



Department
for Education

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Reform

Equalities impact assessment

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Introduction

This document records the analysis undertaken by the Department for Education (DfE) to enable Ministers to fulfil the requirements placed on them by the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

The PSED requires Ministers to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not and
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

These aims are also known as the 3 limbs of the PSED. Readers may find it useful to refer back to these limb definitions, as this document summarises the anticipated impacts against them. The protected characteristics in question are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

Note on terminology

In England, the Equality Act 2010 defines a person as having a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. As a result, some pupils have disabilities that meet the Equality Act's definition but do not require special educational provision, while others have special educational needs (SEN) arising from learning difficulties that do not meet the Act's definition of disability.

There is, however, a significant overlap between children and young people with disabilities and those with identified SEN. For this reason, education policy commonly refers to the "special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system" as a collective description of provision and support for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Throughout this document, 'SEND' is used as a broad, system-level term. 'SEN' is used specifically where referring to data and evidence on identified special educational needs, reflecting the terminology used in published statistics and data collections. However, SEN identification itself is not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, and the DfE has limited information on the precise overlap between SEN status and disability. Further information on the available evidence is set out in Annex A.

Cumulative summary

Introduction

This equalities impact assessment focuses on policies directly affecting children and young people with SEND, their families, and the education workforce.

Each policy has been assessed in line with the requirements of the PSED. In doing so, DfE has considered potential impacts across the protected characteristics, identifying a range of anticipated positive impacts as well as areas where careful implementation and mitigation may be needed. This approach reflects the requirement to have due regard on an ongoing and proportionate basis as policies are developed and implemented. Where policies engage more than one aspect of the PSED, this is reflected within the characteristic specific analysis, rather than through repeated reference to individual limbs in every section.

Taken together, the reforms are expected to have a positive or neutral impact on the protected characteristics under the PSED, particularly in relation to sex, race, disability and age. At the same time, DfE recognises that system level reform of this scale can create pressures and risks, especially during transition, and these have been actively identified and reflected with mitigations in the assessment.

The reforms are intended to support a more inclusive education system in which all children and young people—including those with SEND and those from disadvantaged backgrounds—can achieve and thrive, including through fuller access to the curriculum. This includes a stronger focus on high quality adaptive teaching and evidence-based support, earlier identification of need, and inclusive practice within the National Inclusion Standards. DfE will also produce practical guidance on reasonable adjustments, which will contain real examples and simple, actionable tools to embed inclusive practice confidently and consistently.

Overall, the reforms are intended to simplify and speed up access to support and resolution. Statutory duties and routes to resolution will remain an important backstop to ensure that children and young people with SEND can access the support they need.

Policies aimed at strengthening pupils' engagement across schools, early years and post-16 settings are expected to benefit children and young people across protected characteristics. These policies emphasise partnership between pupils, parents, and schools to address barriers to engagement and participation.

Further details, including the statistical and research evidence relevant to the assessments set out in this equalities impact assessment, are provided in Annex A. Annex A underpins the equality analysis across the policy areas and sets out the data and analysis considered in assessing potential impacts on people who share protected characteristics, in line with the requirement to have due regard to the PSED.

Positive impacts

Overall, most policies are expected to have positive impacts on pupils, parents and the education workforce in relation to the protected characteristics of sex, race, disability, and age.

Policies on mainstream inclusion, identification of need, specialist workforce planning and reforms to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) are expected to deliver positive impacts over time. Taken together, these measures are intended to deliver support, strengthen inclusive practice within mainstream settings, and reduce reliance on statutory assessment processes. As these changes apply across the 0 to 25 age range, they are expected to benefit children and young people across these age characteristics in early years settings, primary and secondary education and in colleges and further education settings.

The proposed reforms introduce over £200 million for Best Start Family Hubs, £1.6 billion for inclusion funding over the next 3 years, £1.8 billion for Experts at Hand and £3.7 billion capital funding to improve the accessibility of buildings, create new special school places, and tens of thousands of new places in inclusion bases in mainstream settings. This is expected to have a positive effect, particularly for children and young people with disabilities and those from some ethnic minority backgrounds, by supporting schools to meet a wider range of needs more effectively.

Neutral impacts

Some policies are assessed as having a neutral impact on certain protected characteristics. For example, existing safeguards – such as the legal principle of the presumption of mainstream education – are expected to have a neutral impact. In addition, for inclusion-related policies, neutral impacts are anticipated for protected characteristics other than sex, race, disability, and age.

Negative impacts and mitigations

DfE recognises that system level reform of this scale can place transitional pressures on parts of the education system as changes are introduced. For instance, efforts to embed more inclusive practice within mainstream settings may initially increase workload for sections of the education workforce in the short term. However, we assess there are existing workload pressures on the education workforce due to the current levels of unmet SEND need, and the escalatory nature of the current system which outweigh these. These impacts from reform will be mitigated by streamlined processes to minimise unnecessary workload, supported by ongoing engagement to ensure the changes are manageable and contribute to a more sustainable system over time. Given that the workforce is predominantly female and largely White British, this impact may be particularly felt by these groups (see Annex A).

To support the transition, planned measures include reducing unnecessary bureaucracy (including for the special educational needs coordinator role, SENCO) and funding more settings directly. DfE will update the SEND Code of Practice to clarify responsibilities for education settings and local partners, make the guidance easier to use and navigate, and with refreshed areas of development.

Over time, the intention is that earlier and more effective support within mainstream settings will reduce the escalation of need and the reliance on reactive interventions.

Overall impacts

Overall, the assessment reflects the extent of the available evidence and the nature of the policy measures. In line with a proportionate approach under the PSED, further analysis is limited where there is insufficient data to assess differential impacts with confidence.

As DfE are consulting on our proposals, these assessments are provisional assessments on the basis of the available evidence at the time of publication.

Anticipated impacts across each protected characteristic

Table 1: The universal offer

	Data and technology	Support for children and families in the earliest years of life	National Inclusion Standards	National training
Age	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive
Disability	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive
Gender reassignment	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Marriage and civil partnership	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Pregnancy and maternity	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	Neutral
Race	Neutral	Positive	Positive	Positive
Religion or belief	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	Neutral
Sex	Neutral	Positive	Positive	Positive
Sexual orientation	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral

Table 2: Targeted and targeted plus support

	Individual Support Plans	Inclusion Bases	Experts at Hand
Age	Positive	Positive	Positive
Disability	Positive	Positive	Positive
Gender reassignment	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Marriage and civil partnership	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Pregnancy and maternity	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Race	Positive	Positive	Positive
Religion or belief	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Sex	Positive	Positive	Positive
Sexual orientation	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral

Table 3: Specialist support for those with complex needs

	Specialist Provision Packages	Education, Health and Care Plans	Parental preference	Independent special schools
Age	Positive	Positive	Neutral	Positive
Disability	Positive	Neutral	Neutral	Positive
Gender reassignment	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Marriage and civil partnership	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Pregnancy and maternity	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Race	Positive	Positive	Neutral	Positive
Religion or belief	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Sex	Positive	Positive	Neutral	Positive
Sexual orientation	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral

Table 4: Reforming the system to reward inclusion

	Funding reform	Accountability	Resolution and legal framework
Age	Positive	Positive	Positive
Disability	Positive	Positive	Positive
Gender reassignment	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Marriage and civil partnership	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Pregnancy and maternity	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Race	Positive	Positive	Positive
Religion or belief	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Sex	Neutral	Neutral	Positive
Sexual orientation	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral

The universal offer

Data and technology

Policy context

DfE is exploring how data and technology can be used responsibly to improve support for children and young people with SEND. The policy measures set out in the SEND consultation document will be developed and tested before implementation. Measures under consideration include piloting assistive technology lending libraries, investing in tools that support earlier identification of need, and improving how information about SEND is recorded and shared.

Throughout the development of these measures, due regard will be given to data privacy, digital equity and the prevention of algorithmic bias or exclusion. Recognised risks associated with increased use of digital and artificial intelligence (AI) enabled tools, including excessive screen time, exposure to harmful content, and uneven access to technology, are being addressed through published safety frameworks, accessible and inclusive design standards, age appropriate guidance, workforce training and engagement with children, young people and families. These safeguards will continue to be developed and refined as research progresses.

