



HEADTEACHERS' ROUNDTABLE
EDUCATION MANIFESTO 2024
MAKING IT POSSIBLE

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Education Manifesto 2024 | Making It *Possible*

A General Election is looming. **Headteachers' Roundtable** has been conducting conversations with other school leaders across the entire country, both directly and through regional headteacher groups and from all sectors. These conversations have focused both on the challenging issues they are managing, and canvassing their ideas for how things could and should improve.

What has emerged from these conversations is the powerful and unequivocal message that the job of the headteacher is now **impossible** on so many fronts:

- Funding is not matching operating costs;
- Teacher shortages make running an effective curriculum a constant headache;
- Buildings are literally crumbling;
- Children's services (such as those for mental health) don't even begin to meet current needs, with schools left responsible for so much more than education;
- There is no clear, fair, and appropriate strategy for children with SEND.

Meanwhile, school leaders experience unprecedented levels of criticism, scrutiny, and accountability from Ofsted, the DfE, the media and even their own parents. The job of school leader in 2024, we are told, feels thankless, exhausting, and unsustainable.

Headteachers are a group of professionals usually known for their determination to make a difference and their adaptability to change (for example, completely reinventing schools during the pandemic) so this feeling that the job is now impossible indicates a system at breaking point; the need for change is urgent.

Headteachers' Roundtable outlines in our brief **Education Manifesto 2024** the policies and approaches hundreds of school leaders said would make the job possible once more: for our children, our staff and the future of our profession.

We remain an optimistic profession, aspiring to the same hopeful philosophy of Nelson Mandela when he opined that **"It always seems impossible until it's done."** However, we must be listened to and must have our concerns taken seriously.

Here we outline four essential issues that currently seem impossible to manage and we provide 24 policy solutions to ensure that we move beyond the current crisis so that leading state schools becomes **possible** once more.

Executive Summary

1. Performance data: We need to move beyond this nonsense and develop a system that looks at exactly who attends a school, how long they are there, whether they make it through their full school career and where they end up by the time they are 25. We can only get a full picture of how a school or trust is performing when we also look at: destinations; proportions of children with EHCPs; movement off roll; elective home education; long term disadvantage and all those other factors that sit behind the headline figures we see for schools.
2. Inspection: We must create a system where an independent body works with schools and trusts to support and improve self and peer evaluation. Instead we should be considering more developmental critiques and the effective use of annual reviews to check safeguarding and school roll activity. Information to parents on school performance could take the form of a dashboard covering a range of metrics. School leaders should be involved in the design of a dashboard and ensure that it presents context and inclusivity measures. This would offer a more robust and regular mechanism for keeping children safe , whilst creating an ethical agenda for an independent inspectorate.
3. Policy: The DfE's trust quality descriptions are a step in the right direction but now need to align accountability, inspection and policy with metrics relating to inclusion. If we get our performance measures right and use the inspectorate to stop any gaming of rolls, then the government will have the tools to change the whole school landscape, recognising and rewarding high quality inclusive education and growing the positive influence of schools and trusts who serve all their communities well and do the most to retain and develop great teachers.
4. SEND: Change the accountability measures – schools should be positively regarded rather than penalised for including higher proportions of students with SEND and those with disadvantaged backgrounds.
5. SEND: Conduct a Judicial Review of school policies and practices around admissions. School policies should protect against the exclusion of or disadvantage to children with SEND and other priority groups to ensure equality and equity.
6. SEND: Reallocate LA funds to Special Schools. LAs should stop using taxpayers' money to disproportionately fund independent specialist schools over the maintained sector. LAs should, instead, redistribute SEND funding to invest and grow new provision within our existing Special Schools. Invest to save is a cost neutral strategy that will stop state funding leaking out into the independent sector and keep our most vulnerable children close and in their communities.
7. Early intervention: A joined-up family friendly strategic approach to Children's Services which puts the child at the centre of the support and intervention offered to them and fosters open communication about how their needs can be met.
8. Early intervention: Establishing reasonable and realistic thresholds for referral to social care and CAMH services. This necessitates funding those services adequately.
9. Early intervention: Re-investment in countywide Sure Start children's centres which remain one of the best evidenced models of community support for families.
10. Early intervention: Providing adequate high-quality Alternative Education provision in every region.

