework is to be developed on factors that determine pupils’ engagement in education, to make improvements.

By 2029, every school will be expected to monitor pupils’ sense of belonging and engagement.

## 10. ...and parental engagement guidance

The government plans to design “minimum expectations on parental engagement”.

The principles will “make clear what families can expect from schools, and what schools will expect of families in return”.

## 11. New way of handling parent complaints

The government will create a “digital, accessible solution for handling complaints” to simplify the process, and improve co-ordination and data collection.

It will set out “mutual expectations” for handling complaints, including “consistent timeframes for resolving complaints, to help schools with managing expectations while ensuring that families feel reassured”.

## 12. Plans for teacher retention

A teacher retention programme will launch in the autumn.

It will see best practice on flexible working shared across the sector, and “provide peer support, coaching and resources” so schools “learn from each other on managing workloads and expanding flexible working”.

## 13. One-stop shop for school support

The white paper lays out plans to “build a new one-stop-shop digital platform for schools”. It will signpost “quality-assured support to empower smart investment in data-driven, evidence-led self-improvement”.

## 14. AI standards and ‘data spine’

The DfE is working to build “clear principles” on the use of AI in schools, which will “firmly guide technology companies” to create tech that supports children’s outcomes.

The government will create a “data spine” providing a “secure, privacy-respecting and streamlined way to connect and share information”.

## 15. Focus on ‘excellence in leadership’

The white paper lays out a targeted package of interventions for “excellence in leadership”.

The government will review the headteachers’ standards, and has pledged an extra £500,000 a year for improved early headship coaching.

Newly appointed headteachers will be offered retention payments of up to £15,000 to work in certain areas under a planned pilot.

Read the longer version online [here](#)



# Government seeks to remove 'average' progress labels

**FREDDIE WHITTAKER**

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Schools will no longer be publicly compared to the national "average" for their progress scores in a proposed overhaul of government league tables.

Instead, ministers are proposing that schools be listed based on percentiles – for example, they might be in one of five "quintiles" for pupil progress.

The Department for Education has proposed new "best fit" progress score for low prior attaining pupils could work. League tables would show the proportion of pupils achieving a grade 7 or above in English and maths GCSE, with breakdowns for key pupil groups.

Currently, schools are given progress scores based on how much pupils improve during primary school, between primary school and GCSE, and between GCSE and A-level. They are listed based on "confidence intervals". These are "well below average", "below average", "average", "above average" or "well above average".

However, in a consultation launched on Monday, the government said the approach led to many



pupils who enter secondary school behind their peers".

schools being labelled as average. Bandings can be impacted by school size.

The government is proposing to continue to rank schools in order of progress score but assign bandings based on percentiles.

The DfE proposes to present three years of progress scores and bandings, along with cohort size and pupil characteristics and a box explaining uncertainty due to cohort size.

The change is proposed across all key stages and would start with key stage 2 progress scores in December.

The government is also consulting on a new performance measure for key stage 4, in addition to progress 8, focused on the "progress made by

pupils who enter secondary school behind their peers".

The government already allocates pupils to prior attainment groups based on their key stage 2 results.

It is proposing to calculate an additional measure for those in low prior attainment groups. The DfE would then calculate progress scores for each pupil starting with a score for maths, at least one English GCSE and their best subject. It would calculate an additional progress score for every extra subject sat by a pupil and take their best progress score to calculate the new measure for the school.

The government could make an adjustment to the baseline used for pupils with English as an additional language, taking the higher of their average score in reading and maths at the end of KS2, or just maths.

The consultation sets out plans to adjust which additional academic measures the government publishes in league tables. This will include a new attainment measure showing the proportion of pupils getting a grade 7 or above in English and maths GCSE.



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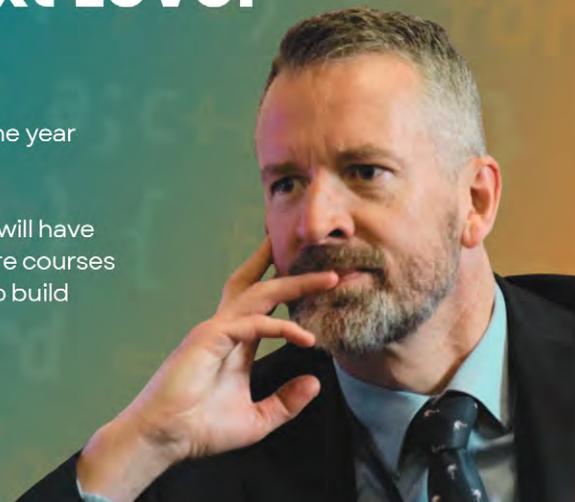
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## Off-rolling curbs welcomed, but warnings over 'gaps in data'

JACK DYSON

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Labour's illegal exclusions crackdown could finally "shed light on a practice that is currently invisible" but must be supported by councils and trusts to work, experts have said.

The schools white paper unveiled plans to tighten up scrutiny over pupil movements, and to interrogate the leaders of schools suspected of off-rolling or other shady methods to skew cohorts.

Kiran Gill, chief executive of inclusion charity The Difference, said this "has been an area of insufficient data accountability".

"It shouldn't be up to investigative journalists or brilliant statisticians to highlight where there's a system challenge."

**Concerning practices**

The government will launch a new internal dashboard that identifies school-level trends "that could suggest off-rolling or other concerning practices, including off-site direction and managed moves". It will use this to conduct an annual review of how children move through the education system. Officials will "follow up on a targeted basis with responsible bodies to better understand and challenge where there are possible



Kiran Gill

concerns".

Off-rolling is when a pupil is removed from a school's roll without a permanent exclusion, when it is primarily in the best interests of the school, not the child. Education Policy Institute (EPI) research two years ago found tens of thousands of pupils have "unexplained" moves out of school each year, with poorer children more likely to be impacted.

At least some of these exits are managed moves. These are allowed when agreed between heads, parents and pupils, but constitute off-rolling if not in a pupil's best interests.

**Fill data gaps**

The think tank urged ministers to launch "a central data reporting system which captures all moves and the reasons for them".

The white paper said the clampdown will "pay particular attention to schools where SEND, free school meal or demographic trends appear significantly out of sync with their local context".

Jon Andrews, the EPI's interim CEO, said the government was "right to use a 'curious' approach, because a data dashboard can identify unusual patterns but cannot, on its own, tell you whether any individual move was in a child's interest".

However, there are "gaps in the data that the government will need to address".

Managed moves are not recorded nationally and schools are not

required to report reasons for pupil departures if they are not permanently excluded.

"Data which captures all moves and the reasons for them, including managed moves and moves into home schooling, is required," Andrews said.

**'Perverse incentives'**

A The Difference report last year told government, councils and trusts to "take an active role in identifying and improving non-representative schools".

"This white paper recommendations are a recognition that the department and the governance structures around schools – councils and MATs – need to be part of policing the worst of those perverse incentives," Gill said.

The white paper said the Department for Education will try to share more timely pupil movement data with Ofsted to help it identify "unacceptable" techniques.

Where "bad practice" is unearthed, schools will likely be issued with an 'urgent improvement' grade for leadership and governance.

**Inclusion bases and AP**

Dr Carlie Goldsmith, of education charity Impetus, believes the proposed off-rolling changes "will shed light on a practice that is currently invisible".

She offered a "word of caution", warning that "nationalising the system makes it difficult to spot patterns of poor practice at the local level".

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## Government plans to tighten fair banding rules

Ministers' inclusion drive could be boosted by new school guidance on how "fair banding" admissions approaches can alter the make-up of classes, campaigners argue.

The government is planning to tighten the rules around fair banding – a practice used by secondaries to admit a proportion of pupils from different ability groups based on a test – to ensure it "produces representative intakes". It also wants to make the operation of the controversial arrangements "clearer" by requiring schools to set out more details about how they work. No further information on the changes have been released.

Trinity Multi Academy Trust chief executive Michael Gosling, who runs schools that use fair banding, said: "The proposals seem

reasonable and fair because they talk about more details being required to ensure clarity, which I don't think anybody would argue with.

"However, rather ironically, they also lack the detail needed to provide clarity on what that means in practice."

Current rules state fair banding can be used to produce an intake that is representative of the ability of applicants to a school, the ability of children locally or the national average.

Requirements "must be fair, clear, and objective". Trusts and councils must publish their schools' admission requirements, and the process for banding and decisions, including details of the tests.

When approached for more information, the Department for Education did not outline in

what ways arrangements are unclear now.

Charlotte O'Regan, of social mobility charity Sutton Trust, said: "It's the current implementation of fair banding that's the challenge, not the mechanism itself. Schools could benefit from support and guidance on the potential impact of each option that's in the school admissions code, in a way that ensures inclusion is at the heart of their decisions."

*Schools Week* revealed in October that a controversial decision allowing the Carlton Bolling school in Bradford to introduce practice had been withdrawn by the admissions watchdog over allegations that important evidence was ignored. The approval was reinstated.

# All schools in trusts, but where will expansion cash come from?

**JACK DYSON**

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Academy bosses are urging ministers to give them “clarity” over whether recently dumped trust growth funds will come back from the dead.

Labour’s schools white paper unveiled its vision to move all schools into “high-quality” chains to defragment the system and “drive excellence in standards and inclusion”.

However, questions over how the moves will be paid-for remain, with trust growth funding “notably absent” from the document.

