



NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN TERM 2025

An overview of key issues for Governing Boards to consider and review over the Autumn Term 2025.

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DfE Updates

National Behaviour Report

The Department for Education has published its third annual national behaviour survey, covering the 2023 to 2024 academic year. The report explores school behaviour culture and policies, pupil and parent voice, school environment and experiences, and the frequency and impact of misbehaviour.

The findings show a marked difference in perception between school leaders and teachers. While 72% of leaders rated pupil behaviour in their school as ‘very good’ or ‘good’ in the past week, only 46% of teachers agreed.

Pupil experience is also highlighted. Nearly a quarter of pupils (24%) reported being bullied at some point in the past 12 months. For those bullied online, appearance was the most common factor (39%), followed by race or ethnicity (7%).

The survey draws on responses from school leaders, teachers, pupils, parents and carers across all school types, including maintained schools, academies, free schools, all-through schools and special schools. Additional data from the Parent, Pupil and Learner Panel was collected in April 2024.

Guidance published by the DfE to date can be accessed via:

[National behaviour survey report: 2023 to 2024 academic year - GOV.UK](#)

Martyn's Law for Education Settings

The Department for Education has published guidance on how schools and other education providers can prepare for Martyn's Law, the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025. The Act will make those responsible for premises and events legally accountable for minimising the impact of a terrorist attack.

The law applies widely across education, covering local authority maintained schools, academies, independent schools, colleges, training providers and universities. There will be a 24-month implementation period before the legislation comes into force. During that time, the government will issue statutory guidance to support compliance.

For governors, this new duty emphasises the strategic role boards play in overseeing the safety of children and young people. While schools already hold responsibilities around safeguarding and site security, Martyn's Law introduces a clearer legal framework. Governing boards will need assurance that leaders are conducting proportionate risk assessments, updating emergency procedures, and preparing staff and pupils without creating unnecessary anxiety. The implementation window offers boards the chance to check whether current arrangements are robust and whether investment in training, communication or site improvements may be required.

[Martyn's law for education settings - GOV.UK](#)

New EYFS Framework

The Department for Education has brought in new versions of the **EYFS statutory frameworks** (one for childminders, one for group and school-based providers). While the learning and care standards themselves remain consistent, there are now additional requirements linked to **employment references**.

Providers must use the new **early years employment reference template** when giving references for staff. This is designed to improve safeguarding and ensure consistent practice across the sector.

The EYFS continues to set the standards for:

- Helping children learn and develop well from birth to five
- Keeping children healthy and safe

- Preparing children with the knowledge and skills they need to start school

Governor takeaways

- Ensure leaders and early years staff are working from the new September 2025 framework (childminders, nurseries, and school-based provision each have their own version).
- Ask whether safer recruitment processes include the new reference requirements.
- Keep oversight on how the EYFS is implemented in your school's early years provision, especially around safeguarding, staff qualifications, and readiness for inspection.

[Early years foundation stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework - GOV.UK](#)

Improving Attendance - Webinar

Good attendance is a cornerstone of pupil achievement, and boards have a statutory role in making sure schools and trusts meet their duties. To support governors and trustees, GovernorHub is hosting a free 45-minute [webinar](#) with the Department for Education's attendance unit on **Wednesday 17 September 2025, 4pm–4.45pm**.

The session will unpack the statutory guidance *Working together to improve school attendance*, which sets out governing body responsibilities and expectations for monitoring.

Themes include:

- Ensuring all school staff are trained on attendance and understand their role in promoting it
- Prioritising focus, with discussion on the different impact of holiday leave in term time, occasional absence, and persistent or severe absence

For governors, the key take-away is that attendance must be seen as a whole-school responsibility, with the board providing oversight and challenge. Governors should be confident that leaders are embedding training, tracking patterns of absence, and targeting the right interventions. The webinar offers a practical opportunity to strengthen understanding and ensure compliance.

