

Research Briefing

By Nerys Roberts

5 April 2022

March 2022 schools white paper (England)



Summary

- 1 Background
- 2 What are the main commitments in the schools white paper?

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Summary

The first schools white paper in six years

March 2022's schools white paper for England is the first in six years. It's set against a backdrop of pandemic disruption and 'learning loss' for many, especially disadvantaged and vulnerable children.

The policy paper, [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#), is wide-ranging, proposing changes to how schools are managed and run, the length of the school week, the standards pupils should achieve in English and maths, and many other areas.

The final step toward a full academy system?

Just over half of all pupils now attend academies rather than maintained schools. Academies are independent but state-funded schools outside of council control. A much higher proportion of secondary schools have made the switch to academy status, than primaries.

Multi-academy trusts (MATs) are groups of academies, varying in size. According to the white paper, the Government now wants all schools to be part of a "strong trust" by 2030, or be in the process of forming, or joining one, by then. Given current rules, this implies that remaining maintained schools would change status, to become academies. There will be new quality standards for MATs, and a unified system of oversight and regulation.

Strong trusts, says the DfE, will be those that offer high-quality and inclusive education; have effective school improvement and workforce development and deployment strategies; robust strategic governance; and strong financial management.

Academisation has always attracted strong views, with some seeing opportunities for autonomy and school-led collaboration, while others question whether it improves standards. Under the current plans, the Government says local authorities would be able to establish MATs in areas where there's a shortage of strong ones – albeit with limits on their level of involvement in trust boards.

Higher standards in English and maths

By 2030, the Government wants 90% of children to achieve expected standards in English reading, writing and maths by the end of primary school. Children in year six (aged 10 or 11) are tested and assessed on these subjects via SATs. In 2019, the last year when SATs took place owing to the pandemic, 65% of pupils achieved the expected standard. 90% would therefore be a significant increase – especially given pandemic-related disruption to education. There will also be other measures, including a new parent pledge to ensure parents whose children are falling behind receive information, and the pupils get targeted help.

The Government also wants the average grade in English language and maths GCSE to rise to 5, a ‘strong pass’ – according to the Department for Education (DfE), it was 4.5 in 2019, the last year in which exams were held. Under the new numeric grading system for GCSEs in England introduced for pupils taking exams from summer 2017, 9 is the highest grade, and 1, the lowest.

Schools to open for longer

The white paper foresees a “richer, longer” school week, with an expectation that all mainstream state-funded schools are open for a minimum of 32.5 hours per week by September 2023. This equates to six hours and 30 minutes per day, on average. Some evidence suggests a longer school day may lead to more learning, but DfE surveys estimate most schools are already open, on average, for six hours and 15 minutes per day, or longer. Some have therefore questioned whether this ambition will lead to much real change.

Wide-ranging other measures

The white paper also covers several other areas, including school admissions; behaviour, attendance and absence; oversight, accountability, and intervention; curriculum support; and teacher and school leader development. In the same week, the Government also published a long-awaited review of support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). These proposals are not covered in this paper but will be explored in another Library publication.

This briefing doesn’t aim to cover all the schools white paper proposals in equal detail. It highlights key areas, and those that have generated the most debate, so far.

Funding the proposals

To fund implementation, Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi has pointed to the [recent DfE Spending Review settlement](#), which has increased core school funding through to 2024/25, and dedicated education recovery funding now standing at around £5 billion.

Inevitably, there have been questions about whether this is enough, especially given inflation rates, and expected increases to newly qualified teacher starting salaries. There are also ongoing debates about whether education recovery funding is being targeted and spent appropriately.

1 Background

1.1 The first schools white paper in six years

[Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#), is the first schools white paper since [Educational excellence everywhere](#) six years previously. The new white paper echoes some of the main themes of its predecessor, focusing on reforms to the structure of schooling and improvements to teacher and school leader professional development:

- Every school will join a strong multi-academy trust (MAT), or be in the process of doing so, by 2030
- All state-funded mainstream schools to be open for 6.5 hours or more, per day, on average.
- 90% of children at the end of primary education meeting the expected standard in core academic subjects: English reading, writing, and maths. This is coupled with a “parent pledge” that children who’ve fallen behind will receive “timely and evidence-based support”.¹
- The average GCSE grade achieved nationally, in both English language and maths, to rise from 4.5 (in 2019) to 5.