Equality analysis

Age

Improved use of assistive technologies and digital tools is expected to benefit children and young people across different ages by supporting accessibility and consistency of support throughout their education. Better recording and sharing of information may also support smoother transitions between phases.

Risks associated with younger children's exposure to online harms and to variable confidence among staff in using digital tools will be addressed through published safety frameworks, age appropriate guidance, workforce training, peer-to-peer support and targeted training to build digital confidence.

Disability

Assistive technologies and accessible digital systems have the potential to reduce barriers to participation for disabled children and young people, support reasonable adjustments and enable more personalised support for learning. Improved digital recording of SEND is also expected to support continuity of support by ensuring relevant information is available to professionals.

Accessible design standards, safety requirements for AI enabled tools, infrastructure improvements, and a capability framework embedded within wider national training will mitigate the risk that inconsistently implemented tools could create new barriers.

Pregnancy and maternity

No direct impacts on children and young people have been identified. However, more flexible digital systems may provide indirect benefits for staff returning from maternity leave by supporting adaptable working practices and easier access to information.

Race

The policy is expected to have a neutral impact overall. Inclusive design, transparency around data use, engagement with communities and ongoing monitoring will mitigate the risk that digital exclusion or algorithmic bias could disproportionately affect some groups.

Where designed appropriately, improved digital tools may also support better engagement with families and pupils who use English as an additional language.

Sex

The policy is expected to have a neutral impact in relation to sex. Personalised digital tools may indirectly support efforts to narrow attainment gaps, including in literacy, where boys are currently overrepresented among lower attaining pupils. Risks associated with unequal access to devices or digital poverty are being addressed through inclusive design and evidence-based guidance on digital pedagogy.

Other protected characteristics

No significant direct impacts have been identified for gender reassignment, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. The policy promotes inclusive digital environments and respectful engagement. DfE will continue to seek further evidence to ensure that any emerging or indirect impacts are identified and considered as the policy is developed and implemented.

Support for children and families in the earliest years of life

Policy context

Best Start Family Hubs are intended to break down barriers to opportunity by improving access to a wide range of health, education and family support services. The policy aims to strengthen early development support and ensure that families can access help at the right time, so that every child is given the best possible start in life.

The Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life publication set out the government's vision for rebuilding family services nationally. This includes providing high quality, joined-up support to parents and children from pregnancy through to age 5 and beyond, with additional support for families of children with SEND. We are investing over £200 million over 3 years to ensure every Best Start Family Hub has a dedicated offer for children with additional needs and their families, and a SEND practitioner to offer direct support to children and families. This is on top of the over £700 million already committed to Best Start Family Hubs and the Healthy Babies programme in Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life, in partnership with the Department for Health and Social Care.

Equality analysis

Age

Best Start Family Hubs are expected to have a positive impact across age groups by improving coordination of services that support children and families at different life stages. Babies and young children are expected to benefit directly from improved access to health, early development and parenting support. Older children and young people are also expected to benefit through stronger links between family hub services and wider youth, education and relationship support services. These connections should support clearer pathways to help and improve continuity of support as children grow.

Disability

The development of Best Start Family Hubs is expected to strengthen support for children with disabilities by improving access to coordinated joined-up services. Embedding SEND services within family hubs is intended to support earlier identification of need, reduce barriers to access and promote inclusion.

Earlier support and improved coordination across education, health and care services are expected to help prevent needs from escalating and improve outcomes for children and their families.

Pregnancy and maternity

The start for life offer is expected to have a direct positive impact on women with the protected characteristic of pregnancy and maternity by improving access to maternity

services, health visiting, and early family support. The joined-up model of family hubs should also support continuity of care and reduce fragmentation between services during the perinatal period.

Race

Children and families from some ethnic minority backgrounds are disproportionately represented among those living in areas of higher deprivation.¹ Targeting Best Start Family Hub funding towards areas with the highest levels of child deprivation is therefore expected to have an indirect positive impact by improving access to early support and advancing equality of opportunity.

Improved access to trusted, community-based services may also support engagement with families who face structural barriers to accessing support, including language and cultural barriers.

Religion or other belief

Improved access to coordinated family services is expected to have a positive impact for people with different religions or beliefs by helping ensure support is accessible, appropriate and delivered in a respectful and inclusive way that reflects families' needs and circumstances.

Sex

Evidence suggests that boys living in deprivation are more likely to experience worse outcomes than girls.² By targeting early help and family support in areas of higher deprivation, Best Start Family Hubs are expected to have a positive impact on boys by improving access to early intervention and support.

Other protected characteristics

No significant impacts have been identified in relation to gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership or sexual orientation. DfE will continue to seek further evidence to ensure that any emerging or indirect impacts are identified and considered as the policy is developed and implemented.

¹ [People living in deprived neighbourhoods - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures](#)

² [Key stage 4 performance, Academic year 2024/25 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

National Inclusion Standards

Policy context

The National Inclusion Standards will set out expectations for good quality, ordinarily available provision across the 0 to 25 education system. It will support effective delivery of inclusive mainstream practice, promoting evidence-based approaches to identifying barriers to learning and meeting needs, across the layers of support. DfE will appoint an expert panel, with an independent chair, who will be responsible for developing and reviewing the National Inclusion Standards, improving the quality of evidence across the SEND system.

Equality analysis

Age

DfE will support the workforce by equipping them with evidence-based approaches that will strengthen inclusive practice. This is expected to have a positive impact at all ages and stages of education. The National Inclusion Standards will support earlier identification of need, reduce stigma and improve access to timely support to remove barriers to participation and learning. This is also expected to support positive peer relationships and reduce isolation.

Clearer expectations around inclusive and anticipatory provision, underpinned by evidence-based practice, should improve transition planning and consistency of support across settings and stages of education.

Disability

The standards are expected to have a positive impact by equipping educators with evidence-based approaches, strengthening inclusive practice, improving access to reasonable adjustments and reducing discrimination.

Clearer expectations around anticipatory and whole setting approaches should reduce reliance on reactive interventions and help prevent unmet need from escalating.

Race

Children and young people from some ethnic groups – including Travellers of Irish heritage, Gypsy/Roma, Mixed White and Black Caribbean, Black Caribbean and White British pupils – have particularly high rates of SEN identification (see Annex A). Strengthening evidence-based inclusive practice should enable earlier and more equitable access to support.

Sex

Strengthened duties are expected to reduce discrimination and stereotyping, and reduce exclusions and attainment gaps for boys through improved support.

Gender-based misconceptions can contribute to delayed or inaccurate identification of some types of SEN, including autism, for girls.³ Strengthening inclusive practice and expectations around early identification should support more timely and accurate identification for all pupils, helping to reduce disparities. Improved mainstream inclusion is also expected to reduce exclusions and support positive peer relationships.

Other protected characteristics

No significant impacts have been identified for marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. DfE will continue to seek further evidence to ensure that any emerging or indirect impacts are identified and considered as the policy is developed and implemented.

³ Education staff were less able to identify what autism 'looks like' in girls, compared to boys, when presented with case vignettes. Whitlock, A., Fulton, K., Lai, M. C., Pellicano, E., & Mandy, W. (2020). Recognition of girls on the autism spectrum by primary school educators: An experimental study. *Autism Research*, 13(8), 1358-1372

National training

Policy context

DfE is spending £200 million over 3 years on an inclusion training package from September 2026. The programme will provide staff across early years, schools and post-16 settings with access to government funded training focused on inclusive practice and early identification of need.

Training will support adaptive teaching, calm and inclusive learning environments, early engagement with parents and carers, inclusive practice for teaching assistants, and improved accessibility within further education. This builds on existing reforms to initial teacher training, the early career framework and strengthened SEND content for early career teachers.

There will be a new requirement set out in the SEND Code of Practice for all settings to ensure that staff receive training on SEND and inclusion, and to clearly signpost government funded training. By embedding this expectation across early years, schools and colleges, staff will be upskilled to deliver inclusive practice. Leaders will retain flexibility to select training that fits their context, while guidance and signposting will support quality and consistency. DfE will also review the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) role to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and reinforce inclusion as a shared responsibility across the workforce.

