

Excellence, Equity, Inclusion.

Essex County Council
Cabinet Office
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Essex CM1 1LX



April 2026

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome back to the summer term, I hope you all enjoyed a restful and relaxing spring term break with family and loved ones. As we have now entered the Pre-Election Period, it is appropriate that, as Director of Education for the Local Authority, this term's newsletter for Governors is issued from my office.

Last term the Department for Education (DfE) published its Schools White Paper: *Every child achieving and thriving* as well as its SEND Reform: *putting children and young people first*, outlining its ambitious plans to address the challenges we all experience across the Education sector at this time. This sets out proposals to strengthen support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). As you know, this has been long-awaited by many schools, Trusts, parents and carers, as well as organisations working within the SEND system.

In the paper, the Government has outlined an ambition to ensure children receive support earlier, that inclusion in mainstream settings is strengthened and that families no longer feel like they need to fight to get support for their child; these are important elements that my Education Directorate and I have been working on for the past few years already.

The Government has stated they will focus on:

- improving early identification and support in early years settings, schools and colleges
- strengthening support in mainstream schools, with better access to specialist advice
- ensuring children with the most complex needs continue to receive statutory plans and specialist provision
- improving consistency and reducing delays across the system

I have included more detail later in this newsletter, and I would encourage colleagues to submit their views to the DfE consultation on these important matters by the deadline on 18th May 2026.

As always, colleagues can obtain regular updates and important news from the DfE relating to governance in maintained schools and academy trusts in England is available at [School governance update - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/school-governance-update)

Finally, wishing you all a very successful and impactful third school term of this academic year.

Yours sincerely,

Clare Kershaw
Essex County Council Director of Education

ESSEX EDUCATION TEAM UPDATES



Safeguarding and Wellbeing

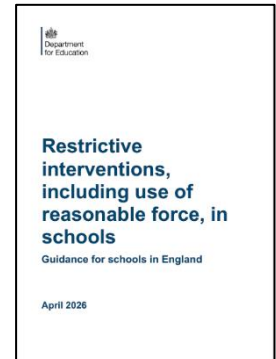
Strategic lead: Jo Barclay – Head of Education Safeguarding and Wellbeing

Essex Infolink



The DfE has updated its guidance on '[Restrictive Intervention, including Use of Reasonable Force](#)' as of April 2026.

The use of restrictive interventions, including reasonable force and seclusion, can have a significant impact on the pupils, staff members and parents involved, as well as the wider classroom. However, there are times when the use of restrictive interventions will be lawful and necessary; for example, to keep individuals and the wider school community safe. This document aims to help schools proactively minimise the need to use restrictive interventions through early support, prevention and de-escalation strategies, and when necessary, to help school staff feel more confident in knowing how to use these interventions safely, appropriately and lawfully.



As a result, the Essex Education Safeguarding team has reviewed our ECC guidance and updated all the resources so they are compliant with the new DfE guidance; and the new pack is available in the secure area of the Essex Schools Infolink. The resource pack includes a new model policy, model reporting template and model letter to parents. As always, no requirement for schools to use these, they are there to support you and we always write them in Word format so you can review and amend to meet your needs.

Jo Barclay and her team will be leading a final virtual Safeguarding briefings for governors, for this academic year 2025-2026 on the date and time outlined below. Remember, Jo's team will be requiring all attendees to pre-register their attendance via a booking with the [ECC Workforce Development team](#).

Event	Date	Time
Summer term Safeguarding briefing for Governors	Tuesday 30 th June 2026	6pm – 7pm

A reminder that the DfE is seeking views on proposed changes to KCSIE: [Keeping children safe in education: 2026 proposed revisions](#). When responding to the consultation you will need to refer to the [draft guidance](#). The consultation closes on the 22nd April 2026.

Finally, a reminder for colleagues of the materials and resources supporting Safeguarding in all schools and academies, are available on the [Safeguarding | Essex Schools Infolink](#)

To contact the LA's Education Safeguarding team, please email educationsafeguarding@essex.gov.uk

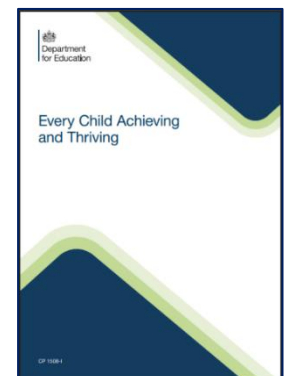
Schools White Paper: Every child achieving and thriving and SEND Reform: putting children and young people first.