DfE launches AI-powered 'similar schools' attendance report

Boards can now ask leaders to bring the Department for Education's new AI-powered 'similar schools' attendance report to a meeting. Unlike national or local averages, which can mask important differences, this tool compares a school's attendance with around 20 others that share similar characteristics such as free school meal eligibility, SEND profile, levels of deprivation, English as an additional language, geographical region, funding per pupil and school type.

The report has been designed to highlight variation that cannot simply be explained by pupil demographics. In practice, this means it draws attention to where leadership decisions, culture, systems or engagement with families may be influencing outcomes. By removing the "our pupils are different" defence, the comparison encourages a sharper focus on what can be controlled and improved.

Schools can also break the analysis down by pupil group, subjecting patterns to closer scrutiny. For example, free school meal pupils can be compared against their peers in other similar schools. Year-group comparisons are also possible, allowing governors to spot where particular cohorts may need additional support. A strong result – such as above-average attendance on Wednesday afternoons, perhaps linked to enrichment activities – can be identified and celebrated, while weaker attendance in Year 11 may point to the need for more targeted interventions.

For governors, the report offers an accessible way into what can often feel like complex or opaque attendance data. It can be requested via the Monitor Your School Attendance tool, and it provides boards with a concrete basis for challenge and support.

Governor takeaways

- Ask leaders to present the report at a board meeting and explain both the strengths and the gaps.
- Probe the variation: how does your school compare with similar schools, not just the national average?
- Explore which pupil groups are driving absence patterns and what actions are underway.

- Encourage leaders to share how strong practice in one year group or context can be applied more widely.

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025

The Department for Education has released the updated statutory guidance *Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2025*, which comes into force this September. The guidance sets out what all schools and colleges in England must do to safeguard children and promote their welfare.

Key themes include:

- Early help – schools must identify vulnerabilities at the earliest stage, with particular focus on pupils with SEND, mental health needs or risk of exploitation.
- Staff knowledge and training – all staff must receive safeguarding and child protection training at induction and regular updates, with greater emphasis on online safety and filtering/monitoring systems.
- Leadership and governance – governing bodies must ensure a strong safeguarding culture, appoint a suitably trained Designated Safeguarding Lead, and review policies regularly.
- Safer recruitment and vetting – clear requirements for DBS checks, prohibition checks, right-to-work verification and overseas record checks.
- Child-on-child abuse and sexual violence – policies must set out a zero-tolerance approach to harassment, violence or harmful behaviour, with trauma-informed support for victims.
- Allegations about staff – boards must ensure procedures cover both serious allegations and low-level concerns, with staff confident in how to report.
- Emerging threats – schools must be alert to issues such as radicalisation, county lines, domestic abuse, forced marriage, FGM and online harm.

Why this matters for governors

Governing boards are explicitly responsible for ensuring compliance with KCSIE and embedding a safeguarding culture. Questions for governors to ask include:

- Have safeguarding policies been updated to reflect the 2025 changes?
- How is safeguarding training for all staff, volunteers and governors being refreshed?
- What evidence can leaders provide that safer recruitment and vetting checks are being applied consistently?

- How does the board gain assurance on the school's response to child-on-child abuse and online risks?

With the September deadline approaching, governors should expect leaders to have reviewed policies, delivered refresher training and audited recruitment practices.

The full statutory guidance is available on GOV.UK: [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025](#).

Raising Standards in Non-School Alternative Provision

In August 2025, the Department for Education published [new voluntary national standards](#) for non-school alternative provision – sometimes referred to as unregistered provision. These settings support some of the most vulnerable children in the education system but, until now, have not been subject to consistent expectations or inspection.

Although currently non-statutory, the government has signalled its intention to legislate in the future. In the meantime, local authorities and schools are encouraged to adopt the standards voluntarily.

The standards focus on four themes:

- Safeguarding and welfare – enhanced DBS checks, single central records, clear child protection policies, and trained safeguarding leads.
- Health and safety – robust risk assessments, medical needs support, first aid, and fire safety procedures.
- Admissions, support and guidance – transparent referral processes, accurate record-keeping, prompt attendance monitoring, and clear behaviour expectations.
- Quality of education – age-appropriate curricula with literacy and numeracy embedded, skilled staff, regular assessment, and continuous self-evaluation.

