

Opportunity for all: Summary of the Schools White Paper

School Trusts are groups of schools that come together to form a single organisation. They are sometimes called Multi-Academy Trusts or MATs, but we prefer School Trusts because the word 'school' is universally understood and best describes what academies are.

On 28th March 2022, the Department for Education published Opportunity for all: Strong schools with great teachers for your child.

In it, the Government has set two national ambitions for 2030: 90% of primary school children to achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, and the percentage in the worst performing areas to increase by a third; and the national average GCSE grade in English and maths to increase from 4.5 to 5.

The White Paper contains four chapters; CST has summarised the major announcements from each chapter in this short read.

Chapter one: An excellent teacher for every child

- Introduction of a Leading Literacy National Professional Qualification
- New National Professional Qualification for Early Years Leadership
- A consultation on introducing a SENCO National Professional Qualification
- A 'Levelling Up Premium' - worth up to £3,000 tax-free for eligible maths, physicals, chemistry and computing teachers who choose to work in disadvantaged schools, including in new Education Investment Areas, in years one-five of their careers

Chapter two: Delivering high standards of curriculum, behaviour and attendance

- A minimum expectation on the length of the school week in mainstream state-funded schools of 32.5 hours (from September 2023)
- A new arms-length curriculum body that works with teachers to co-create optional, adaptable digital curriculum resources
- Extension of the legal requirements to provide independent careers guidance to all secondary school children
- Introduction of a new test of literacy and numeracy, taken by a sample of Year 9 children to estimate national performance

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- A National Behaviour Survey to better understand what parents, children, teachers and leaders think of behaviour and wellbeing in their school
- Revision of the Behaviour in Schools Guidance, and Suspension and Permanent Exclusions Guidance
- Design of a national data solution, and legislation to modernise rules on recording attendance

Chapter three: Targeted support for every child who needs it

- A 'Parent Pledge' - schools will provide evidence-based support if a child falls behind in English or maths, and schools will communicate this with parents/carers
- A re-endowment of the Education Endowment Foundation (at least £100million)
- Reform of SEND and Children's Social Care
- £2.6billion in high needs capital investment
- New Regions Group to hold local authorities and Trusts to account for local delivery for children with SEND, make better use of data to understand system health, and work with independent inspectors and health colleagues

Chapter four: A stronger and fairer school system

General

- By 2030, all schools to be in a Trust or have plans to join/form one
- A single regulatory approach in the system
- Consultation on moving schools that have received two consecutive below 'Good' Ofsted judgements into strong Trusts
- Consultation on a statutory framework to govern children's movements so that all placement decisions - including Alternative Provision - are always in the best interest of the child
- Up to £86million in Trust Capacity Funding, with a particular focus in Education Investment Areas
- A new collaborative standard requiring Trusts to work collaboratively with each other
- A new CEO development programme for established leaders
- An expectation that most Trusts will be on a trajectory to serve at least 7,500 students or run at least 10 schools
- A limit on the proportion of schools run by an individual Trust in an area, though no limit on a maximum number

Local Authorities (LAs)

- LAs to be able to establish new Trusts where too few strong Trusts exist
- A clearer role for LAs

- A strengthened role in overseeing admissions arrangements
- Consultation on a new 'backstop' power for LAs to direct Trusts to admit children, with the right of appeal for Trusts to the Schools Adjudicator
- Local Safeguarding Partnerships to commission safeguarding audits every three years

Regulatory review

- To increase clarity, proposed and existing requirements of Trusts to be brought into statutory academy trust standards
- New statutory intervention powers to underpin standards and provide a framework to tackle Trusts which fail to achieve expected outcomes in managing and governing their schools effectively
- Regional Schools Commissioners will become Regional Directors, and will take a single regulatory approach to Trusts
- Consultation on "exceptional circumstances in which a good school could request that the regulator agrees to the school moving to a stronger Trust"
- A definition of Trust strength and academy Trust standards will be the basis for transparent assessment of potential for growth
- New transparency measures to ensure it is always clear to parents how the flexibility to GAG pool is being used

Defining a Strong Trust

The White Paper provides, for the first time in a DfE publication, a definition of 'Strong Trust', which will be used in a future regulatory approach and act as the basis for transparent assessment for potential for growth. The defining features used by the Department as high quality and inclusive education; school improvement; strategic governance; financial management; and workforce.

While this definition is very similar to CST's own, and we are broadly supportive of it, we argue that high quality, inclusive education and school improvement should not be considered as separate elements - as a School Trust delivers high quality, inclusive education through its school improvement practices.

We believe the definition of a strong Trust should include public benefit and civic duty. Found out more in our 'What is a Strong Trust' short read as part of our Trust The Facts series, or more fully in our detailed paper.

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