

# Written Evidence from Kids to the Education Select Committee Inquiry – Solving the SEND crisis

**February 2025**

## Contents

1. About Kids .....	1
Key recommendations.....	5
2. Support for children and young people with SEND .....	7
3. Current and future model of SEND provision .....	20
4. Finance, funding and capacity of SEND provision.....	27
5. Accountability and inspection of SEND provision .....	30

## 1. About Kids

1.1. Kids is a national charity, founded in 1970, that provides a wide range of services to children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families in England. We support children at all ages and stages of childhood, from babies through to young adults, whatever their disability, and each year we support around 18,000 disabled children, young people and family members.

1.2. Kids services include play and social opportunities that help children with SEND to grow and expand their horizons while having fun – like specialist adventure playgrounds, after school activities, holiday play schemes, and youth clubs; advice and support that helps families to navigate the world of SEND and support when they need it most including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) and a Special Educational Needs and Disability Mediation and Disagreement Resolution Service that helps families resolve disputes with the local authority or health service; and learning and development

services including early years nurseries and family groups for under 5s, as well as projects helping teenagers like 'Autism in Schools'.

### **1.3. Summary**

We are delighted to have the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Education Select Committee Inquiry into Solving the SEND Crisis. Given our areas of expertise, this response focuses on what we hear and see, on the ground, of the experiences of thousands of families along with evidence of policy solutions that work. This is why our responses are focussed in the main on the first two themes of the inquiry – the current support for children and families within the existing SEND system, a system within which we deliver various provisions for children with SEND, and this practical knowledge of the systems informs our answers and solutions given to the second theme of what the future SEND system should provide. Our services and participation work with children and young people provide us with insight into how the SEND system is working on the ground for those children and families who exist within it, and how they should be effectively supported by the services and professionals that the first theme of this inquiry focusses on. We regularly facilitate discussions within our Youth Voice Collective on the very topics this inquiry asks key questions on: what inclusive mainstream education should look like, what specialist interventions work for children and young people with SEND, how could the curriculum and post-16 pathways work better for children and young people with SEND. At Kids we have been directly asking and involving children and young people with SEND in our work and services for years, and our insights and expertise are equally informed by our specialist workforce – professionals trained and experienced in supporting children and young people with SEND. Reflecting the nature of our work, we will refer to the population in question as children and young people with SEND.

We know the Government is committed to changing the SEND system and support available, and we recognise that there are lots of layers that will make up the wholesale reform of the SEND system, making it a complex task. We put forward the idea that whilst the individual agencies within education, health and care will be the ones practically tasked with changing their practices and ways of working, the national Government has a crucial role to play in providing the leadership that will ensure the cooperation of key Government departments such as the Department for Education (DfE), the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the Treasury. We need to see Government translating the opportunities that come with the various current mechanisms for reform into evidenced outcomes and solutions (ie. Fully utilising opportunities that come with the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (CWS), the Law commission review into children's social care, for example). The findings and evidence from the various consultations, reviews and inquiries currently taking place need to be considered alongside existing reviews and recommendations such as the SEND and alternative provision improvement plan published under the last Government. All of these need to be looked at in the round, with the Government

taking a methodical, robust and thorough approach to ensure they arrive at a realistic, well evidenced and costed plan for wholesale SEND reform. Improving the quality, consistency and availability of support must be the litmus test for the Government's reforms. Guiding questions for the Government must be whether proposals will rebuild the trust and confidence of children and parents in the system. We summarise below the key themes that underpin our solutions for reforming the SEND system.

#### Inclusion and wholesale reform

Overall, we welcome the Government's aim of increasing inclusion in mainstream education, however, this work must be based on a clear, agreed definition of inclusion, produced by the Department for Education (DfE) but involving children and young people with SEND, their families and the SEND workforce and professionals who understand their needs best. We are clear that DfE must work on this definition of inclusion immediately, guided by the recently appointed expert advisory panels as well as others in the SEND sector. This must be immediately followed up by a concrete vision and a costed plan detailing how inclusive mainstream education will be achieved, with clear time scales and milestones for progress attached. We recommend that all the key policy drivers for achieving true inclusion in mainstream settings are considered: the Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR), the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (CWS), as well as any upcoming proposals for legislative change of the SEND systems. We are clear that central to delivering inclusive mainstream settings is the need for a whole school approach and the required resources to make this a reality; every school must be adequately equipped to be truly inclusive, not just in its environment but across its systems, policies, curriculum and in its relationships with professionals outside of education in health, social care and the wider community.

