



**Every Child Achieving
and Thriving**
**Summary and Insights on
the DfE White Paper (2026)**

The government's white paper Every Child Achieving and Thriving outlines a long-term plan to raise standards, strengthen inclusion, and ensure that all children - particularly those with SEND and those from disadvantaged backgrounds - receive the support they need to succeed.

It emphasises that achieving its vision is a "shared responsibility" requiring schools to work in partnership with parents, government, local authorities, healthcare, businesses, charities and communities.

As a trusted partner that has been supporting schools and academy trusts for over a decade, One Education is here to support you as we navigate the changing landscape. Throughout this article, we will summarise key points from the white paper and share expert commentary that reflects on what has been said and how we can move forward.

The white paper is structured around the following themes:

- **Setting every child up to succeed** – rebuilding public services around children and schools so every child can grow up healthy, happy and able to thrive, with integrated, community-rooted support that replaces isolated services with shared responsibility for children's outcomes.
- **Narrow to Broad** – ensuring that learning starts from birth, with high-quality early years support, ambitious schooling, and smooth transitions through education and into adulthood.
- **Side-lined to Included** – ensuring all children, especially those with SEND and disadvantage, can thrive in mainstream settings by rejecting low expectations, building an inclusive education system with high standards, investing in better training, digital tools and timely specialist support so needs are identified early, support is consistent across the country, and families regain confidence in the SEND system.
- **Fragmented to Coherent** – creating a more joined up, high-quality school system allowing children to succeed by creating safe, calm, connected environments with strong relationships, high expectations and close work with families and local services, ensuring excellent behaviour and attendance so learning is not lost and shifting communities from disengagement to genuine engagement with school.

They aim to achieve these by:

- **Supporting and investment in high-quality staff** – working closely with school staff, recognising the vital contribution of support staff, by increasing the number of expert teachers, improving maternity pay, expanding high-quality training and professional development, strengthening leadership support, and collaborating with unions and employers to ensure policies are effective in practice.
- **Collaboration between schools and with other partners** – building on partnership and collaboration to raise standards and improve outcomes, supporting schools to act as community anchors by moving all schools into trusts rooted locally, ensuring independent inspection and targeted intervention where needed, and defining clear roles for local government and other partners to work together for children.
- **Enabling innovation and ambition** – they plan to drive innovation and ambition through system-led improvement by expanding the RISE (Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence) programmes so schools can share best practice and access targeted support, using data, AI and technology safely to enhance teaching and learning.

As it is such a large, complex document, our analysis focuses on the key areas of curriculum; SEND and high needs; school development and collaboration; attendance and behaviours; 16-19 pathways and qualifications; workforce and system reform; staff development; digital and AI in education; and wellbeing. We will consider how these reforms are intended to improve the current system and what will be required to implement them effectively.

1. Curriculum Reform

The white paper sets out a national ambition for a broad, knowledge-rich curriculum across all key stages, moving the system from a “narrow to broad” offer so every child - not just those in high performing schools - can access high-quality, rich teaching and learning. It reinforces high standards in core subjects, stronger literacy and numeracy, better teacher training and CPD, clearer alignment between phases, and a curriculum that supports both academic and technical pathways. Excellence in maths and science is seen as essential for developing future problem solvers, while a love of reading and strong foundations in speaking, listening and writing will help children communicate confidently, think critically and navigate an increasingly complex information landscape.

To deliver a “broad and rich” education, the white paper sets out that schools will refresh their programmes of study by 2028 with a stronger focus on mastering core concepts, ensuring sufficient space to build knowledge and deepen understanding and oracy, supported by a new national oracy framework and expanded guidance on speaking and listening across the curriculum. They have suggested there should be a focus on curriculum coherence and that foundation subject content should specify the essential substantive knowledge and skills which should be taught.