Equality analysis

Age

Strengthened training across early years, school and post-16 settings is expected to benefit children and young people at all ages by improving inclusive practice and supporting earlier identification of need and better evidenced support. Earlier intervention is likely to be particularly beneficial for younger children, helping reduce the risk of needs escalating over time. Enhanced training in accessibility within post-16 education is expected to support older learners' transitions and progression.

Disability

Children and young people with SEND are expected to benefit from improved workforce confidence, earlier identification of need and more consistent use of reasonable adjustments. Strengthened training is intended to reduce exclusionary practices, support high standard inclusive learning environments.

There is a risk that uneven uptake of training could result in variable levels of support. This will be mitigated through clear requirement in the SEND Code of Practice, accessible guidance, signposting to funded provision and oversight through existing inspection and assurance arrangements.

Race

Improved workforce confidence and strengthened inclusive practice are expected to support earlier identification, better engagement with families and more equitable access to support.

Sex

Although we know some needs are likely to be under-identified in girls, based on current rates of identification, we think boys are particularly likely to benefit.. The training is also intended to support earlier and more accurate identification of need, helping to address existing gender based disparities in identification and support.

Other protected characteristics

No significant direct impacts have been identified for gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. However, the training is expected to support inclusive practice more broadly by promoting respectful engagement and reducing stigma.

DfE will continue to seek further evidence to ensure that any emerging or indirect impacts are identified and considered as the policy is developed and implemented.

Targeted support

Individual Support Plans

Policy context

DfE will introduce a statutory duty for settings to record and monitor special educational needs and provision in an Individual Support Plan for children and young people with SEND. Individual Support Plans will be developed with parents and young people and will include details of identified needs, strategies to support pupils and outcomes that are expected from that support. Individual Support Plans will be standardised across the system to facilitate transitions between settings. They are also intended to act as a shared tool for settings, parents and carers, supporting clearer communication and regular discussion about a child's needs, the support in place and how this may change over time. This will also allow settings more flexibility to respond quickly and to update plans in response to children and young people's changing needs.

Individual Support Plans are designed to be dynamic and responsive to individual need rather than a static record created at a single point in time. By supporting ongoing dialogue between parents and settings, Individual Support Plans are intended to enable parents to engage more fully in decisions about their child's support. Subject to further development and testing, the intention is for Individual Support Plans to be supported by a standardised digital system to promote consistency, accuracy and ease of use across settings, while improving transparency and access for families.

A more consistent approach to recording support needs has the potential to promote greater equity by reducing unnecessary variation between settings. Clearer identification of need and improved communication across education providers may help improve fairness in access to support, provided Individual Support Plans are implemented with appropriate training, professional judgement and safeguards.

Equality analysis

Age

Individual Support Plans are expected to have a positive impact across age groups by supporting earlier and more consistent identification of need, including before a child starts school. Clearer recording, and regular reviews of support should help prevent needs escalating as children progress through education and support continuity at key transition points.

Many settings already maintain records of pupils' additional needs and support strategies. DfE will co-design Individual Support Plans to ensure usability for staff across education settings, as well as parents and families, provide clear guidance, appropriate training and phased implementation, alongside funding and alignment with existing best

practice programmes (for example the national training programme discussed above) to mitigate the risk that introducing Individual Support Plans could create additional short term pressures for staff, particularly those less confident with new digital systems.

Disability

More consistent recording of need through Individual Support Plans is expected to support more reliable access to provision and reasonable adjustments, advancing equality of opportunity for disabled pupils. Clearer documentation of support will also improve communication between education providers and other professionals, supporting continuity of provision and reducing the risk of unmet need.

Race

Improved accuracy and consistency in recording need, alongside clearer communication with parents and carers, is expected to support more equitable access to support. When developing proposals, DfE will consider accessibility for families who use English as an additional language to support engagement and foster good relations.

Sex

More boys than girls are identified as having SEN (see Annex A). Boys are also disproportionately represented in suspensions, exclusions and alternative provision, indicating a greater risk of unmet need where support is not provided early or consistently (see Annex A).

Earlier and more consistent recording of need through Individual Support Plans is expected to support more timely identification and monitoring of support for all pupils. By encouraging earlier intervention and clearer communication with parents and carers, Individual Support Plans are expected to support inclusion within mainstream settings, helping to reduce the risk of exclusion, and advance equality of opportunity for both boys and girls.

Other protected characteristics

No significant direct impacts have been identified in relation to marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. DfE will continue to seek further evidence to ensure that any emerging or indirect impacts are identified and considered as the policy is developed and implemented.

Targeted plus support

Inclusion Bases

Policy context

DfE will invest £3.7 billion from now until 2030 to make buildings accessible, create new special school places, and tens of thousands of new places in Inclusion Bases in mainstream settings. These bases are intended to provide access to specialist expertise and tailored support while enabling children and young people with more complex needs to remain connected to their local schools, communities and peers. Inclusion Bases will be underpinned by 2 models:

- **‘Support Bases’** - commissioned and funded by individual settings and multi-academy trusts to deliver targeted support
- **‘Specialist Bases’** - commissioned and funded by the local authority to deliver specialist support

This will allow children with more complex needs to receive the specialist support they need whilst remaining in their local communities, close to their families and friends and reducing often lengthy and expensive travel journeys to get their educational needs met.⁴ By embedding Inclusion Bases within mainstream provision, the policy aims to strengthen inclusive practice and deliver high quality teaching and support to children with more complex needs who would benefit from provision that bridges the current gap between mainstream and specialist.

Equality analysis

Age

Increasing the number of Inclusion Bases is expected to have a positive impact for children and young people of different ages by expanding the capacity of mainstream schools to meet a wider range of needs. Benefits are expected to be most apparent initially for younger pupils in the current school cohort, with longer term benefits for older pupils as secondary mainstream settings become more inclusive.

Disability

Children and young people with disabilities are expected to benefit from the increased availability of specialist support within mainstream settings. Embedding Inclusion Bases is intended to reduce barriers to participation, support reasonable adjustments, and foster greater inclusion, advancing equality of opportunity and promoting positive relationships.

⁴ National Audit Office, [Home to school](#) (2025)

The policy emphasises inclusive design, clear expectations around integration, peer to peer support networks, and strengthened accountability through Inclusion Strategy Reports to promote high quality, genuinely inclusive practice. DfE will also publish guidance to help mainstream settings deliver high quality support for children and young people accessing Inclusion Bases, and work with Ofsted so these bases are recognised and celebrated, while also being held to account for delivering inclusive provision.. This will mitigate the risk that, if not well integrated, Inclusion Bases could inadvertently reinforce separation or stigma.

Race

Improved access to Inclusion Bases is expected to have a positive impact by expanding the capacity of mainstream schools to meet the needs of children and young people with SEN.

Sex

By increasing inclusive capacity within mainstream settings and improving access to specialist support, Inclusion Bases are expected to support earlier intervention and sustained access to appropriate support. This should help reduce exclusions, support inclusion within mainstream education and improve outcomes for both boys and girls.

Other protected characteristics

No significant direct impacts have been identified in relation to gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. DfE will continue to seek further evidence to ensure that any emerging or indirect impacts are identified and considered as the policy is developed and implemented.

Experts at Hand

Policy context

DfE is investing £1.8 billion over 3 years to help mainstream settings access early support and advice through the Experts at Hand offer. This support will be commissioned locally by local authorities and Integrated Care Boards and is intended to make it easier for schools to draw on specialist expertise to meet needs early and effectively.

This will include expanding outreach from alternative provision (AP), special schools, and special post-16 institutions, enabling teachers with specialist expertise to provide advice and share effective approaches. Mainstream schools will also have access to time limited placements in specialist settings, such as AP and special schools for children and young people who need additional expert support to address individual needs and develop the skills and strategies to return to, and thrive in, mainstream classrooms.

Alongside this, DfE is investing over £40 million to grow the specialist workforce by expanding educational psychology training, with 2 cohorts of over 200 trainees starting in 2026 and 2027, followed by further cohorts from 2028 to 2030. DfE will also expand access to educational psychologists and speech and language therapists (SaLTs), including through expanding apprenticeship routes and upskilling the existing workforce.

