

MAKING SCHOOL

Rachel Macfarlane
and Paul Jenkins

UN MISS ABLE



SCHOOLING THAT MAKES SENSE

Praise for

MAKING SCHOOL UNMISSABLE

Amid so much gloom about education, here at last is a book that is unflinching in recognising the problems but also sets out a series of solutions. Without being soppy or trite, Macfarlane and Jenkins provide a call-to-arms for how all of us involved in education might better engage those young people who see schooling as marginal or irrelevant. *Making School Unmissable* mixes principles with strong evidence and practical proposals. Recommended reading.

Geoff Barton, former teacher, head teacher and union leader

This book captures the kind of change education desperately needs. For underserved learners like I was, school can become a place where rejection is reinforced and difference goes unseen or ignored. Macfarlane and Jenkins understand that deeply. They show that achieving real equity is not just about raising aspirations, but about building schools where every learner is genuinely seen, valued, related to and given a place to belong. This work is urgent and would have made a meaningful difference in my life had it been implemented. Therefore, every leader serious about equity and outcomes for all learners should read this book.

Tier Blundell, Chief Executive of Excluded from School

Persistent disengagement and absence have become the education challenges of our generation. The sheer complexity of the problem can leave leaders feeling either defeated or trapped in the paralysis of analysis. *Making School Unmissable* brings clarity to the conversation. It draws the data together, reframes the purpose of education and offers a persuasive framework for restoring the senses of belonging and adventure that young people crave. Most importantly, it moves beyond diagnosis and into action – giving school leaders tangible strategies to make attending school both compelling and joyful.

Manny Botwe, head teacher, Tytherington School, president,
Association of School and College Leaders

This is an essential, timely and transformative book in which Rachel Macfarlane and Paul Jenkins offer a robust, compassionate and urgently needed framework to address the challenges around school attendance and exclusion.

The authors' articulation of why traditional arguments fail – especially the reliance on delayed gratification – is insightful and essential reading for all educators. This book is not just a book; it is a mission statement for whole-school change. It provides the language and strategic lens required to build an ethos, culture and curriculum that ensures no child risks becoming invisible to the system.

Vital and inspiring, *Making School Unmissable* should be required reading for anyone serious about tackling the engagement crisis and ensuring every young person thrives.

Ellie Costello, Executive Director at Square Pegs

Making School Unmissable confronts the uncomfortable truth that school is currently very missable for many young people. Unsurprisingly, as it's written by two authors with a combined seven decades of experience in schools, it is deeply practical about what leaders can do to make education as unmissable as it has been for those like me who have great memories of school. Rachel and Paul go far beyond platitudes about belonging, however, as they deftly grapple with the challenges of contemporary society and schooling.

Children whose school leaders engage with this book will see their friends want to, rather than have to, come to school.

Dr Tim Coulson, CBE, Director General, Regions Group,
Department for Education

What's brilliant about *Making School Unmissable* is that, without underplaying the extent of the challenges, it offers practical ways of reimagining schools so that everyone wants to be there and all can flourish. We need five 'senses', the authors argue: to understand the point of school, to share a common identity, to celebrate the strengths of all young people, to boost their learning power and to create a sense of adventure. Simple really! Get yourself a copy of this book and you'll see these senses make great sense!

Professor Bill Lucas, author, education reformer and
co-founder of Rethinking Assessment

Rachel Macfarlane and Paul Jenkins have built on their wide experience and successful practice to write a book which addresses one of the most difficult issues facing schools today. The volumes of texts that already exist on

school improvement are so often based on the assumption that the child is attending school and willing to learn. *Making School Unmissable* makes a strong argument that the prerequisite of this – getting children and families to engage – is now so critical that it needs to be addressed more seriously.

This is a book that will make you think, but also set you on a pathway to responding to what is undoubtedly a question for our times.

