

SCHOOLING IN ENGLAND AN OVERVIEW



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Abstract:

The structure of the English schooling system can be quite rigid, with principles of the system and the ethos of performance-based testing as an evaluation of a child’s performance a mainstay for the past two hundred years. In terms of teacher-training, routes and opportunities into the profession are varied and, although pay is increasing, the status of teaching as a profession is not held in as high acclaim as it was in the previous century. The strengths of the English system are a free education for all until aged eighteen, with a standard National Curriculum to enable parity of learning across different communities and social economic statuses. Additionally, routes into education - or, rather, becoming a teacher - are varied, allowing for a multitude of individuals to work in the profession. However, a perhaps singular focus on high-stakes performance testing has led to several weaknesses of the system. It would be preferable if curricular design and the principles and practices of education were designed by an independent body of educators, rather than be dependent upon which political party is/was in power at any time. This would offer stability on policy and practices and would keep pupil interests and wellbeing central to decision-making processes.

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1. Can you describe to us what the current structure of the school system is in England, from 6 years of age up to excluding university, specifying the different paths and thresholds relating to compulsory schooling?

England has confusing names for its school system. “Public” and “Independent” Schools are private, fee-paying schools, which are typically extremely expensive, even when scholarships are offered. This paper will not discuss private, fee-paying schools, as they are the minority route catering for around 6.4% of English school children (Green, 2022). This paper describes free “state” schooling in England paid for through the taxation system, as this is the dominant education route (although the structure and organisation of educa-

tion across fee-paying and state schools in England is similar).

Free, compulsory schooling in England has gone through many changes. The most recent iteration breaks down programmes of study into stages: The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) ages 3-5, called YN and YR; Key Stage 1 (KS1) ages 5-7, Y1 and Y2; Key Stage 2 (KS2) ages 7-11, Y3-Y6; Key Stage 3 (KS3) ages 11-13, Y7- Y9; Key Stage 4 (KS4) ages 13-16, Y10 -Y11); Key Stage 5 (KS5) ages 16-18. How these stages map onto the schooling structure (e.g., Nursery, Infant, Primary, Secondary schools etc.) is overviewed in Table 1 at the end (Columns 1-3).

When the National Curriculum was introduced in 1988 (discussed more below), all schools, except independent schools had a statutory duty to follow this. With the introduction of Academies and Free Schools in 2010 (these are school not maintained by the Local Education Authority) this requirement has changed. However, almost all schools: private, state and academies do follow the National Curriculum in England. The three other jurisdictions of the UK have different National Curricular and different ways of organising their school systems.

The school year starts from the Autumn term (although the exact start date can vary from mid-August to early-September depending on the geographical area of England and the Gregorian calendar). Importantly, the cut-off date for formal school entry is that the child should be 5 years of age at the start of the school year. Assuming an Autumn term start date of 1st September (which is a typical cut-off date), a child who has turned 4 on 31st August will be in the same school year as a child who turns 5 on 2nd September. Thus, in England, children in the same school year can vary in age substantially (up to almost 12 months). On occasion, however, a parent can choose to delay school entry if their child is born in the summer term. As stated above, whilst schooling is not officially compulsory until aged 5, parents are encouraged to enrol their child/children at the earliest point from which they turn 4 – so YR, “Reception” year.

The law states that class size must not be more than 30 pupils in EYFS and KS1 (Legislation.gov.uk, 2012). There is no legal maximum after this age, although typically class sizes are about 30 pupils. In rural areas, where pupil numbers are low, mixed year groups are often common. Typically, up to aged 11, children will be taught all lessons by one teacher for a year. This teacher will have a holistic approach to the development of the children and acts as *loco parentis*. The class teacher is sometimes supported by one or more Teaching Assistants. The primary

(i.e., KS1 and KS2) school a child can attend is dictated by post (zip) code. On occasion, a parent can lodge an appeal with the Local Authority for their child to attend a different school than their catchment school, but there is no guarantee of a successful appeal outcome.

