



# The Children's Plan

## Building brighter futures – Summary

department for  
children, schools and families



# Foreword

## By the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families



Our aim is to make this the best place in the world for our children and young people to grow up. This is why we created the new Department for Children, Schools and Families six months ago, and why we announced that we would draw up this first ever Children's Plan, to put the needs of families, children and young people at the centre of everything we do.

Since then, we have been listening to parents, teachers, professionals, and children and young people themselves. We heard that while there are more opportunities for young people today than ever before, parents want more support in managing the new pressures they face such as balancing work and family life, dealing with the internet and the modern commercial world, and letting their children play and learn whilst staying safe. We heard that while children are doing better than ever in school, we need to do more to ensure that every child gets a world class education. We heard that while fewer children now live in poverty, too many children's education is still being held back by poverty and disadvantage.

And so building on a decade of reform and results, and responding directly to these concerns, our Children's Plan will strengthen support for all families during the formative early years of their children's lives, take the next steps in achieving world class schools and an excellent education for every child, involve parents fully in their children's learning, help to make sure that young people have interesting and

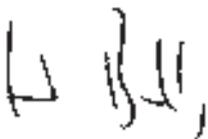
exciting things to do outside of school, and provide more places for children to play safely.

The Plan and the new Department mean that more than ever before families will be at the centre of excellent, integrated services that put their needs first, regardless of traditional institutional and professional structures. This means a new leadership role for Children's Trusts in every area, a new role for schools as the centre of their communities, and more effective links between schools, the NHS and other children's services so that together they can engage parents and tackle all the barriers to the learning, health and happiness of every child.

I am also determined to make sure that this Children's Plan is the beginning of a new way of working, not a one-off event. As well as making sure that everyone understands what part they need to play, we need to carry on listening if we are going to get this right and help all our children and young people aim high and achieve their ambitions. There will also be an opportunity to feed in to the different reviews that we have announced.

We are setting ourselves ambitious new goals for 2020, and we will report back on the progress we are making on the Plan in a year's time. With schools, children's services, the voluntary sector and government all playing their part, we can ensure that every child has the best start in life, we can back all parents as they bring up their children, we can unlock the talents of all our young people and we can ensure that no child or young person is left to fall behind.

That is what our Children's Plan sets out to do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Balls'.

**Ed Balls**

Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families

# Executive summary

1. The Children's Plan aims to make England the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up. Over the last ten years, we have made much progress to tackle under investment and low aspirations in early years, schools, colleges and other services for children. Since 1997:
  - the number of registered childcare places has more than doubled so that there is now a registered childcare place for 1 in every 4 children under 8;
  - standards in schools have risen across the board, with results at ages 11, 14, 16 and 19 now at or about their highest ever levels, far fewer weak or failing schools, and more young people than ever before going on to university;
  - the number of children in relative poverty has fallen by 600,000 and teenage pregnancy rates are at their lowest level for 20 years; and
  - as a result of Every Child Matters, local areas have begun to change the way they manage their services for children and young people.
2. However, while there are more opportunities for families and children now than ever before, parents say they sometimes find it hard to cope with a rapidly changing world. More mothers as well as fathers are pursuing rewarding careers, but can find it hard to balance work and family life. Parents regret that their children do not play independently outside as they did when they were young, but worry about safety if their children go outside alone. Families are more aware of how to pursue healthy lifestyles but too much time spent in front of video games or the television and fatty foods mean that child obesity is on the rise. And when this generation of children and young

people leave education, they will need higher skills to succeed in employment.

3. Moreover, some children and young people, often from disadvantaged backgrounds, are still underachieving. While many of our teachers and schools are among the very best in the world, there is still too much variation in quality, and as a result children are not achieving all of which they are capable. And too many children and young people suffer unhappy childhoods because of disadvantage or problems that are not addressed, or tackled too late.
4. Based on our consultation, five principles underpin the Children's Plan:
  - government does not bring up children – parents do – so government needs to do more to back parents and families;
  - all children have the potential to succeed and should go as far as their talents can take them;
  - children and young people need to enjoy their childhood as well as grow up prepared for adult life;
  - services need to be shaped by and responsive to children, young people and families, not designed around professional boundaries; and
  - it is always better to prevent failure than tackle a crisis later.
5. The Children's Plan sets out our plans for the next ten years under each of the Department for Children, Schools and Families' strategic objectives, with a chapter at the end looking at how we will make these reforms happen.

