

Information on SEND reform for leaders of special schools, AP and specialist post-16 institutions

The Department for Education has published our schools white paper, *Every Child Achieving and Thriving*, alongside a consultation on SEND reform, called *Putting Children and Young People First*. These documents set out our plan to improve the lives of all children and young people

We have set out a clear and positive vision for the specialist sector – special schools, alternative provision (AP) and specialist post-16. The sector has a key role supporting children and young people with the most complex needs with a consistent and evidence-led offer.

We recognise that the specialist sector comprises a wide range of settings including maintained special schools, non-maintained special schools, independent special schools (ISS), special academies, AP schools, special post-16 institutions. Our vision in this section applies to all these settings. There are also reforms specific to ISS and AP settings.

What's changing

In the future, all state-funded special schools, AP and special post-16 institutions will:

- Deliver new Specialist Provision Packages. These will set out evidence-based support for children with complex needs and will be delivered by state-funded specialist providers across the country
- Provide high-quality support and specialist education for children and young people with the most complex needs
- Work in partnership with LA Commissioners to ensure parental engagement and the ongoing appropriateness of a placement for a child or young person
- Act as catalysts for improvement in the mainstream and specialist sectors by sharing expertise, coaching colleagues and contributing to joint professional development across the local authority area
- Strengthen the overall system by demonstrating how education, health and care can work together around the needs of the child or young person
- Provide outreach and short-time placements for some children and young people enrolled in mainstream settings

We will encourage all registered AP schools to provide a three-tiered model of support:

- Outreach into mainstream schools for specialist teachers and leaders in AP schools and to offer preventative support
- Time- limited placements, that will offer pupils a short time in an AP school or special school for their needs to be assessed and addressed, which we expect will then allow them to return to their mainstream school
- Longer-term placements, where a child has been assessed as needing one of the Specialist Provision Packages. Such placements will focus on supporting pupils into a more sustainable educational placement, with a particular emphasis on ensuring progression to appropriate post-16 provision and employment

Independent special schools will be regulated like other special schools to ensure fair admissions, high-quality SEND support, financial transparency, and value for money, so that children get the right placements without unnecessary costs.

What you'll receive

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

The aim of these reforms will be to establish a fairer funding system that appropriately covers SEND costs, both at local authority level through the high needs block of their dedicated schools grant, and at school and college level. For specialist settings, we will explore and consult on establishing a more consistent, transparent and predictable funding system, including the development of a national funding formula and a cost framework for packages of specialist provision for a cohort of pupils or students in different types of specialist setting. The aim of these reforms will be to establish a fairer funding system that appropriately covers SEND costs, both at local authority level through the high needs block of their dedicated schools grant, and at school and college level.

What we need from you

- Support in developing and delivering our new Specialist Provision Packages, including developing funding bands
- Support to make specialist expertise available across the system through the Experts at Hand service
- Develop EHCPs and Individual Support Plans collaboratively with parents for all children and young people

Timeline

Repair and reform to this new system will be gradual with support in place before changes are made.

Phase one: 2026 to 2028 Investment and building new system	• Workforce training programmes for all staff. • Schools, colleges and early years settings receive Inclusive Mainstream Fund. • Experts at Hand comes on stream for all settings. • Specialist Provision Packages published. • National Inclusion Standards published.
Phase two: 2028 to 2029 Improved support	• We will continue to invest in and build-up the new system • New legislation expected to come into effect from September 2029
Phase three: School year 2029/30 onwards Future system	• School year 2029/30: First assessments of children take place under reformed system. • Independent special school price restrictions introduced. • EHCP, National Inclusion Standards and Individual Support Plan legislation enacted. • First children using Specialist Provision Packages. • 60,000 new school places for children with SEND will have been created in special schools and inclusion bases.

Have your say and more information

Visit gov.uk/dfe/send-reform

- [Every Child Achieving and Thriving Schools White Paper](#)
- [SEND Consultation](#)
- [Further information and fact sheets](#)