

Education Committee

Solving the SEND Crisis

Fifth Report of Session 2024–25

HC 492

Education Committee

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Summary

Since the introduction of the Children and Families Act 2014, the number of children and young people identified with special educational needs (SEN) has surged from 1.3 million to 1.7 million.¹ Today over 1.2 million children and young people receive SEN support, and nearly half a million have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. Behind these numbers are families navigating a system that too often feels adversarial, fragmented and under-resourced.²

Throughout our inquiry, we heard from exhausted parents fighting for basic support, teachers stretched beyond capacity and committed professionals working within services buckling under pressure. Their voices were clear and consistent: the current system is not working. The level of need is placing overwhelming strain on services and professionals across both the education and health sectors, ultimately creating a crisis. Crucially, the system's inability to meet this need means that children and young people with SEND, and their families, are not consistently receiving the high-quality support to which they are entitled. Without decisive, long-term change, the SEND system will remain under unsustainable pressure, unable to meet current or future needs effectively.

Securing inclusive education

More than a decade on from major reform of the SEND system is not delivering as intended. Gaps in provision and capacity are creating barriers to timely support, limiting progress, and preventing improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND. While it is usual for there to be significant numbers of children with SEND in mainstream schools, the current system is not designed with inclusion in mind. As a consequence, it addresses SEND needs on an individual case by case basis as additional to the mainstream and not a part of it, and it cannot cope with the current level of need. Delivering an inclusive mainstream education system is essential both for the quality of provision for individual children and the long-term financial sustainability of the system.

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- 1 DfE, Academic Year 2024–25 [Special educational needs in England](#), June 2025, gov.uk (accessed 17 July 2025), Department for Education, Statistical First Release, [Special educational needs in England: January 2015](#), gov.uk 23 July 2015, p 1
 - 2 DfE, Academic Year 2024–25 [Special educational needs in England](#), June 2025, gov.uk (accessed 29 August 2025)

The evidence shows a lack of standardisation in both ordinarily available provision and Special Educational Needs (SEN) support, with no clear, consistent understanding of what these should involve in practice. We heard from parents and carers that this inconsistency leads to variable quality of provision, which in turn is driving more families to seek support through specialist placements or by securing an EHC plan. It is unacceptable that a clear definition of inclusive education is still lacking.

In order to ensure an inclusive mainstream, the Department for Education should establish national standards and expectations for ordinarily available provision and SEN support, providing a consistent baseline to help education settings become more inclusive. These should be accompanied by statutory requirements for adequate resourcing, access to specialist staff, appropriate equipment and an inclusive physical environment. These interventions will require investment; however, we have seen evidence that the delivery of genuinely inclusive education with well resourced, thoughtfully designed whole-school approaches to SEN support and ordinarily available provision significantly reduces the need for EHC plans.

Restoring trust and confidence

Central to addressing the SEND crisis is rebuilding trust and confidence among stakeholders in the system, particularly, children and young people with SEND and their families. We found through the evidence that trust has been eroded by inconsistent provision, delays in support, lack of transparency in decision-making and a failure to deliver on legal duties. Further, current accountability mechanisms, including Ofsted inspections of schools can serve indirectly to encourage exclusionary practices and Area SEND inspections can fall short in effectively addressing and penalising exclusionary practices. Rebuilding strong, transparent relationships through clearer communication from the Department for Education, and reforming and strengthening accountability systems so that mainstream schools are held to account for delivering inclusive practice and are well supported to do so, will be crucial to ensuring that policies and reforms are fully understood, widely supported, and effectively implemented.

Equipping the workforce

The realisation of an inclusive vision for mainstream education will also depend on equipping professionals—across education, health and local authorities—with the training, resources, and support they need to respond effectively and compassionately to the diverse needs of children and young people with SEND and their families. We heard about the importance of a whole-school approach to SEND, in which all staff have the skills to support

and educate children with SEND, and responsibility is shared across all teachers, leaders and support staff, including teaching assistants (TAs), who are often at the forefront of delivering SEND support rather than falling solely on the SENCO. Evidence suggested that Initial Teacher Training and the Early Career Framework require further changes to integrate fully sufficient, fit for purpose SEND content and, while continuing professional development is valued, its impact is inconsistent, partly because it is not currently mandatory. Changing this situation is an essential requirement of delivering an inclusive mainstream education sector.

The evidence points to significant capacity challenges among educational psychologists and relevant allied health professionals, including speech and language therapists. These shortages have knock-on effects on assessment waiting times and schools' access to specialist support, while at the same time the overwhelmed nature of the system means that skilled professionals who are trained to work therapeutically with children are spending far too much time on assessments and reports rather than delivering beneficial interventions. The Department for Education should work with the Department of Health and Social Care to address these issues and improve capacity, through the development of a dedicated SEND workforce plan. We were deeply concerned to hear about the negative experiences of children, young people, and their families when engaging with local authority staff. Many described interactions that felt adversarial and distressing, leaving a lasting erosion of trust. Targeted training on child development including SEND and SEND law, alongside the development of effective mediation skills, is essential to ensure these interactions are constructive, respectful, and focused on the best interests of the child or young person with SEND. Parents and carers describe being treated as an inconvenience or assumed to be unreasonable and routinely locked out of discussions and decisions about their child's education. In order to rebuild trust and establish effective partnership working in the best interests of the child, parents and carers should be treated as genuine partners in their child's education and be entitled and expected to be present in discussions and decisions about their child.

Achieving a sustainable model of funding

We heard compelling evidence of the urgent need for greater financial stability within local authority budgets, supported by a clear, long-term plan for sustainability. Witnesses highlighted that looming deficits and the continued extension of the statutory override are creating significant uncertainty, making it difficult for local authorities to plan and deliver services effectively. This instability is compounded by inadequate school funding, which has not kept pace with rising levels of need and the increasing costs of provision. As a result, both schools and local authorities face mounting pressure, often forced into difficult decisions that risk

compromising the quality and availability of support for children and young people with SEND. The Department must work urgently with HM Treasury and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to secure the funding necessary to realise the vision of an inclusive mainstream education system. This must include a clear strategy to address the growing SEND-related deficits faced by local authorities. Without a strategy, the system will remain under unsustainable financial pressure and unable to meet the needs of children and young people effectively.

Building partnerships across services

Collaboration must be strengthened at every level if the Government's ambitious vision of inclusive mainstream education is going to be achieved. From national policy coordination to local partnerships between schools, local authorities, health services, and community organisations each partner must be proactive. However, we heard that, at present, schools and local authorities are shouldering most of this responsibility, while the health sector plays a more passive role. A shared, top-down understanding of roles, responsibilities, and agreed priorities is needed alongside a fit for purpose accountability framework. The Government should introduce clear statutory duties for health and social care services in relation to SEND, and the Department of Health and Social Care should appoint a dedicated national SEND lead to drive accountability and coordination.

Expanding SEND capacity

We heard that there is a pressing need for improved and more strategic capacity building. Currently, specialist state schools are frequently oversubscribed, resulting in reliance on out of area or independent specialist placements. Improving capacity must not only involve expanding the resources and infrastructure available, but also ensuring that they are targeted effectively, underpinned by robust data. We welcome the extension of powers to local authorities through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill; however, the Department for Education must further facilitate a coordinated approach by implementing longer funding cycles and comprehensive data collection, helping to build a resilient, equitable system that can deliver on the promise of inclusive education for all.

Improving early years for lasting impact

Effective identification of needs, intervention and support in the early years can provide game-changing outcomes for children, while also reducing some long-term costs and needs. The early years sector plays a critical

role in SEND support; however, it is largely under-resourced. We recognise the Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) and Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) programmes as important tools for early intervention and preventing needs from escalating. The Department for Education should ensure these programmes receive the necessary funding and resources to enable a universal rollout across England. We welcome the Department for Education's Best Start for Life initiative. However, it must fully embrace inclusivity for children with SEND. It is vital that this programme recognises the diverse needs of all children from the earliest stages and integrates targeted support to ensure equitable access to early development opportunities and expertise helping prevent the escalation of need.

Post-16

We heard that young people with SEND frequently experience a sharp decline in support after the age of 16, despite the extension of SEND support up to age 25 under the 2014 reforms. This "cliff edge" is partly due to the post-16 education and training sector often being overlooked within SEND policy frameworks, while SEND considerations are similarly absent from further education and skills policies. To create a truly inclusive system, the post-16 offer must be broadened beyond academic qualifications and apprenticeships to include a wider range of pathways that reflect the diverse needs, talents, and aspirations of young people with SEND, including wider access to work experience. Furthermore, we are concerned that the current Maths and English GCSE resit policy disproportionately affects young people with SEND, often undermining their confidence and limiting their opportunities for success. This policy should be reworked to be better calibrated to the needs of a wide range of young people with SEND, with greater flexibility.

1 Introduction

Our inquiry

1. The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system is in crisis, failing far too many children and their families, as well as creating intense pressure on local authority funding and education systems. In recent years there has been a stream of reports setting out in detail the extent of the crisis and its devastating impact, but little meaningful progress in addressing these challenges. This inquiry—our Committee’s first—was launched in December 2024 and instead of spending more time documenting problems, we have deliberately set out to focus on solutions, investigating how to achieve both short-term stability and long-term sustainability for the SEND system, and, even more importantly, how to improve experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. We received over 890 pieces of written evidence and held 7 oral evidence sessions with a wide range of witnesses. We received compelling evidence from a panel of young people with SEND, hearing first-hand about their recent experiences of the SEND system. In our final oral evidence session, we heard from Catherine McKinnell MP, the then Minister of State for School Standards. To inform our inquiry further we visited Ontario, Canada to learn how inclusive mainstream education is provided, as well as Aylsham High School in Norfolk and City College Norwich to observe how they support pupils and students with SEND. We are very grateful to everyone who has contributed to this inquiry by sharing their professional expertise and lived experience or by hosting visits and giving evidence in person or in writing.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in England

2. Following the 2024 General Election, responsibility for SEND policy was moved into the schools remit within the Department for Education (DfE). This change reflected a shift in how SEND is positioned within the education system, more closely aligning it with mainstream education policy rather than treating it as a separate, semi-detached area. This change reflects the Government’s vision for inclusive mainstream education. In July 2024 the Secretary of State for Education summarised the Government’s new approach to SEND, announcing:

We are committed to taking a community-wide approach in which we improve inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools, as well as ensure that special schools cater to those with the most complex needs. I have already restructured my Department to start delivering on this commitment.³

3. The Department for Education has said that a white paper on SEND will be published in Autumn 2025 which will outline the Government’s approach to reforming the SEND system.⁴ Since the last major SEND reforms introduced by the Children and Families Act 2014, the number and proportion of children and young people identified with SEND has increased significantly. This increase in need has brought about a variety of challenges around capacity, support, teacher preparedness, multi-agency collaboration and local authority finances. These factors have triggered what is widely accepted as a “crisis” of the SEND system. This report presents conclusions and recommendations based on the written and oral evidence we have received to help solve this crisis.
4. The report begins by examining the current state of inclusive education in England, briefly identifying the key drivers of the SEND crisis and the obstacles to achieving a truly inclusive mainstream education system. It then reviews the types of support introduced by the 2014 reforms and the further changes required to secure inclusive education. Next, the report considers how to rebuild trust with parents and families, including improvements needed in accountability systems. Following this, it outlines ways to equip professionals better across education, local authority, and health services to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND and their families. The report then addresses the challenge of establishing a sustainable funding model for SEND. It goes on to examine how SEND services are delivered across multiple agencies and explores how to strengthen collaborative partnerships. Subsequently, the report evaluates the overall capacity of the SEND system. Finally, it focuses on the early years and further education stages in relation to SEND.

3 HC Deb, 24 July 2024, [col 700](#)

4 HM Treasury, [Spending Review 2025](#) (accessed August 2025)

Box 1: Key developments in SEND since 2014

2014 Children and Families Act: introduced major reform to the system used to identify children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The Act introduced two main levels of support: SEN Support and Education, Health and Care Plans.⁵ A Statutory Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice was published alongside the 2014 Act.⁶

In the SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years the Department for Education makes the following distinction between SEN and SEND:

“A child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.

A child of compulsory school age or a young person has a learning difficulty or disability (SEND) if he or she:

has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or

has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions”.⁷

2018 Education Committee Inquiry into SEND: concluded that whilst the “[2014] reforms were the right ones”, the “implementation [had] been badly hampered”, notably by poor administration and insufficient funding.⁸

2019 SEND Review: looked into how to “improve the services available to families who need support, equip staff in schools and colleges to respond effectively to their needs as well as ending the ‘postcode lottery’ they often face”, with specific mentions to its links with health and social care.⁹

5 DfE, [Children with special educational needs and disabilities \(SEND\)](#) (accessed July 2025)

6 DfE and DHSC, Statutory Guidance [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#), 11 June 2014, updated Sept 2024 (accessed July 2025)

7 DfE and DHSC, Statutory Guidance [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#), 11 June 2014, updated Sept 2024 (accessed July 2025)

8 House of Commons Education Committee, First Report of Session 2019, [Special educational needs and disabilities](#), HC20

9 DfE, [“Major review into support for children with special educational needs”](#), 6 Sept 2019 (accessed July 2025)

2023 SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan: published in March 2023 including reforms to the qualifications for special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs).¹⁰ The SEND and alternative provision roadmap setting out timelines for parts of the Government’s proposals was published alongside this.¹¹

July 2024: The Department for Education announced a restructure to place responsibility for SEND and alternative provision (AP) within its schools group “to ensure that we deliver improvements to inclusion within mainstream schools”.¹² The Autumn Budget in October 2024 included a £2.3billion increase in the DfE core budget: £1billion of this will be used to support the SEND system.¹³

September 2024: Ofsted announced, in response to its Big Listen consultation, that it plans to add an “inclusion” criterion to its new inspection framework.¹⁴

June 2025: in June 2025, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government announced a further extension of the statutory override lasting until 31 March 2028, as part of a phased approach to SEND system reform.¹⁵ In June 2025 the Department for Education confirmed they will publish a White Paper on SEND reform in Autumn 2025.¹⁶

July 2025: the Department for Education published its Best Start for Life strategy which aims to improve child development and get 75 per cent of 5-year-olds in England to have a good level of development by 2028.¹⁷

10 DfE, Policy paper, [SEND and alternative provision improvement plan](#): right support, right place, right time, CP 800, March 2023 (accessed July 2025)

11 DfE, [SEND and alternative provision roadmap](#), March 2023 (accessed July 2025)

12 DfE, Press release, “[Sir Kevan Collins appointed at DfE as Non-Executive Board Member](#)”, 10 July 2024 (accessed July 2025)

13 DfE, Blog, [What does the Budget 2024 mean for education?](#), 31 October 2024 (accessed July 2025)

14 Ofsted, Consultation outcome, [Hearing feedback, accepting criticism and building a better Ofsted: the response to the Big Listen](#), Sept 2024, (accessed July 2025)

15 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Press Release, “[Fairer funding for councils across the country in major reform](#)”, June 2025

16 DfE, [What does the Budget 2024 mean for education?](#), 31 October 2024

17 DfE, Blog, [Giving every child the best start in life](#), CP 1362, July 2025

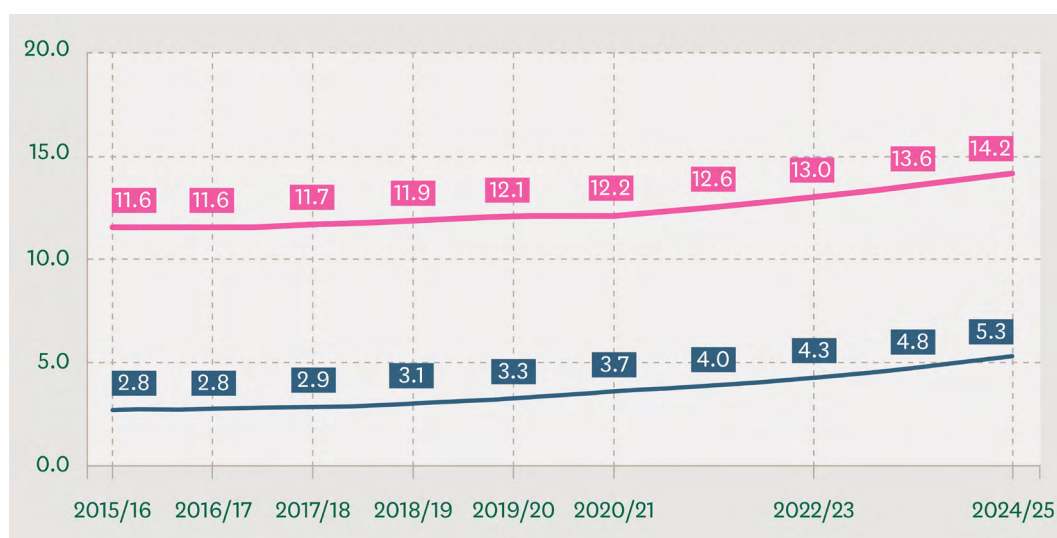
2 The state of inclusive education in England

Current trends in SEND

Increasing need for SEND support

5. There are increasing numbers of children and young people with SEND and in receipt of various forms of support in England. The graph below shows how the percentage of pupils on school rolls with SEN, either receiving SEN support or with Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans has increased since 2016.

Percentage of pupils with SEN, by SEN provision, 2015/16 to 2024/25



Source: [DfE, Special Educational Needs in England: 2024, June 2024](#), main text; [DfE, Special Educational Needs in England: 2019, July 2019](#) (for all data prior to 2020)

6. In the 2024/25 academic year over 1.7 million pupils in England had special educational needs, with 482,640 pupils having EHC plans (an 104.4 per centage increase from 2015/16) and 1,284,284 without an EHC plan but receiving SEN Support (a 20.6 per cent increase from 2015/16).¹⁸ EHC plans are given to children and young people aged up to 25 so the figures in the

18 DfE, Academic Year 2024–25 [Special educational needs in England: 2025](#), gov.uk, June 2025

graph above do not represent that total number of EHC plans. However, these follow a similar trend of increase with the total number of EHC plans more than doubling between 2015 and 2025, rising from 240,183 to 638,745.¹⁹

Box 2: What support is currently available?

There are three levels of support through the **graduated approach**: ordinarily available provision, SEN Support and EHC plans.

The graduated approach is a step-by-step method used by schools and early years settings to identify and respond to a child or young person's SEND. The graduated method is promoted by the SEND Code of Practice. Its aim is to ensure that support is proportionate to need, moving from inclusive classroom practice to more targeted and specialist interventions as necessary.

Level 1: Ordinarily Available Provision

Ordinarily available provision refers to the inclusive, high-quality teaching and everyday adjustments that all schools and settings are expected to provide for all pupils, including those with mild or emerging SEND. This is provided by class teachers and teaching assistants and does not require any formal identification of SEND.

Level 2: SEN support

SEN support is for children who need additional help beyond ordinarily available provision. This includes more targeted interventions and individualised support. Delivery of SEN support often involves the school's SENCO and can involve external specialists such as speech and language therapists and educational psychologists.

Level 3: EHC plan

An EHC plan is a legal document issued by the local authority for children and young people (aged 0–25) with complex and long-term needs that cannot be met through SEN Support alone. The local authority coordinates the plan, with input from professionals, the setting, the family, and the child or young person. The purpose of the plan is to ensure coordinated, legally enforceable support across education, health, and care services.

19 DfE, [Education, health and care plans: 2025](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-health-and-care-plans-2025), gov.uk, June 2025

7. There is no single explanation for the increase in complexity of SEN nor the increased need for SEN support and EHC plans identified by the Department, researchers or stakeholders. The National Audit Office report, *Support for children and young people with special educational needs*, points to a combination of four hypotheses:
- greater awareness and understanding of conditions within families, the medical profession and schools;
 - cultural shift towards greater acceptance and support for those with SEN;
 - conditions and needs changing, potentially accelerated by the impact of COVID-19—although the incidence of social and communication needs had started to increase before the pandemic; and
 - incentives for schools to request EHC plans for pupils to access high-needs funding, or transfer pupils to special schools.²⁰

We also received some written evidence which suggested that medical advancements have improved the survival rates of premature babies and children with complex medical conditions.²¹

Increased complexity is the “new normal”

8. Throughout the inquiry we were told about the growing complexity of SEN over the last decade amongst children and young people, in addition to the increased volume of cases. We heard from Cllr Kate Foale, then Spokesperson for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities at County Councils Network of the Local Government Association, that “increased complexity is the new normal”.²² This includes children being diagnosed with more complex or multiple needs, as well as receiving diagnoses later, often after their needs have significantly escalated. According to the Department for Education, the most common type of need among pupils with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan is a diagnosis of autism with one in three (33.6 per cent) being identified with a primary need of autism. This is followed by speech, language and communication with one in five (20.7 per cent). For those receiving SEN support, the most common need is speech, language and communication needs affecting one in four (25.7 per cent) pupils.²³ This is followed by social, emotional and mental health needs (23.6 per cent) and moderate learning difficulties, which account for 14.4 per cent of cases. We heard across the evidence that there has been a particular

20 NAO, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), HC 299, October 2024

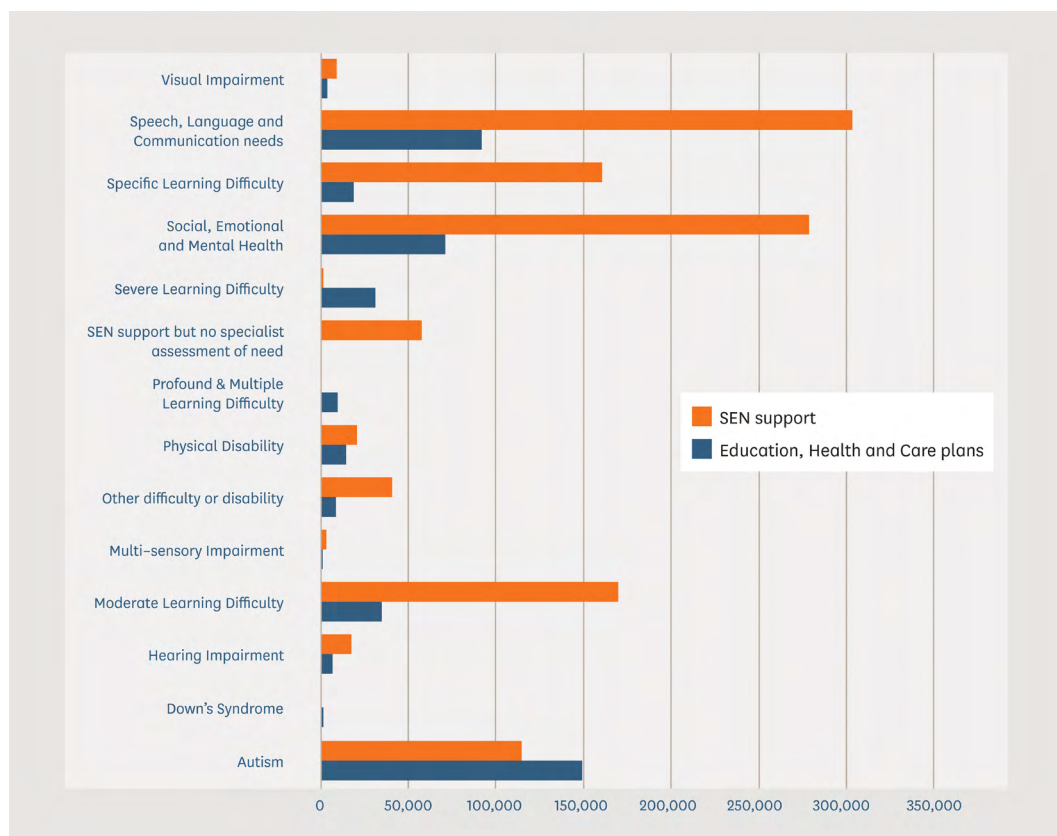
21 National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) ([SEN0248](#)), SEN0413, SEN0700

22 [Q58](#)

23 DfE, [Special educational needs in England: 2024/25](#), gov.uk

increase in speech, language and communication needs and social, emotional and mental health needs since the pandemic and subsequent lockdown.²⁴ These figures are presented in the bar chart below:

Pupils with an EHC plan or SEN support by type of need, 2024/25



Source: DfE, Special educational needs in England, 2024–25²⁵

- The increased complexity of SEND need was reflected in what we heard from Phil Haslett, Deputy Chair of F40, a cross-party local authority campaign group set up by the lowest-funded councils for education in England. He told us that the “predominant element of the rise” seen amongst the local authorities represented by F40 was found in social and emotional mental health and speech and language.²⁶ Similarly, we were told by Dr Luke Sibieta, Research Fellow at Institute for Fiscal Studies:

24 Portsmouth City Council, West Sussex County Council, East Sussex County Council, Brighton and Hove ([SEN0266](#)), Malden Oaks School and Tuition Centre ([SEN0282](#))

25 DfE, [Special educational needs in England: 2024/25](#), gov.uk

26 [Q63](#)

If you look across local authorities in terms of the types of need that are driving demand, it is autistic spectrum disorders, speech, language and communication needs, and social and emotional mental health needs, including ADHD. It is really consistent across local authorities and regions.²⁷

SEND support by education phase and setting

- 10.** The increase of EHC plans and SEN Support varies across school type and phase; however, the proportion of pupils with SEN has increased in most school phases:
- In state-funded nurseries, 16.7 per cent of pupils receive SEN support and 2.1 per cent have an EHC plan, an increase from 12.1 per cent and increase from 0.6 per cent in 2015 respectively.²⁸
 - Across state-funded primary schools, 14.8 per cent receive SEN support and 3.5 per cent have an EHC plan, an increase from 13 per cent and 1.4 per cent in 2015 respectively—in 2025, primary schools saw the largest increase in the number of EHC plans, with an additional 21,000 pupils with plans since 2024.²⁹
 - Across all state-funded secondary schools, 13.4 per cent receive SEN support and 3.1 per cent have an EHC plan, an increase from 12.4 and 1.8 per cent respectively since 2015.³⁰
 - Across all independent schools, 6.5 per cent have an EHC plan and 17.6 per cent receive SEN support, an increase from 5.7 per cent and 16.7 per cent respectively. However, when disaggregated, it is clear that the overwhelming majority of these pupils with EHC plans attend specialist independent schools with 94.5 per cent of these pupils with EHC plans attending specialist independent schools compared to 1.4 per cent in attending mainstream independent schools.
 - In state-funded Alternative Provision (AP), 83.4 per cent have an EHC plan or SEN support, an increase from 82.2 per cent.³¹

27 [Q63](#)

28 Includes state-funded nursery, non-maintained special schools, state-funded alternative provision schools and independent schools

29 Includes state-funded primary and special schools, non-maintained special schools, state-funded alternative provision schools and independent schools

30 Includes state-funded secondary and special schools, non-maintained special schools, state-funded alternative provision schools and independent schools

31 DfE, [‘Pupils in all schools, by type of SEN provision - 2016 to 2025’ from ‘Special educational needs in England’](#), August 2025 (accessed 18 August 2025)

11. We received evidence from local authorities about the increased use of expensive independent school placements for children and young people with SEND. According to the Department for Education’s written evidence there were 728 independent special schools in 2024, compared to 658 in 2023 and 477 in 2018. Placements in independent special schools are “overwhelmingly” funded by the state, with the School Census showing that, for 80 per cent of the sector, 90 per cent or more pupils have EHC plans and the figures in the above bullet points showing that 94.5 per cent of pupils with an EHC plan attending an Independent school are attending specialist independent school.³² This data shows the commonality of local authorities paying for specialist places in independent schools to meet children’s needs.³³ Susan Acland-Hood, Permanent Secretary at the Department for Education, told the Public Accounts Committee that the Department is “committed to and working on really hard” to reduce current reliance on the independent sector and has indicated its full plan will be set out in the upcoming SEND White Paper, due in Autumn 2025.³⁴

EHC plans

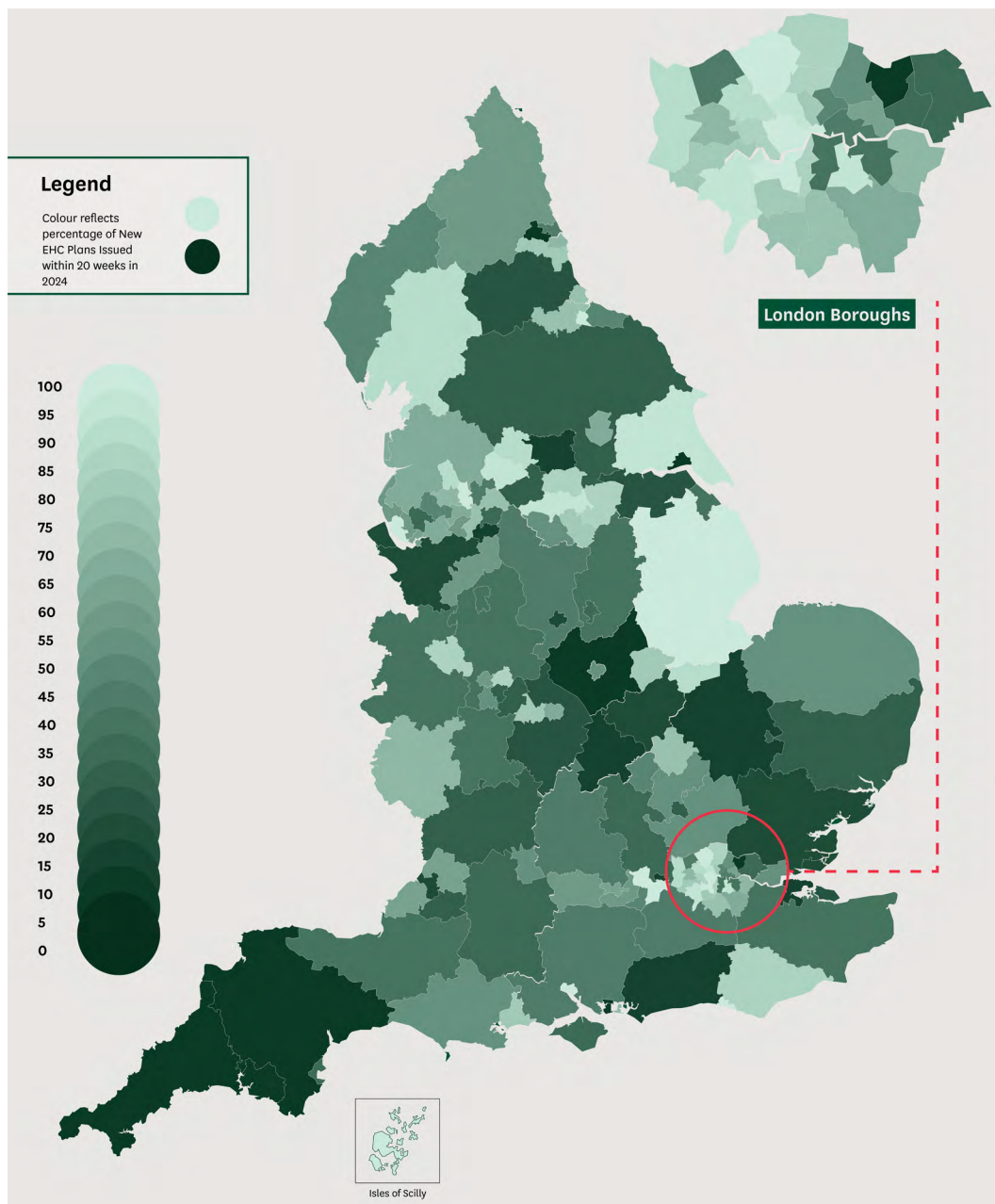
12. Across England, children and young people are facing increasingly long waits for their Education, Health and Care plans (EHC plans) to be issued. Delays have worsened in recent years: in 2024, only 46.4 per cent of EHC plans were issued within the statutory 20-week timeframe, compared to around 60 per cent between 2018 and 2021. The graphic below illustrates the proportion of new EHC plans issued within 20 weeks in 2024.

32 DfE, [Academic Year 2024/25 Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#), June 2025 (accessed July 2025)

33 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

34 National Audit Office, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), October 2024, Oral evidence taken by the Public Accounts Committee on 18 November 2024, [Q52](#) [Susan Acland-Hood]

Percentage of new EHC plans issued within 20 weeks in 2024



Source: Department for Education statistics on education, health and care plans, June 2025

13. EHC plan delays are in part due to increased waiting times to see specialists such as speech and language therapists or educational psychologists. Waiting to receive an assessment protracts the EHC plan process, particularly when children are on multiple waiting lists. The charity Kids highlights that this waiting has a “devastating impact on children and families”, delaying referrals to other health professionals and limiting access to support.³⁵
14. Families can challenge individual decisions made by local authorities about EHC plans through the SEND tribunal. For example, if a local authority refuses to issue an EHC plan after assessment or issues an EHC plan but families are unhappy with the description of the child’s needs or the special educational provision listed. Local authorities told us that decisions not to issue an EHC plan or to offer less support than is needed are often driven by limited resources, capacity constraints, or a lack of authority to compel other services into action.³⁶ The most recent statistics show that only 2.5 per cent of local authority decisions on EHC plans were appealed at a tribunal in 2023/24. However, of these, the tribunals found partly or wholly in favour of parents and carers in 99 per cent of cases.³⁷

Attainment, outcomes and curriculum

15. Pupils with EHC plans or receiving SEN support generally have lower academic attainment than pupils with no SEN identified. There are also attainment gaps between pupils with EHC plans and those receiving SEN support, likely reflecting the more complex need of students with EHC plans.

Key stage 2 attainment

16. In 2015/16, 62 per cent of pupils with no SEN identified met the expected standard for attainment across state-funded schools, compared to only 14% with either an EHC plan or in receipt of SEN support amounting to a 48 percentage point gap. In 2023/24 this gap had increased closed with 72 per cent of pupils with no SEN identified meeting the expected standard for attainment across state-funded schools and 22 per cent of pupils with either an EHC plan or in receipt of SEN support amounting to a 50 percentage point gap.

35 Kids, [Kids Policy Solutions: Delivering cost-effective support to tackle SEND waiting lists and reduce the mounting - and costly - crisis in provision for disabled children and their families](#), October 2024

36 The County Councils Network ([SEN0850](#))

37 MoJ, [Tribunal Statistics Quarterly: July to September 2024](#), gov.uk, 12 December 2024

17. Comparing over the same period, there is a gap between the percentage of pupils with and without SEND exceeding standard expectations. In 2015/16, 6 per cent of those without SEN met this higher standard while only one per cent of those with an EHC plan or receiving SEN support did, amounting to a five percentage point gap. In 2023/24, while the percentage of pupils without SEN reaching this higher standard increased to nine per cent, the percentage for children with either an EHC plan or in receipt of SEN support remained at one per cent.

Key stage 4 attainment

18. At the Key Stage 4 level, gaps in attainment are also prevalent. In 2014/15, 66.4 per cent of pupils without SEND achieved a grade 4/C or above in English and maths GCSEs while only 24.2 per cent of pupils identified with SEND achieved these grades. This amounts to a 42.2 percentage point gap. In 2023/24, 72.3 per cent of pupils without SEND achieved a grade 4/C or above in English and maths GCSEs while 30.8 per cent of pupils identified with SEND achieved these grades, amounting to a 41.5 percentage point gap.
19. In its analysis of the post-16 landscape, commissioned by the County Councils Network and the Local Government Association, Isos Partnership found that just 30 per cent of young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC plans) achieved Level 2 qualifications by age 19—down from nearly 37 per cent in 2014/15. Isos Partnership also reported that 94.6 per cent of young people without SEND were in sustained education, apprenticeships, or employment, compared to 90.2 per cent of those with EHC plans in the 2021/22 cohort. The table below shows that on the whole, the proportion of young people in sustained education, apprenticeships and employment has remained broadly stable with some small improvements, in education and work. However, there has been a 0.5 decline in the percentage of those in sustained apprenticeships which raises concerns considering the focus of skills policy on the apprenticeship route, as the table below shows.³⁸

38 County Councils Network and Local Government Association, [Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England](#), July 2024

Table 1: Post-16 destinations of young people with EHC plans, 2015/16 and 2021/22

	Overall percentage of young people with EHC plans in education, apprenticeships or employment, sustained	Education, sustained	Apprenticeships, sustained	Work, sustained	NEET	Destination unknown
2015/16	90.0 per cent	86.4	1.4	2.2	5.4	1.2
2021/22	50.2 per cent	86.8	0.9	2.5	4.8	1.9

Source: County Councils Network and Local Government Association, Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England, July 2024

- 20.** Throughout the inquiry we heard about the need for the curriculum to be more expansive and less rigid so it can be better adapted to the needs and abilities of pupils. Annamarie Hassall MBE, CEO at National Association for Special Educational Needs (Nasen), told us:³⁹

We have to have a curriculum that is more flexible and broader, and that enables school leaders to make decisions about what works for their learner population, to bring in creativity and movement and, within that, opportunities for teachers to be able to reflect and talk with each other.

- 21.** When asked how the current curriculum and assessment framework could be improved, young people with SEND similarly told us that the curriculum and assessment framework lacks sufficient flexibility, making it harder for them and their peers to engage with both positively. We heard from Lucy Bowerman, aged 22, that “flexibility is the most important thing”.⁴⁰ Madeline Thomas, aged 19, expanded on what this might look like in practice, saying:

we could look more at the way that children learn, in terms of what could be effective within the curriculum for disabled children and young people, with the possibility of having more flexibility in how they tackle classroom activities or homework. Instead of saying that something has to be done within a very specific standard—an essay—

39 [Q84](#)

40 [Q106](#)

it would be interesting, especially in the younger years, to see the change that could come from having children go off and find their own ways of displaying that information for themselves and having more flexibility and freedom.⁴¹

Attendance, exclusion and suspensions

- 22.** Parents and carers consistently reported in their evidence to our inquiry that their children’s school attendance was negatively affected by the lack of appropriate support for their SEND within educational settings.⁴² This is reflected in the attendance rates for pupils with SEND. The overall absence rate for pupils with an EHC plan was 12.52 per cent in 2024/25. This compares to 9.2 per cent for pupils with SEN support and 5.4 per cent with no identified SEN.⁴³ There has been a consistent, albeit very small decrease in persistent absence amongst pupils identified with SEN identified; however, these percentages remain disproportionately high compared to pupils without identified SEN.
- 23.** Across the evidence we heard particular concern about the prevalence of persistent absence for children and young people with SEND, compared to pupils with no SEND identified. In 2014/15, nine per cent of pupils with any type of SEND were persistent absentees compared to 3.7 per cent of the total pupil population.⁴⁴ In 2023/24, 34.18 per cent of pupils with EHC plans were persistently absent and 26.3 per cent of pupils in receipt of SEN support were persistently absent, while only 14.7 per cent of pupils with no identified SEN were persistently absent.⁴⁵ Further, viewed in isolation, these rates are unacceptably high and are likely to contribute directly to poorer long-term outcomes for children and young people with SEND. This level of disparity cannot be regarded as acceptable within an inclusive education system.
- 24.** During the inquiry, we heard concerns that behavioural policies in mainstream schools can disproportionately affect children with SEND. This is reflected in suspension rates: pupils with an EHC plan had a suspension rate of 25.6 per cent, slightly lower than the rate for those receiving SEN support, which stood at 29.4 per cent. In comparison, the rate for pupils with no identified SEN was 7.6 per cent—more than three times lower. A similar pattern is evident in permanent exclusions. The rate among pupils with an EHC plan was 0.3 per cent, again lower than for those with SEN support at 0.4 per cent, while pupils with no SEN had a much lower

41 [Q107](#)

42 Thematic summary of evidence submitted by parents and carers ([SEN0894](#))

43 DfE, [Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn term 2024/25](#), gov.uk, August 2025

44 DfE, [Pupil absence in schools in England: 2014 to 2015](#), March 2016 (accessed August 2025)

45 DfE, [Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn term 2024/25](#), gov.uk, August 2025

exclusion rate of 0.1 per cent.⁴⁶ The exclusion rates for students with SEND which has not been formally identified are assumed to be even higher, although data are not collected or monitored. Autistic students represent the largest SEND group affected by exclusions. We heard that for many students with SEND, exclusions from mainstream schools often stem from unmet SEND needs that are “misunderstood” and then misinterpreted and viewed as “bad behaviour” resulting in an “unhelpful disciplinarian culture” rather than an inclusive environment.⁴⁷

Specialist provision

25. The Department for Education did not begin to systematically collect and monitor data on specialist school places until 2023. The absence of reliable data prior to this has hindered effective planning for new specialist provision, because it meant there was no reliable data underpinning decisions on the delivery of new specialist school places and the data now available is still limited in scope and maturity. There are no published DfE statistics on how many special schools have waiting lists or how long these lists are. However, there are some data on special school capacity. It should be noted that the most recent data, collected in May 2024, do not include independent special schools, or special units attached to mainstream schools. Of state-funded special schools:
- There were 153,000 special school places reported across all phases;
 - There were around 160,000 pupils on roll across these schools, so a net excess of around 7,000 pupils across all phases; and
 - Around two-thirds of special schools reported being at or over capacity.⁴⁸
26. There are no published data on how far pupils are travelling to attend specialist placements; however, there are data on the proportion of special school pupils attending school in a different local authority area to the one they live in. The proportion attending school out of area has remained relatively stable in recent years at around 9 per cent, as shown in the table below. However, this data excludes independent sector pupils.