Baroness Estelle Morris, former Secretary of State for Education

This book speaks directly to an urgent challenge: the need for every young person to be included in rich and high-quality education of the 'head, heart and hand'. Rachel Macfarlane and Paul Jenkins begin by powerfully articulating the problem – that for all our focus on academic rigour (the 'head'), 'too many hearts remain distinctly unconvinced' by the current educational offer. They then uncover the core truth that school improvement is about winning hearts and minds, and the failure to convince pupils and parents of its transformative value is a failure to reach those who would benefit most.

Making School Unmissable is a vital, insightful and practical text for every school leader. It provides a roadmap for creating a school experience so rich, purposeful and compelling that it becomes genuinely essential: an environment that children simply cannot bear to miss.

Liz Robinson, CEO, Big Education

In *Making School Unmissable*, Macfarlane and Jenkins offer a timely, heart-centred response to the national attendance crisis. Moving beyond punitive measures, they argue that school must be made compelling, not just compulsory.

They introduce a transformative 'five senses' framework – purpose, belonging, success, empowerment and adventure – as an antidote to a system that too often fails the doubtful student, staff member and parent. The authors also brilliantly demonstrate how shifting from competitive to ipsative success, focusing on beating one's personal best, can re-engage those whom the system has historically bypassed. And as an advocate for the underserved, I found their focus on unbelonging and proximal stress for minoritised groups particularly vital.

Through vibrant case studies, from sandpits to social action, this book is a masterclass in how schools can build a culture of agency. It is essential reading for any educator committed to ensuring that school is a place of joy and significance for every child.

**Sufian Sadiq, Chief Talent and Transformation Officer,
Chiltern Learning Trust**

Making School Unmissable is a book that will help to make the job of teaching feel really enriching. It speaks to schools about why they exist and how they can make every child believe they matter.

Mick Waters, educationalist and author

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and Paul Jenkins

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FOREWORD

Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.

Aristotle

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We have long recognised that absence from school is a serious issue, impacting pupils' learning and jeopardising their academic outcomes, as well as potentially placing them in unsafe situations. While there has been a modest improvement in overall attendance since the post-COVID-19 slump, an alarming number of young people are still persistently absent from their schools. In our data-driven age, where there appears to be little time for reflection and over-emphasis on immediate action, there is sometimes a tendency to blame the absentees and their families for a breakdown in the social contract, to ramp up penalties and measure success only in terms of the numbers of children returning, however unwillingly, to their classrooms.

Knee-jerk responses to attendance concerns are unlikely to yield positive long-term impacts. Punitive measures are liable to alienate pupils and their families, rather than making school irresistible. Instead, a strategy to foster positive engagement has more potential to build sustainable success, and this involves seeing attendance not as an end in itself but as a symptom of wider contextual issues.

Making School Unmissable is an evidence-based and refreshingly engaging exploration of school culture, in which Rachel Macfarlane and Paul Jenkins define five senses (a sense of purpose, a sense of belonging, a sense of success, a sense of empowerment, a sense of adventure) and consider how each can be developed so that pupils, their families and teachers experience school as a happy and enticing place that balances nurturing support and academic challenge. As adults, how we feel in any situation determines our response – and, crucially, the same is true of our children. As educators, we have to focus on hearts as well as minds, building rapport and letting every child know that they count. This isn't just motherhood and apple pie: the authors have drawn upon their own lived experience as head teachers as well as signposting tried-and-tested practice from a wide range of successful schools, to provide readers with useful strategies to consider within their own contexts.

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Disadvantaged young people have proportionally lower attendance than their more affluent peers. Those with special educational needs and disabilities are also more likely to have more days off school. Knowing these pupils as individuals, understanding the barriers they face and helping to dismantle the identified barriers are key ingredients of success in any truly inclusive school. In part this is about helping to offset material poverty through initiatives such as partnering with food-banks and recycling preloved uniform. But it's also about the quality of daily interactions, which assure children that they genuinely matter.