Additionally, an Enrichment Entitlement will ensure all children benefit from cultural, civic and outdoor experiences. The white paper pledges to continue to support schools in implementing the new writing framework, introduce Year 8 assessments, and publish a secondary framework for oracy, reading and writing to help embed literacy across subjects and strengthen progression from early years through to secondary education.

Expert Insight

The ambition to embed a broad curriculum from the earliest stage is welcome, however robust curricular policy only delivers if it is backed by practical support for implementation. Our youngest pupils benefit not just from high expectations, but from curriculum design that respects developmentally appropriate pedagogy: play, exploration, rich interactions, agency and a strong sense of belonging - particularly in EYFS and KS1.

Alongside this, I agree that enrichment must not be viewed as an optional extra. However, this will require a systematic review in how we approach timetabling, especially in primary school. Enrichment will need to be woven through daily experience to build background knowledge, vocabulary, curiosity and cultural capital. If we are serious about strong foundations, enrichment must sit at the heart of curriculum design and not become an add-on that puts additional pressure on the profession or our children. There is a risk that an emphasis on measurable

outcomes may inadvertently push provision towards formal, academic instruction too early, despite strong evidence that young children learn best through active, play-based experiences. Enrichment, in this sense, is not separate from attainment; it is the soil in which attainment grows.

Furthermore, while national targets may help focus collective effort, they must be accompanied by resources and structural support for our younger children, especially those in disadvantaged areas where access to enrichment beyond school may be limited. Schools serving these communities often carry the greatest responsibility for providing cultural, creative and experiential opportunities. Without sustained funding, time and professional development, higher expectations risk becoming tick-box targets rather than drivers of meaningful improvement.

I support the ambition to raise expectations and broaden the curriculum, but only if the focus is not purely on attainment and preparing children for statutory tests. We need to ensure children are met where they are, with investment that enables educators to understand the nuances of developmentally appropriate practice.

Jo Gray, Head of Educational Development

Much of the aims of the white paper focus on further developing key areas of literacy, including building a love of reading and ensuring children have strong foundations in writing, speaking and listening. The target for 90% of all pupils to pass the Phonics Screening Check in Year 1 as well as a renewed focus on children leaving primary school at the expected standard is admirable.

The paper commits to continuing this focus throughout secondary education, with the implementation of a new Year 8 reading test alongside there being an expectation for Year 8 pupils' progress in Writing to be assessed, as well as the creation of a new integrated oracy, reading and writing framework to support practice. Throughout the phases, there is also a commitment to securing children's media and critical literacy right across the curriculum, which is a crucial step towards the aim of supporting children to adapt to our modern world.

At its heart, much of the white paper links directly back to the intended amendments to the National Curriculum proposed in Dr. Becky Francis' Curriculum and Assessment Review. As we wait for updated curriculum documentation, the question remains how schools will be further supported to enact these aims in practice.

Laura Buczko, Literacy Team Leader

It is encouraging to see that the proposed reforms focus on promoting equality through effective provision and the development of leadership skills in driving these changes in schools. One key area of focus is oracy, which is crucial in preparing children for the 21st century. As we move toward a technological future, the skill of effective communication across a range of contexts and audiences will be essential for success in the workplace. As the foundation for all learning, oracy supports the assessment of pupils' ongoing understanding, making it integral to the educational process.

The proposed oracy framework is a welcome step forward, with the white paper offering teachers the support they need to develop oracy skills in their students. It is vital that we teach speaking and listening skills explicitly and ensure that oracy is not side-lined but recognised as fundamental to all learning through effective research-led, whole-school implementation.

Alice Pepper, Education Consultant, Oracy Award Lead

While the ambition for a broader curriculum is welcome, it is important to recognise that children's readiness to learn is deeply connected to their emotional wellbeing and sense of safety. For many pupils, particularly those who have experienced adversity, trauma or disrupted attachment, learning is not only a cognitive process but a relational and emotional one. Children should be given the opportunity to explore ideas, emotions, and experiences through play, movement, storytelling, art and drama. These approaches support language development, emotional regulation and imagination – all of which underpin the communication, oracy and critical thinking skills highlighted in the white paper.