46 DfE, [Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England](#), gov.uk, July 2025

47 Global Black Maternal Health, [Black Child SEND report](#), Accessing special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provisions for Black and mixed Black heritage children: Lived experiences from parents and professionals living in South London, 2024

48 DfE, [School capacity: 2023/24 academic year](#), gov.uk, March 2025

Table 2: Special school pupils attending school outside home local authority 2023/24 academic year

	Within local authority	Outside local authority	Percentage out of area
2019–20	103,609	9,860	8.7
2020–21	108,838	10,474	8.8
2021–22	114,897	11,269	8.9
2022–23	121,205	11,946	9.0
2023–24	127,595	12,658	9.0

Source: Department for Education, Academic year 2023/24, Schools, pupils and their characteristics, June 2024⁴⁹

27. We have heard that home to school transport costs are a “key factor” in the financial difficulties being faced by local authorities.⁵⁰ Published data shows that in 2023–24, local authorities spent £2.24 billion on transporting children and young people to school and college. This represents a dramatic increase of £1.23 billion—or 122 per cent—over the past decade. However, the most significant cost pressures have emerged in the last three years. Between 2015–16 and 2019–20, annual expenditure grew by an average of 7 per cent a year. In contrast, from 2020–21 to 2023–24, average annual growth rose sharply by 20 per cent.⁵¹ In a recent survey by the Local Government Association, local authorities identified the placement of children with EHC plans in schools—particularly in special schools located further from home or outside the local authority area—as the second most significant factor driving up the cost of SEND home-to-school transport. Of the 51 councils that responded, 14 cited this as the most important factor, while a further 23 ranked it as the second most important.⁵²

Inclusive education

28. The Government has stated its intention to improve the effectiveness of the SEND system by enabling the majority of children with SEND to have their needs met in inclusive, mainstream education settings.⁵³ However, the Department is yet to publish a definition of inclusive mainstream education. When asked what the Department’s working definition of an inclusive mainstream setting is, then Minister McKinnell outlined early identification,

49 Department for Education, [Academic year 2023/24, Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#), June 2024

50 [Q66](#)

51 Local Government Association, [The future of Home to School Transport, June 2025](#)

52 Local Government Association, [The future of Home to School Transport, June 2025](#)

53 DfE, Press Release, [“Sir Kevan Collins appointed at DfE as Non-Executive Board Member”](#), 10 July 2024

effective support, high-quality teaching and the effective allocation of resources as key features of inclusivity but did not set out a clear definition.⁵⁴ We have heard from charities, school leaders and the wider sector that without an official definition of inclusive mainstream education from the Department for Education there is little clarity about what inclusive mainstream education actually entails. Reflecting on the early years context, Catherine McLeod MBE, CEO of Dingley’s Promise, told us:

what we really want to see is a situation where the local authority, the settings and the families have a shared understanding of what inclusive practice looks like. At the moment, I would say we do not.⁵⁵

- 29.** This lack of clarity and shared understanding poses challenges to accountability and reduces the likelihood of inclusive mainstream education becoming a practical reality. Katie Ghose, CEO of Kids, a charity that supports children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and their families, told us:

We welcome the Government’s drive for inclusive education in mainstream schools to become a reality. For that to happen, the Department for Education should clearly define inclusive education... that would take us some way forward.⁵⁶

- 30.** Margaret Mulholland, SEND and Inclusion Specialist, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), explained that a definition of inclusive mainstream education from the Department for Education would enable schools and local areas to understand what action is needed to support this and how they should work collaboratively to achieve it: “[t]hat is what we need to be clear about—that participation and engagement, how schools and local areas support that, and how we work collaboratively”.⁵⁷

- 31.** We also heard that although the intention to create an inclusive mainstream education system is positive, the role of other education settings, in particular specialist schools in the wider SEND system, should not be forgotten. Margaret Mulholland, SEND and Inclusion Specialist, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), said: “I think we get mixed messages that simply having high numbers of children with SEND in school and not in specialist settings is somehow indicative of inclusion.”⁵⁸ Similarly, Clare Howard OBE, CEO of Natspec, the membership association for organisations which offer specialist provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities, told us that while she agrees that having the majority of

54 [Q231](#)

55 [Q87](#)

56 [Q3](#)

57 [Q88](#)

58 [Q88](#)

children and young people in mainstream education is “the right ambition” this is “only one part of inclusion”.⁵⁹ When giving oral evidence, then Minister Catherine McKinnell acknowledged the role specialist education provision has for some children and young people with SEND, saying: “[s]ome children will always need that more specialist provision, and it is important that those places are available for those children who need it and their families”.⁶⁰

- 32.** Clarity on the definition of inclusive mainstream education would also allow the Department for Education, local authorities and schools to have a better understanding of the time, resource and investment needed to achieve an inclusive mainstream education system. Without clarity on what a reformed, inclusive mainstream education system is, the Government will not be able to articulate a programme for delivering it or measure and monitor progress. Jo Hutchinson, Director for SEND and additional needs at the Education Policy Institute (EPI), told us:

We have to be realistic about the timeframes in which one can build that new inclusive mainstream system ... We have to be realistic about the fact that that involves investing up front.⁶¹

- 33.** Minister McKinnell cited the £1 billion added to the high needs budget in the Autumn Budget 2024 and the £740 million capital funding announced in March 2025 to adapt mainstream state schools as evidence of the Department providing the funding and resourcing to deliver inclusive mainstream education. However, when pressed, the Minister was unable to confirm whether the Department would be receiving more money from the Treasury in the future to invest in an inclusive mainstream and specialist provision.⁶²

34. CONCLUSION

We welcome the Department’s focus on inclusive education; however, we are concerned about the absence of a Departmental definition of this and the subsequent lack of clarity about what ‘inclusive mainstream’ education looks like and means in practice for educators, education settings, pupils and families. We are also concerned that the Department does not appear to have a clear understanding of the timescale and level of investment that is needed to achieve a truly inclusive mainstream education system.

59 [Q88](#)

60 [Q269](#)

61 [Q209](#)

62 [Q233](#)

35.

RECOMMENDATION

It is unacceptable that a clear definition of inclusive education is still lacking. The Department must publish a definition of inclusive education and rationale for this vision alongside examples of good practice across different phases of education and settings within the next 3 months. Continued ambiguity undermines progress and accountability.

36.

RECOMMENDATION

An inclusive mainstream education system must be underpinned by several key elements, all of which we would expect to be included in the Department's definition at a level of detail sufficient to enable professionals and families to have a clear understanding of the Government's approach:

- education settings and environments must be accessible, safe, and designed to meet a wide range of sensory and physical needs;
- teachers and teaching assistants and other support staff should have the expertise, training, and confidence to support diverse learners, underpinned by regular access to embedded specialist professionals;
- the curriculum must be flexible, relevant, and reflect the representation of young people with SEND; and the Government must ensure the curriculum itself and the assessment of it reflect and accommodate their needs;
- accountability systems must examine and prioritise the progress and outcomes of all pupils, on a rounded set of indicators which include but are not limited to academic attainment, so that inclusion is embedded as an essential component of quality for all settings. The proportion of pupils with SEND should be published and compared with other local schools and multi-academy trusts, to act as a disincentive to exclusionary practices; and
- critically, good inclusive practice must always ensure rigorous, systemic approaches to understanding the individual needs of every child and delivering personalised support.

37.

RECOMMENDATION

The UK is a signatory member of the UNCRPD (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) since 2008. It would be helpful in developing any definition of inclusive education for the Department for Education to draw on the principles and substantive materials in relevant articles of this Convention. This should include Article 24 on education, Article 25 on health and others, for example, Article 30 on participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport. It may also be helpful for the Government to consider the UN general comment number 4 on Article 24 - the right to inclusive education, as well as the UNICEF report (2017) expanding on these issues in practice.⁶³

38.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department must urgently assess the funding required to implement meaningful reforms to SEND provision. There must be a clear plan for how the Department will work towards this level of investment in the short and medium term, which aligns with the timeline for SEND reforms.

39.

RECOMMENDATION

As part of delivering a fully inclusive mainstream, the Government must set out how it will deliver, over time, a system in which highly skilled professionals, including educational psychologists and speech and language therapists, are less tied up in undertaking assessments and writing reports and more effectively deployed in delivering the support children need. It should be clear what professional skills and expertise an inclusive mainstream school should be able to draw on, and how this expertise will be made available.

Drivers of the SEND crisis and barriers to inclusive education

40. Throughout the inquiry, we heard about several key issues that need to be addressed in order to solve the SEND crisis and ensure progress towards inclusive mainstream education. These are set out briefly below, with possible solutions that are explored in greater detail in the rest of the report.

63 [UNICEF, Inclusive education: Including children with disabilities in quality learning: what needs to be done?, September 2017](#)

Inclusive education is yet to be secured

41. SEND support is currently limited and inconsistent, often leading to escalating needs and increased demand for statutory interventions. For inclusive mainstream education to succeed, the quality and consistency of ordinarily available provision and SEN support must be significantly enhanced. Appropriate specialist support must continue to be accessible for those who need it, and aspects of education such as the curriculum and the physical environment carefully designed to meet the needs of all children and young people.

Parents and carers have limited trust and confidence in the SEND system

42. The current SEND system suffers from a lack of accountability, eroding the trust and confidence of children and young people with SEND and their families in local authorities, schools and the Department for Education, statutory duties are frequently unmet and exclusionary practices persist. Building a truly inclusive mainstream education system requires meaningful engagement with parents and robust accountability mechanisms across all levels and services involved in delivering and supporting the education of children and young people.

The education workforce is not equipped to support pupils with SEND

43. The current education workforce lacks the capacity, training and resources consistently to support children and young people with SEND in mainstream settings. This is driven by shortages of specialists such as SENCOs, reduced access to external services like educational psychologists and therapists, and insufficient training and CPD for mainstream teachers. Many educators lack the skills and confidence to meet complex needs, leading to inconsistent provision. To address this, high-quality SEND training must be embedded throughout teacher training, resources for specialist teachers must be increased, and routine access to external specialist services must be significantly improved to provide timely, coordinated, and effective support. We have received evidence that local authority staff also need more rigorous and systematic training.

Funding and finance

44. The current SEND system is critically underfunded at both local authority and school levels. Funding has failed to keep pace with the rising number and complexity of SEND cases, leaving many local authorities in financial

distress and unable fully to meet their statutory duties. Schools often lack the resources needed for specialist staff, tailored interventions, and inclusive environments. Furthermore, the current accountability framework provides little incentive for schools to prioritise existing resources towards meeting the needs of children with SEND. This prevents timely, high-quality support, increases pressure on families, and drives greater reliance on EHC plans. To achieve truly inclusive mainstream education, sustainable and adequate funding for both local authorities and schools is essential.

Partnership between services is weak

45. Coordination between services responsible for assessing and delivering SEND support remains limited, with many operating in silos. This fragmentation leads to inefficiencies and delays. To achieve inclusive mainstream education, priorities must be aligned, roles and responsibilities clearly defined, and effective mechanisms put in place to ensure seamless collaboration across all services.

Lack of intervention in the early years is leading to the escalation of need

46. SEND support in the early years sector is significantly under-resourced, underfunded and inconsistently available, resulting in a failure to deliver at a critical stage for the early identification of children's needs. Investment in early years provision is required to ensure that practitioners are adequately equipped with the skills, resources, and capacity to identify needs promptly, provide appropriate and effective support, where possible, mitigate the escalation of more complex needs in later childhood, and refer on to assessment teams and specialists, so that a child's needs are well understood and properly documented as early as possible.

Post-16

47. Young people with SEND frequently experience a reduction in support once they reach the age of 16. This gap in provision can limit their opportunities and undermine the progress made during earlier stages of education. A comprehensive approach is required to ensure that young people with SEND have access to sustained, tailored support beyond the age of 16, underpinned by a diverse range of pathways for progression and their needs are adequately reflected in the Government's current and future skills strategies.

48. CONCLUSION

The SEND system is not delivering for children and young people or their families, with poor experiences and outcomes becoming the norm in many places across England. Rising need coupled with limited school resourcing, stretched local authority budgets and a mismatch between local authority responsibilities and their powers has resulted in a costly and adversarial system. Over a decade on from the 2014 reforms, the key challenges are evident: preparedness of the education workforce, lack of parental trust and confidence in the system, limited accountability across schools, multi-academy trusts, NHS services and local authorities, disjointed working across the various agencies and families, limited capacity and the inadequacy and unsustainability of funding.

49. RECOMMENDATION

It is essential that the Department addresses these challenges if it is going to succeed in making mainstream education inclusive and fixing the broken SEND system. The Department must involve stakeholders in reforms and begin to consult with parent-led organisations now. It should set out a clear timeline for SEND reforms and report on progress at least on an annual basis.

3 Securing inclusive education

50. Section 66 of the Children and Families Act 2014 directs education settings to use their “best endeavours” to provide appropriate support for children and young people with SEND.⁶⁴ The SEND code of practice describes a graduated approach to supporting children and young people with SEND spanning the three types of support set out in the previous Chapter:
- **Ordinarily available provision:** general support that should be available in mainstream schools for children and young people with special educational needs, without the need for an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan;
 - **SEN support:** tailored support given to children and young people with special educational needs who do not have an EHC plan; and
 - **EHC plan:** a legal document for children and young people aged 0–25 who have special educational needs or disabilities and need more support than is available through SEN Support.
51. While we heard broad support for the graduated approach throughout our inquiry, it is clear that improvements are needed at every level, from ordinarily available provision to SEN Support and EHC plans, to ensure its effectiveness and to realise an inclusive education system.⁶⁵

Ordinarily available provision

52. The SEND code of practice sets out what schools and local authorities should provide as part of their ordinarily available support for children with SEND. It states that mainstream schools must make reasonable adjustments and provide targeted support for pupils without needing an EHC plan.⁶⁶ This can include interventions that can be made at the SEN Support level. The SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan states:

64 [Children and Families Act 2014](#)

65 [Q83, Q92](#)

66 DfE and DHSC, [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#) (accessed April 2025)

“[w]e want ordinarily available provision and high-quality teaching to meet children and young people’s needs wherever possible, and specialist support to complement the skills and expertise of the wider workforce”.⁶⁷

- 53.** Clear guidance on ordinarily available provision and what this entails is important in giving clarity to education settings on “what they are expected to do for all children as a minimum”, allowing families to see what their children should be offered and enabling local authorities to hold education settings to account when these expectations are not met.⁶⁸ However, we found that in practice there is often a lack of clarity. A coalition of local councils including Portsmouth City Council, West Sussex County Council, East Sussex County Council and Brighton and Hove City Council told us that “the ordinarily available offer differs across local authorities, some offers are not consistent even within the same local authority”.⁶⁹ We heard that this inconsistency is due to the absence of a clear and consistent definition of ordinarily available provision. Dr Peter Gray, Co-Coordinator at the SEN Policy Forum, told us “we are experiencing issues about how to define ordinarily available provision”.⁷⁰ This is similar to what we heard from Alison Ismail, Director of SEND and Alternative Provision at the Department for Education, who told us:

What we see from the visits we do and talking to schools is that provision for children with additional needs in one school might be done through their core offer, perhaps even without giving the label of SEND support, and in another school it might be considered to require an EHC plan application. There is that interesting disconnect in the consistency of practice and consistency of expectations, which we know is really important to parents and carers.⁷¹

- 54.** We also heard about the need for greater consistency in ordinarily available provision from Amanda Allard, CEO of the Council for Disabled Children, who told us:

We need some national standards. There need to be clear expectations. Children, young people and their parents need to understand what they can expect to have as ordinarily available provision in schools, and schools need to be inspected against whether that level of support is provided.⁷²

67 DfE, [Special Educational Needs and Disabilities \(SEND\) and Alternative Provision \(AP\) Improvement Plan, gov.uk](#), March 2023, p. 53

68 Dingley’s Promise ([SEN0334](#))

69 Portsmouth City Council, West Sussex County Council, East Sussex County Council, Brighton and Hove ([SEN0266](#))

70 [Q196](#)

71 [Q237](#)

72 [Q3](#)

55. We have received evidence suggesting that some local authorities have independently developed guidance on ordinarily available provision to support education settings. For example, Pinpoint Cambridgeshire, a SEND parent/carers forum based in Cambridgeshire, reported that the settings valued these resources; however, the guidance was “not being used consistently in every school all of the time”.⁷³ We also heard that not all local authorities provide such guidance, leaving schools and parents unsure about what ordinarily available provision entails. An anonymous parent told us: “[t]here seems to be little local authority guidance and support for parents or schools about what support is and must be ordinarily available or monitoring of school compliance”.⁷⁴
56. Much of our evidence argued that to resolve this and achieve greater clarity and accountability around the expectations of ‘ordinarily available provision’, an improved definition and national standards for ordinarily available provision are necessary. Pinpoint Cambridgeshire told us that the Department for Education needs to be more specific about ordinarily available provision so it is “consistent everywhere” and schools can be resourced and held accountable for delivering it.⁷⁵ Similarly, Rhianedd Hughes, the Head of SEN Statutory Service at Brighton and Hove City Council told us: “[a] national version of ordinarily available provision should be implemented with a staged approach at SEN support with clear levels so that everyone is clear about expectations and there is a national level of consistency”.⁷⁶
57. The Department for Education acknowledges the need for the SEND code of practice to update and clarify ordinarily available provision and indicated that this will be a part of the upcoming SEND White Paper expected in Autumn 2025. Alison Ismail, Director of SEND and Alternative Provision at the Department for Education, told us:

From what we hear and from the evidence that you have taken as a Committee, that needs to be perhaps clearer, updated and more accessible as something that we can clearly point to for the expectation on the core offer... I expect that as part of looking at the overall system, we would definitely review whether there is more we can do to improve the code of practice.⁷⁷

73 Pinpoint Cambridgeshire ([SEN0205](#))

74 Anonymous ([SEN0104](#))

75 Pinpoint Cambridgeshire ([SEN0205](#))

76 Ms Rhianedd Hughes (Head of SEN Statutory Service at Brighton and Hove City Council) ([SEN0043](#))

77 [Q237](#)

58. However, we heard that standardisation should not come at the expense of locality and context, as “there will always need to be room for local variance but some core principles to guide local authorities in establishing their core offer would be beneficial”, for example, the minimum expectations associated with specialist outreach and therapy services.⁷⁸
59. We also heard about the importance of local authorities and schools taking strategic, locally tailored approaches to underpin any national standards for ‘ordinarily available provision’. Dr Susana Castro-Kemp, Associate Professor at the Institute of Education, Psychology & Human Development and lead researcher of ScopeSEND, told us:

Having a common understanding of what is meant by high-quality provision for all is important, but one caveat of just standardising practice nationally without having a clear strategy underneath it is that it might make us neglect specific local needs... If we have written standards alone, it might not be effective but that is not to say that we should not have written standards. They should be accompanied by a very clear strategic and systemic approach to inclusion.⁷⁹

SEN support

60. SEN Support is non-statutory and involves reasonable adjustments in education given to a child or young person at pre-school, school or college, supplementing ordinarily available provision for children and young people with SEND. The below table outlines some the type of support that should be available to pupils through SEN Support.

78 Portsmouth City Council, West Sussex County Council, East Sussex County Council, Brighton and Hove ([SEN0266](#))

79 [Q196](#)

Table 3: Department for Education, Children with special educational needs and disabilities⁸⁰

SEN support for children under 5	SEN Support for children between 5–15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a written progress check when your child is 2 years old • a child health visitor carrying out a health check for your child if they're aged 2 to 3 • a written assessment in the summer term of your child's first year of primary school • making reasonable adjustments for disabled children, like providing aids like tactile signs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a special learning programme • extra help from a teacher or assistant • to work in a smaller group • observation in class or at break • help taking part in class activities • extra encouragement in their learning, for example to ask questions or to try something they find difficult • help communicating with other children • support with physical or personal care difficulties, for example eating, getting around school safely or using the toilet

- 61.** According to the Department for Education, young people aged 16 or over in further education should have their parents or carers contact their college before starting to ensure the setting is able to meet their need and the setting and local authority should talk with the young person about the support they need.⁸¹
- 62.** Throughout our inquiry we heard about the varied quality and availability of SEN support. Nasen highlight that this is in part driven by the significant disparity in how SEND is identified and supported across education settings and what their “best endeavours” looks like. In some settings, learners may receive tailored support, while in others, the same needs may not even be recognised. The Identifying SEND report by the Education Policy Institute (EPI) found inconsistencies amongst primary and secondary schools in approaches to identifying SEND to be a major driver in a child's chances of receiving support. The EPI found that this variation between schools

80 DfE, [Children with special educational needs and disabilities \(SEND\)](#), gov.uk (accessed November 2024)

81 DfE, [Children with special educational needs and disabilities \(SEND\)](#), gov.uk (accessed July 2025)

accounted for two-thirds of the differences between those identified with SEND and those not identified.⁸² Georgina Downard, Senior solicitor at Independent Provider of Special Education Advice (IPSEA) told us:

We hear of schools and local authorities interpreting [best endeavour] duties differently and quite often a child falls through the gap... these different interpretations that we see reflect how current duties around SEN support lack clarity and, if necessary, are difficult to enforce.⁸³

This aligns with what we heard from Daniel Constable Phelps, Executive Headteacher at St Mary’s Primary and Nursery School who told us:

The issue with [SEN support] is the language that is used within that guidance. Instead of language like “you must provide the following”, it is “should”. That for me is why the quality you sometimes see varies. Particularly in my job where I go to different schools to help, I see that variability because what that “should” looks like is not set in stone.⁸⁴

Conrad Bourne, Director for SEND at The Mercian Trust, told us “the code of practice gives us some pointers, but one challenge that I have always felt is that it does not give us the structure and framework.”⁸⁵ And Nicole Dempsey, Director of SEND and Safeguarding at Dixons Academies Trust, said:

We definitely need greater clarity and guidance in the SEN support space... By this I mean the need for specific guidance around the universal offering in the SEN support stage, access to services, how we understand inclusive leadership and create a culture of belonging for all children, and how we implement effective responsive provision that does not take children away from their lessons and the shared experiences of education.⁸⁶

- 63.** Some of the written evidence we received attributed the increase in demand for EHC plans to the inconsistency of support offered to those without an EHC plan. Department for Education findings from Phase One of Delivering Better Value in SEND, published in October 2024, found that better support in mainstream schools could lead to 30,000 more children having their needs met through SEN Support rather than via an EHC plan and 35,000

82 Education Policy Institute, [Identifying SEND](#), February 2025

83 [Q179](#)

84 [NB: Statutory Guidance is issued under powers granted by legislation. It often uses “must” and “should” to distinguish between mandatory duties and recommended practices. For example, local authorities “must” follow certain safeguarding procedures, while they “should” follow others and be able to give objectively good reasons why they have not if they choose not to do so.], [Q212](#)

85 [Q212](#)

86 [Q213](#)

more children having their needs met in a mainstream setting rather than a specialist placement, including 15,000 more children supported through resourced provision.⁸⁷ These findings were repeated to us by then Minister McKinnell and reflect how the current inadequacy of SEN support is driving need for EHC plans.⁸⁸

64. Susan Acland-Hood, Permanent Secretary of the DfE, told the Public Accounts Committee in November 2024 that the 40 per cent increase in demand for EHC plans has been caused by a lack of clarity about what children and young people with SEND should receive through SEN support as well as the inconsistency of this support. Acland-Hood argued that “it’s really important that it’s possible for people to get more support without having to go through an [EHC] assessment process”.⁸⁹

65. The current inconsistency in SEN support and ordinarily available provision across England means that children with SEND are experiencing vastly different levels of support, leading to inequitable outcomes that undermine the very principles of inclusion and fairness. These disparities are fuelled by vague guidance and inconsistent interpretations of the legal duty to use ‘best endeavours’, resulting in delayed identification of needs, patchy provision, and an excessive reliance on EHC plans. Amanda Allard, CEO of the Council for Disabled Children, told us:

I now meet parents, which I never did before, who are saying to me, “My child should never have needed a plan. Their need should have been met within mainstream schools.” We must get to a situation where we are not making parents go down that route when it should not be necessary.⁹⁰

66. Similarly, Contact, a charity that works with families with disabled children, explained that currently the only way to get provision such as speech and language therapy or support from an educational psychologist is through an EHC plan. It is therefore “unsurprising that the number of requests for assessment–followed by the issuing of EHC plans has increased.”⁹¹

67. Our written evidence was clear that SEN support needs to be consistent, strong and effective if more children’s needs are to be met in mainstream schools. The families of children with SEND highlighted the need to “empower and fund schools and local authorities to provide interventions and support which may reduce the need for EHC plans.”⁹² Evidence

87 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

88 [Q236](#)

89 Oral evidence taken by the Public Accounts Committee on [18 November 2024](#) [Susan Acland-Hood]

90 [Q3](#)

91 Contact ([SEN0174](#))

92 Anonymous ([SEN0101](#))

from those working in the SEND system shared this perspective, telling us “parents should feel confident in SEN support not having to push for statutory Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment”.⁹³ A SEN caseworker emphasised the need for parents to have a credible alternative in seeking support for their child:

Trustworthy, clear, and accessible support mechanisms should be put in place that allow parents to feel confident their children’s needs are being met without the need for lengthy and often stressful applications. This could help to reduce the dramatic rise in EHC plan applications, many of which are for children with low-level SEN.⁹⁴

- 68.** Some of the evidence we received and heard advocated strengthening the Children and Families Act 2014 to place SEN Support on a statutory footing in order to improve SEN, the consistency of support in mainstream schools and reduce demand for EHC plans. Contact, a charity for families with disabled children, told us that the Children and Families Act 2014 currently places “minimal and vague duties” on schools to support those pupils who have SEN, but no EHC plan.⁹⁵ Being non-statutory, a “lack of enforceability [of SEN support] enables non-inclusive practice in mainstream schools”.⁹⁶ Contact argued that strengthening the Act would provide a “major improvement” for children and young people who don’t need an EHC plan but do need extra provision and support.⁹⁷ Other evidence suggested that, in practice, putting SEN support on a statutory footing would involve an increased emphasis on inclusive practices and provision of support for children with SEND in mainstream settings by requiring the introduction of national standards for SEN support and an avenue for redress.⁹⁸
- 69.** Whilst exploring the potential benefits of placing SEN support on a statutory footing, we also heard concerns about what this might mean in practice. For example, Annemarie Hassall, CEO of Nasen, raised concerns about “unintended consequences” such as limiting access to SEN support through the introduction of rigid or overly prescriptive criteria and Margaret Mulholland, SEND & Inclusion specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders told us about the risk of “pathologising” those in need of this support instead of focusing on broader, universal provision.⁹⁹ Another key issue highlighted in evidence was that, without the allocation

93 Ms Rhianedd Hughes (Head of SEN Statutory Service at Brighton and Hove City Council) ([SEN0043](#))

94 Miss Joan Northage (SEN Casework Manager at Brighton & Hove City Council) ([SEN0052](#))

95 Contact, [Contact’s 3 Asks to improve England’s SEN system](#) (accessed July 2025)

96 Contact ([SEN0174](#))

97 Contact ([SEN0174](#))

98 Mr David Robinson (Architect at Robinson+ limited) ([SEN0059](#))

99 [Q85](#)

of additional resources, relevant expertise, and targeted investment, there was no assurance that making SEN support statutory would lead to meaningful improvements. Clare Howard, CEO of Natspec, told us:

[making SEN support statutory is] not a magic bullet. Just creating a statutory framework does not mean that it will happen, as we have seen with the unlawful practice that is happening in other areas of the system [EHC plans].¹⁰⁰

70. We heard that the effectiveness of SEN Support is being significantly undermined by both resource constraints and wider systemic issues. Stakeholders described how, even where guidance on effective SEN provision is available such as through ordinarily available provision frameworks, schools often lack the staffing, funding, and specialist input needed to implement it effectively. This issue is examined in greater detail in Chapter 7.

71. In addition to these capacity issues within schools, we also heard concerns about a lack of alignment between what schools are expected to provide as part of SEN Support and what local authorities actually fund or make available. This mismatch can create confusion and frustration: schools are held accountable for delivering provision they cannot realistically resource, while families may be left unclear about what their child is entitled to and who is responsible for securing it. This gap between local authority expectations and school-level capacity is placing additional strain on the SEN system and, ultimately, limiting the support available to children and young people with SEN. A more detailed exploration of this can be found in Chapter 9.

72. CONCLUSION

The current inconsistency in SEN support and ordinarily available provision across England is unacceptable and results in deeply inequitable experiences for children and young people with SEND. The lack of consistent good practice in SEN support, driven by insufficiently clear and specific guidance and inconsistent interpretations of ‘best endeavours’ are causing delays in identifying needs, inadequate support, and an overreliance on EHC plans. This not only undermines trust in the system but also places unnecessary strain on families. National standards must be introduced without delay to establish clear, enforceable expectations while allowing for local flexibility where appropriate.

73. CONCLUSION

Insufficient funding and resources and a mismatch between local authority responsibilities and powers negatively impacts the adequacy of ordinarily available provision and SEN support. We have heard from school leaders and SENCOs that without sufficient resources, settings are struggling to provide the high quality, consistent support necessary to achieve inclusive mainstream education.

74. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should publish a unified national framework for ordinarily available provision and SEN support. This should offer clear, evidence-led guidance and include practical, real-world examples tailored to educators and educational settings, ensuring that all practitioners have access to quality-assured strategies and interventions.

75. RECOMMENDATION

The Department should publish statutory requirements mandating the minimum resources, specialist expertise, and equipment that every educational setting must have access to as a part of their offer of SEN support and in order to deliver an inclusive education. This will establish a clear, enforceable baseline covering staffing, training, physical materials, and assistive technologies. This will also ensure that all schools and multi-academy trusts are adequately equipped to support children and young people with SEND through ordinarily available provision and SEN support, reducing the need for EHC plans.

Access to specialists

- 76.** Currently the role and availability of specialists such as educational psychologists and allied health professionals, including occupational therapists and speech and language therapists, in education settings is inconsistent. This is due to capacity issues which are explored in further detail in Chapter 7 as well as funding and resourcing. The Local Government Association and County Councils Network report, *Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England*, states that the most inclusive mainstream schools have multi-disciplinary teams, including relevant allied health professionals, based on site; however, these positions are typically funded from the schools' own resources.¹⁰¹ We also heard evidence that many schools no longer have the budget to access

101 County Councils Network and Local Government Association, [Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England](#), July 2024

educational psychologists and their expertise, leaving them, in their words “isolated and on their own in providing and funding support”.¹⁰² This is of concern because of the significant role educational psychologists can play in supporting schools in early identification and intervention; enabling children’s needs to be met without the need for an EHC plan.¹⁰³ Similarly, we received evidence suggesting the need for more speech and language therapists in schools as a form of early intervention. It is this importance of direct involvement from parts of the health workforce that led the Local Government Association and County Councils Network to identify each mainstream school having easy access to a team of multi-disciplinary specialists physically present in settings for a specified number of days a week as a “core element” of achieving a more inclusive mainstream education system.¹⁰⁴

- 77.** However, according to written evidence, financial constraints are leading many schools to apply for EHC plans in order to access the expertise they need, describing it as “impossible for schools to get advice from an educational psychologist when needed any other way”.¹⁰⁵ This is reflective of evidence we received from Contact which stated:

If the only way to get necessary provision such as speech and language therapy or support from an educational psychologist is via an EHC needs assessment, it’s unsurprising that the number of requests for assessment—followed by the issuing of EHC plans—has increased.¹⁰⁶

- 78.** However, this is furthering the capacity challenges for the workforce and undermining the availability of SEN support in schools. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists stated:

As a result of limited resources and pressure to cut waiting times, some NHS speech and language therapy services are now commissioned only to provide therapy for children with EHC plans. Many more have such limited capacity that, although in theory they offer a service to all children who need it, in practice there is little resource available for children and young people on SEN support once statutory requirements have been met.¹⁰⁷

102 Anonymous ([SEN0101](#)), Anonymous ([SEN0013](#))

103 Anonymous ([SEN0122](#)), Surrey County Council ([SEN0389](#)), Anonymous ([SEN0031](#))

104 County Councils Network and Local Government Association, [Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England](#), July 2024

105 Anonymous ([SEN0101](#))

106 Contact ([SEN0174](#))

107 Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists ([SEN0707](#))

79. This creates a cycle where the time of the specialist workers is taken up with completing assessments and paperwork at the expense of spending time in education settings working with children to deliver meaningful support and upskill teaching and support staff to deliver therapeutic interventions and support. To address this issue, Tameside Local Authority recommend that schools directly receive “significant funding” to build workforce capacity and give schools access to external expertise, such as educational psychologists without relying on EHC plans to “unlock” this resource.¹⁰⁸

Education, Health and Care Plans

80. Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC Plans) are a type of statutory support for children and young people aged up to 25 who need more support than is available through ordinarily available provision and SEN support. EHC plans describe an individual’s special educational needs, the support they need, and the outcomes they would like to achieve.¹⁰⁹ When first introduced through the Children’s and Families Act 2014, EHC plans were intended to be used only for those with the most acute SEN needs. Introducing EHC plans, the SEND code of practice 2014 states:

The majority of children and young people with SEN or disabilities will have their needs met within local mainstream early years settings, schools or colleges [...] some children and young people may require an EHC needs assessment in order for the local authority to decide whether it is necessary for it to make provision in accordance with an EHC plan.¹¹⁰

81. All the young people who gave oral evidence to our inquiry in March 2025 eventually received EHC plans, which they found beneficial. Madeline Thomas, aged 19, told us she “definitely had more support after gaining an EHC plan when I was 14, which my mother applied for; [...] the EHC plan, and then further on with a Disability Support Allowance when I got to university, has definitely been a massive help”.¹¹¹ Katie Nellist, aged 17, told us that her support “got a bit better” after her autism diagnosis and receiving an EHC plan.¹¹² Similarly, we heard from Lucy Bowerman, aged 22, that getting an EHC plan “did help things”.¹¹³

108 Tameside Local Authority ([SEN0246](#))

109 Council for Disabled Children, [What is an Education Health and Care Plan?](#) (accessed July 2025)

110 DfE and DHSC, [SEND code of practice 2014](#), June 2014

111 [Q97](#)

112 [Q100](#)

113 [Q97](#)

- 82.** As outlined in the previous section, Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans are increasingly being used to fill the gaps left by insufficient SEN support and inadequate ordinarily available provision, where parents feel that their children’s needs are not being met and applying for an ECHP is the only way to “unlock” the support they need.¹¹⁴ However, we have seen evidence that if mainstream schools embed an inclusive approach, it is not always necessary to apply for an EHC plan to meet a child’s needs. For example, during our visit to Aylsham High School in Norwich, we saw and heard how the school’s strong emphasis on high-quality ordinarily available provision, alongside effective SEN support, meant that many pupils’ needs were being met without the need for an EHC plan. The proactive and inclusive approach of the school appeared to reduce the demand for formal statutory support by ensuring early intervention and effective approaches are embedded into everyday practice.
- 83.** The Head of SEN Services at a city council told us the EHC plan process “should only be for children and young people with the greatest of needs and parents should feel confident in SEN support, not having to push for statutory [Education Health and Care Needs Assessments]”.¹¹⁵ Although some needs could be addressed through improvements in ordinarily available provision and SEN support, it is important to remember that some children and young people have needs that require the long term support and individualised intervention provided by EHC plans. Dr Peter Gray, Co-Coordinator at the SEN Policy Research Forum, told us: “we need to be improving ordinarily available provision and build on that while recognising that there are some children who have very significant needs and challenges that we need to address more substantially”.¹¹⁶
- 84.** In addition, as a statutory entitlement, EHC plans are a critical mechanism for ensuring accountability within the SEND system. They provide a legally binding framework that sets out the support a child or young person is entitled to receive, offering families a route to challenge decisions and seek redress when provision is inadequate or not delivered through mediation and the SEND Tribunal (See Chapter 4). In a system where non-statutory support such as SEN support and ordinarily available provision is often inconsistent or insufficient, EHC plans serve as a vital safeguard for those with the most complex needs.
- 85.** The total number of EHC plans has risen from 256,315 to 517,049 between 2016 and 2025, a 102 per cent increase.¹¹⁷ There is recognition across the sector that this “escalation” is an issue, putting unsustainable pressure on the SEND system, from local authority finances (explored in Chapter 8) to

114 Tameside Local Authority ([SEN0246](#))

115 Dr Deborah Lawson (Disability Advocate) ([SEN0048](#))

116 [Q201](#)

117 DfE, [Education, health and care plans: 2024](#), gov.uk, June 2024

the capacity of specialist provision (explored in Chapter 10) and workforce (explored in Chapter 7).¹¹⁸ There is a clear appetite across the sector—from parents and school leaders to local authorities—for this issue to be addressed in order to make the SEND system more sustainable in the long term. As Minister McKinnell told us, there is a “need for long-term sustainability” within the system. However, despite this pressure and desire for change, we heard from Jo Hutchinson, Director for SEND and additional needs at the Education Policy Institute that it is crucial that any reform does not “pull away lifeboats in the meantime” and take away this statutory support.¹¹⁹

- 86.** In addition to the increase in volume of Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments, the waiting time for issuing EHC plans has also increased in recent years. In 2024, 46.4 per cent of new EHC plans were issued within the twenty-week statutory timeframe. This is lower than in 2023, when this figure was 50.3 per cent. Previously, between 2018–21, this was around 60 per cent.¹²⁰ We received a substantial amount of evidence referencing waiting months and sometimes years for diagnosis and EHC plans.¹²¹ EHC plan delays are in part due to increased waiting times to see specialists such as speech and language therapists or educational psychologists. We heard about various factors contributing to extended waiting times, such as staff shortages and local authorities “considerably” reducing their Educational Psychology services in addition to “chaotic commissioning practices”.¹²²

118 [Q86](#)

119 [Q209](#)

120 DfE, [Education, health and care plans](#), gov.uk, June 2025

121 DfE, [Education, health and care plans](#), gov.uk, June 2025

122 [Q123](#)

Box 3: Models of disability

Over the past few decades, a number of different understandings of development and disability have emerged:

- The medical model, which focuses on the individual’s impairment as the source of the problem;
- The social model, which views the source of difficulty as lying within the environment, not the individual; and
- The biopsychosocial model, which adopts a systemic view of development and of needs and strengths, recognising that disability arises from restrictions in everyday life participation—defined as involvement in everyday life activities.

Source: ScopeSEND¹²³

- 87.** In England, entitlement to an EHC plan is not, in law, determined by a medical diagnosis. However, throughout the inquiry we heard that in practice access is often treated as dependent on a formal diagnosis. By contrast, during our visit to Toronto, Ontario, we observed a system where entitlement to an Individual Education Plan (equivalent to an EHC plan) is explicitly based on an individual pupil’s needs rather than on a medical diagnosis, both in guidance and, crucially, in practice.¹²⁴ For example, Individual Education Plans are developed regardless of whether a student has been formally diagnosed or identified as “exceptional pupils” by an identification, placement and review committee.¹²⁵ Individual Education Plans are also available to students who have not been formally identified as exceptional, but who require a special education programme or services to attend school, achieve curriculum expectations or demonstrate learning. This contrasts with experiences we heard about from families seeking to access an EHC plan, where the lack of a formal diagnosis was often a barrier to this support.
- 88.** The ScopeSEND project found that within countries with broader, needs-based definitions of SEND—aligned with biopsychosocial rather than medicalised models—parents tend to have more positive views of policy implementation.¹²⁶ In contrast, England’s approach reflects a mix of medical and biopsychosocial models, combining reliance on formal diagnosis with

123 Scope SEND, [An international analysis of SEND policy and practice: ScopeSEND](#), June 2025

124 Government of Ontario, [Individual Education Plan](#), Ontario.ca (accessed March 2025)

125 Government of Ontario, [Identifying students with special education needs](#), Ontario.ca (accessed March 2025)

126 Nuffield Foundation, [An international analysis of SEND policy and practice: ScopeSEND](#), February 2025

elements of individual needs and participation-based support. Dr Susana Castro-Kemp, Associate Professor at the Institute of Education, Psychology & Human Development and lead researcher of ScopeSEND, told us that although a diagnosis isn't legally required for support, in practice it is seen as a de facto gateway or "passport" to access services, largely due to weak guidance, limited training, and poor systems for assessing need.¹²⁷

89. Furthermore, the Children's Commissioner for England indicates that in practice the approach taken in England is more medical-based with lack of a diagnosis sometimes being a barrier to support and adaptations.¹²⁸ Across the evidence, we heard that waiting to receive a formal diagnosis can have a "devastating impact on children and families", exacerbating existing need, blocking support and delaying referrals to other professionals.¹²⁹
90. Our evidence consistently highlighted that even when EHC plans are issued, they are not always fully implemented, often due to resource and capacity shortages and insufficient training on delivering inclusive practice. Sarah Cobb, a 20-year-old with SEND who spoke directly to us in Spring 2025, told us:

when I started secondary school that support all started to fall apart. Yes, I still had the EHC plan, but there was not enough support for me. It turned out being things like the staff not giving me a TA in PE or my predicted grade happened to be lowered because I was not getting the right support.¹³⁰

91. The Local Government Association and County Councils Network commissioned report, *Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England*, published in 2024, highlights the role financial and resource limitations play in the poor implementation of EHC plans despite them being a statutory obligation.¹³¹ For example, even when a specific setting is named or an educational psychology assessment is requested within a EHC plan, places or appointments may not be available. We were told by Kate Foale, Spokesperson for SEND at the County Councils Network, that local authorities often do not have the "levers, the capital or the money to put [EHC plans] into practice".¹³² This raises significant concern

127 [Q198](#)

128 Children's Commissioner for England, [Experiences of children with SEND](#), October 2023

129 Kids, [Delivering cost-effective support to tackle SEND waiting lists and reduce the mounting - and costly - crisis in provision for disabled children and their families](#), October 2024

130 [Q97](#)

131 County Councils Network and Local Government Association, [Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England](#), July 2024

132 [Q66](#)

because it means that in some cases local authorities lack the resources and power to offer the SEND provision to which a child or young person is legally entitled and which it is the local authority's legal duty to deliver.

92. CONCLUSION

Current levels of EHC plans are unsustainable; however, the solution to this cannot be to remove the statutory entitlements from a system which lacks accountability in many other areas and in which parents already have so little trust and confidence. We have heard throughout our inquiry from parents, schools, and the Department for Education that the increased need for EHC plans is due to support not being provided through ordinarily available provision and SEN support, leading to a lack of trust from parents. We have also seen that for many children and young people with less complex needs, high quality support can be provided without a plan. While some pupils will always need an EHC plan, evidence indicates that mainstream schools and multi-academy trusts practising real inclusivity generate fewer EHC plans, as they meet more students' needs effectively without them.

93. RECOMMENDATION

Support should be provided as soon as a need is identified, rather than only once an EHC plan is in place. This would bring England in line with good practice found internationally, for example in Ontario, Canada, where entitlement is based on need rather than lengthy assessment processes. Such a change would prevent the current situation in which many children receive little or no effective support while waiting for an EHC plan and would ensure timely intervention that can improve outcomes and reduce escalation of need. The Department's SEND reforms must not be based on any withdrawal of statutory entitlements for children and young people with SEND. The Department must instead set out plans for reform which increase accountability across the whole of the SEND system, so that many more parents and carers can be confident that their children's needs will be met regardless of whether they have a diagnosis or EHC plan.

94.

RECOMMENDATION

Where EHC plans are issued, they carry a statutory duty which must be delivered in full. To make this a reality, the Department for Education should strengthen the ability of local authorities to meet these obligations by ensuring that the necessary levers are in place to compel other services, for example, NHS services, and commissioners such as local Integrated Healthcare Boards (ICBs). This must include coordinated action with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to address wider pressures on local authority budgets and capacity, so that councils are properly equipped to deliver the provision set out in every EHC plan.

4 Restoring parent trust and confidence

95. At present, there is very little trust and confidence in the SEND system among parents and carers of children and young people with SEND. Many feel let down by inconsistent support, delays, and unfulfilled promises. If the Government's plans for SEND reform are to succeed, this trust must be rebuilt. Parents and carers need to feel confident that the changes will genuinely benefit their children. This chapter explores how parental involvement and engagement can be strengthened, drawing on international and domestic examples of good practice. It then considers how school accountability can be made more robust. Next, it examines local authority accountability, and the changes required to ensure greater transparency and responsiveness. Finally, it looks at the accountability of health services and how these can be improved to work more effectively for children and young people with SEND.