#### Collective responsibility: training, reasonable adjustments and cultural change across the whole SEND system

Our submission makes clear that change does not just come about from government legislation or funding alone. A key theme running throughout our submission is the need for better training and understanding of SEND across professions. We argue that this is necessary from the earliest stages of a child's life right through to adolescence and early adulthood – for the early years and education workforce, through the education system as well as for health, social care and community professionals. Universal services would become immediately more accessible to children and young people with SEND if those services and spaces were more welcoming and accommodating to children with SEND – something easily solved by providing training in the key SEND conditions to workforces across community, education, health and care. We know, and hear first-hand, that children with SEND are too often an afterthought. Historically, they have not been considered as part of mainstream policies across education, health and care. This is unacceptable and this

attitude is reflected in the discriminatory practices still enacted across public services and systems today. Whilst we acknowledge the impact of cumulative budget cuts to public services over the last decade, it is not just due to a lack of resources that children with SEND are discriminated against. We argue that attitudes and understanding need to change across the board. The tools needed to ensure children and young people with SEND are treated fairly already exist. We make the argument that schools and local authorities in particular must adhere to the Equality Act 2010 and act on their duty to make reasonable adjustments for children with disabilities. Many national and local policies around behaviour and attendance are applied inflexibly and therefore discriminate against children with SEND. We address the high school exclusion and absence rates amongst children with SEND, demonstrating why a lack of appropriate support, and a lack of reasonable adjustments to school policies contribute to children with SEND being overrepresented in absence and exclusion rates. Reasonable adjustments will be needed not just in how policies are applied but in the behavioural and communication approaches taken by the whole school workforce. We need reasonable adjustments to be made for children with SEND in the same way they are for adults with disabilities.

#### Early intervention and existing community provision

Our submission sets out below how earlier interventions represent a vital part of the solution to the current SEND emergency. Despite the deep failings and pressures in the SEND system and the current desperate picture for families, there are short term solutions available that are either in place already or that should be picked up, replicated and championed. We provide details of tried and tested early interventions and provision which have worked to provide support to children and families at the right time and have reduced the need for more costly crisis care in the longer term. Our submission highlights the importance of community provision in a child and family's life and gives examples of the types of professionals and services that are key to successful early intervention programmes. We also provide costings for provisions that we have piloted and know work, providing details of existing, available and practical solutions which the Government and DfE can easily incorporate into their plans for reforming the system. We stand ready to work with Government and civil servants to build a concrete plan of how these types of early interventions could be scaled up and delivered across local areas. Throughout our submission we highlight the need to get it right in the early years with solutions to the workforce crisis including a costed early years workforce plan, and simplifying and increasing current funding arrangements for early years settings allowing for SEND babies and toddlers to be better supported and included in early years settings.

#### Joint commissioning and multi-agency working

Our submission argues that effective multi-agency partnership working will be crucial to the success of any reform to the SEND system. We know that children with SEND

do not exist only in the education system – the nature of their disabilities, and special educational needs mean that they are frequently in contact with health, care and community services or if they are not, they are likely to need input from professionals working across these sectors at some point. Many of the questions posed by this inquiry pertain to the Education, Health and Care plans (EHCPs) that many children with SEND are in receipt of; we argue that in order to reduce the number of these plans, to speed up assessments for these plans and for plans to be effectively implemented, the key agencies of education, health and social care need to be held equally accountable. We argue for the addition of binding statutory duties on health and social care to solve the uneven and unfair load on education to provide support that it often cannot realistically provide (for example the health and care parts of a plan must be provided by health and social care professionals who currently have no legally binding duty placed on them to provide their services). In order to further make this type of multi-agency approach a reality we argue that senior leaders in Government departments (DfE and DHSC) must mandate that local authorities and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) commission services and provision jointly in local areas.