Embedding creative and experiential learning within the curriculum can help children build confidence, resilience and a sense of belonging in school. When children feel safe enough to express themselves and explore ideas creatively, they are more able to engage with learning, develop curiosity and deepen understanding across subjects.

Jeni Goodfellow-Pemsel, Head of Creative Psychotherapy in Education

2. SEND and High Needs Reform

The white paper presents SEND reform as a central pillar of creating a system in which every child can achieve and thrive, with the DfE aiming to establish a nationally consistent approach that ensures children receive the right support at the right time.

A key element of this vision is the introduction of Individual Support Plans (ISPs) for every child with identified SEND, giving these plans legal standing and replacing the variable SEN Support currently used in schools. This creates a consistent national entitlement, while reserving Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) only for the most complex needs, reducing pressure on statutory assessment and tribunals. The reforms emphasise early identification, stronger multiagency coordination, and improved access to specialists such as speech and language therapists and educational psychologists through a new £1.8 billion “experts at hand” service. The ambition is for more children with SEND to be supported effectively in their local mainstream schools, with ISPs capturing barriers to learning and intended outcomes in a single digital record that follows the child.

The white paper also reinforces the principle that children should be educated in their local community wherever possible, reducing unnecessary placements far from home and strengthening inclusion. Overall, the reforms aim to reduce the adversarial nature of the current system, ensuring that support is proactive rather than reactive and that every child - regardless of need - has access to the stability, expertise, and coordinated provision required to thrive.

Expert Insight

Pupils with SEND are at the heart of the White Paper. No one can argue that over the last few years the needs of pupils being supported in schools has increased dramatically. I support some of the ideas in the white paper, including better early identification and better access to Speech and Language Therapists and Educational Psychologists. However, the delivery and timeline of this is unclear - and yet schools are crying out for help now.

The move to a standardised, digital ISP is a positive step, but there will undoubtedly be concerns over the possibility that schools hold legal responsibility for delivering as opposed to the local authority. The White Paper needs to be read with the 'SEND reform: putting children and young people first'.

The ambition for children to be supported in their local area is, I believe, a good one but only if the infrastructure, training, staff and associated professionals are available.

Helen Marriott, Specialist Inclusion Teacher, Head of Inclusion

The SEND Reform appears to mark a philosophical move towards collectivism where there is an emphasis on working together for 'our children', sharing responsibility across schools to support children and families, shifting away from adversarial, individual-focused systems. There is a lot of information to digest in the SEND Reform Paper and as they say...the 'devil is in the detail' and this is an example of where the details matter!

The Experts at Hand proposals offer opportunities for considered, needs-led multi-disciplinary services to be developed to 'wrap around' schools or groups of schools to provide a 'core offer'. Educational Psychology Services, Specialist Teachers and Speech and Language Therapists are well placed to provide this support. However, a challenge for most local authorities and schools will be how to develop these models of support whilst also meeting the increasing numbers of EHCP requests that are predicted to continue to rise in the coming years.

I feel optimistic about these forthcoming changes and there are many opportunities for Educational Psychologists to support schools, MATs and LAs with system-level change, in addition to working at every layer (universal, targeted and targeted+) to support children and families. As an EP Service we are currently interrogating the proposed 5 Areas of Development (a reframing of the current 4 categories of need) to reflect on whether this captures all information, if there are any unintended consequences of framing development in this way, and how our systems and services need to adapt to reflect these changes. I welcome a move away from diagnostic labels driving primary areas of need to providing evidence-informed information for teachers on child development and factors that impact on learning.

We live and breathe the SEND system and understand why change is necessary. We also understand that change and uncertainty can feel daunting, so it is no surprise there has been a wide spectrum of emotional, ethical and practical reactions from schools, families, and other professionals. I remain optimistic about the future and look forward to opportunities to contribute to this programme of change.

