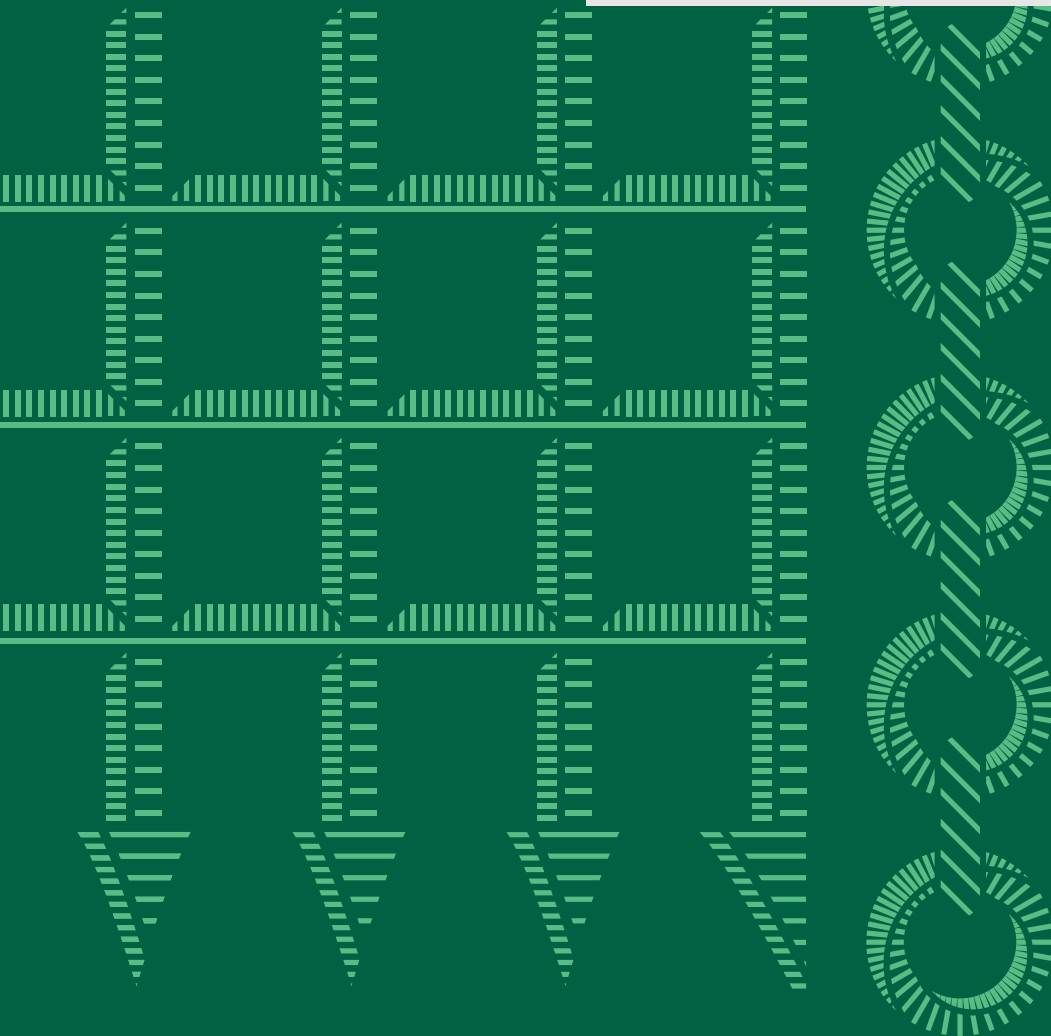


Education Committee

Foundations of Learning: replacing RAAC and securing school buildings

Seventh Report of Session 2024–26

HC 1399



Education Committee

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Summary

The RAAC crisis of 2023 exposed systemic weaknesses in the management of England's school estate: gaps in data on older buildings, variable estates-management capability across England, and fragmented communication between the Department for Education (DfE) and responsible bodies (academies, multi-academy trusts and local education authorities). Progress since then is notable. The Department has identified affected sites, restored face-to-face learning, committed funding, and begun removing RAAC at pace. It has issued practical guidance (Managing Older Buildings), launched standards to improve capability, and established a resilience function with an emergency response team. Ministers now plan to deliver a live, shared digital platform to improve data quality and speed of alerts.

Yet significant risks remain across an ageing estate that includes many 'system-build' schools¹ now beyond their intended design life. We call for a mandatory three-to-five-year survey and risk-assessment cycle for higher-risk building types and a whole-estate, long-term investment strategy that prioritises the most at-risk schools and provides clear timelines to parents, pupils, staff and governors.

¹ System-build construction methods refer to industrialised, non-traditional building techniques developed primarily in the UK during and after World War II.