Parental involvement

96. Parents and carers lack trust and confidence in the SEND system. Across the evidence we heard from parents and carers of children and young people with SEND about adverse experiences engaging and interacting with schools, local authorities and other professionals in the SEND system.¹³³ A parent of an autistic 11 year old described feeling a “deep mistrust in the system” due to her own experiences and the experiences of others, including services misrepresenting the level of support being provided.¹³⁴ Jo Harrison, Director and Co-Chair at National Network of Parent Carer Forums, told us that “many parents and carers feel unheard, often blamed, quite often shamed, when they are advocating their child’s and young person’s needs.”¹³⁵ Another parent told us:

133 Mrs Melanie Fernandez ([SEN0037](#))

134 Miss Claudine Allen ([SEN0304](#))

135 [Q34](#)

The overall treatment of SEND families by local authorities is appalling. Families are left feeling abandoned, disrespected, and forced to fight every step of the way to secure what their children are legally entitled to... the current system exacerbates the struggles faced by SEND families rather than supporting them.¹³⁶

- 97.** We heard that this results in distrust, frustration and makes the system adversarial where such processes should instead be non-adversarial, transparent, and supportive.¹³⁷ This was echoed by then Minister McKinnell, who told us: “[w]e desperately need to move away from this adversarial system where parents feel they need to fight for every bit of their child’s education and for their child to get the education they deserve”.¹³⁸
- 98.** The evidence consistently highlighted the importance of parents feeling comfortable and empowered to engage meaningfully with the SEND system and the process of accessing SEND support. However, it is clear that this is not the reality for many families. Agnes Agyepong, CEO and founder of Global Black Maternal Health, told us “parents need to feel safe, we need to be able to feel safe to be able to participate in this process, and oftentimes parents don’t”.¹³⁹ On our visit in June 2025 to Aylsham High School in Norwich, we observed that meaningful and empathetic engagement with, and support for, parents of children with SEND is both achievable and effective. We heard how the school establishes regular contact with parents even before admission, helping to build relationships and trust, and giving parents confidence that their child’s needs can be met without requiring a specialist placement. One parent described Aylsham High School as “the shining light at the end of a very long dark tunnel”.¹⁴⁰
- 99.** On our visit to Ontario, Canada, we saw a system where parents are kept informed and involved in such processes. The identification, placement and review committee (IPRC), which decides whether a student should be identified as ‘exceptional’, what any ‘exceptionality’ is and the appropriate placement for the student, must notify the parent or guardian when their child is being discussed. Additionally, parents and students who are 16 years of age or older have the right to:
- Be present at and participate in all committee discussions about the student;
 - Be present when the committee’s identification and placement decision is made; and

136 Mrs Charlotte Plant ([SEN0038](#))

137 Dr Deborah Lawson (Disability Advocate) ([SEN0048](#)), [Q14](#)

138 [Q235](#)

139 [Q34](#)

140 Corrine Bruce ([SEN0893](#))

- Be provided with relevant documentation including information about the child received by the IPRC chair such as assessment results.¹⁴¹

100. This represents a more collaborative and transparent approach than in England. School leaders in Ontario told us that this model fosters constructive relationships between schools and parents, avoiding the adversarial dynamic often reported in the English system. They emphasised the importance of engaging parents early in the process, noting that clear, honest communication from the outset helps to ensure understanding, build trust and manage expectations. Teachers and school leaders also highlighted that early conversations include open discussions about resource limitations and the types of support realistically available, ensuring that families are informed and involved partners in the decision-making process. Such openness would undoubtedly be beneficial in England at the local authority level. Amanda Allard, Director of the Council for Disabled Children, told us:

The local authorities that manage to be less adversarial have a really good relationship with the parents, an open-door policy and a real understanding. It can be incredibly difficult when money is tight, and a natural reaction can be to defend and guard that pot. Opening up and having pragmatic but realistic discussions about what we can achieve with what we have works a lot better in local areas.¹⁴²

101. CONCLUSION

Parents and carers of children and young people with SEND often feel excluded from the processes that affect their children’s education and support. However, meaningful and collaborative parental involvement is essential to the success of the SEND system. When parents and carers are actively engaged in the planning, decision-making, and delivery of support, both satisfaction and outcomes improve significantly. Engagement fosters greater trust, transparency, and confidence in the system, and helps build constructive, collaborative relationships between families, professionals, support and advice services including SENDIASS. Ensuring parents and carers are treated as equal partners in any process must be a fundamental feature of any reformed SEND system.

141 Government of Ontario, [Identifying students with special education needs](#), Ontario.ca (accessed March 2025)

142 [Q18](#)

102. RECOMMENDATION

Parents and carers must be actively and meaningfully involved in all processes that affect their child’s education, support, and overall wellbeing. This includes being fully informed and invited to participate in all relevant meetings where decisions about their child’s needs or provision are being discussed at the school and local authority level. Families should have access to independent advocacy to enable and strengthen their engagement in the process. Parental insights and lived experience are invaluable in shaping effective and appropriate support. Embedding parental involvement as a standard part of decision-making not only enhances transparency and trust but also leads to better-informed, more tailored outcomes for children and young people with SEND. Local authorities must actively engage and be properly equipped to support and respond to parental engagement in a positive way. This requires dedicated resourcing and ongoing training to ensure staff have the skills, capacity and confidence to work effectively with families, build trust, and act on their concerns in a timely and constructive way. These changes would need to be subject to a New Burdens Assessment to ensure that local authorities had the resources to support better parent and carer engagement.

Future reforms

- 103.** Given the deep-rooted lack of trust and confidence among parents and carers of children and young people with SEND, it is essential that any future reforms are developed and implemented with transparency, collaboration, and a strong focus on rebuilding relationships with families. Minister McKinnell acknowledged this, telling us: “consultation is key to not only getting it right, which is our No. 1 priority, but also to rebuilding that trust and confidence”.¹⁴³ During the course of our inquiry, numerous media reports have speculated on government proposals to reform the SEND system. These reports have generated considerable concern and anxiety among parents, professionals, and organisations across the sector, prompting the launch of the Save Our Children’s Rights campaign and the publication of a joint letter on retaining the right to an education, health and care plan.¹⁴⁴ Both express concern that the proposed reforms could remove crucial elements of support and lead to poorer outcomes, ultimately undermining the Department for Education’s aim of achieving inclusive mainstream education.

143 [Q247](#)

144 [Save Our Children’s Rights](#) (accessed July 2025), Guardian, [The right to an education, health and care plan must be retained](#), 6 July 2025

104. In March 2025, we wrote to then Minister McKinnell to seek clarity on the nature of these changes and to insist that any future reforms are communicated transparently and developed in consultation with those directly affected.¹⁴⁵ In response the Minister wrote to us saying:

You reference timings for any government announcement and note the article in The Guardian about plans to reform the SEND system. I can assure the committee that the article in question was speculative and we do not comment on such speculation.

Putting right the support for children with special educational needs will take time, and it is important that we listen to children and young people, parents, teachers and those who work within the system.¹⁴⁶

105. In June 2025, the Department announced that a White Paper outlining future SEND reforms would be published in Autumn 2025. In July 2025 we asked the Minister what plans the Department had for engaging with parents and carers in advance of the White Paper. The Minister was unable to provide specific detail; however, she told us:

engagement is important for us, not only because we want to hear about current experiences, but because we want to make sure that any changes that we make build that confidence of parents, of families, of stakeholders. That is a real priority for us.

She confirmed that there would be a period of consultation with stakeholders after the publication of the White Paper.¹⁴⁷

106. We also asked Minister McKinnell whether changes announced in the White Paper due Autumn 2025 would result in the removal of existing SEND support. Minister McKinnell told us:

I want to be really clear from the outset that we will not be removing any existing effective support. We want to identify where there is good practice in the system, where we are seeing the delivery of consistent high-quality provision that is helping young people to thrive in a timely and effective way as they move into adult life. That is what we want to build on and expand across the system.¹⁴⁸

145 Letter from Chair to Catherine McKinnell MP, then Minister of State for School Standards, on Government SEND Policy, [11 March 2025](#)

146 Letter from Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing to Chair, [13 October 2023](#)

147 [Q246](#)

148 [Q231](#)

107. CONCLUSION

Children and young people with SEND, and their families, have little trust and confidence in the SEND system, often shaped by adverse experiences. Inadequate communication and engagement from the Department with parents and carers and their organisations about future reforms, as well as media speculation, has further undermined parental trust in the Department for Education and in the future SEND system. It is wholly unacceptable that families already under considerable pressure should face additional anxiety and disruption. While there is widespread recognition among parents and carers that reform is necessary, there remains deep concern about the form these changes will take and whether they will lead to meaningful and lasting improvements.

108. RECOMMENDATION

To avoid causing undue alarm and to help rebuild confidence and trust in the system, parents and carers must be fully engaged and any reforms must be implemented gradually and in a carefully phased manner. New approaches should first be piloted through a pathfinder model, allowing for thorough testing in real-world settings before national rollout. This will provide an opportunity to identify potential challenges, address inefficiencies, consult with parents' and carers' groups and make necessary adjustments to ensure reforms are effective, practical, and responsive to the needs of children, young people, and their families. At all times, the Department for Education must have an effective communication strategy, regularly setting out the clear vision for change, and providing reassurance to all affected agencies and individuals that planned reforms are fully planned, coordinated, and funded.

School accountability

- 109.** Throughout our evidence the accountability of schools and other education settings has been highlighted as crucial to the success of SEND inclusivity.¹⁴⁹ However, the Public Accounts Committee concluded in their Support for children and young people with special educational needs report that there are currently “few incentives for schools to be inclusive” within the current accountability framework.¹⁵⁰ Achieving the Government’s agenda for inclusive mainstream education will require significant improvements in this area. The need to improve accountability is acknowledged by the

149 Dingley’s Promise ([SEN0334](#))

150 Public Accounts Committee, First Report of Session 2024–25, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), pg4, HC 353

Department for Education, who stated in their evidence to us that they intend to “strengthen accountability to ensure that mainstream schools are as inclusive as possible”.¹⁵¹

Ofsted

- 110.** Currently Ofsted considers SEND provision within mainstream school inspections; however, our evidence raises concerns that the provision of support for children with SEND in mainstream schools does not receive enough attention or scrutiny by Ofsted. In September 2024, Ofsted announced that as a part of its wider reform of the inspection framework, ‘inclusion’ would be introduced as a new criterion for inspection.¹⁵² These reforms are expected to be gradually introduced from November 2025.¹⁵³
- 111.** During the inquiry we received evidence that the current Ofsted accountability framework encourages “exclusionary practices to maintain academic performance” or “skew educational performance metrics”.¹⁵⁴ The evidence refers to exclusionary admissions practices, off-rolling of children with SEND, not prioritising funding and resources for SEND, inappropriate use of part-time timetables and the disproportionate use of exclusion in mainstream schools.¹⁵⁵ When questioned about this, Adam Sproston, Senior Inspector for SEND and Alternative Provision at Ofsted, told us that Ofsted has “long been committed to tackling off-rolling and any other exclusionary practices such as gaming, for example, where something is done not in the best interests of the child”.¹⁵⁶ However, it is evident from the available evidence that despite these efforts, significant further action is required.
- 112.** Evidence also highlighted the need for Ofsted inspections to place a stronger focus on how educational settings support children with SEND.¹⁵⁷ Ofsted reported a similar sentiment from those who engaged with its consultation, The Big Listen.¹⁵⁸ Respondents to this consultation felt that “inspections should pay closer attention to how schools support pupils with SEND, and whether they meet their needs and ensure that they make progress” and that “schools should be commended for inclusivity and for

151 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

152 Schools Week, [‘Inclusion’ a key ‘criterion’ for new Ofsted report cards](#), September 2024

153 Times Educational Supplement, [Ofsted set to stagger full inspection launch in November](#), July 2025

154 Dr Deborah Lawson (Disability Advocate) ([SEN0048](#))

155 Ms S White ([SEN0023](#)), [Q180-182](#)

156 [Q180-2](#) [Adam Sproston, Sharon Chappell, Georgina Downard]

157 Thematic summary of evidence submitted by parents and carers ([SEN0894](#))

158 Ofsted, [The Big Listen](#), 2024

measuring the progress of children with SEND based on their individual starting points, rather than solely on their academic outcomes”.¹⁵⁹ Adam Sproston told us:

We [Ofsted] work to find out about children’s starting points, talk to leaders about that and what is being put in place for the support and guidance for the child. Again, if there is something that is different from mainstream peers, our inspectors will seek to explore why that decision has been made and what the end point proposed for the child is.¹⁶⁰

113. We heard from Katie Ghose, CEO of Kids, about the opportunity Ofsted’s new inclusion criterion provides to

have a much more expansive vision of what ‘good’ looks like. It is not just the academic standards, and the qualifications met, but it is a wonderful rounded, inclusive education.¹⁶¹

In February 2025 Ofsted launched a consultation on education which outlined Ofsted’s working definition of inclusion. This definition outlines various expectations for inclusive education settings such as:

- providers placing every child and learner at the centre of their work, setting high expectations and prioritising support for those with the greatest needs, including those with SEND;
- leaders promoting a clear, ambitious vision for inclusion, creating a culture of belonging and ensuring access to high-quality education; and
- settings working closely with parents, carers, and external agencies to achieve the best outcomes, and are committed to identifying and removing barriers to learning so all children can succeed.¹⁶²

114. Though we welcome the publication of this definition, we are also aware of some criticism within the sector that the new definition and framework risk holding schools accountable for failures beyond their control. For example, leaders are expected to ensure effective support for pupils with SEND, including from external specialists; this expectation often overlooks

159 Ofsted, [Findings of Ofsted’s Big Listen public consultation](#), March 2024; Ofsted, [Hearing feedback, accepting criticism and building a better Ofsted: the response to the Big Listen](#), September 2024

160 [Q187](#)

161 [Q22](#)

162 Ofsted, [Improving the way Ofsted inspects education: consultation document](#), June 2025

the limited availability of such services. Delays and capacity issues in local authority and NHS provision frequently prevent schools from accessing the necessary support.¹⁶³

- 115.** Minister McKinnell suggested to us that the introduction of this inclusion criterion will introduce incentives for schools to be more inclusive, telling us:

A core part of its inspection framework will be inclusivity and the provision of inclusive mainstream education within the school system. Therefore, schools will want to make sure that they have the best training and the best support available for their workforce to deliver on that, to deliver on the outcomes for the children that we all want to see and that will be inspected as part of the Ofsted process.¹⁶⁴

- 116.** However, we heard that unless Ofsted adopts a more comprehensive approach to inclusion, its new criteria will struggle to effectively incentivise inclusive mainstream education. We were told that this new criterion should consider “how well schools meet the diverse needs of their students, how staff are trained, and how resources are allocated to support SEND learners”.¹⁶⁵ For example, this could include whether schools are effectively implementing pupils’ EHC plans and providing effective SEN support, the prioritisation of funding and resources to SEND and whether schools are adapting teaching and learning to suit the capabilities of pupils with SEND.¹⁶⁶ Nasen told us that “by broadening the scope of what’s measured, schools can gain a more comprehensive understanding of their impact on learners with SEND” and about the importance of “looking beyond traditional metrics to assess and evaluate inclusion”.¹⁶⁷ For example, this could include looking at data such as attendance patterns, the proportion of children with SEND compared to other schools in the local area, levels of co-production and tracking outcomes beyond the school environment to assess how well learners are being prepared for adulthood. Katie Ghose, CEO of Kids, also told us about the importance of measuring “negative data” such as the level of exclusion of children with SEND from that school as well as “positive data” such as equal and adapted access to PE and sport support for children with SEND in the school.¹⁶⁸ We heard from Ofsted that inspectors have “robust evidence, pre-inspection information that comes

163 Special Needs Jungle, [How will Ofsted’s inspection overhaul affect children with SEND? And why you need to respond to the consultation](#), February 2025

164 [Q252](#)

165 Ms Rhianedd Hughes (Head of SEN Statutory Service at Brighton and Hove City Council) ([SEN0043](#))

166 Justify Foundation ([SEN0068](#)), Mr David Robinson (Architect at Robinson+ limited) ([SEN0059](#)), Dr Neil Alexander-Passe (Former SENDCO, Now Exam Access Assessor. Researcher and author at City and Islington College) ([SEN0069](#))

167 Nasen ([SEN0809](#))

168 [Q22](#)

through, that can lead to some lines of inquiry” on attendance, exclusions and off-rolling. Adam Sproston, senior inspector for SEND and Alternative Provision at Ofsted, further expanded:

We do have colleagues in our data and insights team who identify any possible patterns in pupils’ attendance that may alert inspectors to possible off-rolling or concerns with attendance at the school, we will always explore those with leaders on the ground. In the handbook, we are ultimately committed that if we find exclusionary practices, off-rolling or gaming for whatever reason, there will be consequences to the school.¹⁶⁹

- 117.** Let Us Learn Too, a campaign group of parents and carers of disabled children, told us that schools and inspections “need to [have] greater focus on grade progression rather than just the amount of ‘top’ grades” and that “greater weighting” should be given to SEND in Ofsted inspections.¹⁷⁰ For example, this might include examining the internal process by which pupils are assessed for additional support talking to parents of children with SEND at schools to understand their experiences and assessing samples of EHC plans to see whether provision is met.

118. CONCLUSION

We have heard that accountability pressures relating to narrower measures of attainment and behaviour may incentivise schools and multi-academy trusts to adopt non-inclusive practices in order to meet narrow performance metrics. The introduction of the new Ofsted inspection framework presents a valuable opportunity to shift this dynamic. By placing greater emphasis on inclusion and the experiences and progression of all learners, the framework has the potential to ensure that schools and multi-academy trusts are more meaningfully held to account for the inclusivity and accessibility of the education they deliver, thereby promoting a more equitable and supportive environment for every student.

169 [Q180](#)

170 Let Us learn Too ([SEN0130](#))

119. RECOMMENDATION

The Department must urgently engage with Ofsted to ensure that the inclusion criterion within the new inspection framework is robust, measurable, and reflective of the experiences of all pupils, particularly, those with SEND. This should include incorporating metrics such as the proportion of pupils with SEND on roll, their attendance rates, exclusion figures, school swaps, progression and attainment and other indicators of engagement and outcomes, to provide a clearer picture of how effectively schools and multi-academy trusts are supporting these learners. It is important that the new framework does not disadvantage schools with high levels of SEND pupils, particularly in disadvantaged areas, by contextualising quantitative indicators with qualitative evidence, recognising systemic barriers, and balancing accountability with constructive support to avoid disproportionate pressure on teachers' workloads.

120. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should introduce mandatory, comprehensive SEND training for all Ofsted inspectors. The success of the new framework depends on inspectors having a deep understanding of SEND, including how to identify, assess, and evaluate inclusive practice. Without this expertise, there is a significant risk that inspections will be inconsistent, fail to identify gaps in provision, and ultimately undermine the objectives of the framework.

121. We heard consistently during our inquiry about the need to strengthen opportunities for parental engagement in the Ofsted inspection process. Witnesses emphasised that parents and carers should have a more meaningful role in providing feedback and shaping how inspections reflect the lived experiences of families. Hayley Harding, founder of Let Us Learn Too, stressed that Ofsted must prioritise parental voices, as parents of children with SEND offer a critical perspective and first-hand insight into both the inclusivity of educational settings and the effectiveness of SEND provision, telling us:

Parents are living it; that is what is forgotten about. We live it, we breathe it, we reap the consequences when things go wrong... the reality is we actually know the results, so we really need Ofsted to listen to us and rate that as high, if not higher than any other factors in their decision-making.¹⁷¹

122. RECOMMENDATION

Area SEND inspections should engage with parents across the locality to gather the perspective of parents of children with SEND on the admissions policies and inclusive practices of local authorities, schools and multi-academy trusts in the area.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

- 123.** When parents or carers wish to challenge or complain about a school or local authority’s decision making about SEND, another route for accountability is the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), the statutory and independent body for complaints about councils in England which addresses claims of “maladministration leading to injustice” and can be used challenge a local authority and some school decision without going to court.¹⁷² In 2024, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman identified SEND as a priority, reporting that their casework had become “dominated” by complaints about SEND and the actions of schools or local authorities, including failure of councils to carry out EHC plan assessments and reviews in a timely manner, and failure to provide the support stated in an EHC plan once a child has one.¹⁷³ These complaints made up 26 per cent of all complaints received by the Ombudsman in 2023–24 and were 42 per cent of all the cases the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman upheld. In the area of SEND the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman found fault in 92 per cent of the cases investigated and this number is “increasing rapidly”.¹⁷⁴
- 124.** At present, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is able to investigate complaints about some aspects of the education system, such as admissions appeals and exclusions for local authority-maintained schools. However, we heard that the exclusion of academies and free schools from this scrutiny creates a “complex landscape where different people have access to different levels of redress depending on which school their child attends or have no access to redress at all”. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman told us this is “neither logical nor is it fair”.¹⁷⁵ SOS! SEN, a charity supporting parents and carers of children and young people with SEND, recommended that the remit of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman be expanded to include

172 LGSCO ([SEN0576](#))

173 LGSCO, Press Notice, “[Ombudsman highlights priorities to improve public services over next three years](#)”, November 2024

174 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, [Local government and social care in 2024 and beyond: time to rebuild](#), pg 7, November 2024

175 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, [Local government and social care in 2024 and beyond: time to rebuild](#), pg 7, November 2024

academies and free schools, in addition to maintained schools.¹⁷⁶ Further, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) powers do not extend to investigating how a school implements EHC plans or SEN Support. This presents a significant gap in accountability, particularly for children and young people who do not meet the threshold for an EHC plan but would nonetheless benefit from the additional support that schools are legally required to provide under SEN Support. As highlighted by the Independent Provider of Special Education Advice (IPSEA), without access to the LGSCO as a route of redress, these pupils and their families are left with few options to challenge inadequate provision, leaving unmet needs unaddressed and undermining trust in the system.¹⁷⁷ Our conclusions in Chapter 3 regarding the inconsistency in the delivery of SEN Support and EHC plan provision highlight the critical need for a clear and accessible route of redress. Ensuring accountability is essential—particularly if the Department for Education is serious about restoring trust and confidence in these fundamental elements of the SEND system. Without this, families may continue to feel unsupported and lose faith in the system’s ability to meet their children’s needs. In order to strengthen accountability within the SEND system and improve services for children and young people with SEND, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) has repeatedly called for increased powers to:

- investigate the way Education, Health and Care Plans are implemented in schools;
- investigate cases where children and young people with additional needs are admitted to or excluded from schools; and
- investigate issues with the support children and young people with SEND are offered in the school setting.¹⁷⁸

125. Recognising the vital role that strengthened SEND accountability could play in alleviating wider pressures on the system, the LGSCO wrote in their Triennial Review 2021–2024:

The legal protection afforded by a plan, and the lack of accountability and redress for those children and young people who fall below the threshold for a plan, makes it more likely parents and carers will ask for assessments and challenge any refusal. We could help

176 SOS Special Educational Needs ([SEN0834](#))

177 IPSEA (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice) ([SEN0678](#))

178 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, [Local government and social care in 2024 and beyond: time to rebuild](#) Triennial Review, November 2024

address that pressure if we were given the ability to hold schools and academies to account when they fail to meet the needs of those children with SEND, but without an EHC plan.¹⁷⁹

126. This call has been repeated across evidence submitted to our inquiry.¹⁸⁰ Georgina Downard, senior solicitor at IPSEA, told us “we believe that the ombudsman’s jurisdiction should be extended, and its ability to strengthen accountability would be further strengthened by SEN support being made statutory”.¹⁸¹ The Department for Education told us that it will review and consider the Ombudsman’s call for further powers as it reforms the SEND system.¹⁸²

127. CONCLUSION

We have heard about significant variability in the provision of SEN support and inconsistencies in the implementation of EHC plans across education settings. The limitations of the Local Government Ombudsman’s powers mean there is insufficient accountability for the delivery of SEND support, as well as other aspects of school-based provision. This has led to repeated failures to meet children’s needs. This is a serious and unacceptable accountability gap that must be closed if inclusive mainstream education is to be a reality.

128. RECOMMENDATION

The Government must extend the powers of the Local Government Ombudsman to cover complaints about the delivery of EHC plans, SEN support and other appropriate inclusive education for children with SEND in schools, multi-academy trusts and other education settings. This would strengthen accountability, provide families with a clearer route to redress, and help ensure that statutory responsibilities are met consistently across the system. Without this change, serious shortcomings in support will continue to go unaddressed.

179 Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman, [Review, Refresh, Renew Triennial Review of Local Government and Social Care Complaints and Public Accountability Arrangements](#), pg 16, December 2021

180 SOS Special Educational Needs ([SEN0834](#))

181 [Q183](#)

182 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

129.

RECOMMENDATION

To ensure accountability for inclusive practice, SEND expertise should be embedded within schools and multi-academy trust (MAT) governance structures, for example, by making it mandatory to appoint governors or trustees with specific responsibility for and relevant expertise (including lived experience) of SEND as we saw in Ontario. Without this, inclusive education risks being sidelined at the strategic level, and outcomes for pupils with SEND will continue to be deprioritised.

Local authority accountability

130. Local authorities play a central role in the delivery of SEND support. Under the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND code of practice, local authorities are required to ensure that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) receive the support they need by:

- identifying and assessing special educational needs and disabilities for children and young people in their area by deciding whether to carry out an Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment if requested;
- commissioning and providing support to children and young people if an EHC plan is issued; and
- publishing a Local Offer to inform families about the services and support for SEND available in their area.

131. These responsibilities make it essential that robust and effective accountability systems are in place. However, lack of local authority accountability has been highlighted as a concern across the sector. Evidence from the Independent Provider of Special Education Advice (IPSEA), one of the leading charities in the field of SEND law, states that the current legal framework for SEND is clear about what children and young people are entitled to and where responsibility lies. However, in their view local authorities frequently “exercise a level of discretion in their local policies and decision-making that the law does not permit”, resulting in children and young people’s rights not being upheld and SEND support and provision being inadequate.¹⁸³

132. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman raised the following concerns about local authorities’ provision of SEND:

183 IPSEA (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice) ([SEN0678](#))

- the repeated failure of local councils to complete EHC plan assessments and reviews within the required timeframes; and
- the frequent failure to deliver the support and provision set out in a child’s EHC plan once it has been issued.¹⁸⁴

133. Much of our evidence referenced these issues. Katie Ghose, CEO at Kids, a charity that supports disabled children and young people, told us: “[t]he system is so deeply letting down families and young people, and so many of the behaviours are just delay, delay, delay and very adversarial”¹⁸⁵

134. In such cases the LGSCO aims to “get people back in the position they would have been in, had the fault not occurred”; however, Sharon Chappell, Assistant Ombudsman at Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman acknowledged that the LGSCO “simply cannot do that for a child or young person who either has been out of school for an extended period or has not had the provision that they are entitled to for an extended period.”¹⁸⁶ This underscores the critical importance of ensuring that the processes and decisions made by local authorities are correct and timely from the outset.

SEND Tribunal

135. Parents and carers can appeal to the SEND Tribunal if they are unhappy with a decision made by a local authority related to an EHC plan, for example:

- a decision to not conduct an EHC needs assessment;
- a decision not to issue an EHC plan after an assessment; and
- the description of the child’s needs, special educational provision listed, or the education setting named (or not named) in an EHC plan.

136. The success rate of parents in these tribunals is extremely high. Out of the 11,000 cases decided by the Tribunal in 2023-24, parents were successful and had their appeals fully or partially upheld in 95 per cent of cases, highlighting that frequency at which local authorities are making decisions on SEND that are either partially or wholly non-compliant with the law.¹⁸⁷ Such a trend suggests systemic issues in initial decision-making processes, leading to costly legal battles that authorities frequently lose. In 2021–22, local authorities collectively spent over £46 million defending SEND Tribunal appeals, while the Department for Education incurred more than £13 million

184 [LGSCO \(SEN0576\)](#)

185 [Q18](#)

186 [Q159](#)

187 Education Law Advice, Press Notice, [SEND tribunal statistics](#), January 2025

in court costs to facilitate these tribunals.¹⁸⁸ These figures highlight that a significant amount of public funds are allocated to legal disputes rather than the direct provision of SEND support. Georgina Downard of IPSEA told us:

We need a zero-tolerance approach to authorities not complying with their legal duties to children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and by that, I mean not complying with the existing legal framework. Local authorities should be expected to make lawful decisions about these children, and they should be sanctioned if they don't. At the moment we see the same authorities making the same unlawful decisions on repeat and they can effectively put off revisiting that until a tribunal hearing many months down the line.¹⁸⁹

- 137.** Our evidence shows clear frustration amongst parents and carers of children and young people at being drawn into lengthy and complex processes in order to secure the support to which they are legally entitled. For example, Parent Carers Together, a group of parents and carers of disabled children based in Bournemouth, told us: “parents have expressed frustration over the lack of accountability in ensuring Education, Health & Care Plans are followed”.¹⁹⁰ Similarly, Georgina Downard, senior solicitor at IPSEA, who provides parents and carers with independent advice on SEND law, told us:

The onus should not be on parents to fight for what their child needs and what they are entitled to and go through the lengthy appeals referred to. It would not be if local authorities were adequately resourced and if they made decisions in line with the law the first time around. It should not be accepted that they do not.¹⁹¹

- 138.** The Department for Education appears to understand and want to change this, with then Minister McKinnell telling us that she recognised that this process can be “incredibly time consuming and incredibly stressful” and saying “we want that to change ... We want that to end”.¹⁹² Across the evidence there was consensus that the SEND Tribunal should only be used as the “very last resort”.¹⁹³ IPSEA says that the “key” to resolving the SEND crisis and reducing the use of the SEND Tribunal lies in finding a way to ensure that local authorities comply with the existing law and fulfil their duties to children and young people. They raise concerns that reducing the

188 Pro Bono Economics, Press Notice, “[Wasting money, wasting potential: The cost of SEND tribunals](#)”, April 2024; Schools Week, [SEND tribunal costs spiral to £13m](#), October 2024

189 [Q154](#)

190 Parent Carers Together ([SEN0249](#))

191 [Q154](#)

192 [Q242](#)

193 Stuart Marpole ([SEN0291](#))

legal duties of local authorities would reduce the availability of support for children and young people with SEND but not their need for support.¹⁹⁴ Alison Stewart, Head of SEND at the South West London ICB, told us:

we cannot manage this only thinking about the tribunal response. The initial point has to be the development of the education and healthcare plan, do we have good enough advice from our health services around the table at the beginning in order to inform the development of a plan?¹⁹⁵

139. Along similar lines, Marie Gascoigne, consultant at Better Communications CIC, told us:

We have to prevent people needing to go to tribunal, through giving confidence and giving a good service further upstream [because] a tribunal should be a last resort. That is what it was there for originally and now it is being quite a norm, which is clearly not helpful.¹⁹⁶

140. Despite this, there has been an increase in the number of appeals going to the SEND Tribunal. In the 2023/24 academic year, the number of registered SEND Tribunal cases reached a high of 21,000, a 55 per cent increase from the previous year. Of these appeals:

- 59 per cent were in relation to the contents of an EHC plan;
- 27 per cent were in relation to the Local Authority’s refusal to secure an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA); and
- 360 appeals were registered in relation to disability discrimination, a 9 per cent increase compared to the previous year.¹⁹⁷

141. Preventing disagreements about EHC plan decisions from escalating to the SEND Tribunal requires a multifaceted approach. We heard about the need for more training on SEND law to help decision-makers at local authorities make fair and lawful decisions from the outset. Imogen Steele, Policy and Public Affairs Officer at Contact, told us she would “strongly suggest” that local authority officials receive additional training on SEND law, particularly its practical application, to help ensure the right decisions are made from the outset.¹⁹⁸ IPSEA do this work, offering such training to local authorities to improve their knowledge and understanding of the SEN legal framework. In addition to training, we also heard about the important role dispute resolution and mediation can play in avoiding the escalation of issues to

194 IPSEA (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice) ([SEN0678](#))

195 [Q145](#)

196 [Q145](#)

197 Lexology, [2024 SEND Tribunal data is published showing appeals increased by 55%](#) (accessed July 2025)

198 [Q18](#)

the SEND Tribunal.¹⁹⁹ The benefits of a more collaborative approach were recognised by former Minister McKinnell, who told us: “[w]e want to create a much less adversarial and more sustainable redress system where families and local authorities work together to resolve disputes much earlier”.²⁰⁰

- 142.** However, written evidence indicates that the current quality and effectiveness of these approaches varies considerably due to engagement from local authorities and health services often being limited.²⁰¹ Georgina Downard of IPSEA told us:

In some cases when a parent is fully informed and perhaps when you are there to support them, mediation can be effective in resolving issues without the need for an appeal and quicker, but only if the local authority, and where relevant the integrated care board, complies with the governing law. We frequently hear that that does not happen.²⁰²

- 143.** Along similar lines, we heard from Alison Stewart, Head of SEND at South West London Integrated Care Board, who stated that “robust [and] joint dispute resolution” is needed in relation to issues or complaints around SEND support.²⁰³ Such an approach is essential to ensure the roles and responsibilities of the relevant services across education, health, and social care are properly understood, fulfilled, and examined.

144. CONCLUSION

Tribunals are an important feature of the accountability system, allowing families to challenge local authorities’ decisions regarding their children’s support; however, they should only need to be used as a last resort. We are deeply concerned by the number of local authorities found to have failed to meet their statutory obligations at the SEND Tribunal. A 97 per cent loss rate for Tribunal cases suggests a pattern of non-compliance which is unacceptable, particularly given that the entitlements of children and young people with SEND are clearly set out in the existing legislative framework. Greater efforts are needed to prevent cases from escalating to SEND Tribunals by prioritising good partnership working with parents and carers, effective mediation and ensuring local authorities have the resources and the powers to fulfil their statutory obligations.

199 [Q156](#)

200 [Q242](#)

201 Kids ([SEN0624](#))

202 [Q156](#)

203 [Q143](#)

145.

RECOMMENDATION

The SEND Tribunal must remain as a backstop of the accountability process. The Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care must systematically monitor SEND Tribunal outcomes and identify local authorities that repeatedly fail to comply with their statutory duties. The Government should mandate the framework for reporting SEND Tribunal data and undertake focused work with poor performing local authorities to understand why they are so often failing to uphold their statutory duties and support them through resourcing and targeted intervention, including specialised training, to address underlying issues and ensure that the rights of children and young people with SEND are upheld. The SEND White Paper should explicitly identify and set out plans to address any structural or resource-related barriers to effective support.

Area SEND inspections

Box 4: Area SEND inspection outcomes

There are 3 possible full inspection outcomes, leading to different subsequent inspection activity:

1. The local area partnership's SEND arrangements typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The local area partnership is taking action where improvements are needed.
2. The local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements.
3. There are widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND, which the local area partnership must address urgently.

Source: Ofsted, Main findings: area SEND inspections and outcomes in England as at 31 December 2024²⁰⁴

146. Ofsted and the CQC conduct area SEND inspections to evaluate the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND aged 0–25 and how well members of a local area partnership work together.

204 Ofsted, [Main findings: area SEND inspections and outcomes in England as at 31 December 2024](#), June 2025

These inspections focus on how well a partnership supports and meets the needs of children and young people with SEND, either those with an EHC plan or those receiving SEN support. This partnership includes health, education, social care services across a local authority. The current Ofsted and CQC area SEND inspection framework was launched in January 2023 with all local areas due to receive a full inspection within 5 years.²⁰⁵ Since the introduction of the new framework, Ofsted and the CQC have completed 64 inspections out of 153 local area partnerships. We were told by Adam Sproston, Senior inspector for SEND and Alternative Provision at Ofsted, that around a third received an outcome of widespread and systemic failings, around half inconsistent experiences, and approximately a quarter typically positive experiences and outcomes.²⁰⁶ Where a council does not meet its duties, the Department for Education told us they are able to take action that prioritises children’s needs and supports local areas to bring about improvement. The Department for Education also offers a range of universal, targeted and intensive support through Department for Education managed programmes, such as the Sector Led Improvement Partners which provides peer-to-peer tailored support.²⁰⁷

147. In response to Ofsted’s Big Listen survey, Ofsted and the CQC launched an area SEND review. Based on this they have committed to several actions to improve their area SEND inspections:

- improving children, young people and their families’ ability to feedback to inspectors, for example by improving the surveys used to gather their views;
- specifying more clearly which member of the partnership should take forward areas for improvement, where appropriate; and
- working with the Ofsted Academy to continue recruiting inspectors with relevant experience in SEND and alternative provision.²⁰⁸

In June 2025 the reviewed and updated Area SEND inspections: framework and handbook was published.²⁰⁹

148. However, throughout the evidence we received, there was a clear sense of dissatisfaction with the area SEND inspection process. Many contributors expressed serious concerns about the lack of meaningful engagement with parents and carers of children with SEND, including the reduction of in person meetings with parents in favour of online surveys or other forms

205 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

206 [Q160](#)

207 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

208 Ofsted and CQC, [Area SEND review: what we heard and how we are improving](#), June 2025

209 Ofsted and CQC, [Area SEND inspections: framework and handbook](#), July 2025

of engagement.²¹⁰ When asked about the role of parent engagement in the inspection process, Adam Sproston and Lucy Harte told us that the SEND area review will clarify how Ofsted and the CQC plan to strengthen the voices of parents and carers and clarified their approach to engagement meetings. In June 2025, Ofsted and the CQC published their analysis of the SEND area review.²¹¹ They found “a strong desire from children, young people, families and representative groups to have more opportunities to share their experiences with inspectors”.²¹² To improve this, Ofsted and the CQC have committed to providing more opportunities for children, young people and families to share their experiences. Inspectors will now also meet with parent and carer forum groups during the week of on-site inspection in addition to during the second week of inspection. The aim of this change is to allow inspectors to compare feedback from these groups with the evidence that they have gathered and further test it in subsequent inspection activities. Evidence-collection activities will also be changed so that inspection teams can gather more first-hand evidence from children, young people and families.

- 149.** Georgina Downard, senior solicitor at IPSEA, told us that area SEND inspections should “prioritise monitoring [...] compliance with the legal duties to children [with SEND]”.²¹³ Lucy Harte, Deputy Director of Multi-agency Operations at the CQC, told us that such data is used as an “important starting point for the inspection team” and informs the development of Ofsted and the CQCs line of inquiry; however that the inspection framework focuses on the experience and outcomes of children with SEND.²¹⁴

150. RECOMMENDATION

The outcomes of SEND Tribunal cases must be factored into area SEND inspections, with clear scrutiny of how repeated non-compliance reflects the quality and effectiveness of local provision. Where local authorities fail to uphold their statutory duties, this should directly lower their inspection rating. Ongoing failure must have clear consequences if accountability is to mean anything.

210 [Q33](#)

211 Ofsted and CQC, [Area SEND review: what we heard and how we are improving](#), June 2025

212 [Letter from Adam Sproston HMI, Ofsted and Lucy Harte, Deputy Director, Multi-agency Operations, Care Quality Commission on Joint local area SEND inspections, dated 12.06.25](#)

213 [Q153](#)

214 [Q166](#)

Health accountability

- 151.** Section 25 of the Children and Families Act 2014 focuses on the promotion of integration, mandating that local authorities ensure integration between educational, health, and social care services when it benefits children and young people with SEND.²¹⁵ Section 42 of the Act also provides for joint working between health care and education services to secure special education provision and health care provision, placing a legal duty on health bodies to arrange the health care provision specified in an EHC plan.²¹⁶

Area SEND inspections

- 152.** Although area SEND inspections cover multiple agencies and services there is a persistent lack of engagement from health services on SEND support. Research by the County Councils Network and Local Government Association found that in practice, the “burden of improvement” typically falls on local authorities rather than health services.²¹⁷ Further, the research found that local authorities lack the levers to compel education settings or health services such as Integrated Care Boards into action. There was widespread agreement from witnesses that accountability needs to be more “equally spread” between local authorities, ICBs and schools.²¹⁸ Along these lines, Jo Harrison, Director and Co-Chair at National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF), told us:

a lot of the accountability sits within the local authority yet the responsibility to deliver the provision sits within the school—sits not even within the ICBs but the providers that they then commission to deliver health support, and within social care. There is very little accountability for the local authority to hold that to account.²¹⁹

- 153.** Amanda Allard, Director at the Council for Disabled Children, gave us examples of limited engagement from health services on SEND support and told us that often ICBs only begin to engage with local authorities after a local area has systemic failings identified by an area SEND inspection.²²⁰ We were told about the need for more shared accountability across health, education and social care. Alison Stewart, Head of SEND at South West London ICB, said:

215 [Children and Families Act 2014, section 25](#)

216 [Children and Families Act 2014, section 42](#)

217 [County Councils Network and Local Government Association, *Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England*, July 2024](#)

218 [Q142](#)

219 [Q30](#)

220 [Q16](#)

there does need to be an increased accountability for the local area, the local system. That should be the local authority, the ICB and the providers.²²¹

Similarly, Marie Gascoigne told us that accountability should be “more equally spread”.²²²

- 154.** There is a lack of interdepartmental coordination between the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care resulting in gaps in support and inconsistencies in outcomes. We heard that greater collaboration between the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care would help strengthen multi-agency accountability. Alison Stewart, Head of SEND at South West London Integrated Care Board told us that cross-departmental collaboration would “support” shared responsibility and accountability with health services by providing cross-departmental oversight.²²³ Similarly the County Councils Network and Local Government Association report, *Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England*, suggested more joined-up thinking on the standards for partnerships and expectations of their respective agencies.²²⁴ We also heard about the particular need for health specific accountability around SEND to improve. Amanda Allard of the Council for Disabled Children proposed the inspection of individual health services and ICBs to assess how their services contribute to the support of children and young people with SEND.²²⁵

SEND Tribunal and health

- 155.** Under the Children and Families Act 2014, education, health, and social care services are not jointly responsible for the delivery of special educational provision. Several contributors to our inquiry recommended amending the legislation to establish joint responsibility across these services. Specifically, they called for changes to the Act that would make education, health, and social care “jointly responsible” for ensuring the delivery of appropriate support for children and young people with SEND.²²⁶ This would enable the SEND Tribunal to make legally binding decisions regarding health and social care provision as well as educational provision requiring action and accountability from partners across these sectors.

221 [Q142](#)

222 [As above](#)

223 [Q128](#)

224 County Councils Network and Local Government Association, [Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England](#), July 2024

225 [Q19](#)

226 Contact ([SEN0174](#))

156. At present, the recommendations made by the SEND Tribunal in relation to health and children’s social care are not legally binding. This means that while the Tribunal can advise on what should be provided in these areas, there is no legal obligation on the relevant services to implement those recommendations. This lack of enforceability can lead to inconsistent provision and undermines the accountability of health and social care bodies in meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND. We heard strong support for increasing the accountability of health services by enabling SEND Tribunals to make binding decisions on health and social care. Alison Stewart told us that it would be “helpful” to make such recommendations enforceable.²²⁷ However, she also emphasised the importance of earlier and increased involvement from health services to help prevent disputes from escalating to the SEND Tribunal stage saying:

In dispute management what we often see is that complaints around the experience of children and young people with SEND come into the local authority, they sit with the local authority and do not always make it into the health service field of complaints management. That reinforces some of the challenge that we have with accountability. If we could get to a position of robust joint dispute resolution where we are looking at how the combined offer, the combined services for a child or young person are contributing to that complaint, we may get to a much better place of resolution.²²⁸

157. CONCLUSION

The limited engagement of health services in the SEND system stems from a lack of robust and enforceable accountability mechanisms. Despite being a critical enabler of positive educational outcomes for children with SEND, health services are not held to the same standards of responsibility as education providers. To deliver on the promise of inclusive education, the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care must strengthen accountability frameworks to ensure health partners are fully integrated and responsive within the SEND system.

158. RECOMMENDATION

There must be mandatory training for health commissioners on good practice in meeting the needs of children with SEND.