There are some supplementary papers and consultation responses published alongside the schools white paper, including one making the case for a fully trust-led system; one on the envisaged economic benefits of the paper’s proposals; and one on the new GCSE English and maths targets, all available from [the white paper’s landing page](#).

On the same day, the DfE also published [a consultation response on completing reforms to school funding](#).

A day after the schools white paper publication, the DfE released its long-awaited [green paper on special educational needs and disabilities \(SEND\)](#). These proposals will be covered in a separate Commons Library briefing paper.

¹ HM Government, [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#), CP 650, 28 March 2022, p37.

1.2 A long horizon (mostly)

For many of the proposals, the timescale for implementation is relatively long. Most of the newly announced plans and targets are to be achieved by 2030, except for the school day proposals (September 2023), and some previously announced policies such as the inspection of formerly exempt 'outstanding' schools (by the end of the summer term 2025); and rolling out high-speed internet to all schools (also by 2025).

1.3 Funding to support the proposals

The white paper notes that Spending Review 2021 provided an additional £7bn for schools by 2024-25. The [Institute for Fiscal Studies \(IFS\) estimates](#) this will take per-pupil real-terms spending in 2024, back to around 2010 levels.² There is also around £5 billion in total for education recovery from the pandemic.

Explaining the financial context for the white paper, Education Secretary, Nadhim Zahawi said:

The investment that we are putting in, you know, I secured £7 billion before 2025 and much of that is front loaded," he explains. "Plus, of course, if you look at the evidence for high-performing multi-academy trusts and what they can deliver, if we achieve that for the whole system, then we will deliver on those [primary and secondary attainment] targets."³

On additional support for education recovery and tutoring, such as the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) he said:

I will make sure we have the evidence, so we evaluate how we are doing. There is already very clear positive evidence for primary school children doing better in terms of literacy and numeracy; I want to see that evidence at secondary as well. And then if I need to, I will go back for more funding. But the focus has to be on, 'let's get this right for the £5 billion and then keep going'.⁴

The NTP currently has three strands: school-led tutoring, tuition partners and academic mentors. The last two are currently administered by contractor, Randstad, but there are concerns about low uptake and administrative issues in the tuition partner strand, with starts on the school-led tutoring strand

² Institute for Fiscal Studies press release, [Education spending changes put a major brake on levelling up](#), 30 November 2021

³ ["Zahawi on why he didn't ask for any new cash for the White Paper"](#), the TES [online], 28 March 2022, accessed 4 April 2022

⁴ As above.

outstripping this. On 31 March 2022, Mr Zahawi confirmed a re-tender process would start in April, for a significantly slimmed-down contract to come into operation from September 2022. He confirmed that “all £349 million of tutoring funding we are providing in [academic year] 22/23 will go directly to schools”.⁵

The Education Policy Institute (EPI) [has raised concerns](#) about funding in the context of the white paper, given inflation rates:

The very large recent rise in inflation is another threat to these plans – it is already significantly reducing the real value of the government’s education spending. Public sector pay is also lagging behind private sector pay, and this could cause real problems for teacher recruitment and retention over the next few years. This is a worry given the government plans rightly place a high priority on quality teaching.⁶

The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) said:

No one would disagree with the ambition that every child should be supported to achieve their full potential. I am pleased that the white paper matches the ambition long shared by every teacher and school leader in the country.

“But to achieve this the government will need to step up with more than bold words. Headlines don’t educate children; professional teachers do that. I hope the ambition in the white paper will result in the support schools need. There has been a support deficit for far too long. Schools cannot do it alone.

