

Education Committee

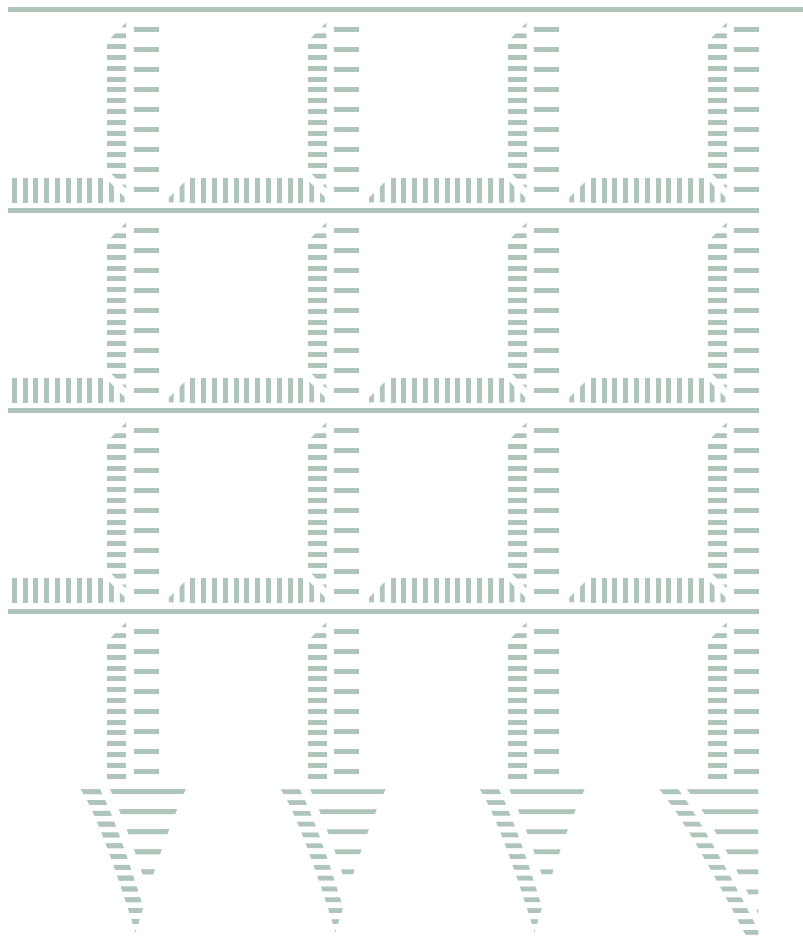
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# Solving the SEND crisis: Government Response

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First Special Report of Session 2026–27

HC 382



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# Education Committee

The Education Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Education and its associated public bodies.

## Current membership

[Helen Hayes](#) (Labour; Dulwich and West Norwood) (Chair)

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## Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No. 152. These are available on the internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

## Publication

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# First Special Report

The Education Committee published its Fifth Report of Session 2024–26, [Solving the SEND Crisis](#) (HC 492), on 18 September 2025. The initial [Government Response](#) was received on 28 November 2025 and was published as the Seventh Special Report of Session 2024–26 (HC 1565). The final Government Response was received on 11 June 2026 and is appended below.

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## Appendix: Government Response

### Introduction

The Education Select Committee launched its inquiry into “Solving the SEND Crisis” on 24th December 2024 and published its report on 18th September 2025.

We thank the committee for its insightful report, as well as giving us the opportunity to give evidence into the inquiry. Following the interim response we made in December, we now welcome the opportunity to formally respond in full to the Committee.

This document sets out our response to the report and the recommendations made within it – a response to each recommendation has been provided with a broad summary of the Government’s response under themed headings.

Since the publication of the report, we have published the white paper, *Every Child Achieving and Thriving* and undertaken the consultation for our *SEND reform: putting children and young people first* publication. These publications outline our proposals for re-shaping the SEND system to make all mainstream early years settings, schools and colleges truly inclusive and strengthen the specialist sector to better meet the needs of all children and young people, earlier and without families having to fight.

As the committee is aware, we have been consulting on the full set of SEND reform proposals – our response should be taken as provisional and dependent upon the outcome of the consultation and subsequent legislation.

## Background to our response

Since July 2024, we have heard from and spoken to thousands of children, young people, parents, families, professionals and local authorities. As part of our National Conversation the Department reached over 8,000 people through online and in-person events. This engagement continued during the consultation phase with regional consultation events, engagement with children and young people, including that led by the Council for Disabled Children, and ministerially-led SEND Development and Complex Needs groups.

Alongside this engagement, we have worked closely with experts across the SEND sector. We have also considered recommendations from independent bodies such as the Children’s Commissioner’s Office, alongside nonprofit and policy or research organisations, campaign groups and MPs. We are grateful to everyone who has contributed to this conversation and helped shape these proposals.

Through this engagement process we have heard a clear and consistent message from families, professionals and children and young people themselves: the current system is not working. It is failing children, failing parents, failing schools and failing LAs. Parents have told us they often do not feel listened to and want to be recognised as experts on their own children. They have also told us stronger accountability will be essential to putting the system right. Teachers have emphasised the need for appropriate training and access to support – including funding, resources and access to health professionals.

Children and young people also highlight the importance of adults who recognise them as individuals and take the time to understand their perspectives, experiences, and voices; this must be matched by communication that is adapted to their needs and consistent support at every stage of their journey.

Across all groups, we have heard how vital early support is – without long bureaucratic waits, alongside the need for effective multi-agency collaboration and a strong focus on children’s rights.

At the same time, we have also seen examples of outstanding practice: dedicated practitioners providing inclusive, high-quality support that is transforming the lives of the children and young people they work with.

Our ambition is to create a system that builds on and spreads this best practice, ensuring all children and young people have the support and opportunities they need to achieve and thrive.

## Our Reform Principles

- 1. Early.** Children and families should receive the support they need as soon as possible, with a quick response to changing needs. This will start to break the cycle of needs going unmet and getting worse. Instead, we will intervene swiftly and proactively, focusing on providing support earlier in children's lives when this can have the greatest impact.
- 2. Local.** Children and young people with SEND should be able to learn at an education setting close to their home, alongside their peers, rather than travelling long distances from their family and community. Specialist settings should continue to play a vital role supporting those with the most complex needs.
- 3. Fair.** Every education setting should be resourced and able to meet common and predictable needs, including as they change over time, without parents having to fight to get support for their children. Where specialist provision is needed for children and young people, we will ensure it is there, whether that be a mainstream, specialist or Alternative Provision setting, with clear legal requirements and safeguards for children and parents.
- 4. Effective.** Reforms should be grounded in evidence, ensuring all education settings know where to go to find effective practice that has excellent long-term outcomes for children and young people.
- 5. Shared.** Education, health and care services should work in partnership with one another, Best Start Family Hubs, local government, families, teachers, educators, experts, the voluntary sector and representative bodies to deliver better experiences and outcomes for all our children and young people. The voices of children should be at the heart of decision making.

## Committee Recommendations

Our response to each of the Committee's recommendations is below. Where these refer to measures set out in the SEND Consultation, these should be considered provisional and dependent upon the outcome of the consultation and subsequent legislation.

## The State of inclusive education in England

We are grateful to the Committee for its clear and constructive focus on inclusion as the foundation of a sustainable and effective SEND system. We share your ambition for a mainstream education system that is genuinely inclusive, where children and young people with SEND and other additional needs are welcomed, supported and able to achieve and thrive. The reforms to SEND set out below strongly align with this shared ambition, backed by significant investment, workforce reform and sustained engagement with families, practitioners and the wider sector.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 35) The Department must publish a definition of inclusive education and rationale for this vision alongside examples of good practice across different phases of education and settings within the next 3 months. Continued ambiguity undermines progress and accountability.**

**AND**

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 36) An inclusive mainstream education system must be underpinned by several key elements, all of which we would expect to be included in the Department's definition at a level of detail sufficient to enable professionals and families to have a clear understanding of the Government's approach:**

- **education settings and environments must be accessible, safe, and designed to meet a wide range of sensory and physical needs;**
- **teachers and teaching assistants and other support staff should have the expertise, training, and confidence to support diverse learners, underpinned by regular access to embedded specialist professionals;**
- **the curriculum must be flexible, relevant, and reflect the representation of young people with SEND; and the Government must ensure the curriculum itself and the assessment of it reflect and accommodate their needs;**
- **accountability systems must examine and prioritise the progress and outcomes of all pupils, on a rounded set of indicators which include but are not limited to academic attainment, so that inclusion is embedded as an essential component of quality for all settings. The proportion of pupils with SEND should be published and compared with other local schools and multi-academy trusts, to act as a disincentive to exclusionary practices; and**

- **critically, good inclusive practice must always ensure rigorous, systemic approaches to understanding the individual needs of every child and delivering personalised support.**

**AND**

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 37) The UK is a signatory member of the UNCRPD (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) since 2008. It would be helpful in developing any definition of inclusive education for the Department for Education to draw on the principles and substantive materials in relevant articles of this Convention. This should include Article 24 on education, Article 25 on health and others, for example, Article 30 on participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport. It may also be helpful for the Government to consider the UN general comment number 4 on Article 24 – the right to inclusive education, as well as the UNICEF report (2017) expanding on these issues in practice.**

ACCEPT

We thank the Committee for setting out your views on the elements which should underpin our definition of inclusion. Our consultation document, *SEND reform: putting children and young people first*, is clear that our approach to inclusion is guided by the definition set by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Our approach to inclusion is guided by the definition set out in the UNCRPD. In line with general comment number 4 on Article 24, our reforms are aimed at strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach all learners. We also draw on definitions set out in the *Who is Losing Learning* report, published by IPPR and The Difference. Our reforms will address all the points above to achieve an inclusive education system. In *SEND reform: putting children and young people first* we set out the principles that underly an inclusive universal offer in educational settings:

- ambitious leadership and governance that embeds inclusion in planning;
- evidence-based support prioritising early intervention;
- high-quality teaching with a curriculum designed for all learners;
- accessible and enriching provision beyond the classroom;
- a safe and respectful culture fostering belonging and attendance;
- strong partnerships with families and wider services; and
- inclusive environments with continuous improvements to accessibility.

Our upcoming guidance *Inclusive Estates Guidance: Supporting inclusive environments in mainstream settings* supports local authorities, responsible bodies and education settings to identify high-impact adaptations that will improve the inclusivity and accessibility of their existing estate. This aims to improve inclusion and learning experiences for all pupils, including children and young people with SEND.

Our core professional development offer, including Initial Teacher Training, the Early Career Framework, and NPQs for leaders and SENCOs, is grounded in the latest evidence, reviewed by the Education Endowment Foundation and developed with SEND experts to support effective practice.

We are investing over £200 million across this Parliament to ensure that all teachers, educators, teaching assistants, support staff and leaders in every school, college and nursery are trained to support pupils with SEND.

There will be a new requirement set out in the SEND Code of Practice for all settings to ensure that staff receive training on SEND and inclusion. By embedding this expectation across early years, schools and colleges, we will upskill staff and promote inclusive practice. Leaders will retain flexibility to select training that fits their context, while guidance and signposting to government funded training will support quality and consistency

We will develop new evidence-led resources to support effective teaching adaptation for all children and young people in schools and colleges, including those with SEND. These adaptive teaching resources, which were committed to in the Curriculum and Assessment Review response, will support teachers to bring the curriculum to life in inclusive and practical ways.

The adaptive teaching resources will be developed to provide ongoing, flexible support to help teachers support pupils with SEND, and will come alongside a package of materials to support the delivery of in-house SEND training, which will be available from September 2026. The adaptive teaching resources will act as a complementary tool, enabling teachers to deepen and apply their learning in day-to-day practice.

Importantly, these resources will be accessible as and when needed, allowing teachers to revisit key principles, explore practical strategies, and respond to emerging classroom needs over time.

Children and young people with more complex needs should be supported to access as much of the curriculum as possible. Therefore, working with experts, we will consider how we can provide support to mainstream schools in how they can adapt the curriculum to suit the needs of those pupils with complex needs, and look at good curriculum practice in special schools, with a view to spreading best practice and improving standards.

We will develop National Inclusion Standards, which will set out what ordinarily available provision should be in every setting across the 0–25 system, as well as the evidence-based tools, strategies and approaches for educators to draw on to identify and support pupils with additional needs. The Standards will include whole-setting, universal approaches to support inclusion, as well as tools and approaches to identify and respond to individual needs through the targeted/targeted-plus layers of support.

We will appoint an independent panel of experts, selected for their skills, knowledge, and professional standing, and led by health and education co-chairs, to design the National Inclusion Standards and Specialist Provision Packages. While the panel will provide expert input and independent scrutiny, the Department will retain ultimate responsibility for the final content of the National Inclusion Standards.

The Standards will be reviewed by the panel on a regular basis, to ensure they continue to reflect the best available evidence on SEND.

The government's response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review's report, and the Schools White Paper, committed to set out a core enrichment offer through our Enrichment Framework that every school and college, in every community, should aim to provide. This includes access to civic engagement; arts and culture; nature, outdoor and adventure; sport and physical activities; and developing wider life skills.

This will be part of the Enrichment Framework, non-statutory guidance that has been developed with a group of experts across the education, youth, sport and arts sectors. It will set out benchmarks for how schools and colleges can build a strategic, intentional and inclusive offer of enrichment that can benefit all children and young people. The Framework will be published in academic year 2025/26.

The department has also committed to publish a non-statutory best practice framework to help schools increase pupil engagement. This framework will help schools to measure and improve the key factors that determine pupils' engagement in education. This includes a sense of belonging and safety, inclusion, and relationships with teachers and fellow pupils.

The key stage 4 performance measures and targeted RISE extension consultation included proposals for a possible new progress measure to better capture the progress and achievements of children who start secondary school significantly behind their peers. The new progress measure would sit alongside measures such as Progress 8 and Attainment 8. The consultation closed on 4 May, and we plan to publish our response later in the summer term.