11. The workforce: Pay for teachers and support staff needs to adequately recognise and reward the expertise and hard work involved.
12. The workforce: Invest properly in schools to provide sufficient money for non-contact time, staff training and support.
13. The workforce: Fully fund and increase statutory PPA time to give teachers adequate time to fulfil teaching responsibilities outside of the classroom.
14. Retention: Pay for teachers and support staff needs to adequately recognise and reward the expertise and hard work involved.
15. Retention: Invest properly in schools to provide sufficient money for non-contact time, staff training and support.
16. Retention: Increase statutory PPA time to give teachers adequate time to fulfil teaching responsibilities outside of the classroom.
17. Value school leaders: Provide professional supervision for headteachers as standard.
18. Value school leaders: Develop more humane and intelligent accountability systems.
19. Value school leaders: Address problems with the current Ofsted complaints process that absorb a huge amount of leaders' time, energy and resources.
20. Funding: We call for a reform to the funding model which would ensure that funding matches the actual costs of delivering provision whatever the setting and wherever the geography. This should be ring-fenced and protected with cross-party agreement. to ensure the long-term investment needed for the growth and development of all young people.
21. Funding: We need a long-term approach to reliable pay and progression to secure a consistent, sustainable supply of staff. Pay settlements cannot represent an annual circus of delay and disappointment. Leaders must be able to plan over time for pay progression. All staff working in schools must know the sector provides consistently competitive salaries for all to pursue a rewarding career.
22. Funding: If a funding model addresses the cost of provision in the mainstream then High Needs funding for SEND and Alternative Provision must do the same. This group has long argued for funding based on the actual cost of provision. If we genuinely value the vision of the green paper and implementation plan for SEND then we have to transform the outdated unchanged funding models and provide the investment it will take to realise the Right Support in the Right Place at the Right Time.
23. Funding: We repeat our calls to ensure sufficient capital funding for the maintenance and improvement of the school estate. The long-standing existing and well documented issues must not be sacrificed to fund the urgency of RAAC. This should be independently checked against increased pupil numbers, repair and rebuilding required in a holistic way. The existing and eyepopping estimated shortfall of >£16billion cannot be ignored whilst leaders are left chasing a plethora of elusive pots simply to apply sticking plasters to the fabric of their schools.
24. Funding: No one should be making a profit from public money at the expense of young people; this has been facilitated by complex and perverse PFI contracts, stripping affected schools of essential resources. An urgent review needs to be undertaken to obtain best value for taxpayers' money and put a stop to a valuable resource lining the pockets of private companies.

Making **Accountability** Possible

The Impossible

We live under an accountability and inspection regime that has only one defender left: the Secretary of State for Education. Every right-thinking person now acknowledges that single word Ofsted judgements are not fit-for-purpose and there is a growing consensus that the zero-sum approach to school performance at Key Stages 4 and 5 is at best misleading and at worst, downright damaging. Our current system pits school against school, incentivises and rewards non-inclusive leadership behaviour that damages children and adults.

Making it Possible

We call for a new system that is intelligent and recognises the full complexity of what schools and trusts do, a system that encourages collaboration and rewards inclusion, and an inspection system that does no harm, supports improvement, and promotes healthy, inclusive leadership.

Performance data

The Impossible

Progress 8 was a well-intentioned attempt to move away from measures that valued some young people and some grades more than others. However, this has resulted in numerous perverse incentives to change school policy and practice, it doesn't acknowledge context and is, of course, entirely gameable. Successive governments have sought to boil the entirety of school performance down to single measures and this has caused enormous damage. We need to develop a set of metrics that tells the whole story of a school. Achievement of young people is vitally important but must be placed in context. At some point "context" became a dirty word and using it made you an enemy of promise.

Making it Possible

- We need to move beyond this nonsense and develop a system that looks at exactly who attends a school, how long they are there, whether they make it through their full school career and where they end up by the time they are 25. We can only get a full picture of how a school or trust is performing when we also look at: destinations; proportions of children with EHCPs; movement off roll; elective home education; long term disadvantage and all those other factors that sit behind the headline figures we see for schools.

