

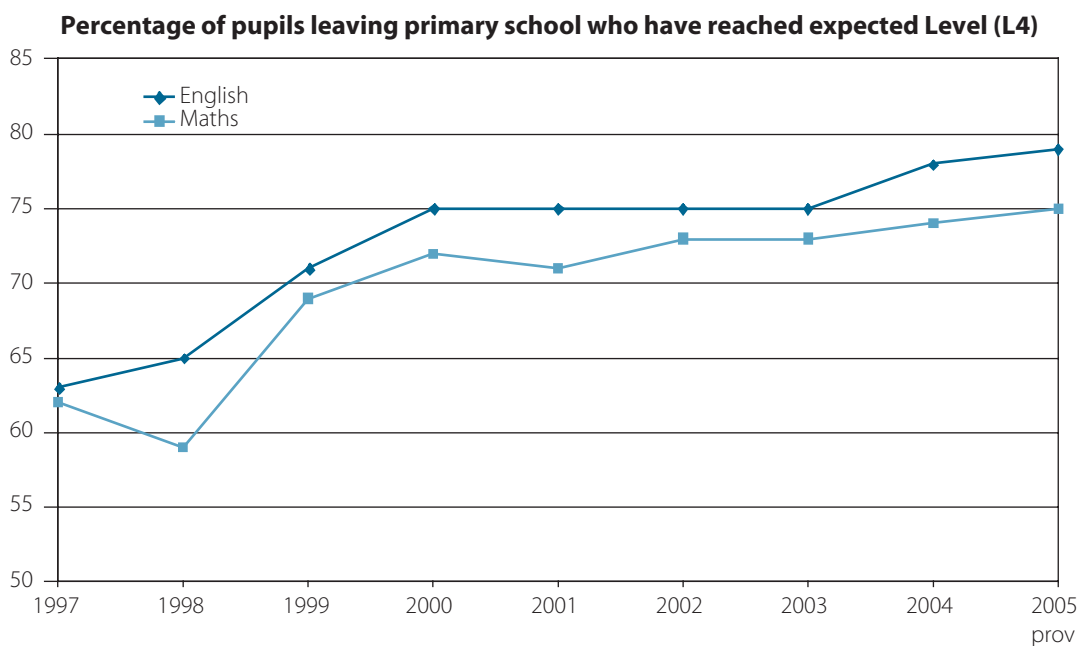
The Challenge to Reform



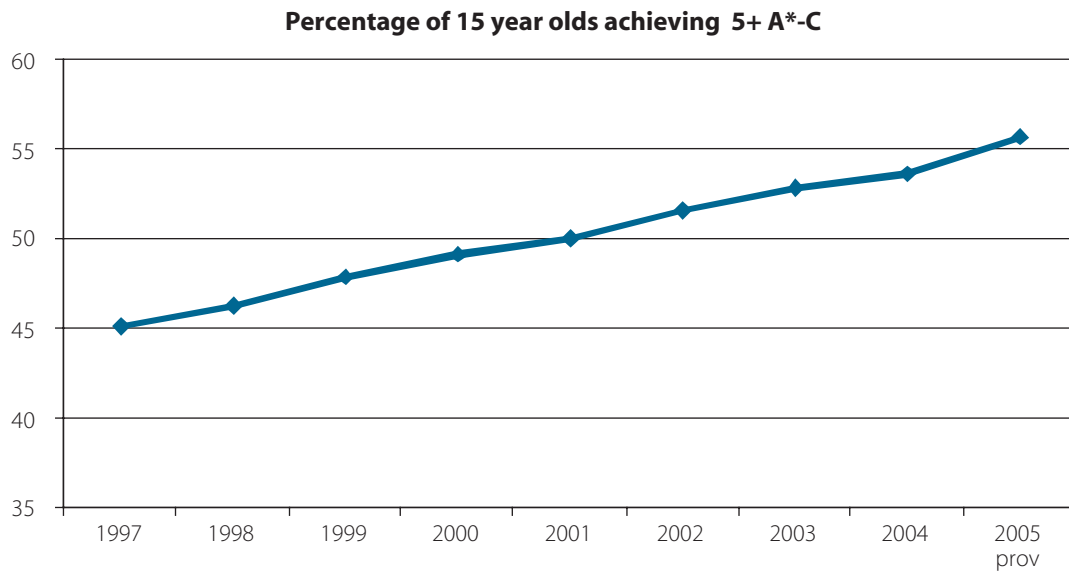
- 1.1** The education system in England is now widely recognised as a success. The first phase of reform launched in 1997 addressed the acute problems of the educational system that we inherited. It focused on getting the basics right and restoring the morale and pride of teachers. The literacy hours and daily maths lessons were designed to ensure that the basics were being properly taught in every primary school in the country. We took tough measures to tackle the appalling numbers of weak and failing schools. Improved pay and incentives halted the teacher recruitment crisis and stemmed the flow of teachers out of the profession.
- 1.2** With these improvements in place, the second phase of reform focussed on building a system of strong and self-confident schools able to sustain the improvement in standards that was underway and choosing to work with others to meet the needs of their pupils. Schools increasingly developed a powerful sense of their own ethos and mission as the vast majority of secondary schools achieved specialist status.