#### Solutions and building on best practice examples

Our submission puts forward the idea that whilst wholesale reform of the SEND system is necessary, urgent action is needed now – children and families are feeling the effects of a system in crisis every day. We put forward the idea that Government must recognise and resource practical support at home and in the community as it will be essential to the Government's ambition for inclusive mainstream schools to be fulfilled. We know from our services and experience that practical and emotional support, from the right people with the right resource and attitudes works. It works to reduce crisis care down the line, it works to help children with SEND feel supported and stay in school, and it works to reduce the impact a lack of support has on the parents/ carers and wider family of children with SEND. These reforms cannot only focus on changes to the education and school systems but need to take a holistic approach – children and young people and their families do not exist in a vacuum and need access to support and services within their homes, their communities as well as in their schools.

## Key recommendations

1. DfE to produce a clearly agreed definition of what good inclusion in mainstream education settings looks like (informed by SEND children, young people, families and experts in the sector)
2. Government must produce a comprehensive Early Years workforce strategy for all who work in the sector
3. Government must ringfence the notional SEN budget for schools so that funding meant for SEND children is spent on SEND children

4. Government to amend the Children and Families Act 2014 to place a statutory duty on health and social care equal to that placed on education to provide the provision detailed in EHC plans for children with SEND
5. Government to ensure the Kids Navigator model is recognised and integrated into the Early Years nursery expansion programme
6. Increase SEND training for teachers and *all* school staff: we recommend a tiered approach with more comprehensive training given to all teachers in the conditions that make up the biggest cohorts of SEND children across settings
7. The Children and Families Act 2014 should be amended to put SEN Support on a statutory footing
8. DfE must produce a clear, costed plan to measure progress, and to gather clearer data on SEND so that funding is better targeted and utilised
9. DfE and DHSC to mandate the implementation of clear data-sharing and partnership working agreements between education, health, and social care agencies
10. Schools and local authorities must make reasonable adjustments for children with SEND in line with the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty, particularly in regard to their decision-making and implementation of attendance and behaviour policies
11. Government to mandate joint commissioning by local authorities and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) as part of their SEND reforms
12. Government should reform procurement rules and practice to make it easier for statutory and community organisations to work together
13. Government should commission a pilot of Kids SEND Navigators for the post-16 transition stage
14. Unlink the Disability Access Fund (DAF) from Disability Living Allowance to allow funding to be accessed earlier and more easily
15. The Department for Health and Social Care must request and ringfence funding for SEND in order to meet their obligations to SEND students
16. Government must scrap the SEND Safety Valve system and write off local authority high needs deficits
17. Government must commit to SEND funding being spent earlier in the system and in a child's life.
18. DfE must develop national standards for SEN support which Ofsted should inspect against
19. Ofsted to request and analyse key data sets as part of inspections to support assessment of inclusive practices and whether these are being applied effectively (ie. exclusion rates for children with SEND and how many attend breakfast- and after-school clubs).
20. Transition planning to formally start for all young people with SEND from age 14
21. DfE and DHSC should work jointly to create a national set of standards that outlines clear roles and responsibilities across education, health and social care regarding transitions to adulthood.

## 2. Support for children and young people with SEND

### 2.1 Defining what inclusivity in mainstream schools and early years settings should mean and look like in practice

We welcome the Government's vision of fully inclusive schools. Properly inclusive and funded schools, and an overall more inclusive society is the right goal; truly inclusive schools and settings are good for *all* children, not just those with SEND. An inclusive school is one where from top to toe policies, systems, training and a culture and practice of reasonable adjustments and flexibility are all in place. However, before inclusive schools can be implemented, a shared understanding and definition of what good inclusive education looks like needs to be agreed. **It is essential that the Department for Education (DfE) arrives at a clearly agreed definition of what good inclusion looks like.** In order to do this, the DfE must consult with those in the disability sector, particularly children and young people with SEND, their parents/carers, and the professionals who support them across education, health and care, to reach this definition.

