House of Commons

Education Committee

# Solving the SEND Crisis: Government Response

Seventh Special Report of Session 2024–26 HC 1565

# 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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## Publication

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# Seventh Special Report

The Education Committee published its Fifth Report, Solving the SEND Crisis (HC 492), on 18 September 2025. The Government Response was received on 28 November 2025 and is appended below.

# Appendix: Government Response

## Introduction

The Government is grateful to the Education Select Committee for its inquiry report into Solving the SEND Crisis and we welcome the opportunity to respond to the Committee.

Every child should have a childhood rich in opportunity and with high quality education and care from their early years through to post-16. Every young person's experience of education should be academically stretching, where every child feels like they belong, and that sets them up for life and work.

The Committee's report rightly highlights the deep-rooted issues which have plagued the SEND system for too long and has resulted in poor experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND and their families.

As part of our Plan for Change, we are committed to reforming the SEND system to deliver an excellent, inclusive education for every child and young person with a world class curriculum and highly trained, expert staff at every phase of learning. The Government is already taking action to make sure that evidence-based support is available as routine, without a fight, for every child and young person who needs it - from significant investment in school places for children with SEND, to improved teacher training, to our Best Start Family Hubs in every local area.

Our response at this time is deliberately high-level and further detail on our plans for SEND reform will be set out in the Schools White Paper early in the new year following a further period of engagement with children and families.

## Principles for SEND reform

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

## Early Years

On 7 July, we published our commitment to giving every child the best start in life. We have pledged to invest close to £1.5bn over the next three years to realise the Opportunity Mission and ensure every child has the best start in life.

Through this investment, we will expand and strengthen family services, make early education and childcare more accessible and affordable, and improve the quality of early education and childcare.

Supporting children with SEND is central to the early years agenda. The government recognises the important role the early years sector plays in early intervention to ensure the right support is put in place for children as soon as possible, and that every child, including those with SEND, should have access to a high-quality early years place that meets their individual needs and nurtures their development.

We are making changes to improve the system for children with SEND already. The Best Start in Life strategy means a stronger focus on early identification, inclusive access to early years education, and tailored family support. We are doing this by:

- making inclusive practice standard practice, working with early years educators, including Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), to embed inclusive practice across all early years teaching and qualifications.
- increasing the funding available to providers to support children with SEND and make improvements to the way funding is allocated as part of wider reforms to the SEND system. Improved funding will provide additional resources for providers to better support inclusion and early intervention to prevent the escalation of needs.
- funding Best Start Family hubs in every local authority, with children and family services professionals specifically trained in working to support parents of children with additional needs. This will help identify children with special educational needs and disabilities who may need extra help early on, making links with local early years settings and health services.
- funding evidenced-based early language interventions to enable early language development and identify SEND at the earliest opportunity. We will continue to ensure every reception class benefits from fully funded access to proven programmes such as the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) – funding for the NELI programme will continue for a further 4 academic years until the end of AY 2028/29. We will also fund specialist early language leads in local areas to give hands-on support and training to early years educators and settings. Reception staff will also be able to access specialist early language lead support.

As set out in the 10 Year Health Plan, building on the successes of programmes such as Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC), we will ensure that education and healthcare providers work together with other local services to plan and deliver evidence-based early interventions for children. An independent evaluation of the ELSEC programme is taking place. This will explore the overall impact of the 'test and learn' programme

and provide a robust evidence base to inform future decisions and next steps in shaping inclusive education and early support systems across all local areas.

## Mainstream Inclusion

We are committed to improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools to ensure they have the tools to better identify and support children before issues escalate.

In December 2024, we created an Expert Advisory Group for Inclusion, led by Tom Rees, to advise the Secretary of State for Education and the Minister of State for School Standards on how to drive inclusive education practice. In September 2025, the group's remit was extended, to ensure that as the government progresses towards publication of a Schools White Paper, Ministers can draw on a broad range of advice and input.

Our new team of expert Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) advisors will also work with mainstream schools to become more inclusive places as one of four priority areas for improvement. The RISE advisors include leaders from the SEND and alternative provision sectors, with a track record of improving schools, who will work with schools and their responsible bodies to drive improvement. They will work directly with schools through bespoke targeted intervention, and support the identification and dissemination of effective inclusive practice as part of the RISE universal improvement offer.

