

## SEND Reform White Paper Summary - February 2026

### **Why the change? (case for reform)**

The White Paper identifies the major issues in the current system as being:

- rising EHCP numbers and costs.
- inconsistent support in mainstream.
- long waiting lists for health services.
- families forced into adversarial processes.
- variable quality and inclusion across schools.
- poor post-16 outcomes for SEND learners.
- crisis-driven rather than focusing on early-intervention.

### **This is a decade-long reform programme aiming to:**

- improve early identification
- strengthen mainstream inclusion.
- reduce bureaucracy.
- provide clearer national standards.
- empower families and children.
- deliver support early, locally, and consistently.
- ensure every child thrives in their local mainstream setting wherever possible, with specialist support available quickly when needed.

### **There will be a managed transition (2029–2035):**

- 2029: Assessments for new system begin.
- 2030: No change to existing EHCP support before this date.
- 2035: Expected stabilisation of EHCP numbers.
- No child will be asked to leave a special school.

### **A Single, Inclusive Education System**

The Government intends to move away from a “two-track” SEND vs mainstream system with the goal of one inclusive education system where most children can thrive in mainstream settings, with specialist support provided promptly and locally.

### **Major New Investment Across SEND (over £7bn)**

The plan includes substantial increases in funding, including:

- £1.6bn for an Inclusive Mainstream Fund (over 3 years).
- £1.8bn for multi-agency professionals (“Experts at Hand”).
- £3.7bn capital investment (Inclusion Bases, accessibility, special schools).
- £200m for staff training (0–25 workforce).
- Additional £700m+ for Best Start Family Hubs
- This funding is intended to strengthen early intervention and reduce reliance on EHCPs.

**A New Structure of Support**-The system will be re-organised into layers, with legal duties behind each:

**Universal Offer**-Support available in every setting without assessments:

- trained staff
- reasonable adjustments
- early identification tools
- inclusion standards

**Targeted / Targeted Plus**-Access to:

- speech & language therapy
- educational psychologists
- adaptations and small-group work
- no need for an EHCP—support is available earlier.

**Specialist Provision Packages (for EHCPs)**-A completely redesigned EHCP system:

- national, evidence-based intervention packages
- clearer, consistent entitlements
- EHCPs reserved for children who need full specialist packages

**New Digital Individual Support Plans (ISPs)**

All children receiving Targeted or Specialist support will have a digital ISP:

- co-produced with parents
- portable across transitions
- updated as needs change
- ISPs aim to replace the current over-reliance on EHCPs.

**Workforce Reforms**

Every member of staff working 0–25 will receive SEND training.

Additional reforms include:

- more educational psychologists
- more therapists
- strengthened SENCO models
- clear expectations for inclusive practice

**Schools Must Publish an Inclusion Strategy (New Legal Duty)**

Every school must set out:

- how they use their funding
- how they meet universal, targeted, and targeted-plus needs
- evidence-based interventions used
- Inclusion becomes a core accountability measure for Ofsted

### **Stronger Multi-Agency Working and Accountability**

- Education is formally integrated into multi-agency safeguarding.
- Clearer duties for Integrated Care Boards (ICBs).
- Updated Ofsted/CQC Area SEND inspections.
- Stronger oversight by the Children’s Commissioner.
- Improved mediation to reduce Tribunal reliance.

### **EHCP Changes**

Under the reforms EHCP’s will become a tightly defined entitlement only for children with the most complex needs, underpinned by national evidence-based packages, while most children will instead access strong targeted support through legally backed ISP’s. In summary:

- EHCPs will only be for children who need a full “Specialist Provision Package” (SPP).
- EHCPs will no longer be used for a wide range of needs.
- Assessments for the new system start September 2029
- There will be no changes to support for existing EHCPs before September 2030
- Movement to the new system will happen at transition points (end of primary, end of secondary, etc.)

### **EHCPs will be issued only to children whose needs match a new, nationally defined SPP which:**

- will be evidence-based.
- set out exactly what interventions, therapies, and curriculum adaptations must be provided.
- define what an EHCP must include.
- will be developed by an independent expert panel.
- moves EHCPs back to being for the most complex needs only.