We will also be publishing percentages of pupils with SEN support and EHCPs for schools and Multi Academy Trusts on school and college profiles, alongside comparisons to national levels.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 38) The Department must urgently assess the funding required to implement meaningful reforms to SEND provision. There must be a clear plan for how the Department will work towards this level of investment in the short and medium term, which aligns with the timeline for SEND reforms.**

ACCEPT

We are making a major increase in investment to prioritise early intervention and deliver an enhanced, inclusive, support offer in mainstream settings. This investment of £4 billion over the three years of includes:

- £1.6bn on Inclusive Mainstream Fund to support the development of a more inclusive mainstream system which can identify commonly occurring, predictable needs and take meaningful steps to embed inclusive practice.
- £1.8bn on Experts at Hand to strengthen the capability of mainstream education settings by providing access to universal and targeted support from key services and health and specialist education practitioners.
- Over £200m on Best Start Family Hubs over three years to strengthen the support available for babies and young children with additional needs through Best Start Family Hubs.
- Over £200m on national training packages to ensure that every teacher, educator, teaching assistant and leader across early years, schools and post-16 settings can be trained to support pupils with SEND.
- £200m on LA transformation to ensure all local authorities have the capacity to undertake meaningful transformation planning and delivery while maintaining current SEND services.

This investment is alongside an additional capital investment of £3.7 billion from 2025 to 2030, to create at least 60,000 specialist places, and a £3.5bn increase in total schools funding in 28–29 to support SEND Reform. In addition, this government is committed to supporting local authorities with their DSG deficits as we transition to a reformed SEND system. All local authorities with a SEND deficit will be eligible in 2026–27 to receive a High Needs Stability Grant covering 90% of their High Needs-related DSG deficit accrued up to the end of 2025–26, so councils can focus on what matters: supporting children and families. For deficits arising in 2026–27 and 2027–28, local authorities can expect that we will continue to take an appropriate and proportionate approach, though it will not be unlimited. Future support

will take into account local authorities' successful delivery of their approved Local SEND reform plan, including appropriate use of investment funding to establish an Experts at Hand offer.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 39) As part of delivering a fully inclusive mainstream system, the Government must set out how it will deliver, over time, a system in which highly skilled professionals, including Educational Psychologists and Speech and Language Therapists, are less tied up in undertaking assessments and writing reports and more effectively deployed in delivering the support children need. It should be clear what professional skills and expertise an inclusive mainstream school should be able to draw on, and how this expertise will be made available.**

ACCEPT

We are investing over £40m to grow the specialist workforce of Educational Psychologists (EPs) and Speech and Language Therapists (SaLTs).

Of this funding, £26m will go towards training at least 200 educational psychologists per year in 2026 and 2027. This will be followed by further investment to train more from 2028, subject to future spending review. It is a requirement that, upon graduation, trainees who have had their training funded by DfE remain in local authority employment for a minimum period. This is to ensure that children and young people, schools and families are benefitting from the investment of public money in their training. From September 2024, this minimum period is three years. Continuing to grow the EP workforce will bolster capacity for EPs to focus on early identification, intervention and support for children.

The remaining £15m will be invested to establish new speech and language therapist advanced practitioners in every ICB geographical area to enable more SaLTs to work with educational settings. It will also be used to invest in upskilling speech and language support workers who can provide more routine support for children, and to promote the existing Level 6 Speech and Language Therapist apprenticeship programme to grow the workforce further.

Our reforms aim to create more clarity for professionals and parents and unify processes across LAs which we believe will release specialist capacity from paperwork and assessments, allowing them to prioritise direct support in education settings.

We recognise how important it is that mainstream early years, schools and post-16 settings can access expert support early, when needs first arise. So, we will also be introducing the new Experts at Hand programme, backed by £1.8bn over the next 3 years. As part of our new investment, settings will be able to access support, advice, training, and specialist expertise from professionals such as speech and language therapists, educational

psychologists and specialist teachers. These experts will work directly with children, young people and educators, building the skills and confidence to identify and address needs early and effectively. Where appropriate, local areas will commission specialist settings, including special schools and Alternative Provision, to provide outreach and share their expertise.

This approach is informed by evidence from DfE and NHS England programmes such as: Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools, Early Language Support for Every Child, AP 3-tier support model, and the Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce where experts strengthened the expertise and services available directly to education settings to support their inclusive practice and build skills and confidence in the mainstream workforce. These programmes also included outreach from specialist settings, including AP, working in partnership with mainstream settings, this will be a key part of Experts at Hand. This could include group-level support for children and young people, strategic advice such as carrying out practitioner-led audits of the setting environment or tailored guidance for setting staff on delivering evidence-based early interventions.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 49) It is essential that the Department addresses these challenges if it is going to succeed in making mainstream education inclusive and fixing the broken SEND system. The Department must involve stakeholders in reforms and begin to consult with parent-led organisations now. It should set out a clear timeline for SEND reforms and report on progress at least on an annual basis.**

ACCEPT

Since July 2024, we have engaged with thousands of children, young people, parents, families, professionals and local authorities. As part of the National Conversation held between December 2025-January 2026, the Department reached over 8,000 people through online and in-person events.

This engagement continued during the consultation phase through a programme of regional events, work with children and young people (including activity led by the Council for Disabled Children). During the 12-week consultation period, this programme combined ministerial oversight, targeted expert input and public participation, ensuring that families, practitioners and young people could engage meaningfully with the proposals.

This included:

- 9 regional events involving Ministers.
- 47 focus groups and conversations led by CDC capturing the views of 186 children and young people aged between 8 to 25.

- 6 information webinars for leaders across health, education, local authorities, social care and parent carer groups.
- 6 NNPCF led SEND Reform Community of Practice Sessions with parent carers.
- Bespoke engagement for those differing needs, including sessions with those from Ambitious About Autism, the Down's Syndrome Association and Changing Realities.

Additional departmental forums—including RISE conferences, early years and post-16 networks, workforce forums, and the Improving Education Together group—provided further opportunities to raise awareness and gather sector feedback. We also had ministerial engagement at the annual Youth Voice Matters conference with over 100 children and young people from across England. Whilst this was held in February before the official start of the consultation it was a good way of engaging the young people for early awareness of the pending consultation.

Alongside this wider engagement, we continued engagement with two ministerially led groups: the SEND Development Group and the Complex Needs Group. These groups met regularly to provide strategic challenge and discussion across our reform areas, drawing on representatives from parent groups, charities, the sector and local authorities.

We also carried out a programme of deep-dive discussions with experts and parent representatives to explore specific themes. Insights from these sessions informed ministerial group discussions alongside the formal consultation analysis and will continue to shape policy development.

These conversations highlighted experiences of the current SEND system and how the proposed reforms could better meet needs of children and young people. This programme of engagement ensured broad, balanced and representative engagement, in line with consultation principles of transparency, accessibility and fairness.

We want to ensure children's and young people's needs and voices remain at the heart of SEND reform – in *SEND Reform: putting children and young people first*, we proposed a new remit for the Children's Commissioner to provide independent oversight and scrutiny of SEND reform. This will include monitoring the progress and effectiveness of reforms for all children, with particular focus on children in care, children in need, those not in school (including those who have been excluded), and those facing intersectional or multiple disadvantages.

## Securing inclusive education

We welcome the Committee's emphasis on moving from aspiration to consistent, day to day delivery of inclusive education across the system. We agree that clearer national expectations, earlier support and stronger accountability are essential to ensuring children and young people with SEND receive the help they need, when they need it and close to home.

Our reforms are designed to establish a clear, evidence led framework for SEN support, strengthen local partnerships and accountability, and ensure that statutory duties are fulfilled in practice, so inclusion is secured as a shared and enforceable responsibility across education, health and care.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 74) The Department for Education should publish a unified national framework for ordinarily available provision and SEN support. This should offer clear, evidence-led guidance and include practical, real-world examples tailored to educators and educational settings, ensuring that all practitioners have access to quality-assured strategies and interventions.**

ACCEPT

We will introduce National Inclusion Standards which will provide a shared, nationally consistent understanding of the best evidence to identify and support children and young people with SEND, equipping early years settings, schools and colleges to intervene early and effectively. The Standards will set out evidence-informed tools, strategies and approaches for educators to draw on to identify and support children and young people with additional needs.

We will appoint a panel of independent experts, selected for their skills, knowledge, and professional standing, and led by education and health co-chairs, to advise on what approaches, strategies, and tools should be included in the National Inclusion Standards. While the panel will provide expert input and independent scrutiny, the Department will retain ultimate responsibility for the final content of the National Inclusion Standards.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 75) The Department should publish statutory requirements mandating the minimum resources, specialist expertise, and equipment that every educational setting must have access to as a part of their offer of SEN support and in order to deliver an inclusive education. This will establish a clear, enforceable baseline covering staffing, training, physical materials, and assistive technologies. This will also ensure that all schools and multi-academy trusts are adequately equipped to support children and young people with SEND through ordinarily available provision and SEN support, reducing the need for EHC plans.**

**AND**

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 93) Support should be provided as soon as a need is identified, rather than only once an EHC plan is in place. This would bring England in line with good practice found internationally, for example in Ontario, Canada, where entitlement is based on need rather than lengthy assessment processes. Such a change would prevent the current situation in which many children receive little or no effective support while waiting for an EHC plan and would ensure timely intervention that can improve outcomes and reduce escalation of need. The Department's SEND reforms must not be based on any withdrawal of statutory entitlements for children and young people with SEND. The Department must instead set out plans for reform which increase accountability across the whole of the SEND system, so that many more parents and carers can be confident that their children's needs will be met regardless of whether they have a diagnosis or EHC plan.**

ACCEPT

Early support is one of our five principles for reform. We will set out what good, ordinarily available SEN support should look like in the National Inclusion Standards. We propose that these should set out minimum standards that all settings must adhere to and also include a range of evidence-based tools, approaches and strategies from which leaders and teachers should choose the most appropriate provision for children and young people in their setting or classroom – recognising that settings operate in different contexts.

Schools will be required to produce an Inclusion Strategy, to ensure effective cohort-level planning for common and predictable needs and the meaningful implementation of inclusive education. This will be published on their website. We propose legislating for all settings across the 0–25 system to have regard to the evidence base in the National Inclusion Standards when designing their provision and producing their Inclusion Strategy. This will include support at the Targeted and Targeted Plus layers. The Targeted Plus layer will include access to specialist support such as Experts at Hand without the need for a statutory plan. We will continue to work with Ofsted to determine how they will consider a setting's use of the Standards, in their inspections.

The Standards will be reviewed by the expert panel on a regular basis, to ensure they continue to reflect the best available evidence on SEND. We will also work with Ofsted to ensure that the Trust inspection Framework includes descriptors on the effectiveness of trusts in supporting inclusion in their schools.

We will place a duty on settings to produce an Individual Support Plan for any child or young person receiving targeted or specialist support. The Individual Support Plan will be developed by settings together with parents and young people, giving every child or young person receiving targeted or specialist support a clear and consistent record of their needs and the help they receive, so that support is joined up, timely and genuinely centred on what will help them to thrive. The use and quality of ISPs will be considered in Ofsted inspections, with clear routes for parents to raise concerns.

Making reasonable adjustments is central to removing barriers to learning and ensuring disabled pupils can participate fully in school life. To improve consistency and strengthen inclusive practice, we will work with partners such as the EHRC improve the clarity, accessibility and usefulness of guidance for making reasonable adjustments. This will support settings to apply their responsibilities with confidence, plan for a wide range of needs, reduce avoidable disputes and build strong relationships with parents and carers.

We will also update the Code of Practice, including setting out expectations on staff training, and issue guidance on inclusion bases and inclusive approaches to mainstream environments. Alongside the Inclusive Mainstream Fund, this will set clear expectations around what and how settings should deliver SEND support.

Funding settings directly for provision set out in the National Inclusion Standards, delivering accessible support through Experts at Hand, without the need for statutory processes, and outreach from special schools into mainstream settings, are some of the ways we are looking to deliver support as soon as a need is identified. As set out in the SEND consultation document, our reforms will increase rather than decrease the duties on settings to deliver for those with SEN Support, and we are continuing to look closely at accountability and parental support to ensure that we have the right measures in place to rebuild trust in the system. The SEND Tribunal will also continue to hear appeals about key decisions relating to EHC plans and needs assessments.

We are looking to strengthen the school complaints system with the inclusion of an appropriate, independent SEND specialist (for example a SENCo, MAT inclusion director, senior school manager) on a panel, if the complaint cannot be resolved by the school's senior management team or head teacher.

We intend to strengthen utilisation of Disagreement Resolution Services, by improving and updating guidance for schools. Disagreement Resolution Services are provided to all children and young people with SEND needs via local authorities, as a tool for independent facilitation of complaint resolution.

We will take forward these improvements alongside wider work set out in the Schools White Paper to improve the whole school complaints system including exploring digital solutions, updating guidance and setting out clearer handling processes.

As set out in the White Paper, the implementation of these reforms will be overseen by the Children's Commissioner who will provide appropriate scrutiny with particular attention to vulnerable cohorts.

We will also update the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND inspection framework to align to the clarified statutory roles that local authorities and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) will have in relation to children and young people with SEND.

Ofsted and CQC will also explore the introduction of a report card for AREA SEND inspection to help the inspectorates report on inclusion and other evaluation areas relating to SEND across an area, to provide a consistent approach across local area partnerships. As set out below in response to the recommendation on page 145, we propose taking steps to strengthen transparency and accountability on local area decision-making, including through the publication of an annual DfE SEND Tribunal outcomes dashboard.

In March 2026, the Department for Education commissioned local authorities, together with their Integrated Care Boards, to develop SEND reform plans by June 2026. The department will use these plans to hold them accountable to deliver strong outcomes for children and young people with SEND and will act decisively where progress does not materialise. Where failure is persistent, we will not hesitate to use the full range of intervention powers.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 94) Where EHC plans are issued, they carry a statutory duty which must be delivered in full. To make this a reality, the Department for Education should strengthen the ability of local authorities to meet these obligations by ensuring that the necessary levers are in place to compel other services, for example, NHS services, and commissioners such as local Integrated Healthcare Boards (ICBs). This must include coordinated action with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to address wider pressures on local authority budgets and capacity, so that councils are properly equipped to deliver the provision set out in every EHC plan.**

NOT TAKEN FORWARD

The statutory framework already places clear duties on health partners in relation to children and young people with SEND. Where an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan is issued, statutory duties apply to the relevant partners. Under the Children and Families Act 2014, Integrated Care Boards

(ICBs) have a duty to work with local authorities on participation in EHC needs assessments and plans and securing health provision. For the first time, the NHS Medium Term Planning Framework, which guides ICBs in making prioritisation decisions, included a clear expectation that ICBs and providers fulfil their statutory SEND duties and support the government's SEND Reform plans.

