

Institute for Public Policy Research



OUT OF KILTER

HOW TO REBALANCE
OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM
TO WORK FOR PEOPLE,
ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

**Harry Quilter-Pinner,
Efua Poku-Amanfo,
Loic Menzies and
Jamie O'Halloran**

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CONTENTS

Foreword	5
Summary	6
Part 1. The challenge we face	9
Closing the gaps	11
Part 2. The change we need	17
Shift 1: Instead of a narrow focus on attainment, we should value a wider set of goals for young people	19
Shift 2: Empower schools and teachers to drive improvement, instead of using top-down control.....	26
Shift 3: Harness the whole village to support learning, rather than overburdening schools	33
Shift 4: Empower young people’s voices and agency rather than disempowering them	40
References	46
Appendix: Policy costings methodology note	50

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**BIG
CHANGE.**

phf Paul Hamlyn
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FOREWORD

Young people make up nearly a quarter of our population – but 100 per cent of our future. This is why I am so proud to have been a part of this important and timely work which sets out to make sure we prepare young people for life and not just exams.

Aged 15, I set up Youth Leads UK to support young people across Greater Manchester to develop their skills, take on challenges and influence society for the better. Over the decade since then, we have become an award-winning charity successfully ensuring the voices of young people are heard and acted upon.

It is in this capacity that I have been working with Big Change and IPPR as they have sought to set a new direction for education and learning in England. This work has focussed on understanding and elevating the public appetite for long term, significant changes. It included a large-scale and in-depth national listening exercise across 2020 and 2021 to capture the views of the public (young people, parents, educators, employers) and assess the post-pandemic demand for change as well as support for Big Education Conversations across the country.

Shaped by that work, this report proposes the first steps on a journey to a school system that ensures every young person is able to thrive in school, work and life. This work has embraced young people as experts in shaping these proposals. The ideas that have emerged from this, including the proposal for votes at 16, present a rallying call to government and wider society: we must listen to and act with young people to support their ideas and ambitions, and break down the barriers they face in fulfilling their potential.

Having grown up in care, I know only too well that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds can be held back from shaping their future. It's time for change – we need a schools system that works for young people and wider society, and this paper is the blueprint for making that happen.



Saeed Atcha MBE DL

**Founder and chief executive, Youth Leads UK and
former UK government social mobility commissioner**

SUMMARY

THE CHALLENGE WE FACE

The social contract - that each generation should do better than the previous one - is increasingly under strain. Society has long been built on the expectation that each generation of young people will get more opportunities and do better than the one before them. This social contract is now under severe strain in England. Progress is stalling or even going into reverse, with young people often more likely to be worse off than their parents. This can be seen most clearly in incomes and home ownership rates - but it can also be seen in education and learning.

We face four deeply concerning 'learning gaps' across all the main dimensions of 'success in school and life'.

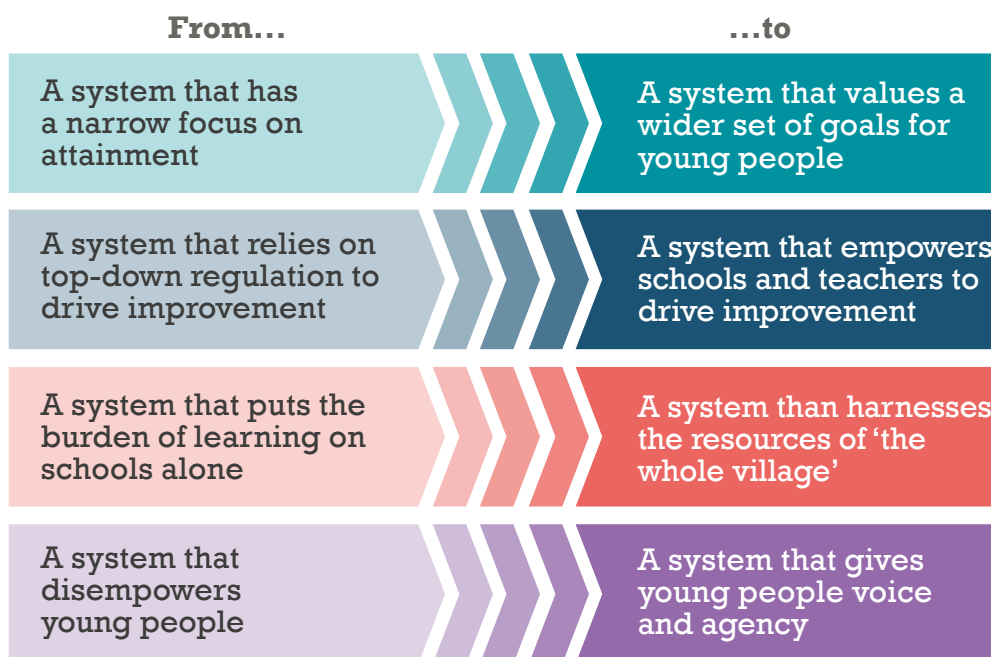
- **A foundation of knowledge needed to get on.** The most basic function of schools is to ensure that all young people leave education with the foundational knowledge needed to get on in life. This includes literacy, numeracy and oracy (the ability to communicate effectively verbally). These skills are linked to a wider set of economic and social outcomes. But too many young people - around a fifth every year - go out into the world without this knowledge.
- **The competencies and character required for meaningful work.** In addition to knowledge and skills, competencies (the ability to apply knowledge in real-world situations) and character (the individual traits and qualities that enable someone to flourish) are both critical to future success. They include things like self-management, team working, social connection, problem solving and technological literacy, and characteristics such as creativity, grit, curiosity and humility. These are crucial for employability - yet businesses often find it hard to recruit staff with these skills.
- **An underpinning of good mental and physical health.** Health - mental and physical - is the foundation of a good life. Yet too many young people are suffering from poor health, and the UK lags behind many similar countries on a range of metrics. Teachers, parents and pupils are particularly struggling with the explosion of mental ill-health. The proportion of young people aged seven to 16 years with a probable mental disorder has risen significantly, from one in 10 in 1999 to one in four today. Ill-health, particularly obesity, is also a serious concern and represents a ticking time-bomb for society, our health system, and our economy.
- **The tools required to thrive in life and participate in society.** Young people want and need to understand their identity, feel a sense of purpose, be ready for the challenges of adulthood, and be able to contribute productively to society. A particularly important dimension of this challenge is active citizenship, with young people feeling increasingly disempowered. This can be seen in voting rates (18-24-year-olds are significantly less likely to vote) and attitudes towards democracy.

Schools cannot solve these problems alone, but they could take on a bigger role if they were properly resourced and supported to do so. Schools should not and cannot take sole responsibility for closing these 'learning gaps'. These are societal challenges and demand a society-wide response. That said, schools do have a vital role to play. Indeed, many are already taking on this role. But too often this happens despite rather than because of the system. This must now change.

THE CHANGE WE NEED

We argue that our school system is currently ‘out of kilter’ and needs to pursue four shifts in order to better unlock the potential of all young people.

FIGURE S.1: THERE ARE FOUR SHIFTS NEEDED TO OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM TO UNLOCK THE POTENTIAL OF YOUNG PEOPLE



Source: Authors’ analysis

Shift 1: Instead of a narrow focus on attainment, we should value a wider set of goals for young people

We need to redouble our efforts to ensure that young people master core academic knowledge and skills but combine this with teaching and assessing a wider set of goals that we care about collectively.

We recommend that we:

- set four big goals that schools should contribute to in England: high and fair attainment, meaningful employment, mental and physical health, and active citizenship
- maintain a focus on key academic subjects - particularly English, maths and the sciences - but broaden the core subjects included in the Ebacc and Progress 8 ‘baskets’
- invest in ensuring all young people benefit from a wider enrichment offer and extra-curricular provision by creating a national entitlement to pre- and post-school activities
- enhance the assessment mix where this can be done without compromising reliability, for example by expanding the use of comparative judgement and by creating more opportunities to recognise independent study through awards like the Extended Project Qualification
- scrap pupil-level grading in key stage two Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) to reduce exam pressure at a young age. and shift to multi-year measures of school performance across the board

Shift 2: Empower schools and teachers to drive improvement, instead of using top-down control

We need to shift the drivers of better schooling from high-stakes, top-down regulation to a system which empowers schools and teachers to learn from evidence, innovate and improve, and eases the teacher recruitment and retention crisis.

We recommend that we:

- abolish overarching judgements in inspection reports from Ofsted and develop a new, narrative driven report for parents and guardians
- trial a new, three-tier regulatory response that promotes supported improvement. This should involve ‘school-led development’, ‘enhanced support’ and, as a last resort, ‘immediate action’ to drive improvement in the system and ensure no pupil experiences a substandard education
- invest in improvement capacity - the time, capabilities and resources to drive improvement within schools - across the school system by adopting a ‘whatever it takes’ approach to support for local areas, including an offer of extra resources, capacity and freedoms where needed
- introduce a more generous minimum entitlement for teacher training and development, starting immediately with ensuring all teachers get access to 105 hours of quality training every three years at an average cost of £198 million per year
- endow a new innovation organisation with £500 million to work alongside EEF to test, spread and evidence new approaches to improvement and innovation. This would ensure we look at both ‘what works’ and invest in finding out ‘what could work’.

Shift 3: Harness the whole village to support learning, rather than overburdening schools

We need to stop putting more pressure on schools alone to educate - and solve wider problems such as mental ill-health - and instead harness and connect the resources of public services, parents and the wider community.

We recommend that we:

- roll out a national parent-partnership strategy including regular parent surveys, teacher training, and parental engagement and education programmes
- introduce and resource a national entitlement to an on-site counsellor and nurse, and pre- and post- school activities, as well as implementing the key recommendations of the MacAlister review into children’s social care
- invest in training to help teachers support young people’s wellbeing and respond to their mental health needs.

Shift 4: Give young people voice and agency rather than disempowering them

We need a system that treats young people as partners in building a system that gives them a voice and agency, within and outside the school setting.

We recommend that we:

- embed young people’s feedback throughout the school’s system through a new national survey, learning from the rollout of similar approaches such as patient-reported outcomes in the NHS
- commit to rolling out Big Education Conversations that bring together teachers, parents, communities and young people to feed into policy nationally, along with a greater use of other participatory mechanisms
- introduce votes at 16 combined with consistently high-quality and expansive civic education in schools to boost voter turnout and political engagement among young people.

PART 1. THE CHALLENGE WE FACE

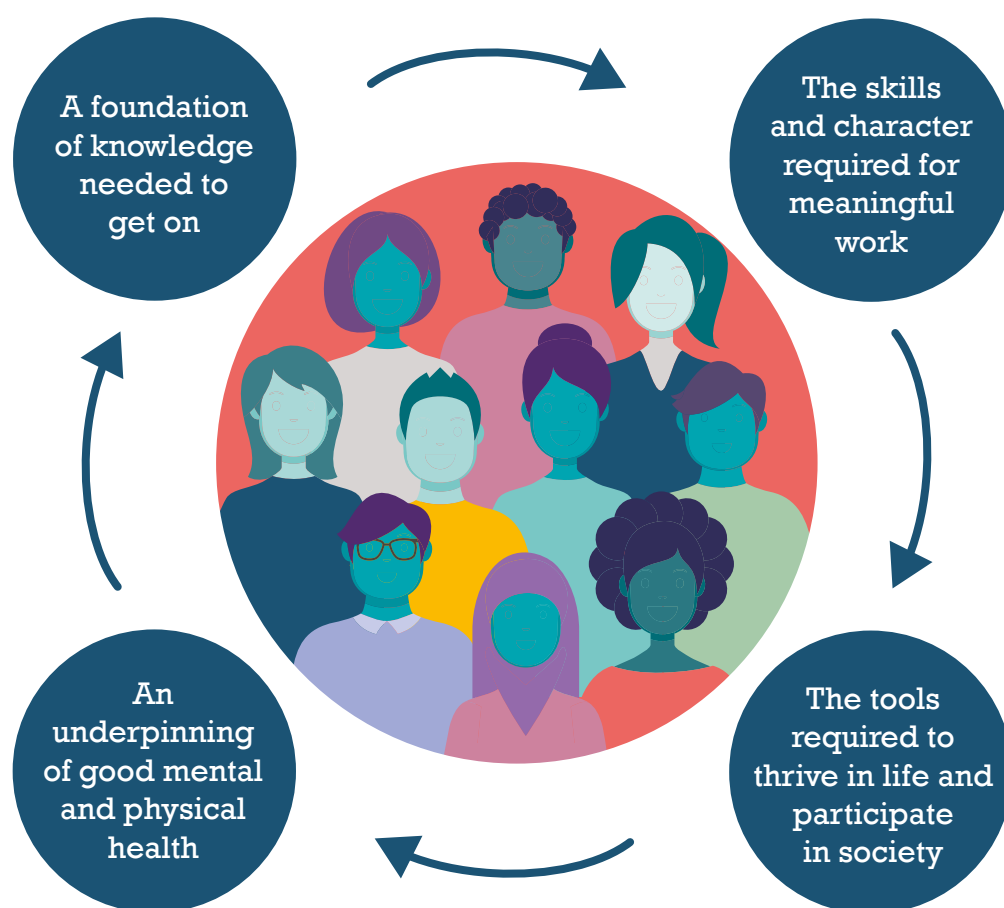


It has long been the societal expectation that each generation of young people will get more opportunities and do better than the one before them: get better jobs; earn higher incomes; be more educated; live healthier lives; and enjoy greater freedom. This has underpinned an unspoken but important social contract in our society.

