

# Department for Education and Skills: Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners

**Presented to Parliament by  
the Secretary of State for Education and Skills  
by Command of Her Majesty**

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## **Executive Summary**

Education and childcare are improving

Children and all those who learn are our future. That is why this Government has invested in extra nurseries and childcare places, teachers and schools, books and computers and colleges and universities.

This investment has gone hand in hand with reform and together they are producing results. Fewer children are born into poverty. More children at risk are getting better help and protection.

Our education system is now among the best in the world. Our ten-year olds are the third best readers in the world. There are many more good or excellent schools for parents to choose from, with specialist and inner city schools improving fast. The standard of teaching has never been higher. Many schools now have buildings that are a source of pride not shame.

A record number of students are now going to university. More adults now learn a new skill at work.

**But we still face major challenges**

We have opened up opportunity at every stage of life. But we have not yet broken the link between

social class and achievement. No society can afford to waste the talent of its children and citizens. So major challenges at each key phase of life remain:

- 1 **Under 5s** – disadvantage starts early in life and children who get a poor start tend to fall further behind as they go through the education system. And despite the improvements we are still not providing enough childcare places in a flexible way that meets parents' needs.
- 1 **School age years** – there are still too few excellent secondary schools for parents and pupils. While standards have risen, they are not yet high enough for all. Parents and teachers worry about truancy and bad behaviour.
- 1 **14-19 year olds** – too many pupils drift, become disenchanted with school or get into trouble and drop out at 16. Vocational learning is still seen as second best. And pupils leave school insufficiently prepared for the world of work.
- 1 **The world of work** – the UK lags behind other countries in terms of output and skills. A large number of adults lack vital skills in literacy and numeracy. And too often the training system does not give employers the sort of courses and qualifications that suit their business.

Underlying these challenges are more general problems. Children's services and education have been too compartmentalised. Services have not been joined up. Funding has been too fragmented. Children and learners have not had their needs addressed in a way that fits their specific needs. And as various governments have, over the years, tried to make improvements, too many of the changes have been organised in a top down way. The result has been to squeeze innovation and the entrepreneurial flair of good head teachers, nursery managers and college principals out of the system.

## So we have to sustain progress, with new and more radical reforms

Our aim is to secure world-class standards for the great majority of our citizens, particularly in our schools. We do not accept the fatalist outdated argument that more means worse or that year on year improvements mean standards are falling.

Five key principles of reform will underpin our drive for a step change in children's services, education and training:

- 1 **Greater personalisation and choice**, with the wishes and needs of children, parents and learners centre-stage.
- 1 **Opening up services** to new and different providers and ways of delivering services.
- 1 **Freedom and independence** for frontline headteachers, governors and managers with clear simple accountabilities and more secure streamlined funding arrangements.
- 1 **A major commitment to staff development** with high quality support and training to improve assessment, care and teaching.
- 1 **Partnerships** with parents, employers, volunteers and voluntary organisations to maximise the life chances of children, young people and adults.

For the **early years**, our **offer** to children and parents is:

- 1 All parents able to get local one-stop support through Children's Centres that will provide childcare, education, health, employment and parenting support
- 1 From birth to two, more opportunities and support for parents to stay at home with their children if they want to
- 1 A flexible system of 'educare', that joins up education and childcare and provides 12½ hours free support per week for three and 4 year olds before they go to school, with more choice for parents about when they use it

- 1 The development of dawn-to-dusk schools, with breakfast childcare and after-school clubs to help parents juggle their busy lives
- 1 Children's Trusts bringing together all those who provide services for children and families in each local area, and making sure children at risk get proper care, education and protection

Once children reach **primary school**, our **offer** to children and parents is:

- 1 Every child making the best possible progress in reading, writing and maths, with high-quality teachers and support staff in the classroom giving children more tailored learning
- 1 A wider school curriculum and the choice for every child to learn a foreign language, play music and take part in competitive sport
- 1 A closer relationship between parents and schools, with better information through a new 'school profile' and more family learning
- 1 More primary schools working together in networks, supporting each other and challenging failure; and the best heads helping to improve the rest; and poor schools turned around quickly or closed

In **secondary education**, our central purpose for every pupil over the next five years is to raise the quality of education, teaching and learning, and to widen the range of real choices which are available. We will build on the achievements of the last seven years, to increase freedoms and independence; to accelerate the pace of reform in teaching and learning; and to extend choice and flexibility in the curriculum. Underpinning each of these is sustained and rising investment in schools.

At the heart of our reforms is the development of independent specialist schools in place of the traditional comprehensive – a decisive system-wide advance. We are not creating a new category of schools – rather, giving more independence to all schools within a specialist system.

But we will never return to a system based on selection of the few and rejection of the many; we will not abandon intervention in failing schools; and we will not cast aside our ambitious targets for schools to keep on improving. Independence will be within a framework of fair admissions, full accountability and strong partnerships that drive improvement.

We will put in place eight key reforms:

**1. Guaranteed three-year budgets for every school from 2006, geared to pupil numbers, with every school also guaranteed a minimum per pupil increase each year.** A dedicated Schools Budget, guaranteed by national Government and delivered through Local Authorities, will give headteachers and governors unprecedented financial security and confidence, and the ability to plan for the future.

**2. Universal specialist schools – and better specialist schools.** Every school will be able to become a specialist school with a mission to build a centre of curriculum excellence. Specialist schools will be able to take on a second specialism to develop their mission further. High-performing specialist schools will have the chance to become training schools or leaders of partnerships; those without sixth forms will have new opportunities to develop sixth form provision.

