

What parents of children and young people with SEND need to know

We've been having a national conversation with children, young people, parents and teachers about how to improve SEND support for every child from nursery through to college. This has involved thousands of conversations across the country.

We know that too many children and families have been let down by the current system – forced to fight for support that should simply be there. That is not acceptable, and these reforms are designed to fix it.

There will be clear legal duties, standards and expectations for schools, colleges, early years settings, local authorities and healthcare services, and real accountability when these are not met.

We've listened carefully and shaped proposals based on what you've told us so far. Now we want to hear your views as part of a formal consultation. Alongside collecting written responses, we'll continue to run events to make sure we're hearing from as many people as possible.

This 12-week consultation period is not the end of our conversation with you. We know it's essential we get this right and we're committed to keeping you up to date as our proposals develop. As we work through what you've told us, we'll work with your schools, colleges and early years settings and networks, such as the National Network of Parent Carer Forums, to share updates with you openly and honestly over the coming years – because getting this right for your family matters.

Our reforms are built around five principles:

1. Early: Support as soon as needs are identified, not after a long fight.
2. Local: Learning close to home, alongside peers, rather than travelling long distances.
3. Fair: Settings resourced to meet commonly occurring needs and clear legal rights and national standards to secure support for children who need it.
4. Effective: Evidence-based approaches that work.
5. Shared: Education, health/care and family support working together.

What we're proposing

We're re-shaping the SEND system to make all mainstream early years settings, schools and colleges truly inclusive. We're investing billions of pounds to adapt classrooms and corridors, train teachers, educators and assistants, and bring experts like speech and language therapists into settings.

All children and young people with SEND will have an Individual Support Plan. For the children and young people who have complex needs, over and above what can routinely be provided by mainstream settings, EHCPs will be retained and improved.

Special schools and alternative provision will take on a dual role - continuing to provide high-quality education for children with the most complex needs, while also acting as outreach hubs to support mainstream settings.

In the new system	What this means for you
Mainstream settings	Every mainstream setting will be expected to deliver a strong universal offer – high-quality, inclusive teaching for all children.
Layers of support	Children who need additional help will be able to access three flexible layers of support – Targeted, Targeted Plus and Specialist – on top of the universal offer. Children will be able to easily move between layers as needs are identified and develop, they are not sequential.
Individual Support Plans	All schools (including maintained nursery schools and school-based nurseries) and colleges will be legally required to create Individual Support Plans for any child or young person with identified SEND, regardless of which layer of support they're receiving.
Inclusion bases	We'll ensure every secondary school and the same number of primary schools have an inclusion base. A base is a space in a mainstream school designed for children with SEND where they can receive targeted interventions and support or spend time to help them regulate and access their education. This will support more children to receive specialist and targeted support whilst being part of their local school.
Specialist Provision Packages	For children and young people with the most complex needs, beyond what mainstream settings can routinely provide, the specialist layer of support will include new Specialist Provision Packages. These will set out clearly what support your child is entitled to – including education, health and care. These packages will be created by an independent panel of education, health and care experts in discussion with children and families. They will be based on evidence and delivered across the country, meaning the same high standard of support

In the new system	What this means for you
	will be available wherever you live, ending the postcode lottery that parents currently face.
Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)	EHCPs will be retained and improved. They will give a legal entitlement to more intensive or complex support than mainstream education settings can routinely provide. New EHCPs will be based on new Specialist Provision Packages, putting an end to the postcode lottery in support. Changes to EHCPs will move in lockstep with radical improvements to SEND support in mainstream nurseries, schools, and colleges, which means more children will get SEND support including more involvement of healthcare professionals like speech therapists and experts like educational psychologists. These changes will be phased. For children and young people with an existing EHCP, transition to the new system will begin from 2030, once the new inclusive mainstream system has been fully built.
Special settings and alternative provision	These settings are vital for children and young people with the most complex needs. Our investment will increase the number of special school and alternative provision places available for children who need them.
Your legal rights	EHCPs provide statutory protection for complex needs. Individual Support Plans are a legal obligation for schools (including maintained nursery schools and school-based nurseries) and colleges.
Resolution	School complaints systems will be updated so complaints about SEND are heard by a panel including a SEND expert independent of that school. For children with EHCPs or applying for a needs assessment the tribunal will remain as an important backstop, and we will improve mediation and dispute resolution so more disagreements can be resolved without lengthy legal processes.
Accountability	Ofsted will inspect all settings on how well they support children with SEND – including whether the right support is in place and high expectations are being met. We will support

In the new system	What this means for you
	and intervene when local authorities and Integrated Care Boards don't meet the expected standards.