This social contract is now under severe strain in England, as it is across many other advanced democracies. Progress is stalling or even going into reverse, with young people increasingly likely to be worse off than their parents. This can be seen most clearly in incomes and home ownership rates (Resolution Foundation 2018). But it can also be seen in education and learning.

In this section, we set out the evidence for this across all four dimensions of 'success in school and life' (see figure 2.1). As a result, we argue that these represent four 'learning gaps' that we must tackle to ensure that every young person is able to thrive.

FIGURE 2.1: THERE ARE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF 'SUCCESS IN SCHOOL AND LIFE' FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



Source: Authors' analysis

CLOSING THE GAPS

There are few things more important than preparing young people for life. Every young person should be able to enjoy learning, unlock their potential, get on in work, participate fully in society and live a long, happy and fulfilled life. This is a goal that we can all agree on.

Achieving this is clearly the work of many people and organisations: parents and carers; friends and neighbours; employers and local businesses; and of course, the state, including local government and the NHS. As the proverb says: 'It takes a village to raise a child.'

At the heart of this eco-system are schools, institutions created with the sole purpose of supporting young people to learn, develop and grow. Their role in preparing the next generation for adulthood cannot be overstated. Indeed, young people spend over 6000 hours a year - at least 13 years in total - at school.

Most schools, teachers, and the wider staff teams who work with them, deliver excellent education that transforms the lives of young people. However, there is growing evidence that we are still falling short across all four dimensions of 'success in school and life'.

These failures have a profound cost for individuals; too many young people are unable to unlock their potential in life. There is also a cost to society, which holds back British businesses and our wider economy. A recent study found that school reform could unlock £125 billion a year to the British economy (Times Education Commission 2022).

There is therefore an urgent case for a society-wide effort to close these 'learning gaps'. While schools should not and cannot take responsibility for this alone, they do have a vital role to play. Many are already taking on this role. But with a bolder reform agenda, there is no doubt they could play a bigger role in the future.

Gap 1: A foundation of knowledge needed to get on

The most basic function of schools is to ensure that all young people leave education with the foundational knowledge needed to get on in life. These include the following.

- **Literacy:** This includes the ability to read and write, and a wider grasp of written language.
- **Numeracy:** This includes the ability to solve numerical problems, reason mathematically in the classroom, and understand basic statistics.
- **Oracy:** This includes the ability to speak eloquently, to articulate ideas and thoughts, and to influence through talking.

There is significant evidence that these foundational skills are closely linked to a wider set of social outcomes. Young people who leave school without them find themselves locked out of the jobs market, have lower lifetime earnings, and experience lower levels of wellbeing (CSJ 2023a).

These skills are also the building blocks for future learning. Literacy, numeracy and oracy are transferrable skills that, once mastered, allow children to develop further knowledge and skills throughout their time at school, and enable life-long learning beyond that.

This makes the fact that a significant minority of young people are currently failing to achieve the basics in these areas even more concerning.

The most recent data, published in 2022, shows that shockingly, 127,500 (20.5 per cent) young people in England started primary school without the communication skills expected for their age, 150,000 children didn't reach the expected level of maths (24.1 per cent) and nearly 200,000 (32 per cent) didn't reach the expected level of literacy (DfE 2022a).

These gaps tend to become more entrenched over time. Even before the pandemic, more than 220,000 pupils left primary school without reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and maths. Recent data shows this has grown to 275,243 post-pandemic (ibid).

This challenge persists among 16-year-olds, with numerous studies estimating that around 20 per cent of young people lack basic literacy and numeracy by the end of their GCSEs. They are what one academic has called the 'forgotten fifth of pupils who go out into the world without basic foundational knowledge' (Parsons and Major 2022). We are letting these young people down and our society cannot continue to allow so much potential to go to waste.

This challenge is not experienced equally among different groups in society. Those from low-income backgrounds (on free school meals (FSM), with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and from Gypsy/Roma, Black Caribbean, or Pakistani backgrounds, are more likely to leave school without this basic knowledge (Tuckett et al 2021).

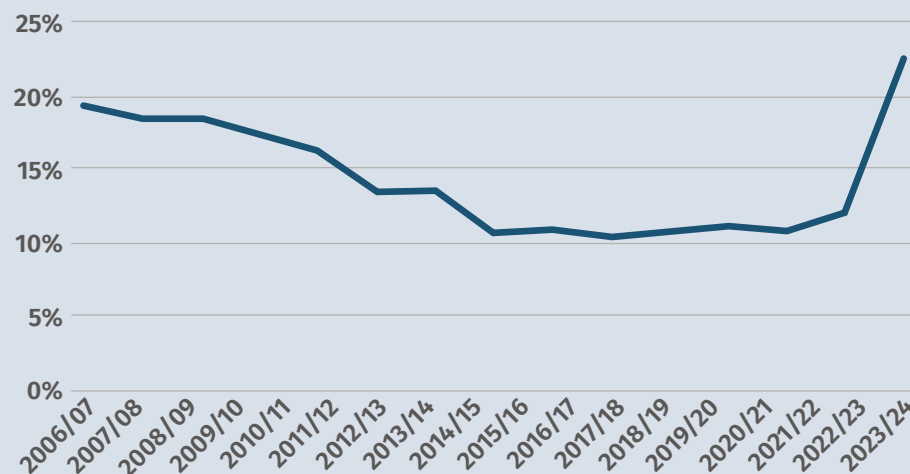
INFORMATION BOX: A CRISIS OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Persistent absence is a growing cause for concern, having reached new heights since schools returned from the second Covid-19 lockdown. Children who are persistently absent miss 10 per cent or more of possible sessions in school. This is equivalent to missing one afternoon every week.

This issue peaked in spring 2022 when 1,927,589 children (27.2 per cent of children in mainstream or special schools) were persistently absent. Severe absence - where children miss 50 per cent or more of possible sessions in school - has also increased.

FIGURE 2.2: ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOL HAS RISEN RAPIDLY SINCE THE PANDEMIC AFTER A DECADE OF PROGRESS

Percentage of persistent absentees over time



Source: CSJ (2023)

The overall rise in absence is the result of an increase in both authorised and unauthorised absences. Ill-health is the most frequently cited reason for absence, with unauthorised holidays also increasing (perhaps a result of the cost-of-living crisis).

Commentators and researchers have also pointed to a deeper set of reasons including disruptions at home, a rise in mental ill-health and anxiety, and a changing culture surrounding school attendance due to the pandemic.

The attendance crisis is undoubtedly feeding into educational inequalities. In 2021/22, children eligible for FSM had a persistent absence rate which was more than double, and a severe absence rate of more than triple, the rate for children who were not eligible for FSM.

This crisis is also linked to the mental health challenge. Overall, children with profound and multiple learning difficulties, physical disabilities, and social, emotional and mental health SEN primary needs have the highest rates of absence.

Gap 2: The competencies and character required for meaningful work

Foundational knowledge and skills are essential but young people also need to develop a wider set of attributes to thrive. These can be grouped into competencies, meaning the ability to apply knowledge in real-world situations, and character, meaning the individual traits that enable someone to flourish (CBI 2019).

These attributes are sometimes considered 'soft' but businesses consistently point to them as important for work (ibid). For example, the CBI has argued that in addition to foundational knowledge and skills, young people need to develop competencies like self-management, team working, social connection, problem-solving and technological literacy, and characteristics such as creativity, grit, curiosity and humility.

A survey of businesses conducted by Pearson and the CBI found that those which recruited school leavers are broadly satisfied with their academic knowledge (74 per cent) but are less confident about their work-readiness, including wider character, behaviours and attributes, as well as relevant work experience. This concern is mirrored by young people who do not feel school is preparing them for work (ibid).

FIGURE 2.3: THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS IN RECRUITING SCHOOL/COLLEGE LEAVERS
Survey of employers (higher score = more important)



Source: CBI/Pearson

This is contributing to competencies gaps across the country. The latest data collected by the DfE suggests that 5 per cent of employers have skills-shortage vacancies and 13 per cent of employers have skills gaps among their workforce (DfE, 2022b). Meanwhile, the OECD estimates that the UK has a shortage in almost all competencies apart from negotiation, persuasion and programming.

This has real impacts on individuals, locking too many people into low pay, low productivity jobs, which in turn has an impact on our whole economy. Countries that experience the most pronounced competencies mismatches show lower productivity levels than their peers, with one study suggesting the UK could improve its productivity by 5 per cent if it reduced the level of competencies mismatch.

In the absence of policy change, these competencies gaps are likely to grow. This is because the emergence of transformative technologies such as AI, along with environmental breakdown and the greening of our economies, will profoundly disrupt jobs markets (UK Commission for Skills and Work 2014). This will make competencies and characteristics, particularly those that are uniquely human, even more important and will require people to continue to upskill and reskill throughout their career (ibid).

Gap 3: An underpinning of good mental and physical health

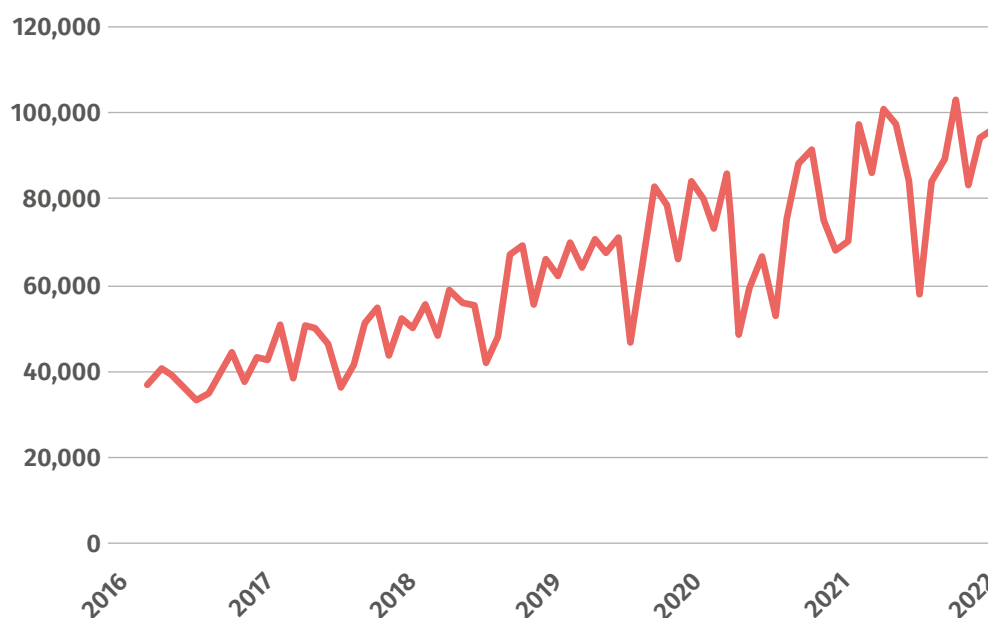
Health - mental and physical - is the foundation of a good life. Maintaining good health during childhood and building healthy habits are crucial to achieving this. Those who start life in poor health, exhibit risky habits (eg smoking, overeating) or suffer adverse childhood experiences¹ (ACEs) such as sexual or physical abuse, are far more likely to experience ill-health later in life (Hochlaf and Thomas 2020).

It is therefore deeply concerning that young people in England too often experience poor health. A study by the Nuffield Foundation finds that across a whole range of measures, young people in the UK have worse health than comparator countries, including issues such as obesity. The evidence is also clear that experiences like abuse are more commonplace than we once thought (and may have risen as a result of Covid-19).

Perhaps the most immediate concern among parents, pupils and teachers is the explosion of need around mental ill-health. The proportion of young people aged seven-16 years with a probable mental disorder has risen significantly from one in 10 in 1999 to one in nine in 2017, and then to one in six in 2020. Among young people aged 17-19 years, rates reached one in four in 2022 (NHS Digital 2022). This is particularly stark among teenage girls, who have even higher rates (ibid).

1 Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are 'highly stressful, and potentially traumatic, events or situations that occur during childhood and/or adolescence. They can be a single event, or prolonged threats to, and breaches of, the young person's safety, security, trust or bodily integrity.' (Young Minds 2018). This includes living with someone with an addiction, physical or sexual abuse, or losing a parent due to death or abandonment.