“It also requires a focus on the policies that are likely to make the biggest difference to pupil outcomes. This is where the government’s white paper falls short. Commitment to adequate funding, access to support services or detail on how these bold ambitions will be achieved is sadly missing. Another round of talking big and supporting small will only cheat children and young people whilst damaging the country’s long-term prospects”.⁷

⁵ Department for Education press release, [National Tutoring Programme simplified to reach as many pupils as possible](#), 31 March 2022

⁶ Education Policy Institute press release, [EPI responds to Schools White Paper proposals](#), 28 March 2022

⁷ National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) press release, [Schools White Paper ‘full of ambition but falls short on support’, say school leaders](#), 28 March 2022

2 What are the main commitments in the schools white paper?

2.1 A fully trust-led system

Academies: a brief history

The passage of the Academies Act in 2010, and the Education Act 2011, fundamentally changed the organisation of the state-funded school system in England. It moved from one made up almost entirely of local authority maintained schools, to one where now, in 2022, more children are educated in academies and free schools than in schools under the control of councils. These schools are technically independent schools outside local authority control, although wholly funded by Government.

Academy status was launched under pre-2010 Labour Governments, as a means of turning around schools deemed underperforming. However, this evolved under the Coalition Government from 2010, into two strands of academy policy: ‘sponsored academies’, to replace schools deemed to be underperforming; and ‘converter academies’ – well-performing schools voluntarily adopting academy status. Free schools are wholly new academies (in law) providing additional school places.

What are the characteristics of MATs, academies, and free schools?

Academies and free schools are funded directly by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). They can be standalone, or part of groups of schools (multi-academy trusts, or MATs) with different degrees of centralisation.

MATs vary in size and pupil numbers, with the largest chains such as United Learning Trust having upwards of 50 schools and (in ULT’s case) more than 50,000 pupils.⁸ However, the majority of academies are in trusts of 9 or fewer schools. A larger proportion of primary schools have kept their maintained status than have secondary schools. The DfE notes that 80% of secondary schools are now academies or free schools, compared to 39% of primary schools.⁹ Further statistical breakdowns on the composition of the academy

⁸ Department for Education, “[Get information about schools \(GIAS\)](#)” database, data downloaded on Tuesday 29 March 2022

⁹ Department for Education, [The case for a fully trust-led system](#), March 2022, p2

and maintained sector can be found in the DfE's [Case for a fully trust-led system](#) document (link to PDF, 2MB).

Every school an academy?

The system shift from maintained to academy status has been controversial, with detractors often arguing:

- There is limited evidence of an 'academy effect' on school performance.
- Academisation risks fragmenting the system.
- It removes democratic oversight and control from the system.
- Some 'unattractive' schools (whether for reasons of historic debt, poor enrolment numbers, or sustained under-performance) will be left isolated.

Supporters say:

- Increased independence supports school-to-school collaboration and a self-improving school system.
- Trusts can share good practice, pool resources, and achieve economies of scale.
- Fresh leadership and swift intervention can transform schools that have underperformed for long periods of time.

2016 'every school an academy' proposals

In March 2016, the then-Government published a white paper, [Educational excellence everywhere](#). On school organisation, this proposed local authorities would no longer maintain schools, and an all academy system would be created.

The proposed system would have included:

- Most schools becoming part of multi-academy trusts (MATs).
- A reformed role for local authorities, focusing on duties such as ensuring sufficiency of school places, supporting vulnerable pupils, and acting as a champion for parents.
- A new legal framework for an all-academy system.

Ultimately, the all-academy proposals weren't taken forward at that time.

The 2022 white paper proposals

By 2030, the white paper sees all schools being part of, or being in the process of joining, a strong trust. It says the current system of schooling can be fragmented, overlapping and confusing. To support the move to a fully ‘trust-led’ system, the Government says it will introduce statutory academy trust standards, and will make changes to the process for intervening when there are concerns about MAT performance.

Proposals include:

- Allowing local authorities to establish trusts where there is a shortage of other strong local ones, subject to limits on LAs’ degree of control over trusts.
- Limits on the proportion schools one trust can run in one area.
- A proposal to consult on allowing academy schools to apply for a transfer to a new trust.
- The expectation that “most trusts will be on a trajectory to serve at least 7,500 pupils, or run at least 10 schools”.¹⁰
- Requiring all trusts to have local governance arrangements for their schools – currently, local governing boards are not a requirement for MATs.
- A “regulatory review” in May 2022, looking at trust accountability, regulation, and inspection. Ofsted has long called for the power to inspect whole MATs including their central functions, which it doesn’t currently have.
- Subject to consultation, allowing maintained specialist settings to move into specialist-only, or mixed MATs (ie, those with mainstream and specialist providers).