### **Earlier support available without an EHCP**

The white paper makes clear that families should not need an EHCP to get support. There will be two new support levels—Targeted and Targeted Plus—which will provide:

- therapy input.
- small-group work.
- curriculum adaptations.
- multi-agency support.
- these will be legally guaranteed without an EHCP.

### **Every child receiving Targeted or Specialist support will get a Digital Individual Support Plan (ISP)**

ISPs are not legally equivalent to EHCPs, but they carry new legal duties on settings to deliver the support and will:

- replace the “EHCP as a passport to support” problem.
- be co-produced with families.
- be updated as needs change.
- move with the child through transitions.

### **Fast-track EHCP route for children under 5 with complex needs**

For children whose needs are very clear early:

- a new fast-track system will be introduced.
- developed with the NHS.
- avoids long waits for diagnosis or assessment.

### **National consistency in EHCP content**

The new Specialist Provision Packages will:

- define the content and detail of EHCPs nationally.
- reduce local variation.
- ensure plans match evidence, not local interpretation.

### **EHCPs become more flexible and responsive**

The white paper acknowledges that EHCPs today don't adapt as needs change.

Under the new system:

- EHCPs will follow a clearer framework.
- ISPs will ensure provision updates regularly.
- multi-agency teams will be required to coordinate delivery.

### **New accountability for delivering EHCPs**

Stronger mechanisms will ensure EHCPs are actually implemented:

- Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) will have clearer statutory duties.
- local authority duties will be updated.
- Ofsted and CQC inspections will reflect the new legal framework.

### **Funding Headlines (please see the link below to the funding formula for details)**

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69417d442d5e7e863253755a/The\\_national\\_funding\\_formula\\_for\\_schools\\_and\\_high\\_needs\\_-\\_2026\\_to\\_2027.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69417d442d5e7e863253755a/The_national_funding_formula_for_schools_and_high_needs_-_2026_to_2027.pdf)

- **Early years settings, schools and colleges can benefit from £3.7 billion of capital investment** from this year to 2030 to create new places in Inclusion Bases in mainstream settings, make buildings accessible and create new special school places.

- Schools will be required to proactively plan the support they provide through a new duty to produce an Inclusion Strategy, which will replace the current duty to produce SEN Information Reports. They will also be legally required to publish this Inclusion Strategy annually, so parents and local partners can understand how inclusion is being delivered. **To enable settings to meet these duties, in addition to existing mainstream funding we will invest £1.6 billion in an Inclusive Mainstream Fund over three years from 2026-27 to help schools, colleges and early years settings become inclusive.** Early years settings will receive more upfront funding, and, for schools and colleges, more funding will go directly to mainstream budgets allowing leaders to meet needs more effectively, rather than being routed inefficiently through high needs budgets. With these additional funds, early years settings, schools and colleges will be held accountable for delivering high-quality inclusive practice.
- Early years settings will be equipped to provide earlier, higher-quality SEND support for children and their families. **There will be investment of over £200 million over three years to deliver a dedicated SEND offer in Best Start Family Hubs,** with a SEND practitioner providing direct support for parents in every Hub.
- **Places will be created in Inclusion Bases within mainstream settings** for children who need specialist support. ‘Inclusion Bases’ will replace the current terms SEN unit, resourced provision and pupil support unit, and instead comprise of:
  - Support Bases (setting/MAT funded, providing Targeted Support)
  - Specialist Bases (LA funded, providing specialist support)
  - Inclusion Bases will therefore combine access to the mainstream curriculum and activities – adapted where required – alongside bespoke specialist teaching and support.
- **There will be £3.7 billion high needs capital investment between 2025 and 2030, aims to improve the accessibility of buildings, create new special school places,** and create tens of thousands of new places in Inclusion Bases in mainstream settings.
- **There will be an investment of £40 million over three years to boost the educational psychology and speech and language therapy workforce.** There will be over 200 more educational psychologists per year from 2026 and 2027, with further investment to train more over the following three years. This builds on the £31 million the government has already invested to train 600 additional educational psychologists since 2023.
- **There will be investment of at least £3 billion between the 2026/27 and 2029/30 financial years to create new special school places** and tens of thousands of new

places in Inclusion Bases. This builds on £740 million committed in 2025 to create new specialist places in mainstream schools.