Inspection

The Impossible

Ofsted has achieved the unimaginable by unifying the profession in complete consensus across the entire system; we all now believe the current system of inspection is not fit for purpose and desperately needs reform. There are so many problems with single word judgements, they are almost impossible to list: they are unreliable, have destroyed careers and lives and make the whole system of inspection adversarial. Honest conversations can take place, but how much more honest would they be if these powerful and important insights were not reduced to single word judgements which are pivotal for school communities.

Making it Possible

- We must create a system where an independent body works with schools and trusts to support and improve self and peer evaluation. Instead we should be considering more developmental critiques and the effective use of annual reviews to check safeguarding and school roll activity. Information to parents on school performance could take the form of a dashboard covering a range of metrics. School leaders should be involved in the design of a dashboard and ensure that it presents context and inclusivity measures. This would offer a more robust and regular mechanism for keeping children safe, whilst creating an ethical agenda for an independent inspectorate.

Policy

The Impossible

For too long, we have been operating under systems of flawed performance measures and inspection. This in itself is bad enough. However, our gameable progress measures and unreliable single word judgements have then been used by government to drive a policy agenda that has “rewarded” those who win the zero-sum game, regardless of whether they do so inclusively or through off-rolling, exclusion, curriculum narrowing or saying they “can’t meet need”. So, some trusts have grown despite a toxic model that damages young people and staff, whilst others doing it the right (and hard) way are seen as less effective. This has to stop.

Making it Possible

- The DfE’s trust quality descriptions are a step in the right direction but now need to align accountability, inspection and policy with metrics relating to inclusion. If we get our performance measures right and use the inspectorate to stop any gaming of rolls, then the government will have the tools to change the whole school landscape, recognising and rewarding high quality inclusive education and growing the positive influence of schools and trusts who serve all their communities well and do the most to retain and develop great teachers.



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Making **Inclusion** Possible

The Impossible

No matter the context, inclusion is the can of the education system that gets kicked down the road of despair. The current system rewards schools with clear academic outcomes, and sanctions schools where pupil data is more varied. This inevitably means the most inclusive schools, with pupils with the most complex needs and highest levels of disadvantage, are punished by the accountability system. The reverse should be true.

Making it Possible

Any world-class education system that prepares our young people for as yet unimaginable futures must be inclusive, equitable and well-resourced with every child valued and adequately supported.

SEND

The Impossible

It doesn't take much to realise the relationship between the proportion of students with SEND within a school and school attainment scores and hence the impact on those high stakes Ofsted grades. The current Ofsted framework drives anti-inclusion behaviours and tempts schools and trusts to adopt selective student admissions policies or practices. It is a form of social engineering via school policy.

This toxic chain reaction results in the creation of 'sink schools' where nobody wants to be, whilst covertly selective 'affluent schools' continue to be seen as high achieving. This problem is not particular to mainstream schools alone. Taxpayers, as well as our most vulnerable children, are hit hardest by the specialist sector. Ill-conceived Local Authority commissioning decisions allocate millions of taxpayer funds into independent specialist schools, as the anti-inclusion framework kicks our most complex students out as far away as possible, at unimaginable cost.

Making it Possible

We can see three further changes that would make a difference:

- Change the accountability measures – schools should be positively regarded rather than penalised for including higher proportions of students with SEND and those with disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Conduct a Judicial Review of school policies and practices around admissions. School policies should protect against the exclusion of or disadvantage to children with SEND and other priority groups to ensure equality and equity.
- Reallocate LA funds to Special Schools. LAs should stop using taxpayers' money to disproportionately fund independent specialist schools over the maintained sector. LAs should, instead, redistribute SEND funding to invest and grow new provision within our existing Special Schools. Invest to save is a cost neutral strategy that will stop state funding leaking out into the independent sector and keep our most vulnerable children close and in their communities.

Inclusion is not just about meeting the needs of children with SEND. Inclusion is not just about mainstream or special schools. Inclusion is not a bolt on policy; and inclusion is not too difficult or expensive for a new government to sort out.