Why this matters for governors

Boards may not commission alternative provision directly, but schools and trusts frequently place pupils in these settings. Governors should ask:

- How do we assure ourselves that any provision used for our pupils meets these new standards?
- Are safeguarding and attendance reporting processes robust and transparent?
- How are we monitoring the quality of education and progress for children placed in alternative provision?

By adopting these standards now, local areas and providers can raise confidence in the safety and quality of provision, while preparing for the likelihood of future statutory regulation.

Relationships, Sex and Health Education – new guidance from 2026

In a new statutory [guidance](#) on relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) will replace the 2019 document from September 2026. The changes expand the curriculum and set clearer expectations for how schools work with parents.

Highlights include:

Primary schools are strongly encouraged to teach about same-sex parents and different family structures.

Pupils must be taught the facts and the law on biological sex and gender reassignment, with schools taking care not to present contested views as fact.

Expanded content on sexual harassment and abuse, including stalking, public harassment, revenge porn and strangulation.

Stronger focus on online risks such as pornography, incel culture and deepfakes.

New health content on suicide prevention, self-harm, eating disorders, vaping, gambling, menstrual health and bereavement.

Schools must consult parents on RSHE policies and show them the resources they plan to use. Parents can view all curriculum materials, but cannot veto content.

A three-year technical review and six-year full review cycle is introduced.

For governors, the priority will be to ensure policies and parental engagement plans are updated in good time and that staff training is in place for the more complex topics. Boards should be confident that RSHE sits firmly within safeguarding and wellbeing strategies and that parents understand what is being taught.

Academy Updates

Academy Trust Handbook 2025

The [Academy Trust Handbook has been updated](#), with changes coming into effect from 1 September 2025, which sets the framework for financial governance and

management in academy trusts. Compliance is a condition of each trust's funding agreement and the changes apply from 1 September 2025.

What has changed?

- Digital and estates responsibilities – trusts should now be working towards meeting the 6 core digital and technology standards by 2030, and further guidance has been issued on estates management.
- Accounting officer duties – definitions of regularity, propriety, value for money and feasibility have been updated to align more closely with HM Treasury's *Managing Public Money*. Accounting officers also have a strengthened duty to raise concerns with the board or DfE if proposed actions conflict with requirements.
- Executive pay – further clarity on the board's role in setting executive salaries. Decisions must be transparent, evidence-based, and defensible.
- Procurement – updated guidance on processes and expectations around value for money.
- Cyber security – trusts are explicitly prohibited from paying ransomware demands.
- Regulator and intervention – DfE may now recover funds where there is evidence of fraud or irregularity. Educational performance has been removed as a standalone trigger for a Notice to Improve.

Governor take-aways

- Ensure your trust board is fully aware of the revised duties of members, trustees, accounting officers and CFOs.
- Scrutinise executive pay decisions – check that a clear policy and evidence base is in place.
- Review how your trust is progressing against digital and cyber standards, particularly around filtering, monitoring and cyber security.
- Confirm that procurement processes, whistleblowing procedures, and risk registers are up to date and reflect the new requirements.
- Ask your leaders how the trust is ensuring estates remain safe and well-maintained, and that asbestos and RAAC risks are actively managed.

The full handbook, including the **Schedule of Musts**, is available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

News in Brief

Supplier Cost Hike

Schools are being hit by supplier price increases that are sharper than expected, with many contract renewals for catering, cleaning and waste services rising by 5–10%, well above inflation.

The increases are being driven by higher minimum wage rates and national insurance contributions. Although the government provided additional funding for schools' own staff costs, suppliers are now passing on their own extra costs.

Business leaders report annual catering costs rising by over 11% in some cases, forcing schools to find thousands more mid-year. Surveys of CFOs show two-thirds dipping into reserves, many predicting in-year deficits, and some reducing curriculum options and staffing to balance budgets.