- **There will be a new £1.6 billion Inclusive Mainstream Fund over three years from the 2026/27 financial year, worth over £500 million per year**, for three years. Funding will help the mainstream system to be more inclusive, guided by the new National Inclusion Standards.
- **There will be an investment of £1.8 billion over three years in “Experts at Hand”** to improve access to specialist interventions when they need them, reducing delays.
- **There will be increased funding for local parent carer forums** to enhance their peer support, and have further influence in local SEND systems, working with local partnership boards, Integrated Care Board (ICBs) and Best Start Family Hubs as we implement Experts at Hand.
- **SENDIASS will also receive additional funding** so that they can provide families with high-quality, easily accessible and independent information and guidance to help them navigate the new system and to build parents trust in the system.

## Next Steps

The proposals for the SEND reforms are subject to public consultation and over the coming months (no firm timetable provided) there will be:

- **A SEND development steering group** comprised of broad membership including parents, teachers, educators, health representatives, local authorities and representative organisations. There will also be visits and a full suite of engagement events.
- **In-person consultation events and engagement sessions** led by experts in the SEND system and delivered in local communities, focused on the consultation questions set out in the white paper.
- **Targeted roundtables and bilateral conversations** with parents, children, and professionals to test ideas, surface practical solutions, and ensure reforms reflect the realities that families face.

## Appendix: Summary of consultation questions

### PART A – About You

1. What is your name?

2. What is your email address?

Please note: It is helpful to have your email address if we want to contact you about your answers to the questions in this consultation. You do not have to give your email address, and your views will be considered whether or not you give your email address.

3. Are you happy to be contacted directly about your response?

(Options: Yes; No)

Please note: The Department may wish to contact you directly about your responses to help our understanding of the issues. If we do, we will use the email address you have given above.

4. Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

(Options: Individual; Organisation)

If you are responding as an individual, we will consider the views within your response to this consultation to be your personal views. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, we will consider the views within your response to this consultation to be those of your organisation and not necessarily your personal views.

5. If you are responding as an individual, how would you describe yourself?

(Options: student, pupil or learner; parent or carer; teacher, tutor or lecturer; researcher, academic or education expert; governor; health, education or childcare professional; other member of the public)

If more than one applies, please select the one that you think is most important to understanding your consultation response.

6. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, which of the following best describes who/which part of the sector your organisation represents?

(Options: maintained primary school; primary academy; maintained secondary school or sixth form; secondary academy; 16-19 academy; maintained special school or Alternative Provision; special or Alternative Provision academy; other maintained school – e.g. middle school or boarding school; other academy school; independent school; academy trust; sixth form college; general further education colleges (including designated institutions); special post-16 institutions; local authority provider; independent training provider; childminding business; maintained nursery school; private, voluntary or independent early years group setting; representative organisation or trade association; local authority; government organisation/agency; other (please specify))

If more than one applies, please select the one that you think is most important to understanding your consultation response.

7. What is the name of your organisation?

(Free text 250 word limit)

8. What is your role within the organisation?

(Free text 250 word limit)

9. Would you like us to keep your name and/or organisation confidential?

9a. Name: (Options Yes; No)

9b. Organisation: (Options: Yes; No)

10. Would you like us to keep your responses confidential? (Options: Yes; No)

If yes, please explain why you consider it to be confidential.

(Free text 250 word limit)

### **PART B – Consultation questions**

Q1. We want children, young people and their families to be involved in making better, evidence-based decisions about SEND, both in their local area and across the country.

How can we make sure children, young people and their families have a genuine say in these decisions?

Q2. How can we make sure that high-quality evidence and best practice inform decisions about SEND? Please share examples.

