

SEND reform: Putting Children and Young People first

RCSLT summary

March 2026

The UK Government has published a consultation document detailing their plans to reform the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system in England, [SEND reform: Putting Children and Young People First](#).

This document provides a summary of the Government's SEND reform plans for speech and language therapists. Members should consult the original document for full details on the proposals.

If you don't have time to read the whole summary, you can use the contents table below to navigate to the sections that are most relevant to you.

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1. The vision

The Government says its proposals are intended to achieve the objective that children and young people who can achieve and thrive in mainstream education will be supported to do so; and children and young people who need specialist support will receive it promptly and with dignity, clarity and care.

The reforms are based on a vision of one inclusive education system for all children, with four layers of support that children can access quickly and move between as their needs change: universal, targeted, targeted plus, and specialist. These layers will be guided by new National Inclusion Standards.

What are National Inclusion Standards?

The Government intends to introduce National Inclusion Standards to address the current inconsistency in provision across settings and regions. The standards will aim to provide education providers with clear, evidence-based guidance and practical tools, so that they can adopt inclusive whole-setting approaches and strategies, and quickly recognise and respond to barriers to learning and participation.

What does this look like?

- A shared, nationally consistent understanding of the best evidence to support children and young people with SEND, and what good ordinary provision should be in every setting.
- A digital library of high quality identification tools and provision across the 0-25 system covering all layers of support.
- The standards will be structured around the new five 'areas of development' (see [section 7](#)).

2. The universal offer

The universal offer is intended to set a new consistent baseline for mainstream education settings, aiming to place inclusion at the heart of everyday practice.

What does this look like?

- High quality teaching and support for all children
- Ambitious leadership and governance that embeds inclusion in plans and policies
- Timely identification of need and early, evidence-based support
- Strong partnerships with families and wider services
- In the early years: high quality education focused on communication and language
- In schools: high quality teaching and a rich and broad curriculum for all learners

How does the Government propose to deliver it?

- **Inclusion Strategy:** A new duty on schools to produce an Inclusion Strategy. This replaces the current duty to produce an SEN Information Report. Schools will have to publish their Inclusion Strategy annually, and Ofsted will assess how well the Inclusion Strategy is embedded in practice.

- **Inclusive Mainstream Fund:** £1.6 billion over three years from 2026-27 to help schools, colleges and early years settings become inclusive
- **Inclusive design guidance:** The government will publish guidance to help local authorities and settings adapt their buildings to support inclusion, with advice on creating calm spaces like breakout rooms or sensory rooms.
- **Staff training**
 - £200 million over three years to fund a new training package on inclusion for all staff working across early years, schools and Post-16 settings
 - A new requirement set out in the SEND Code of Practice for all settings to ensure that staff receive training on SEND and inclusion, and to clearly signpost government funded training
 - A review of the Early Career Teacher Entitlement in 2027, with a focus on teaching children and young people with SEND.
- **Strengthening the role of SENCO:** Redefined roles and responsibilities across the system to drive inclusive practice, with the SENCO role expected to become more strategic and less administrative.

3. Targeted support

Settings will provide targeted support for children and young people who have ongoing and commonly occurring needs which cannot typically be met by the universal offer. For example, small group interventions to develop language skills, or pre-teaching key vocabulary to help access the curriculum.

What will this look like?

- Effective curriculum delivery and adaptations
- Barriers to learning identified and understood
- Each child or young person who needs targeted support will have their needs and provision captured in a digital 'Individual Support Plan' (ISP) – these should include evidence-based interventions from the National Inclusion Standards.

What are Individual Support Plans or ISPs?

- Digital documents that are used to record and monitor a child or young person's special educational needs and provision
- Tailored in line with the layers of support, with guidance to support settings in creating high-quality plans
- Standardised across settings to facilitate transitions
- Used to communicate provision to parents and to document actions taken between parents and educators
- Should evolve as a child's needs change; will be reviewed annually at a minimum.
- Settings will be expected to work with parents and young people to develop their ISP; parents and young people will raise concerns about provision directly with the setting, including through a revised schools complaints process ([see section 12](#))

How does the Government propose to deliver it?

