

SEND Reform: Putting Children and Young People First

A Government White Paper

Glossary of Terms

Accountability: To be accountable for something means to be responsible for making sure it happens in the way it is supposed to, and if that does not happen to explain why it has not happened.

Alternative Provision (AP): settings that provide education for children unable to attend a mainstream school.

Assessment: this can mean having a conversation with somebody or maybe taking a test to understand a person's needs to find out what support they may need.

Barriers to learning: anything that stops learners from fully engaging in a lesson or activity.

Best Start Family Hubs: community-based centres in England providing free, joined-up support for families from pregnancy to age 5, extending up to 25 years old for disabled people or someone with a special educational need.

Consultation: To consult means to ask for information and advice to check ideas. A consultation means to ask a lot of people what they think about a subject or an idea.

Department for Education: They are part of the government. They are in charge of children's services and education in England.

Document: something that provides information. It can be written down, and either be printed or online. It can also be a photograph or a table or graph that shows information.

Early years/early years settings: early education for children aged 0–5, including childminders and nurseries.

Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP): a legal document outlining the education, health and social care support that is to be provided to a child or young person who has special educational needs (SEN) or a disability.

Equality Act 2010: A law that protects people from being treated unfairly because of who they are.

Factual: Something that is true and can be proven.

Government: the group of people who are in charge of running a country.

Inclusion: Our approach to inclusion is guided by the definition set by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which focusses on breaking down barriers to learning and participation.

Inclusion Bases: spaces in a school designed especially for children with SEND. This is also a new way to refer to a SEN unit, resourced provision, or a pupil support unit.

Individual Support Plans (ISPs): a record of a child or young person's **barriers to learning** and of the provision in place to overcome those barriers. These will be for children and young people in the Targeted, Targeted Plus and Specialist layers.

Law: a rule made by a government

Layers of support: three types of extra support, which may be provided to children and young people with higher support needs. These are called Targeted, Targeted Plus and Specialist.

Legal duty: a requirement that is set by a law. It requires a person or organisation to act or not act in a certain way.

Local authority: a government organisation that organises public services, like education, housing, and rubbish collection, within a certain area. A county council is an example of a local authority.

Mainstream School or College: a school or college where most children and young people go to learn.

National Inclusion Standards: A new idea for a digital library of resources for teachers and other professionals working in education, health and social care to support disabled children and young people, and children and young people who have a special educational need aged between 0-25.

Ofsted: This stands for Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. They inspect schools and services that care for children and young people.

Post-16 settings: places to learn after **secondary school** (including sixth forms, further education colleges, specialist post-16 institutions, 16-19 academies).

Pupil Engagement Framework: a new idea to help us better understand children and young people's day-to-day experiences.

Reasonable Adjustments: Changes that are put in place to remove barriers for a person with support needs.

Secondary school: a place that provides education for students typically between the ages of 11-16, or up to 18 if it has a Sixth Form.

SEND Code of Practice: legal guidance for organisations (including some nurseries, schools and colleges) that support children and young people, aged 0-25 years, who have special educational needs or disabilities.

SEND system: all of the services, people and processes (the way things work) that are in place to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and their families. **SEND:** SEND stands for special educational needs and disabilities.

Sensory needs: how an individual's body processes and responds to information, like touch and sound. If someone experiences over-sensitivity, they might feel something very intense. If someone experiences under-sensitivity, they might struggle to understand the information or miss it altogether.

Settings: the different types of educational environments where children and young people receive learning and support. This includes early years provision (including childminders and nurseries), schools (mainstream and special), and colleges or other post-16 education providers.

Social care: a term that generally describes all forms of personal care and other practical assistance for disabled children, young people and adults who need extra support.

Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs): a teacher or educator responsible for making sure children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) get the support they need at school or college.

Special schools: schools designed for disabled children and young people, and those with special educational needs, who have the highest support needs.

Specialist provision (or support): dedicated support for children whose needs require more support than is usually available in an early year's setting, mainstream school or setting.

