

## Education Committee Inquiry: Solving the SEND Crisis

The National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) is pleased to represent the views of its members to the Education Committee's Call for Evidence on Solving the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Crisis. The NNPCF brings together local Parent Carer Forums (PCFs) across the country with 155,000 members. These forums represent the voices of Parents and Carers of Children and Young People (CYP) and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). As a member organization, we are representing the views of membership which were collated in January 2025<sup>1</sup>.

### 1. Sen Support and Accountability:

- 1.1. We asked our members how they would rate the current quality of SEN support in mainstream schools and early years settings. Only 2.98% rated provision good or excellent, 15.67% rated it equate and 81.35% rated provision poor or very poor<sup>2</sup>.
- 1.2. Parents and carers report inconsistent SEN support across regions, local authorities, and even schools within the same trust, often described as a "postcode lottery." Lack of standardization and unclear expectations create confusion.
- 1.3. It is necessary to establish clear standards for SEN (Special Educational Needs) provision, accompanied by accountability measures to ensure equitable access and avenues for recourse for parents and carers, particularly within multi-academy trusts.
- 1.4. National guidance on reasonable adjustments, such as school uniform and behaviour policies, is essential.
- 1.5. National guidance on accountability for schools and local authorities is crucial to define roles, responsibilities, and ensure effective support.
- 1.6. OFSTED must gain parents and carers' trust with a focus on SEN to improve practices and be a reliable quality measure.
- 1.7. Schools face funding shortages, with the SEN notional budget being insufficient to meet growing needs.

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<sup>1</sup>196 provided views through a survey in January 2025. All questions were optional, allowing respondents to provide feedback on topics relevant to them. Additionally, we received feedback through verbal communication and email.

<sup>2</sup>Based on 134 responses to a specific question dated January 2025, the feedback was as follows: Excellent – 1.49%, Good – 1.49%, Adequate – 15.67%, Poor – 52.99%, and Very Poor – 28.36%.

- 1.8. SEN funding should be ring-fenced to ensure adequate resources and broader support.
- 1.9. Early identification of needs, proactive rather than reactive processes (e.g. EHCP) applications and coordinated health and education planning are essential.
- 1.10. Early identification of needs, which occurs in some schools improves outcomes for CYP, along with excellent SEN support evident in some early years and primary settings.

## **2. Consistency in SEND Provision**

- 2.1. SEND support is inconsistent between local areas, schools, and even classrooms in the same school.
- 2.2. Establish national standards for SEND provision to ensure consistency across the country.
- 2.3. Provide clear national guidance to local authorities and schools, with mechanisms to monitor and enforce compliance. Including where health's responsibilities lie.

## **3. EHCP Process and Reviews:**

- 3.1. Stronger Accountability in Law: Improve enforcement of the CYP and Parents and carers Act 2014, particularly regarding LA compliance with Section 36(8)<sup>3</sup> and provision delivery.
- 3.2. The process should be efficient, clear, and focused on the child, with achievable and enforceable targets.
- 3.3. Provide clear and accessible advice for parents and carers across all age groups.
- 3.4. Enhanced and consistent communication with parents and carers throughout the process.
- 3.5. EHCP Annual Reviews (AR) must fully involve parents and carers and the voice of the CYP, avoiding unilateral changes that lead to appeals. Clearly outline update schedules for the AR, ensuring the plan evolves with the CYP and binding all aspects of delivery to the school or relevant party.

## **4. Specialist and Mainstream Integration**

- 4.1. Increased availability of specialist units within mainstream schools (inclusive not segregated approach).

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<sup>3</sup> Section 36(8) of the CYP and Parents and carers Act 2014 (CFA 2014) refers to the legal test that a Local Authority (LA) must apply when deciding whether to conduct an Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment for a child or young person.