Great schools are suffused with an absolute commitment to giving every child the opportunities to flourish, a commitment manifested in considered action. This book offers tools to investigate all aspects of school life that may impact on children's sense of belonging, including curriculum design, pedagogical style, pastoral support and enrichment activities. It explores the unintended barriers that leaders and teachers may inadvertently create through their decisions and language choices. Just as children need to feel a positive emotional connection with their school, so do the adults who have key roles in the educational partnership. The authors provide self-review questions and practical suggestions to build mutually supportive relationships with parents and families, fostering empathy and involving them proactively as their children's first educators. They also provide insights on culture building which enhance staff wellbeing through empowerment and understanding.

This book is both scholarly and practical, revisiting the essential concept of happiness, which can be overlooked in the struggle to improve attendance data and secure performance targets, but which is fundamental to both.

**Sir Hamid Patel, Chief Executive, Star Academies
and Chair of the Confederation of School Trusts**

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INTRODUCTION

My school days were the happiest days of my life,
which should give you some indication of the misery
I've endured since.

Paul Merton (n.d.)

.....

School days: the best days of our lives.

Or are they?

If you are reading this book, the chances are that you are passionate about school. You probably enjoyed your school days. You almost certainly love the buzz, creativity and sense of possibility provided by the school environment. You are, no doubt, convinced of the transformative power of education and believe that great schooling lays the foundations for a successful life. You most likely chose education as a vocation in order to serve this higher purpose. This belief is what drives you, what nourishes you and, at times, what frustrates you.

Sadly, not everyone shares that vision – not all pupils, not all parents and not even all teachers.

The hard fact is that the message of the life-changing power of school is not reaching everyone we need it to. Too often it bypasses completely those who would benefit most from education's transformative powers.

If school improvement is centred around winning hearts and minds, then we have the evidence to engage minds, but too many hearts remain distinctly unconvinced by our current education offer.

The benefits of schooling have been well rehearsed: the acquisition of knowledge and skills, the development of oracy, reading and writing, numeracy, digital literacy, social and emotional skills, the forging of friendships, learning with others through play, exploration, investigation and experimentation, the development of confidence, agency and status. A great school experience supports smooth transition into higher education, employment and the world. It equips learners with vital life skills and prepares them to navigate the challenges and enjoy the experiences ahead of them.

As educators, we are convinced of the long-term benefits of a good education, and we know that school can be an enriching and fulfilling

experience in the moment. But we must be able to answer convincingly the most sceptical commentators – students and parents who struggle with the concept of deferred gratification. And it is incumbent on us to make sure that education works in the ‘now’, as well as in the future.

What is the point of school? It is this conundrum that is the wellspring of our book. It is this challenge that we seek to address in *Making School Unmissable*.

The undeniable problem

Reports and news headlines appear, with relentless frequency, to remind us that school is not seen as an attractive proposition by a significant number of the young people expected to attend, the family members expected to ensure that they attend, and even the staff who work in them.

In summary, the case for attending school every day is currently not sufficiently compelling.

As we started writing this book, the nation was marking the fifth anniversary of the first COVID-19 lockdown when, for the only time in our living memory, mainstream schools across the nation were closed to most pupils. Much has been written about the challenge of persuading young people and their parents of the non-negotiable status of school attendance after months of enforced remote learning and home education. Likewise, the shift to working from home or hybrid home/office work arrangements in many professions – a legacy of the pandemic – and the fact that such flexibility cannot be afforded to most teachers, has been cited as a reason why teaching is now seen as a less attractive career by many.

But the reality is that, while the pandemic may have exacerbated the sense that school is ‘missable’, we faced issues with pupil attendance, parental investment in school and staff recruitment and retention long before the COVID-19 virus appeared.

Pupils

Let’s first take a look at pupil attendance rates.

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Ellie Costello, executive director at Square Peg, argues that ‘The fire was already burning pre-pandemic. Three-quarters of a million children were persistently absent – missing at least 10 per cent of school – in the autumn of 2018’ (Costello 2025). Department for Education (DfE) figures report that the overall absence rate in state schools rose from a pre-pandemic level of 4.7 per cent to 7.1 per cent in 2023–24, while persistent absence almost doubled from 10.9 per cent in 2018–19 to 20 per cent in 2023–24 (DfE 2025a).

