HM Government

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan

Right Support, Right Place, Right Time

March 2023

CP 800

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan

Right Support, Right Place, Right Time

Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Education
by Command of His Majesty

March 2023

CP 800

OGL

© Crown copyright 2023

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to the Department for Education at www.education.gov.uk/contactus.

ISBN 978-1-5286-3924-8

E02864447 03/23

Printed on paper containing 40% recycled fibre content minimum

Printed in the UK by the APS Group on behalf of the Controller of
His Majesty's Stationery Office

Contents

Table of figures 2

Ministerial Foreword 3

Executive Summary 5

Chapter 1: Introduction 15

Chapter 2: A national system underpinned by National Standards 21

Chapter 3: Successful transitions and preparation for adulthood 44

Chapter 4: A skilled workforce and excellent leadership 52

Chapter 5: Strengthened accountabilities and clear routes of redress 70

Chapter 6: A financially sustainable system delivering improved outcomes 81

Conclusion 91

Annex A − Consultation response summary 92

Annex B – The government's vision for the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) system and delivery approach 94

Annex C – The future Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) system 96

Table of figures

Figure 1: A vicious cycle of late intervention, low confidence and inefficient resource allocation 16

Figure 2: A three-tier model for alternative provision 25

Figure 3: National Standards 26

Ministerial Foreword

Children only get one childhood. They deserve to get the support they need to thrive and prepare for happy, healthy and productive adulthoods. For children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), or in alternative provision, this is especially vital.

There is much to celebrate about the SEND system: many children and young people with SEND, from birth to 25, receive excellent support from thousands of dedicated education, health and care staff. 89% of state-funded special schools and 87% of state-funded alternative provision schools are graded outstanding or good by Ofsted[1].

However, we know from listening to children, young people and families that significant issues remain. We know that some families feel frustrated by the system and feel they need to battle to access specialist education, health or care services including from mental health services. We know that providers and services are facing delivery pressures.

It is time to deliver a more dignified experience for children and young people with SEND and to restore families' confidence in the system.

The SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper, published in March 2022 alongside the Schools White Paper, set out bold proposals to deliver a generational change for a more inclusive system.

With earlier identification and evidence-based provision, delivered through new National Standards, more children and young people with SEND will fulfil their potential and be set up for long-term success.

Throughout the consultation, we heard from thousands of children and young people, families, those working in education, health, social care, and local government, as well as the voluntary and community sector. Thank you for taking the time to share your views.

In many cases, the proposals set out in the green paper were welcomed. Typically, people agreed with our assessment of the current challenges in the system. There was broad support for the proposal for a new national SEND and alternative provision system that delivers timely, high-quality services and support in mainstream settings, alongside swift access to more local state specialist settings, where required.

[1] State-funded schools inspections and outcomes as at 31 August 2022, Ofsted, November 2022

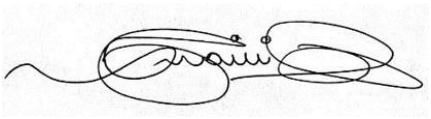
We also heard, particularly from parents, some concerns about whether proposals could make it harder to meet the individual needs of children and young people. Our ambition for this set of proposals is to create a sustainable SEND and alternative provision system that is easier for families to navigate. We want parents to have confidence that their child's needs will be met consistently and effectively as a result of earlier identification and evidence-based support.

This Improvement Plan draws on the rich feedback we heard from children and young people with SEND, their families and others. It is aligned with other reform programmes that we are taking forward to improve outcomes and experiences for all children and young people across education and care, including the Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy and the upcoming Academies Regulation and Commissioning Review.

Concerted action is needed, including a period of designing and testing proposals to ensure they deliver for children and families. There are also steps we can all take in the short term to support and stabilise the system and address the immediate issues that exist, especially in the challenging economic climate we currently face.

Our Plan will be overseen by our respective departments through a new National SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Board jointly chaired by the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy.

The steps in this Plan cannot be delivered by government alone and local system leaders can start now in learning from and adopting good practice from elsewhere. We ask that you join with us to rise to the challenge, and we look forward to working with you to deliver a single national system that delivers consistently for every child and young person with SEND and in alternative provision.



Gillian Keegan
Secretary of State for Education

Steve Barclay
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Executive Summary

1. The SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper explored the issues present within the current SEND system. It set out the government's proposals to improve outcomes for children and young people; improve experiences for families, reducing the current adversity and frustration they face; and deliver financial sustainability. It also considered the specific issues facing the alternative provision sector. This is because 82% of children and young people in state-place funded alternative provision have identified special educational needs (SEN)[2], and it is increasingly being used to supplement local SEND systems.

2. The publication of the green paper marked the start of an extensive 16-week consultation (see Annex A). We attended 175 events, hearing from over 4,500 people including children, young people and families. We received around 6,000 responses to the online consultation, in addition to submissions from organisations and respondents received directly through email.

Delivering for children and families

3. What we heard through the consultation – particularly from parents and families - gives us confidence to establish a new national SEND and alternative provision system with the mission to:

    - **fulfil children's potential:** children and young people with SEND (or attending alternative provision) enjoy their childhood, achieve good outcomes and are well prepared for adulthood and employment;
    - **build parents' trust:** parents and carers experience a fairer, easily navigable system (across education, health and care) that restores their confidence that their children will get the right support, in the right place, at the right time;
    - **provide financial sustainability:** local leaders make the best use of record investment in the high needs budget to meet children and young people's needs and improve outcomes, while placing local authorities on a stable financial footing.

4. The foundation for the new nationally consistent SEND and alternative provision system will be new evidenced-based National Standards. Standards will improve early identification of needs and intervention, and set out clear expectations for the types of support that should be ordinarily available in mainstream settings. This will give families and providers clarity, consistency and confidence in the support that is ordinarily available, in order to be responsive to children's needs. With these expectations, and improved mainstream provision, more children and young people will receive the

[2] Special educational needs in England, Department for Education, 2022

support they need through ordinarily available provision in their local setting. Fewer will therefore need to access support through an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

5. For those children and young people with SEND who do require an EHCP and specialist provision, we want to ensure that parents experience a less adversarial system and restore their trust that their children will get prompt access to the support they need. We have heard parental concerns about the complexity they need to navigate in trying to get decisions made and provision agreed, and the frustration they feel whilst they wait for information to be confirmed and letters to be answered. Standardised EHCPs will reduce bureaucracy in the system; and alongside this publication, we are approving a tranche of applications from local authorities to open new special free schools in their area. We will shortly launch competitions to seek high-quality proposer groups to run these schools. This is in addition to 92 open special free schools and a further 49 which are in the delivery pipeline. This will mean that more children and young people have timely access to sufficient local special school places.

6. We are committed to delivering alternative provision that is fully integrated with the wider SEND system. Consultation feedback supported this integration and the vision of alternative provision we set out in the green paper. Respondents recognised the vital role that alternative provision can play in supporting children and young people to remain in mainstream education by offering early, targeted support; and in offering time-limited or transitional places in alternative provision schools for pupils who need more intensive support. The vast majority of pupils receiving alternative provision also have SEND, and these services need to be aligned throughout local planning and delivery. This is why we refer to measures about the ‘SEND and alternative provision system’ throughout this Plan, with specific reforms to alternative provision embedded within individual chapters.

7. We also heard about the growing challenges facing the system. Despite significant investment, local authority spending continues to outstrip funding. That is why we have already announced investment to support delivery of this Plan: £400 million of the £2 billion additional funding for schools, announced in the Autumn Statement, will be allocated to local authorities’ high needs budgets in 2023-24. In 2023-24, high needs funding will be rising to £10.1 billion - an increase of over 50% from the 2019-20 allocations.

8. This extra funding will help local authorities and schools with the increasing costs of supporting children and young people with SEND. It is clear, though, that more needs to be done to support and stabilise the system, as we deliver systemic changes to ensure we have a sustainable and effective system that delivers better outcomes for children and young people and improved services for families. As this Plan is implemented, we will carefully monitor the pace of progress towards the mission for the new national system, to ensure that reforms are working as intended for children and young people, their parents and families, and all those that work with them.

Creating a more inclusive society through a new national SEND and alternative provision system

9. To fully realise our mission for the new national system, we agree with those respondents who called for us to seize this moment to reimagine what a more positive experience for children and young people with SEND and their families should look like in England (see Annex B). Our vision is to create a more inclusive society that celebrates and enables success in all forms, with the cultures, attitudes and environments to offer every child and young person the support that they need to participate fully, thrive and fulfil their potential. We want the process of identifying needs and accessing support to be early, dignified and affirmative, focusing on a child or young person's achievements, talents, and strengths. We also want the process to be easier to navigate, with parents being clear on what support they can expect for their child and where they can turn for help, including how to make use of support through the SEND Local Offer and SEND Information, Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS).

10. This vision aligns with other key reforms underway across government. The recently published Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy envisages that every child and family who need it will have access to high-quality help no matter where they live. We have worked closely to ensure that the reforms across both SEND and Children's Social Care align, in recognition of the important overlap between these groups of children and young people and the services and systems designed to support them. The upcoming Academies Regulation and Commissioning Review will set out plans to spread the impact of high-quality multi-academy trusts and incentivise improvement for all children in all parts of the country, including support for children and young people with SEND who attend mainstream settings. In addition, a new Disability Action Plan will be consulted on and published in 2023, setting out the practical action ministers across government will take over the next two years to improve disabled people's lives.

Delivering National SEND and Alternative Provision Standards

11. In the green paper, we proposed that the new single national SEND and alternative provision system should deliver consistent, clear and early support for children and young people with SEND. Through the consultation, we heard that a national system must give greater clarity to parents about the timely and accurate identification of needs, and how decisions around support are made from early years to post-16. Support should be put in place, based on a child or young person's needs, not where they happen to live, in line with this government's commitment to levelling up.

12. The national system, delivered through the collective impact of the policies set out in this Plan, will provide greater clarity on evidence-based support, share examples of best practice, and minimise perverse incentives that can prevent inclusion:

- For children and young people, this means that they will be able to access and regularly attend the most appropriate early years setting, school or college for their needs – be this mainstream or specialist.
- For parents and carers, a national system will provide clarity about what support their children should be receiving without a fight to secure what is appropriate, and without needing to navigate a complex system. This will increase confidence and, in turn, minimise disputes.
- For providers, it will give them clarity on the support they should be providing, who should be working together, and will enable government to hold delivery partners to account and intervene where expectations are not met. It will also provide clarity on the resources available to deliver the right provision, for example, by ensuring that the new National SEND and Alternative Provision Standards are clear on which budgets should be used to provide different types of support.

13. Critically, we agree with what we heard during the consultation: that the national system should be co-produced with families, children and young people, so we can build their confidence that the system will meet their needs quickly and effectively. We are actively engaging with children, young people and families from the earliest stages of development of the new system.

14. **National Special Educational Needs and Alternative Provision Standards** *(‘National Standards’)* will set clear and ambitious expectations for what good looks like in identifying and meeting needs, and clarify who is responsible for delivering provision and from which budgets, across the 0-25 system.

15. With the right resources and accountability in place, our intention as we deliver the new national system is for children's needs to be identified earlier and met more effectively. National Standards will place a greater emphasis on the important role mainstream settings play in providing quality first teaching and evidence-based SEN Support to meet the needs of the majority of pupils with SEND, so that all settings provide consistently high-quality provision. By improving early identification and the quality of SEN Support, we expect to reduce the need for EHCPs because the needs of more children and young people will be met without them, through ordinarily available provision. We are committed to working closely with children, young people and their families when writing the National Standards to ensure that the system is responsive to individual needs – and based on the latest evidence of what works – within a fair, consistent and sustainable national system.

16. The delivery of National Standards will be supported by new SEND and alternative provision practice guides for frontline professionals and an amended SEND Code of Practice for all system partners (which we will consult on). These will set out the wider processes and systems to ensure children and young people get the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

17. By the end of 2025, we will publish the first three practice guides focused on advice for mainstream settings. We will build on existing best practice, such as the Nuffield Early Language Intervention, the work of the Autism Education Trust, and the government's guidance on promoting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. This will target the greatest areas of need in primary and secondary, as well as supporting the cross-government focus on improving the mental health of children and young people. We will identify any gaps in best practice to help build a stronger evidence base in the long term.

18. As we deliver the new national system, our objective is to ensure that all children's additional needs are met effectively and quickly within affordable provision, reducing the need for an EHCP and, where an EHCP is needed, to ensure that parents do not endure lengthy, adversarial and costly processes. We will judge our success, in part, by the extent to which we reduce parental complaints about their experiences of the system and the volume of cases parents take to Tribunal because of the better services we will deliver through the new national system. This will include swifter, better responses to parental concerns such as through our proposals for mediation and new guidance for local authority SEND casework teams, who play a vital role in supporting families to navigate the system and ensuring they have good experiences.

19. As we develop the National Standards, we will use these as a basis for developing a **national approach to delivering funding bands and tariffs** to support commissioners and providers to meet the expectations set out in the National Standards.

Delivering a single national SEND and alternative provision system

20. This Plan sets out how an effective single national system based on the new National Standards will be delivered locally, through new local partnerships and an improved EHCP process to ensure that the experience of seeking support at every stage is less bureaucratic and less adversarial for families and providers alike.

A national system underpinned by National Standards

21. We will:

- set up **engagement across education, health, and care** during spring 2023 to **develop National Standards**. This will include parents, carers, children and young people, strategic leaders, frontline professionals, voluntary sector representatives, local authorities and cross-government civil servants. This will ensure we consider a wide range of perspectives, including those with expertise across a broad range of needs, and in specific settings such as alternative provision, early years, youth justice and further education.

- by the end of 2023, start testing some elements of the **National Standards** with Regional Expert Partnerships (who will help us co-produce, test and refine key reforms via the Change Programme).
- **publish**, by the end of 2025, a significant proportion of the **National Standards** with a focus on those that are most deliverable in the current system.
- **introduce local SEND and alternative provision partnerships** that bring together partners to plan and commission support for children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision, meeting the National Standards.
- **expect local SEND and alternative provision partnerships to create evidence-based local inclusion plans** that will set out how the needs of children and young people in the local area will be met in line with National Standards.
- **develop and spread best practice of partnerships and plans** through our Change Programme, starting with the Regional Expert Partnership areas from spring 2023.
- invest **£2.6 billion** between 2022 and 2025 to fund **new places and improve existing provision** for children and young people with SEND or who require alternative provision. We are **approving a tranche of applications** from local authorities to open new special free schools in their area. We will shortly launch competitions to seek high-quality proposer groups to run these schools. This is in addition to 92 open special free schools and a further 49 which are in the delivery pipeline.
- **develop innovative approaches for short breaks** for children, young people and their families with **£30 million in funding** being allocated to new projects over three years.
- **review social care legislation relating to disabled children** so we can improve clarity for families about the support they are legally entitled to.
- **work with stakeholders to deliver a standard EHCP template, with supporting processes and guidance from 2025.** This will include testing the impact of a consistent approach to supporting local authority decision-making through the use of multi-agency panels.
- **develop digital requirements for EHCP systems** to improve experiences for parents, carers and professionals, reduce bureaucracy and improve our ability to monitor the health of the SEND system.
- require local authorities to **improve information available to families** and provide a **tailored list of suitable settings informed by the local inclusion plan**. We will continue to listen to children, young people, families, SEND sector professionals and system leaders as we develop and test delivery options through the Change Programme.

- **create a three-tier alternative provision system**, focusing on targeted early support within mainstream school, time-limited intensive placements in an alternative provision setting, and longer-term placements to support return to mainstream or a sustainable post-16 destination.

Successful transitions and preparation for adulthood

22. Our ambition to enable children and young people to fulfil their potential means we need to place a far greater emphasis on preparation for adulthood. We want to have high aspirations for children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision, with smooth transitions into their next step, including further and higher education and employment.

23. We will:

- **publish guidance to support effective transitions** between all stages of education, and into employment and adult services.
- **conduct a pilot** to consider the evidence required to access flexibilities to standard **English and mathematics requirements for apprenticeships.**
- **invest £18 million** between 2022 and 2025 to **double the capacity of the Supported Internships Programme.**
- continue to support the Department for Work and Pensions' **Adjustments Passport pilot** to smooth the transition into employment.
- **improve the Disabled Students' Allowance process** by continuing to work with the Student Loans Company to reduce the time for support to be agreed.

Delivering a single national system through three key enablers

24. We agree with the feedback we heard that National Standards, and the single national system, will not deliver real change for parents and carers on their own. To deliver for children, young people and their parents, we need a stronger emphasis on improving the underpinning drivers that will make a national system a reality: a strong and robust workforce; strengthened accountabilities; and sustainable and fair resourcing. This Improvement Plan sets out our roadmap for implementing a single, national system and achieving real change in practice so that every child and young person can thrive.

A skilled workforce and excellent leadership

25. We will:

- introduce a **new leadership level SENCo** (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) **NPQ** (National Professional Qualification) for schools.
- review the **Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Frameworks** (commencing early this year).

- **fund up to 5,000 early years staff** to gain an **accredited Level 3 early years SENCo qualification** to support the early years sector, with training running until August 2024.
- increase the **capacity of specialists,** including by investing a further £21 million to train two more cohorts of educational psychologists in the academic years 2024 and 2025; and, in partnership with NHS England, as part of our £70 million Change Programme, pioneering innovative practice through running Early Language and Support For Every Child (ELSEC) pathfinders to improve access to **speech and language therapy** for those who need it.
- work together to take **a joint Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care approach to SEND workforce planning**, including establishing a steering group in 2023 to oversee this work, which we aim to complete by 2025.
- publish the first **three practice guides** for frontline professionals, building on existing best practice, including the Nuffield Early Language Intervention, the work of the Autism Education Trust, and the government's guidance on promoting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.
- propose **new guidance** on delivering a responsive and supportive SEND **casework service** to families when consulting on the SEND Code of Practice.
- develop a **longer-term approach for teaching assistants** to ensure their impact is consistent across the system, starting with **a research project** to develop our evidence base on current school approaches, demand and best practice.
- **strongly encourage the adoption of the DSCO (Designated Social Care Officer) role** in each local area, including by proposing an amendment to the SEND Code of Practice.
- **extend funding** until March 2025 of the **alternative provision specialist taskforce (APST) pilot programme**, which is testing co-location of a diverse specialist workforce in pilot alternative provision schools.

Strengthened accountabilities and clear routes of redress

26. We will:

- **publish a local and national inclusion dashboard** from autumn 2023 to support the development of local inclusion plans, giving parents improved transparency of local performance, informing decision-making and driving self-improvement across the system with ongoing updates and iterations in response to user feedback.
- **deliver updated Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND inspections** from 2023 with a greater focus on the outcomes and experience of children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision.

- create a **ladder of intervention for local areas** from 2023, **greater powers for the Secretary of State for Health** through the Health and Care Act 2022, and robust action for all where statutory duties for children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision are not met, to **strengthen accountabilities** across all parts of the system.
- require every Integrated Care Board to have a **named Executive Board member lead accountable for SEND.**
- **facilitate a more joined-up response between the Department for Education and NHS England** to improve outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND, including social, emotional and mental health issues, and tackle systemic failings leading to significant concerns.
- **strengthen redress for individual disagreements** by clarifying who is responsible for resolving complaints and undertaking further testing of effective mediation approaches.
- set up an **expert group** to support the development of a **bespoke national alternative provision performance framework.**
- work with local authority, trust and school leaders to review processes and develop options for **ensuring transparent and effective movement of pupils** without EHCPs, such as those requiring alternative provision, to address behavioural needs.

A financially sustainable system delivering improved outcomes

27. We will:

- increase **core school funding by £3.5 billion** in 2023-24 compared to the year before, of which almost £1 billion of that increase will go towards high needs. This means high needs funding will be £10.1 billion in 2023-24.
- support **local authorities** through the Delivering Better Value and the Safety Valve programmes and share the best practice from local areas with inclusive and sustainable high needs provision more widely.
- develop a **system of funding bands and tariffs** so that consistent National Standards are backed by more consistent funding across the country.
- publish a response to the **consultation on the schools National Funding Formula** in 2023 which includes proposals on funding for SEND, including the notional SEND budget, and a mechanism for transferring funding to high needs budgets.
- develop **new approaches to funding alternative provision** aligned to their focus on preventative work with, and reintegration of pupils into, mainstream schools. We will do this in consultation with mainstream schools, the alternative provision sector and local authorities.
- re-examine the state's **relationship with independent special schools** to ensure we set comparable expectations for all state-funded specialist providers.

A sustainable system set up for long-term success

28. Our vision is that, once these reforms have been implemented, we will have achieved the following (see Annex C):

- The new **national SEND and alternative provision system will be well established** and bring national consistency to the identification of need and provision of support as set out in the evidence-based National Standards.
- The system will be **financially sustainable** for local authorities with needs routinely being met effectively where they arise.
- **Parents have confidence** that high-quality teaching and targeted evidence-based support will be available as a matter of course in mainstream settings when a need is identified, to avoid needs escalating.
- **Children and young people can access additional support** through a **fair and consistent process** where children, young people, families and professionals work together to put in place the right value-for-money support to meet their needs.
- Longer-term proposals, such as options for the tailored list, have been tested, co-produced and delivered.
- Evidence will emerge from **Regional Expert Partnerships** to support the co-production of careful and effective improvements to the statutory framework in the next Parliament.

29. The National SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Board will publish updates on progress in delivery against this Plan for children, young people and parents.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. The SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper identified 3 key challenges facing the system**:**

   - **The system is failing to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND.** Children and young people with SEND are not consistently being helped to fulfil their potential.
   - **Parents' confidence in the system is in decline.** Too many parents have lost faith in a system that is not sufficiently responsive to them, which is increasingly adversarial, and in which they face long waiting times to access information and support for their children, including accessing therapists and mental health support.
   - **Despite substantial additional investment,** the system has become financially unsustainable. The government has increased investment in high needs by over 50% from 2019-20 to 2023-24, with no marked improvement in outcomes or experiences.

2. The green paper highlighted that there is a vicious cycle of late intervention, low confidence and inefficient resource allocation that drives these challenges across the system. This cycle starts in early years and mainstream settings, where early identification of needs and provision of support does not happen consistently, despite the best efforts of the workforce. Children and young people's needs are identified late or incorrectly, with needs escalating and becoming more entrenched. The inconsistency across the system means that parents, carers and providers do not know what to reasonably expect from their local settings, resulting in low confidence in the ability of mainstream settings to effectively meet the needs of children and young people with SEND.