- 4.2. Mainstream schools should integrate SEND hubs, breakout spaces, sensory-friendly areas, and adopt more inclusive environments and policies, such as flexible uniform and behaviour policies.
- 4.3. Improved access to specialist settings for CYPs who cannot thrive in mainstream environments. This measure will help ensure that no CYP is left without suitable provision. Currently, many CYP are left without a school place, creating an additional challenge of reintegrating these individuals back into education.
- 4.4. Many CYP in specialist provisions could succeed in mainstream schools if appropriate support and a truly inclusive environment were provided, reducing demand for specialised and statutory provisions.
- 4.5. Collaboration between mainstream and specialist schools should be improved to share expertise and improve inclusion.
- 4.6. Smaller class sizes, better staff-to-CYP ratios, and improved outreach or alternative provisions through school links were frequently suggested.
- 4.7. EBSA is often seen as unwillingness to learn rather than an inability to thrive in the current teaching environment. Schools need to adapt to better support these CYP.
- 4.8. CYP in specialist provisions should have opportunities to undertake GCSEs to prevent disadvantages for those capable of achieving them.
- 4.9. The implementation of certain resource-based provisions within mainstream schools has shown positive outcomes and should be further expanded. However, it is crucial to ensure that these provisions are truly inclusive and not merely segregating CYP with SEND.

## **5. Flexible Curriculum for CYP with SEND**

- 5.1. Flexibility in the curriculum is essential to support SEND learners.
- 5.2. Many CYP could thrive in mainstream settings if more adaptive approaches were taken, including consideration being given to how CYP with SEND may develop differently to their peers and allowing flexible approaches.
- 5.3. The curriculum's focus is highly academic, fast-paced, and narrow, which restricts opportunities for many CYP with SEND to demonstrate their abilities.
- 5.4. For those CYP with SEND who have a high academic capability, many find the school environment and pressures, generates an inaccessible learning environment.
- 5.5. Reintroduce vocational courses and allow flexible curricula without needing an EHCP or specialist provision.

- 5.6. Hybrid learning, reduced emphasis on early testing such as phonics screening and SATs, along with a move away from priorities driven by league tables, is necessary.
- 5.7. Adjustments including extended task time, assistive technology, sensory breaks, social-emotional learning, and life skills should be implemented to support CYP with SEND in mainstream education, including those without a diagnosis.

## **6. Policies, Attendance and Exclusions**

- 6.1. Attendance coding frequently conceals the reality that numerous CYP with SEND do not receive full-time education.
- 6.2. A full review of school policies is required to eliminate discriminatory practices and better address the needs of CYP with SEND.
- 6.3. Exclusions are frequently used as an "off-rolling" tactic and lack consideration for what happens next.
- 6.4. Schools must better understand and meet the needs of CYP to reduce exclusions and absences.
- 6.5. Attendance targets and rewards should be revised to accommodate CYP with SEND who may have medical appointments, mental health issues, or other conditions that impact their attendance.
- 6.6. Punitive attendance measures worsen already difficult situations and do not effectively support improved attendance for CYP with SEND.
- 6.7. Whether to exclude a CYP with SEND should be determined through a multidisciplinary meeting to evaluate if the behaviours stem from unmet needs or lack of support.
- 6.8. Schools and LAs must maintain safeguarding responsibilities for CYP with SEND, regardless of attendance.
- 6.9. Addressing CYP needs can support reductions in exclusions, suspensions and EBSA.

## **7. Approaches to Support Attendance in Mainstream Schools**

- 7.1. Early identification of SEND needs is crucial to provide tailored support.
- 7.2. Understanding the impact and suitability of the school environment in relation to a CYP's SEN is crucial to ensuring they can thrive, maximize attendance, and reach their full potential.
- 7.3. Empower SENCOs to provide the right support at the right time, maintain effective communication with parents and carers, and liaise efficiently with external services, such as speech and language therapy, to ensure a holistic approach to meeting CYP needs.

- 7.4. SENCOs require more than online “Tool Boxes” and resource lists to support CYP with complex needs. They need specialist teachers, outreach from specialist provisions, or professionals when standard strategies fail.
- 7.5. Improved multi-agency collaboration ensures comprehensive support and effective strategies for CYP both within and outside education.
- 7.6. Designated spaces and sensory breaks help CYPs manage anxiety, reduce sensory overload, and ensure smoother transitions throughout the day.
- 7.7. Assistive technologies like speech-to-text software and audiobooks support learning and communication for CYPs facing challenges in traditional environments.
- 7.8. Differentiating lessons by adjusting content, teaching methods, and environments ensures all CYPs can effectively access the curriculum.
- 7.9. Adapting the curriculum with modifications like extended time, alternative assessments, or personalized learning goals ensures meaningful engagement for all CYPs.
- 7.10. Allowing CYP with SEND to focus on core GCSE subjects reduces overwhelm and enables success by concentrating on their strengths.
- 7.11. A supportive approach to attendance focuses on understanding the root causes of absence rather than punitive measures, fostering a positive school-parent relationship.
- 7.12. Regular reviews of strategies for addressing challenging behaviour ensure interventions remain effective and adapt to evolving CYP needs.
- 7.13. Open and consistent communication between schools and parent and carers aligns strategies with the child's needs, thereby strengthening the school-home partnership.
- 7.14. An inclusive school culture which values diversity, supports **all** CYP and fosters a positive learning environment where **every** child can thrive.

