



SCHOOLS FUNDING FORUM AGENDA

8.00 am

**Thursday
27 November 2025**

**Rm 233 CEME,
Rainham**

Members 21: Quorum: 9

MEMBERSHIP:

Representative Groups

LA Maintained School Representatives:

Head Teachers (7): Emma Allen, Special
Michael Ross, Primary
Kirsten Cooper, Primary
Georgina Delmonte, Primary
Hayley McClenaghan, Primary
David Unwin-Bailey, Primary
Chris Speller, Primary

Governors (1): Les James

Academy Representatives:

Primary (2): Chris Hobson
Vacancy

Secondary (5) Neil Frost
Scott McGuinness
David Turrell
Paul Larnar
Vacancy

Special (1) Andy Smith

AP Academy (1) Tony Machin

**Non-School
Representatives:** **Error! No document variable supplied.**

**Early Years PVI Sector
(1)** Emma Reynolds

Post 16 (1) Paul Lerner

Diocesan Board (2) Chris Speller, Diocese of Chelmsford
Michael Ross, Diocese of Brentwood

Trade Unions (2): George Blake/John McGill, Teachers
Peter Liddle, Support Staff

**For information about the meeting please contact:
Katherine Heffernan
Katherine.Heffernan@haverling.gov.uk**

AGENDA ITEMS

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS OR OBSERVERS

2 TO AGREE THE NOTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON... (Pages 1 - 5)

The notes are attached at Appendix A.

3 MATTERS ARISING

4 ITEM 4 SCHOOLS FUNDING 2026-27 (Pages 6 - 9)

5 ITEM 4 APP A - THE NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA FOR SCHOOLS 2026 - 2027 (Pages 10 - 424)

6 NEXT MEETINGS

The next meetings have been arranged as follows:

15th January 2026

All meetings to be held at CEME at 8.00am.

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Zena Smith
Democratic and Election Services Manager

Agenda Item 2

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE HAVINGHAM SCHOOLS FUNDING FORUM

Thursday 23rd October 2025 at CEME
(8.00am – 9.55am)

Present:

LA Maintained School Representatives:

Primary Kirsten Cooper (*Chair*)
Georgina Delmonte
Hayley McClenaghan
Ryan Kinnear
Mike Ross (also representing the Diocese of Brentwood)
Chris Speller (also representing the Diocese of Chelmsford)

Special Emma Allen (EA)

Governor Les James (LJ)

Academy Representatives:

Primary Chris Hobson (CH)

Secondary David Turrell (*Vice Chair*) (also representing Post 16)
Paul Larnar (also representing Post 16)

Special Vicky Mummery

AP Academy Mandeep Kaur

Non-School Representatives:

Early Years PVI Sector: Becky McGowan*

Trade Unions: John McGill (JM) (Teaching staff union representative)
Julia Newman (JN) (Support staff union representative)
George Blake (GB) (Teaching staff union representative)

Observers:

Russell Abrahall (NAHT) Observer

Non-Members in attendance:

Angela Adams	Clerk, HGS
Marcus Bennett	Head of SEND
Kavan Cheema	Strategic Business Partner
Trevor Cook (TC)	Assistant Director of Education
Katherine Heffernan (KH)	Head of Finance (Business Partnering)
Hany Moussa (HM)*	Principal Education Finance Officer
Jacqueline Treacy (JT)	Senior Inspector for schools casing concern (HSiS)

*for part of the meeting

1. ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW MEMBERS, APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS OR OBSERVERS

All were welcomed to the meeting.

Apologies were received from the following Forum Members:

Emma Reynolds – Early Years PVI sector (Becky McGowan in attendance as representative)
David Unwin Bailey Primary sector (Ryan Kinnear in attendance as representative)
Neil Frost- Secondary Academy
Scott McGuinness- Secondary Academy
June MacDonald – Olive Academy

2. ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

Funding forum members noted that a Chair and Vice chair needed to be appointed for the academic year, until the first meeting of the autumn term 2026. Forum members discussed the appointment of members to the roles and the following was unanimously agreed.

To reappoint Kirsten Cooper as Chair and David Turrell as Vice Chair until the first meeting in the autumn term 2026.

3. TO AGREE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12th JUNE 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th June 2025 were received and agreed.

4. MATTERS ARISING

The following were matters arising from the previous minutes that were not included elsewhere on the agenda:

- 4.1. Membership (minute 1 refers): P Larner had been contacted with regards to his membership of the funding forum and he was in attendance.
- 4.2. De-Delegation (minute 4 refers): Forum members noted that the carry forward was still held and would be discussed in more detail under De-delegation on the agenda.
- 4.3. Working party (minute 6 refers): KH advised that the working party was in the process of being established to support schools with their budgets.

5. SCHOOLS BLOCK FUNDING

Forum members were asked to:

1. **Note the update on schools funding for 2026-27**
2. **Agree to apply the national funding formula rates to schools data in calculating schools' funding**
3. **Agree the School Block 0.5% transfer to High Needs and to consider a disapplication request be submitted to the DfE for any transfer above 0.5%**
4. **For LA maintained primary school representatives; to consider whether to continue with the de-delegation of funding for the following services:**
 - (i) **Insurance**

- (ii) Free school meals eligibility checking
- (iii) Maternity leave insurance
- (iv) EAL service
- (v) Trade Union Facility Time
- (vi) Contingency to support schools in financial difficulty
- 5. For LA maintained primary and special school representatives; to consider the de-delegation of funding for the following:
 - (i) Statutory and regulatory duties
 - (ii) Core school improvement activities

Forum members were asked to note the 2026-27 funding update, agree use of National Funding Formula (NFF) rates, confirm the 0.5% transfer from the Schools Block to High Needs, and consider de-delegation arrangements for maintained schools.

The DfE had not yet confirmed allocations for 2026–27, but the expectation was continued use of the NFF. Havering already used the NFF, so scope for change was limited.

B McGowan joined the meeting at this point, 8:24am

- Schools Block Transfer

The current 0.5% transfer to High Needs remained insufficient, but Forum members did not support increasing it. Any increase would add pressure on school budgets. This position would be shared with clusters. Model examples and top-up rates would be reviewed.

- Growth and falling rolls.

Some areas were expecting growth while others faced declines. No changes were proposed to the falling rolls fund.

Members discussed whether to continue de-delegation for various services. Points noted included:

- Free school meals checking: LGfL offered this at no cost.
- EAL: usage varied; some schools preferred a traded approach. HSIS to explore inclusion in its package (action: JT/TC).
- Trade Union Facility Time: further work was ongoing, with concerns about consistency, funding, and academy participation. Updated membership data would inform next steps.
- Contingency funding: views differed on whether top-sliced funding should be redistributed or used for support. Rising numbers of financially challenged schools were noted.

Members requested a clearer breakdown of statutory and regulatory duties funded through de-delegation

ACTION: HM/KH

Clusters were asked to review proposals on core school improvement funding (action: all maintained representatives).

The demographic in Havering was changing and schools became better at supporting pupils with EAL the more they had on their roll, schools also received funding for EAL.

H Moussa joined the meeting at this point, 8:43am

Funding forum members then voted on the following

- 1) They agreed to apply the national funding formula rates to schools' data in calculating schools' funding.**
- 2) They agreed the School Block 0.5% transfer to High Needs.**
- 3) They did not agree with the proposal to transfer more than 0.5% to High Needs.**

6. HIGH NEEDS FUNDING

Forum members were asked to note the report.

Forum members noted the report.

A forecast overspend of £28.5m was highlighted, linked to historic low funding levels and rising needs. The High Needs Working Group would explore the pressures further.

Forum members noted the report.

7. CENTRAL SCHOOLS SERVICES BLOCK (CSSB)

Forum members were asked to:

Note the projected allocation of CSSB for 2026-27

Consider the request to retain funding for central statutory services.

Members noted the projected 2026–27 allocation of £1.95m.

Funding would continue to support core statutory services and existing commitments.

Members agreed to retain the current distribution.

Forum members noted the projected allocation of CSSB for 2026-27

Forum members voted and all agreed to continue with the distribution for CSSB.

8. EARLY YEARS FUNDING UPDATE

Forum members were asked to note the report which was for information only.

Forum members noted the report.

The estimated carry forward was £1m following a DfE adjustment.

Termly census arrangements now applied across all providers.

£628k was distributed to providers at 32p per hour.

Next-year planning would follow a revised timetable, with an additional EYPRG meeting in January ahead of consultation. The pass-through rate would rise to 97%.

Forum members noted the report.

9. SCHOOLS MONITORING

At year-end 2024–25, 15 schools were in deficit (total £0.5m). Only four expected improvement; a further 14 schools risked deficit within three years.

A group would be formed to strengthen support and guidance. Minutes would be shared.

The Forum acknowledged the pressures on school leaders and LA staff.

ACTION: TC

10. NEXT MEETINGS

Thursday 27th November 2025
Thursday 15 January 2026
Thursday 12 February 2026
Thursday 11th June 2026

Meetings to start at 8.00am at CEME either in room 233 or 235.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no additional business items.

The Chair thanked Forum members for their contributions.

Meeting closed at 9.55am.

Agenda Item 4



Schools Funding Forum 27th October 2025

ITEM 4

Subject Heading:**Schools Funding 2026-27****Report Author:****Hany Moussa – Principal Education
Finance Officer****Eligibility to vote:****All maintained schools members**

SUMMARY

This report offers information to the Schools Funding Forum representatives on the DfE's 2025-26 Policy Note, the upcoming FSM Expansion Grant and the draft Schools and High Needs consultation. It invites LA maintained schools to review the consultation outcomes and consider voting on the proposed service de-delegation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Schools Funding Forum notes the update on DfE Funding Policy Note Guidance 2025-26
2. That Schools Funding Forum notes the update on FSM Expansion Grant for financial year 2026-27
3. LA maintained primary school representatives to review consultation responses and vote on continuing the de-delegation of funding for the following services:
 - (i) Insurance
 - (ii) Free school meals eligibility checking
 - (iii) Maternity leave insurance
 - (iv) EAL service
4. LA maintained primary and special school representatives to review consultation responses and vote on continuing the de-delegation of funding for the following services:
 - (i) Statutory and regulatory duties
 - (ii) Core school improvement activities

REPORT DETAIL

1. DfE Funding Policy Note Guidance 2026-27 update – November 2025

The DfE released the national funding information for 2026-27 on 19th November 2025, setting out the approach for mainstream schools and central services for the coming financial year.

The total provisional core funding allocated through the Schools National Funding Formula (NFF) for 2026-27 amounts to £50.9 billion, which reflects the annualisation and incorporation of the former Schools Budget Support Grant (SBSG) and National Insurance Contributions (NICs) Grant into the formula. This total includes mainstream schools funding delivered via the NFF, alongside the separate allocations for High Needs, the Central School Services Block (CSSB) and Pupil Premium.

Following the same principles used in preceding years, the Government has rolled these grants into the NFF by applying adjustments to the basic per-pupil rates, the FSM6 allocations, the lump sum, and the minimum per-pupil levels (MPPL). The SBSG has been annualised to reflect a full-year equivalent, as opposed to the part-year award provided in 2025-26 when it was used to support the teachers' pay award. Baselines have been uplifted accordingly.

The DfE published the "*National Funding Formula for Schools 2026 to 2027*" technical note and policy guidance, which sets out the factor-level changes, the national methodology and the revised rules for local formula construction. Full details are attached at Appendix A.

Local authorities that do not fully mirror the NFF will again be required to move their local formulae closer to national values. Havering already works on NFF factors and rates and therefore continues to comply with these requirements.

The key updates for the national NFF rates (pre-ACA) for 2026-27 in the Schools Block are as follows:

- The overall structure of the NFF remains unchanged, maintaining consistency with the 2025–26 model.
- The Schools Budget Support Grant (SBSG) and the NICs Grant are rolled into the NFF, with increased values applied to the basic entitlement, FSM6, Lump Sum and MPPL.
- Most NFF factors receive a further 2.11% uplift, including basic entitlement, FSM6, lump sum, IDACI, low prior attainment (LPA), EAL, mobility, sparsity and split-site factors.
- The FSM factor receives a 1.66% uplift, aligned to inflation forecasts.

- Updated MPPL values for 2026–27 are:
 - £5,115 per primary pupil
 - £6,640 per secondary pupil
 These levels include the rolled-in SBSG and NICs Grant but no additional inflationary uplift.
- The MFG range remains between –0.5% and 0%, consistent with the NFF funding floor. The 2025–26 baseline used for MFG calculations incorporates the rolled-in grants, ensuring all schools see a year-on-year funding increase.
- Growth Fund arrangements remain unchanged, following national guidance.
- Local authorities must again move factor values 10% closer to the national NFF unless already mirroring it (the mirroring threshold remains within $\pm 2.5\%$ of NFF values, accounting for Area Cost Adjustment).

Although the DfE has set the top of the MFG range at 0.0%, schools will still receive increased funding through the embedded grant values within their baseline allocations. This ensures that funding previously delivered through temporary grant streams is now permanently consolidated into core budgets.

As outlined, the updated indicative NFF funding rates for 2026-27 now incorporate both the rolled-in grant funding and the inflationary uplift to factor values. These revised rates will underpin the 2026-27 schools funding formula.

The updated indicative NFF and Havering (inclusive of ACA) values for the 2026-27 formula, alongside the 2024-25 and 2025-26 equivalent, are set out in **Appendix B**.

The DfE has indicated that further detailed guidance, along with final DSG allocations, will be published in late November and December. These updates will be provided to Schools Funding Forum members at the January 2026 meeting.

2. Universal Credit (UC) Roll-Out – Free School Meals Expansion Grant

In June 2025, the Government confirmed that from September 2026 the entitlement for Free School Meals (FSM) will be extended to all children in households receiving Universal Credit (UC). This represents a major expansion of eligibility and will significantly increase the number of pupils qualifying for FSM nationally.

The DfE has confirmed that no changes will be made to the FSM factor within the NFF for 2026–27 in relation to the UC roll-out. Instead, the increased entitlement will be funded through a separate, dedicated FSM Expansion Grant in 2026-27, similar to the operation of other in-year targeted grants that the DfE has previously introduced.

The policy note confirms the following:

- The FSM Expansion Grant will be new, ring-fenced funding for 2026-27.
- It will cover the additional number of pupils becoming eligible as a direct result of UC entitlement.
- The DfE will publish details on the calculation methodology at a later date, once national modelling of take-up rates and transitional protection arrangements has been completed.

- The grant will be provided to ensure schools are able to meet the costs of providing meals to the expanded cohort without financial pressure.
- Funding will begin from the start of the 2026-27 academic year (September 2026), aligned to the policy implementation date for the UC roll-out.
- As per existing targeted grants, it is expected the funding will be issued directly to schools (academies) or via local authorities (maintained schools).

At present, the DfE has not yet published:

- The per-pupil funding rate
- Whether transitional protection will be put in place
- Which data source and fields, that the funding will be linked to this new entitlement (e.g. census data, real-time eligibility, or an alternative collection method)

The timeline for releasing further information has not been disclosed, however it is anticipated that it will be in Spring or Summer 2026 that the DfE releases further details on this new grant.

3. De-delegation and Education Services consultation (Maintained Schools)

At the meeting held on 23rd October 2025, the Schools Funding Forum received a report on the de-delegated and Education Services proposals for financial year 2026-27. Following discussion at the meeting, the LA has consulted with Maintained Schools for de-delegation and Education Services.

The Local Authority presented a consultation document for review by the Maintained Schools for the services for 2026-27. The funding consultation was issued on 19th November 2025 with a closing date of 26th November 2025. The consultation document is shown at **Appendix C**.

The consultation was active at the time of preparing this paper, therefore the results of the consultation will be provided to School Forum members to review before the meeting is held.

Maintained schools School Forum members are to note the consultation responses and to review the recommendation of de-delegation for the following services:

- Insurance
- Free school meals eligibility checking
- Maternity Leave insurance
- EAL Service
- Trade Union Facility Time
- Statutory and Regulatory Duties (Maintained Schools)
- Core school improvement activities (SIMB)



Department
for Education

The national funding formula for schools

2026 to 2027

November 2025

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Introduction

1. This document sets out how the funding will be allocated through the national funding formulae (NFFs) for schools and central school services for 2026 to 2027. Details on the allocations of high needs funding for 2026 to 2027 will be published at a later date.
2. Total provisional funding for mainstream schools through the schools NFF will total £50.9 billion in 2026 to 2027. This includes funding that was allocated in 2025 to 2026 through the schools budget support grant (SBSG) and National Insurance Contributions (NICs) Grant, which has been “rolled in” to the schools NFF in 2026 to 2027 to help simplify the funding system. On top of this rolled in funding, factor values in the school NFF have been increased, with details of the uplifts provided below.
3. In 2026 to 2027, local funding formulae will continue to determine funding allocations for individual schools, but as in recent years local authorities which are not already “mirroring” the NFF will be required to move their factor values at least 10% closer to the NFF values than the previous year.
4. Central school services funding funds local authorities for the ongoing responsibilities they continue to have for all schools, and some historic commitments entered into before 2013 to 2014. The total provisional funding for ongoing responsibilities is £379 million in 2026 to 2027.
5. Final allocations of mainstream schools and central schools services funding for 2026 to 2027 will be calculated in December 2025, based on the latest pupil data at that point, when we announce local authorities’ Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations.
6. In June 2025, the government announced that, starting from September 2026, Free School Meals (FSM) will be extended to all children in households receiving Universal Credit (UC). For 2026 to 2027, we are not proposing any changes to the schools NFF FSM allocations through the DSG. Instead, the additional funding for the FSM expansion will be provided through a separate grant. Further details on how this grant will be calculated will be published separately in due course.

Section 1: The national funding formula for schools

7. For 2026 to 2027, we are making no changes to the structure of the schools National Funding Formula (NFF), with the same factors used in the formula as in 2025 to 2026. A full description of the 2026 to 2027 schools NFF is set out in Annex A. Further detail on the methodology used for the schools NFF is set out in the [2026 to 2027 NFF technical note](#).

Rolling the additional grant funding into the schools NFF

8. The mainstream schools elements of the Schools Budget Support Grant (SBSG) and the National Insurance Contribution (NICs) grant are being rolled into the schools NFF for 2026 to 2027.

9. The approach to rolling in these grants is very similar to how earlier grants were rolled into the 2025 to 2026 NFF. We have rolled in the grants in three ways, to reflect the three different ways in which schools attract funding through the NFF:

- Increasing the basic entitlement, FSM6 and the lump sum factor values for schools funded through the main formula factors (before protections);
- Increasing the minimum per pupil levels; and
- Increasing the baseline for each school, which is used to calculate funding protections for schools funded through the funding floor.

10. Table 1 below shows the amounts that have been added to the core factor values in respect of the grants. These same amounts have been used when uplifting each school's baseline in the NFF. For the NICs grant, these are simply the funding rates from the respective factors in the NICs grant. For the SBSG, the amounts that are added to the NFF factor values reflect the "full year equivalent" of the SBSG funding rates. This means that the SBSG funding in the table below is higher than the funding rates that were actually used for the 2025 to 2026 SBSG, as the latter supported schools with the part-year costs of the 2025 teachers pay award.

11. The existing Area Cost Adjustment (ACA) calculation within the NFF ensures that the per pupil rates added to these factors are uplifted to reflect geographical variation in labour market costs, as is currently the case with the grants.

Table 1: Factor value uplifts from the rolling in of grants

Factor	SBSG (annualised)	NICs grant	Total
Primary basic per-pupil	£55	£78	£133
KS3 basic per-pupil	£78	£68	£146
KS4 basic per-pupil	£88	£77	£165
Primary FSM6 per-pupil	£49	£75	£124
Secondary FSM6 per-pupil	£72	£60	£132
Lump sum	£2086	£2400	£4486

12. Table 2 below shows the amounts added to the schools NFF minimum per pupil levels in respect of the grants. It reflects the amount of funding allocated through the NICs grant in 2025 to 2026, as well as the full year equivalent of the SBSG.

Table 2: Minimum per pupil (MPPL) funding uplifts due to grants

	Uplifts for 2025-26 SBSG and NICs grant
Primary MPPL	£160
Secondary MPPL	£175

13. The rolling in of these grants into the schools' notional NFF allocations will affect the core budgets that maintained schools will receive from April 2026, and that academies will receive from September 2026. Because of this, academies will receive further grant payments for the period April 2026 to August 2026.

Increasing funding factor values

14. Almost all factor values in the schools NFF have increased from 2025 to 2026. The amount of the increase varies between factors:

- The basic entitlement values, FSM6 values, the lump sum and the minimum per pupil funding values have increased to reflect the rolling in of the Schools Budget Support Grant (SBSG) and the National Insurance Contribution (NICs) Grant from 2025 to 2026, as covered in the section above.
- On top of this, a further 2.11% increase has been applied to the basic entitlement; FSM6 values and the lump sum factors.
- A 2.11% increase has also been applied to the IDACI, low prior attainment (LPA), English as an Additional Language (EAL), mobility, sparsity and split sites factors.
- A 1.66% uplift has been applied to the FSM factor in the NFF, in line with inflation forecasts – as of the GDP deflator forecast of March 2025.

15. All primary schools will attract at least £5115 per pupil, and all secondary schools at least £6640 per pupil – the minimum per pupil funding levels incorporate the rolled in SBSG and NICs Grant funding, but no further percentage uplift has been applied to the minimum per pupil funding levels for 2026 to 2027.

16. All 2026 to 2027 factor values can be seen in table 3 below.

17. The funding floor will continue to protect schools from sudden drops in their funding. The 2026 to 2027 NFF funding floor is set at 0%. This ensures that no school will see a cash reduction in its pupil-led per pupil funding they attract, compared to the 2025 to 2026 baseline. For 2026 to 2027 the baseline includes rolled in funding to reflect the NICs Grant and the annualised equivalent of the SBSG.

18. Because of this baseline uplift, the 0% floor in 2026 to 2027 still incorporates a year-on-year increase in funding compared to what schools attracted in 2025 to 2026.

19. Premises funding for exceptional circumstances and business rates will continue to be given at the local authority level, based on the amounts reported by local authorities in their 2025 to 2026 local funding formulae, as recorded in the 2025 to 2026 Authority Proforma Tool (APT).

Rules governing local authority formulae

20. The responsibility for deciding local funding formulae rests with local authorities for mainstream schools in their area for 2026 to 2027. The funding levels that schools, both maintained schools and academies, receive will be decided by the respective local formulae.

21. In 2026 to 2027 local authorities must move their local formulae factor values at least a further 10% closer to the corresponding NFF values, compared to the previous year, except where their local formula is already 'mirroring' the NFF.

22. Local authorities must comply with the national requirements for growth and falling rolls funding as set out in the [growth and falling rolls guidance](#).

23. Further details on the tightening requirements for local formulae with guidance for local authorities are set out in the [schools operational guide](#). We have also published the allowable factor values for 2026 to 2027 for each local authority [here](#).

Other key features of the local funding formulae

24. Local authorities will continue to set a minimum funding guarantee in local formulae, which in 2026 to 2027 must be between 0% and -0.5%. This allows them to match the funding floor protection in the NFF, which is set at 0%.

25. Local authorities will again be able to transfer up to 0.5% of their total schools block allocations to other blocks of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), with schools forum approval. A disapplication will continue to be required for transfers above 0.5%, or for any amount without schools forum approval. The criteria the Department apply when considering such requests are available in the [schools operational guide](#).

26. Local authorities should continue to review the methodology used to calculate schools' notional Special Educational Needs (SEN) budgets, ensuring that allocations are proportionate to both the incidence and associated costs of pupils receiving SEN Support and that they meet the additional support costs of up to £6,000 per pupil for those with more complex needs. More guidance for local authorities is published here: [Pre-16 schools funding: local authority guidance for 2026 to 2027 - GOV.UK](#).

Table 3: Factor values and total spend in 2026 to 2027

	Unit Values	Total Funding (incl. ACA)	Proportion of core total
Basic per pupil Funding		£37,719 m	74.3%
Basic entitlement		£37,634 m	74.1%
Primary basic entitlement	£4,064	£18,218 m	35.9%
KS3 basic entitlement	£5,686	£11,241 m	22.1%
KS4 basic entitlement	£6,410	£8,176 m	16.1%
Minimum per pupil		£85 m	0.2%
Primary Minimum Per Pupil funding	£5,115	£70 m	0.1%
Secondary Minimum Per Pupil funding	£6,640	£15 m	0.0%
Additional Needs Funding		£9,192 m	18.1%
Deprivation		£5,595 m	11.0%
Primary FSM	£505	£564 m	1.1%
Secondary FSM	£505	£446 m	0.9%
Primary FSM6	£1,210	£1,376 m	2.7%
Secondary FSM6	£1,725	£1,616 m	3.2%
Primary IDACI A	£700	£105 m	0.2%
Primary IDACI B	£530	£151 m	0.3%
Primary IDACI C	£500	£139 m	0.3%
Primary IDACI D	£455	£122 m	0.2%
Primary IDACI E	£290	£147 m	0.3%
Primary IDACI F	£240	£116 m	0.2%
Secondary IDACI A	£970	£101 m	0.2%
Secondary IDACI B	£760	£157 m	0.3%
Secondary IDACI C	£710	£143 m	0.3%
Secondary IDACI D	£650	£125 m	0.2%
Secondary IDACI E	£460	£168 m	0.3%
Secondary IDACI F	£345	£119 m	0.2%
Low Prior Attainment		£2,933 m	5.8%
Primary LPA	£1,200	£1667 m	3.3%
Secondary LPA	£1,825	£1267 m	2.5%
English as an Additional Language		£572 m	1.1%
Primary EAL	£610	£383 m	0.8%
Secondary EAL	£1,630	£189 m	0.4%
Mobility		£91 m	0.2%
Primary Mobility	£985	£67 m	0.1%
Secondary Mobility	£1,415	£24 m	0.0%
School-Led Funding		£3,249 m	6.4%
Lump Sum		£3,145 m	6.2%
Primary lump sum	£152,700	£2,624 m	5.2%
Secondary lump sum	£152,700	£521 m	1.0%
Sparsity		£104 m	0.2%
Primary sparsity	£58,600	£99 m	0.2%
Secondary sparsity	£85,200	£5 m	0.0%
Premises		£598 m	1.2%
Split sites	£82,700	£37 m	0.1%
Area Cost Adjustment: Multiplier applied to basic entitlement, additional needs, school-led funding and split sites (it is included in the factor subtotals)			
Core total (excl. funding floor)		£50,758 m	
Floor		£162 m	
Primary floor funding		£81 m	
Secondary floor funding		£81 m	
Total		£50,919 m	

27. Table 3 shows the unit values, total funding and proportion of funding for each factor in the formula. The total funding for each factor is rounded to the nearest £1 million, and the proportion of the total is rounded to the nearest 0.1%. The total funding and proportions quoted for groups of factors have been calculated based on the underlying unrounded figures. The secondary minimum per pupil factor value is based on a standard secondary school with five-year groups. The sparsity unit values correspond to the maximum a school can attract for these factors, and the split sites unit value to the maximum amount an additional site can attract through the basic eligibility and distance funding combined.

Section 2: The national funding formula for central school services

The central school services block in 2026 to 2027

28. The central school services block (CSSB) within the DSG provides funding for local authorities to deliver central functions on behalf of maintained schools and academies. The block will continue to consist of two elements: ongoing responsibilities and historic commitments. For the 2026 to 2027 financial year, the funding formula will remain unchanged from the 2025 to 2026 approach.

Ongoing responsibilities

29. The CSSB will continue to fund local authorities for the ongoing responsibilities they deliver for all pupils in maintained schools and academies. The total provisional funding for ongoing responsibilities is £379 million in 2026 to 2027. This includes funding for the rolling in of the centrally employed staff elements of both the SBSG and NICs grant into the CSSB for 2026 to 2027 – with the SBSG grant element recalculated on a full-year basis. Funding for ongoing responsibilities in the CSSB is calculated using a simple per pupil formula, the structure of which is unchanged from 2025 to 2026. 90% of the funding will be distributed through a basic per pupil factor, and 10% of the funding through a deprivation factor based on the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals within the past six years (FSM6) in mainstream schools.

30. Local authorities will continue to be protected so that the maximum per pupil year-on-year reduction in funding for ongoing responsibilities is at -2.5%, while the year-on-year gains cap will be set at the highest affordable rate, of 2.13 %.

31. Further detail on the methodology used for the CSSB formula is set out in the [2026 to 2027 NFF CSSB technical note](#).

Historic commitments

32. A 20% reduction has been applied to historic commitments funding since 2020 to 2021. From 2026 to 2027 onwards, we will reduce historic commitment funding from the fixed baseline of 2025 to 2026 (rather than simply the baseline of the immediately preceding year, as previously).

33. We will continue to protect the elements of CSSB relating to prudential borrowing and termination of employment costs that were in place prior to April 2013. It is expected that this will continue to reduce year by year, as they conclude. It is the responsibility of local authorities to claim from the department for these costs, which will form part of the

DSG adjustment in March 2026. Further information on this process is included in the [schools operational guide](#).

34. It is our intention that the 20% reduction from the 2025 to 2026 baseline will mean that from April 2030 only residual protected historical commitment funding will continue to be funded. This is subject to reviews of funding in subsequent years.

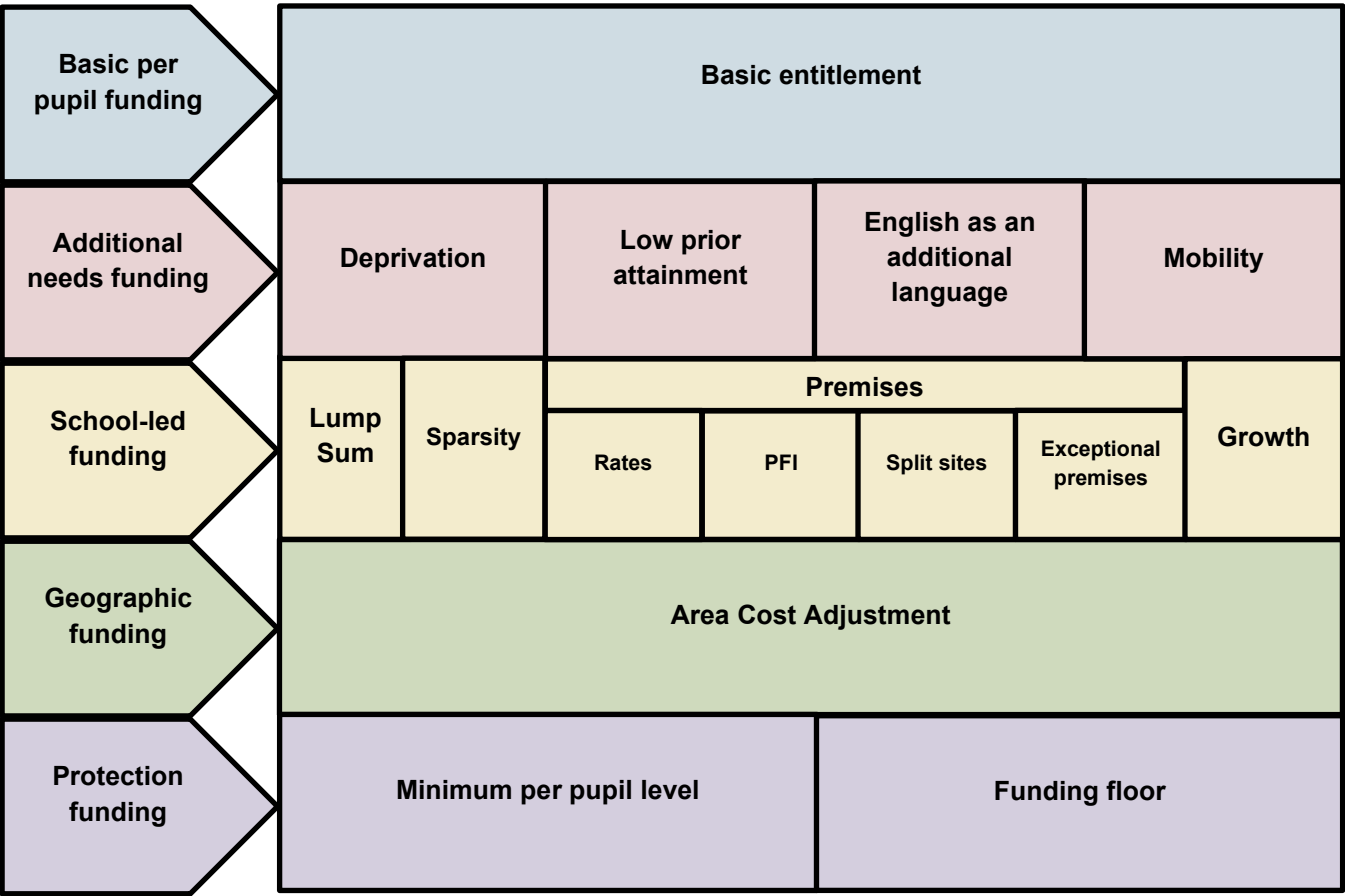
35. Local authorities must not exceed the previous year's expenditure on these historic commitments. However, with the approval of the schools forum, an authority may sustain this level of spending by using alternative funding sources, should they choose to do so.

Annex A: The structure of the schools national funding formula

Overall design of the formula

- 1. We use the schools National Funding Formula (NFF) to calculate the core funding allocated to each local authority for 5 to 16-year-old pupils in mainstream schools. Local authorities then use their own formulae, within certain constraints, which determine the distribution of this funding to maintained schools and academies in their area.
- 2. The NFF is made up of 14 factors, as illustrated in the diagram below.

Figure 1: Current NFF Funding Factors



- 3. The above figure, which is not to scale, illustrates the factors that are used when calculating schools block DSG funding allocations through the NFF. “Growth” funding is included in this diagram – it is not a factor within the NFF, but is allocated to local authorities in the DSG allocations.
- 4. Approximately 92.4% of the school’s NFF funding is allocated through ‘pupil-led’ factors. The ‘pupil-led’ factors are determined by pupil numbers and pupils’ characteristics. Most of this funding is allocated through the basic entitlement factor,

which all pupils attract. The NFF allocates the rest of 'pupil-led' funding towards additional needs.

5. Evidence shows that pupils with additional needs are more likely to fall behind and need extra support to reach their full potential. This is why the NFF allocates 18.1% of all funding through additional needs factors based on deprivation, low prior attainment, English as an additional language and mobility.

6. Pupils attract funding for all the factors for which they are eligible. A pupil currently eligible for FSM attracts the amount provided through the FSM factor as well as the amount through the FSM6 factor. This also applies for children with any combination of multiple additional needs. That is not intended to imply that all such funding should be dedicated to the pupil who attracts it. An individual child who attracts deprivation funding, for example, may need more, or less, support than the sum that they attract in the NFF. Rather, these additional needs factors are predominantly "proxy" factors, using the overall incidence of particular pupil characteristics to identify how much additional funding a school is likely to need, in total.

7. 'School-led' funding is allocated through various factors according to a school's characteristics. In the 2026 to 2027 NFF, all schools attract a lump sum of £152,700. Small and remote schools attract additional support through the sparsity factor. Other school-led funding reflects costs associated with a school's premises and overheads through four separate factors: rates, split sites, private finance initiative (PFI) and exceptional circumstances.

8. An area cost adjustment (ACA) is applied as a multiplier to formula allocations to reflect higher costs in some parts of the country, due to differences in salary costs.

9. Finally, the formula offers two different forms of protection for schools:

- The minimum per pupil level guarantees a minimum amount of funding for every pupil. Any school whose formula allocation is below the minimum per pupil level attracts a top up to the minimum levels.
- The funding floor protects schools from sudden drops in their funding, by ensuring that no school attracts less pupil-led per pupil funding compared to the previous year's baseline.

10. The following sections give more detail on the design of the individual factors within the schools NFF.

Pupil-led factors

Basic entitlement

11. 74.1% of the schools NFF is allocated through the basic entitlement, which every pupil attracts. The amount varies by age. In the 2026 to 2027 NFF pupils in Reception to Year 6 attract £4,064; pupils in Year 7 to Year 9 attract £5,686 and pupils in Years 10 and 11 attract £6,410.

Additional needs factors

Deprivation

12. The NFF allocates 11.0% of all its funding to deprived pupils. Pupil deprivation is based on three deprivation measures – current Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility, FSM eligibility at any time in the last 6 years (“FSM6”), and the level of deprivation in the postcode where the pupil lives, which is measured using the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI).

Free School Meals

13. Schools attract £505 for all primary and secondary pupils who are recorded as eligible for free school meals (FSM), as set out in the eligibility criteria at [Free school meals: guidance for schools and local authorities - GOV.UK](#). This funding is broadly intended to cover the cost of providing free meals for each eligible pupil. As set out above, funding for free school meals of pupils eligible through the expanded entitlement from 2026 will be allocated through a separate grant.

FSM eligibility at any time in the last 6 years

14. All pupils who are recorded as eligible for free school meals, or who have been at any point in the last six years, attract funding through the “FSM6” factor. Schools attract £1,210 for each primary pupil and £1,725 for each secondary pupil eligible for FSM6 funding.

Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index

15. Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) funding is based on the IDACI 2019 area-based index measuring the relative deprivation of Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs). For the NFF, the IDACI ranks are divided into seven bands A to G, with A representing the most deprived areas and G the least deprived. Additional funding is targeted towards pupils in bands A-F, with more funding directed to pupils in the more deprived bands. The boundaries of these bands are based on the proportions of LSOAs (small areas) in each band and are defined by rank.

Table 4: The IDACI bands are set out in the table below

Band	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Proportion of LSOAs in each band	2.5%	5%	5%	5%	10%	10%	62.5%
Primary unit value	£700	£530	£500	£455	£290	£240	£0
Secondary unit value	£970	£760	£710	£650	£460	£345	£0

16. Table 4 shows that 2.5 % of LSOAs are placed in IDACI band A which attracts the highest funding, 5% in IDACI band B attracting the second highest level of funding, and so forth. 62.5% of LSOAs are in band G which does not attract any additional funding.

Low Prior Attainment

17. We are allocating 5.8% of the NFF in respect to pupils with low prior attainment (LPA).

18. Primary school pupils who have not achieved the expected level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile assessment (EYFSP) and secondary pupils who have not achieved the expected standard in Key Stage 2 at reading, writing or maths attract £1,200 and £1,825 respectively.

English as an additional language

19. The pupils eligible to attract funding through the NFF English as an additional language (EAL) factor are those recorded as having entered state education in England during the last three years, and whose first language is not English. 1.1% of the NFF is allocated through the EAL factor.

20. Schools attract £610 for all EAL-eligible primary pupils, and £1,630 for all EAL-eligible secondary pupils.

Mobility

21. 0.2% of the total NFF funding is allocated in respect of pupils eligible for mobility funding. The mobility factor supports schools in which a significant proportion of pupils join the school part way through the year.

22. Pupils are considered mobile if they have joined the school in the academic year at a non-standard time within the past three years. Schools attract £985 per eligible

primary pupil, and £1,415 per eligible secondary pupil above a threshold of 6% of the school's pupil numbers (i.e., where more than 6% of a school's pupil are classified as mobile).

School-led factors

Lump Sum

23. Every school attracts a lump sum of £152,700 through the NFF irrespective of its size or phase. The total spend on the lump sum represents 6.2% of the NFF.

Sparsity funding

24. 0.2% of the NFF is allocated through the sparsity factor, for small and remote schools.

25. Eligibility for sparsity funding depends on the distance the pupils living closest to the school would have to travel to their next nearest compatible school, and the average number of pupils per year group.

26. A school is eligible for sparsity funding if:

a. For all the pupils for whom it is the nearest “compatible” school, the average distance (as measured by road) from the pupils' homes to the second nearest compatible school is above the relevant distance threshold. The main distance thresholds are 3 miles for secondary schools and 2 miles for all other schools, with the distance threshold taper set at 20% below each threshold (2.4 miles at secondary, 1.6 miles for other schools).

b. The average year group size is below the appropriate year group threshold. This threshold is 21.4 for primary schools, 69.2 for middle schools, 120 for secondary schools and 62.5 for all-through schools.

27. Primary schools qualifying for sparsity funding attract up to £58,600 and all other eligible schools up to £85,200.

28. Schools with a lower number of pupils attract a higher amount than those closer to the year group threshold. In addition, schools with a sparsity distance between the distance threshold taper and main distance threshold will attract some sparsity funding – tapered by both size and how far away from the main distance threshold they are. Of two schools of the same size, one closer to the main threshold would attract more. The distance threshold taper mitigates the risk of year-on-year fluctuations in sparsity eligibility having a significant impact on a school's sparsity funding.

Premises

29. The NFF allocates funding to reflect the costs associated with a school's premises and overheads.

Rates

30. For local accounting purposes, rates funding allocations will continue to feature in NFF allocation publications for all schools. From 2022 to 2023, the payment of business rates for local authorities whose billing authority or billing authorities are on the central payment system has been centralised, with the Department paying rates directly to billing authorities on behalf of schools. For local authorities whose billing authority or billing authorities are not on the central payment process, the Department will continue to allocate funding for business rates on a lagged basis, to enable schools to cover their liabilities.

PFI

31. In calculating a school's PFI funding, the lower of the local authority's 2025 to 2026 PFI premises factor and the school's PFI funding from the 2025 to 2026 NFF is taken as the baseline for calculating the 2026 to 2027 PFI factor. This baseline is then uplifted in line with the Retail Prices Index excluding mortgage interest payments (RPIX) growth.

32. For schools whose contracts are coming to an end during the 2026 to 2027 financial year, funding is calculated on a pro-rata basis for the part of the year when the contract is still in place.

33. Exceptions are made where the Department has approved applications for higher increases from local authorities. Such applications are subject to certain criteria being met and must be supported by an affordability model substantiating the amount claimed.

Split Sites

34. The split sites factor targets extra funding to schools which operate across more than one site. Schools attract a £55,100 lump sum payment for each of their additional eligible sites – up to a maximum of three sites.

