



Ambition for all – our vision for a school system that works for all children

March 2022

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A paper from the Children's Commissioner for England's Office

"People don't realise how much education is important for life in general. [...] if they don't learn in school, they might not be able to enjoy life to the fullest" – Girl, 14

"In reality the existence of school is for education and great opportunities" – Boy, 14

Foreword from the Children's Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza DBE

As Children's Commissioner for England, my mission is to make England the best place to grow up in the world. This means the ambitions of every child being matched by the support around them – by their family, school and, where needed, being able to access brilliant mental health and social care services and support for Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND). Wherever a child grows up, whichever school they attend, every child deserves a world class education which is as ambitious for them, as they are for themselves.

I say this because there is no shortage of aspiration amongst England's children. Last year, I conducted the largest ever survey of children, [The Big Ask](#), and the overwhelming message I got back from over half a million responses was that today's generation are bright, outward looking, and aspirational, in every corner of England. The majority are happy. They like school, and its absence over lockdown meant they relished the chance to be back. Where children needed additional support, and received it quickly and locally, they were happier than the overall cohort.

At the same time, I heard too many stories from children who felt that their ambitions were not being matched by those around them. This meant they could not see themselves realising the opportunities available. Grown-ups' ambitions were too often lower for those who would be classed as disadvantaged or vulnerable. These are not words children use to describe themselves, but they can unwittingly become labels which change the level of ambition we have for a child. We must have the same aspirations and ambitions for all our children, because overwhelmingly they have it for themselves – they uniformly want a fantastic education, a good job, a happy family.

Schools can transform the way children see themselves in the world and help turn aspirations into tangible opportunities and outcomes. What separates out the very best schools is the level of belief they have for each and every one of their pupils. This is what I want for every child in England, wherever they live, whatever their background.

That is why I want to place ambition at the heart of our school system, and the forthcoming Schools White Paper. I want us to strive for:

- Every child to be able to read and write by the end of primary school; and,
- Every child to obtain a Level-2 qualification by the end of secondary school.

Many will say this is not possible, but this misses the point. We need to strive for every child in every school, because if there is one thing I learnt in more than 30 years of education, it is that all children can do amazing things, and every child deserves to be at a school that believes in them. No child should start off in a system which sees their labels before them, or thinks 'they can't do this because of where they are from'.

This is the cause to which I have devoted my career, so this is personal as well as professional. Having worked in many of the most 'challenging' schools, taught many of the children we label as 'disadvantaged', and turned around schools we'd written off as 'failing', I know what children can achieve, if children's potential is matched by our ambition. In writing this document I'm motivated by all the children I've worked with and spurred on by those I've spoken to in the year since I took up post, particularly the most vulnerable.

And I know it can be done. I have been part of the school reform movement in England since it began over 20 years ago. The motivations for reform were simple: too many children in England were having their life chances limited by inadequate schooling, and many schools were stuck in a cycle of low-ambition and complacency, both for themselves and their pupils. Over the past 20 years *thousands* of schools across England have been transformed, in turn improving the life chances of millions of children. The school system is unrecognisable - for the better. And now, as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is time to reignite that reformist ambition. Not least because if we can draw any hope or positives from the last two years, it's that we can do the unthinkable, that the impossible is possible; if we all coalesce around shared goals - we need to apply that spirit to children's services now.

There are some major reforms underway which need to be joined up to ensure effective support for children, and their families: the SEND Review, Health and Care Bill and the Independent Review of Children's Social Care. It is vital we don't think of these reforms in isolation, but as part of a wider ambition we have for how schools can truly deliver the best possible outcomes for children and young people and support our professionals to work in ways that they can be most effective.

New analysis from my office shows both how important this is, because it is the children who are facing the biggest 'disadvantages' who benefit the most from a great school, and yet are least likely to be attending one:

- If you are a child who gets free school meals *and* has had support from children's services in the past five years you are 30% more likely to pass Maths and English GCSE if you are attending a school which is rated good or outstanding; yet
- If you are a child receiving free school meals, you are 1.4 times more likely to be going to a school that is less than good. If you are a child with a social worker, then you are 1.2 times more likely to be going to a school that is less than good.¹

¹ All statistics are drawn from Children's Commissioner's Office analysis of the National Pupil Database, unless otherwise stated.