The RAAC Crisis

The dilapidated school estate

1. The 2023 RAAC crisis did not emerge in isolation, it exposed deep structural issues rooted in underinvestment and ageing infrastructure within England's school estate. According to a June 2023 report by the National Audit Office (NAO), around 38% of school buildings (approximately 24,000) have exceeded their original design life, with some dating back to before 1940, and more than 700,000 pupils were currently learning in schools with buildings in need of major refurbishment or replacement. This asset decline follows years of capital shortfalls: while the Department for Education (DfE) has estimated that £7 billion annually is needed to properly maintain, repair, and rebuild the estate, it has actually received just £3.1 billion per year since 2020, with average annual capital investment of only £2.3 billion between 2016 and 2022.²
2. This persistent underfunding has accelerated deterioration of critical building components such as roofing, windows, heating systems, and cladding leading to safety risks and degraded learning environments. The NAO warned that such conditions could hinder pupil attainment and contribute to teacher retention problems.³
3. A pivotal moment came in 2010 when the Government cancelled Building Schools for the Future (BSF), which originally aimed to rebuild or refurbish all 3,500 secondary schools by 2020. At the time, the NAO estimated the BSF programme would cost between £52–55 billion, significantly above initial projections, and that its suspension led directly to a steep suppression of capital investment across the school estate.
4. Subsequent initiatives, including the School Rebuilding Programme and targeted grant funding for urgent repairs, sought to address long-standing deficits in the condition of the school estate. However, the NAO concluded that the scale and pace of investment had not kept up with need, and that funding allocations had repeatedly fallen short of what the Department for Education itself assessed was necessary to maintain buildings in a

2 National Audit Office, [Condition of school buildings: Department for Education](#), Session 2022–23, HC 1516, 28 June 2023, p 19

3 National Audit Office, [Condition of school buildings: Department for Education](#), Session 2022–23, HC 1516, 28 June 2023, p 22

safe and serviceable condition. As a result, a substantial maintenance backlog continued to grow across an ageing estate, characterised by deferred repairs, limited long-term planning, and buildings well beyond their intended design life. The RAAC crisis thus emerged within a context of systemic underinvestment and against a backdrop of deferred maintenance, insufficient long-term planning, and an ageing capital stock highlighting the urgent need for a more strategic, well-resourced and long-term investment strategy.⁴

5. Critically, the state of school buildings has tangible educational consequences. The NAO highlighted that poorly maintained and outdated facilities can negatively affect pupil engagement, attendance, outcomes, and teacher morale. When classrooms leak, heating fails, or environments feel unsafe, these factors create barriers to an effective learning experience.⁵

6. **CONCLUSION**

Taken together, the RAAC emergency represents more than an isolated safety risk, it is symptomatic of a chronic capital investment deficit. Restoring resilience to the school estate requires sustained, strategic investment, a clear commitment to long-term infrastructure renewal and recognition that the quality of physical environments is an essential pillar of educational success.

Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete

7. In 2023 the National Audit Office (NAO) reported that approximately 24,000 school buildings had exceeded their original design life, and an estimated 700,000 pupils were learning in schools that may require major rebuilding or refurbishment directly impacting the quality of education and pupil experience.⁶ Among these risks, Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) was identified as one of the most serious threats to the safety of the school estate. RAAC is a lightweight form of concrete widely used in school construction between the 1950s and the mid-1990s.⁷ Patrick Hayes, Technical Director at the Institution of Structural Engineers, explained to

4 National Audit Office, [Condition of school buildings: Department for Education](#), Session 2022–23, HC 1516, 28 June 2023, p9

5 National Audit Office, [Condition of school buildings: Department for Education](#), Session 2022–23, HC 1516, 28 June 2023, p7; House of Commons, Committee of Public Accounts, [The condition of school buildings](#): Second Report of Session 2023–24;

6 House of Commons, Committee of Public Accounts, [The condition of school buildings](#): Second Report of Session 2023–24; National Audit Office, [Condition of school buildings: Department for Education](#), Session 2022–23, HC 1516, 28 June 2023

7 National Audit Office, [Condition of school buildings: Department for Education](#), Session 2022–23, HC 1516, 28 June 2023

us that RAAC was never intended to last indefinitely; its porous structure and thin reinforcement mean that panels deteriorate over time, particularly when exposed to moisture (for example due to a leak in a concealed pipe which has gone undetected).⁸

Events of 2023

8. Unlike traditional concrete, RAAC is aerated and reinforced with thin steel bars, designed to make it lighter and easier to install.⁹ Buildings containing RAAC are now known to be vulnerable to sudden structural failure, often occurring without warning. This risk was brought into sharp focus in August 2023 when three buildings with RAAC rated ‘non-critical’ collapsed.¹⁰ As Baroness Barran told the former Education Committee on 19 September 2023, the collapses in 2023 were not the first RAAC incidents at a school.¹¹
9. At the end of July 2018, a RAAC plank in a UK school outside England failed, but unusually, remained wedged rather than crashing down. This allowed departmental experts to spend two days examining its condition. They concluded that the plank would not have been classified as “critical” before failure. Previously, the Department’s advice to schools was to vacate areas with RAAC graded as critical and work with the Department to make them safe. This incident was the first to raise questions about whether that advice remained appropriate and forced a rapid policy rethink.¹²
10. During August 2023, new incidents, including one in a commercial setting and another in an English school, reinforced the danger that “non-critical” RAAC could still fail without warning.¹³ Junior ministers were advised on 21 August that affected school areas should be closed. On 31 August, the Department for Education issued new guidance telling education settings to vacate any spaces with confirmed RAAC unless mitigations were in place just days before pupils were due to return. What followed next was a national scramble to survey sites, stand up temporary accommodation, and restore face-to-face learning. In 19 cases this led to the delaying of the start of term and in four cases to the use of fully remote learning.¹⁴ Lists of affected schools were first published on 6 September 2023 and updated on 19 September 2023.¹⁵