## Chapter 1: Happy and healthy

### Secure the wellbeing and health of children and young people

6. Families are the bedrock of society and the place for nurturing happy, capable and resilient children. In our consultation, parents made it clear that they would like better and more flexible information and support that reflects the lives they lead. Our Expert Groups emphasised how important it is that parents are involved with policy affecting children and that we need particularly to improve how government and services involve fathers. To help every parent do the best for their child, we will:
  - allocate £34 million over the next three years to provide two expert parenting advisers in every local authority;
  - expand school-based Parent Support Advisers;
  - develop for parents a personal progress record on their child's development from the early years to primary school, building on the idea behind the 'red book' on young children's health; and
  - put parents' views at the heart of government by creating a new Parents Panel to advise us on policies affecting parents.
  
7. Some families need more intensive help than others and to ensure they receive that support we will:
  - ensure all families benefit from Sure Start Children's Centres by improving outreach services;
  - strengthen intensive support to the neediest families by piloting a key worker approach, bringing services together around need;
  - help families in which children are caring for others;

- invest £90 million capital over three years to improve facilities for disabled children to take short breaks; and
  - extend the Family Fund which supports the families of disabled children by offering support up to age 18.
8. Parents and children told us that they wanted safe places to play outside, and we know that play has real benefits for children. We will spend £225 million over the next three years to:
- offer every local authority capital funding that would allow up to 3,500 playgrounds nationally to be rebuilt or renewed and made accessible to children with disabilities;
  - create 30 new adventure playgrounds for 8- to 13-year-olds in disadvantaged areas, supervised by trained staff; and
  - we will publish a play strategy by summer 2008.
9. Good health is vital if children and young people are to enjoy their childhood and achieve their full potential. If we can establish good habits in childhood, this will provide the basis for lifelong health and wellbeing. To improve children's health we will:
- publish a Child Health Strategy in spring 2008, produced jointly between the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Health; and
  - review Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services to see how universal, mainstream and specialist support services can be improved for the growing number of children and young people with mental health needs.
10. Poverty blights children's lives, which is why we have committed to halve child poverty by 2010 and eradicate it by 2020. The new joint Department for Children, Schools and Families and Department for Work and Pensions Child Poverty

Unit will coordinate work across government to break the cycle of poverty from generation to generation. Poor housing is a particular problem for poor families and tackling it is important to meeting our 2020 goal and so we will:

- tackle overcrowding, publishing an action plan in 2008; and
- prioritise children's needs in housing decisions, especially the need to stay close to services like schools.

## Chapter 2: Safe and Sound

### Safeguard the young and vulnerable

11. Keeping children and young people safe from harm must be the priority and responsibility of us all. However, children need also to be able to learn, have new experiences and enjoy their childhoods, so we will help families strike the right balance between keeping children safe and allowing them the freedom they need. So we will:
  - publish Dr Tanya Byron's review on the potential risks to children from exposure to harmful or inappropriate content on the internet and in video games;
  - commission an independent assessment of the impact of the commercial world on children's wellbeing;
  - fund a new home safety equipment scheme to prevent the accidents which happen to young children in the home;
  - encourage local authorities to create 20mph zones, where appropriate, because they can reduce child pedestrian deaths by 70 per cent; and
  - strengthen the complaints procedure for parents whose children experience bullying.

12. Government also has a responsibility to put in place the right frameworks and systems for safeguarding children and young people, working in partnership with key national and local organisations and so we will:
  - publish the *Staying Safe Action Plan* in early 2008, responding to the *Staying Safe* consultation; and
  - ensure that schools and local authorities take a proportionate approach to health and safety to allow children to take risks while staying safe.

## Chapter 3: Excellence and equity

### Individual progress to achieve world class standards and close the gap in educational achievement for disadvantaged children

13. We want every young person to achieve their potential and enjoy their time in education. Parents' support for their child's learning is an essential foundation for achievement. Parents told us they want to be more involved in their children's education, and schools see the benefits of greater engagement with parents. High quality early years education ensures that children are ready to succeed at school and is particularly beneficial to those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Our Expert Groups told us that the best way to achieve world class standards is a system in which all children receive teaching tailored to their needs and which is based on their 'stage not age'.
14. Partnership with parents is a unifying theme of the Children's Plan. Early years settings, primary schools and the best secondary schools have done much to work with parents and involve them in their child's education. However, we have

further to go to deliver our vision for all parents, especially in secondary school, and so:

- we will set out and consult on a new relationship between parents and schools and legislate if necessary in order that:
  - parents will be contacted by a staff member at secondary school before their child starts at the school;
  - parents will be able to attend information sessions at the new school;
  - every child will have a personal tutor who knows them in the round, and acts as a main contact for parents;
  - parents will have regular, up to date information on their child's attendance behaviour and progress in learning;
  - Parents Councils will ensure that parents' voices are heard within the school; and
  - parents' complaints will be managed in a straightforward and open way.
- we will spend £30 million over the next three years to provide more family learning to help parents and carers develop skills and learn with their children in schools.

