

Higher Standards, Better Schools For All

More choice for parents and pupils

A guide for parents – Summary

department for

education and skills

creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence

Summary

Our aim is to create a school system where every child receives an excellent education – whatever their background and wherever they live. Once the Government's plans are in place, you as a parent will get:

- more regular information from school on your child's progress and how you can support their learning at home;
- additional opportunities to express your views and work with your child's school;
- more personalised learning for all children, with extra help for your child if they need it;
- extra measures to help tackle poor behaviour in your child's school;
- more rapid turnaround if your child's school is failing;
- better information about choosing a school for your child;
- the chance to speak to independent advisers who can explain the choices available and help you decide which school best meets your child's needs;
- introductory sessions for you when your child starts primary and secondary school;
- improved home school agreements so you and your child's school are clearer on your responsibilities to each other and your child's education;
- a chance to tell your local authority about the type of school places you think your area needs, with an obligation on them to respond;
- an opportunity to complain directly to Ofsted if your concerns about school standards aren't being resolved satisfactorily by the school or local authority.

HIGHER STANDARDS, BETTER SCHOOLS FOR ALL

More choice for parents and pupils

Involvement with your child's learning and development

Being a parent is a big job, and as a parent, you'll already know that you are your child's most valuable teacher. What your child learns at home helps them become more confident with others, better behaved and keener to find out more about the world.

But your influence doesn't have to stop once your child is at school. Children whose parents take an active interest in their school education are more likely to be successful, both at school and in later life. Schools achieve most when they involve parents in their own children's education, and when parents are confident about how best to play their part – parental involvement is good for everyone.

In October 2005, the Government published the Schools White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools for all* which sets out its plans to radically improve the school system. You will be glad to know that these plans put you, and your children's needs, at the heart of the school system. This pamphlet explains how.

More regular information on your child's progress

We know it's important that you receive regular and high quality information about how and what your child is being taught, how they are progressing and where they need to develop. By law, schools must give you a written report once a year but many already do far more than this.

If they aren't already, we want your child's school to give you more information at more regular intervals. This will generally mean information each term on progress and targets on top of the annual report. This will help when talking to your child's teacher about how you can best support your child.

Schools listening to parents

Under the new plans, all school governing bodies will have to consult you as a parent before making decisions about things like travel arrangements, school meals or the curriculum. It will be up to your child's school to decide the best way to do this. Some schools already use regular questionnaires or workshops while others rely on face-to-face meetings with teachers. Schools which have set up Parent Councils have found this works well and we will encourage more to follow their lead.

As well as having a bigger voice in the day-to-day running of your child's school, we want you to help extend the role of the school, so they serve better your community. Schools will, in future, open earlier and later to provide new opportunities for their pupils but also parents and the whole community. Your input can help them ensure the right services and activities are provided.

Parent support advisers

Some schools already have people working in them who support children and families who want or need additional help. These advisers might arrange more support for your child in class, or put you in touch with a parenting group to get advice and support from other parents.

We plan to introduce a number of dedicated parent support advisers in schools. We'll look at examples of where schools are already using them effectively, and put different sorts of advisers in other schools to test out how these might work.

More personalised learning

Every child has different needs when it comes to their education and these needs will change over time. We want you to be confident that your child is receiving the support they need to fulfil their potential and that their education is tailored as much as possible to their individual needs.

Teachers will be given extra guidance, from experts, to help them more quickly identify if your child is falling behind, or is not being sufficiently stretched. This will ensure the right support can be given as early as possible.

There will be extra catch up lessons if your child is struggling, with one to one tuition where needed. If your child can do more, he or she will be given extra opportunities to step up their learning – both in and out of school hours. These will include the introduction of new, non-residential, summer schools.

There will also be more support if your child has particular difficulties – because, for example, English is not their first language or there are problems at home.

To support these changes, teachers will need to make regular accurate assessments which will add to the information you get from the school on your child's progress.

Ensuring good behaviour

The last thing you want is for your child's education to suffer because they are being bullied, playing truant or getting distracted by other children misbehaving.

We've worked hard with teachers to reduce disruption in schools. We've also made parents more responsible for their own children's behaviour, by introducing parenting contracts and orders. The latest Ofsted report showed that two-thirds of schools now have good behaviour, or better.

To build on this improvement, we're now introducing new measures to help ensure no child's education is undermined by bad behaviour, bullying or truancy:

- working with senior teachers to introduce a new set of guidelines that clearly state how and when teachers and support staff can discipline a child;
- making more use of parenting contracts to tackle bad behaviour – enabling them to be brought in before a child is excluded and allowing schools, and not just local authorities, to apply for them;
- providing further advice to parents, schools and pupils on how to reduce and respond to bullying, and encouraging teachers to punish bullying.
- ensuring parents face up to their duties when a child is excluded by making them responsible for their supervision for their first five days out of school with fines if they fail to do so;
- compelling parents to attend a meeting when an excluded child returns to school to discuss how problems can be resolved.