In an interview with *Schools Week* in March 2025, Catherine McKinnell, the then Minister of State for School Standards, talked of the by now 1.6 million ‘persistently’ absent pupils who were missing at least a day a fortnight, and ‘the 150,000 “severely” absent – those who missed more school than they attended’. She described absence as the ‘education challenge of our generation’ (Storer 2025).

And then there are those young people who are not on a school roll, so don’t count in the absence figures cited above.

A study by the Education Policy Institute (EPI) in 2024 estimated that the number of children ‘missing’ from education could be close to 300,000: 41 per cent higher than in 2017 (EPI 2024).

A significant and growing number of learners do not want to, or do not feel able to, go to school. In a survey conducted by Parentkind in 2025, almost a third of respondents said their child had refused to go to school on more than one occasion in the past year (Norden 2025). The top reason cited was not enjoying school. A third of respondents said that they have a weekly argument about school attendance.

Parents

Now let’s see what’s happening with parents of school-aged children.

Many parents feel powerless to compel their child to attend, and some feel unsupported by their school, which appears to them as remote and unwelcoming. An increasing number of parents feel impotent without the external agency support required to make schooling accessible for their child. Some look at the type of provision available or the school experience offered and decide that educating their child at home is the only or a preferable option.

The EPI 2024 report found that the number of formally registered home-educated children has increased by over 100 per cent from 2017

to almost 95,000 children in 2023. While a number of these parents are committed home-educators, the sad fact is that, for some, this is a method of stepping away entirely from the system. Because the parents simply do not believe in the offer, their child risks becoming invisible and their education left fallow.

Then there are the parents, about whom we often hear mention in the media, who are not convinced of the need for their child to go to school every day. A study by Public First, reported on *Sky News*, stated that 'since the COVID pandemic, there has been a "seismic shift" in attitudes to full-time school attendance' (*Sky News* 2023). Polling conducted for a 2025 report by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) and the Rigby Foundation found that 44 per cent of British parents of school-aged children think it is 'reasonable' for a pupil to miss one in every ten school days, with 42 per cent saying that 'most of what my child gets taught in school is unlikely to help them in later life'.

Lastly, it's important to consider the cost of sending a child to school every day: uniform, equipment, trip costs, meals, travel, non-uniform days, charity contributions and other 'incidentals'. In May 2023 *The Guardian* ran an article about a Child Poverty Action Group report, which stated that 'Sending a child to a state secondary school costs families at least £39 each week' (Adams 2023). This correlates with, and is likely to partially explain, the fact that children eligible for free school meals have a lower attendance rate than their more economically advantaged peers.

Staff

Now let's turn to the evidence around how unmissable school is for those who work in education.

A National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) report of 2024 argued that 'teacher supply is in a critical state, representing a substantial risk to the quality of education'. His Majesty's Chief Inspector Sir Martyn Oliver, speaking at the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) conference in March 2025, stated that recruitment for teachers in twelve out of seventeen secondary subjects had unfilled places in 2024. The NFER report found that 'the number of teachers considering leaving teaching increased 44 per cent between 2021/22 and 2022/23'.

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Edurio's *School Staff Experience Report* (2025b) found that 41 per cent of staff were considering resignation in the 2024–25 academic year. This was down from 43 per cent in the previous two years, but is still shockingly high.

DfE data on school leadership retention shows that only nine in ten of primary heads and fewer than 86 per cent of secondary head teachers who started their role in 2021 remained in that post or a more senior one twelve months later. After three years, only eight out of ten primary heads and fewer than two-thirds of secondary heads were retained or promoted in phase (DfE 2025b).

In 2024 the *Daily Telegraph* reported that nearly 14,000 teachers in England had called in sick every day the previous year (Education Business 2024). It cited DfE data showing that about 2.5 million school days were lost in 2022–23 as more than 326,000 teachers missed class owing to sickness. Each teacher who took sick leave reported an average of eight days off work. In total, about 66.2 per cent of England's teaching workforce had some sickness absence in 2023, according to the DfE's school workforce statistics. The UK government does not keep data related to reasons for school staff absence beyond illness.