There would also be a number of related changes to the role of local authorities:

- Local authorities will “champion the interests of children”¹¹ and “harness their unique capacity to coordinate across local services particularly vulnerable children”.¹²
- They will be responsible for co-ordinating in-year applications, as well as retaining responsibility for co-ordinating main admissions rounds.

¹⁰ HM Government, [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#), CP 650, 28 March 2022, p47

¹¹ As above, p10

¹² As above, p51

- Strengthening local authorities' powers to direct trusts to admit children as a 'backstop' measure; currently LAs can ask the Secretary of State to direct admission to an academy, but can't do this themselves.
- The Department for Education – or new Regional Directors – being responsible for deciding on new schools, and school expansions.

Impact of academisation and MATs on school performance and improvement

The white paper's proposals for a wholly trust-led system have re-ignited debates about the impact of academy status and the role of MATs in driving school improvement. This issue was extensively debated when 2016's 'Educational excellence everywhere' white paper was published, and is covered in [a historical Commons Library briefing paper on those proposed reforms](#).

The DfE's view is that there is now a larger body of evidence on the impact of MATs and academy status to drive school improvement. It published a supplementary document alongside the March 2022 white paper, setting out its case:

- DfE, [The case for a fully trust-led system](#), 28 March 2022

This argues that the different way the MAT and maintained sectors have developed, and their different school and pupil characteristics, should be taken into account when comparing schools' performance. It says:

- More than 7 out of 10 sponsored academies are now rated Good or Outstanding compared to about 1 in 10 of the local authority maintained schools they replaced.¹³
- MATs [...] have many more schools which have historically faced challenges. As underperforming LA maintained schools have joined MATs, remaining LA maintained schools are more likely to be judged Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. Many schools converted into single academy trusts as higher performing Good and Outstanding schools and have largely remained so.¹⁴
- If all pupils did as well in reading, writing and maths at key stage 2 in 2019 as pupils in the MAT performing at the 75th percentile of MATs, national performance would have been 8 percentage points higher at 73%. At the 90th percentile [of MAT performance] this would have been 79%.¹⁵

¹³ Department for Education, [The case for a fully trust-led system](#), 28 March 2022, p1

¹⁴ As above, p13

¹⁵ As above, p17

Commentary

The [Local Government Association \(LGA\)](#) said it welcomed Government recognition that the current system was fragmented, and that councils had “an excellent track record in providing a high-quality education for pupils, with 92 per cent of maintained schools rated by Ofsted as outstanding or good – a higher proportion than any other type of school”. However, it called for LAs to be able to take on ‘orphan’ schools for which a strong MAT couldn’t be found. It continued that, with sufficient powers and funding, councils were “ideally placed to act as the ‘middle tier’ between central government and schools”.¹⁶

The [Education Policy Institute \(EPI\)](#) raised concerns about the reliance on strong MATs to achieve some of the white paper’s aims:

The government seems to be placing a lot of weight on all schools being in a ‘strong multi-academy trust’ by 2030, but it is clear from our research that academisation is no ‘silver bullet’ for improving school performance and there may simply not be enough capacity to absorb thousands of schools into the higher performing MATs.¹⁷

The [National Association of Head Teachers \(NAHT\)](#) said the plans were “likely to be controversial [...] the ambition to tidy up the system risks being a distraction”, and that there remained a question of “why now?” when it came to making further structural changes to schools. Echoing some of the commentary around the earlier 2016 white paper, it warned against compulsory conversion, saying any such move risked being “destructive”. It also raised concerns about capacity issues, saying it was not clear how many new trusts would be needed, nor what the impact of “lifting the best staff out of school to take on new central roles” would be.¹⁸

The [National Education Union](#), referred to the reliance on MATs as “simply not evidence-led [...] Without convincing evidence for the ‘value added’ by academisation, it sets out a massive, costly and unwelcome programme of structural change.”¹⁹ It also subsequently argued the DfE’s evidence for full academisation was “badly flawed”:

The NEU’s analysis, [The Government’s flawed case for a fully trust-led system](#), shows that the Department for Education has:

- systematically misrepresented Ofsted grades for many schools - claiming them for schools in multi-academy trusts (MATs) when those grades were achieved when the schools were in Local Authorities

¹⁶ Local Government Association press notice, [LGA responds to Schools White Paper](#), 28 March 2022

¹⁷ Education Policy Institute press release, [EPI responds to the schools white paper proposals](#), 28 March 2022

¹⁸ National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) press release, [Schools White Paper ‘full of ambition but falls short on support’, say school leaders](#), 28 March 2022

¹⁹ National Education Union press release, [Schools white paper](#), 28 March 2022

- used small samples in order to produce higher results for schools in MATs
- failed to report Pupil Premium information for these small samples in a way which is highly misleading.

The DfE have had months to find the best evidence they can to justify their claims; they have found no justification for forcing schools into MATs.

In parallel, a [new NEU analysis of Ofsted ratings of Local Authority and MAT schools](#) highlights the lack of evidence for the Government's wish to require schools to join such trusts.²⁰

The Confederation of School Trusts (CST), a group representing academy trusts and other groups of schools, said it supported the trust-led aim of the white paper, and it particularly welcomed “the recognition that strong trusts will be solely accountable for school improvement”. On allowing local authorities to set up MATs, it said it was important that these trusts be regulated in the same way as others, and that safeguards were in place to manage conflicts of interest. However, CST strongly disagreed that schools should be able to apply to leave trusts, saying the proposal “fails to understand that the trust is the legal entity – it is not an ‘authority’ somehow separate from its schools. We have shared our concerns about this proposal and will continue to make the case that this is a retrograde step.”²¹

2.2

Length of the school day

Current position

There is currently no minimum or maximum length for a school day in England, although maintained schools must provide education for 380 sessions per year – or 190 days.

The head teacher of a maintained school recommends the length of a school day, including session times and breaks. The governing body must agree the recommendation. Academies and free schools set their own school day.

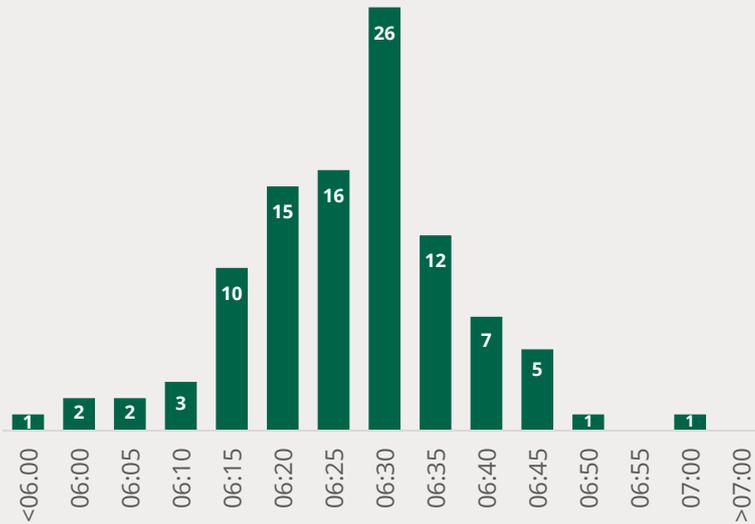
Department for Education survey-based estimates suggest that, pre-pandemic, a large majority of schools were already open for 6 hours and 15 minutes, or longer, each day, on average.

²⁰ National Education Union press release, [Government's evidence for forcing schools into MATs is badly flawed](#), 31 March 2022

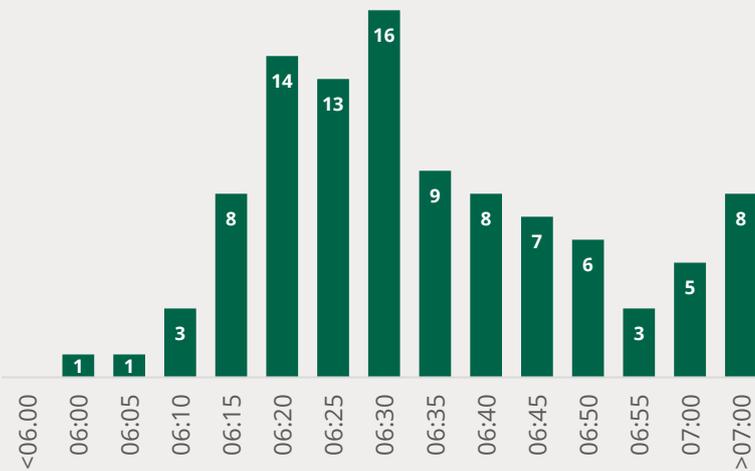
²¹ Confederation of School Trusts press release, [DfE schools white paper 2022](#), 28 March 2022

