

# Higher Standards, Better Schools For All

More choice for parents and pupils



## Summary





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Our aim is to transform our school system so that every child receives an excellent education – whatever their background and wherever they live. Because of the progress we have made since 1997 we can now take the next, vital steps.

In 1997, a third of children left primary schools without having mastered the basics in English and maths. Now three-quarters achieve in maths and even more in English. Our secondary schools have substantially improved too. There are dramatically fewer failing secondary schools. And there have been sustained and substantial improvements in achievement at 14, 16 and 18. There are more resources and more teachers in our schools.

These achievements are important. But they are not yet good enough. Standards must keep rising in the globalised world in which we now live. High standards must be universal to every child in every school in every community. The attainment gap between high and low achieving schools is too great. And a child's educational achievements are still too strongly linked to their parents' social and economic background – a key barrier to social mobility.

This White Paper sets out our plans radically to improve the system by putting parents and the needs of their children at the heart of our school system, freeing up schools to innovate and succeed, bringing in new dynamism and new providers, ensuring that coasting – let alone failure – is not an option for any school. In this way we will ensure that every school delivers an excellent education, that every child achieves to their potential and that the system as a whole is increasingly driven by parents and by choice. To make that happen we need an education system that is designed around the needs of the individual – with education

tailored to the needs of each child and parents having a real say in how schools are run. And to achieve that, we need to reform schools so that they have the freedoms and flexibilities to deliver that tailored, choice-driven education.

### **...so we are developing a radical new school system...**

In this new system, improvements will become embedded and self-sustaining within schools, because the changes will be owned and driven by schools and parents:

- every school will be able to acquire a self-governing Trust similar to those supporting Academies, which will give them the freedom to work with new partners to help develop their ethos and raise standards;
- Academies will remain at the heart of the programme, with continued and new opportunities to develop them in schools and areas of real and historical underperformance and underachievement;
- independent schools will find it easier to enter the new system; and
- a national Schools Commissioner will drive change, matching schools and new partners, promoting the benefits of choice, access and diversity, and taking action where parental choices are being frustrated.

This will create a system of independent non-fee paying state schools, where schools can decide whether they wish to acquire a self-governing Trust or become a self-governing Foundation school. They will do so without unnecessary bureaucratic interference, in a system of fair admissions, fair funding and clear accountability.

### **...supported by improved choice and access for all...**

School improvement has been helped not only by the reforms introduced since 1997, but also by published data and inspection reports, and the ability of many parents to vote with their feet by finding a better state school. There are those who argue that there

is no demand for choice; but this ignores the reality that the vast majority of parents want a real choice of excellent schools.

The affluent can buy choice. We will ensure that choice is more widely available to all within an increasingly specialist system, not just to those who can pay for it. Key to choice is the provision of more good places and more good schools. This will be supported by:

- introducing better information for all parents when their child enters primary and secondary school, and dedicated choice advisers to help the least well-off parents to exercise their choices;
- extending the rights to free school transport to children from poorer families to their three nearest secondary schools within a six mile radius (when they are outside walking distance) and piloting transport to support such choices for all parents, which will help the environment as well as school choice; and
- making it easier for schools to introduce banding into their admissions policies, so that they can keep a proportion of places for students who live outside traditional school catchment areas within a genuinely comprehensive intake. Some specialist schools and Academies already successfully use this approach.

### **...with parents and pupils fully engaged in improving standards...**

But parental engagement should not stop just with the choice of school. It should continue throughout a child's education. The education system has benefited enormously from the greater availability of pupil-level data, enabling teachers to see how much their pupils have improved and assessing their potential for further improvement in partnership with parents. Every parent should be able to access that information, so that they can work with teachers to enable their child to achieve their full potential.

We will ensure that:

- parents receive regular, meaningful reports during the school year about how their child is doing, with opportunities to discuss their child's progress with their teachers;

- parents have the chance to form Parent Councils to influence school decisions on issues such as school meals, uniform and discipline (such Councils will be required in Trust schools);
- parents have better local complaints procedures and access to a new national complaints service from Ofsted where local procedures have been exhausted;
- parents have access to more and clearer information about local schools, how to get involved and how to lever change; and
- parents are able to set up new schools supported by a dedicated capital pot.