227 [Q144](#)

228 [Q143](#)

159. RECOMMENDATION

The powers of the SEND Tribunal should be extended to allow it to issue binding recommendations to health services, not just education providers. This would ensure that when a failure to deliver a health provision specified in an EHC plan occurs, health bodies are legally obligated to take corrective action. This should include the introduction of a statutory duty on health services to respond to Tribunal decisions within a defined timeframe, with clear consequences for non-compliance.

160. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education must significantly improve cross-departmental coordination with the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England to establish clear, consistent accountability for SEND at the ICB level. Current arrangements are fragmented and lack clarity. Strengthening the role, authority, and visibility of the Senior Responsible Officer for SEND within ICBs is essential to ensure health services are fully held to account for their responsibilities. Without stronger oversight, health bodies will continue to operate without sufficient scrutiny or consequence.

5 Improving early years for lasting impact

- 161.** The Department for Education told us in their evidence: “we know that early intervention prevents unmet needs from escalating... getting it right in the early years is essential to supporting children’s development, health and life chances”.²²⁹ We also heard from Catherine McLeod, CEO of Dingley’s Promise, who emphasised the importance of the early years due to the lasting impact this can have on children’s attainment:

There needs to be that value and recognition of the early years ... what we know is that, by the end of the early years, you can fairly accurately predict what children are going to achieve at age 16, at their GCSEs.²³⁰

- 162.** Understanding this significance, the Department for Education has invested in two early intervention programmes: the Early Language and Support for Every Child pathfinder and the Nuffield Early Language Intervention programme. The Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) pathfinder is a joint initiative by the DfE and NHS England. It funds nine joint ICBs and local area partnerships to trial new ways of working to better identify and support children with speech, language and communication needs in early years and primary schools, utilising pre-qualification Therapy Support Assistants.²³¹ The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists highlights the programme as a positive example of joint working and early identification and in their evidence, call for the programme to be extended beyond 2025, when it is currently due to end.²³² Multiple local authorities and councils described ELSEC to us as a “truly multi-professional approach to early intervention” that has been “very effective in identifying and meeting needs earlier”. However, they also warned that further investment is needed to sustain and build on progress.²³³ Similarly, we were told that the programme is “showing promise”; however, given the importance of early language intervention and support, it needs to be rolled out universally across England.²³⁴

229 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

230 [Q84](#)

231 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

232 Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists ([SEN0707](#))

233 Portsmouth City Council, West Sussex County Council, East Sussex County Council, Brighton and Hove ([SEN0266](#))

234 pdnet ([SEN0283](#))

163. The Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) is a programme for four to five-year-olds. The programme consists of LanguageScreen, an assessment to select children for intervention and monitor individual and whole-class progress, CPD certified training with mentor support and a 20-week intervention delivered by teaching assistants (TAs) or teachers.²³⁵ In September 2023, the Education Endowment Foundation published its final evaluation of NELI at scale, marking the culmination of nearly 20 years of rigorous trials and high-quality research. The findings show that four- and five-year-olds who received the targeted oral language intervention made, on average, four months’ additional progress in language skills compared to their peers. The impact was even greater for children receiving free school meals, who gained an average of seven months’ additional progress.²³⁶ As of now, 11,100 schools are registered for the NELI programme. Between September 2020 and July 2024, it is estimated to have improved the speech and language skills of around 211,700 children aged four to five. In total, over 640,000 primary school children have been screened to identify those with language development difficulties.²³⁷ We received lots of evidence in favour of the NELI programme with many including the Confederation of School Trusts recommending that it is “immediately” scaled up.²³⁸

164. CONCLUSION

ELSEC and NELI are positive initiatives, but far more must be done to sustain and build on the progress they are achieving. Without ongoing commitment and resources, any gains risk being temporary and insufficient to address long-term needs.

165. RECOMMENDATION

A national rollout of ELSEC and NELI is essential and should be accompanied by comprehensive, long-term funding and resources to meet the scale of children’s speech and language needs. In addition, the Government should undertake further work to understand where the balance of resource should sit between early years and reception in order to ensure it is able to achieve its goal of 75 per cent of 5-year-olds in England to have a good level of development by 2028.

235 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

236 Confederation of School Trusts ([SEN0760](#)), Education Endowment Foundation, [Nuffield Early Language Intervention \(NELI\) – Reception](#), August 2025

237 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

238 Confederation of School Trusts ([SEN0760](#))

Funding

- 166.** Evidence from the Department points to the SEN Inclusion Fund (SENIF) as a tool of early intervention. SENIF supports early years providers in delivering additional support for children who have low and emerging SEND. It applies to children aged 2–4 who are accessing free early education and require extra support that goes beyond what is ordinarily available. In 2024–25, total planned spend on SENIF was £123m. In 2024, the Department reviewed early years SEND funding arrangements including SENIF and found “significant variations in how LAs manage EY SEND funding, particularly in application processes, accountability, and fund usage”.²³⁹ This reflects a critique from Dingley’s Promise that there is a “vast range of SENIF processes with no consistent model for allocating this funding to children with SEND in the early years”.²⁴⁰ The Department for Education has said work is being done to explore how to improve consistency in the delivery of SENIFs.²⁴¹ However, according to Dingley’s Promise, existing efforts have not been sufficient and the issue of inconsistency and a “wide range of differing practice in early years SEND at all levels of the system” has resulted in demand for more national guidance documents and formats to improve effectiveness and consistency of the delivery and support for children with SEND. In addition to these inconsistencies, Dingley’s Promise highlight SENIF being absorbed by children with medium to high needs, while they are going through the process of securing EHC plans, leaving limited funding for children with low and emerging needs, which is what the fund was initially designed to support, as a “common theme in many areas”.²⁴²
- 167.** The Disability Access Fund provides additional financial support to early years providers with the aim to enable early years settings to make reasonable adjustments that improve accessibility and inclusion such as purchasing specialist equipment, adapting learning spaces or funding additional staff training. The Disability Access Fund offers a one-off annual payment of £910 per child, paid directly to the setting the child attends. When first introduced eligible children had to be three or four years old, in receipt of Disability Living Allowance and accessing their funded early education entitlement. However, from 2024 to 2025, the age eligibility was extended to 2-year-olds and children 9 months old to 2 years. Dingley’s Promise told us that the disability access fund is underspent across various local authorities because of its link to the disability living Allowance.²⁴³ We were told that not all parents feel ready to do this at an early nor are some comfortable with the details required in the “deficit focused” application.

239 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

240 Dingley’s Promise ([SEN0334](#))

241 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

242 Dingley’s Promise ([SEN0334](#))

243 Dingley’s Promise ([SEN0334](#))

Further, The DLA application process is often lengthy, complex, and dependent on parental awareness and capacity to navigate the system. This can impact a settings willingness to take a child with SEND as without disability access funding there is limited funding to implement the changes and adaptations needed to support a young child with SEND properly. These dynamic risks excluding the very children the policy was designed to help.

168. CONCLUSION

There is a clear need to improve the consistency and effectiveness of the SENIF across early years provision. At present, practice varies significantly between local authorities, with differences in how funding is managed and allocated. This means there is inconsistency in access to early years SEND support. Such variation undermines the principle of equitable access to early education and can place additional pressure on providers in areas with less generous or less flexible SENIF arrangements. In addition, the eligibility criteria for the Disability Access Fund limits its effectiveness. Tying this funding to Disability Living Allowance, creates an unnecessary barrier to eligibility that risks excluding the very children the funding was created to help and shifts the burden of unmet need onto providers and families.

169. RECOMMENDATION

To address inconsistency in the delivery of early years provision and the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF), the Department for Education must establish a set of national inclusivity requirements for early years settings. These requirements should be backed by increased, funding to ensure providers are able to deliver inclusive practice in a sustainable way. At the same time, the Disability Access Fund should be reformed by removing its dependency on Disability Living Allowance. The current eligibility criteria act as a barrier for many families, restricting uptake and undermining the fund's effectiveness. Without these reforms, there is a risk that the system continues to perpetuate inequity and discourage inclusive practice at the earliest stage of education.

Family Hubs and Best Start

- 170.** The importance of early intervention was emphasised in research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) into the short- and medium-term impacts of Sure Start on educational outcomes. This looked at the policy of Sure Start centres, which was in place from the early 2000s. The IFS found that while identification of SEND at age five was higher amongst children who lived near Sure Start Centres, it was lower for these same children at ages 11 and 16, suggesting that early intervention led to a reduction in long term

needs and better outcomes for children.²⁴⁴ In addition to better outcomes for children, Dingley’s Promise also highlight in their evidence that early identification and intervention also reduces spend in the education system as a whole.²⁴⁵

- 171.** Family Hubs were launched in the late 2000s. Since 2022 the Government has allocated £69 million to continue expanding Family Hubs, with £57 million from the DHSC supporting Start for Life services for families from pregnancy to age two.²⁴⁶
- 172.** Family Hubs provide integrated support for children aged 0–19 (or 0–25 for those with SEND), improving access to services and strengthening connections between families, professionals, and providers. Local authorities have enhanced SEND support through Family Hubs by ensuring staff are trained in SEND services, can guide families to the right support, and assist with EHC plan referrals. The Family Hubs also coordinate with health visiting teams, who play a crucial role in early childhood development, providing preventative care, safeguarding, and early intervention. The Department for Education has funded the EY SEND Partnership Consortium led by the Council for Disabled Children from August 2023 to March 2025.²⁴⁷ This involves three main strands of activity to help Family Hubs best support disabled children and children with SEN during their earliest years:
- Strategic support to family hub areas through regular meetings or ‘action learning sets’;
 - Targeted training for practitioners from family hub areas; and
 - Open-access training for parents and carers.
- 173.** In July 2025, the Government launched their Best Start in Life strategy which commits £1.5bn over the next three years to expand family services, make early education and childcare more accessible and affordable, and improve quality across the early years system.²⁴⁸ This has the goal of 75 per cent of five-year-olds in England having a good level of development by 2028. Best Start Family Hubs will be rolled out across England as a part of this strategy building on the existing Family Hubs programme. According to Government plans each Best Start Family Hub will have a children and family services professional trained to support children with additional needs. These will help:

244 IFS, [The short- and medium-term impacts of Sure Start on educational outcomes](#), April 2024

245 Dingley’s Promise ([SEN0334](#))

246 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

247 National Children’s Bureau, [Early Years SEND Partnership](#) (accessed July 2025)

248 DfE, [Giving every child the best start in life](#) (accessed July 2025)

- Identify children who may need extra support before starting school
- Connect parents with local early years settings and health services
- Train family support staff to spot early signs that a child might need extra help
- Provide guidance for navigating what can be a complex system

174. CONCLUSION

Best Start Family Hubs and the expansion of childcare provision present a valuable opportunity to engage with families earlier and identify SEND needs at the earliest possible stage. We welcome the announcement that every Best Start Family Hub will have a SENCO. However, SEND awareness is not currently sufficiently embedded amongst all early years staff, nor are there currently sufficient opportunities for early screenings that could facilitate timely support and referrals. We note the current inquiry at the time of publication of the Health Social Care Committee on ‘The First 1000 Days: a renewed focus’ and the further work we have agreed to undertake on early years, all of which should be taken full account of by the Government.

175. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education must ensure that Best Start Family Hubs incorporate routine SEND screening and awareness as a core part of their early years services, supported by targeted training for staff and childcare providers to enhance early identification and referral. Additionally, dedicated funding must be allocated within childcare expansion and Family Hub budgets specifically to support SEND-related training for early years staff and families of children with SEND, resources, and integrated multi-agency working, ensuring sustainable and effective early intervention.

176. RECOMMENDATION

The commitment for every Best Start Family Hub to have a dedicated SENCO should be embedded within the SEND workforce strategy and extend to educational psychologists and speech and language therapists.

177.

RECOMMENDATION

There is a need to increase access to CPD and ensure that staff from all agencies in every early years setting has the expertise to undertake the effective early identification of SEND needs. Through the Best Start in Life strategy the Government should also ensure that there is a strong and consistent framework for building SEND capacity and good practice in early years settings through the deployment of educational psychologists, speech and language therapists and other specialists in training the workforce. From September 2025, 80 per cent of the funding for early years providers will come from the Government, and the Department should introduce a new set of inclusivity requirements for all early years settings, provide the foundation for greater inclusivity across all early years settings.

6 Post-16

- 178.** The evidence we received indicates that students with SEND are often overlooked in further education (FE) and skills policies, while FE itself receives insufficient attention within SEND policy. Natspec describe FE and skills policy as “lacking” meaningful attention to SEND because successive Governments have focused their FE and skills policies mainly on qualifications and apprenticeships—pathways that are not always accessible for students with SEND. At the same time, SEND policy often focuses on schools and inaccurately assumes FE settings are operating in the same context. In reality, FE is a “distinct and complex sector” with different funding arrangements, policy contexts and catchments to schools.²⁴⁹

Qualifications, assessments and outcomes

- 179.** The County Councils Network and Local Government Association found that 94.6 per cent of young people without SEND were in sustained education, apprenticeships, or work, compared to 90.2 per cent of those with EHC plans in the 2021/22 cohort. However, this is only a 0.2 percentage point increase when compared to the 2015/16 cohort of young people with EHC plans, who completed Key Stage 4 before the 2014 SEND reforms were implemented, as seen in the table below.²⁵⁰ More concerning is the one-third decline in sustained apprenticeships over this period. Across the inquiry we heard that apprenticeships are an important option for young people with SEND, offering practical, skills-based learning and a supported transition into employment.²⁵¹ The reduction in young people with SEND remaining in apprenticeships risks limiting career prospects, undermining efforts to improve inclusion in the labour market, and increasing the likelihood of poorer long-term outcomes. It also raises concerns about the extent to which the apprenticeship pathway is genuinely inclusive for young people with SEND. Ensuring that these pathways are accessible, and that young people with SEND are supported to sustain and complete their apprenticeships, is vital. This is critical to enabling them to build independence and secure meaningful employment.

249 Natspec ([SEN0305](#)), Natspec ([SEN0895](#))

250 County Councils Network and Local Government Association, [Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England](#), July 2024

251 Twinkl ([SEN0192](#)), Tameside Local Authority ([SEN0246](#)), National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) ([SEN0248](#))

Table 4: Post-16 destinations of young people with EHC plans, 2015/16 and 2021/22

	Overall percentage of young people with EHC plans in education, apprenticeships or employment, sustained	Education, sustained	Apprenticeships, sustained	Work, sustained	NEET	Destination unknown
2015/16	90.0 per cent	86.4	1.4	2.2	5.4	1.2
2021/22	50.2 per cent	86.8	0.9	2.5	4.8	1.9

Source: County Councils Network and Local Government Association, *Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England*, July 2024²⁵²

- 180.** The County Councils Network and Local Government Association also found that only 30 per cent of young people with EHC plans achieved Level 2 qualifications by age 19, compared to nearly 37 per cent in 2014/15.²⁵³ Let Us Learn Too suggest “bridging the gap” between support pupils receive in school and the support received in universities; and improving the support given in sixth form colleges. Their evidence states that “young people with learning disabilities are likely to need much more input in further education” so existing support should be sustained during these transition phases.²⁵⁴ The need for improvement is clear from statistics showing the low progression rates to university among young people with SEND. 21.1 per cent of students with any special educational need progressed to higher education by the age of 19 in 2023–24. This is the highest on record, however, well below the progression rates of their peers without SEN which was more than 50 per cent. Further, the gap between progression to high tariff providers (the top 33 per cent of higher education institutions) is even larger, 14.9 per cent for those without SEN and 3.8 per cent for those with SEN.²⁵⁵

252 County Councils Network and Local Government Association, [Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England](#), July 2024

253 County Councils Network and Local Government Association, [Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England](#), July 2024

254 Let Us learn Too ([SEN0130](#))

255 David Kernohan, [“Just 329 students with an EHCP got to a high tariff provider last year”](#), WonkHE, July 2025

- 181.** Across the inquiry we were reminded that positive outcomes are not limited to academic success and that qualifications and assessment should be varied to account for the different needs and abilities of students with SEND. Natspec advocates for more flexibility in post-16 education, and that qualifications and apprenticeships should be “one strand in a set of policies inclusive of all young people with SEND”.²⁵⁶ We saw this approach in action during our visit to Ontario in March 2025 and to Norwich City College in June 2025 where we saw children with SEND develop life skills, functional skills, undertake work experience and build confidence through a more diverse post-16 offering.
- 182.** During our visit to Toronto in March 2025 we visited St Mary’s Catholic Academy. Here we were introduced to their ‘Students training to acquire real life skills’ (STARS) programme, a specialised alternative programme for students from Grades 9–12+ (ages 14–19) with varying special educational needs. The main goal of the programme is to provide opportunities for students to develop skills which allow them to become more confident and independent. It involves a non-credit course which focuses on two main areas: social skills development and personal life skills. As a part of this, students partner with the Student Council to co-ordinate and run school events, develop their entrepreneurial skills by organizing fundraisers and running a catering business to provide refreshments for events, and develop their collaboration and organisational skills by meal planning and preparation.²⁵⁷ During our visit to West Credit Secondary School, we observed a strong focus on skills-based education, with on-site provision in areas such as carpentry, hair and beauty, and pet care. The school had also developed long term partnerships with local employers, enabling post-16 students to access structured work experience placements that complement their classroom learning and help prepare them for employment or further training. We heard from students how this programme has improved their confidence, given them real life work experience and supported them in learning how to use community spaces and socialise beyond an education setting.
- 183.** On our visit to Norwich City College in June 2025 we heard about their ‘MINT’ programme which provides supported internships for young people with SEND but without an EHC plan across the admin, care, hospitality, customer service and retail sectors.²⁵⁸ This programme includes:
- A referral and employment profile
 - 1:1 support with a job coach

256 Natspec ([SEN0305](#))

257 St Mary Catholic Academy, [Special Education Services](#) (accessed March 2025)

258 City College Norwich, [Helping young people into sustainable paid employment](#) (accessed August 2025)

- Pre-employment projects
- Functional skills
- A work placement and in work support
- Outdoor activity days

184. We heard that since 2010/11 this programme has delivered an average of 66 job outcomes per year, including long term employment for alumni.

Maths and English GCSE resits

185. Since 2014, successive Governments have maintained the condition of funding requirement that full-time students aged 16 to 18 who have not attained grade 4 (grade C under the previous grading system) in GCSE maths and/or English have an entitlement to continue to study an approved qualification in those subjects and work towards achieving the required pass grade.²⁵⁹ The majority of these students continue to study the relevant GCSE. However, some students are eligible to take a functional skills qualification in maths or English (also a level 2 qualification), which aims to teach numeracy and literacy skills needed in daily life and the workplace. Students with SEN support are around 40 per cent less likely to pass English and maths whilst students with EHC plans are 40 per cent and 28 per cent less likely to pass English and maths, respectively. Research conducted by the Education Policy Institute (EPI) shows that these students are also less likely to attain a pass grade by age 19.²⁶⁰ We saw this on our visit to City College Norwich in June 2025 where we were told that on average, a third of their students resitting maths and/or English require access arrangements related to SEND. Nasen emphasised the “pressing need” to establish a cut-off point for learners who, despite repeated efforts, are unable to achieve a Grade 4 in English and maths, raising concerns that requirements to pass English and maths limit access to post-16 pathways, and can force students onto unsuitable routes just to progress. Nasen describe this as “particularly disheartening” for young people with SEND who may never attain a GCSE grade 4 in either or both subjects and highlight how changes to BTECs and T-Levels have further undermined accessibility.²⁶¹ Nasen view greater flexibility in post-16 pathways, including elevating the status of functional skills, as a solution to this. We heard that “flexibility is the most important thing” from Lucy Bowerman, 22 a young person with SEND who spoke to us earlier this year. She told us:

259 HC Deb, 2 July 2014, col 57WS [Commons written ministerial statement]

260 “[Time for a resit reset?](#)”, Education Policy Institute, 31 January 2024

261 Nasen ([SEN0809](#))

Some subjects might not work for some students. Rather than continually drumming into them, “You need to do this as part of the national curriculum. You have to learn this”... maybe schools should think about whether, actually, if students are finding a subject that difficult, they are gaining anything from being forced to sit in that lesson? ... Is there some sort of vocational course that might work a lot better for them and that might not only give them life skills but significantly improve their wellbeing?²⁶²

186. CONCLUSION

The post-16 condition of funding, whereby students who have not achieved a grade 4 or above in GCSE English and maths are effectively repeatedly required to take GCSE resits in those subjects as part of their programme of study, must be reformed. Despite a modest rise in overall attainment over the past ten years, the progression rate from age 16 to 19 remains low, with 72 per cent of those who did not achieve grade 4 at 16 still not achieving that grade by 19. This policy can be demoralising for students and a huge strain on colleges and their staff. Whilst ensuring that students continue to make progress in literacy and numeracy, an alternative approach is necessary.

187. RECOMMENDATION

The Government must introduce a three-route model for those who have not attained grade 4 GCSE in maths and/or English based on their level of attainment at age 16 and their chosen post-16 qualification/employment pathway:

- Students who, based on their GCSE results at age 16 and prior attainment, have a realistic prospect of achieving grade 4 in maths and/or English should be supported to work towards those qualifications.
- Vocational courses of study, for which the English and maths content required can be easily identified, should have that content built into the curriculum. Students taking courses with embedded English and maths content which have been rigorously quality assured could then, in consultation with employers, be considered for exemption from the requirement to re-sit English and maths GCSE.
- Students who, based on past performance, are very unlikely to attain grade 4 in maths and/or English despite multiple resits and who would benefit from pursuing a functional skills qualification in

maths and/or English—for example, focused on financial literacy, debt and interest and household budgeting—should be supported to achieve a pass in that form of qualification.

Funding

- 188.** We received considerable evidence from further education providers that funding pressures undermine the support that can be provided and their efforts to build inclusive education for young people with SEND. Natspec told us that the extension of the SEND system to 25 was never fully costed, ultimately leaving further education “disproportionately underfunded”.²⁶³ For example, there is no dedicated funding for SEN support given to the post-16 sector. This means there is no additional funding available to support the learning of students in this sector with SEN but without an EHC plan. Further, even though 26.3 per cent of EHC plan holders are aged 16–25, less than 10 per cent of the high needs budget goes to this age group and only half of FE EHC plan holders are high-needs funded. Despite this, these students are “rarely seen as a priority for funding” by either local authorities or the Government across SEND and FE policy.²⁶⁴

189. CONCLUSION

Greater policy focus is required on further education provision for young people with SEND. At present, both FE and SEND policy frameworks give limited consideration to the specific needs of learners post-16, and funding arrangements often fail to provide adequate resources to meet those needs. This lack of targeted attention and investment contributes to significant gaps in provision and support, leaving many of these young people effectively overlooked within the education system. Without dedicated and sufficient funding for SEN support beyond the age of 16, mainstream further education settings will struggle to provide the adjustments, specialist staff, and tailored resources necessary to meet learners’ needs and achieve good outcomes. This is incompatible with the Government’s vision for inclusive mainstream education. Without targeted reform and investment, the FE sector risks falling behind other parts of the education system.

263 Natspec ([SEN0305](#))

264 Natspec ([SEN0895](#))

190. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should introduce a dedicated and ring-fenced funding stream for SEN support beyond the age of 16. This would enable further education providers to recruit and retain specialist staff, provide tailored learning resources, and make the reasonable adjustments necessary to meet the diverse needs of learners with SEND. Such investment is essential to ensuring that mainstream FE provision is genuinely inclusive and that young people with SEND have equitable opportunities to succeed.

191. RECOMMENDATION

When Ofsted considers the accountability of post-16 education settings, it should ensure a stronger focus on inclusivity and outcomes for young people with SEND.

Home to school transport

- 192.** The cost of home to school transportation for pupils with specific needs has risen in recent years, impacting local authority finances. In November 2023, the County Councils Network (CCN) report on making school services sustainable found that costs could rise nationally by 2027/28 to £2.2bn, with county councils responsible for £1.1bn of this figure.²⁶⁵ According to the report by the CCN, these rising costs have been driven by the increase in EHC plans that include transport to education settings, longer journeys to specialist settings further away.²⁶⁶ This was also reflected in the evidence which highlighted a reliance on out-of-area placements due to inadequate local provision.²⁶⁷ Despite rising costs in home to school transport, transport provision for young people with SEND is not comprehensive. Currently, young people over 16 do not have the same rights to local authority funded transport as under-16s, despite those aged 16 and 17 having to remain in education or training.²⁶⁸ Transport provision for 16–19-year-olds is discretionary. If a local authority chooses to continue offering the same transport arrangements a student had before turning 16, it may charge for this service or request a parental contribution towards the cost. We heard this described as a “loophole” by charities in the sector and is particularly

265 County Councils Network, Press Notice, “[Spiralling SEND transport budgets threaten financial sustainability of England’s largest councils, report reveals](#)”, November 2023 (accessed November 2024)

266 County Councils Network, Press Notice, “[Spiralling SEND transport budgets threaten financial sustainability of England’s largest councils, report reveals](#)”, November 2023 (accessed November 2024)

267 Surrey County Council ([SEN0389](#)), Tameside Local Authority ([SEN0246](#))

268 Contact, Press Notice, “[Lack of school or college transport forces over 16’s to stay at home](#)”, January 2025

concerning given the crucial role transport plays in enabling young people with SEND to attend and engage fully in education. For example, Contact describe school transport as the “the glue that helps hold things together for families with disabled children”.²⁶⁹ Contact’s research shows that almost 60 per cent of disabled teenagers face changes to their school transport arrangements when they turn 16 with one in seven losing it altogether—jeopardising their ability to continue at school or college.²⁷⁰

193. Amanda Allard of the Disabled Children’s Partnership told us about the importance of reviewing transport arrangements at transition points as well as independent travel training as a way to reduce reliance on home to school transport where appropriate.²⁷¹ This was recognised across the written evidence. Tameside Local Authority outlined numerous strategies “aimed at fostering independence and optimising resources” such as:

- Embedding travel training into EHC plans where this is appropriate for the young person is a key step, equipping students with the skills to navigate public transport and reducing long-term reliance on funded services.
- Encouraging families to utilise Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) for travel costs also promotes independent management of transport needs while alleviating pressure on local authority funding.
- Collaborative planning during transitions can identify cost-effective solutions, including shared transport arrangements for students attending the same provider. Partnerships with local transport providers for subsidised travel and offering personal travel budgets to families can further enhance flexibility and efficiency.²⁷²

269 Contact, Press Notice, “[Lack of school or college transport forces over 16’s to stay at home](#)”, January 2025

270 Contact, [School transport survey 2024 for parents with disabled children online survey](#), February 2025

271 [Q17](#)

272 Tameside Local Authority ([SEN0246](#))

194. CONCLUSION

We know that some young people in some areas will have a long-term need for home to school transport due to extremely limited public transport options in their local area or their individual needs. We are concerned about the impact that lack of statutory home to school transport for 16–19-year-olds with SEND has on the ability of these young people to access education. No young person should be locked out of education because of a transport need. Evidence also indicates a lack of adequate travel training for this age group in some areas, which increases reliance on home to school transport, creating significant barriers to attendance and participation in learning.

195. RECOMMENDATION

The Department should review home to school transport and identify costs across regions. Additionally, the Department must mandate that all local authorities provide travel training programmes for young people with SEND in this age group to promote independence and safe travel where this is appropriate. Statutory transport provision should be guaranteed based on clear criteria such as distance from education settings, level of need, and other relevant factors to ensure no young person is unfairly disadvantaged. We welcome the acknowledgement in the Government’s fair funding review of the need for comprehensive costings for current and future home to school transport need. The Department for Education must work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Transport as they prepare to introduce a bespoke formula to recognise Home to School transport costs. As part of this collaboration, the Department for Education should ensure that there is transparency around how outcomes are measured and reported. We support the recommendation of the Transport Select Committee with regard to the provision of bus passes for under 22-year-olds.²⁷³

273 House of Commons Transport Committee, Third Report of Session 2024–25 [Buses connecting communities](#), August 2025

7 Equipping the workforce

- 196.** Achieving an inclusive mainstream education system requires all professionals involved in assessing, supporting, and delivering SEND provision to be better equipped. This chapter examines how this can be achieved. It begins by considering the education workforce and the role of training, continuing professional development, and leadership in embedding a whole-school approach to SEND. It then turns to the local authority workforce, highlighting the importance of equipping staff to engage with families empathetically. Finally, it addresses the capacity challenges facing educational psychologists, speech and language therapists and other relevant allied health professionals.

Education workforce

Initial Teacher Training and the Early Career Framework

- 197.** The Department’s evidence states that high-quality teaching and learning is “central” to ensuring that pupils with SEND are supported through education.²⁷⁴ However, we heard from a range of witnesses that there is much room for improvement in this area. For example, we were told by Katie Ghose, CEO of Kids, that better training was “top of the list” in the “drive for inclusive education”.²⁷⁵ Similarly, Luke Sibieta, Research Fellow at the IFS, identified a lack of high-quality training as one of the “main challenge[s]” of improving the SEND system, he told us:

What is lacking at the moment is proper support and funding to provide training for both teachers and TAs to provide better support. That would help provide good quality provision in mainstream settings.²⁷⁶

- 198.** Across the inquiry, we heard about the importance and effectiveness of a whole setting approach to SEND. This requires SEND training for all staff, “top to toe” to improve confidence and capacity to support pupils with SEND and deliver inclusive education beyond SENCOs.²⁷⁷ We received evidence

274 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

275 [Q3](#)

276 [Q55](#)

277 Kids ([SEN0624](#))

highlighting the need for training on a range of SEND issues.²⁷⁸ For example, a survey by the National Autistic Society found that 58 per cent of teachers do not feel prepared to support autistic students while the Department for Education found 31 per cent of teachers lack confidence in teaching children with neurodiverse conditions.²⁷⁹ If teachers are ill-equipped and unconfident teachers will not be able to:

- Recognise early signs of neurodiversity and intervene before a child falls behind;
- Implement simple, effective strategies that foster inclusion;
- Prevent unnecessary disciplinary actions that disproportionately impact neurodiverse students; and
- Support families who are already struggling within a system full of barriers rather than solutions.²⁸⁰

199. The combined and updated Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework published in January 2024 contains “significantly more content” related to adaptive teaching and supporting pupils with SEND, including content on making effective use of specialist technology to support pupils with SEND.²⁸¹ However we heard that although the updated Framework is “an improvement” there remains “a long way still to go” with regards to enhancing and embedding SEND throughout the framework to make SEND “intrinsic and explicit”.²⁸² Isos Partnership wrote to us saying that SEND should form a “much more significant element” of Initial Teacher Training and should be a “golden thread” that runs through every teacher’s career.²⁸³ Annamarie Hassall CEO at Nasen explained to us that to achieve inclusive mainstream education:

We need a teaching workforce that comes out of their initial teacher education expecting to see an inclusive classroom and that is part of their remit, rather than an added extra.²⁸⁴

This reflects written evidence from a collective of city councils which said, “inclusive practice should not be a separate ‘thing’ but something which is entirely embedded in everyday practice”.²⁸⁵

278 Bright Future Training Limited ([SEN0519](#))

279 National Autistic Society ([SEN0646](#))

280 Mr Christopher Moore ([SEN0522](#))

281 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

282 Association of School & College Leaders ([SEN0663](#))

283 Isos Partnership ([SEN0421](#))

284 [Q93](#)

285 Portsmouth City Council, West Sussex County Council, East Sussex County Council, Brighton and Hove ([SEN0266](#))

- 200.** We heard that the current framework would be improved by including the practical skills teachers need to be able to adapt their teaching to meet the “diverse and fluctuating needs of all learners”.²⁸⁶ Further, that there should be focus on improving teachers’ confidence in their understanding and management of SEND requirements across Initial Teacher Training and the Early Career Framework to ensure that inclusivity is promoted from the start of their careers.²⁸⁷ We heard suggestions across the written evidence that compulsory experience in specialist settings for trainee teachers would help achieve this.²⁸⁸
- 201.** Such training is also vital for those working in the early years. According to Dingley’s Promise, inclusion training for early years educators is “key to ensuring high quality inclusion”.²⁸⁹ The SEND in Early Years Initial Teacher Training, the early years practitioner (level 2) and early years educator (level 3) qualifications and in the National Professional Qualification in EY Leadership (NPQ EYL) all include content on SEND and inclusion to help equip staff with the knowledge they need. To supplement this, in September 2024 the Department and for Education launched an online training module and SEND assessment guidance.²⁹⁰ These were aimed at supporting early years educators to identify, assess and support children with SEND and developmental differences and delays in their settings.

202. CONCLUSION

While the Department for Education’s update to the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework is a positive move, it needs to go further to adequately prepare teachers to support pupils with SEND. SEND is still not fully integrated across all training modules, and there is a clear lack of focus on how to apply this knowledge practically in the classroom. This shortfall risks leaving teachers unprepared to meet the needs of pupils with SEND effectively.

286 Anonymous ([SEN0384](#))

287 HMC (The Heads’ Conference) ([SEN0414](#))

288 North Northamptonshire Parent Carer Voices ([SEN0423](#)), Bloomfield Dyslexia Centre ([SEN0422](#))

289 Dingley’s Promise ([SEN0334](#))

290 Dingley’s Promise and Department for Education, [EY SEND assessment guidance](#) (accessed July 2025)

203. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education must implement a continuous review and update cycle for the ITT and ECF to keep training relevant and effective. It must urgently increase the number of ITT placements and explore the viability of mandating every teacher to complete a placement in a specialist setting during ITT or ECF. Without practical, hands-on experience supporting children and young people with SEND, teachers will remain ill-equipped to meet their needs.

204. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should provide comprehensive training within ITT and clear guidance for schools, multi-academy trusts and education staff on delivering inclusive education practice. This will ensure that all settings understand their legal obligations and are equipped to make the necessary accommodations to support pupils with SEND effectively. Embedding this knowledge is crucial for promoting inclusive practices, preventing discrimination, and fostering environments where every child can thrive.

Continued Professional Development (CPD)

- 205.** In addition to Initial Teacher Training and the Early Career Framework, we heard strong evidence about the vital role of Continued Professional Development (CPD) in equipping the education workforce to deliver truly inclusive mainstream education. CPD was consistently identified as essential to building the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to effectively support children and young people with SEND in everyday classroom settings. Annemarie Hassall, CEO of Nasen told us:

I do not think we will ever be able to have somebody leaving their initial teacher education and their first couple of years of early teaching topped up with everything they need to know. The commitment to ongoing professional development is essential.²⁹¹

- 206.** Similarly, Jo Hutchinson, Director for SEND and Additional Needs at the Education Policy Institute (EPI), emphasised to us the importance of continued professional development, noting that because understanding of SEND is continually evolving, it is essential that training and best practice evolve in parallel to ensure the education workforce remains informed and effective. She explained:

It will not be possible to inject all the knowledge needed for a whole career during initial teacher training, nor is it likely to be very feasible to add that much to the curriculum in ITT, but it is possible to make it a priority across all the various phases of professional development that teachers go through.²⁹²

- 207.** Despite its recognised importance, CPD focused on SEND is not mandatory in England. While current accountability frameworks encourage schools to demonstrate evidence of staff engagement with CPD, there is no specific requirement for ongoing professional development in SEND. Furthermore, initial findings of ScopeSEND, a three-year research project examining and comparing SEND policy in different countries, indicate that much of the CPD available in England is typically delivered through standalone courses, workshops, or one-off training sessions. As a result, it often lacks integration into the everyday practice and culture of schools, limiting its effectiveness in driving sustained, inclusive teaching approaches across the education system. Dr Castro-Kemp of the Scope SEND research team explained the importance of having an embedded culture of CPD to us, saying:

When CPD is embedded, there is a culture of personal and professional development... [even if] it is not mandatory [it] is encouraged and expected professionally, so it is seen more as a professional right rather than a professional obligation ... [and there is a] sustained culture of engagement in professional development that is more context specific as a right of the workforce.²⁹³

- 208.** The Department for Education funds the Universal SEND Services programme as a key part of the Department’s CPD offer.²⁹⁴ Universal SEND Services programme is delivered by Nasen and provides SEND focused CPD to the school and further education workforce. Since launching in 2022 over 20,000 online training units have been completed on various SEND related topics and over 220,000 professionals have undertaken autism training.²⁹⁵ Alison Ismail, Director of the SEND and Alternative Provision at DFE, praised the programme for driving “that whole school approach to SEND and mak[ing] sure that the whole school workforce feels equipped to support children”.²⁹⁶ We were told by witnesses that this programme has been helpful in addressing “gaps in confidence or understanding within the workforce”.²⁹⁷ However, funding for the Universal SEND services programme is due to end in 2026. When we raised concerns with then Minister McKinnell about whether the benefits of the programme will be embedded

292 [Q206](#)

293 [Q205](#)

294 Nasen, Whole School SEND, [Universal SEND Services programme](#) (accessed July 2025)

295 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

296 [Q251](#)

297 Nasen ([SEN0809](#))

and sustained over the long term we were told that the Department for Education intend to “turbocharge” the approach that underpins the universal SEND services programme, where “excellent SEND provision [is] at the heart of the core business of all schools” and that further detail will be set out in the upcoming White Paper, due autumn 2025.²⁹⁸

209. CONCLUSION

It is deeply concerning that SEND-specific continuing professional development (CPD) is not mandatory. The education workforce must be consistently equipped with up-to-date, evidence-based knowledge through ongoing CPD to ensure an inclusive mainstream with high-quality support for children and young people with SEND.

210. CONCLUSION

Continuous professional development in SEND should not be viewed solely as a support mechanism for specialist SEND educators. When all teachers are trained to understand and respond to the needs of pupils with SEND, the entire workforce becomes more inclusive, adaptive, and confident in managing diverse classrooms. An essential skill set in the modern classroom, this not only improves outcomes for pupils with SEND but also supports teacher resilience and wellbeing, enhancing the learning experience for all students by fostering a more empathetic, dynamic and flexible teaching environment. We have seen evidence that deploying this approach reduces the need for EHC plans.

211. RECOMMENDATION

SEND CPD should be made mandatory to ensure that all educators are equipped to meet the diverse needs of children and young people with SEND. This could be achieved through a nationally recognised supplementary qualification in SEND that all existing teachers must complete within a defined timeframe (e.g. three years), similar to the Early Career Framework but focused on inclusion and SEND best practice; or through the incorporation of mandatory SEND modules into existing CPD requirements; or through performance management frameworks, ensuring ongoing engagement and application in classroom settings.

Special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs)

Box 5: Special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs)

SENCOs lead and co-ordinate a school's provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. In September 2024, the Government introduced a new leadership level NPQ for SENCOs as mandatory training that must be complete within three years of taking up their position.²⁹⁹

- The SENCO NPQ training covers eight topics:
- school culture
- statutory framework
- identification of need
- teaching, behaviour
- leading and managing provision
- professional development
- implementation.³⁰⁰

This training intends to provide SENCOs with the knowledge and skills to work with other leaders to create an inclusive environment.

Source: Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators' national professional qualification, Department for Education³⁰¹

- 212.** We understand the important role SENCOs can play in disseminating knowledge and best practice on inclusive teaching and education from school leaders and teacher unions. However, some evidence we received reflects the struggles being faced by those in this role including the “huge inconsistency” in how SENCOs are valued and deployed within schools and the expansion of their workload.³⁰² One primary school SENCO summarised their experience to us as “overworked, undervalued and isolated”.³⁰³

299 DfE, [Special educational needs co-ordinator's \(SENCO\) national professional qualification](#) (accessed July 2025)

300 DfE, [Special educational needs co-ordinator's \(SENCO\) national professional qualification](#), February 2024

301 DfE, [Special educational needs co-ordinator's \(SENCO\) national professional qualification](#), February 2024

302 Miss Kate Worrall (SENCO at East Peckham Primary School) ([SEN0003](#)), Justify Foundation ([SEN0068](#)), Mr Eugene McFadden (SENCO at Truro Penwith Academy Trust) ([SEN0017](#)), Mrs Judy Cooper ([SEN0092](#))

303 Miss Kate Worrall (SENCO at East Peckham Primary School) ([SEN0003](#))

The then Minister McKinnell acknowledged these challenges and stated her intention for them to be fully addressed in the upcoming SEND White Paper. She also highlighted work already underway by the Department, particularly the introduction of the new SENCO NPQ in 2024, describing this as a “training programme for SENCOs to be skilled up... supported in the challenging work that they do, because we want to make sure that they do have high-quality and evidence-based training so that they know what works”.³⁰⁴ This qualification has been welcomed by the sector, with the Association of School and College Leaders describing it as “crucial”.³⁰⁵ However, current funding limits the number of staff per school able to access this training, leading to calls within our evidence for further investment to expand its offer and meet the “overwhelming demand” from schools.³⁰⁶

- 213.** From the evidence it is clear to us that SENCOs would benefit from access to ongoing, high-quality training to support them in their roles. Conrad Bourne, Director for SEND at The Mercian Trust told us he was “surprised” that there is no other statutory requirement for training or professional development beyond the ASEN or NPQ.³⁰⁷ Along similar lines, Nicole Dempsey, Director of SEND and safeguarding at Dixons Trust Academy, highlighted the value she found in additional, local authority-led SENCO training she had been a part of. This training, initiated by the local authority connected SENCOs to local services and systems, focusing on the practical application of skills and knowledge.³⁰⁸ We view such initiatives as imperative if an inclusive mainstream education system is going to be practically achieved.
- 214.** The feeling of being isolated and undervalued reported by SENCOs often stems from limited support or engagement from senior leadership. Nasen told us that if SENCO expertise to be valued and recognised it must be “embedded at a strategic level”, giving SENCOs “meaningful opportunities to influence senior leadership and drive forward inclusive practice within their schools”.³⁰⁹ This was acknowledged by then Minister McKinnell who told us about the importance of SENCO being “supported with knowledge and skills to be able to work with all leaders in their school to create that inclusive environment”.³¹⁰ Some evidence we received suggested appointing SENCOs to a setting’s Senior Leadership Team would elevate the status of SENCO, improving their support and engagement from senior leadership.³¹¹

304 [Q248](#)

305 Association of School & College Leaders ([SEN0663](#))

306 Association of School & College Leaders ([SEN0663](#))

307 [Q224](#)

308 [Q225](#)

309 Nasen ([SEN0809](#))

310 [Q248](#)

311 Justify Foundation ([SEN0068](#))

However, we were warned that this may have a particularly adverse impact on early career teachers. Conrad Bourne, Director for SEND at The Mercian Trust told us:

A SENCO should not necessarily be on the senior team because you may not want to be on the senior team as a SENCO. It may not be your career ambition. Also, we see SENCOs at different stages of their careers of becoming SENCOs. I see a number of colleagues in primary settings taking on the role of SENCO quite early in their teaching career and more so in secondary now. Often, as we see with senior leaders, you probably will not just be the SENCO. You will have other leadership portfolios and that means that you need a developed level of training to take on those. I would not want to put that pressure on.³¹²

- 215.** The Department for Education highlighted to us that all leadership NPQs contain a section on ‘Additional and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities’, which includes supporting leaders to understand how adaptive teaching can increase pupil success and the importance of working with families and staff to ensure effective support for pupils with SEND is in place.³¹³ The Association of School and College Leaders argues that school leaders should be expected to complete the SENCO NPQ as a marker of effective leadership, and goes further to propose that it could become a prerequisite for undertaking the NPQ for Headship in order to develop a “leadership pipeline and strengthen whole school confidence with the support required to co-ordinate SEND provision”.³¹⁴ This would build on the current leadership NPQ which contains a section on ‘Additional and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities’, which covers understanding how adaptive teaching can increase pupil success and the importance of working with families and staff to ensure effective support for pupils with SEND is in place. This would also align with what we heard from Nicole Dempsey, Director of SEND and Safeguarding at Dixons Academies Trust who told us that “having advocacy and knowledge and understanding [of SEND] on the senior leadership team is an absolute must”.³¹⁵

216. CONCLUSION

We welcome the introduction of the new National Professional Qualification (NPQ) for SENCOs as a positive step towards enhancing the leadership and expertise of SEND provision in schools and multi-academy trusts. However, further action is urgently needed. The scale of the challenges facing SENCOs including excessive workloads, insufficient time to carry out their statutory duties, and a lack of support requires immediate attention.