8 [Q2](#)

9 [Failure_of_Reinforced_Autoclaved_Aerated_Concrete__RAAC__Planks.pdf](#)

10 National Audit Office, [Condition of school buildings: Department for Education](#), Session 2022–23, HC 1516, 28 June 2023

11 [Q2, Oral evidence to the Education Committee, 19 September 2023](#)

12 [Q2, Oral evidence to the Education Committee, 19 September 2023](#)

13 National Audit Office (2023) [Condition of school buildings](#), Session 2022–23, HC 1516, 28 June 2023

14 [Oral evidence to the Public Accounts Committee, 11 September 2023](#), Q108

15 [Oral evidence to the Education Committee, 19 September 2023](#)

- 11.** Our predecessor Education Committee took evidence from Baroness Barran MBE, then Minister for the School System and Student Finance, and Susan Acland-Hood, Permanent Secretary, DfE, on 19 September 2023 on unsafe concrete in education settings and explored the immediate aftermath of the crisis and its impact on schools.¹⁶
- 12.** Two years on from the initial crisis, we returned to the work of our predecessor Committee to follow up on the DfE’s ongoing response to the events of the summer of 2023. We held a one-off oral evidence session on 28 October, first with a panel of witnesses representing the perspectives of structural engineers, school leaders and those responsible for managing school estates; and then with the Minister for Children and Families, Josh Macalister MP OBE, and his senior official Dr Jonathan Dewsbury, Director of Education Estates and Net Zero, Department for Education.
- 13.** This short report describes the continuing remediation work to remove RAAC from school buildings, the impact of that work on schools and those working and studying in them and the work carried out at a strategic level by DfE to learn from the crisis of the summer of 2023. We also reflect on the role of the DfE in relation to the management of school estates more generally and the government funding available to responsible bodies to maintain and refresh their estates; and make recommendations in key areas.

16 [Oral evidence to the Education Committee, 19 September 2023](#)

RAAC in schools

Initial response

14. In July 2018, the roof of Singlewell Primary School in Kent suddenly collapsed. The structural problem was identified as RAAC which had reached the end of its intended lifespan. In response, the DfE issued guidance on RAAC for schools and with the Local Government Association (LGA), contacted school building owners advising them to check as a matter of urgency roofs, floors, cladding or walls made of RAAC.¹⁷ In June 2018 the Department for Education issued the Good Estate Management for Schools (GEMS) guidance.¹⁸
15. In May 2019, the Standing Committee on Structural Safety (now called Collaborative Reporting for Safer Structures (CROSS), a mechanism by which professionals in the built environment may report safety concerns) issued an alert that pre-1980 RAAC planks were now past their expected service life; and in November, the Office of Government Property issued a warning note with CROSS' recommendation that all RAAC planks installed before 1980 be replaced.¹⁹
16. In February 2021, the DfE expanded its survey of all 22,000 school buildings, the Condition Data Collection programme (CDC2), which runs to 2026, to include RAAC and issued a guide to identifying RAAC 12 months later (subsequently updated in December 2022 and April 2024). In March 2022, DfE sent a questionnaire to responsible bodies asking for information about RAAC on school estates. In December 2022, the DfE's Annual Report and Accounts identified the "risk of collapse of one or more blocks in some schools which are at or approaching the end of their designed life-expectancy and structural integrity is impaired", and assessed the risk as "Crisis - Likely, or Critical - Very Likely".²⁰

17 Department for Education, [Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete: Identification guidance](#), April 2024, p 8