15. Having created over the last decade a universal early years and childcare system, and having raised the entitlement to free early education and childcare for 3- and 4-year-olds from 12.5 to 15 hours a week, we will now invest £100 million over three years to:

- extend the offer of up to 15 hours of free early education and childcare to 20,000 2-year-olds in the most disadvantaged communities.

16. In schools, building on the £144 million already allocated over the next three years in the Every Child a Reader and Every Child

Counts programmes to provide intensive support to children in primary schools at risk of falling behind, we will:

- allocate £25 million over the next three years to an Every Child a Writer programme to offer intensive one-to-one coaching in the areas of writing children find hardest to master;
- offer new 'stage not age' tests which children will take when they are ready and which, if current trials prove successful, will replace Key Stage tests at ages 11 and 14; and
- publish new indicators to show the performance of pupils achieving Level 7 or above in English, mathematics and science and achieving Level 8 and above in mathematics, to ensure proper attention is given to gifted and talented learners.

17. As our experts highlighted, the curriculum should help children move seamlessly from nurseries to schools, from primary to secondary and then to work or further and higher education. It should ensure all children secure the basics, while allowing flexibility to learn new skills and develop the social and emotional skills they need to succeed. Therefore we have announced a root and branch review of the primary curriculum, led by Sir Jim Rose, to ensure there is:

- more time for the basics so children achieve a good grounding in reading, writing and mathematics;
- greater flexibility for other subjects;
- time for primary school children to learn a modern foreign language; and
- a smoother transition from play-based learning in the early years into primary school, particularly to help summer-born children who can be at a disadvantage when they enter primary school.

18. In order to meet our 2020 goals for educational achievement, we will need to improve the attainment of some specific groups who we know are currently underperforming. Our vision is that there will be ready access from schools to the range of support services necessary to ensure barriers to learning are broken down. We will:
- spend £18 million over the next three years to improve the quality of teaching for children with special educational needs, including:
    - better initial teacher training and continuing professional development;
    - better data for schools on how well children with special educational needs are progressing; and
    - a pilot scheme in which children with dyslexia will receive Reading Recovery support or one-to-one tuition from specialist dyslexia teachers.
  - ask Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools to review progress on special educational needs in 2009, in the light of the impact of greater personalised learning.

## Chapter 4: Leadership and collaboration

### System reform to achieve world class standards and close the gap in educational achievement for disadvantaged children

19. If we are to achieve the potential improvement in standards from personalisation, we need to create an early years and schools system where all institutions are consistently achieving at the level of the best.
20. The single most important factor in delivering our aspirations for children is a world class workforce able to provide highly personalised support, so we will continue to drive up quality and capacity of those working in the children's workforce. We

know from our consultation how important the quality of early years childcare and education is to improving children's achievement. So we will invest £117 million over the next three years in the early years workforce, including measures to:

- fund supply cover so early years workers can take part in continuing professional development; and
- boost the Graduate Leader Fund so that every full daycare setting will be led by a graduate by 2015, with two graduates per setting in disadvantaged areas.

21. We already have many teachers and headteachers who are among the best in the world. However, to deliver a teaching workforce and a new generation of headteachers which is consistently world class we will allocate £44 million over the next three years to:

- make teaching a Masters level profession by working with the social partnership to introduce a new qualification, building on the recently agreed performance management measures;
- ensure new recruits spend a minimum time training within the one year Graduate Teacher Programme;
- establish a Transition to Teaching programme to attract more people with science, technology and engineering backgrounds into teaching; and
- extend the Future Leaders programme which places people with proven leadership credentials into urban schools.