Timeline

When	What's happening
Now to 2030	Consultation open; early investments flowing - £3.7bn for tens of thousands more SEND places, £4bn in earlier identification needs and support.
2026/27	National SEND training programme begins for all staff; Best Start Family Hubs rolled out nationally; and draft Specialist Provision Packages published in Autumn 2026.
2027/28	Final Specialist Provision Packages published. We will design a new needs assessment process based on the packages, working with children, families and experts to ensure assessments involve professionals who know the child, that parents' voices are heard and there is nationally consistent process without parents feeling pressured to pay for extra assessments or costly diagnoses.
2029/30	These changes will be phased. For children having their needs assessed for the first time, new needs assessments will begin from September 2029. For children and young people with an existing EHCP, transition to the new system will begin from 2030, once the new inclusive mainstream system has been fully built. Transitions will then only happen as children naturally move between primary and secondary school, or from secondary school to college. Every child with a special school place in September 2029 will be able to stay in a special school until they finish their education.
2030 onwards	All reforms in place. Children will receive earlier intervention and support in mainstream reducing the need for lengthy legal processes and children with complex needs will have EHCPs backed by new national standards. First children transition from the old system to the new system.

The new system in practice

Inclusive mainstream

At the heart of our reforms is a strong universal offer in mainstream early years settings, schools and colleges - high-quality, inclusive teaching and early help for all children and young people.

As well as investment in teacher and staff training, Inclusion Bases and accessible buildings, there will be an updated Code of Practice and new National Inclusion Standards. Every setting will know what good looks like and can learn from what the best schools, early years settings and colleges are already doing, to ensure every child and young person is getting the right support.

Three layers of support

The new system has three layers on top of the universal offer. These are designed so your child gets the right level of support. Your child can receive support from any layer of support at any time during their education, some children will need specialist support from the start, others may have needs that develop over time or could receive a targeted intervention which manages their needs to the point where they no longer need that help. Children will be able to easily move between layers as needs are identified and develop, they are not sequential. These flexible layers of support are:

1. Targeted Support

- Support like small group interventions delivered by setting staff, and reasonable adjustments
- An Individual Support Plan will record their needs, the support they're receiving and intended outcomes
- Support can flex as your child's needs change
- The help and support they are entitled to receive will be written into the law

2. Targeted Plus Support

- Support from Experts at Hand – a new service bringing specialists such as speech and language therapists, educational psychologists and occupational therapists
- Use of Inclusion Bases, a dedicated space within a mainstream setting offering a calmer environment and small group sessions
- Short-term placement at alternative provision or special school if needed, to help your child re-engage
- Your child will still have an Individual Support Plan developed with you

3. Specialist Support

For children and young people with the most complex needs, beyond what mainstream settings can routinely provide:

- New Specialist Provision Packages will set out clearly what support your child is entitled to – including education, health and care.
- These packages will be created by an independent panel of education, health and care experts in discussion with children and families. They will be based on evidence and delivered across the country, meaning the same high standard of support will be available wherever you live, ending the postcode lottery that parents currently face.
- Your child will be assessed to see which package(s) of support meets their needs and they may receive support from more than one package. Their EHCP will give them a legal right to the support set out in a Specialist Provision Package. We will design a new needs assessment process with children, families and experts based on the packages.
- Your school will work with you on a detailed Individual Support Plan which will set out how the provision in your child's EHCP will be delivered. Children with an EHCP may have a place in a specialist or mainstream setting, including mainstream settings with specialist inclusion bases. Settings will have to be able to deliver all the support set out in a child's EHCP, which will be based on the Specialist Provision Package they have been matched to.

EHCPs, Individual Support Plans, and Specialist Provision Packages

Children and young people with SEND will have a digital Individual Support Plan from September 2029 – developed by their school, college or nursery, together with you, and regularly updated – setting out their needs, the day-to-day support they receive and what that should help them achieve.

New EHCPs will be based on the Specialist Provision Packages. They will be digital and standardised across the country.

We will take the next three to four years to build the new system and strengthen the ability of mainstream early years settings, schools and colleges to meet children's needs.