Schools Week analysis suggests applications to convert to academy status have more than halved since the government’s surprise decision to cut three expansion grants.

## All schools in trusts

The white paper revealed ministers want all schools to join or form trusts. To aid this, councils and local area partnerships will be given the power to launch their own chains.

It follows mixed messages on academies from the Labour administration, which has previously described itself as “agnostic” about school structures.

It also axed the £25,000 grant available to schools to cover the legal, rebranding, human resources and employee costs incurred while converting to academy status in January 2025.

Two other multi-million-pound trust expansion schemes were halted at the same time.

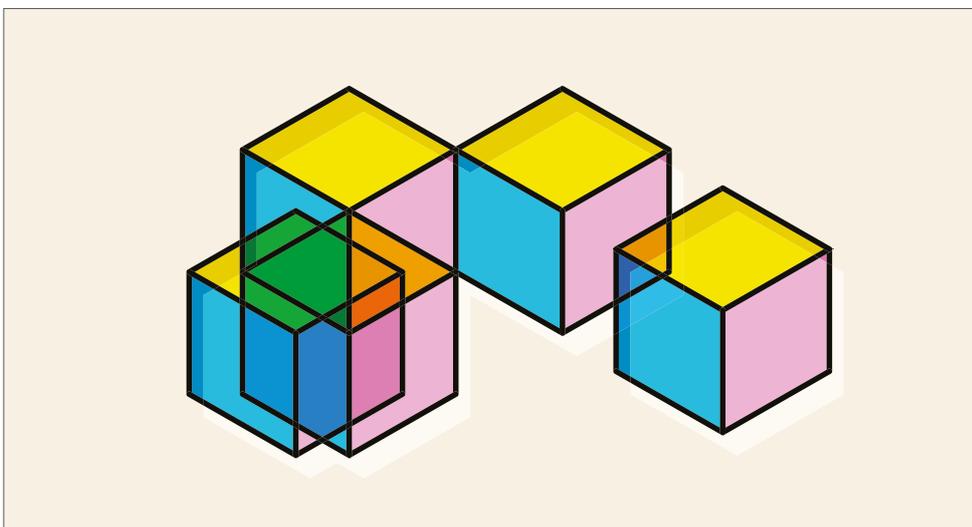
Figures suggest the appetite to academise has reduced in the months following the cuts. Schools Week analysis suggests, on average, 17 conversion applications were lodged each month last year, compared to 59 across 2024 and 2023.

Lydia Michaelson-Yeates, of law firm Browne Jacobson, stated the “big challenge for government is how fast and easily” it can move all schools into trusts. With the issue of growth funding “notably absent” from the white paper, it “remains to be seen” if they will be expected to pick up the costs.

Confederation of School Trusts chief executive Leora Cruddas called for “clarity”. The DfE did not respond when asked if it was going to support trusts with the cost of conversion.

## Death of SATs?

A deadline has not been set for all schools to be in trusts and ministers have clarified they will not force schools to convert. Guidance on how large



trusts should be has not been issued. Instead, the government will prioritise “quality over pace” and allow for “a degree of flexibility on size... to reflect the different characteristics of local school landscapes”.

However, pointing to the number of single-academy trusts (SATs) in deficit, the document posed a “challenge to our best standalone schools” to partner with others and make the system less fragmented. Of the 89 chains in deficit at the end of 2023-24, 59 were SATs.

Michaelson-Yeates believes this “spell[s] the end for single academy trusts”.

The number of SATs in England has already tumbled, having fallen by 30 per cent since 2021.

## LA trusts

Graham Burns, a partner at the Stone King law firm, expects the white paper to trigger a “rush” for council-run schools to organise groups to establish new trusts, or to align themselves with existing MATs.

Some could also opt to join planned local authority trusts. But the proposal isn’t new, having been put forward – and later ditched – in the previous government’s white paper four years ago.

Richard Sheriff, a former trust CEO, believes there won’t be “much of a thirst” for it among local authorities, with many “extremely stretched” and facing shrinking budgets. “You’ve suddenly got to deal with dozens and dozens of Ofsted inspections. How are you going to create school improvement capacity at scale?”

The white paper said limitation will be placed on local authority involvement in the day-to-day running of their MATs.

Burns thinks this will “amount to a minority stake of less than 20 per cent of the trust’s membership [or] trustees, reflecting well-established current restrictions for academy trusts”. This would allow chains to be at “arm’s length” from the council.

## Trusts judged on community work

As part of the changes, trust commissioning guidance will be updated. A “pillar focused on community collaboration” will be added.

The DfE will encourage trusts to provide updates on “how they have supported stronger outcomes in their community role through annual public benefit reporting”. It will also consult on requiring trusts to have governance structures that “include all their schools, hold annual parental forums, and ensure boards hear directly from parents and school communities”.

National Governance Association boss Emma Balchin is “pleased to see the commitment to focusing on community collaboration in the new trust standards and the government’s decision to consult on requiring all trusts to have local governance”.

“A fully academy trust-based system needs local roots if it is to retain the confidence of parents and communities, and maintain its overt sense of mission.”

The government announced on Wednesday that its advisory boards – which rule on academy growth bids – will be canned next month. This is because the white paper “sets out that it will renew its approach to decision making”.

Advisory board members, usually trust leaders, are not decision-makers, but they “help inform” decisions made by regional directors.

## ANALYSIS

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# Headteacher retention scheme could prove 'divisive'

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Annual cash payments to encourage headteachers to work in under-served areas could prove “hugely divisive” and risk repeating the failure of a similar scheme for teachers, experts have said.

The government’s “excellence in leadership” programme will include a trial of a “place-based headteacher retention incentive”, aimed at attracting and keeping new headteachers in areas that most need them.

However, sector leaders remain “unconvinced” the scheme will address leadership shortages and say more detail is needed on how the government plans to better support leaders.

The government has pledged £1 million a year, starting next year, to award newly appointed heads annual payments of up to £15,000. It has yet to explain how payments will be allocated or who will qualify.

“We remain unconvinced that the answer to restoring school leadership and teaching as attractive career paths lies in differentiated regional pay rates, and the same is likely to be true of the proposed retention payment for heads in certain areas,” said NAHT general secretary Paul Whiteman.

He added such payments “might be welcome” in individual areas, but would be “hugely divisive”, risking new pay inequalities.

“Crucially, it does not address the fundamental issues which are driving leaders to quit and deterring senior teachers from aspiring to leadership.”

Whiteman cited “intolerable workload, high-stakes accountability... and significant real-terms pay cuts since 2010”. He instead called for a reformed national pay structure with minimum pay points, to protect salaries when staff move schools.

Pepe Di’Iasio, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, agreed while retention payments “may help”, the difficulties of leading schools in disadvantaged communities would remain.

The scheme shares similarities with a decade-old Conservative government initiative. Nicky Morgan’s National Teaching Service – a 2016 pilot aimed at parachuting teachers into north-west schools struggling to recruit and retain staff – set out to redeploy hundreds of teachers with incentives of up to £10,000. It was scrapped after



less than a year after placing just 24 teachers.

“Lessons from that scheme need to shape this new one, otherwise history risks being repeated,” said Teacher Development Trust chief executive Gareth Conyard. “For us, the key test is whether the support being provided for leadership development meets the challenges of the current system and the new proposals included in the white paper. It is hard to see how the excellence in leadership programme will do this.”

Education Endowment Foundation research has shown targeted incentives can help schools attract and retain strong teachers and heads.

Becky Francis, the EEF’s CEO, said the government’s plan “recognises the importance” of such incentives.

However, money is not the biggest factor driving leaders out of the profession. In the government’s most recent working lives of teachers and leaders report, just 25 per cent of those who left the state sector cited pay.

Among the top reasons were workload (74 per cent) and pressures around pupil outcomes or inspections (53 per cent).

Jack Worth, lead economist at the National Foundation for Educational Research, said studies show teachers still “tend to respond to incentives”. But less is known about headteacher career decisions, and “the jury’s out” on the impact of financial incentives.

“We might expect it to have a positive effect,” said Worth, but it is unclear how strong that will be against the “sheer challenge” of leading a school in difficult circumstances.

The government will invest an extra £1 million a year in wellbeing support, giving up to 2,500 leaders a “confidential space” to build resilience strategies, revealed

the white paper.

Schools Week understands the funding will extend an existing government contract run by Education Support, which provides professional supervision for heads, and was due to end next March. Education Support CEO Sinéad Mc Brearty welcomed the move.

In the charity’s latest teacher wellbeing index, 86 per cent of senior leaders reported stress, and 43 per cent had considered leaving the profession.

Mc Brearty said professional supervision helped heads perform their roles, and “contributes directly to reducing school leader attrition”.

But for real impact support must be consistent, reach leaders early, and sit alongside wider action on workload, accountability, and budgets, she added.

Whiteman said the support “could be an important step in the right direction”, but called for an entitlement to professional supervision for all leaders.

The government will also invest an extra £500,000 a year in an “improved” early headship coaching offer, expected to reach around 500 additional heads, especially in disadvantaged areas.

It will also create a new support offer for leaders, helping them access mentors and peer support networks.

However, information on these initiatives remain limited.

“We need to see further details of the plans,” said Whiteman.

The white paper includes a pledge to review headteachers’ standards to ensure they “reflect key expectations for high-quality leadership”.