Pre-covid, most primary and secondary schools were already open for 6hr 15 min or more a day

Primary schools in England, estimated % of schools by average length of day



Secondary schools in England, estimated % of schools by average length of day



Note: based on a sample of 1,010 schools

Source: Department for Education/ Government Social Research/ IFF Research, [COVID-19 School Snapshot Panel Findings from the March survey](#) (May 2021), link to PDF file (543KB)

On potential funding implications of a longer school day (for schools that don't already open for so long), the paper states:

Thousands of schools, in every corner of the country, already deliver this length of week within existing budgets. With the additional investment of £7 billion for schools by 2024-25 announced at the Spending Review, we will expect all state-funded mainstream schools to deliver at least a 32.5 hour week within their budgets.²²

The white paper doesn't suggest the 32.5 hours per week expectation would be statutory; however, it does say Ofsted may consider schools' decisions about length of the school week when making judgements about the quality of education provided overall.

Commentary

The proposals on lengthening the time some schools are open has attracted significant attention. Robert Halfon, Chair of the Education Committee, said he was:

[P]articularly pleased to see the commitment made by the Department to establish a uniformity of school hours. It is my hope that this will mean pupils up and down the country will have more time to catch up on their lost learning from the pandemic, and to also develop their skills by exploring creative subjects like sport, drama and music. Not only will this benefit their mental health and resilience, but it will also improve their educational attainment and allow every child to climb the ladder of opportunity, regardless of their background or circumstance.²³

The [NEU was less positive](#), citing evidence that most schools were either already meeting, or not far off, the 32.5 hours threshold:

The expectation of a 32.5 hour week for pupils is a classic example of government trying to hit a target but missing the point. The vast majority of schools' days are of this length or a little more or less. We are looking for much more sophisticated change. Where is the multifaceted recovery plan? What should happen in the extra 10-15 mins some pupils will now spend in school? How will pupil wellbeing and education staff workloads be improved to ensure their time together is as impactful as both want and deserve?²⁴

2.3

School standards and curriculum

Background

The national curriculum is mandatory for maintained schools in England but not for academies or free schools – although in practice many will follow it. It

²² HM Government, [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#), CP 650, 28 March 2022, p29

²³ Department for Education press release, [Schools White Paper delivers real action to level up education](#), 28 March 2022

²⁴ National Education Union press notice, [White paper plans longer school week](#), 26 March 2022

was comprehensively reformed during the 2010s, and elements of the revised version were first taught from September 2014.

Although the national curriculum provides the broad framework for what schools in England teach, assessments also drive what material schools cover.

Alongside reforms to the curriculum, qualifications, including GCSEs, AS and A Levels, and vocational and technical equivalents were also fundamentally changed during the 2010s. For GCSEs, along with changes to content and the form of assessment, new numeric grades were introduced to replace the old letter grading system. Grade 9 is now the highest, and a grade 1, the lowest. An [Ofqual article](#) provides background on the new grading system.²⁵

National curriculum assessments – usually known as SATs – also changed. Externally-marked, or moderated, assessments in English reading, writing and maths are taken by most children at the end of the primary phase of schooling, in year six, when they are aged between 10 and 11 years. Usually, the results are published at school level, as part of school performance tables. There are also assessments in year two, at the end of key stage one, but these are internally marked and not reported at school level.