Dr Sarah McIntosh, Principal Educational Psychologist

The white paper's focus on early identification and access to specialist expertise is encouraging, particularly given the increasing complexity of need in schools. However, alongside assessment and intervention frameworks, there must also be recognition of the relational and emotional factors that shape how children engage with learning.

Many pupils with SEND, particularly those with social communication needs, developmental trauma or anxiety, benefit from therapeutic approaches that support emotional regulation, relationship building and self-expression. Creative arts therapies provide a developmentally appropriate way for children to process experiences, build trust with adults and develop the internal resources needed to participate in learning.

For reforms such as Individual Support Plans to be effective, schools will need access to a broad range of specialist support that addresses not only academic barriers but also the emotional and relational needs that often underpin them.

[Creative Psychotherapy in Education Team](#)

3. School Development and Collaboration

The white paper positions collaboration as the essential foundation of a high-performing, inclusive school system, making it clear that collective effort is central to ensuring every child can achieve and thrive. There is an expectation that all schools will join school trusts, including new local authority or area-based trusts that are designed to be rooted in their communities and responsive to local needs, so that improvement becomes a shared responsibility rather than an isolated endeavour. Trusts are expected to act as collaborative structures that drive school improvement, share expertise, and innovate for the benefit of all children, not just those in individual schools.

The paper also emphasises the importance of strong partnerships with local services, encouraging schools to work closely with health, local government, and community organisations to identify and meet children's needs early, ensuring that barriers to learning are addressed before they escalate. Local authorities will have clearer, more defined roles across all schools in their area, helping to provide coherent support, strong oversight, and joined up services that wrap around families. By embedding collaboration at every level of the system, the white paper aims to create an environment where expertise is shared, support is coordinated, and every child, regardless of background or need, can flourish.

Expert Insight

Collaboration, when genuine, can break down ineffective insularity and build collective capacity. Trust-based systems and formalised networks can amplify the impact of effective teaching and leadership. The stress on shared standards, collaborative problem-solving and pooled expertise reflects models of professional learning communities that are backed by evidence in improving school outcomes.

However, genuine collaboration requires shared time, resources, and relationships where educators can be open and honest.

Due to operational demands, unless collaboration is resourced and financed, it risks becoming another admin task, rather than a vehicle for genuine improvement. If done well, however, bespoke collaboration could be transformative.

Jo Gray, Head of Educational Development

The white paper's emphasis on collaboration across services is particularly significant for supporting children with complex needs. Schools cannot address the full range of emotional, social and developmental challenges that children bring into the classroom in isolation.

Creative arts therapists often work alongside teachers, pastoral teams, educational psychologists and other specialists to help schools understand behaviour through a relational and trauma-informed lens. This multidisciplinary collaboration supports staff to reflect on the emotional dynamics within classrooms, strengthens relationships between adults and pupils, and helps develop consistent approaches across the wider system.

When collaboration includes space for reflective practice and professional dialogue, schools are better able to respond thoughtfully to complex behaviour and maintain inclusive environments where both staff and pupils can thrive.

Creative Psychotherapy in Education Team

4. Attendance and Behaviour

The white paper underlines that children can only achieve and thrive when they attend school regularly and learn in calm, safe, and supportive classrooms. Yet, it acknowledges that absence and misbehaviour remain too high despite recent improvements. In light of this, schools are encouraged to foster a sense of belonging for every child, which requires staff to understand pupils' lived experiences and the factors that shape their behaviour. Moreover, schools are expected to identify and address the root causes of individual behaviours, including where these are linked to a child's special educational needs or disabilities, so that responses are supportive rather than punitive.

Rebuilding what it calls the "social contract" around attendance and engagement is central to this vision, with a national ambition to secure the fastest improvement in attendance in a decade and reach over 94% attendance by 2028/29. By 2029, every school will be expected to monitor pupils' sense of belonging and engagement, recognising that emotional connection to school is a key driver of both attendance and achievement. Families are also positioned as essential partners, with schools required to set clear expectations for communication and provide parents with the tools they need to support learning at home. Through this combined focus on safety, belonging, early intervention, and strong partnerships, the white paper outlines a system designed to ensure that every child has the stability, support, and connection required to attend and engage with school effectively.