312 [Q224](#)

313 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

314 Association of School & College Leaders ([SEN0663](#))

315 [Q225](#)

217. CONCLUSION

Strong leadership on SEND is essential to delivering effective and inclusive education. Often the bulk of responsibility for SEND inclusion falls to a single SENCO and this should not be the case. Evidence shows that when senior leadership prioritises inclusion, this commitment permeates throughout the school, positively influencing staff attitudes and pupil experiences. Embedding SEND awareness and inclusion as a strategic focus at the highest-level drives culture change and ensures that inclusive practices are consistently implemented.

218. RECOMMENDATION

To strengthen leadership on SEND, the Department should, in the short term, mandate that at least one member of the Senior Leadership Team in every school and every multi-academy trust holds SENCO qualifications.

219. RECOMMENDATION

The Department should also publish guidance on appropriate SENCO-to-pupil ratios and develop a national strategy to ensure these ratios are achieved consistently across schools and multi-academy trusts.

220. RECOMMENDATION

Within four years, the Department should introduce a requirement for all new headteachers to hold a SEND-specific qualification. Ensuring that SEND expertise is embedded at the highest levels of school or multi-academy trust leadership will promote strategic oversight, improve the quality of inclusive practice, and better meet the needs of pupils with SEND.

Teaching assistants and learning support assistants

- 221.** Across the inquiry we heard about the significant role support staff and teaching assistants have in the delivery of SEND support in mainstream education settings. A 2023 DfE survey on the use of teaching assistants in schools reflects this, finding that across all settings, teaching assistants most commonly support pupils with SEND, including those with EHC plans.³¹⁶ The then Minister McKinnell reiterated this, saying “support staff play such a crucial role in schools, and teaching assistants in particular often work very closely with children with special educational needs and disabilities”.³¹⁷

316 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

317 [Q249](#)

Despite such staff providing the majority of the 1:1 support given to children and young people with SEND in mainstream settings, much of the evidence we received raises concerns about their “minimal training,” resulting in a situation where the “least qualified staff [are] working with the highest-need students”.³¹⁸ This evidence raises significant concerns, particularly given the Department’s intention for these staff to play a key role in delivering an inclusive mainstream education system. The submissions we received make it clear that currently many teaching and learning support assistants are not sufficiently prepared to meet the needs of children with SEND. If they are to fulfil their intended role effectively, it is essential that they receive more comprehensive training, guidance, and support to enable them to provide high-quality, inclusive education for all learners.

222. The 2023 Departmental survey found that just over two thirds (67 per cent) of teaching assistants have received training to deliver targeted SEND interventions and indicate an interest in training on working with pupils with SEND and/or other learning needs.³¹⁹ As a result, much of the evidence we received highlighted the need for teaching assistants and support staff to have more opportunities to engage with SEND specific training. The then Minister McKinnell acknowledged that supporting teaching assistants to develop their skills was “very important” and cited the level 5 specialist teaching assistant apprenticeship approved in 2024 as an avenue for upskilling.³²⁰ The specialist teaching assistant apprenticeship has also been cited as a solution to issues with the recruitment and retention of teaching assistants support staff with Unison welcoming this as an opportunity to make a “real difference”.³²¹ However, across the evidence many cite low pay as the main contributing factor to poor recruitment and retention.³²² This was reflected in Unison’s warning that level 5 specialist teaching assistant apprenticeship “must be paid at the going rate for the job and there should be no teaching on the cheap”.³²³ Further, we received evidence, from an experienced SENCO who described the struggle schools are having recruiting and retaining teaching assistants and support staff because salaries do not “match the expectations and responsibilities of their roles”.³²⁴

318 Mrs Judy Cooper ([SEN0092](#)), Anonymous ([SEN0047](#)), Dr Neil Alexander-Passe (Former SENDCO, Now Exam Access Assessor. Researcher and author at City and Islington College) ([SEN0069](#))

319 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

320 [Q249](#)

321 Schools Week, “[New apprenticeship to equip teaching assistants on SEND](#)”, September 2024

322 Dr Neil Alexander-Passe (Former SENDCO, Now Exam Access Assessor. Researcher and author at City and Islington College) ([SEN0069](#))

323 Schools Week, “[New apprenticeship to equip teaching assistants on SEND](#)”, September 2024

324 St Mark’s CE Primary, Vicarage Park CE Primary, Crosscrake CE Primary ([SEN0369](#))

223. CONCLUSION

Learning support assistants and teaching assistants are integral to the effective delivery of SEND support and resourcing their deployment properly can help reduce the need for expensive specialist placements. To sustain and strengthen their contribution, improvements are urgently needed in the recruitment, training, CPD and retention of this workforce. We are particularly concerned by evidence that many LSAs and TAs lack adequate SEND-specific training to perform their roles safely and effectively.

224. RECOMMENDATION

SEND content should be an integral part of teaching assistant training, and they should be provided with regular opportunities for CPD and peer support. This could be through incentivised or ring-fenced funding for schools and multi-academy trusts to release teaching assistants and learning support assistants for SEND CPD, removing practical barriers to participation and ensuring consistent take-up across the sector.

225. RECOMMENDATION

The Department should issue guidance on teaching assistant-to-pupil ratios and urgently address the worsening crisis in recruiting and retaining TAs and learning support assistants to ensure these ratios can be met. These professionals are vital to the delivery of inclusive education, yet their contribution continues to be undervalued and under-supported. A robust and comprehensive strategy is urgently required. This must include:

- A clear career progression framework with opportunities to develop specialist expertise and the opportunity for some TAs to progress to qualified teacher status.
- Competitive pay increases that reflect the skill, responsibility, and complexity of their roles.
- Expanded and better-promoted apprenticeship pathways to attract new entrants and diversify the workforce.
- Clearer communication to schools, multi-academy trusts and stakeholders about the distinct functions, expectations, and career progression routes within TA and LSA roles.

226. RECOMMENDATION

These measures are essential. Without decisive action, the system will continue to lose experienced staff, leaving vulnerable pupils without the support they need and deserve.

Local authority workforce

- 227.** Local authority staff are another key part of the SEND workforce. This includes professionals across support services who play a vital role in assessing needs, coordinating provision, and ensuring children and families can access the support they are entitled to. Given their close involvement in the SEND system, it is essential that local authority staff have a strong understanding of SEND and receive appropriate training to carry out their responsibilities effectively and empathetically. However, we heard that this is not always the case, with parents of children with SEND reporting that local authorities often fail to respond to their queries and provide timely or adequate support. One parent described their local authority response to their concerns as “purely lip service, rather than actual empathic acknowledgement.”³²⁵ Such experiences mean parents often feel “completely at a loss with the system” instead of genuinely supported.³²⁶
- 228.** We heard that, in order to improve the experience of children with SEND and their families, local authorities must significantly strengthen their communication practices. This includes ensuring that communication is more consistent, timely, and delivered with empathy and understanding. One proposal we heard was the introduction of dedicated caseworkers to support families in navigating the process of accessing SEND support.³²⁷ These caseworkers would keep families informed about progress and decisions, helping to foster greater trust, confidence, and consistency in the system. Another recommendation we heard was for enhanced training for local authority staff on SEND legislation and their legal responsibilities.³²⁸ Imogen Steele, Policy and Public Affairs Officer at Contact told us that “a lot more” training for local authority officials on SEND law would help improve interactions between local authority staff and children with SEND and their families and reduce the adversarial nature of interactions.³²⁹ This is because such training would help improve understanding of the processes related to SEND support and decision making ensuring the correct decisions are made earlier.

325 Dr Karen Broomhead (Degree Programme Leader/Senior Lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University) ([SEN0051](#))

326 [Q9](#)

327 Tameside Local Authority ([SEN0246](#))

328 IPSEA (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice) ([SEN0678](#))

329 [Q18](#)

229. CONCLUSION

Many children with SEND and their families continue to have unsatisfactory experiences when navigating the SEND system, particularly in their interactions with local authority staff. These challenges are often rooted in a failure to work empathetically in partnership with parents and carers and demonstrate a limited understanding of the assessment process and its significance. In some cases, local authority staff make poor or inadequate contributions to EHC plans, undermining their quality and failing to reflect the needs of the child. These issues not only erode trust in the system but also contribute to delays, disputes, and ultimately poorer outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

230. RECOMMENDATION

Local authority staff require improved training on child development, SEND law, parent engagement and mediation, alongside changes in practice that strengthen accountability and foster more constructive relationships with parents and carers. This should include meaningful parental involvement at every stage of the decision-making process regarding a child's needs and support. Embedding a more collaborative and transparent approach would not only enhance trust and outcomes for families but also help alleviate the pressures contributing to staff burnout within local authorities.

Health workforce

- 231.** Research by the County Councils Network and Local Government Association suggests that where investment in specialist support services has not kept pace with the needs of children and young people with SEND the offer of targeted support available to children and young people has “narrowed”, resulting in EHC plans being seen as one of the only ways to access additional specialist support.³³⁰ This was also reflected in anonymous evidence we received from a SEND and EHC plan lead at a specialist school, highlighting the increased demand from schools for external professionals from the specialist SEND health workforce to address the needs of pupils.³³¹

330 County Councils Network and Local Government Association, [Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England](#), July 2024

331 Anonymous ([SEN0013](#))

Box 6: What does the specialist SEND health workforce do in education settings?

The role of the specialist SEND health workforce in the diagnosis of needs, Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) process and individuals accessing SEND support varies depending on the specialism.

Educational psychologists provide consultation, model and implement effective interventions and change programmes to support students learning and wellbeing at the setting level.³³² Educational psychologists also suggest types of support that would help children and young people with SEND. In most cases, these interventions should fall into broad categories of support that schools provide as ordinarily available provision such as small group support or one-on-one help.³³³

Speech and language therapists work directly with children, their families, and other professionals to maximise communication potential. This can include one-to-one or small group sessions to develop speech sounds, language comprehension and expression, social communication, or fluency. Speech and language therapists also provide training and advice to setting staff, on approaches to supporting speech, language and communication. For example, adapting learning environment, resources, and teaching strategies to meet communication needs as well as promoting inclusive communication through communication aids (e.g., visuals, signs, symbols, or communication devices).

Occupational therapists share expertise on topics such as handwriting, school readiness, good seating, student wellbeing, dyspraxia, sensory regulation and motor skill development. They also support and advise teachers on creating accessible and inclusive learning environments that support sensory regulation and participation. This includes recommending modifications to routines, classrooms, playgrounds and lessons.

Local authority staff play a wide range of roles in the assessment and delivery of SEND support. They are responsible for identifying and assessing needs, and for developing and reviewing Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans. In addition, they provide children and young people with SEND, and their families, with information and guidance on the EHC needs assessment process, the support available, and how to access relevant services. These staff also facilitate collaboration across education, health and social care, working with professionals and schools to ensure that the provision set out in EHC plans is implemented effectively and in a coordinated way.

332 Dr Sarah Tighe ; Dr Niamh Wherity ([SEN0288](#))

333 Anonymous ([SEN0104](#))

Capacity challenges

232. The County Councils Network and Local Government Association report, *Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England*, highlights the “systemic difficulties” faced across the specialist SEND health workforce preventing vacancies being filled.³³⁴ For example:

- According to a survey by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists conducted in spring 2024, across the England, 19 per cent of speech and language therapy (SLT) posts were vacant in early 2024.³³⁵
- In December 2024 the Royal College of Occupational Therapists surveyed occupational therapists to understand factors making it difficult for people to access or benefit from occupational therapy. Of the 675 children’s occupational therapists who responded:
 - 72 per cent reported increased demand over the previous 12 months;
 - Only 58 per cent said they were able to provide the necessary level or type of occupational therapy support children and young people need.³³⁶
- In November 2024 local authorities reported employing 2,700 educational psychologists. In 2015 1,650 educational psychologists were directly employed by local authorities.³³⁷ According to the 2023 *Educational psychology services: workforce insights and school perspectives on impact report* by the Department for Education, just under a quarter (22 per cent) of the educational psychologists they surveyed anticipated moving to a different job within educational psychology, often in private practice, while 3 per cent anticipated leaving the profession.³³⁸

233. These capacity issues are limiting the support that can be provided. We heard from parents that their children’s speech and language support was “virtually non-existent”.³³⁹ Tameside Local Authority described educational psychologists to be in “critically short supply”.³⁴⁰ Limited capacity

334 County Councils Network and Local Government Association, [Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England](#), 2024

335 Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, [Vacancy survey](#) (accessed June 2025)

336 Royal College of Occupational Therapists, [Workforce survey report 2023](#), January 2025

337 Schools Week, “‘Insufficient’ educational psychologists to ‘meet demand’ from schools, warns government report”, March 2019 (accessed August 2025), DfE, [School workforce in England](#), June 2025 (accessed August 2025)

338 DfE, Research Report, [Educational psychology services: workforce insights and school perspectives on impact report](#), June 2023

339 Anonymous ([SEN0078](#))

340 Tameside Local Authority ([SEN0246](#))

throughout the specialist SEND health workforce has resulted in increased waiting times. A report on support for children and young people with special educational needs by the Public Accounts Committee, published in January 2025, highlighted long waits for children’s speech and language therapy and said that “timely access to health expertise constitutes a significant barrier in a struggling system”.³⁴¹ This reflects evidence we received from Tameside Local Authority who wrote:

Long waiting lists for assessments and interventions leave schools and families frustrated, while educators are forced to fill gaps they are not trained or resourced to address. The absence of timely specialist support exacerbates delays in identifying and meeting the needs of children, impeding children’s access to education and placing additional strain on an already stretched system.³⁴²

234. As of November 2024, 65,114 children were waiting for speech and language therapy.³⁴³ Of these, 29,693, or 45.6 per cent, had been waiting for over 12 weeks.³⁴⁴ However, waiting times are not only an issue with access to speech and language therapists. Ofsted has identified that children experience particularly long waiting times (worsening since the pandemic) for both speech and language therapists and educational psychologists.³⁴⁵ In July 2024, over 19,000 children and young people in England were waiting to see an occupational therapist in community (outside of hospitals).³⁴⁶ The widespread issue of waiting times is concerning, as delayed or limited access to occupational therapists and other allied health professionals can lead to worsening physical, learning, and mental health needs. This can result in a greater demand for intensive and costly interventions and risks intensifying the difficulties experienced by children and young people with SEND.

235. In addition to longer waiting times capacity issues are also increasing reliance on private assessments. This raises concern because it means families with the financial means could pay for quicker private assessments and support, leading to inequalities between children with SEND and their families.³⁴⁷ This was demonstrated in the evidence we received. One parent wrote:

341 House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, First Report of Session 2024–25, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), HC 353, January 2025

342 Tameside Local Authority ([SEN0246](#))

343 NHS England, [Community health services waiting lists](#) (accessed June 2025)

344 NHS England, [Community health services waiting lists](#) (accessed June 2025)

345 National Audit Office, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), HC 299, October 2024

346 Royal College of Occupational Therapists, [Occupational therapy Workforce Strategy action plan](#) (accessed June 2025)

347 National Audit Office, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), HC 299, October 2024

My child has had a positive experience of education. This is due to having the right support in place and I have been fortunately able to afford to provide professional support privately in the form of Educational Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational therapy as local services are inadequate.³⁴⁸

- 236.** The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan, published in June 2023 under the previous government, set an ambition to increase training places by over 25 per cent to over 18,800 by 2031/32. The plan also includes increasing the proportion of the speech and language therapy workforce joining via an apprenticeship route to five per cent. The plan also set an ambition to increase training places in addition to the proportion of the occupational therapists workforce joining via an apprenticeship route to between 25–50 per cent by 2031/32.³⁴⁹ To increase the number of Educational Psychologists, the Department for Education is investing £21 million to train 400 more Educational Psychologists starting in 2024. This builds on the £10 million already spent to train over 200 EPs who began their courses in September 2023. In addition, trainees funded by the Department for Education must now stay in local authority roles for at least three years after qualifying. This minimum service period has increased from two years for those starting their training in 2024.³⁵⁰
- 237.** The Public Accounts Committee report on Support for children and young people with special educational needs recommended that the Department for Health and Social Care sets out how its longer-term workforce plans will address current and forecast SEN skill shortfalls; and its processes, plans and targets for reducing related waiting lists within six months of the report’s publication in January 2025.³⁵¹ This has yet to be done by the Department for Health and Social Care. In December 2024, Health and Social Care Secretary Wes Streeting announced that a refreshed NHS workforce plan would be published in Summer 2025 and a 10 Year Health Plan published in Spring 2025 to help address capacity issues and ensure the NHS has the staff it needs to treat patients in a timely manner.³⁵² King’s Fund recently published Ten actions the Government can take to improve children’s health. Two of these actions are of particular relevance to SEND:

348 Anonymous ([SEN0031](#))

349 NHS England, [NHS Long Term Workforce Plan](#), June 2023

350 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

351 House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, First Report of Session 2024–25, HC 353, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), January 2025

352 DHSC, [NHS workforce plan](#) (accessed July 2025), DHSC, [10 Year Health Plan](#) (accessed July 2025)

- Place a stronger focus on addressing the shortages in the child health workforce (including in school nurses, health visitors, midwives and consultant paediatricians), and improve staff retention across the medical, nursing and allied health professional specialist children’s workforce when reviewing the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan.
- Set an expectation that every ICS strategy includes specific focus on children and young people’s health, wellbeing, and health and care services, including clear pathways to ensure that local systems are sufficiently prioritising children.³⁵³

238. Despite such efforts capacity issues persist as need outstrips the capacity of educational psychologists, speech and language therapists and other allied health professionals in the public sector.³⁵⁴

239. CONCLUSION

Shortages of educational psychologists and allied health professionals, including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, and physiotherapists are significantly undermining the availability and quality of SEND support. These workforce gaps delay assessments, restrict access to essential interventions, and place additional pressure on schools and multi-academy trusts to fill specialist roles they are not equipped to provide. In addition, the shortages have resulted in far too many highly skilled professionals being deployed predominantly in undertaking assessments and writing reports rather than working directly and therapeutically with children and young people. This has to change, for the benefit of professionals who are becoming harder to retain, and in order to deliver a genuinely inclusive system in which access to support is available for every child who needs it.

353 King’s Fund, Briefing, [Ten actions the government can take to improve children’s health](#), April 2025

354 Association of Educational Psychologists, [Interested in a career in Educational Psychology?](#)

240. RECOMMENDATION

The DfE and DHSC should urgently develop a joint SEND workforce plan to address shortages and build capacity across education, health, and care services. This should include explicit measures to deliver a shift in the deployment of educational psychologists, speech and language therapists and other allied health professionals away from undertaking assessments and writing reports and towards greater deployment in education settings, delivering therapeutic support for children and upskilling early years practitioners, teachers and support staff. This will enable professionals to concentrate on delivering frontline support. Such an approach would help retain skilled practitioners within the system and encourage those who have left the profession, often due to excessive paperwork and limited direct engagement to return.

8 Getting to a sustainable model of funding

241. The current SEND funding model is unsustainable. Parents told us consistently that insufficient funding is eroding the resources and support available to children and young people with SEND.³⁵⁵ This chapter outlines how the Department for Education, working with HM Treasury and the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, can bring stability to the system and lay the foundations for long-term sustainability. It begins by examining education funding, including the high needs block and the national funding formula, then considers local authority finances and measures to ease financial pressures.

Education funding

242. Education funding to support pupils with SEND in England is drawn from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) the funding allocated to local authorities to fund schools in two main blocks:

- the **schools block**, which is allocated to individual mainstream schools, and
- the **high needs block** which is managed by local authorities and supports provision for children and young people with more complex needs, for example those with Education, Health and Care plans.

The overall size of the schools block funding received by local authorities is determined by the Department for Education (DfE) and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) in relation to the National Funding Formula (NFF). We discuss both types of funding in more detail below.

243. Throughout the inquiry, we consistently heard that current levels of funding for SEND are inadequate. The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)'s funding survey of members in 2024 found that funding for SEND support is falling short of need. For example:

- 99 per cent of responding members reported that funding for pupils requiring SEN support (with no EHC plan) is insufficient.

355 Thematic summary of evidence submitted by parents and carers ([SEN0894](#))

- 99 per cent of responding members reported that the funding they receive to fully meet the needs of all pupils with EHC plans is insufficient.³⁵⁶

244. We heard from parents that current levels of funding were incompatible with the Government’s desire for inclusive mainstream education. One parent told us that the Department for Education’s “fixation on inclusivity [...] is not accompanied by the necessary level of investment to make it a reality”.³⁵⁷ The Department for Education acknowledged that fiscal restraints were limiting the funding provided for SEND, however suggested that this could be overcome through the strategic allocation of funds, saying:

More money is not the always the answer (or an option), and the government’s current fiscal challenges have been set out at the Budget. What matters is how the money is spent, and what behaviours we are incentivising within the system from funding allocations.³⁵⁸

Schools block funding

245. The Schools Block is the largest component of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), amounting to approximately £48.7 billion in 2025–26.³⁵⁹ This funding is primarily allocated to support mainstream schools. By design, the amount of Schools Block funding each local authority receives per pupil varies. These differences reflect factors such as local demographics, levels of deprivation, historical funding patterns, and the application of the National Funding Formula which “aims to ensure a fair and needs based allocation of funds”.³⁶⁰

246. Local authorities are required to identify a notional budget within the schools block for their mainstream schools to help them comply with their duty to use their ‘best endeavours’ to meet the special educational needs (SEN) of pupils.³⁶¹ Each mainstream school’s funding allocation includes funding for the first £6,000 of support costs for each child with SEND; however, the Department for Education expects that most needs will be met for less than this amount.³⁶² We heard consensus across the evidence that the notional £6,000 is insufficient, largely due to the fact that the £6,000

356 National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) ([SEN0444](#))

357 Mrs Judy Cooper ([SEN0092](#))

358 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

359 House of Commons Library, [Dedicated Schools Grant](#), Debate Pack CDP-0090, 2 May 2025

360 Department for Education, [The national funding formulae for schools and high needs 2024–25](#) (accessed July 2025)

361 DfE and EFSA, [The notional SEN budget for mainstream schools: operational guidance 2025 to 2026](#), November 2024

362 Mainstream academies are also expected to fund the first £6,000 of support costs for pupils with SEND.

figure has not been increased since it was first recommended in 2009 and introduced in 2014.³⁶³ Another, contributing factor to the inadequacy of this funding is the increased cost of support services over the past decade. We were told by Daniel Constable-Phelps, Executive Headteacher at St Mary's Primary and Nursery School in Southampton:

I do not believe that the £6,000 is enough. Part of the reason is the astronomical cost of services has gone up and that has not been in line with the £6,000 changing at all in the school's budgets.³⁶⁴

- 247.** We also heard that often this notional £6,000 is diverted away from SEND support and provision, “not given to the SENCO or spent on SEND [but] spent in another area of the school, where it is just as equally needed”.³⁶⁵ This practice reflects the broader issue of underfunding across the education system. Written evidence told us that this diversion of funds results in the quality of SEND provision in mainstream schools being “weak [and] inconsistent”.³⁶⁶ Some witnesses strongly advocated for the ringfencing of this funding, Katie Ghose, CEO of Kids told us “it [the notional £6,000] should be ringfenced; money for children with SEND should go to children with SEND”.³⁶⁷ In addition to ringfencing we heard that an inflationary increase for this funding is required if mainstream education is going to improve and an inclusive system be established.³⁶⁸ Similarly, the NAHT advocated for the “increase and protect[ion of] new funding for children with SEND” with the hope that this will enable schools and education settings to build the necessary capacity to deliver inclusive mainstream education.³⁶⁹
- 248.** The extensive evidence we received clearly demonstrates that current levels of funding for SEND are wholly inadequate. Simply reallocating existing resources will not address the scale of the challenge. Delivering truly inclusive education in mainstream settings requires sustained and meaningful investment to cover costs such as teaching assistant and specialist staff salaries, assistive technology, and other tailored support. Without this, schools will continue to struggle to meet the needs of all learners, not because of a lack of will but a lack of resource.

363 9000 Lives SEND Consultancy ([SEN0027](#)), [Q28](#)

364 [Q228](#)

365 Tameside Local Authority ([SEN0246](#)), [Q28](#)

366 Dr Neil Alexander-Passe (Former SENDCO, Now Exam Access Assessor. Researcher and author at City and Islington College) ([SEN0069](#))

367 [Q14](#)

368 9000 Lives SEND Consultancy ([SEN0027](#))

369 National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) ([SEN0444](#))

249. CONCLUSION

It is clear that the current levels of funding provided to schools and multi-academy trusts are inadequate to support the effective inclusion of pupils with SEND. The notional £6,000 threshold is insufficient to deliver good SEN support, placing unsustainable pressure on school budgets. The Department cannot reasonably expect inclusive education to be realised without a significant increase in investment. Adequate and sustained resourcing is essential to ensure that mainstream schools, multi-academy trusts and teaching staff are properly equipped to be inclusive. However, the Government does not appear to have a realistic understanding of the scale of investment required to deliver a genuinely inclusive education system. Without acknowledging and addressing the true level of resource needed, efforts to improve outcomes for pupils with SEND risk falling short.

250. RECOMMENDATION

The current £6,000 notional threshold is outdated and inadequate. It must be automatically updated each year in line with inflation to prevent further erosion of support for pupils with SEND. This is a necessary correction to address years of chronic underfunding. This funding should also be ringfenced to ensure it is used exclusively for supporting pupils with SEND and to improve the transparency and accountability of the resources schools and multi-academy trusts are committing to deliver inclusivity. However, these measures alone will not be enough to create the change desperately needed in this failing system. The Department must set a clear trajectory towards a more sustainable and equitable funding model that is informed by, and able to deliver, the Department's definition of inclusive mainstream education.

High needs block

251. The high needs block allocation to local authorities is set according to the National Funding Formula (NFF). The high needs block:

- provides £10,000 basic per-pupil place funding in state-funded special and alternative settings and non-maintained special schools;
- top-up funding for pupils with needs that cannot be met from settings' basic budgets (including High needs top-up funding allocated for SEND support costs that are in excess of £6,000 per pupil from the high needs block);
- meets the cost of placements in independent specialist settings; and
- provides specialist SEND services.

252. The Government will provide nearly £11.9 billion for high needs funding in 2025–26, a nine per cent cash increase compared to 2024–25. According to the Department for Education the 2025–26 high needs allocations ensure that every local authority will receive a minimum increase of seven per cent per head of their 2–18-year-old population, most authorities seeing higher increases—up to 10 per cent per head. Between 2015–16 and 2024–25 high needs funding has increased significantly, rising by 59 per cent (or £4 billion) in real terms.³⁷⁰ This increase makes up about half of the total rise in school funding during the same period. However, factors such as the increased funding demand, complexity of pupil need, inflation and more recently the impact of falling pupil numbers mean the funding available per student with an EHC plan has dropped by around a third in real terms.³⁷¹ Despite the increased high needs funding, we heard that there had been “no real improvement in outcomes”.³⁷² To address this, Alison Ismail, Director for SEND and Alternative Provision at the Department for Education told us it would look carefully at making resource available at an earlier stage.³⁷³ Across the inquiry we have heard a consistent message: early intervention can avoid the escalation of SEND need and complexity. In line with this Kids, a charity supporting children and young people who are disabled, advocates for a portion of the High Needs Block to be dedicated towards funding early education for children with SEND because currently only 6 per cent of local authorities offer sufficient childcare for children with SEND.³⁷⁴ This was echoed by Amanda Allard of the Council for Disabled Children who told us “the money could not be spent more badly... than it currently is ... there is no money for early intervention and we are pushing children into requiring more specialist support.”³⁷⁵

253. CONCLUSION

We have seen and heard evidence that delivering inclusive practice in education improves long term outcomes for children and young people with SEND which has wider benefits to the economy as well as costing less to deliver than expensive specialist placements.

370 DfE, [High needs funding: 2024 to 2025 operational guide](#), December 2024

371 IFS, [Spending on special educational needs in England: something has to change](#); F40 (SEN0327)

372 [Q257](#)

373 [Q257](#)

374 Kids, Press Notice, [“Only 6 per cent of local authorities offer sufficient childcare for children with SEND”](#) (accessed June 2025)

375 [Q14](#)

254. RECOMMENDATION

The Government should undertake a rigorous cost-benefit analysis to understand the short- and long-term economic benefits of investing in a fully inclusive education system.

255. CONCLUSION

Funding must be strategically deployed to deliver the best outcomes for children and young people with SEND. This should include prioritised investment in early intervention. Timely and targeted support is essential and can prevent some needs such as speech and language and SEMH needs from escalating, reducing long-term costs to the system, and improving educational and life outcomes. Prioritising early support in such areas not only represents better value for money but also aligns with a preventative, rather than reactive, approach to SEND provision. Ensuring that schools, multi-academy trusts and services are resourced to identify and meet speech and language and SEMH needs at the earliest stage should be a central principle of any funding reform. However, the Department must recognise that while early intervention plays a crucial role in supporting children with disabilities, it is not a solution for all needs. Some children will require consistent, long-term support throughout their lives. Where this is the case, it is essential that adequate and sustained funding and resources are in place to ensure these children receive the ongoing support they need to thrive.

256. RECOMMENDATION

The High Needs Block should be refocused to enable and incentivise earlier intervention. Currently, a significant proportion of this funding is directed towards supporting high-cost, specialist provision once needs have escalated. While such provision is vital for some, a more preventative approach is needed to reduce long-term need and improve outcomes. Redirecting a greater share of High Needs funding towards early identification and support within mainstream settings and through multi-agency services will help address emerging needs and ensure that good support is put in place at the outset.

National funding formula (NFF)

- 257.** Despite increased funding many local authorities, trade unions and think tanks are in favour of reviewing the NFF to take better account of inflation, deprivation and the increasing volume and complexity of additional needs.³⁷⁶ In addition to these issues another concern we heard about is the

376 Surrey County Council ([SEN0389](#)), F40 ([SEN0327](#))

unequal nature of per pupil allocations of high needs funding across local authorities in England by the NFF. Rob Williams, Senior Policy Advisor at NAHT told us that the formula:

perpetuates the historical inconsistencies that are already in the system [...] from our members' perspective that does not make any sense at all and from the parents' perspective it doesn't either. Particularly if they move between schools in two different areas their expectation of what their child might get may look very different if they move to a different school. That is difficult to explain in a system that is supposed to be a national SEN system.³⁷⁷

- 258.** Though we recognise and understand the need for regional differences within the formula to account for differences in local costs and deprivation, current disparities are too large. To reduce disparities and make the allocation of funding fairer F40 suggest that the NFF determining schools block and high needs funding should be based on current need profiles and the lowest funded areas given an uplift.³⁷⁸ Though the then Minister McKinnell acknowledged the challenges around the inequity of the NFF, she emphasised that any change must be done “very carefully and needs a significant amount of work and input”.³⁷⁹ Alison Ismail, Director of SEND at the Department for Education and Alternative Provision told us:

we are alive to some of the disparities in the system, but I would agree with the Minister that it is how we approach it in the round to try to address some of those without creating instability.³⁸⁰

259. CONCLUSION

The National Funding Formula must ensure that funding for SEND is both fair and sufficient to meet the needs of children and young people across the country. While some geographical variation is to be expected, this should reflect the prevalence and relative level of need in each area. The formula must guarantee that all local areas are equipped with the necessary resources to deliver consistent, high-quality SEND provision and support equitable outcomes for all learners.

377 [Q37](#)

378 [F40 \(SEN0327\)](#)

379 [Q258](#)

380 [Q258](#)

260. RECOMMENDATION

A comprehensive review of the National Funding Formula is urgently needed to ensure funding is allocated fairly and reflects the real level of need across the country. The current formula fails to address historic underfunding, ignores rising inflation, does not account for regional differences in cost and need and ignores hidden pockets of deprivation. These gaps are driving deep and persistent inequalities in SEND provision. Any credible funding system must correct these failures and provide a stable, needs-based foundation for support.

Local authority finances

- 261.** Many reports have highlighted the immense financial pressure local authorities are under due to growing SEND need and related expenditure.³⁸¹ Failure to keep up with the growth of need and in turn expenditure has resulted in education budget deficits at the local authority level. In 2022–23, 101 local authorities overspent their high-needs budget which has contributed to growing cumulative deficits within their dedicated schools grant.³⁸² Currently the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) estimates that this deficit totalled at least £3.3 billion by the end of 2024. The National Association of Head Teachers identifies high-needs deficits across local authorities as a “challenge in developing greater inclusivity”.³⁸³ They view such deficits as a symptom of the “burden of high-needs underinvestment by the previous government and subsequent overspend in local authorities”.³⁸⁴ To overcome this challenge they suggested that the Government should write off all local authority high-needs deficits so new funding set aside for pupils with SEND is not consumed by this debt.

Measures to alleviate financial pressures

- 262.** The Government has used a variety of interventions to alleviate and manage the financial pressures being faced by local authorities due to SEND associated costs.

381 County Councils Network and Local Government Association, [Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England](#), July 2024

382 NAO, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), HC 299, October 2024

383 National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) ([SEN0444](#))

384 National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) ([SEN0444](#))

Statutory override

263. In 2020 the then-Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities introduced the ‘statutory override’ which allows local authorities to exclude any deficits on their Dedicated Schools Grant spending from their main revenue budgets. This was subsequently extended to run until the end of March 2026. In June 2025 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government announced a further two-year extension until 2027–28.³⁸⁵ The evidence we have received from, local councils highlight the significance of these deficits and how they undermine local authorities’ ability to support children and young people with SEND. F40 suggested that these deficits should be written off by central government, saying:

the crisis in SEND cannot be resolved whilst local authorities have these deficits hanging over them. The system needs reform and more funding, and local authorities need the deficits paying off by Government so they can begin to support children with a clean slate.³⁸⁶

264. In their report, Support for children and young people with special educational needs, published in October 2024, the NAO recommended the Department for Education work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and HM Treasury as a “matter of urgency” to develop and share plans for the financial sustainability of each local authority once the statutory override ends in 2025–26.³⁸⁷ The Public Accounts Committee report into Support for children and young people with special educational needs made a similar recommendation, however, also highlighting the complications of any potential solution given local authorities’ differing financial situations saying there is a “real risk of unfairness” due to varying financial circumstances of local authorities given some have accrued SEND related deficits and others have used their own non-education funding to avoid large deficits.³⁸⁸ To account for this the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has launched a consultation on these plans to ensure the local government finance settlement is fair.³⁸⁹ However, it has been made clear to us that the extension of the statutory override is not a long-term solution to local government deficits. Wider system change is needed to achieve financial sustainability. Phil Haslett, deputy chair of f40 told us:

385 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Fairer funding for councils across the country in major reform](#), June 2025

386 F40 (SEN0327)

387 NAO, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), HC 299, October 2024

388 Public Accounts Committee, First Report of Session 2024–25, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), HC 353

389 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Press Notice, [“Fairer funding for councils across the country in major reform”](#), June 2025

The extension of the statutory override is just kicking this issue down the road. If we extend it again, we are just going to have larger and larger deficits to deal with. At some point we must make significant changes ... to make the system financially sustainable so that you can then have a sensible conversation about what happens to the accumulated deficits, which is what the statutory override is covering.³⁹⁰

- 265.** Similarly, Cllr Pete Marland, chair of the Local Government Association’s economy and resources board, said that though greater financial certainty and a simpler funding system were important:

Council finances remain under pressure and all councils need adequate resources to meet growing cost and demand pressures.³⁹¹

- 266.** The then Minister McKinnell told us that one billion pounds had been added to the high needs budget to support the creation of 44,500 new places in mainstream school by 2028 and £740 million capital funding provided to adapt existing mainstream state schools buildings and expand specialist units within mainstream schools was evidence that the Department was already delivering on funding and resourcing to deliver inclusive mainstream education.³⁹² However, the IFS found that even with the extra one billion pounds announced in the 2024 Autumn Budget, local authority deficits could exceed eight billion pounds by 2027 if funding does not increase in line with inflation. Further, because EHC plans come with legal obligations, funding must keep up if these obligations are to be fulfilled.³⁹³ Further, when we pressed the Minister on whether she envisaged more money from the Treasury to support this on a longer-term basis, the Minister could not provide confirmation, promising this would be addressed in the upcoming White Paper on SEND due in autumn 2025.³⁹⁴

390 [Q60](#)

391 Local Government Chronicle, “[BREAKING: Send deficit override extended](#)”, June 2025

392 [Q233](#)

393 IFS, [Spending on special educational needs in England: something has to change](#), December 2024

394 [Q233](#)

267. CONCLUSION

The extension of the statutory override until 2027/28 is a welcome step, but it remains a temporary measure in response to the ongoing financial instability facing local authorities across England. Reducing deficits is essential to achieving long-term financial sustainability however, this cannot be done at the expense of local authorities fulfilling their legal obligations to children and young people with SEND. Any permanent solution must involve coordinated, cross-departmental action between the Department for Education, HM Treasury, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to address the systemic funding challenges within local government.

268. RECOMMENDATION

We believe that a reset of local authority finances through a partial write-off of SEND-related deficits could provide a necessary step towards long-term stability. However, this must be approached with care, recognising the progress made by some local authorities through the Delivering Better Value in SEND programme and Safety Valve agreements, and the contributions already made by some local authorities from their General Fund towards SEND over and above contributions from their High Needs education block. It is essential that the Department for Education engages meaningfully with local government representatives to develop a fair and transparent approach that supports improvement while ensuring accountability. The Department must provide further detail on this in the upcoming SEND white paper due in Autumn 2025.

9 Building stronger partnerships

269. Healthcare is an “essential enabler” for children and young people with SEND to be in, and stay in, education.³⁹⁵ Recognising this, a “core aim” of the 2014 SEND reforms was to establish a more joined up, whole system approach across education, health and care on SEND.³⁹⁶ This chapter explores the legislation and guidance governing multi-agency working in SEND. It examines how differing priorities and incentives across partner organisations are hindering effective collaboration, and considers the changes needed to bring these into alignment. We go on to explore how clearer roles, stronger accountability, and joint commissioning could enhance the impact of multi-agency working. Finally, we review the collaborative work currently taking place at departmental level and discuss how this can be sustained and strengthened.

Box 7: SEND legislation and statutory guidance on multi-agency working

Children and Families Act 2014

Section 25 of the Children and Families Act 2014 focuses on the promotion of integration, mandating that local authorities ensure integration between educational, health, and social care services when it benefits children and young people with SEND. It says:

(1) A local authority in England must exercise its functions under this Part with a view to ensuring the integration of educational provision and training provision with health care provision and social care provision, where it thinks that this would:

(a) promote the well-being of children or young people in its area who have special educational needs or a disability, or

(b) improve the quality of special educational provision

(i) made in its area for children or young people who have special educational needs, or

395 [Q10](#)

396 County Councils Network and Local Government Association, [Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England](#), July 2024

(ii) made outside its area for children or young people for whom it is responsible who have special educational needs.³⁹⁷

Section 26 of the Act focuses on the promotion of whole system approach through joint commissioning arrangements. Through this section local authorities and partner commissioning bodies (including health partners) are required to make joint arrangements for delivering education, health, and care provisions for children and young people with SEND:

(1) A local authority in England and its partner commissioning bodies must make arrangements (“joint commissioning arrangements”) about the education, health and care provision to be secured for:

(a) children and young people for whom the authority is responsible who have special educational needs, and

(b) children and young people in the authority’s area who have a disability.³⁹⁸

Section 42 of the Act also seeks to promote joint working between healthcare and education services to secure special education provision and health care provision, placing a legal duty on health bodies to arrange the health care provision specified in an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan:

(3) If a plan specifies health care provision, the responsible commissioning body must arrange the specified health care provision for the child or young person.³⁹⁹

The SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years

The SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years was published by the Department for Education and the Department of Health in 2015 to support the implementation of the Children and Families Act 2014. It provides statutory guidance, including explaining the practical responsibilities of health partners. Chapter 3 of the code of practice, titled Working together across education, health and care for joint outcomes, highlights:

- The duty to integrate educational and training provision and health and social care provision where this would promote wellbeing and improve the quality of provision for disabled young people and those with SEND;

397 Children and Families Act 2014, [Section 25](#)

398 Children and Families Act 2014, [Section 26](#)

399 Children and Families Act 2014, [Section 42](#)

- That joint commissioning must be based on a clear understanding of local needs and should make best use of the resources available in an area to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
- That partners must agree on how they will collaborate to provide personalised, integrated support across education, health, and social care. This support should focus on positive outcomes and smooth transitions from early childhood to adult life, including key stages like moving between education settings or transitioning to adult services.
- That the scope of commissioning arrangements includes children and young people aged 0 to 25 with special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities, whether they have an EHC plan or not.
- The scope of services includes a wide range of provision including clinical treatments, medication delivery, speech and language therapy, assistive technology, personal care, CAMHS, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, nursing supports, specialist equipment or wheelchairs. Additionally, they may cover highly specialist services required by a small number of children, such as those with severe learning disabilities or services commissioned centrally by NHS England such as alternative communication systems.
- The role of Designated Medical Officer should support partners to meet their statutory obligations towards children and young people with SEND.
- The importance of information sharing between education, health and care services in order determine the provision needed by the child or young person.
- The ‘tell us once’ approach to sharing information during the assessment and planning process as good practice so that families and young people do not have to repeat the same information to different agencies, or different practitioners and services within each agency.
- The need to consider the range of professionals across health and care who need to be involved in the assessment process and as well as their availability and flexibility to be a part of the EHC plan implementation and continuous improvement.⁴⁰⁰

SEND and alternative provision improvement plan

The SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time, was published by the Department for Education in March 2023. This outlined some interventions to enhance collaboration with health services to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND including:

- Improving ICB accountability by requiring each ICB to have a named Executive Board member responsible for SEND.
- Developing national standards that recognise the roles of health and social care professionals within SEND provision and promoting interdependent working within the existing statutory framework.
- Updating the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND inspections to focus on the outcomes and experiences of children and young people with SEND, reinforcing the importance of health services in education settings.
- Developing standards for multi-agency and advisory panels to facilitate better cooperation between the education, health, and social care sectors.⁴⁰¹

270. Despite legislation and guidance setting out the roles and responsibilities of schools, health commissioners and local authorities in the delivery of the SEND system, we found that “misaligned priorities and incentives” undermine collaboration and the adoption of a whole system approach.⁴⁰² Research by the County Councils Network and Local Government Association found that leaders across health, education, and local government agree the 2014 SEND reforms have not delivered a more integrated system across education, health, and care.⁴⁰³ Jo Harrison, Director and Co-Chair at the National Network of Parent Carer Forums told us that:

We need to strengthen the system... because we don’t have the multi-agency working that we should have, based on current legislation.⁴⁰⁴

271. The written evidence also raised concerns about the limited effectiveness of multi-agency and joined up working across education, health and social care. A carer of three children with SEND echoed the frustrations of many

401 DfE, [SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time](#), March 2023

402 National Audit Office, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), HC 299, October 2024

403 County Councils Network and Local Government Association, [Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England](#), July 2024

404 [Q30](#)

parents and carers when they described the educational, health and social care systems as “completely separate” and highlighted that professionals in these sectors “don’t talk to one another”.⁴⁰⁵ This lack of communication was highlighted as undermining information sharing, the EHC plan assessment process and the overall provision of support to children and young people with SEND. We heard that another preventable consequence of limited multi-agency working was “children routinely fall through cracks and conditions worsen resulting in greater need”.⁴⁰⁶ We heard that this is particularly the case with the SEND system and CAMHS. Jo Hutchinson, Director for SEND and Additional Needs at EPI told us her research found a “surprisingly low overlap between the two” systems despite their relevance to each other. Jo told us that there is more work to be done to build a shared understanding of what and how each service contributes to the assessment of needs as well as treatment and intervention.⁴⁰⁷ Tameside Local Authority emphasised the need for professionals across health and education to “provide timely, high-quality contributions to the process, ensuring that families are not burdened with chasing missing input”.⁴⁰⁸ The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill proposal to introduce a single unique identifier, applied consistently across education, health, and social care services, represents a positive step towards strengthening information sharing and more joined-up support for children and families. When asked about this, then Minister McKinnell told us about the potential for the single unique identifier in the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill to be an “important tool” for sharing information between different partners such as healthcare, the local authority and schools.⁴⁰⁹

Different priorities and incentives across education and health

- 272.** We have heard repeated concerns that SEND was not enough of a priority for health services and the Department of Health and Social Care. NHS England has 32 priorities for 2024/25, however, only two of these pertain to people with learning disabilities, with one focused on those under 18 years old.⁴¹⁰ This is in direct contrast to the Department for Education

405 Anonymous ([SEN0090](#))

406 Anonymous ([SEN0101](#))

407 [Q208](#)

408 Tameside Local Authority ([SEN0246](#))

409 [Q285](#)

410 NHS England, [2024/25 priorities and operational planning guidance](#) (accessed July 2025). The objectives are to reduce reliance on mental health inpatient care for people with a learning disability and autistic people, to the target of no more than 30 adults or 12–15

which has identified SEND as a departmental priority.⁴¹¹ The NAO described these different priorities and incentives as “obstacles to building a cohesive system”.⁴¹² In January 2025 the Public Accounts Committee report on Support for children and young people with special educational needs, recommended that the Department for Health and Social Care set out how Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) would consider SEND alongside wider priorities within six months.⁴¹³ The Government agreed with this recommendation and has committed to implementing it by December 2025.⁴¹⁴

273. We heard repeated calls for the Department of Health and Social Care to better prioritise and invest in SEND. For example, the Council for Disabled Children told us that the SEND sector is “begging for some real leadership from DHSC on this issue”.⁴¹⁵ Similarly, Katie Ghose, CEO at Kids, emphasised to us the importance of building in the mechanisms and the structures so that the working across health and education is “given, not an add-on” at all levels. Ghose went on to tell us that Kids “would expect the Health and Social Care Department to be seeking SEND money from the spending review in the way that the Department for Education would be”.⁴¹⁶ However, in the most recent spending review the Department for Health and Social Care did not receive any funding towards SEND. Wider cuts to funding across health also pose a risk.