## 8. Transitions

### 8.1. Challenges in Transitions:

- 8.1.1. Insufficient support during transitions exacerbates difficulties, increasing the risk of exclusions and poor outcomes.
- 8.1.2. Secondary school transitions are particularly problematic due to heightened academic, social, and environmental pressures.
- 8.1.3. Inconsistent and insufficient transition support often leaves CYP and parents and carers without the necessary help, with a lack of accountability forcing parents and carers to navigate these challenges alone.
- 8.1.4. Short-notice placements from appeals or tribunals leave inadequate time for preparation, complicating transitions, and reintegration into education.

## **8.2. Recommendations for Improvement:**

- 8.2.1. Equip teachers and staff with skills to better support CYP through transitions.
- 8.2.2. Create tailored transition plans by partnering with schools, local authorities, parents, and carers.
- 8.2.3. Extended transition periods for example, replacing single-day transitions to secondary school with a term-long program featuring transition afternoons in small groups across the incoming year group. This approach should include introductory lessons, support in navigating the school environment, opportunities to build relationships with key staff, identification of sensory, spatial, and nurture provisions tailored to each child's needs, and allows them time to fostering social connections with new peers.
- 8.2.4. Actively engage parents and carers in transition planning to address their concerns and leverage their insights. Introduce parents and carers to key staff, including teachers, SENCOs, year group leads, and wellbeing professionals, ensuring they understand communication processes, how to raise concerns, and the support their child will receive.
- 8.2.5. Communication from professions to parents and carers across types of settings, varies significantly. For example, transitioning from daily verbal handovers in primary school to little or no communication in secondary school can heighten parental anxiety. Clear communication processes define what, who, and when, providing consistent support and eases concerns.
- 8.2.6. Ensure consistent support and communication across educational phases to ease transitions. Many parents and carers report that support changes or "can't be delivered" especially between primary and secondary.
- 8.2.7. Identify and address potential issues proactively before transitions occur.
- 8.2.8. Adopt strategies that address emotional, social needs as well as education and at times travel needs incorporating input from education, health, and social care sectors.

## **9. Post 16**

- 9.1. There is a clear call for a broader range of educational options post-16, including vocational training, apprenticeships, and functional qualifications, to cater to different skills, interests, and abilities. CYP with SEND need the flexibility to access a variety of subjects and courses, not just those limited to basic life skills or entry-level qualifications.

- 9.2. There is a strong emphasis on the importance of work placements, supported internships, and apprenticeships to provide real-world experience. Many CYP with SEND feel underserved by a system that doesn't offer enough practical or relevant opportunities.
- 9.3. The requirement for GCSE Maths and English to access post-16 education is seen as a barrier for many CYP with SEND . Functional skills or alternative qualifications should be prioritised for those whose strengths lie in other areas, like creative or vocational subjects.
- 9.4. There is a perceived lack of support for CYP with SEND in mainstream colleges and a shortage of specialized post-16 placements. Additionally, many CYPs face challenges in transitioning from school to further education, especially when their EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plans) are ceased prematurely.
- 9.5. It is crucial that CYP with SEND receive tailored support throughout their post-16 education. This includes personalised learning plans, specialised staff, and more transition support to ensure smooth adjustments from school to further education or employment.
- 9.6. Transport barriers are a recurring issue for CYP with SEND, as they are often excluded from transport provisions post-16, which makes accessing education or training more difficult. The lack of accessible transport exacerbates isolation and limits opportunities.
- 9.7. Schools, colleges, employers, and local authorities must collaborate more effectively to ensure that CYP with SEND have clear pathways to employment and independence. This collaboration should include offering meaningful work experiences and encouraging employers to create opportunities for CYP with SEND.
- 9.8. More investment in life skills programs is needed, as many CYP with SEND need long-term planning for adulthood and independent living, not just academic achievement. There should also be greater recognition of the value of these skills in the job market.
- 9.9. Parents and carers often feel unsupported and overwhelmed by the post-16 options available. There needs to be more accessible information, clearer guidance on available provisions, and better communication between schools, local authorities, parents and carers to ensure that CYP with SEND receive the support they need.
- 9.10. Many parents and carers express frustration with the lack of suitable post-16 options, the inconsistency of support, and the systemic issues that hinder CYP with SEND from achieving their potential. There is a clear call for more investment, better quality education, and a more inclusive system that adapts to the diverse needs of CYP with SEND.

