

Further plans to level up opportunities for every child

New measures to make sure children are getting the quality of education they deserve are being announced today, as the government continues its drive to level up opportunities for every child and family across the country.

The government has today (Thursday 03 February) confirmed it will go ahead with the creation of a register for children not in school at the earliest available legislative opportunity, alongside plans to give schools greater support on behaviour and rebuild hundreds more school buildings across the country.

The vast majority of home education is already done well, but particularly in light of the pandemic contributing to a rise in children not being educated in school, the government will support local authorities to make sure they know where every child is being educated, that it is of the right quality, and that support is offered to home educating families.

The government is also providing greater support on behaviour for headteachers to create calm, orderly, safe and supportive environments for children and young people to thrive in. A consultation on revised guidance will open today to give headteachers clearer support on maintaining that positive culture, and advice on responding to behaviour incidents online.

The flagship School Rebuilding Programme, announced by the Prime Minister in 2020 and with £2bn to be invested in 100 rebuilds already, is also entering its most intensive phase. Applications are being invited for the first time for the selection of up to 300 of the programme's 500 total projects this decade, transforming the lives of hundreds of thousands of students across the country, providing facilities fit for the future of education.

Today's package is the latest in a string of announcements this week to help level up across the country, following the publication of the Government's Levelling Up White Paper, including plans for targeted education support in 55 lower performing areas such as Bolton, Luton and Rochdale.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

Education is at the heart of this government's plans to level up, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to succeed no matter where they grow up or what their background.

While the majority of children already learn in a calm and well-maintained classroom, and some learn at home with dedicated parents, there are areas across the country where high standards are not being met.

As Education Secretary, it is my priority to make sure every child

gets the start in life they deserve, which is why I'm announcing clearer guidance to help every school boost behaviour and new legislation to create the first local authority register for children not in school. Not only this, but our school rebuilding programme will ensure pupils can learn in state of the art facilities, giving them the best opportunity to thrive.

The revised behaviour guidance also makes clear that heads are best placed to make decisions on whether mobile phones should be in classrooms, considering the needs of their pupils. There will also be more consistent guidance to support headteachers with decisions about exclusions, making sure they are used in a proportionate and fair way.

Action to increase attendance is already underway via the Department's alliance of education leaders, including the Children's Commissioner, to make sure no child is lost from the system.

The new duty on local authorities to maintain a register of children not in school will help them spot and support young people in the rare cases they may be receiving an unsuitable education, for example at an unregistered school.

Children's Commissioner Rachel D'Souza said:

The register of children not in school is vital in making sure that we are able to keep children safe and engaged, wherever they are learning. The reason I've pressed for the roll-out of a national register is that it is all about ensuring children are safe, that they get the best education they can, helping to unlock doors to their future, and that those dedicated parents who choose to educate their children at home feel supported in doing so.

What hundreds of thousands of children have told me is that they love school and are so pleased to be back in the classroom. Nothing made them value school more than the face-to-face education they'd missed so much during lockdown – they are happy to be back with their friends and teachers.

There are however too many children who, for many reasons, have not come back to school or are not attending consistently and regularly. All of us working with children need to redouble our efforts to get all children back in the classroom – we should all know where all our children are, that they are safe, and getting the best education and support we can offer.

Following a public consultation on how the Department will prioritise schools for the School Rebuilding Programme, up to 300 schools, rather than the usual 50, will be selected for participation in the programme later this year. This will give schools and families assurances that they have been prioritised for future investment. The Programme will continue to start delivery on 50 new

projects each year, with 100 already in progress from selection rounds from last year.

For the first time in the Programme, the bodies responsible for running schools such as local authorities and academy trusts will be able to provide additional evidence of their buildings' condition need, making sure the selection harnesses local knowledge, helping level up where the need is greatest across the country. The application process has been made as simple as possible and full guidance has been published today on making a quality application.

All projects in the School Rebuilding Programme are built to the latest construction standards, resilient to climate risks, net-zero in operation, and include modern facilities to support a world-class education from classrooms and science labs, to sports halls and dining rooms.