Together, these measures are intended to build capability and capacity within mainstream settings, supporting a shift from reactive, individualised interventions towards earlier, whole setting support. The policy aims to enable more strategic deployment of specialist expertise across education and health services, improving identification of need and access to timely support.

Equality analysis

Age

Improved access to specialist expertise is expected to benefit children and young people across early years, school and post-16 settings by supporting earlier identification of need and more timely intervention. Access at earlier stages is expected to be particularly beneficial in preventing needs from escalating, while continued access across phases supports continuity and smoother transitions.

Disability

Children and young people are expected to benefit from earlier access to specialist advice and intervention. Specialist workforce shortages currently contribute to delays in assessment and support, increasing the risk of unmet need.

By improving access to educational psychologists and SaLTs, the policy is expected to support earlier identification, more effective reasonable adjustments and strengthened

inclusive practice within mainstream settings. Speech, language and communication needs are among the most common forms of SEN,⁵ meaning improved access to specialist support is expected to benefit a large number of pupils.

Race

Improved access to early specialist support is expected to help reduce disparities in identification and access to support by strengthening inclusive practice and engagement with families.

Sex

By supporting earlier identification and enabling schools to respond more effectively to emerging needs, improved access to specialist expertise is expected to help reduce the risk of exclusion and support inclusion within mainstream settings for both boys and girls.

Other protected characteristics

No significant direct impacts have been identified in relation to gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. DfE will continue to seek further evidence to ensure that any emerging or indirect impacts are identified and considered as the policy is developed and implemented.

⁵ [Special educational needs in England: January 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

Specialist support for those with complex needs

Specialist Provision Packages

Policy context

The proposed reforms introduce nationally defined Specialist Provision Packages for children and young people with the most complex SEND. The provision offer set out in the Specialist Provision Packages will underpin the entitlements in an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), and we propose that only those children and young people who need a Specialist Provision Package will have an EHCP in future, whether in a mainstream or specialist setting. These packages are intended to improve clarity and consistency by setting out expected provision, outcomes and resourcing, supported by evidence-based practice and a national framework. A revised statutory assessment process, to be co-designed with experts, children, and families, would determine eligibility, with the aim of ensuring more timely, transparent and equitable access to specialist provision.

Given the sensitivity of change for children and young people with complex needs, implementation of Specialist Provision Packages will be phased to support continuity of provision and minimise disruption. Clear communication with families, alongside coordination between education, health and care services, will be central to ensuring individual circumstances are considered as packages are introduced.

Equality analysis

Age

Children aged 5 to 15 currently represent the largest proportion of those with EHCPs (see Annex A). The introduction of nationally defined packages is expected to improve consistency and clarity of support for this group, while also strengthening planning for post-16 transitions.

Earlier identification and clearer packages are expected to enable younger children to access appropriate support sooner, supporting improved long term outcomes. Phased implementation and targeted transition planning, with a focus on continuity of education and access to appropriate support, will safeguard against risk associated with change for older pupils and post-16 learners during periods of transition.

Disability

Children and young people eligible for Specialist Provision Packages are likely to meet the Equality Act definition of disability (see Annex A). Introducing nationally defined package is expected to reduce geographical variation, improve consistency in decision making and advance equality of opportunity for disabled children and young people.

All children and young people who have a special school place in September 2029 will be able to stay in special school until the end of their education, unless they choose to move to a mainstream setting, which will mitigate against risk of disruption. The overall approach emphasises phased transition, workforce development, expanded resourced provision and inclusive planning, ensuring that mainstream and specialist settings are supported to meet needs effectively through significant investment while maintaining stability for families.

Race

A more transparent and nationally consistent approach to specialist provision is expected to help reduce disparities that arise from geographical variation or unequal access to information and advocacy. Support will be strengthened through inclusive communication, supporting engagement with families and promoting equitable access to specialist packages based on need rather than background.

Sex

SEN is more commonly identified among boys, though some needs are known to be under identified in girls (see Annex A). Boys are also disproportionately represented in exclusions, suspensions and alternative provision, often reflecting unmet or escalating needs (see Annex A). Clearer specialist packages, alongside wider reforms to strengthen inclusion and early identification, are expected to support more appropriate and timely support. This may help reduce exclusions, support sustained engagement in education and improve outcomes for both boys and girls.

Workforce training and improved identification practices are also intended to address known under recognition of certain needs in girls and support more balanced access to specialist support.

Other protected characteristics

No significant direct impacts have been identified in relation to gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. DfE will continue to seek further evidence to ensure that any emerging or indirect impacts are identified and considered as the policy is developed and implemented.

Education, Health and Care Plans

Policy context

The aim of this policy is to improve outcomes for children and young people with the most complex SEND by ensuring their needs are met through an evidence-based and more consistent system, including improved Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) that set out clear statutory entitlements and intended outcomes aligned to Specialist Provision Packages.

We will introduce primary legislation to establish that EHCPs will be granted to children who require a Specialist Provision Package. This means that where a child's needs can be well supported in mainstream schools through an Individual Support Plan and the help of the Experts at Hand service, that will be the norm and there's no need for a statutory assessment. This will reflect our reorientation of the system towards mainstream inclusion with early intervention, flexible provider-led support and the embedding of education and health professionals within mainstream settings. We will place a duty on schools to produce an Inclusion Strategy, setting out what they will provide across the Universal offer, and the Targeted, and including Targeted Plus layers of support. This means that, for the first time, we are creating a duty on schools to set out how they will deliver evidence-based support to children and young people with SEND. We are introducing new duties on settings to create Individual Support Plans and, for the first time, setting out a requirement to use evidence-based resources and interventions to identify and meet need.

Given these reforms, we anticipate over time that more children and young people will be supported in the Universal offer or Targeted layer in mainstream. We expect that EHCP numbers will increase but at a slower rate through to 2029 to 2030 as we begin to invest in the new system and equip mainstream early years settings, schools and colleges to meet needs earlier. As reforms become embedded, we expect the number of children and young people needing a Specialist Provision Package, and hence an EHCP, to access support will return to around today's level by 2035. This will be above long-term historical trends, as we know needs have increased worldwide, in part through better identification. We will manage the transition to a new system carefully.

Taken together, these measures are intended to strengthen support across the system, maintain continuity at key transition points, and reduce the likelihood of adverse impacts as the reforms are implemented.

Equality analysis

Age

Improvements to the clarity, quality and consistency of EHCPs are expected to benefit children of compulsory school age by supporting more effective access to education, stronger inclusion and improved outcomes.

Disability

Clearer entitlements, earlier support, and improved consistency may reduce discrimination, improve access to appropriate support, and promote inclusive learning environments for children and young people with disabilities.

Race

White children and young people represent the largest cohort of those with an EHCP (see Annex A). The reforms aim to improve fairness and consistency in the system, which may help reduce disparities in access to support, advance equality of opportunity, and foster positive relationships across different racial and ethnic groups.

Sex

Boys are more likely than girls to have an EHCP (see Annex A). This means they are likely to be impacted by the reforms. Improving clarity, earlier intervention and consistency in assessment and support may help reduce barriers for all children and young people particularly where needs have previously been overlooked.

Other protected characteristics

No significant direct adverse impacts have been identified in relation to gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. DfE will continue to seek further evidence to ensure that any emerging or indirect impacts are identified and considered as the policy is developed and implemented.

Parental preference

Policy context

For those who need specialist support it is important that young people and parents retain a strong right to indicate a preference for a particular placement, and we want them to receive greater support and information to make this decision. We also believe that the law needs to allow decisions on placements to be made with greater consideration of evidence of effectiveness, good value, and the needs of other children. For example, where a special school is full it would likely not be in the best interests of all children for more to be admitted to that setting.

