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Policy paper

Maximising value for pupils

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Applies to England

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Our vision

Our ambition is to work with schools and trusts to maximise value from the investment in the school system, so every pound delivers for children. This is a shared endeavour and the collective responsibility of government and the entire school system. It is critical to delivering our ambitions and delivering for our children and young people.

We know schools and trusts are experienced in making tough decisions to manage costs and protect quality, and we know there is excellent practice across the sector,

with schools and trusts proactively finding ways to secure better value from their resources. We want to spread this throughout the system, seizing opportunities to go further in unlocking the full value of the substantial resources available, including the expertise and commitment of the skilled people working to make this happen.

We know that government has a role to play because systemic challenges at a national level can be barriers for schools and trusts striving to get the most out of their budgets. That's why government will tackle the issues that increase costs and prevent schools and trusts from realising the best value for money. We have the collective power to take on key spending areas to secure better deals for schools and ensure more money is best invested in our children.

We are committed to doing this, with an energy deal already in place and having negotiated rate caps for agency supply that will provide significant value for money via the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) framework due June 2026.

We are also tackling wider societal challenges that will relieve some of the additional cost pressures that schools and trusts have faced in recent years. The government's decision to remove the two-child benefit cap in this year's Budget will lift almost half a million children out of poverty and comes alongside a substantial increase in children's social care funding, ensuring all children have the best start in life. This builds on the opportunities for children and support for families we will deliver through:

- free breakfast clubs
- the extension of free school meals
- the national expansion of Best Start Family Hubs
- investment in government-funded childcare

These actions will boost children's life chances and will support staff currently going above and beyond to fill the gaps left by other services being stripped away.

The **Maximising value for pupils** programme will tackle the systemic issues and support all schools and trusts to allocate resources smartly across 4 key pillars:

- commercial spend
- assets, including reserves
- workforce deployment
- developing capabilities, including digital and technology

We set out here the support available now to help guide schools and trusts through resource planning for next year and the years ahead. We will continue to deliver existing initiatives but also expand the support available. We will build on previous programmes such as School Resource Management and provide broader support in areas that are likely to yield greatest results and overcome key barriers.

We urge every school, trust and local authority to draw on this support to identify and implement proactive steps to continue to maximise value from every pound spent.

We are committed to working closely with the sector to help develop and expand our offer over the coming years to ensure it is informed by feedback and meets sector needs.

Support for schools and trusts

We are equipping schools and trusts with the data and insights to identify opportunities to secure better value.

All schools and trusts are encouraged to take advantage of the updated [Financial benchmarking and insight tool \(FBIT\)](#) to quickly examine their financial data and benchmark spending against similar schools and trusts. This can help identify where the evidence points to the biggest opportunities to drive value.

Comparing performance to similar schools and trusts provides greater insight into what's possible. This is matched with the practical support from the new Maximising Value for Pupils programme set out below – where we have identified key opportunities across 4 pillars and are taking action to support schools and trusts.

Pillar 1: Commercial

We are harnessing the collective buying power of around 22,000 state-funded schools, taking on key areas of spending and helping secure better deals and maximise value from budgets.

Schools and trusts, on average, spend 20% of their budgets on non-staff costs. We believe more can be done to help schools and trusts achieve better value in this area. This means schools and trusts can invest more in frontline provision that

makes the greatest difference for children.

There's clear evidence this is possible:

- the Department for Education's [Energy for schools](#) pilot identified an average 36% saving for participating schools
- [a trust saved](#) over £500,000 through smarter contract management when taking advantage of the [Get help buying for schools](#) service

We will continue to drive value from key areas of spend where we know we can use our collective buying power to offer a better deal.

On top of our existing offer, we plan to develop and deliver new services starting with procurement of Management Information Systems, technology, learning resources and agency supply teachers.

We have started working on these areas because we have strong evidence that schools and trusts can secure better value for money and, with departmental support, we know we can support schools to make significant savings and reduce risks.

[Achieving better value when buying](#) includes further information.

Pillar 2: Assets

We are supporting schools and trusts to unlock value and deliver more for pupils by making the most of financial and physical assets.

There is significant potential in under-utilised assets across schools and trusts, including sizeable financial reserves and physical assets such as land and buildings. Opportunities include better banking solutions and making use of the substantial reserves in our system, which totalled more than £6 billion in 2023/24, nearly 10% of the core schools budget.