Secondary Education (SE) in England is compulsory for all. It is typical for children to transition from Primary to Secondary Education in the Autumn term after their 11th birthday (Year 7) and children remain in SE until aged 16 (Year 11). Secondary schools are much larger than primary schools and each secondary school has what are known as catchment (or “feeder”) primary schools. However, once again, the secondary school a child should attend depends upon their postcode. This dictates the school they are “catchment” for, which can vary in size from just two or three forms/classes per year to over 13 forms/classes per year. Often, in SE, the children have a form tutor who they see every morning and afternoon for registration and this individual serves as a key person, but the children move around the school for lessons with subject specialist teachers. Some schools have switched to a vertical tutoring system in an aim to eliminate year group mentality and to promote cooperation and collegiality between year groups.

Finally, young adults transition into tertiary education (i.e., Key Stage 5) the Autumn Term after they turn 16. It is the law they remain in education until they are 18, but they can do this in a school, an FE College or working as an Apprenticeship in a work environment with study time at an FE College. To add to complexity, vocational and apprenticeship routes are developing and becoming popular. This has led to “specialist” Academies taking children from aged 13 (Year 9) through to aged 18 (Year 13). These Academies are specialised towards a certain vocation and therefore choice of GCSEs, A-Levels, T-Levels and/or Apprenticeships is restricted to the Academy’s specialisation (see for example: <https://jcb-academy.com/>). KS5 is the final free stage of education. Post 18 years of age is Higher Education, but this is not free.

2. What are the pedagogical principles that most guide this system, and what is its historical background?

The English education system is an amalgamation of many practices and philosophical beliefs about what education is and what it is for. Education had been allowed to develop along class lines, with schools for the rich separate from those who served the poor, with the

latter namely run by charitable organisations and churches. The Elementary Education Act (Forster, 1870) saw the beginning of compulsory education for all children aged between 5 and 12 years. The class divide within the schooling system continued, however (Gillard, 1998). Additionally, the concept of educating the masses was not welcomed by all; many wanted to keep the poor illiterate as a means of social control. Parents relied on the money their children earned whilst at work. Yet, industrialisation (the beginnings of factory working) meant a semi-literate workforce was needed to compete in the growing capitalist economy.

In 1880, a further act was introduced to ensure compulsory attendance for all children from ages 5 – 10. This was a lowering of the upper age of compulsory schooling, but it did increase attendance. Since this initial inception of mass, compulsory schooling there have been many changes. It was made free to attend school in 1891. However, what is often noted, is how similar schooling is now as it was since the 1880s (Robinson, 2015). With respect to the current principles of English education, the buildings, organisation of school days, timings and holidays are remarkably like what they have always been and are built around the need for children to work on the land (e.g., harvesting fruit and vegetables) during the summer in the 19th and 20th century. Classroom layout is still remarkably like it was in the 19th Century, with a teacher at the front and children sitting in rows (especially in Secondary school), the chalkboard has been replaced with an interactive whiteboard, but it is still used in the same way, for the best part. Primary schools have had children working in groups at tables, although, more recently, many are returning to rows with stricter, more disciplinarian routines.

There was a brief period of creative and flexible teaching in the 1960s and 1970s, then in 1988 the first National Curriculum was developed. This curriculum marked the beginning of the standardisation and marketisation of education across England. The rationale for standardising the curriculum and raising expectations was a sound one. However, it meant teachers lost some of their professional autonomy on what they could teach. Tomlinson (2022) has argued that the increasing marketisation and high stakes performativity of the schooling system has had a negative impact on education. Whilst the reason for this standardisation/marketisation is positive (e.g., the driving up of educational standards for all pupils, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds), the reality has meant a narrowed curriculum, teaching to tests (expanded upon in question 4) and an inspectora-

te that induces fear rather than support (Perryman et al., 2023). Schools are inspected by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and are inspected against DfE requirements. Judgements are made and published and this can have very negative consequences. At the time of writing, Ofsted are facing an Inquest over the suicide of a Headteacher, Ruth Perry, after the school she led received a negative judgement.