ICBs are expected to be strategic commissioners of local health services, responsible for commissioning services to meet the needs of their local population for whom they are responsible. This is part of the 10 Year Health Plan's ambition to distribute power to local systems and drive more holistic, ongoing support in the community. There are no plans to introduce levers for local authorities or any other body to compel ICBs or NHS services to make specific decisions, which would cut across the way ICBs operate, consider the needs of their whole population and how to meet wider statutory duties.

As set out in *SEND reform: putting children and young people first*, we will work with DHSC, NHS England and local areas to look for further opportunities to strengthen accountability to improve outcomes for families and children and young people with SEND. This includes exploring how to ensure that there are robust and appropriate SEND metrics across the system to help hold local area partnerships, Integrated Care Boards, local authorities and providers to account. Which metrics are appropriate and useful will be considered and developed over the course of the reforms.

In March 2026, the Department for Education commissioned local authorities, together with their Integrated Care Boards, to develop SEND reform plans by June 2026. The department will use these plans to hold them accountable to deliver strong outcomes for children and young people with SEND and will act decisively where progress does not materialise. Where failure is persistent, we will not hesitate to use the full range of intervention powers.

We also engage with DHSC and NHSE as part of the improvement and intervention approach following Area SEND inspection. In response to its Big Listen and wider stakeholder engagement, Ofsted reviewed the first two years of Area SEND inspections under the new framework. This identified a need for greater family involvement, reduced inspection burden, and clearer reporting, including making clearer which partner should take forward areas for improvement where appropriate. Ofsted has committed to changes to the framework, alongside a wider update to align it with clarified statutory roles for local authorities and Integrated Care Boards, which will be subject to full consultation.

## Restoring parent trust and confidence

We fully agree with the Committee's strong and sustained focus on restoring trust and confidence among parents and carers. Building meaningful partnerships with families is essential to creating a fair, accountable and effective SEND system and so we're pleased to accept and reflect many of the Committee's recommendations, particularly those strengthening engagement, advocacy, transparency and inspection practice.

We note that in several important areas including routes to redress, governance accountability, and the role of health services, our approach does not fully align with the Committee's proposals. However, we have a shared aim – to ensure that children and young people with SEND get the support they need when they need it. We recognise the need to continue engaging with parents, carers and the sector on these issues to ensure accountability arrangements are strong enough to rebuild confidence and uphold the rights of children and young people with SEND. As outlined, we are working on strengthening local area accountability through our review of the Area SEND Inspection framework, local area reform plans and a strengthened approach to intervening in poor performing local authorities.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 102) Parents and carers must be actively and meaningfully involved in all processes that affect their child's education, support, and overall wellbeing. This includes being fully informed and invited to participate in all relevant meetings where decisions about their child's needs or provision are being discussed at the school and local authority level. Families should have access to independent advocacy to enable and strengthen their engagement in the process. Parental insights and lived experience are invaluable in shaping effective and appropriate support. Embedding parental involvement as a standard part of decision-making not only enhances transparency and trust but also leads to better informed, more tailored outcomes for children and young people with SEND. Local authorities must actively engage and be properly equipped to support and respond to parental engagement in a positive way. This requires dedicated resourcing and ongoing training to ensure staff have the skills, capacity and confidence to work effectively with families, build trust, and act on their concerns in a timely and constructive way. These changes would need to be subject to a New Burdens Assessment to ensure that local authorities had the resources to support better parent and carer engagement.**

ACCEPT

We will make it easier for children, young people, and parent carers to access clear advice and practical support from government, both locally and nationally.

We want families' voices and experiences to shape SEND policy and local delivery, ensuring that families can influence decision-making around the support that they receive including in local partnerships, and in the development of the policy that drives those decisions.

Nationally we will improve access to services:

- We are increasing investment in the national helpline.
- We will also continue to work with and expand parent carers in strategic partnership roles to support system-wide improvements.

We know local services are critical. We want to help local services to support families better, particularly through the reform implementation period. Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies are one part of a wider offer this government is building for families, with over £900 million invested between 2026 and 2029. Every Best Start Family Hub will have a Best Start Inclusion Practitioner providing flexible, early support for children aged 0–5 with emerging needs, without the need for a formal diagnosis. Alongside this family-centred approach, we will:

- Increase investment to local information, advice and support services (IASS), ensuring the quality of support is improved through enhanced training. Providing a local IASS is a statutory duty of every local authority.
- Include additional capacity for parental support (as was the case for the 2014 reforms). We have consulted on the best way to deliver this but it is a commitment to ensure that there is additional parental support and guidance as the system changes.
- We will couple this with bringing forward measures such as training and consider accreditation to ensure local services can support the reform implementation period.
- We will strengthen the framework within which Parent Carer Forums operate with consistent standards, training and sustainable funding. We will also increase funding for local parent carer forums to enhance their peer support, and have further influence in local SEND systems, working with local partnership boards, ICBs and Best Start Family Hubs as we implement Experts at Hand.
- Introduce Individual Support Plans, which will be developed by settings together with parents and young people, giving every child or young person with SEND a clear and consistent record of their needs and the help they receive. These will be used to communicate provision to parents and actions taken between parents and settings, supporting the relationship between home and setting.

- We are co-designing our reformed EHC needs assessment process, including with parents to ensure that their voices are heard throughout the process and decision making about support for their child or young person is transparent.
- As part of the new training offer on SEND CPD, all staff across the country will have access to flexible courses, with practical advice about how to make education more inclusive, how to work effectively with parents, and how targeted support can ensure every student reaches their full potential – without the need for a diagnosis.

We are reviewing consultation responses alongside feedback from engagement events to understand what is needed nationally and locally and will use this as the basis for future support for families.

As we set out in our consultation, we will strengthen existing local strategic SEND partnerships and strategic planning across the country as part of our reforms, working with schools, trusts and LA partners. These partnerships should foster a sense of collective responsibility to deliver better outcomes and coordinated services for children and young people and their families. We have been clear in the consultation that we are proposing local strategic SEND partnerships include parent representatives.

In our consultation document *SEND Reform: putting children and young people first*, we ask a number of questions related to engaging and working with children and families, in addition to wider space for respondents to share views.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 108) To avoid causing undue alarm and to help rebuild confidence and trust in the system, parents and carers must be fully engaged and any reforms must be implemented gradually and in a carefully phased manner. New approaches should first be piloted through a pathfinder model, allowing for thorough testing in real-world settings before national rollout. This will provide an opportunity to identify potential challenges, address inefficiencies, consult with parents' and carers' groups and make necessary adjustments to ensure reforms are effective, practical, and responsive to the needs of children, young people, and their families. At all times, the Department for Education must have an effective communication strategy, regularly setting out the clear vision for change, and providing reassurance to all affected agencies and individuals that planned reforms are fully planned, coordinated, and funded.**

ACCEPT

Clear and timely communication is essential to rebuilding confidence, helping families understand proposed changes, and ensuring reforms are coordinated and deliverable. Testing proposals with parents, carers, young people and professionals, through structured engagement, will help identify issues early and refine the approach.

This has been exemplified through our ‘test and learn’ Change Programme, which has been testing proposals in relation to the SEND and AP system, working across 9 regions and 32 local areas. Parents, carers, children and young people, along with education, health and care professionals across the whole system have been an integral part of the ‘test and learn’ approach, with co-production and a continuous ‘feedback loop’ core components of the programme.

The Change Programme runs until August 2026 to deliver across the 25/26 Academic year. The learning from the programme continues to be shared across both Change Programme areas and wider and has informed the government launched “Experts at Hand”, a £1.8 billion investment over three years to boost the availability of external support, such as educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, and occupational therapists.

The Experts at Hand offer is a key part of SEND reform within the Schools White Paper and builds on learning from the Change Programme, including the Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC), Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINs) and Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce (APST) pilots

It will continue to build the evidence base and good practice to help local areas deliver an offer that supports mainstream settings across early years, primary, secondary and post-16 to better identify and meet the needs of children and young people with SEND - providing dedicated professional expertise to help more children and young people access support within their settings.

This commitment is also reflected in our 12-week consultation programme, which brought together ministerial engagement, expert input and public participation. Through regional events, children and young people-led sessions, webinars and existing departmental forums, alongside the SEND Development Group, Complex Needs Group and weekly policy deep dives, we are ensuring proposals are co-developed and informed by wide-ranging experience across the SEND system. This approach ensures meaningful conversation, transparent testing of ideas, and robust evidence for final policy decisions, while also supporting the careful phasing-in of reforms so that changes are introduced in a manageable and evidence-based way.

We’ve also listened to concerns about transition to the new system and put in place plans for a phased transition over a generous period.

We have put in place a triple lock of transitional protections that mean no child will lose effective support already in place. This means that every child who has a special school place in 2029 will keep it until they finish education; transition for those children with an EHCP in mainstream will only begin from 2030 once the new inclusive mainstream system has been fully built, and will take place as children naturally move between phases; and ISPs will be put in place for all children who are transitioning from an EHCP before they move to the new system to ensure no break in support.

As they approach the point of transition, children and young people with an existing EHCP will have their needs re-assessed under the new system, with the tribunal as a backstop. If they need a specialist provision package, then they will get a new EHCP naming their package of support. Alternatively, they will transfer to an Individual Support plan developed with families and setting out the support they need.

To aid transition and make it as smooth as possible, every child and young person with an existing EHCP who moves to an ISP will have priority in school admissions and be able to select the mainstream setting of their choice for their next placement.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 119) The Department must urgently engage with Ofsted to ensure that the inclusion criterion within the new inspection framework is robust, measurable, and reflective of the experiences of all pupils, particularly, those with SEND. This should include incorporating metrics such as the proportion of pupils with SEND on roll, their attendance rates, exclusion figures, school swaps, progression and attainment and other indicators of engagement and outcomes, to provide a clearer picture of how effectively schools and multi-academy trusts are supporting these learners. It is important that the new framework does not disadvantage schools with high levels of SEND pupils, particularly in disadvantaged areas, by contextualising quantitative indicators with qualitative evidence, recognising systemic barriers, and balancing accountability with constructive support to avoid disproportionate pressure on teachers' workloads.**

PARTIALLY ACCEPT

We agree with the intent of this recommendation and we will work with Ofsted as they develop their toolkit in line with our reforms. In developing new inspection arrangements for school trusts, we will also ensure they are evaluated for how they support inclusion across their schools.

Ofsted have now published, and are inspecting against, their renewed education inspection framework, which includes a specific evaluation area on inclusion. Inspectors consider how leaders set high expectations for all children and young people, including those with SEND, and put the right support in place to meet their needs.

Inspectors are provided with available data about pupils with SEND prior to inspection through the inspection data summary report (IDSR). More information about the data available to inspectors through the IDSR can be found here: [School inspection data summary report \(IDSR\) guide - GOV.UK](#).

In addition to a separate evaluation area on inclusion, the impact of a school's work on inclusion is a 'golden thread' through the renewed education inspection framework, with inclusive practice a key consideration in all evaluation areas.

More generally, we will continue to engage with Ofsted through the SEND reform process, and Ofsted will continue to review and update its inspection arrangements to align with this.

There will also be a new remit for the Children's Commissioner to provide oversight and scrutiny of SEND reform implementation. The Children's Commissioner will report publicly at regular intervals on the progress of reforms, including identifying gaps, risks, and unintended consequences as well as areas of strength or good practice that we should build on.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 120) The Department for Education should introduce mandatory, comprehensive SEND training for all Ofsted inspectors. The success of the new framework depends on inspectors having a deep understanding of SEND, including how to identify, assess, and evaluate inclusive practice. Without this expertise, there is a significant risk that inspections will be inconsistent, fail to identify gaps in provision, and ultimately undermine the objectives of the framework.**

ACCEPT

As set out in our white paper, *Every Child Achieving and Thriving*, Ofsted have introduced comprehensive training for inspectors on their renewed approach to inclusion.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 122) Area SEND inspections should engage with parents across the locality to gather the perspective of parents of children with SEND on the admissions policies and inclusive practices of local authorities, schools and multi-academy trusts in the area.**

ACCEPT

Area SEND inspections engage with parents across the locality to gather the perspective of parents of children with SEND on a wide range of topics. Following a review of the current framework, which included stakeholder engagement, Ofsted made some changes to the framework to enhance inspection practice. This included providing more opportunities for children, young people and families to share their experiences.

There will be a full consultation on changes to the Area SEND inspection framework, following publication of the government's response to the SEND reform consultation, *SEND Reform: putting children and young people first*. As part of the consultation on the Area SEND inspection framework, we intend to work with Ofsted to consider how the inspection of local area partnerships can be strengthened, including in relation to our focus on mainstream inclusion.

In addition, this summer, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) will be working together to deliver a new series of thematic visits focused on the SEND Local Offer. This work forms part of Ofsted and CQC's wider area SEND inspection framework. The visits will provide information on how the SEND Local Offer is developed to reflect local need, how services are commissioned and how children, young people and their families are made aware of services available to them.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 128) The Government must extend the powers of the Local Government Ombudsman to cover complaints about the delivery of EHC plans, SEN support and other appropriate inclusive education for children with SEND in schools, multi-academy trusts and other education settings. This would strengthen accountability, provide families with a clearer route to redress, and help ensure that statutory responsibilities are met consistently across the system.**

NOT TAKEN FORWARD

National escalation routes for school complaints already exist for non-EHC-related SEND disputes. In the first instance, parents should raise their complaint with the school. If this does not resolve the issue, parents can complain to the Department for Education where a school has acted unreasonably or failed to comply with a statutory duty, including certain SEND duties. We outlined proposed reforms to the school complaints system in the Schools White Paper, which aims to strike the right balance between appropriate burden on schools, while maintaining parents' rights to raise concerns and have these considered fairly and at the right time. The National Inclusion Standards will set out evidence-informed tools and approaches for identifying and supporting children and young people with SEND. Individual Support Plans will reflect the National Inclusion Standards, making much clearer for both families and settings the support that should

be provided should a disagreement arise. When inspecting schools, Ofsted will also evaluate how effectively they are implementing their Inclusion Strategy, which again will refer to the National Inclusion Standards.