Schools are perversely penalised by the current accountability system which carries a tangible risk to the leaders who dare to make inclusion possible. Unfortunately, too many school leaders bear the perceived performance scars of seeking to be truly inclusive in a system that does not recognise or reward them for it.

Let's now learn from the past and shape a system that really incentivises our best people to work in our most complex schools and really make Inclusion possible.

Early Intervention with Families

The Impossible

Four million children are currently growing up in poverty in the UK according to the 2023 Child Poverty Action Group. Shockingly, that is one in three of our children. Many working families are on low incomes and the impact on our children is clear in schools. Growing numbers of children are now in care because their families can no longer afford to take care of them. Twenty years ago, schools could refer children and families to a raft of services that are now few and far between. Back then, families in crisis could then be supported so that mainstream schools could use their unique expertise and resources to educate children. There are now hundreds of thousands of families in crisis across the land and the Covid-19 pandemic has merely exacerbated this by removing any safety nets that were there for them.

Consequently, more children than ever present with complex emotional, behavioural and developmental needs that are not recognised until they reach school. It feels to our headteachers that they are simply expected to fill the gaps left by the services they previously relied upon, often because thresholds for support have become so high that they act as a cloak to hide inadequate funding. Schools are stepping in to provide food, clothing, mental health services, basic hygiene items, highly bespoke speech and early skills development, counselling and more. Diminished funding does not make these additional responsibilities sustainable. Children in crisis too often grow into dysregulated teenagers, who in turn are vulnerable to criminal exploitation, exhibiting violent or anti-social behaviours. This makes them extremely difficult to manage in mainstream schools alongside their peers, no matter what level of support is provided. There are not enough Alternative Provision placements for these youngsters when their school placement breaks down beyond repair. Fewer young people would end up at risk of permanent exclusion if high quality early intervention for families in crisis was available and Children's Services were adequately funded.

Making it Possible

- A joined-up family friendly strategic approach to Children's Services which puts the child at the centre of the support and intervention offered to them and fosters open communication about how their needs can be met.
- Establishing reasonable and realistic thresholds for referral to social care and CAMH services. This necessitates funding those services adequately.
- Re-investment in countywide Sure Start children's centres which remain one of the best evidenced models of community support for families.
- Providing adequate high-quality Alternative Education provision in every region..

Making Recruitment and Retention of Staff Possible

The Impossible

Dedicated and highly trained school staff are our most precious and crucial resource. Securing, sustaining and developing teachers, leaders and a wider team of support staff is fundamental to being able to run our schools and to provide high-quality education. Since the inception of the Headteachers' Roundtable, there has been a dogged focus on the importance of addressing challenges contributing to the recruitment and retention crisis.

Decades of erosion of school funding and undermining of the profession has taken its toll on our workforce. Working in and leading our schools has become an unattractive prospect. Pay and conditions have been insufficiently competitive and flexible to attract prospective candidates and to retain existing staff. An exponential increase in demands on schools has created untenable working conditions and caused institutional burnout. A lack of respect for and trust in the profession has manifested itself in unhealthy and inhumane accountability pressures.

Making it Possible

A properly invested, long term strategy is required to mend the damaged and demoralised teaching workforce.

The Workforce

The Impossible

We know from research carried out by the Education Endowment Foundation, that great teaching is the most important lever to improve student attainment, especially for our most vulnerable learners. On this basis teaching, the one profession that creates all other professions, should feature amongst the top graduate career options, particularly given that Generation Z's career aspirations are characterised by a desire for meaningful work with social impact.

And yet the UN has issued a global alert over teacher shortages. To safeguard against a chronic international shortage of teachers, 44 million teachers need to be recruited worldwide by 2023. Meanwhile, recent NFER data published in April 2024 shows another poor year of ITT recruitment with 11 out of 17 subjects below target plus primary. Headteachers are all too familiar with these challenges; in recent years, all subjects and phases have become shortage subjects.

Making it Possible

- Pay for teachers and support staff needs to adequately recognise and reward the expertise and hard work involved.
- Invest properly in schools to provide sufficient money for non-contact time, staff training and support.
- Fully fund and increase statutory PPA time to give teachers adequate time to fulfil teaching responsibilities outside of the classroom.