We will maintain the legal principle known as ‘presumption to mainstream’, so that where a parent or young person with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) indicates a preference for a mainstream setting, there will be strong legal duties on local authorities to make this happen. We will amend the law so that local authorities are required to provide young people and parents with a list of recommended settings which are able to deliver the appropriate Specialist Provision Package for their child, from which to choose. We will also amend the current legal exception related to incompatibility with the ‘provision of efficient education for others’ so that local authorities are not required to name a school or setting in an EHCP where it is already full or where this would have a seriously detrimental effect on children or young people already in the setting. Lastly, we will amend the current legal exception related to incompatibility with ‘the efficient use of resources’ to make it clear that weight must be put on the evidence of the effectiveness of the provision, value for money, and fairness in future decisions about placements.

In addition, all children and young people who move from an EHCP to an Individual Support Plan will retain the ability to request a placement at a mainstream setting of their choice.

Equality analysis

Age

Children of compulsory school age represent the largest cohort of children and young people with EHCPs (see Annex A). As a result, this group is more likely to experience the effects of changes to placement decision making. This reflects their greater representation within the EHCP cohort rather than an age specific impact of the reforms.

Disability

A significant proportion of children and young people with EHCPs are disabled under the Equality Act 2010 (see Annex A), meaning that any impacts of these reforms may be more frequently experienced by disabled children and young people.

Race

This means children from certain ethnic groups may be more frequently affected by changes to placement processes (see Annex A). Placement decisions will continue to be based on assessed need and statutory duties, rather than background or ethnicity.

Sex

Boys are overrepresented among children and young people with EHCPs (see Annex A), meaning they are likely to experience the impact of reforms more frequently. This means that boys and young men are more likely to experience the effects of these reforms, reflecting the existing composition of the EHCP cohort.

Other protected characteristics

No significant direct adverse impacts have been identified in relation to gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. DfE will continue to seek further evidence to ensure that any emerging or indirect impacts are identified and considered as the policy is developed and implemented.

Independent special schools

Policy context

The proposed reforms strengthen regulatory oversight of independent special schools (ISS) to improve quality, consistency and value in state funded specialist provision for children and young people with the most complex needs.

Under the reforms, only providers meeting strengthened registration and quality requirements would be eligible for state funded placements. This includes clearer expectations on standards, alignment with national Specialist Provision Packages, and aligning their admission duties with that of other specialist settings. DfE also intends to introduce differentiated fee caps to improve transparency and value for money, while ensuring specialist placements remain available where required.

DfE is working to ensure that phased implementation informed by sector analysis, close engagement with local authorities, strengthened sufficiency planning, and continued expansion of state-maintained specialist provision and specialist capacity within mainstream settings all safeguard against the risk of disruption for children and young people. DfE is committed to supporting continuity of placements, including maintaining existing special school places for all children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) at the point of transition. This is supported by the investment of £3.7 billion from now until 2030 to make buildings accessible, create new special school places, and tens of thousands of new places in Inclusion Bases in mainstream settings.

Further work is being undertaken with sector experts, providers and local authorities to ensure that specialist provision packages, pricing structures and local sufficiency planning support high quality, financially sustainable provision. Phased implementation will be critical to managing risks associated with provider adjustment or exit and to maintaining continuity of education for children and young people.

Overall, the reforms are intended to reduce variability in quality and cost, improve oversight of the independent specialist sector, and support sustainable local sufficiency of appropriate provision.

Equality analysis

Age

Children aged 11 to 15 make up a significant proportion of ISS placements, accounting for around 66% of those in ISS with EHCPs.⁶ As a result, this age group is more likely to experience the effects of regulatory changes.

Mitigation is provided through improved transition planning, particularly at key points such as movement into post-16 education. Clearer pathways, earlier planning and stronger coordination between settings are intended to reduce disruption and support positive outcomes during a critical stage of development and preparation for adulthood.

Disability

Many children and young people placed in ISS have SEND requiring an EHCP and are likely to meet the Equality Act definition of disability (see Annex A). The most common primary types of need in ISS include autism spectrum disorder; social, emotional and mental health needs; speech, language and communication needs; and moderate learning difficulties.⁷ Strengthened oversight and clearer expectations for provision are expected to support more consistent quality and improve confidence that placements are able to meet complex needs effectively.

The reforms affect the regulation and funding of specialist provision rather than eligibility for education, health and care support and are therefore expected to have a neutral equality impact. Any potential differential impacts arising from changes to local provision are mitigated through phased implementation, sufficiency planning and a focus on continuity of support, with placement decisions continuing to be based on assessed need.

Race

Some ethnic groups – including Black Caribbean, White British and White Irish pupils – are over represented in ISS compared to the general pupil population.⁸ As a result, changes affecting independent provision may be experienced more frequently by these groups.

Mitigations include improving mainstream inclusion, £3.7 billion capital funding to improve the accessibility of buildings, create new special school places, and tens of thousands of new places in inclusion bases in mainstream settings, and strengthening

⁶ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/639db9d7-1ae6-481e-4255-08de53314f92>

⁷ EHCP Publication 2024/25: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/4cd5a755-5ec6-4d6d-ac6f-08de58cb0688>

⁸ [Independent special schools – by ethnicity and sex, 2025. Pupil population statistics by gender, 2025. Pupil population statistics by ethnicity, 2025.](#)

local specialist capacity to ensure suitable alternatives are available if required. Improved oversight and consistency are also intended to reduce disparities in access and outcomes across different racial groups. As part of this, DfE is also working with local authorities to improve sufficiency of state-maintained specialist places to ensure they can provide high-quality local places.

Sex

Boys are significantly overrepresented in ISS.⁹ As a result, any changes to specialist provision may be more frequently experienced by boys and young men, reflecting existing identification patterns rather than differential treatment arising from the reforms. This will be mitigated through workforce development, earlier identification of need, and expanded specialist support within mainstream and state maintained settings. By strengthening inclusive capacity in the system and supporting earlier identification of need, the reforms are expected to help reduce reliance on late or reactive placements and improve outcomes for both boys and girls.

Other protected characteristics

No significant direct adverse impacts have been identified in relation to gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. DfE will continue to seek further evidence to ensure that any emerging or indirect impacts are identified and considered as the policy is developed and implemented.

⁹ ['Number of education, health \(EHC\) plans as at January each year' from 'Education, health and care plans', Permanent data table - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

Reforming the system to reward inclusion

Funding reform

Policy context

The proposed reforms introduce over £200 million for Best Start Family Hubs, £1.6 billion for inclusion funding over the next 3 years, £1.8 billion for Experts at Hand and £3.7 billion capital funding to improve the accessibility of buildings, create new special school places, and tens of thousands of new places in inclusion bases in mainstream settings. Funding will be allocated directly to education settings, enabling schools to respond flexibly and promptly to pupils' needs. Placing resources closer to children and young people is intended to support earlier, evidence-based intervention and improve the quality of SEND provision within mainstream settings.

Evidence from international research and practice in England suggests that systems where a greater proportion of SEND funding is held by schools are more likely to support inclusive mainstream environments and earlier access to support. Such approaches are associated with reduced reliance on diagnosis and less adversarial routes to support for families.¹⁰ The reforms are intended to build on this evidence by enabling schools to respond effectively to emerging needs.

To promote consistency and accountability, setting leaders and multi academy trust leaders will be responsible for how inclusion funding is used, with external oversight through Ofsted. Schools will be required to publish an inclusion strategy setting out how funding is deployed to support children and young people with SEND, supporting transparency and local accountability.

While increased flexibility is intended to improve responsiveness, there is a risk of variation in how funding is used across settings if leadership capacity or workforce expertise differs. This is mitigated through clear accountability at setting and trust level, inspection oversight, transparency through published inclusion strategies, and wider workforce development to strengthen SEND expertise in mainstream settings.

Overall, the reforms are intended to support more consistent, effective use of funding, strengthen inclusive practice across the system, and improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

¹⁰ [Cor Meijer / European Agency, Financing of Special Needs Education \(1999\)](#)

Equality analysis

Age

Earlier access to flexible support may be particularly beneficial for younger children and those approaching key transition points, helping to prevent escalation of need and support continuity.

Disability

There is significant overlap between children and young people with SEN and those who are disabled under the Equality Act 2010 (see Annex A). By increasing the availability and flexibility of funding within mainstream settings, the policy is expected to support earlier identification of need and more timely access to appropriate support for disabled children and young people.