Statutory guidance: rules that explain what early years settings, schools, colleges, and local authorities must do to follow the law. Organisations and individuals should follow the guidance unless they have a very good reason not to.

Introduction

The Council for Disabled Children (CDC) have been asked by the Department for Education (DfE) to help them to create some inclusive materials as part of our role advising them on issues about special educational needs and disability (**SEND**). This is to help people to understand the information in the full version of the White Paper.

What is a White Paper and why is it important

A White Paper shares ideas and suggestions that the **government** thinks will improve a complicated issue. This is the very start of making changes to a **law**, and the ideas and suggestions in the White Paper can change as everyone discusses what they mean and how they might work.

This White Paper is looking in detail at special educational needs and disability support for children and young people. The ideas and suggestions shared in the White Paper are all about support whilst a child or young person is preparing to start school, is in school or college, or is starting adulthood. As the ideas and suggestions are worked out, and people have a chance to have their say, you may also hear them called SEND reforms.

What is this document and why have we written it

White Papers and **consultation documents** can be very long. The full version of this White Paper, which you can see here: [Schools White Paper](#), is 129 pages.

This document is a summary, or overview, of most parts of the full version. It does not include all the information you will find in the full version as that would make this document very long. We have chosen parts of the White Paper that we think most young people will be interested to know about.

We have also changed some of the language from what is used in the full version so that it is easier to read and understand.

This document is not supposed to tell you how you have to feel about the ideas and suggestions in the White Paper. This document is **factual** – it is sharing the same information as the full version, just with similar but easier words.

What is a consultation and what will happen

A consultation is a process that allows people to share information, suggestions, and ideas to help make decisions.

A consultation usually lasts for a set amount of time. In the case of this White Paper and consultation, everyone will have 12 weeks from the start of the consultation on Monday 23rd February 2026 to discuss the ideas and suggestions in the White Paper and send their thoughts to the government using this e-mail address:

SENDreform.CONSULTATION@education.gov.uk

After the consultation closes on Monday 18th May at 23:59, the **Department for Education** will look at all the new information, ideas and suggestions about the White Paper that have been shared. They will decide if any of their ideas and suggestions in the White Paper need to change based on what they have read. Options can include:

- Some of the ideas or suggestions will not go ahead

- Some will go ahead but with many changes
- Some will go ahead with small changes
- Some will go ahead without any changes
- Some new ideas or suggestions will be included

Can children and young people take part in the consultation?

Yes. Everyone can be involved in a consultation. However, we know that it can be harder for children and young people to read difficult information and share their thoughts. This is why we have written this document.

We are also doing a few more things for children and young people to help them take part in the consultation.

1. We will be working with a group of disabled young people to write other inclusive documents like this one. The young people will choose 3 of the topics from this document and share more information about each of them.

The group of disabled children and young people, and children and young people with special educational needs, who will be writing the documents with us have been advising the Department for Education about their experiences of school and college.

2. The [Council for Disabled Children](#) will be having conversations with children and young people during the consultation period. The conversations will be inclusive, and each group of children and young people will get to choose what they want to talk about. There is more information about the [children and young people's consultation](#) at the end of this document.

A Summary of some of the Ideas and Suggestions from the White Paper

Getting the right support as soon as possible

1. Early Support

The government wants to make sure that a child or young person's support needs are noticed and acted on as early as possible, making sure that different services and professionals are working together to give a child or young person the support they need when they need it.

The government wants to do this by giving more money to **Best Start Family Hubs** to support disabled children and children with special educational needs, and their families. The Government wants to make sure that different professions are working together and sharing information to make sure that a child's support needs are noticed as soon as possible.

The government has also suggested introducing a [national training programme](#), to give professionals working with children aged 0-5 years old the knowledge and tools they need to identify and help children and young people who need additional support. Part of this idea will include [National Inclusion Standards](#) which will give people working with children more information and resources, so they are able to provide the best support.

The government will introduce an Inclusive Early Years Fund from 2026-27 which will give more money to **Early Years settings**, such as nurseries, pre-schools and childminders, to support disabled children and children with special educational needs.