This comes on top of inflationary pressures, SEND overspends, falling rolls in some areas and only partial funding of the teachers' pay award. The outlook for September renewals is particularly challenging, with leaders warning of the most difficult financial context in over 15 years.

New 'digital divide' emerges as private schools 'forge ahead' on AI

Private schools are three times more likely than state schools to have a clear, school-wide strategy on artificial intelligence, according to new research from the Sutton Trust.

A survey of 10,000 teachers found 62% had used AI in the last month, with usage growing fastest in lesson planning and preparation. Private schools, affluent state schools and those rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted were most likely to report strategic use of AI.

Teachers in private settings also reported greater use of AI for reports, assessment design, parent communication and marking. Nearly half (45%) had formal training, compared with just 21% in state schools. However, concerns remain widespread: more than nine out of ten teachers said they had reservations, with worries about cheating and accuracy most pronounced.

The Sutton Trust warns that without action, “access to AI risks becoming the next major barrier to opportunity for disadvantaged young people”. The report calls for schools to designate a senior leader for AI and for teacher training programmes to embed digital literacy.

Government guidance issued in June emphasises that schools should develop a clear AI “vision” and monitor safeguarding and privacy risks, while also planning for wider uses such as budgeting and SEND support.

What governors need to know

- Boards should recognise that AI uptake is uneven, with risks of widening gaps between schools and pupils.
- Governors should ask whether their school has a clear AI strategy and whether responsibility has been assigned at leadership level.
- Oversight should include how AI is being used for teaching, assessment, administration and SEND support, alongside staff training needs.
- Boards should be alert to safeguarding, privacy and ethical risks, and ensure school policies are updated to address them.
- Importantly, governors should consider equity: how will the school’s approach to AI support disadvantaged pupils and prevent deepening inequalities

GCSE Results 2025

This summer, more than 7 million qualification results were issued across England, spanning GCSEs, A levels and a wide range of vocational and technical qualifications. In August alone, over 860,000 results were awarded for AS and A levels, while GCSE results topped 5.6 million. Alongside these, more than 600,000 outcomes were recorded for applied generals, tech levels, technical awards and technical certificates.

The national picture reveals familiar patterns. Mathematics remained the most popular A level, with over 100,000 results, followed by psychology, biology, chemistry and sociology. At GCSE, combined science continued to dominate with close to a million entries, alongside large cohorts in English, English literature, maths and history. Regional differences remain pronounced. In London, just under a third of A level entries were awarded at grade A or above, compared with less than a quarter in the North East. A similar story played out at GCSE, with London students achieving 72 per cent of results at grade 4 or above, while the West Midlands recorded 63 per cent.

Ofqual is keen to emphasise that grading standards remain stable. The aim is to ensure that the level of work required for each grade is consistent year on year,

protecting comparability. Even so, the distribution of outcomes continues to reflect local challenges in pupil demographics, school context and subject uptake.

For governors, these results provide an important backdrop. They offer a chance to reflect not only on how well schools are supporting pupils to succeed in core subjects, but also on how learners are guided towards a broad and balanced curriculum. The gaps between regions and between school types underline the importance of probing data in detail, asking what sits behind headline figures and how teaching, curriculum and intervention strategies can respond.

Government to crackdown on bad behaviour and boost attendance

As the new school year begins, Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson has [launched](#) a national drive to improve attendance and tackle disruptive behaviour. New data shows that seven minutes in every half hour of teaching are lost to poor behaviour, with over three-quarters of teachers saying this impacts their wellbeing.

The government is investing in a major expansion of its RISE Attendance and Behaviour Hubs, with 800 schools – serving around 600,000 pupils – receiving support this term. Eventually, 5,000 schools will be part of the programme, with the 500 most in need benefiting from intensive targeted help. Experienced leaders such as Tom Bennett and Jayne Lowe have been appointed as Attendance and Behaviour Ambassadors to share proven strategies and shape the programme.