- 1.3** The Key Stage 3 Strategy improved the teaching and learning of 11-14 year-olds, so that the improvements in the basics in primary schools could be built upon in secondary education. And new resources and the benefits of school collaboration were brought to the most deprived areas of the country through programmes like Excellence in Cities and in London through the London Challenge.
- 1.4** Substantial and sustained investment has underpinned all these reforms. Spending on education in England has risen from £35 billion in 1997/98 to

£51 billion in 2004/05, allowing a real-terms increase in funding of 29% per pupil and significant investment in the workforce, in books and technology and in the fabric of the school estate. By 2007/08, at the end of the current spending review period, this figure will have risen to £60 billion in today's prices.

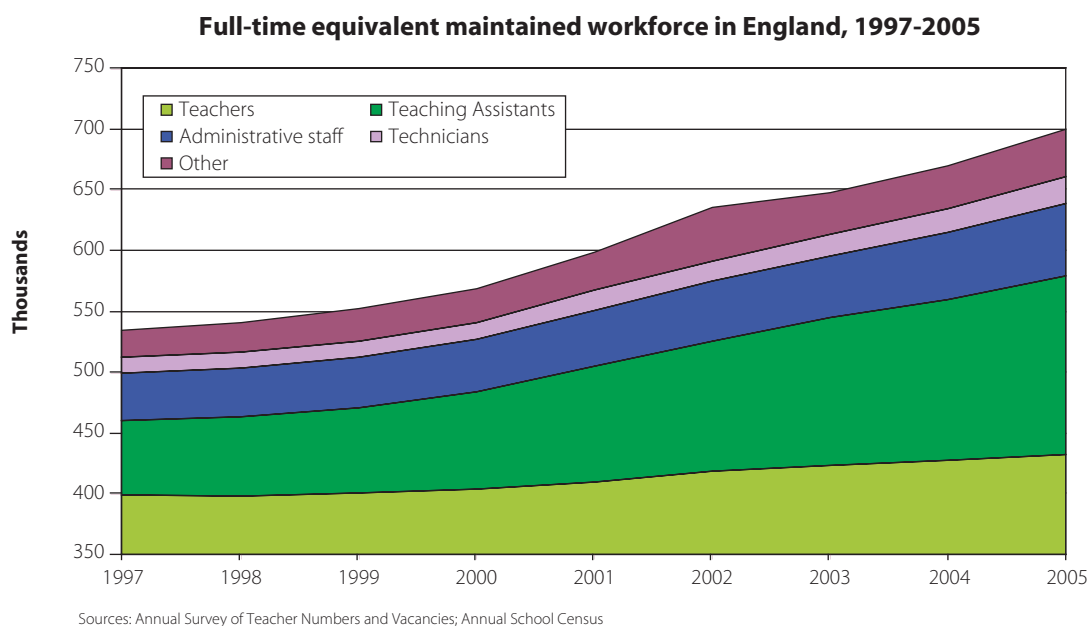
1.5 While change in a school system always takes time to feed through into outcomes, our reforms quickly began to have real impact, especially in the primary area. While in 1997 a third of children left primary school without the skills to make proper progress in the secondary curriculum, now 79% achieve these basic standards in English and 75% in maths. Teaching standards have been transformed by the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, and our primary schools offer a broad and rich curriculum.