## **10. Independent Sector and Profit**

- 10.1. The independent sector is built on making a profit by filling gaps in local authority (LA) provision and should have regulations to prevent excessive profit.
- 10.2. Ensuring high-quality support and regular inspections of independent specialist schools are crucial.
- 10.3. There is a need for better regulation and oversight for independent schools. The issue of excessive high fees needs to be addressed.
- 10.4. Improving LA schools and NHS provision would reduce the need for independent services.
- 10.5. Local provision should be established to decrease dependence on independent high-cost services. Local competition should bring down excessive costs.
- 10.6. Councils could bring together stakeholders to identify lacking provision and tender with external stakeholders for creative bespoke solutions.
- 10.7. Regular audits, proper commissioning, and monitoring of independent SEND services are necessary.
- 10.8. Independent schools must be held accountable for their curricula and staff training.

## **11. Inclusion**

- 11.1. The NNPCF and many PCFs recognize the Labour Government's commitment to mainstream school inclusion. Nonetheless, numerous parents and carers believe that SEND is not explicitly addressed or given priority within this vision. Those who have fought hard for SEND recognition feel that simply subsuming SEND under the term "inclusion," without visible change, fails to inspire confidence or address their concerns.
- 11.2. Parents and carers suggest that while schools aim to include CYP with SEND, their CYP are often physically present but not fully engaged, supported, or understood.
- 11.3. CYP with SEND are often unable to participate in certain aspects of school life, such as assemblies, events, and RSHE lessons. Lack of access or understanding in RSHE increases their isolation, limits their sense of belonging, and leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and unintended legal consequences.
- 11.4. Insufficient resources, training, and specialist staff in mainstream schools worsen the issue, making parents and carers feel their CYP are an afterthought rather than truly included.

- 11.5. Genuine inclusion requires more than physical integration; it demands a shift in mindset, resources, and practices to ensure SEND CYP are valued, supported, and able to thrive.

## 12. Inclusion and Ofsted

### 12.1. In response to our question on key areas Ofsted should prioritize for their 'Inclusion' measure, PCFs highlighted the following:

- 12.1.1. Policies and Procedures: Inclusion policies, uniform guidelines, SEND support, reasonable adjustments, and behaviour management (82.98%).
- 12.1.2. Support for CYP with SEND: Clear evidence of support provided to CYP with SEND (88.30%).
- 12.1.3. CYP Voice: How CYP and young people's voices are heard and considered (90.43%).
- 12.1.4. Parental Collaboration: Effective collaboration with Parents and carers and carers (92.55%).
- 12.1.5. Professional Partnerships: Schools' engagement with external professionals, such as therapists or SEND specialists (82.98%).
- 12.1.6. Staff Training: Training on SEND needs and inclusion strategies for staff (93.62%).
- 12.1.7. Outcomes and Progress: Systems for tracking and reporting the outcomes and progress of CYP with SEND (82.98%).
- 12.1.8. Additional Considerations: Other factors identified as important (32.98%).

### 12.2. Other key considerations included:

- 12.2.1. Send enrolment and demographics including the percentage of send pupils on roll compared to local and national statistics, the types and numbers of send pupils relative to similar schools, and the number on part-time timetables or excluded.
- 12.2.2. Provision and accessibility how schools adapting the curriculum to meet send needs.
- 12.2.3. Environment and accessibility do schools create safe, accessible spaces for send pupils and ensuring reasonable adjustments for specific needs, such as dining areas or sensory-friendly spaces.
- 12.2.4. School culture and inclusion involve fostering integration between send and non-send pupils, ensuring access to extracurricular activities and pastoral support, engaging in impactful inclusion training, and involving send pupils during inspections or Ofsted visits.