Pedagogical practices have not changed much either since the 18th and 19th century, and it is still the case that the teacher is seen as transmitter of knowledge and the pupils' role is to receive this knowledge. Increasing accountability and performativity measures are placed on schools, and results of a school's performance are made freely accessible in open-access league tables (Perryman et al., 2023). This "high stakes" testing and pedagogical approach has increased and can be seen across many primary schools as well as secondary schools. It is an approach favoured by the current political party in England, who have been in power since 2010. The argument is that for pupils, nationally standardised summative assessment provides information on how they are performing in comparison to pupils nationally. For schools, the argument is that these nationally standardised summative assessments enable school leaders and their governors to benchmark their school's performance against other schools locally and nationally, to make judgements about the school's effectiveness (McIntosh, 2015). The results of these tests are published, and schools are ranked accordingly. However, many educators argue this type of teaching and learning is detrimental to developing critical thinking citizens who are reflective and responsive to their environment (Claxton & Lucas, 2015).

The Core Content Framework (DfE, 2019) which is the framework of initial teacher education has 35 references to behave/behaviour and 25 references to expect/expectations (Smith, 2021). Additionally, many of the schools and Academy Chains that are Department for Education (DfE) flagship schools, have a zero-tolerance approach to behaviour and insist children transition between lessons in secondary school in silence. Moreover, in lessons, the pupils are expected to track the teacher during teacher exposition (i.e., presentational talk) with the learnt acronym SLANT (Sit Up, Listen, Ask Questions, Nod and Track the speaker). Whilst there is no denying a positive culture supports learning, it could be argued that this focus on the tight control of pupils, and their behaviour, is detrimental to developing creativity, an intrinsic motivation to learn and a love of learning.

3. Can you describe to us what the current process is for becoming a teacher and what type of compulsory or optional training they receive, especially regarding the educational role and the relational aspect of their profession? In general, how is the role of teachers seen on a social level?

There are various routes to becoming a teacher and being awarded the Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in England and, whichever path is chosen, there are strict minimum entry requirements. For example, GCSE qualifications at grade 4 (C) or above in both English and maths (and science for a primary teacher). In addition to this, teachers are required to have a degree qualification. If an individual has been awarded a degree or equivalent, then they can complete a postgraduate course in teacher training to gain QTS. This usually takes between nine months full-time, to up to two years on a part-time programme. Universities, schools, and groups of schools facilitate this training. A further route is to complete a specific undergraduate teacher training degree, which results in the award of degree and QTS. These courses are university based. Some educational settings further permit people to work as a teacher whilst they are assessed for QTS, this is known as the Assessment Only Route. However, to apply for this course, the trainee must have taught in two different educational settings, have a degree qualification and be able to demonstrate that they meet the Teachers' Standards without the need for further training. In addition to the more well-established routes into teaching, Postgraduate Teaching Apprenticeships are another employment-based route to achieving QTS in both the primary and secondary sectors whereby trainees follow a combination of school-based learning and university-based study. This course appeals to those who may already be working as an unqualified teacher or teaching assistant, but who wish to progress as a fully qualified staff member. Academies, free schools, private and independent schools, but not state schools, can employ non-qualified teachers and these will be paid at a lower salary.

Regardless of the route taken, Initial Teacher training/Education (ITE/E) has the main purpose of ensuring that all beginning teachers meet the DfE's Teachers' Standards and these must be achieved to be awarded QTS. According to the DfE (2021a), the standards set the minimum requirements for teachers' practice and conduct and are to be followed by: trainees working towards QTS; teachers in their induction period; and all teachers in

maintained schools. Part One of the Standards includes: the setting of high expectations; promoting good progress; the demonstration of good subject and curriculum knowledge; the ability to plan and teach well-structured lessons; the ability to adapt/respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils; make accurate use of assessment; manage behaviour effectively; and fulfil wider professional responsibilities. Part Two emphasises the importance of personal and professional conduct and the professional duties of being a teacher. Alongside this framework, all ITE/E providers must follow the ITT Core Content Framework (DfE, 2019), which has been created to support development in the core areas of behaviour management, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and professional behaviours. Providers and their partners, including school settings, must use the framework when designing and implementing their specific programmes.