FIGURE 2.4: THERE HAS BEEN AN EXPLOSION OF MENTAL ILL HEALTH IN RECENT DECADES
Number of children and adolescent mental health referrals (2016-22)



Source: NHS Digital (2022)

These challenges also emerge in broader measures of life satisfaction. For example, data from The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reveals that the UK ranked 37th out of 48 countries overall and 24th of 27 Western European countries for life satisfaction amongst 15-year-olds (Gregson Family Foundation 2020). Even worse, the UK saw the largest decline in satisfaction in recent years (ibid).

The causes of this challenge are many and complex, and far from fully understood. Potential explanations include the rise of social media, material deprivation, family breakdown, and growing concern about global issues such as climate change (Menzies et al 2023). The pandemic is also likely to have made things worse, through increased social isolation and, for some, greater exposure to risks at home (eg abuse, neglect).

Gap 4: The tools required to thrive in life and participate in society

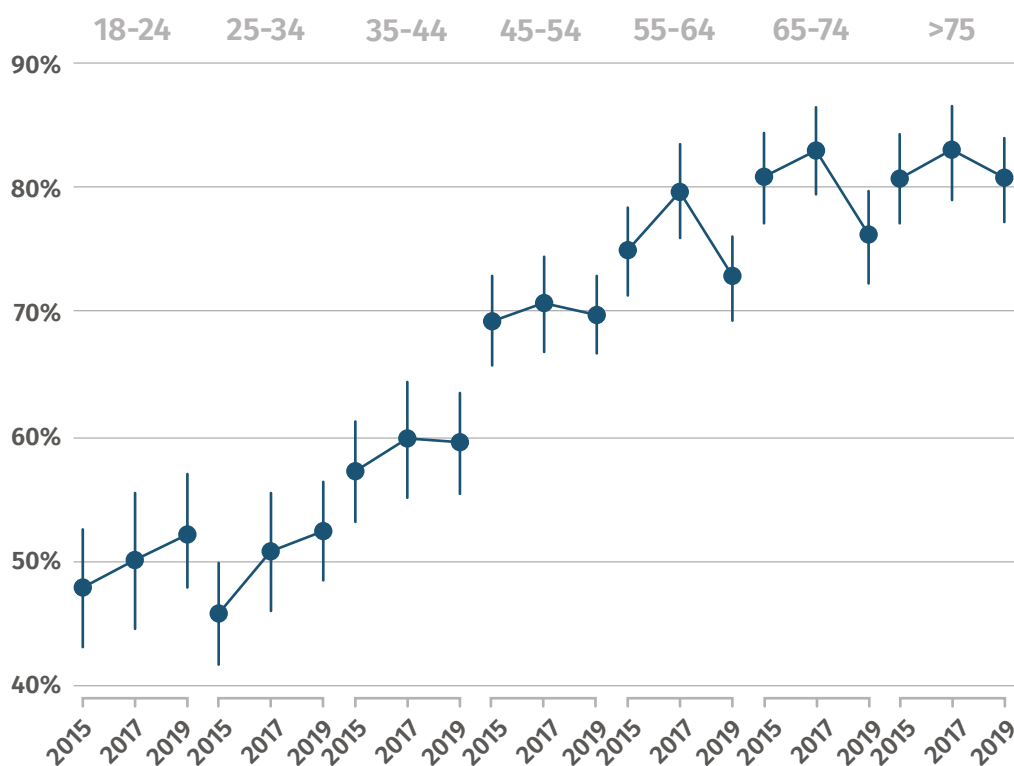
Growing up is about more than just preparing for work. Young people want and need to understand their identity, feel a sense of purpose, be ready for the challenges of adulthood and to contribute productively to society. This dimension of 'success in school and life' is less easily qualifiable than the others but is also vital.

There are many elements to this gap. For example, through our conversations with teachers, parents and employers, and particularly young people, a consistent theme was the need for more support with preparing for life, including on issues such as managing finances, navigating relationships and embracing diversity (Big Education Conversation 2022).

However, in this report we will primarily focus on civic participation and young people's ability to shape society as one of the main aspects of this challenge. The data makes it clear that while young people are more concerned about social challenges than ever before, including the climate crisis and racism, they feel disempowered and are increasingly disengaged from more traditional forms of participation.

Notably, voter turnout among young people (aged 18-24) is around - and often below - 50 per cent of the population, compared with nearer 80 per cent among older adults (figure 2.5) (BES 2021), although it has been increasing in recent years. This matters because we know that voter turnout shapes the policies pursued by politicians. For example, the age inequalities in voter turnout described here are skewing policies towards the interests of older voters.

FIGURE 2.5: VOTER TURNOUT BY AGE GROUP (2015-19)



Source: BES (2021)

This is underpinned by a generational shift in attitudes to democracy. Young people's faith in democratic politics is lower than any other age group (Stanley et al 2022). They are also more likely than other age groups to be sympathetic towards authoritarian methods for governing the UK (ibid).

These trends are replicated in wider measures of participation such as volunteering, where people aged 25-34 are the least likely age group to formally volunteer (UK Civil Society Almanac 2021). Just 12 per cent volunteer formally at least once a month – slightly more than half the rate of those aged 65-74 (ibid).

These trends are not inevitable but they do require bold action to address them, both within and outside the school system.

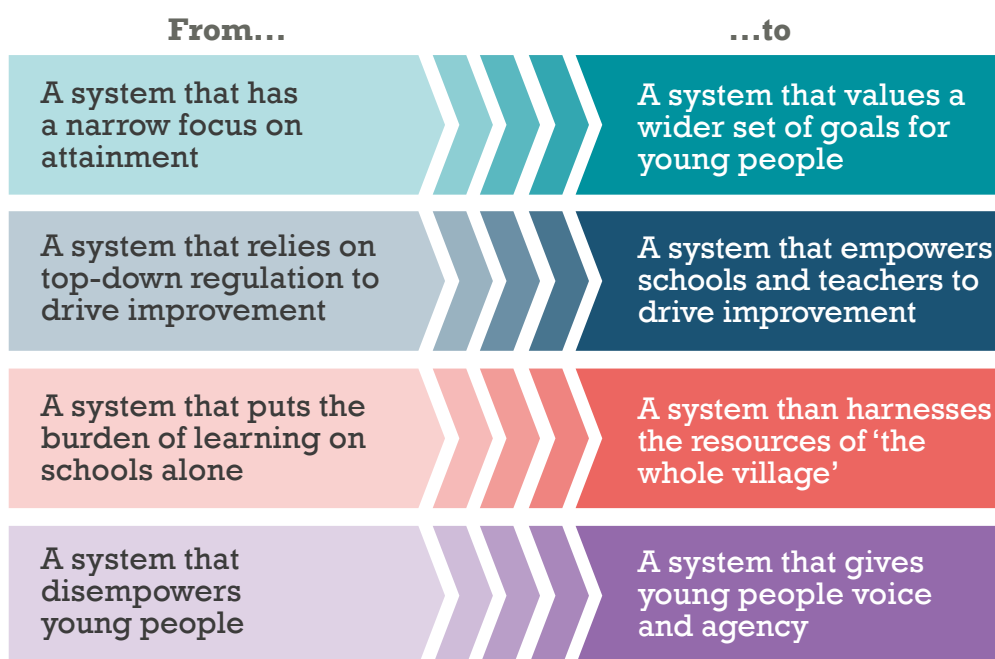
PART 2. THE CHANGE WE NEED



Schools should not and cannot take sole responsibility for closing these ‘learning gaps’. These are societal challenges and demand a society-wide response. That said, schools do have a vital role to play. Indeed, many are already taking on this role - but too often this happens despite rather than because of the system. This must now change.

This section sets out the role that schools can and should play in closing the ‘learning gaps’, and how our system can enable this to happen. We argue that our current school system is ‘out of kilter’ and that there are four shifts needed to fully harness the passion and commitment of teachers, parents and the wider community, and unlock the potential of young people (figure 3.1).

FIGURE 3.1: THERE ARE FOUR OPPORTUNITIES TO UNLOCK THE POTENTIAL OF YOUNG PEOPLE



Source: Authors' analysis

SHIFT 1:

INSTEAD OF A NARROW FOCUS ON ATTAINMENT, WE SHOULD VALUE A WIDER SET OF GOALS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

WHAT WE HEARD

'You want to deliver well-rounded kids...providing that broad base of education as a foundation for the kids to...develop further into meaningful careers or quality lives.'

Employer, focus group

'We need a much bigger focus on the skills for life young people actually need, rather than a narrow focus on exam results.'

Teacher, Big Education Conversation

'I feel like schools are paying more attention to making sure that you pass the exam than actually learning some stuff.'

Young person, focus group

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

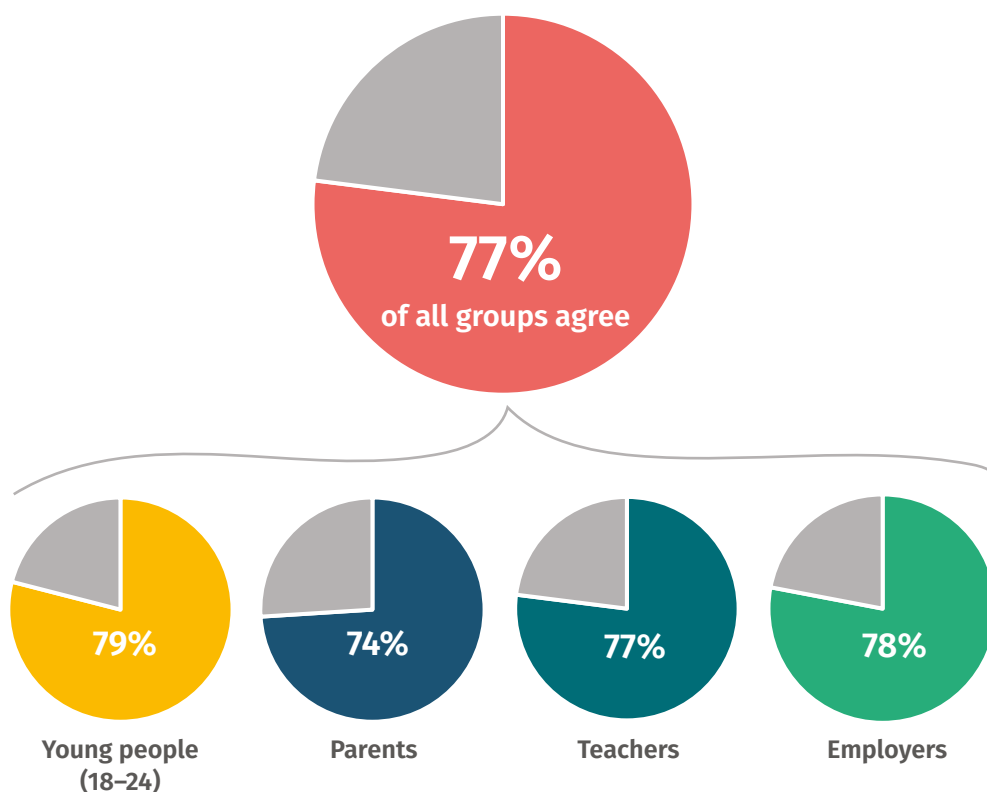
We need to redouble our efforts to ensure that young people master core academic knowledge and skills but combine this with teaching and assessing a wider set of goals that we care about collectively.

Over the last decade, the government has narrowed the curriculum and raised the stakes of examinations. Since 2010 there has been a move towards a knowledge-rich curriculum across all subjects, with a particular focus on academic subjects such as maths, English and science, alongside higher pressure on these examinations through top-down accountability.

This narrowing may have contributed to some improvements in academic outcomes although these have been mixed, with progress on the attainment gap stalling. However, it has also undoubtedly resulted in the wider enrichment offer and vocational subjects being marginalised, as well as unintended consequences such as 'teaching to the test'.

There is a growing view that this agenda may have gone too far. Polling of the general public as well as young people, parents, teachers and employers, suggests a consensus among all groups that now is the time to rethink the purpose of education' - with over three quarters in agreement (figure 4.1) (Goddard et al 2022).