Last year saw the biggest improvement in school attendance in a decade, with five million more days in classrooms and 140,000 fewer pupils persistently absent. Ministers are determined to build on this momentum, warning that schools, parents and carers must all play their part in ensuring children are in class and ready to learn.

For governors, the emphasis is on culture, consistency and oversight. Governing boards will want to be assured that their school is not only monitoring absence carefully but also acting swiftly on patterns of poor behaviour. With new hubs offering practical models of success, boards can ask leaders how external expertise is being used, whether parental engagement is strong enough, and what the impact is on teaching and learning time.

The government's forthcoming white paper will set out further plans for attendance and behaviour, alongside broader investment in breakfast clubs, mental health support, and improvements to the school estate.

Record attendance gains unlock £2bn in future earnings

England's schools have recorded the biggest year-on-year improvement in attendance for a decade. Government figures show over 5 million more days spent in classrooms this year and 140,000 fewer pupils classed as persistently absent, including 45,000 children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Department for Education estimates this improvement alone will safeguard more than £2 billion in pupils' future earnings, based on the long-term impact of regular attendance on learning and career opportunities. Teachers also gained back over 10,000 days that would otherwise have been spent helping pupils catch up after absence, freeing more time for whole-class teaching.

The improvement reflects a national push on attendance, with schools now able to use upgraded AI-powered reports to compare their data with similar schools, expanded breakfast clubs in primaries, and more mental health support in schools. Specialist attendance mentors are also being rolled out, working directly with 10,000 of the most vulnerable children over three years.

For governors, the data is a reminder of the link between attendance and long-term outcomes. Boards will want to be assured that their school is analysing the new attendance reports, acting swiftly where patterns of absence appear, and drawing on wider government initiatives such as breakfast clubs and early SEND intervention.

The Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson, described attendance as "non-negotiable" for breaking the link between background and success, signalling that governors should expect continued scrutiny of attendance data in the months ahead.

Teachers to benefit from 4% pay award from September

Teachers in England will see their pay rise by 4% from September, following the Education Secretary's decision to accept the School Teachers' Review Body's recommendation in full. This follows last year's 5.5% increase and is part of the government's wider plan to recruit and retain 6,500 more teachers by the end of Parliament.

The award comes with a £615 million funding package from government, though schools will be expected to cover the first 1% of the uplift through productivity gains and smarter spending. Ministers point to examples such as energy deals already saving hundreds of schools more than a third on costs, while encouraging leaders to embrace further digital and procurement efficiencies.

Alongside the schools settlement, £160 million is being invested in colleges and post-16 providers, targeted at hard-to-staff subjects like construction and manufacturing, where shortages could hold back economic growth.

The Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson, said the increase was a signal that teaching is being “restored as the highly valued profession it should be”, noting encouraging signs in teacher recruitment, particularly a 25% rise in STEM trainees.

For governors, the key issue will be affordability and impact. Boards will want assurance that the school’s budget can sustain the uplift without compromising curriculum breadth or support for pupils. Leaders should be asked how they are maximising savings opportunities while maintaining staff morale, and how pay awards are contributing to retention in shortage subjects.

Support staff to receive 3.2% pay rise

School support staff will receive a 3.2% pay increase this year, after national employers reached agreement with two of the three sector unions, GMB and Unison. Unite has refused to accept the deal and has indicated it will support ballots for action where members want to push for more.

The settlement, covering support staff, carers and other council employees, was described as “reluctantly agreed” by unions who warned that many workers would still view it as a disappointment. The increase falls short of the 4% awarded to teachers earlier this year and is lower than the wider economy’s projected 3.7% wage growth.

National employers acknowledged the financial strain but argued the offer is “fair to employees”, while unions said it represents a continued real-terms cut after years of pay restraint. Support staff pay now begins at £23,656, compared with a starting salary of just under £33,000 for teachers in 2025–26.

For governors, the issue is twofold. First, schools will need to ensure their budgets can absorb this uplift, particularly when combined with teacher pay awards and rising supplier costs. Second, boards must recognise the importance of support staff to the life of the school. Recruitment and retention challenges are already acute, and governors should seek assurance that leaders are engaging with staff concerns and monitoring workforce pressures carefully.