When a trainee completes training and commences employment, they are supported as an Early Career Teacher (ECT) with the Early Career Framework (DfE; 2021b). This establishes what ECTs are entitled to continue to learn about when they commence employment. Again, this is structured around the Teachers' Standards (2021a) and builds upon their previous training. A teacher has ECT status for the first two years of their career. The Early Career Framework (ECF) offers a package of support with the aim of supporting retention within the profession and this is much needed, as record numbers of teachers are leaving the workforce. The latest workforce census survey released by Gov.UK (2023) noted that almost 40,000 teachers left their job in state schools in 2022. This is almost 9% of the total teaching workforce, and the number of teacher vacancies has increased from 1,600 in November 2021 to 2,300 in November 2022.

The government policy makers hope that increased levels of support; a pay rise (starting salary is now £30,000 for an ECT based outside of London); and improved professional development will boost retention figures. Indeed, there are now 468,400 full-time teachers in England, which is an increase of 2,800 since the previous year, and an increase of 27,000 since 2010 when the school workforce census began (Gov.UK., 2023). However, it is too early to assess overall impact, as the ECF was only introduced in 2022. The current economic context of the cost-of-living crisis, teachers' strike action and concerns over workload and mental health in the workplace adds to the complex situation with both teacher retention and recruitment.

When considering the role of teachers at a social/societal level, the profession has evolved significantly over time.

In the past, education was only available to the minority, which meant that teaching was a well-respected and high-status profession. However, Hargreaves et al. (2007) found that there has been a decline in teacher's social status from the 1960s, owing in part to the need for more teachers following on from World War 2 and the greater flexibility in terms of recruitment of teachers to fill vacancies. This, they argue, has led to a reduction in standards and the overall quality of teacher education. In the 2013 Global Teacher Status Index (Dolton et al., 2013), where individuals rank teachers against other professions (including doctors), UK respondents compared teachers to social workers and nurses, suggesting a reduction in their societal value. Most recently, the Global Report on the Status of Teachers (Thompson, 2021) has highlighted several international concerns, which also represent some of England's challenges, including the media's negative portrayal of teachers, potentially inaccurate issues of overpay, deteriorating working conditions and increased workload. Conversely, during the COVID-19 pandemic there was a more positive representation of teaching, and numbers entering ITT/E did increase at this time. Moreover, in 2023, teachers and school leaders in England accepted a 6.5% government pay offer ending strike action in state schools after a period of disruption led by teaching unions. This is important as positive relationships with governments, policy makers and those in the teaching profession are linked to improving the societal status of teachers (Thompson 2021, Yağan et al, 2019), which in England was reducing until COVID-19.

4. Evaluation is a complex and delicate aspect of the educational process. How is it addressed in England? By whom, and according to what criteria, are students and their skills evaluated throughout their school career?

In England, as the National Curriculum is a formal statutory curriculum/framework that state schools and educators must follow, formal statutory assessment occurs at the end of most key stages. These are classroom tests or formal examinations at the end of key education stages EYFS, KS1, KS2, KS4 and KS5. Thus, in England, evaluation forms a key aspect of the educational process from when a child is aged 4/5 (YR) through to aged 17/18 (Year 13). An overview of these evaluative processes is detailed below and in Table 1 (Columns 4 & 5).

In YR (or when a child first enters the English educational system), children have a baseline assessment fo-

cused on maths, language, communication and literacy. The purpose of this assessment is to track both pupil and school progress (Roberts, 2022). However, the first formal reported evaluation of a child's progress is the Year 1 "Phonics screening check". The exact testing date is dictated by UK Government, as is the 'expected standard' (i.e., threshold) to be met for a child to pass. Results of this evaluation are reported at the local authority level. If a child does not reach the expected standard in Y1 they are required to complete the screening again in Y2.