- A duty on schools (including maintained nursery schools and school-based nurseries) and colleges to produce an ISP for any child or young person with SEND. The use and quality of ISPs will be assessed through Ofsted inspections.
- Work in collaboration with experts and school leaders to create new Curriculum in Practice resources: a flexible suite of adaptive teaching strategies, case studies, and real-world examples tailored to different phases of education.

4. Targeted plus support

Children and young people who need extra support to thrive in inclusive mainstream education will receive Targeted Plus support, with input from education and health professionals such as speech and language therapists through the Experts at Hand offer.

What is the Experts at Hand offer?

Local areas will develop an Experts at Hand offer which enables professionals – such as speech and language therapists or education psychologists - to work directly with mainstream settings, and for specialist settings to provide outreach support to build the capacity and expertise in mainstream.

What will this look like?

- Settings will have a readily available source of expert advice and support – which can be accessed quickly and flexibly
- ‘Expert’ professionals working directly with education staff and children, upskilling the mainstream workforce to support children and young people with commonly occurring needs
- Local authorities (LAs) and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) working together to establish the offer, with strong partnership working and development with local settings, health partners and families

How does the Government propose to deliver it?

- £1 billion of funding for LAs and ICBs to commission expert professionals such as speech and language therapists to work directly with mainstream settings.
- £800 million for LAs to support specialist settings to build the capacity of mainstream settings.
- Delivery guidance and examples of good practice.
- £40 million over three years to boost the educational psychology and speech and language therapy workforce.

The document sets out the following plans to increase the speech and language therapy workforce:

- A new speech and language therapist advanced practitioner role in every ICB area to work with schools, colleges and early years settings to get more speech and language therapists and support workers working with children and young people.
- Investment in upskilling speech and language therapy support workers / assistants
- Promotion of the Level 6 Speech and Language Therapist apprenticeship programme.

What does targeted-plus support look like?

- Settings can access high-quality support from education and health professionals and outreach from an alternative provision (AP) or specialist setting.
- Each child or young person receiving 'Targeted Plus support' will also have an ISP outlining their specific needs and expectations for ongoing support
- Pupils will have access to an 'Inclusion Base' within their mainstream setting to provide bespoke learning environments, equipment and expertise to meet their needs
- When appropriate, pupils can access time-limited support in an AP or a specialist setting, in order for the child's needs to be assessed and addressed, before reintegrating back into a mainstream setting

What are inclusion bases?

Inclusion bases are intended to deliver high-quality teaching and support to children with more complex needs who would benefit from provision that bridges the current gap between mainstream and specialist, while still being able to attend a local mainstream school.

The term 'Inclusion base' will replace the current terms SEN unit, resourced provision, and pupil support unit.

There are two models of inclusion base:

- 'Support Bases' – commissioned and funded by individual settings, SEND schools and multi-academy trusts to deliver targeted support; and
- 'Specialist Bases' – commissioned and funded by the local authority to deliver specialist support.

What does this look like?

- The bases will have specialisms, providing tailored teaching and support for specific groups of children and young people, as well as cascading their specialist expertise more widely
- Flexible access to specialist education or health support where needed

How does the Government propose to deliver it?

- Provide £3.7 billion between 2025 and 2030 to create tens of thousands of new places in Inclusion Bases in mainstream settings, with an expectation that eventually every secondary school will have an Inclusion Base, with an equivalent number of places in local primary schools.
- Publish national guidance, setting out the principles and standards of high-quality practice in inclusion bases.
- New data collection measures will record which settings are operating a base and the children and young people accessing it.

5. Specialist support

Children and young people with “the most complex needs” who require an offer which is substantially different from the usual curriculum model and approach delivered in mainstream setting will receive specialist support, based on nationally defined ‘Specialist Provision Packages’. Eligibility for an Education, Health and Care Plan will be based on whether the child requires the support set out in a Specialist Provision Package.

What does this look like?

- Mainstream and specialist settings working in close partnership to provide ‘specialist support’ to children and young people with the most complex needs.
- New nationally defined ‘Specialist Provision Packages’ (SPPs) designed by experts and tested with parents will outline packages of provision, based on evidence.
- Settings will be commissioned to provide placements for specific SPPs, and they will organise support for the whole group of children assigned to that Package.
- An ISP will set out educational support needed for the child or young person – the document gives the example of weekly interventions with a speech and language therapist.
- For children with very low incidence, high complexity needs, the government will explore options for moving to regional commissioning and regional budgets.