35. In addition, schools whose sites are separated by more than 100 meters attract split site distance funding. The distance funding varies depending on how far apart the sites are, up to a maximum of £27,600 for sites which are at least 500 meters away from the main site. Where a school has more than three sites, the three sites being furthest away from the main site are used to calculate the funding.

Exceptional Circumstances

36. The exceptional circumstances factor is included in the formula so that, where local authorities have had approval from the Department to direct additional funding to a

small number of schools with significant additional costs, this is taken into account when determining their funding. Local authorities receive funding for this factor on the basis of their spend in the previous year.

Geographic funding

Area Cost Adjustment

37. The area cost adjustment (ACA) in the schools NFF reflects variations in labour market costs across the country by taking into account the general labour market trends and the particular salary variations in the teaching workforce.

38. It is a combination of:

- a) A teacher pay cost adjustment, to reflect the differences in the basic pay ranges between the four regional pay bands for teachers and
- b) A general labour market (GLM) cost adjustment, to reflect geographical variation in wage costs for non-teaching staff.

39. The NFF's ACA is calculated for each local authority by:

- a) Weighting the relevant teacher-specific cost adjustment in line with the national proportion of spend on teaching staff in mainstream schools (51.74%).
- b) Weighting the relevant GLM labour cost adjustment in line with the national proportion of spend on non-teaching staff in mainstream schools (28.85%).

40. Nationally the schools block ACA ranges between 1.00 and 1.18. Some local authorities – those that are partly in 'London Fringe' areas – have one ACA for schools in the fringe part of the authority, and a different ACA for the schools in the non-fringe area.

Protective elements of the NFF

Minimum per pupil levels

41. The minimum per pupil level (MPPL) guarantees a minimum amount of funding for every pupil. Any school whose formula allocation is below the MPPL attracts a top up to the minimum levels.

42. The MPPL varies from school to school depending on the year groups they have. The unit values per year group are £5,115 for primary year groups, £6,388 for KS3 and £7,018 for KS4. Each school's MPPL is calculated as a weighted average of the number of year groups they have.

43. This means that the MPPL is £5,115 for primary schools, and £6,640 for secondary schools with year groups 7 to 11. For middle schools and all-through schools, an MPPL is set based on the specific year groups that they educate.

44. The MPPL values are compulsory in local authority funding formulae, which determine actual funding allocations for maintained schools and academies. Academy trusts have flexibilities over how the funding they are allocated in respect of their individual academies is then distributed across academies in their trust.

45. This means that, in some cases, an academy could receive a lower per pupil funding amount than the MPPL value. This may reflect, for example, activities that are paid for by the trust centrally, rather than by individual academies.

The funding floor

46. The funding floor ensures that a school's funding is protected year-on-year, preventing schools from seeing sudden drops in their funding even where the core formula factors indicate that their funding would otherwise be lower.

47. In 2026 to 2027, the floor is set at 0%. This ensures that no school will see a drop in the amount of pupil-led per pupil funding they attract, compared to the 2025 to 2026 baseline.

48. Local authority funding formulae must include a minimum funding guarantee (MFG) that works in a similar way to the funding floor. In 2026 to 2027, the MFG can be set between 0 % and -0.5%. Further guidance on how the MFG works can be found in the [schools operational guide: 2026 to 2027](#).

Growth funding

49. In addition to the funding allocated through the schools NFF formula factors described above, we also provide growth funding to local authorities to manage increases in pupil numbers. School funding operates on a lagged funding basis whereby schools receive funding in a given year based on pupil numbers from the year before. Local authorities can use the growth funding they are allocated to support schools to manage an increase in pupil numbers before the lagged funding system has caught up.

50. Growth funding is distributed based on the actual growth that local authorities experience for each year. It is based on the observed differences between the primary and secondary number on roll in each local authority between the most recent October school census, and the census in the previous October.

Local authorities' growth funds can only be used to:

- Support growth in pre-16 pupil numbers to meet basic need.

- Support additional classes needed to meet the infant class size regulation.
- Meet the revenue cost of new schools

51. Local authorities must continue to provide growth funding where a school or academy has agreed with the local authority to provide an extra class in order to meet basic need in the area (either as a bulge class or as an ongoing commitment).

52. Local authorities have to provide funding that is at least that calculated through using the following formula:

Primary Growth Factor value (£1,570) * Number of Pupils * ACA

53. Funding for maintained schools is provided to cover the period from September to March before the lagged funding system 'catches up' from the subsequent April through the subsequent year's NFF. Since academies are funded on an academic year basis, they would receive additional funding (at a rate of an additional 5/7 of the allocation) to cover a full year's growth funding before the system 'catches up'.

Falling rolls funding

54. Alongside growth funding, we also allocate funding to local authorities on the basis of falling rolls.

55. Falling rolls funding is distributed on the basis of the reduction in pupil numbers that local authorities experience for each year. It is based on the observed differences between the primary and secondary number on roll in each local authority between the most recent October school census, and the census in the previous October.

56. Local authorities will continue to have discretion over whether or not to operate a falling rolls fund within their local formulae. Where local authorities operate a falling rolls fund, they will only be able to provide funding where the most recent school capacity data (SCAP) shows that school places will be required in 2026 to 2027 and/or the subsequent two years.

Annex B: Equalities Impact Assessment

1. The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Secretary of State to give due regard to achieving the following objectives in exercising their functions:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

2. We have considered the impact on persons who share any of the protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. We have focused on those protected characteristics for which the impact is largest, and which are most closely tied to the distributional policy choices we are making. We use incidence of SEND as a proxy for disability in this analysis, as the two are highly correlated, and ethnicity as a proxy for race.

3. The NFFs were introduced in 2018 to 2019 after significant consultation and a full equalities impact assessment was published at that time. The design of the NFFs stays largely unchanged, and so we have focused this assessment primarily on the key policy changes that are being made in 2026 to 2027.

Schools NFF

Increases to factor values and the rolling in of grants into the schools NFF

4. Increases to the NFF factor values mean that all schools which are funded through the main formula factors (that is all schools except those funded through the minimum per pupil levels or the floor) will attract more funding in 2026 to 2027 than they would have done without an increase.

5. We are rolling the SBSG and NICs grant into the schools NFF in such a way that the added NFF funding schools and local authorities receive is as similar as possible to the funding they would receive if the grants were not rolled in. The method for rolling in the grants will therefore be expected to have a neutral impact on equalities.

6. As a result of the rolling in of the grants, different NFF factors are being increased by different amounts. The FSM6 factor is increasing the most (in percentage terms), followed by the basic entitlement and the lump sum. Other additional needs factors are

increasing by a lower proportion than the FSM6 factor, since the previous grants used FSM6 as a proxy for additional needs more widely.

7. The exact impact on pupils and schools will depend on the local formulae, but on average:

a) The FSM6 factor value is increasing by a higher proportion than other factors, and as a result, the proportion of funding allocated through the FSM6 factor in the schools NFF is increasing. This will tend to have a positive impact on equalities as there is a positive correlation between pupils attracting FSM6 funding and pupils with SEND.

b) The low prior attainment (LPA) factor, IDACI factor, and English as an additional language (EAL) factor will also rise by 2.11% compared to their 2025 to 2026 values.

c) As there is a positive correlation between pupils attracting these factors and pupils with SEND and certain ethnic minorities, this will tend to have a positive impact on equalities compared to if no increase had been made, or if these factors were increased by a lower percentage.

d) The funding floor is set at 0% for 2026 to 2027, as in the previous year. Schools funded through the funding floor tend to be in urban areas and have a higher proportion of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds because these areas are more ethnically diverse. They also have a higher occurrence of non-Christian faith schools. While these schools will see lower-than-average increases in funding in 2026 to 2027, they still have higher than average levels of funding. The lower-than-average funding increase for these schools is therefore necessary to overcome historic discrepancies in funding and ensure that funding is distributed fairly based on pupil needs and characteristics, including by ensuring that funding can be fairly directed to areas seeing relative increases in levels of deprivation and other additional needs.

8. Overall, we expect the equalities impact of the increases to the 2026 to 2027 schools NFF factor values to be positive, in comparison with the 2025 to 2026 NFF. Additional needs factors in the NFF are increasing by a higher percentage in 2026 to 2027 than in 2025 to 2026 – which will tend to have positive impact on pupils with disabilities - while the funding floor remains at the same level as in 2025 to 2026.

Tightening of local formula rules

9. Local authorities are still required to bring their funding formulae closer to the National Funding Formula (NFF), using the same approach as previously used.

10. Most local authorities already mirror the NFF, so the tightening requirements for 2026 to 2027 will only affect the minority of local authorities who do not currently mirror the NFF in their local formula.

11. Our expectation is that moving local formulae closer to the NFF will create a fairer and more consistent distribution of funding that is more closely aligned to need. However, the exact impact will depend on how local authorities respond to the tightening requirements, and how they use their remaining formula flexibilities.

Central School Services Block NFF

12. The formula that allocates the central school services block funding is unchanged for 2026 to 2027; we do not expect this to have an impact on different groups of pupils, including those with protected characteristics.

13. We will continue to reduce the funding for historical commitments by 20%, while keeping the protections for prudential borrowing and staff termination costs relating to commitments made before April 2013. This funding has been reducing since 2020 to 2021, and so we judge that local authorities have adequate time to mitigate any negative impacts in terms of equalities.

Overall impact

14. Our assessment is that the distribution of the available funding for mainstream schools and local authorities in 2026 to 2027 will, compared with the 2025 to 2026 NFFs, not have an overall adverse impact on mainstream school pupils with protected characteristics, and have a positive impact on those children and young people identified as having SEND (which includes those with disabilities).

15. The allocation of funding in 2026 to 2027 means a larger increase in additional needs factors within the schools NFF compared to the previous year. This will tend to benefit pupils with SEND (including those with disabilities), and will support mainstream schools to being inclusive for pupils with SEND. A further impact assessment will be produced alongside the confirmation of high needs funding allocations for 2026 to 2027.



Department
for Education

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Schools Block - Main Formula - APT - NFF Indicative rates 2026-27

Area Cost Adjustment	1.08352	1.08335	1.08291	1.08352	1.08335	1.08291
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Factor	Primary						Secondary												
	2024-25		2025-26 projected		% change		2026-27 projected		% change		2024-25		2025-26 projected		% change	2026-27 projected		% change	
	NFF	LBH	NFF	LBH	LBH		NFF	LBH	LBH		NFF	LBH	NFF	LBH	LBH	NFF	LBH	LBH	
	£	£	£	£			£	£			£	£	£	£		£	£		
Basic per pupil	3,562.00	3,859.50	3,847.00	4,167.65	7.98		4,064.00	4,403.43	5.66		KS3	5,022.00	5,441.44	5,422.00	5,873.93	7.95	5,686.00	6,157.43	4.83
excl other grants (below)	3,443.00	3,730.56	3,634.00	3,936.90	5.53		3,931.00	4,256.92	8.13		KS4	5,661.00	6,133.81	6,113.00	6,622.52	7.97	6,410.00	6,941.45	4.82
											KS3	4,854.00	5,259.41	5,122.00	5,548.92	5.50	5,540.00	5,999.32	8.12
											KS4	5,471.00	5,927.94	5,774.00	6,255.27	5.52	6,245.00	6,762.77	8.11
Free School Meals	490.00	530.92	495.00	536.26	1.01		505.00	547.18	2.04			490.00	530.92	495.00	536.26	1.01	505.00	546.87	1.98
FSM Ever 6	820.00	888.49	1,060.00	1,148.35	29.25		1,210.00	1,311.06	14.17			1,200.00	1,300.22	1,555.00	1,684.61	29.56	1,725.00	1,868.02	10.89
excl MSAG	716.00	775.80	820.00	888.35	14.51		1,148.35	1,244.27	40.06			1,047.99	1,135.52	1,200.00	1,300.02	14.49	1,593.00	1,725.08	32.70
IDACI A	680.00	736.79	685.00	742.09	0.72		700.00	758.46	2.21			945.00	1,023.93	950.00	1,029.18	0.51	970.00	1,050.42	2.06
IDACI B	515.00	558.01	520.00	563.34	0.96		530.00	574.27	1.94			740.00	801.80	745.00	807.10	0.66	760.00	823.01	1.97
IDACI C	485.00	525.51	490.00	530.84	1.01		500.00	541.76	2.06			690.00	747.63	695.00	752.93	0.71	710.00	768.87	2.12
IDACI D	445.00	482.17	445.00	482.09	-0.02		455.00	493.00	2.26			630.00	682.62	635.00	687.93	0.78	650.00	703.89	2.32
IDACI E	285.00	308.80	285.00	308.75	-0.02		290.00	314.22	1.77			450.00	487.58	450.00	487.50	-0.02	460.00	498.14	2.18
IDACI F	235.00	254.63	235.00	254.59	-0.02		240.00	260.04	2.14			340.00	368.40	340.00	368.34	-0.02	345.00	373.60	1.43
Low Prior Attainment	1,170.00	1,267.72	1,175.00	1,272.94	0.41		1,200.00	1,300.22	2.14			1,775.00	1,923.25	1,785.00	1,933.78	0.55	1,825.00	1,976.31	2.20
EAL	590.00	639.28	595.00	644.59	0.83		610.00	660.95	2.54			1,585.00	1,717.38	1,595.00	1,727.94	0.62	1,630.00	1,765.14	2.15
Mobility	960.00	1,040.18	965.00	1,045.43	0.50		985.00	1,067.27	2.09			1,380.00	1,495.26	1,385.00	1,500.44	0.35	1,415.00	1,532.32	2.12
Lump sum	134,400.00	145,625.09	145,100.00	157,194.09	7.94		152,700.00	165,453.50	5.25			134,400.00	145,625.09	145,100.00	157,194.09	7.94	152,700.00	165,360.36	5.20
excl MSAG	129,890.00	140,738.41	134,400.00	145,602.24	3.46		145,100.00	157,218.75	7.98			129,890.00	140,738.41	134,400.00	145,602.24	3.46	145,100.00	157,130.24	7.92
Minimum per pupil funding level (MPPL)	4,610.00	4,610.00	4,955.00	4,955.00	7.48		5,115.00	5,115.00	3.23			5,995.00	5,995.00	6,465.00	6,465.00	7.84	6,640.00	6,640.00	2.71
excl MSAG	4,467.00	4,467.00	4,610.00	4,610.00	3.20		4,955.00	4,955.00	7.48			5,809.00	5,809.00	6,145.00	6,145.00	5.78	6,465.00	6,465.00	5.21
Minimum Funding Guarantee	0.0% - 0.5%	0.5%	-0.5% - 0.0%	0.0%			-0.5% - 0.0%	0.0%			0.0% - 0.5%	0.5%	-0.5% - 0.0%	0.0%			-0.5% - 0.0%	0.0%	
Gains cap	n/a	2.5%	tba	0.85%			tba	t.b.c.			n/a	2.5%	tba	0.85%			tba	t.b.c.	

Sums consolidated into NFF funding rates					
	2024-25		2025-26		2025-26 - Policy Note update
	MSAG		TPAG	TPECG	CSBG uplift
Basic per pupil - Primary	£119.00		£62.00	£75.00	£51.00
Basic per pupil - KS3	£168.00		£86.00	£106.00	£71.00
Basic per pupil - KS4	£190.00		£98.00	£119.00	£80.00
Primary FSM6	£104.00		£53.00	£65.00	£70.00
Secondary FSM6	£152.00		£77.00	£100.00	£68.00
Lump sum	£4,510.00		£2,306.00	£2,800.00	£1,915.00
Adjustment to MPPL - average per pupil gain					
Primary	£143.00		All grants	CSBG uplift	Additional Increase
KS3	£186.00		£213.00	£62.00	£70.00
KS4	£208.00		£320.00	£83.00	£67.00

2026-27	
SBSG - original rate	
NIC	
£78.00	£37.00
£68.00	£53.00
£77.00	£60.00
£75.00	£35.00
£60.00	£50.00
£2,400.00	£1,400.00

Total increase	
£217.00	
£264.00	
£297.00	
£150.00	
£170.00	
£7,600.00	



Consultation for LA Maintained Schools De-delegation and Education Functions 2026-27

Release : Version 1 -18th November 2025

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Introduction

This consultation proposes options for the de-delegation for central services for maintained schools for the financial year 2026-27.

LA maintained primary schools are to consider for financial year 2026-27, whether to continue with the de-delegation of funding for the following services:

- Insurance
- Free school meals eligibility checking
- Maternity leave insurance
- EAL service
- Statutory and regulatory duties
- Core school improvement activities

Schools are asked to consider the options outlined in the documents and respond to the Local Authority (LA) for further consideration by the Schools Funding Forum.

At this stage, all figures used in the calculations are from the October 2024 Census, with the rates that will apply for 2026-27 de-delegation services. The final calculation will be based on the October 2025 Census data, with the rates proposed to be unchanged.

The DfE do not release the October 2025 Census data until late December 2025. Therefore, LAs consult using the previous year's dataset (October 2024 Census) to agree the principles for the forthcoming financial year.

Process

A summary of responses to the consultation will be reported to the meeting of the Schools Funding Forum on 27th November 2025, and will form part of the final decisions taken by the Local Authority in January, before schools are issued with their funding for the 2026-27 financial year.

Responding to the Consultation

This consultation is sent to the Head Teachers of all LA maintained schools only. Please bring this to the attention of Chairs of Governors, Chairs of Resources, Board Members and Trustees as appropriate.

You can contribute your views to the consultation in the online link provided in the body of the email.:

If you require clarification on any point please email:

Education Finance at: education.finance@havering.gov.uk

Closing date of consultation: 12.00pm Wednesday 26th November 2025

Schools Funding 2025-26

1. Background to De-delegation and Education Functions

This section explains how local authorities may hold funding centrally on behalf of maintained schools, through de-delegated services, education functions and school improvement, monitoring and brokerage (SIMB). It sets out what each arrangement covers, who they apply to, and how decisions will operate for 2026-27.

1.1 De-delegated services

Funding for services that may be de-delegated is initially allocated to maintained mainstream primary and secondary schools through the local funding formula.

With the agreement of the maintained school representatives on the Schools Forum, these schools may choose to allow the local authority to retain this funding centrally and deliver the service on their behalf.

De-delegation applies only to maintained mainstream primary and secondary schools. It is not available to academies, nursery schools, PRUs, or special schools. Where de-delegation is agreed, the local authority may offer the same service to academies or other schools outside the arrangement on a buy-back basis.

Decisions to de-delegate apply for one year only. New decisions are therefore required for 2026-27. Decisions are taken separately for each phase and, once agreed, apply to all maintained schools within that phase. The funding is then deducted from formula allocations before school budgets are issued.

The services eligible for de-delegation are:

- contingencies (including schools in financial difficulties and deficits of closing schools)
- behaviour support services
- support to underperforming ethnic groups and bilingual learners (EAL)
- free school meals eligibility checking
- insurance
- museum and library services
- licences and subscriptions
- staff costs supply cover (e.g. long-term sickness, maternity, trade union and public duties)

For each service agreed, the local authority must clearly explain how the funding is deducted, (e.g. primary insurance £20 per pupil, FSM eligibility £9.50 per FSM pupil), and how any allocations, including contingency awards, are determined.

If a school has been approved to receive funding from a de-delegated contingency and later converts to academy status, that allocation must still be honoured for the period the school is maintained.

Any unspent de-delegated funding at year-end is reported to the Schools Forum and may be carried forward for future de-delegated use.

1.2 Education Functions (Statutory Duties for Maintained Schools)

Funding for services that may be de-delegated is initially allocated to maintained mainstream primary and secondary schools through the local funding formula.

Education functions are statutory duties that local authorities must discharge for maintained schools. These responsibilities are required by law and cannot be opted out of by individual schools. To fund these duties, the local authority may seek approval from the Schools Forum to top-slice a small amount from maintained schools' budgets.

These statutory duties apply to all maintained schools, including special schools. They do not apply to academies, which receive their own equivalent funding directly from the DfE.

Education functions cover the core responsibilities that support the oversight and proper governance of maintained schools. These include:

- financial and audit responsibilities
- central administrative and regulatory functions
- statutory asset management
- governance, HR, and pension-related obligations
- duties relating to school organisation and access to education

Approval for education functions is required annually. When a maintained school converts to academy status, the education functions funding for that school is removed from the local authority's allocation from the date of conversion.

1.3 School Improvement, Monitoring and Brokerage (SIMB)

SIMB represents the local authority's monitoring, oversight, and support for maintained schools. For the purposes of the 2026-27 consultation, the LA is requesting funding only for statutory SIMB via education functions, to provide clarity and focus LA support on statutory activities.

The statutory SIMB via Education Functions (focus for consultation):

- Applies to all maintained schools, including special schools.
- Covers the minimum statutory duties the local authority must carry out, including:
 - mandatory monitoring visits
 - statutory interventions for schools requiring improvement
 - oversight of governance, leadership, and school performance
 - coordination and reporting to DfE/ESFA
- Funded via Schools Block top-slice for maintained schools only (separate from CSSB).
- The LA's support for schools in 2026-27 will focus on these statutory activities only.

To note, that there is an optional, additional SIMB support (previously funded via de-delegation) which is not being proposed. This ensures transparency about what funding is requested and how it will be used.

1.4 Table of Services and Functions

Aspect	De-delegated Services	Education Functions	SIMB (Statutory)
Nature	Optional, discretionary services funded collectively by maintained mainstream schools	Statutory duties that LAs must perform for maintained schools	Statutory school improvement, monitoring, and brokerage
Who it applies to	Maintained mainstream primary and secondary schools only	All maintained schools (including special schools)	All maintained schools (including special schools)
Academies	Cannot be de-delegated, but may buy back	Not applicable. Academies fund equivalent statutory duties directly	Not applicable. Funded only for maintained schools
Approval	Annual Schools Forum vote, separately by phase	Annual Schools Forum approval for all maintained schools	Annual Schools Forum approval via education functions top-slice
Effect of academy conversion	If a school becomes an academy mid year, provision honoured for period school is maintained	Funding removed from date of conversion	Funding removed from date of conversion
Funding block	Schools Block top-slice for maintained schools only	Schools Block top-slice for maintained schools only	Schools Block top-slice for maintained schools only (statutory)
Funding type	Traded / discretionary	Statutory	Statutory

2. De-delegation and Education Functions Service 2025-26

The following table demonstrates the services that was requested and outcome for financial year 2025-26.

Service	De-delegation requested 2025-26	Outcome
Contingencies (including schools in financial difficulties and deficits of closing schools)	No	N/A
Behaviour support services	Yes	Not Agreed
Support to underperforming ethnic groups and bilingual learners (EAL)	Yes	Agreed
Free school meals eligibility	Yes	Agreed
Insurance	Yes	Agreed
Museum and library services	No	N/A
Licences/subscriptions	No	N/A
Staff costs supply cover (maternity leave insurance)	Yes	Agreed
Staff costs supply cover (trade union facility time)	Yes	Agreed
Statutory and regulatory duties	Yes	Agreed
Core school improvement activities	Yes	Agreed

3. De-delegation and Education Functions Service 2026-27 Consultation

As agreed at the Schools Funding Forum meeting held on 23rd October 2025, this consultation was proposed to be issued to all maintained schools to help Schools Forum members with the decision making for the de-delegated services for 2026-27.

The summary of responses to the consultation will be reported to the meeting of the Schools Funding Forum on 27th November 2025, and will form part of the final decisions taken by the Local Authority in January.

4. Proposed De-delegated Services and Education Functions 2026-27

Consideration to the continuation of the financial year 2025-26 de-delegated services is proposed, and the list of services and functions are as provided below and in the applicable Appendices.

4.1 Insurance

Insurance for maintained schools is arranged as part of the borough's main insurance contract and funded through de-delegation.

The LA proposes increasing the 2026-27 rate to reflect expected rises in premiums and associated costs, in line with the RPA benchmark. The cost of participation in the RPA for 2025-26 was £27.00 per pupil, an increase of £2.00 from the previous year, and further increases are anticipated for 2026-27 due to rising sector-wide claims.

The proposed funding through de-delegation from LA maintained primary schools is as follows:

2026-27	Primary
Formula factor	Basic Entitlement
Amount	£27.00*
Total	£470,745

2025-26	£21.00
---------	--------

**The proposed rate for 2026-27 will be updated to align with the final RPA charge once confirmed by the DfE. The current RPA rate is £27.00 per pupil for 2025-26.*

Benefits of de-delegating insurance:

- Provides comprehensive cover for maintained schools underwritten by regulated insurers.
- Ensures a £50 million liability limit, protecting schools and the LA.
- Maintains continuity of cover for both school and LA liabilities, reducing the risk of insurance gaps.
- Access to advice, claims handling, and risk management support not available through the RPA.
- Includes cover for areas that schools would otherwise need to purchase separately under the RPA.
- Ensures employer liabilities retained by the LA are appropriately insured.
- Safeguards the LA's responsibilities and reduces risk, as any external supplier would need to provide adequate cover to protect the LA from potential liabilities.
- Delivers competitively priced, high-value cover, aligned with the national RPA benchmark while maintaining local assurance.

If schools do not buy in:

- Individual schools would need to arrange separate insurance cover, potentially at a higher cost and without the pooled benefits.

- Schools may lose access to the central claims handling and risk management support, and any external arrangement would need to ensure adequate coverage to safeguard the LA's responsibilities and reduce potential liabilities.

As the LA remains the employer and retains certain liabilities, the pooled approach ensures these are appropriately insured. The pooled arrangements ensures maintained schools continue to benefit from competitively priced, comprehensive cover and support, aligned to the DfE's national RPA benchmark while maintaining local value and assurance.

4.2 Free school meals eligibility checking

This service centrally checks children's eligibility for free school meals (FSM) and the pupil premium grant via the government hub.

The LA Education Finance Team provides the service on behalf of Education Services and schools, using the dedicated Synergy software.

Various education departments rely on this centralised, "live" database to identify eligible pupils and target support for schemes, such as the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme and other initiatives where FSM status is a criterion.

The proposed funding through de-delegation from LA maintained primary schools is as follows:

2026-27	Primary
Formula factor	FSM eligible pupils
Amount	£7.75
Total	£24,761
2025-26 rate	£9.50

Benefits of de-delegating:

- Eliminates the need for individual schools to determine eligibility themselves.
- Provides a centralised, up-to-date FSM database accessible across relevant services.
- Supports targeting of support and funding to eligible families efficiently.
- Reduces administrative burden on school staff.

If schools do not buy in:

- Schools would need to make their own arrangements to check eligibility, increasing administrative work and the risk of errors.
- There would not be a central, live database that stakeholders can use for FSM-related schemes.
- Schools will need to provide the data to the relevant teams to confirm eligibility for FSM-related schemes.
- Cessation of service, effective 1st April 2026.

The 2025-26 rate was £9.50. The proposed reduction of £1.75 per FSM pupil reflects additional contributions from central services that use the FSM data for their programmes, ensuring sufficient funding to cover staff and software costs for delivering this service.

4.3 Maternity leave insurance

The LA operates a pooled maternity cover scheme for teachers and support staff in maintained schools. While it functions similarly to insurance, it is not an insurance policy. The scheme pools contributions from maintained schools to cover maternity leave costs.

The Education Finance Team administers the scheme on behalf of Education Services and schools.

The proposed funding through de-delegation from LA maintained primary schools is as follows:

2026-27	Primary
Formula factor	Basic Entitlement
Amount	£42.92
Total	£748,310
2025-26	£40.49

The per-pupil rate is proposed to increase by 6.0% (from £40.49 to £42.92) to reflect expected increases in staff salaries and on-costs, which determine maternity leave payments.

Benefits of de-delegating:

- Provides central management of maternity leave cover, reducing administrative burden on schools.
- Ensures all maintained schools have access to maternity cover without needing to arrange individual schemes.
- Maintains the financial viability of the pooled scheme by spreading risk across all maintained schools.

If schools do not buy in:

- Schools would need to make individual arrangements to cover maternity leave, which could be more complex and potentially less cost-effective.
- Schools would need to enquire whether maternity cover could be combined with their separate staffing sickness scheme. This will need to be reviewed by the supplier on a case-by-case basis.
- Cessation of service, effective 1st April 2026.

Key points about the pooled fund:

- The fund is finite. If claims exceed the pooled contributions, the LA will communicate with schools regarding the shortfall. Schools will then be advised on next steps to manage cover for the remainder of the year.

For 2024-25 and 2025-26, although the expected spend exceeded the budget, underspends in other de-delegated services offset the difference. A similar situation is anticipated for 2026-27, and the £2k shortfall is not expected to materially affect the overall de-delegated budgets.

	2024-25	2025-26*	2026-27*
Budget	£645,543	£705,943	£748,310
Spend	£680,000	£715,000	£750,750
Outturn	-£34,457	-£9,057	-£2,440

Rate	£36.96	£40.49	£42.92
Applicable pupils	17466	17435	17435

* Projected figures

4.4 English as an Additional Language (EAL) Service

The LA proposes the continued de-delegation of funding to maintain the central EAL service for maintained primary schools at a reduced rate. The proposed reduction reflects schools' differing levels of need and introduces a 39% reduction in cost for LA maintained primary schools.

The new Ofsted framework places a focus on children who face "*barriers to their learning*," identifying EAL pupils as a vulnerable group with specific inspection criteria. The expertise and support provided by the central EAL team are therefore crucial in helping schools meet these requirements and ensure that pupils with EAL achieve their full potential.

The proposed funding through de-delegation from LA maintained primary schools is as follows:

2026-27	Primary
Formula factor	EAL 3
Amount	£23.12
Total	£71,428

2025-26	£38.00
---------	--------

*Funding cap: £72,000 to ensure that any additional EAL3 funding remains within school budgets.

Benefits of de-delegating:

- Schools collectively fund the central EAL team, allowing specialist support that individual schools could not provide alone.
- Provides equitable access for all maintained schools, regardless of size or individual budget constraints.
- Reduces administrative burden on individual schools, as the LA manages deployment of staff and resources.
- Ensures continuity of expertise, training, and specialist resources across the borough.

If schools do not buy in:

- Individual schools would need to arrange their own EAL support, which could be more costly and less efficient.
- Some schools may not have access to specialist resources or consultancy visits.
- Smaller schools may be disproportionately affected, as they could struggle to fund individual support packages.

Service highlights from 2024–25:

- Around two-thirds of all mainstream Havering schools received direct support from the EAL team.
- 90% of LA-maintained primary schools accessed the service via the HES portal.
- Schools benefited from consultancy visits, training, and specialist resources.
- Customer satisfaction feedback was wholly positive, with 100% of respondents rating the service as good or better.

Further details of the service offered through de-delegation are provided in [Appendix A](#).

4.5 Trade Union Facility Time

The LA proposes the continued de-delegation of funding for Trade Union Facilities Time (TUFT). This provides support from locally based, accredited trade union officials to school staff. Further details of the support provided is in [Appendix B](#).

The LA is administering this pooled arrangement on behalf of schools and the trade unions. Without the LA acting as an intermediary, individual schools and trade unions would need to make arrangements directly with each other. The Education Finance team manages the scheme on behalf of Education Services, schools, and the unions, ensuring a centralised, efficient, and equitable approach.

The following unions and the staff they support are as follows:

Union	Staff Supported
National Education Union (NEU)	Teaching
National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)	Teaching
Community	Teaching
National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)	Teaching
UNISON	Support
GMB	Support

* The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) are no longer supported by this provision

Last year the Forum agreed an increase in the sum per pupil de-delegated from £2.80 to £2.96 to help meet the rise in salary costs of the local trade union representatives delivering the service.

There is a proposed 3.5% per-pupil increase for TUFT, that reflects the estimated rise in teachers' pay and associated staff costs for the local trade union representatives delivering the service. It ensures that the LA can continue to provide the same level and quality of support to school staff, maintaining the pooled arrangement's sustainability and enabling schools to access consistent, high-quality union support without managing individual arrangements.

The proposed funding through de-delegation from LA maintained primary schools is as follows:

2026-27	Primary
Formula factor	Basic Entitlement
Amount	£2.96
Total	£53,351
2025-26	£2.80

Benefits of de-delegating:

- Ensures all maintained schools have equitable access to accredited trade union support.
- Reduces administrative burden on individual schools in managing TUFT arrangements.
- Provides locally based support, helping schools manage workforce relations effectively.
- Maintains consistency of service across schools and ensures compliance with statutory obligations regarding staff consultation and representation.
- By acting as intermediary, the LA simplifies arrangements between schools and trade unions, removing the need for separate negotiations or contracts.

If schools do not buy in:

- Individual schools would need to arrange their own trade union support, which may be more costly and less efficient.
- Smaller schools may have limited access to support or struggle to meet statutory obligations for staff representation.
- Consistency and quality of support across schools could vary, potentially affecting workforce management.
- Schools and unions would need to negotiate separately without LA support, increasing administrative workload.

Education functions – applicable to LA maintained primary and special schools only

4.7 Statutory and regulatory duties

Education functions are applicable only to LA maintained primary and special schools. These contributions cover statutory and regulatory services that the LA is required to provide to maintained schools but not to academies. The approach reflects the central service charges applied by most Multi-Academy Trusts, ensuring consistency with national practice.

Historically, the Education Services Grant (ESG) funded these statutory services for both maintained schools and academies. Following the withdrawal of ESG, part of the funding was transferred into the DSG Schools Block, while the remaining statutory services for maintained schools have been funded through contributions from school budgets since the 2018-19 financial year. Rates have been adjusted annually in line with the National Funding Formula (NFF) factor values.

For 2026-27, the LA proposes a 3.5% increase to reflect the expected rise in staff salaries, which make up the majority of the cost of providing these services. The new contribution rates would be:

2026-27	Primary	Special
Formula factor	Basic Entitlement	Place
Amount	£21.71	£65.13
Total	£373,732	£10,095

2025-26	£20.98	£62.94
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This would produce a minimum total contribution of £383,827 from maintained schools.

These services are statutory. As the LA is legally required to provide them, maintained schools do not have the option to opt out. This ensures that all schools receive consistent, compliant, and centrally coordinated support, safeguarding pupils, staff, and the LA itself.

Categories of LA responsibilities funded through this contribution:

Category	Central Services functions for LA Maintained Schools (previously ESG - now part of Education Functions)
Service Strategy & Regulation	Budgeting and accounting functions relating to maintained schools (Sch 2, 73)
	Functions relating to the financing of maintained schools (Sch 2, 58)
	Authorisation and monitoring of expenditure in respect of schools which do not have delegated budgets, and related financial administration (Sch 2, 57)
	Monitoring of compliance with requirements in relation to the scheme for financing schools and the provision of community facilities by governing bodies (Sch 2, 58)
	Internal audit and other tasks related to the authority's chief finance officer's responsibilities under Section 151 of LGA 1972 for maintained schools (Sch 2, 59)
	Functions made under Section 44 of the 2002 Act (Consistent Financial Reporting) (Sch 2, 60)
	Functions related to local government pensions and administration of teachers' pensions in relation to staff working at maintained schools under the direct management of the headteacher or governing body (Sch 2, 62)
	HR duties, including: advice to schools on the management of staff, pay alterations, conditions of service and composition/organisation of staff (Sch 2, 63); determination of conditions of service for non-teaching staff (Sch 2, 64); appointment or dismissal of employee functions (Sch 2, 65)
	Consultation costs relating to staffing (Sch 2, 66)
	Provision of information to or at the request of the Crown relating to schools (Sch 2, 68)
	Establish and maintaining computer systems, including data storage (Sch 2, 71)
	Appointment of governors and payment of governor expenses (Sch 2, 72)
Asset management	General landlord duties for all maintained schools (Sch 2, 76a & b (section 542(2)) Education Act 1996; School Premises Regulations 2012) to ensure that school buildings have:
	• appropriate facilities for pupils and staff (including medical and accommodation)
	• the ability to sustain appropriate loads
	• reasonable weather resistance
	• safe escape routes
	• appropriate acoustic levels
	• lighting, heating and ventilation which meets the required standards
	• adequate water supplies and drainage
	• playing fields of the appropriate standards
	General health and safety duty as an employer for employees and others who may be affected (Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974)
	Management of the risk from asbestos in community school buildings (Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012)
Monitoring national curriculum assessment	Monitoring of National Curriculum assessments (Sch 2, 74)

4.8 Core school improvement activities

The School Improvement, Monitoring and Brokerage (SIMB) grant was withdrawn by the DfE from 2023-24. Local authorities were given the power to fund all improvement activity, including core school improvement activities, via de-delegation with the agreement of Schools Forums or the Secretary of State.

During the summer term of 2022, the LA worked with school and academy leaders to refresh its Quality Assurance (QA) Framework. A key objective is that all children attend schools judged to be “*effective*” (Good or Outstanding) by Ofsted.

To support the maintenance of high standards, all LA-maintained schools are included in the QA cycle. Stand-alone academies or schools within academy trusts are welcome to participate, but are not required to do so in the same way as maintained schools.

For 2026-27, the LA proposes a 3.5% increase to the per-pupil rate. This follows a reduction in 2025-26, when the rate was lowered from £5.11 per primary pupil to £3.38 per pupil, reflecting efficiencies achieved by delivering more of the intervention work internally.

The 2026-27 increase from £3.38 to £3.50 per pupil is therefore applied to this lower baseline, ensuring that schools benefit from a saving compared with previous higher rates, while still enabling the LA to provide high-quality, centrally coordinated school improvement support and account for rising staff costs. The new contribution rates would be:

2026-27	Primary	Special
Formula factor	Basic Entitlement	Place
Amount	£3.50	£10.50
Total	£60,480	£1,643

2025-26	£3.38	£10.14
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Details of the service provided are shown in [Appendix C](#).

5 Conclusion

We hope that this paper and the accompanying appendices explain the de-delegated services and education functions options that form the basis of this consultation, and the rationale behind these options.

As explained above, the rate for each of the services will remain as per the consultation proposals once the final dataset is made available in December. However, the budgets for each of the de-delegated/education functions are indicative and final calculations will be made once the validated data from the October 2025 census has been received from the DfE.

Appendix A - English as an Additional Language service

Rationale for maintaining a central EAL team

The LA proposes a continued contribution from LA maintained primary schools in order to retain a central specialist EAL team. Without a core de-delegated contribution, the service would need to operate solely on a traded basis, which would significantly reduce its viability and ability to respond to fluctuating levels of need.

For 2026–27, the proposed charge has been reduced by 39.2%, ensuring the model remains proportionate while safeguarding a level of provision that schools rely upon, particularly as the current Ofsted framework continues to identify EAL learners as a vulnerable group facing potential barriers to learning. A centrally held team ensures compliance, preparedness for inspection, and consistency of support across settings.

Proposal for 2026–27

It is proposed that £23.12 per EAL pupil be de-delegated for the financial year 2026-27. This reflects a 39.2% reduction from the 2025-26 contribution and would generate £71,428 towards the cost of the service, compared with £114,538 in the previous year.

Given expected demographic shifts, EAL3 allocations to schools are likely to increase over the year. To ensure schools retain the majority of this additional funding, the amount held centrally will be capped at £72,000, with any further increases remaining within individual school budgets.

1. Changing demographics

Havering continues to experience a rapidly changing demographic profile, with sustained increases in families arriving from abroad and from other areas of the UK. A growing proportion of pupils enter schools with limited or no English, including children from areas affected by conflict. Many of these pupils have benefited from targeted EAL interventions such as the Homes for Ukraine in-school teaching project, overseen by the EAL team.

This continued growth in new-to-English arrivals strengthens the need for a responsive and centrally coordinated service that can support schools at the point needs arise.

2. Service usage

The EAL team remains well used across the borough, with:

- Two-thirds of all mainstream Havering schools accessing support through a combination of traded and de-delegated routes.
- 90% of LA-maintained primaries using the service via the HES portal.
- 77% attending centrally delivered EAL training.
- 60% requesting direct consultancy or pupil support.

Schools also accessed ongoing telephone and email advice, as well as essential resources, including screening tools, proficiency assessment templates and teaching materials, through the HES portal.

3. Risk if the service ceases to be centrally funded

Unlike some service areas with predictable demand, EAL needs fluctuate significantly between schools due to changing cohorts and variable staff experience. This makes traded-only income unpredictable and insufficient for sustaining a specialist team.

If schools were unable to pool funding collectively, the borough-wide EAL service would likely become unviable, requiring schools to secure ad-hoc external support at a higher cost and with less flexibility. The average centrally supported value of £2,937 per school provides a more comprehensive offer than any equivalent traded service could provide.

4. Flexibility and responsiveness of the current model

Retaining a discrete EAL service provides schools with flexible and timely support. Visits can be arranged when new pupils arrive or where staff capacity changes, avoiding the constraints of package-based traded models. Schools can request short visits, remote consultations, in-house CPD, and pupil-focused observations, ensuring support is tailored to immediate needs. Twice-termly networks for EAL co-ordinators and TAs further enhance professional practice and borough-wide consistency.

5. Team Capacity

The three EAL Advisers continue to meet all requests for support. Communications are issued regularly to ensure schools are aware of available courses, consultancy, and new resources. Capacity is strengthened through a specialist secondary consultant who also supports cross-phase needs as required. No requests from LA-maintained primaries have been declined due to capacity constraints.

6. Offer to LA-maintained primary schools (2026-27)

Schools contributing via de-delegation will have access to:

- Termly consultancy visits, with further visits arranged depending on individual school needs.
- Pupil-focused support, as well as advice for pupils with combined SEND/EAL needs.
- In-house EAL CPD for teachers and support staff.
- EAL reviews and learning walks.
- Teacher surgeries for priority pupil discussions.
- Twice-termly networks for EAL co-ordinators and EAL TAs.
- Unlimited access to all centrally held EAL CPD.
- Telephone and email support.
- Access to subscriber-only content within the HES EAL resource pages (<https://www.hes.org.uk/Page/147>).