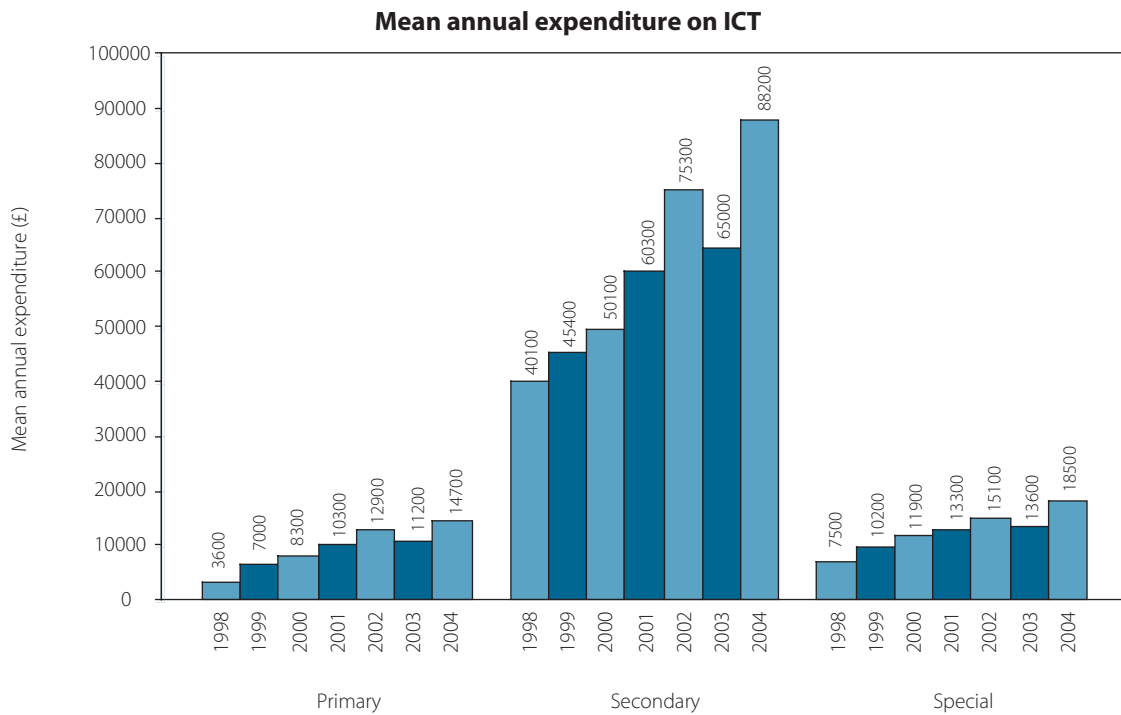
1.6 In secondary schools substantial progress has also been made, significantly accelerated by the spread of specialist schools, with more than 2,300 specialist schools now offering a distinctive curriculum and higher standards. Within two years, virtually every secondary school will have a specialism. 2005 saw the highest ever levels of achievement for 14 year-olds in the core subjects of English, maths, science and ICT. Also in 2005 schools secured a record rate of improvement in GCSE with some 56% of sixteen year-olds achieving 5 or more good GCSEs, up from 45% in 1997. This means that there are now 63,000 more young people each year well-placed to progress to further and higher education and to rewarding employment, than in 1997.



