

New Schools Bill to boost education standards across the country

The Schools Bill is set to deliver on the government's mission to raise standards across the country, increasing attendance and improve safeguarding for children wherever they are educated.

Education remains at the forefront of the government's agenda because by ensuring every child receives an excellent standard of teaching in a high-performing setting, they will be given the opportunity to fulfil their future potential and secure the jobs needed to support our economy.

The bill, published today (Thursday 12 May), will pave the way for all schools to join a strong multi-academy trust. It provides the framework for a new, legally enforceable set of standards for academy trusts, replacing disparate standards agreed with each trust at the point it was created – so that parents will know what they can expect for their children. It introduces a new legal tool for local authorities to request some or all of their schools join a strong academy trust, in addition to the existing powers that individual school governing boards hold.

It includes new powers for Ofsted to gather evidence and act against schools operating illegally, and removes loopholes that allowed some settings not to register as a school despite having children attend during most or all of the school week.

Subject to the passage of the bill, inspectors will gain a new power to 'search' for evidence of suspected criminal activity in relation to the rare cases of illegally operating schools, removing another loophole where evidence could be hidden in locked cabinets or password protected computers, out of inspectors' legal reach.

This bill follows the plans set out in the Schools White Paper, including a pledge to parents that if their child falls behind in English or maths they will receive tailored support to get back on track, and the ambition for 90% of children to leave primary school at the expected standard in reading, writing and maths by 2030. This will mean that every child no matter where they live are given the same opportunities to succeed.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

My mission is clear; I want to make sure every single child across our country has access to an excellent education, supporting them to reach the full height of their potential.

Between the strengthened safeguarding measures and greater accountability in our new Schools Bill, and our Schools White Paper ambitions to embed evidence, tutoring and excellent teacher training in the school system, I am confident we will achieve these

ambitions for every child.

Other stronger safeguards the bill sets out in relation to suspected independent school criminal activity include making it an offence for individuals to not provide information or assistance to Ofsted inspectors, in effect making sure Ofsted can gather witness statements to use in evidence.

Alongside this, reforms to expand the remit of the Teaching Regulation Agency will make sure unsuitable teachers are prohibited from the profession, regardless of whether they were currently teaching at the time of their misconduct.

Other safeguarding powers in the bill include a new legal requirement for local authorities to maintain registers of children not in school, helping make sure no child gets lost from the education system, as well as new requirements for schools, trusts and councils to work together to drive the highest possible levels of attendance in every corner of the country.

As all schools join multi-academy trusts, the new statutory academy standards will help make sure trusts themselves all remain strong, effective and able to command public confidence.

In the rare cases failures occur in trusts, there will a clear and consistent approach to dealing with them, as is currently the case for schools themselves.

The bill also encodes protections for grammar schools to retain their current status when joining multi-academy trusts, and for faith schools to similarly retain their existing freedoms.

This Bill also delivers on the government's commitment to move to a direct National Funding Formula, increasing fairness by making sure every school receives funding on the same basis, wherever it is in the country. This is all backed by huge government investment – core school funding will rise by £4 billion in 2022/23 compared with 2021/22, which represents a 7% increase per pupil. On top of this, £5 billion has been invested in the Government's ambitious education recovery programme, including in the National Tutoring Programme, offering high-quality catch-up tutoring for students who fell behind during the pandemic.

By giving every child a good education, it gives them the opportunity to thrive and secure the jobs needed to support our economy – and this is absolutely vital to the government's levelling up mission.

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