While some schools and trusts have reserves earmarked for capital projects, it is important to acknowledge that they have greater income stability than many other charities or businesses. Good management of reserves can unlock funds for schools and trusts to benefit their children today. Investing in new technology, for example, can also help tackle staff workload and increase productivity. Where it is legitimate for schools and trusts to hold cash to manage financial risks, these funds

should be invested in accounts that offer a strong return on investment – and our new banking tool can help to do this.

We will engage schools and trusts to understand how we can best support them to continue to maximise use of their financial and physical assets. Many schools and trusts are using their assets for community benefit. We want to ensure this social value is maintained while supporting opportunities to maximise value and reinvest savings where they matter most.

We will also launch updated guidance for academy trusts in 2026, helping them manage their reserves effectively to improve outcomes and to support them in their financial planning and strategic investment.

[Maximising school and trust resources: managing financial and physical assets](#) includes further information.

Pillar 3: Workforce

We know that leaders are making careful planning decisions within tight budgets to ensure their workforce deployment and curriculum help every child achieve and thrive.

Schools and trusts spend around 80% of their budgets on staff. We know that deploying staff effectively is critical to delivering high-quality education, and schools and trusts are working hard to respond to the needs of their local communities and to maximise their resources for high-quality teaching^{[\[footnote 1\]](#)}. While every school is different, common themes include:

- innovating with new models of teaching
- refining leadership team structures
- changing approach to use of supply and agency staff
- refining support staff deployment to maximise impact on learning and development
- maximising the use of technology and artificial intelligence in support of the workforce

We are tackling the systemic issues. We know schools and trusts undertake spending in some costly areas that are not optimal for pupils' outcomes – for

example, national expenditure on agency supply teachers reached £1.4 billion in 2023/24. We will crack down on unacceptable practices and excessive supplier margins within the teacher supply market, to help reduce school spend on agency supply teachers.

We will support this initiative through a wide range of tools and resources. This includes driving usage of the newly negotiated Crown Commercial Framework, which will provide a significant saving to the schools and trusts that adopt this approach. We will also share best practice with schools – for example, trusts harnessing their buying power to secure better agency rates and using their supply teacher data to help make more strategic recruitment decisions.

At a school and trust level, we are asking leaders to continue to:

- look deeply at their data, including the similar school comparisons and suggestions available on FBIT
- seek out staff feedback
- explore the great practice happening across the sector

This includes looking at the very top, by ensuring that pay and rewards for multi-academy trust executives are proportionate and justified. It also means looking at the long term, including ways to address long-term vacancies, reduce high turnover rate and support overall retention.

As we hear more from schools and trusts about the great innovation and practice across the sector, we will ensure this good practice is shared. To support with this, we will publish a toolkit in 2026 with further research and resources, including case studies and additional FBIT features. We will also explore further ways to build and share a strong evidence base on workforce deployment, including on the best ways to support inclusion.

[Strategic workforce planning for schools and trusts](#) includes further information.

Pillar 4: Developing capability, including digital and commercial

We are committed to building capability by, for example, supporting schools and trusts to improve their commercial expertise, meet digital standards and share what

works across the sector.

Schools' and trusts' capacity to find and achieve best value varies considerably. We want them to have opportunities to enhance the capability of finance, operations and business teams to strengthen practices across operations and financial planning. We encourage schools and trusts to make use of the opportunities available, including:

- virtual and in-person training
- qualification bursaries
- mentoring
- advisers who can provide peer-to-peer advice on using revenue and capital resources effectively

Case studies show that technology in schools has the potential to reduce costs and administrative workload to free up time for teaching. In the [2025 Technology in schools survey](#), 31% of school leaders reported that technology has contributed to cost savings 'at least to some extent' over the past couple of years. However, adoption remains uneven and barriers such as upfront costs, infrastructure gaps and confidence in using technology effectively still exist.

We are tackling this and encourage schools and trusts to consider the support available when planning, procuring and implementing technology within their schools.

[Improve your school's and trust's digital and financial planning](#) includes further information.

We know there is more to do. We are committed to working with the sector to build capability and understand and address the barriers that stop schools and trusts from getting best value for money.

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1. [Schools' responses to financial pressures 2023](#) ↩

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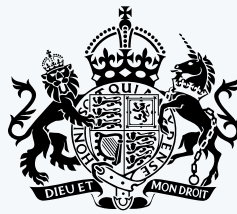
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