22. By promoting diversity in a collaborative system we can ensure that children, young people and parents are able to choose provision that reflects their particular needs. Schools and other settings can use their increased freedoms to innovate and find new solutions to problems, which can then be shared with others to ensure all children benefit. To strengthen both

diversity and collaboration, we are expecting every secondary school to have specialist, trust or academy status and every school to have a business or university partner, with 230 academies by 2010 on the road to 400. Through strengthened accountability and governance, we will build on the successes of the last ten years in reducing the number of failing schools. We expect local authorities to take swift and decisive action to prevent schools from failing and to reverse failure quickly when it happens. We also expect local authorities actively to challenge schools who are not improving their pupils' performance but are coasting. We have already set a goal that within five years no secondary school should have fewer than 30 per cent of pupils gaining 5 higher level GCSEs. To improve the quality of accountability and governance and in addition to our measures to strengthen parental engagement in schools we will:

- make governing bodies more effective, beginning by consulting on reducing the size of governing bodies.

Chapter 7 sets out further detail on how we expect schools to work together and with other services to break down barriers to learning.

23. We know that standards of behaviour continue to be a matter of concern for parents, teachers, and children and young people themselves. It is important that the environment in every classroom supports effective teaching and learning and we have made it easier for teachers to enforce discipline and good behaviour. We currently expect secondary schools to be in behaviour partnerships, as recommended in Sir Alan Steer's 2005 report, to work together to improve behaviour and tackle persistent absence as well as improve outcomes for those whose behaviour is poor. Sir Alan's report recommended that participation in behaviour partnerships should be compulsory from 2008. Given that 97 per cent of schools are already

participating, we are minded to implement this recommendation and will:

- ask Sir Alan Steer to review progress since his report and the effectiveness of behaviour partnerships; and
- depending on his findings make participation in them compulsory for all maintained schools and all new academies, encouraging all existing academies to take part as well.

24. Children who behave poorly and are excluded, those unable to attend a mainstream school and those disengaged from education are a relatively small proportion of pupils. However, they include some of the young people with the worst prospects for success in later life, and most likely to develop problem behaviours. The quality of education they receive is highly variable despite the difference it can make to their prospects. To address this we will:

- spend £26.5 million over the next three years on piloting new forms of alternative provision which could include using small schools – studio schools – with close links to business and providing a high quality vocational education; and
- publish performance data for pupils not on a school roll, to ensure local areas have incentives to improve their performance.

25. To deliver world class education and children's services we need world class buildings and use of technology. We will continue with our unprecedented investment in the fabric of schools and children and young people's services to create schools fit for the 21st century and will:

- produce guidance within the Building Schools for the Future programme to ensure that where possible new buildings make space for co-located services; and

- set an ambition for all new school buildings to be zero carbon by 2016. We know that with the technologies currently available, the zero carbon ambition cannot be achieved on many school sites. We are therefore appointing a taskforce to advise on how to achieve zero carbon schools, whether the timescale is realistic and how to reduce carbon emissions in the intervening period.

## Chapter 5: Staying on

### Ensure that young people are participating and achieving their potential to 18 and beyond

26. A changing economy means we need to ensure our children and young people have the right skills as they become adults and move into further or higher education, or into work. By 2015, we want all young people to stay on in education or training to 18 and beyond. And when they leave we want them to have the skills they need to prosper in a high skills economy.
27. To achieve this we must reduce the numbers who are not in education, employment and training. Diplomas and Apprenticeships will increase the learning options available to 14–19-year-olds and will also help tackle the concerns raised by employers and higher education institutions about the broader functional and personal, learning and thinking skills of learners. To reinforce the impact of 14–19 reform, we will:
  - legislate in this Parliamentary session to raise the participation age to 17 from 2013 and 18 from 2015;
  - develop 3 new Diplomas in science, humanities and languages to increase the options for young people;
  - create a new independent regulator of qualifications, with the consultation launched before the end of 2007;

- transfer funding for 16–19 learning from the Learning and Skills Council to local authorities, with a consultation on how best to achieve this in early 2008; and
- allocate £31.5 million over the next three years on a new programme to re-engage 16-year-olds who are not currently engaged in learning, building on the extra measures we have announced on NEETs, including better tracking and financial incentives to remain in learning.