In short, children who most need to be at a good school are the least likely to be going to one. And this is why we need to re-double our efforts to make sure every school in England is not just good, but brilliant in the education it provides, the belief it instils in its pupils and the wider support it offers. One thing we have learnt from over 20 years of school reform is that brilliant schools take many forms, but all provide a stimulating, broad and knowledge rich curriculum, they focus on high-quality teaching and allow teachers to focus on what they do best by providing the wider support through a wider family of schools and they provide an environment that engages their pupils and promotes learning.

There is lots to be celebrated in England's school system, but we need to share this promise with even more children so that we deliver for every child. In this paper we explain what children have told us they want; what the data tells us about those who are missing out and what reforms we think would be helpful in bringing about a whole education system that delivers for children.

The pandemic has confirmed what I already knew - schools, and the people who work in them, are vital. They are the place where children learn, where they make friends, where they find things they are passionate about and talented at. A place that is safe, with adults around them who care about their lives and that provides routine, structure, and discipline. And I want to pay testament to everyone working with children for all their hard work and commitment to improving children's lives and outcomes.

The time is now to shift the dial, and if all of us working with children commit to doing just that, we can deliver for all of England's children – that means every child, in every school, in every corner of England, receiving the world class education they deserve, to set them up for life.

Executive Summary

This paper sets out our vision for the school system in England and outlines the reforms needed to realise that vision. This is based on two core ambitions:

1. Making sure every child is attending an excellent school
2. Expanding the capacity of schools to provide an offer to children which extends from an enriching curriculum to additional support.

The nexus of opportunity provided by the timing of the Schools White Paper, the SEND Review Green Paper, the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and the reforms to Integrated Care Services allows us to truly rethink how we deliver for and around children, especially those who are at the greatest risk of missing out.

This is grounded in the challenge to the schools system articulated by children in [The Big Ask](#) last summer. This told us children were focused on school, wanted to do well and have their ambitions matched, but also wanted more from school in terms of support. Support in the form of a wider and more enriching curriculum; support to achieve their ambitions and support when things went wrong. At the time we laid out the challenge thus:

“Support can mean different things. First, let's look at forms of support which build on what we are already doing well. During the last ten years of reform, we have seen lots of positive change. Aided by insights provided by research evidence, cognitive science, and curriculum theory, we have made progress in teacher development, and good work continues. The evidence-based curriculum revolution has transformed what we thought possible for teaching in England. Pedagogy is increasingly sophisticated. We now have much better online resources than we have ever had before. As we recover from the pandemic, we need to make sure that all children can truly access the curriculum and make progress. That means being able to understand the curriculum, remember it and apply it; being able to see themselves in the curriculum and – through the curriculum – see beyond their experiences. Most importantly, all children need to be able to experience success within the curriculum, especially in its core components. None of this has to mean a concession in standards: it does mean careful curriculum design, early intervention and responsive teaching, all of which are much easier to do if your school has the right support. That will often mean being part of a network – a high-functioning family of schools – whatever form that may take. In a culture of rapid reform, these are hard balances to strike, but the balance is key.”

We set out what children told us and what the data tells us, and then set out our policy proposals to achieve the following core-aims:

Making sure every child is attending an excellent school

Ambitions:

1. Every child to attend a school that provides them with the best possible education
2. Every child to be able to read and write when they leave primary school, and to obtain a Level-2 qualification by the end of secondary school
3. Every child to attend and be engaged in school every day
4. A school system which is clear, transparent and consistent for children and families
5. Strong, system-wide accountability accompanied by a focus on children's outcomes

Expanding the capacity of schools to provide an offer to children which extends from an enriching curriculum to additional support.

