

Specialist workforce for children with special educational needs and disabilities

Westminster Hall debate: Wednesday 22nd March 2023

Briefing by the #SENDintheSpecialists coalition

Introduction

- The #SENDinTheSpecialists coalition welcomes this debate on the specialist workforce for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.
- The APPENDIX to this briefing provides an illustrative, not exhaustive, list of the specialist workforce to which early years settings, schools and post-16 settings, require access to ensure the best level of support for their pupils, including those with SEND.
- The debate follows the #SENDinTheSpecialists coalition writing to ministers on investing in the specialist workforce on 2 November 2022ⁱ and writing again on 16 March 2023ⁱⁱ after its publication of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan.
- It also follows parliamentarians from 16 All-Party Parliamentary Groups writing to the Government in December 2022 calling for investment in the specialist workforce.ⁱⁱⁱ
- The debate comes after the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing recognised the importance of the specialist workforce in her oral statement on the SEND and AP Improvement Plan on 6 March.^{iv}
- The debate is a useful opportunity for the Government to set out more details of the plans it announced in the SEND and AP Improvement Plan for a joint Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care approach to SEND workforce planning, with a clear timeframe to establish a steering group in 2023 and complete its work by 2025.
- The #SENDinTheSpecialists is seeking specific commitments from the Government in its response to the debate about the specialist workforce.

What commitments is the #SENDinTheSpecialists coalition seeking from the Government the debate?

The #SENDinTheSpecialists coalition is seeking a number of commitments from the Government in the debate.

Specifically, we are seeking positive answers to the following questions:

- Given its breadth of experience and expertise, will the Government commit to having representatives from the #SENDinTheSpecialists coalition on the Steering Group for the workforce planning work?
- Given its broad range covering education, health, and care, will the Government commit to working with the #SENDinTheSpecialists coalition to ensure that the definition of the SEND and specialist workforce is as wide as possible?

- How does the Government plan to address the recruitment and retention issues facing the specialist workforce?
- Will the Government commit to working with the #SENDInTheSpecialists coalition to identify ways in which children and young people with SEND who need specialist support right now are able to access it?

What does the #SENDInTheSpecialists coalition think of the SEND and AP Improvement Plan?

On the 16 March, 105 members of the #SENDInTheSpecialists coalition wrote to the Government setting out our response to the SEND and AP Improvement Plan.^v

Given the coalition's particular focus on workforce, we:

- Welcomed the Government's commitment to work alongside children, young people, and their families, and those who work across every part of the SEND system to improve the SEND and AP system.
- Welcomed the announcement of the joint Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care approach to SEND workforce planning, with a clear timeframe to establish a steering group in 2023 and complete its work by 2025. This join up across education, health and social care at the national level is vital to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND.
- Requested a place on the steering group to help take forward the reforms outlined in the Improvement Plan.

We also highlighted that coalition members have identified two key factors we think the steering group should address.

- **Definition of SEND and specialist workforce:** given the minister's comments in her oral statement on the SEND and AP Improvement Plan on 6 March about the importance of specialist support and the specialist workforce, there should be a broad approach to defining the SEND and specialist workforce, to consider all the different education, health and care professionals who work with children and young people to identify and support the totality of their needs.
- **Recruitment and retention:** consideration should be given to how the recruitment and retention issues facing the specialist workforce can be addressed.

We also sought early discussions with Government on how we can improve access to the specialist workforce for the many children and young people who need support right now.

While the #SENDInTheSpecialists coalition's focus is on workforce, we recognise that many of our members – and many other bodies, organisations, and coalitions – have wider, and significant, concerns about the SEND and AP Improvement Plan. We hope that the Government will also address those

concerns going forward so children and young people's and their families' experiences of the SEND system is improved with professionals better able to support them.

What is the #SENDInTheSpecialists coalition?

The #SENDInTheSpecialists coalition is made up of broad range of organisations covering education, health, and care, representing parents and carers, charities, royal colleges, professional bodies, professional associations, trade unions, and others.

It was formed in November 2022 when 114 organisations wrote to the Secretaries of State for Education and Health and Social Care calling on them to invest in the specialist workforce for children and young people.^{vi}

Since November 2022, more organisations have joined the coalition and it now has 128 members.^{vii}

What are the issues facing the specialist workforce for children with special educational needs and disabilities?

In our letter in November 2022, the #SENDInTheSpecialists coalition called for investment in and better planning of the specialist workforce for children and young people.^{viii}

We highlighted that across our sectors, we are seeing a variety of concerning issues impacting the specialist workforce, including:

- an insufficient number of specialists being trained to meet demand;
- a falling number of specialists, including through them failing to be retained and supported to further develop their specialisms, with some leaving the public sector;
- an increased demand for support in general and in more complex cases in particular; and
- responding to the pressures of COVID-19 which has exacerbated pre-existing demands on the specialist workforce and increased waiting times to access them.