## Chapter 6: On the right track

### Keeping children and young people on the path to success

28. We want all young people to enjoy happy, healthy and safe teenage years and to be prepared for adult life. Too often we focus on the problems of a few young people rather than the successes of the many – we want a society where young people feel valued and in which their achievements are recognised and celebrated.
29. Positive activities and experiences are a vital part of happy and enjoyable teenage years. We have established a Youth Task Force to ensure that we improve delivery of young people's services and so that they are designed around their needs. We have already announced investment of £60 million in improving youth facilities in advance of funding released from unclaimed assets. But we want further and faster transformation of the lives of young people and so we will:
  - invest £160 million over the next two years to improve the quality and range of places for young people to go and things for them to do;

- develop an entitlement for all young people to participate in positive activities which develop their talents including piloting a new offer to take part in cultural activities in and out of school; and
  - spend £20 million over the next three years to use Acceptable Behaviour Contracts as a measure to prevent young people engaging in antisocial behaviour and to ensure young people receive support to improve their behaviour at the same time as an Antisocial Behaviour Order.
30. Experimentation in early teenage years and adolescence can expose young people to risks, and where they fail to make informed and sensible choices, they can too often put their health and future at stake. To tackle behaviour that puts young people at risk and help young people manage these risks, we will:
- publish a youth alcohol action plan in spring 2008, around the same time as the new Drugs Strategy which will:
    - improve alcohol education in schools;
    - tackle parental alcohol misuse which can influence young people's own consumption; and
    - consider the case for further action on alcohol advertising.
31. Following Expert Group discussions of the importance of relationships as young people move from adolescence to adulthood we will:
- review best practice in effective sex and relationships education and how it is delivered in schools.
32. The majority of young people do not offend but we need to reduce the harm caused by youth crime both to those who are victims and to young offenders themselves. In advance of the Youth Crime Action Plan, the Children's Plan sets out how we want mainstream services to work together to prevent crime,

what we will do to deal swiftly with those involved in youth crime and how we will prevent reoffending including:

- allocating, with the Home Office, £66 million over the next three years to target those most at risk;
- piloting a restorative approach to youth offenders; and
- publishing a Green Paper in 2008 looking at what happens when young offenders leave custody and consult on how to improve the education they receive in custody.

## Chapter 7: Making it happen

### Vision for 21st century children's services

33. Delivering the vision set out in the Children's Plan will require a series of system-wide reforms to the way services for children and young people work together. By putting the needs of children and families first, we will provide a service that makes more sense to the parents, children and young people using them, for whom professional boundaries can appear arbitrary and frustrating. By locating services under one roof in the places people visit frequently, they are more likely to find the help they need. And by investing in all of those who work with children, and by building capacity to work across professional boundaries we can ensure that joining up services is not just about providing a safety net for the vulnerable – it is about unlocking the potential of every child.
34. We want to build on the ambitions set out in Every Child Matters, and deliver a step change in outcomes. We will:
  - expect every school to be uncompromising in its ambitions for achievement, sitting at the heart of the community it serves;
  - set high expectations for Children's Trusts to:

- deliver measurable improvements for all children and young people;
- have in place by 2010 consistent, high quality arrangements to provide identification and early intervention for all children and young people who need additional help;
- monitor the difference Children's Trusts are making and examine whether Children's Trust arrangements need to be strengthened to improve outcomes, including by further legislation; and
- publish a Children's Workforce Action Plan in early 2008, covering everyone who works with children and young people, which will strengthen integrated working across all services.

## Goals for 2020

35. The Children's Plan also sets out goals we have for what we can and should achieve for our children by 2020. These should be aspirational for both children and young people's educational attainment and for their wider wellbeing. We will consult widely over the next year on whether these goals represent the right national ambitions:
- enhance children and young people's wellbeing, particularly at key transition points in their lives;
  - every child ready for success in school, with at least 90 per cent developing well across all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile by age 5;
  - every child ready for secondary school, with at least 90 per cent achieving at or above the expected level in both English and mathematics by age 11;

- every young person with the skills for adult life and further study, with at least 90 per cent achieving the equivalent of five higher level GCSEs by age 19; and at least 70 per cent achieving the equivalent of two A levels by age 19;
  - parents satisfied with the information and support they receive;
  - all young people participating in positive activities to develop personal and social skills, promote wellbeing and reduce behaviour that puts them at risk;
  - employers satisfied with young people's readiness for work;
  - child health improved, with the proportion of obese and overweight children reduced to 2000 levels;
  - child poverty halved by 2010 and eradicated by 2020; and
  - significantly reduce by 2020 the number of young offenders receiving a conviction, reprimand, or final warning for a recordable offence for the first time, with a goal to be set in the Youth Crime Action Plan.
36. We will report on progress in delivering the Children's Plan in a year's time.





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