7. Impact of the EAL team:

Targeted support from the EAL team helps schools tailor provision to accelerate progress for new arrivals and early-stage learners, enabling them to reach age-related expectations or narrow attainment gaps rapidly.

In the 2024-25 HES customer satisfaction survey, 100% of respondents rated the service as good or better, with positive feedback highlighting the quality, responsiveness and practical value of the advice provided.

8. Summary

Targeted support from the EAL team helps schools tailor provision to accelerate progress for new arrivals and early-stage learners, enabling them to reach age-related expectations or narrow attainment gaps rapidly.

Appendix B - Trade Union facility time

Introduction

There is a legal obligation on schools as employers to ensure they have in place arrangements to negotiate and consult with accredited Trade Union representatives and to afford their employees Trade Union representation, in compliance with legislation. Such arrangements include paid time off ('facilities time') for accredited trade union representatives to undertake these duties.

This service provides confidence to participating schools that they are fulfilling their legal obligations and ensuring their staff have access to employee representation from local Union representatives from across the County.

The support from Union representatives, available through de-delegation, also ensures that sensitive issues do not spiral out of control into situations involving formal procedures which can be extremely costly in both senior leadership time and money.

The scheme helps avoid the risk of operational disruption and the cost of schools having to release their own staff for specific training to fulfil this role and other functions linked to Trade Union facilities time.

By not having access to this local experienced resource there is an increased risk of lengthy and stressful processes that could impact on the running of schools and the health of all staff involved.

There are also increased risks around the following:

- Schools not fulfilling their legal duty.
- Schools not having access to a local Union rep resulting in delays in case management and resolution.
- Application of HR Policies impacted due to lack of availability of Union support.
- Lack of local mediation/discussion with regional reps who know the area.
- Escalation of grievances and cases (including sickness absence management) which might otherwise be avoided.
- Schools having to provide training for staff to the standard of local branch secretaries in order to fulfil legal duties.
- Schools unable to find staff who want to take on the Trade Union representative role.

Trade union facility time and membership fees

There is also often confusion around individual member subscriptions to Unions and the facilities payments received from schools. There is a specific distinction between the two and what they cover:

- 1) **Individual membership fees** not only pay towards the overall running costs of unions, but members also receive a number of fringe benefits, from support and guidance, legal services, training, financial assistance, compensation, non-employment law and insurance.
- 2) **De-delegated Trade Union Facilities Time** from schools funds the release of local representatives within Havering. Unions work collaboratively with schools and the LA to enable a smooth and seamless service.

Service provision

School leaders and governors are likely to only see a glimpse of the activity and support provided by Unions and what actually takes place in terms of casework.

A great deal of time is spent by local reps dealing with employees' concerns and grievances 'behind the scenes' in a way which prevents things ever escalating into confrontation and formal procedures.

Local Union reps help members work through conflict and change to the benefit of the members themselves and of school leaders.

The pooled arrangements allow facility time for branch secretaries to provide support to their members in a range of areas including:

General Advice and Support

1. Access for members to advice and support on employment issues from local representatives who understand Havering school issues because they work within them.
2. Prompt response to all requests for contact or support from Trade Union/professional association representatives.
3. Joint working between Trade Union representatives, LA Officers, members and school leaders, supporting staff whilst working collaboratively with management for best outcomes - to reduce escalation; maintaining open channels of communication to create resolution in challenging and difficult circumstances.
4. Schools and their staff are kept abreast of issues on the national Trade Union agenda and pertaining to collective agreements. All Unions work at a national level, campaigning and lobbying the government to reform key issues within education to support children and their learning with the best possible outcomes for everyone.

Consultation, Compliance and Policies

5. Availability of a pool of specialist Trade Union representatives able to consult meaningfully with the Local Authority on proposed changes to HR policies on behalf of all maintained schools. This saves individual schools having to consult with the Trade Unions independently.
6. Assurance that model employment policies issued by Havering LA have been through formal negotiation and consultation with Havering Division/Branch Trade Union officials

Employee Relations

7. Employees' concerns and grievances are addressed informally wherever possible, in a way which prevents sensitive issues escalating into confrontation involving contracted formal procedures. This can be extremely costly in both senior leadership time and money as well as emotionally for all involved.
8. Matters are often addressed without recourse to regional officials.
9. Where the involvement of regional or national officials is required, named contact details are provided promptly by local reps.
10. Genuine support for the well-being of staff, through positive and productive working relationships.

Restructuring and Reorganisation

11. Specific support for staff restructurings and budget saving options.
12. Discussion about alternative individual employment options, including settlement agreements.

TUPE and Academy Conversion

13. Meaningful consultation over academy conversion.

Branch secretaries, whose facility time is funded through de-delegation are senior and experienced Trade Union representatives with a good level of knowledge and expertise on employment matters.

Appendix C - Core school improvement activities - Havering Education Quality Assurance Process 2025-2026

Quality Assurance Cycle

A key objective of the Local Authority (LA) is that all children will attend a school that is judged to be “effective” by Ofsted.

To support the maintenance of high standards, all LA maintained schools will be included in the LA Quality Assurance (QA) cycle. Schools in Federations have individual URNs and will therefore be deemed to be separate schools for purposes of the QA cycle.

Schools which are stand-alone academies, or schools that are part of an academy trust are welcome to participate in all aspects of the cycle in the same way as maintained schools. However they are not required to participate in the way that LA schools are, and if they choose to participate then there will be a charge from April 2026.

However, as a minimum, schools that are an academy will be strongly encouraged to participate in Keeping in Touch (KIT) visits. The KIT visits may focus, by negotiation on individual member schools within the cycle window, and an overview of the trust schools within Havering and trust quality assurance processes generally. The KIT will ensure that the LA has the necessary information to ensure that elected members are kept fully engaged in the local education system. We also encourage the sharing of good practice between all providers in our education community regardless of governance arrangements.

The LA proposes the following cycle of QA for “effective” schools:

Timeline

- Year 1 – Post Ofsted Inspection leaders attending to ‘Areas for Improvement’
- Year 2 - KIT visit or Peer Review Programme, if eligible
- Year 3 - Full QA (Ofsted Readiness) visit
- Year 4 - KIT visit
- Year 5 - Ofsted Inspection (possible KIT)

A school will join a point of the LA QA cycle according to when it was last inspected by Ofsted. This will be done by term as near as possible.

KIT Visits

A school judged to be “effective” will have a Keeping in Touch (KIT) visit 12 months after inspection.

A KIT visit of up to half a day, will include a discussion about:

- o the strengths of the school and evidence to support
- o area of improvement/focus, improvement planning, impact of actions taken and evidence to support this
- o pupil outcomes
- o concerns the school or the LA may have
- o brokerage of support

If a KIT visit suggests that one or more areas of the school's practice appears vulnerable, the school is strongly encouraged to engage with a specialist advisor to undertake a more in depth analysis of that area of practice in order to address any area of vulnerability.

If prior to September 2024 a school was graded Requires Improvement following a Graded Inspection or the evidence gathered during an Ungraded Inspection suggested that the grade may be lower than Good if a Graded Inspection was to be carried out, or post September 2024 a school is judged not to be "effective", then the school will be subject to 'Requiring Additional Intervention & Support' by the LA in the case of maintained schools. In academies, the LA will offer additional support and encourage engagement with the plans for improvement, or if necessary engage with the DfE Regional Director. Support from the LA would be chargeable.

Where serious concern is identified the DfE will continue to intervene, including by issuing an academy order. From September 2024 the policy of government intervention for two or more consecutive judgements of "requires improvement" will be one of providing support.

In year 2 of the cycle, following inspection, schools not subject to 'Requiring Additional Intervention & Support' are encouraged to be involved in school-to-school improvement programmes, e.g. facilitated peer review, peer support and HSIS school improvement packages. Where an LA officer is a participant in the facilitated peer review, in some circumstances where the focus is suitable, this may replace the KIT visit.

It is envisaged that these programmes will support leaders to address the areas for improvement noted in the inspection report and others that are identified as well as identifying excellent practice that can be shared with other schools in order to support the agenda of self-improving schools.

In year 4, the school would again receive a KIT visit. A further KIT may be agreed in year 5 or later, where the inspection timetable becomes considerably overdue.

Full QA (Ofsted Readiness) Visit

In year 3, the QA Ofsted Readiness visit will be a more in-depth school evaluation involving a team of relevant specialist advisors, and will include:

- A review of key information provided in advance of the visit e.g. School Self-Evaluation, School Development Plan, Safeguarding S175 audit (there is a requirement for the audit to have been externally validated either by the LA or an external provider within the previous 12 months.)
- A short pre-visit meeting for leaders to share their evaluation of improvements made in the areas for improvement identified during the last inspection, the Quality of Education, and to confirm visit arrangements and areas of focus. This meeting may be held virtually or in-person.
- The in-school visit will include discussions with the school's senior curriculum leader and leaders in subjects and other areas of focus, with an emphasis on their leadership and its impact. This will be led by the LA QA Link Officer supported by one or more LA Officers according to focus. The Leadership of Reading in school will always be an included area. There will also be discussions with pupils.
- Visits to lessons, looking at pupils' work and where possible discussion with teachers are also likely to be included.
- There will always be a focus on SEND.

Risk Register and Schools Monitoring Group

The LA regularly maintains a risk register analysis of all educational establishments within the borough, in order to pre-empt difficulties and offer support, fulfil our statutory duties ([Support and intervention in schools statutory guidance](#) September 2025) and engage with local elected members, Ofsted, safeguarding complaints, and the DfE Regional Directors.

The Schools' Monitoring Group (SMG) meets each half-term to monitor progress in schools at risk of not sustaining an "effective" school judgement in their next inspection (Schools 'Requiring Additional Intervention & Support'), take decisions regarding the utilisation of Local Authority Powers of Intervention, engagement with the DfE Regional Directors, deploy School-to-School Support resources and broker HES support.

All teams within LA Children's Services relating to schools contribute triggers which could be areas of concern, or suggest vulnerabilities in relation to their areas of work. These triggers are published in [Appendix 1](#). Triggers are not exclusive and other situations may arise from time to time. All service areas are represented at the SMG meeting, so that relevant information can be shared to identify any emerging vulnerabilities so that activity can be coordinated.

Schools 'Requiring Additional Intervention & Support':

There are five trigger points for a school to be deemed to be 'Requiring Additional Intervention & Support':

1. Prior to September 2024 Ofsted grading less than "Good" /suggestion less than "Good" following an Ungraded Inspection.
2. LA year 3 Ofsted readiness QA suggests the school may not be judged to be "effective" at its next inspection.
3. Information gained during an LA KIT visit suggests significant risk.
4. LA identification following an SMG periodic risk register analysis e.g. attendance, behaviour, complaints, pupil outcomes suggests significant risk.
5. Self-identification by a school to generate additional support through strategic link officer.

Progress Review Meetings (PRMs)

For maintained schools (and academies by agreement), where a school is considered vulnerable and 'Requiring Additional Intervention & Support', the school relevant LA officers will discuss the situation fully with the Headteacher/Executive Headteacher/Principal and the Chair of Governors.

Where a school is judged to be 'Requiring Additional Intervention & Support':

- Progress Review Meetings (PRMs) will be implemented if trigger 1 or 2 occurs and if required depending on outcomes of findings for trigger 3 or 4.
- Points 3, 4 and 5 will lead to a full school or area review and if deemed that the school is a vulnerable school, will be subject to regular PRMs.
- PRMs are meetings chaired by a senior LA Officer and are attended by the Headteacher, the Chair or Vice Chair of Governors and others by invitation of the LA Officer.
- PRMs will include an element of first-hand evidence validation undertaken with school leaders.

Their purpose is for the LA to:

- oversee the implementation of action plans to secure rapid and sustained improvements, so are likely to be 'front-loaded' with more frequent meetings at the outset.
- monitor progress of actions taken to ensure they have maximum impact.
- commission additional resources when needed to support rapid improvement.
- monitor the impact of brokered support, including partnership support.
- where possible, gather direct evidence of progress for LA monitoring and reporting to Schools' Funding Forum' and for Ofsted.

Summary

For maintained schools, the activity described above as part of the wider Quality Assurance Cycle, PRMs, further in-school support such as a full school review, or review of an area of the school's practice, would all be funded from the de-delegated 'School Improvement Monitoring and Brokering Grant', and spend will be reported to Schools' Funding Forum. However, this is subject to Schools' Funding Forum approval.

PRMs are not mandatory for academies but can be offered if requested, but would be chargeable to cover direct costs of LA officer resource, as would any in-school support, such as a full school review or review of an area of the school's practice.

Appendix 1 – LA Children’s Services School Vulnerability Triggers

Admissions, attendance and behaviour

- High number of deletions from school registers – parents transferring schools
- High number of Permanent Exclusions being issued
- High levels of attendance absence
- High levels of referrals from schools requesting pupils directed ‘off site’
- High levels of suspensions / exclusions of pupils with undiagnosed SEND needs – where schools have not dealt with the basics
- A high number, significant increase in parents wishing to Electively Home Education as pupils unhappy with school
- A significantly high number of bullying incidents, reports and reasons pupils are not in a specific school

Asset Management

If schools chose **not to**

- Carry out their statutory tests and inspections on their school buildings i.e. building compliance
- Keep their school buildings safe and in good working order by tackling poor building condition and or health and safety issues.
- Use their devolved formula capital budget appropriately

Finance

- **Deficit Balances:** Schools with a deficit balance of more than £10,000 at the end of the previous financial year which they have not budgeted to recover within this financial year and there is no agreed recovery plan.
- **Deficit budget:** Schools setting a budget with an in year deficit ***in excess of £100,000 or 50% of their total balances at the end of the previous financial year***, with projections indicating this deficit will *increase over the next three years*.
- **High Surplus:** Schools carrying a budget surplus in excess of ***8% of their total income at the end of the previous financial year*** where the school has excess surplus balances and no agreed plan to use these.
- **Audit Outcomes:** Schools that received a ***‘limited assurance’ or ‘no assurance’ rating*** in their most recent internal audit or financial health check, highlighting significant weaknesses in financial controls, governance, and risk management practices.
- **Leadership and Financial Oversight:** Schools with a combination of an ***inexperienced or interim School Business Manager (SBM) and a newly appointed or interim Head Teacher***, indicating potential financial vulnerabilities due to a lack of experienced oversight in budget management.
- **Non-Compliance with Financial Reporting:**
 - (i) ***Failure to submit*** the school budget, three-year financial plan, or the Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS) by the required deadlines.
 - (ii) ***Non-submission of monthly financial reconciliations for three consecutive months*** without a valid justification, despite repeated

- reminders from the local authority.
- (iii) **Failure to submit year end returns** and backing documents by required deadlines or significant errors
- (iv) **Poor quality forecasting and budgeting** – a pattern of significant unforecast variances to budget

Governor Services

- High governor turnover
- Governor vacancies and lack of engagement by GB to fill vacancies
- Chair – new or lack of engagement
- Parental complaints
- Relationship between governors and SLT
- Meetings being re-arranged or not planned effectively
- Indications of lack of governor effectiveness
 - Gaps in skills / experience across the GB (evidenced by skills audit)
 - Evidence of lack of challenge (evidenced by meeting observation, feedback from clerks and minutes)
 - Lack of strategic working and/or over involvement in operational issues
 - Lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities by GB collectively or by individual governors and/or HT
- Non-compliance with GB Code of Conduct

Havering School Improvement Services (HSiS)

Leadership:

- Inexperienced Head Teacher –in first year of headship.
- New Head Teacher, not new to Headship
- Interim Head Teacher arrangements in place
- Lack of capacity of leadership team, including vacancies
- Substantial concerns raised following a S175 audit

Quality of Education:

- Leadership of overall Curriculum
- Leadership of a significant curriculum area or a number of areas
- Inappropriate use of alternative provisions
- Outcomes for pupils
 - Academic achievement
 - Other – PD/Well-being, support for mental health/Gatsby principles, benchmarking/Destinations/NEET/wider curriculum

Other:

- Concern re pupil behaviour/conduct
- Concern re low attendance/high persistent absence
- School recently amalgamated/become part of a federation
- Complaints, including from Ofsted
- Staffing: Absences/vacancies/turnover/ recurrent HR issues
- Lack of engagement with staff development opportunities
- Website –intelligence gathering pre a school visit e.g. PP, SEND, Reading... not compliant or out of date

Health & Safety

Management Audit Scores:

- Overall score $\leq 50\%$
- Specific sections scores:
- Risk assessment $< 80\%$
- Maintenance $< 80\%$
- Inspection $< 80\%$

Human Resources

HR monitors Employee Relations casework and how schools perform in their duty under relevant school employment policies and procedures.

- Effective use of employment policies and procedures across the whole school that demonstrates best practice in the management and motivation of all school staff. Unlikely to have any active casework.
- Any active casework completed in line with policies/procedures with effective use of HR support/guidance provided.
- Employee Relations casework complex, requiring regular HR support/guidance, likely to lead to potential collective disputes (up to and including dismissal), and where the school is not effectively following HR advice and guidance.
- Significant Employee Relations casework (high number of cases or complex casework) requiring significant leadership input and requiring regular HR support/guidance and where the school is not effectively following HR advice and guidance. One or more of these cases is likely to lead to collective disputes, dismissal(s), settlement agreement(s) or possible Employment Tribunal claim(s).

SEND

- A high number or significant increase in parental complaints (either formal or informal) to the SEND Service
- A high number, significant increase in, or inappropriate or illegal use of reduced timetables, alternative provision, suspensions/exclusions
- A high number or significant increase in placement breakdowns or requests for change of placements for pupils with SEND
- Failure to comply with statutory requirements relating to SEND processes (e.g., consultation responses, annual reviews)
- Evidence of poor, exclusionary, or potentially illegal/discriminatory practice in regards to pupils with SEND
- Resistance or a lack of openness to external services and to support from external teams to develop SEND processes, practice, and promote inclusion



Schools Funding Forum 27th November 2025

ITEM 5

Subject Heading:

High Needs funding

Report Author:

Hany Moussa – Principal Education Finance Officer

Eligibility to vote:

Information only

SUMMARY

This report summarises the research briefing on SEN : Support in England, the in-year projections for the High Needs block, and the SEN Top-up funding for out-of-borough commissioners' placements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Schools Funding Forum notes the report.

REPORT DETAIL

Research Briefing – SEN : Support in England

The latest national research briefing presents a clear picture of a SEND system under sustained and growing pressure. The full report is in **Appendix A**, with the Education Committee's June 2025 report in **Appendix B**.

As of January 2025, more than 1.7 million pupils in England had identified special educational needs, with close to half a million holding an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

The briefing states plainly that the system is approaching, and in some areas has already reached, crisis point, despite significant increases in national High Needs funding over the past decade. Rising demand, the continued escalation in specialist and independent placement costs and growing transport pressures are all contributing to a model that is

widely viewed as unsustainable without substantial change.

The briefing also sets out the direction of the forthcoming reform, in the upcoming Schools White Paper, now anticipated early in 2026. This is likely to introduce national standards for provision, stronger expectations around early and local support and a fairer approach to funding.

The DfE are reviewing the arrangements for a national framework of bands and tariffs, intended to bring greater consistency to SEND funding and to reduce the wide variation currently seen across local areas.

Previous national intervention programmes, such as Safety Valve and Delivering Better Value (DBV), were designed to support local authorities experiencing financial difficulty, but these schemes have now been discontinued. The research briefing highlights that, despite this support ending, concerns remain about balancing financial pressures with the statutory rights of children and young people, emphasising the continuing need for careful oversight and strategic management.

These national pressures are reflected locally within our own High Needs Block. Demand for EHCPs continues to grow, and the cost of placements, particularly in the independent and non-maintained sector, remains a significant driver of expenditure. The overall position of the HNB remains under considerable strain, and projected DSG deficits in future years underscore the importance of ongoing vigilance. While the detailed financial breakdown has been presented to the Forum previously, the high-level picture is one of persistent, structural pressure that mirrors the national trends highlighted in the briefing.

The national emphasis on early intervention, strengthened mainstream inclusion, and clearer expectations around “ordinarily available provision” means that mainstream schools will be expected to play a more central role in supporting children at earlier stages.

This shift will require clarity, collaboration, and further work on how mainstream support is resourced and monitored. The anticipated introduction of national bands and tariffs also indicates that local funding arrangements will need to align with emerging national standards. Preparing for these changes will demand robust data, transparent costing, and effective communication with providers.

The High Needs Working Group will continue to review local arrangements and objectives as part of the SEND strategy, focusing on areas such as top-up structures, inclusion pathways, and building capacity in mainstream settings. By ensuring more pupils can be supported closer to home in the right provision, the local authority will be better positioned to implement the forthcoming changes with minimal disruption, drawing on lessons from previous transitions.

High Needs Block Funding update

DSG is forecasting a £28.5m overspend, equivalent to 14.8% of the total DSG budget. This position remains unchanged from the previous period. The overspend is entirely driven by the High Needs Block, which continues to face significant pressure due to rising demand for SEND provision, and there is a 65% overspend in comparison to the DfE’s High Needs allocations for Havering. This highlights that the current funding formula from central government does not adequately reflect Havering’s needs, a challenge shared by many local authorities.

DSG Block	DSG Allocation (post-recoupment)	Forecasted Expenditure	Forecast Variance	% of budget
Schools Block	98,731	98,731	0	0.00%
Central Schools Services Block	1,912	1,912	0	0.00%
High Needs Block	43,721	72,200	28,479	65.20%
Early Years Block	47,819	47,819	0	0.00%
DSG – overall	192,183	220,662	28,479	14.80%

This table shows the breakdown of forecasted expenditure and overspend across DSG blocks, highlighting the disproportionate pressure on the High Needs Block. The High Needs Block has a budget of £43.721m, with forecasted expenditure of £72.200m, resulting in a £28.479m overspend—equivalent to 65.2% of the block's budget. A £1.291m transfer from the Schools Block has been made to help mitigate this pressure.

The cumulative DSG deficit is presently projected to reach £64.9m by the end of 2026-27. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has extended the statutory override for DSG deficits until 2027-28, reducing the immediate impact on the Council's general fund.

SEN Top-up funding for OoB commissioners

Under the DfE's High Needs Funding Operational Guide (2025-26) in **Appendix C**, local authorities are responsible for calculating their schools' notional SEN budgets. These estimates, embedded within mainstream schools' core funding, provide a guide for the costs of additional SEND support up to the statutory £6,000 threshold per pupil. Costs above this threshold are met through top-up funding from the commissioning authority, responsible for the child.

A particular complexity arises when children attend schools outside their home local authority (Out-of-Borough or OoB). The commissioning authority remains responsible for top-up funding for these pupils. However there can be differences in interpretation of the guidance between authorities which can lead to difficulties – for example where authorities use different rates for calculating the cost of support.

Schools are encouraged to carefully quantify the costs of any proxy provision used, such as support hours, and to engage with the child's caseworker to confirm the appropriate finance contact in the commissioning LA for invoice submission. Notional SEN arrangements and rates for schools in each LA apply uniformly to all learners, irrespective of which LA they come from, ensuring that each child is treated consistently and fairly.

Havering has a number of neighbouring authorities with cross border movements in both directions. There are inconsistent arrangements in place and we have been working to standardise this. There are ongoing discussions with the authority with the largest group of children.

Research Briefing

14 November 2025

By Robert Long,
Nerys Roberts

Special Educational Needs: Support in England



Summary

- 1 Support for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- 2 Funding system
- 3 Accountability: Ofsted and CQC inspections
- 4 The SEND Review and the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan
- 5 Education Committee report on Solving the SEND Crisis
- 6 Statistics

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Summary

Background

The [Children and Families Act 2014](#) provides the statutory basis for the system for identifying children and young people (age 0-25) in England with special educational needs (SEN), assessing their needs and making provision for them.

The statutory [Special Educational Needs and Disability \(SEND\): Code of practice](#), first published in 2014, sets out detailed information on the support available for children and young people aged 0 to 25 under the 2014 Act.

Broadly, there are two levels of support:

- SEN Support, provided to a child or young person in their pre-school, school, or college
- Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) which provide a formal basis for support for children and young people who need more support than is available through SEN Support

Education is a devolved policy area and this paper applies to England only.

How many school pupils have SEN?

In January 2025, there were over [1.7 million school pupils in England with identified SEN](#) (19.6% of all pupils).

Of these pupils with identified SEN, around 1.3 million receive SEN Support, and around 0.5 million have Education, Health, and Care plans.

Government white paper announcement

On 11 June 2025, as part of the [Spending Review](#), the government confirmed that its intended approach to SEND reform would be set out in a Schools White Paper in autumn 2025. This has since been [delayed to early 2026](#).

Pressure on local authority finances

In recent years, numerous reports have described increasing pressure on local authority finances relating to SEND, with EHCP numbers rising sharply and increased costs in other areas such as transport.

In January 2025, the Public Accounts Committee said the system for supporting children with SEN “[is reaching, or, arguably, has already reached, crisis point](#)” despite significant extra funding being provided.

Under the Conservative government, Safety Valve and Delivering Better Value programmes were implemented to attempt to manage local authority finances, although these have proved controversial. New Safety Valve arrangements have been paused by the Labour government.

Since 2020, a ‘statutory override’ has also been in place that allows local authorities to exclude any deficits on their Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) spending from their main revenue budgets, meaning that local authorities’ DSG deficits could be separated from their wider accounts. This override has been extended to 2028 under the current government, pending wider reform of the system.

Education Committee report – September 2025

The Education Committee published a report on [Solving the SEND Crisis](#) in September 2025. The report was extensive and contained a large number of recommendations, proposed ahead of the expected schools white paper later in the year.

The report said that there should be no withdrawal of statutory entitlements for children and young people, and focused on inclusivity and early intervention to support children and young people as a way to restrain EHCP numbers and associated costs.

The report’s other recommendations included national standards for ordinarily available provision and SEN support, a review of SEN funding, and mandatory teacher training on SEN.

1 Support for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

1.1 Legislation and Code of Practice

The [Children and Families Act 2014](#) provided for a major reform of the system for identifying children and young people in England with special educational needs (SEN), assessing their needs and making provision for them.

The statutory [Special Educational Needs and Disability \(SEND\): Code of practice](#), first published in 2014, sets out detailed information on the support available for children and young people aged 0 to 25 under the 2014 Act.

1.2 Definition of SEN

The statutory SEND¹ [Code of Practice](#) sets out the definition of special educational needs used in England:

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 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

For children aged two or more, special educational provision is educational or training provision that is additional to or different from that made generally for other children or young people of the same age by mainstream schools, maintained nursery schools, mainstream post-16 institutions or by relevant

¹ The Code of Practice refers to SEND, Special Educational Needs and Disability, whereas this briefing is focused on children and young people with SEN. While many children with SEN will also have disabilities (and vice versa), this is not uniformly the case. This briefing focuses on educational support.

early years providers. For a child under two years of age, special educational provision means educational provision of any kind.²

It is not necessary for particular medical conditions to have been assessed or diagnosed for these criteria to be met, and for support to be provided. An [article by the SEND charity IPSEA](#) provides useful information.³

1.3 Levels of support

The type of support that children and young people with SEN receive may vary widely, as the types of SEN that they may have are very different. However, two broad levels of support are in place: SEN support, and Education, Health and Care Plans.

SEN Support

This will be support given to a child or young person in their pre-school, school, or college.

The [gov.uk website](#) sets out that SEN support for children under 5 includes:

- 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

For children of compulsory school age, the following [indicative list](#) is provided of the type of help a child might receive:

- a special learning programme
- extra help from a teacher or assistant
- working in a smaller group
- observation in class or at break
- help taking part in class activities

² Department for Education, [Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#), January 2015, p15-16

³ IPSEA, [The myth of needing a diagnosis before you can get support](#), 8 April 2024

- 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

A young person of 16 to 25 in further education would need to contact their school or college before starting a course, to ensure their needs can be met.

Education, Health and Care Plans

Education, Health and Care Plans are for children and young people aged up to 25 who need more support than is available through SEN support. They aim to provide more substantial help for children and young people through a unified approach that reaches across education, health care, and social care needs.

The [gov.uk website](https://www.gov.uk) makes clear that parents can ask their local authority to carry out an assessment if they think their child needs an EHC Plan.

A request can also be made by:

- anyone at the child's school
- a doctor
- a health visitor
- a nursery worker

A local authority has six weeks to decide whether or not to carry out an EHC needs assessment.

In conducting an EHC needs assessment, a local authority is required to:

- establish and record the views, interests and aspirations of the parents and child or young person
- provide a full description of the child or young person's special educational needs and any health and social care needs
- establish outcomes across education, health and social care based on the child or young person's needs and aspirations

- specify the provision required and how education, health and care services will work together to meet the child or young person's needs and support the achievement of the agreed outcomes⁴

Barring exceptional circumstances, the whole process of EHC needs assessment and EHC plan development, from the point when an assessment is requested (or a child or young person is brought to the local authority's attention) until the final EHC plan is issued, must take no more than 20 weeks.⁵

A chart on page 154 of the [SEND Code of Practice](#) sets out the relevant processes and timescales.

1.4 Key aspects of the system

The local offer

Since September 2014, local authorities have been required to publish a 'local offer' to clearly set out the services available for children and young people with SEND. The offer must have been developed in partnership with children and young people with SEN or disability and their parents, and education, health, and care partners. It should cover the support available for those with and without EHC Plans and from birth to 25 years, including SEN Support.

The Code of Practice states:

Local authorities must publish a Local Offer, setting out in one place information about provision they expect to be available across education, health and social care for children and young people in their area who have SEN or are disabled, including those who do not have Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans. In setting out what they 'expect to be available', local authorities should include provision which they believe will actually be available.⁶

The Code makes clear that this initial offer is intended to be the start of an ongoing process, with local offers developed and revised over time through regular review and consultation.

EHC plans for 19-25 year olds with SEN

EHC plans may be provided for eligible students up to the age of 25. However, [DfE guidance](#) makes it clear that this does not mean that students have an automatic entitlement to education up to the age of 25:

⁴ Department for Education, [Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#), January 2015, p142

⁵ As above, p152

⁶ As above, p59

Young people with SEND are not automatically entitled to maintain their EHC (education, health, and care) plans after they turn 19.

Reforms to the SEND system should mean that children and young people are better prepared for adulthood. Therefore, we expect the majority of young people with EHC plans to complete further education with their peers by age 19. However, we recognise that some young people with SEND need longer to complete and consolidate their education and training. The length of time will vary according to each young person.⁷

Nonetheless, 19 to 25 year olds with a learning difficulty or disability have the right to request an EHC needs assessment (unless one has been carried out in the last 6 months) and may appeal if a request is rejected.⁸

Personal Budgets

Young people and parents of children who have EHC plans have the right to request a Personal Budget, which may contain elements of education, social care, and health funding. A Personal Budget is an amount of money identified by the local authority to deliver provision set out in an EHC plan where the parent or young person is involved in securing that provision. Local authorities must provide information on Personal Budgets as part of the local offer. Personal Budgets are optional for the child's parent or the young person, but local authorities are under a duty to prepare a budget when requested.⁹

A local policy should be available that includes:

- a description of the services across education, health and social care that currently lend themselves to the use of Personal Budgets
- the mechanisms of control for funding available to parents and young people including:
 - direct payments – where individuals receive the cash to contract, purchase and manage services themselves
 - an arrangement – whereby the local authority, school or college holds the funds and commissions the support specified in the EHC plan (these are sometimes called notional budgets)
 - third party arrangements – where funds (direct payments) are paid to and managed by an individual or organisation on behalf of the child's parent or the young person
 - a combination of the above

⁷ Department for Education, [SEND: 19- to 25-year-olds' entitlement to EHC plans](#), February 2017

⁸ As above

⁹ Department for Education, [Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#), p178

- clear and simple statements of eligibility criteria and the decision-making processes that underpin them¹⁰

Requirement for consultation with children, young people, and their parents

The [Code of Practice](#) provides information on the requirements on local authorities to consult with children and young people with SEN, as well as their parents, in carrying out all duties relating to SEN:

Local authorities, in carrying out their functions under the Act in relation to disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs (SEN), must have regard to:

- the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person, and the child's parents
- the importance of the child or young person, and the child's parents, participating as fully as possible in decisions, and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions
- the need to support the child or young person, and the child's parents, in order to facilitate the development of the child or young person and to help them achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes, preparing them effectively for adulthood¹¹

The Code states that these principles are designed to support:

- the participation of children, their parents and young people in decision-making
- the early identification of children and young people's needs and early intervention to support them
- greater choice and control for young people and parents over support
- collaboration between education, health, and social care services to provide support
- high quality provision to meet the needs of children and young people with SEN
- a focus on inclusive practice and removing barriers to learning
- successful preparation for adulthood, including independent living and employment¹²

¹⁰ Department for Education, [Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#), p48

¹¹ As above, p19

¹² As above, ps19-20

The Code of Practice sets out what these principles should mean in practice, and how it is intended that they will be implemented.¹³

Disputes

Where a parent is not satisfied with the provision to support their child's SEN at school, or at an early years provider or a college, they should raise this as a complaint with the educational establishment concerned. All providers should have published complaints procedures to follow.

There is a different process where young people or parents [disagree with a local authority decision](#) about their child's support, such as a decision on whether to create an EHC plan, or the contents of a plan.

Disputes of this kind may be resolved using mediation processes. Where a dispute cannot be resolved in this way, appeals may be made to the [First-tier Tribunal \(Special Educational Needs and Disability\)](#).

The Tribunal is responsible for handling appeals against many local authority decisions regarding special educational needs, including a refusal to:

- assess a child or young person's educational, health and care (EHC) needs
- reassess their EHC needs
- issue an EHC plan
- change what's in a child or young person's EHC plan
- maintain the EHC plan

The Tribunal also deals with appeals about the content of plans, about alleged discrimination by schools or local authorities due to a child's disability, and about some decisions on support for young people in custody. Since a trial period between 2018 and 2021, the Tribunal also has the power to make recommendations about health and social care issues in all appeals where there was a valid appeal.

Chapter 11 of the [SEND Code of Practice](#) provides more detail on resolving disputes.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman can also investigate some complaints relating to SEN which cannot be appealed through the Tribunal.

¹³ Department for Education, [Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#), p20-29

The [LGO website states](#):

The Ombudsman can investigate a complaint that a council has failed to appropriately address a child's special educational needs (SEN). This includes delay in assessing a child and issuing an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and failing to implement an EHCP or carry out an annual review.

The law generally prevents us from investigating complaints for which a remedy is available through an appeal to a statutory tribunal. This means that the Ombudsman cannot investigate a complaint when the issues it raises can be dealt with through an appeal to the First Tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability) (SEND). So, for example, we cannot question a council's decision not to assess a child for an EHCP as this can be appealed.

SEND can also hear appeals about the health and social care aspects of an EHCP, alongside the educational provision.

If you have appealed to SEND, it is unlikely we will be able to investigate any aspect of a complaint, such as interim provision, while the appeal is being heard. However, this will depend on the specific circumstances of each case.

The website also includes information on how to complain:

You should normally complain to the council first. Councils often have more than one stage in their complaints procedure and you will usually have to complete all stages before we will look at your complaint.

Then, if you are unhappy with the final outcome, or the council is taking too long to look into the matter - we think 12 weeks is reasonable - you can complain to us.

Usually, you should complain to us within 12 months of when you first knew about the problem. If you leave it any later, we may not be able to help.

For more information on how to complain, please [read our step by step process](#).

Advice for parents, carers, children and young people

The following organisations may be able to provide advice for individuals on their particular situations:

- Local Parent Partnership Service through the [Information, Advice and Support Services \(IASS\) Network](#)
- [Independent Provider of Special Education Advice \(IPSEA\)](#)
- [SOS!SEN](#)

1.5

Labour government position on reform and planned white paper

In response to a parliamentary question about special educational needs on 2 June 2025, the then schools minister, Catherine McKinnell, said:

The department is working closely with experts on reforms, including appointing a strategic advisor for SEND, who is playing a key role in convening and engaging with the sector, including leaders, practitioners, children and families.

The department has also established an [expert advisory group for inclusion](#) to improve the mainstream education outcomes and experiences for those with SEND, and a [Neurodivergence Task and Finish Group](#) to provide a shared understanding of what provision and support in mainstream educational settings should look like for neurodivergent children and young people within an inclusive system.¹⁴

In a [December 2024 announcement](#) on funding specialist provision, the government said the funding would “start to pave the way for the government’s wide-ranging long-term plans for reform to help more pupils with SEND to have their needs met in mainstream schools.”¹⁵

On 11 June 2025, as part of the [Spending Review](#), the government confirmed that its intended approach to SEND reform would be set out in a schools white paper in autumn 2025. It also confirmed it was setting aside £760 million from the Transformation Fund in 2026-27 and 2027-28, for SEND reform, to ensure services were focused on prevention.¹⁶

In October 2025, the [Education Secretary wrote to the Education Committee](#) to confirm that the schools white paper would instead be published “early in the new year.” The letter set out the following “Principles for SEND reform”:

1. **Early.** Children should receive the support they need as soon as possible. This will start to break the cycle of needs going unmet and getting worse, instead intervening upstream, earlier in children’s lives when this can have most impact.

2. **Local.** Children and young people with SEND should be able to learn at a school close to their home, alongside their peers, rather than travelling long distances from their family and community. Special schools should continue to play a vital role supporting those with the most complex needs.

3. **Fair.** Every school should be resourced and able to meet common and predictable needs, including as they change over time, without parents having to fight to get support for their children. Where specialist provision is needed

¹⁴ [PQ 53641 \[Special educational needs: Reform\], 2 June 2025](#)

¹⁵ Department for Education, [New specialist places to be created in mainstream schools](#), 4 December 2024

¹⁶ HM Treasury, [Spending Review 2025](#), CP 1336, June 2025, p16 & p60

for children in mainstream, special or Alternative Provision, we will ensure it is there, with clear legal requirements and safeguards for children and parents.

4. **Effective.** Reforms should be grounded in evidence, ensuring all education settings know where to go to find effective practice that has excellent long term outcomes for children.

5. **Shared.** Education, health and care services should work in partnership with one another, local government, families, teachers, experts and representative bodies to deliver better experiences and outcomes for all our children.¹⁷

¹⁷ Department for Education, [SEND reform: Education Secretary writes to the Education Select Committee](#), 22 October 2025

2 Funding system

2.1 Background

Funding for SEN in England is not allocated as a separate amount per pupil. SEN funding is part of the overall Dedicated Schools Grant allocated to each local authority to fund their schools budget. It is for local authorities, in consultation with their schools forums, to determine the individual allocation to schools.

The following PQ response provides information on SEN funding for maintained schools:

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether special educational needs coordinators are able to request funds from his Department for extra assistance with SEN students in maintained schools. [201299]

Mr Timpson: The Department for Education does not give funds directly to local authority maintained schools. Funds for extra assistance with students with special educational needs (SEN) come from schools' budgets and, if the extra cost is more than £6,000 per year for an individual student, from local authorities in the form of top-up funding for the school. Local authorities can also give extra funding to schools with a disproportionate number of pupils with SEN. Special educational needs coordinators should therefore seek any additional funds required from the relevant local authority.¹⁸

Mainstream academies are in a similar position. When planning their budgets, academies should take into account that they must meet the costs of additional support for pupils with SEN up to £6,000 from their school budget share (including the notional SEN funding).¹⁹

For maintained or academy special schools, a similar system is in place, but they are funded at the higher level of £10,000 per SEN pupil, with any extra 'top-up' funding then provided by the local authority.²⁰

The charity Independent Provider of Special Education Advice (IPSEA), have produced a [helpful briefing](#) on changes to SEN funding that were introduced from April 2013, which provides more background.²¹

¹⁸ [HC Deb 23 Jun 2014 c83W](#)

¹⁹ Department for Education, [Academy general annual grant allocation guide: 2023 to 2024 academic year](#), February 2023

²⁰ Department for Education, [High needs funding: 2022 to 2023 operational guidance](#), March 2023, provides an overview of relevant funding

²¹ IPSEA, [School Funding Reform: SEN Funding](#), May 2013

2.2

Reform: a national funding formula

The Conservative Government made major reforms to the way schools in England are funded. As part of this, it has introduced a national funding formula to allocate ‘high needs’ funding to local authorities – largely, this is for special educational provision.

The high needs national funding formula includes, among other factors, a basic unit of per-pupil funding for pupils in specialist SEN provision, a historic spend factor, and various proxy measures of likely SEN need such as population, school attainment, and the numbers of children in bad health.

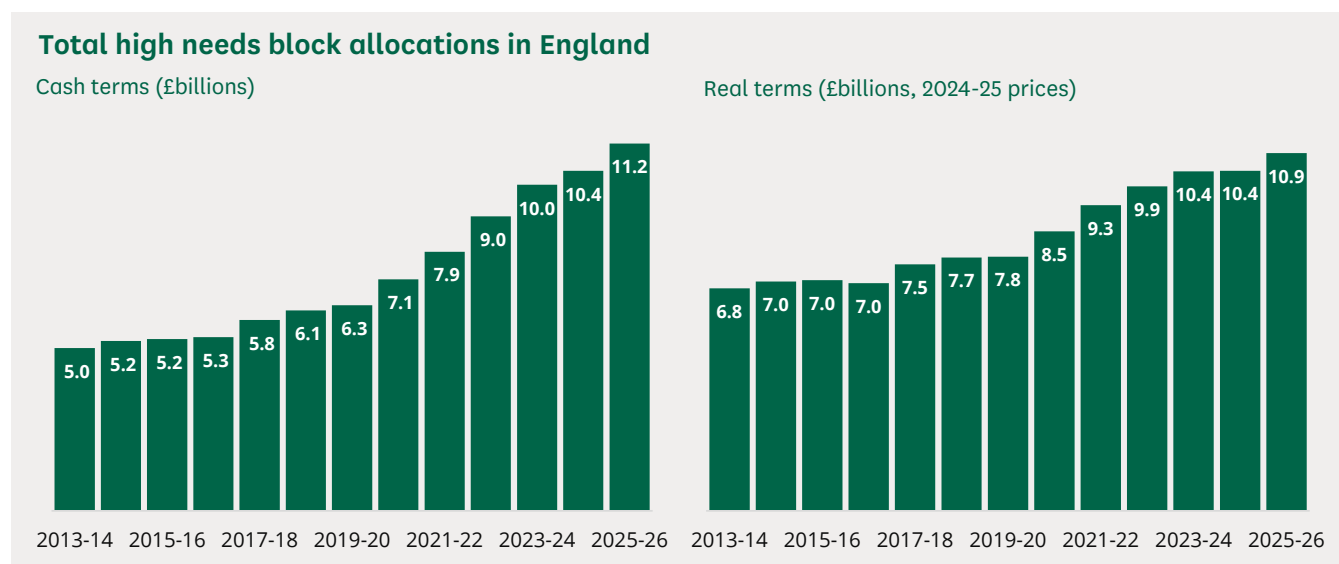
The Department for Education’s [High needs funding: 2025 to 2026 operational guide](#) provides detailed information on the allocation of funding.