Trust and Value School Leaders

Meanwhile, the turnover of school leaders exacerbated by a lack of appetite for progression to leadership paints a concerning picture for succession planning. The fractured web of high stakes accountability mechanisms, short-termism performance culture and a system rife with easily escalated and ubiquitous complaints, is it any wonder that school leadership has become unattractive?

Recent TeacherTapp data indicates the percentage of deputy and assistant heads expressing an aspiration to become a headteacher has fallen to 43%. Meanwhile, the football manager approach to judging school leaders has led to a revolving door of heads. This creates instability and undermines sustainable school improvement. Annual Headrest reports highlight the range of factors that are impacting on school leaders' mental health and wellbeing and that are creating conditions that are contributing to early retirement, career change and the inability to recruit headteachers.

Making it Possible

- Provide professional supervision for headteachers as standard.
- Develop more humane and intelligent accountability systems.
- Address problems with the current Ofsted complaints process that absorb a huge amount of leaders' time, energy and resources.
- We call for a genuine commitment to raising the profile of the profession in order to attract and retain staff and to provide a culture of trust and appreciation for state education.

Stemming attrition rates

The Impossible

The staff churn in our schools is at an all-time high; there are retention issues at every level. The teacher exodus has left us with a nation in which the number of qualified teachers not in the classrooms is close to outnumbering those teaching.

Even if it were possible to replace the volume of teachers that are hemorrhaging from the profession, replacing experienced staff with novice teachers undoubtedly impacts on quality. This has real implications for the quality of teaching. As Kraft and Papay's research findings highlight, teachers' expertise develops over time with appropriate support, training and a developmental culture. Building institutional knowledge and honing professional craft skills is essential to grow teachers.

The Teacher Tapp and SchoolDash annual report on teacher recruitment and retention published in 2023 revealed that only 59% of teachers now expect to still be teaching in three years' time, a significant decrease from the pre-pandemic figures of 74-77%. While many initiatives and recruitment campaigns have focused on retention issues in the first five years of teaching, tokenistic golden handshakes have neglected to meaningfully address contributing factors. Nor have they considered other experienced segments of the workforce that are leaving the profession at alarming rates.

Research from the MTPT Project has highlighted that women aged 30-39 are the largest demographic to leave teaching every year. The experience of those returning from maternity leave struggling with the double bind of excessive, inflexible childcare and unreasonable workload conditions act as the canary in the mine.

The complexity of students' needs has risen dramatically in recent years. The necessary mission creep in safeguarding, pastoral support and in tailoring provision to support students with acute SEND needs has meant that 10% PPA time, introduced in 2005, is woefully inadequate to fulfil teaching responsibilities outside of the classroom.

Making it Possible

- Develop a coherent strategy for teacher training and make routes into the profession simpler and more appealing with payment for trainee teachers and student loan reduction/repayment over time.
- Address unreasonable workload caused by schools absorbing other sectors' responsibilities.
- Respond to findings from ECT framework research to ensure the necessary conditions and support are in place to support trainee teachers and their mentors.

Making **School Funding** Possible

The Impossible

Headteachers' Roundtable has been at the forefront of the fight for fair and sufficient school funding since 2016-17, lobbying MPs, Secretaries of State and Chancellor after Chancellor, both as a group and alongside colleagues across the profession. We have relentlessly, patiently, and consistently worked locally and at the highest levels to point out the futilities of "little extras"; the failure to invest in the school estate and the short sightedness of approaches to recruitment and retention that currently do not adequately reward staff delivering invaluable services that provide hope and aspiration on a daily basis for young people. We have vocalised the serious issues of resourcing schools during the pandemic and the devastating consequences of failing to fund the recovery needed.

Every policy point discussed in this paper is predicated on the undeniable truth that whilst politicians treat education as a cost burden rather than an investment for growth and productivity it is children who reap the outcomes of a national recruitment and retention crisis, crumbling buildings, scandalous SEND shortages and young people who are physically and emotionally manifesting the real cost of failing to make decisions that prioritise students, staff and schools of all phases and stages.