At Kids, our services support 18,000 young people every year in a range of ways and through a wide variety of services. This gives us invaluable insight into the support needs of children and young people with SEND and puts us in a position to share the things that we have learned in terms of what good inclusion should look like. Our Youth Voice Collective are a group of children and young people aged 13-25 with special educational needs or disabilities who completed a piece of work in August 2024 identifying what they thought good inclusion would look like in practice. Over 100 young people took part in this work with representation from all nine regions of England. Young people who are neurodiverse, those with physical disabilities, health conditions, sensory impairments, learning difficulties and more are represented across those who took part. You can find the full report from the Youth Voice Collective [here](#).

Based on our own services, and the insights we have gathered from young people, their carers and families, and the professionals working to support them, we have identified the following as key elements of what a good inclusive mainstream environment looks like:

- **SEND training for all school staff** so everyone has a basic knowledge and understanding of SEND, enabling them to adapt communication, make reasonable adjustments and ensuring they are able to effectively tailor their responses and approaches to children with SEND.
- The training should pave the way for a more **flexible approach across the entire school environment, systems and policies**. Flexibility in approaches is crucial to being able to meaningfully support SEND children, to provide equity rather than equality – a key requirement for ensuring that SEND children are provided with the same essential building blocks to enable the

solid foundations for learning and success that their non-disabled peers enjoy. Flexibility is needed across all areas of school life but most notably in teaching practices and school policies such as those covering behaviour, attendance, and uniform. Flexibility is core to making reasonable adjustments for students with SEND – a duty that schools hold under the Equality Act 2010. Even something as simple as providing flexibility around where and when a child eats can mean the difference between a child staying in school or not. For example, unstructured, loud lunch times are particularly difficult for many neurodiverse children and having a quieter space to go at lunch time may mean the difference between staying in school or leaving. Flexibility of approaches holds benefits for *all* students, not just those with SEND, enabling schools to respond to individual needs in a more innovative way. One size does not fit all – and this is true for all children.

- **Appropriate environments** will be essential to adapting schools to the needs of SEND students. How a school looks, feels, sounds and is experienced physically by SEND students is crucial to their ability to access education and learning. We know that one of the largest cohorts of SEND students are neurodiverse (with the largest amount of EHCPs being issued to children with Autism Spectrum Conditions in 2023/24<sup>1</sup>) – this means that the acoustics, the smells, the physical spaces and even the school menus all have the potential to strongly impact a child's ability to learn. **DfE will need to engage with relevant disability groups and organisations to understand what adaptations to school environments are most needed.** We welcome the Government's announcement of £740million capital funding to ensure more SEND students can access mainstream schools and hope to see an expansion of this type of funding in the long-term to help adapt school environments further.
- **Changing attitudes to disability** and instilling positive and inclusive attitudes to disability and difference in the school population as a whole should usher in a more accepting culture and reduce the stigma associated with the SEND label. This should start early on in early years and Primary settings and **learning and conversations about various disabilities and difference must be built into the curriculum and be included as part of school assemblies as well as lessons.** The curriculum and assessment review and ensuing changes, and the expansion of early years provision, will provide good opportunities to nurture these attitudes. This is crucial to changing attitudes within the general population and was mentioned frequently by the young people in our Youth Collective on what would make the biggest difference to providing an inclusive mainstream environment. Providing

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<sup>1</sup> p.15

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bdc2de3effd5b79ba490fd/Special\\_educational\\_needs\\_and\\_disability\\_analysis\\_and\\_summary\\_of\\_data\\_sources\\_Aug24.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bdc2de3effd5b79ba490fd/Special_educational_needs_and_disability_analysis_and_summary_of_data_sources_Aug24.pdf)

comprehensive SEND training to the early years and schools workforces will provide a good foundation for changing attitudes and understanding.