We also highlighted the potential impact of this on children and young people and their families.

- Without access to the specialist support they need, children and young people, including those with SEND, are at increased risk of poorer educational outcomes.
- In addition, the children, young people, and families we work with tell us about the negative impact of not being able to access support.
- They tell us it affects their education, mental health and wellbeing, home and social life, employment prospects and life chances.

What did the APPGs call for?

In December 2022, Geraint Davies MP, Chair of the APPG on Speech and Language Difficulties, co-ordinated a letter to the Secretaries of State for Education and Health and Social Care.^{ix}

The APPGs cover a range of conditions and settings: Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Childcare and Early Education, Children who Need Palliative Care, Disability, Dyslexia and Other Specific Learning Difficulties, Eye health and visual impairment, Muscular Dystrophy, Oracy, Penal Affairs, Prevention of Childhood Trauma, Psychology, Social Mobility, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, Speech and Language Difficulties, and Stroke.

The APPGs highlighted the risks of children and young people not being able to access support from the specialist workforce, including risks to the public purse. They argued:

We know the risks all this poses to children and young people and their families - potentially impacting negatively on their lives, their education, their mental health, and their employment prospects. For some, it can result in contact with the criminal justice system and exacerbate existing inequalities, including health inequalities. It can also pose a risk to the public purse with more costly later interventions having to be paid for because opportunities to support children and young people at an earlier stage were missed.

The APPGs also highlighted the positive difference accessing the specialist workforce can make to children and young people's lives. They argued:

Equally, we know how access to the specialist workforce can help transform children and young people's lives – improving their educational attainment, their mental health and wellbeing, their relationships, their employment prospects, and their overall life chances. We know too it can support better outcomes for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who are at risk of experiencing a range of inequalities.

More information

For more information on the #SENDInTheSpecialists coalition, please contact: peter.just@rcslt.org or elissa.cregan@rcslt.org

APPENDIX

Examples of the specialist workforce to which access is required

This is an illustrative, not exhaustive, list of the specialist workforce to which early years settings, schools and post-16 settings, require access to ensure the best level of support for their pupils, including those with SEND.

- Qualified Teachers of the Deaf
- Speech and language therapists
- Advisory teachers
- Educational psychologists
- Qualified Teachers of Visual Impairment
- Qualified Teachers of Multi-sensory Impairment
- Specialist teachers for SLCN
- Occupational Therapists
- Physiotherapists
- Qualified Teachers of British Sign Language
- Teachers of sign-supported communication
- Music therapists
- Habilitation Specialists
- Health visitors
- Drama therapists
- Art therapists
- Filial / DDP qualified therapists
- Clinical psychologists
- Family workers
- Play therapists
- Parenting coaches
- Post-natal support
- Social workers
- Psychiatrists
- Specialist teachers for physical disability
- Conductive education practitioners
- Attachment disorder specialists
- Educational Audiologists
- Orthoptists
- Specialist Teachers for Dyslexia Support and Intervention
- Dietitians
- Early Years SENCo
- School nurses
- Teaching assistants
- Learning support assistants
- Auditory Verbal Therapists
- Specialists that use BSL

ⁱ <https://www.rcslt.org/news/rcslt-leads-coalition-calling-for-investment-in-the-specialist-workforce/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.rcslt.org/news/sendinthespecialists-coalition-writes-to-minister-for-children-and-families/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://twitter.com/GeraintDaviesMP/status/1600821077646905344?s=20&t=QrpiQqzW-adbJ4NR9KZBSq>

^{iv} [https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-03-06/debates/EA32B4A1-9DED-4418-971B-](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-03-06/debates/EA32B4A1-9DED-4418-971B-198534B7EFAC/SENDAndAlternativeProvision)

[198534B7EFAC/SENDAndAlternativeProvision](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-03-06/debates/EA32B4A1-9DED-4418-971B-198534B7EFAC/SENDAndAlternativeProvision)

^v <https://www.rcslt.org/news/sendinthespecialists-coalition-writes-to-minister-for-children-and-families/>

^{vi} <https://www.rcslt.org/news/rcslt-leads-coalition-calling-for-investment-in-the-specialist-workforce/>

^{vii} <https://www.rcslt.org/news/sendinthespecialists-coalition-writes-to-minister-for-children-and-families/>

^{viii} <https://www.rcslt.org/news/rcslt-leads-coalition-calling-for-investment-in-the-specialist-workforce/>

^{ix} <https://twitter.com/GeraintDaviesMP/status/1600821077646905344?s=20&t=QrpiQqzW-adbJ4NR9KZBSq>