Jack Worth

## ANALYSIS

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## Diversity and flexibility push in DfE's 6,500 teachers plan

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Ministers aim to improve diversity in teaching and access to flexible working as part of their plan to boost the size of the workforce by 6,500.

The government has published the delivery plan for its years-old pledge to recruit additional teachers.

While progress on the goal appears promising, experts have warned better long-term thinking is needed to address entrenched workforce issues.

The boost was a manifesto pledge for Labour; ministers have since faced repeated criticism for moving goalposts and failing to explain how it would be achieved.

**Pledge 'on target'**

The pledge initially promised 6,500 "new teachers in key subjects", but the metric later changed to measure overall workforce growth, including retained teachers.

The Labour government said recruitment will target areas "where the need is greatest", including shortage subjects and disadvantaged areas.

Progress will be measured against a baseline of 245,805 full-time equivalent teachers, working in secondaries, special schools, pupil referral units and FE colleges in 2023-24.

The government says it remains "on track" to deliver its pledge. The secondary and special school workforce had grown by 2,346 by 2024-25, while FE teacher data is due in May.

**Boosting recruitment through equality**

Much of the plan to boost recruitment includes work already under way, and work to specifically grow the FE workforce. One goal is ensuring the schools workforce "reflects the diversity of our communities".

A recent NFER report highlighted "significant ethnic disparities" in ITT rejection rates among UK applicants. This was not explained by differences in applicants, suggesting "discrimination has a role". The NFER said neutralising this could see about 2,000 more teachers trained a year.

The government will pilot "anonymised" teacher trainee applications, increase transparency by publishing more recruitment data, and improve how it collects information



on ethnicity and disability in schools to "monitor and address disparities".

The Office for Equality and Opportunity's race equality unit will research "improving the recruitment, retention and progression" of ethnic minority teachers.

Allana Gay, founding member of BAMEed, said diversity should be more closely monitored at ITT provider level. She urged the government to move away from "the gimmicks of 'blind' recruitment" and instead ensure ITT providers "are mandated to connect with those from diverse... backgrounds".

NFER lead economist Jack Worth said he was "pleased" by the equality focus, but warned anonymised applications must be carefully piloted and evaluated, noting "a lack of rigorous evidence about what works".

**Retention drive**

Retention is another central element of the 6,500-teacher plan, which concedes "too many" find teaching "difficult and unsustainable".

A policy trailed ahead of the white paper is doubling full maternity pay from four weeks to eight.

The DfE will fund a programme giving schools training, resources and peer support "to normalise flexible working and manageable workloads". This will be "aligned to the wider school improvement strategy and promoted through RISE", and will include a focus on staff returning from maternity leave.

The plan cited changes being worked on to help tackle retention, such as tackling pupil behaviour, improving pay and increasing support for leaders.

**Professional development**

The third prong of the 6,500-teacher plan is developing staff through "career-

long development opportunities", to ensure a pipeline of "high-quality" teachers and leaders.

A new teacher training entitlement – another much-anticipated election pledge – "will provide every school with access to high-quality continuous professional development (CPD)", says the report. But the development appears focused primarily on SEND and leadership.

Gareth Conyard, chief executive of the Teacher Development Trust, said he is "unconvinced" by the proposals, adding they remain "top-down, with too little account taken of the importance of local context and teacher agency".

"We worry that these proposals do little to address that or to create a permanent expectation around professional development," said Conyard.

**'Must not rest on laurels'**

Worth said "important progress" had been made on recruitment, with economic trends "driving us towards...a better place on teacher supply". But he warned the government must "not rest on [its] laurels".

"Things can rapidly change again if you're not careful, keeping an eye on things like keeping pay competitive and workload manageable," he added.

Emma Hollis, CEO of the National Association of School-based Teacher Trainers, said while efforts to boost recruitment are "always welcome", retention and workload "will remain the critical issues if the system is to deliver on its wider ambitions".

She said there are "some really positive proposals" aimed at tackling this, but they must be "implemented in a thoughtful, joined up and time-sensitive way".

**'Big gaps' in plan**

Louis Barson, director of science, business and education at the Institute of Physics, said there are "big gaps" in how the plan will address staffing issues in shortage subjects.

A recent IOP report estimated England has a shortfall of 3,500 physics teachers.

"The government needs to set out how far this plan is expected to address [this] shortfall," said Barson.



Emma Hollis

# Complaints reforms welcomed, but greater powers needed

**RUTH LUCAS**

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Proposed changes to the parental complaints system “stop short” of providing the powers schools need to enforce them, legal experts have warned.

The government has announced it will create a “digital, accessible solution” for handling complaints, with new expectations aimed at improving relations between parents and leaders.

More than five-million complaints were made by parents in the past year, according to ParentKind. A *Schools Week* investigation found headteachers “weren’t sleeping” due to stress over complaints, with many generated by artificial intelligence.

The schools white paper said heads and parents have been “left to navigate this largely on their own foot for far too long”, and that it will “improve the consistency and impact of the engagement” between them.

It said the new digital platform will improve data collection and stop complaints being escalated through multiple avenues at the same time, such as Ofsted, an individual school and the Department for Education.

“Minimum expectations” for home-to-school partnerships will be outlined for schools, along with a best-practice guide.



The expectations will govern effective and timely communication, establishing high expectations of families, supporting transitions between stages, supporting learning at home and regular family participation in school life.

While legal experts have welcomed the changes announced, some have warned that they “stop short” on the powers needed to make sure parents follow the rules.

Claire Archibald, legal director at Browne Jacobson, welcomed the proposal to stop complaints through multiple avenues.

But she said she was concerned the minimum expectations framework would “remain advisory rather than compulsory” and did not have enough “legislative teeth”.

“Our concern remains that the framework stops short of giving schools any real mechanism to enforce that balance in practice.

“Parents have rights but they also have responsibilities, and although the white paper nods more clearly towards those, the question of

what happens when those expectations are not met by families is not yet answered.”

Senior associate at Winckworth Sherwood Adam Jackson said it “remains unclear how the platform will address challenges” within the existing system.

“For it to be effective, schools will need a legitimate basis to require parents to submit concerns exclusively through the digital system,” he said.

Laura Berman, partner at Stone King LLP, said the introduction of new individual support plans, which schools will have a legal duty to produce for SEND pupils, could make the complaints process “escalate significantly”.

“If there’s no other route to challenge these individual support plans, it’s all going to come down to that complaint process. And that is going to be really, really difficult.”

However, experts have welcomed many parts of the proposals.

“There is a real sense that the white paper is attempting to reframe this as a two-way partnership, empowering families to understand that they are active participants in their child’s education and that engagement is something they are responsible for, not merely entitled to,” Archibald said.

*Schools Week* has asked the DfE when the digital platform will be introduced and how the minimum expectations will be enforced.

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## Questions over new area ‘missions’

Missions to boost outcomes in left-behind regions risk being ineffective with questions over the schemes’ funding and leadership unanswered, the government has been warned.

Two place-focused programmes, mission north east and mission coastal, will be launched in a bid to tackle entrenched disadvantage.

Chris Zarraga, the director of Schools North East, described the announcement as a “significant step forward”, but this “must now translate into redistribution, capacity-building and long-term commitment”.

“The north east does not need higher expectations, it already has them, it needs structural conditions that make those expectations achievable.”

The white paper said mission north east

will “focus explicitly on radically improving outcomes for white working-class children”. Meanwhile, mission coastal will centre on disadvantaged seaside communities.

The programmes will bring together clusters of schools facing similar challenges and develop improvement strategies.

Schools North East noted key elements of the missions “remain under-specified”, like the amount of cash the regions will get and who will deliver them.

Without these details hashed out, the body fears the programme “risks becoming symbolic rather than structural”.

Officials said funding will be “determined as we work collaboratively with schools and local partners to develop the approach”.

But the DfE has said the missions will seek to build on the “revolutionary impact” of the London Challenge, the Blair government’s school improvement programme in the capital.

At its peak, the initiative had an annual budget £40 million.

Sir Alan Wood, who was involved in the scheme while director of education at Hackney council, said that for such a programme to work “you have to be able to rely on a sufficient supply of highly skilled teachers and leaders”.

“If you haven’t got that, then you can’t get off the ground because you’re then just recirculating the things that have failed.

“You also have to recognise you will have to pay substantially more for teachers and ensure their career development is looked after.”

# 'There is nothing left to cut': The schools counting the cost of inclusion

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**More pupils with special educational needs will be educated in mainstream schools under government plans set out this week, with money due to be "rebalanced" from high needs to core school budgets.**

**Schools Week investigates how the current system punishes inclusive schools financially, with leaders facing making cutbacks to maintain current levels of support.**

"Year on year it has been increasingly challenging to set a balanced budget," says headteacher David Rogers. "We have had no choice but to reduce costs across the whole school.

"We have finally reached the stage where there is nothing left to cut and are now in a budget deficit."

At his school, Bentfield Primary in Essex, four in 10 pupils were either on the SEN register or had an education, health and care plan in 2023-24. The school has 24 enhanced provision places for children with learning difficulties, who are taught alongside mainstream peers but with adapted curriculums.

"Being inclusive is at the heart of everything we do," says Rogers, but adds the "enormous benefits for every single one of our pupils" stem from a "staff intensive" approach.

"Many of our enhanced provision pupils need full-time intimate care across the whole school day, including playtimes and lunchtimes, as well as support with feeding and when addressing medical needs.