The next phase of evaluation in England is the "Standard Assessment Tests" (SATs), or National Curriculum assessments, which are an assessment of primary pupils' progress and attainment in English and Maths. Children undertake these tests towards the end of Year 2 and Year 6, with a further separate evaluation of mathematics (the Multiplication Table Check, or MTC) in Y4. The purpose of the MTC is to determine whether pupils can recall their times tables fluently, which the UK government argues is essential for future success in mathematics. Once again, the dates of these assessments - and for SATS the expected standards - are set by government (see for example: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/primary-assessments-future-dates>). For KS1 SATs, whilst this phase of testing is optional from 2024, at KS2, the tests are compulsory and conducted in a formal manner. The KS2 SATS cover "English grammar, punctuation and spelling", "English reading" and "Mathematics". Every child in England takes the tests on the same dates. Performance evaluation takes the form of raw and scaled scoring, decided nationally. Scaled scoring is used to establish a child's level of attainment according to three nation-wide categories: Below Expectations; At Expected Level; Above Expectations/Greater Depth. Results of KS2 SATS are provided to a child's parents/carers, as well as the Secondary school the child will attend. Specific primary school-level results are further published in national performance league tables, to allow comparison across schools.

During KS3, evaluation is less formal, neither being dictated by, nor reported at, the school or local authority level. During KS3, while children still receive regular evaluation/progress reports, these assessments are made by their subject specialist teachers. Typically, these take the standard form of a child and parent receiving subject by subject feedback and gradings on an annual or bi-annual basis. Whilst there is no specific standard for this reporting, many schools continue to use a three-tier "below", "meeting", or "above" expectations grading, with some schools providing pupils with marks for effort, not just attainment. This is very different to evaluation at

KS4, which is formally and nationally assessed through the child undertaking several General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs). GCSEs are a performance measure report on the achievement of a pupil at the end of secondary education (Y11) according to the National Curriculum. English, Maths and Science are compulsory GCSEs for all children across England. Children take two examinations for English (English Language & English Literature), one examination for Maths and between one and three examinations for Science. For Science, “Single”, “Double”, or “Triple” Science, incorporate all three subjects of Biology, Physics and Chemistry, but Double Science counts as two GCSEs, and Triple as three. Pupils then take several further GCSE subjects dependent upon what the school offers combined with timetabling options. Typically, pupils are encouraged to choose a GCSE from the: Arts (e.g., Art and Design, Music or Drama); Design and Technology (e.g., DT, Graphics or Cooking and Nutrition); Humanities (e.g., History, Geography or Religious Education); and Foreign Languages (e.g., French, German or Spanish). However, as the choice of GCSEs increases to include a variety of new subjects (e.g., Computer Science, Psychology, Business Studies etc.), pathways are less stringent. Generally, though, pupils are encouraged to take between nine and eleven GCSEs.

GCSEs are now predominately exam (vs. coursework) based. They are devised and marked via four government approved exam boards. It is, however, the DfE who sets GCSE subject content that schools, exam boards and GCSE exams must cover. In England, GCSEs are scored from 9 (the highest grade) to 1 (the lowest). Broadly, a grade of 4 or above is classed as a passing grade, a grade of 5 equates to a high C/low B and is considered a ‘strong’ pass, and a grade of 7 or above equates to an A/A*. Additionally, although exam boards endeavour to set exam papers at the same level of difficulty each year, variations in performance result in changes to grade boundaries each year (i.e. scaled scores). This “awarding” decision-making process is undertaken by a group of subject specific senior exam board examiners and is overseen by the UK government’s “Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation” (Ofqual). Given the importance (i.e., high stakes) of GCSEs, pupils sit the examinations in the final term of Year 11 under stringent conditions.

In England, all young people must continue in education or training until they are at least 18 years of age. If students have achieved four GCSEs of Grade 4 or above (and including Maths and English), they can continue

formal education and choose to undertake and sit A-Level examinations. The programme of study for A-Levels is 2 years, from aged 16 – 18. Typically, students elect 3 subjects. However, some schools encourage 4 subjects and the students study these with subject specific teachers, normally in class sizes smaller than 30, but it can depend on the popularity of the subject. The students’ timetable is no longer full time, and they have ‘free periods’ where they are encouraged to study independently. A-Level exams, like GCSEs, are overseen by government approved assessment boards under the auspices of Ofqual. Note that at age 16 A-Level education is not the only route, with further training (vs. education) routes overviewed in Table 1.