2. Reasonable Adjustments

In England, we already have a law called the **Equality Act 2010** that says early years settings, schools and colleges must make **reasonable adjustments** for disabled children and young people. These are changes that settings must put in place to make sure that disabled children and young people are able to take part in school life in the same way as other children and young people. The government wants to build on this law and give more examples to settings about what are really good reasonable adjustments, this is called **guidance**. Settings would then be expected to use the guidance to help improve the everyday support given to their students.

The government wants the guidance to be for all students, even if they do not have a diagnosis. All settings should use the guidance to plan ahead and be more inclusive.

3. Curriculum Adaptations

The government want to create a new school curriculum which aims to be more inclusive to all learners.

This will include new digital resources to help teachers make changes to the ways that they teach. It will also mean thinking about how some learning materials can be changed so that they are to a high standard and useful for all learners. The new curriculum will also teach all children and young people about disability and learning support needs in a positive way.

The government will work with experts to think about how **special schools** can use the curriculum to make sure that children and young people learning in different types of schools and colleges are being taught things which are most useful to them.

Giving professionals the skills they need

4. National Training

A new national training program will be available to all early years, school and college staff in England from 2026. This training will support professionals working in early years, schools, and colleges, including teachers to notice needs and give support to children and young people earlier. For example, the training for staff in mainstream schools will focus on flexible teaching and creating calm classrooms.

There will be a new rule saying early years, school and college staff must have training about supporting disabled children and young people, and those with a special educational need, and how to include everyone. There will be clear information about where staff can find this training.

The government want schools and colleges to build teams that know how to support all learners, creating a culture where every student can succeed and thrive. This means that supporting students with SEND will be everyone's job, not just the SENCO's job.

5. National Inclusion Standards

The government would like to create **National Inclusion Standards**, which will include a digital library of resources for teachers and other professionals working in education, health and social care. These will support disabled children and young people, and children and young people who have a special educational need aged between 0-25 years old.

The Standards will cover a number of different types of support a child or young person need. The Standards would explain the support that should be available in every **setting**, including what good everyday support they are expected to give before specialist help is needed. The Standards would give teachers and teaching assistants the resources they need to support children and young people, regardless of whether they have a diagnosis.

The government hopes having National Inclusion Standards will make settings more inclusive and will mean the support teachers, teaching assistants, and other people in a

setting give is based on examples of what is working well to meet a student's needs. They also hope that this will help to solve the problem of some settings providing less support than others, making the quality of support better and more reliable across the country.

If most people agree this is a good idea, the National Inclusion Standards will be developed by a group of experts, and will involve working with children, young people, and their families to ensure they reflect their experiences. The group will also look at new research about how to notice support needs at the earliest opportunity. The government would like the new National Inclusion Standards to be reviewed regularly to make sure they stay up to date and relevant.

6. Updating the SEND Code of Practice

The government will make changes to the **SEND Code of Practice**. The SEND Code of Practice explains the ways that settings, services, and professionals must follow the law when working with disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs aged 0-25.

The government thinks it needs updating because when some of the ideas and suggestions from the White Paper begin to take shape, the information that settings, services, and professionals need to know so that they can follow the laws will change.

The government wants the SEND Code of Practice to be clearer and easier for everyone to understand, including families.

The government has suggested updating the SEND Code of Practice by:

- Making it clearer what education **settings** and local partners' (like health or **social care** services) responsibilities are, so they work together better.
- They want to change how children and young people get help in settings so they can get support more quickly and easily. Instead of waiting for a doctor to give a diagnosis, teachers would look at what a child finds hard and give help straight away. They would think about different areas of the child's life, like everyday skills, moving and physical skills, **sensory needs** (such as being sensitive to noise or light), speaking and understanding, and social and emotional skills. This means children can get the support they need without long delays.
- Giving clear instructions on how schools and colleges should support mental health needs, and how to work with mental health professionals.
- Making the Code of Practice easier to use, so organisations and professionals can use it every day to understand their responsibilities.

