



Department
for Education

Expert Advisory Group for Inclusion: Terms of Reference

Expert group advising the Department for Education on improvements to the education system for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Purpose

The group was set up in December 2024 to advise the Department on how to improve the mainstream education experiences for children and young people with SEND, so that every child can achieve and thrive in education. In June 2025, the group's remit was extended to ensure that as the government progresses towards publication of a Schools White Paper including SEND reforms in the autumn Ministers can draw on a broad range of advice and input.

The group will use their collective expertise to support the generation and mobilisation of research and best practice evidence to enable the implementation of high-quality inclusive education. By strengthening the evidence base on inclusive system and practice, the group's work will underpin improvements to the way needs are identified and supported in education, using robust, evidence-based assessments and high quality professional development.

The group will also provide advice and challenge on specific areas of policy and engage with other sector experts and draw on key stakeholder groups as appropriate to inform and challenge their thinking on how best to improve the educational experiences of children and young people with SEND.

Scope

The group's work and advice will cover policy and practice delivered within mainstream settings across Early Years, Schools and Post-16.

The group will pay particular attention to the interactions between mainstream and specialist settings, including alternative provision. It will also look at how settings and local authorities and health partners best work together to deliver high quality and inclusive education.

The group will consider how reforms focused on improving inclusion will interact with wider system reforms including, but not limited to, the Curriculum and Assessment Review and reforms to Ofsted and accountability.

The group will interact with, and consider, any developments in health and social care.

Membership

- Tom Rees, CEO, Ormiston Academy Trust (Chair)
- Dr Anne Heavey, Director of Insights, Ambition Institute
- Susan Douglas, CEO, Eden Academy Trust
- Heather Sandy, Executive Director of Children's Services at Lincolnshire County Council
- Matthew Evans, CEO of The Athelstan Trust
- Simon Knight, Co-Headteacher, Frank Wise School
- Dr Sue Franklin, Principal Educational Psychologist at Lewisham Local Authority and Chair of the National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists
- Mark Vickers, CEO, Olive Academies
- Julian Grenier, Senior Content and Engagement Manager for Early Years, Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)
- Michelle Dowse, Principal and Chief Executive, Heart of Worcestershire College
- Karen Guldberg, Professor of Autism Studies at University of Birmingham (former chair of the Neurodivergence Task and Finish Group)

How the group will work

In developing advice, the EAG will draw on a wide range of inputs, including from education professionals in both the mainstream and specialist sectors, alongside other experts, parents, children and young people, and stakeholders such as employers, colleges, trade unions, and charities.

The group will engage with Dame Christine Lenehan, as government's Strategic Advisor on SEND, and will interact with other relevant departmental expert groups including the Scientific Advisory Council, the Expert Advisory Group for Early Years SEND and the FE Leaders Advisory Group.

In order to support the development of policy that supports high-quality and evidence-informed practice, the group will engage with research and the work of research organisations. The group will work with the Department to build stronger guidance for inclusive practice, including frameworks, research guidance and best practice.

The group will report to the Secretary of State, via the Minister for School Standards, and although it will work with the Department, they will be officially independent from the

Department, with any communications making it clear that they are not party-political appointments and that their role is to provide advice in their professional expert capacity.

Timings

The expert advisor roles will last for up to 9 months (until March 2026). The duration may be subject to change following ministerial decisions.