Turning around failing schools faster

We know that one of your biggest concerns is that there should be prompt action if your child's school isn't performing well. So we need to make sure local authorities react quickly and positively to address any shortcomings.

If your child's school is found to be failing its pupils, we will give the local authority a particular duty to seek your views, and a power for parents to appoint a champion to support parents and carers. The parent champion will consult you about the local authority's plans for the school and will keep you informed about the changes being made.

When a school has a very poor inspection, Ofsted may place it in what is called "special measures". This means there are serious educational issues to address, and the school will have just 12 months to demonstrate to inspectors it has made progress. If not, there is a strong possibility it will be closed. If the school's problems are not quite as serious, but still inadequate, it could get a "Notice to Improve" from Ofsted. In this case, it must have improved when re-inspected after 12 months, or it will go into special measures.

When a failing school is closed, it will probably be replaced by a Trust school, or an Academy – these are similar to Trust schools, but are independent and manage their own curriculum. While the change is taking place, arrangements will be made for pupils at the school to continue with their lessons, to make sure their education isn't disrupted.

Help with choosing a school

One of the most important decisions you will make as a parent is choosing the right school for your child. There is a great deal of information available already to help you make the right choice. But we are working with local authorities to continue improving it so this information is comprehensive and easy to understand. You can find out more about school admissions at **www.parentscentre.gov.uk/choosingaschool/**

For those of you who want additional personal help and advice, we will give you the chance to talk to new choice advisers. They will be completely independent of any particular school so can offer impartial advice on the choices available and which school might be best for your child. A national network of choice advisers will be in place by 2008.

Information when your child starts or moves school

Starting or moving school can be a testing time for you and your child. So we want to encourage schools to provide the information and support you need to help your child make a really successful start. From September 2006 we will be working with a number of schools to develop information sessions for new parents and share what we learn from these sessions with other schools.

Over time, all schools will offer these information sessions as well as other types of advice and support for parents, including:

- how you can helping your child do well – at home and at their new school;
- information on helplines, websites, and local groups so that you can get information and help more easily;
- access to parenting groups, offering the chance to discuss hints and tips for dealing with typical situations with experts and other parents;
- access to specialised support if you have particular worries about your child – for example if they are playing truant or getting in trouble at school.

Home School Agreements

The Government introduced Home School Agreements in 1999 to help you play a bigger role in your child's education. But while all schools must have HSAs, some are not using them very effectively. Through examples of schools that are making the most out of these agreements, we will show just how valuable a method of communication with you they can be. This is so that you as a parent can:

- have a clearer understanding of what the expectation is between you, your child and your child's school
- use the agreement as a line of communication with your school, particularly if problems arise.

You can get more out of these agreements if you discuss them with your child's school. It's a good idea to involve your child in these discussions, as it will give them a clearer idea of what they can expect from their own education.

Influencing the school system in your area

You will also have a bigger opportunity to influence your local school system, local authorities have overall responsibility for planning school places, based on the needs of parents and the wider community. We want to give you the chance to have a say about the sorts of schools that are available in your area. For example, if you feel there is a lack of specialist, faith or single-sex places in your area, you will be able to share your concerns with the local authority that will have to respond. If you are not satisfied with their reply, you can complain to a new Schools Commissioner.

Trust schools

The White Paper introduces a new type of school – Trust schools. These are government-funded schools that receive additional support from a charitable trust which could be formed by a local business, for example, or by a community group, university or educational charity. Members of the Trust lend their expertise to help govern the school, encouraging flexibility, innovation and helping to create an environment in which pupils have access to a wider range of opportunities.

The Trust will appoint Governors to oversee the running of the school, some of whom must be parents of the children there. You or any other parent can also be elected as Parent Governors by other parents. Where the Trust appoints a majority of the governors of a school, the school will also set up a Parent Council. This will include at least one parent from every year group, who will represent the views of all parents to the governing body.

The right to complain to Ofsted

Ofsted monitors standards in our schools by carrying regular inspections. We will give you the right as a parent to ask Ofsted to investigate if you feel standards are slipping across the school and neither the school or local authority are taking complaints seriously. Ofsted, where they feel it is necessary, will be able to investigate and, in the most extreme cases, carry out a snap inspection of the school.

More Information

If you'd like to know more about the Government's plans, you can find the Schools White Paper at **www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/schoolswhitepaper/**