Schools should and can be inclusive, exciting, fun and dynamic workplaces. But clearly, for too many they are not.

What does the data tell us?

What we take away from this stark statistical picture is that we are experiencing a disconnect in the profession with a sizable proportion of our learners, staff and families.

Many students don't find school-based learning easy. They see school as a Gradgrindian experience of studying and regurgitating facts, bearing no relation to the real world. In a world of YouTube, TikTok, Duolingo and so on, there are now countless innovative and engaging ways to acquire and learn facts.

A September 2025 report, 'Listening to, and learning from, young people in the attendance crisis', by Impetus and Public First (Carr, Whitehead and Burtonshaw 2025), argues that persistent school absence has become endemic and embedded as a cultural norm and is driven by

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young people's entanglement with the online world. In the foreword to the report Susannah Hardyman, MBE, chief executive of Impetus, said: 'Young people ... have told us that going to school is now a choice – decided each morning, shaped by mood, circumstances, or competing priorities. Not because they don't want to succeed, but because school, too often, feels rigid, pressured, and exam-driven.'

We teachers are no longer the guardians of information and, dare we say it, not always as zippy or attractive as the influencers our learners follow.

But what we *can* offer is a learning community environment in which to develop social, collaborative and creative skills, opportunities to develop and experience new learning, guided and supported by expert tutors, an escape from the boredom and frustration that can often accompany solo learning, and the life skills that come through human interaction. We know that home schooling during COVID-19 was a poor second, but we need to make sure our students and parents realise that too.

At times, education leaders can be their own worst enemies – citing exam outcomes, league table positions and destination percentages as the only currency of value. This serves to embed institutional suspicion and a sense that education is not for all but just the academically successful. Sir Tony Blair's drive for 50 per cent of students to go to university may have exacerbated this view and, while a noble aim, it seemed to denigrate trades, crafts and non-graduate jobs. The rise in apprenticeships has somewhat countered this focus on the purely academic markers of success, and many welcomed Sir Keir Starmer's announcement in September 2025 that the goal of 50 per cent of young people progressing into higher education is to be replaced with a new target of two-thirds achieving higher level skills – through university, further education or apprenticeships.

It is vital that we articulate a purpose for school beyond just the confines of the academic. Many parents have a negative attitude towards academia, as a consequence of their own school experience. This can result in them not presenting the long-term benefits of education to their children. Where students also suffer with delayed gratification, too much discussion of end-goals is not productive.

We have perhaps over-relied on a culture of compliant parents ensuring that their children arrive at school each day. But now a significant number of students simply aren't coming to school, and many parents can't or won't enforce attendance. We need to convince sceptical parents of

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the unmissability of school and tool them up to support us in ensuring attendance.

Nationally, it is currently tough to recruit sparky, skilled and committed graduates to the teaching profession. Retention is also a challenge as teachers lose sight of their core purpose under the weight of the high-stakes accountability of Ofsted, league tables and ever-changing governmental diktats. Our view is that increasing accountability and pressure has led to teachers becoming disempowered, often with prescribed and scripted lesson plans.

A third of primary teachers surveyed for the 2025 National Education Union study 'Are you on slide 8 yet?' said that they had little or no influence over the content of individual lessons (National Education Union 2025). The drive for consistency has often come at the cost of innovation, individuality and the sheer joy in teaching. The schools that will be successful in recruiting from a declining pool are likely to be those that ensure their staff have a degree of professional autonomy and are credited for being skilful individuals in their own right. The teachers who stay in the profession will be those who feel invited to bring humanity and individuality to their classroom practice. If we're no better than a YouTube explainer or a textbook, then we're out of a job.

We need to make the school experience not just compulsory, but compelling.

The five senses: what are they and how did they come about?