Expert Insight

As a Speech and Language Therapist it is always great to hear people talking about behaviour as a form of communication and unmet need. These need to be considered separately. Unfortunately, pupils who display outwardly disruptive behaviours are often misdiagnosed, and the underlying Speech, Language and

Communication Need (SLCN) is missed. UK studies estimate that 60% of the youth offending population has SLCN (Gregory and Bryan, 2011), six times that of the general population (Norbury et al, 2016).

In addition to this there are an estimated 2- 3 pupils in each class with undiagnosed Developmental Language Disorder. These pupils are often quiet and have learnt behaviours to 'get by' whilst the gap in learning to their peers widens. Schools need support to effectively screen and identify these pupils and have access to Speech and Language Therapists to support those pupils who need it.

Helen Marriott, Speech and Language Therapist, Head of Inclusion

The commitment to improving attendance rates by 1.3 percentage points compared to 2023/24, to over 94% is welcomed, along with support offered to schools through the RISE Attendance and Behaviour Hubs. However, further information is needed on what support schools will be able to access from these Hubs, and how the Hub schools will increase their capacity to be able to provide this level of intervention to schools in significant need.

The individual AI reports will outline a personalised minimum annual improvement target for overall attendance set on the basis of the performance of similar schools. Whilst this information may be helpful to some extent, the comparison data will be very difficult to effectively analyse without a true picture of demographic, staffing structure and the impact of support offered to schools who are in a MAT.

Throughout the white paper there is reference to support from multi-agency partners in supporting school attendance, which at present is a huge barrier. Historically, schools' concerns on educational neglect have not always been validated by social care, and support from health services has been limited. The commitment to strengthen these partnerships to positively influence attendance is a step in the right direction.

Jess Lane, Head of Service for School Attendance & Safeguarding

The recognition that behaviour and attendance must be understood through the lens of children's experiences is an important step forward. Increasingly, schools are recognising that persistent absence and emotionally based school avoidance are often linked to anxiety, trauma, neurodiversity or unmet emotional needs.

Children are far more likely to attend and engage with school when they feel safe, understood and connected to the adults around them. Therapeutic and relational approaches can help rebuild this sense of safety by supporting children to regulate emotions, process experiences and gradually re-engage with learning environments.

Creative arts therapies provide a space where children who may struggle to articulate their feelings verbally can communicate through play, imagery, story and movement. These approaches often help children rebuild confidence and trust in school relationships, creating the conditions that make re-engagement with learning possible.

Jeni Goodfellow-Pemsel, Head of Creative Psychotherapy in Education

5. 16-19 Pathways and Qualifications

The paper sets out a vision for a coherent post 16 system, balancing academic and technical routes. It reiterates that A Levels are a strong academic pathway but that these are not a 'best fit' for all pupils. Therefore, other avenues of study should be strengthened and promoted. These include T Levels for pupils following a technical route as well as improving the progression from Level 2 to Level 3. There is also an expectation that all students will study English and maths up to the age of 18. The aim of this is to ensure that every young person leaves education ready for work or further study.

Expert Insight

Every pupil brings a different set of strengths, needs, ambitions, and learning preferences, so schools must move away from trying to fit all learners into the same "box" and instead create environments that adapt to the individual. Academic ability is only one part of a pupil's profile; factors such as emotional regulation, social communication, executive functioning, sensory needs, and mental health all shape how a young person engages with learning. By identifying these non-academic needs early, schools can use reasonable adjustments and adaptive teaching to remove barriers while maintaining high expectations for every learner.