Through regional events, conferences and networking opportunities, universal RISE will enable schools and trusts to come together to discuss issues and share learning, drawing on expertise from across the whole school system. RISE will help all schools to identify how they can drive inclusion and support them to go further, improving outcomes for all pupils.

The government aims to deliver a rich, broad and inclusive reformed curriculum as part of our mission to break down barriers to opportunity and commissioned an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review July 2024. The Review was clear that whilst many young people are succeeding through the current system, too many are still leaving full-time education without the essential knowledge and skills they need to thrive and adapt in a rapidly changing world, particularly those with SEND and from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Furthermore, for the first time Ofsted have set out an explicit focus on inclusion in their new framework, gathering evidence on factors from school culture to assessment of need. The new inspection framework came into effect on 10 November.

## Workforce

The biggest in-education factor that makes the impact to a child's educational outcomes is high-quality teaching. This is particularly important for pupils with Special Educational Needs and disabilities (SEND).

As we set out in the Best Start in Life strategy, we will make inclusive practice standard practice in the early years. We will do this by working with early years educators, including Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), to embed inclusive practice across all early years teaching and qualifications, alongside additional resources and funding.

For the early years workforce, we have already funded training for 1000 early years Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) to achieve their level 3 Early Years SENCO qualification by the end of FY2025–26, having already funded training for up to 7000 early years SENCOs in previous years. We have also published additional resources, including a free online training module and SEND assessment guidance. We have also invested in the Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) programme, as well as the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) supporting children in the early years with their speech and language.

In schools, we want to make sure teachers can access high quality professional development that supports them to deliver the best teaching for all pupils, including those with SEND. We are considering how we can improve professional development for all teachers, from Initial Teacher training and early career support through to leadership.

In September 2025, building on the support available to early career teachers, we introduced the Early Career Teacher Entitlement (ECTE). The ECTE revised and improved the delivery of what we formerly referred to as the ECF programme.

Changes were introduced including moving to a combined framework to create a joined-up programme of development, which covers the first three years or more at the start of a teacher's career. The ECTE is underpinned by the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) which contains new and enhanced framework statements relating to adaptive teaching and supporting pupils with SEND.

We have also committed to providing targeted support and further resources for ECTs in special schools. This will ensure that the ECTE will help to create a more supportive and effective environment for ECTs teaching pupils with SEND, ultimately leading to better outcomes for those pupils.

We recognise that continuous improvement is essential in order to transform the training and support for all new teachers, and to review the experiences and needs of ECTs as well as trainees. That's why we are committing to a full review of the delivery of the ECTE, including the content of the ITTECF, in 2027 to ensure it continues to provide the best possible support for ECTs based on the most up to date evidence. We know that it's crucial that ECTs feel supported in teaching pupils with SEND which is why we will also review our approach to SEND, and the support we provide ECTs in teaching pupils with SEND.

National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) are a national, voluntary suite of evidence-based qualifications designed to support teachers and leaders at all levels. They provide access to high-quality training in the areas that matter most to teaching and learning. NPQs offer a clear pathway for professional growth and system-wide improvement. Upskilling teachers and leaders to develop the knowledge needed throughout their career journey. Leading to improved settings and ultimately driving better pupil outcomes.

In autumn 2024, we began delivery of the NPQ for Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (NPQ for SENCOs). This is now the mandatory qualification for SENCOs in mainstream schools. Participants will develop the essential knowledge and skills needed to set the strategic direction of SEN policy in a school and the conditions in which pupils with SEND can thrive.

We want to ensure that NPQs continue to offer the best possible support to teachers and leaders wanting to develop their knowledge and skills. On 10 January 2025, we began formally reviewing NPQ content frameworks and delivery, to consider new evidence and best-practice. SEND and inclusion is a priority area for the review for which we are engaging extensively with stakeholders from across the sector. We aim to update the NPQ frameworks to strengthen inclusive leadership practices to ensure high-quality teaching for all pupils, as well as increase the understanding and awareness of targeted support for pupils with additional needs.

To support the review, the department has convened an expert steering group (ESG), representing a wide range of expertise from across the education sector, including SEND experts and serving school leaders. The work of the ESG will also be complimented by a wide-ranging programme of engagement from across the sector.

Teaching Assistants (TAs) play an important role in supporting pupils with SEND. We recognise that training and career progression opportunities for TAs help schools have the skilled staff they need.