18 Department for Education, [Good estate management for schools - Guidance - GOV.UK](#), updated 24 February 2025

19 Office of Government Property, [RAAC Safety Briefing Notice](#), 7 September 2022

20 Department for Education, [Consolidated Annual Report and Accounts](#), 19 December 2022

17. Professor Chris Goodier of Loughborough University told us that when school roof collapses occurred in 2023, “there was very little knowledge about RAAC as a structural material, compared with traditional concrete.” This lack of research and guidance has compounded the challenge of managing RAAC safely across the education estate”.²¹
18. In the summer of 2023, concerns about the integrity of RAAC intensified when panels in two schools and one commercial building unexpectedly collapsed. These panels had previously been considered low risk, as the Department for Education (DfE) indicated they “would have been judged as non-critical on visual inspection.” This development fundamentally altered the Department’s risk assessment approach. Consequently, in August 2023, just weeks before the start of the new school term, the DfE issued urgent guidance instructing all responsible bodies to close any spaces containing RAAC, regardless of their prior condition rating.²²
19. We heard stark testimony from the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) about the reality school leaders faced as RAAC was identified across the estate. Andy Walls described a period of intense disruption and uncertainty, with limited confidence in the Department for Education’s handling of events: leaders “had to keep pressing the Department to say how many schools this affected,” while surveyors were still being dispatched, RAAC was confirmed in situ, buildings were closed, pupils were sent home or taught in temporary spaces, “it was a chaotic process for schools”.²³
20. In February 2024, then Secretary of State for Education the Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP announced a final list of schools and colleges with confirmed cases of RAAC: 234 education settings, around 1% of the school estate.²⁴ This included 98 schools in the East of England, 29 in London, 12 in the North East, 26 in the North West, 33 in the South East, 6 in the South West, 15 in the West Midlands and 11 in Yorkshire and the Humber. Of these:
 - 119 needed complex or extensive work to remove RAAC and would have one or more buildings rebuilt or refurbished under the Schools Rebuilding Programme;
 - 110 schools and colleges needed smaller remediations, and would receive grant funding to address them; and
 - 5 schools had other arrangements, such as taking the building in which RAAC had been found out of use.

21 [Q2](#)

22 Q117, Public Accounts Committee, Oral evidence: The condition of school buildings (PDF), 11 September 2023, HC 1338; PQ197808 [[Nurseries: Buildings](#)] 5 September 2023

23 [Q3](#)

24 Written Ministerial Statement, [Schools and Colleges Condition Update](#), 8 February 2024,

The then Secretary of State also said that all settings had returned to providing full-time face to face education once again.²⁵

Progress in 2024–25

- 21.** The General Election took place in July 2024 and the Labour Party formed a new Government. In January 2025, the Independent newspaper reported that “[m]ore than a year since the RAAC scandal emerged, nearly 90 per cent of schools receiving government support to remove dangerous concrete have not had work carried out”.²⁶ At that date, 30 schools had had RAAC removed using government grants and the school rebuilding programme was forecast to take 3–5 years to reach fruition. In answer to a Parliamentary Question from Munira Wilson MP in April 2025, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the DfE, Stephen Morgan MP, said that “39 schools where works are being delivered by responsible bodies via grant funding have informed us they have permanently removed RAAC” and that “[a]ll schools and colleges with confirmed RAAC are providing full time face-to-face education for all pupils and have suitable mitigations in place”.²⁷ Minister Morgan said:

For schools and colleges receiving grants, it is for responsible bodies to develop project plans that suit their individual circumstances, drawing on the department’s support as needed. The scope and cost of each project will vary depending on the extent of the issue and nature and design of the buildings. Grants are agreed with responsible bodies and we support them as they take this forward.²⁸

- 22.** Professor Goodier described DfE’s response to the management of RAAC since 2023 in positive terms, “the DfE was the government department that engaged most with the research. It ... wanted to learn, and to talk to IStructE, talk to [Loughborough University] and write its guidance with us”.²⁹
- 23.** Against this backdrop, the Government has since set out its progress since the General Election. On 10 September 2025, the Government released a press notice stating that over half (60%) of schools and colleges in which RAAC had been discovered were either “fully free” of it or “on the path to

25 Written Ministerial Statement, [Schools and Colleges Condition Update](#), 8 February 2024

26 The Independent, [Ninety per cent of schools hit by crumbling concrete scandal have not had RAAC removed](#), 5 January 2025

27 Written Question: Department for Education, [Schools: Concrete](#), tabled on 3 April 2025

28 Written Question for Department for Education, [Schools: Concrete](#), tabled on 3 April 2025

29 [Q3](#)

removal”: 53 schools had had all RAAC removed; and 71 schools were being rebuilt under the School Rebuilding Programme (52 of which had been started since the General Election).³⁰

Ongoing Remediation and Impact

24. We asked witnesses about the operation of schools from which RAAC has not yet been removed. Although the initial emergency closures have passed, for some schools the RAAC crisis remains far from resolved. Andy Walls of the NAHT told us that while “if you are one of those schools affected, the crisis is ongoing and serious.” Schools still operating with RAAC faced significant disruption, often relying on temporary solutions such as marquees or modular classrooms. Rob Thomas, Co-Chair of EBD OG, highlighted that these stopgap measures affected both school management and curriculum delivery, warning that “there is not enough pace in the remediation programme” and stressed the need to remove RAAC from the estate as quickly as possible to restore confidence and stability.³¹ Andy Walls concurred “The money needs to be found and given to schools to effect the repairs, and to local authorities and other responsible bodies”.³²
25. Beyond logistical challenges, witnesses stressed the personal cost to pupils. Bryony Green, Chief Operating Officer at Aldridge Education, reminded us that “every child gets only one chance in school.” She warned that delays in remediation, sometimes stretching over several years, could consume a significant portion of a child’s education, with consequences that may last a lifetime.³³
26. Evidence to the Committee also highlighted that disruption from RAAC has effects beyond immediate closures. Witnesses reported dips in admissions at affected schools, challenges recruiting and retaining staff in sub-optimal environments, and the financial strain of operating temporary accommodation or split sites.³⁴
27. A further material risk identified was that RAAC remediation activities could compromise the integrity of previously encapsulated asbestos, necessitating immediate specialist intervention and compliance with hazardous material protocols. Andy Walls explained “When you find that [asbestos], you clearly have to close the school immediately because it is