For EHC-related disputes, families will be able to appeal to the Tribunal about an LA's decision that a needs assessment is not necessary, whether a child or young person meets the threshold for a specialist provision package and therefore an EHC plan, the type of package they are offered, the placement or type of placement named in an EHC, and a decision to cease an EHC plan.

We recognise that accountability is an important area to get right and will continue to engage families and the sector as part of the consultation exercise and consider their views in our response.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 129) To ensure accountability for inclusive practice, SEND expertise should be embedded within schools and multi-academy trust (MAT) governance structures, for example, by making it mandatory to appoint governors or trustees with specific responsibility for and relevant expertise (including lived experience) of SEND as we saw in Ontario. Without this, inclusive education risks being sidelined at the strategic level, and outcomes for pupils with SEND will continue to be deprioritised.**

ACCEPT

We recognise that governing bodies and trust boards play a critical role in ensuring the provision children and young people receive is high-quality, improves outcomes and drives inclusive culture and practice. School governing bodies are already expected to have a member with specific oversight of SEND. To ensure effective scrutiny and challenge, we will build on this and expect governing bodies and trust boards to interrogate Inclusion Strategies and review Individual Support Plans. We will also provide training to governors on how to most effectively fulfil their oversight role on SEND and update relevant guidance for governors and trust boards to provide further information, including on the data that governors and trustees should see on a regular basis to enable them to effectively monitor the effectiveness of provision.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 145) The SEND Tribunal must remain as a backstop of the accountability process. The Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care must systematically monitor SEND Tribunal outcomes and identify local authorities that repeatedly fail to comply with their statutory duties. The Government should mandate the framework for reporting SEND Tribunal data and undertake focused work with poor performing local authorities to understand why they are so often failing to uphold their statutory**

**duties and support them through resourcing and targeted intervention, including specialised training, to address underlying issues and ensure that the rights of children and young people with SEND are upheld. The SEND White Paper should explicitly identify and set out plans to address any structural or resource-related barriers to effective support.**

ACCEPT

Our proposals for reforming the SEND system include the retention of the SEND Tribunal as an important legal backstop for key decisions about EHC needs assessments, specialist provision and placements. The consultation document also explains our plans to improve parental confidence that local authorities will act on Tribunal judgments and ensure improvements are made to local authorities' future decision-making. We have proposed publishing an annual SEND Tribunals outcomes dashboard, providing anonymised information on the outcomes of SEND Tribunals by local authority. In addition, after each judgment, we propose that local authorities will be required to write to parents explaining the action they will take and by when. Local authorities will also need to publish regular updates that summarise any judgements against them and set out how they will remedy any wider systemic issues. We will also consider how best to support local authorities where there remain issues with decision-making. Local authority reform plans will provide a way of assessing local authorities overall in terms of how they are implementing reforms and any resource or structural barriers. Proposals to strengthen the accountability of health services are set out below.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 150) The outcomes of SEND Tribunal cases must be factored into area SEND inspections, with clear scrutiny of how repeated non-compliance reflects the quality and effectiveness of local provision. Where local authorities fail to uphold their statutory duties, this should directly lower their inspection rating.**

PARTIALLY ACCEPT

Our proposals to improve local authority accountability for acting on Tribunal decisions are set out above, including the new dashboard and ongoing work with local authorities where there are concerns about decision-making. Area SEND inspections evaluate the impact of the local area partnership's arrangements for children and young people with SEND and consider analysis and learning from tribunal applications and resolutions from the last 12 months as part of a range of data sources considered to evaluate local area partnership arrangements. We will work with Ofsted and the CQC to update the Area SEND inspection framework to align to the clarified statutory roles that local authorities and ICBs will have in relation to children and young people with SEND.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 158) There must be mandatory training for health commissioners on good practice in meeting the needs of children with SEND.**

PARTIALLY ACCEPT

There are several high quality learning resources which currently exist, including the Council for Disabled Children's freely accessible [e-learning modules](#) which are for health professionals, commissioners as well as executive leads. In addition, there are improvement tools such as the [What Works in SEND](#) platform, which has examples of effective practice, an implementation toolkit and Effective Practice Evidence Framework.

Furthermore, the [Research & Improvement for SEND Excellence programme](#) works in collaboration with Department for Education (DfE) leads and local areas to develop interventions designed to address local challenges – supporting development needs and facilitating improvement. Together, these offer flexible ways for professionals to build expertise.

As set out in the [NHS Oversight Framework 2025/6](#), ICBs will transform in line with the Model ICB Blueprint, focusing on strategic commissioning and implementing plans to meet the running cost reductions.

A strategic commissioning development programme will be in place from April 2026 to support ICBs and others who commission NHS services to develop as strategic commissioners, as described in the [Strategic Commissioning Framework](#).

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 159) The powers of the SEND Tribunal should be extended to allow it to issue binding recommendations to health services, not just education providers. This would ensure that when a failure to deliver a health provision specified in an EHC plan occurs, health bodies are legally obligated to take corrective action. This should include the introduction of a statutory duty on health services to respond to Tribunal decisions within a defined timeframe, with clear consequences for non-compliance.**

NOT TAKEN FORWARD

We have not proposed changes to health and social care appeals to the SEND Tribunal in our consultation document, including that these should be binding.

This is to allow ICBs to plan and manage to meet total population needs, and for NHS providers to prioritise on the basis of clinical need.

Tribunal decisions on health and social care are non-binding, but local authorities and ICBs are expected to follow them, and in most cases do. If they do not follow the Tribunal's recommendations, they must send a

response setting out the steps they have decided to take (if any) following consideration of the recommendations and give reasons for any decision not to follow the recommendations.

We are working closely with all partners in the SEND system, including health colleagues, to clarify roles and responsibilities, to strengthen accountability. This will strengthen collective responsibility for the outcomes of children and young people and give parents confidence that their children and young people will get the support they need when they need it. The consultation document asked questions about the design and delivery of specialist provision packages to ensure that these can effectively meet children's needs.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 160) The Department for Education must significantly improve cross-departmental coordination with the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England to establish clear, consistent accountability for SEND at the ICB level. Current arrangements are fragmented and lack clarity. Strengthening the role, authority, and visibility of the Senior Responsible Officer for SEND within ICBs is essential to ensure health services are fully held to account for their responsibilities. Without stronger oversight, health bodies will continue to operate without sufficient scrutiny or consequence.**

ACCEPT

Our SEND reforms aim to build a SEND system with clearer roles and responsibilities for all partners and more collective responsibility for the outcomes of children and young people with SEND in a local area. Local partnership working between local authorities, ICBs, health providers, education settings and parents is a foundational building block of successful delivery of SEND services, as has been demonstrated regularly in Area SEND inspections. We will strengthen existing local strategic SEND partnerships and strategic planning across the country as part of our reforms.

The Government's consultation on SEND reforms sets out our proposals to strengthen local area accountability and ensure there are clear standards and outcomes for children and young people with SEND, with all partners having an understanding of what they will have to do to improve their provision and how delivery of support aligns with the principles underpinning reform.

The NHS Medium Term Planning Framework 2026–27 to 2028–29 (published October 2025), included an explicit reference to SEND, reinforcing to ICBs and health providers that they are expected to meet their statutory duties in relation to SEND and to work with NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care to respond to the Government's SEND reforms. It set out NHS priorities on learning disabilities, autism and ADHD, including

ICBs and providers optimising existing resources to reduce long waits for autism and ADHD assessments. It also set goals to reduce the proportion of waits over 18 weeks for community health services and to expand coverage of Mental Health Support Teams in schools and colleges, ahead of the ask for full national coverage by 2029. This is an important reminder during the current time of transformation for ICBs and the NHS.

NHS England guidance ([Appendix A](#)) for ICBs requires that every ICB has board level executive leadership on SEND. Their role is to support the Board with delivery of their statutory duties for SEND. ICBs are currently restructuring to bring consistency in efficiency and effectiveness to ICBs. This has included NHS England sharing with ICBs a good practice guide for their SEND team, adopting national best practice locally. NHS England has statutory duties to oversee the performance of ICBs and undertake an annual assessment of each ICBs, intervening where necessary to address any shortcomings. NHS England works within their NHS operating and oversight frameworks to ensure there is regional assurance and oversight processes in place for ICB assurance working with DfE regions regarding local area inspections.

We recognise that there is substantial reform taking place in local areas, including in relation to ICBs. DfE, DHSC and NHS England will work closely together and with areas to ensure that any changes do not disrupt or deprioritise statutory duties in relation to SEND and will look for further opportunities to strengthen accountability. As set out in our proposed SEND reforms, we will work to develop appropriate SEND metrics across the system to help hold local area partnerships, ICBs, local authorities and providers to account.

We will update the Ofsted and CQC Area SEND inspection framework to align to the clarified statutory roles that local authorities and ICBs will have in relation to children and young people with SEND. Ofsted and CQC will continue to inspect the role of education, health and social care partners responsible for the planning, commissioning and delivery of arrangements for children and young people with SEND in the local area.

Ofsted and CQC will also explore the introduction of a report card for Area SEND inspection to help the inspectorates report on inclusion and other evaluation areas relating to SEND across an area, to provide a consistent approach across local area partnerships.

There will be a full consultation on proposed changes to the Area SEND inspection framework following the publication of the response to the *SEND Reform: putting children and young people first* consultation. This will look at changes needed to Area SEND inspection because of changes to statutory duties of local area partners. In their review of Area SEND inspections, Ofsted/CQC committed to, where appropriate, specifying more clearly which

member of the partnership should take forward areas for improvement, to strengthen accountability for individual partners within a partnership. Any changes to Area SEND inspection 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. We will continue to work with local authorities in our support and intervention approach, including through any periods of reform and transition.

## Improving early years for lasting impact

Early years settings play a vital role in early identification and timely intervention and sit at the heart of reforms to the whole SEND system – as such, we agree with the Committee’s strong emphasis on the early years as the point at which inclusive practice can have the greatest and most lasting impact for children with SEND and we share the Committee’s ambition to strengthen early identification, workforce capability and integrated support.

We are addressing the Committee’s recommendations by setting National Inclusion Standards for early years practice, which will provide a coherent national approach to inclusive practice, helping settings to identify needs earlier and deliver support more effectively. This will sit alongside increased training and dedicated inclusion roles, embedding specialist SEND expertise into mainstream early years settings. We are also investing over £200 million over three years to strengthen the SEND offer in Best Start Family Hubs, creating a more joined up offer.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 165) A national rollout of ELSEC and NELI is essential and should be accompanied by comprehensive, long-term funding and resources to meet the scale of children’s speech and language needs. In addition, the Government should undertake further work to understand where the balance of resource should sit between early years and reception in order to ensure it is able to achieve its goal of 75 per cent of 5-year-olds in England to have a good level of development by 2028.**

PARTIALLY ACCEPT

As set out in the Giving Every Child the Best Start in life strategy, we are continuing to fund access to proven early language programme in reception, including the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) which has been shown to help children build strong speech and language skills. Funding for NELI continues for the next 4 academic years until 28/29 (subject to future spending reviews) for any school that wants it and 11,000 schools are currently registered for the programme. In addition, we are introducing early language leads in Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs and English Hubs

to support early years settings and reception staff. They will provide on-the-job training to early years educators, helping them build confidence in improving children's vital language skills.

As part of our SEND Reform plans, we will be asking all local area partnerships, convened and led by the local authority, to implement an early identification and intervention programme for children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) based on the evaluation of the ELSEC 'test and learn' programme.

In partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England we will work to ensure that there is a new Speech and Language Therapist (SaLT) advanced practitioner in every Integrated Care Board area. These practitioners will work strategically with local authorities and ICBs linking health, education and training systems in order to strengthen and grow the speech and language therapy workforce that supports children and young people in education setting including early years settings. In addition to this, we will invest in upskilling speech and language support workers who provide essential support to children and young people.

The government is changing how specialist support is delivered for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), the Experts at Hand offer will support local area partnerships to focus on proactive and timely support for mainstream education settings, prioritising early identification and intervention so that staff are able to meet the needs of children more quickly and effectively within the setting.

In partnership with the Department for Health and Social Care we will invest over £200m more over the next three years to strengthen the SEND offer in Best Start Family Hubs. The SEND offer will be led by a named professional in every Hub.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 169) To address inconsistency in the delivery of early years provision and the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF), the Department for Education must establish a set of national inclusivity requirements for early years settings. These requirements should be backed by increased, funding to ensure providers are able to deliver inclusive practice in a sustainable way. At the same time, the Disability Access Fund should be reformed by removing its dependency on Disability Living Allowance. The current eligibility criteria act as a barrier for many families, restricting uptake and undermining the fund's effectiveness. Without these reforms, there is a risk that the system continues to perpetuate inequity and discourage inclusive practice at the earliest stage of education.**

PARTIALLY ACCEPT

The *Every Child Achieving and Thriving* White Paper sets out clear plans to strengthen consistency and inclusion across early years provision. As part of the SEND reforms, the government plans to introducing new National Inclusion Standards to help ensure earlier, more consistent, and high-quality support for children with additional needs across all mainstream education settings, including early years. These standards will underpin a more coherent national approach to inclusive practice, helping settings to identify needs earlier and deliver support more effectively.

The Disability Access Fund (DAF) supports disabled children to access their funded early education entitlements, and DLA remains the most reliable and consistent eligibility measure available across local authorities. In 2026–27, the DAF rate increased to £975 per eligible child to help providers make reasonable adjustments. As part of our wider review of early years SEND funding, we are examining how SENIF and DAF operate locally and will consult publicly on early years funding, including elements relevant to DAF, in summer 2026.