3. Due to this low confidence, parents, carers and providers feel they need to secure EHCPs and, in some cases, specialist provision as a means of guaranteeing support. This results in further challenges across the system. Parents feel that they have to navigate long, difficult processes to access information and support. As more children and young people receive EHCPs to be supported in mainstream and attend specialist settings, more resource and capacity is pulled to the specialist end of the system. There is then less resource available to deliver early intervention and effective, timely support in mainstream settings. As a result, the vicious cycle continues. The unprecedented investment into the high needs system has not been felt, especially by families, because outcomes and experiences do not improve.

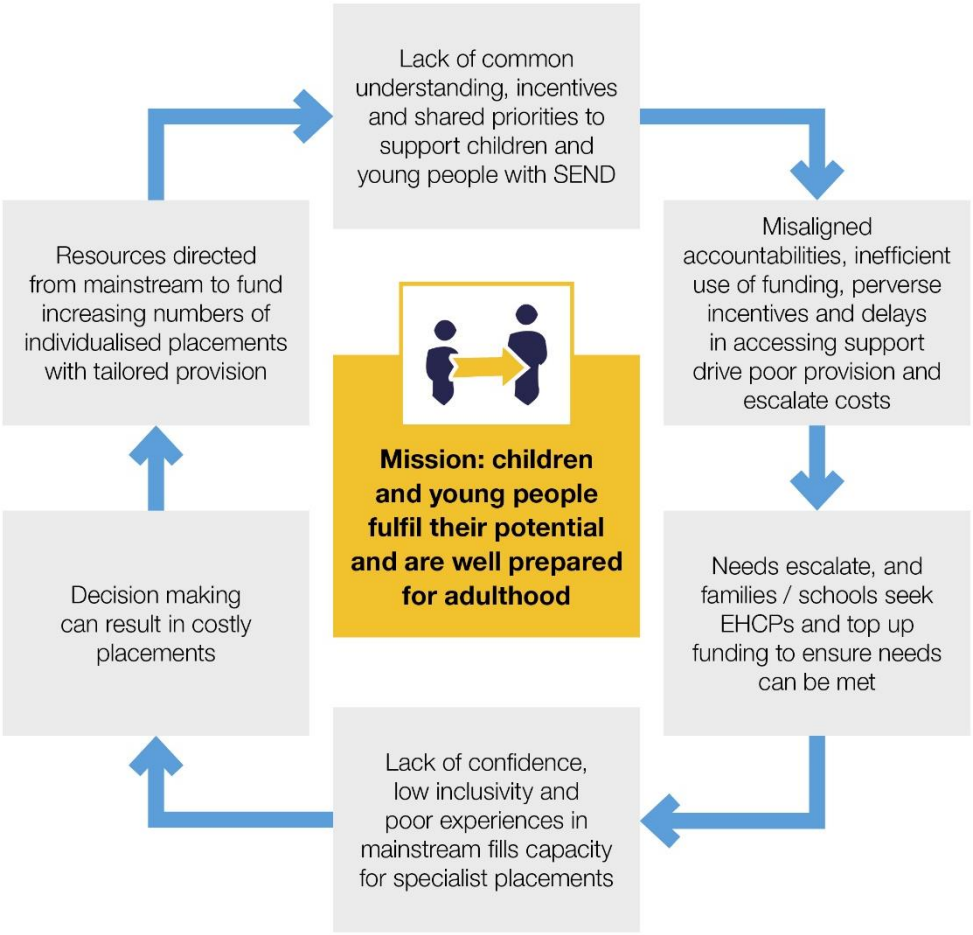


Figure 1: A vicious cycle of late intervention, low confidence and inefficient resource allocation

4. **The green paper proposed to improve outcomes and experiences within a fair and financially sustainable system in five ways:**

- Creating a single, national SEND and alternative provision system, underpinned by National SEND and Alternative Provision Standards for identifying and meeting need from early years to further education, regardless of place or needs.
- Improving capacity and expertise in mainstream education from early years to post-16. This is so that all those working with children and young people with SEND have the confidence and expertise to do so and can identify additional needs and access targeted support when this is needed.
- Ensuring there is appropriate, high-quality specialist provision for those who need it, with a clear vision for alternative provision in delivering early intervention.
- Identifying clear roles and responsibilities across the system, with strengthened accountabilities and funding reform to deliver National Standards effectively.
- Focusing on effective delivery from the very start and supporting the system to respond to immediate challenges whilst preparing for longer-term reform.

Through the green paper consultation, we listened carefully to the views of many, including children and young people with SEND or in alternative provision

5. Through the consultation, we wanted to understand whether our proposals would deliver a system across education, health and care that would deliver improved outcomes for children and young people, and better experiences for them and their families. We wanted to understand if the proposals would give families confidence that their children's needs would be met more consistently and effectively, through earlier identification and evidence-based support. We thank everyone who took the time to share their views with us. We have especially listened to the views of children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision, and their families.

6. The publication of the green paper marked the start of an extensive and accessible 16-week consultation period:

    - We attended 175 events, hearing from over 4,500 people, including children, young people and families.
    - We received around 6,000 responses to the online consultation questions. These included 21 specific questions, and a final question that allowed respondents to share general reflections.
    - We also received submissions from organisations and respondents directly through email.

7. An independent report on the consultation feedback, taking account of responses to the online consultation and feedback received via submissions and emails, has been produced. This Improvement Plan reflects the feedback that we received through events, through the online consultation, and through submissions from organisations and emails.

The sequencing of our proposed reforms is based on consultation feedback

8. We intend to move most quickly on the proposals where consultation feedback gives us confidence that they have the greatest potential to improve experiences for children, young people and families, with the lowest risk of unintended consequences.

9. Through our £70 million Change Programme, we will establish up to nine Regional Expert Partnerships who will help us co-produce, test and refine key reforms. This will include the establishment of new local SEND and alternative provision partnerships, agreed local inclusion plans, strengthened accountabilities and new inclusion dashboards.

10. We will take the time to consider how to deliver those proposals which parents and those representing children were most concerned about. This is so that children, young people and their families can be confident that their needs and feedback are at the heart of any changes. We remain committed to delivering a tailored list of placements and proposals for mandatory mediation, as well as developing a national system of

funding bands and tariffs. However, we recognise the challenges and risks involved in such a move and will review and test these policies carefully through the Change Programme to ensure that they work and do not create unintended consequences for families.

11. We will use the findings from the Change Programme to inform future legislation to deliver these reforms. This would include new burdens assessments and consideration of the capacity required to manage the delivery of the reforms.

Delivering improved outcomes in a financially sustainable system

12. Our goal is to achieve an inclusive system that enables children and young people to fulfil their potential, has parental trust and is financially sustainable. This will be a system in which local partners work together effectively with families to deliver for children and young people, with each partner accountable for playing their part. The right balance will be struck, so that more resources can be dedicated to providing timely, effective support early and as a matter of course in mainstream settings. This will reduce the need for as many parents to have to navigate lengthy statutory EHCP assessment processes.

13. This Improvement Plan sets out the next steps in a multi-year programme to deliver this improved system. This includes plans to design and test reforms, through our Change Programme, to inform future choices about delivery and put the system on a more efficient and financially sustainable footing. We will ensure that the system delivers effectively throughout this period, and we are taking action now to ensure that it does. The government has made substantial investment to secure the sustainability of the system, with the high needs budget rising by more than 50% over 5 years from 2019-20: it will increase to £10.1 billion in 2023-24.

14. Despite this substantial investment, a significant proportion of local authorities have accumulated Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficits due to high needs block overspends. The government has recently extended a 'statutory override'[3] on local authority DSG deficits for a one-off period of three years (up to March 2026), to give local authorities the flexibility they need to implement sustainable change.

15. We will continue to work with local authority leaders to ensure that we are all doing everything possible to ensure high-quality and sustainable systems which are delivering good value for money. It is important that, when the 'statutory override' comes to an end in 2026, local authorities are delivering high-quality SEND services for children, young people, and their families, as well as being in a position to manage their high needs DSG spending and eliminate accumulated deficits. We will continue to

[3] The statutory override treats DSG funding as separate from the general funding of local authorities, and any deficit an authority may have on its DSG account is kept separate from the authority's revenue account and placed in a separate account established solely for that purpose. This has recently been extended for a one-off period of three years up to and including the 2025-26 financial year.

support the sector through spreading best practice and disseminating practical lessons from those authorities that are improving their local service including moving to a more sustainable position. We will also continue to work with the sector to assess progress and, if the system is not on track to achieve such financial sustainability, take further action to ensure that local authorities can and do bring their high needs budgets back into balance.

16. **We have three approaches to delivery:**

    1 – Support and stabilise: We will support and stabilise the system, getting local areas working in the best possible way within the current system to ensure that the needs of children and young people are met, without escalating costs, and to ensure that local authority deficits are brought under control. This includes supporting local authorities with financial deficits through the **Delivering Better Value** and the **Safety Valve** programmes. Further information on these programmes is set out in chapter 6.

    2 – Delivering capacity to address supply issues: In the short to medium term, we will take action to address supply issues – ensuring that there is sufficient support available for children and young people when they need it, in the most efficient way. This includes **investing £2.6 billion** between 2022 and 2025 to deliver **new places and improve existing provision** for children and young people with SEND or who require alternative provision, reducing the need for costly independent provision.

    3 – Design and test for systemic reform: Our £70 million Change Programme will create up to nine Regional Expert Partnerships that will test and refine longer-term, systemic reforms including developing and testing National Standards, strategic partnerships and inclusion plans, the proposed alternative provision service and tailored lists. This will help guard against unintended consequences and build a strong evidence base to inform future funding and legislation.

We will monitor progress towards delivering our mission

17. To understand whether the system is delivering on our mission, we would expect to see the following shifts:

    - **Fulfil children's potential:** Better outcomes driven by earlier identification of needs and evidence-based targeted support to meet needs promptly, including mental health support. Higher levels of attendance for those with SEN both in more inclusive mainstream settings and in alternative provision. Improvements in attainment, with more children identified with SEN and in alternative provision reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of primary education[4] and improved GCSE grades in English language and

[4] 18% of pupils with SEN reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in 2021/22, compared to 69% of those with no identified SEN, National curriculum assessments at key stage 2, Department for Education, 2022

mathematics[5]. For the very small number of children and young people for whom reaching the expected standard may not be an appropriate aim, we would expect to see an increase in the progress they make. Better preparation for adulthood at every age and stage means that those with SEND and in alternative provision are able to live more fulfilling and independent adult lives with improved employment outcomes.

- **Build parents' trust:** Families find it easier to navigate the system and access support. They have greater confidence in it, reporting better experiences of a system which is based on dignity and affirmation. Mainstream settings are seen as being high-quality and inclusive, valuing those with SEND. Specialist provision is seen to be delivering effectively and is available locally to those needing it without lengthy processes that are difficult to navigate.
- **Provide financial sustainability:** Local systems deploy their resources effectively such that spending shifts towards early intervention and away from costly specialist provision, where this is not required. Local authorities operate within their budgets and achieve value for money so that record investment in the high needs budget is used effectively and with evidenced outcomes that are financially sustainable. As a result, local authorities will be able to deliver high-quality services within budgets.

18. The actions we are taking now set a path towards delivering on our mission and we will monitor progress. As we design and test for systemic reform, using the Change Programme to help us, we will develop proposals further so that the objectives above can be achieved. As we do so, we will continue to work with children, young people, and families so that the proposals are responsive to children's needs, build confidence, and deliver positive change. In particular, for proposals that require primary legislation, we will set out further detail for consultation, supported by evidence from the Change Programme. We want to make sure that with every step we take to implement this Improvement Plan, we are building confidence that it will work, learning from experience and hearing the voices of children, young people and families.

[5] In 2021/22, 32% of pupils with SEN achieved grades 4 or above in English and mathematics GCSEs, compared to 76% of those with no identified SEN, GCSE and equivalent attainment by pupil characteristics, Department for Education, 2022

Chapter 2: A national system underpinned by National Standards

1. In the SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper, the government outlined a vision for an inclusive education system with excellent mainstream and specialist provision that puts children and young people first. Through the consultation, we heard that this approach was welcomed, but we needed to be clearer about what we meant by inclusion and what it would look like in practice. We also heard, particularly from parents and organisations supporting families, that we should be more ambitious in reimagining a society that is inclusive at every level. A society with cultures and environments that are designed to offer every child and young person the support they need to fulfil their potential, both within the classroom and beyond.

We will:

- set up **engagement across education, health and care** during spring 2023 to **develop National Standards**. This will include parents, carers, children and young people, strategic leaders, frontline professionals, voluntary sector representatives, local authorities and cross-government civil servants. This will ensure we consider a wide range of perspectives, including those with expertise across a broad range of needs, and in specific settings such as alternative provision, early years, youth justice and further education.
- by the end of 2023, start testing some elements of the **National Standards** with Regional Expert Partnerships (who will help us co-produce, test and refine key reforms via the Change Programme).
- **publish**, by the end of 2025, a significant proportion of the **National Standards** with a focus on those that are most deliverable in the current system.
- **introduce local SEND and alternative provision partnerships** that bring together partners to plan and commission support for children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision, meeting the National Standards.
- **expect local SEND and alternative provision partnerships to create evidence-based local inclusion plans** that will set out how the needs of children and young people in the local area will be met in line with National Standards.
- **develop and spread best practice of partnerships and plans** through our Change Programme, starting with the Regional Expert Partnership areas from spring 2023.
- invest **£2.6 billion** between 2022 and 2025 to fund **new places and improve existing provision** for children and young people with SEND or who require alternative provision. We are **approving a tranche of applications** from local authorities to open new special free schools in their area. We will shortly launch competitions to seek high-quality proposer groups to run these schools. This is in addition to 92 open special free schools and a further 49 which are in the delivery pipeline.
- **develop innovative approaches for short breaks** for children, young people and their families with **£30 million in funding** being allocated to new projects over three years.

- **review social care legislation relating to disabled children** so we can improve clarity for families about the support they are legally entitled to.
- **work with stakeholders to deliver a standard EHCP template, with supporting processes and guidance from 2025.** This will include testing the impact of a consistent approach to supporting local authority decision-making through the use of multi-agency panels.
- **develop digital requirements for EHCP systems** to improve experiences for parents, carers and professionals, reduce bureaucracy and improve our ability to monitor the health of the SEND system.
- require local authorities to **improve information available to families** and provide a **tailored list of suitable settings informed by the local inclusion plan**. We will continue to listen to children, young people, families, SEND sector professionals and system leaders as we develop and test delivery options through the Change Programme.
- **create a three-tier alternative provision system**, focusing on targeted early support within mainstream school, time-limited intensive placements in an alternative provision setting, and longer-term placements to support return to mainstream or a sustainable post-16 destination.

A vision for a society where every child and young person can succeed

A society that celebrates and affirms success

2. Our ambition is to create a society that celebrates, encourages and enables the success of all children and young people, including those with SEND or in alternative provision. A society where we hold high aspirations for all children and young people, recognising that although success looks different for everyone, it is no less worthy of celebration. A society where navigating systems and accessing support across education, health and care is dignified, involves children and young people in decision-making about their own support, and recognises the broad array of strengths held by children and young people with SEND or in alternative provision. This is a significant societal change. To achieve this will take time and effort across many aspects of society, but we are clear that the rewards are significant.

An inclusive system where everyone can thrive

3. Delivering an inclusive society will require improved, high-quality mainstream provision where children and young people have their needs identified early and can access prompt, evidence-based, targeted support. This will mean that more children and young people can have their needs met through ordinarily available provision, without the need to rely on an EHCP to access the support they need. An inclusive system also depends upon improved access to timely, high-quality specialist provision, where this is appropriate for the child or young person, so that every child and young person has

access to the resources, information and opportunities that enable them to thrive and feel a strong sense of belonging. For some children and young people who are falling behind their peers, high-quality teaching, alongside short-term classroom-based support will be sufficient to meet their needs without a SEND diagnosis.

4. The Schools White Paper, published in March 2022, set clear expectations about what high-quality and inclusive mainstream provision entails and its value in supporting all children and young people to reach their full potential, alongside removing any barriers that prevent them from engaging in their learning. Across the 0-25 SEND system, such provision involves fair access, effective central leadership teams, high aspirations for every child and young person and the use of evidence-based curriculum design and implementation to facilitate high-quality teaching within calm, safe and supportive settings. We are continuing this approach and building on the reform set out in the Schools White Paper through our upcoming plan to increase primary attainment, which will be published in 2023.

5. In a 0-25 SEND system, we recognise the important role of the early years sector in the early identification of needs and in building up effective working relationships with parents about their child's needs. In practical terms, improved mainstream provision will enable more of the children and young people with SEND in early years, schools and further education to fully participate within mainstream settings and receive the additional support they need through ordinarily available provision. The further education (FE) sector is the launching point into adult life for many young people with SEND. Staff in FE settings play a crucial role in making sure that young people are prepared for adulthood and supported to transition to their next stage – whether that's employment, higher education, or adult services. Children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision will receive the adaptations and support they need to attend and engage in early years settings, at school or in college to access the same benefits of improved attainment and wellbeing as those who do not face the same barriers to education.

6. The system will provide earlier, more accurate and more consistent identification of need, targeted support to address those needs and timely access to specialist services and support, including specialist placements where appropriate. This ambition is based on evidence that greater inclusion in mainstream settings can improve the academic achievement for children and young people with SEND and has neutral or small positive effects on the outcomes of those without SEND. A whole-setting inclusive ethos improves the sense of belonging for those with SEND and has been found to increase acceptance of difference amongst peers[6].

[6] Gray, P., Norwich, B., Webster, R. (2021) A review of the evidence on the impact of inclusion on pupils with SEND and their mainstream peers; Kart, A., & Kart, M. (2021). Academic and social effects of inclusion on students without disabilities: A review of the literature. *Education Sciences*, *11*(1), 16

Case study – King Ecgbert School, Sheffield

King Ecgbert School in Sheffield is a mainstream secondary school and part of the Mercia Learning Trust. The school aims to be warm, welcoming and inclusive in all senses of the word, including for its pupils with SEND. It sets inclusion as "everyone's job" – both staff and pupils.

The school has high expectations for all pupils and strives to ensure that all reach their potential. Consistent quality-first teaching, as the first step to supporting pupils with SEND, helps all classrooms at King Ecgbert School to be inclusive and the current continuous professional development programme for staff is focused on this. The percentage of pupils at the school with EHCPs is higher than the national average for state-funded mainstream secondary schools[7] and the school's Progress 8 score is above the national average[8].

Some of the school's pupils with EHCPs are attached to its integrated resource for pupils with autism. The aim is for those pupils to be supported into the mainstream classroom and able to access the broad curriculum for most of the time (at least 80% of the time) but also access a parallel curriculum to help them with life skills and emotional regulation.

Tom in the integrated resource, who is going to sit 9 GCSEs this summer and plans to go on to sixth form to study A levels, said, "the integrated resource has helped me in a variety of ways. It has supported my mental wellbeing and it also helps me pursue my educational desires and hopes. The resource is a great place for students like me and I am glad I've been able to access it."

An integrated SEND and alternative provision system

7. Alternative provision is an important aspect of our reforms and will be used as an intervention, not a destination. High-quality alternative provision, including for social, emotional and mental health needs, will create additional capacity for mainstream school leaders and staff to address challenging behaviour earlier and re-engage pupils in education. Interventions will be based on a three-tier model with a focus on targeted support whilst children are in mainstream school, to deal with needs early and reduce preventable exclusion. Time-limited or transitional placements into an alternative provision setting will provide more intensive intervention or longer-term support where it is needed, before these young people return to a new mainstream setting or progress to a sustainable post-16 destination.

[7] Absence and pupil population - King Ecgbert School, Department for Education, 2022

[8] Secondary - King Ecgbert School, Department for Education, 2022. Due to the uneven impact of the pandemic on school and college performance comparisons between schools and colleagues and national averages should be interpreted with caution.

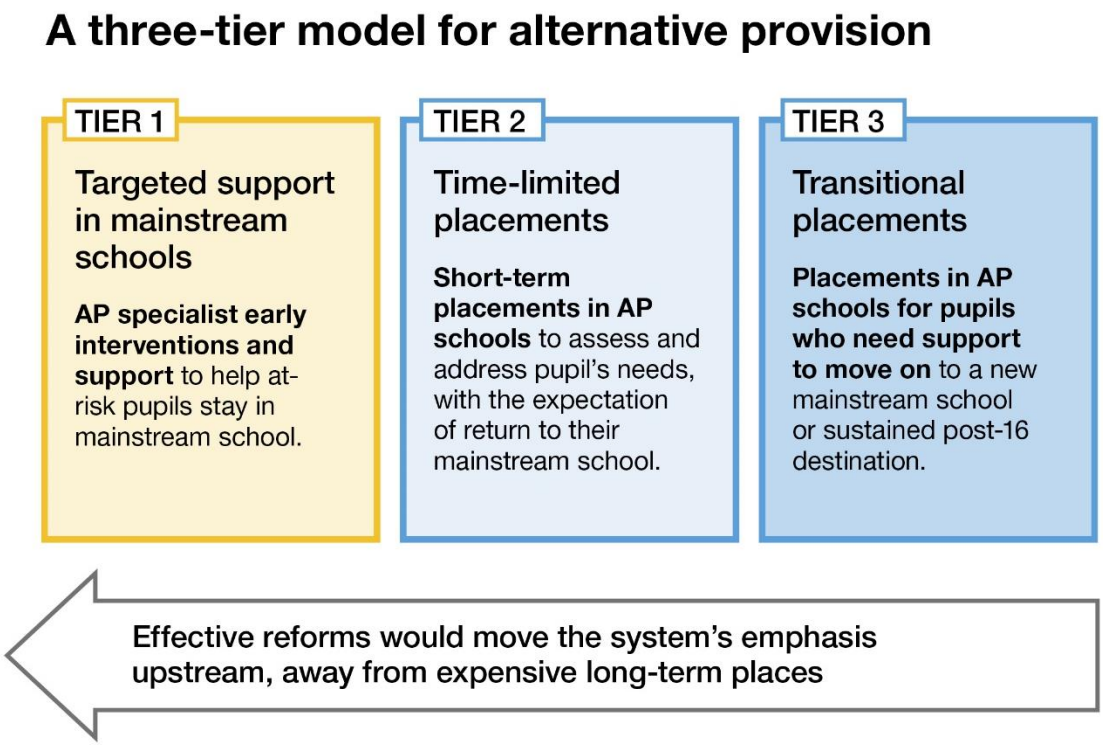


Figure 2: A three-tier model for alternative provision

A supportive system for children and families

8. Our vision is echoed in the Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy, which envisages that every child and family who need it will have access to high-quality help no matter where they live. Many respondents to the green paper highlighted that the SEND reforms must also align with reforms to the wider children's social care system and share a focus on providing help to families early and at the right time. Families reported barriers to accessing support and experiencing safeguarding-focused assessments which made them feel criticised and undermined. The Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy includes a commitment to strengthen the focus on disabled children's needs in the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children. The proposed update to this guidance will also focus on the role of education settings, further strengthening links between education and social care for children and young people with SEND.