30 Press release, [Government progress fixing crumbling Schools and Hospitals](#), DfE, 10 September 2025

31 [Q4](#)

32 [Q4](#)

33 [Q5](#)

34 [Q4-8](#)

a toxic, hazardous substance that has to be removed by specialists. That has an effect. On the whole, parents do not want to send their children to a school that has asbestos in it.”³⁵

Timescale of RAAC remediation

28. We asked the Minister about the timescale of RAAC remediation. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary told us:

RAAC has already been removed from 62 schools and colleges, and 55 of those completions have been since last year’s general election. I am able to share that ... all schools and colleges will either have RAAC removed or be in delivery as rebuilds by the end of this Parliament.³⁶

29. Dr Dewsbury, Director of Education Estates and Net Zero, DfE, told us the DfE had spent £211 million on RAAC mitigation and remediation to date. He said that “this Government, like the previous Government, have committed to doing whatever it takes to remove RAAC from the education estate”.³⁷

30. Our witnesses noted that whilst RAAC-affected schools were now being prioritised within the schools rebuilding programme, this remained “an ongoing process”.³⁸ During the period before permanent solutions were delivered, schools may need to “put kids in temporary accommodation” and, in some cases, “close parts or all” of their site. Importantly, witnesses stressed that the inclusion of RAAC schools into the school rebuilding programme did not expand the overall size of the programme, meaning “other schools that would have had a slot... are then waiting,” effectively “robbing Peter to pay Paul.” This approach had resulted in significant disruption and “a lot of pain for the schools that are affected and the communities they serve.”³⁹

31. **CONCLUSION**

The removal and remediation of RAAC from school buildings has been essential to safeguarding pupils and staff. We recognise the significant progress made by the Government and the Department for Education in identifying affected sites, implementing emergency measures, and committing resources to address this challenge. These efforts have prevented greater disruption and ensured that most children have been able to continue learning safely.

35 [Q7](#)

36 [Q25](#)

37 [Q26](#)

38 [Q4](#)

39 [Q4](#)

32. CONCLUSION

However, the process has not been without cost. For school leaders, teachers, and above all pupils, the experience has been stressful and has affected learning and well-being. In those schools where RAAC remains an ongoing issue, temporary solutions cannot substitute for permanent fixes.

33. CONCLUSION

We welcome the Government's pledge that, by the end of this Parliament, every school building containing RAAC will either have had it removed or be in the process of a rebuild. This is an ambitious and necessary commitment. We will continue to monitor progress closely to ensure that this promise is met and that the lessons of the RAAC crisis lead to a stronger, safer school estate for the future.

Lessons learned from the RAAC “crisis”

- 34.** We asked our witnesses whether DfE had learned from the experience of managing the identification and removal of RAAC since 2023. Patrick Hayes of IStructE told us that the management of the RAAC crisis had made apparent several underlying issues with the management of school buildings. Most importantly, the data held by schools on their older buildings was poor and it was not evident that estates managers had the expertise to manage those buildings. DfE had, since then, produced a “very good guide”, *Managing Older Buildings*, to help estates managers to identify potentially problematic structures. DfE had also commissioned research on the risks of “system builds”, another potentially dangerous type of construction method used in the 1940s-80s with materials no longer considered safe and long-lasting. Mr Hayes stated that, having understood the riskier building-types and collected data on extant buildings, a robust process would then build in surveys and risk assessment every three to five years.⁴⁰
- 35.** The Minister, Josh Macalister, told us there had been two major lessons learned from the RAAC situation, on communication between DfE and the bodies responsible for schools, local government and trusts; and the necessity of having an holistic strategy for schools estates with the most urgent repairs and remediation work prioritised. He said that communication with responsible bodies had been “a major barrier for the last Government in resolving the RAAC crisis”. The Minister reflected that “[t]he quality of communication and information going back and forth between the Department and responsible bodies has improved” and in 2026

40 [Q3](#)

the Government planned to launch *Manage Your Education Estate* “a digital platform with live data that can be shared between responsible bodies in the Department for the management of the estate”. He stated that the Government had learned the importance of a “much clearer” understanding of the condition of the whole estate and prioritisation of work over the long term, both for maintenance and for rebuilds, “so that schools have more certainty and confidence about when new builds may be coming and what maintenance work needs to be prioritised”.⁴¹