Changes will only happen when your child moves to a new phase of their education. The first cohorts will be those starting a new phase in September 2030. For example, if your child is in year 3 in September 2029, they will not transition to the new system until they move into secondary school. If your child is in year 7 in September 2029, they will not transition to the new system until they move into post-16 education. If your child is in early years, they will not transition until year 7. To find the transition point for your child, [please see our information on EHCPs](#).

Special and alternative provision settings

Special schools and alternative provision remain a vital part of the system for children with the most complex needs. Under the reforms, special schools will take on a wider role by sharing their expertise with local mainstream settings.

Support for children with the most complex needs will be clearer and more consistent, with new Specialist Provision Packages setting out exactly what children are entitled to and ending the postcode lottery in support families face.

Accountability

Ofsted will inspect early years settings, schools and colleges specifically on their inclusive practice. This includes the standard of their targeted and targeted plus provision and how well they set high expectations and provide support for children with SEND.

Schools will be legally required to publish an Inclusion Strategy showing how resources are used to support children with SEND, subject to scrutiny from parents (as well as Ofsted and governors). We will also work with nurseries and colleges to set out a proportionate approach. Schools (including maintained nursery schools and school-based nurseries) and colleges will have a legal duty to develop Individual Support Plans, with parents and carers. We will work with private, voluntary and independent early years providers to understand how ISPs could work in their settings. This transparency is designed to give you greater confidence about your child's

We are asking agencies including health and care and local authorities to come together with education and families to plan, commission and deliver SEND support to children. Where local authorities and Integrated Care Boards are failing to meet expected standards, we will intervene. We are also asking the children's commissioner for England to oversee the reforms, asking them to particularly focus on the most vulnerable groups.

Key investment for SEND

- £1.6 billion for early years settings, schools and colleges over three years through the Inclusive Mainstream Fund, so settings can better support children with special educational needs and disabilities and embed more inclusive practices.
- £1.8 billion for Experts at Hand to bring more expert advice and services from education and health professionals such as educational psychologists and speech and language therapists into mainstream schools, early years settings and colleges.
- £200 million for local authorities to transform their SEND services, who will be held firmly to account for delivering high-quality, inclusive provision.
- Over £200 million for new training so all staff can feel more confident supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

- £3.7 billion in capital for 60,000 new specialist places, including tens of thousands of places in Inclusion Bases, and to make buildings accessible to improve early years, school and college buildings.

Your questions answered

Will my child lose their EHCP?

EHCPs will continue to be a very important part of the new system, and we will create new Specialist Provision Packages that will end the postcode lottery in quality and support set out in EHCPs.

The first cohort of children and young people to transition to the new system will be those in at the end of primary, secondary and post-16 in school year 2029/30. They will be assessed from September 2029 and will move to the new system in September 2030.

For example, if your child has an EHCP and is in year 6 in a mainstream school in September 2029 they will have priority admission for their secondary school place, so you can choose the right school for them. All secondary schools will by then have an inclusion base. When you make that application, your LA will also undertake a new needs assessment to see if your child needs the support of a Specialist Provision Package. If they do, they'll move to secondary school (in September 2030) with new EHCP based on the package(s) of support they need. If you are unhappy with the outcome of this assessment, you will be able to go to tribunal.

If they don't need the support of a Package they will still have a legally backed Individual Support Plan which will set out their needs, the support they will get to meet them and what that support should help them achieve. This could include healthcare support from the Experts at Hand service, small group lessons, or time to regulate out of the classroom or in an inclusion base. This same process will happen for children in year 11 in September 2029, before they move to post-16. If you are unhappy with the support your child is receiving, you will have access to our strengthened complaints process.

No changes will happen before school year 2030 and from then only when children reach the end of primary or secondary school.

Children attending special schools can stay there for the duration of their education unless you decide to move.

Will my child be forced into mainstream setting?

No. All children and young people who attend a specialist setting can stay there, and children who need the support of a special school will continue to get the specialist school place they need.

How do I have my say?

The consultation is open now. Your voice matters – these reforms were designed following the biggest national conversation on SEND in a generation.

Find out more

Visit gov.uk/dfe/send-reform

- [Every Child Achieving and Thriving Schools White Paper](#)
- [SEND Consultation](#)
- [Further information and fact sheets](#)
- [National Network of Parent Carer Forums](#)