As colleagues may be aware, in February 2026, the DfE published its [Schools White Paper: Every child achieving and thriving](#) and [SEND Reform: putting children and young people first](#).

The Schools White Paper sets out the UK government's long-term vision to raise standards, strengthen inclusion, and ensure that every child can **achieve and thrive** in a more coherent and supportive school system.

Core Aims

- **Shift from narrow to broad education** so all children access a rich curriculum and wider enrichment opportunities.
- **Reduce inequality and improve life chances**, including a national ambition to **halve the disadvantage gap** and raise average attainment to **GCSE grade 5**.
- **Increase attendance** so children collectively attend **20 million more days of school** each year by 2028/29.
- **Build belonging and engagement**, requiring all schools to monitor pupils' sense of belonging by 2029.



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Key Reforms

- **Teacher workforce investment**, including recruiting **6,500 additional teachers**, improving retention, maternity pay, and leadership support.
- **A more inclusive mainstream system**, backed by new **Inclusive Mainstream Funding** and multi-agency “**Experts at Hand**” support to intervene early and consistently.
- **Shift to a trust-led system**, encouraging all schools to join or form strong school trusts, with Ofsted inspecting trusts as single entities.
- **Joined-up services** ensuring local authorities, schools, health and social care work together for children with additional needs.

SEND Reform: *Putting Children and Young People First*

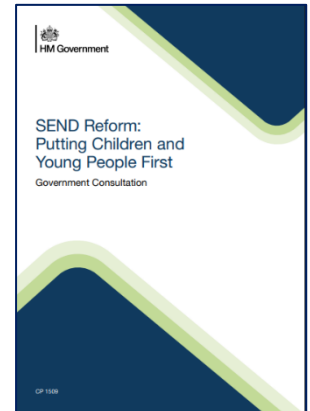
Published alongside the Schools White Paper, this SEND reform consultation sets out proposals to improve support for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities across the whole **0–25 system**.

Overall Purpose

To create a system that delivers **early, fair, and consistent support**, strengthens accountability, and ensures children with SEND can thrive in mainstream settings wherever possible.

Key Proposals

- **Tiered support model:**
 - *Targeted* – school-based support
 - *Targeted Plus* – external professional input
 - *Specialist* – for complex needs requiring specialist provision
- **Replace most EHCPs with Individual Support Plans (ISPs)** for children whose needs are not in the most complex category, ensuring consistent baseline support for all SEND learners.
- **Experts at Hand service**, providing education and health specialist advice directly within mainstream settings.
- **Strengthening inclusion through system reform**, rewarding schools that demonstrate inclusive practice.
- **Greater collaboration and shared accountability** across local authorities, health services, schools and families.
- **Extensive consultation** is ongoing until **18 May 2026**, with opportunities for parents, CYP, schools and professionals to contribute.



How the Two Documents Fit Together

Both *Every Child Achieving and Thriving* and *SEND Reform: Putting Children and Young People First* are designed as **a single, integrated reform package**.

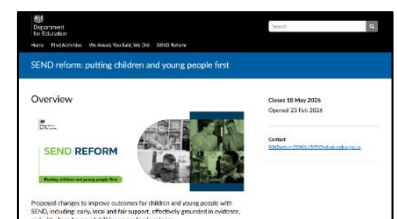
- The **Schools White Paper** sets the wider strategic vision for raising standards, inclusion, curriculum breadth, workforce strengthening and system coherence.
- The **SEND Reform consultation** provides the detailed mechanisms for transforming SEND identification, support and accountability to ensure that inclusion and high standards are delivered **hand-in-hand**.

Together, they aim to create a school system that:

- identifies needs earlier;
- intervenes sooner and more effectively;
- reduces reliance on statutory plans;
- makes mainstream provision consistently inclusive; *and*
- improves life outcomes for all children and young people

The Government has opened a 12-week period of consultation on the proposals, ending **18th May 2026**.