At the same time, a deeper understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma is essential, as many pupils carry the impact of early adversity into the classroom. Trauma-informed practice helps staff interpret behaviour through a lens of empathy and curiosity, creating safe, predictable environments where pupils feel secure enough to learn. When schools combine inclusive teaching with trauma aware approaches, they are better equipped to support all pupils - including those with SEND - to access ambitious pathways and achieve meaningful outcomes.

Helen Marriott, Specialist Inclusion Teacher, Head of Inclusion

As the white paper seeks to strengthen pathways into adulthood, it is important to recognise that many young people's ability to access academic or vocational routes is shaped by their emotional wellbeing and sense of identity.

Adolescence is a period of significant psychological development, and for some young people unresolved trauma, anxiety or social difficulties can become barriers to participation in education or training. Providing spaces within education where young people can explore identity, relationships and aspirations in supportive ways can be a powerful contributor to long-term engagement and successful transitions into adulthood.

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6. Workforce and System Reform

The white paper sets out an ambitious plan to strengthen the school system by ensuring that all state schools join multi-academy trusts, either through established trusts or local area partnerships, with the aim of creating greater consistency, shared expertise, and stronger accountability across the sector. This includes the introduction of trust quality descriptors, clearer expectations for school improvement, and a stronger focus on inclusion, attendance, behaviour, and pupil outcomes, with new national standards defining what “good” SEND provision should look like.

Alongside structural reform, there is significant emphasis on investing in the workforce and recognising staff as the system’s most important asset. Key measures include a teacher retention programme from Autumn 2026, strengthened recruitment efforts, and a £200 million investment to support the rollout of a new Teacher Training Entitlement that guarantees career-long professional development. The launch of the new Support Staff Negotiating Body reflects a commitment to improving conditions and recognition for the wider workforce, while the recruitment of 6,500 additional expert teachers aims to increase capacity across schools. Leadership development is also prioritised, with new mentoring and coaching offers designed to support headteacher retention, wellbeing, and effectiveness, particularly in disadvantaged areas.

Schools are further encouraged to embrace digital innovation, including the safe use of AI tools to reduce workload and the adoption of a national “data spine” to improve the use of data and insights. Together, these reforms aim to create a more coherent and consistent education system that is capable of delivering high-quality provision for all pupils, including those with SEND.

Expert Insight

The government states they intend to “remove the ceiling” on Teacher’s Pay, but I would question how this will be supported when schools are already facing significant budget constraints. Funding would need to be provided.

It is promising to see encouragement for school leaders to embrace more flexible working opportunities, the sector is significantly behind the times with this in comparison to others. Similarly, the pledge to improve and fund better maternity pay for all staff to improve retention of females in leadership posts is another welcome change.

Notably, the paper pledges to recruit 6,500 new teachers in secondary, special and FE schools. This is three times the amount of teachers recruited in 2024/2025 so is an ambitious pledge. However, there is no specific delivery plan other than during the term of this current parliament. The government has said it is quality over pace so this may not be achieved for some years. Again, funding will be needed. In the meantime, school staffing shortages continue to be a big pressure that school leaders face daily.

Jade Walwyn, Head of HR and People

The introduction of the School Support Staff Negotiating Body represents a significant change to the national framework governing pay, terms and career development for support staff in schools. The School Finance Teams will need to develop long-term workforce financial modelling to help leaders plan sustainable staffing structures.

They will need support to understand and prepare for these changes by providing financial modelling, workforce planning advice and guidance on budget implications. Training and financial assurance will be essential to help schools plan for potential changes to pay structures and staffing costs while maintaining sustainable budgets and supporting workforce stability.

Petra Pratt, Head of School Finance

Schools will need support to guide them through the complex process of joining a multi-academy trust, but it is important to consider this will be impacted by the DfE and local authority resources available. The previous DfE conversion grant is no longer available, which puts increased financial pressures on schools to fund this process. As there is no specific timescale, there will continue to be significant resistance from schools to join already established trusts. Governors will need professional support, training, advice and guidance as they embark on academy governance.