- 1.7** There have been very substantial reductions in the numbers of failing schools, the total falling from 515 in the summer of 1998 to 242 at the start of this term. Performance in inner cities and in our more deprived communities has improved more quickly than the national average partly due to targeted programmes of support such as Excellence in Cities. Over 50% of pupils in Inner London now get 5 or more good GCSEs, compared with a third in 1997 and 55% do so in Birmingham, compared with 35% in 1997.
- 1.8** Academies are now addressing entrenched school failure in our most deprived areas and are starting to transform educational opportunity for thousands of our young people who need it most. The first 27 Academies are up and running and we are already seeing significant improvements in results in these communities, with results in Academies rising more than three times as fast as the national average between 2004 and 2005.
- 1.9** Much of the improvement is a result of the hard work of our teachers, headteachers and support staff. Investment and reform of the workforce has resulted in a dramatic expansion of support staff and a dynamic generation of school leaders and there are now more teachers than at any time since 1981. We have done all this through a powerful and lasting partnership with headteacher, teacher and support staff unions and employers.
- 1.10** Teacher numbers have risen from 399,200 in January 1997 to 431,900 in January 2005, with much higher numbers of well-qualified graduates joining the profession through programmes such as Teach First. School support staff numbers have doubled since 1997, to 269,000, with more trained and qualified staff than ever before playing leading roles in the classroom.



- 1.11** The results of these striking improvements in teaching, leadership and investment are clear. Ofsted reports 75% of leadership and management as good or better, compared with 56% in 1997. The proportion of good or excellent teaching in primary schools has, according to Ofsted, risen from 45% in 1997 to 74% last year, and from 59% to 78% in secondary schools. Ofsted is clear we have the best generation of teachers ever.
- 1.12** Nationally, school attendance is at a record high with an average of 51,000 more pupils in school each day in 2004/05 compared with 1996/97. And the scourge of bullying is being vigorously tackled. But there remains more to do in tackling truancy effectively, particularly in those schools where this has been a longstanding problem.
- 1.13** Hundreds of school buildings around the country are either being completely replaced or completely modernised. Thousands of temporary classrooms have already been replaced. New roofs have been constructed and modern efficient boilers and lighting systems installed. New CCTV and security fencing have made schools safer.
- 1.14** Schools are increasingly throwing off their neglected image to become places of pride to communities, children and parents. Our Building Schools for the Future programme will rebuild and renew the entire secondary school estate and half of primary schools over the next 15 years.
- 1.15** And, as a result of our substantial investment in educational technology, England has become a world leader in ICT in this area. Schools have access to twice as many computers, as well as new interactive whiteboards and broadband technology, enabling ICT to become an increasingly integral part of teaching and learning. Spending on ICT has more than doubled since 1998.