"There are often occasions – for example, when hoisting and changing pupils – where two members of staff are required."

Schools Week analysed school-level Department for Education demographic and financial data for 2023-24. The dataset included mainstream state



## 'We have finally reached the stage where there is nothing left to cut and are now in a budget deficit'

primary and secondary schools, both academies and maintained.

Mainstream primaries where less than five per cent of pupils had designated SEND spent on average of £1,104.05 per pupil on education support staff and £80.67 per pupil on education consultancy.

By contrast, schools where more than 40 per cent of the school roll had designated SEND spent £2,238.29 per pupil on education support staff and £319.11 per pupil on education consultancy.

Schools receive extra funding to support children with EHCPs. But even when looking at the proportion of their total income, primary schools with the highest proportion of pupils with EHCPs spent 21.5 per cent of their income on support staff, compared to 15 per cent of those with the lowest.

"We know that it does cost money to support children with additional needs and we know that the funding that schools currently get doesn't always cover that as well as we would need it

to," says Charlotte O'Regan from social mobility charity the Sutton Trust.

"If you've got children that are disadvantaged and with SEND, and then they've got parents who, despite the deepest desire to do so, [don't have] the resources to financially support them, you then have to back that up. The school then have to spend that money."

Our analysis found primary schools with more than 40 per cent of pupils with SEND had markedly worse finances than those with smaller SEND intakes, recording an average in-year revenue loss in 2023-24 of about £4,000. The median primary school made a surplus of about £40,000.

Bentfield spent £3,951 per pupil on education support staff in 2023-24 – high even by the most SEND-inclusive schools' standards – and spent relatively highly on non-education support staff. However, the school registered a £54,000 in-year revenue loss that year, followed by an £89,000 loss in 2024-25, leaving it with just £20,232 in

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revenue reserve last March.

Despite rising SEND numbers, the school has cut learning support assistant work by 85 hours a week in the past year, mainly to cover pay rises and higher national insurance contributions, which Rogers said were “nowhere near fully funded” by the government.

Lunchtime assistants have been cut by a quarter since 2023-24. Spending on learning resources has fallen substantially, with the parent teacher association and outside fundraising playing increasing roles.

Senior leaders have taken on more teaching responsibilities; the supply teacher budget has been cut to zero, meaning absences must be covered internally. Spending on costs associated with school grounds and buildings has been reduced.

“SEND funding remains stagnant and has done so for far too long,” said Rogers. He welcomed the government’s reported plans to increase high-needs SEND provision in mainstream schools, but said it was “imperative” this was funded properly with annual uplifts and support staff pay rises.

“Without this, it is deemed to fail and will further reinforce the reluctance that many schools have to be fully inclusive, despite the amazing benefits it can offer,” he added.

In mainstream state secondary schools, some primary school patterns are repeated. Rising SEND cohorts are accompanied by higher spending on education support staff, per pupil and as a share of total income. Per-pupil spending on teaching staff is flatter; there is no clear trend in schools’ financial fortunes.

At Rugby Free Secondary School in Warwickshire, 27 per cent of students in 2024-25 either had an EHCP or were on the SEN register.

Headteacher Iain Green said its SEND inclusion team is “by far” the school’s biggest department. “It’s bigger than our English department, it’s bigger than our maths department, it’s bigger than my senior leadership team.”

In recent years Green has recruited two SENCOs, two assistant SENCOs, a SEND administrator, an EHCP co-ordinator, two mental health support workers and other support staff.



Iain Green

## Primary schools' spending by % of pupils with SEND

% of pupils with SEND	FSM %	Spend on teachers	Education support staff	Education consultancy	Non-education support staff	Revenue reserve	In-year balance
< 5	8.4	£3,468.41	£1,104.05	£80.67	£764.29	£88,950	£20,020
5 - 10	12.3	£3,011.35	£1,088.75	£96.79	£597.02	£122,123	£39,654
10 - 15	17	£2,978.75	£1,149.04	£95.67	£577.91	£135,450	£44,294
15 - 20	22.7	£3,035.09	£1,245.22	£116.00	£601.58	£136,095	£40,327
20 - 25	27.2	£3,197.03	£1,371.16	£132.67	£641.80	£124,644	£27,156
25 - 30	30.3	£3,313.00	£1,505.05	£176.03	£694.59	£122,693	£19,895
30 - 35	34.3	£3,521.18	£1,662.49	£196.47	£733.19	£121,442	£14,932
35 - 40	36.1	£3,649.56	£1,791.28	£234.63	£779.60	£95,971	£6,700
> 40	38.4	£4,834.18	£2,238.29	£319.11	£1,079.22	£70,971	-£4,023

Schools Week analysis of DfE data

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## ‘Our SEND inclusion team is bigger than our English department’

The school has a specialist resource provision, which with the school’s pro-inclusion ethos, attracts parents of SEND children.

“We’ve had to employ additional staff to deal with the number of SEND students that we have due to our popularity, which is a nice thing as it shows how inclusive and supportive we are, but also it’s difficult when you have the local disparities in SEND intakes that we might see,” Green said.

He pointed to the time spent on training. “That all has a cost. It might not be a financial cost, but it has a time cost, and absolutely worthwhile by the way, but you can’t put a measurable, tangible figure on that.”

Having high proportions of pupils with SEND is “creating challenges for schools, challenges in terms of pressure on school staffing, definitely on funding and on access to specialist support,” said Matt Walker, senior researcher at the National Foundation for Education Research.

Walker added that mainstream schools with the largest SEND cohorts were generally those with on-site SEN units or resource provision. These represent the DfE’s preferred direction of travel according to recent

announcements.

Schools Week’s analysis found big local disparities in mainstream schools’ SEND intakes. In 2024-25, 94 mainstream state secondary schools had SEND cohorts under five per cent of the school roll – sometimes as low as one or two per cent.

In five full-size secondary schools, there wasn’t a single child with an EHCP. Nationally, 14.2 per cent of pupils receive SEN support, while 5.3 per cent have an EHCP.

However, there are limitations to identifying inclusive schools based on the size of their cohorts alone, given schools can categorise pupils in different ways.

The 94 schools’ SEND cohorts, measured as a percentage of their total student bodies, were anywhere between one half and one 20th of the average among neighbouring schools. Eighty of the 94 schools are selective.

“Selective schools, by their nature, are typically not representative of the communities that they serve,” said Jon Andrews of the Education Policy Institute, pointing to wide attainment gaps at the end of primary school for pupils from low-income families and those with SEND.

“By selecting based on tests at age 11, these pupils are less likely to meet the criteria for admissions.”

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## JON ANDREWS

Interim chief executive and head of analysis, Education Policy Institute

### White paper has hope for inclusion but we're in the dark about details

**The 'experts at hand' plan is positive, while hints of reform for school performance measures echo the EPI's feelings about current shortcomings, says Jon Andrews**

**A**t the last general election, the Labour Party manifesto argued that the education system fails to meet the needs of all children.

This week, nearly two years on, we finally have a white paper outlining the government's strategy to rectify this.

Predictably, the proposed SEND reforms have drawn the most attention.

The challenges facing the SEND system are well-documented. Yet for too long, it has felt as though the solutions were perpetually just around the corner.

But many will see reason to be optimistic.

#### Experts at hand

Significant additional funding to underpin the introduction of "experts at hand" will give schools better access to specialist support, while individual support plans will aid transparency.

However, parents will need reassurance that tiered support and reforms to EHCPs do not simply become a new set of hoops to jump through or further distance them

from decisions around their child's education.

And if they see any of the proposals as a watering-down of what has often been hard-won access to support, the government's back benches will soon let them know.

Other aspects of the white paper, while less prominent in the headlines, could prove equally significant.

In the decade that the Education Policy Institute has spent measuring the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, the divide has narrowed only twice, and one of those instances followed a pandemic-related spike.

Particularly concerning is the gap for persistently disadvantaged pupils, who remain nearly two years behind by the time they sit their GCSEs.

We have long argued that the funding system – which fails to distinguish between short-term and long-term poverty – must better reflect this reality.

The commitment to targeted funding for those in the deepest poverty is welcome, though we await further detail on its practical implementation.

Most interesting in that regard is how we define disadvantage. While eligibility for free school meals has been the long-standing metric for schools in England, its use is not without issues.



“These metrics act as a disincentive to remain inclusive”

Our research demonstrates that many eligible families are not registered for their entitlement – a problem that is particularly acute in early years settings and at the beginning of primary school.

Similarly, between the white paper and the government's response to the curriculum and assessment review, there is some recognition of the need to reform school performance measures.

As they stand, these metrics often act as a disincentive for schools to remain inclusive. Proposed reforms to progress 8 to include creative subjects may not have received universal praise, but they go some way toward recognising curriculum breadth.

Furthermore, the introduction of an additional measure for pupils with low prior attainment may provide overdue recognition for schools admitting a higher proportion of these learners.

However, giving this measure the same status as the headline metric will be easier said than done.

#### Workforce wanted

In the longer term, the rollout of "school profiles" has the potential to offer a more rounded understanding

of school performance, though exactly what those will look like remains in the wait and see column.

Any structural changes require a workforce to implement them.

The government's delivery plan for 6,500 additional teachers asks the right questions, and early signs on recruitment are positive.

But 6,500 is a net national target and it could be met in full while the schools that struggle most to recruit see little improvement.

