

Every Child Achieving and Thriving

UK Education is Changing

The Parent & Educator Guide to the
2026 Education White Paper

6 key changes for every age group,
from nursery through to sixth form

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About This Guide

In February 2026, the Department for Education published *Every Child Achieving and Thriving* — a 118-page white paper setting out the biggest education reforms in a generation, from nursery through to age 19.

We've read all 118 pages so you don't have to. This guide breaks down the six key changes for each age group, written in plain English for parents and educators.

What is a white paper? An official government document that sets out proposals for future legislation or policy changes — basically explaining what the government plans to do and why.

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■ Nursery & Early Years

6 things every parent should know

1. Your child's nursery will get extra SEND funding

A new Inclusive Early Years Fund will give nurseries and childminders money to identify and respond to emerging additional needs — so settings can no longer say they're not equipped to support your child.

2. Every Best Start Family Hub will have a dedicated SEND practitioner

Backed by £200m+ over three years, helping you understand your child's development, spot emerging needs earlier, and join up nursery, health visitors and SEND teams.

3. Nurseries and schools will be funded to work together on transitions

New partnerships will help your child (and you) build relationships with their future school before they even start, including shared resources and home visits.

4. The target is 75% of children reaching a good level of development by 2028

New Reception Networks, training for reception teachers, and the Nuffield Early Language Intervention programme are all being rolled out.

5. 30 hours of government-funded childcare is expanding

Alongside new school-based nurseries, saving working families up to £7,500 a year. A Childcare and Early Education Review will also simplify the system.

6. Speaking and communication are now a priority from the earliest age

The government is investing in oracy from nursery onwards — recognising that strong communication skills are essential for learning, mental health and relationships.

■ Primary School

6 things every parent should know

1. Speaking is now a core skill alongside reading, writing and maths

A new oracy framework will help primary teachers support children to become confident, fluent speakers by the end of Key Stage 2.

2. Every school will offer a core enrichment programme

Arts, sport, outdoor activities, civic engagement and life skills — embedded in the school day. An Enrichment Framework is being published this academic year.

3. Free breakfast clubs are coming to every primary school

Part of rebuilding services around schools to support families and remove barriers to learning and attendance.

4. Disadvantage funding is being redesigned

Schools will receive more funding for children with deeper, longer-term disadvantage — not just a binary free-school-meals measure.

5. Digital Individual Support Plans for SEND children

One record of your child's needs, reviewed with you every year, that follows them between schools.

6. SATs are staying — writing assessment improving

The government targets the highest KS2 results since current assessments began. Phonics check stays with 90% target.

■ Secondary School

6 things every parent should know

1. GCSEs are getting broader

New Progress 8 requires science, plus at least two of languages, creative subjects and humanities.

2. Key Stage 3 taken seriously as its own phase

A new RISE KS3 Alliance tackles disengagement and rising absence in Years 7 to 9.

3. New assessments in Year 8

Writing and maths assessed in Year 8 — the government wants to check progress before GCSEs.

4. Two weeks work experience for every child

New Gatsby Benchmarks with career hubs linking schools to local employers.

5. New School Profiles for parents

Ofsted grades, attainment, progress, attendance and enrichment — all in one accessible place.

6. Attendance target: 94% by 2028/29

AI-powered benchmarking, personalised targets and expanded mentoring for persistently absent children.

■ Sixth Form & Post-16

6 things every parent should know

1. V Levels arriving alongside A Levels and T Levels

A new vocational Level 3 qualification — clearer choices, simpler pathways.

2. New Level 2 pathways replace qualification chaos

An Occupational Pathway into work and a Further Study Pathway to progress higher.

3. Automatic college place if no post-16 plan

Improved data-sharing means no young person falls through the cracks.

4. 100 hours English/maths teaching without grade 4

Plus new preparation qualifications for students at grade 2 or below.

5. Colleges recognised for progress, not just passes

Less pressure to resit before students are ready.

6. Every child must have a planned destination

Targeted support for anyone at risk of becoming NEET.

■ SEND

6 things every parent should know

1. £1.6 billion for inclusive mainstream schools

Direct funding for common needs — without fighting for an EHCP first.