Ambitions:

6. A curriculum which is engaging and rewarding for all children
7. A wider careers offer which recognises multiple pathways to a good career
8. Where additional support is needed, it is provided easily, quickly, to every child, every time
9. For schools to be embedded in local partnerships delivering for children

A note about Early Years

This paper focuses on the future of the school system, and how this can help transform the life chances of children. While this paper focuses on children of school age, this is not the whole story, and improving life chances also needs action to improve early years provision, and to ensure children begin school ready to learn. In 2019, 29% of children are still not at the 'expected' level of development (as measured by the EYFS assessment of learning and development) at the end of Reception year. In particular, 26% of children do not achieve at least expected levels in writing, the highest percentage across all learning goals.² This represents a significant level of developmental delay across multiple domains of development, and suggests children are beginning school not in a position to learn. Reaching and supporting these children needs equal focus, and while it is not the subject to this paper, it is a priority for the Children's Commissioner.

² Department for Education, *Early years foundation stage profiles in England, 2019*, 17th October 2019, [link](#).

What children told us about their education in The Big Ask

"I am very lucky at my school to have amazing opportunities and people motivating me to do the best I can" – Girl, 14

We know that **children value education and enjoy going to school**. Just over half of 9–17-year-olds (52%) said that a good education was one of their most important future priorities. Among 9- to 17-year-olds, 84% were happy or neutral about their life at school and 90% were happy or neutral about their progress in education. Similarly, among 6- to 8-year-olds, 96% said they were happy or fine with their education.

Children had **high ambitions for themselves, but often felt they needed more support to reach these ambitions, be it for mental health issues, early family help or additional learning needs**. They were frustrated when they felt their school didn't believe in them, or wasn't good enough, and this was seen as a barrier to realising their aspirations.

The Big Ask showed that most groups of vulnerable children, including children with a social worker, children in care, or children receiving support from a youth offending team were more likely to be unhappy in school than the overall cohort. However, children receiving good SEND support in school were less likely to be unhappy about their life at school (13% were unhappy) than other children (16%). Children **believe that having good teachers can impact success in life**.

"If you have a good teacher that is passionate about their job you are more likely to be influenced by them" – Boy, 14

"Having a good teacher makes a huge difference" – Girl, 13

"Not all schools are equipped with facilities and good teachers compared to other schools" – Boy, 15

Children **want a wider offer from school**, including better careers support, practical skills, PSHE and extra-curriculars. Children are thoughtful and ambitious and want school to prepare them to find great jobs and start great careers.

"There is little to [no] talk about the option of apprenticeships and instead teachers and advisers talk as if there is no option but university. This can make it feel like there is less support for students like me who are most likely going into an apprenticeship after sixth form" – Boy, 17

"It seems almost all focus is on higher education and that universities are heavily promoted. If you do not intend to go to university then it seems as if there are very few available options [...] then it can become difficult for people my age to be motivated to work" – Boy, 16

Children told us that they want **school to be the access point for wider help if they need it**, for example, with mental health needs.

"Accessibility to good mental health in school and outside of school along with lack of focus on pastoral care at school and life at school, rather than just academic achievements, tests and grades" – Girl, 14

"The lack of mental health support in this country is shocking. Due to social media half of my friends suffer from eating disorders and depression. I personally struggle with self-harm. I've never even considered reaching out to school because I know they do not have the facilities to help. This means that we cannot focus on our education and reach our goals" – Girl, 16

A sense of fairness in education is important for children. Children want to be treated fairly and consistently, to feel that everyone has the same chances, and that school is an inclusive environment.

"It takes a long time to be diagnosed so you just feel stupid and that makes you feel unhappy" – Boy, 12, with SEND

"Minorities barely have any representation, so how can we achieve things that we have never even seen before?" – Girl, 17

"The inability to push any further than the class that we were born into due it being created by the area we live in and funding for education on those areas being low and the lack of opportunities in those areas being high" – Boy, 17

What the data tells us:

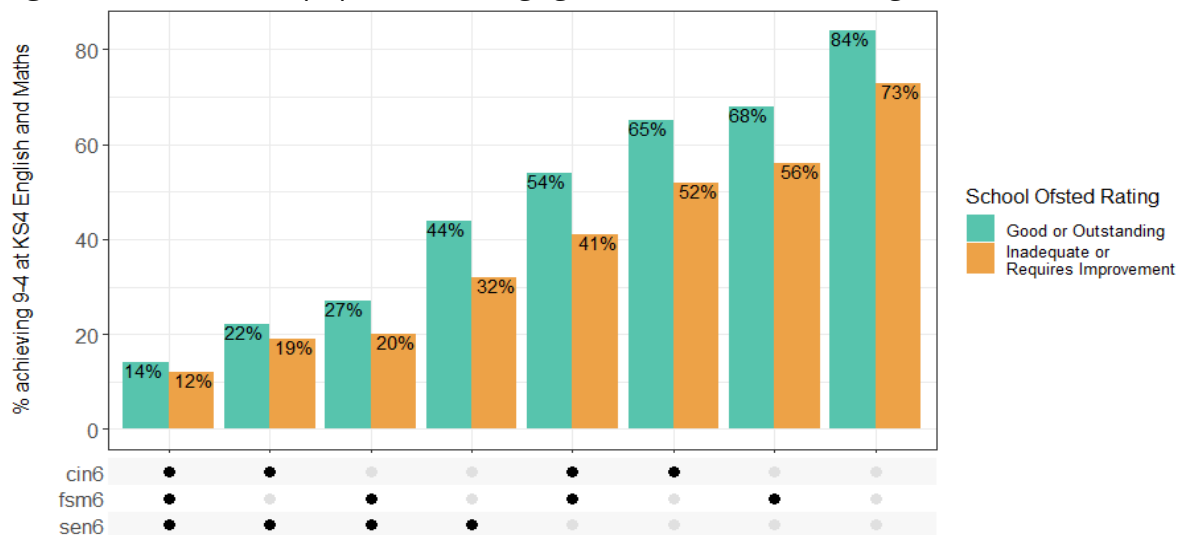
Our education system includes some of the world’s best schools. But, not all children get to experience the same quality of education. And there are some children for whom a good school is not enough, they need a wider range of support.

That means, despite the success of educational reforms over the past 20 years:

- 27% of children leave primary school without reaching the expected level of reading in their SATs.³
- 19% of children still reach age 19 without a Level-2 qualification. This increases to 38% of children who are eligible for FSM.⁴

The children who do worst in the education system are those that face multiple disadvantages, for example children who are economically disadvantaged, are known to social services and/or have special educational needs. As the graph below shows, children are remarkably resilient, but when they face multiple disadvantages, their outcomes are impacted disproportionately:

Figure 1: Share of pupils achieving grades 9-4 on KS4 English and Maths⁵



However, we see that children – whatever their characteristics – are doing significantly better at good or better schools. For example:

- A child who has, or has recently had, a social worker is 20% more likely to pass Maths and English GCSEs if they go to a good or outstanding school.

³Department for Education, *Attainment in KS2 by Subject 2019*, 13th Dec 2019, [link](#)

⁴Department for Education, *Level 2 and 3 attainment 16 to 25*, 29th April 2021, [link](#) See Table 4: Level 2 attainment at 19 by pupil characteristics, 2010/11 to 2019/20 (based on pupils recorded in mainstream state-funded schools in England in year 11),

⁵ Note that the cohort includes all pupils who wrote KS4 exams in the summer of 2019. CIN6, FSM6, SEN6 refer to whether a child has experienced a CIN episode, received FSM or received SEN support in the last 6 years. The dots indicate the exact combination of characteristics for a specific group. For example, a single dot in FSM 6 row indicates children who are FSM 6 with no other CIN/FSM/SEN characteristics. Data on this cohort from the National Pupil Database and annual Child in Need census is matched with Ofsted ratings from August 2019, found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/state-funded-schools-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-august-2019>

Matching ambitions with solutions

A race to the top – making sure every child is attending excellent school

“Bad education stops some children from being able to achieve something great in life” – Boy, 12.