Rob Merino, Head of Governance and Compliance

7. Staff Development

Professional development is highlighted as a critical lever for strengthening teaching quality and supporting a more inclusive education system. The paper foregrounds the “professionalisation and spread of evidence-based teaching” as a key driver of sustained improvement in schools, underscoring the need for ongoing staff development aligned with emerging national reforms.

Alongside this, its wider workforce proposals, including the recruitment of thousands more teachers and expansion of specialist support, signal a systemic commitment to equipping educators with the skills, knowledge and collaborative structures required to meet diverse learner needs and deliver a broader, more ambitious curriculum for all children.

Expert Insight

Elevating CPD and coaching to system-level priorities is one of the strongest aspects of the policy. High-quality learning for educators, not just initial teacher training, is a proven method for improving classroom practice and student outcomes. Many countries take this approach with significant positive impact. Offering structured, evidence-informed development opportunities across a career trajectory (from early career through to headship) addresses a known gap in the current system.

I particularly value the explicit inclusion of leadership coaching and mentoring, recognising that leadership quality underpins school culture, staff development and pupil achievement. We, at One Education, know that a systematic coaching offer could help cultivate deeper professional leadership standards across the profession and would be incredible to see alongside the collaborative approach.

That said, the success of CPD depends critically on quality, relevance, and delivery. Simply increasing CPD funding or expanding entitlement is not enough. We need to ensure it is evidence-informed and context-relevant (responsive to local school needs), and delivered in ways that enable reflection and practice change, not just compliance. Protected in school time, so it does not add to workload without impact, planned for over time, and - to ensure the biggest impact - it must be valued as a profession and not seen as an add on.

Jo Gray, Head of Educational Development

The white paper includes some welcome interventions for headteachers such as coaching, mentoring and an investment of £1m additional funding for headteacher wellbeing support which will reach 2,500 Headteachers. The wellbeing of the overall workforce is top down and more support for headteachers is definitely needed. However, this shouldn't just be focussed on reactive wellbeing interventions such as therapy support, headteachers would benefit from workforce planning, culture and workload management training/CPD.

There are also plans to pilot a new retention incentive payment for headteachers to stay in areas where they are needed most starting from 2027. Whilst this will help schools in the more challenging areas retain their headteachers, this could inadvertently have a negative impact on retention in less challenging areas.

Jade Walwyn, Head of HR & People

The white paper's commitment to strengthening professional development is particularly important as the complexity of children's needs continues to grow. Alongside subject knowledge and pedagogical skills, educators increasingly need opportunities to develop understanding of trauma, attachment, emotional regulation and the relational dynamics that influence behaviour in classrooms.

Reflective practice and creative supervision can play a valuable role in supporting staff wellbeing and professional growth. These spaces allow educators to reflect on challenging situations, develop professional curiosity and build confidence in responding to pupils whose behaviour may reflect distress rather than defiance. When staff feel supported and able to think reflectively about their work, they are better equipped to maintain compassionate authority, strong relationships and inclusive learning environments.

Creative Psychotherapy in Education Team

8. Digital and AI in Education

The white paper recognises the rapidly expanding role of technology and AI in teaching, learning, and assessment. It emphasises how digital innovation can reduce teacher workload, improve staff wellbeing, and free up time for high-quality interactions that make the greatest difference to pupil progress. AI enabled tools also offer opportunities to personalise learning more effectively, allowing pupils to access content at the right pace, level, and format for their individual needs, while improved assessment and feedback systems can help teachers identify gaps earlier and tailor support more precisely.

However, the paper stresses that the successful use of technology must be underpinned by careful implementation, equitable access, and robust safeguarding to ensure that no child is disadvantaged by

digital developments. By balancing innovation with responsibility, the aim is to create a system where technology enhances teaching, strengthens inclusion, and raises the standard of achievement for every learner.