More fundamentally, the white paper asks a great deal more of teachers, who will need to support more children with SEND, and meet new training requirements.

The experts at hand service should ease some of that burden, but it will take time to build and depends on a specialist workforce that is itself in short supply.

Whether the job of teaching becomes more or less attractive as a result may matter more than any recruitment target.

Overall, this white paper sets out significant ambitions and provides a potential roadmap toward a system that works for all. Ultimately, however, its success hinges on a great deal that is yet to be fully set out.

## Opinion

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## EMMA SHEPPARD

The MaternityTeacher  
PaternityTeacher Project

## Small maternity wins welcome, but we should strive for more

**Weeks at full salary are doubled but with cuts elsewhere the 7.5% increase is hardly the gift the DfE would suggest, says Emma Sheppard**

This week's maternity pay reforms for teachers, shared in the Department for Education's white paper, feel like a huge announcement.

But on closer inspection, the victory may be more of a symbolic gesture than a significant financial uptick for teacher families.

The move claims to "double" the number of weeks at full pay from four to eight weeks.

But in reality, with the reduction in half pay to 10 weeks, and removal of two weeks at 90 per cent, this amounts to a 7.5 per cent increase in pay – the equivalent of a week's more fully paid leave.

The announcements come after almost eight years of research and campaigning from The MTPT Project and union and wider sector partners, which gained particular interest following the 2024 Missing Mothers report, a collaboration with The New Britain Project.

The findings of this report made it impossible to deny the negative impact of the motherhood penalty on the education workforce.

In particular, it highlighted our woeful maternity pay offer in comparison to other graduate professions, with Teacher Tapp

later reporting that 48 per cent of mother-teachers felt forced to return to work earlier than they would have liked.

From September 2027, a colleague on an M5 pay scale will now be around £970 better off during their maternity leave. A senior leader on L4 will receive a boost of approximately £1,200.

With maternity pay so poor, can we argue that any increase is a good thing? After all, increased finances are associated with improved maternal wellbeing, employee loyalty, women's participation in the labour market and a sense of equality within couples.

And colleagues working in local authorities and multi-academy trusts that already offer better than "Burgundy Book" maternity pay share that greater financial freedom has transformed their experience of maternity leave.

One secondary teacher working at The Education Alliance, which introduced improvements in 2024, said: "I just want to emphasise the difference from my first maternity leave. I don't have any signs of postnatal depression. We can provide for our children without worrying, which felt impossible last time."

A senior leader working for an Islington local authority school where maternity pay is more than double even the new offer from the DfE, said: "I want a second child.



“Can we argue that any increase is a good thing?”

I'm now aware that Islington offer better conditions, and I wasn't before, so it definitely makes me think I need to stay."

The announcement comes with a commitment to funding, and a sensible plan of a holistic approach to support and retention including flexible working, peer support, coaching and resources.

It also pledges an ongoing focus on "managing workload and... protecting teacher time so experienced teachers stay and thrive."

There is clear evidence the DfE is listening to research and voices from the sector, and are interested in building a programme of multifaceted support, rather than relying on one silver bullet.

Despite these positive steps, there are still disappointments for our community of parent-educators.

There has been no equivalent offer for support staff (though this discussion is promised), adoption and paternity leave.

Any notion of equality is completely absent from the conversation, and the actual financial increase is still a far cry

from the enhanced maternity pay offered in local authorities like Camden, or multi-academy trusts like Astrea.

Teachers working in these schools will still be more than £4,000 better off, even when the new maternity pay is introduced.

A particular stinger for our community of parent-educators is the comparison to the maternity pay offered to civil servants, including DfE colleagues, who receive 28 weeks fully paid leave.

This is equalised for fathers and non-birthing partners through their shared parental leave policy.

Consequently, an informal poll from The MTPT Project revealed that 61 per cent of our community think the new reforms are not good enough.

It cannot be denied, however, that the announcement finally recognises the importance of our mother-teacher demographic.

The narrative surrounding motherhood is now clearly one of retention and value rather than a voiceless community or a burden to employers. In itself, this is worthy of celebration.

## Opinion

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**ARTI SHARMA**  
CEO, nurtureuk

## An inclusion base must remove a student's barriers to learning

**To be more than just a room, secondary school inclusion bases should be designed with a clear purpose to aid reintegration, says Arti Sharma**

The expectation that every secondary school should have an inclusion base marks a significant shift in how we think about supporting vulnerable learners.

The government's ambition is clear: fewer exclusions, stronger mainstream inclusion and better support for pupils with additional needs.

But a room is not a strategy.

If inclusion bases are to make a meaningful difference, we must move beyond the idea that simply designating a space will solve deep-rooted challenges.

Done well, these bases can be transformational. Done poorly, they risk becoming holding rooms – places where pupils are parked rather than supported.

At nurtureuk, we have spent more than 50 years championing and developing nurture groups – the UK's original inclusion-focused intervention.

Decades of frontline experience have taught us a great deal about what makes such provision succeed, and what causes it to falter.

### Underlying needs

First, purpose must come before provision.

An effective inclusion base is not defined by soft furnishings or a separate timetable.

It is defined by a clear, shared purpose: to remove barriers to learning by addressing pupils' underlying needs.

Leaders must be explicit about who the base is for, what outcomes are expected, how progress will be measured and how pupils will reintegrate successfully into mainstream lessons. Without this clarity, even the most well-intentioned space will drift.

Second, relationships are the intervention.

Inclusion bases work when they are staffed by skilled adults.

Pupils who attend are often carrying experiences of instability, anxiety or repeated failure. They do not need containment, they need connection.

The adults in these spaces must be able to build trust, model co-regulation and create predictable, emotionally safe environments.

This requires training, supervision and time for reflective practice. Investment in bricks and mortar without investment in people will not deliver sustainable impact.

Third, prioritise social and emotional development – early.



“Pupils do not need containment, they need connection”

Too often, inclusion provision is reactive. Pupils are referred at crisis point, and support is improvised.

Our experience shows that early and regular assessment of children's social and emotional needs enables schools to be proactive and preventative, tailor interventions and track progress meaningfully.

When staff understand a pupil's social and emotional needs as well as their academic profile, support becomes targeted rather than generic, and reintegration is far more successful.

The most effective provision focuses explicitly on developing social and emotional skills, building self-regulation, resilience, communication and confidence.

These are not “soft” outcomes; they are the foundation on which academic success rests.

When pupils learn to recognise and manage their emotions, form trusting relationships and experience success in small, structured steps, their capacity to engage in mainstream learning grows and any need for additional, specialist support is more easily identified.

Fourth, inclusion bases must be integrated into whole-school culture.

If the base becomes an island, it

will fail. Clear referral pathways, transparent criteria and regular review points are essential.

So is strong communication between base staff, subject teachers and pastoral teams. Time spent in the base should reinforce, not replace, classroom learning.

### Support for belonging

Crucially, leaders must guard against stigma. An inclusion base should be framed as a support for belonging, not a sign that a pupil has fallen short.

Language matters. So does leadership messaging. When the entire school community understands that inclusion is everyone's responsibility, these bases become part of a graduated, preventative approach rather than a last resort.

The drive to establish inclusion bases presents a genuine opportunity. We know early, relational intervention can change trajectories for children who need targeted support.

But inclusion is not about where a pupil sits. It is about whether they feel safe, understood and able to learn.

That is the measure against which every inclusion base should be judged.

## Opinion

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## TERRY GREGO

Inclusion and behaviour specialist, former director of programmes at Football Beyond Borders and deputy head teacher

## It demands a team effort to keep pupils like Z in the game

**Mainstream schools haven't been set up to meet the needs of the most challenging students, but change is coming, says Terry Grego**

I met Z when he was in year 10. I was deputy head of the pupil referral unit (PRU) he was referred to for persistent disruptive behaviour.

He is likeable, funny and quick-witted. He has developed good relationships with staff, but he has oppositional defiant disorder, so he is frequently stubborn, hostile and prone to losing his temper.

He has fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and is medicated for ADHD. He is under the care of child and adolescent mental health services and is living with extended family members in the care system.

He is highly vulnerable to child criminal exploitation, is already involved with police, and unsafe in neighbouring postcodes. No education health and care plan application has been started at the point of writing.

If you've worked in schools, PRUs, alternative provisions or other specialist settings, you've probably met young people like Z.

He's one of the many existing on the fringe of the education system, facing multiple learning, wellbeing and safeguarding needs, all competing for priority, and all impacting his ability to engage with

school.

### Needs escalate

At the PRU, I only met young people like Z after their needs escalated to the point that they couldn't stay in mainstream education.

At Football Beyond Borders I saw young people on the other side of that divide. Pupils facing multiple intersecting needs that impact their ability to learn, but still in mainstream school, some only just.

The team at FBB works tirelessly to keep these young people thriving in mainstream schools.

But while PRUs, APs and other specialist settings are built around inclusion, many overstretched secondaries (and primaries) are not designed or given the resources they need to intervene early and meet pupils' challenges.

So what would it take to change that?

When Z arrived at the PRU, it was clear his needs had been escalating under the surface for some time.

But there are lots of reasons why mainstream schools like his are not set up to meet those needs, at least not yet.

The government has stated its commitment to making schools places where young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are four times more likely to be suspended and five times more likely to be permanently excluded, feel like they belong.



“ His needs had been escalating for some time

In the past, this might have been seen as prioritising the needs of the few over those of the many.