Ambition 1: Every child to attend a school that provides them with the best possible education

There are 1,183,168 children currently at schools rated less than ‘Good’ by Ofsted. Improving these schools, and enabling them to better support their children’s education, is central to achieving our wider ambitions and outcomes. We should not see a school being ‘Good’ as an end to itself, but rather as a floor standard that indicates a school is safe, well-run and offering a good all-round education. Once schools have achieved this standard, they can strive for excellence by responding to the needs of their pupils in a number of different ways. But the first priority is to ensure schools are at least ‘Good’ to indicate they have the capacity to get even better.

There are some areas in England where every school is good or outstanding. But we want this for every child, in every area. To achieve this, struggling schools will need additional support, our view is that this is best achieved by ensuring all schools are part of a family of schools. There is shared strength in families of schools, and there are a number of ways that share their experience more effectively.

The success of different approaches to education across England shows there is no one-size fits all model to running a good school. However, there are common ingredients to all the successful approaches: strong and effective leadership, a clear sense of purpose and ambition both for the school and for each pupil, a culture that supports staff and inspires pupils, consistent approaches to behaviour and a strong emphasis on the quality of teaching and shared curriculum resources. A family of schools shares this ethos across their schools, and can impart knowledge and resources. On a practical level this means the sharing of back-office functions (such as finance and HR); work to develop a curriculum that meets the needs of *their* pupils and offer enhanced opportunities for staff training and development. All of these facets are what enables excellent schools to sustain excellence over a long time frame and across a wider footprint.

Moving to a school system where all schools are within families of schools, will require additional effort to develop the capacity of existing trusts. To this end, we believe local authorities should be able to establish their own families of schools. But this must be under the same strategic oversight of the Regional School’s Commissioner and subject to the same regulatory process. As the map above demonstrates, there are some areas which have much stronger concentrations of good and excellent schools than others. Supporting the areas without this concentration of excellence needs to be the priority, we support schemes such as Education Investment Areas, but believe more investment may be needed directly into small Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) with the capacity to expand in some areas, and this could be done directly through Regional Schools Commissioners.

This should not mean an end to innovation within the education system, which has been a cornerstone of improvement. The Free Schools programme, which has demonstrated multiple effective school models, in mainstream, special and alternative provision, should

remain. Ideally, we would like to see Free Schools linked to MATs to provide some logistical support. This could be MATs opening Free Schools, incubating new approaches and expanding on the great practice that already exists. However, where this is not possible Free Schools should still be allowed to open as standalone schools.

Achievement for All

Ambition 2: All children to be able to read and write when they leave primary school, and to obtain a Level-2 qualification by the end of secondary school

As outlined above, 27% of children leave primary school without being able to read to the expected level and 19% of children become adults without obtaining a Level-2 qualification (which is essentially 5 GCSEs, a technical equivalent or an apprenticeship). As the research that informs this paper outlines, these children are much more likely to have special educational needs, have grown up in poverty, be from a family with social service involvement or who have gone to poorly performing school. All the measures outlined in this paper are aimed at improving the outcomes for these children, but none of these measures will succeed without belief in each one of these children, despite their circumstances. The system has to believe in every child for the potential they have, so that children can believe in themselves and see for themselves the power of education. If we accept from the offset that some children will not achieve in education, there is invariably a risk that it is those from the most 'disadvantaged' backgrounds who are presumed to fall into this camp, not because of who that child is, but because of whom they are perceived to be. This is stigma children repeatedly tell the Children's Commissioner about, particularly the most 'marginalised' groups, such as Gypsy Roma Traveller children and children in care.

Attendance - everyone's business

Ambition 3: For every child to attend and be engaged in school every day.