274. In March 2025, the Secretary of State for Health, Wes Streeting MP, announced that NHS England would be abolished, and that, as part of this process, ICBs would be required to reduce their running costs by 50 per cent.⁴¹⁷ We heard that these reductions, coupled with the 30 per cent cut in running costs over the past three years, have hindered the involvement of health services. It is therefore “unsurprising” that efforts to strengthen collaboration and partnership between local government, schools, and other partners have been limited.⁴¹⁸ Sarah Walter, Director of Integrated Care System Network at the NHS Confederation told us that these system and structural changes will inevitably result in an “additional degree of

under 18s for every 1 million population and to ensure 75% of people aged 14 and over on GP learning disability registers receive an annual health check in the year to 31 March 2025.

411 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

412 National Audit Office, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), HC 299, October 2024

413 Public Accounts Committee, First Report of Session 2024–25, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), HC 353

414 HM Treasury, [Treasury minutes: Government response to the Committee of Public Accounts on the First report from Session 2024–25](#), CP 1306, April 2025

415 [Q19](#)

416 [Q19](#)

417 NHS Confederation, [Abolishing NHS England: what you need to know](#), March 2025

418 [Q129](#)

instability” across the system, weakening capacity.⁴¹⁹ However, Sarah also told us that these changes could also provide an “opportunity” in the longer term with ICBs having to focus on “strategic commissioning” and assessing population needs.⁴²⁰

275. CONCLUSION

The current failure to embed Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) as a shared priority across government departments is not just a policy oversight, it is a profound injustice to some of the most vulnerable children in our society. It is evident that SEND is not sufficiently seen as a priority by the health system. The education system is increasingly shouldering the weight of responsibilities for supporting children and young people with SEND that should, in part, be met by health services. This chronic imbalance places unsustainable pressure on schools, multi-academy trusts and local authorities and undermines the principle of joint responsibility set out in the SEND Code of Practice. The erosion of funding to Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), alongside ongoing structural upheaval within the health sector, risks further weakening the capacity of health services to meet their statutory duties. If we are serious about improving outcomes for children with SEND, then coordinated investment, shared accountability, and genuine cross-departmental collaboration must become non-negotiable. Without it, the burden will continue to fall disproportionately on schools and local authorities, compromising outcomes for children and placing additional strain on an already stretched education system.

276. RECOMMENDATION

SEND should be identified as a priority across the health system and ongoing NHS restructuring must be used as an opportunity to strengthen the role and accountability of health services in supporting children and young people with SEND. This includes ensuring that ICBs are fully engaged in local SEND systems, with clearly defined responsibilities and mechanisms for joint planning and delivery. The seniority, authority and visibility of senior responsible officers for SEND within ICBs must be increased.

277. RECOMMENDATION

Bringing education and health more closely together should be supported by an evidence-led approach, drawing on the role of NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) to produce new SEND guidelines and intervention pathways.

419 [Q129](#)

420 [Q129](#)

278.

RECOMMENDATION

Crucially, this must be backed by appropriate financial investment from the health sector to meet statutory duties, provide timely access to therapies and assessments, and contribute equitably to joint commissioning arrangements. All areas should have a robust and fully operational partnership arrangement in place by autumn 2026. This should be underpinned by clear governance and shared accountability.

Responsibilities, accountability and joint commissioning

279. Research commissioned by the County Councils Network and Local Government Association found that responsibilities for SEND provision are not equitable, concluding that “despite the fact that SEND is a multi-agency responsibility, there are few opportunities for joint strategic oversight, there is a lack of really robust mechanisms for holding ICBs and social care to account for their contributions”.⁴²¹ For example, the Council for Disabled Children told us that often the first time an ICB comes to the table to work with local authorities on SEND is after a negative local area SEND inspection.⁴²² We also heard from Let Us Learn Too about the need for “meaningful involvement from health and care providers”, including committing to provision.⁴²³ To improve the effectiveness of multi-agency working Contact proposed strengthening the Children and Families Act 2014 to place joint legal duties on health, social care and education authorities instead of education authorities alone as is the current situation. According to Contact this change would “ensure that disabled children receive a complete package to meet their needs”.⁴²⁴ Imogen Steele, Policy and Public Affairs Officer at Contact, told us:

For EHC plans in section F, which is where the special education provision is outlined, the legal duty to provide that provision is solely on the local authorities [...] if there was a joint legal duty, it would mean that there was more accountability on health, social care, equality and education [...] it would currently be a duty on the local authorities to secure a speech and language therapist, whereas if it were made joint, health would have to make sure that they provided it.⁴²⁵

421 County Councils Network and Local Government Association, [Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England](#), July 2024

422 [Q16](#)

423 Let Us learn Too ([SEN0130](#))

424 Contact, [Contact’s 3 Asks to improve England’s SEN system](#) (accessed March 2025)

425 [Q15](#)

- 280.** The NAO found that without these legal duties, and with local authorities having weak leverage over health services, the responsibilities and costs for healthcare are being shifted onto schools, colleges and local authorities.⁴²⁶ We heard about the various complications and complexities this is causing in meeting the needs of pupils with complex medical needs. Katie Ghose, CEO of Kids, told us of the reluctance of some schools to provide complex medical support because of “rigidity... worry [and] fear”.⁴²⁷ We were told by the Council for Disabled Children that a consequence of this is some children being out of school for extended periods of time. To overcome this, the Council for Disabled Children recommended an “integrated model where schools are properly supported”, either through the deployment of medical staff or upskilling of school staff to meet complex medical needs in the school setting.⁴²⁸
- 281.** However, several education unions (GMB, Unite, Unison and NAHT) have written to us raising concern about the lack of reference to delegation in the DfE’s ‘Supporting Pupils’ guidance and the DoH/DfE SEND code of practice, despite some children with SEND requiring healthcare provision to enable access to education or training. The unions highlight the lack of statutory, regulatory and governance schemes linking the health and education sectors.⁴²⁹ For example, there are no general legal provisions in place at an organisational level which permit NHS Act 2006 healthcare services to be delegated from the NHS to schools. Without this, delegation at an individual level from a registered professional to an unregulated member of staff is complicated. The unions propose that an NHS-commissioned, needs-led clinical school nursing service is put in place in conjunction with the local authority commissioned public health nursing service, in every school.
- 282.** Katie Ghose, CEO of Kids, told us of some great examples where education staff have been upskilled by clinicians in the medical professions to support children’s medical needs:

In one of our nurseries our staff were trained by the local nurses to support a child with a tracheostomy. They said it was the first in the county.⁴³⁰

426 National Audit Office, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), HC 299, October 2024

427 [Q10](#)

428 [Q13](#)

429 [Letter from Joint Unions to Chair on Solving the SEND Crisis, dated 28.05.25](#)

430 [Q10](#)

283. Katie noted this as a strong, practical example of how healthcare specialists are deployed for their unique expertise, while also building up the skills of the wider SEN workforce. However, evidence from the unions makes it clear that such examples remain rare, underscoring the need for a systematic approach to be established at a national level.

284. CONCLUSION

Guidance on the delegation of healthcare responsibilities within schools and multi-academy trusts remains weak. There is insufficient clarity on how and when healthcare tasks can be appropriately and safely assigned to school or multi-academy trust staff, what training and safeguards should accompany such delegation, and ultimately where responsibility lies between education and health services. This lack of direction creates uncertainty for schools and multi-academy trusts, risking inconsistency and unsafe practices in the delivery of health interventions for pupils.

285. RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care should issue joint statutory guidance clarifying how and when healthcare responsibilities can safely be delegated in schools and multi-academy trusts. This should be produced in collaboration with school and multi-academy trust leaders and health and education unions and set out clear lines of accountability between education and health services, minimum training requirements for school staff, and safeguards to ensure consistent and safe delivery of health interventions for pupils.

286. A lack of clearly defined responsibilities within the health system can significantly weaken accountability. When roles and obligations are ambiguous or fragmented, it becomes difficult to hold individual professionals or organisations to account for the provision of SEND support. This can lead to delays, inconsistent service delivery, and ultimately poorer outcomes for children and young people with SEND, who rely on timely and coordinated input from health services. Currently, the primary mechanism for promoting joint accountability across education, health and care services is the area SEND inspection framework. These inspections assess how effectively local area partnerships work together to identify and meet the needs of children and young people with SEND. Another mechanism intended to support joint accountability is the SEND Tribunal, which allows parents and carers to appeal decisions related to EHC plans. While the Tribunal plays an important role in upholding the rights of children and young people with SEND, its focus is primarily on individual cases rather than systemic accountability. Further detail on our conclusions and recommendations regarding joint accountability can be found in Chapter 4.

- 287.** The joint commissioning of SEND provision between education, health and social care services is highlighted as an opportunity for joint working and the sharing of responsibilities in the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND code of practice: 0–25.⁴³¹ Ian Kessler and Annette Boaz’s scoping study into the supply and demand of therapists for children and young people with SEND states that joint commissioning is understood to be a “key means” of securing therapy services because of the interest of education and health services as well as local authorities.⁴³² Further, Kessler and Boaz highlighted that there was “no shortage of advice and guidance on management of the commissioning process and on service design”.⁴³³ Despite this, significant variation in the success and use of joint commissioning persists.
- 288.** The Council for Disabled Children told us they would like joint commissioning to be a requirement rather than an expectation because since the 2014 reforms they have not seen a significant increase in joint commissioning as “people’s level of ambition is still too low”.⁴³⁴ The Council for Disabled Children also highlighted to us the importance of strategic and informed commissioning, which requires the consistent sharing of information; and expressed positive anticipation about plans to introduce a unique identifier for children and young people through the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill to improve data sharing across education, health and care.⁴³⁵ This will be further explored in chapter 10. We also heard from Sarah Walter, Director of Integrated Care System Network at the NHS Confederation, who said that that through improved data and information-sharing, local authorities can identify and assess “in-depth population needs” and then strategically commission services for the outcomes they desire.⁴³⁶

431 DfE and DHSC, [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#) (accessed April 2025), [Children and Families Act 2014](#)

432 Kessler, I & Boaz, A 2024, [The Demand and Supply of Therapists for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities: A Scoping Study](#), NIHR Policy Research Unit in Health and Social Care Workforce, The Policy Institute, King’s College London.

433 Kessler, I & Boaz, A 2024, [The Demand and Supply of Therapists for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities: A Scoping Study](#). NIHR Policy Research Unit in Health and Social Care Workforce, The Policy Institute, King’s College London.

434 [Q16](#)

435 [Q19](#)

436 [Q129](#)

289. RECOMMENDATION

The Department of Health and Social Care must urgently appoint a dedicated national SEND lead to drive accountability and coordination across the health system. This role must be empowered and mandated to provide coherent strategic leadership on the delivery of health-related SEND duties, forge robust partnerships with education and care sectors, and ensure that the needs of children and young people with SEND are embedded in the heart of health policy, planning, and workforce development from senior officials to frontline services.

290. RECOMMENDATION

The Government should place a clear statutory duty on health services, including ICBs and NHS providers, to ensure their full and accountable participation in the planning, commissioning, and delivery of SEND provision. This duty must align with the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice, which emphasises joint commissioning and integrated working. Strengthening statutory responsibilities for health is key to ensuring timely access to assessments, therapies, and interventions, and upholds the principle of a coordinated, child-centred approach to SEND support.

Cross-departmental partnerships

- 291.** The then Minister Catherine McKinnell MP told us that the Department for Education, the Department of Health and Social Care, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government were “work[ing] very closely” to ensure alignment across government on the Department for Education’s plans for a reformed SEND system.⁴³⁷ She also highlighted “strong overlaps” with future plans of the Department of Health such as its neighbourhood health ambitions, which will introduce neighbourhood health centres and localise the delivery of health services in its 10-year plan.⁴³⁸ Sarah Walter, Director of Integrated Care System Network at the NHS Confederation, told us that ICBs should use the “more proactive, anticipatory” 10 year plan and its emphasis on local partnerships, early intervention and prevention as an opportunity to lean into “develop[ing] partnerships across the NHS teams with local government partners, schools and voluntary sector partners” to improve collaboration on SEND.⁴³⁹

437 [Q276](#)

438 NHS Confederation, [Ten-Year Health Plan: what you need to know](#), July 2025; DHSC, [10 Year Health Plan for England: fit for the future](#), July 2025

439 [Q146](#)

292. The then Minister McKinnell highlighted existing cross-departmental partnerships on SEND that are proving effective, such as the Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) initiative.⁴⁴⁰ This is a cross-government initiative led by the DfE, DHSC and NHS England supporting around 1,600 mainstream primary schools in better meeting the needs of neurodiverse children by deploying health and education specialists to build staff capacity. Schools receive up to five days of tailored support, shaped by self-assessments, pupil feedback, and parent/carer input. The programme is active in 40 of 42 ICB areas. Projects such as the Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) pathfinder which is a joint initiative by the DfE and NHS England and the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) are other examples of collaborative efforts to enhance SEND intervention and provision.⁴⁴¹ These projects are further explored in chapter 5.

440 [Q276](#)

441 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

10 Expanding capacity within the SEND system

293. The current crisis in SEND provision is not just a failure of capacity. Our evidence showed it was a failure of funding and political will. Addressing the current crisis and building the Government’s stated objective of an inclusive mainstream education system will require a significant expansion of capacity. We heard heartbreaking reports from parents who felt compelled to send their children to independent specialist or out-of-area schools to access the support they should have received locally.⁴⁴² We also heard pleas from local authorities seeking greater autonomy to design and deliver provision that reflects the specific needs of their local SEND populations, needs that were too often lost in a one-size-fits all national framework. We’ve heard persuasive arguments that strengthening local capacity, alongside empowering authorities to respond flexibly and innovatively, will be essential to reducing reliance on placements far from home and ensuring that every child and young person can access high-quality inclusive education within their community.

Box 8: Education reforms impacting school capacity since 2010

Academies Act 2010

The Academies Act 2010 transferred power from local authorities to the Secretary of State and academy trusts. By mandating that new schools be academies and obliging councils to support conversions, the Act left LAs with the statutory duty to secure school places (Education Act 1996, s.14) but without the same legislative powers to deliver them. The Act came into force in July 2010. Its key provisions were:

Section 1: Allowed the Secretary of State to enter into Academy arrangements with any maintained school, not just those in difficulty (as under previous legislation).

Section 4: Enabled the Secretary of State to make an Academy order, requiring a local authority to cease maintaining a school once it converted.

442 Thematic summary of evidence submitted by parents and carers ([SEN0894](#))

Section 6: Imposed a duty on local authorities to “take all reasonable steps” to facilitate the conversion of maintained schools to academies.

Schedule 1: Transferred publicly funded land used by a converting school to the academy trust (or made it available for free schools).

The Act also amended earlier legislation (notably the School Standards and Framework Act 1998) to create the framework for free schools, which are legally academies established from scratch.

Impact on School Capacity

Restriction on new maintained schools: Following the Act, and later clarified in the Education Act 2011 (s.36), new schools could normally only be established as academies (the “academy presumption”). This limited LAs’ ability to expand capacity through traditional community schools.

Fragmented growth: Because free schools could be proposed by groups outside LA control (parents, trusts, charities), new capacity could be added in areas not prioritised in LA forecasts.

Statutory responsibility remained with LAs: Under Education Act 1996 (s.14), LAs still had the legal duty to ensure sufficient school places, but after 2010 they lacked the power to open or expand maintained schools freely, creating tension between duties and powers.

Impact on Local Authority Powers

Loss of control over schools converting: Once a school became an academy under the 2010 Act, the LA ceased to maintain it and had no role in its governance or funding.

Duty to support conversion (s.6): LAs were legally obliged to facilitate, not resist, conversions.

Reduced role in admissions and expansions: While LAs retain duties under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (Part III) to coordinate admissions, academies are their own admissions authorities, reducing LA influence.

The Education Act 2011

The Education Act 2011 received Royal Assent in November 2011. It built on the Academies Act 2010, further consolidating the academies/free schools model and reducing local authority functions in education. The Education Act 2011 deepened the Academies Act 2010 by legislating for the academy presumption (s.36); it effectively removed local authorities’ ability to establish new maintained schools. Councils kept the statutory

duty to provide sufficient school places (Education Act 1996, s.14) but lost many of the legislative levers to do so. This created a structural tension: responsibility without full powers. Its key provisions included:

Section 36: Introduced the “academy presumption”—where a local authority identifies the need for a new school, it must first seek proposals for an academy/free school.

Section 37: Allowed the Secretary of State to direct that a new school be established as a local authority-maintained school only if satisfied that no suitable academy proposals exist.

Section 43–44: Imposed a duty on converting academies and free schools to participate in fair admissions and comply with the School Admissions Code.

Section 45–47: Changed local authority powers over school improvement, reducing their ability to issue warning notices (later strengthened in 2016).

Impact on School Capacity

Academy presumption (s.36): Local authorities lost the general power to open new community schools, including specialist schools, meaning that almost all new capacity had to come via academies/free schools.

Demand-led but less coordinated growth: While free schools could provide capacity quickly, they were not necessarily aligned with LA projections of local need, potentially leading to surpluses in some areas and shortages in others.

Reinforcement of LAs statutory duty: Under Education Act 1996, s.14, LAs remained legally responsible for ensuring sufficient school places, but the 2011 Act restricted their practical mechanisms to fulfil this duty.

Impact on Local Authority Powers

School organisation curtailed: Sections 36–37 meant LAs could no longer simply establish a new maintained school, including specialist schools, when needed; the Secretary of State had the decisive role.

Admissions influence reduced: Although LAs still coordinated admissions under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, academies became their own admissions authorities. The 2011 Act required compliance with the admissions code but placed enforcement power mainly with the Schools Adjudicator/Secretary of State, not LAs.

School improvement role weakened: LAs' intervention powers were scaled back; central government took more control over failing schools via academy conversion.

- 294.** This chapter begins by examining current school capacity and the challenges arising from its limitations. It then explores the shortcomings of the existing place-planning process, before considering the critical role of data and how improving its quality and use can help ensure that needs are met through strengthened local capacity.

Current school capacity

- 295.** In 2023 the School Capacity Survey began to ask local authorities to provide data on the capacity of special schools and the capacity of SEN units and resourced provision in mainstream schools. This was the first time this data was collected, so there is no data on the period from 2014–2022. Local authorities reported that in the 2022/23 school year there were 148,000 special school places, alongside 9,000 places in SEN Units and 18,000 places in resourced provision in mainstream schools.⁴⁴³ However, the Department for Education do not know how many of these places are unfilled and caveat this data as approximate due to it being the first year of data collection and data still being developed. The Department for Education told us they “expect data quality to improve over the coming years”.⁴⁴⁴
- 296.** There are 333 state funded AP schools, including 170 LA-maintained pupil referral units and 112 AP academies and 51 free schools. There are around 26,900 pupils in state funded AP and an additional 48,130 pupils attending other types of AP arranged by LAs. The proportion of pupils in state place-funded AP identified with SEN has remained stable between 2021/22 and 2022/23 at around 82 per cent. However, the proportion of pupils in state place-funded AP with an EHC plan has more than doubled between 2015/16 and 2022/23, from 10 per cent to 25.5 per cent, respectively.⁴⁴⁵
- 297.** The Government’s vision for inclusive mainstream education system will require capital investment, whether for resource bases, inclusive infrastructure and adaptations within mainstream settings or additional specialist settings for those with the highest needs.⁴⁴⁶ Local authorities receive SEND capital funding which is also known as the High Needs Provision Capital Allocation (HNPCA). This funding can be used to help manage pressures in budgets by creating new state school places for

443 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

444 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

445 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

446 Tameside Local Authority ([SEN0246](#))

children and young people with SEND and improving existing state school facilities for children and young people with SEND.⁴⁴⁷ However, since 2010, local authorities have not had the power to directly establish new specialist schools due to the Academies Act 2010 and Education Act 2011 (more detail on this can be found in the box at the beginning of this chapter). Instead, new provision can only be created through the Free Schools programme, requiring delivery by academy trusts rather than by local authorities themselves. This shift limited councils' ability to respond directly to local need for specialist places, leaving them dependent on the willingness of academy sponsors to establish and run new schools. Furthermore, local authorities have been unable to manage pupil place-planning across their area or influence the admissions policies of academies due to this legislation, further limiting local authorities' ability to deliver sufficient SEND capacity. The Department for Education has used its capacity data to allocate funding, providing more money to areas with less state special school capacity. Local authorities can use SEND capital funding to:

- Invest in mainstream schools, special units, special schools, early years settings, and further education colleges;
- Make changes to the curriculum;
- Provide additional equipment, IT, and teaching materials;
- Support small group work and classroom assistance;
- Create dedicated SEND areas in schools.

298. The Department for Education has invested over £3bn in high needs capital since 2018–19, with over £2.4bn of this being spent through high needs provision capital allocations since 2022–23. According to the Department for Education, this investment has created over 50,000 new and re-provided places in special and mainstream schools.⁴⁴⁸ According to the NAO the HNPCA is one of the main routes through which the Government have sought to increase specialist school places in addition to its free schools programme.⁴⁴⁹ In the 2024 Autumn Budget the Secretary of State announced £740m for high needs capital in 2025–26 to support children and young people with SEND or who require AP.⁴⁵⁰ However, with many state special schools at or over capacity there is consensus that current provision is

447 DfE, [High Needs Provision Capital Allocation](#) (accessed July 2025)

448 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

449 National Audit Office, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), HC 299, October 2024

450 Department for Education ([SEN0887](#))

insufficient and will struggle further to meet future need.⁴⁵¹ According to the DfE around 63 per cent of special schools are at or over capacity (52 per cent are over).⁴⁵²

299. Across the evidence, many councils highlighted that the shortage of local state specialist provision is driving an overreliance on out-of-area and “poor value for money” independent settings.⁴⁵³ The Local Government Association and County Councils Network report, *Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England*, explained that:

increasing demand combined with limitations on LAs’ ability to create new provision can mean that the independent sector is the only part of the SEND system that can react when additional provision is needed.⁴⁵⁴

300. The NAO estimates that an independent special school place costs £61,500 compared to £23,900 in an equivalent state special school.⁴⁵⁵ We heard that in some cases, such costs can be explained by the specialised provision they offer, particularly where provision for low-incidence needs may not be available in local state special schools.⁴⁵⁶ However, such a significant gap in cost raises questions about cost-effectiveness in other contexts. A number of our witnesses highlighted that the independent specialist sector is increasingly being “dominated” by independent schools owned by private equity firms.⁴⁵⁷ Concerns were raised that these organisations are capitalising on the shortage of state specialist places and the gaps in local provision, with some reportedly charging up to £100,000 per pupil per year and operating at profit margins as high as 25 per cent. This raises serious questions about value for money, the sustainability of provision, and the extent to which profit motives align with the best interests of children and families, and it further underlines the urgent need to ensure that local authorities have the ability to deliver new specialist places directly where they are needed. Ensuring more effective delivery of specialist places in the state sector can also help to reduce home to school transport costs arising from children having to travel long distances to school.⁴⁵⁸

451 Institute for Fiscal Studies, [Spending on special educational needs in England: something has to change](#), December 2024, F40 (SEN0327)

452 Department for Education (SEN0887)

453 F40 (SEN0327), Institute for Government, [SEND spending needs reform to stop local authorities going bust](#), January 2024, NAO, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), HC 299, October 2024

454 County Councils Network and Local Government Association, [Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England](#), July 2024

455 National Audit Office, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), HC 299, October 2024, p. 20

456 [Q68](#)

457 SEN0630, Oxfordshire County Council (SEN0770)

458 SEN0603, New Economics Foundation (SEN0710), Seashell (SEN0700)

Resource bases

301. The Department for Education is placing significant emphasis on expanding resource bases as the primary mechanism for delivering specialist places within mainstream education. This approach reflects a commitment to increasing access to specialist provision while promoting inclusion; however, it also raises important considerations about consistency, quality, and the integration of resource bases within broader school communities. Resource bases come in the form of SEN units and resourced provisions.

302. SEN units are special provisions within a mainstream school where the pupils with SEN are taught within separate classes for at least half of their time. In January 2025, there were 449 schools in England with SEN units. SEN units:

- are designated by the local authority specifically for making SEN provision, and sometimes accommodate pupils registered at other schools on a part-time basis;
- receive funding of £6,000 or £10,000 per place, and usually top-up funding for any additional costs of support required by individual pupils;
- cater for a specific type or types of SEN (for example autistic spectrum disorder); and
- are usually for pupils with an EHC plan (but may also provide support for pupils with SEN support).

303. Resourced provisions are places that are reserved at a mainstream school for pupils with a specific type of SEN, taught for at least half of their time within mainstream classes, but requiring a base and some specialist facilities around the school. In January 2025 there were 1,217 schools with resourced provision. Resourced provisions:

- are designated by the local authority specifically for making this kind of SEN provision;
- receive funding of £6,000 or £10,000 per place, and usually top-up funding for any additional costs of support required by individual pupils;
- cater for a specific area or areas of SEN (for example specific learning difficulties); and
- are usually for pupils with an EHC plan, but could include pupils with SEN support.

304. We received some evidence across the inquiry supporting the expansion of resource bases.⁴⁵⁹ However, it was made clear to us that expansion alone will not make mainstream settings inclusive. Further, that the quality of resource bases can vary depending on staff qualifications, the extent to which the provision is appropriately tailored to the needs of the children it serves, and the overall inclusivity of the culture within the host school.⁴⁶⁰ This makes it clear that the expansion of resource bases within mainstream settings must be accompanied by greater clarity on good practice, improvements in training, teaching and accountability measures.⁴⁶¹ We also received evidence suggesting that the proliferation of resource bases could amplify the “othering” of children and young people with SEND, segregating them from mainstream classrooms.⁴⁶² In Ontario we saw an effective use of a resource base-type approach. The settings we visited allowed students to access specialist provision within mainstream schools through a flexible, individualised, child-centred approach. Children spent time in specialist classrooms when they required targeted support and otherwise participated in mainstream classrooms enabling individualised learning pathways as well as promoting inclusion and social integration. The extent of time each child spent in a specialist or mainstream classroom was specific to that child. This model demonstrated how specialist and mainstream provision can be integrated to meet the diverse needs of learners without segregating them from their peers. Our visit made it clear to us that a clear understanding of the role of resource bases and the role they play within an inclusive mainstream school, combined with strong governance and oversight and access to appropriate expertise are essential for this approach to be successful.

459 Surrey County Council ([SEN0389](#))

460 Staffordshire County Council ([SEN0417](#))

461 Staffordshire County Council ([SEN0417](#))

462 Solihull Council ([SEN0450](#))

305. RECOMMENDATION

If the Department for Education expands the use of resource bases to increase specialist provision within mainstream schools and multi-academy trusts, it must set out a detailed implementation plan. This plan should clearly specify how resource bases should be staffed, including required qualifications, expertise, and staff-to-pupil ratios to ensure all children with SEND receive appropriate support. The Department must also define mandatory standards of good practice for resource bases, covering physical facilities and equipment and good practice approaches to integration with the wider school or multi-academy trust community. By establishing these standards and holding schools and multi-academy trusts accountable for meeting them, the Department can ensure that the expansion of resource bases delivers high-quality, consistent, and inclusive provision, meeting the needs of children with SEND while strengthening inclusion across mainstream education.

Planning

306. There are various factors contributing to limited specialist capacity, for example, the inefficiencies of the funding application process. The current process for securing high needs capital funding is set out below:

- **Consultation:** Local authorities are expected to consult an “appropriate and proportionate manner” with local parents, carers, young people, and providers when developing their local capital strategy for HNPCA.
- **Application submission:** Authorities submit detailed proposals outlining the scope, objectives, and anticipated outcomes of the projects.
- **Evaluation:** The Department reviews submissions to ensure they align with funding criteria and effectively address the needs of the local SEND population.
- **Funding disbursement:** Approved projects receive funding in instalments, with specific timelines for each financial year.
- **Monitoring and reporting:** Authorities must monitor the progress of funded projects and report on outcomes to ensure compliance with grant conditions and to demonstrate the effective use of public funds.

307. We heard from local authorities that this process is cumbersome and slow, delaying delivery of vital places. Further, that it is “essential” that this process changes. Tameside Local Authority told us:

The current system for securing funding and establishing new SEND schools is often slow and overly complex, delaying the delivery of critical places. LEAs require more flexibility to allocate funds based on local needs, with simplified national frameworks that enable faster decision-making.⁴⁶³

- 308.** High Needs Capital Funding agreements in England are typically allocated on a multi-year basis, but individual project funding can be subject to short-term funding cycles. For example, the High Needs Provision Capital Allocations (HNPCA) programme received £2.6 billion in funding between 2021 and 2025, distributed to local authorities over multiple financial years. However, individual project funding agreements usually last for a single financial year, with local authorities required to allocate and spend the funds within specified timeframes. While the overall investment strategy spans several years, the short-term nature of annual funding cycles can create challenges for long-term planning and project delivery. The short-term nature of capital funding cycles is a “key issue” that undermines long-term capital investment.⁴⁶⁴ We heard that guaranteed, multi-year capital funding cycles over the next decade would help stabilise the system and enable the proactive expansion of SEND provision rather than this always being reactive. This would help allow local education authorities to phase developments over time according to need, “address[ing] gaps in specific types of provision” and “avoid[ing] sudden shortfalls”.⁴⁶⁵
- 309.** The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill will give local authorities a greater role in key decision-making areas relevant to SEND capacity where they were previously lacking. For example, the Bill expands local authority admission powers, giving local authorities the ability to direct both maintained schools and academies to admit a child under statutory criteria, with new duties to cooperate on admissions planning, including published admission numbers. This has the potential to give local authorities a much wider range of options when seeking to place a child without access to a school place. Local authorities will also regain the power to propose and establish new state schools, including specialist state schools. This is a change from only academies, free schools and trusts being able to establish new schools. Along with this power the Bill also gives local authorities more responsibility for monitoring the availability of school places in their area, identifying and addressing gaps in provision, and ensuring that new schools meet local demand.⁴⁶⁶

463 Tameside Local Authority ([SEN0246](#))

464 Tameside Local Authority ([SEN0246](#))

465 Tameside Local Authority ([SEN0246](#)), [Q58](#)

466 Bevan Brittan, [Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill – key education issues for local authorities](#), January 2025

310.

CONCLUSION

The allocation of £740 million in high needs capital funding for 2025–26 is a welcome investment and reflects a growing recognition of the urgent need to expand and improve SEND provision. However, this funding should be seen as a starting point rather than a solution. One-off or short-term funding cycles make it difficult for local authorities and providers to plan, commission, and deliver the specialist and inclusive provision needed to meet rising need. We have heard consistent evidence highlighting the need for longer-term, multi-year funding settlements to support more strategic and sustainable planning at the local level.

311.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Education should develop and implement a comprehensive capital investment strategy for SEND. This strategy should provide clarity over future funding streams, enable better forecasting and planning, and support the development of high-quality, fit-for-purpose settings across both mainstream and specialist provision.

312.

CONCLUSION

We welcome the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill, particularly the proposed reforms that give local authorities a greater role in key decision-making areas such as the establishment of new schools, oversight of admissions, and the placement of pupils. These changes represent a positive step toward restoring strategic oversight at the local level. Empowering local authorities in these areas is essential for improving coordination across the system, addressing local sufficiency gaps, and reducing reliance on costly out-of-area or independent placements. Currently, without this, local authorities have been unable to ensure that sufficient and suitable provision is available for children and young people with SEND in their area.

313. CONCLUSION

The Department for Education should expand specialist SEND provision by investing in high-quality specialist state schools and mainstream resource bases and other mainstream provision. This should be achieved through shifting funding from some independent specialist school provision to better value for money state specialist school provision. This will help meet rising need, support inclusive mainstream education, and reduce reliance on costly or distant placements. This expansion must be aligned with robust local planning and forecasting, ensuring that new provision is responsive to patterns of demand and delivered in a way that reduces pressure on over-capacity special schools and minimises reliance on distant or expensive independent placements.

314. RECOMMENDATION

As part of the expansion of specialist SEND, the highest-performing state specialist schools should be designated as Centres of Excellence. These schools would play a leading role in supporting the development of expertise across other schools, local authorities or multi-academy trusts by providing training, sharing best practice, and offering targeted support to meet complex and specialist needs across the system.

315. RECOMMENDATION

The Government should continue to review whether local authorities have the necessary powers to fulfil their legal obligations to children and young people with SEND in order to address the mismatch between powers and responsibilities which has arisen as a consequence of previous reforms.

316. RECOMMENDATION

As it seeks to expand the capacity of specialist state schools and deliver inclusive mainstream schools, the Government should monitor and report on an annual basis on the number of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools, in specialist independent schools and specialist state schools.

Data

- 317.** Surrey County Council highlighted the importance of “data-driven decision-making” involving enhanced data collection and outcome monitoring in improving the capacity of SEND provision.⁴⁶⁷ Similarly, Tameside Local Authority told us:

A comprehensive understanding of SEND sufficiency is the foundation for effective planning. LEAs must have accurate data on the prevalence and types of SEND in their area, mapped against existing provision. This requires ongoing analysis of current and future demand, accounting for trends such as demographic changes, medical advancements, and the long-term impact of the pandemic on developmental needs. With this information, LEAs can develop a clear and detailed roadmap for SEND provision across all phases of education—early years, primary, secondary, and post-16.⁴⁶⁸

- 318.** According to the Department for Education, the targeting of high needs capital has improved since 2024, when it began using school capacity data to determine how funding is allocated. Since then, funding allocations have been determined by taking into account each local authority’s size and its pupil-to-capacity ratio. However, in January 2025 the Public Accounts Committee concluded that “reform of the [SEND] system is hindered by a lack of data” and recommended that the Department for Education “urgently improve” data collection.⁴⁶⁹ We heard from a range of stakeholders that further progress is still needed in how data is used to ensure capital investment is effectively targeted to meet local needs and demand. Evidence from NAHT identifies high-quality data and the “granular detail” it provides as “essential” to local authorities being able to make informed decisions about capital investments.⁴⁷⁰ Tameside Local Authority told us:

Local Education Authorities (LEAs) face significant challenges in planning and delivering the SEND school places required to meet the growing and evolving needs of children with SEND. To address these challenges, LEAs need a strategic, long-term approach, grounded in robust data, collaborative planning across their area, and guaranteed capital investment funding over an extended period.⁴⁷¹

467 Surrey County Council ([SEN0389](#))

468 Tameside Local Authority ([SEN0246](#))

469 NAO, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), HC 299, October 2024

470 National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) ([SEN0444](#))

471 Tameside Local Authority ([SEN0246](#))

- 319.** From the evidence we have received, it is clear that the availability of robust and comprehensive data, including accurate information on the number and location of current specialist SEND places, is essential to improving the allocation of capital funding. Without this, there is a risk that investments will not be targeted to areas of greatest need. A stronger data-led approach would help ensure that funding is directed where pressures on places are most acute. Expanding provision within the state sector, across both mainstream and specialist settings, in areas of identified shortage would not only improve access for children and families but also help to reduce the escalating costs of home-to-school transport and limit reliance on costly independent special school placements.
- 320.** The Council for Disabled Children also highlighted to us the importance of “outcomes-based commissioning” which requires more sophisticated data and systematic approach to information sharing. The Council for Disabled Children told us that they welcome plans to introduce a unique identifier for children and young people through the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill to improve data sharing across education, health and care.⁴⁷² Evidence from Let Us Learn Too also highlighted the need for greater collaboration and information sharing between the Department for Education and local authorities to improve projections of the number of pupils who will require support throughout their education journey, and to develop capacity accordingly.⁴⁷³ When asked about this, then Minister McKinnell told us that the Department for Education had a data strategy and wanted to make improvements to the data and the oversight of the SEND system to drive improvement and reform.⁴⁷⁴

321. CONCLUSION

The data currently collected and available to the DfE on both mainstream and specialist SEND need is limited and inconsistent. Comprehensive data at the local, regional and national level is essential to assessing the sufficiency of capacity and determining funding allocations for education settings.

472 [Q19](#)

473 Let Us Learn Too ([SEN0130](#))

474 [Q285](#)

322. RECOMMENDATION

To plan effectively for future capacity and ensure the right support is in place, the Department must take a data-driven approach, developing a more robust understanding of need by systematically gathering and analysing relevant, high-quality data. This should include a national SEND data strategy that requires local authorities and education settings to collect and report standardised, high-quality data on levels of need, current provision, capacity, and projected demand. This would require clear definitions and metrics for identifying and categorising SEND across mainstream and specialist settings and mandatory annual data submissions aligned with school and local authority planning cycles.

- 323.** Evidence from Let Us Learn Too suggested that the Department should require any new mainstream school over a certain size to have a specialist base or unit to avoid shortfalls and gaps in provision. Tameside Local Authority agreed that some national oversight is necessary to ensure equity in provision, however, highlighted that local flexibility is “equally important”, saying:

LEAs must retain the capacity to review and adapt provision over time. SEND needs are not static, and local authorities must be able to adjust plans as circumstances change. This requires a system of regular monitoring, flexible funding for expansions, and mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of new schools and places once established.⁴⁷⁵

- 324.** To resolve this and increase state specialist capacity, Surrey County Council called for more investment to build new specialist resource bases within mainstream schools and new specialist settings to meet rising local demand.⁴⁷⁶ A collective of city councils specifically highlighted the need for greater capital investment in the early years sector to enable local authorities to provide “opportunities for earlier intervention that may result in a better transition into mainstream provision”.⁴⁷⁷

475 Let Us Learn Too ([SEN0130](#))

476 Surrey County Council ([SEN0389](#))

477 Portsmouth City Council, West Sussex County Council, East Sussex County Council, Brighton and Hove ([SEN0266](#))

11 Conclusion

- 325.** The SEND system in England is at a breaking point. Despite the ambition for inclusive mainstream education, the reality for many children and young people with SEND is one of unmet needs, delayed support, and fractured services. Families are forced into adversarial battles for basic entitlements, while educators and professionals operate within systems that are under-resourced and overwhelmed. The evidence is clear: the current model is unsustainable, inequitable, and failing to deliver the outcomes our children deserve.
- 326.** In this inquiry we listened to those who have the most experience of and insight into the current system. The conclusions and recommendations we make in this report present a comprehensive roadmap for reform, grounded in the lived experiences of families, educators, and professionals—a reform programme which will put children and young people with SEND back at the centre of our education system, and in doing so, deliver benefits for the system as a whole. We call for national standards to ensure consistency in provision, statutory duties to strengthen accountability, and a workforce strategy that equips all professionals to deliver inclusive education. Crucially, we conclude that SEND provision demands a sustainable funding model that reflects the true scale and complexity of need, alongside stronger partnerships across education, health, and care. These reforms must be underpinned by transparency, collaboration, and a commitment to restoring trust in the system highlighting issues, concerns and good practice.
- 327.** Change is not optional—it is urgent and essential. The Department for Education must act decisively, working across government and with all stakeholders including children with SEND and their families to deliver a SEND system that is inclusive, fair, and fit for the future. Every child and young person with SEND has the right to thrive in education. We must not wait another decade to make that a reality.

Appendix 1: Insight from Norwich

Box 9: Committee visit to Norwich

In June 2025 we visited Norfolk as a part of our inquiry into Solving the SEND crisis to see examples of SEND delivery. During this visit we went to Aylsham High School and Norwich City College. At Aylsham High school we saw:

- A senior leadership team that is highly trained and deeply committed to mainstream inclusion, with this commitment reinforced by testimonies from parents of children with SEND, who reported feeling listened to, respected, and supported with empathy.
- A resource base that responded to the individual needs of each pupil, while being fully integrated within the mainstream school. This involved a flexible approach that allowed pupils to spend time in the specialist classroom when targeted support is needed, and in the mainstream classroom when appropriate.
- Broad learning opportunities for pupils with SEND, including access to vocational subjects such as horticulture and construction.
- Intentional transition support, before pupils enter secondary school with engagement with parents and pupils from as early as year 4 in some cases and pupils spending time in their new class before the summer holiday break to help reduce anxiety and familiarise pupils with new staff and routines.