Funding levels

In a [written statement on 18 December 2024](#), Schools’ Minister, Catherine McKinnell said high needs funding would be worth over £11.9bn in 2025-26. She said this was a cash terms increase of 9% compared to the previous year.

The chart on the next page shows the total high needs block allocations over the last decade (2025-26 figures are taken from [published DSG allocations](#), which are slightly lower than the £11.9bn noted above and provisional, so subject to later updating). Some funding for SEN provision comes from other sources, including the Core Schools’ Budget Grant, and the core schools block of the DSG.

High needs block allocations have generally followed an upward trend, particularly in recent years.



Notes: When calculating real-terms figures, GDP deflator growth for 2020-21 and 2021-22 has been averaged across the two years to smooth the distortions caused by pandemic-related factors.

Figures for 2022-23 and 2023-24 include additional high needs funding for local authorities, made available in recognition of cost pressures.

Sources: Department for Education, [Dedicated Schools grant: Various years](#) (cash terms allocation), HM Treasury, [GDP deflators at market prices, and money: June 2025](#); OBR, [Economic and fiscal outlook, March 2025 \(table 1.7 of supplementary economy tables\)](#) (real terms calculations)

Transferring funding between blocks

Prior to 2018-19, the Dedicated Schools Grant was split into 3 blocks: the schools block, the high needs block and the early years block. These blocks were notional, with local authorities free to move funds between them.²²

Following the introduction of the national funding formulas, this position is now more restricted:

131. The second stage of the consultation recognised that a degree of flexibility between the DSG funding blocks would be needed to ensure that local authorities could manage their high needs budget. Local authorities will therefore be able to transfer up to 0.5% of their schools block funding into their high needs budget, with the agreement of their schools forum. [...] [T]here will be a process for considering any reasonable requests for exceptions to these rules.²³

²² Department for Education, [School revenue funding: Current funding arrangements](#), March 2016, p4

²³ Department for Education, [The national funding formula for schools and high needs Policy document](#), September 2017, p38. See also section 30 of Department for Education, [Schools operational guide: 2024 to 2025](#), 19 December 2023

2.3

Education Committee funding report (2019)

In July 2019, the Education Committee published its report on [A ten-year plan for school and college funding](#), which included recommendations on SEN funding.

The report described special educational needs and disability funding as “completely inadequate...[with] simply not enough money in the system to provide for the scale of demand.”²⁴

Government response

The government published its [response to the report](#) in October 2019.

The government highlighted its forthcoming SEND review, and then-recent additional funding for SEND.²⁵

In response to wider concerns about the funding system and how money is allocated, the response highlighted the call for evidence on the funding system (see section 2.3), which it stated would feed into future decisions about the future of the funding system.²⁶

2.4

Funding policy developments 2019-24

In May 2019 the Department for Education opened a [call for evidence](#) on the high needs funding system.²⁷ The call for evidence ran until 31 July 2019.

The call for evidence was followed by the 2022 [Special Educational Needs and Alternative Provision green paper](#) (see section 4.2) said the existing SEND and alternative provision system is financially unsustainable.²⁸ The green paper included proposals on SEND funding, and future consultations on wider school funding reform are expected to include more proposals on how local authorities manage their SEN budgets.²⁹

Chapter 6 of [the SEND and alternative provision improvement plan](#) published in March 2023 (see section 4.3) discusses how the then government planned to reform the system’s funding.

²⁴ House of Commons Education Select Committee, [A ten-year plan for school and college funding](#), Tenth report of session 2017-19, July 2019, HC 969, para 105

²⁵ Department for Education, [Government response to Education Committee report on school and college funding](#), Cm 190, October 2019, p19

²⁶ As above, p19-20

²⁷ Department for Education, [Education Secretary confirms plans to simplify school accountability](#), 3 May 2019

²⁸ Department for Education, [SEND Review: right support, right place, right time](#), March 2022, p22

²⁹ Department for Education, [SEND Review: right support, right place, right time](#), March 2022, p74

As noted, SEND funding is part of the overall Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocated to each local authority to fund their schools budget. It is for local authorities, in consultation with their schools forums, to determine the allocation to individual schools. Both SEND and alternative provision are funded out of the high needs block of the DSG.

The government did not propose to change this basic setup but the improvement plan provides for a new national framework of banding and price tariffs for high needs funding, which would be matched based on need and type of education set out in the new national SEND standards.

Consultation on school funding reform

From June to September 2022, the Department for Education ran a [consultation on school funding reform](#), including SEND funding.³⁰

The [government's response](#) was published in April 2023. The response said the government would:

- Continue flexibility for local authorities to transfer funding to high needs budgets, with a corresponding adjustment to mainstream schools' funding allocations, through an application process to the Secretary of State
- Introduce a national approach to calculating schools' indicative SEND budgets and consult further on the design and operation of this approach

The response said SEND budgets:

...could only ever act as an indication of what might be needed, because head teachers, Special Educational Needs Coordinators and other professionals working in and with the school are best placed to decide what support each child needs, and a budget calculation at national level based on proxy measures of need could never accurately predict the precise level of resources required. An indicative SEND budget would, however, provide some assurance that the level of SEND in the school's pupil population was reflected in their funding allocation.³¹

Bands and tariffs

The Improvement Plan set out the then government's intention to develop a system of funding bands and tariffs to support the planned national standards for SEND, with more consistent funding across the country.

The plan said:

Whilst there will always be some local variation, to have a consistent, national SEND and alternative provision system and ensure value for money, we must

³⁰ Department for Education, [Implementing the direct national funding formula](#), 7 June 2022

³¹ Department for Education, [Implementing the Direct National Funding Formula Government consultation response](#), April 2023, p16

move to a world where similar types of support are backed by similar levels of funding.³²

It acknowledged that costs vary around the country and that any changes needed to take account of this:

We know that currently there is significant variation in the cost of provision across the country, so, starting in 2023, we will undertake research to gather more information about the costs of provision and then explore the best way to manage and reduce this variation as much as possible.³³

The plan said many respondents to the green paper consultation “welcomed the proposal for a more nationally consistent and transparent system,” but also that others were concerned the reforms needed to be flexible enough to adapt to the needs of individual children and young people, in particular those whose needs change over time.³⁴

Independent schools

The green paper proposed that national bands and tariffs would apply across the whole range of special education provision, including the independent specialist sector.

The Improvement Plan said while independent special schools represent a third of special schools and support 5% of pupils with EHCPs, and the sector’s funding comes overwhelmingly from the state, it is not treated in the same way as state-maintained specialist provision, and its regulation is designed for private fee-paying schools:

Management is fragmented and small-scale, based on local authorities’ individual pupil placements. This is inefficient for both commissioners and providers and makes it difficult to assess the overall impact of independent special schools. Provision can be opened or closed regardless of the effect on the existing local offer of provision made by schools and colleges, leaving local authorities to deal with over or under supply.³⁵

The plan continued:

We will re-examine the state’s relationship with independent special schools to ensure the expectations we set are comparable to those on other state-funded specialist providers. We will work with the sector to consider how they should be aligned with the new National Standards, defining the provision they offer and bringing consistency and transparency to their costs.³⁶

³² Department for Education, [SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time](#), CP 800, March 2023, p84

³³ Department for Education, [SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time](#), CP 800, March 2023, p85

³⁴ As above, p84

³⁵ Department for Education, [SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time](#), CP 800, March 2023, ps87-88

³⁶ Department for Education, [SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time](#), CP 800, March 2023, p88

2.5

Additional funding and support for local authorities facing financial challenges

‘Safety valve’ intervention programme

In the 2020-21 financial year, the DfE introduced a programme where a small number of local authorities facing the most significant financial challenges are given additional funding and support to address their DSG deficits. This is known as the safety valve intervention programme.

The original local authorities that signed safety valve agreements, committing them to addressing their budget deficits and managing overspends were Stoke-on-Trent, Bury, Hammersmith and Fulham, Richmond upon Thames, and Kingston upon Thames.

A further nine local authorities signed safety valve agreements with the DfE during 2021-22. 20 more agreements were signed in 2022-23, and four in 2023-24, meaning a total of 38 local authorities are involved. A list of authorities involved in the safety valve programme [can be found on the DfE website](#). The DfE has [published guidance on sustainable high needs systems, and its intervention work with local authorities](#), last updated in October 2022.

In [response to a parliamentary question](#) in May 2024, the minister, David Johnston, summarised the programme’s purpose:

The Safety Valve programme supports the local authorities with the highest Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficits. The programme requires the local authorities involved to develop substantial plans for reform to their high needs systems, with support and challenge from the department, to rapidly place them on a sustainable footing. If the local authorities can demonstrate sufficiently that their DSG management plans create lasting sustainability, including reaching an in-year balance, and are effective for children and young people, then the department will enter into an agreement.

Through the agreements, the local authorities are subsequently held to account for their reform and savings projections via regular reporting to the department. The department will help the local authorities with additional revenue funding over time to contribute to their historic deficits, but this is contingent on delivery of the reforms in the agreements.³⁷

In July 2023, the charity, IPSEA, [said it had written to all safety valve intervention local authorities](#) seeking assurance that they would meet their legal duties in relation to SEN provision, which it notes “remain unchanged in the context of both the government’s SEND Change Programme and the safety valve intervention programme”. IPSEA Chief Executive, Ali Fiddy, said:

Individual safety valve agreements are explicit about containing numbers of EHC needs assessments, EHC plans and placements in non-mainstream settings, among other things. But it would not be lawful, for example, to

³⁷ [PQ 27163 \[Special Educational Needs: Finance\], 24 May 2024](#)

introduce local policies on eligibility for EHC needs assessment that vary from the legal threshold, or blanket policies on access to particular services or placements.

While early intervention, effective multi-agency working and inclusive practices are all vitally important, there will always be children and young people who need additional statutory support. The Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Regulations 2014 set out clearly children and young people's entitlement to provision that meets their individual needs. However, the steady rise in appeals to the SEND Tribunal, and the high volume of unlawful decision-making evidenced by the overwhelming number of appeals upheld by the Tribunal, indicates that local authorities do not always prioritise compliance with SEND law.³⁸

In May 2024, IPSEA published information it had requested from [local authorities with safety valve arrangements](#) under the Freedom of Information Act. IPSEA were particularly concerned about what targets might exist to limit special educational provision as part of these agreements. From the information they received, IPSEA raised concerns that safety valve agreements were requiring local authorities to:

- Reduce the number of EHC needs assessments
- Reduce the number of children and young people attending special schools and colleges
- Reduce the number of children and young people attending a school or college outside their local area
- Cease to maintain larger numbers of EHC plans³⁹

IPSEA said that the responses raised concerns that the programme prioritised financial concerns over children and young people's needs and the associated legal duties, and called for the safety valve programme to be scrapped.⁴⁰

Pause of safety valve programme

The Labour government has said that the use of new Safety Valve arrangements is currently paused and that the Department for Education is undertaking a review of the programme's impacts:

Baroness Smith: [...] The department is also conducting a research project into the impact of Safety Valves in local areas. This will help us further understand the experience of children, parents, carers and schools.

³⁸ IPSEA, '[IPSEA writes to local authorities over concerns with safety valve agreements](#)', July 2023

³⁹ IPSEA, '[Prioritise needs over numbers, and end the safety valve intervention programme](#)', 10 May 2024

⁴⁰ As above

The department has confirmed that it will not enter into any more Safety Valve agreements for councils that have financial deficits, pending wider reform of the whole system to prioritise early intervention, properly supporting councils to bring their finances under control. We will continue to work with local authorities that have Safety Valve agreements with the department, to deliver their plans.⁴¹

Delivering better value in SEND

Alongside the safety valve programme, the DfE has also introduced the [Delivering better value \(DBV\) in SEND](#) programme. This is an optional programme, and works with 54 local authorities, which are able to apply for grants from the DfE, in connection with work to identify and address budget pressures. The authorities were chosen “based on those with the highest deficits as at 2020-21 (after those authorities that have already been invited to join the DfE’s safety valve programme).”⁴² However, DBV “will not ‘write off’ any high needs budget deficits”.⁴³ A [list of participating local authorities](#) can be found on the DBV website.

There have been reports suggesting participating DBV local authorities may face targets to reduce the number of EHC plans,⁴⁴ and concerns about the likely success of the programme in reducing local authority deficits.⁴⁵

In response to a PQ on 23 October 2023, Minister David Johnston said:

The department’s Delivering Better Value (DBV) programme has no targets to reduce the number of new Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans. Decisions about individual children and young people and whether they require EHC plans must be made on an individual basis, following the processes set out in the Children and Families Act 2014. The department is protecting every parent and family’s existing legal right to an EHC plan when they need one, and that will not change.

The DBV programme is part of the wider reform work set out in detail in the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan. DBV aims to put the SEND system on a more sustainable footing by funding system transformation in up to 55 local authorities with high dedicated schools grant deficits. It does so by providing diagnostic support to each local authority to engage with its stakeholders and identify opportunities to improve services and meet children’s needs at an early stage and with the right level of support.⁴⁶

In October 2024, the Department for Education published a research report on [Findings from Phase One of DBV](#). The report’s key findings were that:

⁴¹ [PQ HL3554 \[Special educational needs\], 30 December 2024](#)

⁴² Department for Education, [Guidance on our intervention work with local authorities](#), October 2022, p3

⁴³ Delivering better value in SEND, “[about](#)” [website article](#), undated

⁴⁴ See: Matt Keer and Tania Tirraoro, Special Needs Jungle, “[DBV Part 2: 20% EHCP cuts? After repeated denials, the Department for Education’s got some explaining to do...](#)”, 11 September 2023

⁴⁵ “[Government SEND savings plan will barely dent council deficits](#)”, Schools Week, 29 September 2023

⁴⁶ [PQ 203508 \[on Special Educational Needs\], 25 October 2023](#)

- 65% of the children and young people reviewed could have had their needs met in a more effective way
- An improved system could lead to 30,000 more children having their needs met through SEN Support and 35,000 more children having their needs met in a mainstream setting rather than a specialist placement, including 15,000 more children supported through resourced provision
- The main barrier to more effective support for children and young people was being supported in a provision that is not most effective for them.⁴⁷

2.6

Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee report on local authority finances (2024)

In February 2024, the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee published a report on [Financial distress in local authorities](#). Among other areas, the report addressed financial pressures resulting from SEND expenditure.

Statutory override

As well as rising demand, the report highlighted the ‘statutory override’ introduced by the then-Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local government in 2020. The override allows local authorities to exclude any deficits on their Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) spending from their main revenue budgets, meaning that local authorities’ DSG deficits could be separated from their wider accounts.⁴⁸ The override ran initially until March 2023, but in December 2022 was extended to the end of March 2026.⁴⁹

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities told the committee in oral evidence that a decision on whether the government will fund, or expect local authorities to fund, deficits remaining when the statutory override ends is expected in the next Parliament.⁵⁰

Longer-term sustainability

The committee raised concerns about the longer-term efficacy of the current support programmes in place for local authorities experiencing difficulties:

⁴⁷ Department for Education, [Delivering Better Value in SEND: Phase 1 Insight Summary](#), October 2024, p12

⁴⁸ [PQ 98741 \[Special Educational Needs\]](#), 7 December 2022

⁴⁹ Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee, [Financial distress in local authorities](#), Third Report of Session 2023-24, HC 56, p30

⁵⁰ As above, p31

While we appreciate that some efficiencies may be achievable, it is not realistic to expect local authorities to manage down deficits of the scale of many billions of pounds over a period of two or three years. One-off ‘safety valve’ funding does not address the underlying mismatch between demand, costs, and annual DSG funding and it will not prevent local authorities from accumulating further deficits subsequently.⁵¹

Among the committee’s recommendations was for the government to provide clarity to local authorities on its specific expectations for resolving existing DSG budget deficits, and agree with local authorities a set of “realistic and achievable steps, supplemented by sufficient additional funding,” for eliminating those deficits, by the end of March 2024.⁵²

Government response

The government [responded to the report](#) in March 2024. The response confirmed that the statutory override would remain in place up to March 2026, and said that as part of the improvement plan launched in 2023, it would “carefully monitor the pace of progress towards our aims to improve outcomes and experiences within a fair and financially sustainable system.”⁵³

Extension of the statutory override to 2028

In June 2025 the Labour government announced that, while reforms were being made to the system of support for SEND, the Dedicated Schools Grant statutory override [would stay in place until the end of 2027/28](#).⁵⁴

2.7

National Audit Office report on system effectiveness and financial sustainability (2024)

The National Audit Office published a report on [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#) in October 2024. The report looked at how well the current system is delivering for children and young people in England identified as having SEN, as well as the DfE’s progress in providing a sustainable system that achieves positive outcomes for children.

The report presented several key findings about the system, including that:

⁵¹ As above

⁵² As above, p33

⁵³ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, [Financial distress in local authorities: government response to the Select Committee report](#), 25 March 2024

⁵⁴ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Fairer funding for councils across the country in major reform](#), 20 June 2025

- Since 2019, there has been no consistent improvement in outcomes for children and young people with SEN
- Families and children lack confidence in the system, which often falls short of statutory and quality expectations
- State special schools are over capacity which may mean children are not in the most appropriate setting, including in more expensive independent schools
- The factors influencing rapid increases in SEN can be hard to quantify, which inhibits the DfE's ability to focus on addressing root causes, many of which extend beyond its remit in underlying social, educational or medical causes
- If unreformed, the SEN system is financially unsustainable. The DfE estimates that the cumulative deficit of local authorities will be between £4.3 billion and £4.9 billion when the statutory override ends in March 2026
- The DfE has taken steps to tackle local authorities' immediate financial pressures through the Safety Valve and Delivering Better Value programmes, but these will not provide a sustainable system.⁵⁵

The NAO made several recommendations, including that the DfE should “explicitly consider whole-system reform” to improve outcomes and create financial sustainability.⁵⁶ This should be accompanied by work to understand the root causes behind increases in SEN and demand for EHC plans and special school places, as well as to build a more integrated system of support with other areas such as healthcare.⁵⁷

The report also made a series of recommendations for the DfE to make better use of its funding, including to:

as a matter of urgency, work with MHCLG and HM Treasury, to share with local authorities its plans for ensuring each local authority can achieve a sustainable financial position once the statutory override ends in 2025-26.⁵⁸

Parliamentary discussion

An urgent question was tabled in the House of Commons on 24 October 2024 by Munira Wilson (LD), when the NAO report was published.

⁵⁵ National Audit Office, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), October 2024, pp6-10

⁵⁶ National Audit Office, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), October 2024, p11

⁵⁷ As above

⁵⁸ As above

The schools minister, Catherine McKinnell, said that the report was “bang on the money” and that regaining parents’ confidence in the SEND system would “be a huge and complex reform.”⁵⁹

James Wild (Con) said that “since the election we have heard very little from this Government about their plans for reform. We look for more clarity, and we certainly support greater inclusivity.”⁶⁰

Munira Wilson said that the “report makes clear the urgent need for whole-system reform, with joined-up thinking across local and national Government, the NHS and schools.”⁶¹

2.8

Institute for Fiscal Studies report on spending on SEN (2024)

In December 2024, the Institute for Fiscal Studies published a report, [Spending on special educational needs in England: something has to change](#). The report said the system had faced:

unprecedented pressure over the past decade, and without substantial reform it will likely become unmanageable for local authorities over the coming years. Fundamentally, this is due to the rocketing number of children and young people with education, health and care plans (EHCPs).⁶²

The report said the reasons behind this rise are complex, but could include increased severity of needs, expanded recognition and diagnosis of needs, and stronger incentives to seek statutory provision. As well as these rising numbers, the report identified the following key concerns:

- High needs spending has been consistently higher than funding by £200–800 million per year between 2018 and 2022
- There are large variations in identified need, funding and deficits across local authorities
- Nearly two-thirds of the increase in spending has been driven by increased spending on pupils in special schools
- Financial incentives for schools to seek EHCPs

The report said reform would be complex and costly, with potential changes including the expansion of provision in mainstream schools, expansion of

⁵⁹ [HC Deb 24 October 2024 c405](#)

⁶⁰ [HC Deb 24 October 2024 c408](#)

⁶¹ [HC Deb 24 October 2024 c406](#)

⁶² Institute for Fiscal Studies, [Spending on special educational needs in England: something has to change](#), 10 December 2024

state-funded special school places, geographic redistribution of funding, and reducing the statutory obligations currently attached to EHCPs.⁶³

2.9

Public Accounts Committee report on special educational needs (2025)

In January 2025, the Public Accounts Committee published a report on [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#).

The committee said the system for supporting children with SEN “is reaching, or, arguably, has already reached, crisis point” despite extra funding, and that the system was both failing to provide support for children and putting enormous strain on local authority finances, without any sign of reforms to improve the situation:

As well as not delivering outcomes, the SEN system is unaffordable, placing a significant strain on local authorities’ finances. Most worryingly, government does not know how it will address immediate financial challenges faced by local authorities where, for many years, local authority spending has outstripped departmental high-needs funding, leading to substantial deficits.⁶⁴

The committee’s chair, Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Con), said that:

The immensity of this situation cannot be overstated. As a nation, we are failing countless children. We have been doing so for years. At the same time, we are creating an existential financial risk for some local authorities, caused by that same failing system.⁶⁵

The [government response](#) to the report was published in May 2025. The response stated that the government intends to set out plans for reforming the SEND system later in 2025, including support for local authorities with their deficits, and that this would “inform any decision to remove the statutory override.”⁶⁶

⁶³ As above

⁶⁴ Public Accounts Committee, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), First report of session 2024-25, HC 353, p1

⁶⁵ Public Accounts Committee, [SEND emergency: Unviable system will end in lost generation of children without reform](#), 15 January 2025

⁶⁶ HM Treasury, [Treasury Minutes Government Response to the Committee of Public Accounts on the First to the Fourth and the Sixth to the Ninth reports from Session 2024-25](#) (pdf), May 2025, p6

2.10

SEN and home-to-school transport

As set out in statutory [home to school transport guidance](#) for England, local authorities have duties to provide home-to-school transport for children of compulsory school age in some cases.

Pages 11-15 of the guidance provide an overview of considerations relating to children with special educational needs or disabilities, which it says must be considered on a case-by-case basis. In particular it states:

A child is eligible for free travel to school if:

- they attend their nearest suitable school, and
- it is within the statutory walking distance of their home, and
- they could not reasonably be expected to walk there because of their special educational needs, disability or mobility problem, even if they were accompanied by their parent [...]

To be eligible on these grounds, a child does not need to:

- have an Education Health and Care plan (EHC plan); or
- have travel to school specified in their EHC plan if they have one; or
- attend a special school; or
- live beyond the statutory walking distance.⁶⁷

A child's needs would need to be considered as part of any transport that was arranged for them. The guidance is not prescriptive on how these duties are met.

Related pressure on local authority finances and planned funding changes

The National Audit Office report on [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), published in October 2024, highlighted transport as an important example of other local authority funding being used to support those with SEN, and said that local authorities spent £1.4 billion on home-to-school transport to support those with SEN in 2022-23, an 80% real terms increase from 2015-16.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Department for Education, [Travel to school for children of compulsory school age](#), January 2024, p11-12

⁶⁸ National Audit Office, [Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#), October 2024, p20

In July 2025, the Local Government Association published research which found that [spending by councils on home to school transport](#) for children with special educational needs and disabilities was predicted to reach nearly £2 billion in 2025/26.⁶⁹ The report said:

Key factors behind the increased cost of SEND transport include a rise in children with Education, Health and Care Plans (which set out the support a child will receive), more children having to be placed further from home and outside their local area, and changes in complexity of need, which for example might require individualised transport arrangements.⁷⁰

In June 2025, the government announced that it would “introduce [a bespoke formula to recognise Home to School transport costs](#).”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Local Government Association, [Council spending on SEND home to school transport soars – new LGA research](#), 2 July 2025

⁷⁰ As above

⁷¹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Fairer funding for councils across the country in major reform](#), 20 June 2025

3

Accountability: Ofsted and CQC inspections

Overview of inspections

Since 2016, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) have been carrying out inspections of all local authority SEND support provision in England.

Under the [Local area special educational needs and disabilities inspection framework](#), inspectors review how local areas meet their responsibilities to children and young people (from birth to age 25) who have special educational needs or disabilities (or both).

The framework sets out that the purpose of these inspections is to:

- provide an independent, external evaluation of the effectiveness of the local area partnership's arrangements for children and young people with SEND
- where appropriate, recommend what the local area partnership should do to improve the arrangements

Inspectors do not carry out inspections of individual education, social care or health services or providers under this inspection framework

Since 2023, inspections have taken place in a continuous inspection cycle, and there are three potential inspection outcomes, as set out in the framework:

- 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
- 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
- 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.⁷²

⁷² Ofsted, [Area SEND inspections: framework and handbook](#), December 2023

Subsequent monitoring or reinspection of an area is dependent on its inspection outcome.

Separate [information for young people and families](#) about the inspections has also been published.

The relevant reports [are published](#) on the Ofsted and CQC websites.

Revised approach in 2023

Ofsted and the CQC published a revised [area inspection framework and handbook](#) effective from January 2023, which amended their approach, following a [consultation on the new area SEND framework](#).⁷³

The [SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan](#) included the following summary:

In January 2023, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission introduced a new approach for area SEND inspections. These place greater emphasis on the outcomes that are being achieved for children and young people, look more closely at children under 5 and those aged 16-25 years old and include alternative provision for the first time. It will have three possible inspection outcomes providing more nuanced judgements for areas to better inform a Department for Education response into local areas. Finally, as part of the framework, there will be a series of thematic visits each year, with the first focusing on alternative provision, publishing in autumn 2023.⁷⁴

The Plan further said that the Department for Education would adjust its response to poor performance, in line with the new inspection framework, so that it could act proactively when areas fail to provide the necessary support to meet the needs of children and young people, including the removal of service control and imposition of a trust or commissioner on local authorities, where required.⁷⁵

Area inspection findings

[Ofsted's annual report for 2022/23](#) stated that, between January and August 2023, Ofsted and the CQC inspected 16 local area partnerships under the revised inspection framework.⁷⁶ Five of these inspections found local arrangements typically led to “positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people”.⁷⁷ In six areas, arrangements led to “inconsistent experiences and outcomes” and in five, there were “widespread and/or systemic failings”.

⁷³ Ofsted, [HMCI commentary: publishing our new area SEND framework](#), 29 November 2022

⁷⁴ Department for Education, [SEND and alternative provision improvement plan](#), March 2023, p73-74

⁷⁵ As above

⁷⁶ Ofsted, [Annual report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2022/23](#), 23 November 2023

⁷⁷ As above

The report summarised:

Inspections under the new framework are showing many of the same concerns as under the previous framework. Most significantly, families continue to experience long waiting times for some assessments and support, such as child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), educational psychology and speech and language therapy. The increase in EHC plans is having a negative impact on health and education services. The DfE has reported that services such as educational psychology are struggling to deal with the volume of EHC plan referrals, which is delaying access to other essential services. Educational psychologists are suggesting that better early interventions could reduce the need for EHC plans and the pressure on health and education services.⁷⁸

Background on the introduction of inspections

In March 2015, the Department for Education published [Special educational needs and disability: supporting local and national accountability](#), which provided a framework for monitoring the performance of the reformed SEND support system. The document indicated that the government would develop a set of key indicators to monitor the progress and impact of the reforms locally and nationally,⁷⁹ and included information about new arrangements for independent assessment, including proposed inspections by Ofsted and the CQC.⁸⁰

A [consultation](#) on the proposed inspections by Ofsted and the CQC was launched in October 2015 and ran until January 2016. It set out that, starting in May 2016, inspectors from these two bodies would inspect the provision of support for children and young people with SEND across the responsible local bodies in health, social services, and education.⁸¹

Ofsted and the CQC published a [response to the consultation](#) on 10 March 2016. The response set out how Ofsted and the CQC would develop their approach, informed by consultative pilot inspections.

Ofsted and the CQC stated that there was “considerable agreement” with the proposals and that inspections would begin in May 2016.

⁷⁸ Ofsted, [Annual report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2022/23](#), 23 November 2023

⁷⁹ Department for Education, [Special educational needs and disability: supporting local and national accountability \[link to PDF, 589kb\]](#), March 2015, p6

⁸⁰ As above, p14-15

⁸¹ Ofsted, [Local area SEND consultation: The inspection of local areas' effectiveness in identifying and meeting the needs of disabled children and young people and those who have special educational needs \[link to PDF\]](#), October 2015

4 The SEND Review and the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan

4.1 SEND review announcement (2019)

In September 2019, five years after the introduction of the current system of support for children and young people with SEND, [the government announced a major review of its effectiveness](#).

The review aimed 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.”⁸² It intended to look at how the system has evolved since its introduction, links with health and social care, and would “conclude with action to boost outcomes and improve value for money.”⁸³

The government said it would consider and propose action on:

- the evidence on how the system can provide the highest quality support that enables children and young people with SEND to thrive and prepare for adulthood, including employment;
- better helping parents to make decisions about what kind of support will be best for their child;
- making sure support in different local areas is consistent, joined up across health, care and education services, and that high-quality health and education support is available across the country;
- how to strike the right balance of state-funded provision across inclusive mainstream and specialist places;
- aligning incentives and accountability for schools, colleges and local authorities to make sure they provide the best possible support for children and young people with SEND;

⁸² For example, the Education Policy Institute identified a “postcode lottery” in the provision of SEND support in its study, “with the chances of receiving SEND support from the school or from the local authority largely dictated by the school that a child attends, rather than their individual circumstances” [Identifying pupils with special educational needs and disabilities](#), 19 March 2021

⁸³ Department for Education, [Major review into support for children with Special Educational Needs](#), 6 September 2019

- understanding what is behind rising numbers of education, health and care (EHC) plans and the role of specific health conditions in driving demand; and
- ensuring that public money is spent in an efficient, effective and sustainable manner, placing a premium on securing high quality outcomes for those children and young people who need additional support the most.

4.2

SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper (2022)

The government published [SEND Review: right support, right place, right time](#), setting out plans for a single national system for SEND and alternative provision on 29 March 2022.

The government said the green paper (a discussion paper) aimed to “improve an inconsistent, process-heavy and increasingly adversarial system that too often leaves parents facing difficulties and delays accessing the right support for their child.”⁸⁴

A consultation on the proposals was open from March to July 2022.

The green paper envisaged:

- a new integrated national SEND and alternative provision system setting statutory, nationally consistent standards.
- establishing new local SEND partnerships, bringing together education (including alternative provision), health and care partners with local government and other partners to produce a local inclusion plan, setting out how each local area will meet the national standards.
- introducing a standardised and digitised EHCP process and template.
- local authorities providing a tailored list of SEND settings to support parents and carers to express their preference for a suitable placement.
- introducing a streamlined process for redress, including mandatory mediation. The SEND Tribunal, responsible for handling appeals against local authority decisions regarding special educational needs, would remain in place.
- a planned consultation on a new Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) National Professional Qualification for school SENCos, and to

⁸⁴ Department for Education, [Ambitious reform for children and young people with SEND](#), 29 March 2022.

increase the number of staff with an accredited Level 3 SENCo qualification in early years settings.

- revised and clarified accountability for responsible bodies, such as schools and local authorities.
- a new national framework of banding and price tariffs for high needs funding, which covers SEND and alternative provision.

The Library briefing on [The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Alternative Provision Green Paper](#) (April 2022) provides more detail on the green paper and its publication.

4.3 The SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan (2023)

The government published its [SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time](#) in March 2023. This followed the green paper consultation and confirmed the government’s future plans.

A [SEND and alternative provision roadmap](#) was published alongside the plan, setting out timelines for key parts of the government’s proposals.⁸⁵

In a [written statement to the House of Commons](#), the then Children’s Minister, Claire Coutinho, said that what the government had heard in the consultation responses “gives us confidence to establish a new national SEND and alternative provision system.”⁸⁶ The Minister also published a [letter to parents](#) providing an overview of the government’s plans.⁸⁷

The Department for Education also published a blog post with an [overview of the plan](#).⁸⁸

Proposals

The [Special Educational Needs and Disabilities \(SEND\) and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time](#) proposes a unified system for SEND and alternative provision, driven by new national standards. The standards were a central proposal of the green paper.

⁸⁵ Department for Education, [SEND and alternative provision roadmap](#), 2 March 2023

⁸⁶ [HC Deb 2 March 2023 c42WS](#)

⁸⁷ Department for Education, [Message to parents of children with SEND from Claire Coutinho MP, Minister for Children, Wellbeing and Families](#), 2 March 2023

⁸⁸ Department for Education, [How we are improving support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities \(SEND\)](#), 2 March 2023

There are no immediate plans to amend existing legislation, although the government does intend to underpin the new national standards with legislation once they have been rolled out, which is planned to begin in 2025.

Alongside new national standards, the improvement plan set out the government's intention to:

- Create local SEND and alternative provision partnerships to lead change and commission provision
- Set up a National SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Board to oversee the implementation of the plan
- Develop a standard template for Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs), and digitise the plans
- Create a three-tier alternative provision system, focused away from long-term placements
- Develop options for providing parents and carers with a tailored list of SEND educational settings
- Support a SEND and alternative provision change programme to oversee the reforms
- Improve skills in the SEND workforce, with a particular emphasis on early intervention
- Strengthen accountability, including with a new local and national inclusion dashboard and refocused inspections of local SEND provision by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission
- Explore options for strengthening mediation between schools and local authorities, before deciding on whether to make mediation mandatory
- Introduce a new national framework of banding and price tariffs for high needs funding, with more details on this to follow later in 2023

The Library briefing on [The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan](#) provides more detailed information.

4.4

New SENCo qualification

As noted above, the SEND green paper and improvement plan announced reform of qualifications for special educational needs co-ordinators (SENcos).

In November 2023, [the DfE published details](#) of how the transition to a new leadership-level National Professional Qualification for SENCOs would work.⁸⁹

This confirmed:

- The new NPQ would be taught from autumn 2024
- SENCOs who already hold the existing qualification (known as NASENCO) would not have to gain the new qualification, and nor will SENCOs in post before 1 September 2009
- SENCOs newly appointed during the 2023/24 academic year could either start the existing NASENCO programme before September 2024, or enrol on a new NPQ course no later than Spring 2025

⁸⁹ Department for Education, [Transition to national professional qualification for special educational needs co-ordinators](#), 7 November 2023

5 Education Committee report on Solving the SEND Crisis

5.1 Announcement

In December 2024, the Education Committee [launched a wide-ranging inquiry](#), “Solving the SEND Crisis.”⁹⁰

The [terms of reference](#) for the inquiry included a number of questions under the following headings:

- Support for children and young people with SEND
- Current and future model of SEND provision
- Finance, funding and capacity of SEND provision

The terms of reference said, “mindful of previous reviews that have taken place in this area, and the evidence that already exists about the nature and scale of the problem, the Committee would welcome evidence primarily focused on solutions.”⁹¹

5.2 Report

The [Committee published its report](#) in September 2025. The report was extensive and contained a large number of recommendations, proposed ahead of the expected schools white paper later in the year.

The report emphasised inclusivity in education, and the announcement said that SEND “must become an intrinsic part of the mainstream education system, rather than an addition to it,” and that supporting needs early would ease the pressures on the system:

Embedding inclusivity in all education settings, from early years through to post-16, and identifying needs early in a child’s education, will enable support to be provided in the mainstream. [...]

⁹⁰ Education Committee, [Solving the SEND crisis – Education Committee launches major inquiry](#), 20 December 2024

⁹¹ Education Committee, [Call for Evidence: Solving the SEND Crisis](#), December 2024

This cultural shift would then calm the rising need for complex, costly education health and care (EHC) plans in the long-term, and help put schools and local authorities' finances on a sustainable footing.⁹²

The committee said that the existing SEND system was “unsustainable, inequitable, and failing to deliver the outcomes our children deserve”⁹³ and made recommendations across the system to address these concerns.

One of the report's key recommendations was that, while current numbers of EHCPs were not sustainable, it would not be the solution “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.”⁹⁴

The report said:

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.⁹⁵

The report's other main recommendations included:

- The publication of a definition of ‘inclusive education’ with good practice examples for schools
- A unified national framework for ordinarily available provision and SEN support
- A comprehensive review of the National Funding Formula, with the £6,000 funding allocated to pupils in mainstream schools to be ringfenced and uprated each year in line with inflation
- The SEND Tribunal should be retained and further empowered to issue legally binding recommendations to health services
- Continuously updated cycles of Initial Teacher Training and the Early Career Framework relating to SEND, and for continuing professional development on SEND to be mandatory for all teachers in mainstream education

⁹² Education Committee, [Solving the SEND crisis: report calls for culture shift and funding to make mainstream education genuinely inclusive](#), 18 September 2025

⁹³ Education Committee, [Solving the SEND crisis: report calls for culture shift and funding to make mainstream education genuinely inclusive](#), Fifth report of session 2024-26, HC 492, 18 September 2025, p149

⁹⁴ As above, p46

⁹⁵ As above

- A more active role for the NHS in SEND with NHS restructuring used as an opportunity to strengthen the role and accountability of health services in supporting children
- The introduction of a dedicated and ringfenced funding stream for SEN support beyond age 16
- Expanding specialist SEND provision by investing in high-quality specialist state schools, specialist ‘resource bases’ in mainstream schools, and other mainstream provision.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Education Committee, [Solving the SEND crisis: report calls for culture shift and funding to make mainstream education genuinely inclusive](#), 18 September 2025

6 Statistics

6.1 Number of pupils with SEN

There are two broad levels of support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in England. Education Health and Care plans (EHC Plans) are for children and young people aged up to 25 who need more support than is available through the other main pathway, SEN support.

In January 2007 there were around 1.6 million pupils with SEN in England. The total increased gradually reaching 1.7 million in 2010 before declining again until 2016, when the total stood at around 1.2 million. Since then, the number of pupils with SEN has increased in each year and was over 1.7 million by January 2025.

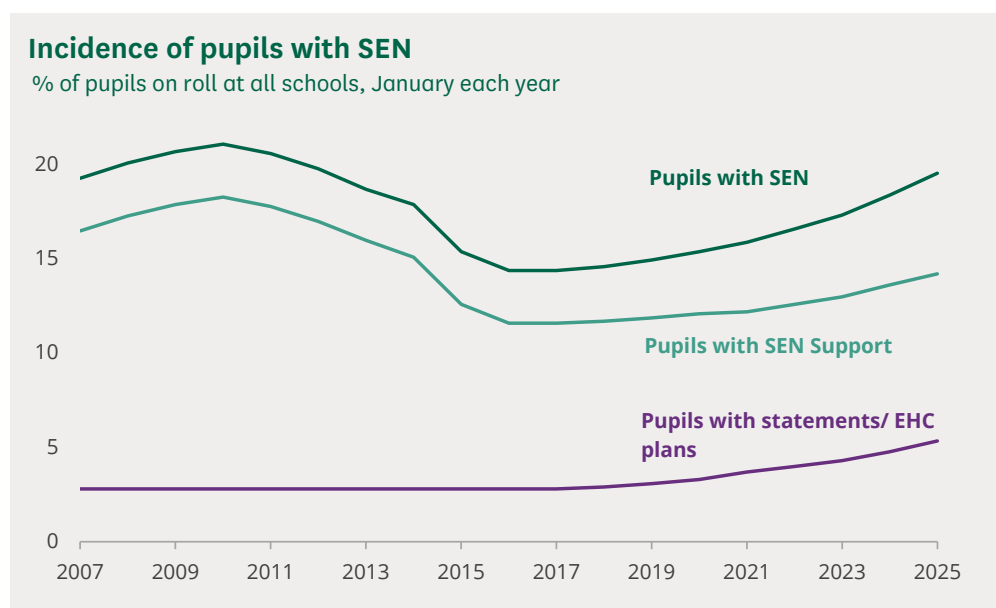
Only a minority of pupils with SEN have EHC plans, but the number has increased over time. In January 2025, around 483,000 pupils had EHC plans (27% of pupils with identified SEN). This compared with around 233,000 pupils with statements in 2007 (15% of pupils with identified SEN).⁹⁷

The SEN incidence rate describes the proportion of all pupils with identified SEN.

The overall SEN incidence rate was around 19% in 2007. The rate gradually increased reaching a peak of around 21% in 2010. The SEN incidence rate then declined and reached its lowest level in 2016 and 2017 (around 14%), before increasing again gradually to just below 20% in 2025.

The proportion of pupils with statements or EHC plans has also increased in recent years. The rate remained at around 3% of pupils in each year between 2007 and 2017, however it has increased slightly in each year since then reaching a peak of around 5% in 2025. More details are provided in the chart below.