Mitigation is provided through accountability and oversight arrangements, ensuring funding is used to deliver evidence-based support. This should help reduce delays, prevent unmet need from escalating, and support improved educational outcomes.

Race

Enabling schools to respond to needs without reliance on formal thresholds may support more equitable access to early support for pupils. Transparency requirements and oversight mechanisms are intended to promote fairness and consistency in how support is provided, helping to reduce disparities in experience and outcomes.

Sex

Boys are more likely to be identified with SEN, although there is some evidence that some needs may be under identified in girls.¹¹ More flexible access to early support may help address both over and under identification by reducing reliance on formal diagnosis before support can be provided.

Other protected characteristics

No significant impacts have been identified in relation to gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, religion or belief, and sexual orientation. The policy does not differentiate access to funding or support on the basis of these characteristics. DfE will continue to seek further evidence to ensure that any emerging or indirect impacts are identified and considered as the policy is developed and implemented.

¹¹ Whitlock, A., Fulton, K., Lai, M. C., Pellicano, E., & Mandy, W. (2020). Recognition of girls on the autism spectrum by primary school educators: An experimental study. *Autism Research*, 13(8), 1358-1372

Accountability

Policy context

Accountability reforms aim to strengthen oversight and transparency across the SEND system by introducing clearer and more consistent expectations for schools, local authorities and multi-academy trusts. The reforms will require education settings to publish Inclusion Strategies, produce Individual Support Plans, improve reporting on the use of SEND funding, and demonstrate compliance with statutory duties. This will come on top of Ofsted's new inspection framework, which will assess all settings for inclusion and in due course we will consult on changes to the area SEND inspection framework. We will also update school performance measures to promote high standards for all pupils and to recognise inclusive mainstream schools which are enabling good progress amongst the children and young people who face the greatest barriers to learning.

These changes are intended to reduce variation in practice, support continuous improvement, and ensure that children and young people receive appropriate, high-quality support within mainstream settings wherever possible. By increasing transparency and accountability, the reforms aim to promote earlier identification of need, more consistent provision, and greater confidence for families in how decisions around support are made. DfE will refine the definitions of the areas of development, to be included in the updated Code of Practice and underpinning the National Inclusion Standards, and explore and clarify how educators can support the areas of development in the classroom and setting, linking to the evidence-based approaches that will be set out in the National Inclusion Standards.

Equality analysis

Age

Stronger accountability for early identification and inclusive practice is expected to benefit younger children by reducing delays in support and improving long term outcomes. Clearer expectations around transition planning, monitoring and reporting should also support continuity of provision for young people at key transition points, including post-16 education.

Disability

Enhanced accountability is expected to support more consistent application of reasonable adjustments and inclusive practice, reducing discrimination and advancing equality of opportunity for disabled children and young people.

There is a risk that variability in how settings interpret new requirements could lead to uneven experiences. This will be mitigated through refining the definitions of the areas of development, to be included in the updated Code of Practice and underpinning the

National Inclusion Standards, clear statutory guidance, workforce training and monitoring through Ofsted, supporting consistent and needs-led implementation.

Race

Clearer accountability and transparency arrangements are expected to support more equitable access to support by reducing variation in practice and improving engagement with families.

There is a recognised risk that reporting or communication requirements could be inaccessible if not carefully implemented. This will be mitigated through accessible information, inclusive communication approaches and ongoing engagement with families and communities, especially for those with English as an additional language.

Sex

Improvements in inclusive practice and accountability may be more frequently experienced by boys. There is also a potential indirect impact on the workforce, given the high proportion of women working in education (see Annex A). This is being mitigated through efforts to streamline reporting requirements, align accountability processes with existing systems and reduce unnecessary administrative burden.

Other protected characteristics

No significant direct adverse impacts have been identified in relation to gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. DfE will continue to seek further evidence to ensure that any emerging or indirect impacts are identified and considered as the policy is developed and implemented.

Resolution and legal framework (the tribunal)

Policy context

Appeals relating to SEN and disability have increased substantially in recent years,¹² contributing to delays and lengthy resolution times for families. The reforms aim to ensure that more needs are identified and met earlier through effective support in mainstream settings, reducing reliance on formal appeal processes.

Where disagreements do arise, the reforms seek to provide quicker, proportionate and collaborative routes to resolution, including through greater use of mediation and disagreement resolution services, and enhancing school level complaints processes, including independent SEND expertise.

As noted in the impact assessment on Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), as reforms become embedded, we expect more children to have their needs met in mainstream and therefore will use the mainstream redress system not the tribunal. When combined with investments in mediation and school complaints processes, this should lead to fewer parents and young people feeling forced to go through the tribunal process in order to receive the support their children need. However, parents and young people will retain access to the tribunal for appeals against:

- decisions not to carry out an assessment for accessing new Specialist Provision Packages
- local authority decisions about whether a child meets the new threshold for new Specialist Provision Packages, and therefore an EHCP
- the Package which the local authority has matched their child to;
- a local authority decision that a child no longer needs the support set out in a package and that an EHCP should cease
- a local authority's placement decision

Parents of disabled children will also retain access to the SEND tribunal in relation to disability discrimination cases against schools and local authority-maintained nurseries under the Equality Act 2010 where reasonable adjustments are not made.

Overall, the reforms are intended to reduce delay and reliance on lengthy adversarial processes, while ensuring families continue to have meaningful and proportionate routes to challenge and resolution.

¹² [Tribunals statistics quarterly: July to September 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

Equality analysis

Age

In 2024 to 2025, approximately 12% of tribunal appeals related to children under 5, 81% to children aged 5 to 16, and 7% to young people over 16.¹³ While DfE does not hold data on appeal types by age, school aged children are therefore most likely to experience the impact of these reforms.

Positive impacts are expected through improving and promoting earlier resolution of disputes including via mediation. Earlier identification and support through mainstream settings will ensure children's needs are met more quickly and result in fewer parents needing to appeal to the tribunal.

Disability

Positive impacts are expected where earlier support and greater focus on mediation and disagreement resolution services reduce the need for adversarial processes and ensure that problems can be resolved more quickly. Earlier identification and support through an improved mainstream offer, alongside improvements to mediation and school complaints processes, should reduce the need for appeals. Parents of disabled children will also retain access to the SEND tribunal in relation to disability discrimination cases against schools and local authority-maintained nurseries under the Equality Act 2010 where reasonable adjustments are not made.

Race

DfE does not currently hold data on the ethnicity of children and young people involved in dispute resolution. Where some ethnic groups are disproportionately identified with SEN (see Annex A), there is potential for changes to dispute processes to be experienced more frequently by these groups.

Mitigations include improving early support and engagement with families, reducing the likelihood that disputes escalate to formal appeals. Strengthened mediation, clearer communication and culturally sensitive engagement are also intended to support equitable access to resolution mechanisms across different ethnic groups.

Sex

SEN is more commonly identified among boys, though some needs are known to be under identified in girls (see Annex A). As a result, boys may be more likely to experience the effects of changes to dispute resolution processes.

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/tribunals-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2025> Tribunals statistics quarterly: July to September 2025 - GOV.UK, SEND Tribunal tables 2024-2025, Table SEND 4

Earlier identification, improved support and more collaborative routes to resolution are expected to support better outcomes for both boys and girls. Retained access to tribunal routes for key decisions provides assurance that rights to challenge remain protected.

Other protected characteristics

No significant direct adverse impacts have been identified in relation to gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. DfE will continue to seek further evidence to ensure that any emerging or indirect impacts are identified and considered as the policy is developed and implemented.

Concluding remarks

This assessment reflects the DfE's analysis at the current stage of policy development. The PSED is an ongoing responsibility and, as DfE are consulting on our proposals, these assessments are provisional and DfE have had to make estimates and assumptions throughout on the basis of the available evidence at the time of publication. Assessments are subject to future revision. This approach is intended to support effective implementation and ensure that children and young people with SEND continue to receive timely, inclusive and appropriate support that meets their needs.

Overall, the assessment indicates that the reforms, when taken together, are expected to support greater inclusion, fairness and transparency across the SEND system, while retaining appropriate safeguards and routes to redress.