SATs were suspended in summer 2020 and 2021 but will resume in 2022. Similarly, GCSEs, AS, A Level and equivalent assessments will take place in 2022 after two years in which students had their grades based on teacher assessment. 2018/19 was the last year in which SATs took place as usual. Nationally, 65% of pupils reached the expected standard in all of English writing, reading, and maths, although rates vary by local authority and level of deprivation.²⁶

Proposals: curriculum, testing and targets

The white paper proposes:

- 90% of children to reach the expected standard in English and maths at the end of key stage two. This target was pre-announced in the earlier [‘Levelling Up’ white paper](#).²⁷
- The average GCSE grade in both English language and maths, to be a grade 5 (‘old’ high C/ low B grade) nationally, also by 2030. At GCSE, the DfE has calculated that the average grade in both maths and English language in 2019, was 4.5; this mean average grade has not been routinely published as part of DfE statistical releases to date.

²⁵ Ofqual, [GCSE 9 to 1 grades: a brief guide for parents](#), 2 March 2018

²⁶ Department for Education, [National curriculum assessments: key stage 2, 2019 \(revised\)](#), December 2019.

²⁷ HM Government, [Levelling up the United Kingdom](#), CP 604, 2 February 2022

- A parent pledge whereby all schools will give parents information if their child is falling behind in English and maths, and tailored support.
- Building on the work of the Oak National Academy, to establish a new “arms-length curriculum body” to create and maintain a range of curriculum resources. Their use will be optional, and the materials will be free. The DfE says this has potential to “free teachers to teach” and reduce workload.²⁸ Oak National Academy was launched during the early part of the pandemic and went on to receive DfE grant funding.
- Creating a “secure future” for the Education Endowment Foundation, a charity that summarises evidence on ‘what works’ in schools, commissions and funds independent evaluations of school interventions, and working in partnership with [37 research schools](#) across England.²⁹

The white paper also stresses the importance of teacher and school leader development, recruitment, and retention, with new and pre-announced measures including:

- Increased starting salaries for newly qualified teachers of £30,000.
- The ‘Levelling Up Premium’ for eligible maths, physics, chemistry and computing teachers in the first five years of their career, and who choose to work in disadvantaged schools. This is worth up to £3,000 per annum, tax-free.
- New national professional qualifications (NPQs) in leading early years, and leading literacy – with 150,000 scholarships for NPQs as a whole during this Parliament.
- Developing an Institute of Teaching (alongside the EEF), and measures to strengthen ITT.

Reaction

The Education Policy Institute (EPI) has been contracted by the DfE to undertake research on the pandemic’s impact on pupils’ learning. Responding to the white paper, EPI said:

Since the pandemic started, children have fallen behind in their learning, and the data published so far shows that there has been little catch up for secondary pupils and much bigger losses for the disadvantaged and those in the so-called levelling up areas of the North and Midlands. Our analysis shows that the government’s catch-up programme is not well funded enough to make good these learning losses and get the disadvantage gap closing again.³⁰

²⁸ HM Government, [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#), CP 650, 28 March 2022, p27

²⁹ As above.

³⁰ Education Policy Institute press release, [EPI responds to the schools white paper proposals](#), 28 March 2022

The [Association of School and College Leaders \(ASCL\)](#) warned a focus on English and maths could narrow the curriculum, and that setting a target would not tackle under-performance unless the causes were adequately addressed:

Improving English and maths outcomes is a laudable ambition, but there is little recognition of the wider societal factors which affect those outcomes, such as the fact that nearly a third of children in the UK live in poverty. It is hard to learn when you are hungry, cold, poorly clothed and live in inadequate housing.

“Focusing so intensely on English and maths, important as those subjects are, is also a very narrow view of education. A truly ambitious white paper should have greater ambition for the whole curriculum. The current curriculum is crowded and lacks coherence between early years, primary and secondary education. Some of the government’s school performance measures have driven subjects such as Design and Technology and the creative arts to the margins. This white paper fails to grasp any of these issues.”³¹

2.4

Cold spots: areas where outcomes are poorer

The schools white paper proposals come in the wake of the earlier February 2022 Levelling up white paper with its focus on tackling local and regional inequalities. The schools white paper carries this theme forward, proposing:

- Prioritising schools in the 55 identified [Education Investment Areas](#) (EIAs) for swift moves into strong MATs, if they have received two consecutive Ofsted inspection grades that are less than good.
- Focusing £86 million in [trust capacity funding](#) over the next three years on these areas.
- Prioritising applications for academically-focused 16-19 free schools in these areas.
- More support, including £40m of additional funding for [a subset of 24 Priority EIAs](#), for “bespoke interventions to address local needs, such as addressing high absence rates.”³²
- Launching a new MAT chief executive officer development programme, aimed at executive head teachers and senior leaders in MATs.