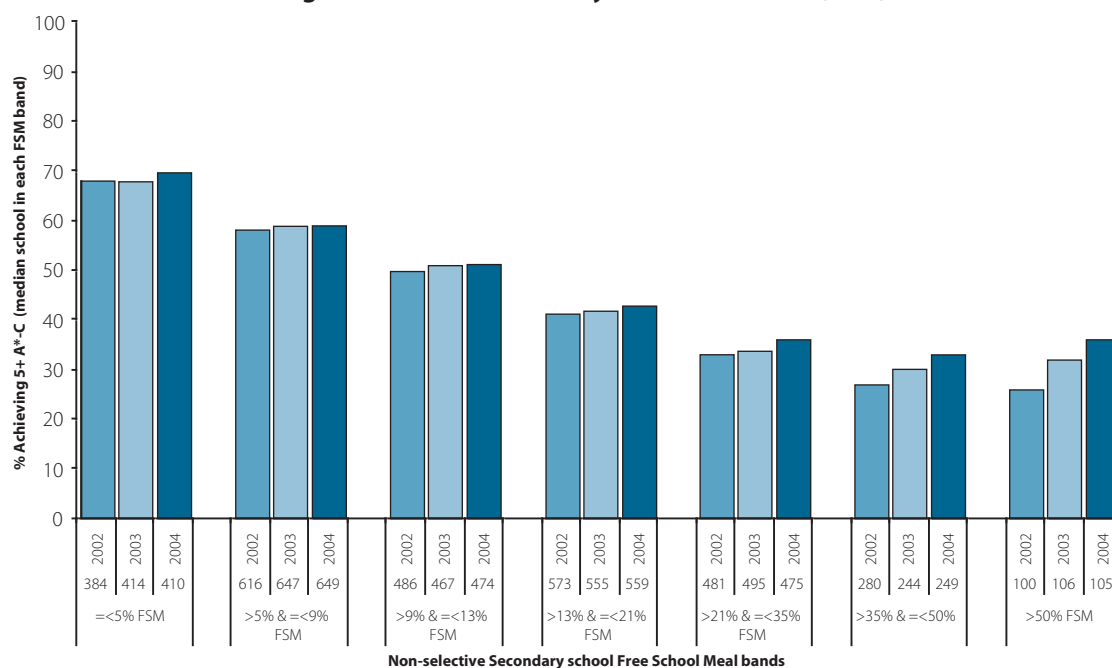


The case for further reform

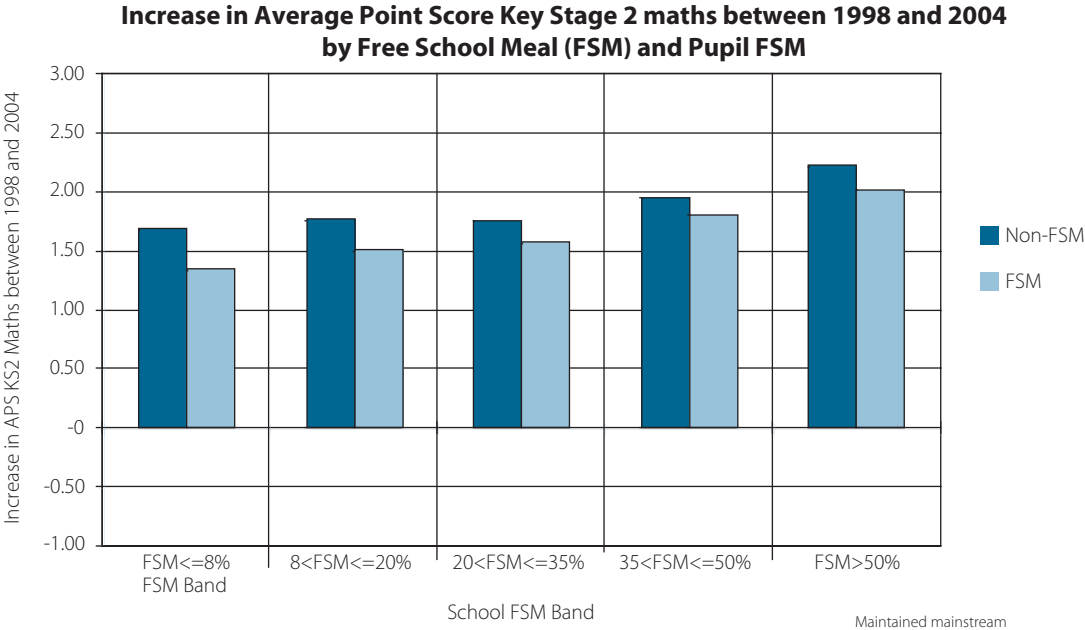
- 1.16** Our earlier phases of reform have achieved an enormous amount and we can all be proud of what headteachers, teachers, governors and support staff, working in partnership with government, have been able to achieve. But they also lay the basis for the next phase of reform which this White Paper heralds: our goal is no less than to transform our schools system by turning it from one focused on the success of institutions into one which is shaped and driven by the success, needs and aspirations of parents and pupils.
- 1.17** We must ensure that the needs of every pupil are catered for, that everywhere we are trying to give parents what they want for their children, and that we strive to get the most out of each and every child in each and every one of our communities.
- 1.18** To realise this, we need to change the system to ensure we have schools that parents are pleased to choose between; to raise standards for all – especially amongst the least advantaged; to help all parents engage with the education of their children and to create programmes of learning appropriate to the needs of each and every child.
- 1.19** We believe this requires schools to have the freedom to tailor the way they manage themselves, and the teaching and support they offer, to the needs and talents of individual pupils and their parents. Working within the principles of fair funding and fair admissions, schools will benefit from new energy in the system through a more diverse set of providers that allows more parents to choose the school that suits their child.