⁹⁷ [DfE, Special Educational Needs in England: 2025, June 2025](#), main text; [DfE, Special Educational Needs in England: 2019, July 2019](#) (for all data prior to 2020, Table 1)



Source: DfE, [Special educational needs in England: 2025](#), June 2025, main text; [DfE, Special Educational Needs in England: 2019, July 2019](#) (for all data prior to 2020, Table 1)

In January 2025, the most common type of primary need among pupils with an EHC plan was autistic spectrum disorder (around 149,200 pupils or 34% of all pupils with an EHC plan). The second most common type of primary need was speech, language, and communication needs (around 92,000 pupils or 21% of all pupils with an EHC plan).⁹⁸

The most common type of primary need among pupils with SEN support was speech, language, and communication needs (around 304,000 pupils or 26% of all pupils with SEN support). The second most common type of primary need was social, emotional and mental health needs (around 297,200 pupils or 24% of all pupils with SEN support).⁹⁹

6.2

Education, health, and care plans across all age groups (0 to 25 years)

Trends in number of statements and education, health, and care plans

Education, health, and care plans (EHC plans) are available to people aged 0-25 years old. The data in this section includes all children and young people

⁹⁸ Department for Education, [Special Educational Needs in England: 2025](#), June 2025, [custom table](#)
These figures exclude pupils with EHC plans in independent schools

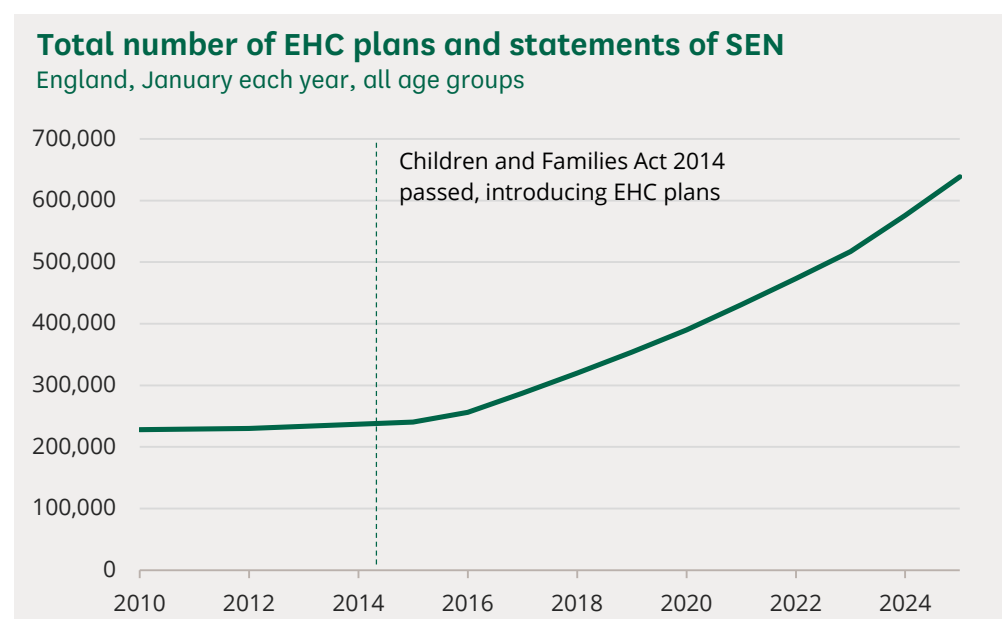
⁹⁹ As above

with EHC plans (unlike the previous section which only included school pupils).

In January 2025, there were around 638,700 children and young people of all ages with an EHC plan. This was an increase of 10.8% on the previous year, 2024, which comes on top of a 11.5% increase between 2023 and 2024. Around 70% of those with EHC plans are aged between 5 and 15, 20% are aged 16 to 19, 6% are aged 20 to 25, and 4% are aged under 5.¹⁰⁰

The number of EHC plans (and earlier, statements of SEN) maintained by local authorities has increased in each year since 2010 (when there were around 228,200). This increase has accelerated since 2015 (when there were around 240,200). This increase occurred in a wider context of rising pupil numbers, as well as reforms that extended the age group potentially covered, to 25 years old.¹⁰¹

The chart below shows the number of EHC plans and statements maintained by local authorities, since 2010. The DfE does not publish incidence rates of EHC plans across all age groups (as it does for the narrower category of school pupils).



Notes: Figures include Statements of SEN and EHC plans until 2019, by which point all statements should have been transferred to EHC plans. The Children and Families Act 2014 extended coverage to 19-25 year olds.

Source: Department for Education, [Education, health and care plans: 2025](#), June 2025, [custom table](#)

¹⁰⁰ Department for Education, [Education, health and care plans: 2024](#) June 2024, main text

¹⁰¹ As above, [custom table](#)

Timeliness in issuing new EHC plans

In calendar year 2024, around 97,700 new EHC plans were issued, a 16% increase on the number issued in the previous year (84,400). 2024 saw the highest number of new EHC plans issued since their phased introduction from 2014.¹⁰²

Of the new EHC plans issued in 2024, around 46% were issued within the 20 week time limit. This is slightly lower than in the previous year, 2023, when 50% were issued within 20 weeks. 2017 saw the highest proportion of plans issued within 20 weeks, at 65%. These figures all exclude cases where certain narrow statutory exceptions to the 20 week time limit apply.

The DfE has published the proportion of plans issued between 20 and 52 weeks, and after 52 weeks. In 2024:

- 46% of plans were issued within 20 to 52 weeks
- 7% were issued after 52 weeks.¹⁰³

Placements

In January 2025, of those with an EHC plan:

- 44% were attending mainstream schools
- 30% were attending special schools
- 14% were in further education and post-16 providers

The remainder were in a variety of other settings, including early years settings and alternative provision schools and colleges.¹⁰⁴

6.3

SEND Tribunals

Parents, and in some cases young people themselves, have statutory rights of appeal to the First Tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability) for qualifying decisions made relating to EHC needs assessments and plans. Local authorities must comply with Tribunal decisions.¹⁰⁵

In the academic year 2023/24 (the latest data), 11,157 cases were decided by the Tribunal.¹⁰⁶ Of these 11,007, or around **99%**, were decided in favour of the appellant. This does not necessarily mean that all aspects of the decision

¹⁰² Department for Education, [Education, health and care plans: 2025](#), June 2025, main text

¹⁰³ As above, [custom table](#)

¹⁰⁴ Department for Education, [Education, health and care plans: 2025](#), June 2025, main text

¹⁰⁵ IPSEA, [What is the SEND Tribunal](#), accessed 11 June 2025

¹⁰⁶ This excludes cases which were conceded or withdrawn

were in the appellant's favour.¹⁰⁷ The proportion of cases decided in favour of the appellant has increased significantly since 2011/12, when it stood at 69%.

Of all appeals for which an outcome was recorded in 2023/24, around a third (5,569 out of 16,726) were withdrawn or conceded. This can happen, for example, where the local authority and the appellant have come to an agreement before the hearing.¹⁰⁸

The following table sets out in more detail the trends in tribunal outcomes since 2011/12, and shows the local authorities (LAs) with the highest and lowest appeal rates. For 2024, the DfE is using a different methodology to calculate local authority-level appeal rates, as experimental statistics. For this reason, 2024 appeal rates should not be directly compared to previously published appeal rates for 2023 and earlier years. Nationally, the appeal rate was 5.3%.

The appeal success rate is not published at local authority level.

SEND Tribunals England, academic years			Appeal rates 2024 calendar year	
	Decided	% decided in favour of applicant		as % of appealable decisions
2011/12	823	69	LAs with lowest rates	
2012/13	808	84	North East Lincolnshire	0.8
2013/14	797	83	North Lincolnshire	0.9
2014/15	788	86	Darlington	1.1
2015/16	883	88	Wolverhampton	1.3
2016/17	1,599	89	Blackburn with Darwen	1.5
2017/18	2,298	89	LAs with highest rates	
2018/19	2,614	92	Hertfordshire	27.9
2019/20	3,770	95	Newham	17.6
2020/21	4,825	96	Slough	16.7
2021/22	5,600	96	East Sussex	14.3
2022/23	7,968	98	Derbyshire, Westminster	14.1
2023/24	11,157	99		

Note: Left-hand table figures exclude cases that were withdrawn or conceded. Right-hand table figures exclude City of London and Isles of Scilly, and authorities with missing data.

Sources: (left hand table) Ministry of Justice, [Tribunal statistics quarterly: July to September 2024](#), SEND Tribunal tables (SEND1), December 2024; (right hand table) Department for Education, EHC plan statistics: reporting year 2025, June 2025, "SEND tribunals and appeal rate" csv file.

¹⁰⁷ Ministry of Justice, [Tribunal statistics quarterly: July to September 2024](#), 14 December 2024, SEND Tribunal tables 2023 to 2024 (SEND1)

¹⁰⁸ As above, (SEND5)

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Education Committee

Solving the SEND Crisis

Fifth Report of Session 2024–25

HC 492

Education Committee

The Education Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Education and its associated public bodies.

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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

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- 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

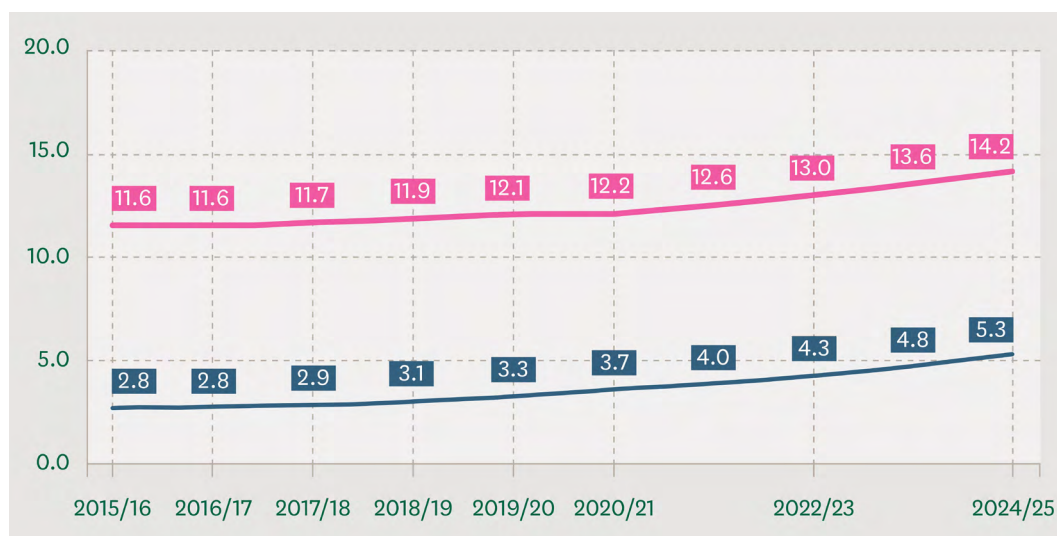
2 The state of inclusive education in England

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](#), 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

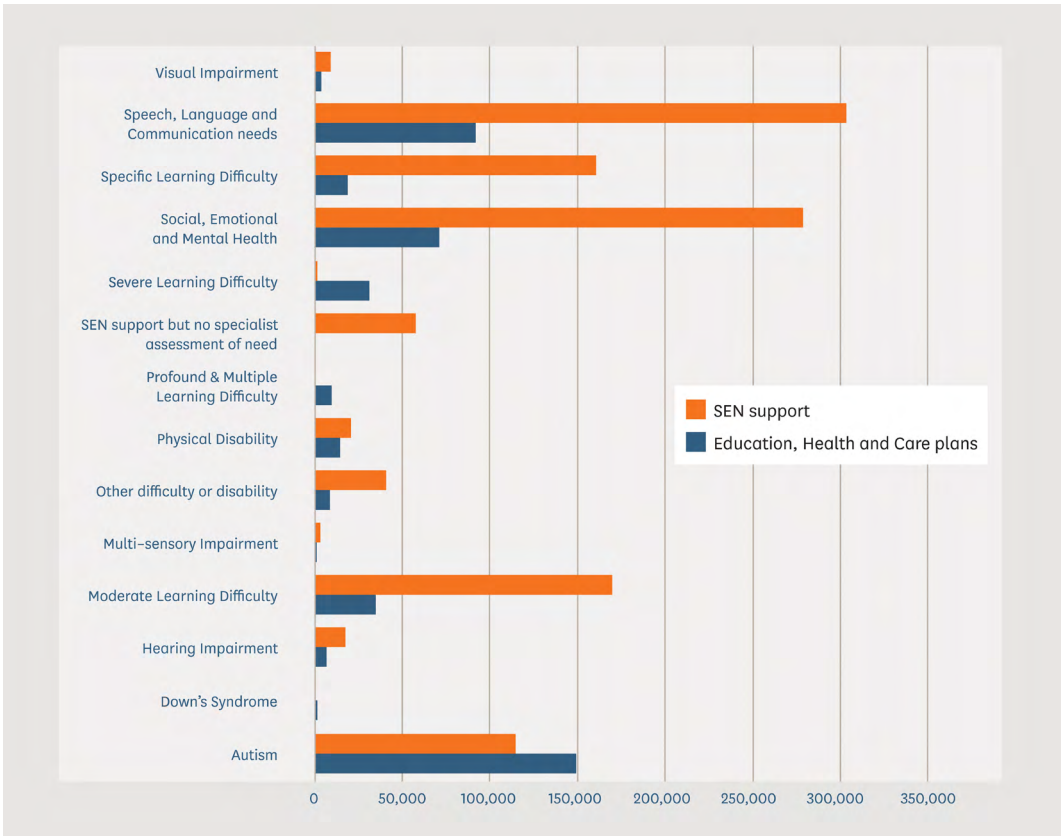
21 National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) ([SEN0248](#)), SEN0413, SEN0700

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

9. 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

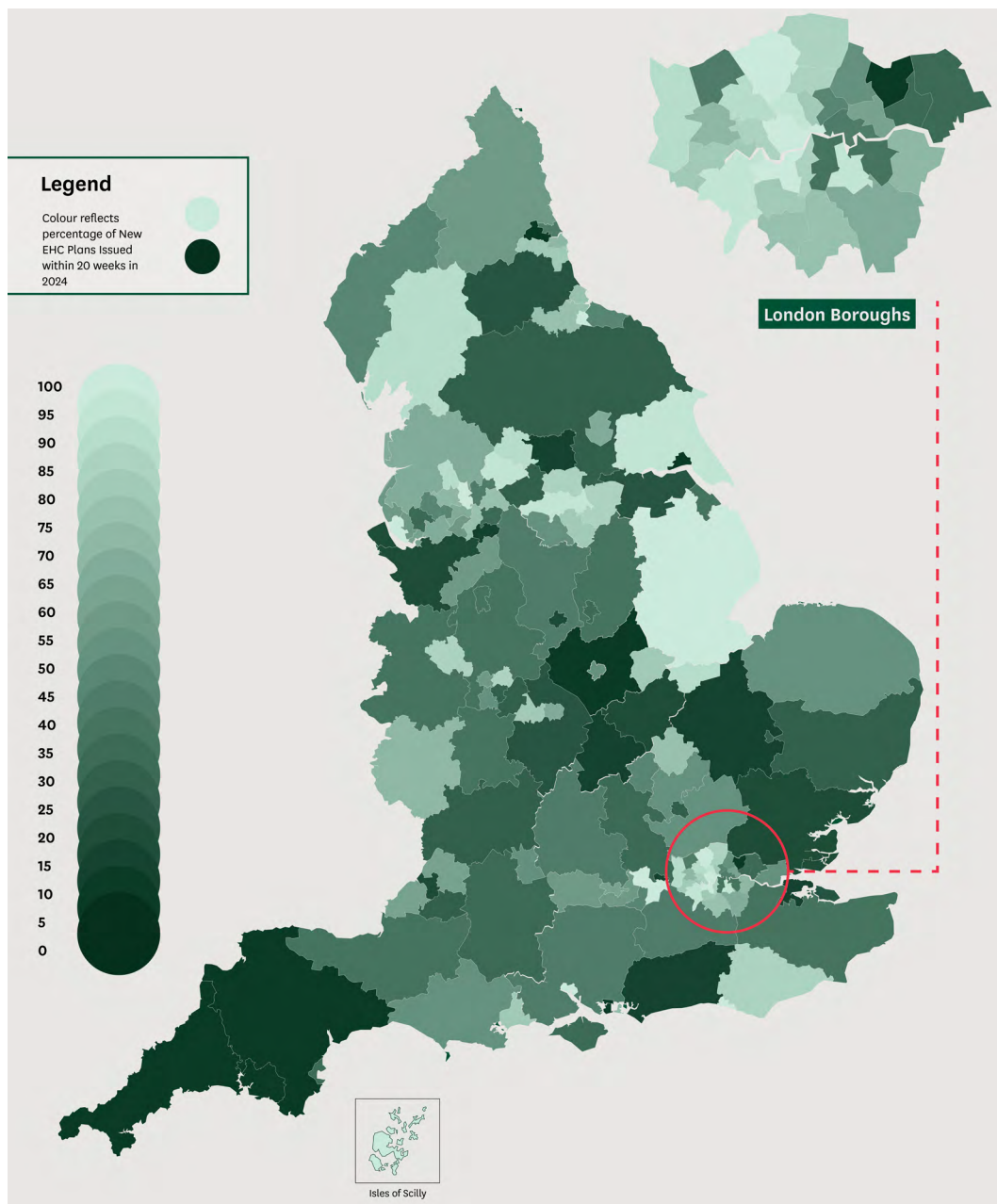
12. Across England, children and young people are facing increasingly long waits for their Education, Health and Care plans (EHC plans) to be issued. Delays have worsened in recent years: in 2024, only 46.4 per cent of EHC plans were issued within the statutory 20-week timeframe, compared to around 60 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 50.2 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 percent 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 50.2 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, Crosscraze 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 Thameside 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 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 uprated 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/carers 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 uprated 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 Sowards

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)	SEN0864
128	Challenge Partners	SEN0768
129	Challenging Behaviour Foundation	SEN0555
130	Chance UK	SEN0571
131	Chapman, Mrs Claire	SEN0475
132	Chartered College of Teaching	SEN0757
133	Children North East	SEN0491
134	Children's Services Development Group (CSDG)	SEN0851
135	City of York Council	SEN0496
136	Civil Mediation Council; and College of Mediators	SEN0557
137	Clark, Dr Sian	SEN0359
138	Cockburn, Kathryn	SEN0871
139	Coddi, Ms Cecilia	SEN0338
140	Coffman, Mrs Lisa	SEN0012
141	Compass	SEN0267
142	Compass Learning Partnership	SEN0223
143	Confederation of School Trusts	SEN0760
144	Connections in Mind CIC	SEN0443
145	Contact	SEN0174
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)	SEN0814
147	Cooper, Miss Anne (Headteacher, Bell Farm Primary School)	SEN0494
148	Cooper, Mrs Judy	SEN0092
149	Cornwall Council	SEN0637
150	Cornwell, Mrs Megan	SEN0132
151	Cox, Pam MP	SEN0696
152	Cranford Park C of E primary	SEN0382
153	Cranmere Primary School	SEN0295

154	Crookhorn College	SEN0387
155	Cunningham, Mrs Maxine (Trust SEND Improvement and Inclusion Lead, Voyage Education Partnership)	SEN0149
156	DFN Project SEARCH	SEN0556
157	Dallaglio RugbyWorks	SEN0301
158	Damerall, Miss Sharon (Headteacher, Roselyn House School)	SEN0582
159	Dean, Mrs Cathy	SEN0134
160	Dell, Mrs Tracey	SEN0342
161	Dennis, Angela	SEN0629
162	Department for Education	SEN0887
163	Department of Psychiatry, University of Cambridge	SEN0717
164	Diamond, Mr Gus	SEN0073
165	Difolco, Marie	SEN0097
166	Diggle School	SEN0278
167	Dingley's Promise	SEN0334
168	Disability Rights UK	SEN0889
169	Disabled Children's Partnership	SEN0722
170	Dixons Academies Trust	SEN0858
171	Down's Syndrome Association	SEN0526
172	Drumbeat Outreach	SEN0581
173	Duffy, Grace	SEN0797
174	Durning, Mrs Aimee (Director of Inclusion and Community, University of Cambridge Primary School)	SEN0651
175	Dyslexia Cornwall	SEN0566
176	EPIC Think Learn C.I.C.	SEN0608
177	Eames, Paul	SEN0593
178	Early Education and Childcare Coalition	SEN0698
179	EdAct	SEN0588
180	Ely, Mrs Sonya (Executive Headteacher, Tydd St Mary and Weston Hills Church of England Primary Schools federation)	SEN0567
181	Empowering Learning	SEN0105
182	Enable Trust	SEN0337
183	England and Wales Cricket Board	SEN0604

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
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290	Leeds Trinity University	SEN0368
291	Liberty Academy Trust	SEN0263
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294	Little, Mrs Lucy Emma	SEN0396
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399	Paulmann, Silke (Professor, Head of Department, University of Essex, Psychology Department); and Claire Oakley (Lecturer, University of Essex, Department of Psychology)	SEN0776
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428	River Tees Multi-Academy Trust	SEN0730

429	Robertson, Christopher (Visiting Professor, Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability, University of Derby)	SEN0731
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458	Southwark Law Centre; and Action for Education Rights Group	SEN0317

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Education & Skills
Funding Agency



Department
for Education

Guidance

High needs funding: 2025 to 2026 operational guide

Updated 30 June 2025

Applies to England

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The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) closed on 31 March 2025. All activity has moved to the Department for Education (DfE). You should continue to follow this guidance.

1. Introduction

This guide explains how the 2025 to 2026 financial and academic year high needs funding system will operate locally and across different educational settings in England. Some sections of the guide are specific to particular types of setting.

The guide is to inform local budget planning and consultations in the months prior to the beginning of the financial year 2025 to 2026, particularly in agreeing how provision for children and young people with high needs should be commissioned and funded.

The information detailed in the guide should be used with immediate effect, as many of the sections are also relevant for the ongoing operational arrangements in the 2025 to 2026 financial and academic year.

The main updates are highlighted in the [changes to the high needs funding operational guide for 2025 to 2026](#) section.

1.1 Planned publication of the 2026 to 2027 guide

We will publish the 2026 to 2027 high needs operational guide following the publication of the national funding formula (NFF) for 2026 to 2027.

1.2 Who is this publication for?

This guidance is mainly for:

- local authorities
- schools and colleges (see 'Table 1: definitions of terms' below)
- early years providers, including maintained nursery schools

1.3 What is high needs funding?

High needs funding supports:

- provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) who require additional resources to participate in education and learning, mainly in schools and colleges, from their early years to age 25 (excluding young people aged 19 to 25 who do not have an education, health and care plan (EHC) plan and individuals who are over the age of 25)
- children up to age 16 in alternative provision (AP) who, because of exclusion, illness, or other reasons, cannot receive their education in mainstream or special schools

Supporting funding arrangement information for young people with special educational needs (SEN) who are aged 19 to 25 and do not have an EHC plan, and those who are over the age of 25 is set out in [annex 1: other information](#).

High needs funding is provided to local authorities through the high needs block of the dedicated schools grant (DSG), enabling them to meet their statutory duties under the [Children and Families Act 2014](#) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted>) and the Education Act 1996. Local authorities must spend that funding in line with the associated [DSG: conditions of grant](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2025-to-2026>) and [The School and Early Years Finance \(England\) Regulations](#) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2025/42/contents/made>).

Local authorities' high needs funding allocations through the DSG cover:

- allocations of funding to schools and colleges, including place funding which forms part of schools' and colleges delegated annual allocation, and top-up funding
- funding for high needs services delivered directly by the local authority, or under a separate service level agreement with a school or college. The latter can include funding devolved to schools and colleges, for them to spend within limits specified in the agreement

High needs funding is also provided directly to some schools and colleges by the Department for Education (DfE) and the respective conditions of grant and funding agreements apply.

1.4 Local special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) responsibilities and accountability

Local authorities are statutorily responsible for overseeing the local offer of services and provision to meet the special educational needs of children and young people in their area. The [Children and Families Act 2014](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted>) requires them to do this through co-production with key partners. Local authorities must ensure that children and young people and their parents/carers are involved in discussions and decisions about their individual support, as well as involving them in reviewing and improving local provision, in line with their statutory duties and the [SEND code of practice](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>).

Likewise, local authorities must ensure any changes to SEND provision and high needs funding arrangements are made in close consultation and co-production with the schools and colleges which will be affected. The local authority's [schools forum](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-forums-operational-and-good-practice-guide-2015) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-forums-operational-and-good-practice-guide-2015>) is one way through which partnership working across the education sector can be strengthened to ensure the local authority's spending decisions are most effective. Local authorities must consult with the schools forum about their high needs funding arrangements, which should include funding for place number changes and top-up funding rates, as well as budgets for independent school placements and central support services.

In addition, all of those providing education to children and young people from the area should be engaged, regardless of where the provider is located, to ensure good quality provision can be planned, developed and sustained in line with available resources. This includes early years settings and colleges, as well as parents of children and young people with SEND and young people themselves.

Responsibility within a school or college sits at different levels depending on how they are organised. For example, the head teacher or principal of an academy is responsible for the individual school, while the academy trust oversees a group of academies. This is reflected in the statutory duties and the practical arrangements. Under the Children and Families Act 2014 the leader of a specific school or college (for example, a headteacher or principal) must be consulted over the placement of an individual child or young person, while the overarching body (a governing body, academy trust or the proprietor responsible for the school or college) must be involved in strategic decisions relating to the SEND local offer.

In this guidance, references to schools and colleges should be interpreted as applying to the headteacher, principal, governing body, trust or another proprietor according to the context.

1.5 Definitions of terms

The definitions of some terms used throughout this guide are detailed in table 1 below.

Table 1: definitions of terms

Term used	Definition of term
Schools and colleges	The term ‘schools and colleges’ is used to refer to all education provider types, including: all mainstream schools (pre and post-16, maintained and academies, which should normally be taken to include free schools unless these are referred to separately, but excluding mainstream independent schools), maintained special schools and non-maintained special schools (NMSS), special free schools, special academies, independent special schools, pupil referral units (PRUs) and AP academies, hospital schools, general further education (FE) colleges, sixth form colleges, independent learning providers (ILPs) and special post-16 institutions (SPIs) – unless specific references or funding processes are relevant to particular types of school or college
Commissioning local authority or commissioning school	<p>This is the local authority or school placing a child or young person at a school or college.</p> <p>For those with EHC plans this will be the local authority where they live (the resident local authority). In the case of AP, schools may also be commissioners for children placed in AP settings</p>
Provider local authority	This is usually the local authority where a school or college is located. The provider local authority funds the high needs places at a school or college from its DSG. For centrally funded schools and colleges, that is, NMSS, SPIs and a small number of other FE, DfE is considered the provider local authority
Resident local authority	This is the local authority where a child or young person lives (where their main residence), as

Term used	Definition of term
	identified in the school census or Individualised Learner Record (ILR) using their postcode. The local authority where a child or young person lives will be responsible for securing any special educational provision or for making AP, funded from their high needs budget

2. Changes to the high needs funding operational guide for 2025 to 2026

We have taken the opportunity to review some aspects of this 2025 to 2026 guide and have consequently made some changes from the 2024 to 2025 version. These changes have resulted in a rearrangement of the order of some sections; and refinements to the text to improve the readability, provide greater clarity and remove duplication to aid the reader. Finally, some sections have also been moved from the main document into annexes.

In making these changes, we have not altered the substance of the guidance, as the operational processes and core principles remain unchanged.

For 2025 to 2026, the main changes are:

2.1 New information:

- overall funding increases and changes to the high needs national funding formula (NFF) - see [annual 2025 to 2026 high needs funding overview](#)
- changes to how [legacy funding streams and additional grant funding are allocated](#)
- [2025 to 2026 special schools minimum funding guarantee](#)
- new VAT rules which apply to some schools and colleges
- 2024 to 2025 academic year 16 to 19 average national funding rate
- 2024 to 2025 academic year exceptional in-year growth methodology / criteria for SPIs and centrally funded colleges

2.2 June 2025 update:

- updated core schools budget grant (CSBG) funding information and references related to the £83 million to help special and AP schools with the additional costs relating to the teachers' and other staff 2025 pay awards

2.3 March 2025 updates

- information about the distribution methodology for the additional funding to compensate employers for the increase in National Insurance contributions (NICs). This funding is being allocated as an additional part of the 2025 to 2026 CSBG, which already comprises a continuation of 3 separate 2024 to 2025 grants: the teachers' pay additional grant (TPAG); 2024 teachers' pension employer contribution grant (TPECG 2024) and 2024 to 2025 CSBG for the 2024 teachers' pay award and support staff costs
- information about the commissioning and contract implications for SEND education placements and services, following the introduction of the Procurement Act 2023 that took effect from 24 February 2025
- references to updated guidance for local authorities and schools on AP

3. Annual 2025 to 2026 funding overview

3.1 High needs funding allocations to local authorities for 2025 to 2026

The majority of high needs funding is allocated through the high needs NFF and included in [local authorities' DSG allocations](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2025-to-2026>). The total high needs budget for 2025 to 2026 will be £12 billion, of which £11.3 billion is initially distributed through the NFF to provide indicative allocations for local authorities, £145 million is set aside for later NFF adjustments and allocations outside the NFF, and £605 million is for the CSBG.

The basic structure of the high needs NFF for 2025 to 2026 has not changed from the 2024 to 2025 NFF. More details can be found in the [NFF policy document \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-funding-formula-for-schools-and-high-needs-2025-to-2026\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-funding-formula-for-schools-and-high-needs-2025-to-2026), [calculation tables and technical note \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-funding-formula-tables-for-schools-and-high-needs-2025-to-2026\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-funding-formula-tables-for-schools-and-high-needs-2025-to-2026).

The separate CSBG, which local authorities will receive in 2025 to 2026, and for which we have set aside £605 million, comprises 3 separate grants they received in 2024 to 2025:

- £480 million for a continuation of 3 separate grants they received in 2024 to 2025:
 - TPAG
 - TPECG 2024
 - a full year allocation of the CSBG which is allocated for the period September 2024 to March 2025, to help with schools' overall costs, including the 2024 teachers' pay award and support staff costs
- £125 million to reflect the additional costs of the employer NICs increase that employers will face from April 2025
- £83 million to help special schools and academies, PRUs, AP academies and providers of hospital education, with the costs of the teachers' and other staff 2025 pay awards

Further details of how the 2025 to 2026 CSBG allocations to local authorities are calculated and how local authorities are required to pass this CSBG on to eligible special schools, PRUs, AP academies, post-16 institutions and those providing hospital education can be found in the [core schools budget grant \(CSBG\) 2025 to 2026 for special schools and alternative provision \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/core-schools-budget-grant-csbg-2025-to-2026-for-special-schools-and-alternative-provision\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/core-schools-budget-grant-csbg-2025-to-2026-for-special-schools-and-alternative-provision).

3.2 Funding increases for 2025 to 2026

All local authorities are receiving an increase in funding in 2025 to 2026, through the NFF. A funding floor provides a minimum increase of 7% per head of a local authority's projected resident 2 to 18 population, and the NFF provides increases up to a gains limit of 10% per head.

The increases in funding to local authorities are both for the costs of additional placements (including those as a result of a new EHC plan) and services, and for any increase in the costs of existing high needs placements and services. Local authorities should therefore discuss with

their schools and colleges the funding that they believe is necessary to make the required provision, taking into account:

- the number of placements they expect to commission (or schools to commission in the case of AP) in 2025 to 2026, and which should be reflected in the allocation of high needs place funding for the places required
- the anticipated costs of those placements in 2025 to 2026, which may be reflected in the allocation of high needs top-up funding (or high needs funding for the full cost of placements in independent special schools and special post-16 institutions not in receipt of place funding)
- the amount of CSBG that schools are receiving

A minimum funding guarantee (MFG) of 0% continues to offer protection for special schools. Further details can be found in the section on maintained special schools and special academies, and in [annex 3: special schools minimum funding guarantee](#).

3.3 Mainstream schools' and colleges' SEND provision

The government has made it clear that the general direction of SEND reform is towards establishing a mainstream school and college environment that is more inclusive of children and young people who need specialist SEND provision, including in SEN units and resourced provision (RP). DfE is working on a range of reforms that will facilitate that shift.

In the meantime, drawing on the research and examples of existing good practice that have already been published [\[footnote 1\]](#) [\[footnote 2\]](#), local authorities should consider with their schools and colleges whether changes to local high needs funding arrangements and other developments could be taken forward to support an enhanced role for mainstream schools and colleges in making provision for children and young people with more complex needs. Many local authorities are already improving SEND provision in their mainstream schools through the creation of more SEN units and RP.

[The School and Early Years Finance \(England\) Regulations](#)

[\(https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/42/contents/made\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/42/contents/made) for 2025 to 2026, will allow local authorities to spend from their high needs budget in support of such initiatives. Specifically, local authorities can incur expenditure and target funding for the purposes both of encouraging the education of children and young people with SEN at mainstream schools, and of collaboration between special and mainstream schools to enable those with SEN to engage in mainstream school activities. See further information below on local authorities' funding of such [services centrally](#), and on the

funding for [mainstream schools](#), which can be used to target schools that are particularly inclusive of children with SEND.

4. How funding is allocated to local authorities, schools and colleges

4.1 High needs funding for local authorities through the dedicated schools grant (DSG)

The DSG is the main source of government funding for the provision of education by local authorities and schools in England. Its use is governed by the [DSG: conditions of grant](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2025-to-2026>), one of which requires the grant to be spent in accordance with [The School and Early Years Finance \(England\) Regulations](#) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/42/contents/made>). Schedule 2 to the regulations sets out the categories of central expenditure from their DSG that local authorities are permitted to incur. The DSG cannot be used for purposes other than those specified in the conditions of grant and regulations. Examples of such high needs expenditure from the DSG that is not permitted are: local authorities' spending on their SEND and finance administration, including EHC needs assessment and planning functions, and spending on health and social care costs. See [annex 6: health and social care costs](#) for further information.

The DSG is intended to meet:

- the educational costs of early years provision, covered by the early years block
- primary and secondary mainstream education for pupils up to age 16 in maintained schools and academies, covered by the schools block
- the educational costs of provision for children and young people aged 0 to 25 with complex SEN (excluding those aged over 19 and up to 25 without an EHC plan), and of AP, covered by the high needs block
- the costs of some services for schools delivered centrally by local authorities, covered by the central school services block (CSSB)

Local authorities can transfer funding from the high needs block and CSSB to other budgets funded through the DSG. Transfers from the early years block can be made in compliance with the early years pass through rate

conditions, details of which can be found in the [early years entitlements: local authority funding operational guide 2025 to 2026](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-entitlements-local-authority-funding-operational-guide-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-funding-2025-to-2026>).

The schools block is ringfenced which means that this block must be spent for the purposes specified in the conditions of grant. Local authorities retain the ability to transfer up to 0.5% of funding out of the schools block to any other block, with the agreement of the schools forum. Formal permission from the Secretary of State (a disapplication of the relevant DSG condition of grant) will be required for transfers out of the schools block above 0.5%, or transfers of any amount without schools forum approval.

Further details of transfers out of DSG funding blocks, including how to request a disapplication, can be found in the transfer between blocks section of the [schools operational guide: 2025 to 2026](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-16-schools-funding-local-authority-guidance-for-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-16-schools-funding-local-authority-guidance-for-2025-to-2026>).

Local authorities should be aware that section 5 of the DSG: conditions of grant sets out particular requirements relating to how income and expenditure from the DSG should be accounted for locally, including action that must be taken in the event of overspends and year-end deficits.

4.2 High needs place deductions

For the following schools and colleges, place funding is included in local authorities' initial DSG allocations and then deducted from the provider local authority's DSG by DfE to pay the funding direct to:

- mainstream academies and free schools
- special academies and free schools
- AP academies
- 16 to 19 academies and free schools
- general FE colleges, sixth form colleges and ILPs

The number of high needs places deducted is based on the annual place change notification process.

We do not deduct in the same way for places at centrally funded NMSS, SPIs and some FE colleges. Instead, these deductions are effectively made through the NFF import/export adjustment. Further information about this NFF adjustment is set out in the [2025 to 2026 NFF policy document](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-funding-formula-for-schools-and-high-needs-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-funding-formula-for-schools-and-high-needs-2025-to-2026>), and the data for 2025 to

2026 will be published in May/June 2025. It is important that schools and colleges complete the school census and ILR respectively during the academic year with accurate information on the number of pupils and students for whom they receive high needs top-up funding from a local authority, as this information is used in the calculation of the import/export adjustment.

Deductions are made for some places at AP free schools, also based on school census data. For the 2025 to 2026 academic year, deductions will be made for places at AP free schools that opened during or before the 2023 to 2024 academic year. The deduction is from the DSG of the local authority where pupils live, based on the number of pupils aged 5 to 15 years, main or sole registered at that AP free school at the time of the October 2024 census.

The academic year place funding rates are shown below in table 2, with further information in table 3 on the type of school. The 2024 to 2025 and 2025 to 2026 academic year place amounts are pro rated as follows, to calculate DSG deductions for the 2025 to 2026 financial year, by place and type of school or college.

Table 2: pre-16 DSG deductions by type of school

Type of school	AP: 2024 to 2025 academic year (× five- twelfths)	AP: 2025 to 2026 academic year (× seven- twelfths)	SEN unit/RP: 2024 to 2025 academic year (× five- twelfths)	SEN unit/RP: 2025 to 2026 academic year (× seven- twelfths)	Special schools: 2024 to 2025 academic year (× five- twelfths)
Mainstream academies and free schools	N/A	N/A	£2,500 or £4,167	£3,500 or £5,833	N/A
Special academies and free schools	£4,167	£5,833	N/A	N/A	£4,167
AP academies and AP free schools	£4,167	£5,833	£4,167	£5,833	N/A

Table 3: post-16 (SEN places) DSG deductions by school or college type

Type of school or college	Schools: 2024 to 2025 academic year (× four-twelfths)	Schools: 2025 to 2026 academic year (× eight-twelfths)	Post-16 schools (16 to 18): 2024 to 2025 academic year (× four-twelfths)	Post-16 schools (16 to 18): 2025 to 2026 academic year (× eight-twelfths)	
Mainstream academies and free schools	£2,000	£4,000	N/A	N/A	
Special academies and free schools	£3,333	£6,667	N/A	N/A	
AP academies	£2,000	£4,000	N/A	N/A	
16 to 19 academies/FE/ILPs	N/A	N/A	£2,000	£4,000	

The above rates are multiplied by the number of places to calculate the total deduction amount.

5. Funding for schools and colleges

Schools and colleges receive high needs funding in different ways, depending on the type of setting.

5.1 Core funding

The annual allocation a school or college receives as high needs place funding, which is equivalent, or in addition, to the core funding received by schools and colleges through their respective funding formulae. This funding is received either directly from the provider local authority (for

maintained schools and PRUs, based on the financial year) or from DfE (for academies, NMSS, ILPs, FE colleges and SPIs, based on the academic year). This core funding has been supplemented by various additional funding streams, which have remained as separate annual allocations and grants.

5.2 Top-up funding

The funding required over and above the core funding, allocated by local authorities to schools and colleges from their high needs budget, to enable a pupil or student with high needs (normally when an EHC plan is in place) to participate in education and training.

5.3 Funding for the full costs of a placement

Local authorities also allocate high needs funding to independent schools (including independent special schools), independent AP and SPIs not receiving place funding, to meet the cost of the placements they commission, rather than as place and top-up funding.

5.4 Funding under a service level agreement

A local authority can commission a school or college to deliver a SEND or AP service and fund that from its high needs budget, where permitted by the regulations.

The sections below explain place funding and top-up funding for all schools and colleges, and the [funding overview by education setting type](#) section provides further information on the funding of high needs provision in different types of school or college.

6. High needs place funding

Place funding is allocated as an annual amount of core high needs funding for schools and colleges. Place funding is allocated at a standard rate for a

number of places, reflecting the number of high needs placements which commissioning local authorities expect to make in the coming year.

Place funding is allocated to:

- all types of special schools, excluding independent special schools
- PRUs and AP academies (including AP free schools)
- all types of mainstream school with a SEN unit or RP and/or with a sixth form that has pupils with high needs
- all types of colleges that educate students who have high needs, apart from the SPIs and any other post-16 institutions that are fully funded by a local authority

The annual process for local authorities to notify DfE of changes to certain schools' and colleges' 2025 to 2026 high needs place number is set out in the [how to complete the high needs place change workbook for 2025 to 2026](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026>).

The annual allocation of place funding for the school or college is neither intended to cover particular costs, nor associated with or reserved for a specific local authority or individual pupil or student. Place funding should not be withdrawn if an individual does not occupy a funded place, and a local authority may not seek to recover funding for places it considers unused in the previous or current academic year.

6.1 Determination of funded place numbers

In most cases the provider local authority in whose area a school or college is located determines the numbers of high needs places to be funded. Those place numbers are then multiplied by the relevant funding rates to provide each school's or college's place funding allocation. For certain schools and colleges, the place numbers are aggregated and inform the place funding deductions that are made by DfE from each local authority's DSG allocation.

Exceptions are AP free schools, NMSS, SPIs and a small number of centrally funded FE colleges and ILPs, where DfE acts as the provider local authority and determines place numbers. Funding for these providers is allocated mainly on the basis of the previous year's data on the number of high needs pupils or students who attend the school or college, as reported through the school census and ILR, respectively. Further information on this is set out under the sections about the different types of school or college.

Dialogue between local authorities and all schools and colleges that offer high needs provision is essential when preparing for the allocations of high needs place funding for the following academic year. Local authorities should consult with schools and colleges in their area and discuss both the current numbers of places being occupied by pupils or students, whose details are included on the school census and ILR returns, and the number of places expected to be taken up in future.