**3. Freedom for all secondary schools to own their land and buildings, manage their assets, employ their staff, improve their governing bodies, and forge partnerships with outside sponsors and educational foundations.** At present one in three schools enjoys some or most of these powers, including aided schools and 'foundation' schools. In future all schools – except those which are failing – will have a right to take on all these powers by a simple vote of their governing body, following a brief period of consultation. A strict national requirement for fair admissions will remain; and we will not allow any extension of selection by ability, which denies parents the right to choose.

**4. More places in popular schools.** There is no 'surplus places rule'. All successful and popular schools may propose to expand. We have introduced dedicated capital funding to encourage this, and

rules to allow it in all but exceptional circumstances. We will introduce a fast-track to expansion so there are more places in popular schools. We will mandate competitions for new schools which will enable parents' groups and others to promote schools, including smaller schools. This will enable successful schools to establish and manage entirely new schools and federations.

**5. A 'new relationship with schools' to cut the red tape involved in accountability, without cutting schools adrift.** Inspection, accountability and intervention to tackle failure are essential for independence to thrive properly. But they need to be of high quality and involve minimal bureaucracy. We will halve the existing inspection burden on schools, without scrapping the expectation that schools must constantly improve. We will replace the existing system of local authority 'link advisers' with a single annual review carried out by a 'school improvement partner', usually a serving headteacher from a successful school. In cases of failure, intervention will follow as necessary. High-performing schools will only undergo the formal review once every three years.

**6. 200 academies by 2010 – and more new schools.** We will provide for 200 independently managed academies to be open or in the pipeline by 2010 in areas with inadequate existing secondary schools. Some will replace under-performing schools; others will be entirely new, particularly in London where there is a demand for new school places. We expect there to be around 60 new academies in London by 2010.

**7. Every secondary school to be refurbished or rebuilt to a modern standard over the next 10 to 15 years.** The 'Building Schools for the Future' programme, made possible by a sevenfold increase in the schools capital budget since 1997, will give every school the buildings, facilities and information technology it needs to succeed. It will also drive reform in each locality, including the expansion of popular schools, the closure of failing schools, and the establishment of new schools and sixth forms.

**8. 'Foundation partnerships'** to enable schools to group together to raise standards and to work together to take on wider responsibilities – in areas such as provision for special educational needs or hard-to-place pupils.

This new system of independent specialist schools will be underpinned by a new role for Local Authorities, as champions of parents and pupils, acting as strategic leaders of education in their area.

This reshaped system will drive up quality and choice. But as well as being able to go to a strong independent specialist school, we must make sure that within their school, every pupil has the personalised teaching they need to succeed. Our **offer** to every **secondary** pupil is:

- 1 Excellent teaching based on real knowledge of individual pupils, helping all achieve their potential
- 1 A broad and rich curriculum with more choice and a wider set of out-of-hours opportunities – including much higher levels of sporting activity, as well as clubs, societies and residential activities
- 1 Innovative use of leading-edge technology, with state-of-the art facilities for every pupil and teacher
- 1 Good discipline, with heads having powers to deal with trouble-makers, and a commitment to traditional values of respect and authority
- 1 A culture of regular attendance in every school, supporting learning but also cutting down crime and anti-social behaviour
- 1 Schools at the heart of their communities, working closely with parents to support children

When they get to **14**, our **offer** to pupils, parents and employers is:

- 1 A much wider choice of what and where to study, with high standards in every subject and new sixth forms and sixth form colleges where they are needed

- 1 Demanding courses for the most able pupils, whether they take academic or vocational options, and Young Apprenticeships that start at 14
- 1 Closer link between schools and employers, so vocational learning means something in the world of work
- 1 Extra support for young people leaving care
- 1 High-quality advice and guidance to help young people make good decisions, and a wide range of things to do and places to go for young people outside school or college

Our **skills** gap is narrowing but it is still much wider than many other countries. So our **offer** to individuals and employers is:

- 1 High quality courses for everyone, and every adult able to get the skills they need for good jobs
- 1 Free tuition for people learning basic skills, and free tuition and new Adult Learning Grants for adults going for Level 2 qualifications (the equivalent of 5 good GCSEs)
- 1 Employers in the driving seat, with colleges and training providers who know how to help business and respond to their needs
- 1 High-quality Further Education, with no funding for poor provision

And for those people who go on to **university**, our **offer** to them and to employers is:

- 1 Access to university for anyone with the potential to benefit
- 1 Grants for students that need them, an end to up-front fees, and a fair way for graduates to contribute to the cost of their course
- 1 High-quality courses and teaching, with more flexible opportunities to study
- 1 Better vocational Foundation Degrees designed with and for employers
- 1 World-class research that keeps us as a leading-edge nation
- 1 Good engagement between employers and higher education to boost innovation and skills

This programme is backed by a big increase in resources. Spending on education in England will rise to £58 billion by 2008. At the same time, we will make sure that the money is being spent well. We will improve productivity and slim down the Department for Education and Skills, reducing our central staff by over 1400 – more than 30 per cent – and becoming more strategic about the way we lead the system.

This is an ambitious strategy for education, skills and children's services. It seeks not only to address our historic weaknesses, but also to improve everything we do. It puts a clear focus on children, learners, parents and employers, not just in setting out what we want to offer, but in designing ways of doing it that promote personalisation and choice.