Too often, and for too long, policy-based investment has followed political priorities and localities rather than acknowledging the genuine need at source. We must recognise the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and deprivation in all areas, phases, sectors and communities, not just those designated for expedient opportunity. We cannot turn a blind eye to the layers of disadvantage, where intersectionality of discrimination and poverty diminishes opportunity for families and futures for young people.

We must recognise that those residing in our more isolated communities live subject to a rural premium of 10-20%, despite wages being 7.5% lower than urban counterparts, affecting supply of and connectivity and transport to already scarce or absent services. Resource must follow rhetoric. Whilst politicians treat education as a cost burden rather than an investment for growth and productivity it is children who reap the outcomes

Making it Possible

- We call for a reform to the funding model which would ensure that funding matches the actual costs of delivering provision whatever the setting and wherever the geography. This should be ring-fenced and protected with cross-party agreement. To ensure the long-term investment needed for the growth and development of all young people.

- We need a long-term approach to reliable pay and progression to secure a consistent, sustainable supply of staff. No initiative ensures school improvement more than a talented teacher in every classroom. Pay settlements cannot repeatedly present as an annual circus of delay and disappointment. Leaders must be able to plan strategically and holistically over time for pay progression as well as take account of national changes to living wage, pension and national insurance contributions. All staff working in schools must know the sector provides consistently competitive salaries for all to pursue a rewarding career.
- If a funding model addresses the cost of provision in the mainstream then High Needs funding for SEND and Alternative Provision must do the same. This group has long argued for funding based on the actual cost of provision. If we genuinely value the vision of the green paper and implementation plan for SEND then we have to transform the outdated unchanged funding models and provide the investment it will take to realise the 'Right Support in the Right Place at the Right Time'.
- We repeat our calls to ensure sufficient capital funding for the maintenance and improvement of the school estate. The long-standing existing and well documented issues must not be sacrificed to fund the urgency of RAAC. This should be independently checked against increased pupil numbers, repair and rebuilding required in a holistic way. The existing and eyepopping estimated shortfall of >£16billion cannot be ignored whilst leaders are left chasing a plethora of elusive pots simply to apply sticking plasters to the fabric of their schools.
- No one should be making a profit from public money at the expense of young people; this has been facilitated by complex and perverse PFI contracts, stripping affected schools of essential resources. An urgent review needs to be undertaken to obtain best value for taxpayers' money and put a stop to a valuable resource lining the pockets of private companies.

The economic reality in 2024 is significantly more challenging than at any previous time that we have written on this topic. Any new government will face many competing demands for resources as well as a desperate national desire for hope and optimism.

Education must have both sustainable and stable investment. This will enable the development of safe and consistent learning environments so leaders can focus on and develop the knowledge, skills and talent for an ambitious and innovative national renewal for generations to come.

It Always Seems *Impossible* Until It's **Done**

We believe that every one of these 24 changes could be made during the first term of a new government and would be supported by our nation's school leaders if during the first 100 days in office there was a genuine effort made to value our opinions and to rebuild a respectful relationship between government and the profession. A powerful signal of intent to do just that would be to dispense with Ofsted judgements at the earliest opportunity. It would demonstrate that teaching and school leadership was once more a highly regarded and trusted profession, not just by the public but by those who govern us.

We believe the next government could show full commitment in its intent to provide a great school for every child by co-creating with the profession, this urgent but hopeful manifesto for change.

Chair of the Headteachers' Roundtable: Caroline Derbyshire

Vice Chair: Caroline Barlow

Vice Chair: Sabrina Hobbs

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Headteachers' Roundtable



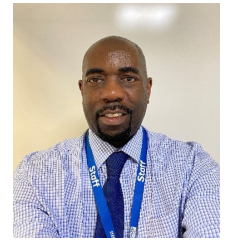
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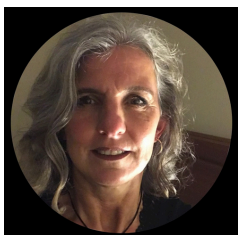
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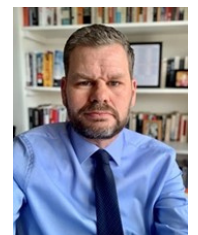
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