In the event of local differences between local authorities and their schools and colleges about the number of places that will be used for their allocations of place funding:

- the [high needs place change process: 2025 to 2026 place academic year](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026>) guidance sets out the process for managing ‘not agreed’ cases for academies (including most free schools), and most FE colleges
- local authorities make the final determination for their maintained schools

6.2 Reporting place numbers for the 2025 to 2026 academic year

The guidance on the [high needs place change process: 2025 to 2026 academic year](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026>) (published October 2024) explains the place change notification process. This sets out the collaborative approach and supporting process that local authorities, schools and colleges should use for reviewing, adjusting and reporting to DfE changes to the academic year 2025 to 2026 high needs place numbers from the current 2024 to 2025 published places at: academies, free schools (excluding AP free schools), FE colleges, sixth form colleges, ILPs and SPIs not previously funded by DfE. Further details are provided in the [funding overview by education, setting type](#) section.

The outcomes from the high needs place change process for academic year 2025 to 2026 are published in January 2025, and this publication is followed by a 2-week enquiry window, where local authorities, schools and colleges can raise significant issues.

Local authorities do not need to report changes in maintained schools through the annual place change process but must consult their schools forum and report accurate data annually via the [authority proforma tool \(APT\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-complete-the-authority-proforma-tool-apt-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-complete-the-authority-proforma-tool-apt-2025-to-2026>) and [section 251 \(s251\) budget statements](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/section-251-2024-to-2025) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/section-251-2024-to-2025>), as this information is used for local and national funding calculations.

The APT assists local authorities to model and then confirm how they plan to allocate mainstream school funding, in accordance with the arrangements set out by DfE. The APT asks for the number of SEN unit or RP places that are occupied by pupils in the mainstream school to which that unit or RP is attached, as at the most recent October census. This allows the distribution of occupied and unoccupied places to be calculated for academy funding and DSG deductions. In addition, it is important that the number of places that are being funded in each school is reported accurately on the local authority's s251 budget statement, as this data is used locally for calculating individual schools' budget share, and nationally for other local authority grant calculations.

For maintained schools or PRU converting to academies, local authorities must agree place numbers with the respective school and submit a 'notification of changes to funded high needs places' form before conversion to ensure accurate funding. This document is supplied by DfE's delivery officer and must be returned before the school converts. If no notification is received, September to March place numbers recorded in the 2024 to 2025 s251 budget return will be rolled forward.

A 'notification of changes to funded high needs places' form must also be completed for all mainstream schools or PRUs converting where post-16 places are required. This is because post-16 place data is not differentiated from pre-16 place numbers in the s251 return. In these cases, completion of the form will ensure clarity of the split between pre and post-16 place numbers.

6.3 Where pupil and student numbers differ from funded places

We recognise that there may be a difference between the number of funded high needs places and the actual number of pupils or students in attendance when the new academic year commences, or at other points during the year. As explained in the [high needs place funding](#) section, place funding is not reserved for specific individuals. It is for schools and colleges to apportion the total allocated place funding across the actual number of pupils and students with high needs. In most cases, the variance between place numbers and pupils or students is small, or only has a marginal impact on the cost of the provision. We are unlikely to revise annual allocations to academies and colleges where the number of commissioned places changes after the annual processes, although there are processes for exceptional in-year growth in centrally funded colleges (see below).

If the number of pupils or students agreed as having high needs by the resident local authority exceeds the number of funded places, the school or

college should approach the provider local authority. In practice, that could result in the school or college incurring additional costs in making special provision not met through the top-up funding amount normally paid. We expect the provider local authority to engage with the school or college to agree how the costs of the additional special provision required are to be met and these conversations should take place as early as possible. The provider local authority should not automatically be charged an additional £10,000 or £6,000 (the relevant place funding amount) per pupil or student. The amount should reflect the actual costs of making additional special provision available, which may only be marginal, and which may, therefore, require no additional funding or, funding that is less than the full amount of place funding, taking into account the top-up funding paid by the resident local authority. Importantly, the provider local authority and the school or college should seek to agree how those costs are to be met.

Where pupils or students attend a school or college in a different local authority area to the one they live in, the import/export adjustment will compensate the provider local authority, albeit in the subsequent financial year. This will avoid the position where the commissioning resident local authority effectively funds twice – both through increased top-up funding direct to the school or college and through the £6,000 import/export adjustment in the NFF. These arrangements apply to colleges and special schools that are experiencing year-on-year growth in the number of pupils and students with high needs that they admit.

An example of how the high needs funding arrangements should operate when a college has more students with high needs than the number of places is included in [annex 2: an example of where pupil and student numbers differ from allocated places](#). The same principles apply when a school has more pupils with high needs than the number of funded places.

Where DfE acts as the 'provider local authority' (for NMSS, SPIs and a small number of centrally funded FE colleges), funding is provided on a lagged basis. This means that the number of pupils or students who attend one of these schools or colleges in any given year is used to calculate their respective place funding allocation for the following year. The funding allocation will subsequently be deducted from the relevant commissioning local authorities through the NFF import/export adjustment.

Given these arrangements in place, these centrally funded schools and colleges should not seek to secure any additional place funding from any local authority, to avoid a situation where a local authority effectively funds a place twice.

For SPIs and the centrally funded FE colleges and ILPs, if the number of high needs students recorded in the academic year 2025 to 2026 ILR R04 return is greater than their funded places, they may receive an in-year growth award as part of the annual exceptional in-year growth process, subject to the annually agreed criteria. This is a data driven process and no

business case is needed. The methodology for calculating in year growth is determined annually. In the meantime, and for information, the methodology for the 2024 to 2025 (academic year) can be found in [16 to 19 funding: in-year growth funding for the 2024 to 2025 \(academic year\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-in-year-growth-for-2024-to-2025) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-in-year-growth-for-2024-to-2025>).

If a NMSS has significant numbers of pupils or students over and above their allocated place numbers, which raises funding concerns because of the lagged data approach, they should contact us via the [Customer Help Portal](https://customerhelpportal.education.gov.uk/) (<https://customerhelpportal.education.gov.uk/>).

7. High needs top-up funding (including examples)

Top-up funding (sometimes referred to as element 3) is the funding which is required over and above the core funding (sometimes referred to as elements 1 and 2) a school or college receives to enable a pupil or student with high needs to participate in education and learning. This is paid by the commissioning local authority (or sometimes schools in the case of AP).

Most of this section covers how top-up funding works for children and young people with SEND and includes some examples. Further information about how top-up funding works for PRUs, AP academies and AP free schools is set out in the [alternative provision](#) section.

Although many pupils and students receiving high needs funding will have an associated EHC plan, local authorities have the flexibility to provide high needs funding outside the statutory assessment process for all children and young people with high needs up to the age of 19.

7.1 Collaboration between local authorities, schools and colleges to organise local authority top-up funding

Local authorities play an essential statutory and strategic role in planning education services and funding placements, and in supporting local schools and colleges, within a robust financial framework. The local approach to top-up funding should, therefore, be planned so far as possible in the context of a strategic agreement between commissioning local authorities, schools and colleges on the available special educational provision and the overall levels of funding required.

Such strategic discussion should be carried out as part of the local authority's statutory duty to keep the special educational provision in their area under review, working with parents, young people, schools and colleges, as set out in chapter 4 of the [SEND code of practice](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>), and to publish information about this local offer of services and provision for children and young people with SEN on their website. The published local offer must include information about the arrangements the local authority has for funding children and young people with SEN and disabilities, including any agreements about how providers will use any funding that has been allocated to them. A wide range of educational providers are required to collaborate with local authorities in such reviews, including maintained schools, academies, FE and sixth form colleges, independent and NMSS, SPIs and other providers of special educational provision, and relevant early education providers.

It is always better if funding arrangements are developed collaboratively and agreed in advance to facilitate a shared understanding of the different types of provision which should be available, the needs of the children and young people who are likely to require them and the associated level of top-up funding (for example, if funding bands are used) to meet their support needs.

7.2 Other requirements relevant to top-up funding

Local authorities' expenditure from the DSG is subject to [conditions of grant](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2025-to-2026>) set by DfE, which govern the way high needs funding is used, including the way top-up funding is organised, including:

- local authorities must treat children and young people with high needs on a fair and equivalent basis when making arrangements for their funding, regardless of whether they are placed in maintained schools, academies and free schools, providers in the FE sector, or non-maintained and independent provision
- local authorities must make payments of top-up funding in a timely fashion on a basis agreed with the school or college. These must be monthly, unless otherwise agreed

We will examine cases and consider remedial action where there is clear evidence from a school or college that a local authority is not meeting the relevant conditions of grant, providing the local authority's complaints processes have been exhausted (see the 'Resolving funding disagreements' section below).

Where a pupil or student with an EHC plan is due to move between educational settings or phases, the local authority must review and amend the EHC plan in the spring of the preceding academic year and issue a revised EHC plan by 31 March of that same year, as set out in [annex 8: important dates](#). In no circumstances should an admission of a pupil or student, or the continuation of a placement at a school or college be conditional on or delayed by receipt or agreement of top-up funding.

7.3 Determining top-up funding levels

Local authorities are responsible for decisions regarding levels of top-up funding since they have the statutory responsibility for making the educational placement. Where a child or young person has an EHC plan, the local authority must secure the special educational provision specified in the plan. Local authorities also have statutory duties in respect of children of compulsory school age without a school place, that require the use of AP.

Local authorities, schools and colleges should consider the following principles relating to decisions about top-up funding.

7.3.1 Decisions should be timely

Levels of top-up funding should be confirmed at the earliest opportunity, before the pupil or student has been admitted to the school or college, so that their placement is not disrupted, and recognising the cashflow and accounting requirements of schools and colleges.

7.3.2 Decisions should be clear

The local authority should confirm (in writing) the amount of top-up funding to be paid as soon as possible after the placement has been commissioned. Where a local authority makes a number of placements, a single schedule of placements and payments may be sufficient.

7.3.3 Decisions should be evidence-based

The local authority should consider evidence from the school or college about the costs of offering provision for the pupils and students with high needs, including cost increases such as for utilities and staff pay awards that are not met from other sources. Schools and colleges should be transparent about their costs and how they contribute to delivering the overall provision for the pupils and students with high needs.

7.3.4 Decisions should reflect relevant costs

Top-up funding is intended to contribute to the costs of special educational provision for children and young people with high needs. Top-up funding should therefore take account of other elements of funding that also contribute to meeting such costs, such as mainstream schools' and

colleges' formula funding to meet the cost of additional support up to £6,000 per pupil, or special schools' and colleges' place funding.

Top -up funding can reflect:

- the provision and facilities required by individual pupils and students, such as the cost of any specific additional support to meet the individual's needs, or free school meals for those entitled to receive them in special schools
- the costs of the overall provision for all those with SEND, for example, the costs of buildings for those schools and colleges not able to access capital funding

However, we do not expect top-up funding to contribute to, or, subsidise:

- overheads attributable to other budgets within the school or college, and funded from other sources, for example, residential accommodation funded from the local authority's social care budget or adult education provided by a college
- costs that would have had to have been met even if it had no pupils or students with high needs, for example, the salary of the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) required by all mainstream schools
- the costs of legal action against local authority decisions on assessment, provision, and top-up funding, including support for parents seeking SEN tribunal judgments on such local authority decisions
- the cost of educational and other assessments (both non-statutory and EHC needs assessments), for example, by educational psychologists

7.3.5 Decisions should be based on agreed provision and cost expectations

Agreements over what provision should be ordinarily available, with associated standardised funding rates, can simplify extensive negotiations on provision and funding, and avoid disputes arising. By calculating top-up funding for a cohort of pupils or students, local authorities can create certainty for schools and colleges on the level of funding they can expect to receive for the provision. A clearly understood and consistently applied local 'banding' framework can therefore be particularly important – see further information about banded funding arrangements below. In such circumstances, even where provision is specified in an EHC plan, there is no statutory requirement that a local authority must pay top-up funding at a particular rate requested by a school or college.

In some cases, decisions about top-up funding may need to reflect the normal or expected occupancy of places. The nature of pre-16 AP and SEND provision in some schools and colleges may result in empty places arising at some points in the academic year, for example, in AP where

referrals begin to be made later, or after the autumn term. Similarly, some schools may routinely admit a higher number of pupils than the places for which they are funded.

Place funding comes from the provider local authority's high needs budget, and top-up funding from the resident authority's high needs budget. Because the sources of these different elements of funding can be different local authorities, if a school or college has been funded for high needs places which are not being used (whether at £6,000 or £10,000 per place), place funding should not simply be deducted from the normal level of top-up funding. Similarly, if a school or college has filled all of its funded high needs places, they should not automatically expect the top-up funding rate to be increased by £6,000 or £10,000 per additional placement. See [annex 2: an example of where pupil and student numbers differ from funded places](#) for supporting information.

7.4 Banded funding arrangements

Many local authorities have systems which indicate the range of top-up funding that might be provided for children and young people with a particular type and complexity of need (sometimes referred to as 'banded funding' systems). These can be helpful in providing clear and transparent funding arrangements.

Where a local authority makes a large number of placements at a school or college or at a range of schools and colleges locally, a system which agrees likely levels of top-up funding in advance can be a very efficient way of allocating funding. The local authority must be satisfied that the final allocation of funding (both the top-up funding and other elements of funding) is sufficient overall to secure suitable provision (for example, that specified in an EHC plan) and should keep top-up funding levels under review at regular intervals.

There can be issues when a child or young person is placed in a school or college located in another local authority area if there are different expectations of provision and funding. When placing a pupil or student in a school or college in another local authority's area, commissioning local authorities should therefore:

- determine top-up funding in accordance with the funding bands that the provider local authority uses for their pupils and students, unless there is clear evidence that the provision required for the child or young person would require different levels of funding
- collaborate with neighbouring local authorities when reviewing and developing their top-up funding bands

consistency to the levels of top-up funding for schools and colleges used routinely for placements by more than one local authority

7.5 Resolving funding disagreements

Schools, colleges and local authorities should work together to avoid and resolve disagreements about commissioning arrangements and the top-up funding for the placement of individual children and young people. In addition to following the principles outlined above, the following points of guidance should help in preventing disputes and resolving any that arise:

- local authorities' responsibilities for decisions on top-up funding should be discharged fairly, reasonably and after proper consultation, recognising that at every level, different types of school and college are also accountable for their spending
- in the case of children and young people with EHC plans, the statutory annual review process should also be an opportunity to review the funding arrangements in the light of evidence about an individual's needs, their progress and any changes to the provision they require
- many local authorities use multi-agency panels to provide advice on decisions relating to EHC plans, placements and high needs funding. This can be an important way to ensure area-wide approaches (such as funding bands) are applied consistently and fairly in individual cases. Such panels can only be advisory: decisions on placements, provision and funding must remain with an officer of the local authority

Where a funding dispute remains unresolved, a local dispute resolution protocol can help to resolve this in a timely manner, if the dispute is not resolved, the complaint may be considered by the [Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman \(LGSCO\)](https://www.lgo.org.uk/) (<https://www.lgo.org.uk/>) if appropriate.

All stages of the local authority's complaint procedure(s) should be fully documented before a complaint to the Secretary of State is considered.

7.6 Other information relating to top-up funding (including public sector procurement)

DfE has published [non-statutory guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/procuring-send-education-placements-and-services) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/procuring-send-education-placements-and-services>) on procuring SEND education placements and services following the introduction of the [Procurement Act 2023](#)

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/54/contents>) that took effect from 24 February 2025. The guidance aims to help local authorities and education providers to understand how the Procurement Act 2023 interacts with the Children and Families Act 2014 and identify if SEND education placements and services are in or out of scope of the procurement legislation.

Pupils and students should only be counted as having high needs for funding purposes (and be recorded on the [school census](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-census) <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-census>) or [ILR](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/individualised-learner-record-ilr) <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/individualised-learner-record-ilr>) as such), if the local authority has determined that top-up funding is payable for that pupil or student. A pupil or student should not be recorded as having high needs unless the local authority has made such a determination, even where a school or college has assessed a pupil or student as requiring additional support from the local authority's high needs budget, or where a pupil or student has been offered a high needs place by that school or college. In such circumstances, the school or college should use its best endeavours to make the special provision for the pupil or student, seeking advice from the local authority, if necessary, as to what additional support the pupil's EHC needs or other assessment may have indicated is appropriate.

If a pupil or student's placement is interrupted temporarily for public health reasons, for example, because a school or college has had to partially close, the school or college should contact the commissioning local authority to discuss alternative arrangements for their continuing access to education and support and for the continuation of top-up funding for the provision being made. If an absence is expected to be long-term, because a public or personal health issue affects the young person's attendance and ability to engage in their education, the local authority should review the EHC plan and if necessary, amend it to name a different suitable placement.

8. Local authority high needs central services and support

While the majority of a local authority's high needs budget is spent on place and top-up funding for schools and colleges, local authorities can also use high needs funding to provide additional or targeted support for children and young people with SEND, as permitted under schedule 2 of [The School and Early Years Finance \(England\) Regulations](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/42/contents/made) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/42/contents/made>). This can take the form of preventative and early intervention support services, and access to specialist services or expertise commissioned by the local authority, as well as additional funding to schools and colleges.

Specifically, to support the new government's ambition for a more inclusive mainstream education system, the regulations allow local authorities incur expenditure and target funding for the purposes both of encouraging the education of children and young people with SEN at mainstream schools, and of collaboration between special and mainstream schools to enable those with SEN to engage in mainstream school activities.

As in previous years, the amount that the local authority plans to spend on such support and services should be included on the local authority's s251 budget statement. The actual expenditure should be reported on the same basis in the local authority's s251 outturn statement. The schools forum is expected to discuss the details, including funding and effectiveness of these services.

8.1 Specialist support services

Specialist support services can play an important role in enabling mainstream schools and colleges to meet a wider range of special educational needs and supports the presumption in law that all children and young people should be educated in mainstream provision, unless they require more specialist provision, as determined through the statutory EHC assessment process.

If mainstream provision is to meet a wide range of SEND, it is important that mainstream schools and colleges have access to high-quality specialist support, for example, to help children and young people who have:

- autism spectrum disorder
- speech and language needs
- social, emotional and mental health needs
- sensory impairment
- challenging behaviour associated with their SEND

This typically involves specialist teachers with expertise in supporting pupils with complex needs who are available to advise, train and support other teachers and special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) in mainstream schools and colleges. For example, support could be provided through networking and targeted training or commissioned from a specialist provider.

It is important that such support is available to mainstream schools (maintained schools, academies and free schools), general FE colleges, sixth form colleges and 16 to 19 academies. They are all statutorily required to identify the SEN of their children and young people and to use their best

endeavours to make sure that a child or young person who has SEN gets the support they need.

Local authorities and mainstream schools and colleges should discuss how such specialist support should be delivered when considering how to spend the high needs funding available to them. Many local authorities employ specialist teachers, funded directly from their high needs budget. Others give special schools additional funding to provide specialist support to other schools and colleges. Such arrangements are frequently accompanied by a service level agreement confirming what will be delivered in return for the additional funding.

Specialist support for pupils at risk of suspension or permanent exclusion may be commissioned by the local authority or by schools (using funding devolved by the local authority). Further information on centrally commissioned AP services can be found in the 'Alternative provision' section below.

High needs funding cannot be used for local authorities' costs in relation to SEND administration, assessment, co-ordination and monitoring, as per schedule 1 of [The School and Early Years Finance \(England\) Regulations](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/42/contents/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/42/contents/made>). For example, educational psychologist costs for the identification of children and young people with SEND, the assessment of EHC needs and the preparation and review of EHC plans, cannot be charged directly to the DSG. [Annex 6: health and social care costs](#) provides further guidance on the funding of health and social care costs.

9. Funding overview by education setting type

9.1 Early years provider settings

DfE funds local authorities to deliver the early years entitlements using early years national funding formulae. The 2024 autumn budget confirmed £1.8 billion in 2025 to 2026 to support the expansion of the entitlements. This means the planned budget for childcare entitlements in 2025 to 2026 will be over £8 billion.

Local authorities are then responsible for setting individual provider funding rates in consultation with their providers and schools forum, and fund providers using their local funding formula. From 2025 to 2026, local

authorities are required to plan to pass through at least 96% of their funding received from the government to early years providers. This new 96% requirement will apply separately to the entitlements for:

- 9-month-old children up to 2-year-olds of eligible working parents
- 2-year-old children of eligible working parents
- 2-year-old children from families receiving additional support
- 3 and 4-year-olds (universal and additional hours)

For 3 and 4-year-olds, whilst the minimum pass-through requirement is increasing, there is no change to the approach of how this will be calculated, and the pass-through requirement will apply to the universal and additional hours in combination. For 2-year-olds and under, the requirement will apply to each of the entitlements individually. This means that local authorities cannot meet a combined pass-through requirement on the 2 separate entitlements for 2-year-olds.

The [early years entitlements: local authority funding operational guide 2025 to 2026](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-funding-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-funding-2025-to-2026>) includes more information on how the early years block funding is allocated to local authorities and should be distributed to providers to deliver the early years entitlements.

9.1.1 High needs funding in early years

Children aged 0 to 5 with more complex needs and those with an EHC plan are also eligible to receive funding from local authorities' high needs budgets, funded from the high needs block of the DSG.

Local authorities can meet the costs of children aged 5 and under with high needs in different ways from their high needs budget. These may include SEN support provided directly as a central service for young children with high needs and resources for early years providers to enable them to make the required provision. Place funding may also be used for early years provision, for example, at special schools, supplemented by top-up funding for individual children.

9.1.2 Special educational needs inclusion fund (SENIF)

All local authorities are required to have special educational needs inclusion funds (SENIFs) for all eligible children with SEN taking up any of the free entitlements, regardless of the number of hours taken. These funds are intended to support local authorities to work with providers to address the needs of individual children with low level or emerging SEN who are taking up the entitlements. The structure also supports local authorities to undertake their responsibilities to strategically commission SEN services as required under the [Children and Families Act 2014](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted>).

Local authorities can establish their SENIFs using funding from the early years block and/or the high needs block of their DSG allocation. Although local arrangements will vary, local authorities should consider the right balance to strike in drawing from these 2 blocks of funding, taking into account the particular pressures on high needs and early years budgets locally.

9.1.3 Disability access funding

As set out in the [early years entitlements: local authority funding operational guide 2025 to 2026](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-funding-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-funding-2025-to-2026>), the disability access fund (DAF) supports eligible disabled children's access to any of the entitlements.

9.2 Mainstream schools, academies and free schools

Mainstream schools without SEN units or RP are funded for pre-16 pupils with SEN as follows:

- core funding: included within the local schools funding formula
- top-up funding: agreed and paid on a per pupil basis by the commissioning local authority

High needs place funding is only available in pre-16 provision to mainstream schools with SEN units or RP. It is available for mainstream schools with sixth forms in the same way as for other post-16 provision.

Maintained mainstream schools will receive notification of their core funding allocations of pre-16 funding for the new financial year beginning in April, by the end of the prior February. Mainstream academies and free schools will receive notification by the end of March, before the subsequent academic funding year starting in September.

The core funding for mainstream schools includes funding for pupils with SEND, whose additional support costs are lower than £6,000. Maintained schools and academies should have sufficient funding in their delegated budget to enable them to support pupils with SEN as required, up to the mandatory cost threshold of £6,000 per pupil per annum.

For pupils aged 5 to 15 years in mainstream schools, a notional SEN budget is identified, and the amount should be shown in a maintained school's budget notification and is included in an academy's general annual grant (GAG) notification. This is an indicative amount that schools may use as a guide for how much they might need to spend on supporting their pupils with SEND. The [notional SEN budget for mainstream schools operational guide](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-16-schools-operational-guide) ([https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-16-schools-](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-16-schools-operational-guide)

[funding-local-authority-guidance-for-2025-to-2026](#)) for local authorities explains how their schools' notional SEN budget can be calculated using local funding formula factors, with the aim of achieving greater consistency in that calculation.

Local authorities should review their schools' notional SEN budget calculation for 2025 to 2026 in line with that guidance, to ensure that the budget identified is reasonable as a guide to what schools might need to spend on additional support for their pupils with SEND, taking into account costs up to £6,000 per pupil. Where there is a disproportionate number of pupils with SEND in a school, additional funding may be provided outside the main funding formula, as explained below.

9.2.1 Additional funding for mainstream schools

Local authorities can provide additional targeted funding from their high needs budget, and outside the main funding formula for mainstream schools and academies on a consistent and fair basis, where:

- there is a disproportionate number of pupils with SEND, and/or with more complex SEND (for example, a primary school may have developed a particular expertise or facility for meeting the needs of high achieving pupils with autism, or pupils with physical disabilities, resulting in more pupils with these needs being admitted)
- that number cannot be reflected adequately in the funding they receive through the local funding formula

They should define the circumstances in which additional funding will be provided from their high needs budget, through a formula or other methodology agreed with schools. In all cases, the distribution methodology should be simple and transparent, and devised so that additional funds are targeted only to a minority of schools which have particular challenges because of their disproportionate number of pupils with SEN and/or high needs, or their characteristics.

The criteria and budget should be included in the additional factors/commentary section of the APT, and the budgeted and outturn expenditure included in line 1.2.4 (additional high needs targeted funding for mainstream schools and academies) of the s251 returns.

Where individual pupils require additional support costing more than £6,000, the excess should be met by top-up funding associated with the individual pupil.

9.2.2 Sixth forms in mainstream schools

Mainstream school sixth forms are funded for their core funding per student based on the 16 to 19 funding formula (sometimes referred to as element 1) and £6,000 per high needs place (element 2). Funding to support students whose additional support costs are lower than £6,000 is provided through

the disadvantage factor of the mainstream 16 to 19 funding formula allocation.

High needs place funding (element 2) is available to schools for students with SEN requiring additional costs exceeding £6,000. Local authorities should have engaged with their mainstream schools with sixth forms to agree place numbers. Local authorities also have flexibility to agree alternative ways of calculating this element of high needs funding with maintained schools, academies, and free schools. Further information can be found within the [high needs place funding: local flexibility to allocate differently](#) section.

We do not require information on changes to places funded in maintained schools, as local authorities fund these directly and have local flexibility to change the number of places, as well as the method of calculating the allocation. Local authorities should, however, notify DfE of changes to place numbers for academies and free schools, to ensure that they are funded on the correct basis as part of the [annual place change process](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/making-significant-changes-to-an-existing-academy>).

As explained for pre-16 pupils, where individual pupils require additional support that costs more than £6,000, the excess should be met by top-up funding associated with the individual pupil.

9.2.3 Special educational needs (SEN) units and resourced provision (RP) in mainstream schools

Many maintained mainstream schools and academies have SEN units and/or RP attached, offering specialist provision formally recognised by the local authority where the school is located and with high needs places funded by that authority. Both SEN units and RP are usually for pupils with an EHC plan, but may also provide for pupils without an EHC plan, and often cater for a specific type or types of SEN. They sometimes accommodate pupils registered at other schools on a part-time basis.

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.

RP consists of 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.

Mainstream schools are funded for SEN units and RP through:

- pre-16 core funding:

- a combination of per-pupil funding through the local schools funding formula, plus £6,000 per place for those occupied by pupils on roll (that is, recorded on the school census as sole or dual (main) registered at the school)
- £10,000 per place for places that are or will be occupied by a pupil registered on the roll of another school, places not occupied at the time of the school census count, but which are likely to be filled and require funding or places for capacity required for another local reason)
- post-16 core funding: element 1 (based on the 16 to 19 funding formula) plus element 2 (£6,000 per place) based on the number of places to be funded
- top-up funding for pupils with high needs, whose additional support costs more than £6,000, paid by the resident local authority commissioning the placement(s)

In the case of place numbers for maintained schools with SEN units and RP, the provider local authority that maintains the school determines the total number of places to be funded, taking full account of places that may be commissioned by other local authorities.

DfE confirms:

- the number of funded high needs places in mainstream academies and free schools following the annual place change notification process
- the place funding amount rate, based on occupancy data provided in the APT

The total number of places funded is based on the outcomes from the [place change notification process \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026). The number of places funded at £6,000 per place is calculated based on the number of places occupied by pupils on-roll of the school or academy, as recorded in the APT. This would not exceed the total number of funded places.

For example, if funding for 10 places was agreed through the place change process, and 12 places were recorded as occupied in the APT, 10 places would be funded at £6,000 per place. This is because we use the place change process to determine the place numbers, not the APT.

The number of unoccupied places, funded at £10,000 per place, is calculated as the funded places (via the place change process), minus the number of occupied places recorded in the APT. This funding will not be below zero. In the example above, there are no unoccupied places, given the total of occupied places is the same as, or above the number notified as part of the place change process.

Where there are provision changes such as a new SEN unit or RP at an academy or free school, this must first be approved through the [significant change process](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/making-significant-changes-to-an-existing-academy) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/making-significant-changes-to-an-existing-academy>). Supporting guidance on [opening, closing and making changes to schools](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/opening-closing-and-making-changes-to-schools) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/opening-closing-and-making-changes-to-schools>) is also available. A signed deed of variation must be received from the academy trust so place funding can be reflected in the 2025 to 2026 academic year allocation from DfE, as notified through the [annual place change process](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026>).

Depending on the range and type of services on offer, it is also possible for such provision to be a centrally funded service commissioned by the local authority, normally under a service level agreement with the school or academy. If such an agreement is with an academy, this would be a local arrangement with the SEN unit or RP funded directly by the local authority rather than via DfE. More information is included in the 2025 to 2026 place change technical note.

9.3 Maintained special schools, special academies and special free schools

Pre-16 and post-16 high needs places at maintained special schools, special academies and special free schools are funded at £10,000 per place. Details of how the annual place numbers are determined is detailed in the [high needs place funding](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026) section and [supporting guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026>).

Maintained special schools are notified of their place funding allocations for the financial year 2025 to 2026 (that is, their budget shares) by their local authority (by the end of February 2025). Special academies and free schools receive their funding allocations from DfE (by the end of March 2025), in advance of the academic year.

Funding for special school growth following the annual place funding allocation is covered in the 'Where pupil and student numbers differ from funded places' section.

DfE provides additional place funding to local authorities for new and growing special free schools to cover the cost of their period of growth, ensuring there is no additional cost to the local authority.

For those special free schools that have reached the end of their period of growth, additional funding has been included in local authorities' baselines, informed by data from the previous academic year. Further information can be found in the [special free schools adjustments: a guide for local authorities](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026>).

In addition, maintained special schools, special academies and special free schools receive per pupil top-up funding paid by the commissioning (resident) local authority.

9.3.1 Special schools minimum funding guarantee

A special school protection, otherwise known as the MFG, will continue to apply to maintained special schools and special academies (including special free schools but excluding NMSS and independent schools) in 2025 to 2026. The MFG to be operated by local authorities for 2025 to 2026 must be 0% using their schools' 2024 to 2025 funding baseline. The local authority must have a disapplication request approved to use a negative percentage.

This means that no special school will receive from their provider local authority less funding per pupil in 2025 to 2026 on a like-for-like comparison with their pupil cohort in 2024 to 2025, unless a disapplication request has been approved. The calculation should assume that the number and type of places remains the same between 2024 to 2025 and 2025 to 2026. It should also assume that all pupils in the school are placed by the provider local authority (usually, where the school is located) and that all top-up funding rates received by the school are those set by that local authority.

See [annex 3: special schools minimum funding guarantee](#) for further information on the MFG protection, including worked examples.

9.3.2 Special schools additional funding streams

Special schools must also receive the 2025 to 2026 CSBG, which combines the full-year equivalent of the 2024 to 2025 CSBG with the 2024 to 2025 TPAG and TPECG from their provider local authority. In addition, they must receive high needs funding that is equivalent to the historic teachers' pay and pensions grants, and a continuation of the additional funding first received in 2023 to 2024. See [annex 4: historic teachers' pay and pensions funding and additional funding](#), for details of how this additional funding is to be calculated by local authorities.

Table 4 below summarises the various funding streams that are relevant for these special schools.

Table 4: main funding streams for special schools' core staffing and other running costs

Funding element	Value	Data used	Inclusion in 2025 to 2026 MFG
Place funding	Flat rate £10,000 per place	Number of places decided by provider local authority, in consultation with school	Yes
Top-up funding	Variable, may depend on local system of funding bands	Should reflect the cost of provision in excess of the place funding, necessary to make the provision that has been commissioned	Yes
Historic teachers' pay and pensions funding (previous TPG and TPECG)	Locked at 2020 to 2021 value per place	Number of places decided by local authority, in consultation with school	No, this is a separate high needs funding stream, not to be included in the MFG calculation
Additional 3.4% funding equivalent to mainstream schools additional grant (MSAG)	Locked at 2023 to 2024 value per place	Number of places decided by local authority, in consultation with school	No, this is a separate high needs funding stream, not to be included in the MFG calculation
CSBG consolidated grant for 2025 to 2026, incorporating pay and pensions funding allocated	Locked at 2024 to 2025 full-year value per place of combined TPAG, TPECG and CSBG, unless moving to national	Number of places decided by local authority, in consultation with school	No, this is a separate high needs funding stream, not to be included in

Funding element	Value	Data used	Inclusion in 2025 to 2026 MFG
as separate grants in the previous year and 2025 NICs and staff pay increases funding	per-place rate following consultation, plus 2025 NICs and staff pay increase funding block of CSBG allocated as above		the MFG calculation

9.4 Non-maintained special schools

NMSS receive place funding directly from DfE and are subject to a grant funding agreement. All NMSS places (pre and post-16) are funded at £10,000 per year.

We base NMSS place funding allocations on the pupil number data from the latest October school census, uplifted by the difference between the previous year's October and January census pupil number data. Only pupils resident in England and within the school's age range are included in the calculation. If there is a reduction in the number of pupils between the October and January census, DfE does not reduce funding. This ensures that no school is funded on numbers less than those recorded in their latest October census. If a school predicts that they will have significantly more pupils than the number of places on which their funding is calculated, and they have concerns about how provision for those pupils will be funded, they should contact us via the [Customer Help Portal](https://customerhelpportal.education.gov.uk/) (<https://customerhelpportal.education.gov.uk/>).

In addition, NMSS receive top-up funding paid by the commissioning local authority, as well as historic teachers' pay and pensions high needs funding, and a CSBG allocation directly from DfE.

From 1 January 2025 local authorities' top-up funding for NMSS in respect of individual pupils' placements will be subject to VAT. Under section 33 of the VAT Act, local authorities are able to reclaim the VAT they pay. Any invoices submitted to local authorities will therefore need to identify VAT clearly.

9.5 Independent schools

Independent schools, including independent special schools and independent AP, sit outside the high needs place funding system. Where a local authority has commissioned a place in an independent school, the local authority is responsible for funding the school from their high needs budget to reflect the full cost of provision for that child or young person with SEND, rather than the school having an allocation of place funding and top-up funding. Much of the guidance relating to top-up funding will be relevant in local authorities' decisions about their funding for independent schools. The total expenditure on these placements should be included in the relevant high needs top-up funding line of each local authority's s251 returns.

Only educational costs (including deemed educational costs) should be funded by the DSG. In some cases, the integrated package of support will be costed and charged through a single fee. We encourage schools to be clear, and where requested provide evidence, about which elements of provision (and therefore, cost) should be attributed to education, health and social care so that the local authority can charge non-educational costs to the responsible partners. Further information can be found in [annex 6: health and social care costs](#).

From 1 January 2025 the fees charged for placements in independent schools will be subject to VAT. Under section 33 of the VAT Act, local authorities are able to reclaim the VAT they pay. Any invoices submitted to local authorities will therefore need to identify VAT clearly.

CSBG funding to local authorities includes an amount based on SEND placements in independent schools, as recorded in each local authority's [alternative provision census return \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/alternative-provision-ap-census\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/alternative-provision-ap-census). This grant is to support a continuation of any increase in fees charged by independent schools for the 2024 to 2025 financial year period as a result of the 2024 teachers' and other staff pay awards and teachers' pension employer contribution rate increase, and to support any increase in fees as a result of the 2025 NICs and other staff salary increases.

9.5.1 Parental placements in independent schools

In the event that a child's parents make suitable alternative arrangements for their child's education (for example, by making a private fee-paying placement in an independent school), the local authority's duty to secure the special educational provision specified in the EHC plan will not apply. The local authority must assure itself that the alternative arrangements are suitable and has the option of providing discretionary top-up funding to ensure they are suitable. More information about how local authorities

should discharge their responsibilities for children and young people with SEND in independent schools is set out in the [SEND code of practice \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25), in particular paragraphs 9.131 to 9.136.

9.5.2 Unregistered independent schools

Where a local authority is considering placing a child or young person with an EHC plan on a full-time basis in independent provision, they must ensure the setting is properly registered with DfE before any placement is made. Any provision that provides full-time education for 5 or more pupils of compulsory school age, or for one or more pupils of compulsory school age who have an EHC plan or are looked after by a local authority and which is not a maintained school, or a non-maintained special school will be considered an independent school. All independent schools must be registered with the Secretary of State. Further information on the process can be found at [independent school registration \(https://www.gov.uk/independent-school-registration\)](https://www.gov.uk/independent-school-registration).

It is an offence to conduct an unregistered independent school, and anyone who does so is liable on summary conviction to a fine and/or imprisonment. Local authorities making use of unregistered provision for the purpose of providing full-time education to children with EHC plans may prejudice future prosecutions of unlawfully operating settings.

9.6 General further education (FE) colleges, sixth form colleges, 16 to 19 academies and maintained schools and independent learning providers

General FE colleges, sixth form colleges, ILPs and 16 to 19 maintained schools and academies receive core funding based on an amount per student calculated using the 16 to 19 funding formula (element 1) and, for their students with high needs, £6,000 per high needs place (element 2). Top-up funding for students with high needs (element 3) is paid directly by the local authority commissioning the place.

Element 1 funding, based on student numbers, is allocated directly by DfE to colleges (or via the provider local authority for 16 to 19 maintained schools) for students aged 16 to 19 and those aged 19 to 25 with EHC plans. The number of students and amount of funding paid has no impact on local authorities' high needs allocations through their DSG. Funding to support students with SEN where additional support costs are lower than £6,000, is provided through the disadvantage factor of the mainstream 16 to 19 funding allocation, since these students do not count as students with high needs.

The number of high needs places (element 2) funded at £6,000 per place for the 2025 to 2026 academic year is determined through the place change process. As indicated above, it is essential that the provider local authority (that is, the one in which the main college or provider headquarters is located) discusses with their colleges how many places should be funded. Further information about how place funding works, including where students exceed place numbers, can be found in the 'High needs place funding: local flexibility to allocate differently' section.

FE colleges may also agree an alternative method of calculating this element of funding with their provider local authority (that is, a calculation that is not necessarily a number of high needs places multiplied by £6,000), subject to the requirements outlined in the [high needs place funding: local flexibility to allocate differently](#) section.

There are a number of situations where a 14 to 16-year-old may be studying in a college. These could be:

- students who achieved a level 2 qualification early and are choosing to enrol on a full level 3 course, and home-educated students are counted as 16 to 19-year-olds. Such students are funded alongside 16 to 19-year-olds via the 16 to 19 funding formula for element 1 and £6,000 per place for element 2
- students enrolled in a maintained school or academy but studying part-time in college are not funded as 16 to 19-year-olds, as the maintained school or academy will receive funding in respect of these students via the pre-16 process applicable to that school
- some colleges are eligible to be directly funded by DfE for 14 to 16-year-olds
 - these students should be recorded in the ILR accordingly and will be funded for element 1 via the 16 to 19 formula using a separate process. For element 2, these students are counted as 16 to 19-year-olds and funded at £6,000 per place using the same process as for 16 to 19-year-olds. Further details for FE colleges on funding for directly recruited 14 to 16-year-olds in colleges can be found in the enrolment of [14 to 16 year olds in FE guidance \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/full-time-enrolment-of-14-to-16-year-olds-in-further-education-and-sixth-form-colleges\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/full-time-enrolment-of-14-to-16-year-olds-in-further-education-and-sixth-form-colleges).

In addition, colleges receive top-up funding (element 3) paid by the resident local authority that has commissioned the place for a student with high needs for the costs of their educational support in excess of £6,000. Further information on high needs top-up funding (element 3) is set out in the [high needs top-up funding](#) section.

9.7 Special post-16 institutions (SPIs)

SPIs can receive all their funding from local authorities, for students with SEN placed by a local authority in the college. To be eligible to receive high needs place funding from DfE, however, SPIs must either have already been in receipt of programme funding from DfE through the 16 to 19 funding formula (that is, element 1) or have successfully completed the [high needs funding: due diligence process](#)

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-due-diligence-process-for-new-special-post-16-providers>) for SPIs. To receive place funding from DfE, such SPIs must have been proposed by a local authority through the annual place change notification process. Their allocations are determined by the place numbers returned by the local authority in which they are located, through the place change notification for the first year.

All SPIs in their second year onwards of receiving place funding from DfE are allocated funding (element 1 and element 2) based on their ILR R06 return. More information on how element 1 is calculated can be found in the [16 to 19 special post-16 institution revenue funding allocations guide](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-allocations-supporting-documents-for-2024-to-2025/16-to-19-special-post-16-institution-spi-revenue-funding-allocation-guide-2024-to-2025>). Element 2 is £6,000 per place and is calculated using the number of students flagged in the ILR as being in receipt of top up funding. In addition, they receive top-up funding paid by the resident local authority that has commissioned the place for a student. Further information can be found in the 'High needs place funding' and 'High needs top-up funding' sections.

If the number of high needs students recorded in the academic year 2025 to 2026 ILR R04 return is greater than their funded places, SPIs may receive an in-year growth award as part of the annual exceptional in-year growth process, subject to affordability and meeting the annually agreed criteria. This is a data driven process and no business case is accepted, except those relating to data errors. DfE publishes the criteria for calculating elements 1 and 2 of the in-year growth for SPIs once decisions have been made for the academic year in question - this is normally during that academic year. The methodology for the 2024 to 2025 (academic year) can be found in [16 to 19 funding: in-year growth funding for the 2024 to 2025 \(academic year\)](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-in-year-growth-for-2024-to-2025>).

From 1 January 2025 fees charged for placements in SPIs may be subject to VAT. The new VAT rules apply to a SPI:

1. Which is wholly or mainly concerned with providing education suitable to the requirements of persons over compulsory school age but under 19.