This Government values and recognises the professionalism of the entire school workforce, which is why the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB) is being established through the Employment Rights Bill. The body

will mean that in future years the pay rates, pay awards, and terms and conditions for school support staff will be negotiated by school support staff employer and employee representatives, and incorporated into contracts when agreed by the Secretary of State. This will ensure that support staff are properly recognised and rewarded for the work they do. The SSSNB will also advise on suitable training and career progression routes that recognise the varied and vital roles support staff undertake. The body will help address recruitment and retention challenges state-funded schools are facing for support staff.

In October we published the Post-16 Education and Skills white paper which highlighted high-quality teaching and inclusivity, stressing that no learner should be left behind. It commits to improving support for students with SEND and mental health needs, including investment in specialist advice and expanded mental health services in colleges.

In recent years, we have supported capacity building of the post-16 workforce through a range of professional development measures for example, from supporting leaders and governors to in-service support through T Level Professional Development and English and maths CPD. Looking ahead, we are taking steps to reform initial teacher education and improve the quality of early career support for post-16 teachers. Funding for trainees before they are employed as teachers , will continue to be offered as tax free FE Initial Teacher Education bursaries, worth up to £15,000. We are also strengthening the quality of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in FE, introducing statutory guidance to ensure consistency and quality in ITE content and delivery.

For more experienced teachers, we are working with the sector to explore opportunities for further in-service training to support SEND students, and to improve access of FE teachers and leaders to National Professional Qualifications including the SENCO NPQ.

We are also developing new, in-service professional development courses and wider support to strengthen professional development pathways available to further education teachers, in areas that are a priority for FE, such as SEND. We will also continue to support colleges to embed SEND provision into curriculum planning and delivery, ensuring accessibility across all pathways.

## Cross-departmental Workforce Strategy and Specialist Workforce

The Department is working closely with DHSC and NHS England to improve access to community health services, such as speech and language therapy, for children and young people with SEND. As set out in the 10 Year Health Plan for England, building on the successes of programmes such as Early Speech and Language for Every Child, we will ensure that education and healthcare providers work together with other local services to plan and deliver evidence-based early interventions for children. We will focus on ensuring allied health professionals, such as speech and language or occupational therapists, who are vital for supporting children and young people with SEND, are more effectively deployed spending time supporting children not on bureaucracy and admin

In addition to the undergraduate degree route, speech and language therapists can now also train via a degree apprenticeship. This route is going into its fourth year of delivery and offers an alternative pathway to the traditional degree route into a successful career as a speech and language therapist.

Educational psychologists also play a critical role in the support available to children and young people, including those with SEND. The Department is already investing over £21 million to train 400 more educational psychologists over two cohorts starting their studies in 2024 and 2025. This is in addition to the £10 million being invested in the training of over 200 educational psychologists who began their training in September 2023.

## Sector Engagement and Co-creation

The Ministerial team and I are continuing to listen closely to families, teachers and experts, as we put together plans to transform outcomes for every child with SEND. Engagement across our stakeholder groups, from children and young people with lived experiences and their families, to experts and charities, allows us to draw on diverse expertise and experiences.

Our engagement will centre around 3 core activity strands:

- **SEND Ministerial development group** -We have listened to feedback from SEND parent groups that, building on our engagement over the past year, they would welcome further opportunities to work directly with the Ministerial team to share their insight and help shape the reform proposals to ensure they are rooted in the lived experiences of children and young people with SEND. In response to this, I've brought

together a development group of SEND parent groups and other key stakeholders, to meet between now and the end of January. This group will hear a range of perspectives and test potential solutions to the key challenges in our SEND system to ensure that policy proposals are built on the knowledge and experiences of children their families and those working in the system. Alongside those representing parents and carers, the group will include representatives from schools and local government as well as health, early years and further education.

- **Regional and online engagement sessions** - From early next month, we'll be running events in every region in England and online, open to everyone with a stake in building a better SEND system.
- **Ministerial roundtables** – We will continue to attend roundtables, enabling us to listen to a wide range of different stakeholders, from parent groups to children and young people and other key stakeholders. We are committed to hearing as many views as possible in this phase of co-creation.

The insights and lived experiences shared during these engagement opportunities will be vital in ensuring that our proposals effectively deliver meaningful reforms for families. We will also continue engagement as part of a formal consultation following the White Paper publication, and the responses received will be carefully considered in shaping the reforms.

## Redress and Accountability

We appreciate the Committee's careful consideration of these issues and will respond to their recommendations on improving local authority accountability, including in relation to the SEND tribunal.