9. Although some families with disabled children are fully supported by universal services, many children with SEND, and their families, benefit from expert help and support when it is first needed. For help to be effective, it must be offered without stigma or criticism, in recognition of the fact that parenting a disabled child can be challenging and families may need additional support to access services which enable them to thrive. We know that there are areas where we need to do more to ensure there is coherency so that reforms make the children's social care and SEND systems easier to navigate for children and families. We will work with all partners in the system, including children, young people and their families, and across government, to ensure

that at every level there is sustained and considered join up between children's social care and the SEND system.

National SEND and Alternative Provision Standards

10. The consultation feedback is clear that while respondents supported a more inclusive and consistent mainstream system that worked for all children and young people, with a dedicated role for alternative provision, aspects of the current system need to change for that vision to be fully realised. We need to address the 'postcode lottery' of SEND and alternative provision support that exists currently. Children, young people and their families do not know what to reasonably expect, settings are ill-equipped to support needs and needs are identified late or incorrectly.

11. We heard during the consultation that respondents wanted more detail on what the standards are, who they are for and how they will work in practice. This included greater clarity on what should be ordinarily available in every nursery, school, and college**,** as well as from health and social care. Children and young people told us that it would be good for schools to know what they must deliver. We have used this feedback to develop the next layer of detail for the National SEND and Alternative Provision Standards ('National Standards').

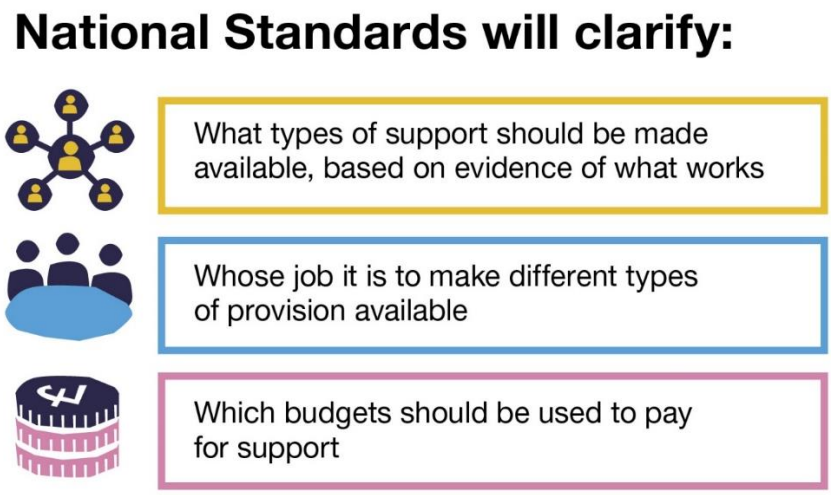


Figure 3: National Standards

12. To deliver our vision of an inclusive society for all, the National Standards will set clear and ambitious expectations for what good looks like in identifying and meeting a range of needs. They will provide clarity for children, young people and their families on what provision should be available through ordinarily available provision and for those with EHCPs. National Standards will clarify what good evidence-based provision looks like, who is responsible for securing it and from which budgets. This will help families, practitioners and providers understand what support every child or young person should be receiving from early years through to further education, no matter where they live or what their needs are. This section details our plan to develop these standards, including how we will work with partners in the system such as children, young people

and their families and test proposals through the Change Programme's Regional Expert Partnerships.

13. The National Standards will set out what provision system leaders, such as multi-academy trust leaders, governing bodies, headteachers, college principals and chief executive officers (CEOs), directors of children's services and Integrated Care Boards, need to make available for all children with SEND in every local area, nursery, school and college. We intend to underpin the standards with legislation for education at the earliest opportunity to facilitate intervention in education settings if standards are not met. This will allow us to set out the provision, resources, policies and training that must be available across local areas and in education settings. As we develop the standards, we will undertake new work to consider how to design accountability mechanisms to ensure the government's expectations are met, including considering the role of Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). When National Standards are delivered, this will mean every child and young person will have access to consistently high-quality and evidence-led support.

14. National Standards will cover the evidence-based approaches to identification and intervention for those with SEN Support and for those with EHCPs. For example, standards will set out how nurseries, schools and colleges must adapt the physical and sensory environment of the setting to enable children and young people with SEND to learn alongside their peers and the role of the local authority in supporting this. This will build on existing best practice, such as Portsmouth City Council's Ordinarily Available Provision, which sets out expectations of the support that should be made available for children and young people with SEND in early years, schools and colleges. This will help children, young people and their families understand what support they can expect to receive. Clear standards for universal and SEN Support provision will enable better accountability at this stage, whilst ensuring that those who need it receive high-quality specialist support. This will help children, young people, and their families understand what support they can expect to receive.

15. During the consultation, organisations raised concerns that the individual needs of a child or young person could be overlooked in the move towards a single, national system. National Standards will help ensure every child and young person, regardless of where they live, receives consistent high-quality support, at both SEN Support level and for those with EHCPs. We recognise that every child or young person with SEND or in alternative provision will have unique needs and these will depend on their personal circumstances and backgrounds. We are committed to working closely with children, young people and their families when writing the National Standards to find a balance between national consistency and individual needs.

16. In the green paper, we committed to producing an amended version of the SEND Code of Practice. We will ensure the National Standards and amended SEND Code of Practice support one another, so that any new legislation is explained in a clear and accessible way for all. We will consult on an amended version of the SEND Code of Practice and work with individuals and organisations across the system to prepare recommendations for the update, including considering how we reflect wider reforms to alternative provision.

17. To equip frontline professionals, such as teachers and early years practitioners, with the skills and expertise to make best use of provision and to identify needs early, accurately and consistently, we will produce a suite of SEND and alternative provision practice guides. We have set out our plans to develop practice guides in chapter 4 as part of our commitment to building SEND skills and knowledge, prioritising areas such as speech and language development, autism and social, emotional and mental health.

18. Together, the National Standards, practice guides and amended version of the SEND Code of Practice will set clear and consistent expectations for what should be ordinarily available for all children, young people and their families, from early years to further education.

19. When the National Standards are delivered effectively, every leader will be bought into a shared vision for how needs should be identified and supported, whether at the universal, targeted, or specialist level and there will be clarity on how support should be paid for, supporting financial sustainability. This will include a clear role for alternative provision across three tiers of support, with a focus on early intervention and inclusion in mainstream settings where appropriate. Parents, carers and families will have clarity on the roles of individual system leaders and the standards they must meet. When delivered successfully, these standards will enable all children and young people to access an inclusive, high-quality education alongside their peers and will prepare them for happy, healthy and productive adulthoods.

Developing the National Standards

20. Throughout the consultation, we heard from a number of respondents about the importance of co-production in developing and delivering the green paper proposals. Specifically, we heard that the process for developing the National Standards needs to involve a wide range of key partners, including children, young people and families.

21. We have reflected this feedback in our plans to develop the National Standards with a wide range of stakeholders, including professional experts across education, health and care, as well as children, young people and their families. We will involve these partners at the earliest opportunity, with a focus on understanding the views of children, young people and their families. Working with leaders and professionals across different areas and sectors will ensure the standards reflect evidence of the best practice already in the system, the unique needs of early years and further education settings as well as the

impact of these reforms. The case study below from Lincolnshire is a valuable example of how co-production can be built in throughout policy development.

Case Study – Lincolnshire Young Voices

Lincolnshire Young Voices (LYV) is a participation group set up to improve service delivery for young people with SEND. The group's members are young people with SEND in the area, who bring their voices and experiences to the forefront of their work. The group encourages and welcomes new members and is funded and supported by Lincolnshire County Council and Lincolnshire Integrated Care Board.

LYV works strategically with partners across Lincolnshire to:

- research and improve issues young people with SEND face in the community.
- raise awareness of members' SEND experiences and of LYV in organisations, with professionals, councillors and the wider public.
- inspire young people with SEND to have a voice.

In 2022 LYV developed an online learning resource called 'A Rough Guide to not Putting Your Foot in it', for professionals such as GPs to improve their confidence when communicating with people with SEND. The group led the project, including drafting the course content and recording the video scripts. Their presentation on the resource has been delivered nationally and LYV have been asked to support other areas around the country in developing similar resources and participation groups.

LYV won the NASEN (National Association for Special Educational Needs) Award for co-production in 2022.

22. During spring 2023, we will set up a steering group of cross-sector representatives to oversee the development of standards. We will regularly test our work with a wide range of stakeholders across education, health and social care, including children, young people and their families. We will embed development of standards in the work of the Change Programme to ensure the standards can be tested, iterated and set up for success. We will also build on the findings from the Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce (APST) pilot (see chapter 4) to reflect existing best practice. Sign-off from the Department for Education will play an important role in ensuring the standards are evidence-based, deliverable and support financial sustainability.

23. We know that it will take time to develop a complete set of standards and to set the system up to implement these successfully. To allow time for genuine co-production and testing, we will develop the standards in stages:

    - **During spring 2023,** we will establish the National Standards Steering Group and identify experts to begin developing the content of the standards.
    - **By the end of 2023,** we will have some elements of the National Standards ready for testing by the Regional Expert Partnerships.

- **By the end of 2025**, we will publish a significant proportion of the National Standards, with a focus on those that are most deliverable in the current system.
- **At the earliest opportunity,** we will underpin the National Standards with legislation and, ahead of legislating, we will publish the National Standards in full for consultation.

24. Throughout this process, we will use the best available evidence on what works to support a range of needs, from universal support, through SEN Support, to the more specialist support provided via EHCPs. This will build on existing successful programmes, such as the £17 million Nuffield Early Language Intervention that targets children needing extra support with their speech and language development and is proven to help them make around three months of additional progress. We will identify any gaps in evidence and explore opportunities to build a stronger evidence base in the long-term, including commissioning new research as necessary.

25. Publishing the National Standards will signal the government's expectations of what high-quality and evidence-based support should be available across universal, targeted and specialist support. In turn, this should shape commissioning behaviour at a local area and whole school or college level by influencing the content of local inclusion plans, the commissioning practices of system leaders and the support that individual children and young people receive.

26. We received consultation feedback on the importance of the National Standards for health and care as well as education. The Department for Education, the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England have agreed to engage health and social care bodies at set points and on specific standards. They will be closely involved in the development of the National Standards, which will ensure strategic oversight and input from frontline health professionals. We will develop National Standards that recognise the role of health and social care and the interdependencies, while operating within the existing statutory framework for health and adult social care.

27. In parallel to these reforms to the SEND and alternative provision system, the government is also delivering an ambitious plan for reform of children's social care. Alignment between the two programmes will ensure that social care needs are more effectively addressed. Government is taking forward the recommendation of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care to introduce a Children's Social Care National Framework that sets the direction for practice and is supported by practice guides that bring together evidence-based advice and information. The Children's Social Care National Framework was published on 2 February 2023, alongside the government's formal response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, which is now open to consultation.

Delivering National Standards

28. We heard that delivering the National Standards in practice is critical if we are to genuinely improve experiences and outcomes for children, young people and their families and we agree that accountability is essential for successful implementation. Others told us that the standards need to strike a balance between supporting and challenging the system if they are to deliver real culture change. Local government organisations and unions stressed the need for funding to incentivise delivery against the standards. They also highlighted that improving skills and capacity across the workforce is vital to delivering the right provision for children and young people.

29. We recognise that publishing National Standards will not deliver change on their own. Standards will only be translated into reality through efficient funding, effective accountability and an appropriately resourced and skilled workforce. The remainder of this Plan sets out the underpinning drivers that are necessary for implementing National Standards in practice. We know that such large-scale change across education, health and care will take time as we test and refine key proposals, but we remain committed to achieving this shared ambition in the months and years to come.

Local SEND and alternative provision partnerships and local inclusion plans

30. The SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper consulted on the proposal to establish statutory local SEND and alternative provision partnerships. These partnerships would bring together partners across education, health (including mental health) and care and enable local authorities to work collaboratively with each other, with parents and other extended partners such as youth justice, to meet their statutory responsibilities for children and young people with SEND and those who need alternative provision. We set out that partnerships will be responsible for undertaking a joint needs assessment and producing a strategic local inclusion plan (LIP) for local delivery including setting out the provision and services that should be commissioned in line with the National Standards. The LIP will inform the existing statutory local offer of SEND services and provision, as well as clarifying the graduated SEN Support offer, so parents and practitioners can clearly see what they can expect in their area. In due course, this will also form the basis for providing parents and carers with a tailored list of settings.

31. Throughout the consultation we heard broad support for these proposals. Stakeholders agree that bringing key partners together at the right level to make strategic decisions is essential. Whilst there are excellent examples of effective partnership working in some areas currently, it is not happening consistently across the system. As a result, decisions are not always ultimately made in the best interests of children and young people.

32. We also heard that the views of parents, carers, children and young people are vital in successful partnerships. Consultation respondents welcomed local SEND and alternative provision partnerships as a way of facilitating effective representation of children, young people and their families, ensuring co-production is at the centre of decision-making, improving transparency and communications with parents. We also heard the importance of structures to facilitate regional collaboration, particularly for post-16 and the commissioning of provision for children and young people with the most complex needs where providers regularly face challenges working across a number of local authorities. We will seek to address this in the guidance for partnerships and plans.

33. Many consultation responses highlighted how the need for specialist provision exceeds the available places because the system is not managed well enough. Children and young people whose needs could be met in a well-supported mainstream setting are instead in special schools or alternative provision, while those who need a specialist placement may not be offered one, or able to find one close to home. Children and young people with particularly complex SEN and disabilities often have to be placed a considerable distance from their families and community. In its recent report, the National Safeguarding Panel found that the 108 children placed at three children's residential care settings formerly run by the Hesley Group were placed an average of 95 miles from home[9]. A strong LIP, grounded in an evidence-based understanding of the services and placements which children and young people will need in the future, will allow local authorities, Integrated Care Systems, schools and colleges to change what they offer so that it meets evolving needs. We want to amplify best practice and support areas to maximise effective partnership working. To achieve this, we are planning to approach delivery in three phases across financial years 2023 – 2025 and beyond.

Phase one (2023)	Phase two (2024)	Phase three (2025 onwards)
• The SEND and Alternative Provision Change Programme's Regional Expert Partners will support areas to design and test their partnerships and LIPs, beginning in spring 2023. • Non-statutory guidance will be issued in autumn 2023, outlining the full detail of the expectations for local SEND	• The SEND and Alternative Provision Change Programme's Regional Taskforce Teams will target support to areas most in need/least mature to develop their partnership structures and develop LIPs.	• Seek to introduce primary legislation at the next available opportunity to put partnerships on a statutory footing and mandate collaborative working. • Support the future introduction of tailored lists of settings.

[9] Safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings, Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2022

and alternative provision partnerships including clear roles and responsibilities for the partnership collectively and the partners individually. • Guidance will set out the requirements for LIPs including the requirements for co-production with children and their families. • This will be underpinned by a maturity matrix self-assessment tool to support local areas to evolve partnerships and move towards new model of plans.	• The Department for Education's Regions Group will work with local SEND and alternative provision partnerships to develop and agree LIPs by end of 2024.	• Continue to work with Ofsted to make sure framework reflects updated arrangements.

Capital investment in new specialist placements and alternative provision

34. Many respondents reported that the need for specialist provision exceeds the available places. We have committed to invest £2.6 billion over the next three years to deliver new places and improve existing provision for children and young people with SEND aged between 0 and 25, or who require alternative provision.

35. On 29 March 2022, we announced High Needs Provision Capital Allocations amounting to over £1.4 billion of new investment. This funding will support local authorities to deliver new places, across the 0–25 system, for academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25 and improve existing provision for children and young people with SEND or who need alternative provision.

36. On 10 June 2022, we published our 'how to apply' guidance for the latest special and alternative provision free school application waves. We are approving a tranche of applications from local authorities to open new special free schools in their area. We will shortly launch competitions to seek high-quality proposer groups to run these schools. This is in addition to 92 open special free schools and a further 49 which are in the delivery pipeline. Applications for partnerships to open new alternative provision free schools closed on the 17 February 2023. We are currently in the process of assessing those applications and we expect to announce the outcome of both application waves in autumn 2023.

37. Starting from summer 2023, we plan to collect data from local authorities on the capacity of special schools and SEN units/resourced provision in mainstream schools, as well as forecasts of the numbers of specialist placements local authorities expect to

make in SEN units/resourced provision, special schools (of all types) and alternative provision. We expect this to be an annual data collection, forming part of the existing School Capacity Survey (SCAP) which will support local authorities in managing their specialist provision. We will explore options for improving and broadening the data we collect in future years. We are working closely with local authorities and other sector stakeholders to ensure the data we collect best supports the needs of users across the 0-25 system. Guidance on completing the SCAP survey, including tools to support local authorities in assessing the capacity of special schools, will be published in the spring.

Case Study – Unity Schools Partnership

Unity Schools Partnership is a multi-academy trust (MAT) consisting of primary, middle, secondary and special schools in Suffolk, on the Essex and Cambridgeshire borders and in East London. The trust has an inclusive ethos centred around providing education that caters for all children in the community. There are three tiers of SEND support within the trust: special schools, high-quality inclusive teaching in mainstream schools and specialist units at mainstream schools.

In all of its schools, high-quality teaching for children with SEND is the first response to meeting their needs and the SENCo ensures teaching staff have guidance and support. Unity Schools Partnership schools have high aspirations of and expectations for all learners, aiming to enable all pupils to take part in lessons effectively and participate fully in school life.

Looking at its more specialist provision, specialist units were opened in five schools in the trust in September 2020 as part of a local authority capital programme in Suffolk to create new specialist education places. Each unit caters for different age ranges from key stage 1 to 4 and different types of need.

The specialist units allow children and young people to be part of a dedicated class which supports their individual needs, while also having access to the mainstream school community, for example:

The Arch at Castle Manor Academy

The Arch at Castle Manor Academy supports 22 pupils in key stages 3 and 4 with cognition and learning needs. Pupils follow a personalised curriculum and integrate within the mainstream setting at a level that is appropriate to their needs, with the support of teaching assistants. Where possible, pupils ‘shadow’ the mainstream expectations, values and curriculum themes so they can participate with the wider school when they are ready. Pupils in The Arch take part in a wide range of curriculum and extra-curricular activities. They enjoy many activities including collecting badges for their work in living the school values, school trips with their peers and all play a musical instrument. Staff have noted that strong friendships have been made both within and outside of The Arch.

Specialist post-16 provision

38. Several respondents highlighted a lack of strategic planning for specialist post-16 provision both locally and regionally, which they felt led to missed opportunities to make the most of such provision, particularly for young people with complex needs. We received strong calls from specialist post-16 institutions and their representatives that the sector is not given the right recognition. Too often this provision is considered as sitting outside, rather than an integral part of the further education sector.

39. We propose to work with the sector to review the way the Department for Education defines and manages specialist further education and to consider what changes could be made to reinforce that integrated position within the wider further education sector.

Wraparound support for families

40. There will be improved access to wraparound services for families and more timely access to specialist support from health and social care partners where a child or young person requires this. The Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy committed to including a stronger focus on support for children with a disability as part of proposed updates to Working Together to Safeguard Children. Through the rollout of family hubs, we are seeking to improve access to a range of services and have set specific requirements for local authorities receiving family hubs funding around helping families who have children with SEND.

Short Breaks Innovation Fund

41. Short breaks provide children, young people and their families with opportunities to enjoy extra-curricular activities, respite and space to develop skills beyond their everyday school and home contexts. They aim to strengthen student resilience and family capacity, therefore de-escalating the interventions that might be required for pupils at risk of moving from mainstream to specialist settings, or into care. The green paper committed £30 million to the Short Breaks Innovation Fund to develop national policy for short breaks by funding innovative, integrated and inclusive approaches to short breaks to address the concern that the policy is under-developed and inconsistently applied.

42. In the first year of the programme (financial year 22-23), we are funding 7 local authority projects to deliver innovative approaches to short breaks in addition to their normal provision, across the 0-25 age range. For year two of the programme, we have taken on board feedback that bids should be co-produced with families and set a requirement that all bids must be supported by the local parent carer forum. £10 million is available for grants of up to £1 million to 10-15 local authorities for year two and successful bidders will be announced shortly.

43. Three years of developing innovative approaches will give us a stronger evidence base on what works well. As part of our reforms to children's social care, we will ensure that we draw on the innovative and inclusive approaches emerging from the Short Breaks Innovation Fund to influence our own approach to structural reform and service design.

Case Study – Short Breaks Innovation Fund in Sunderland

Sunderland City Council is one of the local authorities taking part in the Short Breaks Innovation Fund programme. One of its offers is Breathing Space, a whole-family model of short breaks both after school and during school holidays. It is designed to offer joined-up support and create positive opportunities for families with children who have social, emotional or mental health needs or autism and who are at risk of suspension or permanent exclusion from school. The aim is to improve behaviour over the longer term to improve and/or maintain children's attendance at school.

Breathing Space has different hubs, including:

- a family hub centre which delivers specialist emotional support sessions for children.
- a group for non-verbal children with autism, providing sensory and crafts sessions.
- an alternative provision school providing after-school extra-curricular activities, such as cooking and trips to the theatre.