36. Dr Dewsbury, Director for Education Estates and Net Zero, Department for Education, explained that the Department has established an emergency response team to provide support to responsible bodies when they encounter building issues beyond their local capacity to manage. In addition, a dedicated resilience directorate monitors risks across the Department’s remit and has undertaken exercises to prepare for potential future emergencies similar to the 2023 crisis. While emphasising that the Department was “not expecting another one, but we want to be prepared,” he outlined plans for the new digital portal. Currently being tested with responsible bodies ahead of its launch early in 2026, the portal aims to facilitate data sharing and enable rapid dissemination of alerts should issues arise in the future.⁴²
37. We note that the DfE also issued the Schools Estate Management Standards in April 2024, to assist schools in benchmarking their own competence in estate management and plot their trajectories towards a higher level of expertise in estate management and active risk management.⁴³

38. **CONCLUSION**

We recognise the substantial efforts undertaken since 2023 to safeguard pupils and staff, and to restore continuity of learning in settings affected by RAAC. The Department has improved guidance, begun to professionalise estate capability, strengthened resilience arrangements, and committed to greater transparency through the development of a live digital platform. These are important advances. However, further consolidation and sustained implementation are required.

41 [Q34](#)

42 [Q35](#)

43 Department for Education, [School estate management standards: Policies and processes required to manage the school estate effectively](#), April 2025

39.

RECOMMENDATION

The DfE should require all responsible bodies managing potentially problematic structures within the school estate to undertake a structured survey and risk assessment of higher-risk building types at least every three to five years.

40.

RECOMMENDATION

We further recommend the Government commission a national digital register of asbestos in the education estate and annual reporting on HSE compliance and asbestos removal achieved through capital programmes.

Wider concerns about the condition and maintenance of the school estate

41. The Department for Education (DfE) oversees a vast and complex estate: 21,600 state schools in England, comprising around 64,000 buildings. Responsibility for day-to-day maintenance lies with local authorities, academy trusts, and voluntary-aided bodies, while the DfE sets policy, allocates funding, and ensures value for money. This shared responsibility creates challenges in managing risk across such a diverse portfolio.⁴⁴
42. Expert witnesses told us about the scale and complexity of the problem. Professor Chris Goodier explained the challenge: schools “were all built at different times by different people, using different materials,” and decades of weathering and varied use mean that no two buildings age in the same way. The result was an estate with widely differing conditions and vulnerabilities.⁴⁵
43. The DfE’s own Annual Report for 2024–25 underscored the seriousness of the issue, listing the condition of the school estate as one of its top five risks. It warns of “Critical–Very Likely” structural safety failures, particularly in buildings constructed after 1945 using materials now past their intended design life. While the Department reported no open schools at imminent risk of harm, the underlying concern remains acute.⁴⁶
44. The National Audit Office (NAO) quantified the challenge starkly: 38% of school buildings, around 24,000, were beyond their estimated design life. This included 10,000 pre-1940 buildings and nearly 14,000 system-built blocks from the post-war decades, many with a design life of just 30 to

44 House of Commons, Committee of Public Accounts, [The condition of school buildings: Second Report of Session 2023–24](#); National Audit Office, [Condition of school buildings: Department for Education](#), Session 2022–23, HC 1516, 28 June 2023

45 [Q10](#)

46 Department for Education, [Consolidated annual report and accounts 2024–25](#), p. 68

40 years. As a result, some 700,000 pupils were learning in schools that required major rebuilding or refurbishment due to safety or condition issues.⁴⁷

45. Witnesses emphasised that managing this ageing estate is not a simple question of “safe or unsafe.” Patrick Hayes of the Institution of Structural Engineers told us that safety must be actively managed, not assumed. Bryony Green of Aldridge Education noted that smaller academy trusts often lack the expertise to maintain buildings effectively, even with the DfE’s estates management standards introduced in 2025. “The challenge,” she said, “is making sure everyone knows those standards exist and engages with them.”⁴⁸
46. Rob Thomas of EBD OG highlighted a further concern: public money was often spent “patching and repairing” rather than investing in long-term upgrades. He warned that elemental failures such as roofs, façades and mechanical systems were inevitable and that “at some point, buildings will become life-expired.” He was clear: without additional investment, the estate could not be sustainably maintained.⁴⁹
47. The Minister acknowledged these challenges and told us the Government intends to “get on top of these maintenance backlog issues” through a long-term estate strategy, setting out plans for sustained investment over several years.⁵⁰

48. **CONCLUSION**

The RAAC crisis highlighted a deeper, systemic issue: the ageing and fragile condition of England’s school estate. RAAC is not the only issue of concern within the wider school estate. While we welcome the Government’s commitment to publish a long-term strategy and its recent steps to improve standards and oversight, the evidence is clear that incremental fixes will not suffice. A significant proportion of school buildings are beyond their design life, and the risks though managed remain real.

49. **CONCLUSION**

Funding should move beyond short-term patching and repairs toward comprehensive upgrades and rebuilds, prioritising schools beyond their design life and those posing the greatest safety risks.