While the deal is settled for now, the continuing discontent from Unite signals that pay and conditions for support staff may remain a flashpoint in the months ahead.

Beyond the classroom – parental engagement and wellbeing hold the key to pupil success

A government-commissioned study led by the University of Cambridge has suggested that raising attainment is about far more than what happens in lessons. It found that home learning environment factors – such as parental support, behaviour, and feelings of safety in the local community – strongly influence whether pupils achieve qualifications at levels 2 and 3.

The research highlights that children eligible for free school meals, those who feel unsafe in their neighbourhood, or who display anti-social behaviour are less likely to succeed. By contrast, pupils whose parents encouraged homework and maintained warm, supportive relationships were more likely to achieve well.

The study calls for behaviour interventions that are restorative rather than punitive, especially for pupils at risk of exclusion, and for emotional wellbeing to be prioritised alongside exam outcomes. It also recommends parent workshops in communities where parental education is low, greater access to counselling and conflict resolution programmes, and even the use of AI to personalise support for pupils most in need. For governors, this research underlines the importance of looking beyond raw attainment data and considering the wider ecosystem that supports children. Governing boards should ask leaders how restorative approaches to behaviour are being embedded, whether pupils have sufficient access to wellbeing support, and how the school engages parents in meaningful ways. Boards may also wish to explore partnerships with local services or community organisations to create safer, more supportive environments for young people.

Where schools' responsibilities begin and end

SA new “roadmap” from the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) is urging government to be clearer about what schools should and shouldn't be expected to do as other public services struggle.

The report follows a year-long consultation with 60 school leaders. It notes that while schools are already stretched delivering their core role, they are increasingly being asked to step in where health, social care, or community services fall short – from running food banks to helping families with housing. ASCL warns this is “not sustainable” without proper funding or recognition.

The roadmap sets out three categories:

- Core responsibilities (which schools must deliver): curriculum, safeguarding, attendance, pastoral support, assessment and leadership.
- Conditional responsibilities (which schools might reasonably take on if funded): mental and physical health support for pupils, access to technology, complaints handling, personal hygiene, sexual health.
- Beyond-school responsibilities (which schools should not be expected to provide): family health support, nappy changing, food banks, housing or benefits advice, and behaviour management outside school hours .The new scheme is a step toward creating a comprehensive early education system. To support this, the government plans to use primary school classrooms to establish new nurseries and extend the early years stronger practice hubs programme until at least March 2025.

Surge in suspensions and exclusions raises questions about support for vulnerable pupils

New Department for Education statistics show school suspensions and exclusions have reached their highest levels since 2006. In 2023/24 there were almost 955,000 suspensions, up 21% on the previous year, and nearly 11,000 permanent exclusions, a 16% rise. The most common reason given was persistent disruptive behaviour.

While the majority of suspensions remain in secondary schools, the sharp increase in primary exclusions is a particular concern. More than 100,000 primary pupils were suspended last year, and most of them were already receiving SEND support. Research suggests pupils excluded in primary school are far less likely to achieve passes in GCSE English and maths, underlining the long-term impact.

The data also highlights clear disparities. Pupils with SEND are three times more likely to be suspended, while those on free school meals account for 60% of suspensions despite being only a quarter of the school population. Roma children continue to have the highest rates of all ethnic groups.

The government has pledged reforms, including new attendance and behaviour hubs for 500 schools, expansion of school-based mental health support, and earlier help for children with speech, ADHD and autism needs.

Governor takeaways

- Governors should ask leaders how behaviour is monitored, reported and supported, particularly for pupils with SEND.
- Scrutinise whether early intervention and restorative approaches are being used to reduce exclusions.
- Consider whether relationships with parents and external agencies are strong enough to ensure joined-up support.
- Monitor exclusion and suspension data closely, including patterns by age, SEND, disadvantage and ethnicity, and challenge leaders on the steps being taken in response.