But with fewer than half of young people on free school meals achieving a standard pass in GCSEs English and maths, plus tens of thousands excluded every year, it's difficult to see them as the "few".

It is these young people who hear that they don't belong in school, and so subsequently don't matter to their schools and communities, which often leads them to question whether they matter at all.

### Best interests

Fortunately for Z, the PRU invests in a programme of trauma-informed and attachment-aware training, an in-depth continuous professional development programme of best SEND practice for all staff, and a named trusted adult who Z knows has his best interests at heart.

There is a larger pastoral staff, higher staff-to-student ratio and specialist expertise from speech and language therapists, educational psychologists, occupational therapists and additional one-to-one support.

That doesn't mean the suspensions and exclusion were without cost. Z is statistically more vulnerable now than he was before his suspensions started, with suspended pupils facing worse outcomes across education, employment and youth justice.

Headteachers, regardless of whether they're at a mainstream school or PRU, want young people to succeed. They want them to be able to access the right support at the right time.

Perverse incentives and accountability measures have tied schools' hands.

But despite the structural barriers, many trusts, headteachers, local authorities and third-sector organisations are already beating the odds to embed inclusion and build belonging.

They are challenging received wisdom that pits high standards against inclusion and are building a movement.

Their numbers are growing, and reform is coming – and I am looking forward to a future where all young people can achieve and thrive in a school where they know they belong.

## Opinion

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## RUSSELL HOBBY

CEO,  
The Kemnal Academies Trust

### Replicating Blair-era improvement is an out-of-London challenge

**Success in the capital is cited in the white paper but opportunity feels far more distant in many of England's coastal communities, says Russell Hobby**

The new white paper calls for a coastal mission to raise education outcomes, engagement and participation. It is right to do so.

Twenty of Kemnal's schools can smell the salt on the wind. Our communities do not lack pride or aspiration, but neglect, disdain and underinvestment can turn that aspiration into frustration.

The white paper draws inspiration from the London Challenge, that beacon of transformation from the almost distant past.

The London Challenge worked brilliantly, although no one seems to agree on why. It depends on your perspective.

If you were a school leader, it was about collaboration, constructive challenge and funding. If you were in government, it was about ministerial and civil service leadership. If you ran Teach First, it was about the quality of new teachers...

#### No repeats

Despite strong efforts, however, we have not been able to repeat the London Challenge consistently at scale elsewhere.

While leadership, collaboration

and funding were clearly vital and are welcome anywhere, this speaks to something specifically about London itself.

There is significant poverty in London, but it exists alongside visible opportunity and communities who know education does change lives.

These conditions do not exist in all our coastal communities.

Clearly, "the coast" is a big place. Over 11,000 miles in fact.

Poole, Brighton, Hastings, Weston-Super-Mare, Whitehaven and Bridlington do not have the same issues.

But in many of our coastal towns, despite some brilliant exceptions, opportunity feels distant. Services are stretched. Investment is scarce. Families are not sure whether school is worth it.

#### A new tune

For the coastal mission to become the next beacon of transformation, it should not just repeat the London Challenge. It must craft its own tune. From my experience, this tune needs the following notes.

Respect. It is time to drop the language of disadvantage and any attitude of superiority.

Families won't just do as they are told, and trust is earned the hard way. Nor can the pitch be how quickly we can get you out of this place.

And there is a new risk here: if the



“ It's hard to keep people in isolated communities

new inspection framework does not value leaders who work in these towns, then a revolving door of leadership will destroy trust.

Community. Although we must keep hard-won gains on academic rigour and behaviour, eventually we hit a ceiling of barriers to access: health, housing, crime and safety, social capital.

We can remove the ceiling by working beyond the school gates – before, around and after school. This stretches beyond schools' natural expertise, so should happen in partnership with local authorities and others.

Enrichment. Learning is rightly hard, but if every day holds only struggle, people will opt out.

This doesn't mean making things easier, it means making things broader and deeper, to create the chance for everyone to shine, the opportunity for self-expression through sport, performance and art and a sense of safety. Then people will opt in.

Jobs. We often say that education drives employment, but it is as true to say that employment drives

education.

A big driver of academic outcomes in neglected communities will be the prospect of well paid, satisfying work.

This is not just careers advice. It is a skills strategy for every school based on local labour markets and deep employer partnerships.

Recruitment and retention. It is harder to recruit staff to a school where half your catchment area is water.

It is hard to keep people in isolated and under-resourced communities. We need to recruit and train locally, and we need to target retention incentives heavily in these communities.

The good news is the door is wide open for each of the elements. They all find their place in the white paper.

We need to keep the ambition, for sure, but we also need to build something new, led by the communities themselves and the schools who are already leading the way. London may be calling, but those who live by the water need a new verse.

## Opinion

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## MELANIE RENOWDEN

CEO, National Institute of Teaching

### School reform depends on staff knowledge and confidence

**Using evidence from schools, the NIoT's Teacher Education Dataset will help the sector deliver the schools white paper's aspirations, says Melanie Renowden**

**A**t last, it's here. The lengthy lead-up to the schools white paper has concluded with the government showing it is working through a reassuring thud of documents landing on the desks of teachers and leaders.

Contained within are the long-awaited plans to recruit 6,500 additional teachers, proposed reforms to the SEND system, a renewed focus on the success of disadvantaged children and a wider programme of school improvement.

The white paper is ambitious, its scale significant, and the reform programme it kicks off has already been framed by Bridget Phillipson as a decade-long.

If its publication marks the end of the beginning, we are now just at the start of what will be a complex, risky and sustained period of implementation.

Translating white paper aspirations into improved pupil outcomes will depend on whether teachers and leaders have the knowledge, capacity and confidence to enact them.

Nowhere is this more pressing than in SEND. Evidence continues to suggest that many teachers lack

confidence in meeting the needs of pupils with SEND and this is the most frequently cited area for further training.

#### Promising start

The government's plans for a £200 million SEND training offer for school staff, the creation of training materials for schools, and the formal expectation that all school staff receive training in SEND and inclusion all rightly point to this challenge.

It's a promising start, which can be bolstered by efforts across the suite of statutory and national professional development made up of initial teacher education, the early career teacher entitlement and national professional qualifications.

But while the government can set expectations and run targeted training, most professional learning is delivered directly by schools and trusts, and by the 76 per cent of teachers who say they help develop others.

To get the best for children – particularly those experiencing the greatest barriers to success – from this decentralised ecosystem of professional learning, we need to connect the workforce with the latest evidence on effective teacher education and give them the tools to evaluate how well it works in diverse contexts.

We also need to be scrupulous about the precious commodity that



“Understanding what effective teaching looks like is essential

is teacher time, so professional development is spending it as wisely as possible.

This is not only a matter of implementation fidelity, it is a matter of retention.

In 2025, around three in 10 teachers and leaders reported they were considering leaving the profession within 12 months, most citing stress, wellbeing and workload.

Reform that increases burden without strengthening capability risks undermining its own aims.

#### Anonymised data

Understanding what effective teaching looks like and how it translates into improved outcomes for all learners is essential.

Over the past year, the Teacher Education Dataset (TED) project has taken promising steps in this direction.

Using anonymised teacher and pupil data from participating school trusts, TED is beginning to generate insights into teaching practices, professional development pathways and their relationship to pupil progress, including for pupils with SEND.

As the dataset grows, it has the potential to inform both national policy and local leadership

decisions, helping ensure that teacher education is grounded in evidence of impact.

We must also ensure that all schools have access to high-quality evidence about what works in teacher education and leadership development.

This is the purpose of the newly-launched NIoT Evidence Portal. Built around a global meta-review of robust evidence and drawing on expert perspectives from schools and trusts, the portal is a comprehensive, free-to-use resource for anyone responsible for developing educators.

We hope the Evidence Portal will make it easier for teacher educators and school leaders not only to digest research, but to mobilise it effectively, in their contexts, for the benefit of all children.

This week's reforms are consequential for all those in schools, both children and staff.

If we get what comes next right, the outcome will be truly consequential too: a system where every child, regardless of background or circumstance, is taught by a well-supported, expert teacher equipped with the knowledge and skills to help them to be happy and successful at school.

## Opinion

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## DAWN HAYWOOD

Chief executive,  
Windsor Academy Trust

### Enrichment is a vital ingredient that gives school its full flavour

**Clubs, sports and activities boost educational participation and achievement, and the government is right to recognise this, says Dawn Haywood**

The schools white paper has laid out that enrichment should not be a bolt-on optional extra for the confident and the well-resourced, but an entitlement for all children.

This boldness from the government is something we should be applauding. Now is not the time to be asking whether schools should focus on academics or enrichment. The answer is both.

Strong approaches to enrichment deliver academic outcomes, improved health and a whole lot more.

Enrichment provides the scaffolding that helps children build identity, belonging, friendships and self-worth, and is a powerful catalyst for strong academic outcomes as well as happy, healthy, thriving children.

Childhood and what it's like to be a child growing up today is shifting as the pace of change accelerates amidst rapid technological advances. Simultaneously we are also seeing declines in children's sense of belonging, wellbeing and happiness.

Schools feel this shift every day.

#### Friendship fallouts

We see it in attendance patterns, in behaviour that can be less about defiance and more about dysregulation, in friendship fallouts that spill from an app into the corridor, in the "KS3 dip" when motivation wobbles, and in the number of children who find ordinary school life harder to manage.