5. Choose three of these topics that you consider most significant for the school system of England and tell us about them briefly:

Inclusive education

There is much legislation that forms the basis of mainstream inclusive education in England and these laws apply to all schools including the Special Education Needs and Disability Regulations (Legislation.gov.uk, 2014a), The Children and Families Act (Legislation.gov.uk, 2014b), and the Equality Act (Legislation.gov.UK, 2010). It is illegal for an educational setting to discriminate on the grounds of race, disability, sexual orientation, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy, maternity or religion. The foundation of these Acts is the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, which protects the right to an education in mainstream schools. Reasonable adjustments form part of the Disability Discrimination Act (Legislation.gov.uk, 1995) whereby schools must make reasonable adjustments to support the needs of all children, this can include changes to practice, changes to the learning environments, changes to assessment procedures and the provision of enhanced resources. The DfE (2015) defines Special Educational Needs (SEN) as “a child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for them”. As part of this Code of Practice, all children identified as SEN should be included on a register, where possible they should be taught with their peers, schools should also identify a member of staff responsible for SEN and all staff should be trained to identify and support learners. An Educational Healthcare Plan (EHCP) is given to those children who could be

at a disadvantage without additional support, this documentation outlines the child's challenges and establishes termly targets that the school and local authority should work towards whilst ensuring that the voice of the child and family is heard. Each school is expected to publish their SEN report on the school's website and this must be reviewed annually. Schools are also encouraged to share their SEN policy with all stakeholders.

Sociality

In England, sociality falls under the remit of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education. The U.K. government argues that PSHE is an important and necessary part of all pupils' education. Yet, despite suggesting this, PSHE is a non-statutory subject. This means that schools are obliged, rather than required, to teach PSHE. This stated, it is compulsory that children are taught about "relationships" education in primary education and "relationships and sex education" in secondary education. Given the non-statutory status of PSHE, however, there is much flexibility in how the former subjects are taught. The government argues this allows for high-quality provision, as teachers are best placed to understand the needs of their pupils with a programme that equips pupils with a sound understanding of risk, and the knowledge/skills necessary to make informed decisions (Gov.UK, 2021).

In terms of social time, there is no guidance on the time children should spend socialising in school outside of formal lesson time. Rather, government guidance is that a school week should cover a minimum of 32.5 hours inclusive of breaks, as breaks are an important part of time in school for pupils, allowing enrichment activities, physical activity, and opportunities for social interaction (DfE, 2023). However, given the high stakes emphasis of academic (or exam) performance, opportunities for social interaction are typically the first aspect of a child's timetable to be reduced. For example, when a child falls behind in a statutory subject, catch-up sessions are earmarked for non-statutory subjects such as PSHE, or during the child's lunch or other school breaks. Additionally, since COVID-19, many secondary schools have continued to employ reduced time for socialising. Whilst originally applied to reduce the spread of the virus, the benefits of shorter breaks are a shortened school day, allowing teachers more preparation time. Thus, in some secondary schools it is common for children to only have a single morning break of 15-20 minutes and a single lunch break (to obtain food) of only 35-40 minutes, reducing opportunities for socialising and peer-to-peer relationship building.

Relationship with families

Teacher Education encourages teachers to develop strong partnerships with families. It recognises that teaching requires communication and commitment to work together. Parents are encouraged to participate in school life. However, it is typical for this to decrease as children get older, normally when they enter SE. In EYFS, KS1 and KS2, systems have been developed to ensure communication occurs, sometimes through an electronic platform and parents are frequently invited into school. Many will also drop off and pick up their children and develop friendships with other parents who act as support networks. By SE, the children will take themselves to and from school and typically the only time outside formal reporting systems where teachers and parents would communicate would be if there was a problem. All schools have at least one parents' evening and a formal report every year. With primary schools being smaller and the class teacher remaining the same for the year, there is more opportunity for relationships to develop, which leads to stronger communication and support. However, a child in KS3 and KS4 will have multiple teachers and the teachers will work with more than 150 pupils a week; thus school/family relationships during this stage of education are not an easy task. This said, it is now not uncommon for KS1 to KS5 schools to have Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), which meet on a termly basis and oversee extracurricular events (e.g., Summer Fetes) and fund-raising. Additionally, if a child needs any adaptive provision, it is important that the family are a part of this decision-making process, and their needs and knowledge of the child considered. Parents are recognised as being experts in their own children's needs, although this must be balanced by the overall needs and resources a school has access to. Some teacher education providers build modules which support teachers developing links with wider community networks to best signpost families for additional support and guidance.