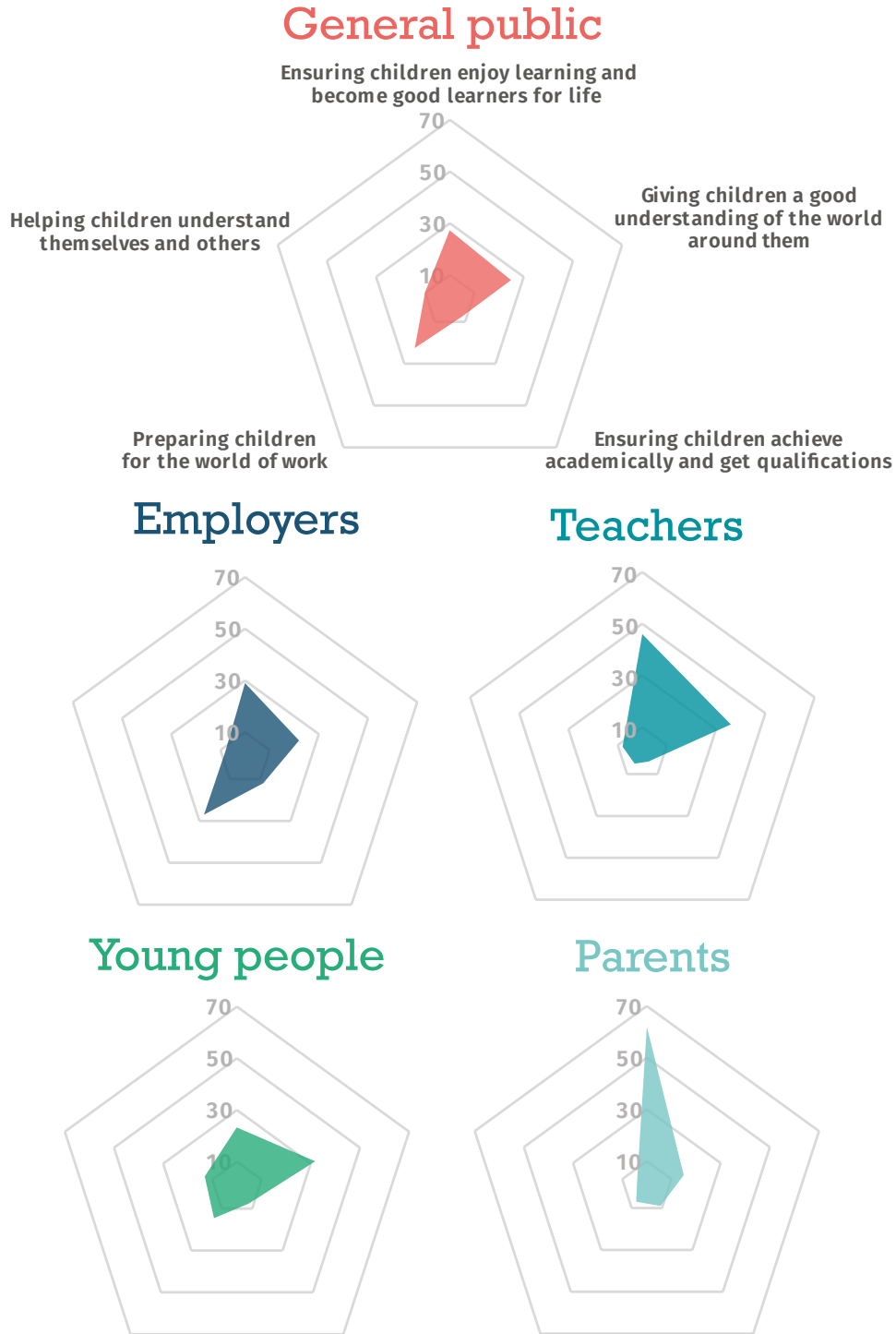
FIGURE 4.1: RESPONSES TO 'NOW IS THE TIME RETHINK THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION AND TO CHANGE THE SYSTEM FOR THE BETTER'



Source: Goddard et al (2022)

When asked what the most important purpose of schools should be, there was significant agreement on delivering a greater focus on young people enjoying learning, self-awareness, understanding society and preparing for work. In comparison, no group put academic achievement at the top of their priority list, which is perhaps a reflection of the recent reforms (ibid).

FIGURE 4.2: RESPONSES TO 'WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PURPOSE OF EDUCATION TO YOU?'



Source: Goddard et al (2022)

Of course, there is a strong case for ensuring all young people study a core set of subjects up to the age of 16 that underpins their ability to continue learning and to flourish in life. This core should prioritise numeracy, literacy and oracy as key foundational knowledge (Menzies et al, 2023). It is unacceptable that in our society

so many pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, leave school without these basics.

However, there are also good arguments for having a broader set of subjects in what we consider the core, including potentially arts and vocational courses, because a wider set of knowledge and skills is needed to thrive in work and life, and because young people are more likely to enjoy learning and flourish when they discover their passions.

Looking beyond the curriculum to recent shifts in examinations and accountability, there is a risk that our ‘high-stakes’ exam system puts too much pressure on young people and their teachers.

Most experts agree that assessment and feedback are a vital part of high-quality teaching and learning. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) summarises purposeful assessment as ‘not simply ... about providing some assessment data for a termly “data capture”; it has value as a learning tool, and the data generated helps diagnosis about learning and informs future lesson planning’ (EEF 2020).

However, there are signs that our system of examination may have become ‘out of balance’. A pupil seeking to fill all three areas within the Progress 8 performance measure is likely to sit over 30 hours of exams at the end of Year 11 (Richmond 2021), not to mention the time spent preparing for them (including hours of mock exams).

Unsurprisingly, the proportion of pupils in the UK who feel anxious about tests, even when they are well prepared, is significantly higher compared with Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) averages. New polling for this report finds that teachers are also concerned: 79 percent of teachers polled believe that “young people within my school find the exam system increasingly stressful” – although studies disagree about the degree to which exam stress is causally linked to mental ill-health (Menzies et al 2023).

Alongside these concerns about the pressures of exams on wellbeing, there are also concerns that our system favours memorising content without providing opportunities to apply it over deep learning. One author calls schools ‘exams factories’ (Hutchinson 2015). In particular, teachers report feeling required to ‘teach to the test’ and pupils become over-focused on memorising without being given enough opportunities to apply this learning (Lupton and Hayes 2021) (Hutchings 2015).

Indeed, 92 per cent of teachers surveyed by YouGov for this report found that “exams and league tables distort the priorities of schools and stops educators from providing a well-rounded education”. In one survey, the impact of testing on the quality of teaching was teachers’ top concern regarding assessment (Pearson 2016).

Finally, there are concerns that this shift has disproportionately disadvantaged certain young people. While we should be committed to ensuring all young people obtain the basic knowledge needed to thrive, we also need a system that recognises that some people may struggle with academic subjects and need more support and time to learn them (Newmark and Rees 2022). 92 percent of teachers polled for this report by YouGov agreed that “assessment solely through exams does not reflect all young people’s talents”.

This is particularly the case for young people with severe special educational needs (SEND). We must also find other ways of validating and celebrating the success of this growing group of young people (Van Herwegen J 2022). Initiatives such as Rethinking Assessment have developed proposals which could provide one approach to this (see case study).

That is not to say that all alternative forms of assessment are likely to do a better job in enabling disadvantaged children to thrive. For example, teacher assessment during the pandemic resulted in increased attainment gaps, and pupils in state schools did worse when compared with their peers in independent schools (Beynon 2021). This implies that any changes to our exams system should be carefully designed to manage the risk of exacerbating inequalities.

In addition to the concerns set out above, there is strong evidence that the pressure on schools to achieve results is linked to ‘off-rolling’ of pupils whose attainment might drag down a school’s results, for example by excluding them or encouraging them to move on (Gill et al 2017; Menzies & Angus 2021; Nye and Thomson 2019). This is unacceptable and must be tackled.

CASE STUDY: BRITISH COLUMBIA AND RETHINKING ASSESSMENT

Building on previous reforms of the 1990s which incorporated active participation of learning and a move to a learner-focused approach, the region of British Columbia has made further changes to its curriculum over the past decade. The recent reforms removed subject-based exams in grades 10-12 and replaced them with new literacy and numeracy assessments that prioritise the application of knowledge.

The local government took a horizontal approach to curriculum design by incorporating educators, families, and First Nation (aboriginal) communities. They introduced a framework centered on subject-based ‘big ideas’ and cross-subject ‘core competencies’. One of the main goals was to narrow attainment gaps between non-indigenous and First Nation students.

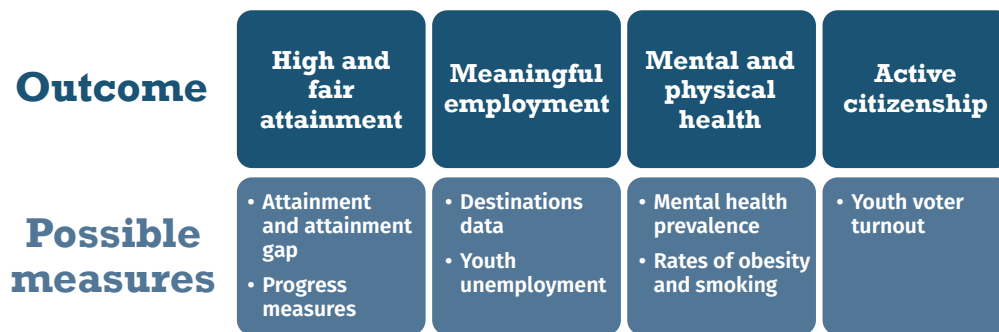
The results from these changes were promising. Improvements were seen in the attainment of First Nation students: over 71 per cent of indigenous students completed high school in the academic year 2019-20, up from 66 per cent in 2017. From 2020, over 52 per cent of indigenous students from B.C. public schools were attending a B.C. post-secondary institution within two years of completing high school.

In the UK, Re-thinking Assessment (RA) has been investigating similar approaches to reforming learning and assessment. This is made up of a coalition of school leaders joining together with wider civil society (policy makers and researchers etc). RA has created digital profiles for students across primary and secondary education to showcase a wide range of achievements that go beyond exams and is calling for this approach to be more widely adopted.

Policy recommendations

- **Set four big goals that schools should contribute to in England.** Our school system in England should seek to contribute towards achieving four big goals for young people (figure 4.3): high attainment, meaningful employment, mental and physical health, and active citizenship. These goals should be given parity of esteem. They are essential for a good life. Efforts should be made to ensure that all these goals are properly measured by government. This is already the case for academic attainment and there is also good data for employment outcomes. But more work may be needed to improve data on health and social capital. These wider measures should not be embedded in accountability frameworks, given the limited levers schools have to drive these outcomes and the difficulty in accurately measuring them.

FIGURE 4.3: FOUR BIG GOALS FOR THE SCHOOL SYSTEM



Source: Authors' analysis

- **Maintain a focus on key academic subjects - particularly English, numeracy and the sciences - but broaden the core subjects included in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) and Progress 8 measures.** Maths and English are key foundations at primary school, and up to the end of key stage four all pupils should study a broad set of academic disciplines since these open up rather than close down future options. But we should widen the range of subjects that are included in the Ebacc (which are most highly prized in secondary school league tables) and the Progress 8². This should include reviewing the components of the humanities basket and whether there is a place for arts and technology.
- **Invest in ensuring all young people benefit from a wider enrichment offer and extracurricular provision.** Learning should go beyond the constraints of the school timetable and curriculum. These areas of knowledge and skills do not need to be examined but they do need to be given time and resources. This happens in private schools and the best state schools - but too many go without. Only 46 per cent of disadvantaged pupils take up extracurricular activities compared with 66 per cent of their better-off peers. Schools serving more disadvantaged pupils are half as likely to offer debating clubs compared with schools serving more advantaged pupils (Menzies et al 2023). This must change through the creation of a national entitlement to enrichment activities with extra resources provided.
- **Review the assessment mix to better develop and recognise talent, where this can be done without unacceptably compromising assessment efficacy.** There are well documented risks in shifting towards forms of examination that either rely on teacher assessment or are undertaken in non-controlled environments (eg at home). This is because the evidence suggests that they tend to benefit better-off young people. However, the trade-off between reliability and validity can be managed to allow a wider set of mechanisms for measuring success, allowing for independent study etc. For example, qualifications like the Extended Project Qualification (see information box) could be taken more widely at post-16 and potentially introduced at GCSE level. Others have also proposed to re-introduce a bigger role for course work, with tasks set and marked externally to reduce the burden for teachers and, as proposed by Wyness (2021), to be completed under controlled conditions to increase reliability. These reforms should take inspiration from Expeditionary schools (see case study).

2 Progress 8 is the accountability measure that government uses to measure the performance of secondary schools.

CASE STUDY: EXTENDED PROJECT QUALIFICATION

The EPQ is a Level 3 course taken alongside A-levels. Pupils choose the topic or project they work on and can present their work as an essay, report or artifact.

45,000 pupils took the qualification in 2018/19, making it more popular than most A-levels. Uptake has increased markedly in recent years and some top-performing sixth forms require pupils to take it. It is in the middle range for difficulty compared with A-levels, and increases pupils' chances of being offered a place at university as well as their success rate if they attend (Gill 2017). Equivalentents are available at Level 1 and 2, and a new primary school award is currently under development (Hallgarten et al 2023). The International Baccalaureate also includes a similar 'personal project'.

These are examples of high-status qualifications that demonstrate pupils' achievements outside the exam hall.

CASE STUDY: EXPEDITIONARY SCHOOLS AND XP SCHOOL, DONCASTER

US education charity Outward and The Harvard Graduate School of Education board put together a proposal in 1992 to get funding to pilot a new approach, which incorporated expeditionary learning. It was trialled in five states in the US: New York, Massachusetts, Oregon, Denver and Iowa.