At Norwich City College we saw:

The significant resources and effort that post-16 settings are dedicating to supporting Maths and English GCSE resits including closing the college to other students during exam periods to accommodate for the space and rooms required to meet access needs.

The importance of supported internships through the colleges MINT programme which helped young people with SEND build their employability by gaining meaningful work experience and developing pathways to long term employment.

Appendix 2: Insight from Canada

Box 10: Committee visit to Ontario, Canada

In March 2025 we visited Ontario, Canada as a part of our inquiry into Solving the SEND crisis. Ontario is often cited by parent and carer organisations in England as a positive example of a non-adversarial SEND system that works better than the one in England. According to research by People for Education, Ontario has a high level of children with SEND in their education system. In 2023–24:

- 100 per cent of elementary schools and 99 per cent of secondary schools have at least some students receiving SEN assistance.
- On average per school, 16 per cent of elementary and 28 per cent of secondary students receive some form of SEN support, a proportion that has remained relatively steady over the last decade.⁴⁷⁸

Legislation

The Education Act mandates all school boards in Canada to provide special education programs and/or services for students with special education needs, formally identified as “exceptional pupils”. This includes students receiving special education programs and/or services who have been identified as exceptional by an identification, placement and review committee (IPRC) and students receiving special education programs and/or services who have not been identified as exceptional by an IPRC.

Funding

The Ministry of Education allocates funding to Ontario’s 72 district school boards. In addition to the Pupil Foundation Grant and other grants within Grants for Student Needs (GSN) funding, the ministry allocates funding

478 People for Education, [Access to special education in Ontario schools: The gaps and challenges](#) (accessed March 2025)

for students with special education needs through the Special Education Grant. This grant is for the additional costs of the programs, services and/or equipment these students may require.

Assessment

Exceptional pupils are identified and placed in special education programs by school board committees called identification, placement and review committees (IPRCs). The IPRC:

- decides if the student should be identified as exceptional;
- identifies areas of the student's exceptionality, according to specific categories and definitions;
- decides an appropriate placement for the student; and
- reviews a student's identification and placement at least once in each school year.

Before the IPRC considers placing the student in a special education class, it must consider whether placement in a mainstream class with appropriate special education services will meet the student's needs and be consistent with parental preference.

Parents and teachers are allowed to attend IPRC and one member of the committee must be a principal or supervisory officer of the school board.

Learning and support in schools

A special education program is an education program that:

- is based on and modified by the results of continuous assessment and evaluation; and
- includes an individual education plan (IEP) which has specific objectives (except when the IEP has accommodations only) and an outline of special education services that meet a student's needs.

Special education services are the facilities and resources necessary for developing and implementing a special education program, including support personnel and equipment.

An individual education plan (IEP) is a written plan that describes special education programs, accommodations and services that a school board will provide for a student. A Standardised IEP template is used, and any adaptations have to be signed off by the Ministry. IEPs are based on a thorough assessment of a student's ability and needs. There are two ways a student can receive an IEP:

- An IEP must be developed for every student who has been identified as an “exceptional pupil” by an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC)

An IEP may be developed for a student who has not been identified by an IPRC as exceptional, but the board deems to require a special education program or services in order to attend school, achieve curriculum expectations or demonstrate learning.

What did we learn and see?

We visited an elementary (primary) school and two secondary schools, Toronto City Hall to understand their early years programme, and the Ontario Legislative Assembly to meet the Minister for Education and government and opposition members with an interest in education. During these visits we saw a SEND system where:

- children and young people with SEND had learning time in resource bases and mainstream classes but remained integrated in the wider school community;
- parents had positive engagement with teachers and schools and worked in collaboration to ensure their child’s needs child were being met and supported appropriately;
- post-16 students had opportunities to get work experience, develop life skills and follow vocational learning pathways such as hairdressing and construction; and
- there was a focus on student employability after the end of education with strong links to businesses in the community.

Conclusions and recommendations

The state of inclusive education in England

1. We welcome the Department's focus on inclusive education; however, we are concerned about the absence of a Departmental definition of this and the subsequent lack of clarity about what 'inclusive mainstream' education looks like and means in practice for educators, education settings, pupils and families. We are also concerned that the Department does not appear to have a clear understanding of the timescale and level of investment that is needed to achieve a truly inclusive mainstream education system. (Conclusion, Paragraph 34)
2. It is unacceptable that a clear definition of inclusive education is still lacking. The Department must publish a definition of inclusive education and rationale for this vision alongside examples of good practice across different phases of education and settings within the next 3 months. Continued ambiguity undermines progress and accountability. (Recommendation, Paragraph 35)
3. An inclusive mainstream education system must be underpinned by several key elements, all of which we would expect to be included in the Department's definition at a level of detail sufficient to enable professionals and families to have a clear understanding of the Government's approach:

 - education settings and environments must be accessible, safe, and designed to meet a wide range of sensory and physical needs;
 - teachers and teaching assistants and other support staff should have the expertise, training, and confidence to support diverse learners, underpinned by regular access to embedded specialist professionals;
 - the curriculum must be flexible, relevant, and reflect the representation of young people with SEND; and the Government must ensure the curriculum itself and the assessment of it reflect and accommodate their needs;

- accountability systems must examine and prioritise the progress and outcomes of all pupils, on a rounded set of indicators which include but are not limited to academic attainment, so that inclusion is embedded as an essential component of quality for all settings. The proportion of pupils with SEND should be published and compared with other local schools and multi-academy trusts, to act as a disincentive to exclusionary practices; and
 - critically, good inclusive practice must always ensure rigorous, systemic approaches to understanding the individual needs of every child and delivering personalised support. (Recommendation, Paragraph 36)
4. The UK is a signatory member of the UNCRPD (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) since 2008. It would be helpful in developing any definition of inclusive education for the Department for Education to draw on the principles and substantive materials in relevant articles of this Convention. This should include Article 24 on education, Article 25 on health and others, for example, Article 30 on participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport. It may also be helpful for the Government to consider the UN general comment number 4 on Article 24 - the right to inclusive education, as well as the UNICEF report (2017) expanding on these issues in practice. (Recommendation, Paragraph 37)
 5. The Department must urgently assess the funding required to implement meaningful reforms to SEND provision. There must be a clear plan for how the Department will work towards this level of investment in the short and medium term, which aligns with the timeline for SEND reforms. (Recommendation, Paragraph 38)
 6. As part of delivering a fully inclusive mainstream, the Government must set out how it will deliver, over time, a system in which highly skilled professionals, including educational psychologists and speech and language therapists, are less tied up in undertaking assessments and writing reports and more effectively deployed in delivering the support children need. It should be clear what professional skills and expertise an inclusive mainstream school should be able to draw on, and how this expertise will be made available. (Recommendation, Paragraph 39)
 7. The SEND system is not delivering for children and young people or their families, with poor experiences and outcomes becoming the norm in many places across England. Rising need coupled with limited school resourcing, stretched local authority budgets and a mismatch between local authority responsibilities and their powers has resulted in a costly and adversarial system. Over a decade on from the 2014 reforms, the key challenges are evident: preparedness of the education workforce, lack of parental trust and confidence in the system, limited accountability across schools,

multi-academy trusts, NHS services and local authorities, disjointed working across the various agencies and families, limited capacity and the inadequacy and unsustainability of funding. (Conclusion, Paragraph 48)

8. It is essential that the Department addresses these challenges if it is going to succeed in making mainstream education inclusive and fixing the broken SEND system. The Department must involve stakeholders in reforms and begin to consult with parent-led organisations now. It should set out a clear timeline for SEND reforms and report on progress at least on an annual basis. (Recommendation, Paragraph 49)

Securing inclusive education

9. The current inconsistency in SEN support and ordinarily available provision across England is unacceptable and results in deeply inequitable experiences for children and young people with SEND. The lack of consistent good practice in SEN support, driven by insufficiently clear and specific guidance and inconsistent interpretations of ‘best endeavours’ are causing delays in identifying needs, inadequate support, and an overreliance on EHC plans. This not only undermines trust in the system but also places unnecessary strain on families. National standards must be introduced without delay to establish clear, enforceable expectations while allowing for local flexibility where appropriate. (Conclusion, Paragraph 72)
10. Insufficient funding and resources and a mismatch between local authority responsibilities and powers negatively impacts the adequacy of ordinarily available provision and SEN support. We have heard from school leaders and SENCOs that without sufficient resources, settings are struggling to provide the high quality, consistent support necessary to achieve inclusive mainstream education. (Conclusion, Paragraph 73)
11. The Department for Education should publish a unified national framework for ordinarily available provision and SEN support. This should offer clear, evidence-led guidance and include practical, real-world examples tailored to educators and educational settings, ensuring that all practitioners have access to quality-assured strategies and interventions. (Recommendation, Paragraph 74)
12. The Department should publish statutory requirements mandating the minimum resources, specialist expertise, and equipment that every educational setting must have access to as a part of their offer of SEN support and in order to deliver an inclusive education. This will establish a clear, enforceable baseline covering staffing, training, physical materials, and assistive technologies. This will also ensure that all schools and multi-

academy trusts are adequately equipped to support children and young people with SEND through ordinarily available provision and SEN support, reducing the need for EHC plans. (Recommendation, Paragraph 75)

- 13.** Current levels of EHC plans are unsustainable; however, the solution to this cannot be to remove the statutory entitlements from a system which lacks accountability in many other areas and in which parents already have so little trust and confidence. We have heard throughout our inquiry from parents, schools, and the Department for Education that the increased need for EHC plans is due to support not being provided through ordinarily available provision and SEN support, leading to a lack of trust from parents. We have also seen that for many children and young people with less complex needs, high quality support can be provided without a plan. While some pupils will always need an EHC plan, evidence indicates that mainstream schools and multi-academy trusts practising real inclusivity generate fewer EHC plans, as they meet more students' needs effectively without them. (Conclusion, Paragraph 92)
- 14.** Support should be provided as soon as a need is identified, rather than only once an EHC plan is in place. This would bring England in line with good practice found internationally, for example in Ontario, Canada, where entitlement is based on need rather than lengthy assessment processes. Such a change would prevent the current situation in which many children receive little or no effective support while waiting for an EHC plan and would ensure timely intervention that can improve outcomes and reduce escalation of need. The Department's SEND reforms must not be based on any withdrawal of statutory entitlements for children and young people with SEND. The Department must instead set out plans for reform which increase accountability across the whole of the SEND system, so that many more parents and carers can be confident that their children's needs will be met regardless of whether they have a diagnosis or EHC plan. (Recommendation, Paragraph 93)
- 15.** Where EHC plans are issued, they carry a statutory duty which must be delivered in full. To make this a reality, the Department for Education should strengthen the ability of local authorities to meet these obligations by ensuring that the necessary levers are in place to compel other services, for example, NHS services, and commissioners such as local Integrated Healthcare Boards (ICBs). This must include coordinated action with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to address wider pressures on local authority budgets and capacity, so that councils are properly equipped to deliver the provision set out in every EHC plan. (Recommendation, Paragraph 94)

Restoring parent trust and confidence

- 16.** Parents and carers of children and young people with SEND often feel excluded from the processes that affect their children’s education and support. However, meaningful and collaborative parental involvement is essential to the success of the SEND system. When parents and carers are actively engaged in the planning, decision-making, and delivery of support, both satisfaction and outcomes improve significantly. Engagement fosters greater trust, transparency, and confidence in the system, and helps build constructive, collaborative relationships between families, professionals, support and advice services including SENDIASS. Ensuring parents and carers are treated as equal partners in any process must be a fundamental feature of any reformed SEND system. (Conclusion, Paragraph 101)
- 17.** Parents and carers must be actively and meaningfully involved in all processes that affect their child’s education, support, and overall wellbeing. This includes being fully informed and invited to participate in all relevant meetings where decisions about their child’s needs or provision are being discussed at the school and local authority level. Families should have access to independent advocacy to enable and strengthen their engagement in the process. Parental insights and lived experience are invaluable in shaping effective and appropriate support. Embedding parental involvement as a standard part of decision-making not only enhances transparency and trust but also leads to better-informed, more tailored outcomes for children and young people with SEND. Local authorities must actively engage and be properly equipped to support and respond to parental engagement in a positive way. This requires dedicated resourcing and ongoing training to ensure staff have the skills, capacity and confidence to work effectively with families, build trust, and act on their concerns in a timely and constructive way. These changes would need to be subject to a New Burdens Assessment to ensure that local authorities had the resources to support better parent and carer engagement. (Recommendation, Paragraph 102)
- 18.** Children and young people with SEND, and their families, have little trust and confidence in the SEND system, often shaped by adverse experiences. Inadequate communication and engagement from the Department with parents and carers and their organisations about future reforms, as well as media speculation, has further undermined parental trust in the Department for Education and in the future SEND system. It is wholly unacceptable that families already under considerable pressure should face additional anxiety and disruption. While there is widespread recognition among parents and carers that reform is necessary, there remains deep concern about the form these changes will take and whether they will lead to meaningful and lasting improvements. (Conclusion, Paragraph 107)

- 19.** To avoid causing undue alarm and to help rebuild confidence and trust in the system, parents and carers must be fully engaged and any reforms must be implemented gradually and in a carefully phased manner. New approaches should first be piloted through a pathfinder model, allowing for thorough testing in real-world settings before national rollout. This will provide an opportunity to identify potential challenges, address inefficiencies, consult with parents' and carers' groups and make necessary adjustments to ensure reforms are effective, practical, and responsive to the needs of children, young people, and their families. At all times, the Department for Education must have an effective communication strategy, regularly setting out the clear vision for change, and providing reassurance to all affected agencies and individuals that planned reforms are fully planned, coordinated, and funded. (Recommendation, Paragraph 108)
- 20.** We have heard that accountability pressures relating to narrower measures of attainment and behaviour may incentivise schools and multi-academy trusts to adopt non-inclusive practices in order to meet narrow performance metrics. The introduction of the new Ofsted inspection framework presents a valuable opportunity to shift this dynamic. By placing greater emphasis on inclusion and the experiences and progression of all learners, the framework has the potential to ensure that schools and multi-academy trusts are more meaningfully held to account for the inclusivity and accessibility of the education they deliver, thereby promoting a more equitable and supportive environment for every student. (Conclusion, Paragraph 118)
- 21.** The Department must urgently engage with Ofsted to ensure that the inclusion criterion within the new inspection framework is robust, measurable, and reflective of the experiences of all pupils, particularly, those with SEND. This should include incorporating metrics such as the proportion of pupils with SEND on roll, their attendance rates, exclusion figures, school swaps, progression and attainment and other indicators of engagement and outcomes, to provide a clearer picture of how effectively schools and multi-academy trusts are supporting these learners. It is important that the new framework does not disadvantage schools with high levels of SEND pupils, particularly in disadvantaged areas, by contextualising quantitative indicators with qualitative evidence, recognising systemic barriers, and balancing accountability with constructive support to avoid disproportionate pressure on teachers' workloads. (Recommendation, Paragraph 119)
- 22.** The Department for Education should introduce mandatory, comprehensive SEND training for all Ofsted inspectors. The success of the new framework depends on inspectors having a deep understanding of SEND, including how to identify, assess, and evaluate inclusive practice. Without this

expertise, there is a significant risk that inspections will be inconsistent, fail to identify gaps in provision, and ultimately undermine the objectives of the framework. (Recommendation, Paragraph 120)

- 23.** Area SEND inspections should engage with parents across the locality to gather the perspective of parents of children with SEND on the admissions policies and inclusive practices of local authorities, schools and multi-academy trusts in the area. (Recommendation, Paragraph 122)
- 24.** We have heard about significant variability in the provision of SEN support and inconsistencies in the implementation of EHC plans across education settings. The limitations of the Local Government Ombudsman's powers mean there is insufficient accountability for the delivery of SEND support, as well as other aspects of school-based provision. This has led to repeated failures to meet children's needs. This is a serious and unacceptable accountability gap that must be closed if inclusive mainstream education is to be a reality. (Conclusion, Paragraph 127)
- 25.** The Government must extend the powers of the Local Government Ombudsman to cover complaints about the delivery of EHC plans, SEN support and other appropriate inclusive education for children with SEND in schools, multi-academy trusts and other education settings. This would strengthen accountability, provide families with a clearer route to redress, and help ensure that statutory responsibilities are met consistently across the system. Without this change, serious shortcomings in support will continue to go unaddressed. (Recommendation, Paragraph 128)
- 26.** To ensure accountability for inclusive practice, SEND expertise should be embedded within schools and multi-academy trust (MAT) governance structures, for example, by making it mandatory to appoint governors or trustees with specific responsibility for and relevant expertise (including lived experience) of SEND as we saw in Ontario. Without this, inclusive education risks being sidelined at the strategic level, and outcomes for pupils with SEND will continue to be deprioritised. (Recommendation, Paragraph 129)
- 27.** Tribunals are an important feature of the accountability system, allowing families to challenge local authorities' decisions regarding their children's support; however, they should only need to be used as a last resort. We are deeply concerned by the number of local authorities found to have failed to meet their statutory obligations at the SEND Tribunal. A 97 per cent loss rate for Tribunal cases suggests a pattern of non-compliance which is unacceptable, particularly given that the entitlements of children and young people with SEND are clearly set out in the existing legislative framework. Greater efforts are needed to prevent cases from escalating to SEND

Tribunals by prioritising good partnership working with parents and carers, effective mediation and ensuring local authorities have the resources and the powers to fulfil their statutory obligations. (Conclusion, Paragraph 144)

- 28.** The SEND Tribunal must remain as a backstop of the accountability process. The Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care must systematically monitor SEND Tribunal outcomes and identify local authorities that repeatedly fail to comply with their statutory duties. The Government should mandate the framework for reporting SEND Tribunal data and undertake focused work with poor performing local authorities to understand why they are so often failing to uphold their statutory duties and support them through resourcing and targeted intervention, including specialised training, to address underlying issues and ensure that the rights of children and young people with SEND are upheld. The SEND White Paper should explicitly identify and set out plans to address any structural or resource-related barriers to effective support. (Recommendation, Paragraph 145)
- 29.** The outcomes of SEND Tribunal cases must be factored into area SEND inspections, with clear scrutiny of how repeated non-compliance reflects the quality and effectiveness of local provision. Where local authorities fail to uphold their statutory duties, this should directly lower their inspection rating. Ongoing failure must have clear consequences if accountability is to mean anything. (Recommendation, Paragraph 150)
- 30.** The limited engagement of health services in the SEND system stems from a lack of robust and enforceable accountability mechanisms. Despite being a critical enabler of positive educational outcomes for children with SEND, health services are not held to the same standards of responsibility as education providers. To deliver on the promise of inclusive education, the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care must strengthen accountability frameworks to ensure health partners are fully integrated and responsive within the SEND system. (Conclusion, Paragraph 157)
- 31.** There must be mandatory training for health commissioners on good practice in meeting the needs of children with SEND. (Recommendation, Paragraph 158)
- 32.** The powers of the SEND Tribunal should be extended to allow it to issue binding recommendations to health services, not just education providers. This would ensure that when a failure to deliver a health provision specified in an EHC plan occurs, health bodies are legally obligated to take corrective action. This should include the introduction of a statutory duty on health services to respond to Tribunal decisions within a defined timeframe, with clear consequences for non-compliance. (Recommendation, Paragraph 159)

- 33.** The Department for Education must significantly improve cross-departmental coordination with the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England to establish clear, consistent accountability for SEND at the ICB level. Current arrangements are fragmented and lack clarity. Strengthening the role, authority, and visibility of the Senior Responsible Officer for SEND within ICBs is essential to ensure health services are fully held to account for their responsibilities. Without stronger oversight, health bodies will continue to operate without sufficient scrutiny or consequence. (Recommendation, Paragraph 160)

Improving early years for lasting impact

- 34.** ELSEC and NELI are positive initiatives, but far more must be done to sustain and build on the progress they are achieving. Without ongoing commitment and resources, any gains risk being temporary and insufficient to address long-term needs. (Conclusion, Paragraph 164)
- 35.** A national rollout of ELSEC and NELI is essential and should be accompanied by comprehensive, long-term funding and resources to meet the scale of children's speech and language needs. In addition, the Government should undertake further work to understand where the balance of resource should sit between early years and reception in order to ensure it is able to achieve its goal of 75 per cent of 5-year-olds in England to have a good level of development by 2028. (Recommendation, Paragraph 165)
- 36.** There is a clear need to improve the consistency and effectiveness of the SENIF across early years provision. At present, practice varies significantly between local authorities, with differences in how funding is managed and allocated. This means there is inconsistency in access to early years SEND support. Such variation undermines the principle of equitable access to early education and can place additional pressure on providers in areas with less generous or less flexible SENIF arrangements. In addition, the eligibility criteria for the Disability Access Fund limits its effectiveness. Tying this funding to Disability Living Allowance, creates an unnecessary barrier to eligibility that risks excluding the very children the funding was created to help and shifts the burden of unmet need onto providers and families. (Conclusion, Paragraph 168)
- 37.** To address inconsistency in the delivery of early years provision and the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF), the Department for Education must establish a set of national inclusivity requirements for early years settings. These requirements should be backed by increased, funding to ensure providers are able to deliver inclusive practice in a sustainable way. At the same time, the Disability Access Fund should be reformed by removing its dependency on Disability Living Allowance. The

current eligibility criteria act as a barrier for many families, restricting uptake and undermining the fund's effectiveness. Without these reforms, there is a risk that the system continues to perpetuate inequity and discourage inclusive practice at the earliest stage of education. (Recommendation, Paragraph 169)

- 38.** Best Start Family Hubs and the expansion of childcare provision present a valuable opportunity to engage with families earlier and identify SEND needs at the earliest possible stage. We welcome the announcement that every Best Start Family Hub will have a SENCO. However, SEND awareness is not currently sufficiently embedded amongst all early years staff, nor are there currently sufficient opportunities for early screenings that could facilitate timely support and referrals. We note the current inquiry at the time of publication of the Health Social Care Committee on 'The First 1000 Days: a renewed focus' and the further work we have agreed to undertake on early years, all of which should be taken full account of by the Government. (Conclusion, Paragraph 174)
- 39.** The Department for Education must ensure that Best Start Family Hubs incorporate routine SEND screening and awareness as a core part of their early years services, supported by targeted training for staff and childcare providers to enhance early identification and referral. Additionally, dedicated funding must be allocated within childcare expansion and Family Hub budgets specifically to support SEND-related training for early years staff and families of children with SEND, resources, and integrated multi-agency working, ensuring sustainable and effective early intervention. (Recommendation, Paragraph 175)
- 40.** The commitment for every Best Start Family Hub to have a dedicated SENCO should be embedded within the SEND workforce strategy and extend to educational psychologists and speech and language therapists. (Recommendation, Paragraph 176)
- 41.** There is a need to increase access to CPD and ensure that staff from all agencies in every early years setting has the expertise to undertake the effective early identification of SEND needs. Through the Best Start in Life strategy the Government should also ensure that there is a strong and consistent framework for building SEND capacity and good practice in early years settings through the deployment of educational psychologists, speech and language therapists and other specialists in training the workforce. From September 2025, 80 per cent of the funding for early years providers will come from the Government, and the Department should introduce a new set of inclusivity requirements for all early years settings, provide the foundation for greater inclusivity across all early years settings. (Recommendation, Paragraph 177)

Post-16

- 42.** The post-16 condition of funding, whereby students who have not achieved a grade 4 or above in GCSE English and maths are effectively repeatedly required to take GCSE resits in those subjects as part of their programme of study, must be reformed. Despite a modest rise in overall attainment over the past ten years, the progression rate from age 16 to 19 remains low, with 72 per cent of those who did not achieve grade 4 at 16 still not achieving that grade by 19. This policy can be demoralising for students and a huge strain on colleges and their staff. Whilst ensuring that students continue to make progress in literacy and numeracy, an alternative approach is necessary. (Conclusion, Paragraph 186)
- 43.** The Government must introduce a three-route model for those who have not attained grade 4 GCSE in maths and/or English based on their level of attainment at age 16 and their chosen post-16 qualification/employment pathway:
- Students who, based on their GCSE results at age 16 and prior attainment, have a realistic prospect of achieving grade 4 in maths and/or English should be supported to work towards those qualifications.
 - Vocational courses of study, for which the English and maths content required can be easily identified, should have that content built into the curriculum. Students taking courses with embedded English and maths content which have been rigorously quality assured could then, in consultation with employers, be considered for exemption from the requirement to re-sit English and maths GCSE.
 - Students who, based on past performance, are very unlikely to attain grade 4 in maths and/or English despite multiple resits and who would benefit from pursuing a functional skills qualification in maths and/or English—for example, focused on financial literacy, debt and interest and household budgeting—should be supported to achieve a pass in that form of qualification. (Recommendation, Paragraph 187)
- 44.** Greater policy focus is required on further education provision for young people with SEND. At present, both FE and SEND policy frameworks give limited consideration to the specific needs of learners post-16, and funding arrangements often fail to provide adequate resources to meet those needs. This lack of targeted attention and investment contributes to significant gaps in provision and support, leaving many of these young people effectively overlooked within the education system. Without dedicated and sufficient funding for SEN support beyond the age of 16, mainstream further

education settings will struggle to provide the adjustments, specialist staff, and tailored resources necessary to meet learners' needs and achieve good outcomes. This is incompatible with the Government's vision for inclusive mainstream education. Without targeted reform and investment, the FE sector risks falling behind other parts of the education system. (Conclusion, Paragraph 189)

- 45.** The Department for Education should introduce a dedicated and ring-fenced funding stream for SEN support beyond the age of 16. This would enable further education providers to recruit and retain specialist staff, provide tailored learning resources, and make the reasonable adjustments necessary to meet the diverse needs of learners with SEND. Such investment is essential to ensuring that mainstream FE provision is genuinely inclusive and that young people with SEND have equitable opportunities to succeed. (Recommendation, Paragraph 190)
- 46.** When Ofsted considers the accountability of post-16 education settings, it should ensure a stronger focus on inclusivity and outcomes for young people with SEND. (Recommendation, Paragraph 191)
- 47.** We know that some young people in some areas will have a long-term need for home to school transport due to extremely limited public transport options in their local area or their individual needs. We are concerned about the impact that lack of statutory home to school transport for 16–19-year-olds with SEND has on the ability of these young people to access education. No young person should be locked out of education because of a transport need. Evidence also indicates a lack of adequate travel training for this age group in some areas, which increases reliance on home to school transport, creating significant barriers to attendance and participation in learning. (Conclusion, Paragraph 194)
- 48.** The Department should review home to school transport and identify costs across regions. Additionally, the Department must mandate that all local authorities provide travel training programmes for young people with SEND in this age group to promote independence and safe travel where this is appropriate. Statutory transport provision should be guaranteed based on clear criteria such as distance from education settings, level of need, and other relevant factors to ensure no young person is unfairly disadvantaged. We welcome the acknowledgement in the Government's fair funding review of the need for comprehensive costings for current and future home to school transport need. The Department for Education must work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Transport as they prepare to introduce a bespoke formula to recognise Home to School transport costs. As part of this collaboration, the Department should ensure that there is transparency around how

outcomes are measured and reported. We support the recommendation of the Transport Select Committee with regard to the provision of bus passes for under 22-year-olds. (Recommendation, Paragraph 195)

Equipping the workforce

- 49.** While the Department's update to the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework is a positive move, it needs to go further to adequately prepare teachers to support pupils with SEND. SEND is still not fully integrated across all training modules, and there is a clear lack of focus on how to apply this knowledge practically in the classroom. This shortfall risks leaving teachers unprepared to meet the needs of pupils with SEND effectively. (Conclusion, Paragraph 202)
- 50.** The Department for Education must implement a continuous review and update cycle for the ITT and ECF to keep training relevant and effective. It must urgently increase the number of ITT placements and explore the viability of mandating every teacher to complete a placement in a specialist setting during ITT or ECF. Without practical, hands-on experience supporting children and young people with SEND, teachers will remain ill-equipped to meet their needs. (Recommendation, Paragraph 203)
- 51.** The Department should provide comprehensive training within ITT and clear guidance for schools, multi-academy trusts and education staff on delivering inclusive education practice. This will ensure that all settings understand their legal obligations and are equipped to make the necessary accommodations to support pupils with SEND effectively. Embedding this knowledge is crucial for promoting inclusive practices, preventing discrimination, and fostering environments where every child can thrive. (Recommendation, Paragraph 204)
- 52.** It is deeply concerning that SEND-specific continuing professional development (CPD) is not mandatory. The education workforce must be consistently equipped with up-to-date, evidence-based knowledge through ongoing CPD to ensure an inclusive mainstream with high-quality support for children and young people with SEND. (Conclusion, Paragraph 209)
- 53.** Continuous professional development in SEND should not be viewed solely as a support mechanism for specialist SEND educators. When all teachers are trained to understand and respond to the needs of pupils with SEND, the entire workforce becomes more inclusive, adaptive, and confident in managing diverse classrooms. An essential skill set in the modern classroom, this not only improves outcomes for pupils with SEND but also supports teacher resilience and wellbeing, enhancing the learning

experience for all students by fostering a more empathetic, dynamic and flexible teaching environment. We have seen evidence that deploying this approach reduces the need for EHC plans. (Conclusion, Paragraph 210)

- 54.** SEND CPD should be made mandatory to ensure that all educators are equipped to meet the diverse needs of children and young people with SEND. This could be achieved through a nationally recognised supplementary qualification in SEND that all existing teachers must complete within a defined timeframe (e.g. three years), similar to the Early Career Framework but focused on inclusion and SEND best practice; or through the incorporation of mandatory SEND modules into existing CPD requirements; or through performance management frameworks, ensuring ongoing engagement and application in classroom settings. (Recommendation, Paragraph 211)
- 55.** We welcome the introduction of the new National Professional Qualification (NPQ) for SENCOs as a positive step towards enhancing the leadership and expertise of SEND provision in schools and multi-academy trusts. However, further action is urgently needed. The scale of the challenges facing SENCOs including excessive workloads, insufficient time to carry out their statutory duties, and a lack of support requires immediate attention. (Conclusion, Paragraph 216)
- 56.** Strong leadership on SEND is essential to delivering effective and inclusive education. Often the bulk of responsibility for SEND inclusion falls to a single SENCO and this should not be the case. Evidence shows that when senior leadership prioritises inclusion, this commitment permeates throughout the school, positively influencing staff attitudes and pupil experiences. Embedding SEND awareness and inclusion as a strategic focus at the highest-level drives culture change and ensures that inclusive practices are consistently implemented. (Conclusion, Paragraph 217)
- 57.** To strengthen leadership on SEND, the Department should, in the short term, mandate that at least one member of the Senior Leadership Team in every school and every multi-academy trust holds SENCO qualifications. (Recommendation, Paragraph 218)
- 58.** The Department should also publish guidance on appropriate SENCO-to-pupil ratios and develop a national strategy to ensure these ratios are achieved consistently across schools and multi-academy trusts. (Recommendation, Paragraph 219)
- 59.** Within four years, the Department should introduce a requirement for all new headteachers to hold a SEND-specific qualification. Ensuring that SEND expertise is embedded at the highest levels of school or multi-

academy trust leadership will promote strategic oversight, improve the quality of inclusive practice, and better meet the needs of pupils with SEND. (Recommendation, Paragraph 220)

- 60.** Learning support assistants and teaching assistants are integral to the effective delivery of SEND support and resourcing their deployment properly can help reduce the need for expensive specialist placements. To sustain and strengthen their contribution, improvements are urgently needed in the recruitment, training, CPD and retention of this workforce. We are particularly concerned by evidence that many LSAs and TAs lack adequate SEND-specific training to perform their roles safely and effectively. (Conclusion, Paragraph 223)
- 61.** SEND content should be an integral part of teaching assistant training, and they should be provided with regular opportunities for CPD and peer support. This could be through incentivised or ring-fenced funding for schools and multi-academy trusts to release teaching assistants and learning support assistants for SEND CPD, removing practical barriers to participation and ensuring consistent take-up across the sector. (Recommendation, Paragraph 224)
- 62.** The Department should issue guidance on teaching assistant-to-pupil ratios and urgently address the worsening crisis in recruiting and retaining TAs and learning support assistants to ensure these ratios can be met. These professionals are vital to the delivery of inclusive education, yet their contribution continues to be undervalued and under-supported. A robust and comprehensive strategy is urgently required. This must include:
- A clear career progression framework with opportunities to develop specialist expertise and the opportunity for some TAs to progress to qualified teacher status.
 - Competitive pay increases that reflect the skill, responsibility, and complexity of their roles.
 - Expanded and better-promoted apprenticeship pathways to attract new entrants and diversify the workforce.
 - Clearer communication to schools, multi-academy trusts and stakeholders about the distinct functions, expectations, and career progression routes within TA and LSA roles. (Recommendation, Paragraph 225)
- 63.** These measures are essential. Without decisive action, the system will continue to lose experienced staff, leaving vulnerable pupils without the support they need and deserve. (Recommendation, Paragraph 226)

- 64.** Many children with SEND and their families continue to have unsatisfactory experiences when navigating the SEND system, particularly in their interactions with local authority staff. These challenges are often rooted in a failure to work empathetically in partnership with parents and carers and demonstrate a limited understanding of the assessment process and its significance. In some cases, local authority staff make poor or inadequate contributions to EHC plans, undermining their quality and failing to reflect the needs of the child. These issues not only erode trust in the system but also contribute to delays, disputes, and ultimately poorer outcomes for children and young people with SEND. (Conclusion, Paragraph 229)
- 65.** Local authority staff require improved training on child development, SEND law, parent engagement and mediation, alongside changes in practice that strengthen accountability and foster more constructive relationships with parents and carers. This should include meaningful parental involvement at every stage of the decision-making process regarding a child's needs and support. Embedding a more collaborative and transparent approach would not only enhance trust and outcomes for families but also help alleviate the pressures contributing to staff burnout within local authorities. (Recommendation, Paragraph 230)
- 66.** Shortages of educational psychologists and allied health professionals, including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, and physiotherapists are significantly undermining the availability and quality of SEND support. These workforce gaps delay assessments, restrict access to essential interventions, and place additional pressure on schools and multi-academy trusts to fill specialist roles they are not equipped to provide. In addition, the shortages have resulted in far too many highly skilled professionals being deployed predominantly in undertaking assessments and writing reports rather than working directly and therapeutically with children and young people. This has to change, for the benefit of professionals who are becoming harder to retain, and in order to deliver a genuinely inclusive system in which access to support is available for every child who needs it. (Conclusion, Paragraph 239)
- 67.** The DfE and DHSC should urgently develop a joint SEND workforce plan to address shortages and build capacity across education, health, and care services. This should include explicit measures to deliver a shift in the deployment of educational psychologists, speech and language therapists and other allied health professionals away from undertaking assessments and writing reports and towards greater deployment in education settings, delivering therapeutic support for children and upskilling early years practitioners, teachers and support staff. This will enable professionals to concentrate on delivering frontline support. Such an approach would help

retain skilled practitioners within the system and encourage those who have left the profession, often due to excessive paperwork and limited direct engagement to return. (Recommendation, Paragraph 240)

Getting to a sustainable model of funding

- 68.** It is clear that the current levels of funding provided to schools and multi-academy trusts are inadequate to support the effective inclusion of pupils with SEND. The notional £6,000 threshold is insufficient to deliver good SEN support, placing unsustainable pressure on school budgets. The Department cannot reasonably expect inclusive education to be realised without a significant increase in investment. Adequate and sustained resourcing is essential to ensure that mainstream schools, multi-academy trusts and teaching staff are properly equipped to be inclusive. However, the Government does not appear to have a realistic understanding of the scale of investment required to deliver a genuinely inclusive education system. Without acknowledging and addressing the true level of resource needed, efforts to improve outcomes for pupils with SEND risk falling short. (Conclusion, Paragraph 249)
- 69.** The current £6,000 notional threshold is outdated and inadequate. It must be automatically updated each year in line with inflation to prevent further erosion of support for pupils with SEND. This is a necessary correction to address years of chronic underfunding. This funding should also be ringfenced to ensure it is used exclusively for supporting pupils with SEND and to improve the transparency and accountability of the resources schools and multi-academy trusts are committing to deliver inclusivity. However, these measures alone will not be enough to create the change desperately needed in this failing system. The Department must set a clear trajectory towards a more sustainable and equitable funding model that is informed by, and able to deliver, the Department's definition of inclusive mainstream education. (Recommendation, Paragraph 250)
- 70.** We have seen and heard evidence that delivering inclusive practice in education improves long term outcomes for children and young people with SEND which has wider benefits to the economy as well as costing less to deliver than expensive specialist placements. (Conclusion, Paragraph 253)
- 71.** The Government should undertake a rigorous cost-benefit analysis to understand the short- and long-term economic benefits of investing in a fully inclusive education system. (Recommendation, Paragraph 254)
- 72.** Funding must be strategically deployed to deliver the best outcomes for children and young people with SEND. This should include prioritised investment in early intervention. Timely and targeted support is essential

and can prevent some needs such as speech and language and SEMH needs from escalating, reducing long-term costs to the system, and improving educational and life outcomes. Prioritising early support in such areas not only represents better value for money but also aligns with a preventative, rather than reactive, approach to SEND provision. Ensuring that schools, multi-academy trusts and services are resourced to identify and meet speech and language and SEMH needs at the earliest stage should be a central principle of any funding reform. However, the Department must recognise that while early intervention plays a crucial role in supporting children with disabilities, it is not a solution for all needs. Some children will require consistent, long-term support throughout their lives. Where this is the case, it is essential that adequate and sustained funding and resources are in place to ensure these children receive the ongoing support they need to thrive. (Conclusion, Paragraph 255)

- 73.** The High Needs Block should be refocused to enable and incentivise earlier intervention. Currently, a significant proportion of this funding is directed towards supporting high-cost, specialist provision once needs have escalated. While such provision is vital for some, a more preventative approach is needed to reduce long-term need and improve outcomes. Redirecting a greater share of High Needs funding towards early identification and support within mainstream settings and through multi-agency services will help address emerging needs and ensure that good support is put in place at the outset. (Recommendation, Paragraph 256)
- 74.** The National Funding Formula must ensure that funding for SEND is both fair and sufficient to meet the needs of children and young people across the country. While some geographical variation is to be expected, this should reflect the prevalence and relative level of need in each area. The formula must guarantee that all local areas are equipped with the necessary resources to deliver consistent, high-quality SEND provision and support equitable outcomes for all learners. (Conclusion, Paragraph 259)
- 75.** A comprehensive review of the National Funding Formula is urgently needed to ensure funding is allocated fairly and reflects the real level of need across the country. The current formula fails to address historic underfunding, ignores rising inflation, does not account for regional differences in cost and need and ignores hidden pockets of deprivation. These gaps are driving deep and persistent inequalities in SEND provision. Any credible funding system must correct these failures and provide a stable, needs-based foundation for support. (Recommendation, Paragraph 260)
- 76.** The extension of the statutory override until 2027/28 is a welcome step, but it remains a temporary measure in response to the ongoing financial instability facing local authorities across England. Reducing deficits is essential to achieving long-term financial sustainability however, this

cannot be done at the expense of local authorities fulfilling their legal obligations to children and young people with SEND. Any permanent solution must involve coordinated, cross-departmental action between the Department for Education, HM Treasury, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to address the systemic funding challenges within local government. (Conclusion, Paragraph 267)

- 77.** We believe that a reset of local authority finances through a partial write-off of SEND-related deficits could provide a necessary step towards long-term stability. However, this must be approached with care, recognising the progress made by some local authorities through the Delivering Better Value in SEND programme and Safety Valve agreements, and the contributions already made by some local authorities from their General Fund towards SEND over and above contributions from their High Needs education block. It is essential that the Department for Education engages meaningfully with local government representatives to develop a fair and transparent approach that supports improvement while ensuring accountability. The Department must provide further detail on this in the upcoming SEND white paper due in Autumn 2025. (Recommendation, Paragraph 268)

Building stronger partnerships

- 78.** The current failure to embed Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) as a shared priority across government departments is not just a policy oversight, it is a profound injustice to some of the most vulnerable children in our society. It is evident that SEND is not sufficiently seen as a priority by the health system. The education system is increasingly shouldering the weight of responsibilities for supporting children and young people with SEND that should, in part, be met by health services. This chronic imbalance places unsustainable pressure on schools, multi-academy trusts and local authorities and undermines the principle of joint responsibility set out in the SEND Code of Practice. The erosion of funding to Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), alongside ongoing structural upheaval within the health sector, risk further weakening the capacity of health services to meet their statutory duties. If we are serious about improving outcomes for children with SEND, then coordinated investment, shared accountability, and genuine cross-departmental collaboration must become non-negotiable. Without it, the burden will continue to fall disproportionately on schools and local authorities, compromising outcomes for children and placing additional strain on an already stretched education system. (Conclusion, Paragraph 275)

- 79.** SEND should be identified as a priority across the health system and ongoing NHS restructuring must be used as an opportunity to strengthen the role and accountability of health services in supporting children and young people with SEND. This includes ensuring that ICBs are fully engaged in local SEND systems, with clearly defined responsibilities and mechanisms for joint planning and delivery. The seniority, authority and visibility of senior responsible officers for SEND within ICBs must be increased. (Recommendation, Paragraph 276)
- 80.** Bringing education and health more closely together should be supported by an evidence led approach, drawing on the role of NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) to produce new SEND guidelines and intervention pathways. (Recommendation, Paragraph 277)
- 81.** Crucially, this must be backed by appropriate financial investment from the health sector to meet statutory duties, provide timely access to therapies and assessments, and contribute equitably to joint commissioning arrangements. All areas should have a robust and fully operational partnership arrangement in place by autumn 2026. This should be underpinned by clear governance and shared accountability. (Recommendation, Paragraph 278)
- 82.** Guidance on the delegation of healthcare responsibilities within schools and multi-academy trusts remains weak. There is insufficient clarity on how and when healthcare tasks can be appropriately and safely assigned to school or multi-academy trust staff, what training and safeguards should accompany such delegation, and ultimately where responsibility lies between education and health services. This lack of direction creates uncertainty for schools and multi-academy trusts, risking inconsistency and unsafe practices in the delivery of health interventions for pupils. (Conclusion, Paragraph 284)
- 83.** The Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care should issue joint statutory guidance clarifying how and when healthcare responsibilities can safely be delegated in schools and multi-academy trusts. This should be produced in collaboration with school and multi-academy trust leaders and health and education unions and set out clear lines of accountability between education and health services, minimum training requirements for school staff, and safeguards to ensure consistent and safe delivery of health interventions for pupils. (Recommendation, Paragraph 285)
- 84.** The Department of Health and Social Care must urgently appoint a dedicated national SEND lead to drive accountability and coordination across the health system. This role must be empowered and mandated to provide coherent strategic leadership on the delivery of health-related SEND duties, forge robust partnerships with education and

care sectors, and ensure that the needs of children and young people with SEND are embedded in the heart of health policy, planning, and workforce development from senior officials to frontline services. (Recommendation, Paragraph 289)

85. The Government should place a clear statutory duty on health services, including ICBs and NHS providers, to ensure their full and accountable participation in the planning, commissioning, and delivery of SEND provision. This duty must align with the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice, which emphasises joint commissioning and integrated working. Strengthening statutory responsibilities for health is key to ensuring timely access to assessments, therapies, and interventions, and uphold the principle of a coordinated, child-centred approach to SEND support. (Recommendation, Paragraph 290)