## **2.2 How can inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools and early years settings be improved to achieve consistent high quality SEN support? What is the DfE's role in this?**

Several models can be adopted when aiming to ensure consistent high quality SEN support in mainstream schools, including:

- **Commissioning more inclusive early years settings** such as our Kids inclusive nursery in Basingstoke. This nursery is one model of what good looks like, where disabled and non-disabled toddlers explore, interact, play, learn grow and thrive, side-by-side as equals. In this truly inclusive setting children with SEND benefit from additional therapies, specialist workforce and a supported pathway to the right education. They develop their speech, language and social skills, celebrate every small step and work with their parents and local agencies to find the primary school place for their needs. We work alongside the family to 'navigate the system', building confidence and skills – helping with the burdensome bureaucracy and form-filling - and we see fantastic results including children with special educational needs joining mainstream primary school – something their parents never thought possible until they attended our inclusive nursery setting
- **Introduction of early and effective specialist interventions within primary and secondary schools.** We know that early, light-touch and relatively low-cost interventions can make all the difference to a child with SEND being able to cope with and stay in mainstream school. **At Kids we provide therapeutic interventions within the school environment – examples being our Draw and Talk and Brick Club sessions in primary schools.** They are group sessions designed to provide a safe, space for children struggling with low self-esteem, trauma or with some aspect of their disability or SEN. LEGO® Therapy is a powerful intervention designed to support children with autism spectrum conditions and communication challenges in developing skills in language and collaboration.
- **Key professionals such as speech and language therapists, occupational therapists (SALT/OT) in every school catchment area.** Professionals key to providing early and key interventions for children with SEND (and also those central to progressing assessments for diagnoses or EHCPs) could be assigned to local areas covering a cluster of primary and secondary schools. They would provide a floating service for schools in their area and be a fast and efficient way of accessing specialist support. Considering the increasing number of children with mental health issues, this could also include a Mental Health worker. This would provide consistency to

all schools in their area as well as allowing trusted relationships to be built between consistent professionals and children with SEND.

- **SEND Hub/base for every school** This provides more intensive help for children in mainstream schools from teachers and support staff with specialist skills or training situated at a building on the school grounds. This offers the flexibility of tailored and often 1-1 support including specialist TAs, reduced timetables and so on. Some students may be full-time at the base whilst others may only use it for certain lessons or time periods. The Government should gather examples of where co-located hubs are working well – taking care to highlight how the students attending the hub are included in the rest of the school’s activities and how the culture of the school ensures the hub is seen as part of the school, rather than an add-on. It is important that hubs work in a way that avoids students who use them being stigmatised or seen as ‘other’ from the rest of the school population.

### **CASE STUDY**

#### **Brick Club**

*“During Brick Club children take part in team-based activities and work together to build a LEGO model, taking turns to play different roles (called the Engineer, Supplier and Builder) until the model is built. Building together involves joint decision-making, communication, social interaction, motor skills, creativity, imagination, problem solving and much more!”*

*Over time, children develop a sense of community and belonging through their shared interest.”*

#### **Draw & Talk**

*“Children are impacted emotionally by many different events, struggles or traumas. Sometimes they are unable to make sense of how they are feeling and how those feelings are impacting on their happiness and ability to navigate the world.*

*Too often children and parents feel afraid to admit they need help around their mental health and emotional wellbeing. Whether you are a child or young person, adult or grandparent, we all at times feel like we are struggling.”*

### **2.3 Whether SEN support should be put on a statutory footing and what this would look like in practice**

We support putting SEN Support on a statutory footing as it would enable funding and resources to be put in earlier, reduce the need for EHCPs and give parents a route for redress. This could easily be done by amending the Children and Families Act 2014. **DfE should develop national standards for SEN Support that would provide a clear framework and guidance on what children and young people with SEND can expect from schools.** These national standards would provide

clear, standardised support and would create a system which would make it easier for parents to understand. These national standards should also form part of the criterion of Ofsted's new inspection criteria.

- The Children and Families Act 2014 should be amended to put SEN Support on a statutory footing
- DfE must develop national standards for SEN support which Ofsted should inspect against

## **2.4 Outcomes for children and young people with SEND and how these can be improved**

The Curriculum and Assessment Review presents an excellent opportunity for Government to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND by ensuring that grades and academic qualifications are not the primary measure of assessment. **In order for children with SEND to be fairly assessed and their success measured in a meaningful way, we must change what we value and measure.** The Curriculum and Assessment Review as well as the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill provide important opportunities to make these changes. We must move away from our over-reliance on grades and academic qualifications as the primary measure of success, and offer wider and more varied curriculum and assessment methods.