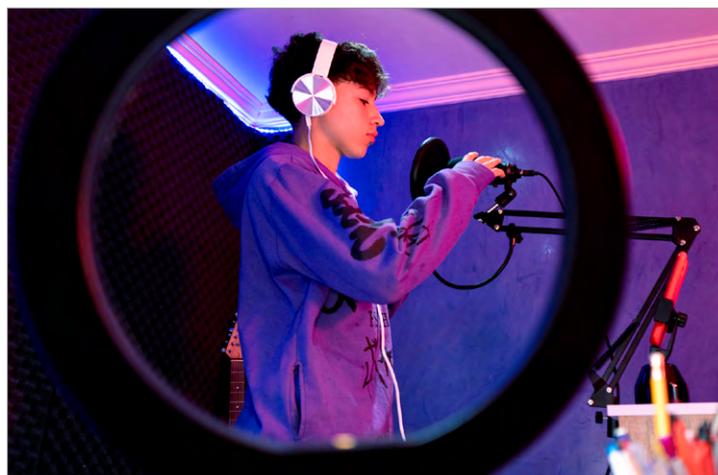
We also see the positives: many children are articulate, principled and passionately engaged with big questions. But the lesson is the same. The school experience has to evolve with childhood as it is now, not childhood as we wish it still was.

So what do we mean by enrichment? It is play, participation, performance, competition, leadership, volunteering, trips and experiences in things that help children discover and pursue their passions.

These passions could be sport, the outdoors, debating, choir, coding, chess, art, dance, drama, reading groups and the hundred other "extra" things that are, in truth, essential to childhood.

That is why I fully welcome the way in which the schools white paper has acknowledged this change.

We need to reprioritise enrichment and broaden how we define what it is for children to thrive and be healthy.



### “A quieter pupil can find their voice on stage

#### Educational 'social' health

When we talk about health in education, we too often default to a narrow, medicalised idea: mental health services, clinical thresholds, referrals. Those matter, but the everyday health of childhood is also social health, the texture of relationships, belonging, routines, and the ordinary joy of doing things together.

It is the ability to spend time with other people without a screen as the referee. It is learning how to talk, listen, disagree, collaborate and recover from setbacks.

There are numerous examples of where children's engagement in sport and the arts positively impacts health.

While many believe that enrichment activities such as sports and arts "take time away" from studying, the research suggests a multiplier effect, where these activities improve the efficiency of learning.

Musical training, in particular, has been linked to improved verbal memory, spatial reasoning and literacy skills. Participation in sport is linked to improved academic outcomes.

It is essential that enrichment is deeply inclusive. A quieter pupil can find their voice on stage. A child who feels on the edge of the school community can become known and valued through a club.

If we are serious about tackling absence, rebuilding behaviour and improving outcomes, we should stop treating enrichment as peripheral.

A school that is rich in belonging is a school where children are more likely to attend, to feel safe, and to invest effort.

But government should help us do that by making enrichment a core expectation, not a postcode lottery.

It should back schools to build coherent enrichment offers that are inclusive, structured, and designed for participation as well as talent.

A school system worthy of today's childhood shift is one that does more than deliver lessons. It builds lives.

If we want children to thrive, we have to design schools that make thriving more likely, every day, for every child. Enrichment is not the reward at the end of education. It is part of the engine that makes education work.

## Opinion

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## DAN MORROW

CEO, Cornwall Education Learning Trust

### Now leaders must leap to the challenge of SEND reform

**The SEND crisis can't be solved overnight or even in one parliament, but the education secretary's ideas map the first steps to recovery, says Dan Morrow**

Every leader knows the kind of problem the SEND system represents for Bridget Phillipson.

It's the kind of problem that hits you like an anvil dropped from the sky the minute you walk into the job.

The kind everyone knows will take years to unpick, but everyone wants to see fixed yesterday.

So it's to Phillipson's credit that she hasn't set out to deliver everything everywhere all at once with this white paper.

Sunday's announcement of a £4 billion cash injection over three years to deliver the more inclusive system Labour's promised since its days in opposition is welcome.

But we all know that the realignment of the entire system to deliver this vision – its workforce training and development, its infrastructure and its capacity, its incentives and (dare I say, in places?) its culture – will take longer than this parliament.

Indeed, Phillipson told Laura Kuenssberg this weekend that this

was a plan for "a decade-long, very careful transition".

That's a realistic timeline for change, and I'm looking forward to making the most of that time for every learner across CELT's 16 schools and beyond. Mission Coastal? Bring it on!

#### Opposition ideas

The problem is: right now, it doesn't look like a realistic timeline for this government to see it through. So my eyes are on the opposition too.

On one hand, Laura Trott "wants to be constructive" on reforms. On the other, she is already playing to parents' fears, trying to position the Conservatives as the champions of those who "had to fight for support". (And whose fault was that?)

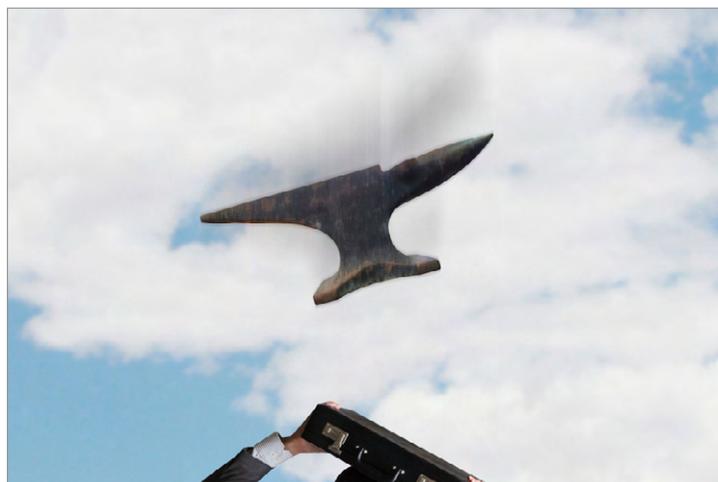
Then there's Reform's new education spokesperson, erstwhile Conservative frontbencher and Michaela School founder, Suella Braverman.

Her focus on "discipline", a "patriotic" curriculum and an "absolute ban" on social transitioning doesn't exactly scream inclusion, just more fear.

As leaders, we all recognise this part of the process too.

You've got your head out from under the anvil. You've got a plan. You're owning the problem.

But other leaders have different



“ Families are scared and primed to resist change

ideas. As do local councillors, and commentators on social media.

The people who really matter – the children and families in your care – are scared and primed to resist change.

What can you do? You tell your story, and keep telling it. You find your allies, and set out to make new ones. You deliver where you can and show proof of concept. You stick to your vision, but remain flexible enough to listen and learn.

#### Don't ask who

The key thing is to keep pointing at that anvil. Who dropped it is irrelevant. You simply can't leave it there for some wily coyote to drop it from above again. It's a safeguarding issue.

For Phillipson, the anvil is our broken EHCP system. It is not meeting the needs of children and families, it is bankrupting councils and it is over-burdening schools.

If evidence-based "specialist provision packages" can help more of us to support children with complex needs, then I hope everyone with the skills to develop

them rallies to do so.

And if money is no longer a barrier to making our settings more inclusive, then I hope to hear far fewer excuses about being "unable to meet need".

If there aren't enough specialist places in your region, I hope my fellow trust leaders will join us in leaping to the challenge of creating them.

Backed by new funding and growing capacity, our individual support plans can and should deliver faster and better than current EHCPs, even if a child does have to move across from one to the other upon re-assessment.

Having said all that, there is valid anxiety among school leaders, and one important question for Phillipson's DfE to answer: What is the limit of "inclusive mainstream"?

Sooner rather than later, we will need a clear image of what we are aiming for 10 years from now.

Without that, the anvil will no doubt find its way into the hands of those waiting to capitalise on a broken mainstream system.

*Week in*

# Westminster

## The week that was in the corridors of power

### MONDAY

If much of the schools white paper seemed familiar upon first reading, that's because a lot of the detail was leaked to the national media over recent weeks and months, ramping up anxiety among families and irking everyone working in schools who were desperate for official details.

Several other announcements were officially briefed to the media over the weekend.

Leaks and pre-briefings are a common tactic used by the government, either to test the public's reaction to controversial proposals and to lay the groundwork for such policies to be announced.

Politicians regularly feign ignorance, but the fact is leaking is usually a deliberate and sanctioned tactic.

One person not a fan of leaks is Lindsay Hoyle, speaker of the House of Commons, whose job it is to uphold the rule that key government policy is announced to parliament first.

Before Bridget Phillipson's parliamentary statement on the white paper this week, a deputy speaker told the House of Hoyle's "disappointment about briefing to the media before important announcements are brought to this House"

"Making the most important statements in the first instance to parliament means doing so before they are made to the media and not at the first available opportunity thereafter.

"The government need to either adhere to their own rules or change them."

Phillipson replied: "Please allow me to

begin by saying that the unauthorised leaking of elements of today's announcement is deeply regrettable.

"I have already asked officials to launch a full investigation into the source to ensure that such breaches do not happen again."

We doubt the findings of the investigation will come as a surprise, nor even come to light.

\*\*\*

Phillipson was left "slightly taken aback" after Reform UK MP Richard Tice spoke positively about the government's SEND reforms and called for curbs on private school fees to be accelerated.