In addition, as part of the government’s wider SEND reforms, early years settings will also benefit from the Inclusive Mainstream Fund, which applies in early years as the Inclusive Early Years Fund (IEYF). IEYF provides upfront funding to support setting wide inclusive practice, enabling earlier identification of need and reducing reliance on individual child level funding decisions. This funding sits alongside SENIF, DAF and high needs funding, and represents an early step towards a more coherent and less fragmented early years SEND funding system. The government will build on this through a public consultation on early years funding in summer 2026, which will consider how funding arrangements, including those supporting inclusion and SEND, can better promote equity, consistency and sustainable inclusive practice across the early years sector.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 175) The Department for Education must ensure that Best Start Family Hubs incorporate routine SEND screening and awareness as a core part of their early years services, supported by targeted training for staff and childcare providers to enhance early identification and referral. Additionally, dedicated funding must be allocated within childcare expansion and Family Hub budgets specifically to support SEND related training for early years staff and families of children with SEND, resources, and integrated multi-agency working, ensuring sustainable and effective early intervention.**

ACCEPT

As set out in *SEND reform: putting children and young people first*, we are investing over £200 million over three years to strengthen the SEND offer in Best Start Family Hubs.

This will give families a more joined up local offer from their child's earliest days, with Best Start Family Hubs, early years settings, health partners and local authorities working together to ensure children with SEND and their families get the support they need, when they need it, in a way that feels straightforward and coordinated. Best Start Family Hubs will offer advice, practical support and evidence-based interventions for children with additional needs and their families at the earliest stage, before school entry and ahead of any formal diagnosis or escalation of need. Best Start Family Hubs will have access to evidence-based identification and intervention tools through the National Inclusion Standards, once available.

The investment includes funding for a family-facing practitioner in every hub to support children with additional needs and families, as part of a broader offer. On 30th March, we published: [Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies: guidance for local authorities - GOV.UK](#). This guidance set out detailed information on the Best Start Family Hub SEND offer, including the role expectations and funding remit, in Best Start Family Hub programme guidance for Local Authorities ahead of April delivery.

This investment to strengthen the SEND offer in Best Start Family Hubs is in addition to the commitment of an additional £200 million investment in SEND and inclusion training to upskill teachers and educators across early years, schools and post-16. As part of this additional commitment, we are developing a new free training package for all early years practitioners over the next three years to support early years educators in delivering inclusive, high-quality education for every child.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 176) The commitment for every Best Start Family Hub to have a dedicated SENCO should be embedded within the SEND workforce strategy and extend to educational psychologists and speech and language therapists.**

ACCEPT

As set out in *SEND reform: putting children and young people first*, every Best Start Family Hub will have a family-facing practitioner to support children with additional needs and families from the earliest stages (Best Start Inclusion Practitioner). Early years settings, mainstream schools and colleges will also have more access to specialists such as Educational Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapists through a new Experts at Hand offer. We will work with the sector as we develop our proposals to ensure that Best Start Family Hubs and Experts at Hand work together to provide a joined up comprehensive service.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 177) There is a need to increase access to CPD and ensure that staff from all agencies in every early years setting has the expertise to undertake the effective early identification of SEND**

**needs. Through the Best Start in Life strategy the Government should also ensure that there is a strong and consistent framework for building SEND capacity and good practice in early years settings through the deployment of educational psychologists, speech and language therapists and other specialists in training the workforce. From September 2025, 80 per cent of the funding for early years providers will come from the Government, and the Department should introduce a new set of inclusivity requirements for all early years settings, provide the foundation for greater inclusivity across all early years settings.**

ACCEPT

The government recognises the importance of ensuring that early years settings can access specialist expertise swiftly and consistently. In *SEND reform: putting children and young people first* we set out proposals for the new Experts at Hand (EAH) offer, which brings specialist support—such as speech and language therapists and educational psychologists—directly into mainstream settings to strengthen early identification and intervention. This is part of the wider “Targeted Plus” level of support, ensuring that educators can draw on expert advice as soon as additional needs are identified.

To ensure this expertise is embedded within a coherent national system, the government is also establishing new National Inclusion Standards, to provide a shared, nationally consistent understanding of the best evidence to identify and support children and young people with SEND, equipping early years settings, schools and colleges to intervene early and effectively. The Standards will set out evidence-informed tools, strategies and approaches for educators to draw on to identify and support children and young people with additional needs. Through the Inclusive Early Years Fund, we are providing an additional £47 million in 2026–27 to support the early years sector to become more inclusive of children with SEND, as part of the 3-year £1.6 billion Inclusive Mainstream Fund. This is on top of the above inflation increase to early years entitlements funding rates announced in December 2025. We will also consult later this year on further reforms to simplify funding streams and support earlier intervention.

Early years educators across all settings will also be able to access high-quality professional development through the national training programme backed by over £200m over the next 3 years across all phases of education, building the skills and confidence to support children effectively.

## Post-16

We welcome the Committee’s continued focus on the post 16 phase as a critical transition point for young people with SEND, where inclusive practice, appropriate pathways and practical support can make a

decisive difference to outcomes and life chances. We agree with much of the Committee's analysis, and we are strengthening inspection, provider accountability and support for participation.

While we do not agree with the committee's recommendation to introduce a three route English and maths model, we have already announced a comprehensive package of reforms to improve progression and attainment in English and maths, which addresses many of the same aims. We are also committed to ongoing reform, consultation and scrutiny to ensure the post 16 system is inclusive, proportionate and focused on meaningful progression for all learners.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 187) The Government must introduce a three-route model for those who have not attained grade 4 GCSE in maths and/or English based on their level of attainment at age 16 and their chosen post-16 qualification/ employment pathway:**

- **Students who, based on their GCSE results at age 16 and prior attainment, have a realistic prospect of achieving grade 4 in maths and/or English should be supported to work towards those qualifications.**
- **Vocational courses of study, for which the English and maths content required can be easily identified, should have that content built into the curriculum. Students taking courses with embedded English and maths content which have been rigorously quality assured could then, in consultation with employers, be considered for exemption from the requirement to re-sit English and maths GCSE. Students who, based on past performance, are very unlikely to attain grade 4 in maths and/or English despite multiple resits and who would benefit from pursuing a functional skills qualification in maths and/or English—for example, focused on financial literacy, debt and interest and household budgeting—should be supported to achieve a pass in that form of qualification.**

NOT TAKEN FORWARD

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

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

We are consulting with the sector on the cohort of students who will take the qualifications, qualification structure, content and proposals for achievement and grading.

- Make changes to the current accountability framework to recognise providers' efforts to progress all students toward Level 2 and consult on changes to our performance metrics to incentivise providers to enter students into exams only when they are ready to make progress. In addition, the renewed Education Inspection Framework, launched in November 2025 places a strong focus on developing skills for learners and apprentices who begin their programmes without level 2 English and/or maths.
- The Further Education Commissioners published the 'Effective Practice in Delivering 16 to 19 Level 2 English and Maths' guide. The guide uses examples of effective practice across ten themes, from FE Colleges within the sector to advise providers on how best to deliver English and maths in a FE setting.

These are in addition to increased funding for providers and support through training.

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

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

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

‘Stepping stone’ qualifications at level 1 and below are also available for those students who have achieved a GCSE grade 2 or below and are deemed not yet ready to continue studying a level 2 qualification, as part of their journey towards Level 2. They include Functional Skills at level 1 and below, ESOL qualifications, and other qualifications that have been nominated by institutions and approved by the Department for Education.

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

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 190) The Department for Education should introduce a dedicated and ring-fenced funding stream for SEN support beyond the age of 16. This would enable further education providers to recruit and retain specialist staff, provide tailored learning resources, and make the reasonable adjustments necessary to meet the diverse needs of learners with SEND. Such investment is essential to ensuring that mainstream FE provision is genuinely inclusive and that young people with SEND have equitable opportunities to succeed.**

PARTIALLY ACCEPT

We share the Committee’s commitment to ensuring that young people with SEND can access high quality, inclusive provision in further education. Our consultation sets out a clear and ambitious programme of reform aimed at investing in mainstream inclusion, improving early intervention, strengthening the role of the specialist sector and ensuring that resources are used effectively across the system.

It is important to recognise further education providers are already among the most inclusive parts of our education landscape. They are supported in this through the substantial funding already embedded in core budgets, distributed through funding factors such as Low Prior Attainment and economic disadvantage factors as well as within the base funding rates. Colleges have the flexibility to deploy this resource to meet the needs of their learners, routinely supporting learners with a wide range of needs and make extensive reasonable adjustments as a matter of course. Our reforms are designed to build on and strengthen this strong foundation.

As part of these reforms, we are already introducing significant additional support to help providers deliver more preventative, “upstream” interventions for learners with SEND and other emerging needs. This includes the new Inclusive Mainstream Fund, which is specifically designed to strengthen early, targeted support within mainstream settings, reducing escalation of need and improving outcomes for all learners requiring

additional help. Alongside this, we are reviewing the 16–19 funding formula to ensure it supports the delivery of inclusive, high quality provision for all learners, including those with SEND.

Through the proposed reforms we aim to transfer some funding from the high needs block into mainstream budgets, ensuring that resources sit “upstream” where they can make the greatest impact. This will give providers greater predictability over their funding and greater flexibility in how they meet the needs of their students.

These steps will significantly increase the resources in post-16 providers core budgets to help them better support young people with SEND. We do not believe that introducing ring fences for SEND funding is the right approach. As set out in the consultation, ring fenced funding brings significant administrative burdens, reduces flexibility, and risks fragmenting provision in ways that do not support the holistic, responsive support we want for young people with SEND and other young people with wider needs.

As we implement reforms we will look at how best to identify the resources to support SEND to help improve transparency in the post 16 system and support our accountability measures.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 191) When Ofsted considers the accountability of post-16 education settings, it should ensure a stronger focus on inclusivity and outcomes for young people with SEND.**

ACCEPT

The new FES inspection approach includes a provider level judgement on inclusion. In addition, throughout the toolkit there are evidence gathering prompts and grading standards which require inspectors to collate evidence and determine grades based on how well inclusive practice supports the different evaluation areas. For example, as part of the Participation and development evaluation area (which is assessed separately for each of education programmes for young people, adult learning programmes, apprenticeships and high needs provision) Ofsted consider ‘how leaders ensure that learners and apprentices are supported to attend and participate well in their studies, including those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND or high needs, those who are known (or previously known) to social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or well-being, such as young carers and those without level 2 English and/or mathematics; this includes support for those at risk of becoming NEET. As such we consider that Ofsted’s inspection framework provides a very strong focus on inclusion and SEN practice and this is comprehensive and effective

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 195) The Department should review home to school transport and identify costs across regions. Additionally, the Department must mandate that all local authorities provide travel training programmes for young people with SEND in this age group to promote independence and safe travel where this is appropriate. Statutory transport provision should be guaranteed based on clear criteria such as distance from education settings, level of need, and other relevant factors to ensure no young person is unfairly disadvantaged. We welcome the acknowledgement in the Government's fair funding review of the need for comprehensive costings for current and future home to school transport need. The Department for Education must work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Transport as they prepare to introduce a bespoke formula to recognise Home to School transport costs. As part of this collaboration, the Department for Education should ensure that there is transparency around how outcomes are measured and reported. We support the recommendation of the Transport Select Committee with regard to the provision of bus passes for under 22-year-olds.**

PARTIALLY ACCEPT

Last year, the department established a local authority data collection on home to school travel, covering both home to school transport for children of compulsory school age and post-16 transport. This data is building our understanding of the transport that local authorities are providing and the associated costs, and our aim is for it to support local authority benchmarking and the sharing of good practice. The collection is currently voluntary, but our intention is for it to be made a mandatory annual collection. The 2026 collection took place in February, and the department plans to publish findings in the summer.

Local authorities have a duty to publish and implement a transport policy which specifies: arrangements for the provision of transport or otherwise which they consider are necessary to facilitate the attendance of post-16 year olds in education; and the arrangements for financial assistance which it is necessary to make in respect of the reasonable travelling expenses of post-16 year olds.

Setting statutory criteria for post-16 transport would be undeliverable for local authorities without additional funding. We do not have current plans to do this because we do not think setting statutory criteria is the best route to sufficiently targeting those most in need or would further enhance the delivery of existing duties.

We will work with local authorities to understand how they are delivering these duties and support the consistent delivery of Independent Travel Training for those young people who would benefit from this. As part of our qualifications reform, we are considering including Independent Travel Training within both our proposed level 2 pathways, to employment and level 3 as part of the enrichment, employability and pastoral element. We are exploring options to ensure parents and young people are aware of how transport support differs at post-16 as part of our SEND reforms, so this can be incorporated into the destination decisions made by young people.

In addition, the Bus Services Act 2025 puts the power over local bus services back in the hands of local leaders, enabling them to shape services that best meet the needs of their local communities. DfE is working with DfT to ensure that transport to education settings is considered in drafting the guidance and secondary legislation they will deliver to support the Act.

DfE has worked with DfT to ensure that *Better Connected, a strategy for integrated transport*, takes account of transport to schools and education settings and encourages local transport authorities to integrate transport to education settings with wider public transport networks, reducing costs and improving service provision and frequency. It also emphasises the importance of improving the reliability, accessibility and safety of public transport and creating safer streets to support walking, wheeling and cycling.

This is also reflected in guidance for Local Transport Authorities which encourages authorities to consider transport to education settings in their Local Transport Plans, and to work with education departments to ensure joined-up planning locally.

The government's investment in walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure, including safer routes to schools, will promote healthier lifestyles and provide low-cost, accessible travel options for pupils and staff, increasing the amount of choice in how journeys to school are made. Together, these reforms signal a shift toward a more coherent, high-quality system in which home to school transport and post-16 travel are embedded within wider transport policy making and network planning, rather than sitting at the margins.

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published the conclusions of the Fair Funding Review 2.0 in November 2025, confirming its plans for the reformed funding system for local government. This includes a bespoke formula for home to school transport for children of compulsory school age. This bespoke formula ensures that each local authority's relative need to spend on home to school transport is taken into account in their overall funding allocations. Funding for post-16 transport is allocated through MHCLG's Foundation Formula.