This approach uses a 'real-world curriculum', incorporating critical thinking, problem solving and teamwork. Students undertake 'learning expeditions' - multidisciplinary projects rather than one subject in one classroom. Assessment is student-led, whereby students assess their performance and undertake steps to improve it with support.

Studies have found a significantly positive two-year impact, corresponding to roughly 1.4 months of additional growth in student achievement compared with a control group. Expeditionary Learning students were significantly more likely to say that their schoolwork was meaningful and important. There are now more than 150 Expeditionary Learning Schools in 30 US states.

XP School in Doncaster is an example of this work being piloted in the UK since 2014. The school has maintained its success by remaining a small institution and student body. The school teaches core subjects based on the national curriculum, but these are taught through expeditions aiming to build wider skills in addition to their subject. Its academic results are strong.

- **Scrap pupil-level grading at key stage two to reduce exam pressure at a young age and shift to multi-year measures of school performance across the board.** SATs are used for school accountability, system monitoring, curriculum enforcement, and setting a (school-level) baseline for Progress 8. None of these require pupil-level results. These exams should be reformed to deliver on these functions, which would allow them to be shortened and mean pupils would not be exposed to the pressure of receiving grades. This could be introduced alongside a wider array of sample-based assessment to ensure the performance of schools can be properly assessed without putting more pressure on young people (Allen 2019).

SHIFT 2: EMPOWER SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS TO DRIVE IMPROVEMENT, INSTEAD OF USING TOP-DOWN CONTROL

WHAT WE HEARD

'Ofsted is the primary voice that determines what schools should do, rather than the voices of those who know the school best.'

Young person,
Big Education Conversation

'I think some of the accountability needs to go, and I think we need to start listening to the profession.'

Parent, focus group

'How do we have those... courageous discussions where they're not afraid of the might of the multi-academy trust or the governors?'

Parent, focus group

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

We need to shift the drivers of better schooling from high-stakes, top-down regulation to a system which empowers schools and teachers to learn from evidence, innovate and improve, and eases the teacher recruitment and retention crisis.

Policy makers in recent decades have pursued a top-down approach to improving public services. This was broadly inspired by New Public Management (NPM), a theory of public sector reform which argued that the absence of market forces in public services meant they suffered from weak or misaligned incentives (Quilter-Pinner and Khan 2023).

The response to this was to reform public services to introduce stronger and better incentives into the public sector. This was to be achieved through two main mechanisms.

- The importation of private sector practices to the workings of public administrations including performance indicators (eg targets) and performance management (eg regulators and delivery units).

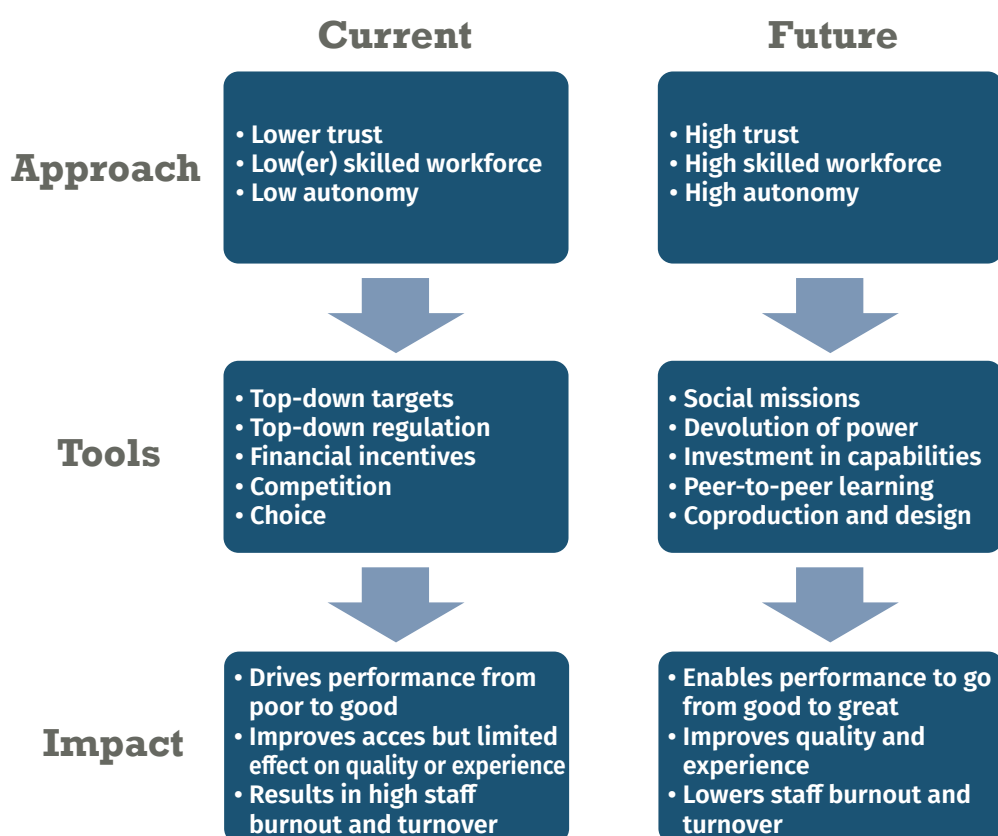
- The introduction of quasi-markets such as choice for ‘consumers’ (usually on quality rather than price) and competition between providers, often including private and third-sector organisations.

Across the public sector, NPM approaches are becoming less and less popular. This is because, while there is evidence that some of these levers (eg targets, regulation) can drive schools and other public services from ‘poor’ to ‘good enough’, there is limited evidence they can drive them from ‘good enough’ to ‘great’.

Indeed, Self Determination Theory (SDT), pioneered by academics Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, suggests that top-down targets, management or financial incentives can crush the pursuit of competence (mastery), autonomy (choice) and relationships (connection), which are the best drivers of improvement and innovation (Deci et al 1999).

As IPPR’s wider work on public service reform has argued, this implies a shift toward unlocking the ‘intrinsic motivation’ of staff and service users by moving from the low-trust, skill and autonomy NPM playbook to a high-trust, skill and autonomy alternative (see figure 5.1) (Quilter-Pinner and Khan 2023).

FIGURE 5.1: WE NEED TO SHIFT THE DRIVERS OF IMPROVEMENT IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM
A framework for current and future drivers of improvement in public services



Source: Quilter-Pinner and Khan (forthcoming)

In schooling, the NPM approach has largely manifested in terms of the use of Ofsted as an important schools’ inspectorate, combined with top-down, and often high-stakes, regulation from the DfE, and through league tables as well as the use of choice and competition.

This approach is increasingly under fire and has led to calls for Ofsted reform. Ofsted inspections are widely considered useful. However, Ofsted's single-word judgements now serve as the sole trigger for DfE intervention and have increasingly been used as a stick with which to beat schools and school leaders.

Teachers and school leaders are reporting that Ofsted causes them considerable stress and contributes to many of them deciding to leave the profession at a time when teacher retention is at an all-time low (The Guardian 2022). Indeed, polling of teachers for this report found that nearly half (42 percent) of teachers say they are likely to leave the profession in the next five years with workload pressures, poor pay and student behaviour and pressure from Ofsted and DfE (joint third) the most likely reasons for this.

This has culminated in calls by many to reform Ofsted with a greater focus on learning and improvement.

Reforms to the accountability and inspection regime should be combined with a significant investment in building the improvement capacity of the system. As it stands, capacity for system improvement largely sits within schools, multi-academy trusts (MATs) and local authorities - or is brought in from external consultants. In some cases, this capacity is substantial and able to drive real improvements in schools. However, improvement coverage and quality are inconsistent. Dialling down top-down system management should therefore be combined with growing bottom-up improvement capacity.

Improvement involves creating time, space and resources for schools to identify challenges and work together - often with citizens and external partners - to design, test and refine solutions. A well-known and successful example of improvement in action was the London Challenge (see case study).

CASE STUDY: THE LONDON CHALLENGE

The London Challenge was a secondary school improvement programme that took place between 2003 and 2011. It was run jointly by the prime minister's office and what was then the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). The challenge was the responsibility of the Minister for London Schools (a new post first held by Stephen Twigg MP) and focused on three clear and measurable objectives:

- To raise standards in the poorest-performing schools
- To narrow the attainment gap between pupils in London
- To create more good and outstanding schools

A London Schools Commissioner provided professional leadership: a team of senior practitioners who had experience of addressing school failure, led by a capable civil servant who had also been a teacher.

High-priority schools were identified and assigned an experienced adviser to broker tailored packages of support, working closely with a DfES official. The London Challenge team also worked with key boroughs where there were systematic concerns about local school performance to develop a 'vision' for school improvement. Lastly, there was investment in leadership development, including 'consultant heads' who shared their expertise with other school leaders.

The performance of London schools over the decade increased dramatically from being among the worst in the country. By 2010, Ofsted rated 30 per cent of London schools as outstanding, compared with 17.5 per cent nationally. The improvement included the poorest pupils and narrowed the attainment

gap. While other changes in education policy and London's demographics took place at the same time, evaluations and assessments concluded that the London Challenge programme drove important improvements in the school system.

Overall, it was a 'highly supportive and encouraging intervention in which head teachers and teachers came to feel more valued, more confident and more effective'. Factors contributing to the success of the London Challenge include the following.

- Sufficient time – the programme ran for eight years while equivalent programmes in other cities were rushed and did not have the same results
- Leadership – senior team with relevant practitioner skills and an improvement mindset
- Learning from experimentation – with short feedback loops, data to monitor progress, and rapid accountable decision-making
- Collaborative culture – between officials and schools with strong shared purpose and relationships based on a positive framing, mutual respect and humility
- Empowering practitioners – to develop professional ownership and accountability
- A well calibrated balance between support and challenge – there were high expectations and robust consequences where improvements were not secured, but this was paired with a 'whatever it takes' approach to support.

Sources: Kidson (2014) and Kings Fund (2015)

The creation of an 'evidence infrastructure' in recent years to support improvement - notably the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) as a What Works centre - has been effective. However, its remit is relatively narrow, with a focus on the attainment gap rather than education outcomes in the round. This could be expanded going forward.

In addition, the approach of What Works centres has been overly focused on randomised control trials (RCTs) rather than supporting wider experimentation and innovation (which often aren't conducive to RCTs) and their impact has been limited by the lack of an effective mechanism to spread best practice.

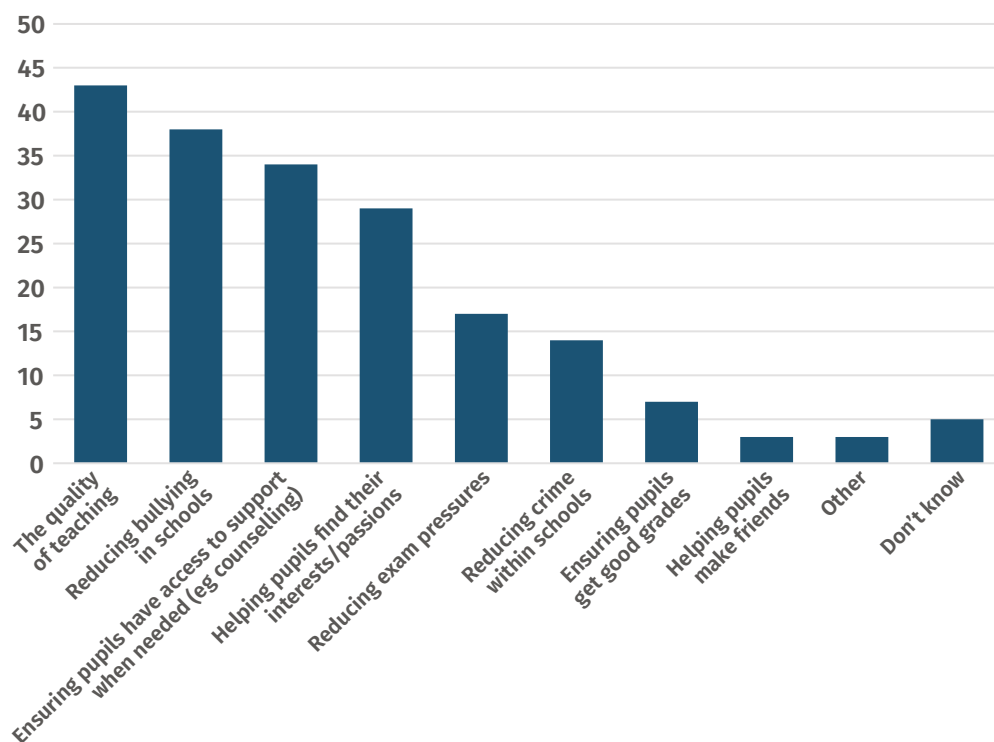
Finally, the main driver of improvement will always remain the development and retention of talent: school leaders and teachers. As the EEF notes: 'The best available evidence indicates that great teaching is the most important lever schools have to improve pupil attainment' (EEF 2023).