Almost 95% of education, health and care plans (EHCPs) and assessments are concluded without a Tribunal hearing. Nationally, in 2024, there were 22,300 appeals registered, giving an appeal rate of 5.7%. However, we acknowledge that the SEND system does not work for too many families who face a lengthy, stressful and adversarial process to secure support for their child.

We recognise the need for clear, independent routes of redress, retaining the SEND Tribunal as an important legal backstop for families who are unable to find resolution earlier in the process. We agree with the Committee that local authorities and education settings should prioritise good partnership working with families. All parties should work closely and collaboratively to develop solutions to their disagreements, so that children or young people get the support they need quicker without the need for a Tribunal appeal.

Similarly, we recognise that the importance of ensuring that schools and local authorities are accountable for the services they have a duty to provide for children and young people with SEND.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman plays an important role in investigating SEND complaints against schools and local authorities. These investigations help ensure that any injustice suffered by children and young people with SEND is corrected and that local authorities adapt their decision-making process accordingly.

We will work closely with the Ombudsman and the Tribunal to determine their roles in a reformed SEND system. In the meantime, I would like to place on record my thanks for the continued work that the Ombudsman and Tribunal do for families of children and young people with SEND.

Ongoing health and social care engagement is essential in delivering effective education and support to children and young people with EHCPs. The SEND Tribunal currently makes non-binding decisions in relation to health and social care appeals, where there is also an appealable educational element. We know that in the majority of cases, these recommendations are followed by health bodies. We will, however, give full consideration to the Committee's recommendations.

A new SEND inspection framework launched in January 2023, with all local areas to be inspected by 2027 to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND. This inspection covers the role of the LA and the ICB. Where a local area does not meet its duties, DfE can take action that prioritises children's needs and supports local areas to bring about rapid improvement.

A recent review of the past two years of inspection identified the need for greater family involvement, reduced inspection burden and greater clarity of reporting including making clearer which partner should take forward areas for improvement where appropriate. DfE continues to work with Ofsted/CQC to refine the framework in line with wider SEND reforms.

## Post-16 and Support for Adulthood

The Government's ambition is that all young people with SEND receive the right support to succeed in post-16 education and as they move into adult life. Post-16 education offers a range of pathways covering academic technical and vocational pathways, including, apprenticeships, and supported internships all of which can benefit SEND learners by providing flexible, personalised routes to help build confidence, gain relevant skills and progress toward employment or further study.

The recently published Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper sets out our vision for a world-leading skills system which breaks down barriers to opportunity for all, meets learner and employers' needs; widens access to high-quality education and training and improves people's lives.

## English and Maths

Progressing towards and attaining level 2 skills in maths and English helps students realise their potential, and gives them the opportunity to progress in life, learning and work. Attaining English and maths GCSE grade 4+ or an equivalent Level 2 pass brings significant benefits to individuals and the economy.

All students who do not achieve a Grade 4 or above in their GCSE at 16 should be supported to study English and maths under the condition of funding. This requires providers to support students on 16–19 study programmes and T Levels without Level 2 English and maths to improve their grade and, wherever possible, attain Level 2 before they leave education, given the benefits this brings. For the academic year 2025/26, this requires providers to offer students a minimum of 100 hours of English and a minimum of 100 hours of maths teaching. We are also reducing the tolerance by which providers may opt out students from these requirements to 2.5% of a provider's total 16–19 cohort in 2025/26 (from its current level of 5%) so as many students as possible get support for English and maths.

To allow more students with EHC plans to continue to receive support for maths and English under the condition of funding, there is a flexibility for institutions to deliver the minimum hours of teaching to them in an alternative format whilst remaining compliant with the condition of funding. In addition, students who have a GCSE grade 2 or below may study towards a GCSE grade 4 - 9, or a level 2 FSQ.

There are a small number of SEND students with EHC plans who may not be able to study towards a qualification. They can be exempted from studying qualifications but should still have literacy and numeracy in their programme at an appropriate level and mode of delivery.

In the Post-16 Education and Skills Strategy White Paper, we commit to introducing a package of reforms to support more students to make progress towards and achieve level 2 in English and maths and break the cycle of unnecessary resits. This includes:

- Offering students new level 1 stepping stone qualifications that support students to consolidate foundational skills and knowledge, preparing those with lower prior attainment for successful GCSE resits

the following year. We want to work closely with the sector and plan to publish a consultation in early 2026 to seek views and set out more details.