2. New Specialist Provision Packages replace EHCPs

Nationally defined, evidence-based. Your existing EHCP is protected.

3. £1.8 billion for specialists in schools

Speech therapists, educational psychologists — without needing a referral.

4. Inclusion bases in every secondary school

Specialist support within mainstream, backed by £3bn and 50,000 new places.

5. Ofsted grading inclusion for the first time

Plus a Children's Commissioner watchdog role over SEND reform.

6. No more retelling your child's story

Digital Individual Support Plans follow your child through every phase.

■■■ Childminders & Educators

6 things you need to know

1. Landmark SEND training from September 2026

£200m+ for all staff. Code of Practice will require it.

2. Support staff get formal recognition

New Negotiating Body for pay, conditions and career progression.

3. Maternity pay doubling for teachers

From 4 to 8 weeks full pay from 2027. Equivalent for support staff.

4. Inclusive Early Years Fund for childminders

Money to equip you to support all children.

5. National Inclusion Standards by 2028

£15m evidence-based framework replacing the postcode lottery.

6. 200+ extra educational psychologists per year

Plus expanded speech therapy apprenticeships.

■ Early Years Educators

6 things changing for you

1. Inclusive Early Years Fund — direct funding

To identify and support children with emerging additional needs.

2. EYITT places more than doubling by 2028

Consultation on training routes for inclusive practice.

3. Funded partnerships with local schools

Sharing pedagogy, curriculum and SEND identification systems.

4. SEND practitioner in every Family Hub

A direct link to health visitors and specialist SEND teams.

5. SEND training includes early years from Sept 2026

£200m+ in government-backed materials. Code of Practice requires it.

6. Childcare and Early Education Review reshaping the system

Sufficiency, funding and oversight are all changing.

■ Primary Teachers

6 things changing for you

1. Oracy is now core curriculum

New frameworks for oracy and writing. Not optional enrichment.

2. Core enrichment offer is mandatory

Ofsted toolkits from September 2026 will assess you against benchmarks.

3. KS2 writing assessment changing

Greater focus on fluent writing. Target: highest results since current assessments.

4. New RISE Reception Networks launching

Dedicated reception teacher training. Target: 75% GLD by 2028.

5. Digital Individual Support Plans mandatory for SEND

Created and maintained by you, reviewed annually. Ofsted will check.

6. Disadvantage funding redesigned

Consultation Summer 2026. Could change your school's budget.

■ Secondary Teachers

6 things changing for you

1. Progress 8 reformed

Two science slots. Affects timetabling and option blocks.

2. Statutory Year 8 assessments

Reading, comprehension and maths. Literacy embedded across subjects.

3. RISE Key Stage 3 Alliance established

KS3 must get proper time. No more compressing for early GCSEs.

4. Inclusion base in every secondary school

Specialist SEND within mainstream. Ofsted benchmarks to follow.

5. 160 days specialist support per year by 2028-29

Therapists and psychologists directly in school without referrals.

6. New School Profiles change accountability

All data public. Changes what you're measured on.

■ Post-16 Educators

6 things changing for you

1. V Levels plus new Level 2 pathways

New qualifications to plan curriculum around.

2. 100 hours English/maths per subject for resitters

Significant teaching commitment to resource.

3. Progress measures changing in your favour

Recognised for progress, not just pass/fail.

4. Every student must have a planned destination

Students without plans get automatically allocated a college place.

5. SEND training applies to post-16

£200m+ package covers you. Digital ISPs are your responsibility.

6. Professional development pathway for FE

Teacher Training Entitlement extends to FE with new CPD.

■ SENCOs & SEND Specialists

6 things changing for you

1. Your role: more strategic, less admin

Digital processes free you to lead inclusive practice.

2. Four areas of need being replaced

New 'areas of development' aligned to child development.

3. National Inclusion Standards by 2028

£15m for expert panel, tools and Specialist Provision Packages.

4. Schools must publish an Inclusion Strategy

Subject to oversight and challenge.

5. Every school joins a local SEND group

Pooled funding, shared expertise across settings.

6. EHCPs redesigned around Specialist Provision Packages

First transitions September 2029.

Want to work with us?

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contact@morecurricular.co.uk | 020 3603 7729

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