6. Ultimately, what do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the school system in England?

In summary, Education (or in later years training) in England is compulsory from age 4/5 to 17/18. The structure of the English schooling system is quite rigid, with principles of the system and the ethos of performance-based testing as an evaluation of a child's performance a mainstay for the past two hundred years. In terms of teach-

er-training, routes and opportunities into the profession are varied and, although pay is increasing, the status of teaching as a profession is not held in as high acclaim as it was in the previous century. The strengths of the English system are a free education for all until aged eighteen, with a standard National Curriculum to enable parity of learning across different communities and social economic statuses. Additionally, routes into education - or, rather, becoming a teacher - are varied, allowing for a multitude of individuals to work in the profession. However, a perhaps singular focus on high-stakes performance testing has led to several weaknesses of the system. For example, a culture of insecure competition where schools and teaching quality are bench-marked against each other via a school's academic performance and Ofsted ratings, results in teacher stress, burnout and exit from the profession. Indeed, the most recent Teacher Wellbeing Index (Education Support, 2023) reports that 78% of educators feel stressed, with 36% reporting experiences of burnout. Moreover, as stated above, Gov.UK (2023) data demonstrates that almost 40,000 teachers left the profession in the last academic year for reasons other than retirement. This represents almost 9% of the workforce and is the highest number since records began. Additionally, some behavioural policies and practices aimed at improving classroom management, such as SLANT, do not work for every child. These policies are not informed by understanding of the child and their individuality, but rather may instil conformity and discipline at the expense of individuality and creativity. Furthermore, they are created by Government bodies not educators. In cases where specific individual needs are recognised (e.g., SEN), sadly the wait-times for an EHCP are often more than 800 days, as compared to Government law suggesting 140 days (Weisz, 2019).

With respect to why our children and youth should attend school, numerous reports highlight that schools should be a source for children to learn how to communicate, develop the motivation to share and care, acquire empathy skills, develop ethical values and respect (see Maratos et al., 2022 for review). Yet, the high-stakes performance culture of the English system, lack of regulated sociality (or PSHE) provision and reduced opportunity for actual socialisation means that for many children this is falling by the wayside. This is a serious weakness of the English schooling system when one considers that healthy social connections are extremely important for good wellbeing, academic success and future life success. For example, positive relationships with others lowers anxiety and depression; both of which are a major and growing health

concern of English pupils today. Indeed, a very recent study has revealed that teaching pupils aged 11-12 the importance of kind and compassionate behaviours to self and others, as well as how to regulate emotions, not only impacts anxiety, but prosocial behaviours, feelings of inclusion and classroom behaviour; with effects of the short curricula extending to the classroom teacher (Maratos et al., in press).

Thus, to conclude, we recognise the English system allows for the very real privilege of access to high quality education, which is free for all, and the laws which protect the rights of all children to access this. However, it would be preferable if curricular design and the principles and practices of education were designed by an independent body of educators, rather than be at the whim of which political party was in power at the time. This would offer stability on policy and practices and would keep the pupils' interests central in the decision-making process. Indeed, it is questionable, why in England Teaching Training is rightly so rigorous, yet in marketized free schools and academies etc., non-qualified teachers can be employed.