### **...and education tailored to the individual...**

We have dramatically expanded our knowledge about how different young people acquire knowledge and skills. Coupled with increased resources in our schools, a reformed school workforce and the greater availability of ICT, this gives teachers the opportunity to tailor lessons and support in schools to the individual needs of each pupil. So there will be:

- targeted one-to-one tuition in English and maths in the schools with the most underperforming pupils, to help those falling behind to catch up with their peers;
- more stretching lessons and opportunities for gifted and talented pupils;
- extended schools, offering many new opportunities to learn and develop beyond the formal school day;
- more grouping and setting by subject ability; and
- a national training programme to enable each school to have one leading professional to help develop tailored lessons.

## **We need strong measures to tackle failure and underperformance...**

We have also learnt, from the action we have taken on failing and underperforming schools, that some schools need extra help to improve. So, we will introduce much tougher rules for failing schools:

- schools in Special Measures will be more quickly turned around; and where no progress is made after a year, a competition for new providers will be held. Schools that receive a notice to improve from Ofsted will enter Special Measures within a year, if progress is not made;
- competitions will be required for new schools and the replacement of failing schools, for the first time providing a straightforward route to bring new providers into the system. All new schools will be self-governing Foundation, voluntary aided, Trust schools or Academies; and
- parents will be able to urge Ofsted action or request new providers, and where there is strong demand or dissatisfaction with existing choices, local authorities will have to respond to their concerns.

## **...with a lighter touch for good schools...**

We have also recognised that good schools should have greater freedoms, and that includes a lighter touch from inspectors and other agencies. Our New Relationship with Schools has already seen shorter, sharper Ofsted inspections; School Improvement Partners, usually other headteachers rather than local authority officers, offering external challenge; dedicated schools budgets; and teachers freed from bureaucracy to focus on teaching.

In the new system, we want:

- good schools to be able to expand or federate more easily with other schools to increase the supply of good places, improving choices for parents;

- the best specialist schools able to acquire extra specialisms and be funded for new responsibilities such as teacher training; and
- Ofsted to consult on an even lighter touch inspection system for high-performing schools.

### **...and better discipline to enable teachers to teach and pupils to learn...**

Schools have increased access to learning mentors and on-site units to help them deal with disruptive pupils. There are more places, for longer hours, in off-site Pupil Referral Units. But many schools still face real discipline challenges because there is too little consistency in dealing with poor behaviour, particularly the low-level disruption to lessons that makes teaching and learning more difficult.

Moreover, some parents do not take their responsibilities seriously enough; and even question the teacher's right to discipline their child. Although attendance overall has improved, truancy still remains too high.

The Steer Group on School Behaviour and Discipline – a group of experienced headteachers and senior teachers – have examined these issues in detail. And we will implement their recommendations by:

- introducing a clear and unambiguous legal right for teachers to discipline pupils, backed by an expectation that every school has a clear set of rules and sanctions;
- extending parenting contracts and orders, so that schools can use them to force parents to take responsibility for their children's bad behaviour in school;
- requiring parents to take responsibility for excluded pupils in their first five days of a suspension (by ensuring they are properly supervised doing schoolwork at home) with fines for parents if excluded pupils are found unsupervised during school hours; and

- expecting headteachers to use their newly-devolved powers and funding collectively to develop on or off-site provision for suspensions longer than five days (instead of fifteen days at present) and insisting that all exclusions are properly recorded.

### **...and underpinned by a new role for local authorities.**

To support all these reforms, the role of the local authority will change from provider to commissioner:

- as a part of their wider responsibilities for children and young people, local authorities will be expected to become the champions of pupils and parents, commissioning rather than providing education. They will have a new duty to promote choice, diversity and fair access to school places and school transport and new powers to act decisively where schools are failing and underperforming;
- it will be easier for new schools to be established, where there is parental demand;
- the School Organisation Committee will be abolished and decisions made by local authorities; disputes will continue to be resolved by the Schools Adjudicator;
- local authorities will work with the newly-created Schools Commissioner to ensure more choice, greater diversity and better access for disadvantaged groups to good schools in every area; and
- local authorities and local Learning and Skills Councils will work more closely together to ensure real choice and higher standards in the provision of education for 14-19 year-olds in schools and colleges.

And capital investment, through Building Schools for the Future and the Targeted Capital Funds, will have a crucial role in supporting reform.

## **These reforms will create and sustain irreversible change for the better in schools...**

We have pushed higher standards from the centre: for those standards to be maintained and built-upon, they must now become self-sustaining within schools, driven by teachers and parents.

No longer will it be possible for any school to hide its low or mediocre standards; or to argue that parents should not play a fundamental role in their child's education, having both rights and responsibilities to do so.

No longer will it be acceptable for young people to be denied the opportunity to achieve their full potential, whatever their abilities and talents; or for artificial barriers to prevent choice and diversity from playing its full part in delivering a good education for every child.



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