In education, there is no substitute for excellent, in-person teaching. The best school cannot offer this to a child if they are not in the class. And those children who do worst of all are those not receiving any education at all. We asked local authorities about the number of children in various educational settings in autumn 2021 and the responses were concerning. Half of local authorities did not have access to up-to-date data on absence and among those who did, estimates of persistent absence (pupils missing at least 10% of sessions) averaged at 22% and estimates of severe absence (pupils missing at least 50% of sessions) averaged at 1.5%. Estimates of Children Missing from Education varied by local authority, ranging from 0% to 4% of children aged 11-15. A lack of data availability on the number of children living in a local authority, the number of children who are electively home educated, and the

number of children in independent schools mean there are barriers to accurately identifying children missing from education.⁷

Informed by the work we have undertaken as part of our Attendance Audit, we believe a series of changes would help make sure more children are attending consistently. First, we need much better, real-time data, that is collected consistently across all areas and schools, so that we are able to identify which children are not attending consistently and intervene early to make sure their attendance improves. We also believe that changes are needed to the system for registering children on the National Pupil Database to ensure local areas have clearer information about the children who need a school place. Attendance needs to be a shared outcome across all professionals working with children and the introduction of a unique identifier for children would make this easier.

Our work with children who do not attend schools shows the causes to be complex. But if you aren't in school you cannot benefit from any of the educational benefits, nor the safeguarding and wider support offer. Given schools were kept open for vulnerable children during COVID-19, the role attendance plays in keeping children safe has been brought into sharper relief. We must build on this, including recognising the role regular and routine attendance plays in good mental health and family stability.

The reasons for poor attendance are many – we need to distinguish between absence driven by ill health or COVID-19, truancy and disengagement, and where there is a wider underlying cause or symptom. Sometimes the reason for poor attendance will lie within the school – for example bullying – but often the cause of poor school attendance stem from mental health, or issues at home, and will require a multi-agency response. We need an approach tailored to the child, underpinned by a common understanding that school attendance is vital for future success. We believe that all local safeguarding partnerships should agree a common protocol to work with schools to counter poor attendance and unnecessary exclusion, with automatic multi-agency escalation points when a child has two fixed term exclusions, or their attendance drops below a defined threshold. Below we go into further detail about how cooperation between schools and other safeguarding partnerships.

We need to be uncompromising in our ambition to ensure all schools are at least good, and in doing this the priority must be school places for those who would benefit most. Our ambition for the quality of schools needs to be mirrored across the rest of the system: children's social care, SEND services and health – there should be no lottery, no disparity between the quality of care and education children receive based on where they live.

We support the local authority becoming the admissions authority for all schools. This will simplify the process for children and parents, and support consistency and fairness across a single area. It also enables us to ensure a consistent admissions priority across the country. Within this, the Children's Commissioner would emphasise the importance of prioritising the following groups of children for

⁷ Children's Commissioner for England, *Where are England's children?*, 9th March 2022, [link](#)

admission to ensure the children who would benefit most are most likely to be at the most aspiration and excellent schools.

- 1) Looked after children;
- 2) Children with a parent serving in the military;
- 3) Children with an EHC plan; and,
- 4) Children on child protection plans or who have had a social worker in the past five years.

Ambition 4: The schools' system should be easily understandable for children and their families, with clear roles and responsibilities.

If we want to empower children and their families within the system, they need to be able to understand it, and everyone within the system should know their roles and responsibilities, and who is doing what. If we want every part of the system to work in unison, we need this clarity to avoid duplication and tension. To achieve this end, we would support the following simplifications of the existing system:

- We believe the local authority should be the single admissions authority for all schools provides consistency across the system and clarity to parents.
- We believe that bringing all schools into a family of schools ends the two-tier structure which creates confusion locally and nationally. It places responsibility for school ethos and improvement in one place. It is for each family to create their offer to pupils, covering educational excellence and wider support. It also makes it much simpler to engage schools in local partnership structures, because it ends the situation where some schools are represented via the local authority and some schools are either represented directly or not at all. This is equally important for the administration of SEND support.

Transparency and data-sharing

Ambition 5: Strong, system-wide accountability with a focus on outcomes

As we move to a system where all schools are within a family, we also need to focus on the quality of those arrangements. No one has a right to run a school, and there needs to be an emphasis on those running schools being able to demonstrate vision for them, along with the capacity to realise this vision.