This book is structured around a model of five senses that are required for someone to feel that school is unmissable. The senses are:

A sense of purpose: To be motivated to attend school, we need to understand the point of it. Drive and ambition are fuelled by a strong sense of purpose. Enabling all stakeholders to imagine, plan and shape their futures means that their education runs alongside their dreams and shapes them into reality.

A sense of belonging: An educational setting is first and foremost a community; a community of people who live, laugh and learn together.

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Each member of the wider community needs to feel not only an affinity for, but also a sense of contribution towards, that group identity.

A sense of success: Beyond just the academic, a sense of success should leave individuals able to articulate their achievements, with a strong understanding of their learning and improvement journey and an unshakable belief in their strengths.

A sense of empowerment: A strong setting gives its students, parents and staff control of their destiny and tools them up with life-long skills to apply to their ambition and situation. By developing a strong sense of self-efficacy, learners are more likely to drive their own learning and make the most of every opportunity.

A sense of adventure: Only by working outside our comfort zone do we begin to realise our true potential and capabilities. School should introduce the unfamiliar and acquaint students with unknown worlds and knowledge. It should make daring and failure part of the journey, not the end of the road. It should also ensure that learners experience fun, awe and excitement, and a sense of the joy of learning.

Like all ideas, this model of the five senses has been one of slow and gradual development. The original seed of an idea was from Paul's head of school, Phillip Blagg, who was working on the school's disadvantage strategy. One day he brought to Paul a sheet of paper with lot of ideas about how the school's leaders could engage and improve the outcomes for underserved students. He framed the 'main idea', with the concept that students needed a sense of belonging and purpose at school. He began to work through his list of strategies, but those initial thoughts scribbled at the top of the page had ignited something in Paul. He stopped Phillip mid-flow and took him back to these ideas which, for Paul, identified the core problem: leaders hadn't defined how they wanted students to feel at the school - the senses - and the qualities they would leave having developed.

Over time, with Phillip's permission, Paul developed the idea of the senses, realising they were not only applicable to students, but to parents and staff. When Rachel first heard Paul talk about the five senses, she loved the concept. Soon after, we decided to co-author a book, using the framework of the five senses as a model to support educators to make school unmissable.

Schooling that makes sense

We firmly believe that approaching school organisation and improvement through the prism of the five senses makes good sense. And that school can satisfy each of these vital senses for learners, staff and families.

That's not to say that there aren't other organisations or structures that offer some or all of these senses. A benevolent example would be organised religion, which can offer a strong community (belonging) and a sense of meaning (purpose), help guide daily decisions (empowerment), encourage social action (adventure) and give a strong sense of peace and satisfaction (success). A malevolent example is membership of a drugs gang, which will offer a drifting teen a group of like-minded individuals (belonging), an income (purpose), a sense of status (empowerment) and a sense of danger (adventure). The senses are primal needs and, we would argue, if school doesn't convincingly fulfil these senses, something else will fill that void.

It would be wrong to imply that the five senses are solely fostered and nurtured by educators in schools. The family are, in many cases, the main driver in this. Yet quite often we see parents who are facing adversity, or have done, allowing their difficult experiences of life or education to be transposed to their children. Philip Larkin reflected memorably on the negative impact that parents can have on their offspring in his infamous opening line of 'This Be the Verse'; the subsequent stanza says that 'they give you all the faults they had and add some extra just for you' (Larkin 1974). Adults in schools do have an important role to play in the development of the senses.

Breaking down how we support families, children and parents to feel these five senses is important as we strive to make school unmissable.

How to approach and use the book

This book can be read from front cover to last page, in one sitting or many. Equally, you may wish to dip into a particular section at a moment in time or to start with a lens you are especially or topically interested

MAKING SCHOOL UNMISSABLE

in. You will find exercises and points for discussion along the way, meaning you can use this book in team meetings or for in-service education and training (INSET) activities, or just for your own private contemplation. We provide as many provocations and questions as answers, because the means of developing the senses in your setting will be shaped by its uniqueness.