47 House of Commons, Committee of Public Accounts, [The condition of school buildings: Second Report of Session 2023–24](#); National Audit Office, [Condition of school buildings: Department for Education](#), Session 2022–23, HC 1516, 28 June 2023

48 [Q10](#)

49 [Q10](#)

50 [Q25](#)

- 50. RECOMMENDATION**
The Government should publish and implement its promised estate strategy without delay, setting clear milestones for reducing the maintenance backlog and replacing life-expired buildings.
- 51. RECOMMENDATION**
We recommend that the DfE provide targeted guidance, training, and funding to ensure all responsible bodies, particularly smaller Multi-Academy Trusts, can meet estate management standards effectively.
- 52. RECOMMENDATION**
The Government must maintain and publish accurate, up-to-date data on the condition of the school estate, including progress against remediation and rebuild targets, to build public confidence and accountability.

System-Build School Buildings

- 53.** Between the 1940s and 1980s, around 13,800 “system-build” blocks were constructed across England’s school estate to meet rapid population growth and rising educational demand. These modular designs, such as Laingspan, CLASP, Orlit, Integrid, and Vic Hallam, were intended as quick, cost-effective solutions, not as structures to last beyond 30–40 years. Today, many of these buildings are well past their design life.
- 54.** System-build blocks present unique risks. Materials once considered innovative such as high-alumina cement, calcium silicate bricks, stramit panels, and wood wool boards are now known to deteriorate over time. Problems include corrosion and cracking of concrete, rotting timber, and movement in steel frames. The NAO’s 2023 report highlighted 3,600 blocks with wood or concrete frames as particularly vulnerable, prompting the DfE to commission research and structural assessments.⁵¹
- 55.** Experts told us that the challenge is compounded by poor historical records and inadequate data. Professor Chris Goodier explained that “we do not even know how they were built, never mind how they might last”. Routine visual inspections cannot detect hidden structural weaknesses, leaving inherent risks unaddressed.

51 House of Commons, Committee of Public Accounts, [The condition of school buildings: Second Report of Session 2023–24](#); National Audit Office, [Condition of school buildings: Department for Education](#), Session 2022–23, HC 1516, 28 June 2023

56. In response, the DfE launched a £5 million research programme in 2024, combining physical investigations, desk studies, and modelling.⁵² Early findings suggest no systemic issues across the estate, which is encouraging, but the final report is not due until spring 2026. Until then, the absence of detailed structural data means responsible bodies cannot provide absolute assurance of safety.

57. **CONCLUSION**

System-build schools are a legacy of a different era: built fast, with limited design life, and now ageing under conditions they were never intended to endure. While we welcome the DfE's proactive research and its early indications of no widespread risk, without deeper structural surveys and enriched information, the Department and responsible bodies cannot guarantee that hidden risks are fully understood or mitigated.

58. **RECOMMENDATION**

The DfE should release the full results of its system-build research as soon as they are available and no later than its own timescale of Spring 2026, and set out clear actions based on those findings.

59. **RECOMMENDATION**

We recommend that the Government establish a long-term programme to replace or modernise system-built blocks most at risk, aligning investment with safety priorities.

60. **RECOMMENDATION**

Reflecting on the Committee's wider recent work, particularly on SEND, we recommend that the Government seeks to ensure that when investment is being made to address safety concerns and to replace or refurbish the most outdated school buildings, it aligns this expenditure with its objective of ensuring that mainstream schools are inclusive of children with SEND and ensures that all investment delivers school buildings which are inclusive for children with a wide range of SEND needs and provide an excellent learning environment for all children.

52 Tes Magazine, [DfE to spend nearly £5m researching risks of older school buildings](#), 18 June 2024

Conclusions and recommendations

The RAAC Crisis

1. Taken together, the RAAC emergency represents more than an isolated safety risk, it is symptomatic of a chronic capital investment deficit. Restoring resilience to the school estate requires sustained, strategic investment, a clear commitment to long-term infrastructure renewal and recognition that the quality of physical environments is an essential pillar of educational success. (Conclusion, Paragraph 6)

RAAC in schools

2. The removal and remediation of RAAC from school buildings has been essential to safeguarding pupils and staff. We recognise the significant progress made by the Government and the Department for Education in identifying affected sites, implementing emergency measures, and committing resources to address this challenge. These efforts have prevented greater disruption and ensured that most children have been able to continue learning safely. (Conclusion, Paragraph 31)
3. However, the process has not been without cost. For school leaders, teachers, and above all pupils, the experience has been stressful and has affected learning and well-being. In those schools where RAAC remains an ongoing issue, temporary solutions cannot substitute for permanent fixes. (Conclusion, Paragraph 32)
4. We welcome the Government's pledge that, by the end of this Parliament, every school building containing RAAC will either have had it removed or be in the process of a rebuild. This is an ambitious and necessary commitment. We will continue to monitor progress closely to ensure that this promise is met and that the lessons of the RAAC crisis lead to a stronger, safer school estate for the future. (Conclusion, Paragraph 33)
5. We recognise the substantial efforts undertaken since 2023 to safeguard pupils and staff, and to restore continuity of learning in settings affected by RAAC. The Department has improved guidance, begun to professionalise

estate capability, strengthened resilience arrangements, and committed to greater transparency through the development of a live digital platform. These are important advances. However, further consolidation and sustained implementation are required. (Conclusion, Paragraph 38)