- 12.2.5. Communication and engagement emphasize accurate communication with parent and carers valuing their input, gathering parent perspectives on exclusions and decision-making, and directly engaging with parents and carers for insights and feedback.
- 12.2.6. Staff training and leadership focus on the quality and monitoring of send-related staff training, the expertise and lived experience of trainers, and headteacher involvement in leading inclusive practices and supporting send provision.
- 12.2.7. Accountability and funding focus on analysing how send funds are spent on individual pupils, understanding why EHCPs are applied for and ceased, and examining attendance and exclusions.
- 12.2.8. Well-being and emotional support focus on measuring the happiness and safety of send pupils and ensuring tailored emotional support to meet individual needs.

### **13. Workforce and Training**

- 13.1. There is recognition of good practice in certain areas where inclusive school cultures, driven by strong leadership, have resulted in significant positive change.
- 13.2. Mainstream settings face high staff turnover and recruitment challenges, particularly in early years and teaching assistant roles, impacting support for CYP with SEND.
- 13.3. Replacement staff often lack the knowledge and training to effectively support CYP with SEND.
- 13.4. Shortages of Educational Psychologists, Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists, and specialist teachers limit the quality of advice and support available.
- 13.5. Teachers and staff frequently lack training in key areas like masking, ASD, PDA, ADHD, de-escalation, behaviour management, and emotional regulation.
- 13.6. Reactive and punitive behaviour approaches can exacerbate challenges like dysregulation, Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA), and school-induced trauma.
- 13.7. SENCOs often juggle teaching duties with SEND responsibilities, reducing their ability to provide adequate support, and are frequently excluded from leadership teams despite their crucial role in inclusion.
- 13.8. Recruitment and retention of SEND professionals are critical for sustainable support.
- 13.9. Whole-school training, including for non-teaching staff, is essential to foster a truly inclusive environment.

- 13.10. Improved collaboration between schools, health services (e.g., SALT, OT, CAMHS), and local authorities was noted by some.

#### **14. Parent and Carer Collaboration**

- 14.1. Many parents and carers feel unheard, blamed, and even shamed when advocating for their CYP's needs, leaving them disempowered and unsupported.
- 14.2. Parents and carers should be recognized as experts on their CYP and their views incorporated into the support their CYP receives.
- 14.3. Many parents and carers report a lack of transparency and effective communication between schools, LAs, and parents and carers.
- 14.4. SENCOs are a key point of contact for parents and carers, but capacity challenges often hinder effective communication and collaboration.
- 14.5. Improved training and workforce capacity would enhance understanding of parents and carers' concerns and improve communication.
- 14.6. Initiatives like the Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) and Autism in Schools (AiS), supported by PCFs, underscore the importance of strong parent relationships in improving outcomes for CYP. These programs have been widely welcomed by parents and carers, schools and other professionals including health.
- 14.7. Acknowledging parents' and carers' views empowers them, fostering stronger collaboration with schools. This should be standard practice, not a postcode lottery.
- 14.8. The perspectives of parents and carers are not adequately incorporated into the planning and decision-making processes for SEND services, both at the local and individual levels.
- 14.9. Parents and carers call for a less bureaucratic, more family-friendly approach to navigating the SEND system.

#### **15. Accountability**

- 15.1. Local authorities, health services, and schools must be held accountable for meeting statutory obligations and delivering consistent support for SEN pupils, regardless of whether they have an EHCP.
- 15.2. All sectors, including schools, early years settings, multi-academy trusts, independent schools, and alternative provisions, must take responsibility for delivering both statutory and non-statutory support in inclusive environments.
- 15.3. Transparent reporting and robust inspection systems are essential to monitor how funding is used and ensure SEN pupils' needs are met. Local SEND partnership boards must be engaged for accountability.