What are specialist provision packages (SPPs)?

The Government proposes to develop approximately seven SPPs which will be nationally defined, setting out the evidence-based interventions, resources and standards required to support children and young people with the most complex needs.

The intention is for SPPs to outline the support required by children and young people with similar needs, including their characteristics, expected outcomes, special educational provision and necessary adaptations (e.g. to the environment of the setting), and the resources required (including staffing, training, equipment) to deliver the Package.

However, the Government also recognises that children’s needs can be complex and overlapping; therefore a child may need elements of support from more than one package.

- The draft initial list of packages – which is indicative and likely to change – is:
 - Profound and multiple learning difficulties
 - Significant executive function (known as severe learning difficulties in the current terminology)
 - Complex executive function and communication
 - Social and emotional development focused on externalising behaviour
 - Social and emotional development focused on internalising behaviour
 - Sensory impairment
 - Physical disability
- SPPs will be linked to a nationally set costing framework, with the aim of ensuring consistency of provision across the country.

- Packages will be “matched” to children and young people by a new LA-led statutory needs assessment process which will determine whether they need the support set out in a Package.

What will Education, Health and Care plans (EHCPs) look like?

- EHCPs will be developed with the setting, and in consultation with parents, after the Specialist Provision Package and placement decisions have been made.
- They will include the educational offer based on the relevant Package, as well as health and care provision agreed during the assessment process.
- The setting will have the legal duty to deliver the educational offer in an EHCP.
- LAs will retain overall ownership of an EHCP and their duties to provide sufficient placements and resources will be strengthened.
- The LA will coordinate the assessment process, which will include input from any experts who have supported the child or young person to date, and the responsible health commissioner will be required to identify and secure the relevant health provision required by the child or young person.
- The EHCP will be reviewed at the end of key stages by LAs, who will ensure they bring in the right expertise and knowledge from experts.
- A fast track for an SPP and EHCP will be introduced for children under the age of 5 whose needs are complex and identified at an early stage.

6. The specialist sector – including special schools, alternative provision

The Government wants to ensure there is a consistent, high-quality, evidence-based offer, including outreach to mainstream settings, across the country.

What does this look like?

- Specialist settings will become centres of excellence, driving inclusive practice through outreach and partnership with mainstream settings, including short-time placements for some children and young people enrolled in mainstream settings
- Stable, predictable funding and stronger accountability
- Specialist pedagogy, therapeutic approaches and partnership working are grounded in the best available research

How does the Government propose to deliver it?

- £800 million of the Experts at Hand funding will be available for local authorities to support high-quality specialist settings to build the capacity of mainstream settings
- A review of good curriculum practice in special schools, with a view to spreading best practice and improving standards.
- Ofsted’s renewed education inspection framework will ensure that inspection of specialist provision holds the sector to high standards.
- SPPs are intended to ensure there is a clear and consistent provision offer which is grounded in best practice and informed by evidence.

Alternative provision

All registered AP schools will be encouraged to provide a three-tiered model of support:

- Outreach into mainstream schools for specialist teachers and leaders in AP schools and to offer preventative support.
- Time limited placements so that pupils needs can be assessed and addressed, allowing them to return to their mainstream school.
- Longer term placements, where a child has been assessed as needing one of the Specialist Provision Packages commissioned in the AP school.

Independent special schools (ISSs)

The government plans to bring forward legislation in regards to ISSs which will:

- Ensure local authorities pay lower costs for placements
- Create a statutory definition and standards
- Align their admission duties with that of other specialist settings.
- Require them to offer placements based on Specialist Provision Packages and in accordance with national funding bands, and to adhere to the Code of Practice

7. Reasonable adjustments

The document recognises that many children and young people with SEND will have a disability under the definition set out in the Equality Act 2010, which does not require a formal diagnosis, and that settings should consider reasonable adjustments based on any needs a child or person may have that meet this definition of disability.

The government plans to produce guidance on reasonable adjustments, with examples and tools to support settings to embed inclusive practice, including how some disabilities can be addressed at a universal level – for example, through high-quality teaching, and wider aspects of school or setting policy such as uniform, behaviour and classroom management.

They will also ask the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to ensure the role of reasonable adjustments for disabled children in schools and other educational settings is reflected in their Technical Guidance for Schools.