6. The DfE should require all responsible bodies managing potentially problematic structures within the school estate to undertake a structured survey and risk assessment of higher-risk building types at least every three to five years. (Recommendation, Paragraph 39)
7. We further recommend the Government commission a national digital register of asbestos in the education estate and annual reporting on HSE compliance and asbestos removal achieved through capital programmes. (Recommendation, Paragraph 40)

Wider concerns about the condition and maintenance of the school estate

8. The RAAC crisis highlighted a deeper, systemic issue: the ageing and fragile condition of England's school estate. RAAC is not the only issue of concern within the wider school estate. While we welcome the Government's commitment to publish a long-term strategy and its recent steps to improve standards and oversight, the evidence is clear that incremental fixes will not suffice. A significant proportion of school buildings are beyond their design life, and the risks though managed remain real. (Conclusion, Paragraph 48)
9. Funding should move beyond short-term patching and repairs toward comprehensive upgrades and rebuilds, prioritising schools beyond their design life and those posing the greatest safety risks. (Conclusion, Paragraph 49)
10. The Government should publish and implement its promised estate strategy without delay, setting clear milestones for reducing the maintenance backlog and replacing life-expired buildings. (Recommendation, Paragraph 50)
11. We recommend that the DfE provide targeted guidance, training, and funding to ensure all responsible bodies, particularly smaller Multi-Academy Trusts, can meet estate management standards effectively. (Recommendation, Paragraph 51)
12. The Government must maintain and publish accurate, up-to-date data on the condition of the school estate, including progress against remediation and rebuild targets, to build public confidence and accountability. (Recommendation, Paragraph 52)

- 13.** System-build schools are a legacy of a different era: built fast, with limited design life, and now ageing under conditions they were never intended to endure. While we welcome the DfE’s proactive research and its early indications of no widespread risk, without deeper structural surveys and enriched information, the Department and responsible bodies cannot guarantee that hidden risks are fully understood or mitigated. (Conclusion, Paragraph 57)
- 14.** The DfE should release the full results of its system-build research as soon as they are available and no later than its own timescale of Spring 2026, and set out clear actions based on those findings. (Recommendation, Paragraph 58)
- 15.** We recommend that the Government establish a long-term programme to replace or modernise system-built blocks most at risk, aligning investment with safety priorities. (Recommendation, Paragraph 59)
- 16.** Reflecting on the Committee’s wider recent work, particularly on SEND, we recommend that the Government seeks to ensure that when investment is being made to address safety concerns and to replace or refurbish the most outdated school buildings, it aligns this expenditure with its objective of ensuring that mainstream schools are inclusive of children with SEND and ensures that all investment delivers school buildings which are inclusive for children with a wide range of SEND needs and provide an excellent learning environment for all children. (Recommendation, Paragraph 60)

Formal minutes

Tuesday 3 February 2026

Members present

Helen Hayes, in the Chair

Jess Asato

Mrs Sureena Brackenridge

Manuella Perteghella

Foundations of Learning: replacing RAAC and securing school buildings

Draft Report (*Foundations of Learning: replacing RAAC and securing school buildings*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 60 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Seventh Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 134.

Adjournment

[Adjourned till Tuesday 10 February 2026 at 9.30am]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 28 October 2025

Mr Patrick Hayes, Technical Director, The Institution of Structural Engineers (IStructE); **Professor Chris Goodier**, Professor of Construction and Materials, Loughborough University; **Bryony Green**, Chief Operating Officer, Aldridge Education; **Mr Andy Walls**, Educational Adviser, NAHT - The school leaders' union; **Rob Thomas**, Co-Chair, The Educational Building and Development Officers Group of local authorities [Q1-24](#)

Josh Macalister OBE MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Children and Families), Department for Education; **Dr Jonathan Dewsbury**, Director of Education Estates and Net Zero, Department for Education [Q25-51](#)

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2024–26

Number	Title	Reference
6th	Further Education and Skills	HC 666
5th	Solving the SEND Crisis	HC 492
4th	Children's social care	HC 430
3rd	Appointment of Professor Edward Peck CBE as Chair of the Office for Students	HC 731
2nd	Scrutiny of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill	HC 732
1st	Appointment of Sir Ian Bauckham CBE as Chief Regulator of the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)	HC 429
7th Special	Solving the SEND Crisis: Government Response	HC 1565
6th Special	Further Education and Skills: Government Response	HC 1555
5th Special	Children's social care: Government Response	HC 1350
4th Special	Scrutiny of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill: Government Response	HC 925
3rd Special	Screen time: Impacts on education and wellbeing: Government Response	HC 915
2nd Special	Delivering effective financial education: Government Response	HC 628
1st Special	Teacher recruitment, training and retention: Government Response	HC 627