But schools do not operate in a vacuum, and the outcomes for many children, especially those with additional needs, will depend on the totality of the support they receive, including mental health, social care and SEND. Currently we have clear and consistent inspection of schools, SEND services and children's social care, but these are done in isolation, and the same focus is not given to other parts of the system. To rectify this, we support a statutory inspection framework of the safeguarding partnerships, based on the existing Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAI) format, but with clear findings on each of the partners.

Alongside inspections, transparency and a focus on outcomes can be an important driver of service improvement and quality. The English education system is one of

the most data-informed in the world, but other parts of the system do not have the same quality of data, nor is it possible to identify or track children prior to beginning school.⁸ This means during the most important period of children's lives, the system is hardest to connect, and we cannot track children from early years settings into school, nor connect health and education data (e.g. health visitor data and school data).

To tackle this, we believe the single child identifier (which is currently allocated when a child starts school), should be allocated at birth, so that we ensure consistency of provision from early years settings into school. We believe this number should be derived from the child's NHS number, so that education and healthcare records can be matched where necessary (for example when creating a child's Education, Health and Care Plan).

We would also like to see a greater focus on child-level outcomes across all the agencies working with children. There are many outcomes which need to be a shared endeavour – such as children attending school – and we need all organisations working with children to understand, and be held to account, for their role in supporting these objectives.

⁸ Department for Education, *A comparison of international childcare systems*, July 2013, [link](#)

Expanding the capacity of schools to provide an offer to children which extends from an enriching curriculum to additional support.

Ambition 6: A curriculum which is engaging and rewarding for all children

"I feel lucky that I have the opportunity to go to a school that offers a wide range of activities, sports and clubs that help to make my life varied, and can offer me skills to draw on as I grow older" – Girl, 15

We know that children thrive in an environment where they are taught a knowledge-rich curriculum which is challenging and engaging. Curriculum is one area where we have seen wide-ranging innovation in the last two decades. Where a new generation of educators have developed pedagogies for making age-old subject matter exciting for children born in a new millennium. Across England different schools have adopted different approaches some of which have been adapted, but with lots of elements which remain bespoke to local communities.

As outlined above, we believe that ensuring all schools are part of a families of schools is key to achieving this. There is clear evidence from the pandemic that those schools who could work together found it much easier to adapt to the rapidly changing education environment due to their trusting, collaborative relationship.

In a family of schools, it is possible to design a curriculum for multiple schools with a shared ethos, approach and population, rather than schools or teachers doing this individually. With a central oversight, subject leads can inform a co-design process that ensures a relevant and engaging learning journey carefully structured to build on a child's previous learning and knowledge. This is especially effective where feeder primaries are working with local secondaries. Teachers can be share resources and lesson plans across a family of schools, to reduce workload and enable the best quality resources to be shared.

Within a family arrangement, it is possible to employ specialist staff who can work across multiple schools, for example, in sport, music, art, and performing arts. They can provide capacity for the relationship management needed to develop partnerships and lead projects that provide valuable cultural and enriching opportunities for children.

Ambition 7: A wider careers offer which recognises multiple pathways to a good career

"It seems almost all focus is on higher education and that universities are heavily promoted. If you do not intend to go to university then it seems as if there are very few available options [...] then it can become difficult for people my age to be motivated to work" – Boy, 16

In The Big Ask children told us they wanted stronger support for vocational training routes so that young people are introduced to more than one pathway to a good career after secondary school. Children want more immersive and practical career support. Through additional capacity, families of schools can co-ordinate careers advice that offers a greater balance between academic and vocational routes. 'High expectations' and 'success' for children can mean a different form of training or

employment – an apprenticeship, traineeship, or an entry-level job, and young people should be given the information and the support to make a success of that as well as promoting university to those less likely to think it is for them.

Children tell us very clearly how central school is to their childhood, and this means they want more from school. Not instead of an academic curriculum, but alongside it. We believe that a voluntary extended school day offering time for catch up and activities would be beneficial. We know children want to take part in sport, learn instruments, stage plays, sing in choirs and be part of a team. Additional time in the school day can lead to attainment gains of up to 2 months, and nearly 3 months for disadvantaged pupils, as well as improved attendance, behaviour and relationships with peers⁹. All children should have access to a 'knowledge rich curriculum', as well as the cultural capital often afforded to those from more affluent backgrounds. There is no one trick to achieving this, but, as above, a family of schools can develop this resource, if we understand and acknowledge its importance as part of a knowledge-rich curriculum.