## Equipping the workforce

The Committee is right that a confident, skilled and well supported workforce is fundamental to delivering a genuinely inclusive education system. We welcome the breadth of the Committee's recommendations in this area and are pleased to accept your recommendations on strengthening SEND training, professional development and access to specialist expertise across all roles and career stages. While we also agree with the Committee on the importance of SENCOs, we also believe that SEND needs to be the responsibility of all staff and so our reforms will ensure that both SENCOs and other professionals are equipped for their evolving roles.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 203) The Department for Education must implement a continuous review and update cycle for the ITT and ECF to keep training relevant and effective. It must urgently increase the number of ITT placements and explore the viability of mandating every teacher to complete a placement in a specialist setting during ITT or ECF. Without practical, hands-on experience supporting children and young people with SEND, teachers will remain ill-equipped to meet their needs.**

ACCEPT

Supporting children with SEND is a critical element of all initial and early career teacher training. Since our reforms to early career training, 80,910 teachers have now either started or completed an ECF-based induction, which represents 15.8% of the state school teaching workforce (according to the 2024/25 School Workforce Census).

It is also important that we keep that content under review to ensure it reflects the latest evidence. We have introduced significantly more content on adaptive teaching and supporting children and young people with SEND into the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF), which underpins ITT and the ECTE. We have also strengthened requirements on training providers to ensure materials for early career teachers contain enhanced content to support teaching pupils with SEND. A further review is planned for 2027.

We are exploring how to encourage more placements in specialist settings during ITT. The high volume of trainees each year (c33,000 in 2025/26) means that mandating this for all trainees would not be feasible. Early Career Teacher Entitlement (ECTE), formerly referred to as Early Career Framework (ECF) based training, does not include teaching placements; instead, it is delivered as part of a teacher's employment during their first two years in the profession.

The ITTECF is just one element of the support available for teachers working with pupils with SEND and it is essential that all teachers—at every career stage—are equipped to meet the needs of all children, including those with SEND. We are also investing £200m of new funding to deliver a new SEND CPD programme which will mean that all staff across early years, schools and colleges, can receive training in inclusive practice.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 204) The Department for Education should provide comprehensive training within ITT and clear guidance for schools, multi-academy trusts and education staff on delivering inclusive education practice. This will ensure that all settings understand their legal obligations and are equipped to make the necessary accommodations to support pupils with SEND effectively. Embedding this knowledge is crucial for promoting inclusive practices, preventing discrimination, and fostering environments where every child can thrive.**

ACCEPT

The ITT criteria and the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) set out the requirements for all ITT leading to QTS which is delivered through accredited ITT providers. All accredited ITT providers are inspected by Ofsted. The ITTECF now contains significantly more content on adaptive teaching and supporting children and young people with SEND, for example developing an understanding of different pupil needs and learning how to provide opportunities for success for all pupils. We have also strengthened requirements on training providers to ensure materials for early career teachers contain enhanced content to support teaching pupils with SEND and will review this again in 2027 to ensure they continue to reflect the latest evidence.

- In addition, the new training package, backed by £200 million of new funding, will ensure that every teacher, educator, teaching assistant and leader across early years, schools and post-16 settings can be trained to support pupils with SEND.
- There will also be a new requirement set out in the SEND Code of Practice for all settings to ensure that staff receive training on SEND and inclusion. By embedding this expectation across early years, schools and colleges, we will upskill staff and promote inclusive practice. Leaders will retain flexibility to select training that fits their context, while guidance and signposting will support quality and consistency.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 211) SEND CPD should be made mandatory to ensure that all educators are equipped to meet the diverse needs of children and young people with SEND. This could be achieved through a nationally recognised supplementary qualification in SEND that all existing teachers must complete within a defined timeframe (e.g. three**

**years), similar to the Early Career Framework but focused on inclusion and SEND best practice; or through the incorporation of mandatory SEND modules into existing CPD requirements; or through performance management frameworks, ensuring ongoing engagement and application in classroom settings.**

ACCEPT

- There will be a new requirement set out in the SEND Code of Practice for all settings to ensure that staff receive training on SEND and inclusion. This is supported by £200m of new funding to deliver a new SEND CPD programme which will mean that all staff across early years, schools and colleges, will receive training in inclusive practice.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 218) To strengthen leadership on SEND, the Department should, in the short term, mandate that at least one member of the Senior Leadership Team in every school and every multi-academy trust holds SENCO qualifications.**

AND

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 219) The Department should also publish guidance on appropriate SENCO-to-pupil ratios and develop a national strategy to ensure these ratios are achieved consistently across schools and multi-academy trusts.**

AND

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 220) Within four years, the Department should introduce a requirement for all new headteachers to hold a SEND-specific qualification. Ensuring that SEND expertise is embedded at the highest levels of school or multi-academy trust leadership will promote strategic oversight, improve the quality of inclusive practice, and better meet the needs of pupils with SEND.**

PARTIALLY ACCEPT/UNDER REVIEW

We recognise the challenges of the current SENCO role and we have committed to helping settings create inclusive workforce models that use SENCO expertise more effectively. Currently, the role is excessively bureaucratic and administrative and places responsibility for inclusive practice and understanding how to support children with SEND on just one person – it needs to be the responsibility of all staff. We are working with the sector to redefine roles and responsibilities across the system to drive inclusive practice and anticipate the SENCO role becoming more strategic and less administrative, focusing on strategic leadership and supporting

the development of high-quality practice. Where necessary, we will revise legislation and consider the experience and training needed to ensure that SENCOs and other professionals are equipped for their evolving roles.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 224) SEND content should be an integral part of teaching assistant training, and they should be provided with regular opportunities for CPD and peer support. This could be through incentivised or ring-fenced funding for schools and multi-academy trusts to release teaching assistants and learning support assistants for SEND CPD, removing practical barriers to participation and ensuring consistent take-up across the sector.**

ACCEPT

As set out in the White Paper, we will improve professional development for staff at all points in their career and invest in training to ensure that teachers can identify and meet a broader range of needs, including the needs of children with SEND. Teaching assistants will benefit from this, and we are pleased that part of the £200m announced for our landmark SEND training offer will include investment for teaching assistants so that they feel equipped and confident to support all students with SEND. We recognise that other training opportunities for teaching assistants are also important, for example there are apprenticeships such as the Level 3 Teaching Assistant apprenticeship available.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 225) The Department should issue guidance on teaching assistant-to-pupil ratios and urgently address the worsening crisis in recruiting and retaining TAs and learning support assistants to ensure these ratios can be met. These professionals are vital to the delivery of inclusive education, yet their contribution continues to be undervalued and under supported. A robust and comprehensive strategy is urgently required. This must include:**

- **A clear career progression framework with opportunities to develop specialist expertise and the opportunity for some TAs to progress to qualified teacher status.**
- **Competitive pay increases that reflect the skill, responsibility, and complexity of their roles.**
- **Expanded and better-promoted apprenticeship pathways to attract new entrants and diversify the workforce.**
- **Clearer communication to schools, multi-academy trusts and stakeholders about the distinct functions, expectations, and career progression routes within TA and LSA roles.**

**AND**

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 226) These measures are essential. Without decisive action, the system will continue to lose experienced staff, leaving vulnerable pupils without the support they need and deserve.**

PARTIALLY ACCEPT

Teaching assistants and learning support assistants have a crucial role in helping children to achieve and thrive and supporting high-quality teaching.

Recognising the vital role support staff play in the operation of schools and young people's education, and to help recruit and retain the support staff we need, we have legislated for and will establish the new School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB). This body will enable bespoke negotiation on pay and terms and conditions to ensure that staff are recognised and rewarded for the work they do, as well as advise on training and career progression. To recognise that the majority of the school workforce is female and facing recruitment and retention challenges, we set out in the White Paper that we will remit the SSSNB to prioritise maternity pay in its first year of operation and will provide the funding for the SSSNB to negotiate improvements in maternity pay equivalent to the improvements proposed for teachers in the White Paper.

The Education Endowment Foundation's guidance report the 'Deployment of Teaching Assistants' makes a number of recommendations to help schools make decisions about how to deploy their teaching assistants to ensure they are used effectively.

We will also continue to fund and promote research into how schools deploy their support staff in evidence-based ways to deliver the best outcomes for children.

Apprenticeships offer key training and career progression opportunities for teaching assistants. The new Level 5 Specialist Teaching Assistant apprenticeship, which candidates started undertaking in the 2024/25 academic year, provides the opportunity for teaching assistants to progress and develop by specialising in one of three areas (SEND, Social and Emotional Wellbeing or Curriculum provision). In the 2024/25 academic year, there were 4,580 starts on the Level 3 Teaching Assistant apprenticeship, and 1,270 starts on the Level 5 Specialist Teaching Assistant apprenticeship.

We recognise the importance of ensuring there are a range of accessible routes into teaching that support talented individuals, including experienced TAs, to gain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). In addition to fee-funded initial teacher training, we support salaried and apprenticeship routes to allow trainees to gain QTS whilst employed in a school. This includes the

Postgraduate Teacher Apprenticeship (PGTA), and the new Teacher Degree Apprenticeship (TDA) for those without an existing undergraduate degree. For the 2026/27 academic year, we have committed to providing salary grant funding for up to 150 secondary maths TDA trainees, to support schools with the cost of employing an apprentice.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 230) Local authority staff require improved training on child development, SEND law, parent engagement and mediation, alongside changes in practice that strengthen accountability and foster more constructive relationships with parents and carers. This should include meaningful parental involvement at every stage of the decision-making process regarding a child's needs and support. Embedding a more collaborative and transparent approach would not only enhance trust and outcomes for families but also help alleviate the pressures contributing to staff burnout within local authorities.**

ACCEPT

The Schools White Paper sets out unequivocal expectations for every local authority on the quality and timeliness of SEND support, including planning school places effectively and providing the expert support that schools and families need, with significant investment in local authorities to transform SEND support.

Interim consultation findings highlight that parental lived experience is regarded as essential expertise, and children, young people and families should be equal partners in shaping support and services through early and meaningful co-production. That is why we will have a greater focus on participation and embedding co-production at national, regional and local level with meaningful involvement families in the design and delivery of SEND services and provision

We committed to continue to work with and expand parent carers in strategic partnership roles to support system-wide improvements, improving local parent carer forums with better standards, training and funding, and increasing investment in training and support for information, advice and support services, which includes potential accreditation of advocacy, to improve support for families and rebuild confidence in the system. Our current Participation programme offers bespoke training packages to support local areas (schools, LAs, PCFs, ICB's) to develop mechanisms and strategies for children and young people engagement and co-production.

In March 2026, we commissioned local authorities, together with their Integrated Care Boards, to develop SEND reform plans by June 2026.

The department will use these plans to hold them accountable to deliver strong outcomes for children and young people with SEND and will act decisively where progress does not materialise. Our SEND Improvement and Intervention programmes target local areas that are showing signs of decline in service. Where failure is persistent, we will not hesitate to use the full range of intervention powers including the consideration of installing a trust to take over the local authority's responsibilities.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 240) The DfE and DHSC should urgently develop a joint SEND workforce plan to address shortages and build capacity across education, health, and care services. This should include explicit measures to deliver a shift in the deployment of educational psychologists, speech and language therapists and other allied health professionals away from undertaking assessments and writing reports and towards greater deployment in education settings, delivering therapeutic support for children and upskilling early years practitioners, teachers and support staff. This will enable professionals to concentrate on delivering frontline support. Such an approach would help retain skilled practitioners within the system and encourage those who have left the profession, often due to excessive paperwork and limited direct engagement to return.**

ACCEPT

As set out in *SEND Reform: putting children and young people first*, we are providing around £1.8bn over the next three years for local area partnerships, including local authorities and Integrated Care Boards, to work together to develop a new 'Experts at Hand' offer. This new offer is designed to strengthen the capability of mainstream education settings by providing access to support from key services and health and specialist education practitioners, such as education psychologists, speech and language therapists or specialist teachers. This will align with the Government's 10 Year Workforce Plan.

We want more opportunities for health and education professionals to work directly with education staff and children in mainstream education settings, upskilling the mainstream workforce to support children and young people with commonly occurring needs, rather than undertaking statutory individualised assessments.

This will give settings easier and earlier access to expert advice without a child or young person requiring an assessment or referral. Practitioners will share effective strategies and interventions for commonly occurring needs and offer tailored guidance as needs change. This builds on the emerging evidence from Early Language Support for Every Child and Partnerships

for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools, which show the benefits of embedding health and other specialist professionals in mainstream settings to de-escalate needs.

Experts at Hand will be delivered through a blend of existing specialist capacity and new staff brought in over time, ensuring the expertise available grows sustainably as the offer develops.

We will also grow the specialist workforce (of educational psychologists and speech and language therapists), backed by a total of more than £40m. Of this funding, £26m will go towards training at least 200 educational psychologists per year in 2026 and 2027. This will be followed by further investment to train more from 2028, subject to future spending review. We want to reduce time spent on paperwork, and allow EPs to focus on early identification, intervention and support for every child and young person.

The remaining £15m will be invested to establish new speech and language therapist advanced practitioners in every ICB geographical area, to get more SaLTs working in educational settings. It will also be used to invest in upskilling speech and language support workers and to promote the existing Level 6 Speech and Language Therapist apprenticeship programme. We will work with the Department for Health and Social Care and NHS England to achieve this.

This Government is also committed to publishing a 10 Year Workforce Plan for the NHS to set out action to create a workforce ready to deliver the transformed service set out in the 10 Year Health Plan. The 10 Year Workforce Plan will ensure the NHS has the right people in the right places, with the right skills to care for patients, when they need it.

LAs and ICBs will work together to strategically plan their approach to workforce they both need to access, and where there are opportunities to attract returners.

## Getting to a sustainable model of funding

We welcome the Committee's clear recognition that the sustainability of the SEND system is inseparable from the way inclusion is funded and incentivised across mainstream and specialist provision. Under the current system, despite an 87% increase in high needs funding over the last 6 years, outcomes for children and young people with SEND have not improved and remain too low. We agree that current funding arrangements, particularly the real terms erosion of the notional threshold and the imbalance between early and high cost support, have contributed to rising demand, adversarial processes and growing inequity.