- 1.20 Despite the sharp improvement in the number of good schools, there are too many children being let down by schools that are coasting, rather than striving for excellence. There remain too many schools where poor behaviour by a small minority of children holds back their learning and that of others. So right across the country – in inner cities and rural areas, in both deprived and more affluent parts– we need to ensure that all schools are pushing themselves to improve throughout the school. And that parents can put pressure on to make that happen.
- 1.21 While many schools already work closely and successfully with their parents, too many parents presently feel disenfranchised by the schooling system. Many parents are not happy with the choices of schools for their child that is available to them. They have insufficient opportunity to engage with their child’s learning. They feel they have no influence when things go wrong.
- 1.22 While parents with confidence and resources can usually make the system work to their advantage, they shouldn’t have to struggle to achieve this, nor be faced with having to use their wealth or move house to benefit from real choice. And we must do much better for those from less well-off families, who do not have such confidence, resources or options. If we are to close the achievement gap, we need to involve these parents in schools and in their child’s learning and development. We need to break the link between poverty and low aspiration once and for all.
- 1.23 Some progress has been made in narrowing the gap at school level:

Average School GCSE results by Free School Meal (FSM) Bands



1.24 But, despite the progress that has been made, at every stage of our education system, parental background still plays too important a role in determining attainment and life chances: those from better-off families do better than those from less well-off families. Although our reforms to date have meant striking improvements for children from all backgrounds, the evidence suggests that those from more deprived backgrounds have not improved as much as others – the attainment gap for pupils has not yet narrowed.



1.25 These gaps matter because those who do not perform well in their early schooling tend to fall further behind, and the chances of breaking out of this cycle of under-achievement reduce with age.

1.26 Despite all the progress we have made in improving the basics, it is still the case that almost a quarter of children leave primary school without the necessary skills in literacy and numeracy to make a success of the secondary curriculum. Over 85% of those children who enter secondary school below this expected level, will then fail to get five or more good GCSEs at 16. It is in these underachieving groups that problems with attendance and behaviour are most pronounced.

1.27 Our participation rate for 17 year-olds in continued education and training is ranked 27th out of 30 industrialised countries. And these overall patterns mask the deeper challenges faced by particular groups. Children from particular black and minority ethnic groups, as well as many white working-class boys, those in public care and those with complex family lives – blighted by drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and criminal activity – all experience poorer outcomes throughout their educational careers.

1.28 Breaking cycles of underachievement, low aspiration and educational underperformance is vital for our economic future. We must ensure that all children have the same chance in life – with success based on hard work and merit, not wealth or family background. And we must make sure that every pupil – gifted and talented, struggling or just average – reaches the limits of their capability.

Our vision

1.29 The scale of progress since 1997 means we can now be very ambitious. And, given the scale of the global economic challenge we face, there is no other choice. We cannot content ourselves with a schools system which, while much improved, is not universally good; or a system that succeeds for most pupils, but not for all pupils. We need to create a schools system shaped by parents which delivers excellence and equity – developing the talents and potential of every child, regardless of their background. A system that can rapidly open to good new providers who can help make this happen. One that will empower parents and give schools the freedoms and incentives to focus on the individual needs of every child. To respond to parental demand, we need to expand choice, create real diversity of provision, and to ensure that the benefits of choice are available to all.