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Table 1: The Schooling System in England: Stages, Ages and Standard Evaluation/Assessment Components

Stage (of Assessment)	Age	Schooling Type	Evaluation Component	Assessor and Purpose
Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) comprising: Year Nursery (YN) Year Reception (YR)	From the Autumn term after a child turns 3 years of age.	Provision is via private nursery or as part of a larger infant or primary school.	Baseline assessment of maths, language, communication, and literacy. The test is conducted within the first six weeks of a child entering formal education (typically YR)	To track both pupil and school progress. Marking/Reporting of pupil progress is by teacher assessment. Results are shared with the local authority.
Key Stage 1 comprising: Year 1 Year 2	From the Autumn term after a child turns 5 years of age.	Provision is via a stand-alone infant school or as part of a larger primary school.	Phonics screening to test a child's ability to decode words and whether they are progressing as expected according to the National Curriculum. The test is conducted in the summer term of Year 1.	To track pupil progress. Marking/Reporting of pupil progress is by teacher assessment. Results (pass/fail) are shared with the local authority and parents.
			KS1 Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) evaluate progress and attainment in English and Maths, and whether a child is progressing as expected according to the National Curriculum. The test is conducted in the Summer Term of Year 2. It is now optional but was compulsory until May 2023.	To track both pupil and school progress. Marking/Reporting of pupil progress is by teacher assessment. Results (a three-tier below-, at-, or above-, expected grading) are shared with the local authority.

<p>Key Stage 2 comprising:</p> <p>Year 3 Year 4 Year 5 Year 6</p>	<p>From the Autumn term after a child turns 7 years of age.</p>	<p>Provision is via a stand-alone junior school or as part of a larger primary school.</p>	<p>Multiplication Table Check to determine whether pupils can recall their times tables fluently.</p> <p>The test is conducted in the summer term of year 4</p>	<p>To track pupil progress.</p> <p>Marking/Reporting of pupil progress is by teacher assessment.</p> <p>Results are shared with the local authority.</p>
<p>Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 comprising:</p> <p>Year 6 Year 7 Year 8 Year 9 Year 10 Year 11</p>	<p>From the Autumn term after a child turns 11 years of age</p>	<p>Provision is via a standalone Secondary School (in some regions a middle school system still exists, but this is in decline).</p>	<p>KS2 SATs evaluate progress and attainment in English grammar; punctuation and spelling (2 papers); English Language (1 paper); and Maths (3 papers), to assess whether a child is progressing as expected according to the National Curriculum.</p> <p>The test is conducted in the summer term of Year 6</p> <p>General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) report on the achievement of a pupil at the end of Secondary education. English (2 GCSEs), Maths (1 GCSE) and science (up to 3 GCSEs) are compulsory GCSEs. Children then choose further National Curriculum subject GCSEs to take.</p> <p>Generally, a child is expected to take between 9 and 11 GCSEs.</p>	<p>To track both pupil and school progress.</p> <p>Marking/Reporting of pupil progress is by teacher assessment.</p> <p>Results (a three-tier below-, at-, or above-, expected grading) are shared with the local authority, with school level results made publicly available for every school in England.</p> <p>To track both pupil and school progress.</p> <p>Marking/Reporting of pupil progress is by specialist government approved exam boards (AQA, OCR, Pearson Edexcel and WJEC Eduqas).</p> <p>Results (a 1 to 9 grading) are shared with the local authority, with school level results made publicly available for every school in England.</p>

<p>Key Stage 5 comprising:</p> <p>Year 12 Year 13</p>	<p>From the Autumn term after a child turns 16 years of age</p>	<p>Provision is via a 6th form college embedded within a Secondary School, a specialist academy or a Further Education (FE) college</p>	<p>Traditionally young adults take between 3 and 4 A-Levels.</p> <p>However, Training and Apprenticeship options also exist at KS5, including National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) qualifications, Traineeships, Apprenticeships and T-Levels</p>	<p>With respect to the traditional (and still dominant) A-Level continued education route, the purpose is to track both pupil and school/FE provided progress.</p> <p>Marking/Reporting of pupil progress is by specialist government approved exam boards (AQA, OCR, Pearson Edexcel and CIE).</p> <p>Results (an A* to E grading) are shared with the local authority, with school/FE level results made publicly available for every school in England.</p>
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