The public also see improving the quality of teaching as important. When polled for this report they were clear that improving 'the quality of teaching' should be the top priority for policy makers going forward - just ahead of reducing bullying in schools and ensuring pupils have access to support such as counselling when needed (see figure 5.2)³.

3 This polling was undertaken by YouGov for IPPR. Polling was conducted with adults in England. Sample size was 1,777 and fieldwork was conducted between 21 and 22 of August 2023.

FIGURE 5.2: THE PUBLIC THINK THAT IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TEACHING SHOULD BE THE TOP PRIORITY FOR POLICYMAKERS GOING FORWARD

Responses to the question 'Which, if any, do you think should be prioritised within schools? Please select up to two.'



Source: YouGov polling for IPPR

While there is no one definition of excellent teaching, there is a consensus that the quality of teaching is not fixed. Teachers can improve with effective professional development (EEF 2021). This has led to the creation of a number of sector-led institutions as well as a big push from government (ibid), which are driving forward improvements in continued professional development (CPD) for teachers.

Unfortunately, it has not yet led to a coherent or stable landscape of support for teachers. Developments like the new early career and core content frameworks are world-leading, but need to be built on to ensure all trainees and mentors receive the training time they were promised (Menzies forthcoming). The system also doesn't have long-term stable funding commensurate with the scale of need (ibid).

Comparing the situation in England with other high-performing nations demonstrates the thinness of the state's commitment to its teacher development. In Singapore, teachers have a right to 100 hours a year of professional development (Parliament 2014), yet England is failing to even meet the 35 hours a year commitment that has been recommended by multiple institutions. This must change if we want a genuinely world-class schooling system.

CASE STUDY: STRUCTURES IN SCHOOLING - SOLUTION OR DISTRACTION?

In the last decade, the other major lever pursued by governments to drive improvement has been the structures of education. Conservative - and Conservative-led - governments have sought to build on reforms that originated under the New Labour government by pursuing a programme of academisation and the creation of free schools.

These reforms introduced greater freedoms for head teachers (and parents in the case of free schools) in running schools and new governance arrangements. Originally this involved the option for high-performing schools to academise but over time they set out a vision for all schools to become an academy, increasingly as part of larger multi-academy chains.

However, while studies show that Labour's original academisation policy, which focused only on underperforming schools and was combined with other measures such as increased resourcing to support improvement, did drive better outcomes (Andrews and Perera 2017), there is very little evidence that the subsequent national roll-out of academisation has had the same effect.

As The Education Policy Institute (EPI) concludes:

'Academies have not provided a panacea to school improvement. In the early days of the programme...sponsored academies recorded a discernible positive impact on pupils' attainment. This has not, however, been sustained... as the programme has expanded since 2010. With the exception of outstanding convertor academies, we do not observe any visible, positive impact on outcomes amongst any other type of academy ... It is evident that the structure of the school is less meaningful to the outcomes of pupils than what is happening within those schools.'

This suggests that policy makers should avoid focusing on structures in seeking to improve school outcomes in the coming decades.

Policy recommendations

- **Abolish overarching judgements in inspection reports and develop a new, narrative-driven report for parents and guardians.** Judgements as to whether expected standards have been met or whether action is needed should be made separately. Ofsted should consult on a new, narrative-driven report for parents, guardians and pupils. This summary report should be based on a clear, accessible format and be accompanied by a data dashboard that includes multi-year progress, attendance, destination and exclusion data - including a comment from Ofsted on any contextual considerations.
- **Trial a new, three-tier regulatory response to drive improvement in the system.** The office of the regional director should combine information provided by Ofsted with its local knowledge of school improvement capacity (for example, regarding the support available from nearby MATs or local authorities) to decide on one of three courses of action: 'school-led development'; 'enhanced support'; and, as a last resort, 'immediate action'. Where, as part of their regulatory function, regional directors deem a school to need 'enhanced support', they should work with schools/MATs/LAs to ensure adequate improvement support is available and in place. The needs-assessment and brokering process should be supported by each region's network of National Leaders of Education (NLEs). The DfE should play a collaborative and enabling role with local leaders (rather than combative or controlling), and should ensure it gives a 'whatever it takes' offer of support, including extra resources, capacity and freedoms where needed.

- **Invest in improvement capacity across the school system by taking a ‘whatever it takes’ approach to support for local areas, including an offer of extra resources, capacity and freedoms where needed.** The DfE’s regional directors should review the availability of school improvement capacity in their regions, including within MATs, local authorities and external providers, to identify any cold spots, pump-priming the development of additional support capacity where necessary. This support should remain independent from the regulator to avoid conflicts of interest.
- **Introduce a more generous minimum entitlement for teacher training and development.** Guarantee all teachers an opportunity to participate in fully-funded, accredited training over their career. Over the next decade, the aspiration should be to move towards an international benchmark of 100 hours a year, starting immediately with 105 hours every three years. This entitlement will support teachers to access a range of career pathways, whether pastoral, pedagogical or leadership-focused. Commit to stable multi-year funding for a clear, evidence-based professional development offer to underpin this. We estimate that reaching the 105 hours target would cost an additional £198 million per year.
- **Endow a new innovation organisation with £500 million to work alongside the EEF to test, spread and evidence new approaches to improvement and innovation.** The government should reinvest in the evidence architecture created in recent years. This should include broadening the remit of the EEF to look at school improvement in the round and resourcing it to incorporate broader approaches to evidence creation (beyond RCTs). The government should also create a companion innovation fund worth £2 billion over the next five years to initiate, test and spread more innovative ‘experiments’ to drive improvement in schools. This would ensure we look at both ‘what works’ and invest in finding out ‘what could work’.

SHIFT 3: HARNESS THE WHOLE VILLAGE TO SUPPORT LEARNING, RATHER THAN OVERBURDENING SCHOOLS

WHAT WE HEARD

'Social care has been decimated. Children centres have been decimated. All of these things are gone and it is incumbent on schools to fill the gap.'

Parent, focus group

'We need funding for specialist services rather than expecting teachers to fill the gap.'

Teacher, Big Education Conversation

'Parents are not the enemy. Listen to us. We love our kids, we love them before starting school, during and after, when they get jobs.'

Parent, Big Education Conversation

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

We need to stop putting more pressure on schools alone to educate and solve wider problems such as mental ill-health, and instead harness the resources of public services, parents and the wider community.

As the saying goes, 'It takes a village to raise a child.' Schools and teachers can and do play a big role. But what happens outside the school gates greatly affects the learning outcomes of young people (Joseph et al 2023). The following factors are crucial.

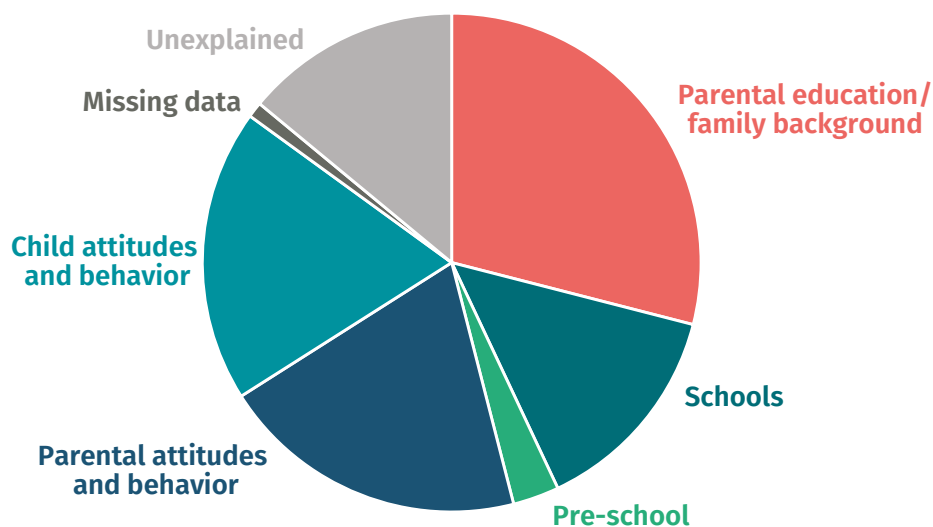
- The level of involvement, attitudes of, and support provided by parents;
- The degree to which the home environment is conducive to learning; and
- Access to learning resources, including digital infrastructure and connectivity.

The home environment also has a significant impact on the wider experiences of young people, with too many of them facing a range of vulnerabilities, including mental health problems (either their own or their families'), exposure to violence, neglect and abuse, bereavement, and caring responsibilities.

Academic evidence suggests that these factors, starting in the early years, are as important – if not more important – than the quality of schooling itself in determining educational outcomes (see figure 6.1) (Goodman and Gregg 2010).

FIGURE 6.1: EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES ARE CAUSED BY MORE THAN JUST THE QUALITY OF SCHOOLS

The factors explaining the gap in educational outcomes between poorest and richest young people; decomposition of direct effects aged 11 (before controlling for prior abilities)



Source: Goodman and Gregg (2010)

This demands that we embrace a broader vision of the purpose of schooling and the support schools can provide to students and their families through becoming hubs for support services. Schools cannot solve all the social problems that create barriers to learning. But they can look to shape the lives of children beyond the classroom.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends that schools adopt a comprehensive ‘whole-school’ approach to promoting the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of students (NICE 2017). This means ensuring wellbeing objectives are embedded into the culture, curriculum, staff and systems of the school (see information box).

INFORMATION BOX: A ‘WHOLE SCHOOL’ APPROACH TO HEALTHY YOUNG PEOPLE

There is growing evidence in support of the whole-school approach to health and wellbeing, which enables social and emotional learning (SEL) (Clarke and Hoskin 2022; Hoare et al 2017). This includes:

- school-level approaches to developing a positive school ethos which also aim to support greater engagement in learning
- universal programmes which generally take place in the classroom with the whole class
- more specialised programmes which use elements of SEL and target pupils with particular social or emotional needs.

A review by the Early Intervention Foundation (Clarke et al 2021) concludes the following.

- There is good evidence that **universal social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions** can have a small to moderate impact on young people's social and emotional skills and in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety in the short-term. There is less evidence in relation to long-term impact.
- There is emerging, if limited, evidence suggesting that **positive psychology-based approaches** can have a small, longer-term impact on life satisfaction and in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- There is good evidence that **mental health literacy interventions** can improve mental health knowledge. There is limited evidence as to how this translates into attitudes towards mental health and help-seeking behaviour.
- **Positive youth development** interventions involve activities such as personal mentoring, youth sports, recreational activities and youth leadership programmes that aim to increase self-esteem, sense of purpose, decision-making, leadership skills and positive interactions with others. There is very limited high-quality evidence of the impact these have on young people's mental health and wellbeing.
- **Mental health interventions** such as anxiety and depression prevention initiatives that seek to prevent or reduce mental health difficulties (rather than promoting mental health and wellbeing) can improve symptoms of depression and anxiety in the short term. There is a lack of evidence on long-term impact. Targeted interventions such as cognitive behaviour therapy-based interventions can reduce symptoms of depression in the short and medium term, which can be helpful in tackling sub-clinical needs.

Delivering on these approaches requires schools to have adequate resourcing and support for teachers to play their role.

CASE STUDY: FRIENDS PROGRAMME AND BEEWELL

FRIENDS is a resilience programme which trains teachers and increases access to cognitive behaviour therapy to improve mental health. It addresses four elements of resilience - emotions, body, mind and learning - and takes a proactive and preventative approach to safeguarding young people's mental health.

A controlled trial showed that when the FRIENDS programme was offered to children with signs of early anxiety their symptoms were reduced, which lowered the chance of an onset of a diagnosable anxiety disorder by 54 per cent. These findings are consistent whether it is offered universally to all children or to selected groups of children and adolescents at risk.

The programme started in Australia and is now being used throughout Europe, Asia, the Middle East, North and South America.

There are now attempts to roll out similar approaches in England. For example, #BeeWell is a survey to measure young people's wellbeing, with the resulting data used to intervene early and connect them with resources and support to improve and manage their mental health.

This model was co-created with 150 young people and brings together a coalition of partners from across local government and civil society to

act on the published census findings. The #BeeWell programme is currently delivered in two regions: Greater Manchester and Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton. But there is a strong case for rolling it - or similar programmes - out nationally.