Expanding capacity within the SEND system

86. If the Department for Education expands the use of resource bases to increase specialist provision within mainstream schools and multi-academy trusts, it must set out a detailed implementation plan. This plan should clearly specify how resource bases should be staffed, including required qualifications, expertise, and staff-to-pupil ratios to ensure all children with SEND receive appropriate support. The Department must also define mandatory standards of good practice for resource bases, covering, physical facilities and equipment and good practice approaches to integration with the wider school or multi-academy trust community. By establishing these standards and holding schools and multi-academy trusts accountable for meeting them, the Department can ensure that the expansion of resource bases delivers high-quality, consistent, and inclusive provision, meeting the needs of children with SEND while strengthening inclusion across mainstream education. (Recommendation, Paragraph 305)
87. The allocation of £740 million in high needs capital funding for 2025–26 is a welcome investment and reflects a growing recognition of the urgent need to expand and improve SEND provision. However, this funding should be seen as a starting point rather than a solution. One-off or short-term funding cycles make it difficult for local authorities and providers to plan, commission, and deliver the specialist and inclusive provision needed to meet rising need. We have heard consistent evidence highlighting the need for longer-term, multi-year funding settlements to support more strategic and sustainable planning at the local level. (Conclusion, Paragraph 310)

- 88.** The Department for Education should develop and implement a comprehensive capital investment strategy for SEND. This strategy should provide clarity over future funding streams, enable better forecasting and planning, and support the development of high-quality, fit-for-purpose settings across both mainstream and specialist provision. (Recommendation, Paragraph 311)
- 89.** We welcome the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill, particularly the proposed reforms that give local authorities a greater role in key decision-making areas such as the establishment of new schools, oversight of admissions, and the placement of pupils. These changes represent a positive step toward restoring strategic oversight at the local level. Empowering local authorities in these areas is essential for improving coordination across the system, addressing local sufficiency gaps, and reducing reliance on costly out-of-area or independent placements. Currently, without this, local authorities have been unable to ensure that sufficient and suitable provision is available for children and young people with SEND in their area. (Conclusion, Paragraph 312)
- 90.** The Department for Education should expand specialist SEND provision by investing in high-quality specialist state schools and mainstream resource bases and other mainstream provision. This should be achieved through shifting funding from some independent specialist school provision to better value for money state specialist school provision. This will help meet rising need, support inclusive mainstream education, and reduce reliance on costly or distant placements. This expansion must be aligned with robust local planning and forecasting, ensuring that new provision is responsive to patterns of demand and delivered in a way that reduces pressure on over-capacity special schools and minimises reliance on distant or expensive independent placements. (Conclusion, Paragraph 313)
- 91.** As part of the expansion of specialist SEND, the highest-performing state specialist schools should be designated as Centres of Excellence. These schools would play a leading role in supporting the development of expertise across other schools, local authorities or multi-academy trusts by providing training, sharing best practice, and offering targeted support to meet complex and specialist needs across the system. (Recommendation, Paragraph 314)
- 92.** The Government should continue to review whether local authorities have the necessary powers to fulfil their legal obligations to children and young people with SEND in order to address the mismatch between powers and responsibilities which has arisen as a consequence of previous reforms. (Recommendation, Paragraph 315)

- 93.** As it seeks to expand the capacity of specialist state schools and deliver inclusive mainstream schools, the Government should monitor and report on an annual basis on the number of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools, in specialist independent schools and specialist state schools. (Recommendation, Paragraph 316)
- 94.** The data currently collected and available to the DfE on both mainstream and specialist SEND need is limited and inconsistent. Comprehensive data at the local, regional and national level is essential to assessing the sufficiency of capacity and determining funding allocations for education settings. (Conclusion, Paragraph 321)
- 95.** To plan effectively for future capacity and ensure the right support is in place, the Department must take a data driven approach, developing a more robust understanding of need by systematically gathering and analysing relevant, high-quality data. This should include a national SEND data strategy that requires local authorities and education settings to collect and report standardised, high-quality data on levels of need, current provision, capacity, and projected demand. This would require clear definitions and metrics for identifying and categorising SEND across mainstream and specialist settings and mandatory annual data submissions aligned with school and local authority planning cycles. (Recommendation, Paragraph 322)

Formal Minutes

Tuesday 2 September 2025

Members present

Helen Hayes, in the Chair

Jess Asato

Mrs Sureena Brackenridge

Amanda Martin

Darren Paffey

Manuella Perteghella

Mark Swards

Solving the SEND Crisis

Draft Report (*Solving the SEND Crisis*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

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

Paragraphs 1 to 327 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fifth 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 Wednesday 10 September 2025 at 9.00am

Witnesses

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

Tuesday 28 January 2025

Ms Katie Ghose, CEO, Kids; **Amanda Allard**, Director, Council for Disabled Children; **Miss Imogen Steele**, Policy and Public Affairs Officer, Contact [Q1-22](#)

Tania Tirraoro, Co-Director, Special Needs Jungle Ltd; **Jo Harrison**, Director and Co-Chair, National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF); **Mrs Hayley Harding**, Founder, Let Us learn Too; **Agnes Agyepong**, CEO and founder, Global Black Maternal Health [Q23-34](#)

Tuesday 25 February 2025

Phil Haslett, Deputy Chair, F40; **Dr Luke Sibieta**, Research Fellow, Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS); **Councillor Kate Foale**, Spokesperson for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, County Councils Network; **Rob Williams**, Senior Policy Advisor, National Association of Head Teachers; **Claire Dorer OBE**, Chief Executive, National Association of Independent Schools and Non-Maintained Special Schools [Q35-81](#)

Tuesday 11 March 2025

Catherine McLeod MBE, CEO, Dingley's Promise; **Ms Annamarie Hassall MBE**, CEO, The National Association for Special Educational Needs (nasen); **Margaret Mulholland**, SEND & Inclusion specialist, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL); **Clare Howard**, CEO, Natspec [Q82-95](#)

Katie Nellist, Young Person with experience of the SEND system; **Miss Lucy Bowerman**, Young Person with experience of the SEND system; **Joanna Hall**, Young Person with experience of the SEND system; **Sarah Cobb**, Young Person with experience of the SEND system; **Madeline Thomas**, Young Person with experience of the SEND system [Q96-109](#)

Tuesday 29 April 2025

Lisa O'Connor, Vice President, Association of Educational Psychologists; **Professor Ian Kessler**, Professor of Public Policy and Management, Kings College London; **Janet Harrison**, Head of Service at Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust and Member, The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists [Q110-126](#)

Ms Marie Gascoigne, speech, language and communication policy expert, advisor and consultant, Better Communications CIC; **Sarah Walter**, Director, ICS Network, NHS Confederation; **Alison Stewart**, Head of SEND, South West London Integrated Care Board [Q127-150](#)

Tuesday 13 May 2025

Georgina Downard, Senior Solicitor, Independent Provider of Special Education Advice (IPSEA); **Sharon Chappell**, Assistant Ombudsman, Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO); **Adam Sproston**, Senior inspector for SEND and Alternative Provision, Ofsted; **Lucy Harte**, Deputy Director of Multi-agency Operations, Care Quality Commission (CQC) [Q151-193](#)

Tuesday 10 June 2025

Dr Susana Castro-Kemp, Associate Professor in Psychology and Special Needs at the Centre for Inclusive Education in the Department of Psychology and Human Development, UCL Faculty of Education and Society (IOE); **Dr Peter Gray**, Co-coordinator of the National SEN Policy Research Forum, SSCYP (Strategic Services for Children & Young People); **Jo Hutchinson**, Director for SEND and additional needs, Education Policy Institute [Q194-209](#)

Daniel Constable-Phelps, Executive Headteacher, St Mary's Primary and Nursery School; **Conrad Bourne**, Director for SEND, The Mercian Trust; **Nicole Dempsey**, Director of SEND and Safeguarding, Dixons Academies Trust [Q210-229](#)

Tuesday 1 July 2025

Catherine McKinnell MP, Minister of State (Minister for School Standards), Department for Education; **Alison Ismail**, Director of SEND, Department for Education [Q230-294](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

SEN numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1	#BeeWell	SEN0816
2	20/20health	SEN0256
3	24x7 Group; and SENDTO	SEN0569
4	9000 Lives SEND Consultancy	SEN0027
5	A Little Bit of Sunshine UK	SEN0781
6	Achieving for Children	SEN0326
7	Action Cerebral Palsy	SEN0507
8	Action for Children	SEN0789
9	Action-attainment CIC	SEN0680
10	ADHD 360	SEN0699
11	Adoption UK	SEN0520
12	Agilisys	SEN0751
13	Alderson, Naomi	SEN0690
14	Alessandro Capozzi	SEN0546
15	Alexander-Passe, Dr Neil	SEN0069
16	AllChild	SEN0517
17	Allcock, Mrs Maria	SEN0055
18	Allen, Miss Claudine	SEN0304
19	Allen, Mrs Tasha (SENDCO, South View Infant School)	SEN0036
20	Alliance for Inclusive Education	SEN0349
21	Alveyn, Mrs Mary (Vice Chair, responsible for SEND, of Governors, St Peters Catholic Primary School, Winchester)	SEN0456
22	Ambitious about Autism	SEN0796
23	Anna Freud	SEN0853

24	Anna Freud	<u>SEN0682</u>
25	Anonymised	<u>SEN0413</u>
26	Anonymised	<u>SEN0104</u>
27	Anonymised	<u>SEN0229</u>
28	Anonymised	<u>SEN0239</u>
29	Anonymised	<u>SEN0238</u>
30	Anonymised	<u>SEN0695</u>
31	Anonymised	<u>SEN0346</u>
32	Anonymised	<u>SEN0384</u>
33	Anonymised	<u>SEN0343</u>
34	Anonymised	<u>SEN0160</u>
35	Anonymised	<u>SEN0155</u>
36	Anonymised	<u>SEN0117</u>
37	Anonymised	<u>SEN0122</u>
38	Anonymised	<u>SEN0140</u>
39	Anonymised	<u>SEN0065</u>
40	Anonymised	<u>SEN0094</u>
41	Anonymised	<u>SEN0101</u>
42	Anonymised	<u>SEN0078</u>
43	Anonymised	<u>SEN0084</u>
44	Anonymised	<u>SEN0090</u>
45	Anonymised	<u>SEN0053</u>
46	Anonymised	<u>SEN0054</u>
47	Anonymised	<u>SEN0047</u>
48	Anonymised	<u>SEN0044</u>
49	Anonymised	<u>SEN0034</u>
50	Anonymised	<u>SEN0016</u>
51	Anonymised	<u>SEN0015</u>
52	Anonymised	<u>SEN0030</u>
53	Anonymised	<u>SEN0011</u>
54	Anonymised	<u>SEN0006</u>
55	Anonymised	<u>SEN0013</u>

56	Anonymised	SEN0018
57	Anti-bullying Alliance	SEN0873
58	Archway Learning Trust	SEN0385
59	Armed Forces Families and Safeguarding, Ministry of Defence	SEN0658
60	Ashworth, Dr Emma (Associate Professor of Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Liverpool John Moores University); Prof Lucy Bray (Professor of Children’s Health Literacy, Edge Hill University); Prof Amel Alghrani (Professor of Law, University of Liverpool); and Dr Joanna Kirkby (Research Assistant, Liverpool John Moores University)	SEN0144
61	Aspris Children’s Services	SEN0799
62	Association of Colleges	SEN0462
63	Association of Educational Psychologists	SEN0686
64	Association of School & College Leaders	SEN0663
65	Aubin, Mr Gary (SEND Consultant, SENDMattersUK Ltd)	SEN0782
66	Auditory Verbal UK	SEN0314
67	Autism Bedfordshire	SEN0418
68	Autistica	SEN0273
69	Azpitarte, Dr Francisco (Senior Lecturer in Social Policy, Loughborough University); Professor Louise Holt (Professor Human Geography, Loughborough University); and Dr Sobhi Berjawi (Research Associate, Loughborough University)	SEN0802
70	Azpitarte, Dr Francisco (Senior Lecturer in Social Policy, Loughborough University); Professor Louise Holt (Professor Human Geography, Loughborough University); and Dr Sobhi Berjawi (Research Associate, Loughborough University)	SEN0772
71	B HEARD	SEN0837
72	B4ND (British Association for Neurodiversity)	SEN0552
73	BMet College	SEN0442
74	Bagnall, Dr Charlotte (Lecturer in the Psychology of Education, The University of Manchester)	SEN0402
75	Bailey, Mr Calvin MP; and Ms Georgina McDonald (Senior Caseworker, Constituency of Leyton and Wanstead)	SEN0596
76	Baker, Mrs Debbie (Trust Lead for Inclusion, Egguckland Vale Primary School)	SEN0465

77	Barber, Mr P	SEN0147
78	Barclay, Lisa	SEN0014
79	Barnard, Mr Matthew (Deputy Headteacher, Kea Primary School)	SEN0272
80	Barnes, Mrs Bridie	SEN0072
81	Barron, Lee MP	SEN0325
82	Bastin, Mr Ben (Head, Treloar College)	SEN0721
83	Bateman, Miss Samantha	SEN0358
84	Baverstock, Ms Wendy	SEN0171
85	Beeches Junior School	SEN0002
86	Beechwood Childcare Limited	SEN0728
87	Beechwood Childcare Limited	SEN0702
88	Beechwood childcare	SEN0587
89	Benjamin, Joel	SEN0855
90	Betoin, (Clinical Psychologist – Relationship Health Practice, Kendal Primary Care Network)	SEN0107
91	Better Communication CIC	SEN0892
92	Better Communication CIC	SEN0822
93	Bevan,	SEN0411
94	Beverley, Mrs (Headteacher, Blackshaw lane Primary and Nursery School)	SEN0270
95	Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust	SEN0669
96	Black Equity Organisation	SEN0709
97	Black SEN Mamas (SEN Mamas CIC)	SEN0435
98	Bloomfield Dyslexia Centre	SEN0422
99	Bond, Professor Caroline (Professor of Educational Psychology, The University of Manchester)	SEN0211
100	Bottomley, Mr Richard (Headteacher, Bradford AP Academy)	SEN0290
101	Boyd, Dr Diana (Family Carer Advisor, National SEND team, NHS England)	SEN0744
102	Brees, Ms Natalie (Outreach Lead Teacher, Oak Grove College)	SEN0548
103	Bright Future Training Limited	SEN0519
104	Bristol City Council	SEN0735

105	British Association of Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People (BATOD)	SEN0808
106	British Dyslexia Association	SEN0503
107	British Educational Suppliers Association	SEN0798
108	Brooks, Mrs Becky (SENDCo, Frogmore Infant School)	SEN0367
109	Brookwood Primary School	SEN0185
110	Broomfield South SILC	SEN0786
111	Broomhead, Dr Karen	SEN0051
112	Brunel	SEN0878
113	Burke, Brian	SEN0847
114	Burke, Mrs Susan	SEN0513
115	Buxton School	SEN0403
116	CENMAC – Assistive Technology in Education	SEN0823
117	CWaC SEND Accountability	SEN0173
118	Calthorpe Academy	SEN0259
119	Cambridgeshire Speech & Language Therapy Service – Cambridgeshire Community Services, NHS Trust	SEN0675
120	Cant, Ms Ayana (Research Assistant, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health); Dr Vincent Nguyen (Research Fellow, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health); Ms Julia Shumway (Research Assistant, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health); Prof Bianca De Stavola (Emeritus Professor of Medical Statistics, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health); Dr Kate Lewis (Research Fellow, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health); Dr Ania Zylbersztejn (Senior Research Fellow, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health); Pro Katie Harron (Professor of Statistics and Health Data Science, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health); and Prof Ruth Gilbert (Professor of Clinical Epidemiology, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health)	SEN0535
121	Career Connect	SEN0746
122	Caritas Westminster	SEN0537
123	Catholic Education Service; and Catholic schools	SEN0562
124	Catterick’s Garrison ASSIST Project (GAP)	SEN0570
125	Cavendish Education	SEN0840
126	Cawston Grange Primary School	SEN0007

127	Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE)	<u>SEN0864</u>
128	Challenge Partners	<u>SEN0768</u>
129	Challenging Behaviour Foundation	<u>SEN0555</u>
130	Chance UK	<u>SEN0571</u>
131	Chapman, Mrs Claire	<u>SEN0475</u>
132	Chartered College of Teaching	<u>SEN0757</u>
133	Children North East	<u>SEN0491</u>
134	Children’s Services Development Group (CSDG)	<u>SEN0851</u>
135	City of York Council	<u>SEN0496</u>
136	Civil Mediation Council; and College of Mediators	<u>SEN0557</u>
137	Clark, Dr Sian	<u>SEN0359</u>
138	Cockburn, Kathryn	<u>SEN0871</u>
139	Coddi, Ms Cecilia	<u>SEN0338</u>
140	Coffman, Mrs Lisa	<u>SEN0012</u>
141	Compass	<u>SEN0267</u>
142	Compass Learning Partnership	<u>SEN0223</u>
143	Confederation of School Trusts	<u>SEN0760</u>
144	Connections in Mind CIC	<u>SEN0443</u>
145	Contact	<u>SEN0174</u>
146	Cook, Dr Anna (Surrey Future Fellow, University of Surrey); Professor Emily Farran (Professor in Developmental Psychology, University of Surrey); Dr Emma Williams (Lecturer in Developmental Psychology, University of Surrey); Dr Jo Moss (Senior Lecturer in Developmental Psychology, University of Surrey); Dr Marie Martel (Lecturer in Developmental Psychology, University of Surrey); and Dr Debbie Gooch (Lecturer in Developmental Psychology, University of Surrey)	<u>SEN0814</u>
147	Cooper, Miss Anne (Headteacher, Bell Farm Primary School)	<u>SEN0494</u>
148	Cooper, Mrs Judy	<u>SEN0092</u>
149	Cornwall Council	<u>SEN0637</u>
150	Cornwell, Mrs Megan	<u>SEN0132</u>
151	Cox, Pam MP	<u>SEN0696</u>
152	Cranford Park C of E primary	<u>SEN0382</u>
153	Cranmere Primary School	<u>SEN0295</u>

154	Crookhorn College	<u>SEN0387</u>
155	Cunningham, Mrs Maxine (Trust SEND Improvement and Inclusion Lead, Voyage Education Partnership)	<u>SEN0149</u>
156	DFN Project SEARCH	<u>SEN0556</u>
157	Dallaglio RugbyWorks	<u>SEN0301</u>
158	Damerall, Miss Sharon (Headteacher, Roselyn House School)	<u>SEN0582</u>
159	Dean, Mrs Cathy	<u>SEN0134</u>
160	Dell, Mrs Tracey	<u>SEN0342</u>
161	Dennis, Angela	<u>SEN0629</u>
162	Department for Education	<u>SEN0887</u>
163	Department of Psychiatry, University of Cambridge	<u>SEN0717</u>
164	Diamond, Mr Gus	<u>SEN0073</u>
165	Difolco, Marie	<u>SEN0097</u>
166	Diggle School	<u>SEN0278</u>
167	Dingley's Promise	<u>SEN0334</u>
168	Disability Rights UK	<u>SEN0889</u>
169	Disabled Children's Partnership	<u>SEN0722</u>
170	Dixons Academies Trust	<u>SEN0858</u>
171	Down's Syndrome Association	<u>SEN0526</u>
172	Drumbeat Outreach	<u>SEN0581</u>
173	Duffy, Grace	<u>SEN0797</u>
174	Durning, Mrs Aimee (Director of Inclusion and Community, University of Cambridge Primary School)	<u>SEN0651</u>
175	Dyslexia Cornwall	<u>SEN0566</u>
176	EPIC Think Learn C.I.C.	<u>SEN0608</u>
177	Eames, Paul	<u>SEN0593</u>
178	Early Education and Childcare Coalition	<u>SEN0698</u>
179	EdAct	<u>SEN0588</u>
180	Ely, Mrs Sonya (Executive Headteacher, Tydd St Mary and Weston Hills Church of England Primary Schools federation)	<u>SEN0567</u>
181	Empowering Learning	<u>SEN0105</u>
182	Enable Trust	<u>SEN0337</u>
183	England and Wales Cricket Board	<u>SEN0604</u>

184	Enrich Learning Trust	SEN0711
185	Essex County Council	SEN0655
186	Etio	SEN0591
187	Everyone Matters Schools Trust	SEN0190
188	F40	SEN0327
189	Faculty of Education, Edge Hill University	SEN0742
190	Fair Education Alliance Youth Steering Group	SEN0688
191	Family Action	SEN0666
192	Farmer, Ms Alison	SEN0638
193	Farrell, Mrs Margaret	SEN0376
194	Farrell, Mrs Margaret	SEN0375
195	Faulkner, Mrs Lucy (Headteacher, Lee-on-the-Solent Junior School)	SEN0139
196	Fearman, Mrs Anne	SEN0008
197	Fernandez, Mrs Melanie	SEN0037
198	Finn-Kelcey, Mrs Isabelle	SEN0274
199	First Look SEN	SEN0247
200	Fisher, Mrs Koreen	SEN0420
201	Fit 2 Learn	SEN0005
202	Flat Stan First Aid Limited	SEN0026
203	Flindall, Dr Sarah (GP partner, East Norfolk Medical Practice)	SEN0365
204	Fort Royal community Primary school (special school)	SEN0127
205	Friedman, Dr Samantha (Lecturer in Applied Psychology, University of Edinburgh); and Dr Sinéad Mullally	SEN0685
206	Freemantles School	SEN0579
207	GMB Union	SEN0538
208	Giles, Gemma	SEN0846
209	Gill, Mr Charles (Teacher, Secondary School)	SEN0218
210	Global Child and Maternal Health CIC	SEN0780
211	Global Mediation	SEN0870
212	Grahl, Cllr Dr Gwen (Labour Councillor and Lead Member for Children, Young People and Schools, Cricklewood & Mapesbury)	SEN0885
213	Gray, Dr Peter	SEN0176

214	Gray, Mrs Abigail	SEN0778
215	Great Wood School	SEN0353
216	Greatorex-Kemp, Miss Sophie (English Teacher, University of Nottingham)	SEN0046
217	Green, Mrs Fiona	SEN0727
218	Greenslade, Mrs N	SEN0447
219	Greenwood Academies Trust	SEN0553
220	Groves, Mr Clive	SEN0323
221	Guide dogs	SEN0888
222	HMC (The Heads' Conference)	SEN0414
223	Hack, Amanda MP	SEN0684
224	Hackney SEND Parent Carer Forum	SEN0577
225	Hackney SEND Parent Carer Forum	SEN0595
226	Haddleton, Mrs Kirsty	SEN0636
227	Haddleton, Mrs Kirsty	SEN0635
228	Hagarty, Dr Imogen	SEN0633
229	Hampshire County Council	SEN0590
230	Hanley, Professor Mary (Professor of Psychology, Durham University)	SEN0506
231	Haringey Council	SEN0872
232	Harris, James (Founder, The Finding Common Ground project)	SEN0473
233	Harris, Mrs Helen (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer, The Tapscott Learning Trust)	SEN0533
234	Harrison, Ms Ekaterina	SEN0472
235	Hatfield, Mrs Debbie	SEN0777
236	Health Conditions in Schools Alliance	SEN0792
237	Healthwatch York	SEN0585
238	Healy, Ms D (Teaching assistant and dyslexia specialist, Secondary School)	SEN0236
239	Hertfordshire County Council	SEN0657
240	Herts Community NHS Trust	SEN0645
241	Herts Parent Carer Involvement	SEN0756
242	High Vibe Foundation	SEN0234

243	Hill, Mr Jamie (Head of Specialist Provision for the Deaf, Medstead C of E Primary School)	SEN0277
244	Hopton, Mrs Melanie	SEN0143
245	Hoult, Dr Elizabeth (Professor of Education, Northumbria University)	SEN0743
246	Hoyle, Ms Alice (CEO, Sense and Connect)	SEN0083
247	Hughes, Ms Rhianedd (Head of SEN Statutory Service, Brighton and Hove City Council)	SEN0043
248	Hull Parent Carer Forum	SEN0598
249	Hunter, David	SEN0412
250	Hyde, Mr Andy	SEN0455
251	Hyde, Andy; Linda Abdulkabir; Martin Dean; Marion Strudwick; Carla Correia; and Maria Telesia	SEN0572
252	IMPACT	SEN0865
253	IPSEA (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice)	SEN0678
254	Imich, Dr Andre (SEN and Disability Specialist Adviser, AI SEND Advisory Service)	SEN0542
255	Inclusive Solutions UK Ltd	SEN0009
256	Independent Schools Council	SEN0758
257	Indoamerican Refugee and Migrant Organisation	SEN0753
258	Information, Advice and Support Services Network	SEN0693
259	Institute of Health Visiting	SEN0471
260	Intensive Interaction Institute	SEN0231
261	International Coalition Against Restraint and Seclusion's (ICARS)	SEN0868
262	Internet Matters	SEN0774
263	Iris Possibilities CIC	SEN0701
264	Isos Partnership	SEN0421
265	Jeffery, Mr Simon	SEN0198
266	Jogo Behaviour Support	SEN0424
267	Johnson, Ms Emma	SEN0025
268	Jubb, Tracy	SEN0167
269	Justify Foundation	SEN0068

270	Kallitsoglou, Dr Angeliki (Senior Lecturer, University of Exeter)	SEN0454
271	Kavanagh, Ms Tonya	SEN0516
272	Kelvin Grove Primary School	SEN0502
273	Kelvin Grove Primary School	SEN0550
274	Kids	SEN0624
275	King, Dr Stephanie (Early Career Academic, University of Derby)	SEN0490
276	King, M	SEN0844
277	Kinship	SEN0509
278	Kirkleatham Hall School	SEN0042
279	Knapman, Nick	SEN0216
280	Knight, Mr Sam (Deputy Head, Outcomes First Group)	SEN0071
281	Knight, Mr Simon (Joint Headteacher, Frank Wise School)	SEN0179
282	LGSCO	SEN0576
283	Lancashire County Council	SEN0594
284	Lane	SEN0771
285	Lawson, Dr Deborah	SEN0048
286	Learn Sheffield	SEN0643
287	Learning DNA Ltd	SEN0534
288	Learning for Life Multi Academy Trust	SEN0224
289	Learning in Harmony Trust	SEN0714
290	Leeds Trinity University	SEN0368
291	Liberty Academy Trust	SEN0263
292	Linford, Mrs Paula	SEN0061
293	Little Hearts Matter	SEN0363
294	Little, Mrs Lucy Emma	SEN0396
295	Littlewood, Mrs Emily (Inclusion Leader, TAMAT – The Alliance Multi Academy Trust); Culligan (SENCO, TAMAT); and Taylor (Inclusion Leader, TAMAT)	SEN0826
296	Liverman, Susan	SEN0091
297	Local Government Association	SEN0415
298	London Borough of Barking & Dagenham	SEN0813

299	London Borough of Camden; North Central London ICB; Camden Learning; Parliament Hill School; Camden SENDIASS; Camden Special Parent Forum; Swiss Cottage School; and Heath School	SEN0747
300	London Borough of Waltham Forest	SEN0425
301	London Councils	SEN0659
302	London South East Academies Trust	SEN0486
303	London South East Colleges	SEN0487
304	Long Covid Kids & Friends	SEN0336
305	Long Marston VA C of E Primary	SEN0070
306	Luff, Mrs Rosalind (London Regional representative, National Network of Parent Carer Forums); and Claire Richmond (London Regional representative, National Network of Parent Carer Forums)	SEN0732
307	Lunn, Dr Judith (Senior Lecturer, Lancaster Medical School)	SEN0750
308	Mable Therapy	SEN0331
309	MacCleary, James MP	SEN0525
310	MacCormac, Lorna	SEN0439
311	Maclay, Leonie	SEN0560
312	Magic Breakfast	SEN0523
313	Malden Oaks School and Tuition Centre	SEN0282
314	Maloy, Dr Liam (Senior Lecturer in Education (Research), University of Derby); Jo Tolley (Researcher and Research Administrator, University of Derby); Emma Cross (Researcher, University of Derby); Nicholas Barwell (Researcher, University of Derby); and Alex Brown (Researcher, University of Derby)	SEN0563
315	Martin, Miss Molly	SEN0315
316	Martin-Morrissey, Ms Sam (SENCO, Home)	SEN0660
317	Mason, Mr Ian (Headteacher, Mills Hill Primary)	SEN0275
318	Max Appeal	SEN0681
319	Macquarrie, Dr Sarah (Senior Lecturer in Psychology of Education, University of Manchester); and Dr Alexandra Hennessey (Senior Lecturer in Psychology of Education, University of Manchester)	SEN0573
320	McFadden, Mr Eugene (SENCO, Truro Penwith Academy Trust)	SEN0017

321	McGrath, J	SEN0096
322	McLaughlin, Professor Colleen (Professor Emerita, University of Cambridge)	SEN0716
323	Melling, Dr Richard (Educational Psychologist, Independent)	SEN0703
324	Mercuri International (UK) Ltd	SEN0399
325	Michaels, Dr Sarah (Neurodevelopmental Specialist GP)	SEN0524
326	Middleton, Dr Tristan (Senior Lecturer in Inclusive Education, University of Gloucestershire)	SEN0390
327	Miller, Simon	SEN0511
328	Milton Keynes City Council	SEN0712
329	Minerva's Virtual Academy	SEN0788
330	Monk, Peter	SEN0691
331	Moor House Research & Training Institute	SEN0665
332	Moore, Mr Christopher	SEN0522
333	More House School, Frensham	SEN0825
334	Morgan, Stephen J (Early Years Coach and Mentor)	SEN0109
335	Morris, Hannah (Educational Psychologist, EdPsych4Kids)	SEN0200
336	Mort, Ms Bethan (Head of SEND Therapies, Southend City Council)	SEN0451
337	Mums Supporting Mums Horsham	SEN0621
338	NAPLIC: National Association of Professional's Concerned with Language Impaired Children	SEN0539
339	NASS (National Association Special Schools)	SEN0287
340	NASUWT – The Teachers' Union	SEN0289
341	NET Academy Trust	SEN0641
342	NEU	SEN0640
343	NIHR Children and Families Policy Research Unit	SEN0740
344	Nasen	SEN0809
345	National Association for Hospital Education	SEN0879
346	National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)	SEN0444
347	National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH)	SEN0453
348	National Autistic Society	SEN0646
349	National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTI)	SEN0222
350	National Foundation for Educational Research	SEN0697

351	National Governance Association	SEN0785
352	National Institute of Teaching	SEN0877
353	National Medicines In Specialist Schools Group	SEN0191
354	National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF)	SEN0248
355	National SENCo Advocacy Network	SEN0146
356	National SEND Forum; and Federation of Leaders in Special Education	SEN0618
357	National Sensory Impairment Partnership	SEN0694
358	National Society for Education (Church of England and Church in Wales)	SEN0754
359	National Star	SEN0393
360	Natspec	SEN0305
361	Needle, Garry (Head Teacher, Saint Joseph's Junior, Infant and Nursery School)	SEN0306
362	Nellist, Dr Ruth	SEN0341
363	Neville	SEN0644
364	New College Worcester	SEN0605
365	New Bridge Group	SEN0255
366	New Economics Foundation	SEN0710
367	Newton, Mrs Faith	SEN0625
368	Nexus Multi Academy Trust	SEN0123
369	Ní Chobhthaigh, Sorcha	SEN0276
370	Nisai Learning	SEN0787
371	Norfolk County Council	SEN0371
372	North Northamptonshire Parent Carer Voices	SEN0423
373	North Somerset Council	SEN0804
374	North Star Community Trust	SEN0745
375	Northage, Miss Joan	SEN0052
376	Nottinghamshire County Council; and Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Board	SEN0779
377	Nystagmus Network	SEN0501
378	Nurtureuk	SEN0381
379	Oastlers School	SEN0116
380	Octavia House Schools	SEN0217

381	Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted)	SEN0689
382	Olive Academies	SEN0457
383	Omnia Learning Trust	SEN0181
384	OnLineTraining Ltd	SEN0128
385	One education, Creative Psychotherapies in Education	SEN0075
386	Open University Students Association	SEN0308
387	Optima Psychology	SEN0883
388	Orange, Mrs Lisa	SEN0775
389	Ordinary Classrooms Educational Consultancy Ltd	SEN0749
390	Orr, Mrs Sally	SEN0161
391	Our Community Multi Academy Trust	SEN0460
392	Outcomes First Group	SEN0829
393	OxEd and Assessment	SEN0347
394	Oxfordshire County Council	SEN0770
395	PAGS	SEN0622
396	PSHE Association	SEN0761
397	Parent Carer Forum Cheshire West & Chester	SEN0039
398	Parent Carers Together	SEN0249
399	Paulmann, Silke (Professor, Head of Department, University of Essex, Psychology Department); and Claire Oakley (Lecturer, University of Essex, Department of Psychology)	SEN0776
400	Patil, Mr Ash (Chair of Governors, Westfield Primary School & Nursery, Berkhamsted, Herts); Mr Ronnie Jacob (Trustee (Finance), Watford Workshop (for disabled people)); and Dr Tim Coulson (CEO, Unity Schools Patnership (MAT in Norfolk, Suffolk & North Essex))	SEN0737
401	Patoss, the Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties	SEN0667
402	Payne, Miss Elizabeth	SEN052
403	Pdnet	SEN02831
404	Perseid School and MSTA	SEN0166
405	Petersen, Dr Katharine (GP partner and ICB clinical lead in Mental health neurodivergence and learning disability in North East North Cumbria)	SEN0114

406	Phillips, Claire	SEN0723
407	Pinpoint Cambridgeshire	SEN0205
408	Plant, Mrs Charlotte	SEN0038
409	Platt, Jo MP	SEN0182
410	Pluquailec, Dr Jill (Senior Lecturer, Sheffield Hallam University)	SEN0280
411	Pole, Elizabeth (Kent Professional Lead Speech & Language Therapist for the Balanced System, Kent County Council); Hester Mackay (SEND Therapies Lead Teacher, Kent County Council); Ruth Clement (Head of Kent Children’s Therapies, Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust); and Helen Wymouth (Head of CYP Therapies, East Kent Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust)	SEN0715
412	Portsmouth City Council	SEN0679
413	Portsmouth City Council	SEN0250
414	Portsmouth City Council; West Sussex County Council; East Sussex County Council; and Brighton and Hove	SEN0266
415	Potential Plus UK	SEN0529
416	Premier Advisory Group	SEN0800
417	Prior’s Court Foundation	SEN0578
418	Pupil Pathways	SEN0405
419	RAF Families Federation	SEN0683
420	REAch2 Academy Trust	SEN0677
421	Raw Learning Community CIC	SEN0202
422	Renaissance (incorporating GL Assessment)	SEN0616
423	Research Centre for Global Learning, Coventry University; and Experts By Experience	SEN0361
424	Rhodes, Rev Laura (Vicar, Church of England)	SEN0004
425	Richards, Hannah (KS2 Class Teacher, St Gregory CEVC Primary School)	SEN0440
426	Richmond Parent Carer Forum	SEN0836
427	Richmond, Claire (NNPCF London Regional Director, NNPCF London Region); and Rosalind Luff (NNPCF London Regional Director, NNPCF London Region)	SEN0793
428	River Tees Multi-Academy Trust	SEN0730

429	Robertson, Christopher (Visiting Professor, Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability, University of Derby)	SEN0731
430	Robertson, Christopher (Visiting Professor, Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability, University of Derby)	SEN0729
431	Robinson, Mr David	SEN0059
432	Rose, Mrs Sarah	SEN0674
433	Royal British Legion	SEN0600
434	Royal College of Occupational Therapists	SEN0372
435	Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists	SEN0707
436	Royal National College for the Blind	SEN0843
437	Royal Society for Blind Children	SEN0431
438	SASC SpLD Assessment Standards Committee	SEN0333
439	SEN Policy Research Forum	SEN0300
440	SEND in The Specialists Coalition	SEN0652
441	SEDSconnective	SEN0842
442	SNAP	SEN0687
443	SOS Special Educational Needs	SEN0834
444	Sadler, Emma	SEN0543
445	Sandcross Primary School	SEN0362
446	School-Home Support	SEN0668
447	Schools North East	SEN0559
448	Searjeant, James	SEN0024
449	Seashell	SEN0700
450	Sefton Council on behalf of Sefton SEND area partnership	SEN0312
451	Sense	SEN0601
452	Service Children's Progression Alliance	SEN0554
453	Sinclairs Law	SEN0849
454	Skills Builder Partnership	SEN0725
455	Snowling, Professor Margaret (Professor Emeritus and Research Fellow, St. John's College, Oxford)	SEN0292
456	Solihull Council	SEN0450
457	South Thames Colleges Group	SEN0485
458	Southwark Law Centre; and Action for Education Rights Group	SEN0317

459	Souza, Ms Rhian Davies-De	SEN0066
460	Spaghetti Bridge	SEN0329
461	Special Educational Consortium	SEN0734
462	Special Needs Jungle Ltd	SEN0610
463	Speech & Language Link	SEN0449
464	Speech and Language UK	SEN0718
465	Speech, Language and Communication Alliance	SEN0704
466	SpeechWise Ltd	SEN0631
467	Springboard Opportunity Group	SEN0121
468	St Ann's Catholic Primary School	SEN0213
469	St Clare's Preschool	SEN0163
470	St Gilbert's CE Primary School	SEN0350
471	St Gregory's CEVC Primary School	SEN0882
472	St Mark's CE Primary; Vicarage Park CE Primary; and Crosscrake CE Primary	SEN0369
473	St Mark's CofE Primary School	SEN0321
474	St. Bartholomew's C of E Primary School	SEN0233
475	Staffordshire County Council	SEN0417
476	Staffordshire Educational Psychology Service	SEN0812
477	Steele, Ms Marcia	SEN0103
478	Steer, Kate	SEN0819
479	Stevens, Emily	SEN0150
480	Stevens, Mr Andrew	SEN082
481	Stevens, Rev Simon	SEN0632
482	Stocksbridge High School	SEN0186
483	Stoke Mandeville Combined School	SEN0404
484	Stone, Mrs Aimee	SEN0348
485	Stonehouse Park Federation	SEN0673
486	Strogilos, Dr Vasilis (Associate Professor, University of Southampton)	SEN0607
487	Sunshine Support	SEN0495
488	Supporting Education Group (SEG)	SEN0875
489	Surrey County Council	SEN0389

490	Sutton, Ian (Children & Young People Project Lead, LDA Programme)	SEN0064
491	Swift, Dr Diane (Associate Lecturer, The Open University); and Mr Andy Ogden (Director of CPD, Tarka Trust)	SEN0357
492	Tameside Local Authority	SEN0246
493	Tarantini-Amor, Ms Laura (SEND and EAL Consultant, Harris Federation)	SEN0432
494	Taylor, Mrs J	SEN0021
495	The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd	SEN0884
496	The Aurora Group	SEN0446
497	The Beckmead Trust	SEN0603
498	The Bell Foundation	SEN0328
499	The Blue Tangerine Federation	SEN0642
500	The British Psychological Society	SEN0592
501	The Brook Special Primary School	SEN0476
502	The Centre for Young Lives	SEN0803
503	The County Councils Network (CCN)	SEN0850
504	The Disability Policy Centre	SEN0498
505	The Eastwood Academy	SEN0286
506	The Henry Beaufort School	SEN0142
507	The Independent Schools Association	SEN0410
508	The Kayaks (Kids And Young Adults Klub – Special Needs support group)	SEN0221
509	The Licensed Private Hire Car Association (LPHCA)	SEN0551
510	The Mulberry Bush	SEN0407
511	The Multi-Schools Council	SEN0461
512	The National Acquired Brain Injury in Learning and Education Syndicate (N-ABLES)	SEN0296
513	The National Association of Principal Education Psychologists (NAPEP)	SEN0881
514	The National Deaf Children's Society	SEN0564
515	The Nuffield Foundation	SEN0380
516	The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)	SEN0226
517	The Tutor Trust	SEN0705

518	Thomas Pocklington Trust	SEN0589
519	Thompson, Dr Angela	SEN0866
520	Thomson, Mrs Lesley	SEN0271
521	Tidball, Dr Marie MP	SEN0648
522	Tighe, Dr Sarah; and Dr Niamh Wherity	SEN0288
523	Together Trust	SEN0602
524	Torbay Council	SEN0739
525	Torbay Council	SEN0574
526	Torbay community paediatrics	SEN0170
527	Townsend, Mrs Lisa	SEN0049
528	ToyBox Diversity Lab, Queen Margaret University.	SEN0204
529	Tracks Autism, Early Years Intervention Centre	SEN0302
530	Triple P UK	SEN0784
531	Ttofa, Juliette	SEN0859
532	Tufts, Miss Sarah (Early Years SENCo, Little Swans Preschool Norfolk)	SEN0623
533	Tute Education	SEN0664
534	Tutt, Dr Rona (Past President of the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT); Malcolm Reeve (National SEND Leader, Whole School SEND); Kiran Hingorani (Principal, Swalcliffe Park School); and Julie Walker (Executive Officer, Special Educational Needs. Somerset Expertise (sen.se))	SEN0627
535	Tweseldown Infants	SEN0137
536	Twinkl	SEN0192
537	Tydd St Mary C of E Primary School	SEN0561
538	UNISON	SEN0489
539	Unity Schools Partnership	SEN0619
540	University of Exeter Centre for Wellbeing, Inclusion, Disability in Education Research (WIDER)	SEN0876
541	University of Liverpool Law Clinic	SEN0388
542	VIEW (Professional Association of the Vision Impairment Education Workforce)	SEN0613
543	Vanderslaghmoelen, Mrs Sandra (TA, Primary school); and Mrs Petra Lee (TA, Primary school)	SEN0330
544	Vaughan, Mrs Alison	SEN0839

545	Voice 21	SEN0568
546	Voice for Learners (Parent action group for online education)	SEN0466
547	Warig, Mr Keith	SEN0227
548	Watson, Mrs Victoria	SEN0077
549	Waugh, Ms Jolanta; Mr Paul Waugh; Ms Alison Miller; Ms Charlene Halsey; Ms Caitlin Taylor; Ms Hayley Thomson-de Boor; Mr Jason Halsey; Ms Camille Deeny; Ms Heather Penny; and Mr Martin Taylor	SEN0818
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555	Whalley, S	SEN0360
556	White, Ms S	SEN0023
557	Whizz Kidz	SEN0303
558	Whole Education	SEN0671
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560	Wilkinson,	SEN0228
561	Williams, Mrs Naomi (Clinical Academic, Sensory learning & Play C.I.C.)	SEN0162
562	Wilson	SEN0378
563	Wilson, Mark (Chief Executive Officer, Wellspring Academy Trust)	SEN0020
564	Wimbledon College	SEN0394
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566	Worrall, Miss Kate (SENCO, East Peckham Primary School)	SEN0003
567	Worrell, Mrs Frances	SEN0102
568	Worthington, Dr Rachel; Dr Kalum Bodfield; and Dr Rossella Sorte	SEN0801
569	Wright, John; and Sally Capper	SEN0458
570	Yates, Ms Denise	SEN0626
571	Yemm, Steve MP	SEN0886
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