Ambition 8: Where additional support is needed, it is provided easily, quickly, to every child, every time

“Not enough mental health help or educated teachers in noticing students who may have issues. In my case, I was recently diagnosed with ADHD at 17 and for the whole of lower school only 2 teachers listened when I was frustrated” – Girl, 17

Children repeatedly told us in The Big Ask that they want help at an earlier stage - in school. That's because children wanted to be able to access help in an environment where they felt safe, access it on their own terms, and seek support that helped them cohesively (i.e. not having to miss school for CAMHS appointments, adding both stigma and stress). This is true for mental health support, additional help for long-term conditions or disabilities and even help for their families. And we need to distinguish between schools providing this support and schools being the place where support is provided.

The ability of schools to offer a wider range of services might be constrained by resourcing, and how resources are shared between schools and other services for children. But we believe the focus should be to support schools in establishing the capacity to operate these additional structures, so that they can access available funding streams – such as the Holiday Activities Fund; they can facilitate services funded by other partners – such as the Mental Health Support Teams, or funded from existing funding streams – such as breakfast clubs funded through pupil premium funding. Many families of schools already operate 'Family Hubs', and we believe more are well placed to support the Government's expansion of this model.

In particular, we support an expansion of school specialisms to support special educational needs. All teachers are teachers of children with additional needs, but all teachers need to be supported to be such. Where teachers are equipped with this knowledge uniquely placed to identify opportunities for extra support that would really benefit the child's development and wellbeing. By locating professionals such

⁹ Education Endowment Foundation, *Extending school time*, July 2021, [link](#)

as Education Psychologists, Emotional Learning Support Assistants, and Speech and Language Therapists within schools or family of schools, this increases teacher's and pupil's access to this support in an immediate way that embeds this additional professional expertise within the school's existing education offer. These important resources for children can be shared across schools, if managed and financed through a family of schools' partnership. This is also true of support, empowering and training Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinators (SENDCOs) and Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs).

Working together

Ambition 9: schools to be embedded in local partnerships delivering for children

We believe that schools and colleges should become full statutory members of local safeguarding partnerships alongside the local authority, police and the NHS. Doing this gives schools a seat at the table in designing and implementing safeguarding systems and policies to protect children and promote their welfare. It also provides a statutory framework for a more open exchange of data between schools and partners. But, along with these opportunities comes obligations, becoming a statutory safeguarding partner requires schools to comply with the policies created by the local safeguarding partnership. We believe this balance of enhanced power and responsibilities befits the role of schools and colleges within the system.

Alongside this, we would like to see enhanced expectations as to the practical processes that safeguarding partnerships should oversee. The statutory definition of safeguarding has been expanded significantly by the 2018 update to the Working Together guidance, which defines safeguarding as:¹⁰

- a. protecting children from maltreatment*
- b. preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health or development*
- c. ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care*
- d. taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes"*

This broader statutory definition needs to be reflected in the way partnerships work with schools to support children. For example, we would like all local safeguarding partnerships to be obliged to have attendance protocols in place agreed between schools, the local authority and the NHS. In practice this needs to mean that if a child does not or cannot attend school, professionals come together to understand why this is, and what needs to be done about it. Our work with children shows this to be complex; a child may be a young carer and worried about leaving their parent; they may have mental health problems, or they may be getting bullied. Each child will warrant a slightly different response, the point is that every child is entitled to the support they need to get to school, and local safeguarding partnerships should be expected to put in place the arrangements to ensure the public service who needs to act, does act.

¹⁰ Department for Education, *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018*, July 2018, [link](#)



Children's Commissioner for England
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Tel: 020 7783 8330
Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk
Visit: www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk
Twitter: @ChildrensComm