2. At which full-time education is provided for such persons.
3. Where fees are paid in relation to the provision of full-time education falling at point 2 (immediately above) is wholly or mainly provision in respect of which fees or other considerations are payable.
4. Which is not an independent training or learning provider.

Under section 33 of the VAT Act, local authorities are able to reclaim the VAT they pay. Any invoices submitted to local authorities will therefore need to identify VAT clearly.

9.8 Centrally funded exceptions (CFE)

There are a small number of post-16 FE colleges and ILPs funded directly by DfE that do not have their allocations agreed as part of the main place change process. Their 2025 to 2026 academic year place funding will be based on the number of high needs students recorded in their academic year 2024 to 2025 ILR R06 return.

If the number of high needs students recorded in the academic year 2025 to 2026 ILR R04 return is greater than their funded places, they may receive an in-year growth award as part of the annual exceptional in-year growth process, subject to affordability and meeting the annually agreed criteria. This is a data driven process and no business case is accepted, except those relating to data errors. The methodology for the 2024 to 2025 (academic year) can be found in [16 to 19 funding: in-year growth funding for the 2024 to 2025 \(academic year\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-in-year-growth-for-the-2024-to-2025-academic-year) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-in-year-growth-for-2024-to-2025>).

10. Alternative provision (AP) and hospital education

When children of compulsory school age are not receiving suitable education, the local authority has a duty, under section 19 of the [Education Act 1996](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/contents) (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/contents>) to arrange it.

When arranging AP, the commissioner should clearly define the nature of the intervention, its objectives, and the timeline to achieve these, accounting for any statutory SEND responsibilities, especially when an EHC plan is in place. [Arranging Alternative Provision](#)

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision>) commissioning guidance sets out further information.

A child may be placed in an alternative setting for a period of time because of a suspension or permanent exclusion or where a child has health-related needs, which mean they are unable to attend a mainstream school full-time. Many schools make use of AP services, before the need for suspension or permanent exclusion arises. In most cases the intention is for these children to return to their mainstream school and the length of the placement should be determined by the needs of the pupil.

When local authorities make arrangements for AP (including hospital education), this is normally funded from their high needs budget. There is flexibility for local authorities to devolve some decision-making and funding for AP to schools, and there is evidence to show that this can be effective in promoting inclusion and accountability. Where a pupil remains on-roll of a mainstream school, the school is effectively acting as a commissioner of AP and retains accountability for the child's education. For example, where a pupil is suspended from a mainstream school for longer than 5 school days, the school is responsible for commissioning and funding AP from the sixth school day of the suspension.

10.1 Organising and funding AP

Local authorities, schools and academies use AP to discharge their statutory responsibilities in different ways. When reviewing and determining commissioning, funding of AP should take account of the needs of local schools in determining the demand for AP and how it is delivered and encourage schools to think collectively about their use of AP and how the full cost of provision is to be met. Many local areas have developed strong partnership arrangements which seek to share responsibilities across schools for AP commissioning, funding, and accountability. Such arrangements can include the local authority devolving some decision-making and funding to groups of schools.

Funding devolved to schools, including AP schools, or partnerships of schools remains as a central budget under the local authority's central control, and the terms of its use should be covered by a service level agreement or memorandum of understanding with the maintained schools and academies involved. As with other elements of high needs funding held centrally, under the conditions of grant associated with the DSG, the local authority must treat maintained schools and academies on an equivalent basis and make sure that any distribution of such funds is fair and reasonable.

The local authority should make sure that there is consultation with the schools forum on the way AP funding is used and distributed. The schools forum regulations are intended to ensure that the arrangements for AP funding are properly discussed at local level – with engagement not only from the local authority, but also from the mainstream maintained schools and academies, PRUs and AP academies and free schools. This is explained in the [schools forum operational and good practice guide](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-forums-operational-and-good-practice-guide-2015) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-forums-operational-and-good-practice-guide-2015>).

The regulations and [schemes for financing schools](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schemes-for-financing-schools) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schemes-for-financing-schools>) do not permit local authorities to make a differential charge on maintained schools' and academies' budget shares according to their use or intended use of AP. It is possible, however, to use funds relating to pupils leaving the school roll, which have been deducted from maintained schools' following the redetermination of their budget shares under regulation 39 of [The School and Early Years Finance \(England\) Regulations](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/42/contents/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/42/contents/made>), or under the similar arrangements with academies to offset some of the cost of places. This is explained further in [annex 7: permanent exclusions: funding adjustments](#).

10.2 How high needs funding is allocated to AP

AP can receive high needs funding in different ways through:

- core funding: the annual allocation of funding based on an amount per place (place funding), which a school receives either directly from the provider local authority (for PRUs, based on the financial year), or from DfE (for AP academies and AP free schools, based on the academic year)
- top-up funding: the funding required over and above the core or place funding, to enable a pupil to participate in education (especially when an EHC plan is in place) is paid by the local authority or school that commissions each place
- service funding: locally negotiated funding for AP services, such as outreach, which are outside the place funding and top-up funding model, usually based on a service level agreement

Core funding provides some certainty for schools, but a stable income and financial viability will continue to depend on:

- developing strong relationships with local authorities and schools that commission places

- working out with commissioners, top-up funding rates that reflect the costs, including (for example) the costs of under-occupancy when places are not filled. See the section on agreeing top-up funding for AP below
- where appropriate, developing commissioned services that can provide an income from local authorities and schools on a longer-term basis (for example, through a 2 or 3 year contract)

PRUs, AP academies and AP free schools must receive from their provider local authority the [2025 to 2026 CSBG](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/core-schools-budget-grant-csbg-2025-to-2026-for-special-schools-and-alternative-provision) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/core-schools-budget-grant-csbg-2025-to-2026-for-special-schools-and-alternative-provision>), as well as high needs funding that is equivalent to the previous teachers' pay and pensions grants, and a continuation of the additional funding received in 2023 to 2025. See [annex 4: historic teachers' pay and pensions funding and additional funding](#), for details of how the additional funding is calculated.

Post-16 students in PRUs, AP academies and AP free schools are not funded in the same way as pre-16 students. AP is, by definition, set up to educate children of compulsory school age (up to age 16). A school will therefore not receive AP place funding for post-16 students because this type of provision is out of scope. If an AP school has post-16 high needs students with SEND, usually with an EHC plan, these places can be funded on the same basis as post-16 students with high needs in mainstream schools (using a combination of funding through the post-16 funding formula, £6,000 per place and top-up funding).

Where the local authority commissions a place at a PRU, AP academy or AP free school, the top-up funding is allocated from the local authority's high needs budget.

Where a school commissions a place at a PRU, AP academy or AP free school, the top-up funding may come from centrally held high needs funding that has been devolved to that school or a local partnership of schools (for example, via a service level agreement), or from a maintained school's delegated budget share or academy's general annual grant.

It is in the interests of the local authority and its schools offering AP to agree the referral process and process for resolving concerns about admissions. If the local authority is unable to place a particular pupil because they are not suited to the type of provision offered by a PRU, AP academy or AP free school, they would need to make other arrangements.

10.3 Place funding for PRUs, AP academies and AP free schools

Each PRU, AP academy, or AP free school usually has a number of places to offer pupils excluded by schools or who cannot get a school place for other reasons. In this case the commissioner would normally be the local authority. Many AP schools will also have places for pupils who are on part-time or shorter-term placements. In many cases local schools would be the commissioner for these places.

Although we have not defined a place in the regulations, we expect that a place will generally be available for occupation by a full-time equivalent (FTE) pupil. We recognise that in AP, places may not be filled by the same individual throughout the year, or in some cases, across the week. Identification of AP places is not determined by pupils' registration status. Where pupils are dual registered with a mainstream school, the time they spend attending a PRU, AP academy or AP free school should be accounted for in the number of places identified.

Whilst it is important that AP schools are not overfunded where places are not required, there will be occasions when places remain unoccupied, for example, to accommodate unpredictable fluctuations in demand. There will also be places that are occupied by more than one individual attending on a part-time basis. For example, a place may be filled by a child who attends for 2 days a week from one school, and another child who attends for 2 days from another school, with no child present for one day a week. AP schools should also consider with their local authority how to direct resources into outreach work in mainstream schools.

It may not be appropriate to provide place funding for some AP services where children are receiving their education offsite, such as a home tuition service or an outreach service provided by teachers whose base is the PRU or AP academy/free school. These services should be funded through a service level agreement with the commissioning local authority or school.

As in previous years, pre-16 AP places will be funded at £10,000 per place in 2025 to 2026, regardless of whether the place will be commissioned directly by a school or by a local authority.

The provider local authority is responsible for agreeing and submitting the number of AP places to be funded in PRUs and AP academies, in consultation with those schools in the area which may need to commission places. This may require consultation with other local authorities and their schools if they are likely to commission places in the PRU or AP academy. As explained previously, post-16 students are funded on the same basis as post-16 students in mainstream schools.

Local authorities have flexibility to change the number of places they fund in 2025 to 2026 at PRUs and should only notify DfE of changes to the place numbers in AP academies, using the 2024 to 2025 place change notification process. We will contact AP free schools directly in November 2024 detailing how their 2025 to 2026 high needs place numbers will be

determined. Evidence to support changes in place numbers may be required, and we recommend that PRUs, AP academies and AP free schools engage early with local authorities and schools commissioning places.

As with special academies, 2025 to 2026 places funded at AP academies are deducted from the DSG of the local authority in whose area the academy is located, and DfE funds the places directly.

10.4 Place funding for AP free schools

Place funding for new AP free schools for the first 2 years is based on their financial plan. We review actual pupil numbers against planned places (occupancy) and under-occupancy in year 1, which may have an impact on the place numbers funded for year 2.

Beyond year 2, the number of funded places is determined by DfE annually using evidence of occupancy (pupil numbers) and commissioning evidence from local authorities and schools. We write to all AP free schools in the autumn term to begin the [place process](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026>) for the following academic year.

10.5 AP free school deductions

For AP free schools, deductions for the 2025 to 2026 academic year are made from the DSG of the local authority where the pupil lives (based on October 2024 [school census](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complete-the-school-census) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complete-the-school-census>) data). These deductions will be notified to local authorities in April 2025. No deduction is made for places in AP free schools opening during the 2024 to 2025 or 2025 to 2026 academic years. However, a deduction is made from the DSG for places in AP free schools open before or during the 2023 to 2024 academic year.

AP academies and AP free schools should receive notification of their 2025 to 2026 allocations of place funding from DfE by the end of March 2025 and PRUs from their local authority by the end of February 2025.

The deductions for 2025 to 2026 financial year are made up of 2 parts: five-twelfths of the 2024 to 2025 academic year and seven-twelfths of the 2025 to 2026 academic year.

10.6 Top-up funding for AP (including examples)

Top-up funding for AP is not usually related to an assessment of SEN. A standard top-up funding rate is often set for each PRU, AP academy or AP free school, which reflects the overall budget needed to deliver the provision for pupils and students attending. The principles of local authorities working constructively with schools and AP providers to co-produce transparent local arrangements for the provision offered and the expected cost rates (as set out in [collaboration between local authorities, schools and colleges to organise local authority top-up funding](#) section) are as important for AP as for any other form of high needs provision.

Cost transparency is an important feature of the high needs funding arrangements. Local authorities and schools should be aware of the full cost of AP in different schools, and placement decisions should be made based on the cost and quality of what is on offer. The local authority should publish clear information about how AP is funded, including top-up funding rates for PRUs and AP academies, and clarity about which organisation is responsible for providing the top-up funding and place funding for AP. When determining top-up funding, local authorities should take account of the overall budget required for the AP to remain financially viable. Local authorities should consult with the schools forum on providing PRUs, AP academies and AP free schools with increases in top-up funding rates comparable to those that are being considered for maintained special schools and special academies.

There is often a very fluid movement of pupils and students in and out of AP during a year. The extent of this movement can create uncertainty and volatility in an AP school's budget planning. Local authorities should recognise such fluctuations and trends to inform a more transparent and simplistic mechanism for administering the distribution of top-up funding.

One such example is where, at the beginning of the year, the AP school and its main commissioning local authorities and schools agree an estimate of the places they expect to be used. Top-up funding could then be paid on account every month throughout the year and a termly or year-end reconciliation could take place to reflect an actual take-up of places by individual pupils during the period (the difference between estimated and actual uptake). This would give the AP school more certainty over its in-year cash flow, enabling it to employ the staff needed to make the required provision available (recognising that an increase or decrease in pupils may not necessarily directly lead to changes in the number of staff needed). This will ensure a high-quality service throughout the year. The amount and nature of provision can be changed over time to meet local authorities' and schools' evolving demand.

It is important that top-up funding relates to pupils actually occupying places. The aim of the system of place funding and top-up funding is to give a proper balance between sustainable income for the AP school, and flexibility to commission AP that meets the needs of individual pupils. Funding based solely on places, which may or may not be occupied, risks spending scarce resources on places that are not needed either by local authorities nor by schools and academies. It also ties up funding that would otherwise allow decisions to be taken about the most appropriate AP for an individual pupil.

We are not prescriptive about how the calculation of top-up funding reflects the period that a child or young person occupies a place. Some AP schools operate based on a daily rate, but it could be more beneficial for planning purposes to calculate the top-up funding using longer periods, for example weekly, monthly, or even termly rates.

It would also be possible to develop a top-up funding system that more closely reflects the achievement of desired outcomes, as a way of encouraging high quality AP. For example, the AP school could receive an enhanced rate of top-up funding after the end of the placement if the intended outcome for the pupil or student had been achieved. In this example, a mainstream school could be seeking a particular intervention for a year 11 student, which would enable the individual to successfully complete their GCSE exams. It could agree a short-term placement for the student at a local PRU and an additional amount of top-up funding that would be paid after the student's exam results are known, and if the expected grades had been achieved. Similarly, a local authority may wish to agree that an additional amount of top-up funding is payable if a year 11 pupil is in education, training, or employment in the year after leaving AP. Such arrangements are not mandatory, but could be used to secure better outcomes and improve the quality of AP.

10.7 Commissioned AP services

In many cases the services offered by a PRU, or AP academy or free school will not fit neatly into the combination of place and top-up funding intended for full-time educational placements. Teachers at the AP setting may be involved in outreach work with local maintained schools and academies or may be employed by them on a consultancy basis, to advise on behaviour management. The local authority may use a PRU's staff to provide home tuition to children with medical needs or to provide a service to pregnant teenagers or young mothers who cannot easily attend school. These are examples of services that would normally be funded by the commissioning local authority or school, or group of schools, under a service level agreement that specifies what is required and the funding to be paid.

Where the local authority commissions the service, the funding would come from its high needs budget.

Where a school or group of schools commissions the service, the funding would come either from those schools' delegated budget share, or from centrally held high needs funding that has been devolved to schools. Any distribution of devolved AP funding should be fair and treat both maintained schools and academies in the same way.

As with other centrally held AP budgets, the local authority should make sure that there is consultation with the schools forum on the amount retained and how it is used and distributed. For certain centrally held budgets, including for services relating to the education of children with behavioural difficulties and other activities for the purpose of avoiding the permanent exclusion of pupils from schools, the regulations require schools forum agreement to the amount retained.

10.8 Permanent exclusions adjustments

Details of the adjustments to schools' funding when a pupil is permanently excluded or otherwise leaves a school and is admitted to another school or AP can be found in [annex 7: permanent exclusions: funding adjustments](#).

10.9 Hospital education

Hospital education is defined in [The School and Early Years Finance \(England\) Regulations](#) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/42/contents/made>) as education provided at a community special school or foundation special school established in a hospital, or under any arrangements made by the local authority under section 19 of the [Education Act 1996](#) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/contents>) (exceptional provision of education) where the child is being provided with such education by reason of a decision made by a medical practitioner.

Although we allocate funding to local authorities for hospital education without reference to the age of the young people receiving the education, local authorities' duties differ for young people aged 16 to 19. This may affect their decisions on funding education for young people in this age group, such as those in independent hospital schools.

As in previous years, hospital education should continue to be funded by local authorities based on either an amount per place, or as a centrally

funded local authority service. An example of the latter is where the local authority employs teachers directly to work in a hospital or offer home tuition to pupils who are confined to their home, because a medical practitioner has decided that is where they should receive their education.

Some local authorities commission such services through hospital schools or PRUs. In all cases, local authorities should ensure that there is clarity on how hospital education is provided and funded locally. Local authorities should report their planned and actual expenditure on such provision in maintained schools, or provision funded as a central service, in the relevant tables of the s251 budget and outturn statements.

Funded hospital education places can be found in maintained special schools (usually a particular type of special school known as a hospital school), maintained PRUs (sometimes known as medical PRUs), special and AP academies and free schools. Often these schools will have a combination of hospital education places and other high needs (AP and SEND) places.

[The School and Early Years Finance \(England\) Regulations](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/42/contents/made)

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/42/contents/made> require that hospital education places in maintained schools and PRUs are funded at least at the same level per place as in the previous funding year. This requirement is also reflected in the funding arrangements for hospital education places in academies. The [DSG: conditions of grant](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2025-to-2026) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2025-to-2026> require local authorities to treat academies the same as maintained schools in their funding arrangements. These requirements will remain in place and be incorporated in the regulations and conditions of grant for 2025 to 2026.

Local authorities are reminded that the high needs NFF provides them with a 7% increase in hospital education funding, compared with the 2024 to 2025 allocations of hospital education funding. Local authorities should consider carefully, following discussion with their maintained hospital schools, academies, and other providers of hospital education, how much of this increase is passed on to them, taking into account not only any increase in their costs, but also the separate CSBG they will also receive. If a local authority intends to pass on an increase to an academy funded for hospital education places, this must be notified to DfE via the 2025 to 2026 place change notification process enquiry window in February 2025.

The [hospital education funding guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026> explains the process for those local authorities wishing to apply for additional funding due to new hospital education provision. Local authorities should engage with their maintained hospital schools and academies, other hospital education providers, and the relevant NHS hospital trusts, to plan for 2025 to 2026, including discussion of the

education funding implications of changes in medical or mental health provision.

Medium secure adolescent psychiatric forensic units, which cater mainly for young people aged 16 to 19, are funded using the same hospital education funding methodology of an amount per place no less than their funding per place in the previous funding year.

Local authorities' duties may require them to commission hospital education from other independent providers, usually registered as independent schools and not in receipt of funding directly from DfE.

In these circumstances, local authorities would be expected to pay the costs of this education from their high needs budgets. In discharging their duties, the law does not necessarily require local authorities to commission a particular education provider, although decisions about education provision should not unnecessarily disrupt a child or young person's education or treatment.

Independent hospital education provision may be funded either as a single service by the local authority in whose area the provision is located or based on the payments for individuals from those authorities where the child or young person normally resides. In both cases, the provider should confirm with the relevant local authority that they are content to commission and fund the education provision.

If funding is provided as payments for individual children and young people, the provider should receive such confirmation from the local authority in writing (if possible), before delivering the education provision to the child or young person and certainly before requesting any funding.

11. High needs funding: post-16 special circumstances

Mainstream academy and free school sixth forms, including AP academy sixth forms, and all general FE colleges, sixth form colleges, ILPs, and 16 to 19 maintained schools and academies are funded at £6,000 per high needs place (sometimes referred to as element 2). This funding is deducted from the local authority's DSG and paid to the schools and colleges via DfE, based on the published data on place numbers from the annual place change notification process. For maintained schools and PRUs, this funding remains in local authorities' DSG high needs allocations to fund schools direct, and local authorities have flexibility to make changes to the place numbers.

11.1 High needs place funding: local flexibility to allocate differently

There remains the flexibility whereby a local authority can reach agreement with any of the types of school or college referred to above, that this element of the educational provider funding can be calculated and paid in a different way directly by the local authority, subject to the following requirements:

- there should be agreement on the alternative funding approach between the local authority and the school or college involved and this agreement should ideally be reached in the autumn before the financial year in which the change takes effect
- the alternative arrangement must ensure a continuation of the £6,000 cost threshold for top-up funding and reflect high needs students attending from other local authorities to maintain consistency in the high needs funding system
- in other words, the funding methodology should continue to provide schools and colleges with funds to meet the additional costs of supporting students with SEN up to £6,000 per annum, with top-up funding meeting the costs in excess of that threshold
- local authorities should be aware that the import/export adjustment will continue to operate as explained above, whatever alternative methodology is used

The schools and colleges involved must, therefore, continue to provide information about students with high needs through the [school census](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complete-the-school-census) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complete-the-school-census>) and [ILR](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/individualised-learner-record-ilr) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/individualised-learner-record-ilr>) according to the current definition. This means that such students must have been assessed by the local authority as having high needs and the provider must be receiving top-up funding for their support costs in excess of £6,000. This school census and ILR information provides the data that allows the import/export adjustment to operate fairly for local authorities.

The local authority can make such alternative funding arrangements by agreement with its maintained secondary and 16 to 19 schools and PRUs without any formal notification to DfE.

Where an alternative funding methodology is agreed with an academy or college, the local authority should notify DfE through the place change notification process that the place number is to be reduced. The place number would be zero if the local authority has agreed with the academy or college that the alternative methodology covers the equivalent of all their

place funding, including those places filled by students placed by other authorities.

In all cases, the deduction from the local authority's DSG high needs allocation would reflect the reduced place number, because the local authority has agreed the change with the academy or college involved and will pay the funding to the academy or college concerned directly.

It is important for local authorities to note that no changes will be made to the import/export adjustment in the NFF, because the provider local authority (the local authority area where the school or college is based), will still be expected to meet the costs of all the places in the school or college. This includes those places to be occupied by students for whom other commissioning local authorities are paying the top-up funding.

This flexibility encourages local authorities and their schools and colleges to work together in making special provision for their students. Examples of alternative approaches could be:

- an agreement to fund a college through a lump sum directly per year over 3 years, to provide certainty to the local authority and college on the level of provision and funding that will be made subject to specified tolerances relating to the actual number of students with high needs receiving support
- an agreement that a school sixth form will be funded for its students with SEN based on similar proxy measures to those used in the local pre-16 funding formula

We may collect further information from local authorities about any alternative funding calculations they devise.

11.2 Post-16 study programmes/supported internships

Most young people with high needs attending a school, college or SPI will have an EHC plan. Local authorities must use the evidence from the EHC plan to make consistent, effective and robust assessments of the support the young person will need to move towards a positive outcome.

Local authorities and the schools and colleges offering places for students with high needs should work together to agree a suitable [study programme for a young person \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-study-programmes-guide-for-providers\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-study-programmes-guide-for-providers), which must be tailored to their individual aspirations and support needs.

A full-time study programme has minimum planned hours of 580 hours and there is no set maximum. Neither local authorities, nor schools and colleges should set an arbitrary maximum number of hours for a study programme, but instead students should be provided with the number of hours they require to complete the programme. A funding requirement for all programmes is that they meet the [condition of funding for maths and English \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-maths-and-english-condition-of-funding\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-maths-and-english-condition-of-funding).

A [supported internship is a full-time study programme funded by DfE \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supported-internships-for-young-people-with-learning-difficulties/supported-internships\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supported-internships-for-young-people-with-learning-difficulties/supported-internships) for young people aged 16 to 25 who have an EHC plan, want to move into employment and need extra support to do so. The costs of additional support associated with providing an effective supported internship placement can include indirect costs (for example, engagement with an employer to ensure the suitability of a placement for the young person, or with their family to ensure they are supportive).

Supported interns can apply for [Access to Work \(https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work\)](https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work) funding from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to cover the costs of practical support in the workplace.

Local authorities should not assume that an application for Access to Work or other sources of funding for supported internships have been successful without receiving written confirmation to avoid top-up funding allocations paying for the support costs twice. Where the costs excluding any other available funding (such as Access to Work) are more than £6,000, these may be eligible to be funded from local authorities' high needs budgets. Students on supported internships whose support costs are less than £6,000 must not be regarded as students with high needs, even though they have an EHC plan.

11.3 Part-time or part year students: post-16

We also consider young people to be high needs students when they are part-time or part-year and their additional support funding would total more than £6,000, if provided over the full academic year, as agreed with the local authority in which the student is resident. For more information, see guidance regarding the [funding rates and formula \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/funding-rates-and-formula\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/funding-rates-and-formula), used in the funding arrangements for 16 to 19-year-olds.

Where a school or college has enrolled, or is considering enrolling, a high needs student who will attend on a part-time or part-year basis, they should hold discussions with the relevant local authority as commissioners of high

needs provision. The normal funding approach should then apply, in line with the principles outlined in this guide.

11.4 Students aged 19 to 25 with EHC plans and schools: funding restrictions

We would normally expect 19 to 25-year-olds to receive their further education in colleges (including ILPs and SPIs) as they are better placed to provide an environment that prepares young people for adult life in their local community. Paragraph 30 of schedule 2 to [The Schools and Early Years Finance \(England\) Regulations](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/42/contents/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/42/contents/made>) permits local authorities to incur expenditure from their high needs budgets on young people aged 19 to 25 who are receiving further education in settings other than schools (including 16 to 19 academies, which are classed as FE colleges), provided they have an EHC plan.

The [DSG: conditions of grant](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2025-to-2026>) and The School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations require that a local authority must not use DSG funding to fund places in maintained special schools for young people who are over 18 years old. There is an exception to this for those aged 19 and over who are continuing to attend a particular course of secondary education which they began before they reached the age of 18. This is to ensure consistency with the law that defines secondary education under section 2 of the [Education Act 1996](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/contents) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/contents>). Special academies are treated the same in this regard.

Further education can be provided by a school, subject to restrictions such as its age range or academy funding agreement. It is not possible, however, for a local authority to incur expenditure from its high needs budget to support young people receiving further education in mainstream or special schools (maintained, academy, free schools, non-maintained and independent). Exceptionally, a local authority can make a [disapplication request](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-16-schools-funding-local-authority-guidance-for-2024-to-2025) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-16-schools-funding-local-authority-guidance-for-2024-to-2025>) to enable the local authority to use its high needs budget to fund further education provision for a student aged 19 or over in a school.

If a school considers providing post-16 further education study programmes and has the appropriate specialist expertise to prepare students aged 19 to 25 with an EHC plan for adult life (including independent living and employment) it should engage with its local authority. The school would need to establish separate FE provision for that age group. This would

normally entail the school setting up a legally and financially separate entity to provide the appropriate environment and curriculum for young people of that age group. Such new post-19 specialist provision would normally be set up as an SPI. To be eligible to receive high needs place funding from DfE for the first time, SPIs must have been included in DfE's annual place change notification process by a local authority and must successfully complete the [high needs funding: due diligence process for special post-16 providers](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-due-diligence-process-for-new-special-post-16-providers) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-due-diligence-process-for-new-special-post-16-providers>).

More information on how new SPIs are funded can be found in the [special post-16 institutions](#) section.

For information on learners aged 19 to 25 without an EHC plan, see [annex 1: other information](#).

11.5 Students aged over 25

A local authority may be required to maintain an EHC plan until a young person is 25 years old and this must be reviewed annually to ensure the provision remains appropriate for the individual's needs. For a student with an EHC plan when they are 24 years old, the plan normally ceases when the student turns age 25, although local authorities have a power to extend an EHC plan until the end of the academic year in which the student turns age 25.

If a local authority extends the EHC plan until the end of the academic year, the local authority must continue to provide top-up funding to the FE college until that time.

Place funding is allocated to the FE college by DfE for the full academic year and would not normally be clawed back if the EHC plan is not extended.

Local authorities are not responsible for commissioning provision for students with SEND who are aged 19 to 25 without an EHC plan or who are over the age of 25. Links to the funding arrangements for these students are at [annex 1: other information](#).

12. Further information

If, having read this guidance, there are any points which require clarification, you can contact us via the [Customer Help Portal](https://customerhelpportal.education.gov.uk/).
(<https://customerhelpportal.education.gov.uk/>)

Maintained schools should contact their local authority.

Additional guidance on SEND support for schools, colleges, children's services and parents and carers can be found at [special educational needs and disability \(SEND\) and high needs](https://www.gov.uk/topic/schools-colleges-childrens-services/special-educational-needs-disabilities) (<https://www.gov.uk/topic/schools-colleges-childrens-services/special-educational-needs-disabilities>).

13. Annex 1: other information

13.1 Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) code of practice

Local authority maintained schools, academies, general FE colleges, non-maintained special schools, and all independent special schools and SPIs on the section 41 list must have regard to the [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25-years) ([https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25-years)) on the SEND system for children and young people aged 0 to 25.

13.2 Arranging alternative provision (AP) guidance

The [Arranging Alternative provision](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67a1ee367da1f1ac64e5fe2c/Arranging_Alternative_Provision_-_A_Guide_for_Local_Authorities_and_Schools.pdf) ([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67a1ee367da1f1ac64e5fe2c/Arranging Alternative Provision - A Guide for Local Authorities and Schools.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67a1ee367da1f1ac64e5fe2c/Arranging_Alternative_Provision_-_A_Guide_for_Local_Authorities_and_Schools.pdf)) document covers updated commissioning guidance local authorities should refer to when carrying out their duty to arrange suitable education for children who cannot attend a mainstream school. It also covers the role that the child's home school should play when commissioning AP to ensure the child receives a suitable education in a safe environment.

13.3 Further education (FE) student financial support, including free meals

DfE provides a range of financial support for students who need it to enable them to participate in post-16 education, including free meals, bursaries to help with the cost of education (such as travel, books, equipment, and trips), plus support for childcare and residential costs where required. For further information on this, including where the cost of meals is sometimes included as part of the package of support that is agreed with local authorities, details are available at [16 to 19 education: financial support for students](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-financial-support-for-students) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-financial-support-for-students>).

13.4 Support funding through the apprenticeships funding methodology

Funding support is available to support apprentices to complete their apprenticeship.

13.4.1 Learning support (including exceptional learning support)

Learning support is there to meet costs (incurred by the provider) of putting in place reasonable adjustments for apprentices to complete their apprenticeship who have a learning difficulty or disability as defined in section 15ZA(6) of the [Education Act 1996](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/contents) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/contents>) (as amended by section 41 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009).

More information on learning support (including exceptional learning support), can be found in [support for apprentices with a learning difficulty or disability](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-apprentices-with-a-learning-difficulty-or-disability) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-apprentices-with-a-learning-difficulty-or-disability>) guidance.

13.4.2 Additional Payments

Providers and employers will receive an additional £1,000 payment towards the additional cost associated with training if, at the start of the apprenticeship training, the apprentice is:

- aged between 16 and 18-years-old (or 15 years of age if the apprentice's 16th birthday is between the last Friday of June and 31 August)
- aged between 19 and 24-years-old and has either an EHC plan provided by their local authority and/or has been in the care of their local authority

Full details on learning support (including exceptional learning support) and additional payments can be found within the relevant sections of the [apprenticeship funding rules](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apprenticeship-funding-rules#the-latest-rules-2022-to-2023) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apprenticeship-funding-rules#the-latest-rules-2022-to-2023>).

13.5 Funding for adults aged 19 and above without an EHC plan

High needs funding can only be used to support adults aged 19 to 25 if they have an EHC plan. There is a range of alternative support available to adults aged 19 to 25 without an EHC plan, and those aged 25 and over who require additional support.

The nature of the support available will depend on the education or training being undertaken, but support is available for adults being funded through both the [adult skills fund \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-skills-fund-funding-rules-for-2024-to-2025\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-skills-fund-funding-rules-for-2024-to-2025) and [apprenticeship funding \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-funding\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-funding).

13.6 Pupils and students living in Wales or England and attending a school or college across the border

DfE is currently engaging with the Welsh Government on the funding arrangements for pupils and students living in England or Wales who are attending a school or college across the border and will provide further guidance in due course.

There are no equivalent statutory arrangements for pupils or students from other countries in the UK or elsewhere. Local authorities, schools and colleges are able to negotiate the recovery of costs as they consider appropriate, taking account of other relevant legislation, such as the [Equality Act 2010 \(https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents).

14. Annex 2: an example of where pupil and student numbers differ from allocated places

The following is an example of how the high needs funding arrangements should operate when a school or college has more pupils or students with high needs than the number of places for which it has been funded. Although it is illustrated using a college located in a local authority area (the provider local authority) with several other local authorities also

commissioning places, similar arrangements may also apply to other schools and colleges, including special academies.

The example demonstrates how the place funding for schools and colleges and consequent deductions from local authorities' high needs allocations work together with the import/export adjustment. This shows the flow of high needs funding between local authorities, schools and colleges when a school or college has to make additional special provision for a number of pupils or students that exceeds the funded place number, including where inter-authority collaboration is required:

1. Following data sharing and discussion with a college and where there is a change from the previous academic year, the provider local authority submits the total high needs place numbers to DfE in November, through the place change notification process, in advance of the start of the academic year.
2. In this example, the local authority and college have agreed on 100 places for the 2025 to 2026 academic year, which comprises the total number of places to be filled by high needs students from all local authorities.
3. The number of college places to be funded is published by DfE in January 2024 and, during the subsequent enquiry window, the college and local authorities check the number, ensuring they are content that it reflects local discussions.
4. DfE issues an allocation to the college in March 2024, in advance of the academic year. This reflects the 100 places, providing £600,000 of high needs funding (100 places × £6,000 place funding).
5. The provider local authority's DSG will also be updated in March 2024 and 100 places deducted from their high needs allocation at £6,000 per place, prorated for the academic year, based on the 8 months from August to March (100 places × £4,000).
6. The resident local authority (the local authority in which the student is ordinarily resident, and which commissions the place) needs to have notified the college directly that the student has high needs and have agreed top-up funding. The provider local authority (if not commissioning the place) and DfE does not need to be involved in these conversations. However, we would encourage neighbouring local authorities to collaborate on the special provision required for their students. This includes cooperation on associated commissioning arrangements and top-up funding levels.
7. In the lead up to the academic year, several local authorities have commissioned further high needs places in excess of the 100 places that the college has received place funding for. Therefore, the college has 120 high needs students at the start of the academic year 2024 to 2025.

8. This has resulted in additional costs for the special provision required by these extra 20 students that the college cannot meet through its existing funding streams. This includes the £6,000 high needs place funding in their allocation and standard top-up funding rates in respect of the 120 high needs students. The college should not seek to recover these costs through the top-up funding sought from the resident authorities commissioning places for the extra 20 students. This is because places funded at £6,000 per place are not reserved for individual pupils or specific local authorities and funding changes may arise from the local authority net import/export DSG adjustment.
9. Therefore, the college discusses with the provider local authority, if possible before the start of the academic year, the scale of the additional special provision that it is being expected to make available and the costs involved. It is agreed that the provider local authority will allocate a further £50,000 of high needs funding to contribute to the additional costs incurred by the college. This is to help meet the additional costs of making the provision required by the additional students, on top of the normal funding streams.
10. It is important to note that within DfE's lagged funding system, we would normally expect the costs of in-year growth to be met by the college. At the same time, local authorities will have received an increase in high needs funding to recognise population and other factors that have contributed generally to the costs of growth. Where that growth is significant in a college, it is reasonable for the provider local authority to consider what extra funding might be needed by the college to maintain the required level of provision, on an exceptional basis. The college should not expect the provider local authority to pay an extra £6,000 for every extra student placed over and above the college's 100 places. The provider local authority should be compensated for the costs of the high needs' places filled by students resident in other local authorities, including 5 of the additional 20 students via the import/export adjustment in the 2025 to 2026 financial year. This includes the final term of the 2024 to 2025 academic year.
11. In this example, 50 students live in other local authorities. This is recorded on the college's ILR in February 2025 and + £300,000 ($50 \times £6,000$) will subsequently contribute to the provider local authority's net import/export DSG adjustment for 2025 to 2026.

It is important to note that this example is provided for a college and some details may vary depending on the school or college or place type.

15. Annex 3: special schools minimum funding guarantee

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The MFG protection for maintained special schools and special academies in 2025 to 2026 is set by a condition of grant that applies to local authorities' DSG.

The local authority, in deciding on top-up funding rates for the pupils to be placed in its maintained special schools, special academies it previously maintained, and special free schools located in its area, must comply with the minimum percentage by which the budget of any special school or special academy would change from the 2024 to 2025 financial year to the 2025 to 2026 financial year. The calculation must assume that all the pupils in the special school or special academy (or free school) were placed by the local authority and the number and type of places remained the same in the 2 financial years 2024 to 2025 and 2025 to 2026.

The MFG percentage for 2025 to 2026 is 0%. The local authority can set a higher percentage increase but must have a disapplication request approved if any of its special schools would have their top-up funding reduced, resulting in a lower (negative) percentage change from year to year.

We expect local authorities to respond appropriately to schools' cost pressures in 2025 to 2026 to secure the provision required for the pupils they place there, taking account of any inescapable cost increases. In considering top-up funding levels, local authorities should also take into account that the place funding rate will remain at £10,000 per place in 2025 to 2026, and also that special schools will receive a CSBG allocation to reflect cost increases already incurred.

The comparison for the MFG calculation will be schools' 2024 to 2025 funding baselines. If the top-up funding has been adjusted for one or more schools so as not to breach the 2024 to 2025 MFG, rather than an adjustment made to the rates applied to all schools, that adjustment should be included in the baseline for the 2025 to 2026 MFG.

The top-up funding must be set at a rate to ensure a school's total budget is no lower on a per pupil basis to that in 2024 to 2025.

Where there are extenuating circumstances, the process to request disapplication of the MFG will remain in place, with details set out below.

The following funding for 2024 to 2025 and 2025 to 2026 should be excluded from the MFG calculation:

- the TPAG, TPECG 2024 and CSBG
- high needs (historic teachers' pay and pensions funding that the school receives in place of the legacy TPG, the TPECG and the teachers' pensions supplementary fund

- the additional funding for 2024 to 2025 and 2025 to 2026 that local authorities are required to pass directly to maintained special schools and special academies, as explained in [annex 4: historic teachers' pay and pensions funding and additional funding](#) of this guide

DfE is considering whether, and how, these elements of funding could be included in the MFG calculation from 2026 to 2027 and will provide further guidance on this as required.

When calculating the protection, local authorities should make sure that they are comparing like for like. Adjustments should be made for changes in the nature of the provision. For example, if previous top-up funding rates included an element for a commissioned service which is no longer provided by the school, the value of that element can be discounted when calculating the MFG protected level.

Once the MFG assessment confirms 2025 to 2026 top-up funding rates received by the school are in line with the guarantee, they can then be applied to reflect the actual number and type of places at the school. There may be reasons why a local authority is not planning on passing a level of top-up funding to one or more of its special schools sufficient to meet the MFG in 2025 to 2026. For example, a local authority might be working with all its schools to re-balance the top-up funding that is allocated between mainstream and special schools, to enable the former to meet a wider range of needs; or a local authority, given the level of reserves a particular special school has accumulated, might have undertaken a benchmarking exercise and aligned top-up funding levels for its schools to ensure similar provision for pupils with similar levels of need are funded on a consistent basis.

Where a local reorganisation or review of funding levels takes place and there are changes to bandings, the pupils in the school(s) in 2024 to 2025 and their categories of need should be attributed as far as possible to the new bandings for 2025 to 2026 to assess whether any school will receive less than the MFG.

Breaches of the MFG should only be in exceptional circumstances. In all circumstances where the MFG is proposed to be breached and the local authority intends to fund one or more schools below the guaranteed level, the local authority must formally request that the relevant condition of grant is disapplied using the [digital disapplication request form \(https://digital-forms.education.gov.uk/XtpMm9RFJX/request-to-disapply-regulations\)](https://digital-forms.education.gov.uk/XtpMm9RFJX/request-to-disapply-regulations) accompanied by supporting information. Local authorities are expected to produce a worked MFG calculation prior to considering a disapplication request – see example tables in the 'MFG modelling' section below.

Disapplication requests from local authorities seeking exceptions to the MFG rule will be considered on a case-by-case basis and each request will apply for one year only. No prior year approvals will be carried forward. Local authorities submitting repeat requests covering the same schools

should ensure the disapplication request is comprehensive, as if a new request was being presented, comprising the necessary up to date supporting information and financial modelling, in line with this guidance.

Where a local authority wishes to adjust the top-up funding across several schools, for example, following a review of its top-up funding rates and as a result some schools gain funding and others face a reduction, a disapplication will be required, however the request will only be relevant to those schools whose funding would fall below the guaranteed level.

Consequently, local authorities should not, through this process, seek endorsement of the entirety of a new top-up funding scheme that they are intending to implement across some or all their special schools.