Overall, the Breathing Space short breaks provision has helped with:

- an improvement in pupils' attendance.
- an improvement in pupils' behaviour in school, linked to improved attitudes to learning.
- a decrease in suspensions.

Supporting Families

44. As part of the Supporting Families programme, a £450,000 pilot project will be established to test approaches to establishing more robust links between SEND and the early help system in each area. Local authorities will be invited to bid for funding to test models of strengthening the join-up between systems locally. This could include, for example, ensuring that any family whose child is undergoing an EHC assessment is offered an early help conversation so that the needs of all members of the family can be understood and support provided. Some areas may also develop projects to increase the involvement of school staff, who already know and understand children with SEND in their settings, to lead on or contribute to early help assessments, ensuring that families with children with SEND are identified and offered support. This increased focus on non-stigmatising access to help is also central to our Family Help reform proposals, which will improve the experience and outcomes for disabled children and their families.

45. We have committed through the Independent Review of Children's Social Care to track the experiences of children with a disability through the care system and will incorporate a strong focus on specific support for children with a disability and their families in our pathfinder testing. In response to the recommendations in the Independent Review of

Children's Social Care, we will establish pathfinders in up to 12 local areas, to test elements of the Family Help reforms. The Support and Protection pathfinders will help us effectively deliver reforms around eligibility for Family Help, access to services via the 'front door' so that it is more needs-based and welcoming, the Family Help workforce working with families in need (under section 17 of the Children Act 1989) and the tailoring of support to meet specific needs, including SEND. An important area for us to test will be how a multidisciplinary team of Family Help workers hold section 17 cases in a way that reduces handovers that are unhelpful for families and avoids the stigma which some families with a child with SEND currently experience.

46. In line with the recommendation made by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, we have asked the Law Commission to review existing social care legislation relating to disabled children so we can improve clarity for families about the support they are legally entitled to, ensuring that families know how to access support and local authorities know what they are expected to provide.

47. We will convene a joint children's social care/SEND roundtable discussion on disability this year, to work with sector experts to make these commitments a reality.

48. The Department for Work and Pensions launched the Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) programme in 2018 to encourage local authorities across England to embed parental conflict support in their local service provision for families. Up to £19 million is available to local authorities to progress this work during this Spending Review. This is particularly important for parents of children with SEND, as this can be a key driver of conflict between parents.

A reformed, nationally consistent EHCP process

49. The green paper set out a vision for EHCPs where there was greater consistency between local authorities' processes, to ensure that those who need more specialist support can get it faster and in a more joined-up way. The green paper restated our commitment to the principle of co-production: that children, young people and their families and services work together as equal partners to support children and young people to achieve their goals. To improve the experience and quality of these plans, we proposed to:

- **standardise** the templates and processes around EHCPs to improve consistency and best practice, improving experiences for families and children and young people seeking plans.
- **digitise** EHCPs, to reduce the burden of administrative process in the system, improve the experience and satisfaction of parents, carers and professionals and improve our ability to monitor the health of the SEND system.
- **introduce the use of local multi-agency panels** to improve parental confidence in the Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment process.

50. These measures were broadly popular across all respondent groups who reported that the EHCP process would benefit from being standardised, simplified, accessible and available digitally. However, while there is agreement that these are the right measures to pursue, it is also clear that local authorities' arrangements have evolved over time to reflect their different circumstances and the needs of their local communities. Therefore, any changes to EHCP processes will need to be worked through carefully to deliver the improvements we all want to see.

51. We said in the green paper that we would consult separately on changing the timescale for the issuing of draft EHCPs following annual reviews. We have considered the responses to the subsequent consultation alongside those to the green paper, given that both consultations relate to reform of the EHCP system. We will shortly be publishing the government response.

Standardisation of templates

52. Although many agreed that standardising EHCP templates is the right thing to do, there was also agreement that plans for this diverse group of children and young people were often complex for good reason, and that standardised paperwork should not result in standardised provision. Most of those who responded to this proposal felt that section F (special educational provision) particularly needed reform. Some respondents felt plans were not revised often enough to reflect the needs of the child or young person as they progressed. Children and young people wanted their plans to be co-produced with them and reflect their goals, ambitions and the full breadth of their lives – their friends and interests as well as their education and employment. They wanted their plans to enable others to understand their strengths as well as the things they found difficult.

53. We will now start work on a national EHCP template, supported by guidance, in partnership with relevant bodies, including parents, children and young people. We will encourage all local authorities to adopt the template and consider the case for mandating its use through legislation.

Digitised EHCPs and digital requirements for EHCPs

54. We think the case is clear for all SEND services to move to digital systems for EHCPs. Digital systems can deliver better experiences for both families and professionals and enable them to continuously improve their services – focusing staff time on working with families rather than managing bureaucracy. These improvements could also help realise the benefits of anonymous data collection, taking account of data protection laws considerations and information sharing protocols, to track indicators such as progress made towards outcomes, trends in the prevalence of need and the provision that is made available. This timely picture of the health of the SEND system could help build the evidence base for National Standards and be a feature of the national and local inclusion dashboard.

55. We are pleased that so many local authorities have already implemented digital EHCP systems and would like all local authorities to move quickly to digitise to gain the benefits outlined.

56. This is an evolving market. We recognise that local authorities are at very different stages of their digital journey and that this Improvement Plan contains significant, long-term reforms to the SEND system which digital EHCP systems will need to accommodate. We have spoken to local authority SEND teams and recognise the need for local collaboration and leadership to drive these improvements forward. Any digital EHCP system should also be implemented to recognise and comply with additional data collection asks, such as the SEN2 annual survey.

57. Therefore, in parallel to local digitisation, the Department for Education will work to develop digital requirements for local authorities to adapt to over time. We will continue to work with local authorities and suppliers to best support this shift towards digitisation and move towards consistent standards of digital EHCP systems.

58. We will work to develop and deliver digital requirements for EHCP processes by:

Phase one (2023)	Phase two (2024)	Phase three (2025)
• Working with local authorities, suppliers and families to further test how digital solutions might best improve their experiences of the EHC process.	• Designing digital solutions and testing drafts with local authorities and suppliers.	• Dependent on digital solutions tested and agreed upon, begin rollout of requirements across local authorities.

Multi-agency panels

59. Respondents agreed that having a wider group of relevant professionals and partners to advise the local authority at key decision points through the EHC process – at the application, planning and review stages – could add value. However, they felt that government needed to be precise about the scope, status and membership of these panels for them to be effective.

60. We know that many local authorities have established multi-agency panels who meet regularly. We recognise that there are other panels (such as multi-agency safeguarding hubs, Local Inclusion Group members or advisory panels of expert practitioners) that already provide support and challenge and we do not want to increase bureaucracy in the system. However, the main source of independent scrutiny of local authority decisions specifically related to the statutory SEND system is currently the First-tier Tribunal. We think enabling a more holistic conversation between local partners about

a child or young person's needs and plan, where those partners can support and challenge each other, would promote good local authority decision-making and facilitate timely help and access to services for children and young people with SEND.

61. We believe there is a potential role for panels to bring together partners who can provide services more quickly and easily, drawing on the expected provision outlined in the National Standards for educational support, and linking up with health-commissioned services and family help, including short breaks. The panels could help to ensure families are offered services, going beyond signposting and helping families to navigate the system across education, health (including mental health) and care. Offering the right services at this early stage will help to reduce escalation of need and reassure parents that their child is being effectively supported to thrive through ordinarily available services, providing consistency around when an EHC assessment can add most value. Where a child does require more intensive and coordinated support, the panel can support the local authority in the decision to carry out an EHC assessment, whilst also looking to offer support promptly.

62. We will work with a small number of local authorities to develop and test a standard for multi-agency advisory panels, to assess the most effective size, membership and remit of a group, and whether the standard EHCP form is effective. We will take this forward alongside the Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy's commitment to strengthen the role of education settings as part of proposed updates to the statutory guidance on Working Together to Safeguard Children.

Tailored Lists

63. As this Plan makes clear, we must ensure that children and young people receive the support that is right for them and that decisions about placements are backed by evidence of what will set them up for success.

64. We outline in this chapter how new local inclusion plans overseen by the new local SEND and alternative provision partnerships will set out how the needs of children and young people in the area will be met in line with the new National Standards. We will ensure this informs the existing statutory local offer of SEND services and provision, as well as clarifying the graduated SEN Support offer, so parents can clearly see what they can expect in their area.

65. In response to the green paper many families, local authorities and those working in education agreed that greater clarity is needed around what support and placements are available so that children and young people get the right support in the right setting. We have heard agreement that a tailored list of settings would provide parents and carers with clearer information, supporting them to express an informed preference for a placement.

66. We want to improve families' experiences, by helping them to understand and assess the available options. A tailored list would allow local authorities to give clear choices to families and better meet the needs of children and young people, while supporting them to manage placements in a way that ensures financial sustainability for the future. To ensure we can deliver these goals, we will first test this proposal through the Change Programme in a limited number of areas to gain feedback on the best way to support families. In the areas we test this proposal, there will be no change to the existing statutory framework and parents and young people's existing rights will be unaffected.

67. We have also heard some of the significant concerns, particularly from groups representing parents, carers and children and young people, about the introduction of the tailored list. Many were concerned that this would reduce choice, and that meeting the needs of the child or young person would not be the central consideration in drawing up the list. Others wanted to see further detail on this proposal.

68. We will continue to listen to children, young people, their families and SEND sector professionals as we develop and test delivery options for amending the process for naming a place within an EHCP by providing parents and carers with a tailored list of settings. These will include mainstream, specialist and independent placements where appropriate, informed by local inclusion plans that will be produced through engagement with children, young people and their families. We are committed to ensuring parents, children and young people continue to be involved in the decision-making process and will have the right to request a mainstream setting for their child, even when they are eligible for a specialist setting.

69. Development of the tailored list will be sequenced alongside wider system reforms, particularly the introduction of National Standards, improved accountability and better local planning. Tailored lists will only be introduced in an area once the local inclusion plan has been quality assured and signed off by the Department for Education's Regions Group as being in accordance with the National Standards.

Testing and delivering change through a £70 million Change Programme

70. We have heard frequently that the primary reason why the high aspirations of the 2014 reforms have not yet been achieved is because insufficient attention was paid to implementation. That is why we committed in the green paper to support delivery of these reforms through a £70 million SEND and alternative provision Change Programme. This will test and refine key reform proposals and support local SEND and alternative provision systems across the country to manage local improvement.

71. The emphasis we have placed on delivery and implementation for this reform programme has been welcomed. We have heard that lessons must be learned from the past to prevent unintended consequences, such as a drift away from inclusion in mainstream education and over-emphasis on securing an EHCP in order to access support in the future. Some consultation feedback focused on the need to develop a programme that delivers effective support for children, young people and families whilst enabling professionals within the system to deliver their duties and implement significant reforms.

72. Many respondents wanted to see further information about the proposed pace and timing of reforms. Some highlighted the need for fast and effective delivery in the short term, with clear direction for longer term changes.

73. We are clear that we need to support local SEND systems across the country to manage current pressures and local improvements. We need to do this whilst also testing and refining some of the more complex key areas of reform so we can be confident that they will deliver on our ambitions, without introducing unintended consequences. This will enable our understanding of the overall impact of reforms on the system. The £70 million Change Programme will serve as the delivery vehicle for this work by creating up to 9 Regional Expert Partnerships. These Partnerships will consist of a cluster of 3-4 local authorities in each region, including at least one lead local authority. These will help test and refine the key reforms over the next two years, with oversight from the National SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Board. The programme will:

- test, deliver and iterate the key reforms to achieve our ambitions for children and young people with SEND or who are supported by alternative provision. This will ensure we allow services to deliver to a high standard. It will also ensure that we deliver the systemic improvements needed to improve outcomes and can intervene to secure improvement where needed. Testing will provide an early indication of progress against our reform mission. It will build the required evidence base to determine the advantages, and understand the potential disadvantages, of the reforms in the SEND and alternative provision system.
- spread this learning and provide bespoke targeted support in areas that are struggling the most, by creating and deploying an expert ‘taskforce’ to support change in each region. The taskforces will draw on expertise from the Regional Expert Partnerships and the Delivery Partner’s SEND, alternative provision and system transformation expertise. The taskforces will build capacity and proficiency and implement best practice in these areas, complementing any improvement support already being received. They will do this by supporting local areas to harness, innovate, scale and support the spread of effective practice on the ground. This will drive high standards and excellence in the basics, help to stabilise the system and prepare the sector for delivery of the SEND and alternative provision reforms to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND or who are in alternative provision.

74. The proposed model builds on consultation feedback that we need to focus on improving mainstream settings to ensure more timely support is available, whilst sharing effective practice on the ground. The model creates a consortium of expertise in each Region, with a clear rationale for identifying those providing support, those being supported and the focus of that support. Delivery in local areas will be overseen by local strategic partnerships to give fast and effective support.

75. Data on outcomes and experiences of the SEND system highlights some disparities in relation to certain characteristics such as place, gender and race. The government has committed to addressing these disparities more broadly, including through the Inclusive Britain report, published in March 2022. In testing and delivering proposals for the SEND and alternative provision system, we want to ensure that the voices of all children and young people with SEND or in alternative provision and their families are effectively heard and no group is disadvantaged in securing timely access to the right provision – irrespective of place, disadvantage, race or gender. Through the evaluation of the Regional Expert Partnerships, we will assess the extent to which our reforms are enabling this ambition and refine our plans accordingly.

Chapter 3: Successful transitions and preparation for adulthood

1. Our vision is of a SEND and alternative provision system which supports children and young people to successfully move through education and into adulthood, regardless of whether they have an EHCP, through the wide variety of routes available.

2. Although each child and young person's journey will be different, destination planning should be built in from the earliest stages and should continue through their education, centred around the aspirations, interests, and needs of the child or young person. Provision should support children and young people to develop independence, contribute to their community, develop positive friendships, be as healthy as possible, and, for the majority of young people, prepare them for higher education and/or employment.

3. The Department for Education's skills reforms will provide a ladder of opportunity to help young people access excellent education and skills training and continue learning through adulthood, to secure good jobs and progress in their careers.

We will:

- **publish guidance to support effective transitions** between all stages of education, and into employment and adult services.
- **conduct a pilot** to consider the evidence required to access flexibilities to standard **English and mathematics requirements for apprenticeships.**
- **invest £18 million** between 2022 and 2025 to **double the capacity of the Supported Internships Programme**.
- continue to support the Department for Work and Pensions' **Adjustments Passport pilot** to smooth the transition into employment.
- **improve the Disabled Students' Allowance process,** by continuing to work with the Student Loans Company to reduce the time for support to be agreed.

Supporting effective transitions

4. Successful transitions must be well-planned. Late planning and decision-making for a child or young person's next stage and poor support around transitions were clear themes in the consultation feedback, particularly in relation to post-16. Many felt that support is not in place at the point of transition as information about students' needs is not shared readily, easily or early enough. For students with an EHCP, local authorities must specify the post-16 provision and name a setting by 31 March for students leaving school, but this deadline is regularly missed. For those without an EHCP, there is no consistent approach for sharing this information between schools and post-16 settings.

5. To address this, the Department for Education is developing good practice guidance to support consistent, timely, high-quality transitions for children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision. This will ultimately look at transitions between all stages of education from early years and will focus initially on transitions into and out of post-16 settings. This includes transitions into employment, adult services and for young people leaving alternative provision at the end of key stage 4, building on learning from the recent Alternative Provision Transition Fund.

6. We are working with the Department for Work and Pensions and key partners from the SEND and post-16 sectors, including the Association of Colleges and Natspec, to develop the project. We are working with young people with different types of need, including those with and without EHCPs, to co-produce the guidance to ensure it improves experiences and outcomes. We will also involve parents and carers. This guidance will feed into the National Standards and practice guides as they are developed. We will consider how this is reflected when amending the SEND Code of Practice. As set out in chapter 5, we are strengthening accountabilities across the 0-25 system, to ensure children, young people, and their families receive the support they need, including at key transition points.

7. We are also conducting research to understand current user journeys of young people applying and enrolling in post-16 education, to improve the sharing of information.

8. The Department for Education and the Department for Work and Pensions are working closely together to underpin successful and supported transitions into employment: the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing, the Minister for Disabled People and the Minister for Social Mobility, Youth and Progression will meet regularly to drive forward cross-departmental activity to support those transitions.

Case Study – George's* experience in further education at City College Norwich

*The name of the student in this case study has been changed

George joined the agriculture and land-based college at City College Norwich and has additional needs of autism; social emotional and mental health needs; dyspraxia and hypermobility.

The college planned George's transition into college well, involving his parents and the college's specialist EHCP team. Through visits, George was able to orientate his way around the site and reduce his anxiety. George flourished which soon meant that the support he needed reduced. By the end of the year, George had grown in confidence and independence which enabled him to give peer support to other learners.

George said, "I feel I've made some friends on my course. I have friends from high school who I keep in contact with. I feel I'm on the right course and training to be what I want to be. I am slowly getting to talk to more of the class. I'm good at practical things and a decent amount of theory."

His parents have noted that George is joining in and speaking more. They feel this is a combination of realising that he has to ask for help, and that he is enjoying the lessons as they all relate to what he wants to do in the future.

Transitions to Adult Services

9. We recognise that transitioning between child and adult services, including into adult social care, can be challenging. The Department for Education is working with the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England to identify how we can improve these transitions, with the aim to include this in the transitions guidance mentioned above. The work set out in chapter 5 to improve accountability across the 0-25 system will also support this. We are working together with the Department of Health and Social Care to update the Statutory guidance for local authorities and NHS organisations to support implementation of the adult autism strategy, which includes a chapter on transitions. We will also explore good practice to smooth the transition into adult services for young people whose needs are very complex and who may never be able to undertake paid work, to ensure they have options which enable them to flourish and live life to the full.

Higher Education

10. We expect all professionals working with children and young people with SEND to have high aspirations for them, and this includes striving for them to access higher education (HE). We heard through consultation events that a proportion of young people do not feel effectively supported to transition into HE, with some reporting delays in receiving support through Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), and that there are significant differences in the levels and types of support available at different Higher Education Providers (HEPs). Some consultation responses suggested extending EHCPs to support people in HE, to address these issues.

11. In preparation for the 2014 SEND reforms, there was significant discussion with stakeholders followed by debate in Parliament about whether the statutory SEND system (including EHCPs) should extend to HE. It was decided that it should not, as the HE sector already has a number of systems in place to support young people with disabilities. However, we recognise that more can be done to strengthen these systems.

12. The Department for Education and the Welsh Government are working with the Student Loans Company to reduce the length of time it takes for a student to progress from making their DSA application to having their DSA support agreed. We will also seek to set expectations through our transitions guidance on how students should be supported to transition into HE, including how they should be supported to apply for DSA.

13. The Department for Education agrees with the recommendation from the Disabled Students' Commission that university staff need guidance on how to support disabled students. This is so university staff understand the barriers students face and so they can improve students' experiences in HE. This recommendation is likely to be included in the 'Commitment' the Disabled Students' Commission is due to launch in March 2023, asking HEPs to commit to a range of recommended good practice in supporting disabled students.

Qualifications reform

14. The government is committed to supporting students with their future and career planning by improving the quality of qualifications and streamlining their number. Since 2013, we have reformed the national curriculum, GCSEs and A levels to set world-class standards across all subjects. These reforms were substantial and have made a lasting improvement to qualifications, ensuring they reflect the knowledge and skills all pupils need to progress. Our gold-standard qualifications system gives all young people, including those with SEND, the opportunity to achieve their full potential and prepare for a huge range of careers. It does this by offering them a wide choice of different high-quality, evidence-informed academic and technical pathways.

15. Alongside this, our reforms to post-16 level 2 and below qualifications will help to deliver an improved landscape for students. This will enable learners to benefit from high-quality provision that better equips them for progression into work or further study at a higher level. In the government response to the post-16 level 2 and below qualifications review consultation, we set out the groups of qualifications that we intend to fund in the future, grouping the qualifications by level and by purpose, i.e. whether they support progression to employment or to higher levels of study. We are committed to having flexibilities in place to ensure students with SEND can access these qualification groups, and there will be a range of options at all levels which create pathways through the system. We will also regularly review the mix and balance of qualifications approved and engage with SEND stakeholders to ensure we are meeting the needs of all learners.

16. We are also developing a set of National Standards for Personal, Social and Employability Skills Qualifications. These qualifications provide knowledge and skills to support the transition into employment and are particularly important for some students with SEND. We will design these with experts from the education sector and industry, drawing on their extensive knowledge and expertise to shape standards that flexibly meet student needs and deliver relevant knowledge, skills and content in accessible ways.

Preparation for employment

17. We know that with the right preparation and support, the overwhelming majority of young people with SEND are capable of sustained, paid employment. Throughout the consultation, we heard repeatedly that children, young people and their families want to be confident that their education is preparing them for work, and that the people working with them share those high ambitions. They want to know what options and pathways are available to them, and what support and adjustments can help them succeed.

18. We expect Careers Leaders to work closely with the relevant teachers and professionals in their school or college, including the SEND lead, to identify the careers guidance needs of all pupils, in order to help children, young people and their families understand the full range of relevant education, training and employment opportunities available and to support them to achieve their ambitions. To support them with this:

    - **The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC)** provides training and support to design and deliver careers education programmes tailored to the needs of young people with SEND regardless of their educational setting. CEC also encourages employers to provide opportunities for young people with SEND to gain experiences of workplaces, employer encounters and employment.
    - **The Career Development Institute** provides professional development for careers advisers working with young people with SEND.

19. Over 600,000 primary school pupils will benefit from a new £2.6 million careers programme that will deliver targeted, age-appropriate careers support in over 2,200 primary schools, to encourage children to think about future jobs and raise aspirations. The programme is a commitment in the Schools White Paper that will be run by CEC and which aims to challenge stereotypes, including about people with disabilities.

Transitions into employment

20. In addition to providing careers support, we are working with the Department for Work and Pensions to smooth young people's transition into employment, for example through the pilot of an Adjustments Passport. The Passport aims to raise awareness of in-work support and empower young people to have more structured conversations with employers about their support needs. We have been supporting the Passport pilots in three HEPs. Evaluation reports show strong agreement from the more than 200 HE students taking part in the pilots that the Passport will help them get adjustments in the workplace. We are working with Supported Internship and Apprenticeship providers to trial the Passport with supported interns and apprentices and will consider whether it could be trialled in different settings.