1.30 This can only be achieved in a system that is dynamic, with weak schools replaced quickly by new ones, coasting schools pushed to improve and opportunities for the best schools to expand and spread their ethos and success throughout the system. Obstacles to innovation must be removed and the system geared to encouraging change rather than shielding poor performance. We need a diversity of school providers and this in turn requires us to harness all the energy and talent that can benefit our school system, bringing in educational charities, faith groups, parents and community groups and other not-for-profit providers to run schools.

1.31 Specialist schools – with external sponsors, strong leadership and a clear sense of mission backed by challenging targets and ready to work with other schools – have consistently outperformed other comprehensives.

1.32 Academies are making real improvements in the outcomes for children in areas of the greatest challenge and disadvantage where underperformance and low expectations have been endemic.

1.33 High performance state schools – and there are five times as many as in 1997 – share these characteristics. But many would also like to go further: this means opening up the system as a whole to the opportunities presented by such innovation and dynamism.

- 1.34** A system designed around the needs of children will require us to deliver the radical vision we have set out for integrated services for children, families and young people that is already starting to benefit children in communities up and down the country. It needs the local authority which has an important insight into local knowledge – to play a role analogous to the one it now plays in early years provision: commissioning and championing the needs of parents and pupils, pushing for improvement rather than interfering in the day to day running of good schools which are empowered with light-touch inspection.
- 1.35** This will be a system driven by parents doing their best for their children. Where schools and professionals feel themselves accountable as much to parents as to some distant centre. It will mean responding to and encouraging high parental expectations. If local parents demand better performance from their local school, improvement there should be. If local choice is inadequate and parents want more options, then a wider range of good quality alternatives must be made available. If parents want a school to expand to meet demand, it should be allowed to do so quickly and easily. If parents want a new provider to give their school clearer direction and ethos, that should be simple too. And if parents want to open a school, then it should be the job of the local authority to help them make this happen.
- 1.36** We are also determined to ensure the system is shaped round the needs and aptitudes of the pupil. Local authorities are already forming Children’s Trusts, bringing greater coherence to the provision of children’s services. Children’s Trusts will be able to respond more quickly to the needs of parents and children. Beyond schools they are delivering on an ambitious agenda to improve access to child care and youth facilities. But Children’s Trusts, working alongside the police, health services and the voluntary agencies, will also be able to work better with schools.
- 1.37** Schools will be able to draw on improved, more co-ordinated and increasingly tailored services to meet the needs of individual pupils. Many schools are already realising the benefits of this. This is because many schools realise that effective support to respond to children’s individual needs outside the classroom will help unlock potential and aspiration inside it.
- 1.38** A more personalised system is not just about wider support. At the heart of a system designed around the needs of children must be tailored learning in schools. We are determined to make rapid progress on our plans for the far-reaching reform of the education of young people aged 14-19. We must offer them a radical extension in curriculum choice and in doing so boost attainment and staying-on rates.
- 1.39** But we must go further. This means that children who have fallen behind should receive catch-up classes. Those with special talents should be stretched. Those wanting to take a specialist course at another school or college should be

allowed to do so. Those with particular interests should be encouraged to develop them not least through after-school clubs. And all pupils should benefit from a flexible and engaging curriculum and be able to take exams when they are ready rather than at a fixed age.

1.40 These reforms are ambitious but they are the crucial next step in transforming our education system into one that can serve us well in the 21st century.

The challenges are great:

- to put in place a system designed around the needs of parents in which every school has the freedoms and flexibilities it needs to be responsive;
- to create the conditions where every parent has the choice of an excellent school;
- to ensure that there are more good schools and make coasting and underperforming schools a thing of the past;
- to personalise education for every child so that all those who fall behind get extra support to help them catch-up, those with a real talent are stretched and all children are encouraged to develop their aptitudes and interests;
- to ensure that every parent is fully engaged with their child's learning and is treated as a full partner in the education service;
- to ensure that no child has their education disrupted as a result of the poor behaviour of others; and
- to ensure we have a diverse and high-quality school workforce, which is well-led and able to support the learning needs and well-being of every child.

1.41 We are confident that the school system will rise to these challenges.