Appendices

Annex A - Overarching statistics on protected characteristics

DfE have included a summary of the relevant data available on special educational needs (SEN) and protected characteristics to provide context for all policies outlined in this document.

SEN identification¹⁴

Over 1.7 million pupils in England have SEN as of January 2025.

- This is an increase of 93,700 (5.6%) pupils since 2024. This includes the number of pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and the number of pupils with SEN support, both of which continue the trend of increases since 2016.
 - The percentage of pupils with an EHCP has increased to 5.3%, from 4.8% in 2024.
 - The percentage of pupils with SEN support (no EHCP) has increased to 14.2%, from 13.6% in 2024.
- The most common type of need for those with an EHCP is autistic spectrum disorder and for those with SEN support is speech, language and communication needs.

SEN outcomes

Absence

- Overall absence for pupils with an EHCP increased from 12.3% in autumn term 2023 to 12.5% in autumn term 2024.
- Over the same period, overall absence rates for pupils with SEN support decreased from 9.6% to 9.2% and overall absence rates for pupils with no identified SEN decreased from 5.8% to 5.4%.¹⁵
- Young people with SEND are c.80% more likely to be NEET compared to the average.¹⁶ 11% of 16 to 19-year-old EHCP holders are classed as NEET; this rises to 20% for 19 to 25-year-olds with EHCPs.¹⁷

¹⁴ [Special educational needs in England, Academic year 2024/25 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2023-24)<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2023-24>

¹⁵ [Pupil absence in schools in England, Autumn term 2024/25 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁶ [Impetus | New Impetus study reveals the deep inequalities holding back young people's job prospects](#)

¹⁷ [Education, health and care plans - Reporting year 2025](#)

Attainment

- There is a large, stable gap between the proportion of pupils entering GCSE English and maths in special schools and state-funded mainstream schools. In 2023 to 2024, 93.6% of pupils with identified SEN in state-funded mainstream schools entered GCSE English and maths, compared to 14.8% of pupils with identified SEN in special schools.
- Overall, 35.2% of pupils with identified SEN in mainstream schools achieved a grade 4 or above in both English and maths compared to 1.7% in special schools.¹⁸

Destinations

- Of those who reached the end of Key Stage 4 in 2021 to 2022 (in state-funded mainstream schools), 86.9% of pupils with an EHCP went onto sustained education, employment, or apprenticeships in 2022 to 2023, compared to 87.3% of pupils with SEN support and 94.2% of those with no identified SEN. To be counted in a destination, young people have to have sustained participation for a 6-month period in the destination year.¹⁹

Age

- Our PSED on age (s149) does not apply to the exercise of a function relating to the provision of education, benefits, facilities, or services to pupils in schools. However, the SEND system covers children and young people aged 0 to 25 and to meet our PSED duties for this cohort includes age within our assessment where relevant.
- In 2025, 1.7 million children were registered for government funded early years provision entitlements, up 34% from a year earlier.²⁰ This represents the highest figure in the series (started 2011) and is driven by children aged 9 months to 2 years registered for the expanded working parent entitlement.
- The percentage of eligible children aged 9 months to 4 years with SEN was 2.2% for those registered for the working parent entitlement.
- The percentage of 3 and 4-year-olds registered for the universal entitlement with SEN was 8.9% in 2025.²¹ In 2024, the percentage of 3 and 4-year-olds with SEN in receipt of funded early education (15-hour entitlement) was 8.9%, an increase from 8.0% in 2023.²²

¹⁸ [Key stage 4 performance, Academic year 2023/24 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁹ [Key stage 4 destination measures, Academic year 2022/23](#)

²⁰ Entitlements here includes: the number of 3 and 4-year-olds registered for the universal entitlement, the number of children aged 9 months to 2 years registered for the working parent entitlement and the number of 2-year-olds registered for the families receiving additional support entitlement.

²¹ [Funded early education and childcare, Reporting year 2025 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

²² [Funded early education and childcare, Reporting year 2024 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

- In the 2024 to 2025 academic year, 20.3% (354,480) of all further education and skills participants aged 19 and over had a self-declared learning difficulty or disability – an increase of 2.8% from 2023 to 2024, when 19.5% (344,7503) of participants had a self-declared learning difficulty or disability.²³
- 87.4% of 16 and 17-year-olds with an EHCP and 86.1% with SEN support were in education and training in March 2025, compared to 93.0% of those without SEN. Note that this statistic is based on transparency data derived from local authority management information – there is considerable variation at the local authority level in how well 16 and 17 year olds are tracked.²⁴

Table 5: Age breakdown of children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans²⁵

Age group	Number of EHCPs (January 2024)	Number of EHCPs (January 2025)	Percentage increase
Under 5	26,500	27,700	3%
5 to 15	395,800	446,300	13%
16 to 19	115,000	127,900	11%
20 to 25	35,500	37,200	5%

Source: Education, health and care plans, reporting year 2025 – GOV.UK

Disability

Although DfE does not formally collect data on the overlap between SEN and disability, research published in 2008 found that 40% of pupils with SEN in primary schools, 46% of pupils with SEN in secondary schools and 78% of pupils in special schools met the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (2005) criteria of being disabled on the basis of parent judgements.²⁶ Therefore, any changes to the SEND system will predominantly affect children and young people with disabilities.

²³ [Further education and skills, Academic year 2024/25 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK - https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/52013d99-d153-4812-4283-08de53314f92](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/52013d99-d153-4812-4283-08de53314f92)

²⁴ [Participation in education, training and NEET age 16 to 17 by local authority, Academic year 2023/24 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK - https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/0cb247ba-e0a2-4baa-4284-08de53314f92](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/0cb247ba-e0a2-4baa-4284-08de53314f92)

²⁵ [Education, health and care plans, Reporting year 2025 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

²⁶ [Disability Data Collection for Children's Services](#)

The Department for Work and Pensions family resources survey shows that 12% of children were disabled in 2023 to 2024, up 5 percentage points from 7% in 2013 to 2014.

The most common impairment type for disabled children was social or behavioural impairments, with nearly 3 in 5 (59%) reporting this. This was followed by a learning impairment at 32% and a mental health impairment, at 29%.²⁷

The proportion of further education and skills participants declaring a learning difficulty or disability (LLDD) has increased to 20.3% in 2024 to 2025. This is the fourth consecutive annual increase in the share of LLDD learners from a low of 16.3% in 2020 to 2021.²⁸

Marriage and civil partnership

This protected characteristic does not apply to the majority of children and young people, as the current legal minimum age to get married or to have a civil partnership is 18.

Whilst some young people aged 18 to 25 may be married or in a civil partnership, there is no evidence available about covering the intersection between marriage or civil partnership status for young people with SEND. However, across all ages, disabled people are less likely to be married or in a civil partnership than the general public.²⁹ DfE will gather further evidence through the consultation.

Pregnancy and maternity

DfE does not hold data on the pregnancy and maternity of children and young people and how this intersects with SEN identification.

Race

In 2025, school pupils from the following ethnic backgrounds had particularly high rates of SEN identification (those with EHCPs and SEN Support) compared with the national average of 19.2%:^{30 31}

- Travellers of Irish heritage – 35.0%
- Gypsy/Roma – 29.0%
- Mixed white and black Caribbean – 25.9%

²⁷ [Family Resources Survey: financial year 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

²⁸ [Further education and skills, Academic year 2024/25 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK - https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/52013d99-d153-4812-4283-08de53314f92](#)

²⁹ [UK Disability Survey research report: data tables - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

³⁰ [Special educational needs in England, Academic year 2024/25](#). Based on state-funded nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, non-maintained special schools and state-funded AP schools. Data is not available for independent schools or general hospital schools.

³¹ [Age groups - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures](#)

- Black Caribbean – 25.0%
- White British – 21.6%

Conversely, school pupils from the following ethnic backgrounds had particularly low rates of SEN identification compared with the national average:

- Chinese – 7.9%
- Indian – 9.4%
- Any other Asian background – 12.5%
- Any other white background – 14.1%
- Any other ethnic group – 14.9%

Religion or belief

Amongst all ages, a slightly higher proportion of disabled people have a religion than the general public.³² There is no evidence available to determine whether children and young people with SEND or in alternative provision (AP) who have a religion will experience disproportionate positive or negative impacts as a result of the reform policies, but DfE will keep this under review as part of our wider PSED monitoring and gather further evidence through the consultation.

