



England's Schools Are Changing Fast

But What About the Learning Experience?

INCLUSION | ENGAGEMENT | IMPACT

As 3,000 School Leaders Gather to Navigate the White Paper, One Question Goes Unanswered: What Does It Actually Look Like in a Classroom?

With half of England's schools now in multi-academy trusts and government policy pointing toward full academisation, the pressure on school leaders to deliver inclusion, close the disadvantage gap and broaden the curriculum has never been greater.

now>press>play, the immersive audio learning resource used by over 500 primary schools, argues the answer starts with learning design - not policy compliance.

LONDON, 7 May 2026 - Today, as the Schools and Academies Show brought together more than 3,000 school and trust leaders at ExCeL London to debate the implications of the government's landmark Education White Paper, now>press>play was not in the room. It was in classrooms.

That is, perhaps, the point.

While the sector's most important annual gathering focused on strategy, policy and procurement - sessions covering what the White Paper means for schools, how to manage SEND provision across trusts, and how to close the disadvantage gap - children across more than 500 primary schools were putting on wireless headphones and stepping into the Amazon rainforest, Ancient Egypt and the Stone Age. Learning not as policy compliance, but as genuine experience.

now>press>play exists because of a question its founders asked in 2012: What does a lesson look like if you design it around the children most often left behind? The answer, it turned out, did not involve a conference room. It involved cognitive science, narrative, movement and the stubborn belief that every child deserves to be fully in the room - not accommodated, not extracted, not given a modified version of the lesson their peers received.



The MAT Moment

New research from FFT Education Datalab, published last month, places the scale of the structural shift in sharp relief. Half of England's schools are now part of a multi-academy trust - up from just 15% a decade ago. The government's White Paper signals that all schools will eventually follow. Yet FFT's modelling suggests that, based on current trends, as many as one in twenty schools could still sit outside trust structures as late as 2040.

The implication for trust leaders is significant. A MAT is not a curriculum. Joining a trust does not, by itself, change what happens when a Year 3 teacher stands in front of thirty children on a Tuesday morning. The structural work of academisation must be accompanied by the pedagogical work of actually improving what those children experience - consistently, across every school in the trust, including those where teacher recruitment is hardest and disadvantage is deepest.

That is a different kind of problem from the one that fills conference programmes. And it is the problem now>press>play was designed to solve.



"We've never been anti-screen. We're pro-learning. The question we started with in 2012 was: what does a lesson look like if you design it around the children who are most often left behind - the reluctant speakers, the SEND pupils, the EAL learners, the children who've never been anywhere and have nothing to draw from? The answer turned out to involve headphones and audio adventures rather than tablets and apps. But the starting point was always the child, not the technology."

Tilly Brooke, CEO, now>press>play

What the White Paper Is Actually Asking For

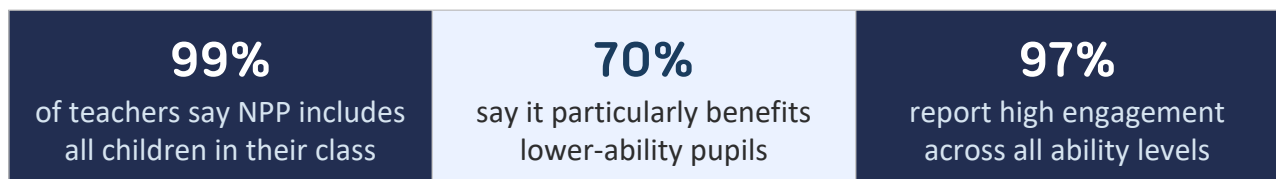
The Government's Education White Paper '**Every Child Achieving and Thriving**' (February 2026) sets seven interlocking priorities: a genuinely broad curriculum, SEND inclusion in mainstream settings, closing the disadvantage gap, belonging and re-engagement, active and enquiring learners, teacher quality and workload, and schools as community anchors. The £1.6bn Inclusive Mainstream Fund gives schools the resource to begin acting on them.

now>press>play maps directly to all seven - not because it was designed in response to the policy, but because both the policy and the product begin from the same place: the children most let down by how learning has traditionally been designed.

The approach rests on four principles that cognitive science consistently supports: multi-sensory input, narrative context, physical movement, and shared experience. In practice, this means every child in the class puts on a pair of wireless headphones and becomes the protagonist of a curriculum-aligned story. The experience is simultaneously individual and communal. Every child hears the same story. Every child responds in their own way. And every child - including those who have rarely engaged in whole-class learning before - has something to draw from when discussion and writing follow.

The Children Most Often Left Behind

The impact data is most striking for the learners whom traditional approaches serve least well.



**Teacher Survey 2025*

These are not the outcomes of a technology product. They are the outcomes of a learning design that starts from the assumption that every child deserves to be in the room - fully, not as an accommodation.

"I knew what to write because I'd been there."

Year 5 pupil, after a now>press>play Experience. The child had SEND and had never previously written more than a few lines.

What Teachers Say

"In my 20 years in education, never has a product had such an impact. Three years after introducing it, it is still constantly used and loved by pupils and staff alike."

Deputy Headteacher, Primary School

"SEN children love it and all learners engage really well. Being immersed in the experience helps the knowledge to stick."

SENCO, Midlands Primary School

"Children orally retold the story and engaged in discussions about their favourite parts. Reluctant writers suddenly had something worth writing about."

Class Teacher

About now>press>play

now>press>play is an award-winning immersive audio learning resource for primary schools, used by over 500 schools across the UK, reaching more than 160,000 children.

Founded in 2012 as a social enterprise, it exists to make the curriculum accessible and engaging for every primary school child - particularly those most often left behind by traditional approaches.

Rated 4.9/5 by teachers on EdTech Impact. Winner of the BETT Awards and Education Resources Awards.

Press contact

hello@nowpressplay.co.uk | 0203 727 5592

nowpressplay.co.uk

Notes to editors

FFT Education Datalab MAT research: ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2026/04/the-state-of-play-for-mats-in-2026/

Schools and Academies Show London 2026: schoolsandacademiesshow.co.uk

Education White Paper 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving', DfE, February 2026. Full alignment document available at nowpressplay.co.uk.

Teacher survey data: now>press>play Teacher Survey 2025, n=500+ schools.

High-resolution images, the full White Paper alignment document and interview requests with Tilly Brooke are available on request.