The book is designed for people in all sectors of education – mainstream and special, state and private, UK and international – and those working at all levels, from pre-school to sixth form. It draws on case studies and impactful stories from a wide range of settings.

We hope that the ideas contained in the book will inspire whole-school strategic change and fire initiatives driven by school and trust leaders. But the principles can just as easily be applied by a class teacher in their own classroom. We encourage subject leaders to use the lens of the senses to analyse their curriculum. Year and phase leaders could consider the journey of their cohorts, and the needs of individuals within them who are struggling, with the five senses in the forefront of their minds.

As you work through this book you will begin to identify the myriad ways that schools and settings can and do build the five senses for their learners, their staff and their families. Hopefully, along the way, you will garner some new ideas, and the suggestions we offer will spark some original thoughts relevant to your students, colleagues and parents.

Ultimately, we aim to provide a framework and a language to articulate to all stakeholders the ‘unmissability’ of school. Not through some stuffy, theoretical mission statement, but through shaping a culture, ethos, curriculum and set of experiences that combine to create something really special. It’s about celebrating what you do, identifying what more you want to and can do, and communicating clearly, positively and compellingly why school is unmissable.

Lastly, this is a book of optimism. The system has to be shaped by those within, by educators like you. We aim to leave each reader with a sense of empowerment and purpose, in the hope that you will pass that on to your students, staff and families.

EXPLORES WHY SCHOOL NO LONGER FEELS ESSENTIAL FOR EVERYONE – AND SUGGESTS HOW EDUCATORS CAN REIGNITE THAT ENGAGEMENT, MEANING AND PURPOSE AND MAKE SCHOOL UNMISSABLE AGAIN

There is a pressing challenge in modern education: too many students, parents and even staff no longer see school as compelling or even interesting. Despite the transformative power of education, rising absenteeism, disengaged students and families and a stressed workforce reveal a disconnect that threatens learning, development and community.

Drawing on research, case studies and real-world insights, this book examines why school can too often feel 'missable' – and how that perception can be reversed.

From school leaders to classroom teachers, this book offers a flexible approach to developing a culture where school is not just compulsory, but compelling. Optimistic and actionable, it equips educators with the tools and mindset to make every school day count, ensuring that learning is experienced as vibrant, relevant and unmissable.

A must-read for teachers and school leaders in any setting

A call-to-arms for how all of us involved in education might better engage those young people who see schooling as marginal or irrelevant.

Geoff Barton, former teacher, head teacher and union leader

Every leader serious about equity and outcomes for all learners should read this book.

Tier Blundell, Chief Executive of Excluded from School

Moves beyond diagnosis and into action – giving school leaders tangible strategies to make attending school both compelling and joyful.

Manny Botwe, president, Association of School and College Leaders

A vital, insightful and practical text for every school leader. **Liz Robinson, CEO, Big Education**

This is a book that will make you think, but will also set you on a pathway to responding to what is undoubtedly a question for our times.

Baroness Estelle Morris, former Secretary of State for Education

A timely, heart-centred response to the national attendance crisis.

Sufian Sadiq, Chief Talent and Transformation Officer, Chiltern Learning Trust

Making School Unmissable speaks to schools about why they exist and how they can make every child believe they matter.

Mick Waters, educationalist and author

Rachel Macfarlane is an education consultant, speaker and author. She was Director of Education Services at Herts for Learning (HFL) from 2018 to 2023 and, prior to this, head teacher of three contrasting schools for over 16 years. In 2011, Rachel set up an all-through 4-18 academy in Ilford. This was judged by Ofsted to be outstanding in all areas in 2014 and 2018.

Paul Jenkins has worked in education for over 25 years. Trained in English, drama and media studies, he has taught a range of subjects up to A level. As a leader, he worked as a Head of Sixth Form, Deputy Head, Head Teacher and Executive Head Teacher. He currently works as an education consultant for standards and curriculum. He has mentored and trained new head teachers and has written articles and award-winning theatre and television scripts.

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