³² [UK Disability Survey research report: data tables - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674222/UK_Disability_Survey_research_report_data_tables.pdf)

Sex

- In January 2025, 24.1% of male school pupils had SEN, compared to 14.2% of female school pupils. Of which:
 - 16.8% of males received SEN support, compared to 11.1% of females
 - 7.4% of males had an EHCP compared to 3.1% of females³³
- 70.6% of children and young people with an EHCP are male. The percentage of those with an EHCP who are female has increased from 28.7% in 2024 to 29.4% in 2025³⁴

Sexual orientation

Amongst all ages, a lower proportion of disabled people identify as heterosexual than the general public,³⁵ but data is not available for the direct intersection amongst the 0 to 25-year-old age group and SEND. There is no evidence available to determine whether children and young people with SEND or in AP who are not heterosexual will experience disproportionate positive or negative impacts as a result of the reform policies, but DfE will keep this under review as part of our wider PSED monitoring and gather further evidence through the consultation.

SEND workforce

As the SEND workforce covers multiple sectors, DfE do not have precise figures on workforce characteristics. We do know:³⁶

Sex

In November 2024, 76% of teachers in state-funded schools are female. School support staff are predominantly female, however there are differences by post. 94% of administrative staff are female, compared to 58% of technicians.³⁷ In July 2023, data from the Health & Care Professions Council shows that 81% of educational psychologists were female.³⁸

Age

Across educational psychologist services, the age distribution of qualified educational psychologists skews towards mid-career. On average, 30 to 39 years accounts for the largest share at approximately 31%, followed by 40 to 49 years at approximately 25% and 50 to 59 years at approximately 19%. Early-career educational psychologists (Under

³³ [Special educational needs in England, Academic year 2024/25.](#)

³⁴ [Education, health and care plans, Reporting year 2025](#)

³⁵ [UK Disability Survey research report: data tables - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

³⁶ [hcpc-diversity-data-report-2021.pdf \(hcpc-uk.org\)](#)

³⁷ [School workforce in England, Reporting year 2024](#)

³⁸ [Diversity data: practitioner psychologists - July 2023 | The HCPC](#) (Educational psychologist modality)

29) represent approximately 9% on average, while 60 to 65 years and over 65 years are comparatively small at approximately 5% and 2%, respectively.³⁹

Race

In November 2024, 83% of the teacher workforce in England were White British. The ethnic diversity of the teacher workforce continues to increase, with 16.8% of teachers identifying as belonging to an ethnic minority group, up from 11.2% in 2010 to 2011. Within the 16.8% identifying as belonging to an ethnic minority group, white minorities accounted for 5.4 percentage points.⁴⁰

Physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, and occupational therapists

The following data is for physiotherapists as of March 2023,⁴¹ speech and language therapists as of November 2023,⁴² and occupational therapists as of January 2024 (Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) data relates to the workforce for patients of all ages, percentages may differ for the children and young people workforce):⁴³

Race

87% of speech and language therapists, 84% of occupational therapists and 77% of physiotherapists are White.

Religion

47% of speech and language therapists, 42% of occupational therapists and 39% of physiotherapists said they had no religion.

Sex

95% of speech and language therapists, 89% of occupational therapists and 70% of physiotherapists are female.

Sexual orientation

86% of speech and language therapists, 87% of occupational therapists and 90% of physiotherapists are heterosexual.

³⁹ National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists (NAPEP) Benchmarking exercise 2024/25

⁴⁰ [School workforce in England, Reporting year 2024 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

⁴¹ [Diversity data: physiotherapists - March 2023 | The HCPC](#)

⁴² [Diversity data: speech and language therapists - November 2023 | The HCPC](#)

⁴³ [Diversity data: occupational therapists - January 2024 | The HCPC](#)

Annex B – Glossary

In alphabetical order.

Alternative provision (AP)

Settings that provide education for children unable to attend a mainstream school.

Artificial intelligence (AI)

Computer-based systems that analyse data or perform tasks that normally require human judgement.

Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)

A neurodevelopmental condition affecting communication, social interaction and behaviour, with wide variation between individuals.

Children and young people (CPY)

Refers to individuals under 25 in the context of SEND policy.

Code of Practice

Statutory guidance for organisations that support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities. The Code of Practice covers 0 to 25 years.

Early years/early years settings (EY)

Early education provision for children aged 0–5, including childminders, maintained nursery schools, school-based nurseries and private, voluntary and independent (PVI) nurseries. In this document, maintained nursery schools and school-based nurseries are grouped with early years settings. Mentions of mainstream schools refer only to primary and secondary schools unless otherwise specified.

Early years foundation stage (EYFS)

Statutory framework for early childhood education.

Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

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.

Educational psychologist (EP)

Specialist support, assessment and intervention for SEND.

Every language support for every child (ELSEC)

Programme aimed at improving early language development.

Experts at Hand

A new offer of expert advice and services from education and health professionals into mainstream education settings.

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. Children's needs are not fixed. They may change over time, and many will face barriers to learning at different stages of their lives – whether due to poverty, bereavement, caring responsibility or other life circumstances. All staff in truly inclusive settings are able to recognise and respond to a wide range of additional needs, not as a response to specific diagnoses, but as a proactive approach towards creating environments where all children can access learning, feel valued and safe, and succeed.

Inclusion Bases

DfE will replace the current terms SEN unit, resourced provision, and pupil support unit (sometimes referred to by settings as 'internal alternative provision') to make it easier for parents to understand the support available for their child. Instead, DfE will collectively describe this provision as 'Inclusion Bases' (as these will sit in mainstream settings) – underpinned by 2 models:

- **'Support Bases'** - commissioned and funded by individual settings and multi-academy trusts to deliver targeted support
- **'Specialist Bases'** - commissioned and funded by the local authority to deliver specialist support

Independent special schools (ISS)

Privately funded schools that specialise in educating children with special educational needs.

Individual Support Plans

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 all children and young people in the targeted, targeted plus and specialist layers.

Integrated Care Board (ICB)

National Health Service (NHS) organisations responsible for planning health services for their local population.⁴⁴

Layers of support

Three layers of support, above the universal offer. These are called Targeted, Targeted Plus and Specialist.

Learning difficulty or disability (LLDD)

A term, commonly used in further education, describing learners whose learning difficulties and/or disabilities affect access to education.

Mainstream

Schools or settings that provide education for all children, including those with SEND.

Not in education, employment or training (NEET)

A classification for young people not currently participating in education, work or training.

Occupational therapist (OT)

Specialist support for physical and sensory needs

Ordinarily available provision (OAP)

Ordinarily Available Provision is the everyday support and adaptive teaching that all mainstream settings are expected to provide from their own resources for children and young people, including those with SEND, before specialist help is considered.

⁴⁴ [NHS England » What are integrated care systems?](#)

Outcomes

Specific goals or achievements set out for a child or young person to measure progress and success.

Public sector equality duty (PSED)

A legal duty requiring public bodies to eliminate discrimination, advance equality and foster good relations.

SEN

Special educational needs.

SEND

Special educational needs and disabilities – a broader term than SEN.

Settings

The different types of educational environments where children and young people receive learning and support. This includes early years provision (including childminders, maintained nursery schools, school-based nurseries, and private, voluntary and independent (PVI) nurseries), schools (mainstream and special), and colleges or other post-16 education providers.

Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH)

Difficulties with emotional regulation, behaviour or mental health that impact learning and wellbeing.

Special schools

Schools designed to meet the needs of children with SEND.

Specialist post-16 institution (SPI)

College or setting providing specialist education for young people with SEND.

Specialist provision (or support)

Dedicated support for children whose needs require more than reasonably adjusted provision in a setting.

Speech and language therapist

Professional support for speech, language and communication needs.

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)

Difficulties with understanding or using spoken language that affect communication and learning.

Transitions

The process of moving between stages of education or settings, such as from early years to primary school, or from school to further education.



Department
for Education

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