21. To ensure disabled people can access the support they need in work, the Department for Work and Pensions provides Access to Work funding. This is a demand-led, discretionary grant that contributes to the disability-related extra costs of working faced by disabled people and those with a health condition in the workplace which go beyond

standard reasonable adjustments, but it does not replace an employer's duty under the Equality Act to make reasonable adjustments. The grant can provide personalised support, including workplace assessments, travel to/in work, support workers, specialist aids and equipment to enable disabled people to move into or retain employment. Young people on supported internships can claim Access to Work funding to support them in their work placement, where needed.

22. We recognise that some young people will need ongoing support to help them secure and sustain employment in adulthood, and we work closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure our programmes are complementary. The Department for Work and Pension's Local Supported Employment (LSE) scheme started in November 2022 and will run until March 2025, helping people with learning difficulties and / or autism to find and retain work. The aim of LSE is to develop a sustainable model for delivering Supported Employment that can help increase the number of supported jobs delivered by local authorities, providing individuals with significant barriers to work with intensive one-to-one support. LSE is being delivered in 28 local authorities across England and Wales and will support around 2,000 people.

23. In 2020/21, the Department for Work and Pensions tested an Autism Accreditation scheme in 15 of its local offices. This scheme developed a service delivery framework to improve the services that job centres deliver to autistic people, by building the knowledge and skills of work coaches and improving processes and systems to better support autistic jobseekers. Although aimed at jobseekers on the autism spectrum, the service delivery framework will also have benefits for other customers with additional needs. The test was a success, and the Department for Work and Pensions are now exploring how to roll-out Autism Accreditation across the whole Jobcentre network.

24. Through the Disability Confident scheme, the Department for Work and Pensions are working with employers to provide them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to attract, recruit, retain and develop disabled people and those with long-term health conditions in the workplace. The scheme encourages employers to think differently about disability and to take positive action to address the issues disabled employees face in the workplace. As of February 2023, there are over 17,700 employers who are members of the scheme[10] covering over 11 million paid employees[11].

Supported Internships

25. The green paper committed to invest £18 million over the next three years to build capacity in the Supported Internships Programme and support more young people with EHCPs into employment. Since then, we have appointed the Internships Work consortium as the delivery partner for this investment. They will be working closely with

[10] Employers that have signed up to the Disability Confident scheme, Department for Work and Pensions, 2023
[11] Disability Confident Jobs Fair Speech, Department for Work and Pensions, 2022

local authorities to double the number of supported internships by 2025 and will engage with all partners in the system to level up the quality of internships across the country. Over 700 job coaches will be trained by 2025 to ensure interns receive high-quality support on their work placements.

26. As part of this work, up to £10.8 million in grant funding will be available to all local authorities over the next three years, alongside support and training. This will enable all local authorities to access a supported employment forum and strengthen the quality of their Supported Internship offers to improve the transition into sustained, paid employment for interns.

Case Study – Katie's* experience on the Supported Internship Programme

*The name of the student in this case study has been changed

Katie, who is 20 years old and autistic, was apprehensive when starting her Supported Internship as sustaining a job was something 'she didn't imagine she'd ever be able to accomplish'.

As part of the programme, Katie's employer received close support to understand her needs and any reasonable adjustments required. Katie's job coach supported her with reassurance, confidence and navigating work-life and relationships. Regular check-ins between Katie, her job coach, and her managers ensured they could review, adjust and work together to help their relationship flourish. The ongoing offer of support during and beyond the Internship was key to making it a success.

Shortly after starting the role, Katie's confidence grew as she was supported to thrive over her difficulties with peer relationships, social communication, and anxiety. Katie quickly became an invaluable team member, leading to her being offered a full-time position as Helpdesk Administrator. Her manager reported that "being able to teach a young person our world and seeing it make a positive impact has been the most rewarding part of this placement."

Reflecting upon her experience, Katie shared: "I wouldn't be in this job without receiving the support I got, I can see all the hard work paid off. It has opened my eyes to the real world and has made me more confident to try new things. I feel ready for the future and I'm happy and proud of myself."

Apprenticeships

27. Consultation feedback highlighted the importance of supporting young people with SEND as they move into employment like an apprenticeship. We are investing in a comprehensive package of professional development for the apprenticeship provider workforce, which we launched in November 2022. The package supports providers to deliver excellent apprenticeships that meet the needs of all individuals, including making reasonable adjustments for apprentices with disabilities.

28. Alongside this, we have published new guidance to make the claims process for learning support funding clearer. Providers can help eligible apprentices to access and complete their learning by claiming additional funding where a reasonable adjustment is provided and evidenced. We are also conducting a pilot to consider the evidence required to access flexibilities to standard English and mathematics requirements (currently apprentices with a learning difficulty or disability may be eligible to achieve their apprenticeship with a reduced level of English or mathematics if they hold an EHCP).

29. We heard about the importance of raising employer awareness and encouraging inclusive practices so young people can access opportunities like apprenticeships. We have been working in partnership with the Disabled Apprentice Network and employers in the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network to share the experience of disabled apprentices and examples of best practice support through publications and events during National Apprenticeship Week 2023. We will update our employer roadmap so employers have the information they need to support their apprentices. Employers could receive £1,000 towards the costs of workplace support when they take on an apprentice aged 16-18 or 19-25 with an EHCP, as well as help to cover the extra costs working individuals may have because of their disability through the Department for Work and Pensions' Access to Work scheme.

30. Consultation feedback also highlighted that children and young people wanted more understanding about what apprenticeships entail. The Department for Education's Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge (ASK) programme continues to inform and inspire young people about apprenticeships, traineeships and T Levels so that they can access these important routes. This includes additional support to students with SEN and working with identified development schools. We will work with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that young people with SEND who are in contact with their services through Jobcentres are aware of apprenticeships and of the benefits they would bring to them.

Local Skills Improvement Plans

31. We have published Statutory Guidance for employer-led Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs). This guidance highlights the important role that national bodies focussing on disability employment, supported employer providers and local disability groups can play in helping education providers and employers to support people with SEND so they can be part of the solution to meeting local skills shortages. This focus on strategic local skills development and supported employment complements the support we are providing to local authorities as part of the Internships Work programme, to strengthen their local supported employment offer.

Chapter 4: A skilled workforce and excellent leadership

1. The multitude of professionals who deliver for children and young people with SEND – in early years, schools, colleges, health and care settings, specialist and alternative provision, local authorities and beyond – are dedicated, highly skilled and passionate about meeting their needs. Throughout the consultation process, we heard clearly that reform is not possible without a strong and capable workforce with robust leadership. Any reform must build on the extensive expertise held by the sector and focus on setting consistent standards and incentives to build one united workforce around the child or young person.

We will:

- introduce a **new leadership level SENCo** (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) **NPQ** (National Professional Qualification) for schools.
- review the **Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Frameworks** (commencing early this year).
- **fund up to 5,000 early years staff** to gain an **accredited Level 3 early years SENCo qualification** to support the early years sector, with training running until August 2024.
- increase the **capacity of specialists,** including by investing a further £21 million to train two more cohorts of educational psychologists in the academic years 2024 and 2025; and, in partnership with NHS England, as part of our £70 million Change Programme, pioneering innovative practice through running Early Language and Support for Every Child (ELSEC) pathfinders to improve access to **speech and language therapy** for those who need it.
- work together to take **a joint Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care approach to SEND workforce planning**, including establishing a steering group in 2023 to oversee this work, which we aim to complete by 2025.
- publish the first **three practice guides** for frontline professionals, building on existing best practice, including the Nuffield Early Language Intervention, the work of the Autism Education Trust, and the government's guidance on promoting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.
- propose **new guidance** on delivering a responsive and supportive SEND **casework service** to families when consulting on the SEND Code of Practice.
- develop a **longer-term approach for teaching assistants** to ensure their impact is consistent across the system, starting with **a research project** to develop our evidence base on current school approaches, demand and best practice.
- **strongly encourage the adoption of the DSCO (Designated Social Care Officer) role** in each local area, including by proposing an amendment to the SEND Code of Practice.
- **extend funding** until March 2025 of the **alternative provision specialist taskforce (APST) pilot programme**, which is testing co-location of a diverse specialist workforce in pilot alternative provision schools.

2. Equipping the sector to deliver reform for children and young people is a long-term challenge – and we know that the impact of the cost of living, compounded by the impact of the pandemic, will make this even more complex. Our programmes and policies will build confidence and expertise at every level of the workforce, from teachers and classroom staff through to specialists, and to leaders who set the overall direction and culture of their settings. We want ordinarily available provision and high-quality teaching to meet children and young people's needs wherever possible, and specialist support to complement the skills and expertise of the wider workforce.

3. A key aspect of this will be our SEND and alternative provision practice guides, which will equip frontline professionals with the skills and expertise to make best use of provision and to identify needs early, accurately, and consistently. By the end of 2025, we will publish the first three practice guides focused on advice for mainstream settings. We will build on existing best practice, such as the Nuffield Early Language Intervention, the work of the Autism Education Trust, and the government's guidance on promoting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. We will identify any gaps in best practice and help build a stronger evidence base in the long-term.

4. We also know that local authority SEND casework teams play a vital role in supporting families to navigate the system and ensuring they have good experiences. Timely and accurate communications are important factors in maintaining parental confidence. Many of the proposals in this Improvement Plan, such as producing good EHCPs through a template and a digitised system, ensuring redress systems are effective and using multi-agency panels well, depend on high-quality delivery by casework teams. We will further consider the skills and training that these teams receive, and when we consult on amending the SEND Code of Practice, we will propose new guidance on delivering a responsive and supportive SEND casework service to families.

Case Study – Telford and Wrekin's SEND casework team

In Telford and Wrekin there has been significant investment in how to approach SEND casework, with a focus on securing positive relationships with parents and carers and keeping open communication.

The local authority has found that a key part of this is to "do the basics brilliantly". A swift response to queries is their priority and as far as possible, they call rather than email.

The team has developed several communication tools with support from its parent carer forum (PODS) and SEND Information, Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS).

They report that the guide they have produced for parents and carers explaining the EHC assessment 20-week timeline has been welcomed as it clearly sets out to the family who their allocated officer is, how to contact them and what to expect during the 20-week pathway.

They also run Moving Forward Meetings as part of the EHC assessment process. Where a difficult decision has been taken, the moving forward meeting, which is always conducted

face to face at the child's educational setting, allows the officer to talk through the decision with the parents/carers and agree a forward plan. The local authority shares that this informal dispute resolution has been incredibly productive, enabled good quality discussions to take place and supports endeavours to minimise a fall into formal mediation processes and ultimately Tribunals.

Every year the local authority reflects and refreshes its approach. Recently officers from the SEND team have led parent drop-ins, which include issues such as early intervention, alternative funding and support mechanisms. They have also delivered workshops focusing on parental participation at annual reviews and report that their family newsletters are very well received.

5. Finally, we are clear that the workforce will be crucial to every aspect of system improvement. Whilst this chapter sets out our vision for the professionals working with children and young people, we will consider the workforce throughout all our reform plans, and understand how we can build the right expertise, capacity and culture to put these into practice.

Improving mainstream provision through high-quality teaching and SEND training

Supporting and upskilling the teaching workforce, so that all pupils and students have access to high-quality teaching, and every teacher is able to adapt their practice to meet the needs of their classroom

6. Teacher quality is one of the most important in-school determinants of pupil outcomes, reducing the risk that children fall behind due to missed opportunities or lack of appropriate support. High-quality, evidence-based teaching is critical in ensuring that the special educational needs of pupils are not mis-identified when their difficulties may be due to poor classroom provision, as well as ensuring that the needs of those with SEN are met effectively.

7. The Schools White Paper set out an ambitious target of 90% of primary school children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. We know we cannot reach this without the right support for children with SEND. The needs of most children can be met through high-quality teaching, and the green paper outlined how adaptive teaching for children and young people with SEND already underpins the frameworks for initial teacher training and early career teachers.

8. We heard, however, that we need to go further if we are going to achieve the aim of improving mainstream provision so that it is more inclusive of children and young people with SEND. Respondents consistently highlighted the need for ongoing teacher training – and when children and young people who are in alternative provision were asked what would have helped them stay in their mainstream school, the most common answer was teacher training in SEND.

9. We will explore opportunities to build teacher expertise through a review of the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Core Content Framework and Early Career Framework. Due to begin early this year, the review will identify how the frameworks can equip new teachers to be more confident in meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND.

10. We are also working with the sector to develop guidance on special schools' involvement in ITT. This will include the appropriate use of special schools for ITT placements and help ensure that providers have confidence to involve special schools and alternative provision in their partnerships. This will enable trainees to benefit from valuable placement experience and enable expertise from special schools and alternative provision to be incorporated into their ITT.

11. We are also providing free SEND-specific professional development, online training, live webinars and peer mentoring opportunities to school and college staff at any stage in their career through the Universal Services programme. The programme, which began in 2022, is backed by almost £12 million and aims to reach at least 70% of schools and FE colleges each year until 2025. Delivery is led by NASEN, in partnership with Education Training Foundation and Autism Education Trust.

12. Since September 2022, the programme has reached out to over 17,000 schools and engaged 99.5% of FE colleges. Almost 3,000 professionals have accessed free online training and attended live webinars with sector specialists, and 60,000 professionals have undertaken autism awareness training through a 'train the trainer' model. Individualised support is also available, with over 80 schools and 135 colleges starting peer reviews to identify ways to improve their SEND provision[12].

13. We are also expanding training to increase school staff confidence in using assistive technology (AT). Following the promising results of our initial pilot, we are extending assistive technology training to a further 150 maintained schools. The extension, known as the 'AT Test and Learn' programme, will teach mainstream school staff how to use AT effectively, with a focus on the technology schools already have available or can easily obtain, such as text-to-speech tools. It will build on last year's pilot by training more schools over a longer period and with more impact data to gain a fuller picture of how AT training can support wider SEND continuing professional development. The AT Test and Learn course is free to attend, and the next cohort will run from March to July 2023.

14. Finally, we recognise the recruitment and retention challenges many settings are facing, and we know that more needs to be done to ensure teaching remains an attractive, high-status profession. Continuing to attract, retain and develop the highly skilled teachers we need is one of our top priorities, as set out in our Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy. That is why we are delivering 500,000 training

[12] Nasen internal report

and development opportunities by the end of 2024, alongside a range of resources to help schools address teacher workload issues, prioritise staff wellbeing and introduce flexible working practices.

Supporting and upskilling teaching assistants, so they are deployed effectively to support children and young people with SEND

15. Support staff play a key role in supporting children and young people with SEND. Some respondents to the consultation wanted to see more action to acknowledge their critical role. Evidence suggests that effectively deployed and well-trained teaching assistants (TAs) can achieve up to four months' progress in pupil attainment.

16. The green paper committed to setting out clear guidance on the effective use and deployment of TAs to support children and young people with SEND. We will do this through the new SEND and alternative provision practice guides, enabling TAs and learning support assistants to make best use of the available provision set out in the National Standards and setting expectations for good practice in meeting the needs of individual children and young people.

17. We will also develop a longer-term approach for TAs to ensure their impact is consistent across the system and the different responsibilities they take on. We want TAs to be well-trained and to be able to develop specific expertise, for example in speech and language interventions. As the first step, we will commission a research project to develop our evidence base on current school approaches, demand and best practice.

Targeted programmes and initiatives to improve educational provision

18. We are investing in the wider school and college workforce and funding evidence-based interventions that can be delivered to all pupils and students who need them, including those with SEND. This includes:

    - Continuing the National Tutoring Programme. To improve the tutoring experience for children and young people with SEND, schools can request SEND specialists, maintain smaller group sizes for pupils with SEND, and align tutoring provision with EHCP requirements.
    - Offering 1:1 tuition and small group support for SEND students and those with EHCPs through the 16-19 tuition fund, which covers vocational and academic subjects, to provide the skills and learning in preparation for adulthood.
    - Additional teaching and learning hours in 16-19 education. To ensure those aged 16 - 25 with an EHCP can benefit, institutions have flexibility to deliver additional hours or appropriate alternative support for these students.
    - Supporting schools to provide a high-quality curriculum, by establishing Oak National Academy as an arm's length body to provide evidence-based, adaptable curriculum resources. Oak's existing resources include specialist lessons for pupils

with SEND and therapy-based lessons covering occupational, physical and speech and language therapy.

- Tackling attendance barriers for pupils with SEND. We know some pupils find it harder to attend school or alternative provision, so may require individualised attendance support at a higher level to their peers. Our new guidance, 'Working together to improve attendance', supports schools, multi-academy trusts and local authorities to work collaboratively to address the in- and out-of-school barriers to attendance (e.g. unmet SEND need) children and their families may be facing.

- Continuing the Accelerator Fund for another three years following its inception in 2021/22. This includes expanding English hubs to 680 additional schools in areas that will benefit most from specialist phonics support and mathematics hubs projects to help pupils to secure the foundation they need to progress, and which may have been missed due to Covid-19.

Equipping SENCos to shape their school's approach through a new SENCo NPQ

19. Special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCos) play a vital role in setting the direction for their school, coordinating day-to-day SEND provision and advising on the graduated approach to providing SEN Support. We want to invest in their training to ensure they are well equipped, valued by their colleagues and the attainment of children with SEND improves.

20. Currently, SENCos must complete the mandatory National Award for SEN Co-ordination (NASENCo) within 3 years of taking the role[13]. To ensure the qualification provides the skills needed for the role, aligns with wider teacher training reforms and is completed consistently, the green paper proposed introducing a new mandatory leadership level SENCo National Professional Qualification (NPQ) and strengthening the mandatory timeframe requirement in which the qualification must be undertaken.

21. We heard through the consultation that introducing a new NPQ sends an important message about the role of the SENCo and the need for it to be "whole-school, senior and strategic" whilst reflecting the complexity of the system and preparing SENCos for this. Where respondents saw disadvantages, it was because they felt that the current qualification is fit for purpose and that changing the type of qualification risks undermining the SENCo role. We heard consistently that there was strong support for strengthening the mandatory requirement to undertake SENCo training.

[13] if they had not previously been a SENCo at that or any other relevant school for more than twelve months prior to September 2009.

22. We intend to replace the NASENCo with a mandatory leadership level SENCo NPQ for SENCos that do not hold the current qualification, including those that became a SENCo prior to September 2009. To ensure the NPQ is high-quality and provides the knowledge, practical skills and leadership expertise needed for the role, we will work with SEND experts to develop the NPQ framework and course design. We are determining arrangements for the transition from the NASENCo to the SENCo NPQ and as part of this, we will consider how the proposal to strengthen the mandatory training requirement is implemented. We will ensure that any strengthened timeframe requirement aligns with teacher recruitment cycles, that the availability of training places meets demand, and that the responsibility for ensuring the SENCo has the relevant training sits at the right level within a school.

23. Further details on the timings for the procurement to identify providers of the NPQ and the approach for introducing the new qualification will be provided in due course.

Ensuring SEND expertise is held at every level

24. As well as the crucial role played by SENCos, we heard about the importance of SEND expertise being held at every level, including senior leaders. Senior leaders play a key role in setting an inclusive culture, in which individual needs are identified and where there are high ambitions for children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision. To support excellent SEND leadership, we have:

- Committed to setting out the first descriptors for academy trust strength, which will include measures for a high-quality, inclusive education. This will help ensure that trust leaders set the right calm, safe and supportive culture for inclusion and improving the outcomes of pupils with SEND and in alternative provision.
- Begun work on a new MAT CEO development offer, providing leaders with the knowledge, skills and behaviours to lead improvement at scale, with the needs of children with SEND and those requiring alternative provision embedded throughout.
- Introduced a new NPQ for Early Years Leadership to support current and aspiring leaders to develop expertise in leading high-quality early years education and care which meet the needs of all learners, including those with SEND.
- Developed the NPQ for Headship to support teachers and leaders to develop the knowledge that underpins expert school leadership and enables all pupils to succeed, including designing and implementing fair and inclusive policies, making reasonable adjustments and encouraging staff to share best practice on supporting pupils with SEND.
- Provided training and capability building to senior strategic leaders in local authorities through the Delivering Better Value Programme, supporting them to design, implement and embed effective change management and evidence-based decision-making.

- Promoted the Local Government Association Leadership Programme, which provides targeted support to senior leaders in local authorities with responsibility for children's social care. SEND is embedded throughout the programme including training, mentoring and bespoke support to deliver targeted interventions to improve their SEND services.

Embedding support from early years to further education

Supporting early years staff to meet need through high-quality early years provision

25. During the consultation, respondents highlighted the crucial role of high-quality early years support in preventing unnecessary escalation of need and providing children with a strong foundation for their future educational journey.

26. Early years staff play a critical role in providing high-quality support for all children to help them reach their potential and avoid learning difficulties arising. To support those children who do have additional needs, the Department for Education committed to funding training for up to 5,000 early years staff to gain an accredited Level 3 EY SENCo qualification. Training will run until August 2024, and we have already had over 4,000 applications for the course. Training is available to all SENCos working in group-based and childminder settings, with additional targeting to specific areas based on levels of disadvantage.

27. In response to feedback from the sector, we have also undertaken a review of the Early Years Educator (EYE) Level 3 criteria. We have consulted on the inclusion of SEND as a standalone criterion, to ensure that all EYE courses include a specific focus on supporting children with SEND. The consultation response will be published in spring 2023.

28. These changes are being taken forward as part of the Early Years Recovery Programme, which provides a package of up to £180 million of workforce training, qualifications and support for the early years sector. As well as SENCo training and EYE reform, the programme includes:

    - funding for up to 10,000 professionals to undertake early mathematics, early communication and language, and personal, social and emotional development training through the third phase of our Professional Development Programme. The previous phase provided more than 1,300 professionals in 51 local authorities with bespoke training, improving the support received by an estimated 20,000 children.
    - the National Professional Qualification in Early Years Leadership (NPQEYL), which includes SEND training.
    - the introduction of up to 18 new Stronger Practice Hubs to support early years practitioners to adopt evidence-based practice improvements, build local networks for sharing effective practice and cultivate system leadership.

A skilled, confident further education workforce

29. Further education (FE) plays a vital role in preparing learners, including young people with SEND, for the next phase of their life, including further learning, training and employment opportunities.