The consultation document explains the changes planned and asks for comments from everyone with an interest, including: Children, young people and families; Schools, trusts and early years and post-16 providers Experts; and academic organisations. Colleagues can submit their views to the consultation at [SEND reform: putting children and young people first - Department for Education - Citizen Space](#)



Renewed OfSTED Inspection Framework in 2025-2026



As colleagues will know, OfSTED launched its renewed inspection framework on 10th November 2025. Please refer to Cllr. Ball's Spring term newsletter for my 'At-a-glance' overview of what's changed as well as what inspectors will look for.

Supporting the governor role with the renewed OfSTED inspection process, one aspect I did want to highlight is the importance of governors understanding their schools IDSR (Inspection Data Summary Report).

What an IDSR is

An IDSR (Inspection Data Summary Report) is an Ofsted-produced data report that summarises how a school is performing over time and how it compares with national outcomes. It is designed to help inspectors, school leaders and governors understand patterns, trends and potential areas of risk or strength.

The IDSR typically includes:

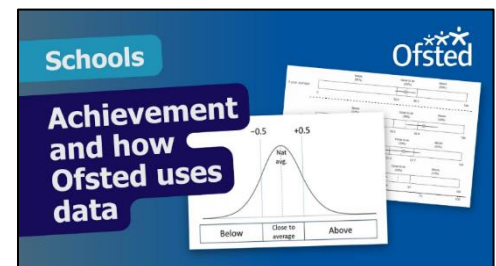
- Attainment and progress information (especially in English and maths)
- Trends over several years, not just one set of results
- Comparisons with national averages
- Outcomes for different pupil groups (e.g. disadvantaged pupils, SEND, gender)
- Attendance and exclusion data
- Contextual information to support interpretation

The IDSR does not make judgements and does not explain causes. It simply highlights where outcomes differ from national patterns and where further questions may be needed.

How governors can use the IDSR

Governors should use the IDSR as a strategic oversight and challenge tool, rather than as a detailed data analysis exercise. Governors can use it to:

- Identify strengths and potential risks in outcomes and trends
- Check consistency between data, leaders' reports and lived experience in the school
- Focus on pupil groups, especially disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND
- Support inspection readiness, by understanding the data inspectors are likely to explore
- Hold leaders to account for improvement actions and impact



The key role of governors is not to analyse data themselves, but to ask the right questions and ensure leaders can explain and act on what the data shows.

Example questions governors can ask

About overall performance

- What are the **main strengths** shown in the IDSR?
- Which areas are **below national** or show **declining trends**?
- Are outcomes **improving over time**, and how secure is that improvement?

About pupil groups

- How do **disadvantaged pupils** perform compared to other pupils and nationally?
- Are there any **significant gaps** between groups? Are these widening or narrowing?
- What does the data suggest about outcomes for **pupils with SEND**?

About trends and consistency

- Are these patterns **seen across several years**, or are they one-off results?
- Do the IDSR findings **match what leaders are telling us** and what we see in school?

About leadership and action

- How do leaders **explain the patterns** highlighted in the IDSR?
- What actions have been taken in response to weaker areas?
- What evidence do we have that these actions are **having an impact**?

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Inspection readiness

- Which parts of the IDSR are inspectors most likely to ask about?
- Are leaders confident in explaining both **strengths and areas for development**?

More information, from the DfE, can be found at: [School inspection data summary report \(IDSR\) guide - GOV.UK](#) as well as the OfSTED YouTube channel at: [‘Achievement’ evaluation area and how we use data: what schools need to know](#)

As Director of Education, I will revisit the importance of governors’ use of the IDSR during my ‘Director’s deep dive on the renewed OfSTED framework’ event on **Thursday 2nd July 2026 6pm – 8pm**.

Hosted at the Ivy Hill Hotel, Margaretting, Essex, the Deep dive will be a practical workshop that will include details of the renewed Ofsted framework, the inspection process as well as case studies from schools that have been inspected under the new framework.

This event will be free for governors on a first-come, first-served basis with a maximum capacity of 75; a waiting list will also be retained in the event of cancellations; look out for further details, and sign up, in future LA Governance team communications.