Tice told MPs: "There is much in these SEND reforms that will reassure parents, particularly the reduction in the adversarial approach.

"I have spoken before of my concerns about excessive fees and profits of private equity-owned specialist schools. Will the secretary of state confirm whether the legislation can be accelerated to reduce the pressure on council budgets?"

"I am slightly taken aback by that question but I welcome it," said a bemused Phillipson.

"We will move fast to ensure that money intended for education is spent on education."

She also pointed out there was a "bit of a mix of views" in Reform about the "right approach to SEND".

"I have heard colleagues of his suggest that children with SEND are naughty or the result of bad parenting. So I suggest that Reform colleagues go away, have a

little conflagration and then come back."

\*\*\*

During briefings with journalists about the white paper, a very senior DfE official repeatedly referred to EHCPs as ECHPs. Oops!

\*\*\*

Former education secretary Gillian Keegan posted on Instagram that she had a #springinmystep as she appeared on Times Radio to discuss government reforms and then moved on to "circuits in the garden".

We too would have a spring in our step if we'd managed to spend our entire time in office avoiding making tough decisions on SEND, only to then conveniently turn pundit following the loss of our seat at the general election...

### WEDNESDAY

The long-running legal battle over Oak National Academy gained an extra layer this week after the High Court ruled publishers could add a ground of "failure to consult" to their judicial review claim.

The British Educational Suppliers Association, Publishers Association and Society of Authors are challenging the previous government's decision to turn Oak into a quango.

And this week the court ruled their case can now include consideration of whether the necessary consultation was completed ahead of the decision.

A bigger potential headache for the government over a policy not of its making...





## HEADTEACHER GREEN MEADOW PRIMARY SCHOOL

We are seeking to appoint a Headteacher to join Green Meadow Primary School.

This is a pivotal and exciting time to join Green Meadow Primary School and make a real difference to children's progress and outcomes.

The Head Teacher will report to the Directors of Education and the Chief Executive Officer.

### They will:

- support the Directors of Education and the Chief Executive Officer to set and review the school's priorities and objectives, leading activity to ensure these are delivered and standards are raised.
- demonstrate exemplary leadership.
- develop, motivate, and deploy teaching and non-teaching staff to secure the best possible use of available talent.

- determine and drive appropriate standards and targets to deliver improvement.
- promote and demonstrate strong parent partnerships.
- create an accountable, safe, and positive learning environment in which diversity and co-operation are celebrated.

We welcome applications from talented and experienced Head Teachers.

Our Excelsior People Strategy aims to get the right people into the right seats from where they will grow into bigger seats, enabling our Trust to meet the needs of all our pupils effectively. Your further growth into ambitious leadership within Excelsior here is key.

**Closing Date: 11th March 2026**

**Interview Date: 24th March 2026**



Vacancies - Excelsior Multi Academy Trust - Driving Equality, Innovation & Aspiration

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO](#)



SOUTH EAST ESSEX ACADEMY TRUST

## CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER



We are now seeking a brilliant Chief Education Officer with a passion for the possible to help us accelerate improvement, raise achievement across all phases, and ensure that every child - regardless of their background - benefits from consistently excellent teaching.

We are a local trust where collaboration is at the heart of everything we do. We believe in visible leadership. We know our schools well and you don't need to go through multiple management layers to speak to the CEO.

As Chief Education Officer, you will be the strategic guardian of educational quality across our nine schools; but you will also roll up your sleeves, walk corridors, visit classrooms, and work shoulder-to-shoulder with leaders where capacity or momentum is needed. This role reports directly to the CEO and sits at the heart of the SEEAT Executive Team.

Closing date: 27th Feb at 8.00am

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IMPOSSIBLE THAT  
IT'S POSSIBLE.



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## CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER – EXCELSIOR MULTI ACADEMY TRUST

With the forthcoming retirement of our founding CEO, Excelsior Multi Academy Trust is seeking an exceptional leader with a proven record of driving and sustaining improvement. This is an exciting opportunity to shape the next chapter of a thriving, values driven trust.

Excelsior Multi Academy Trust is a well established and growing organisation, currently comprising eight primary schools across the West Midlands. Our new CEO will provide inspirational, strategic, and operational leadership across all aspects of the Trust. Working closely with our Board of Trustees, you will refine and advance our shared vision, uphold our values, and ensure that each school continues to strive for excellence – improving life opportunities for our pupils and strengthening the communities we serve.

The successful candidate will be someone with integrity, ambition and drive. They will have a deep belief that every child will succeed. They will be relentless in their pursuit of organisational and operational excellence and will be innovative and courageous.

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO](#)

**Closing Date: 1st March 2026 | Interview Date: 20th March 2026**



## Principal – Specialist Provisions

Education Village Academy Trust

**Location:** Darlington

**Salary:** Leadership salary scale L30 – L34 £105,594 – £116,455 (more may be available for an exceptional candidate)

### Who we are

The Education Village Academy Trust is more than a multi-academy trust; we are a community where learning has no limits and our mission is to deliver exceptional educational experiences that inspire and challenge all learners to achieve their potential.

Our specialist provisions play a central role in meeting the full range of needs of children and young people with EHCPs. Our schools cater for all four broad areas of SEND: Communication & Interaction; Cognition & Learning; Social, Emotional & Mental Health; and Sensory & Physical Needs.

### About the role

The Executive Principal – Specialist Provisions is a key executive leadership role with responsibility for the strategic direction, performance and development of EVAT's specialist schools. The postholder will have strategic oversight of our specialist provisions and ensure that the schools are delivering high-quality, holistic education and care. The postholder will ensure there is accurate

academy self-evaluation, impactful school improvement planning and ongoing curriculum development. for specialist settings

### Who we are looking for

We are seeking an experienced senior leader with a strong track record in education including successful leadership as a headteacher or equivalent, and credible knowledge of SEND practice, curriculum pathways, assessment, transitions and commissioning. You will have a detailed understanding of the demands of specialist provision and the importance of high-quality teaching, safe practice, and well-organised leadership. The role requires strong people leadership skills, including experience of mentoring, managing and developing senior colleagues. Above all, we are seeking a leader who is committed to continuously improving provision and outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

**Closing date: 9 a.m. Monday 2nd March 2026**

[Click here for more info](#)



## Chief Executive Officer

Contract type: Permanent

Pay Scale: £154,061 – £167,321 per annum

Location: Olympus central offices- Winterbourne

At the Olympus Academy Trust, our ambition is for every school to deliver an exceptional education for children and young people. We are committed to ensuring that all students benefit from the highest standards of teaching, strong resources and rich learning opportunities. Although the educational landscape is demanding, it creates exciting opportunities for talented and inspirational professionals to make a significant impact and shape a powerful legacy.

We seek applicants who share our vision and possess the drive, talent and determination to realise it. Our central team provides comprehensive support across leadership, school improvement, legal services, finance, administration, admissions, marketing, premises, safeguarding and HR. We believe the roles within our Trust are uniquely rewarding, supported by a collaborative and expert Olympus team. Contributing to the evolution of modern, forward thinking education is a privilege, and we welcome the ideas and aspirations of all who join us.



We are now seeking a Chief Executive Officer who leads with authenticity, champions inclusive and high quality education, and builds strong, collaborative relationships across the Trust and with wider partners. Working closely with a committed Board, a skilled Executive Team and exceptional school leaders, the CEO will drive our shared ambition for every learner to thrive.

The Chief Executive Officer will be an outstanding strategic leader, able to articulate and model the Trust's vision, values and ethos with clarity and conviction. They will inspire and empower others to embed these principles across all schools. Bringing a proven track record in successful school leadership, the CEO will take overall accountability for the performance and development of every academy within the Trust.

**Closing date: 11th March**

**Interviews: w/c 16th march**



## EXECUTIVE HEADTEACHER (TRUST-WIDE SEND)

This is a rare opportunity for a transformative leader to shape SEND provision across a growing Trust while continuing to lead a school and making a meaningful difference to children and young people.

The Legacy Learning Trust (TLLT) is a vibrant and growing multi-academy trust in the Tees Valley, comprising a large secondary with an ASD specialist provision and 6 mainstream primaries, one with an intervention provision for pupils with identified SEMH needs.

We are responding to a growing need for dynamic and inclusive practice and provision and are seeking an experienced and visionary executive leader with expertise in SEND to join our Central Education Team (CET) as part of the role as the new Head Teacher at Beverley School.

Beverley School, a specialist all-through school serving pupils whose primary need is ASD, is in the process of joining TLLT, with the transfer expected to complete in Summer 2026. During this period of transition and beyond, the appointed Executive Headteacher will operate in a dual leadership role, holding statutory Headteacher responsibility for Beverley School while also providing

Trust-wide executive leadership for SEND. This appointment is central to securing leadership stability, supporting a smooth conversion to academy status, and aligning the school's strategic direction with the Trust's vision for high-quality SEND provision across all settings.

### You will:

- Lead the Trust-wide SEND strategy and ensure statutory compliance
- Support, challenge and develop leaders to secure excellent SEND provision
- Use data, research and evidence to drive improvement and innovation
- Work closely with Trustees, Local Authorities and external partners

### We seek an experienced senior leader with:

- Strong SEND expertise and a track record of improving outcomes
- Experience of leading people, change and school improvement
- Credibility at senior and executive level
- A strong commitment to inclusion, safeguarding and equity

[Click here to apply](#)