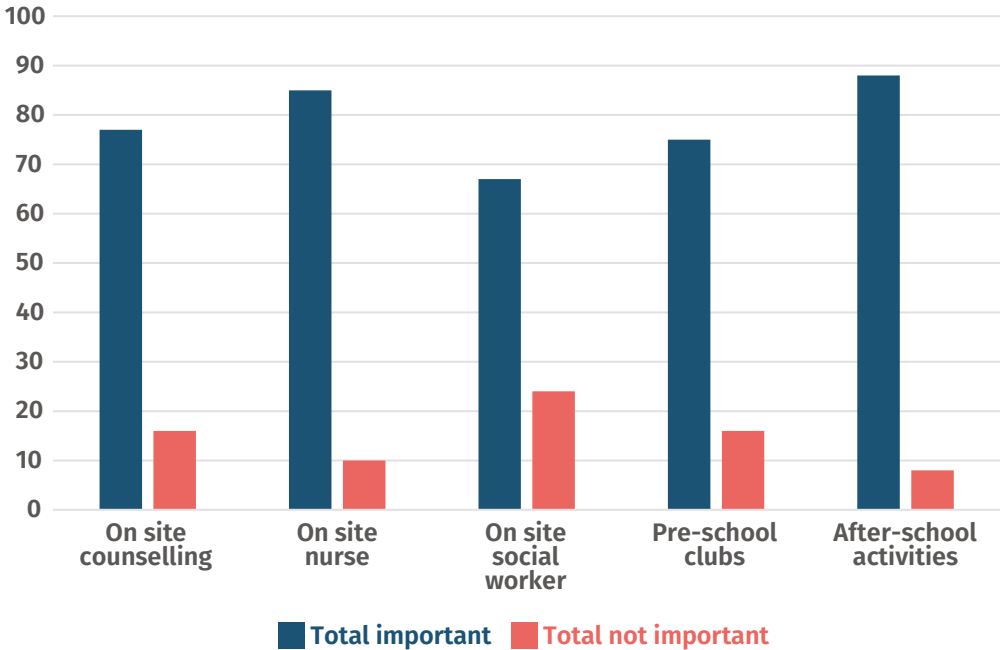
While schools and teachers can and already do take a role in supporting young people with the vulnerabilities they face outside school, teachers are not doctors, counsellors or social workers. There will always be a limit to what they can and should be expected to achieve on their own.

This requires schools to work closely with a wider array of public services, in particular the NHS and social care system, and tap into the wider networks including family and friends of young people, to provide the support young people need. But all too often, the support young people require is not accessible, joined-up with their school or tailored to their needs.

This conclusion is supported by polling undertaken for this report. When asked, voters put ensuring pupils have access to support such as counselling as the third highest priority (see figure 5.2). The vast majority supported having on-site counselling, nursing and care support (figure 6.2).

FIGURE 6.2: THE PUBLIC OVERWHELMINGLY SUPPORT ON-SITE SUPPORT SERVICES IN SCHOOLS AND PRE-AND-POST SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Responses to 'How important, if at all, do you think it is for schools to have each of the following?'



Source: YouGov polling for IPPR

Recent IPPR polling found that half or fewer teachers are in state schools that have access to an on-site counsellor or an on-site nurse (Quilter-Pinner and Ambrose 2020). Our polling finds that teachers believe improving access to such professionals and services would improve attainment and be popular with parents (ibid).

Similarly, there is a case for extending the school day to provide pre-school breakfast clubs and post-school homework clubs as well as enrichment activities, with a majority in favour (figure 6.2). There is good evidence that these can improve wellbeing and academic outcomes. However, our polling also finds that many schools are unable - given financial and staffing constraints - to provide this support (figure 6.3) (ibid).

Finally, parental engagement programmes (see information box) have also been shown to be effective but are not always available. Studies show that parental involvement in a young person's education can have a big impact on achievement even after all other factors shaping attainment have been controlled for (DfE 2010).

CASE STUDY: WHAT WORKS FOR PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT?

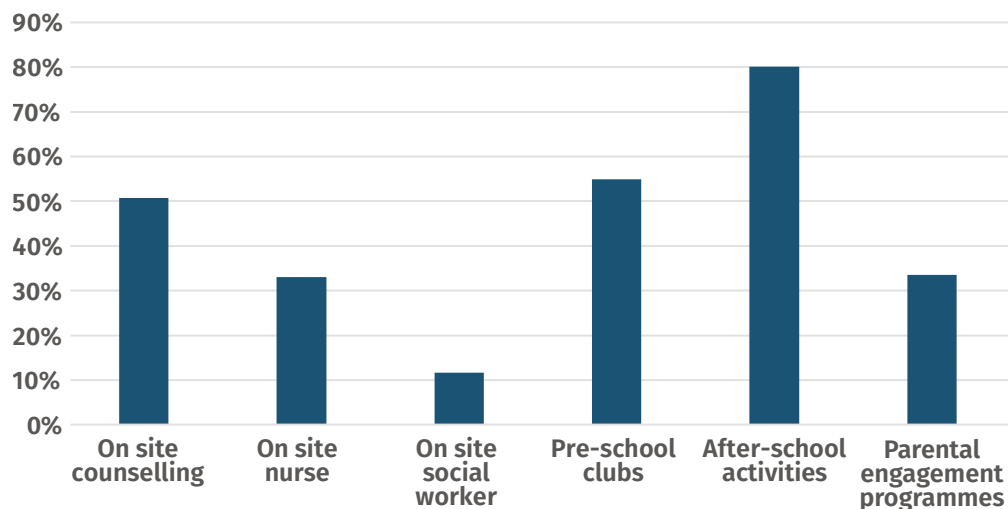
The available evidence suggests that the most promising way to drive better outcomes through parental engagement is through supporting parents to engage with their child's education outside school and in the home. Reforms should focus on: ensuring more regular and effective two-way communication; training for teachers and parents, which can improve outcomes; and, in the case of difficult-to-reach communities, putting home visits in place (EEF 2019).

The evidence suggests three big lessons:

- Regular, personalised, and two-way communication works. Polling of parents suggests that they do not feel that communication with schools is good enough. As the EEF has argued, 'School communications with parents are likely to be more effective if they are personalised, linked to learning, and framed positively (ibid):' In particular, providing crucial information on homework completion, attendance and grades on a regular basis is key. Weekly text messages on progress to parents have shown significant promise in terms of engagement, as have more personalised letters on attendance. Approaches that ask for opinions and feedback from parents are also preferable.
- Training for teachers and school leaders on parental engagement is required. Most schools agree that parental engagement is the responsibility of all staff, particularly teachers on the front line. However, many teachers feel that they are ill-equipped to support parents to engage with their children's education, especially where needs are more complex (for example, as a result of cultural background, parental health or working hours). Fewer than 10 per cent of teachers say they have received training on parental engagement. Programmes that have offered teachers training on this show significant potential (DFE 2010).
- Support for parents on how to help their child is particularly effective. Parents can lack knowledge and confidence when it comes to engaging meaningfully with their children's education. However, a range of interventions have been shown to have a significant impact. Providing group-based workshops for parents or one-to-one support, potentially through a school-home support practitioner (ibid), can help to improve knowledge and confidence, engagement and student outcomes. Interventions such as home visits for hard-to-reach communities can also be effective (EEF 2019). Government could provide extra funding to scale up these interventions across the country.

FIGURE 6.3: TOO MANY SCHOOLS ARE UNABLE TO PROVIDE VITAL SUPPORT SUCH AS ON-SITE COUNSELLING AND PRE- AND POST-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Percentage of teachers who say their school provides key support services



Source: YouGov polling for this report

The universal nature of schools means they are well placed to act as a hub for these wider activities. This can improve access to vital services - for example, specialist mental health support or social care support, which are currently very hard to reach - and can help create a 'whole-school' environment, which can pick up issues early to offer preventative support.

This is already happening as part of the community schools movement in the US (see case study), which has inspired similar models in England. This agenda also has a lot of similarities to the Extended Schools programme in England, which ran up to 2010 and had a positive impact on 'personal, social and health outcomes for young people, family stability, community well-being and school performance' (Cummings et al 2007).

CASE STUDY: COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AND WEST LONDON ZONE (WLZ)

Community schools are a network of schools which value the thoughts, experiences and involvement of the wider community and society in young people's education. The concept of community schools was developed in the 1990s and evolved from John Dewey's vision of schools as social centres and Jane Addams' focus on providing for those in need.

The community schools movement was a response to growing inequality and poverty within the public school system. There was a need for wrap-around support for children within and outside the classroom and school. This support can include pre- and post-school activities, onsite health and employment support, and activities which engage the community and parents.

The US Department for Education identified increases in attendance, and student and parent engagement, after the community schools strategy was introduced into some of America's failing schools. Evidence shows that literacy and numeracy has improved among elementary children

via the introduction of community schools. The approach has been repeatedly mentioned by President Biden in speeches.

This approach has also been adopted in England. For example, West London Zone (WLZ) is a charity taking a whole-society approach to join up every part of a child's welfare to prepare them for adulthood. WLZ has specialist link workers who are co-located in schools to set goals for a child's wellbeing and development and support them to access service services and wider support.

Policy recommendations

- **Make parental engagement a national priority by creating and rolling out a national parental partnership strategy.** The government should work with schools and parents, drawing on Parentkind's 'Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools' (Parentkind 2017), to set out an ambitious new parental engagement strategy. This should establish what parents can expect from schools and what they can do to improve outcomes for their children. Parent voice should be further embedded in the system by building on Ofsted's Parent View survey to create a regular published parent survey. The government should provide funding to ensure that all teachers have access to training on effective parental engagement and separately, to ensure that all schools provide access to support and activities for parents to help support their children's education.
- **Introduce a national entitlement to a 'community school offer', including an on-site counsellor and nurse, and pre- and post-school activities.** The government should revisit the vision behind community schools and set out a national entitlement, alongside additional funding for schools, to the core elements of this, including: an extended school day with pre- and post-school activity, at an annual cost of £200 million and £3.9 billion respectively; a comprehensive programme of parent engagement and education; and an on-site counsellor for every 300 pupils, at a cost of £830 million on average per year, and an on site nurse for every 600 pupils at a cost of £270 million per year. The government should also fully implement the MacAlister review (MacAlister 2022) into children's social care, including the creation within schools of community-embedded multidisciplinary teams to help prevent young people being put into care. This requires an additional investment of around £500 million per year.
- **Invest in teacher training to support the social and emotional needs of young people and improve mental health and anxiety.** Expand social-emotional (SEL) learning and 'whole-school' approaches to wellbeing nationally. Current policies allow space for this, since relationship and sexual education (RSE) and Health Education already include expectations regarding SEL provision. However, teachers are currently navigating increasing mental ill-health among pupils and are being expected to support young people to learn about this. This is skilled, challenging work that does not always align with every teacher's motivations for entering the profession (Menzies et al 2015). More priority should therefore be given to this element of education. Delivery depends on high-quality training, which needs to draw on the best available evidence in this emerging field. Upskilling teachers - as is being achieved through schemes such as the Difference - will require increased and ongoing government funding.

SHIFT 4: EMPOWER YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES AND AGENCY RATHER THAN DISEMPOWERING THEM

WHAT WE HEARD

'Children need to be respected more both as people and as learners.'

Teacher,
Big Education Conversation

'We should lower the voting age to 16.'

Young person,
Big Education Conversation

'Let children explore what to learn and what they want to become.'

Young person,
Big Education Conversation

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

Young people should be partners in building a system that gives them a voice and agency within and outside the school setting.

Young people are deeply concerned about the future. They see the impact that mega trends such as climate change and automation are having on our society, and they fear for the implications for their future. A shocking two thirds (67 per cent) of them believe they will be worse off than their parents' generation (Smith 2019).

At the same time, young people are also standing up - showing inspiring and courageous leadership - to reshape the world. In recent years this has been most obvious on issues such as climate change, racial justice and gender rights. In the UK, 16-24-year-olds are the most likely age group to have signed a petition or joined a protest (CAF 2019).

However, in school there is significant evidence that young people often feel disempowered and unheard. More than one in ten (12.5 per cent) of children aged 10-15 state that they are unhappy at school and the most frequently given reason for low satisfaction is not 'feeling listened to' (The Children's Society 2022).

This is part of a wider problem of citizens feeling disengaged with paternalistic and disempowering public services such as the NHS (Quilter-Pinner et al, 2020). However, whereas efforts have been made to empower citizens in these wider

services (see information box), this has not happened for young people in schools. This is most likely due to the perception that young people cannot be trusted to make their own decisions.

CASE STUDY: USER FEEDBACK IN THE NHS

The UK has led the world in the use of patient surveys in healthcare (NIHR 2020).

The NHS Friends and Family Test

The NHS Friends and Family Test has been running since 2013 and enables people to give short, anonymous feedback (and rate care from 'very poor' to 'very good'). It was extended to staff in 2014 and this data is now collected as a mandatory National Quarterly Pulse Survey.

By the end of 2019, the Friends and Family Test had generated more than 75 million pieces of feedback, with the total rising by about one million every month.

Nine out of ten responses are positive, and the 2019 NHS Staff Survey found that almost six in ten staff think patient feedback is used to inform decisions.

Patient reported outcomes (PROMs)

PROMs capture patient views of their care in a robust and reliable way. The introduction of PROMs in the English NHS in 2009 was considered world-leading at the time and focused on before and after experiences in four areas of elective surgery: hips, knees, varicose veins and hernias. Response rates are good and the dataset has been described as 'extraordinarily rich'.

An emerging set of policy tools is being developed across the world that can help bring citizens - including young people - into the policy making and service design process (see figure 7.1). However, as highlighted above, these have not been widely applied to schools. Addressing this can help make schools more effective in their mission to support young people to learn, grow and flourish.