- 15.4. Local authorities need enhanced powers to hold schools, academies, and trusts accountable, including the ability to issue penalties, withhold funding, and enforce compliance with EHCPs. SEND-specific panels with experts should support governance.
- 15.5. Academisation has reduced LA control over SEND provision, making it harder to ensure consistency and compliance. Strengthened oversight mechanisms are required to address this gap.
- 15.6. Current financial penalties, such as LGO remedies, for non-compliance are insufficient. More impactful consequences are needed to incentivize adherence to SEND obligations and discourage delays or failures in providing support.
- 15.7. Introduce national standards for SEND provision, including statutory templates for EHCPs and SEND plans, to ensure uniformity and best practices. An independent oversight body focused specifically on SEND is recommended.
- 15.8. Accessible, non-adversarial communication channels are needed between schools, LAs, and parents and carers to address issues collaboratively and proactively before they escalate.
- 15.9. Incorporate parent, carers and CYP feedback into decision-making and monitoring processes. Establish transparent complaints systems with meaningful accountability mechanisms.
- 15.10. Resolve governance gaps to eliminate "postcode lotteries" in SEND provision. Align health, education, and social care for holistic and consistent support.
- 15.11. Foster a culture of inclusion across all sectors, where SEND pupils' needs and outcomes are prioritised, and their rights are respected. Move away from punitive measures to proactive, supportive practices.

## **16. Local Area SEND Inspections**

- 16.1. Inspections play a vital role in accountability and ensuring SEND is a priority area for the LA and Health.
- 16.2. Some Local areas, often find themselves in a cycle of continuous planning, preparation, and evidence collation, driven by the outcomes of previous inspections rather than the broader needs of SEND. This diverts attention, strains workforce capacity, and limits the ability to implement meaningful, system-wide work.
- 16.3. Inspections should prioritise outcomes for CYP and parents and carers rather than focusing heavily on processes, policies, and preparation. Failings should not be overlooked simply because effort or processes can be evidenced.

- 16.4. Inspections need greater transparency in how findings are reported and action plans developed.
- 16.5. Parent and CYP voices must be central to inspections, ensuring diverse parents and carers, including those with barriers to participation, are engaged and represented.
- 16.6. Inspections must hold local authorities and schools accountable for tangible, measurable improvements, with clear follow-up mechanisms to track progress. Current systems often fail to ensure meaningful consequences for inaction or non-compliance.
- 16.7. PCF felt that SEND inspections vary in depth, scope, and frequency, leading to inconsistent outcomes and that regular, robust follow-ups are essential to ensure action plans are not only developed but effectively implemented and sustained.
- 16.8. Inspections must integrate education, health, and social care to evaluate SEND provision holistically and ensure all sectors contribute effectively.
- 16.9. Inspectors should have specialized knowledge and regular training in SEND and inclusive practices to accurately assess evolving best practices and challenges in SEND provision.
- 16.10. Overreliance on local authority data can be misleading, as different providers measure metrics, such as waiting lists for ASD and ADHD, at varying points, with no national standards for data collection. Inspections must independently verify data, understand its collection points, and incorporate direct feedback from parents and carers, CYPs, and frontline staff to ensure a comprehensive and accurate assessment.
- 16.11. Inspections should be more frequent and broader in scope, actively involving the voices of PCFs, parents and carers, young people, and frontline professionals—not just commissioners, leaders, and pre-selected professionals, who are often prepared for the inspection. This approach will help provide a more realistic picture of the strengths and challenges of the local area.

## **17. SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan**

- 1.1. PCFs presented mixed views on the impact of SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan for CYP, with only 15.53% feeling it has made a difference and 25.24% suggesting things have got worse<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Based on 103 responses to a specific question dated January 2025, the feedback was as follows: A big positive difference– 1.94%, A small positive difference– 13.59%, No difference– 35.92%, Things have gotten worse– 25.24%, and I’m not sure– 22.30%.

## **18. Planning, Building and Infrastructure, Data and Evidence-Based Planning**

- 18.1. Local councils often lack sufficient data for long term planning for capacity and provision and ensuring provision is quality assured.
- 18.2. Ring-fenced funding and increased investment in specialist schools, SEND hubs, and alternative provisions are essential.
- 18.3. Improved data-sharing and more detailed analysis of specific SEND needs (e.g., autism, SEMH) are required.
- 18.4. Regular collaboration with local PCFs, charities, voluntary organizations, Parents and carers, carers, and the wider community would significantly enhance planning and service provision.
- 18.5. High-cost, complex medical needs are frequently identified at birth or during early childhood; however, they are often not tracked and included in future planning considerations.
- 18.6. More granular data on specific needs (e.g., autism, SEMH, speech and language issues) should inform planning. The current school SEN criteria do not accurately reflect the needs of the CYP.
- 18.7. Mainstream schools should be designed, developed, and expanded to include features for SEND accessibility, such as quiet spaces, sensory areas, and adjustable classroom setups.
- 18.8. Additional investment is required to establish new SEND schools and to expand current facilities. (we also refer to 3.4)
- 18.9. Improvement to buildings and planning of new education settings should also consider post-16 and post-19 provisions, which are currently lacking.