Q3. How can we ensure that children are best supported by the Universal offer?

Q4. How can we ensure that children in the Targeted layer, are best supported?

Q5. How can we ensure that children in the Targeted Plus layer, are best supported?

Q6. How can we ensure that children in the Specialist layer are best supported?

Q7. How do you think early years settings, schools, and college can best support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people?

Q8. Do you agree that the refreshed 'areas of development' will support educators to understand and address barriers to learning and participation? Please explain your answer.

Q9. What arrangements would best support effective joint working between early years providers, Best Start Family Hubs, health, local authorities, and parents for children with SEND in the early years?

Q10. How can the early years foundation stage (EYFS) two-year old progress check and the Healthy Child Programme development review be improved so that children's needs are identified and supported more quickly? Please share examples.

Q11. What should the top three priority areas be for building and sharing evidence within the National Inclusion Standards?

Q12. What are the most important issues for national training to cover, to help support children and young people with SEND?

Q13. What practical actions can help teachers, educators and leaders manage workload whilst implementing these changes?

Q14. How should the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) role evolve to better meet the needs of children and young people with SEND?

Q15. What would provide assurance for families that an Individual Support Plan (ISP) is high-quality and contains the essential information?

Q16: How can we ensure Individual Support Plans are clear, concise and practical for professionals to use?

Q17: How can we best support transition for young people with SEND, so that they are well supported into post-16 provision and further education, training or employment?

Q18. How can we make sure that every area can meet the full range of the needs of children and young people through Inclusion Bases?

Q19. How can we make sure that Inclusion Bases help children and young people succeed in mainstream settings?

Q20. Through the Experts at Hand offer, we want to ensure that mainstream settings can get quick specialist support for children and young people.

What arrangements are needed between local area partners (education, health, social care) to deliver this Experts at Hand offer effectively?

Q21. What needs to be in place so that children and young people with low incidence, highly complex needs can always access the right specialist placement?

Q22. How can Specialist Provision Packages be designed to effectively support the main types of need we currently recognise?

Q23. We propose that EHCPs will guarantee educational provision set out in a Specialist Provision Package, with day-to-day provision captured in Individual Support Plans.

What is needed to make these proposals work effectively?

Q24. We propose creating a more direct route to Specialist Provision Packages and EHCP assessments for children under 5 with complex needs.

How can we make sure this works in practice?

Q25. What would you expect to be considered as part of the needs assessment, for example evidence and expert or professional input?

Q26. What factors should LAs take into account in proposing to parents and young people a list of potential settings to name on a plan?

Q27. What information and support do parents need to make a decision about which setting will be best for their child?

Q28. What do you think is the right maximum length of time for a temporary placement in Alternative Provision (AP) schools? Please explain your rationale.

Q29. We have set out our plans to regulate Independent Special Schools (ISS) sector.

Do you agree that these proposed changes will lead to suitable placements being available at a fair cost? Please explain why.

Q30. How should settings be held accountable for how they spend their Inclusive Mainstream funding?

Q31. Do you agree that more SEND funding should sit directly within mainstream budgets? Please explain why.

Q32: In relation to pooled funding, we propose that every school becomes part of a local SEND group.

Do you agree that this proposal aligns with our aim for all schools to be part of high-quality, community-based trusts?

Q33: How should disagreements about membership, provision, or funding in groups of schools for SEND be resolved?

Q34: How can we ensure the most effective use of these local partnership groups?

Q35. Which stakeholders are important for the success of local partnership groups, and why?

Q36: How can we build stronger collaboration and a culture of improvement through local SEND strategic plans?

Q37. What information, advice and guidance can best support children, young people and their families to ensure greater fairness across the system?

Q38. Do you agree that a SEND specialist (e.g. a SENCO) should sit on the school complaint panel, when the complaint relates to SEND support and provision? Please explain why.

Q39. This consultation outlines a series of measures intended to reform the SEND system. Some of these measures have already been finalised, and this is clearly indicated within the document.

With this in mind, is there anything further you would like to contribute to help inform the remaining proposals that are still under consideration?