FIGURE 7.1: POTENTIAL MECHANISMS FOR INCREASING CITIZEN VOICE IN PUBLIC SERVICES SUCH AS SCHOOLS

Method	Description	Pros	Cons
User feedback	Mechanisms for systematically collecting and using the views of citizens, such as surveys.	Collects information at scale. Allows for representative sample.	No guarantee that findings are used. Does not shift power in system. Information can lack nuance or detail.
Representation	Representatives of citizens are elected or selected into positions of power. Models include tsars and ministers.	Can ensure citizen voice is 'in the rooms' where decisions are taken.	Can end up being ignored/ tokenistic.
Advisory	Groups of citizens are elected or selected onto advisory boards at the local or national level.	Can enable more nuanced discussion and deliberation.	Can end up being ignored/ tokenistic.
Citizens' assemblies or citizens' juries	Groups of citizens are selected to deliberate specific issues, often with the power to make a decision at the end.	Can enable more nuanced discussion and deliberation. If decision-making power is handed over, power is shifted.	Expensive to run. Hard to scale. Only involves a small share of the population.
Participatory budgeting	Groups of citizens are given the power to allocate a share of government spending. Can be achieved at scale using technology.	Hands real power over to citizens. Forces citizens to consider and make trade-offs.	Risk of being skewed by more active groups of citizens unless randomly selected.
Co-design	Groups of citizens work with professionals and experts to co-design services or policies.	Hands real power over to citizens. Can enable more nuanced discussion and deliberation.	Hard to scale. Only involves a small share of the population.

Source: Authors' analysis

However, as well as finding ways to embed youth voice in schools, policy makers should enable schools to support young people's voices to be heard in society. This should include reinvesting in compulsory and high-quality civic education in schools alongside votes at 16, so young people get into the habit of voting from a young age.

During our sessions with young people from across the UK, we found that the mechanisms such as participatory budgeting and co-design were highlighted as having significant potential to embed young people's voices within local and national policy-making processes. These mechanisms are noted to shift power and spread decision making amongst citizens and traditional power holders. The long-term nature was also recognised to allow more time for rigorous scrutiny on key decisions and opened more opportunities for accountability.

Our research with young people has suggested a number of ways that we can institutionalise youth voice rather than fall into tokenistic processes.

- See young people as evaluators and experts and support them in learning new skills to lead on their own programmes (ie via peer-research training or public speaking).
- Introduce accountability mechanisms such as clear and direct feedback loops that outline how their engagement has shaped tangible policy and justifications on why their expertise has not been incorporated.
- Undertake outreach efforts to have a truly diverse group of representatives or participants across identities.
- Use resources to break down barriers to engage a diverse group, including paying for time, travel and accommodation.
- Ensure that opportunities are spread among different groups by rotating them and presenting them to those who may not typically engage with them.
- Provide Sustained and efficient long-term funding to avoid fragmented programmes that don't join up and can lead to inaction.

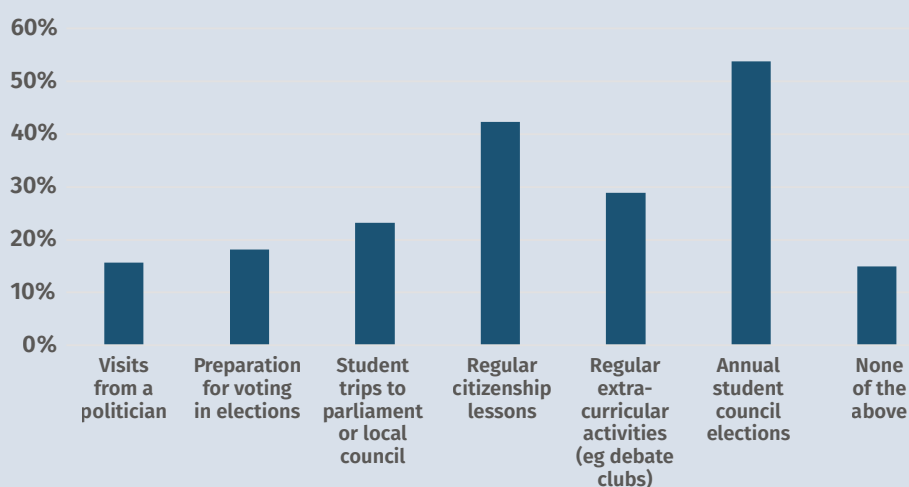
INFORMATION BOX: THE CASE FOR CIVIC EDUCATION

Citizenship education became part of the national curriculum in 2002. But the subject has been neglected in many schools, and academies do not have to follow the national curriculum. Notably, a recent poll found that less than a third of secondary schools are offering weekly lessons in politics or curricular citizenship education, and a fifth of schools are offering no provision at all⁴.

Schools are more likely to provide wider forms of civic engagement and education such as debating societies or student council elections but even these are far from universal (see figure 7.2). Private schools or schools with a wealthier intake of pupils are more likely to provide most elements of a civic education (ibid).

FIGURE 7.2: TOO MANY SCHOOLS ARE FAILING TO PROVIDE A HIGH-QUALITY CIVIC EDUCATION

Percentage of teachers whose school provides various forms of citizenship education



Source: YouGov polling for this report

4 <https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/180038/>

This is concerning because the evidence that civic education comes with significant benefits is strong. Where students receive a regular high-quality learning experience in politics and citizenship, they develop a greater belief in their ability to make a difference, they are more likely to participate in politics by, for example, raising money for charity or signing a petition, and they are more likely to vote (ibid).

Civic education is most transformative where pupils receive both declarative knowledge (ie, facts, concepts and relationships between them) and procedural knowledge (ie, how to carry out actions) within an Open Classroom Climate (OCC) (Schraw 2006). This refers to a learning culture in a classroom which encourages debate and discussion.

Policy recommendations

- **Embed the feedback of young people in the schools system.** Create a new national pupils' survey to systematically and regularly collect young people's views on their schooling experience. Ensure this data is collected, analysed and published at a national level. Ensure it is used to inform assessments of local and system-level performance and action is taken by policy makers, regulators and school leaders. This reform should take inspiration from and seek to replicate the success of patient-reported outcomes in the NHS.
- **Create a statutory entitlement to youth work provision delivered at local level.** A new entitlement would enable educators to work with youth workers and young people to enrich wider civic engagement and democratic processes. This would ensure that youth engagement is sustained over the long term and every young person can be part of local democracy both within and beyond school. This change would support youth engagement at a local community level, which in turn could catalyse longer-term engagement and investment in political processes such as turning up to the ballot on election day.
- **Commit to rolling out Big Education Conversations nationally, along with a greater use of other participatory mechanisms.** Policy makers should commit to a set of rolling local Big Education Conversations across the country, bringing together policy makers, young people, teachers and parents. These should feed into an annual report on the state of schooling in England, with recommendations made about future reforms similar to the Children's Commissioner's recent 'Big Ask'. This could be combined with the wider use of participatory methods such as participatory budgeting and co-design on specific policy questions to embed youth voice in the policy making process.

INFORMATION BOX: BIG EDUCATION CONVERSATIONS

The Big Education Conversation (Big Education Conversation, 2022) was started in the UK by Big Change and Whole Education and is now a global initiative that supports communities to come together to talk about what education is really for (the purpose of education), and to generate ideas and commitments for change. Big Education Conversations are intergenerational and include different stakeholder groups (eg parents, students, teachers, employers, government leaders) to ensure diverse perspectives are heard.

Multiple studies inside and outside education have highlighted the importance of developing a widely shared understanding of a system's purpose and goals, and that when education leaders take the time to have meaningful conversations with diverse stakeholders about the goals of education, it can help pave the way for a broadly-shared vision (Sengeh and Winthrop 2022). Participatory policy design approaches - where teachers, community

members, students and partners have a seat at the table alongside education system leaders - have been highlighted as important for successful large-scale education changes in Portugal, Finland and Canada (Barton 2021).

Since 2021, there have been hundreds of Big Education Conversations in England involving thousands of people. These conversations generate insights and action that can shape policy and practice. A Big Education Conversation at Blackpool Tower was led by young people and involved students, teachers, local councillors and the mayor⁵. The data from the conversation was analysed and is shaping the 10-year education strategy for the town, and was also submitted as written evidence to a House of Lords Select Committee on Education for 11-16 year olds (Speight et al 2023).

- **Introduce votes at 16 combined with consistently high-quality and expansive civic education in schools.** Introduce votes at 16 in UK elections, and in local and mayoral elections for young people in England, aligning it with Scotland and Wales. This has been shown to increase youth turnout in places like Scotland (Eichhorn and Hubner 2023). This should be introduced alongside reinvesting in compulsory, well-resourced and unbiased political education in schools leading up to young people's first vote. This teaching should encourage debate and discussion - and should involve registering young people to vote. The government should resource a new civics teacher training programme, as teachers report low confidence in delivering this subject. New polling for this report finds that 63 per cent of the public support increasing citizenship education in schools - compared with just 13 per cent who don't.

5 A record of the conversation can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1VAUicBmQ>

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APPENDIX: POLICY COSTINGS

METHODOLOGY NOTE

All costs in the report are before Barnett Formula consequentials. If this funding is additional to the existing spending envelope in England the costs of these policies will be higher than quoted in this document

CPD – COSTINGS

Policy

Ensure all teachers get access to 105 hours of quality training every three years at a cost of £198 million per year.

Methods

We use a paper by the Education Policy Institute as a base. They used EEF CPD trials, Wellcome’s CPD Challenge, and the DfE to estimate that Insert after this sentence: Our ambition of 105 hours over three years is calculated on the basis of teachers accessing 35 hours of training each year.

To calculate what the schools spend on average per year, we use the same figures as provided by the EPI. They used school finance data to estimate what schools are already spending. We assume that this will have rebounded since the pandemic. Cost estimates below have been rounded to the nearest £500,00

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
Current spend	£1,436,000,000	£1,474,000,000	£1,496,500,000	£1,510,000,000	£1,526,000,000	£1,548,500,000
Cost of increase to get to 35 hours	£188,500,000	£193,500,000	£196,000,000	£198,000,000	£200,500,000	£203,000,000
Cost of increase to get to 100 hours	£3,206,000,000	£3,290,000,000	£3,340,000,000	£3,370,500,000	£3,406,500,000	£3,456,000,000

BREAKFAST CLUBS

Policy

All primary and secondary schools get funding to provide breakfast clubs.

Methods

We use costs estimates from the national breakfast club programme at £44 per year. We then uprate this cost using GDP deflators.

We use the DfE’s projections on the number of children in primary and secondary school. We include ranges of uptake. We assume that schools that are already providing breakfasts would just start asking for funding rather than continuing to self-fund. Rounded to nearest £100,000.

Breakfast clubs						
	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
Price per pupil	£53	£55	£56	£56	£57	£58
Uptake						
30%	£123,400,000	£126,400,000	£127,700,000	£127,400,000	£127,200,000	£127,200,000
40%	£164,500,000	£168,600,000	£170,200,000	£169,800,000	£169,500,000	£169,600,000
50%	£205,600,000	£210,700,000	£212,800,000	£212,300,000	£211,900,000	£212,000,000

AFTER-SCHOOL CLUBS

Policy

All primary and secondary schools are funded to provide after-school clubs.

Methods

We use EEF's estimate for an after-school club to cost £7 per pupil - this comes from studies costing extending the school day. We then uprate using GDP deflators.

We then use a lower estimated cost of £3.50 per pupil for other after-school clubs that may not be run by teachers, which we then uprate using GDP deflators.

We use the Department for Education's projections to estimate the number of school children in primary and secondary schools. This assumes school take-up of between 80-100 per cent and student take-up of 40-60 per cent. We assume clubs run for three days a week, with one of the three being teacher-led. Cost estimates in the table below have been rounded to nearest £100 million.

Student take-up of after-school clubs						
	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
40%	£3,360,000,000	£3,450,000,000	£3,480,000,000	£3,470,000,000	£3,470,000,000	£3,470,000,000
50%	£3,780,000,000	£3,880,000,000	£3,910,000,000	£3,910,000,000	£3,900,000,000	£3,900,000,000
60%	£4,200,000,000	£4,310,000,000	£4,350,000,000	£4,340,000,000	£4,330,000,000	£4,330,000,000

SCHOOL COUNSELLING

Policy

Increase access to school counsellors in primary and secondary schools.

Methods

Department for Education projections were used to estimate the number of school pupils. An estimated cost for school counsellors comes from a suggestion by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, which we increase by inflation each year. They recommend £14,500 for two days, which we have increased to £36,250 for five days.

Counsellors per student	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
800	£303,200,000	£315,600,000	£315,600,000	£311,800,000	£310,200,000	£310,600,000
600	£404,300,000	£420,800,000	£420,800,000	£415,700,000	£413,600,000	£414,100,000
300	£808,600,000	£841,500,000	£841,600,000	£831,500,000	£827,100,000	£828,200,000

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