## **19. 'Safety Valve' and 'Delivering Better Value in SEND' Programmes<sup>5</sup>**

- 19.1. Limited Positive Impact: Many saw little improvement in SEND services or outcomes, with isolated benefits like new autism provisions outweighed by ongoing challenges. Of those who had a more positive experience, DVB and SV raised the profile of SEND within the local partnerships and enabled some progress.
- 19.2. Focus on Cost-Cutting Over Needs: Programs prioritized budget savings over addressing root issues. Efforts to reduce EHCP numbers were seen as

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<sup>5</sup> This was not an area where many respondents had professional expertise or direct knowledge, which is understandable given the prevalence of such programs. However, some individuals did share insights based on their direct experiences

devaluing SEND CYP, with terms like "demand reduction" criticized for prioritizing cost over need.

- 19.3. Increased Pressure on Local Authorities: LAs faced strain, often cutting essential services (e.g., post-16 EHCPs, transport) to meet demands. Budget improvements were noted but mainly achieved through non-statutory service cuts.
- 19.4. Negative Impact on Parents and carers: Parents and carers felt unsupported, facing delays, lack of transparency, and combative approaches to accessing services, exacerbating adversarial relationships with schools and authorities.
- 19.5. Perceived Misallocation of Funding: Frustration grew over consultants and administrative costs, with calls for funds to be redirected toward direct SEND support and services.
- 19.6. Lack of Communication and Engagement: A lack of transparency and engagement with parents, carers and communities fuelled confusion about program goals and participation.
- 19.7. Workforce and System Challenges: High staff turnover, slow processes, and inadequate training for school staff hindered progress. Calls were made for better training, systemic reforms, and improved collaboration between schools and parents and carers.
- 19.8. Persistent Systemic Issues: Core problems—insufficient funding, lack of resources, and rising needs—remain unaddressed, with programs criticized as superficial "paper exercises."
- 19.9. Call for Long-Term Solutions: Respondents emphasized the need for national funding reforms, inclusion, early intervention, and co-production with Parents and carers to ensure sustainable improvements.
- 19.10. Varied Regional Experiences: Some regions reported minor progress, but many experienced minimal impacts. Safety Valve was seen as exacerbating cost-cutting measures that harmed SEND provision.

**20. The statutory override ending in March 2026<sup>6</sup>**

**20.1. Support Councils Need Before March 2026**

- 20.1.1. Councils need increased, ring-fenced funding to address historic deficits, rising costs, and prevent bankruptcy, ensuring funds are used exclusively for SEND purposes.

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<sup>6</sup> This was not an area where many respondents had professional expertise or direct knowledge, which is understandable given the prevalence of such programs. However, some individuals did share insights based on their direct experiences

- 20.1.2. The government must provide clear expectations, accurate data, and transparent frameworks to manage deficits and transition from the statutory override.
- 20.1.3. Strengthen collaboration between health, social care, and education services to streamline support and reduce inefficiencies.
- 20.1.4. Invest in local SEND schools and inclusive mainstream schools with smaller class sizes to meet rising demand and reduce reliance on costly out-of-area placements.
- 20.1.5. Prioritize early intervention strategies to address needs proactively, reducing long-term costs.
- 20.1.6. Consider restructuring or writing off historic deficits to prevent financial crises.

**20.2. Post-2026: Sustainable SEND Funding**

- 20.2.1. Implement long-term, flexible funding that reflects actual needs, allows councils to respond proactively, and provides uncapped access to central SEND funds.
- 20.2.2. Develop a cross-party, sustainable SEND strategy focused on inclusive reforms for mainstream schools and accountability in spending.
- 20.2.3. Build local, specialized provisions to reduce reliance on costly transport and out-of-area placements, while expanding SEND school types to meet diverse needs (e.g., autism-friendly, physical disability).
- 20.2.4. Improve data monitoring and annual budget planning to align resources with projected needs and outcomes.
- 20.2.5. Enhance inclusivity in mainstream schools and provide more resources for early intervention therapies like SLT and OT to reduce future demand for specialist placements.
- 20.2.6. Recognize the long-term financial and social benefits of effective SEND support, reducing future costs in social care, welfare, and healthcare.
- 20.2.7. Consider structural reforms, such as centralizing SEND budgets or creating unified teams for education and specialist support.