The government plans to make these changes after a second consultation, giving everyone the opportunity to feedback on their suggestions for updating the SEND Code of Practice.

Finding the right level of support

7. The Universal Offer

The government wants to create a more inclusive education experience for all children and young people, where every child receives the right support early, without waiting for a diagnosis or needing an **Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)**. The government has called this a **Universal Offer**, because they want it to be already in place for all students. They want the Universal Offer to start with good teaching that will give help as soon as children and young people need it and will give support that will work for them.

The Universal Offer will include:

- Setting leaders making plans for how to be more inclusive. Support is based on what works and can help early, as soon as someone needs it.
- Teaching is high quality, and lessons are designed so everyone can learn.
- Everyone has the opportunity to take part in activities beyond their lessons, like music, sport or art.
- The setting is safe and respectful, where everyone feels they belong and wants to come.
- Families and support services work closely with the setting.
- Spaces and support are inclusive and keep improving so everyone can take part.

Teachers will receive training on **inclusion** and accessibility, and work closely with other education leaders, including **Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs)**, and families to make sure that children and young people are receiving the right support.

Schools will have to create an Inclusion Strategy, which will explain the support they will give to children and young people. They will be legally required to publish this Inclusion Strategy every year, so everyone can understand how a school will be inclusive. **Ofsted** will judge how inclusive a school or college is.

The government put money aside to help settings be more inclusive, such as through sensory-friendly rooms, breakout spaces and accessible learning environments, to make sure all children can learn, participate and feel that they belong.

8. Targeted Support, Targeted Plus Support and Individual Support Plans (ISPs)

The government thinks that most children and young people will have their needs met through the [Universal Offer](#). For children and young people who need more support, there will be three extra **layers of support** – **Targeted**, **Targeted Plus**, and **Specialist**. Children and young people may move between layers of support as their needs change over time. The exact support that will be given in these three layers will be created based on the [National Inclusion Standards](#).

Targeted support will be given when teachers know what a student's support needs are, but the usual support in the Universal Offer isn't quite enough. For example, Targeted support may include working in a small group to build language skills, or a student learning key vocabulary before a lesson to help them understand it more easily.

Targeted Plus support will help students whose needs are less common and where their **mainstream nursery, school or college** needs to work more closely with the **local authority** and health professionals, for example, Speech and Language Therapists. Young people who receive Targeted Plus support might have access to an '**Inclusion Base**' in their mainstream setting to provide a space for learning that meets their needs. Targeted Plus support may involve temporary support in **Alternative Provision (AP)** or expert support from a specialist setting. Students will not need to have a legal assessment or formal diagnosis to be given Targeted Plus support.

Students receiving Targeted or Targeted Plus support will have a digital **Individual Support Plan (ISP)**. Individual Support Plans will be digital documents that can be changed as a student's needs change and will make sure good help is provided quickly. Children and young people and their families will be able to look at the Individual Support Plans with professionals to have a say in what may need to change.

Specialist support is looked at in more detail in [section 9](#).

9. Specialist Support, Education, Health and Care Plans, and Alternative Provision

The government knows that students with the highest support needs will need a detailed plan in place to give them the support they need. They are calling this **Specialist Support**.

When a child or young person needs more support than a mainstream setting will usually give, they will need a **Specialist Provision Package**. There will be different types of Specialist Provision Packages, for different high support needs. What goes into each of the packages will be decided by experts and tested by parents and organisations that work with disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs who have the highest needs.

To find out if a child needs one of the Specialist Provision Packages they will have an assessment given by the local authority. The assessment process will be new and different to what children have had before. Designing this new assessment will be done with children and young people, parents, teachers and healthcare staff.

Children and young people with a Specialist Provision Package will also have an online Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and a digital Individual Support Plan (ISP). The EHCP will set out the Specialist Provision Package, and the ISP will set out the detail of the day-to-day support a child or young person needs.

The government would like to make these changes for EHCPs because they have been told that at the moment, EHCPs do not give the support they are supposed to. They have also been told that if your needs change it can be difficult to change the support in an EHCP, and different services do not work together very well together.