³¹ Association of School and College Leaders press release, [ASCL comment on schools’ white paper](#), 28 March 2022

³² HM Government, [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#), CP 650, 28 March 2022, p47

2.5

School attendance, absence, and behaviour

Current position

The pandemic has led to renewed concerns about absence from school and its potential impact on attainment and wellbeing. Schools use a variety of methods to record school attendance. Local authorities have statutory duties to identify children not receiving a suitable education, as far as possible. They can also intervene where children are absent without authorisation from their school, including through issuing fixed penalty notices for non-attendance in certain circumstances.

In January 2022, the DfE launched [a consultation on school attendance policies](#) and local authorities' duties in this area.³³ There is also [a current DfE trial whereby schools can submit daily school attendance data](#).

There have been several reviews of behaviour in school and of exclusion in recent years. Most recently, there was [the Timpson review of school exclusions](#),³⁴ the [Government response](#) to which was published in May 2019.³⁵ There is currently [non-statutory DfE behaviour guidance](#) for schools,³⁶ and [statutory guidance on temporary and permanent exclusion](#).³⁷ Both have been the subject of [a recent DfE consultation](#), which closed on 31 March 2022.³⁸

Proposals

Subject to the outcome of consultation in some cases, the white paper promises:

- Legislation to introduce statutory guidance on attendance, and new statutory expectations for local authority attendance services.
- A new national data solution to record and track attendance.
- A new register of children not in school.
- Revised statutory guidance on temporary and permanent exclusions from school, and revised behaviour guidance.
- A new annual national behaviour survey.

³³ Department for Education, [School attendance: Improving consistency of support](#), 25 January 2022

³⁴ [Timpson review of school exclusions](#), CP 92, May 2019

³⁵ Department for Education, [The Timpson Review of School Exclusion: Government Response](#), May 2019

³⁶ Department for Education, [Behaviour and discipline in schools](#), January 2016

³⁷ Department for Education, [School suspensions and permanent exclusions](#), September 2017

³⁸ Department for Education, [Consultation on Revised Behaviour in Schools Guidance and Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Guidance](#), 3 February 2022

2.6

School oversight and accountability

Currently, and as the white paper notes, there is a complex system of school oversight and accountability, with several bodies having sometimes overlapping roles:

- Ofsted is responsible for inspecting state-funded and some independent schools; an overall inspection grading of ‘inadequate’ triggers the mandatory issue of an academy order by the Secretary of State for Education, in the case of a maintained school.
- The DfE reports school performance data at school, local authority and national level, at key stage 2 (end of primary phase), key stage 4 (end of compulsory education) and key stage 5 (end of A Level/ equivalent phase).
- Local authorities still have some statutory intervention powers where maintained schools are causing concern but there are limits on how and when these powers can be exercised; LAs in general do not have powers to directly intervene in academies or free schools.
- There are 9 Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) with oversight of academies who can make decisions on behalf of the Secretary of State about conversion, expansion, and intervention in cases of underperformance. They also exercise some intervention powers in maintained schools causing concern. RSC regions do not directly align with Ofsted regions.
- The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is an executive agency of the DfE, dealing with funding and financial accountability of academy trusts.

The white paper confirms a number of changes to the system, including:

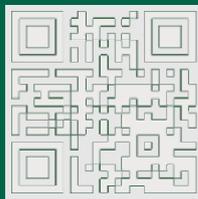
- The reconfiguration of the RSC role; there will now be 9 DfE Regional Directors and new regions groups, to serve as the ‘single interface’ for “functions currently distributed across department and the [ESFA]”.³⁹
- A regulatory review in May 2022, looking at accountability and regulation, including how MATs are held to account through inspection. Currently, Ofsted cannot inspect MATs’ central functions directly, and has long called for this power.
- Subject to consultation, a policy to move a school into a strong trust if it receives two Ofsted inspections below ‘good’ in a row – ie, ‘requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’.

³⁹ HM Government, [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#), CP 650, 28 March 2022, p52

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