15.1 Disapplication request and supporting information

Requests for a disapplication are now made using the [digital disapplication request form \(https://digital-forms.education.gov.uk/XtpMm9RFJX/request-to-disapply-regulations\)](https://digital-forms.education.gov.uk/XtpMm9RFJX/request-to-disapply-regulations). Local authorities wishing to submit a request (other than those in the safety valve intervention programme - see below) should complete the digital disapplication request form and read the [accompanying guidance and supporting notes \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-16-schools-funding-local-authority-guidance-for-2024-to-2025\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-16-schools-funding-local-authority-guidance-for-2024-to-2025). In advance of doing so, local authorities should ensure that in their request there is sufficient relevant and contextual information for an informed, fair and reasonable decision to be made. The core information should comprise:

- how the impact on specialist education being provided to pupils by the schools that are not meeting the MFG has been considered
- why this request is the local authority's preferred option
- what alternatives have been considered
- why the alternatives were discounted (an options appraisal)
- any transitional arrangements that the local authority is putting in place to minimise the impact on special schools and to provide assurance of their ongoing viability
- relevant local contextual information, for example, the results of recent Ofsted inspections

Specific supporting information should be included with the request, as follows:

- financial modelling and the modelling for the preferred option to be in line with the examples provided in this annex, to show the financial impact on those schools not meeting the MFG. The modelling should include the change in total funding between 2024 to 2025 and 2025 to 2026
- information about any previous changes in funding, which have been approved by the Secretary of State and/or agreed with the schools affected
- information on the affected schools' financial health, reserves or deficits and analysis of in-year balances over previous years, as evidenced from [data sources and interpretation published data \(https://financial-benchmarking-and-insights-tool.education.gov.uk/\)](https://financial-benchmarking-and-insights-tool.education.gov.uk/)
- details of the local authority's DSG balance as evidenced from [local authority and school expenditure published data \(https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/la-and-school-expenditure\)](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/la-and-school-expenditure) and the forecast balance at the end of the financial year 2024 to 2025. If the local authority has a DSG deficit, they will need to provide a copy of an up-to-date recovery plan, and explain how the disapplication of the MFG links with this plan
- a summary of the consultations that have been undertaken with the schools affected and other interested parties, such as parent/carers groups
- there is also a requirement that high needs funding arrangements are discussed in the local schools forum, so details of any schools forum consultation or consultations with a wider range of schools and colleges may be necessary
- an equalities impact assessment of the impact on children and young people with protected characteristics

We asked local authorities that were planning to submit a disapplication request to contact us for an initial discussion before starting the process, with an expectation that a formal request with the necessary comprehensive supporting information was submitted by 18 November 2024. This was to allow sufficient time for decisions to be notified to local authorities in advance of the 2025 to 2026 financial year. Following the NFF allocations, if there are any requests that local authorities are now actively considering beyond this deadline, you should contact:

LA.Disapplications@education.gov.uk

To note, all local authorities in the safety valve programme have been contacted individually with details about how they should submit any relevant disapplication requests for 2025 to 2026 and where a request is to be made, this should be submitted to the safety valve team at:

SafetyValve.Programme@education.gov.uk

15.2 Minimum funding guarantee (MFG) modelling

The worked modelling examples below provide 2 scenarios of how the MFG operates in the event of top-up funding changes in 2025 to 2026 for a 100-place special school. Table 5, a worked modelling baseline example shows the funding in 2024 to 2025, when it was occupied by a total of 90 pupils, 30 in each of 3 different bands. This is considered a baseline, and the same number of places, pupils and levels of need should be used for 2025 to 2026. The calculation then highlights the impact of any proposed changes to the top-up funding rates, assuming the school is offering the same level of provision.

In table 6, MFG calculation (MFG scenario 1), one of the 3 top-up funding rates has reduced, and one has increased. Overall, the funding for the school would be above the 0% MFG, if the number and types of places remained the same. Therefore, 2025 to 2026 top-up funding rates are in line with the guarantee and funding to the special school should reflect these rates (for pupils placed by the provider local authority), the number of pupils in each band and the actual number of places.

In table 7, MFG calculation (MFG scenario 2), one of the top-up funding rates has decreased, bringing the funding for the school below the 0% MFG level. Consequently, the top-up funding for this school will need further adjustment to be compliant with the MFG. It will not be necessary for the local authority to adjust all schools' top-up funding rates.

As part of the MFG assessment, if any top-up funding rates that are applied across a local authority's special schools are reduced, this calculation will be needed for each special school. Local top-up funding arrangements vary, although many local authorities have developed top-up funding bands that are the same across all their special schools, it is possible for rates to vary between schools, or for school-level factors to be included. Such arrangements can also be used on a temporary or transitional basis to ensure that all their schools' funding levels are protected and covered by the MFG. If top-up funding rates in 2025 to 2026 are set at a level which means that one or more of the local authority's special schools' funding is less than in 2024 to 2025, taking into account any temporary or transitional top-up funding, and therefore breaching the 0% MFG – on a like for like comparison of 2024 to 2025 and 2025 to 2026 funding levels – a disapplication request must be submitted in respect of those schools.

Table 5: MFG calculation – a worked modelling baseline example

Special schools funding: 2024 to 2025	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Total
Number of places	30	35	35	100
Number of pupils	30	30	30	90
Top-up rate	£5,000	£7,500	£10,000	N/A
Place funding	£300,000	£350,000	£350,000	£1,000,000
Top-up funding	£150,000	£225,000	£300,000	£675,000
Total funding	N/A	N/A	N/A	£1,675,000

Table 6: MFG calculation (MFG scenario 1) - a worked modelling example where the funding is above the 0% MFG

2025 to 2026:	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Total
Number of places	30	35	35	100
Number of pupils	30	30	30	90
Top-up rate	£4,600	£8,000	£10,000	N/A
Place funding	£300,000	£350,000	£350,000	£1,000,000
Top-up funding	£138,000	£240,000	£300,000	£678,000
Total funding	N/A	N/A	N/A	£1,678,000
MFG % difference from 2024 to 2025	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.18%

Table 7: MFG calculation (MFG scenario 2) – a worked modelling example where the funding is below 0% MFG

2025 to 2026:	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Total
Number of places	30	35	35	100
Number of pupils	30	30	30	90

2025 to 2026:	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Total
Top-up rate	£4,600	£7,500	£10,000	N/A
Place funding	£300,000	£350,000	£350,000	£1,000,000
Top-up funding	£138,000	£225,000	£300,000	£663,000
Total funding	N/A	N/A	N/A	£1,663,000
MFG % difference from 2024 to 2025	N/A	N/A	N/A	-0.72%

16. Annex 4: historic teachers’ pay and pensions funding and additional funding

The historic teachers’ pay and pensions funding, and other legacy additional funding that local authorities were required to pass on to schools following the 2022 autumn statement, should not be confused with the separate CSBG for 2025 to 2026. These legacy funding streams, which are part of the DSG high needs funding block, are covered in this annex.

Table 8 below explains the difference between the legacy funding streams and the 2025 to 2026 CSBG, which reflects the additional costs of the 2023 and 2024 teachers’ pay award, the teachers’ pension employer contribution rate increase from April 2024, support staff pay increases for 2024 to 2025, and other more recent cost increases. Further information on the CSBG for 2025 to 2026 can be found in the [core schools budget grant \(CSBG\) 2025 to 2026 for special schools and alternative provision](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/core-schools-budget-grant-csbg-2025-to-2026-for-special-schools-and-alternative-provision) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/core-schools-budget-grant-csbg-2025-to-2026-for-special-schools-and-alternative-provision>).

Table 8: differences between legacy funding streams and CSBG 2025 to 2026

Legacy funding, including for historic teachers’ pay and pensions cost increases	CSBG 2025
This funding covers the ongoing costs arising from:	This funding covers the ongoing costs arising from:
The teachers’ pay awards in September 2018 and 2019	The teachers’ pay award from September 2023

Legacy funding, including for historic teachers' pay and pensions cost increases

This funding covers the ongoing costs arising from:

The increase in employer contributions for teachers pensions from September 2019

Additional cost pressures in 2023 to 2024, for which a 3.4% funding increase was made available, equivalent to the mainstream schools additional grant (MSAG)

CSBG 2025

This funding covers the ongoing costs arising from:

The increase in employer contributions for teachers in the Teachers' Pension Scheme from April 2024

The teachers' pay award from September 2024, support staff pay increases from April 2024 and other cost increases

The increase in employers' NICs from April 2025

The teachers' pay award from September 2025 and support staff pay increase from April 2025

For background on how this legacy funding was originally allocated to local authorities, and the rules for how it should have been passed on to schools in 2024 to 2025, the [high needs operational guide for 2024 to 2025](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2024-to-2025) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2024-to-2025>) provides further information.

This annex explains the modified rules governing local authorities' allocations of this funding for 2025 to 2026, as set out in the [DSG: conditions of grant for 2025 to 2026](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2025-to-2026>). Local authorities must allocate this funding to:

- their maintained special schools and PRUs
- special academies and AP academies they previously maintained or that are located in their area
- special and AP free schools in their area
- hospital schools and the equivalent academies in their area

There is no recoupment for academies and free schools in respect of this funding, so local authorities must fund academies and free schools directly.

This high needs funding must not result in a reduction either:

- to the number of places, for which £10,000 per place is allocated to a special or AP school or another amount per place is allocated to a hospital school
- to the top-up funding paid to the school in respect of individual pupils

This funding will not affect the value or operation of the NFF import/export adjustments, or of the DSG deductions for academies' place funding.

Furthermore, this funding must be disregarded in applying the protection for special schools set out in [annex 3: special schools minimum funding guarantee](#). These are separate high needs funding streams (that is, neither place funding, which remains at £10,000 per place, nor top-up funding).

16.1 Maintained special schools and PRUs, special and AP academies and free schools, and maintained hospital schools and the equivalent academies

Local authorities must allocate the historic teachers' pay and pensions employer contribution grant funding to maintained special schools, PRUs, special and AP academies and maintained and academy hospital schools, on a per place basis according to the number of funded places in the financial year 2025 to 2026, subject to a minimum of 40 places per school.

The amount per place to be funded should be the same as in 2024 to 2025. The local authority should also include in the allocation of this funding any historic teachers' pensions supplementary fund paid by the local authority for the financial year 2024 to 2025.

The other legacy additional funding, originally calculated as 3.4% of the place and top-up funding, should be allocated on a per place basis as follows, using the same place numbers used for funding maintained schools by the local authority, and for funding academies and free schools as published by DfE, in the period April 2025 to March 2026:

- for each special school, academy and free school the full-year amount per place that was used for the period April 2024 to March 2025
- the full-year amount allocated to each PRU, AP academy and free school for the period April 2024 to March 2025, converted into an amount per place using the place numbers for that period

For example, a special academy received additional funding of £142,800 (200 places at £714 per place) in 2024 to 2025. The place number is

increasing to 220 in academic year 2025 to 2026. The special academy should therefore receive additional funding in 2025 to 2026 amounting to five-twelfths of £142,800 (= £59,500) plus seven-twelfths of 220 multiplied by £714 (= £91,630), which totals £151,130.

Hospital schools and the equivalent academies should be allocated funding as above, on a basis equivalent to their status as a special school or academy, or a PRU or AP academy.

There is no requirement to consult schools on these allocations.

16.2 Data to be used for the calculation of additional allocations

In all cases the place numbers used must be the total place number published by DfE for each academy and free school, or that reported by local authorities for funding their maintained schools, in their annual s251 budget statement.

The [place numbers for the academic year 2024 to 2025](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-allocated-place-numbers) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-allocated-place-numbers>) were published in autumn 2024 covering all schools and colleges, except maintained schools. The place numbers for academic year 2025 to 2026 will normally be known by the local authority as a result of the place change notification process, as they are used for their DSG deductions, even though final place numbers for 2025 to 2026 will not be published until March 2025.

A local authority may wish to request information from DfE on the number of 2025 to 2026 academic year places to be funded in AP free schools, before requesting a disapplication in the case of an AP free school, although this information will not be available until March 2025.

Local authorities have provided the 2024 to 2025 academic year place numbers for their maintained schools through their [s251 budget returns](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-catalogue/planned-la-and-school-expenditure) (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-catalogue/planned-la-and-school-expenditure>) (published 26 September 2024). Local authorities will have determined their maintained schools' place numbers for 2025 to 2026 before they are reported in the s251 budget statement for that year and published by DfE.

16.3 New special and AP free schools

Local authorities must make an allocation of high needs funding for any new special or AP free school opening between April 2025 and March 2026, to reflect the historic teachers' pay and pension funding and additional legacy funding that other local schools are receiving. Local authorities will continue to have the flexibility to disburse this funding, following consultation, in recognition of specific costs not covered by the £10,000 per place and level of top-up funding that the school is receiving.

This funding must be an amount per place, subject to a full-year minimum of £660 per place for the historic teachers' pay and pensions funding and £340 per place for the other legacy additional funding. The place number used should be the number of places used by DfE for funding the free school in the period April 2025 to March 2026. There is no requirement for a minimum place number to be used.

16.4 Request to vary the amounts calculated in accordance with the specified data

Local authorities can also propose amounts lower than the minimum calculated using the specified data, by requesting a disapplication of the relevant condition of grant. They will be able to seek approval to use different data or a different calculation that gives a lower amount.

We expect such requests to be rare, for example, when a reduction in the number of places to be funded in 2024 to 2025 has not been agreed between the local authority and the school. In such cases, we may seek to resolve any disputed place number, if it relates to an academy, before a decision on the disapplication request.

Local authorities wishing to submit a disapplication request, other than those in the safety valve programme, should have done so by 18 November 2024 using the [digital disapplication request form \(https://digital-forms.education.gov.uk/XtpMm9RFJX/request-to-disapply-regulations\)](https://digital-forms.education.gov.uk/XtpMm9RFJX/request-to-disapply-regulations). This was to allow sufficient time for decisions to be notified to local authorities in advance of the 2025 to 2026 financial year. Following publication of guidance on the rules relating to this legacy funding in this annex, and the information on local authorities' high needs NFF allocations, if there are any requests that local authorities are now actively considering beyond this deadline, they should contact:

LA.Disapplications@education.gov.uk

16.5 Non-maintained special schools (NMSS)

NMSS will continue to receive the historic teachers' pay and pension funding directly from DfE at a level equivalent to the amounts per place paid in 2024 to 2025, plus any teachers' pension supplementary fund payments, without any recoupment or deductions from local authorities' high needs allocations.

These payments will be distinct from any payments of place funding, which will remain at £10,000 per place.

16.6 Further education (FE) colleges and special post-16 providers (SPIs)

FE colleges and some SPIs that contribute to the pension scheme receive the [teachers' pension scheme employer contribution grant](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-pension-scheme-employer-contribution-grant-further-education-providers) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-pension-scheme-employer-contribution-grant-further-education-providers>), which is based on their audited contributions into the pension scheme.

These arrangements have been confirmed until the end of the 2024 to 2025 academic year.

17. Annex 5: responsibility for children and young people who move between local authorities

Local authorities are responsible for conducting the EHC plan needs assessment and, where necessary, issuing EHC plans and securing the provision specified for children and young people in the local authority's area (section 24(1) of the [Children and Families Act 2014](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/section/24/enacted) (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/section/24/enacted>)). Local authorities should fund any special educational provision for children and young people with EHC plans from the high needs block of the DSG, which is allocated on a formulaic basis, including factors relating to the children and young people resident in their area. Further information can be found in the [high needs national funding formula: technical note](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-funding-formula-technical-note) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-funding-formula-tables-for->

[schools-and-high-needs-2025-to-2026](#)). Therefore, responsibility for SEN and high needs funding is normally based on where the child or young person lives.

Under the [Children and Families Act 2014](#)

(<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted>), local authorities are responsible for children and young people with SEN who are wholly or mainly resident in their area. These duties are based on where the child or young person lives and not on where they are educated. Where a child or young person is educated outside the local authority area where they usually live, it is the local authority where the child normally lives that is responsible for conducting the EHC needs assessment and issuing an EHC plan, where necessary and for securing and funding that provision.

Some children and young people may require residential educational placements (particularly those with the most complex needs). In such cases, it is our view that the child or young person continues to be considered as living in the local authority area that placed them in the residential provision (since a residential school or college placement, even for 52 weeks of the year, is educational provision and not a place where a child or young person lives. That is, the child or young person will remain resident at their family home), and, therefore, they would continue to have the duty to maintain any EHC plan.

The high needs NFF includes a basic entitlement factor and import/export adjustment that together ensure local authorities are appropriately compensated for the high needs place funding for schools and colleges. This funding allocation is paid directly to the schools and colleges either by the local authority that maintains the school or by DfE in the case of academies, NMSS and colleges.

Where a child or young person moves from the area of one local authority into the area of another (for example, changes where they usually live), the new local authority becomes responsible for meeting the statutory SEN duties (as detailed in the [SEND code of practice](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>) section 9.157 to 9.162). This may happen where a child's family moves, or if a young person decides to remain living where they have been educated. If the child or young person already has an EHC plan, the old local authority is required to transfer the EHC plan to the new local authority on the day of the move, or within 15 working days of becoming aware of the move. The new local authority then becomes completely responsible for maintaining the plan and funding the specified educational provision. The new local authority must review the EHC plan within 12 months of the plan being made or being reviewed by the old local authority, or within 3 months of the plan being transferred (whichever is later). The new local authority may conduct a new EHC needs assessment, regardless of when the previous EHC needs assessment took place, since local variations may mean that arrangements in the original EHC plan are no longer appropriate.

17.1 Looked after children (LAC)

Looked after children (LAC) are those who have been taken into care or who are being provided with accommodation by a local authority in its statutory role under the [Children Act 1989](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents>). More than half of looked after children have some form of SEN, and it is likely that a significant proportion of them will have an EHC plan. A significant proportion of looked after children live with foster parents or in a children's home and attend schools in a different local authority to the local authority that looks after them. [The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/959/contents/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/959/contents/made>) distinguish between the responsible authority (the local authority that looks after the child) and the area authority (the local authority in which the child is placed). Local authorities placing looked after children in another local authority's area (for example, with foster parents) need to be aware of that respective local authority's SEND local offer if the children have SEN. Where an EHC plan assessment has been started, it must be carried out by the local authority where the child lives (is wholly or mainly resident), which may not be the same as the local authority that looks after the child, as set out in section 10.8 of the [SEND code of practice](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>). If a disagreement arises, the local authority that looks after the child will act as the corporate parent in any disagreement resolution.

When a local authority places a looked after child with an EHC plan in another local authority's area (for example, with foster parents), the local authority where the looked after child lives (is wholly or mainly resident) becomes responsible for maintaining their EHC plan (including paying any top-up funding), in the same way as any child or young person who moves from one local authority's area to another.

The policy intention behind this is that the local authority where the child lives knows their local schools and educational provision better, so they are better able to assess whether the child needs special educational provision on top of what is ordinarily available.

[The Inter-authority Recoupment \(England\) Regulations 2013](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/492/contents/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/492/contents/made>) permit the local authority where a looked after child with an EHC plan lives to recoup the cost of primary or secondary education, which includes additional special educational provision (for example, the costs of top-up funding), from the local authority responsible for looking after the child. Recoupment of education costs will not normally be appropriate, however, as from 2018 the high needs funding formula and associated arrangements have been designed to ensure that local authorities' allocations of funding for SEND

are based on the characteristics of the children and young people living in their area, including any looked after children. In addition, there are adjustments to reflect the costs relating to the movement of pupils and students living in one local authority area who receive their education in another local authority area.

Inter-authority recoupment may remain appropriate in some circumstances, for example for looked after children from Wales. We also recognise that certain local authorities attract a disproportionate number of looked after children from other local authorities because of the number of children's or foster homes operating in their area. In such circumstances, the local authorities concerned may wish to come to an agreement on how the costs of educating looked after children are funded through the local authorities' respective funding allocations, which may include recoupment of educational costs from the local authority looking after the child. In the case of emergency or temporary placements by the local authority responsible for the looked after child/children, it may also be reasonable for the placing local authority to pick up the costs (directly or via recoupment) until a more permanent placement is made and/or the transfer of the EHC plan is arranged.

It should be noted that the recoupment regulations do not provide for recoupment of costs of FE provision, so costs of additional SEND provision for young people in FE settings cannot be recouped in this way.

[The Education \(Areas to which Pupils and Students Belong\) Regulations 1996](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1996/615/contents/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1996/615/contents/made>) (the 'Belonging' Regulations), as [amended](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2009/1301/contents/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2009/1301/contents/made>), are used to determine which local authority a person belongs to for the purposes of recoupment only. Regulation 1(4) makes clear that the 'Belonging Regulations' do not apply for the purpose of determining which local authority's area a child is in for the purposes of section 24 of the Children and Families Act 2014. They should not be used to determine which local authority is responsible for conducting an EHC needs assessment and maintaining, securing, and funding the provision in an EHC plan, since this must be determined under the Children and Families Act 2014.

17.2 Post-19 provision for young people accommodated under the Care Act 2014

For a young person aged 19 to 25, the local authority where they live is responsible for conducting any EHC needs assessment, issuing an EHC plan where necessary, and for securing and funding that provision.

Children cease to be looked after when they are over the age of 18 (some children will cease to be looked after at 16 or 17 years old and others will continue to be looked after until their 18th birthday). [The Inter-authority Recoupment \(England\) Regulations 2013](#) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2013/492/contents/made>) apply only to looked after children (up to their 18th birthday), and so do not apply to young people aged 19 or over. Once they are no longer looked after, the recoupment regulations no longer apply. This should not matter as the local authority where the young person lives will have been funded through the high needs funding formula to meet the costs, in the same way as for any other young person who lives in their area.

Some care leavers will remain living with their former foster parents past their 18th birthday in staying put arrangements, but they are no longer looked after. The local authority which looked after a child remains responsible for meeting their leaving care duties regardless of where the young person may now be living in England or Wales (section 23A (4) of the [Children Act 1989](#) (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents>)).

This includes providing the young person with support for the expenses associated with living near where they are seeking work, working, or receiving education or training.

Decisions on adult social care placements may change the local authority responsible for making SEN provision. It is our view that, where a young adult is accommodated under the [Care Act 2014](#) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/contents/enacted>) in a residential adult social care placement (as opposed to residential education) made on a long-term basis (for example, with the intention that it is to be permanent for the foreseeable future), it is likely to be considered to be a change in the adult's residence. Therefore, if a young person aged 19 to 25 has been accommodated under the Care Act 2014, in a permanent residential care placement in a different local authority area, it is likely they will have moved into the area of the new local authority, unless there are factors indicating otherwise. Therefore, for the purposes of the [Children and Families Act 2014](#) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted>), the new local authority would be responsible for securing and maintaining any EHC plan.

18. Annex 6: health and social care costs

Where a child or young person with SEND has relevant health or social care needs, these should be addressed within an integrated EHC plan.

Responsibility for securing the provision specified in the plan sits with the

relevant statutory bodies: the local authority for education and social care provision, and either the Integrated Care Board (ICB) or (in some cases) NHS England for health provision.

The high needs funding block of the DSG is intended to meet the educational costs of children and young people with SEN or who require AP. The DSG may only be used for the purposes specified in the [DSG: conditions of grant](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2025-to-2026>) and [The School and Early Years Finance \(England\) Regulations](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/42/contents/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/42/contents/made>) which means that it may not be used to meet non-educational costs, except where specifically permitted. The costs of securing health provision (specified in section G of an EHC plan) should be met by either the ICB or NHS England. The costs of securing social care provision (specified in sections H1 and H2 of an EHC plan) should be met by the local authority from their social care budgets.

However, the [Children and Families Act 2014](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted>) acknowledges that specific types of health or social care provision may be considered as education or training. The Children and Families Act 2014 requires that health or social care provision which educates or trains a child or young person must be treated as special educational provision (that is, deemed educational provision). This particularly applies to therapies such as speech and language therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy. This means that it will be recorded in section F of an EHC plan and will be treated as special educational provision and, therefore, in scope of the high needs budget. However, all decisions about whether health care provision or social care provision should be treated as special educational provision must be made on an individual basis, as set out in section 9.74 of the [SEND code of practice](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>).

While independent and non-maintained provision frequently offers integrated education, health and social care provision, only educational costs (including deemed educational costs) should be funded by the DSG. In some cases, the integrated package of support will be costed and charged through a single fee. In these cases, the local authority should charge non-educational costs to the responsible partners. We would expect the relevant partners to have agreed the basis for the placement and its funding before it is confirmed (for example, before a final EHC plan is issued). The social care element of accommodating children with SEND in schools should be charged appropriately.

19. Annex 7: permanent exclusions: funding adjustments

The [alternative provision and hospital education](#) section highlights the importance of ensuring schools and local authorities explore the most effective arrangements for AP commissioning and funding in their area, including for children who have been permanently excluded. Where pupils are excluded, under [The School and Early Years Finance \(England\) Regulations](#) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2025/42/contents/made>), funding should flow in-year from the school that has permanently excluded the pupil to the provision that takes responsibility for the pupil. If a school subsequently admits a pupil who has been permanently excluded during that financial year, it should then receive additional funding.

The provisions also apply to pupils who leave a mainstream school for reasons other than permanent exclusions and are receiving education funded by the local authority, other than at a school. The provisions also act independently of whether a particular pupil has been on the school census in the first place and whether the school has, therefore, received funding for them.

Local authorities are responsible for adjusting the budget shares of mainstream maintained schools if a pupil is permanently excluded, so that funding follows the pupil. Further information on this, including calculating the amount to be deducted from the excluding school's budget and admitting school's budget (if appropriate), is available in the 'Redetermination of budgets where pupils have been excluded' section of the [schools operational guide: 2025 to 2026](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-16-schools-funding-local-authority-guidance-for-2025-to-2026>).

Different funding arrangements apply in relation to pupils permanently excluded from PRUs, AP academies, maintained special schools, special academies and children in designated SEN units or resourced places at mainstream schools. These schools receive base funding for each place, which is not linked to individual pupils and so is not withdrawn following a permanent exclusion. Similarly, the calculation for an admitting school would not be used for a PRU, AP academy or AP free school. They also receive top-up funding that is linked to individual pupils. When commissioning places at one of these types of school, local authorities and schools should formally agree with the providing school what proportion of this top-up funding will be returned if a pupil leaves the school (for any reason). See sections 'Top-up funding for alternative provision (including examples)' or 'Further information on the approach to top-up funding for PRUs, AP academies and AP free schools' above for further information.

The only exception to this is where pupil premium is payable in respect of a pupil attending a PRU or special school maintained by the local authority. In this situation, local authorities must adjust the school's budget in accordance with the same formula that applies to mainstream schools. In the case of AP and special academies, local authorities should claim from the academy an amount equivalent to the pupil premium (as calculated according to the formula in the regulations) or pay the academy the relevant amount when a previously permanently excluded pupil joins the academy.

Information about regulations covering the movement of funds in relation to permanently excluded pupils who are placed in provision in other local authorities can be found under the section 'Inter-authority funding transfers' in the [schools operational guide: 2025 to 2026](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-16-schools-funding-local-authority-guidance-for-2025-to-2026) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-16-schools-funding-local-authority-guidance-for-2025-to-2026>). The regulations relate to situations where a pupil is permanently excluded from a maintained school in one local authority, and is either:

- subsequently provided with education in the same financial year at a maintained school, or otherwise than at school in a second local authority
- subsequently provided with education in the same financial year at a PRU, or otherwise than at school in a second local authority, and then at a maintained school or otherwise than at school in a third local authority

20. Annex 8: important dates

The timeline below shows the implementation of the 2025 to 2026 high needs funding arrangements, including actions for local authorities and schools and colleges.

Schools and colleges must ensure the [school census](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-census) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-census>) or [ILR](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/individualised-learner-record-ilr) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/individualised-learner-record-ilr>) guidance is followed on all items that are, or will be, used for funding purposes, including elements of the NFF. It is critical that all schools and colleges check the latest guidance to make sure that they understand what is required, including identifying those pupils or students for whom they receive high needs top-up funding.

Department for Education:

- 2025 to 2026 guidance on the place change notification process published and local authorities workbook issued
- January 2024 school census data for special academies and free schools published
- 2023 to 2024 and 2024 to 2025 high needs place numbers updated (as of 1 October 2024)

Local authorities:

- continue discussions with all types of schools and colleges and other local authorities to ensure positive strategic demand and supply planning to enable agreement to be reached in 2025 to 2026 high needs place numbers, in preparation for completion of the data return to DfE

Schools and colleges:

- continue discussions with local authorities and reach agreement in 2025 to 2026 high needs place numbers, in preparation for the local authority data return to DfE
- all maintained schools, academies, NMSS and PRUs, to complete the autumn [school census](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-census) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-census>)
- FE colleges, sixth form colleges, ILPs, 16 to 19 academies and SPIs are to submit 2024 to 2025 ILR R14

November 2024

Department for Education:

- the AP free schools 2025 to 2026 place process launched
- provisional high needs NFF allocations for 2025 to 2026 published

Local authorities:

- deadline for local authority submission of 2025 to 2026 high needs place number changes and requests for local authority hospital education funding changes to DfE
- deadline for requests to disapply conditions of grant relating to funding from the schools block of the DSG
- local authorities' DSG updated

Schools and colleges:

- complete discussions with local authorities and reach agreement for 2025 to 2026 high needs place numbers, in preparation for the local authority return to DfE

- AP free schools: discuss commissioning arrangements with local authorities and schools for the 2025 to 2026 academic year

December 2024

Department for Education:

- 2025 to 2026 DSG schools, central school services and high needs block allocations and DSG: conditions of grant published
- indicative 2025 to 2026 DSG early years block allocations published

FE providers:

- FE colleges, sixth form colleges, ILPs, 16 to 19 maintained schools and academies, and SPIs submit 2024 to 2025 ILR R04

January 2025

Department for Education:

- 2025 to 2026 high needs place change notification outcomes published on GOV.UK
- 2023 to 2024 R14 ILR data returned by colleges published
- 2-week enquiry window for local authorities and relevant schools and colleges to raise place change related issues
- [The School and Early Years Finance \(England\) Regulations 2025](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/42/contents/made) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2025/42/contents/made>) are published

Local authorities:

- calculate additional funding allocations for special and AP maintained schools and academies and consult schools on the data and calculations used
- check published outcomes and ensure queries are discussed with relevant schools and colleges and, if necessary, those raised during the 2-week enquiry window
- this should include checking the outcomes for schools and colleges located in other local authorities, where a local authority places large numbers of students
- deadline for submitting the final 2025 to 2026 APT to DfE. This covers all mainstream maintained schools and academies: including pupil numbers on the October 2024 census in RP and SEN units to support the calculation of funding for occupied and unoccupied places

Schools and colleges :

- schools and colleges to check changes to 2025 to 2026 funded place numbers are correctly reflected in the published outcomes, ensure any queries are discussed with the relevant local authority and, if necessary, raised with DfE during the 2-week enquiry window
- deadline for AP free schools 2025 to 2026 place number returns
- all maintained schools, academies, NMSS and PRUs to complete spring 2025 school census

February 2025**Local authorities:**

- 2-week enquiry window closes for raising queries with DfE regarding 2025 to 2026 funded place numbers
- review of, and amendments to EHC plans must be completed by [15 February \(https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2014/1530/regulation/18\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2014/1530/regulation/18) for pupils moving into, or between, schools in that calendar year
- 2025 to 2026 budgets issued to mainstream schools, special schools and PRUs

Schools and colleges:

- 2-week enquiry window closes for raising queries with DfE regarding 2025 to 2026 funded place numbers
- FE colleges, sixth form colleges, ILPs, 16 to 19 maintained schools and academies and SPIs to submit 2024 to 2025 ILR R06

March 2025**Department for Education:**

- publication of the 2025 to 2026 high needs place numbers for schools and colleges
- following details published on how [16 to 19 funding will work \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-information-for-2025-to-2026\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-information-for-2025-to-2026) and the [timeline for delivering allocations \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-funding-allocations\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-funding-allocations), 2025 to 2026 academic year allocations will begin to be issued to the FE colleges and schools with sixth forms: including free schools (post-16 element), academies (post-16 element), NMSS (post-16 element), SPIs, ILPs and 16 to 19 academies
- local authorities' DSG updated

Local authorities:

- additional high needs funding allocations to special and AP maintained schools and academies, calculated according to the requirements and guidance set out in [annex 4: historic teachers' pay and pensions funding and additional funding](#)
- review of and amendments to EHC plans, including specifying the post-16 provision and naming the school or college, must be completed by 31 March for students moving from a secondary or special school to a college or apprenticeship in that calendar year
- complete EHC plan review process by 31 March for students moving between post-16 colleges, where a young person is expected to transfer to a new post-16 college in the new academic year

April 2025**Department for Education:**

- 2025 to 2026 post-16 academic year allocations – majority of allocations to be issued to eligible schools and colleges in April with some exceptions (see March)

Schools and colleges:

- check high needs allocation is received and correct

June 2025**Department for Education:**

- issue to local authorities the NFF import/export adjustments data at school and college level, the special free school adjustments data and guidance on the import/export data error notification process (supporting information about new special free school adjustments can be found in the [DSG: technical note 2024 to 2025](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dedicated-schools-grant-dsg-2024-to-2025>) and [special free schools adjustment: a guide for local authorities](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-funding-arrangements-2025-to-2026>))

Local authorities:

- review NFF import/export adjustment data

FE providers:

- FE colleges, sixth form colleges, ILPs, 16 to 19 academies and SPIs to submit 2024 to 2025 ILR R10

July 2025

Department for Education:

- 2025 to 2026 high needs place numbers updated and published (as of 1 July 2024)
 - 2025 to 2026 DSG update to reflect final school and college level allocation decisions, NFF import/export adjustments and special free school adjustments (supporting information can be found in the DSG: technical note 2025 to 2026)
 - local authorities' DSG updated
 - local authorities notify DfE of potential data errors in the NFF import/export adjustments
-

1. [Findings from Phase One - DBV in SEND](https://www.dbvinsend.com/insights)
(<https://www.dbvinsend.com/insights>) and
2. [High needs budgets: effective management in local authorities](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-budgets-effective-management-in-local-authorities)
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-needs-budgets-effective-management-in-local-authorities>)



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Schools Funding Forum 27th November 2025

ITEM 6

Subject Heading:

**Central Schools Services Block (CSSB)
2026-27 Update**

Report Author:

**Hany Moussa – Principal Education
Finance Officer**

Eligibility to vote:

Information only

SUMMARY

This report summarises the Policy Note update of the DSG Central Schools Services Block (CSSB) funding for financial year 2026-27.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Schools Funding Forum:

- (i) notes the updated methodology and allocation of CSSB for 2026-27

REPORT DETAIL

1. Background

As part of the introduction of a Schools and High Needs National Funding Formula in 2018-19 the DfE established a fourth funding block, the CSSB, which brought together funding for central services previously funded through the Schools Block and the Education Services Grant.

Following the November 2025 policy update, the DfE has confirmed changes to the CSSB for financial year 2026-27. The incorporation of two grants, NICs and SBSG, paid separately in 2025-26 for centrally employed staff are now rolled into the CSSB baseline.

Similar to the schools share of the grant in the baseline for 2026-27, the SBSG has been annualised. The overall additional grant is then redistributed nationally through the CSSB NFF, with formula protection criteria put in place.

2. CSSB allocation 2025-26

Before the 2026-27 release was published, an early estimate was produced based on a predicted 3.0% uplift to the per-pupil rate for ongoing responsibilities.

The projected allocation that was tabled in the October 2025 meeting for the CSSB, with comparable data from 2025-26 is as follows.

	Ongoing responsibilities			Historical commitments	Total CSSB
	Pupil nos.	Per pupil £	£	£	£
2026-27 projected	39,883.0	47.43	1,891,651	60,292	1,951,943
2025-26 final	39,883.0	46.05	1,836,613	75,365	1,911,978
Difference	0	1.38	55,038	-15,073	39,965

This pre-release estimate is now superseded by the Policy update's confirmed CSSB NFF methodology.

3. Policy Update – indicative allocations

The updated DfE indicative allocations includes the rolling-in of the NICs and SBSG grants by redistribution through the basic per-pupil and deprivation factors. There is transitional protection for the 2026-27 CSSB NFF with LAs protected for losses up to 2.5% in comparison to the previous year baseline, and capped to 2.13% gain against the previous year baseline.

	Ongoing responsibilities			Historical commitments	Total CSSB
	Pupil nos.	Per pupil £	£	£	£
2026-27 projected	39,883.0	55.31	2,205,987	60,292	2,266,279
2025-26 final	39,883.0	46.05	1,836,613	75,365	1,911,978
Difference	0	9.26	369,374	-15,073	354,301

Because Havering's adjusted 2025-26 baseline was higher than the NFF calculation (after NICs/SBSG roll-in), Havering becomes a loss-protection authority. This means:

- Havering does not receive the full annualised amount of the rolled-in grants (£425,939)
- Funding instead rises only up to the maximum permitted gain/loss limit applied nationally

The table below breaks down the calculation step by step.

	Rate	Explanation	Amount
2025-26 adjusted baseline per-pupil	£56.72971	Includes NICs and SBSG rolled into baseline	£2,262,551
2026-27 NFF basic rate (post-ACA)	£47.98840	Basic per-pupil funding before protection (Oct-24 = 39883 pupils)	
2026-27 NFF deprivation rate (post-ACA)	£19.90393	FSM6-related factor (Oct-24 FSM Ever6 = 20.83% = 8308 pupils)	
Combined unprotected NFF rate	£52.13457	£47.99 + £19.90	£2,079,283
Year-on-year change (unprotected)	-8.10%	Fall relative to 2025–26 baseline	
Maximum permitted loss	-2.50%	CSSB formula protection	
Protection applied	£3.18	Required uplift to limit the loss to -2.5%	£126,704
Final protected per-pupil rate	£55.31147	Havering's published 2026-27 rate	£2,205,987
Final year on year change	-2.50%	Transitional maximum loss	-£56,564

4. Services to be funded

The services that LAs can fund from the CSSB are set out in the extract from the Operational Guidance. The updated table for services to be funded from the CSSB are as follows:

Ongoing responsibilities	Final 2025-26 £	Projected 2026-27* £	Projected change £	Projected change %
Copyright licences	280,000	288,400	8,400	3.0
Admissions	597,932	615,870	17,938	3.0
Schools Forum	49,087	50,560	1,473	3.0
LA responsibilities to all schools	909,594	936,821	27,227	3.0
Staffing Costs funded from Legacy Grants (NICs and SBSG)	-	314,336	314,336	n/a
Total	1,836,613	2,205,987	369,374	20.1

Historical commitments	Final 2025-26 £	Projected 2026-27* £	Projected change £	Projected change %
Schools Partnerships/Schools Causing Concern	75,365	60,292	-15,073	-20.0
Total	1,911,978	2,266,279	354,301	18.5

Ongoing responsibility element

The copyright licence costs tend to increase each year but LAs are not notified of the increase until later in the year. An estimated sum of £288,400 has been included. Areas relating to salary costs have been increased by 3.0%. The actual increase in cost is likely to be aligned or more than what has been projected.

Historic Commitments element

Continuing the financial year arrangements for this element of the grant, the LA is proposing that for 2026-27 that this continues to be used for items that are accessible to a large number of schools. This includes the coaching bursary, Havering Academy of Leadership and support commissioned on behalf of all schools.

Schools Funding Forum approved the use of the CSSB at the October 2025 meeting.



Schools Funding Forum 27th November 2025

ITEM 7

Subject Heading:

Schools Financial Monitoring

Report Author:

**Katherine Heffernan – Head of Finance
Business Partnering**

Eligibility to vote:

Information only

SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the 2025-26 in year financial position of Havering Maintained Schools and the number of schools in or at risk of going into deficit.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Schools Funding Forum notes the report.

REPORT DETAIL

Havering Schools Financial Position

At the end of the 2024-25 financial year there were 16 Havering maintained schools with overall deficit budgets, all of which had been in deficit for a number of years. For the first time the overall level of school deficits exceeded the level of surplus meaning that there was an overall debit balance on the LMS reserve. Schools in deficit had received around £5m of cash advances from the authority.

When schools set their budgets for 2025-26 and the following years, it showed that there was a high risk of more schools falling into deficit in this or future years. This reflects the high level of financial pressure that Havering schools are under. However, the financial regulations concerning schools financing are clear that deficits should be avoided where possible and should not be allowed to persist. The legislative framework sets out that deficits should only be permitted as a temporary measure and schools that need to go into deficit should take

steps to recover their position within a reasonable timeframe – with three years being the suggested period.

Schools were therefore grouped into five risk categories as follows.

- A 9 Schools - Schools forecasting to remain in surplus for at least 3 years

These schools are currently in a sustainable position, and no immediate action is required. They should however continue to monitor their situation as circumstances can change.

- B 7 Schools - Schools in surplus in this financial year but forecasting a potential deficit in the medium term.

The Governing Body should monitor their position carefully and consider what action they can take now or in future to ensure they do not fall into deficit.

- C 6 Schools - Schools forecasting they are at risk of falling into deficit in year

The Governing Body should urgently consider whether they can take action in year to avoid falling into deficit. If that is not possible, they can apply for a licensed deficit but will need to produce a recovery plan showing how they will return to surplus in a few years.

- D 6 Schools - Schools in deficit now who are forecasting to reduce their deficit over three years – of which 3 will be in surplus by the end of the time.

The Local Authority will be able to issue a licensed deficit as there is a recovery plan in place. This will need to be monitored to ensure it is successful in returning the school to surplus.

- E 10 Schools - Schools in deficit who are forecasting their deficits will increase over a three-year period.

A recovery plan needs to be developed and implemented to ensure that the school can start to return to surplus in the future. Given the size of some deficits and the nature of the issues this may need to take more than the recommended 3 to 5 years.

The Current Situation

Since this initial exercise schools and governing bodies have worked very hard to identify what action they can take to improve their financial position. In particular most of the six schools in category C may not now move into deficit this year. This is being confirmed by the finance team with those five schools. If this is the case, then there is no further action required in year although the position will need to be monitored.

A further two schools that are in deficit have developed a satisfactory recovery plan and are now projecting a return to surplus in future year.

However, there are still ten schools that have not yet been able to identify sufficient actions to return to surplus although many of these schools have taken action to reduce the rate of

overspending. These are schools with a very high level of challenges and Finance will continue to work with them to understand the main drivers of their pressures and what would help we can provide.

Licensed Deficits

A licensed deficit is an agreement between the Local Authority and a school governing body that the school may go into deficit for a defined period of time. This is a formal decision shared between the Director of Children's Services and the Director of Finance.

A licensed deficit agreement is specific to an individual school and will include the following information:

- The total amount of deficit a school is permitted to reach
- What funds the authority will advance the school
- What action the school should take to recover its situation
- The timescale over which the school will return to surplus
- When any cash advances will be repaid.

We are in the process of drawing up agreements with the schools who have been able to produce recovery plans.

For those schools that have not been able to produce recovery plans we will need to formalise the situation with some kind of interim agreement.

Local Authority Finance Support.

The Local Authority wants to work with schools which are facing financial pressures and to offer them effective support. The team are therefore reviewing our finance offer and will be focusing more on its statutory strategic and regulatory roles. This will also lead to more clarity in the traded offer.

At the same time, we will be working on making changes to our statutory support. This will include – a review of the Scheme for Financing Schools, improved guidance and advice on budget setting, focusing more on in year monitoring in the quarterly financial submissions and more support for schools in deficit.