**21. SEND support been in local councils that have issued Section 114 notices<sup>7</sup>**

- 21.1. Pupils lack adequate provision, leaving many unsupported.
- 21.2. Parents and carers face crises due to limited access to services.
- 21.3. Ineffective service thresholds preventing parents and carers from obtaining support.

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<sup>7</sup> This was not an area where many respondents had professional expertise or direct knowledge, which is understandable given the prevalence of such programs. However, some individuals did share insights based on their direct experiences

- 21.4. Councils fail legal obligations, leaving CYP out of education.
- 21.5. Parents and carers fund private support, creating financial hardship.
- 21.6. Funding cuts reduce LSAs, increasing staff pressure, burnout, and absenteeism.
- 21.7. EHCP support is harder to secure, with more frequent rejections.
- 21.8. Some councils avoid Section 114 notices by cutting corners, risking vulnerable parents and carers.

## **22. Funding for Complex Needs**

- 22.1. Collaborative Budget planning by pooling resources from education, health, and social care budgets to ensure sufficient funding.
- 22.2. Utilize joint commissioning strategies between local authorities and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) to maximize efficiency and share costs.
- 22.3. Local area LAs should collaborate to plan provision together.
- 22.4. Invest in early interventions and local provisions to reduce the need for more expensive out-of-area placements.
- 22.5. Develop long-term strategies to manage demand for high-cost care, such as investing in workforce training, capacity-building for local services, and fostering partnerships with private and voluntary sectors.
- 22.6. Ensure data collection and analysis inform future planning and resource allocation.
- 22.7. Greater regional collaboration and joint commissioning between multiple local authorities and ICBs for specialist schools was strongly recommended.

## **23. Notional Funding for SEN Support**

- 23.1. We asked PCFs if they think that the funding system for SEN support, where schools are responsible for the first £6,000, needs reform, and 77% of those that responded said it is needed while 0% confirming the current system works well.<sup>8</sup>
- 23.2. Current SEND budgets, including the £6,000 rule, often fail to meet the actual needs of SEND pupils, leading to financial strain on schools and local authorities.

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8. Total number of respondents 90. Yes, it needs major reform 77.78%, Yes, but only minor changes are needed 7.78%, No, the current system works well 0.00%, Unsure/No Opinion 14.44%

- 23.3. A need for dedicated and transparent funding for SEND to ensure it is used exclusively for supporting these CYP, with accountability measures in place.
- 23.4. The current system lacks clarity and fairness, and a review is needed to align funding with actual costs and ensure sustainability.
- 23.5. SEND funding should account for inflation, and both short- and long-term investment in resources, training, and infrastructure are critical.
- 23.6. Schools should be held responsible for spending SEND funding appropriately and transparently, with regular audits and reporting.

## **24. Wider SEND Funding**

- 24.1. Stronger national guidelines and governance are needed to ensure fair allocation and use of SEND funding across schools and local authorities.
- 24.2. Significant resources are wasted on fighting parents and carers in tribunals instead of funding the provision CYP need.
- 24.3. Overreliance on EHCPs for accessing support is a symptom of systemic underfunding, with parents and carers often forced to fight for resources.
- 24.4. It was acknowledged that the rising number of SEND diagnoses, mainstream schools which lack inclusivity and limited school, and specialist provision exacerbate pressures on the system
- 24.5. There should be a fair distribution of School Block Funding and High Needs Funding based on individual needs rather than a formula, flat rate or arbitrary caps. Schools should not be financially disadvantaged for taking on more CYP with SEND.
- 24.6. Funding should distribute according to accurate and up-to-date data on SEND populations.
- 24.7. Parents and carers want a clearer understanding of funding, provision, and processes. Many individuals experience a sense of alienation due to a system that requires them to struggle for fundamental support.
- 24.8. Stability for Parents and carers is needed by ensuring Funding should follow the child and support their needs directly, ensuring they can access education and thrive without unnecessary stress or obstacle.