- Make changes to the current accountability framework to recognise providers' efforts to progress all students toward Level 2 and consult on changes to our performance metrics to incentivise providers to enter students into exams only when they are ready to make progress. This is on top of increased funding for providers and support through training and sharing of effective practice.

## Transitions to Adulthood and Employment

This Government is committed to helping young disabled people to access and stay in work when they leave education, with a focus on early support and intervention.

We understand that being supported towards greater independence and employability can be life-transforming and the SEND Code of Practice sets out the expectations that all children and young people with SEND should be prepared for adulthood.

We know that the transition into post-16 provision is a crucial part of the learner journey and can be particularly challenging for learners with SEND. Having a clear understanding of the transition process and available support is vital to ensure learners feel prepared for the next stage of their education. We are developing tools and approaches to reduce the risk of learners with SEND becoming NEET by developing specific, targeted support for those learners who might be at risk of dropping out of education at the post-16 key transition point.

To support this we are improving careers adviser training by embedding vocational profiling for young people with SEND into the 'Careers Leader' and online training modules aimed at Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators and the wider education workforce to support careers conversations. This will help individuals identify their skills, interests, aspirations, and support needs for employment.

We are aligning adult skills provision and careers advice with the Jobcentre Plus network, building a new unified public Jobs and Careers Service. We will review the vital role that adult essential skills provision plays in supporting people with learning difficulties and disabilities into work.

We are also simplifying and strengthening vocational pathways, introducing new, rigorous qualifications so that all learners, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), will have access to high-quality study pathways and a clear line of sight to employment or further study.

These qualifications will include two new pathways at level 2 including a 'further study' pathway for students aiming to progress to Level 3 but needing extra preparation and new English and maths qualifications at level 1 which will provide a gradual route for learners, helping them build knowledge and confidence before resitting full GCSEs where appropriate.

## SEND Reform and post-16 provision

We are keen that we do not lose what is already working well in post-16 provision as a result of future SEND reforms. Improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream education settings is a key part of the Government's ambition to ensure that all children and young people receive the support they need to achieve and thrive.

We are 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 as we consider the next steps for the future of SEND reform.

The proposals which result from this co-production will be set out as part of a Schools White Paper early next year and aim to restore confidence in the SEND system and deliver improvement so that every child can achieve.

## Funding

The overall schools and high needs funding included in the Department's spending review settlement – an increase of £4.2 billion by 2028–29 compared to 2025–26 – continues the support available for children and young people with SEND. It will help in transforming mainstream education so that more of them are included, and in improving their outcomes whether in mainstream or specialist provision.

We recognise that local authorities will need support during the transition to a reformed SEND system. We will work with local authorities to manage their SEND system, including deficits, alongside an extension to the Statutory Override until the end of 2027–28. The government will set out further details on our plans to support local authorities with historic and accruing deficits through the upcoming Local Government Finance Settlement.

We also recognise the important role of capital funding in improving access to provision and in improving the inclusivity of mainstream schools. The £740 million high needs capital for 2025–26 is a core part of our investment into the SEND system. This is an unringfenced formulaic allocation that enables LAs to build provision in line with local priorities. We will set out more detail for our approach across the spending review period in due course.

## Specialist Capacity

We want more children and young people to receive the support they need to achieve and thrive in their local mainstream school, reducing the need for pupils to travel a long way to access a specialist placement.

However, there will always be a vital role for special schools and specialist post-16 provision for children and young people with the most complex needs, and we are committed to improving support across the system to ensure access to those placements for pupils that need them. Many special schools and post-16 providers also play a crucial role in supporting mainstream settings through outreach models and providing training, to improve their SEND provision and support a wider range of pupils.

Special schools and other specialist providers frequently deliver high quality placements but we know there can be inconsistency in the offer available to children and young people based on where they live. In planning for the future, we will consider how we can support the dissemination of good practice and deliver greater consistency for children and young people.

Many mainstream settings are delivering specialist provision locally through SEN units and resourced provision. These specialist facilities attached to mainstream schools can deliver bespoke support, adapted to pupils' needs and close to their home.

We would like to explore how we can make similar practices widespread, not only to improve SEND provision in mainstream, but to deepen the relationship between mainstream and specialist schools.

We thank the committee for setting out a number of valuable recommendations which we will carefully consider as we continue to engage closely with children, parents and experts ahead of the publication of our plans for the SEND system in the Schools White Paper in the new year.