30. The Department for Education's Universal Services programme offers a comprehensive package of SEND training and support for the FE workforce, including employer-led webinars advising on how settings can prepare young people for adulthood and employment, and additional FE-focussed webinars which over 700 college staff and leaders have accessed to date. The programme also offers peer reviews, where FE leaders are given the opportunity to engage in improvement projects.

31. To provide expert support for young people with SEND in FE, we offered bursaries worth £15,000 each, tax free, in academic year 2022/2023 for trainees undertaking SEND Further Education Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

32. Awareness of individual learner needs, and how to respond to these through effective teaching practice, is also a key component of the revised Learning and Skills Teacher (LST) occupational standard. We will require all publicly funded FE ITE programmes to be clearly based on the LST occupational standard from academic year 2024/25, to help to ensure that all those training to teach in FE can effectively recognise and support learners with SEND.

33. To support recruitment across the FE sector, Taking Teaching Further (TTF) is a Department for Education funded initiative that helps FE providers recruit and train experienced business and industry professionals to become FE teachers. TTF has been expanded to include a 'core skills' element, which includes SEND. The aim is to equip industry experts to support learners with SEND into employment in one or more of the 15 technical areas.

34. By March 2023 our FE governance guide will also include the expectation that the governing body of every FE college corporation should have a SEND link governor, who would have a particular interest in the needs of students with SEND.

Providing specialist support at the point of need

35. We are committed to improving the supply, training and deployment of key workforces, to make the best use of professional expertise, at whatever age or stage it is needed, and prevent needs from escalating. Our aim is to harness the expertise of each workforce to create a virtuous cycle where the roles and responsibilities of different professionals and sectors are complementary. National Standards will play a key role in this by clarifying who is responsible for delivering provision and from which budgets.

36. The green paper recognised that children and young people need access to the right specialists but are currently facing delays in accessing this professional support. Through the consultation, we heard further about the challenges presented by long waiting times and staff shortages when it comes to receiving support from specialists.

37. In the green paper, the Department of Health and Social Care committed to working with the Department for Education, NHS England and Health Education England to commission analysis to better understand demand for support for children and young people with SEND from the health workforce so that there is a clear focus on SEND in health workforce planning. The analysis will cover key allied health professionals, including speech and language therapists and occupational therapists.

38. Building on this analysis, the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education will work together to take a joint approach to SEND workforce planning, informed by a stronger evidence base. We will establish a steering group in 2023 to oversee this work, which will feed into the National SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Board, and aim to complete it by 2025.

Increasing the number of educational psychologists

39. We know that educational psychologists play a critical role for children and young people with SEND – in the EHCP assessment and review system, but also in providing early identification and intervention to support the needs of children and young people, and prevention of escalation.

40. In response to the consultation, we heard about the difficulties in securing timely access to educational psychologists. In the green paper we outlined the steps we are taking to increase the number of educational psychologists, including our investment of £30 million to train three cohorts which started in academic years 2020, 2021, and 2022.

41. Since the green paper was published, we have announced a further £10 million for a cohort of over 200 trainee educational psychologists starting this year, and a further £21 million to fund 400 more trainees, commencing in 2024 and 2025.

Access to therapists in areas of need

42. There is strong evidence that without receiving the right support early to address speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), children are at increased risk of poor educational attainment, poor social emotional and mental health and poor employment outcomes. In partnership with NHS England, we will include Early Language and Support For Every Child (ELSEC) pathfinders within our £70 million Change Programme by supporting 9 ICBs and one of the local areas within each of our 9 Regional Expert Partnerships to trial new ways of working to better identify and support children with SLCN in early years and primary schools.

43. The aim of the ELSEC pathfinders is to:

- provide earlier identification and support to children and young people with SEND to reduce the number of children and young people requiring an EHCP to have their needs met.
- build evidence of new ways of working to better and earlier identify and support children with SLCN that could be rolled out more widely.
- test the impact on pupil outcomes such as attendance, attainment, behaviour, mental health and wellbeing over the 2 years of the pilot.

44. This will build on existing initiatives to increase the supply of speech and language therapists and occupational therapists to the NHS. Since September 2020, all eligible undergraduate and postgraduate degree students have been able to apply for a non-repayable training grant of a minimum of £5,000 per academic year, with further financial support available for childcare, accommodation and travel costs.

45. Local inclusion plans will also set out each area's strategic approach to ensuring sufficient education workforces to deliver effective services.

Training teachers of children and young people with sensory impairments

46. We are committed to ensuring a secure supply of teachers of children and young people with visual, hearing and multi-sensory impairments in both specialist and mainstream settings. The importance of these roles came through clearly in consultation feedback and we recognise concerns regarding the number of Teachers of the Deaf.

47. Those teaching classes of children with sensory impairments must hold an appropriate qualification approved by the Secretary of State – the Mandatory Qualification for Sensory Impairment (MQSI). Teachers working in an advisory or peripatetic role are also strongly advised to complete MQSI training, in the best interests of the children and young people with whom they work.

48. To support the supply of teachers with an MQSI, we have already developed a new approval process to determine providers of MQSIs from the start of the academic year 2023/24 and issued contracts. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) are also developing an occupational standard for teachers of Sensory Impairment. This will open up a paid, work-based route into teaching children and young people with sensory impairments by enabling people to undertake high-quality apprenticeships. This will improve the supply of those qualified to teach this important cohort and further help to improve their outcomes. The apprenticeship will attract levy funding, meaning those wanting to undertake it would be funded to do so whilst being in paid work. This will help to open up the profession to individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds. IfATE are working with universities, local authorities and sector representatives, including the National Deaf Children's Society,

the Royal National Institute of Blind People and the British Association of Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People to develop the qualification, and expect it to be available from 2025. In addition to this, the Department for Education are exploring further options to maximise take up of MQSIs with a view to improving the supply of teachers for children with sensory impairments.

Building the health workforce through expanded apprenticeship routes

49. As chapter 3 outlines, we are delivering an extensive package of professional development to the apprenticeship provider workforce. Alongside this offer, our wider work to support growth in apprenticeships is enabling us to support the growth of the health and care workforce. We have seen strong growth of registered nursing degree apprenticeships in recent years, with 3,420 starts in 2021/22, compared to 1,040 in 2018/19[14].

50. There is now a complete apprentice pathway in nursing from entry to postgraduate advanced clinical practice – for example, a person could join the NHS as a Level 2 Healthcare Support Worker apprentice, progress to a Level 5 Nursing Associate apprenticeship, then onto an accelerated Level 6 Registered Nurse Degree Apprenticeship. Health Education England have worked with NHS Trusts to support Nursing Associates' progress onto Registered Nurse apprenticeships – completing one or two years more quickly than their counterparts coming through the typical apprenticeship. People wanting to train as a doctor could achieve their degree by an apprenticeship route from 2023/24, which aims to widen access and participation in undergraduate medical education and deliver better care to patients through a diverse workforce that is more representative of local communities.

51. NHS England are developing a long-term plan for the NHS workforce that will look at the mix and number of staff needed in the future. The plan focusses on the practical action the NHS will look to take, working with partners in government, to grow and transform the workforce, and continue to embed compassionate and inclusive cultures. This includes continuing to grow apprenticeship opportunities from entry level to postgraduate advanced clinical practice. The Department for Education are working with The Department of Health and Social Care to support the growth of apprenticeships needed for the long-term workforce plan.

52. By 2024/25, we will increase investment in apprenticeships across all sectors to £2.7 billion, in addition to making up to £8 million available in 2022-23 to Higher Education Institutions to expand their degree apprenticeships provision.

[14] Apprenticeships and traineeships, Department for Education 2022, Table: Subjects and levels – standards and frameworks

Bringing services together

53. We know that for children and young people with complex needs, joined up working across health, education and care services is particularly important, to support both early identification of needs, and to make sure the right support is put in place as early as possible. We will build upon the good practice initiated through cross-Government commitments in the NHS Long-Term Plan and, for autistic children and young people and those with a learning disability, the Building the Right Support Action Plan (July 2022), to drive faster progress. The Building the Right Support Action Plan brings together actions across government and public services to strengthen community support and reduce overall reliance on mental health inpatient care.

54. Building on last year's investment of £13 million, NHS England are investing £2.5 million in 2022/23 and £1.5 million in 2023/24 to improve autism diagnostic pathways. NHS England are also developing national guidance for Integrated Care Systems about how to improve access to an autism diagnosis assessment.

55. The NHS Long-Term Plan also set out that, by 2023/24, children and young people with a learning disability and/or who are autistic with the most complex needs will have a designated keyworker, implementing the recommendation made by Dame Christine Lenehan.[15] Initially, keyworker support will be provided to children and young people who are inpatients or at risk of being admitted to a mental health hospital. Keyworker support will also be extended to the most vulnerable children with a learning disability and/or autism.

56. The community Keyworking model was developed through extensive consultation with young people, parent carers and other stakeholders, and what families said mattered has been written into the framework for what Keyworkers must deliver. Keyworking services make sure that local systems are responsive to fully meeting the young people's needs in a joined-up way to provide care and treatment in the community with the right support, whenever it is possible. The Keyworking services established in the pilot and early adopter phases within health, local authority or voluntary and community sector hosts actively bring together support to avoid admission, facilitate robust support on discharge and achieve positive outcomes for children and young people and their families. The model is now being rolled out across all areas.

57. To improve early identification, the Department for Education has also invested £600,000 into significantly expanding an autism early identification pilot in at least 100 schools over 3 years, including 10 currently running in Bradford. A 'neurodiversity profiling tool' will empower schools to provide early support for children's needs and decrease the downstream pressures across the system. The Department for Education

[15] These are our children. Council for disabled children. www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/These%20are%20Our%20CHildren_Lenehan_Review_Report.pdf

has since developed a series of ‘Pathfinders’ into four new areas, seeking to understand potential for further development.

Case Study- NHS England Autism in Schools Project

The Autism in Schools project was co-produced by NHS England, parent carer forums and local authorities in North Cumbria and the North East to support autistic children and young people by creating positive environments that support mental health. The project was rolled out in over 300 schools across 26 ICBs in England between 2021/22 and 22/23, following a successful pilot in North Cumbria and the North East, and continues to have positive outcomes for children and young people, families and schools.

Projects were based on bringing education, health and social care services together, providing learning opportunities for school staff, and developing the support available to autistic children and young people. As part of this, most of the schools undertook environmental assessments, also referred to as a sensory audit or learning walk. These explored the sensory aspects of the school environment and were led by occupational therapists, educational psychologists, mental health support teams and local charities.

School staff reported that engagement with the project has made them more open to change, helped them feel empowered to better support the needs of autistic children and young people and supported them to develop stronger relationships with parents, carers and other professionals within the system. Schools also reported finding the whole school training on neurodiversity delivered through the projects especially helpful in allowing them to make reasonable adjustments that support young people to engage in learning, such as low stimulus areas in classrooms, time out passes and individual resource boxes.

Alongside these practical adjustments, schools also reviewed policies and made changes to behavioural and uniform policies to meet the needs of neurodiverse learners.

58. The Health and Care Act 2022 introduces a new requirement for CQC registered providers to ensure their staff receive specific training on learning disability and autism, which is appropriate to their role. To support this new training requirement, the government have made significant progress on the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training, which was trialled in England during 2021 with over 8000 people. Part one of this training – an e-learning package – became available in November 2022.

Providing mental health support to children and young people

59. Meeting children’s social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs is a crucial aspect of strong SEND provision. Schools and colleges play a vital role in promoting and supporting pupil and student mental health and wellbeing. They work to create safe, calm, supportive and inclusive environments, tackle bullying and teach pupils and students about their mental health and about when to ask for help. Through daily interactions, staff can validate children’s feelings, boost their confidence and increase

their resilience. Many education settings also offer targeted support, for example through play therapy or counselling or a nurture or social skills group.

60. However, as the NHS Long-Term Plan recognised before the pandemic, we know many families, children and young people struggle to get timely access to additional specialist support from mental health services.

61. Investment in NHS children and young people's mental health services is growing faster than both NHS funding and mental health investment overall, and the specialist workforce has been growing as a result. A £79 million funding boost in 2021/22 to expand children's mental health services has helped allow 22,500 more children and young people to access community health services, on top of growth already planned in the NHS long-term plan.

62. This funding has also accelerated the roll-out of Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) in schools and colleges, which will be expanded to around 400 operational teams later in 2023, covering around 35% of pupils in England, and reach around 500 operational teams by 2024.

63. Setting teams up involves training a new workforce of Education Mental Health Practitioners to work across health services and schools. This is part of an additional all-age investment of £2.3 billion a year into NHS mental health services by 2023/24. Part of this investment will enable an additional 345,000 children and young people to access NHS-funded mental health support.

64. The independent process evaluation of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Support Team Trailblazer Programme identifies substantial progress in MHST implementation, despite challenges presented by the pandemic. Pupils and students had positive experiences of the first 25 MHST Trailblazer sites it examined, and school and college staff grew in knowledge and confidence around mental health. The programme has evolved since the Trailblazers were launched and the findings will continue to inform the future rollout and mobilisation of MHSTs.

65. To further support positive holistic approaches to promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing, we are also offering all state schools and colleges grants to train a senior mental health lead by 2025, backed by £10 million in 22/23. Over 10,000 schools and colleges - including more than half of state-funded secondary schools in England - have taken up the offer so far.

66. To supplement the senior mental health lead training, we are developing an online hub of practical tools and resources to help mental health leads in schools and colleges to develop and sustain their whole school or college approach to mental health and wellbeing; and a toolkit to support schools and colleges to plan their pastoral offer for pupils and students with social, emotional and mental health needs.

67. The recently published Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy committed to reviewing mental health content included in social work qualifications, early career training and continuous professional development by the end of 2023, including ensuring identification and response to poor mental health issues is embedded in workforce training programmes.

Extending the Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce Pilot (APST)

68. The APST pilot co-locates a diverse specialist workforce in an alternative provision school, with a blended team of specialists providing wraparound support and early needs assessment. Youth and family workers build trust with pupils and families; speech and language therapists develop pupils' communication skills; post-16 coaches support aspirational transitions; youth justice workers prevent offending and reoffending; and mental health therapists improve social and emotional regulation. The APST pilot addresses a critical gap in the evidence on effective practice models in alternative provision by evaluating the impact of embedded multidisciplinary specialist support on attendance, attainment, engagement with education, social and emotional wellbeing, reintegration into mainstream and post-16 transition.

69. Since November 2021, 22 alternative provision schools have worked with over 2,500 young people. Feedback from APSTs is demonstrating the value of building trusted relationships and offering timely and accessible support. In addition, co-locating the core group of specialists is improving staff training and enabling a holistic understanding of and response to a child's needs. The pilot is being fully evaluated by independent evaluators in partnership with the Youth Endowment Fund, which will result in a full impact evaluation[16].

70. The APST pilot will now be funded to run until March 2025. An extension to the pilot will teach us more about the impact on engagement in education, how to secure funding sustainability and how to recruit and retain specialists. We will incorporate the evidence from this pilot into the new National SEND and Alternative Provision Standards and practice guides to ensure expectations for system leaders and frontline professionals are based on existing best practice. The evidence should also encourage local areas to consider this model as an effective strand of their SEND and alternative provision inclusion plans.

71. The APST pilot also provides a valuable opportunity to understand how a specialist taskforce can develop the role of alternative provision in the wider school landscape.

[16] Internal information (metrics and case studies) provided to DfE from AP schools participating in APST pilot

Case Study – Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce pilot: Reuben's* experience

*The name of the student in this case study has been changed

Reuben is in secondary school. His SEND needs include dyslexia, ADHD, social communication difficulties and learning difficulties. He lives with his mother and his younger siblings (a toddler and premature new-born), in a one-bedroom flat. Reuben often does not get to sleep before 1am and is torn between helping his mother and attending school: his school attendance is historically low. He has a history of offending behaviour associated with being a victim of child criminal exploitation.

The APST's family worker conducted home visits, made regular phone calls and visited Reuben at school. The mental health lead gave Reuben's mother safety advice around managing a new-born child in restricted living arrangements and advised on an approach to support Reuben's emotional wellbeing. The youth offending worker took Reuben on as a prevention case, bringing additional intelligence to inform his safety planning.

The APST's interventions have meant that Reuben has been kept safe. While improvements in Reuben's attendance are still being established, he is engaging and benefitting greatly from the support of the specialists. The taskforce is also arranging for him to access speech and language therapy. Reuben is being supported with his post-16 transition options and has now started to look to the future. Looking at possible careers, Reuben has said he would like to be an engineer in the future.

The role for alternative provision schools in providing early outreach support for mainstream schools

72. There is also a key role for special and alternative provision schools in providing early outreach support. This can help mainstream schools with pupils demonstrating challenging behaviour or having difficulty engaging in their education (see case study below) and sits alongside the Department for Education's behaviour hubs programme.

Case Study – Alternative Provision Outreach Support

St George's Primary is one of 62 primary schools within Wandsworth local authority where pupils benefit from local targeted alternative provision outreach support. The funding for this is provided directly from the local authority as part of its universal SEND offer.

The outreach offer supports around 200 of Wandsworth's most vulnerable pupils. Many have multiple overlapping needs including contact with social services and SEND (particularly social, emotional, and mental health needs). The offer includes:

- short-term emergency support in response to specific incidents
- 1:1 support for individual academic, curriculum and behaviour needs including emotional regulation and literacy, and improving social skills
- access to specialist support like mental health services, speech and language therapists or educational psychologists as part of local "team around the child" meetings.

In St George's this is being delivered in a specially designed in-school nurture space. The support from the alternative provision school gives its pupils the confidence to engage in their education within a calm, safe and supportive environment. The school's headteacher believes that this collaboration has provided valuable support which has improved the children's wellbeing and reduced the risk of suspension or preventable permanent exclusion.

Support from Social Care

73. We recognise the importance of aligning SEND reforms with those set out in the Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy. Together, the reforms are designed to create a stronger and more stable network of professionals to deliver improved outcomes for children, young people and their families. This includes strengthening social worker training through the new Early Career Framework, to ensure social workers have skills and knowledge to meet the needs of different cohorts of children and investing in Family Hubs to provide multidisciplinary support.

74. We are developing stronger national guidance for leaders and practitioners through the Children's Social Care National Framework, setting principles for practice and the outcomes that children, young people and families should achieve. This approach reflects the ambition for clear national direction for practice and mirrors the focus on a consistent and robust offer of support, with help being made available at the earliest stage without stigma - the same principles which underpin the proposed National SEND and Alternative Provision Standards. We will develop frontline practice guides, including for professionals working specifically with disabled children to make sure they know how to communicate with children with a disability and provide appropriate help and support to families.

The Designated Social Care Officer Role

75. Many of our proposals, such as standardisation of EHCPs, and introducing multi-agency panels, will improve integration of services and accessibility of support. In the green paper, we advocated for the adoption of Designated Social Care Officers (DSCO) and proposed to use findings from a pilot supported by the Council for Disabled Children to establish what a high-quality standardised DSCO role would look like.

76. We will strongly encourage the adoption of the DSCO role in each local area, including by proposing an amendment to the SEND Code of Practice. The job description and practice expectations for the DSCO will provide the capacity and expertise to improve the links and contributions from care services into the SEND process. Similarly to the DCO/DMO role in health, the DSCO role will support both operational input (such as the contributions from care to Education, Health and Care assessments and reviews) and more strategic planning functions (such as the commissioning of care services such as short breaks) for disabled children and those with SEN.

Chapter 5: Strengthened accountabilities and clear routes of redress

1. We have set out a vision for a SEND and alternative provision system where decisions are made, collectively and consistently by partnerships and informed by robust data and evidence. This will be underpinned by strengthened accountabilities for all those responsible for local delivery. We heard consistently throughout the consultation that current accountability measures are not effective enough. Many respondents felt that whilst the design of the current system and legal framework is right, more should be done to hold all elements of the system to account. They told us that if this is implemented, the support and experiences for children and young people with SEND would improve and the system overall would be less adversarial for families.

2. We agree that more can be done to make sure statutory duties are delivered. Parents should have confidence that their children's needs will be met and that local systems are delivering in line with National Standards, with proportionate and effective action taken, where required, so that children and young people can achieve the best outcomes. Parents should also know that if they have a concern, it will be listened to and resolved in a transparent and efficient way. Our proposals are intended to work together to drive improvements across the 0-25 system. They are underpinned by strong local leadership and supported by a culture of effective relationships, mutual trust and accountability to enable children and young people to get the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

We will:

- **publish a local and national inclusion dashboard** from autumn 2023 to support the development of local inclusion plans, giving parents improved transparency of local performance, informing decision-making and driving self-improvement across the system with ongoing updates and iterations in response to user feedback.
- **deliver updated Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND inspections** from 2023 with a greater focus on the outcomes and experience of children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision.
- create a **ladder of intervention for local areas** from 2023, **greater powers for the Secretary of State for Health** through the Health and Care Act 2022, and robust action for all where statutory duties for children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision are not met, to **strengthen accountabilities** across all parts of the system.
- require every Integrated Care Board to have a **named Executive Board member lead accountable for SEND.**
- **facilitate a more joined-up response between the Department for Education and NHS England** to improve outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND, including social, emotional and mental health issues, and tackle systemic failings leading to significant concerns.
- **strengthen redress for individual disagreements** by clarifying who is responsible for resolving complaints and undertaking further testing of effective mediation approaches.
- set up an **expert group** to support the development of a **bespoke national alternative provision performance framework**.
- work with local authority, trust and school leaders to review processes and develop options for **ensuring transparent and effective movement of pupils** without EHCPs, such as those requiring alternative provision, to address behavioural needs.

National and local inclusion dashboard

3. The green paper set out a proposal to establish a national and local inclusion dashboard that will present timely performance data across education, health and care. The dashboards will improve public transparency, help to enable better decision-making at a national and local level and drive self-improvement across local areas. The metrics in the dashboards will support an assessment of overall system performance and provide a basis for measuring whether we are achieving our mission of improved outcomes, better experiences and a financially sustainable system. Ultimately, the dashboards will help to incentivise the behavioural and cultural change across the SEND and alternative provision system to achieve maximum impact of reform.