Health and Safety training for Governors

The Corporate Health & Safety team are providing a 2-hour update and overview of H&S in schools training course for Governors, via Microsoft Teams on Thursday 18th June 26, starting at 5:30pm at a cost of £90 per attendee.

Should you wish to attend the 2-hour training, or have any queries, please email the Health & Safety team direct at HS@essex.gov.uk. For bookings, the H&S team will require: Attendee name; email address; the name of your school; and your school’s Purchase Order details.



Attendance

Strategic lead: Emma Jordan – Head of Education & EY (West)

Essex Infolink



On **Tuesday 17th March**, the Local Authority hosted a very successful Attendance Summit, for all school leaders and attendance teams, at Colchester FC stadium.

Both nationally and locally, the attendance of pupils is a key priority for both the Department for Education (DfE) as well as Local Authorities and I am to regularly draw governors’ attention to ensuring that we, together, [maximise the attendance of our children and young people in our Essex schools and academies](#).



The Summit aimed for attendees to:

- Hear from schools with a variety of contexts who have made strides in their attendance practice and seen an impact;
- Have the opportunity to network with colleagues from schools and the LA to strengthen knowledge and understanding around the current attendance drive and support-first approach; *and*
 - Leave the day with practical suggestions that could be implemented immediately.



The Attendance Summit included inspiring and insightful keynote speeches from myself (*Director of Education, Essex Local Authority*), Marc Rowland (*DfE advisor National Pupil Premium expert/ Unity Research Schools*) and Alex Turner (*Attendance Programme Team Leader at DfE*). Local Authority teams also delivered a range of sign-up workshops for delegates including:

- “Is statutory legal intervention the right course of action?” for primary & special schools
- Section 19 and effective reintegration
- Leading attendance at every level in Secondary Schools
- Missing from Education – the voices of Young People
- Making Reasonable Adjustments - for primary & special

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- Ensure Accurate Coding
- Let's Talk: We Miss You – assessment and planning tools to support attendance difficulties

Further details for all the workshops can be found at [Essex Attendance Summit 2026 - 1](#), please feel free to share with your school leaders.



Colleagues can enjoy a flavour of this successful Essex event at [ECC Attendance Summit March 2026](#)

Essex Education Task Force - Building skills, shaping futures: Essex Year of Opportunity



The [Essex Year of Opportunity](#) continues to build on the success of the Essex Year of Reading and the Essex Year of Numbers, bringing together education, employers and partners to improve access to skills, careers and employability opportunities for residents of all ages.

Launched in March 2025, the programme focuses on strengthening pathways, improving visibility and ensuring that learning and opportunity are connected from early years through to adulthood.



Education, early careers and enrichment

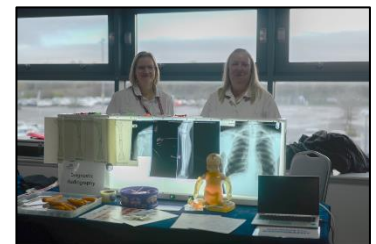
Starting early remains a core principle of the Essex Year of Opportunity. Work with schools has focused on helping children build broad aspirations and understand how learning links to future possibilities. This has included the [My Future programme](#), which has already reached more than 18,000 primary-aged children across over 100 schools. A key feature of this offer is [Roxie's Journey](#) – a series of short films following Roxie as she explores different career sectors. Designed specifically for primary-aged pupils, the films introduce real people behind job roles and help challenge stereotypes about work and ambition.

Alongside this, Step into STEAM events for Year 5 and 6 pupils have provided hands-on experiences to support aspiration-raising ahead of the transition to secondary school.

Libraries also continue to play a central role in enrichment activity. The Winter Reading Challenge saw strong participation from children and families, building reading confidence and enjoyment, while author events, reading challenges and intergenerational projects have continued to support community learning and wellbeing.

Skills, careers and progression

As pupils move through education, the Essex Year of Opportunity places increasing emphasis on skills development and informed next steps. Careers activity for older pupils has included a growing programme of careers fairs, festivals and employer-led events for Years 8 to 13, helping young people explore local growth sectors and understand post-16 and post-18 pathways. Assessment centre-style events have also supported students to build confidence and gain insight into real recruitment processes.