Our investment will be focussed on delivering better outcomes through a reformed system. The longer term trajectory we are establishing is towards a more transparent, equitable and inclusive funding system, which is why we are pleased to accept your recommendations on rebalancing funding towards early intervention and providing stability for local authorities.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 250) The current £6,000 notional threshold is outdated and inadequate. It must be automatically updated each year in line with inflation to prevent further erosion of support for pupils with SEND. This is a necessary correction to address years of chronic underfunding. This funding should also be ringfenced to ensure it is used exclusively for supporting pupils with SEND and to improve the transparency and accountability of the resources schools and multi-academy trusts are committing to deliver inclusivity. However, these measures alone will not be enough to create the change desperately needed in this failing system. The Department must set a clear trajectory towards a more sustainable and equitable funding model that is informed by, and able to deliver, the Department’s definition of inclusive mainstream education.**

PARTIALLY ACCEPT

We agree with the principle the Committee sets out here. The current approach to funding support for children and young people with SEND, has been a major contributor to the challenges the system faces. It contradicts international evidence suggesting SEND systems that prioritise broader services for a wide group of children tend to be more inclusive and less adversarial.

More specifically, we also agree that the current approach to notional SEN budgets and the £6,000 effective financial threshold should be reviewed. Freezing this in cash terms since 2013 (a figure itself based on 2009 costs) has resulted in a more than 50% decrease in real terms in expectations of mainstream schools, at a time when total school funding was increasingly squeezed. This means that some children whose needs were entirely met from mainstream school budgets shares are now receiving support through EHCPs, with the associated costs funded by LAs.

In *SEND Reform: putting children and young people first*, we set a trajectory towards a more sustainable and equitable funding model. We propose to streamline the current school funding landscape by clearly identifying each school’s share of their core funding for inclusion. For each school there will be a transparent share of core funding to meet the new mainstream expectations. This is part of the wider drive towards simpler and more consistent funding as we move to a direct NFF. 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 line with the Committee's recommendation, this will come with substantially strengthened accountability and transparency requirements for how this funding is used. We are introducing this approach by requiring schools to publish Inclusion Strategies, with Inclusive Mainstream Funding supporting schools to develop these and to improve the provision within them. The strategy will cover provision made from the whole of the school's budget, which includes the new Inclusive Mainstream Funding, alongside core allocations through the schools national funding formula.

With the Specialist Provision Packages, we propose to move towards a cohort-based funding model for specialist provision, meaning that we will be able to review the need to continue a financial threshold (that is, the threshold currently set at £6,000) altogether. Ahead of this longer-term goal, we are considering consulting ways to allow local authorities to pass more of their high needs funding directly to local mainstream schools and thus increase schools' and colleges' notional SEN budgets, building on the approach taken in some local authorities. This will enable improved inclusive provision by putting more funding for SEND into schools' and colleges' core budgets – with settings meeting a greater proportion of SEND costs out of their budgets and to ensure top-up funding is only for complex, low incidence needs.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 254) The Government should undertake a rigorous cost-benefit analysis to understand the short- and long-term economic benefits of investing in a fully inclusive education system.**

**AND**

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 256) The High Needs Block should be refocused to enable and incentivise earlier intervention. Currently, a significant proportion of this funding is directed towards supporting high-cost, specialist provision once needs have escalated. While such provision is vital for some, a more preventative approach is needed to reduce long-term need and improve outcomes. Redirecting a greater share of High Needs funding towards early identification and support within mainstream settings and through multi-agency services will help address emerging needs and ensure that good support is put in place at the outset.**

ACCEPT

We have set out our case for change in *SEND Reform: putting children and young people first* focusing on a more inclusive education system. This sets out our evidence on the impact of inclusion on attainment and wider outcomes.

As part of evaluation plans, the department intend to build the evidence base on the impacts and benefits of an inclusive education system. Planned research projects will provide new insights and fill evidence gaps, for example, research on inclusive mainstream practice, a longitudinal study and programme impact evaluations. Evidence on value for money will be supported by these research projects and evaluations to understand whether the investment profile is delivering and achieving expected outcomes and impacts.

Over time, we aim to re-balance funding, directing more funding into core budgets for schools, early years and colleges, while maintaining strong support for those with the most complex needs. Settings will be better equipped for meeting a wider range of commonly occurring needs, enabled by a funding route that allows for more proactive planning of the support their pupils may require and allows them to deliver tailored support more flexibly. We plan to do this by directing a portion of the high needs budget into the core budgets of schools and colleges. At the moment, this money is currently allocated to education settings through EHCP 'top-ups', but in future, more of it will go straight into schools' and colleges' core budgets so they can respond to children and young people's needs more quickly and flexibly. Early years settings will also receive more of this funding up front through local authorities. Schools, colleges and early years settings will be responsible for how they use this funding, along with their wider SEND budgets.

Mainstream settings will have confidence in more consistent funding for SEND. Our planning assumption is that the funding mainstream settings receive directly to support children with SEND will increase at least in real terms per pupil in each year once reforms are implemented, subject to decisions on funding made as part of future spending reviews. Funding for SEN will remain in mainstream budgets, rebalanced to be part of core mainstream funding to be spent on supporting children and young people with SEND in a responsive and adaptive way.

In addition, specialist funding will also be reformed to create a fair, transparent system that gives providers stable, predictable funding to deliver high-quality education and integrated support for children with the most complex needs, while moving towards funding for cohorts instead of individual top-ups.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 260) A comprehensive review of the National Funding Formula is urgently needed to ensure funding is allocated fairly and reflects the real level of need across the country. The current formula fails to address historic underfunding, ignores rising inflation, does not account for regional differences in cost and need and ignores hidden pockets of deprivation. These gaps are driving**

**deep and persistent inequalities in SEND provision. Any credible funding system must correct these failures and provide a stable, needs-based foundation for support.**

ACCEPTED

As set out in *SEND Reform: putting children and young people first*, we will review how best to target funding to schools and colleges. As more funding flows to schools and colleges through mainstream funding, rather than the high needs funding system, we will seek to improve the allocation to support settings with the costs of SEND provision. We will consult on both how we can best target funding at schools and colleges to meet SEND need most effectively, and how best to identify the share of funding to support education providers in delivery of SEND provision and distribution of the funding rebalanced from the high needs budget. This work will align with the current review of the 16–19 funding formula, as well as work to develop and test a new model for targeting disadvantage funding to help schools narrow the attainment gap, as set out in the *Every Child Achieving and Thriving* white paper.

(Recommendation, Paragraph 268) We believe that a reset of local authority finances through a partial write-off of SEND-related deficits could provide a necessary step towards long-term stability. However, this must be approached with care, recognising the progress made by some local authorities through the Delivering Better Value in SEND programme and Safety Valve agreements, and the contributions already made by some local authorities from their General Fund towards SEND over and above contributions from their High Needs education block. It is essential that the Department for Education engages meaningfully with local government representatives to develop a fair and transparent approach that supports improvement while ensuring accountability. The Department must provide further detail on this in the upcoming SEND white paper due in Autumn 2025.

ACCEPT

This government is committed to supporting local authorities with their DSG deficits as we transition to a reformed SEND system. We announced at the Local Government Finance Settlement on 9 February 2026 that all local authorities with a SEND deficit will be eligible in 2026–27 to receive a High Needs Stability Grant covering 90% of their High Needs-related DSG deficit accrued up to the end of 2025–26, so councils can focus on what matters: supporting children and families.

Alongside the announcement of the High Needs Stability Grant, it was announced that all Safety Valve agreements will come to an end and be replaced by the new, wider approach to managing DSG deficits and delivering reform across all local areas. LAs in the Safety Valve programme

will be treated equitably with other LAs; both Safety Valve funding received and general fund contributions made by the LA will be taken into account in the calculation of their grant allocation.

To receive the grant each local authority must develop, submit and receive DfE approval of a Local SEND Reform Plan that sets out a clear pathway towards an inclusive system that meets the needs of children and young people and supports the wider vision for SEND reform. Local authorities received the commissioning pack for these plans in March.

For deficits arising in 2026–27 and 2027–28, local authorities can expect that we will continue to take an appropriate and proportionate approach, though it will not be unlimited. Future support will take into account local authorities' successful delivery of their approved Local SEND Reform Plan, including appropriate use of investment funding to establish an Experts at Hand offer.

## Building stronger partnerships

We also recognise that strong, accountable partnerships, particularly between the education and health systems, are essential to delivering effective SEND support and improving outcomes for children and young people. We agree that recent NHS restructuring presents both a risk and an opportunity, and we are pleased to accept recommendations that strengthen the role of Integrated Care Boards, clarify responsibilities and raise the profile of SEND within health systems.

While we agree on the direction of travel and the need to deliver more joined up, consistent support across education, health and care, we are taking a phased approach that builds on existing powers, guidance, and investment and doesn't pre-empt work currently underway across government.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 276) SEND should be identified as a priority across the health system and ongoing NHS restructuring must be used as an opportunity to strengthen the role and accountability of health services in supporting children and young people with SEND. This includes ensuring that ICBs are fully engaged in local SEND systems, with clearly defined responsibilities and mechanisms for joint planning and delivery. The seniority, authority and visibility of senior responsible officers for SEND within ICBs must be increased.**

ACCEPT

Our SEND reforms aim to build a SEND system with clearer roles and responsibilities for all partners and more collective responsibility for the outcomes of children and young people with SEND in a local area. Local partnership working between local authorities, Integrated Care Boards,

health providers, education settings and parents is a foundational building block of successful delivery of SEND services, as has been demonstrated regularly in Area SEND inspections. We will strengthen existing local strategic SEND partnerships and strategic planning across the country as part of our reforms.

The Government's consultation on SEND reforms sets out our proposals to strengthen local area accountability and ensure there are clear standards and outcomes for children and young people with SEND, with all partners having an understanding of what they will have to do to improve their provision and how delivery of support aligns with the principles underpinning reform.

The NHS Medium Term Planning Framework 2026–27 to 2028–29 (published October 2025), included an explicit reference to SEND, reinforcing to Integrated Care Boards and health providers that they are expected to meet their statutory duties in relation to SEND and to work with NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care to respond to the Government's SEND reforms. This is an important reminder during the current time of transformation for ICBs and the NHS. The NHS Medium Term Planning Framework was explicit that ICBs and providers are expected to optimise existing resources to reduce long waits for ADHD and autism assessments and improve the quality of assessments by implementing existing and new guidance as published. It also set goals to reduce the proportion of waits over 18 weeks for community health services and to expand coverage of Mental Health Support Teams in schools and colleges, ahead of the ask for full national coverage by 2029.

NHS England guidance ([Appendix A](#)) for ICBs requires that every ICB has board level executive leadership on SEND. Their role is to support the Board with delivery of their statutory duties for SEND. ICBs are currently restructuring to bring consistency in efficiency and effectiveness to ICBs. This has included NHS England sharing with ICBs a good practice guide for their SEND team, adopting national best practice locally. NHS England has statutory duties to oversee the performance of ICBs and undertake an annual assessment of each ICBs, intervening where necessary to address any shortcomings. NHS England works within their NHS operating and oversight frameworks to ensure there is regional assurance and oversight processes in place for ICB assurance working with DfE regions regarding local area inspections.

We recognise that there is substantial reform taking place in local areas, including in relation to ICBs. DfE, DHSC and NHS England will work closely together and with areas to ensure that any changes do not disrupt statutory duties in relation to SEND and will look for further opportunities to

strengthen accountability. As set out in our proposed SEND reforms, we will work to develop appropriate SEND metrics across the system to help hold local area partnerships, ICBs, local authorities and providers to account.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 277) Bringing education and health more closely together should be supported by an evidence-led approach, drawing on the role of NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) to produce new SEND guidelines and intervention pathways.**

PARTIALLY ACCEPT

The Government recognises the value of authoritative, evidence-based guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) in driving up standards. NICE has already developed guidelines on ‘Social, emotional and mental wellbeing in primary and secondary education’ (July 2022) and ‘Disabled children and young people up to 25 with severe complex needs: integrated service delivery and organisation across health, social care and education’ (last updated January 2023) that include guidance on services for children and young adults with relevant SEND. NICE keeps its guidance under active surveillance and decisions on whether published guidelines should be updated in light of new evidence are taken by the NICE prioritisation board, chaired by the NICE Chief Medical Officer in line with its published prioritisation framework.

To ensure teachers and educators can support children before needs escalate, we will develop National Inclusion Standards that set out evidence-informed tools and approaches for identifying and supporting children and young people with SEND.

Specialist Provision Packages, for children and young people with complex needs, will set out the support required for specific profiles of need and the resources required to deliver the packages. They will reflect the best available evidence from both research and practice. EHCPs will guarantee statutory entitlements to the educational provision from the Specialist Provision Package that each child and young person needs, and their expected outcomes, alongside care provision and statutory entitlements to health provision.

An independent expert panel will oversee the development of the National Inclusion Standards and Specialist Provision Packages and keep them under regular review. The panel will draw on evidence from academics, education leaders and practitioners, the Education Endowment Foundation, health and social care professionals, and UKRI. They will promote high-quality, evidence-based practice, ensure alignment across the system, engage directly with children and families, and commission new research where needed.

A health expert will co-chair the independent expert panel overseeing the development of the Specialist Provision Packages and National Inclusion Standards.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 278) Crucially, this must be backed by appropriate financial investment from the health sector to meet statutory duties, provide timely access to therapies and assessments, and contribute equitably to joint commissioning arrangements. All areas should have a robust and fully operational partnership arrangement in place by autumn 2026. This should be underpinned by clear governance and shared accountability.**

PARTIALLY ACCEPT

As set out in *SEND Reform: putting children and young people first*, we will strengthen existing local strategic SEND partnerships and strategic planning across the country as part of our reforms, working with schools, trusts and LA partners. These partnerships should foster a sense of collective responsibility to deliver better outcomes and coordinated services for children and young people and their families. This is vital to ensure that strategic planning of resources such as health and education professionals (speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and educational psychologists), and commissioning of Specialist Bases can be done fairly and effectively.

As our reform plan also explains that we are providing around £1.8bn over the next three years for local area partnerships, including local authorities and Integrated Care Boards, to work together to develop a new 'Experts at Hand' offer. This new offer is designed to strengthen the capability of mainstream education settings by providing access to support from key services and health and specialist education practitioners, such as education psychologists, speech and language therapists or specialist teachers.

The Department for Education and Department for Health and Social Care have jointly commissioned all local area partnerships, convened by local authorities, to develop and submit local SEND reform plans, by June 2026, that set out a clearly defined partnership arrangement with evidence of effective, shared, partnership leadership and governance across all system partners, with clear and mutually understood accountability arrangements underpinned by shared, high-quality data, including joint dashboards and use of a partnership maturity matrix to assess effectiveness.