4. Respondents welcomed inclusion dashboards as a way of improving their understanding of what was happening in their local area and as a tool to strengthen accountability. They noted, however, that there are significant challenges of placing additional burdens on already stretched services and duplicating various dashboards that are already produced across local areas, including some which are shared with local delivery partners such as schools and parents. Where new mandatory data collections are proposed for the SEND dashboards, they will pass through the Single Data List procedure, which assesses whether a proposed data collection is genuinely necessary; non-duplicative; comparable and coherent with all other data collections; places a minimal burden on local authority data providers; and is fully funded in accordance with the cross-government 'New Burdens Doctrine'.

5. We also heard the need for caution in selecting the metrics to avoid unintended consequences, such as increasing the focus on targets or the misinterpretation of data, as well as ensuring that dashboards are triangulated with other forms of intelligence to develop a fuller understanding. Feedback showed that all stakeholder groups were opposed to including provider-level data (i.e. for individual early years, schools, further education or post-16 settings) as part of the dashboards, given other tools exist or are being developed that fulfil this purpose, such as school and college performance tables.

6. We heard a range of views regarding the metrics to be included in the dashboards and the needs of the various users. For example, some parent groups highlighted the importance of the dashboards being easy to understand and wanted it to focus more on holistic, long-term outcomes and appropriateness of provision, with less focus on the numbers of pupils in certain types of provision. On the other hand, local authorities and mainstream providers thought key contextual measures such as the proportion of children and young people educated in mainstream, were useful for planning with more functionality to explore data.

7. To ensure we develop a tool that helps us achieve our overall objectives, considers the various users in the system and sets out relevant and useful metrics, there is a need to fully test this. We will also seek to address the tensions in the requirements of the various users. Therefore, we propose to test an initial prototype dashboard from April 2023 with a view to making a fully public version available in autumn 2023. Our proposed approach to delivery in the financial year 2023 and beyond is set out below.

Phase 1 (spring 2023)	Phase 2 (autumn 2023 onwards)
• Develop a prototype dashboard that will consist of core metrics using existing data to minimise any burdens. • Test the prototype through the Change Programme from April 2023 to develop a greater understanding of who users are, what they are using the dashboard for and their needs. • Consider whether a fuller, more sophisticated dashboard is needed.	• Publish a first, fully public version of the inclusion dashboards in autumn 2023. • Ongoing assessment to consider updates and future iterations. This could include new metrics and frequent data collection, supported by the long-term digitisation of EHCP processes.

8. In addition, the Further Education (FE) Performance Dashboard, proposed as part of FE Accountability Reforms in the 'Skills for Jobs' White Paper, will show skills-related outcomes for FE learners at provider level, including breakdowns by SEND learners. More detail about the FE Performance Dashboard is set out in the Department for Education's FE Funding and Accountability consultation which ran from July to October 2022. Subject to user testing, the FE Performance Dashboard is currently planned to go live by the end of the 2023/24 academic year.

Strengthened accountabilities to enforce statutory responsibilities and drive better outcomes and experiences

9. Through the consultation, we heard that current accountabilities are too weak, and families have to battle the system to get support. The new National Standards and local partnerships and plans will provide clarity in the system and encourage people to work together, but we know there is a need for stronger incentives and better enforcement for local areas, including providers, to meet statutory duties.

10. Our measures seek to have an impact across the local system to enable the delivery of improved outcomes and experiences for children and young people from 0-25 years old. Families should feel confident that all parts of the system will be held to account and appropriate action will be taken to prevent and tackle failures. They should also feel confident that where issues arise, there are clear and effective routes of complaint so that the right support is provided as soon as possible.

11. Across local areas we are strengthening accountabilities for local authorities, schools, colleges and multi-academy trusts in the following ways:

    - **Updated Ofsted/CQC area SEND inspections:** In January 2023, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission introduced a new approach for area SEND inspections.

These place greater emphasis on the outcomes that are being achieved for children and young people, look more closely at children under 5 and those aged 16-25 years old and include alternative provision for the first time. It will have three possible inspection outcomes providing more nuanced judgements for areas to better inform a Department for Education response into local areas. Finally, as part of the framework, there will be a series of thematic visits each year, with the first focusing on alternative provision, publishing in autumn 2023.

- In 2023, the Department for Education will adjust its response to poor performance, in line with the **new joint Ofsted/CQC area SEND inspection framework**, so that it can act proactively when areas fail to provide the necessary support to meet the needs of children and young people, including the removal of service control and imposition of a trust or commissioner on local authorities, where required. We will develop a holistic new ladder of intervention for local areas, with a focus on creating financial sustainability and improving outcomes for children and young people, based on evidence and data, including data in the new inclusion dashboards and delivery of local inclusion plans alongside inspection outcomes.
- In addition, in 2023, we will evaluate the full evidence base of where statutory duties are met and not met across the local SEND and alternative provision system, to consider mechanisms to ensure we are able to be more robust with any partner that fails to meet their statutory responsibilities.
- Over the next three years, we will continue to support local authorities through several different improvement programmes to address concerns raised by Ofsted and CQC, as well as those identified by our expert advisors. These include improvement programmes such as, targeted performance improvement providing support to areas in need, sector-led improvement offering peer-to-peer support, the SEND and Children's Social Care Joint Local Government Association Leadership Programme focusing on political leadership challenges in local authorities, and what works in SEND identifying and distributing good practice. The programmes focus primarily on local authority practice and provision by addressing the underlying cross-cutting issues affecting SEND performance, including issues around timeliness and high needs budgetary pressures. The aim is to stabilise the system and build capacity and capability to respond to long-term reforms. In addition, the Safety Valve and Delivering Better Value programmes are supporting local authorities with the biggest deficits to reduce pressure on the high needs budget.
- **Inspections under Ofsted's 2019 Education Inspection Framework:** to be judged good or outstanding, schools and colleges must show that children and young people with SEND achieve good outcomes. The school inspection handbook emphasises that pupils with SEND have different needs and starting points, and inspectors will expect to see an inclusive culture in all education settings. All schools, colleges and apprenticeship providers will have at least one inspection between May 2021 and July 2025. For FE, Ofsted focuses on how well learners

with SEND acquire the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life, through an ambitious curriculum based on high-quality teaching and training.

- **Academies Regulation and Commissioning Review:** will set out for the first time, detailed descriptors for academy trust strength which recognise the value that trust-wide policies and leadership can add to individual schools. These descriptors include measures for a high-quality, inclusive education, helping to incentivise leaders to focus on setting the right culture for inclusion and improving the outcomes of pupils with SEND and in alternative provision across trusts.
- The requirement for all schools to publish **SEN Information Reports** that was introduced in the Children and Families Act 2014 means that every school now has published, standardised information about its policy for pupils with SEN. We will now explore whether the expectations about the contents of the SEN Information Report could be developed further to improve transparency.
- **Attendance**: The recently published 'Working together to improve school attendance' guidance sets out clear roles and responsibilities for schools, multi-academy trusts and local authorities to work together to provide access to early help services and ensure joined up support for children and their families facing special educational needs, health or disability related barriers to attendance. In working with their parents to improve attendance, schools should be mindful of these barriers and put additional support in place such as pastoral or curriculum support.

12. The Department for Education will also work with health colleagues to strengthen lines of accountability through health structures by:

- **Every Integrated Care Board (ICB) will have an Executive Board Lead** for Children and Young People with SEND and Safeguarding, responsible for supporting the ICB Chief Executive in meeting the legal requirements of relevant legislation. Statutory guidance will be issued for ICBs in relation to the requirement for an Executive Lead role for safeguarding and SEND.
- **Continue to review and bring together the existing functions of Designated Clinical Officers and Designated Medical Officers.** This will provide greater consistency in the offer this role brings to the local SEND partnership in relation to the health needs of children and young people with SEND. We will work to maintain the expertise that Designated Clinical Officers and Designated Medical Officers bring to the role and consider whether Designated Health Officer is the most appropriate title.
- **Facilitating a more joined up response between Department for Education and NHS regional and national teams** to improve outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND and tackle systemic failings leading to significant concerns.

Strengthened redress and mandatory mediation

13. Throughout the consultation, many families told us that they felt they needed to go through a lengthy, stressful and often expensive appeals process to secure support for their child.

14. The delivery of National Standards, improved co-production with families and strengthened accountabilities will make it clearer for families what support should be provided and by whom. These improvements should help to prevent disagreements arising in the first place.

15. To help maintain positive relationships locally, we will refresh the model set for co-production at a local level including clear and transparent communication with parents. This will set out expectations for how local areas should work with families in their area to engage constructively and, as a result, prevent issues from escalating. We will also continue to offer training and support, via our contracted delivery partners, to SEND Information, Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS). SENDIASS provide valuable support and free advice to families of children with SEND, and to local areas to resolve disputes early and at formal stages. We will work with our partners to promote the published minimum standards for SENDIASS services and consider with our partners whether the minimum standards should be incorporated into the SEND Code of Practice.

16. When families feel that the service they have received from the local authority has not been good enough, such as deadlines being missed, there are existing routes to seek redress, such as the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). To make it clearer for families how SEND-related concerns and complaints should be dealt with, we will amend the SEND Code of Practice so that it is clearer about who is responsible for resolving concerns. We will set out the routes of escalation if families remain unhappy with the way their concerns have been addressed. To inform this, we will look at what the role of the LGSCO, who consider complaints against local authorities, should be in a reformed SEND system. Additionally, the upcoming Academies Regulation and Commissioning Review will look at removing the duplication of processes between different bodies, improving the experience for trusts, schools and parents.

17. Data on complaints and appeals will be made transparent through national and local inclusion dashboards and be used, alongside other metrics, to monitor performance across areas and drive improvements.

18. For appeals about decisions regarding EHC needs assessments and plans, we proposed in the green paper to make mediation a mandatory part of the Tribunal appeals process. The consultation showed some support for mediation and giving it a greater role to play in redress. We also heard that for mediation to be effective, it needs to be high-quality. However, there were concerns about how making mediation mandatory could lengthen the resolution process for cases that do need to go to Tribunal and how this could delay children and young people with SEND receiving appropriate support.

19. Mediation can help narrow areas of dispute and pave the way for an agreement to be reached. It is usually much quicker than going through a Tribunal process and can help to prevent the additional stress that can come from preparing a case for Tribunal. To ensure that mediators understand the SEND system and are properly equipped to understand all views and appropriately guide families through the process, we will review and build on existing professional standards for SEND mediators. Local authorities will remain responsible for commissioning and funding mediation at no cost to families.

20. We will further improve the quality of mediation and ensure it offers a good service to families by:

Phase 1 2023 (autumn)	Phase 2 2024 (autumn)
• Working with the Civil Mediation Council, the College of Mediators, other sector partners and families to review and build on the professional standards for SEND mediators. • Improving the information, advice and guidance available to families on mediation. • Evaluate the outcomes and impacts of mediation.	• Clearly setting out what processes should be followed by education, health and care partners locally. • Setting out how the mediation process will be monitored to give families confidence in it.

21. We will continue to explore options for strengthening mediation and will test and evaluate approaches further before deciding whether to bring forward legislation to make these strengthened processes statutory and make mediation mandatory. We will be more effective at using data on how mediation is carried out locally to inform intervention activity and will take action where local areas are not participating in mediation as required.

22. The SEND Tribunal is an important backstop for cases that cannot be resolved through early dispute resolution. Resolving more cases via early dispute resolution and mediation will enable the SEND Tribunal to hear cases more quickly than it does now and improve the experience for families who need it. It will also enable more local authority resource to be focussed on providing direct support to families rather than on the administrative burden of preparing for Tribunal cases.

23. The SEND Tribunal also hears disability discrimination claims against schools. In the green paper we set out that we wanted to explore how well the Tribunal's remedies in disability discrimination cases against schools were working in practice. Throughout the consultation, we heard calls for more guidance to increase awareness of schools' duties under the Equality Act 2010 to prevent discrimination, as well as some feedback that the remedies available to the Tribunal in disability discrimination cases should go

further by enabling financial compensation to be awarded. We will seek to prevent discrimination from arising in the first place by supporting schools to comply with their duties under the Equality Act 2010. We will also further consider our policy on how disability discrimination claims against schools are dealt with.

A bespoke alternative provision performance framework

24. Measures used to indicate the performance of mainstream schools do not work well for alternative provision schools. Pupils entering alternative provision will do so having disengaged with education and have significant gaps in their learning, and alternative provision schools will often only have a short time to work with pupils to address those issues. This lack of clear measures specific to the needs of pupils in alternative provision schools makes it hard for those schools to assess where they need to make improvements.

25. To improve the quality of alternative provision based on our new vision for a three-tier service, we proposed to introduce a bespoke alternative provision performance framework based on five named metrics. This would be designed to set robust standards focused on aspects such as increased attendance, attainment, re-integration into mainstream education or progression to sustainable post-16 destinations. Respondents from alternative provision settings, and their commissioners, offered the greatest support and agreement to this proposal. There was also a positive response to setting up an expert group to help improve alternative provision data and performance information at both provider and local level, so that it supported the inclusion of alternative provision into Area SEND inspections. We will set up this expert group as a next step in developing an alternative provision performance framework.

Greater oversight of pupil movements

26. The majority of schools and local authorities act appropriately in facilitating the movement of pupils without EHCPs, for example when children and young people require alternative provision to address behavioural needs. In most areas, local authorities and schools work well together to secure the right places for children, but this does not happen everywhere, and some pupil movement is opaque. A lack of clear oversight can lead to children being placed in settings that don’t meet their educational needs. At the most extreme, they may be missing education altogether, putting already vulnerable children at greater risk. Feedback from the consultation consistently identified a lack of joint working as one of the main weaknesses in the current system. Poor partnership arrangements can also work against our three-tier model for alternative provision, acting as a block to reintegrating children when they are ready to return to mainstream education.

27. We will work with local authority, trust and school leaders to develop options for ensuring transparent decision-making on pupil movement with the child's best interest at heart. These will include arrangements for fair access panels, and will be in line with new National Standards around the role of specialist and mainstream schools in making arrangements for alternative provision. Alongside this, where a school place has not been secured through fair access, we will look at how we can make the process of applying to the Secretary of State for a direction to admit as effective as possible. We will keep the effectiveness of these changes under review and will consider further powers around the placement of children if we need to go further to ensure there are safe and appropriate placements for every child.

Unregistered alternative provision

28. We recognise the need to strengthen protections for children and young people in unregistered alternative provision settings, so that every placement is safe and has clear oversight. To find the right solution, we launched a call for evidence on the use of unregistered alternative provision, which closed on 30 September 2022. We have seen responses that reflect small, flexible provision being able to address individual need in supporting children and young people to engage with education. We have also heard powerful testimony from young adults who feel their life chances were transformed through attending non-school settings.

29. In some local areas there are strong delivery models, for example, with close management by local authorities or alternative provision schools, of frameworks offering quality assured providers, backed up by strong attendance management systems, safeguarding controls and support for wider development. However, this approach is not enough on its own. It can only be effective alongside rigorous oversight of pupil placements and continual attention to the needs of the child. In the best systems, planning for the end of the placement begins at the outset, with a focus on the pupil's progression back into mainstream education.

30. We are analysing responses to the call for evidence whilst having further conversations with providers, commissioners and users on potential implications of the proposals, such as restricting the use of unregistered settings to part-time or time-limited placements, and how such placements should complement education in school. We will set out further proposals as they develop. Separately, for the limited and exceptional cases where commissioners deem full-time online alternative provision to be in the child's best interest, the Department for Education has launched an Online Education Accreditation Scheme for those providers.

National SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Board

31. The green paper proposed setting up a National SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Board to hold partners to account for the timely development and improvement of the system. Following feedback we heard throughout the consultation, we will establish the National SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Board, comprised of parents, sector leaders across education including schools, early years and post-16, health and care and local and national government. The board will be jointly chaired by the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy.

32. The purpose of the Board will be to oversee the implementation of this Improvement Plan. It will be informed by data and sector views, the needs and views of children, young people and parents will be central to its work, and it will embrace the principles of co-production in how it operates. It will draw from, and promote, good practice to lead and drive change across the SEND and alternative provision sector.

33. The Board will also receive regular input from a wide range of stakeholders, including children, young people and parents, and from groups that have been set up to inform the development of specific system reforms. The Board will publish updates on progress in delivery against this Plan for children, young people and parents.

Chapter 6: A financially sustainable system delivering improved outcomes

1. The new single national SEND and alternative provision system should deliver consistent, clear and early support for children and young people with SEND and provide financial sustainability. The system should enable local partners to work together effectively with families to deliver for children and young people. Each partner should be accountable for playing their part, restoring young people and families' faith in the support they receive. Alongside record investment in high needs, these reforms should mean more resources are dedicated to providing timely, effective support early and as a matter of course in mainstream settings. This should reduce the burden on parents to have to navigate the lengthy statutory EHC assessment process to receive support.

2. Through the Change Programme, we will build momentum towards this fairer and financially sustainable national SEND and alternative provision system that identifies clear standards for the provision and processes that should be in place for all children and young people, no matter what their need or where they live. This will help design and test these policies to ensure they work and do not create any unintended consequences for families. Meanwhile, we are supporting all local authorities to look at what positive action can be taken now to deliver high-quality services while bringing high needs budgets under control, so that local areas are in the best position to deliver the wider SEND system reform.

3. These reforms will be a significant change to the high needs system and will require reforms to funding arrangements to support their delivery, for example, by ensuring that funding allows providers to deliver the expectations set out in the National Standards efficiently. Clear and transparent processes, which strike the right balance between national consistency and individual need, will ensure a fairer and clearer system that takes all voices into account, especially those of children, young people and their families. Ensuring an appropriate supply of specialist provision will make sure that high-quality specialist settings are available to those that require them.

We will:

- increase **core school funding by £3.5 billion** in 2023-24 compared to the year before, of which almost £1 billion of that increase will go towards high needs. This means high needs funding will be £10.1 billion in 2023-24.
- support **local authorities** through the Delivering Better Value and the Safety Valve programmes and share the best practice from local areas with inclusive and sustainable high needs provision more widely.
- develop a **system of funding bands and tariffs** so that consistent National Standards are backed by more consistent funding across the country.
- publish a response to the **consultation on the schools National Funding Formula** in 2023 which includes proposals on funding for SEND, including the notional SEND budget, and a mechanism for transferring funding to high needs budgets.
- develop **new approaches to funding alternative provision** aligned to their focus on preventative work with, and reintegration of pupils into, mainstream schools. We will do this in consultation with mainstream schools, the alternative provision sector and local authorities.
- re-examine the state's **relationship with independent special schools** to ensure we set comparable expectations for all state-funded specialist providers.

Fairer, sustainable funding

Supporting local authorities

4. We are supporting all local authorities to look now at what positive action can be taken to improve the way children and young people's needs are met, prepare for wider SEND system reform, bring high needs costs under control and address DSG deficits. This includes the additional funding following the 2022 Autumn Statement, high needs funding will be rising to £10.1 billion in 2023-24 – an increase of over 50% from the 2019-20 allocations.

5. Despite this level of funding, and the best efforts of local authorities, there continues to be a significant proportion of local authorities with accumulated DSG deficits, with the total deficits increasing to over £1 billion by the end of 2020-21. The DSG 'statutory override' has been extended for a one-off period of three years (up to March 2026) to allow local authorities the short-term flexibility needed to implement sustainable change. It is critical that, during this extension, local authorities continue to work with all parts of the SEND system to put themselves in the best position so that when the 'statutory override' comes to an end, local authorities are able to demonstrate their ability to deal with remaining DSG deficits. In view of this, we have already begun supporting local authorities facing particular challenges in delivering their high needs system for children and young people sustainably. More than half of local authorities have been invited to join either the Safety Valve programme or the Delivering Better Value programme.

6. The Safety Valve programme, introduced in 2020-21 for those local authorities with the very highest percentage DSG deficits, requires these local authorities to develop substantial plans for reform to their high needs systems. With support and challenge from the Department for Education's SEND and financial experts, authorities produce plans to rapidly place their system on a sustainable footing by running it more effectively, working collaboratively with key partners and families to do so. The Safety Valve programme has demonstrated that, if a local area's leadership work together, it is possible for even those areas facing the most acute challenges to create innovative and viable plans to reach a sustainable position and maintain a focus on high-quality provision for children and young people with SEND. Steps they have taken to do this include developing a stronger mainstream offer, improving support for phase transitions, and ensuring sufficient local places to meet needs.

7. As part of the programme, we expect local authorities' chief executives, chief finance officers, and Directors of Children's Services to work together on the development of plans. These plans must also include listening to the experiences of children and young people and their families, and local authorities must have the support and engagement of local leaders, schools, parent and carer forums, and other key stakeholders. The principles of all Safety Valve agreements reflect the need to reach sustainability through genuine collaboration with partners to ensure children and young people's needs are met early and appropriately.

8. In 2022, we introduced the Delivering Better Value in SEND programme to target the 55 local authorities who have the next highest percentage DSG deficits after those in the Safety Valve programme. The programme takes a Diagnostic approach to helping local authorities identify achievable and sustainable changes that can drive high-quality outcomes for children and young people with SEND and equip authorities with the tools to enable them to maintain these changes sustainably, on an ongoing basis.

9. The objective of the Diagnostic is, through robust evidence gathering and wider system engagement, to support authorities to identify the most impactful changes that can be made to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND. Since the programme started, 20 local authorities have completed the Diagnostic, with inputs from over 1,800 parents and carers, 500 education providers and professionals, and 700 practitioners across the 20 local systems. The work so far demonstrates that achievable opportunities exist to improve parent, carer and child experiences while managing spend more effectively across the SEND system. We will share learning, insights and best practice from the programme as it progresses.

10. We are seeing that local authorities are able to refocus their resources and provision to encourage mainstream schools to be more inclusive, ensure needs are met early and appropriately and use available local provision effectively. We have published a research report and accompanying guidance to assist local authorities as they make plans for sustainability, drawing on existing good practice in the sector and learning from the programmes. The research report shares over 60 case study examples of

positive practice found in local authorities and offers advice and recommendations that can be applied in other local areas. The initial experience from the Safety Valve and Delivering Better Value programmes, along with this research, has demonstrated that some local authorities can and should be doing more to manage their systems well and sustainably. By supporting all local authorities to act now to adopt practices which support children and young people effectively and sustainably, we can put the system in the best position in advance of our wider reforms.

