Education Secretary Unveils Bold Plan for a New Era of School Standards

3 February 2025



Stronger accountability, targeted interventions, and faster school improvement are central to a new education strategy unveiled by Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson on 3 February 2025. Speaking at the Centre for Social Justice, Phillipson laid out a comprehensive plan to break the link between background and success, ensuring that every child in England has the opportunity to thrive.

Tackling ‘Stuck’ Schools with Urgency

At the heart of this initiative is a focus on England’s 600-plus “stuck” schools—institutions that have consistently received poor Ofsted ratings and serve more than 300,000 children. Pupils at these schools often underperform, leaving primary school with results 14 percentage points below average and secondary school with grades one full level lower per subject.

Phillipson declared that these schools represent the new front in the battle against low expectations: “I will not accept a system that is content for some to sink, even while others soar. The opportunity to succeed must be the right of every child. We simply can’t allow stuck schools to disappear off the radar.”

To address this, the government is investing £20 million in new Regional

Improvement and Support for Education (RISE) teams. These teams will collaborate with underperforming schools to create tailored improvement plans and provide up to £100,000 in specialist support per school—a substantial increase from the previous £6,000 grant.

Strengthening Accountability and Intervention

Building on reforms from the 1990s onward, the plan emphasizes a more robust and responsive accountability system. The government will continue using structural interventions such as academy conversions or moving schools to stronger trusts in cases where Ofsted identifies serious concerns or slow improvement. Schools with significant challenges will also be closely monitored to track progress.

The number of schools subject to mandatory intervention, including those supported by RISE teams, is expected to double. This is designed to accelerate improvement and drive consistently high standards across all regions.

Support from Education Leaders

The strategy has garnered widespread support from leaders in education. Leora Cruddas, Chief Executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, highlighted the progress made over three decades through evidence-based reforms. However, she noted, “The system does not work for all children… If we are to build a great school system, then we must design it so that all our children achieve and thrive.”

Sir Hamid Patel of Star Academies praised the government’s focus on accountability and urgent action: “The entrenched disadvantage gap is a national crisis. The introduction of RISE teams and additional funding will contribute to an aspirational system that benefits all children and families.”

Jon Coles of United Learning underscored the importance of transforming struggling schools: “It is good to see the government’s determination to ensure rapid improvement in a larger number of struggling schools while continuing with structural intervention in the weakest schools.”

Enhancing Parental Engagement and Transparency

Parents are also a key focus of this plan. Jason Elsom of Parentkind welcomed the efforts to uphold high standards: “Parents want a framework that is firm yet fair, one that places the success and well-being of every child at its core.”

To enhance transparency, Ofsted will introduce new “school report cards” beginning this autumn. These will evaluate schools across nine distinct areas and rate them from “exemplary” to “causing concern,” offering parents more detailed and accessible information.

Collaboration for Lasting Change

Dr. Vanessa Ogden of Mulberry Schools emphasized the collaborative nature of the reforms: “Those schools that need it will get the expert challenge and support required to achieve turnaround. Those that already hold this knowledge can help. Working together in this way, we can ensure that every child gets the great school they deserve.”

Tom Campbell of E-Act praised the focus on support over intervention: “RISE teams make high-quality school improvement available to all schools, irrespective of trust or location.”

While RISE teams will initially prioritize stuck schools, they will also work with schools showing worrying declines in pupil attainment. Furthermore, they will provide a universal service, guiding schools to best practices and fostering collaboration to share innovation.

A Path Forward

This ambitious plan marks a significant step in the government’s broader education strategy, aiming for excellence in every classroom and school. By investing in leadership, resources, and accountability, the Education Secretary’s vision is clear: to create an education system where all children, regardless of background, can achieve and thrive.