ICBs take prioritisation decisions for their population, and the Medium-Term Planning Framework, published October 2025, guides prioritisation decisions. It was explicit that ICBs and providers are expected to optimise existing resources to reduce long waits for ADHD and autism assessments and improve the quality of assessments by implementing existing and new

guidance as published. It also set goals to reduce the proportion of waits over 18 weeks for community health services and to expand coverage of Mental Health Support Teams in schools and colleges, ahead of the ask for full national coverage by 2029. As set out in response to Recommendations in paragraphs 160 and 276, it also sets an explicit expectation for ICBs to fulfil their statutory duties in relation to SEND and to deliver SEND reforms.

Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) will check how local services work together for children and young people, and set clear standards and hold them accountable.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 285) The Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care should issue joint statutory guidance clarifying how and when healthcare responsibilities can safely be delegated in schools and multi-academy trusts. This should be produced in collaboration with school and multi-academy trust leaders and health and education unions and set out clear lines of accountability between education and health services, minimum training requirements for school staff, and safeguards to ensure consistent and safe delivery of health interventions for pupils.**

PARTIALLY ACCEPT

The Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care will jointly publish non-statutory guidance confirming how healthcare professionals can delegate the delivery of healthcare tasks to staff in schools, colleges and early years settings. It will seek to confirm the responsibility and accountability for the delivery of healthcare tasks where delegated to staff in schools.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 289) The Department of Health and Social Care must urgently appoint a dedicated national SEND lead to drive accountability and coordination across the health system. This role must be empowered and mandated to provide coherent strategic leadership on the delivery of health-related SEND duties, forge robust partnerships with education and care sectors, and ensure that the needs of children and young people with SEND are embedded in the heart of health policy, planning, and workforce development from senior officials to frontline services.**

PARTIALLY ACCEPT

There has been and will continue to be close partnership between the Department for Education, the Department for Health and Social Care and NHS England on these crucial reforms. The Minister for School Standards and the Minister for Health Innovation and Safety have worked together on the development of the reforms. This mirrors the strong partnership

required at local level to ensure these reforms stand the test of time, supporting the treatment to prevention shift in our 10 Year Health Plan and its focus on early intervention, to prevent needs escalating.

There are clear leads in each organisation for SEND who continue to work together to develop and drive SEND reforms.

The government is bringing forward legislation which will bring most NHS England functions into the Department of Health and Social Care. We will keep arrangements for health input and leadership on SEND under review.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 290) The Government should place a clear statutory duty on health services, including ICBs and NHS providers, to ensure their full and accountable participation in the planning, commissioning, and delivery of SEND provision. This duty must align with the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice, which emphasises joint commissioning and integrated working. Strengthening statutory responsibilities for health is key to ensuring timely access to assessments, therapies, and interventions, and upholds the principle of a coordinated, child-centred approach to SEND support.**

PARTIALLY ACCEPT

ICBs have existing statutory duties under the Children and Families Act 2014 to work with local authorities on: identifying and notifying where a child or young person has potential SEND; joint commissioning; participating in education, health and care assessments and plans; and securing health provision. We will clarify this in future SEND legislation and DfE, DHSC and NHS England will look for further opportunities to strengthen accountability. The NHS Medium Term Planning Framework for 26/27 to 28/29 (published October 2025) has included for the first time a clear requirement for Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and providers to meet their statutory SEND duties and support the government's SEND reform plans.

As part of reforms, we will update the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND inspection framework to align with the clarified statutory roles that local authorities and ICBs will have in relation to children and young people with SEND.

As set out above in our response to the Recommendation in paragraph 276 of the Inquiry Report, the Medium Term Planning Framework raises the profile of these duties, setting an explicit expectation for ICBs to fulfil their statutory duties in relation to SEND and to deliver SEND reforms. ICBs will need to work alongside local authorities to develop local SEND Reform Plans, which will set out each local area's strategy for implementing SEND

reforms – tailored to local context and need. They will lay the foundation for long-term reform, set how partners will work together, and enable ongoing monitoring of progress.

DfE and DHSC will work to ensure there are robust and appropriate SEND metrics across the system to help hold local area partnerships, ICBs, local authorities and providers to account.

We will continue to support and intervene when local authorities and ICBs do not meet the expected standards, and where local decision making is poor. We will ensure that inspections hold each partner to account independently for their role in the delivery of SEND duties, as well as how they work in partnership with others. There are clear consequences for local areas that do not meet high standards and outcomes for children and young people with SEND, and all partners understand what they will have to do to improve their provision. We offer a range of Universal, Targeted, and Specialist support and challenge through expert improvement advisers, commissioners, and DfE managed programmes including tailored, peer-to-peer support from our sector led improvement partners. We will make use of intervention powers, including consideration of installing a trust to take over the local authority's responsibilities, where they fail.

We are currently consulting on the best ways to make these changes to local partnerships, asking for views on the most effective use of local partnership groups, and how we can build strong collaboration and a culture of improvement through local SEND strategic plans.

## Expanding capacity within the SEND system

We welcome the Committee's strong focus on expanding capacity in a way that strengthens inclusion, maintains quality and delivers consistency for children and families and are pleased to accept all the Committee's recommendations in this area.

We agree that growth in specialist and semi specialist provision must be carefully planned, underpinned by clear standards, strong accountability and effective partnership working between local authorities, schools and health services. Our reforms will ensure that expansion of inclusion bases and specialist provision delivers high quality, sustainable and genuinely inclusive support across the system through significant capital investment, clearer guidance, improved data and strengthened local leadership.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 305) If the Department for Education expands the use of resource bases to increase specialist provision within mainstream schools and multi-academy trusts, it must set out a detailed implementation plan. This plan should clearly specify how**

**resource bases should be staffed, including required qualifications, expertise, and staff-to-pupil ratios to ensure all children with SEND receive appropriate support. The Department must also define mandatory standards of good practice for resource bases, covering physical facilities and equipment and good practice approaches to integration with the wider school or multi-academy trust community. By establishing these standards and holding schools and multi-academy trusts accountable for meeting them, the Department can ensure that the expansion of resource bases delivers high-quality, consistent, and inclusive provision, meeting the needs of children with SEND while strengthening inclusion across mainstream education.**

ACCEPT

As a significant component of our £3.7bn high needs capital settlement to 2030 we will invest in a transformational expansion of inclusion bases, so they become a core part of every local education offer, delivering high quality teaching and support to children who would benefit from provision that bridges the current gap between mainstream and specialist.

As part of our reforms to improve local partnership working, we will set an expectation that local authorities and schools work together to ensure the right coverage of ‘Support bases’ (commissioned and funded by individual settings, and MATs) and ‘Specialist bases’ (commissioned and funded by the local authority) across a local area.

We will ensure that all inclusion bases are underpinned by inclusive practices and deliver consistently high-quality provision:

- informed by co-creation with stakeholders, we will publish national guidance setting out the principles of high-quality practice. Ofsted will consider this guidance in its inspections.
- new data collection measures will record which settings are operating a base and the pupils accessing it, to provide additional oversight
- we will continue to roll out peer networks of best practice which schools will be able to access as part of the Universal RISE Inclusive Mainstream programme, and
- expand the evidence base, with a pipeline of research due to be published, so that settings know what works.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 311) The Department for Education should develop and implement a comprehensive capital investment strategy for SEND. This strategy should provide clarity over future funding streams,**

**enable better forecasting and planning, and support the development of high-quality, fit-for-purpose settings across both mainstream and specialist provision.**

ACCEPT

We have committed to providing at least £3.7 billion in high needs capital between 2025–26 and 2029–30 to create 60,000 specialist places. This is on top of the delivery of special and AP free schools or alternative funding for local authorities.

We are getting on with delivery: £1.6 billion of this funding has already been allocated to local authorities in 25–26 and 26–27 and the alternative funding offer for local authorities with a planned special or AP free school is prioritising quicker and more efficient delivery of places.

We plan to publish two guidance documents later this year—one on the high impact estates adaptations to make mainstream settings more inclusive, and one on inclusion bases—to support the development of high-quality provision.

These publications will support the Education Estates Strategy: A Decade of National Renewal, which sets out our long term plan for an education estate that is safe, suitable, sustainable, and sufficiently sized, from early years to post-16. We are also setting clearer expectations for how we expect local authorities to use their allocations, with our ambition that every secondary school has an inclusion base, with a similar number of places in primary; local SEND reform plans to ensure LAs have a clear strategy for use of funding; and a memorandum of understanding for the 2026–27 high needs capital allocations that aligns with this.

Since 2023, we have collected annual data from local authorities on the capacity of special schools and specialist bases in their area, and forecasts for the number of pupils with EHCPs who they expect to need a place in specialist provision. We provide guidance to local authorities on how to complete this return. We will review the data we collect, and the guidance provided in light of changes that are currently being consulted on. To improve our understanding of capacity in the system, we have carried out a Net Capacity Programme collecting consistent and up to date capacity data in special schools, including detailed information on how spaces are used.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 314) As part of the expansion of specialist SEND, the highest-performing state specialist schools should be designated as Centres of Excellence. These schools would play a leading role in supporting the development of expertise across other schools,**

**local authorities or multi-academy trusts by providing training, sharing best practice, and offering targeted support to meet complex and specialist needs across the system.**

PARTIALLY ACCEPT

For the first time, specialist provision will be underpinned by clear evidence-based Specialist Provision Packages, and through the new Experts at Hand offer, expertise will routinely be harnessed not only for those in specialist settings but shared across the whole education system. This is a shift towards greater integration: specialist settings will become centres of excellence, driving inclusive practice through outreach and partnership with mainstream settings. With stable, predictable funding and stronger accountability, the sector will have the confidence to innovate and invest in high-quality provision, while families gain clarity and trust that support will be consistent, fair, and focused on outcomes. These changes will elevate the role of specialist settings, reflecting the fact that they are a vital, collaborative force at the heart of an inclusive education system.

The Experts at Hand offer will recognise the critical role of Alternative Provision (AP) and specialist settings within an inclusive system. High-quality AP and specialist settings are key partners in prevention, reintegration and supporting children and young people with more complex needs, and its expertise should be deployed across the system through the Experts at Hand offer.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 315) The Government should continue to review whether local authorities have the necessary powers to fulfil their legal obligations to children and young people with SEND in order to address the mismatch between powers and responsibilities which has arisen as a consequence of previous reforms.**

ACCEPT

As we have set out in the consultation, our SEND reforms intend to build a system with clearer roles and responsibilities for all partners and more collective responsibility for the outcomes of children and young people with SEND in a local area. Local partnership working between local authorities, Integrated Care Boards, health providers, education settings and parents is a foundational building block of successful delivery of SEND services.

We will strengthen the local authority role to support providers. This approach will build on current monitoring processes and ensure funding delivers real impact for children with SEND. Local government will be critical in championing and delivering an approach that demonstrates collaboration and true partnership working with early years settings, schools, post-16 settings, health providers, communities, parents and families.

To ensure all local authorities have the capacity to undertake meaningful transformation planning and delivery while maintaining current SEND services, we will provide £200 million in support for the transformation of local authority SEND services. This funding will be provided to local authorities in a single payment alongside funding for Experts at Hand, with a proportion allocated to transformation which includes a focus on strategic planning in local SEND reform plans, commissioning, leadership capacity and engaging with the education sector. We recognise the current delivery and capacity challenges for local authorities and aim through system reform to enable them and other partners to engage in more consistent partnership working. The role of local authority SEND leadership and local Area SEND partnerships is critical, and we want to ensure we have the right governance structures and leadership in place at the local level to support delivery of reforms.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 316) As it seeks to expand the capacity of specialist state schools and deliver inclusive mainstream schools, the Government should monitor and report on an annual basis on the number of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools, in specialist independent schools and specialist state schools.**

ACCEPT

The Department already publishes data on the number of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools, in specialist independent schools and specialist state schools and has done so annually since 2010.

**(Recommendation, Paragraph 322) To plan effectively for future capacity and ensure the right support is in place, the Department must take a data-driven approach, developing a more robust understanding of need by systematically gathering and analysing relevant, high-quality data. This should include a national SEND data strategy that requires local authorities and education settings to collect and report standardised, high-quality data on levels of need, current provision, capacity, and projected demand. This would require clear definitions and metrics for identifying and categorising SEND across mainstream and specialist settings and mandatory annual data submissions aligned with school and local authority planning cycles.**

ACCEPT

The Department collects information regarding SEN in England via the school census and SEN2 data collections, providing guidance and support to schools and local authorities throughout this process to ensure that the information provided is as accurate as possible. The Department releases

this information via the annual SEN in England and Education, Health and Care Plans publications. We will continue to ensure that the information collected from the sector is appropriate to the SEND system.

## Conclusion

We'd like to extend our thanks once again for the work of the Committee and the report you have published. It sets out a compelling approach to reform, grounded in lived experience and focused on what matters most: children and young people with SEND and their futures.

We wholeheartedly agree with your assessment that the SEND system has reached a critical point. Far too many children and young people struggle to access consistent, timely and effective support. Families too often experience delay and conflict, while teachers and other professionals are working within a system that has not kept pace with rising need and complexity. We share your conclusion that this is neither inevitable nor acceptable and that change is urgent and essential if we are to deliver better outcomes for all children and young people.

We are currently reviewing the consultation responses we have received alongside feedback from over 200 engagement events. We thank the committee for their engagement.

There is strong alignment between the Committee's recommendations and the direction of the reforms we have proposed, particularly the need for clear national standards, stronger accountability across education, health and care, a better supported and skilled workforce, and a more sustainable funding model that reflects the true scale of need. We also agree that sustainable improvement depends on stronger partnership working, greater transparency, and a system that is less adversarial and more focused on early support, inclusion and trust.

Change is urgent, and it must be delivered in partnership with all those who have a stake in a reformed SEND system. We are committed to working closely with Parliament, local government, education settings, health and social care partners, the voluntary and community sector, and of course children, young people and their families to turn our proposed reforms into reality. We all share the same ambition: that children and young people who can achieve and thrive in mainstream education will get the support they need to do so; and that children and young people who need specialist support will receive it promptly and with dignity, clarity and care. We look forward to working with you to make it a reality.