Employability and inclusion

Employability remains a key strand of the programme, particularly for young people and adults facing additional barriers.

Work with NHS partners across Essex continues to open routes into health and care careers through a combination of careers events, skills development and paid opportunities. This includes targeted support for care leavers, with a focus on sustained employment and progression.

[The Unseen film](#) and the A Lens on Our Journey young care leavers photography exhibition form an important part of this work. Created with care-experienced young people, the project highlights lived experience, resilience and potential, while encouraging local employers to offer meaningful workplace opportunities. The exhibition will continue touring Essex libraries throughout the year, raising awareness of fostering, care and the importance of opportunity.

What to look out for over the summer

Activity will continue across the Essex Year of Opportunity over the summer months, with new My Future encounters for primary schools, alongside oracy training, a countywide oracy competition and new financial literacy teaching resources. Libraries will host the Summer Reading Challenge, Read Aloud Challenge and National Year of Reading

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activity, while careers activity continues with the launch of Careers Ambassadors on the website and new episodes in Roxie's Journey.

Employability-focused work will include NHS employability fairs, ongoing care leaver employment activity linked to The Unseen film and touring photography exhibition in libraries, alongside continued functional skills and apprenticeship hub programmes. To keep up to date with upcoming activity and access new resources and programmes, visit www.essexyearofopportunity.co.uk.

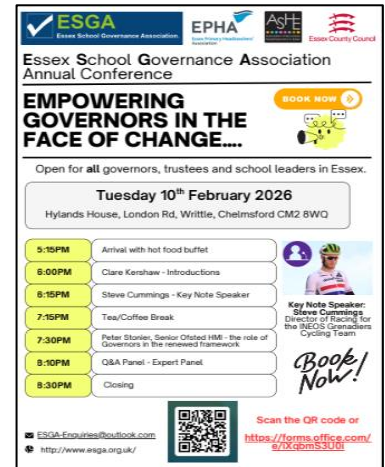
Essex Schools Governance Association (ESGA) Annual conference for Governors

On Tuesday 10th February 5.30pm – 8.30pm ESGA ([Essex Schools Governance Association](http://www.essex.gov.uk/essex-schools-governance-association)) hosted its Annual Conference for Governors, at Hylands House, Chelmsford, and what a spectacular event it was!

The event itself was fully-booked, so I do hope colleagues had been able to attend if they had wished to.

The evening included a keynote speech from Steve Cummings, Former Olympian and Tour de France stage winner, an overview of the renewed OfSTED framework for Governors by Peter Stonier, Senior OfSTED HMI, as well as enchanting music from students and staff from the Essex Music services team led by Peter Lovell.

My sincere gratitude and appreciation to Ruth Bird, Chair of ESGA, as well as the ESGA committee for organising such a warm, welcoming and insightful evening that was capped off by a delicious buffet.



ESGA Essex School Governance Association | **EPHA** | **ASPE** | Essex County Council

Essex School Governance Association Annual Conference

EMPOWERING GOVERNORS IN THE FACE OF CHANGE...

Open for all governors, trustees and school leaders in Essex.

Tuesday 10th February 2026
Hylands House, London Rd, Writtle, Chelmsford CM2 8WG

5:15PM	Arrival with hot food buffet
6:00PM	Clare Kenshaw - Introductions
6:15PM	Steve Cummings - Key Note Speaker
7:15PM	Tea/Coffee Break
7:30PM	Peter Stonier, Senior Ofsted HMI - the role of Governors in the renewed framework
8:10PM	Q&A Panel - Expert Panel
8:30PM	Closing

Key Note Speaker: Steve Cummings, Director of Racing for the BECS Grandstanders Cycling Team

Book Now!

ESGA - Enquiries/Bookings.com | <https://forms.office.com/72k0pm5314>

Scan the QR code or



Traded School Improvement offers for schools 2025-2026

The LA's Education Directorate has a full catalogue of traded programmes of support, reviews, advice and guidance that schools can book from, tailoring professional development support programmes to the needs of their children and school communities.

For more information, and/ or to book a traded activity, please visit: [School improvement: Traded Services](#) | [Essex Schools Infolink](#) and to view the traded services catalogue, please click [here](#).