8. Updating the SEND Code of Practice

The SEND Code of Practice is the statutory guidance introduced under the Children and Families Act 2014 which sets out the legal framework for how education, health and social care partners must identify, assess and support children and young people aged 0–25 with SEND in England.

The Government intends to update the Code of Practice to reflect its reforms and clarify the responsibilities of education settings and local partners, and improve the structure and accessibility of the Code.

'Broad areas of need' become areas of development

As part of the update, the Government proposes to replace the current four 'broad areas of need' (communication and interaction; cognition and learning; social, emotional and mental health; physical and/or sensory) with five new areas of development:

- Executive Function
- Motor and Physical
- Sensory
- Speech, Language and Communication
- Social and Emotional

The intention of this shift is to move away from the categorisation of children and a diagnosis-led approach, and towards early, needs-led provision which recognises individual differences in barriers to learning and participation. Alongside the change to the Code, the Government has committed to provide resources and CPD to support educators to understand more about the five areas of development.

Notably, the change include separating mental health needs from social and emotional development. The government says this change will support effective collaboration and appropriate boundaries between what educators should lead and respond to, and where support should be led by health professionals with the collaboration of schools. There is however recognition that clinical mental health interventions, delivered by health professionals, are likely to play a significant role in some of the Specialist Provision Packages.

A separate, full public consultation on the proposed changes will launch after the publication of the Government's response to the current consultation.

9. Early years

The proposals stress the importance of early identification and intervention, and put Best Start Family Hubs and early years settings at the heart of their approach.

What does this look like?

- Best Start Family Hubs and early years providers will work with families, health professionals and education experts to understand and meet children's needs from the earliest point
- More effective developmental checks, better information sharing and a more coordinated offer for families
- Strengthened support for children and families as they start school

How does the Government propose to deliver it?

Early years settings will also have access to the national training programme ([section 2](#)), the National Inclusion Standards ([section 1](#)) and the Experts at Hand offer ([section 4](#)).

In addition, the Government has committed to:

- £200 million over three years to ensure every Best Start Family Hub has a dedicated offer for children with additional needs and their families, and a SEND practitioner to offer direct support to children and families
- Early years providers will also receive the new Inclusive Early Years Fund from 2026/27
- Funding for new partnerships to strengthen transitions between early years settings and schools
- Continued funding for the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) programme

10. Transition to adulthood

The government hopes that Individual Support Plans will support transition by ensuring that key information about a child or young person's needs is available for their next setting.

- **From School to College:** The government will work with schools, colleges and local authorities to design and implement a clear approach to support transition from school to college.
- **Transitions to adulthood:** The government says it is working to ensure that transition to higher education, training or employment is as smooth as possible for young people with SEND.

11. Reforms to funding

Mainstream settings

Over time, the Government intend to rebalance funding towards mainstream schools and colleges, by moving a portion of funding currently distributed through local authorities from high needs budgets directly into mainstream core budgets so they can respond to children and young people's needs more quickly and flexibly.

For each school there will be a transparent share of core funding to meet the new mainstream expectations. This funding share for inclusion will include the funding schools already receive for SEND within their current core allocations (replacing the current "notional SEND" in core budgets).

In advance of re-balancing funding, over the next three years mainstream schools, early years, and post-16 settings will receive over £500 million per year of additional funding to supplement the existing core funding for SEND.

Schools will be required to publish an Inclusion Strategy Report that covers how they are deploying their resources for SEND, including using existing resource and the additional Inclusive Mainstream Fund.

Schools groups and pooled funding

The Government proposes that every school should be part of a local group to work together on SEND. All of these school groups will need to be actively engaged with the LA and the ICB.

In the long term all schools will be required to pool a minimum level of funding within a local SEND group for inclusion, to support needs fairly across a group of schools. This pooled funding will be used collectively to meet the needs of children with SEND including through sharing expertise, resourcing, staffing, support bases and commissioning of shared resources, such as specialist teachers.

Specialist funding reform

- The government plans to establish a cohort-based funding model for Specialist Provision Packages to provide more consistent and predictable funding to settings.
- The formula for allocating high needs revenue funding to local authorities will be reviewed through a separate consultation.