Once the new ideas become law, only children and young people who need a Specialist Provision Package will have an EHCP. If you already have an EHCP and want to keep it, you will be able to until 2030, or when you finish school or college, whichever is sooner.

Alternative Provision:

Some children and young people learn in Alternative Provision, this might include a hospital school or learning online. Alternative Provision education is often meant to be a temporary place to learn. Part of attending an Alternative Provision includes supporting the student to return to a mainstream school or college as soon as possible.

The government would like every student in Alternative Provision to have a clear plan for moving on from Alternative Provision to a school or college that gives them the support they need.

Keeping children, young people and families at the heart of the SEND system

10. Accountability

The government would like to improve **accountability** across the **SEND system**; this means making it clearer who is responsible for providing what support to a child or young person and what happens when things go wrong or are not working well enough. The government think this is an important change for improving the SEND system and they have some suggestions for what this could look like. The suggestions include:

- By law, schools and colleges would be responsible for creating a digital Individual Support Plan for every student receiving Targeted, Targeted Plus, or Specialist support. They would be responsible for providing the support to meet the child or young person's needs.

At the moment there is no requirement for children without an EHCP to have an individual plan, and for children with an EHCP it is the local authority who has to write this. But the government thinks it would be better for schools and colleges to be responsible because they know the students better.

- All schools will need to create a **pupil engagement framework** by summer 2026. This would be a way for schools to find out whether students are having a good or bad experience.

Schools will check things like if students feel like they belong at school, if they feel safe, if they are being included in learning and other activities, and what relationships between teachers and students are like.

Children, parents and carers, school leaders, and experts would help create this framework by sharing examples of what is working well in their schools and colleges.

- Right now, the government uses exam results to measure how well a student is doing. The government wants to find a new way to measure how much all students are learning and progressing. This is just the beginning of an idea, and the government would like to hear people's thoughts about it.
- In time, all secondary schools will have an inclusion base to help students who need more support. Before, these have been called many different names, such as SEN hubs or SEND inclusion units
- The government would like to give clearer roles and responsibilities to all organisations and services involved in a child or young person's support. This would include making the local authority more involved in helping those providing support, such as early years settings, schools, **post-16 settings**, health providers, communities, and families.

What now

Next Steps

It is important to remember that any of the ideas and suggestions that have been made in the White Paper, and any ideas and suggestions that are received during the consultation, will not happen right away.

The final ideas and suggestions that the government do go ahead with will first need to go through the stages to make them part of a Law. Then, the SEND Code of Practice will be re-written to make sure that everyone knows how to follow the law. This can take some time to get right. We expect that some changes will start to happen from now until 2028 and other changes will happen in 2029 and 2030.

Throughout this time, we will continue to work with our children and young people's advisory group to listen to what is most important to children and young people. Whenever possible, we want to hear from as many children and young people as possible to get the SEND reforms right and make sure they are working to give you the best education and start in life as possible.

The Children and Young People's Consultation

Are you a disabled child or young person, or do you have a special educational need, and would like to share your thoughts on what you have read in this summary document? Or perhaps you are a teacher, a Participation or youth group leader, or work with young people at a disability charity, and would like to support the children and young people you work with to have their say.

The Council for Disabled Children is working on behalf of the Department for Education to meet with groups of children and young people aged 10-25 across England to gather their thoughts, ideas and experiences, and create a young people's response to the SEND reform consultation.

This special consultation will be taking place between March and April. Spaces for groups and individuals to participate are limited but we would like to speak to as many children and young people as possible with different experiences of receiving support. We will prioritise

children and young people who don't already have an opportunity to be heard through existing strategic organisations and Participation groups. We're especially keen to talk to:

- People who are non-verbal or have higher support needs
- Children and young people who are black or global majority
- Young people who have sensory support needs
- Those who receive education outside of a school or college setting
- Primary aged children

You can find out more information about the young people's consultation and register your interest here: [SEND Reform Consultation](#)