Bands and tariffs

11. The green paper acknowledged that to improve financial stability in the system, we must make the most effective use of high needs funding so that local authorities can use the record levels of investment to deliver quality support for children and young people with SEND and balance their high needs budgets. We will introduce a national framework of banding and price tariffs to support commissioners and providers to meet the expectations set out in the National Standards. Whilst there will always be some local variation, to have a consistent, national SEND and alternative provision system and ensure value for money, we must move to a world where similar types of support are backed by similar levels of funding. Bandings will cluster specific types of education provision and tariffs will set the rules and prices that commissioners use to pay providers to deliver what is set out within the National Standards. This will be implemented alongside our broader changes to the national funding system and the development of National Standards. This will ensure that money is targeted to where it is needed most and incentivise and equip settings to provide high-quality education provision, thereby improving outcomes of those with SEND.

12. Many stakeholders have welcomed the proposal for a more nationally consistent and transparent system. Some stated that a national framework will improve consistency and reduce the administrative burden on settings that accept pupils and students from multiple local authorities (such as colleges), while others welcomed more transparency from providers to show how budgets are spent.

13. Many respondents also expressed the importance of ensuring that funding and spending are designed to meet children and young people’s needs, so that national consistency does not undermine supporting individual needs. This was echoed by stakeholders who noted that children and young people’s needs change over time and those with the most complex needs may not fit into neat categories or descriptors. Similarly, some said that a national approach should not cut across personalised individual decision making. Some stakeholders agreed that need should drive provision and that any nationalised approach should only help inform funding. We also heard that a degree of flexibility at a geographical level was necessary, to be able to respond to different financial landscapes.

14. Most local authorities already make use of banded funding arrangements, based on local levels of available provision and costs. We know that an effective funding system is one that is consistent but is also flexible, transparent and simple. The introduction of a national bands and tariffs funding system that sets expectations for the cost and delivery of provision, with appropriate flexibility, is dependent on other policy proposals, particularly the development of National Standards, so this will be developed alongside them. It will be designed to appropriately reflect the needs of children and young people, including the most complex needs, and to meet the cost of the provision that they need. It will give providers clarity on how much funding they should expect to receive in delivering support or a service and enable commissioners to determine the funding required.

15. We know that currently there is significant variation in the cost of provision across the country, so, starting in 2023, we will undertake research to gather more information about the costs of provision and then explore the best way to manage and reduce this variation as much as possible. To do this we will:

    - work with commissioners and providers to collect and analyse data on the cost of provision, which will then be used to inform the development of the bands, tariffs and funding structures needed to deliver the support set out in the National Standards.
    - consider how this research data can be shared with local authorities and providers to inform local decisions on commissioning and funding.

16. We will look at how we can support local authorities by sharing this data to help inform their spending decisions. This will help to address some of the current inconsistencies in spending on high needs, in advance of the implementation of National Standards and the accompanying tariffs.

17. To further support fairer, sustainable funding, we will continue to work with independent specialist providers to consider how we can ensure that there is clarity and transparency about the cost of bespoke packages of support for children and young people with the most complex needs.

Standardisation of Notional SEND Budgets

18. It is important that mainstream schools are resourced appropriately for making suitable provision for their pupils with SEND. In August, we published guidance on the notional SEN budget for mainstream schools that sought to clarify what the current notional SEN budget is for and how local authorities should review the calculation of that budget through local funding formula factors.

19. We are progressing towards fully implementing the National Funding Formula (NFF) for mainstream schools. We consulted in summer 2022 on moving to a direct NFF whereby all mainstream schools are directly funded via the NFF rather than through

150 local school funding formulae. As part of this, we consulted on whether the direct NFF would identify an indicative SEND budget for schools. Most responses to the consultation, including the majority of responses from local authorities and schools, indicated support for the direct NFF to include the identification of an indicative SEND budget determined by the Department for Education. We will publish more details on the outcome of this consultation in spring 2023.

20. In moving towards the implementation of the direct NFF for mainstream schools, we will be looking carefully at what the National Standards say about the SEND provision that schools should make available. This important first step will inform the level of funding that schools will need within their total budget to deliver the expected type and level of provision for their pupils with SEND. We can then work out how best to design the calculation of the indicative SEND budget for each school.

Funding stability for alternative provision

21. Alternative provision schools face a unique difficulty in accurately predicting pupil numbers. The link between funding and pupil numbers also presents a potential perverse incentive to admit and keep pupils when they could receive interventions in, or return to, mainstream provision. Given these issues, the green paper proposed to ensure that state-funded alternative provision schools (whether local authority-maintained pupil referral units or alternative provision academies or free schools) have the funding security and stability they need to deliver a support service focused on early intervention. Under this proposal, local partnerships would draw up a plan for delivering alternative provision in their area and identify the budget that would be needed to implement the plan over a minimum period of 3 years.

22. This proposal was welcomed across the sector, with consultation responses recognising the benefits of providing greater certainty. Responses also suggested that identifying a specific budget for alternative provision would help in local decisions about how much high needs and other funding should be earmarked for that purpose.

23. We will develop new approaches to the funding of alternative provision, based on the three-tier system that prioritises preventative work and reintegration of pupils back into mainstream schools. Funding changes will also need to reflect the role that local partnerships will play in organising alternative provision for an area and establish a more stable financial system for those delivering this provision. As we test the changes in the planning and delivery of alternative provision through the Change Programme, we will make sure that they are supported by appropriate funding reforms. Before implementing funding changes nationally, we will carefully consult with those who provide alternative provision, with mainstream schools that should benefit from their services and, importantly, with local authorities. Local authorities will remain legally responsible for arranging suitable education for those without a school place.

Post-16 funding

24. We are very conscious of the distinct funding issues for colleges and the further education sector, and the many calls on the 16-19 disadvantage funding that is partly allocated to support students with SEND and other additional needs. We have heard a great deal about the challenges across the sector, including the variable approaches to commissioning and funding that colleges experience from the local authorities that they deal with, and, in some cases, the sheer number of authorities that they have to engage with. We know that reform is needed, and we will continue to work with the college sector and local authorities as we consider any changes for the future that may be needed, in addition to the introduction of the National Standards and funding bands and tariffs.

Early years funding

25. In early years, local authorities are required to establish a Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF) to provide additional top-up funding to providers to improve outcomes for children with SEND. Funding for the SENIF can come from both the early years and high needs funding blocks of the DSG. We are very aware that the early years sector is facing economic challenges – similar to challenges being faced across the economy – making it more important than ever that the early years funding system is effectively supporting children with SEND. We will work with local authorities, early years providers and stakeholders to consider whether changes to the SENIF and other associated elements of the wider current early years funding system are needed, to ensure early years SEND funding arrangements are appropriate and well-targeted to both improve outcomes for all pre-school children with SEND, and to support the introduction of a national framework for bands and tariffs.

Management of independent special schools

State-funded independent schools

26. The green paper proposed that national bands and tariffs would apply across the whole range of special education provision, including the independent specialist sector. Independent special schools represent a third of special schools and support 5% of pupils with EHCPs (School Census 2022). The sector's funding comes overwhelmingly from the state, for example in 2022, local authorities placed over 20,000 children and young people with EHCPs in independent special schools[17]. Despite this, the sector is not treated in the same way as state-maintained specialist provision. Its regulation is designed for private fee-paying schools. Management is fragmented and small-scale, based on local authorities' individual pupil placements. This is inefficient for both commissioners and providers and makes it difficult to assess the overall impact of independent special schools. Provision can be opened or closed regardless of the

[17] Special – Independent, Education, health and care plans, Department for Education, 2022

effect on the existing local offer of provision made by schools and colleges, leaving local authorities to deal with over or under supply.

27. We will re-examine the state's relationship with independent special schools to ensure the expectations we set are comparable to those on other state-funded specialist providers. We will work with the sector to consider how they should be aligned with the new National Standards, defining the provision they offer and bringing consistency and transparency to their costs. This will mean that independent specialist providers should be part of local authorities' strategic planning and that decisions about changes to the supply of their provision should be made through Local Inclusion Partnerships.

28. A number of respondents to the consultation were concerned by the risks of trying to standardise highly specialised provision. We do not wish to prevent bespoke packages of support being offered for children and young people with the most complex needs. However, there should be clarity and transparency about the provision available including at highly specialised schools and colleges so that children and young people who need such provision can access it quickly, and to ensure that costs are reasonable. Our work with commissioners and providers to understand the provision offered and its costs will therefore ensure that we do prioritise such provision for those with the most complex needs.

Residential placements for children and young people with complex needs

29. In October 2022, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published its phase one findings into safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) has also raised issues such as children's voices not being heard, the different regulatory standards for residential special schools and children's homes, and the failure of existing checks and balances. This builds on concerns raised by Dame Christine Lenehan in her two 2017 reports into children's homes[18] and residential special schools[19]. The evidence submitted to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care also highlighted that placements for children and young people with complex needs (often autism, learning disabilities and mental health needs, which can include behaviour which challenges) are often poorly planned and unavailable locally when needed. This results in children and young people being placed far from home, sometimes in placements which are not ideally matched to their needs. A consistent theme has been that children and young people with complex needs who are placed far away from home are more vulnerable. These reports also highlight that disabled children who have difficulty in communicating are at increased risk of abuse. It is vital that we look at what more can be done for those children and those who are outside their local area.

[18] These are our children: a review by Dame Christine Lenehan, Department of Health and Social Care, 2017
[19] Good Intentions, Good Enough? Residential special schools and colleges, 2017

30. A significant proportion of the children and young people in residential special schools are placed there because of challenging behaviour. Residential provision may be the right way to meet the needs of some children and young people, but it places them at greater risk by removing them from their families and local support networks. The proposals set out in this Improvement Plan to increase the capacity of mainstream schools to meet a wider range of needs, have a key role to play, supported by a proactive alternative provision outreach programme. This is coupled with the increased focus from children's social care on Family Help, providing support for parents and carers and access to services such as short breaks in the child's own community (as recommended in the Independent Review of Children's Social Care), as well as the Department of Health and Social Care-led Building the Right Support programme, which seeks to avoid the need for in-patient mental health provision by making specialist and intensive support services available where children are. These reforms seek to meet need at the earliest stage, avoid escalation to crisis situations and enable children and young people to remain in their families and communities.

31. The Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy seeks to transform the way care is provided to children and young people, prioritising children's loving relationships in a home which best meets their needs. It sets out reforms at national, regional and local level to increase sufficiency, improve standards of care and regulations and move towards a regional model for providing homes for children. This will have an impact on residential special schools, including dual-registered 52-week residential special schools. These reforms include:

    - reviewing the existing legislation and regulation for all forms of care for looked-after children and young people and developing a core overarching set of standards.
    - working with Ofsted and the sector to develop plans for a financial oversight regime, to increase transparency and to prevent sudden market exit which would disrupt the lives of children living there.
    - supporting local authorities with forecasting, procurement and market shaping, and establishing Regional Care Co-operative (RCC) pathfinders in two areas, which will plan, deliver and commission homes for children in care across the region.
    - improving the sufficiency of residential care provision through capital investment.

32. We will work alongside the Children's Social Care Implementation Strategy's RCC pathfinders to explore how they can best commission and manage residential provision for children and young people with the most complex needs, and how they should work alongside Local Inclusion Partnerships. Our commitments to both set up an expert working group to review all existing legislation and regulation and develop a core overarching set of standards for all forms of care placements and move to a regional model of care commissioning, will also contribute to more consistent and better-quality care placements for both looked-after children and those with complex learning or disability needs.

33. In taking forward our reforms following the SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper, the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and the Safeguarding Children with Disabilities and Complex Health Needs in Residential Settings report, we have an opportunity to set out a new strategy for children and young people with the most complex needs (particularly challenging behaviour), building on existing programmes of activity in SEND, children’s social care and the NHS. The Department for Education is considering how to respond to these system-wide issues.

Conclusion

34. This Improvement Plan sets out how we will work alongside children, young people and their families, and those who work across every part of the SEND and alternative provision system, to deliver improvements for every child and young person with SEND and in alternative provision.

35. As we have demonstrated throughout this Plan, there is work underway now to address the immediate challenges facing the system. We know as well that there are many areas of the country where there is excellent practice, and children and young people are receiving the support that they need to succeed. We look forward to continuing to work with you to spread this practice, as well as testing our longer-term proposals for systemic reform, so that we can all play our part in supporting children and young people with SEND and in alternative provision.

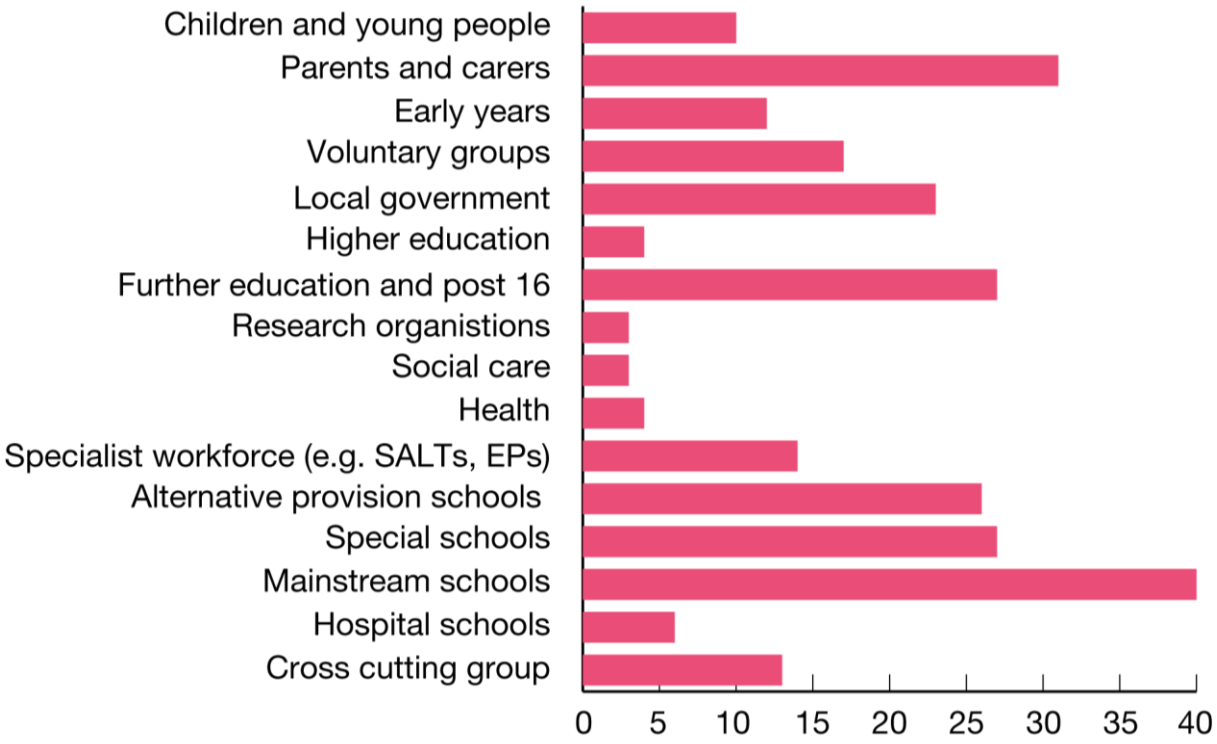
Annex A – Consultation response summary

During the consultation period we:

over 60 events
were with children, young people and parents and carers.

spoke to over 4,500 people

Consultation events by sector



This table does not add up to 175 as multiple sectors attended some of the same events.

Online consultation received nearly

6,000

responses

Parents and carers and headteachers/teachers/other teaching staff collectively accounted for 72% of all responses.

15%

of responses were received via direct email. We also received responses from organisations representing the views of multiple stakeholders.

7 separate questions were aimed at children and young people:

162
children and young people responded

40%
of responses came from those aged between 19–25.

Some respondents told us they liked…

- our proposal to develop a national system with National Standards setting clear and high expectations for good practice.
- our proposals to improve inclusive mainstream provision.
- our new vision for alternative provision.
- the focus on early intervention.

Some respondents agreed with….

- our diagnosis of the system – including the existence of a vicious cycle of late intervention, low confidence and inefficient allocation of resources.
- our suggestion that there is a lack of clarity around the responsibilities between different agencies and therefore too much variation in support – which creates a postcode and social capital lottery.

Some respondents wanted to hear more about…

- how proposals would work in practice – this included acknowledging issues with system capacity.
- our plans to ensure the workforce has the training, expertise and support to achieve our vision for the system.
- an inclusive society where every child and young person is set up to thrive.
- our plans for early years and post-16 settings and for those who need support from adult social care.

Some respondents were concerned about…

- some proposals (like tailored lists) creating a system that does not respond effectively to the needs of individual children and reduces choice.
- some proposals (like mandatory mediation) creating a system that could make it difficult for families to access support promptly.

Annex B – The government's vision for the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) system and delivery approach

Vision

Our ambition is to create a society that celebrates and enables success in a variety of forms, with the culture, attitudes and environments to offer every child and young person the support that they need.

We want the process of accessing support to be dignified and affirmative, focusing on a child's achievements, talents, and strengths.

Above all, we want to create a system where every child and young person can thrive and fulfil their potential. This starts with being able to access the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

Mission

We want all those working across education, health and care to work with local and central government to:

1. **Fulfil children's potential:** children and young people with SEND (or attending alternative provision) enjoy their childhood, achieve good outcomes and are well prepared for adulthood and employment.
2. **Build parents' trust:** families find it easier to navigate the system and access support. They have greater confidence in it, reporting better experiences of a system which is based on dignity and affirmation. Mainstream settings are seen as being high-quality and inclusive, valuing those with SEND. Specialist provision is seen to be delivering effectively and is available locally to those who need it.
3. **Provide financial sustainability:** local systems deploy their resources effectively such that spending shifts towards early intervention and away from costly specialist provision, where this is not required. Local authorities operate within their budgets and achieve value for money so that record investment in the high needs budget is used effectively and with evidenced outcomes that are financially sustainable. As a result, local authorities will be able to deliver high-quality services within budgets.

Values

Our single SEND and alternative provision system is based on 5 core values:

1. **Nationally consistent:** a system based on a suite of National Standards where children, young people and their families know what to expect and providers know what is expected and are accountable for that.

2. **Evidence-driven:** our reforms will ensure decisions around support and placements are driven by evidence of what works best for the child or young person.
3. **Responsive:** early identification of need, targeted support to address children and young people's individual needs and timely access to specialist services and support, including specialist placements where appropriate.
4. **Co-produced:** children, young people and their families will be involved in the decision-making process around the support they receive and in the development of the policy which drives those decisions.
5. **Inclusive:** build on the ambition of the Schools White Paper for high-quality, well-led and inclusive schools with fair access to excellent teaching of evidence-based curricula in calm, safe and supportive settings, where individual needs are identified and targeted academic, pastoral or specialist support is given.

Approach

Feedback from the consultation reflected there is both consensus on the urgency to secure improved outcomes and experiences for children, young people and their families and that bolder proposals for reform need to be carefully designed and tested in order to be successful and reduce the risk of unintended consequences.

We will deliver reform in three different ways:

1. **Support and stabilise:** we will support and stabilise the system, getting local areas working in the best possible way within the current system to ensure that the needs of children and young people are met, without escalating costs, and to ensure that local authority deficits are brought under control. This includes supporting local authorities with financial deficits through the Delivering Better Value and the Safety Valve programmes.
2. **Addressing supply issues:** in the short to medium term, we will take action to address supply issues – ensuring that there is sufficient support available for children and young people when they need it, in the most efficient way. This includes investing £2.6 billion between 2022 and 2025 to deliver new places and improve existing provision for children and young people with SEND or who require alternative provision, reducing the need for costly independent provision.
3. **Design and test for systemic reform:** our £70 million Change Programme will create up to nine Regional Expert Partnerships that will test and refine longer-term reforms including developing and testing National Standards, strategic partnerships and inclusion plans, the alternative provision service and tailored lists. This will build a strong evidence base to inform future funding and legislation.

Annex C – The future Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) system

Below we have set out how the changes in the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan will benefit children, young people and families, education settings and local systems.

National Standards

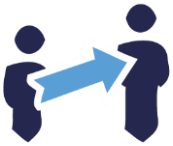
- will give clarity to children, young people and families about what evidence-based support should be in place for their child.
- will give clarity to education settings and providers about the provision they will need to make available for different needs.
- will give local authorities and health and care partners clarity about the support that should be available.

Workforce

- children and young people will have access to a highly trained workforce in their classroom, and from health and care partners.
- we will introduce a new leadership level SENCo NPQ (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator National Professional Qualification) for schools, and practice guides will offer evidence-based support for frontline professionals.
- health partners will have increased specialist capacity and local authority SEND Casework teams will be well placed to deliver high-quality support.

Education, Health and Care

- families will engage with a standardised Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process, with increased use of digital technology, making it easier to navigate.
- for education settings, a standardised EHCP process with increased use of digital technology will reduce bureaucracy.
- Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforces will help deliver wraparound support in alternative provision schools.
- for local systems, each area will be encouraged to have a Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO). Local multi-agency panels will aid decision making, with standardised EHCPs.



Preparation for Adulthood

- children and young people will have improved transitions and access to a range of suitable, ambitious pathways post-16.
- education settings will support children and young people to experience smoother transitions, due to transition standards.
- for local systems, adjustment passports and more Supported Internships will support more young people into sustained employment and higher education.

Accountability

- families will be part of Local Inclusion Partnerships, and help to develop local inclusion plans. Strengthened accountability across the system will increase confidence.
- for education settings, inspections under the Education Inspection Framework must show that children and young people with SEND achieve good outcomes to deliver a good or outstanding judgement.
- for local systems, inclusion dashboards will improve transparency and inform decision making. Local areas will be held to account under new Area SEND inspections.

Financial Sustainability

- children and young people who need a specialist placement will have access to a suitable school, promptly.
- for education settings, the National Funding Formula will give clarity to schools and new funding approaches for alternative provision will be aligned to preventative work.
- for local systems, local authorities will be supported to address current financial deficits and bands and tariffs will give clarity about costs of provision.

The National SEND and Alternative Provision Implementation Board oversees the implementation of the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan, leading and driving change across the sector.

E02864447

978-1-5286-3924-8