Early years funding

- From 2026 to 2027, local authorities will receive new inclusive early years funding to distribute to early years providers. This is intended to support a move towards upfront, cohort based funding which enables settings to plan and deliver proactive support for commonly occurring needs.
- From 2029 to 2030, high needs funding will be rebalanced so that a greater share is available to early years settings upfront.

12. Accountability

The Government proposes to introduce new accountability measures at different levels.

Accountability for individual support

Legislation will set expectations for settings to identify and meet needs as early as possible, and require that they monitor children and young people's progress to ensure timely and effective interventions. There will also be requirements that settings use the National Inclusion Standards to plan appropriate support for their cohorts.

For children and young people receiving Targeted, Targeted Plus or Specialist support their school or college will have a legal duty to produce a digital Individual Support Plan (ISP).

Education setting accountability

A new pupil engagement framework will be launched in summer 2026 to allow schools to measure factors such as school belonging, safety, inclusion and relationships.

The government will also consult on a new performance measure focused on the progress made by pupils who enter secondary school behind their peers, to better recognise schools which are successful in enabling and supporting the progress of all pupils.

To strengthen transparency and accountability for the movement of individual pupils across the education system, an annual review process will be introduced to monitor the use of off-site direction, managed moves, and identify any off-rolling practices.

Local area accountability

To enhance the role of local authority SEND leadership and local Area SEND partnerships, the Government proposes to:

- Update the SEND Code of Practice and publish partnerships guidance to provide clearer expectations of the local SEND partnership
- Use £200m transformation funding to support an increased focus on capacity building to deliver transformation of the SEND system
- Increase investment both locally and nationally for accessible support and practical advice to families, and increase funding for parent carer forums

The Ofsted and CQC Area SEND inspection framework will be updated to align to the clarified statutory roles of local authorities and ICBs - any changes will not come into effect until legislative reforms have been implemented, anticipated as September 2029, with intention for all areas to be inspected under the current framework by the end of 2027.

13. Resolving concerns through complaints, mediation and tribunals

Resolving concerns about universal or targeted support

Where parents have a complaint relating to SEND provision or support, they should use the school's complaints procedures. The government intends to work with school and college leaders, parents and the sector to strengthen school and college complaints processes.

Families will be encouraged to use LA-commissioned disagreement resolution services for any disagreements that cannot be resolved using a setting or LA complaints process.

Families will continue to be able to appeal to the Tribunal about disability discrimination against a child or young person in a school, including in relation to reasonable adjustments.

Resolving concerns about specialist provision

The Government will seek to strengthen LA-commissioned, independent mediation services for decisions about specialist provision. Where mediation does not resolve disputes, parents and young people will be able to appeal to the Tribunal in relation to:

- a local authority decision not to carry out a needs assessment
- a local authority decision about whether a child meets the new threshold for specialist provision
- a local authority decision that a child no longer needs the support set out in a package and that an EHCP should cease
- the identified specialist support package - if the parent or young person believes that the package identified would not provide sufficient or suitable support and that they should have a different package.

In these cases, the Tribunal will make a binding decision.

If parents do not agree with the LA's decision about the setting (placement), they will be able to appeal to the Tribunal. The Tribunal will consider whether the LA's decision is reasonable; if they find against the LA, they can quash the original decision and order the LA to reconsider. However, the Tribunal will not name the placement for the child.

Information about a child or young person's special educational needs (SEN) or special educational provision (SEP) will be considered as part of appeals about Specialist Provision Packages or placements as appropriate, rather than being separate.

To improve parental confidence that LAs will act on Tribunal judgments, an annual SEND Tribunals outcomes dashboard will be published, providing anonymised information on the outcomes of SEND Tribunals by local authority.

14. Transition to the new system

From now until the commencement of legislation, the current system – with its existing duties, rights, and funding routes – will continue.

- Any child with an EHCP in a mainstream setting as of the legislation's commencement date will be able to retain their EHCP until they finish their current phase of education.
- The first cohort of children and young people to transition will be those in at the end of primary, secondary and Post-16 in 2029/30.
- All children and young people who have a special school place in September 2029 will be able to stay in special school until the end of their education, unless they choose to move to a mainstream setting.

However, some elements of the new system – including the Experts At Hand service, expansion of Inclusion Bases, and the national training programme for education staff – will be introduced over the next three years. For more detail on the anticipated timeline for the proposals, see Part 5 (p111-115) of the Government's [consultation document](#).