

Rebuilding the resilience of our school system

Policy priorities for the next government

May
2024



Confederation
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The Confederation of School Trusts is the national organisation and sector body for school trusts in England, advocating for, connecting, and supporting executive and governance leaders. Our members are responsible for the education of more than three million young people.

Bringing together trusts from every region and of every size, CST has a strong, strategic presence with access to government and policy makers to drive real change for education on the big issues that matter most.

Published in May 2024 by the Confederation of School Trusts, Suite 1, Whiteley Mill
39 Nottingham Road, Stapleford, Nottingham, NG9 8AD. Registered charity number 1107640.

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Rebuilding the resilience of our school system

Policy priorities for the next government

CST believes all parties must place the needs of children, families and schools at the heart of their vision for this country. Excellence exists in England's schools but the system is fragile and requires a strategic plan and investment to ensure schools and trusts have the resources they need to deliver sustainable quality. The next government must rebuild the resilience of the school system.

Flourishing together

Our political leaders, schools and school leaders have a foundational question in common – how do children and young people, and those who educate them in our schools flourish?

A series of subsidiary questions follow:

- How do we create school environments where human flourishing is both the optimal continuing development of children's potential (the substance of education) and living well as a human being?
- How do we address the multiple negative impacts of the pandemic and the current economic challenges we face?
- How do we create school environments that are built on affirmative models of disability for children with SEND?
- How do mobilise education as a force for social justice?
- How do we create schools that support the development of the common good and the good society?

A duty of care

The great Peter Hennessy says (Duty of Care, 2022) that the concept of a duty of care should again define us as we learn how to live in a post-pandemic world with such political, economic, and social uncertainty.

Hennessy says: "The great question of UK politics ... is whether we can find the pessimism-breaking policies, the people, the purpose, the language, and the optimism to shift [our current] system and replace it with something much closer to who we are and, above all, who we can be."

We believe education is a good in itself. It is the building of who we can be.

But our school system is fragile...

There are multiple forces putting pressure on our children, families and schools:

- The negative legacies of Covid
- The impact of inflation
- Large increases in the number of children and young people experiencing



- mental ill health
- The school workforce recruitment and retention crisis
- The decimation of services around schools
- Child poverty and destitution

Priorities for the next government in relation to the school system

We need not a big state or a small state (these are ideologies) – but a strategic state that focuses on its duty to build resilience of the school system and wider public services.

We call on all parties to set out plans for:

- **Wider public services reform to alleviate the crisis of vulnerable children, including SEND, mental health services, and surrounding issues such as youth violence.**
- **An evidenced-led strategy for the whole of the schools' workforce, including the recruitment and retention of teachers and a plan to address shortage subjects.**
- **Fair per-pupil funding that is sufficient and sustainable, and equitable and includes weighting for disadvantage; and a capital framework ensuring we have enough school places and schools are safe and good places of learning.**
- **Proportionate and intelligent frameworks of public accountability, inspection and regulation.**
- **And perhaps most urgently, a cross-government national strategy to address child poverty.**

The recent [PISA England Report](#) gave us the stark and terrible finding that one in ten UK pupils reported that they did not eat at least once a week because there is not enough money to buy food. And we have seen recently from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report [Destitution in the UK 2023](#) that there are now more than one million children in the UK living in destitution—that is, living without proper shelter or without enough food.

And in December 2023, UNICEF published a report, [Child poverty in the midst of wealth](#), which shows that child income poverty rates in the UK is the highest among the world's richest countries, and that we rank bottom of the table for changes in those rates in the past decade.

Trust with accountability

The legitimacy of public institutions is crucial for building peaceful and inclusive societies

Trust is integral to the functioning of any society. Trust in each other, in our public institutions and in our leaders are all essential ingredients for social and economic progress, allowing people to cooperate with and express solidarity for one another. It allows public bodies to plan and execute policies and deliver services.

Therefore the next government should move away from the reductionism of new public management as an approach to public service reform. The next government should reset its relationship with public services, and build a new settlement base on accountability with trust.

We stand ready to work with all parties, and the government, to build together the bright future children entrust us to deliver for them. In the words of the late Kofi Annan: "There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children."



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