Expert Insight

It's encouraging to see a forward-thinking recognition of how AI can not only reduce teacher workload but also reshape how we think about teaching and learning. The paper outlines areas in which AI can be used within school particularly to narrow the gap in terms of SEND and disadvantage. Importantly, a 'pedagogy first' mindset is crucial when considering which AI tools to use with learners. The paper's references to metacognition are significant as we must ensure that AI use does not dilute the capacity to learn and think deeply.

Notably, the Chartered College of Teaching is currently developing an 'EdTech Check' to support the evaluation of AI products and ensure the safe use of technology in schools. Ultimately, the success of AI in education will depend not on the sophistication of the technology itself, but on the professional judgement of educators. Used thoughtfully, AI has the potential to enhance inclusion, personalise learning and free teachers to focus on high-value interactions with pupils. However, this will only be realised if investment in digital tools is matched by investment in teacher understanding, ethical guidance and ongoing professional dialogue about what high-quality learning truly looks like in an evolving digital landscape.

Liz Dwarampudi, Education Consultant

9. Wellbeing

The white paper places wellbeing at the heart of a system designed to ensure that every child can achieve and thrive, recognising that emotional safety, mental health, and a sense of belonging are essential foundations for learning. It emphasises the need for schools, trusts, and local partners to work together to create environments where children feel supported, understood, and able to engage positively with their education. This includes strengthening early identification of wellbeing needs, improving access to mental health support, and ensuring that pastoral care is integrated into whole school practice rather than treated as an add-on.

Staff wellbeing is also prioritised, acknowledging that teachers who feel valued, supported, and equipped are better able to create the calm, nurturing classrooms in which children flourish. By embedding wellbeing into leadership, curriculum, behaviour approaches, and multiagency collaboration, the white paper sets out a vision for a school system where all learners can benefit from emotional stability, support, and opportunity.

Expert Insight

We have seen a significant increase in staff being assaulted/injured by pupils and the impact that this has on both staff morale, retention and consistency of provision. It is good to see plans to address this through a consistent reporting channel alongside more training opportunities for all staff to ensure they are equipped to best support the children with the highest need.

This doesn't however address the significant problem schools face daily with staff attendance and cover when staff are absent due to a work-related injury. All staff and children should be able to thrive in an environment without fear.

Jade Walwyn, Head of HR and People

The white paper rightly positions wellbeing as foundational to children's learning and development. Emotional safety, strong relationships and a sense of belonging are key protective factors that enable children to engage with education and build resilience.

Creative arts therapies support wellbeing by offering children and young people developmentally appropriate ways to explore emotions, express themselves and make sense of their experiences. Therapeutic approaches can also support staff teams through reflective practice and supervision, helping educators sustain the emotional demands of their roles and maintain supportive relationships with the children they work with.

Jeni Goodfellow-Pemsel, Head of Creative Psychotherapy in Education

What's next?

Overall, the white paper sets out an ambitious vision for education, aiming to create a system where high standards and inclusive practice go hand in hand. The paper outlines a long-term, phased programme of reform, as many proposals will require further consultation, detailed implementation planning, and, in many cases, legislative change before they can be put into practice.

For now, schools and trusts should continue the important work already underway to support their pupils, families, and communities. Early and correct identification remains central to this along with training for all staff to support all pupils in the classroom and Specialist support for those that need it. The white paper emphasises that forthcoming change will be gradual, evidence-led, and shaped through collaboration between schools, trusts, local authorities, and the wider sector.

A consultation is currently open on the proposed SEND reforms. The insight and experience offered by the sector will be instrumental in influencing what happens next. You can submit evidence to the consultation [here](#).

As the policy landscape continues to evolve, schools, trusts and local authorities will all play an important role in shaping how these proposals will translate into practice. During this time, One Education will continue to share our thoughts, reflections, and practical guidance to help you navigate the changes ahead.

Drawing on our extensive experience and sector expertise, One Education will be here to support schools, trusts and other organisations in implementing these reforms as they come into effect, always with a focus on delivering the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

If there is anything that we can help you with, please be in touch.