**Rethink Alternative Provision (AP) and how it works for children with SEND** – A large proportion of children attending alternative provision or being permanently excluded are children with SEND. All too often AP is seen as the solution to providing an alternative to mainstream, with many young people with SEND being sent to AP with no real support plan in place for their learning needs. According to 2019 [DfE data](#), only 4.3% of pupils who finished Key Stage 4 in state-funded alternative provision (AP) achieved GCSEs in English and Maths at grades 9-4 compared with 64.6% in mainstream and state-funded special schools. A [report](#) by FFT Education DataLab<sup>2</sup> analysing the long-term outcomes of pupils who experience alternative provision and/or permanent exclusions concludes that those who experienced AP or permanent exclusion were much less likely to be observed in a positive destination (further/higher education, training or employment) than those who experienced neither. At age 21, 53.8% of those who experienced AP and 56.4% of those who were permanently excluded were observed in a positive destination, compared with 91.5% of those who experienced neither. This tells us the system is not working for a significant proportion of young people and **Government needs to set out a vision of how local authorities, schools and parents/carers can better work together to prevent children with SEND from entering AP in the first place, to reintegrate children from AP (or at risk of exclusion) back into mainstream settings.** This

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<sup>2</sup> [Home - FFT Education Datalab](#)

must be a core target for ensuring that children with SEND have the same learning and longer-term life chances as their non-disabled peers.

**Government must consider children with SEND when setting educational targets.** We welcome the Government's ambition for a record 75% of 5-year-olds in England to be ready to learn when they start school, with progress to be measured by the number reaching a good level of development (GLD) in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Profile assessment by 2028. However, there is a risk that the target does not properly consider children with SEND, thus disadvantaging them further when they do not meet targets within the parameters or timescales set (based on learning and development profiles of non-disabled children). The GLD for example, poses a risk to children with SEND being held behind at the very start of their educational journeys if they do not meet all the measures included within the GLD target. Being 'ready to learn' will come at different times for many children, and particularly for some children with a learning disability; the Government must consider all children with SEND when setting and measuring progress against their milestone. Whilst we are pleased to see the [Early Years foundation stage profile handbook](#) includes a section on completing the assessment for children with SEND, we note that this chapter states that children are not exempt from the EYFS profile on the basis of SEND. Wording used to describe the need to make reasonable adjustments for children with SEND is not strong enough, examples from the handbook include the following: *'Where a child has a SEND, teachers should take care to ensure the child is able to demonstrate their level of development'*<sup>3</sup>. We recommend strengthening this guidance and are ready to provide suggested amendments and wording.

**Radical reform of the curriculum and assessment systems to better measure the learning and achievements of children with SEND** – the diversity of children in the education system is not currently reflected or recognised by the current system used to assess and measure educational attainment. The Government needs to seize the opportunities presented by the Curriculum and Assessment Review and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (CWS) to radically reimagine the current system of measuring educational achievement – and to make children with SEND a central consideration to these reforms to ensure the system works to help them achieve more positive outcomes.

**Addressing health needs in tandem with educational needs** – For children with SEND, addressing health needs will also be vital to their ability to learn and engage which makes meeting the health needs of these children an essential component of improving learning and educational outcomes. These needs cannot be an afterthought and need to be addressed in tandem with educational needs. Too many schools and their staff do not feel able to make the adjustments needed to meet a child's health needs and this has to change. We need commitment and a concerted

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<sup>3</sup> p. 14 [Early years foundation stage profile handbook](#)

drive from across education and health to work together at national, regional and local levels, including joint commissioning and an end to the disputes over whose duty it is to pay for a child's support needs, which hold back children's development and learning. **We recommend that Government mandate joint commissioning by local authorities and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) as part of their SEND reforms.** The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and DfE must work jointly to adopt, adapt and scale practical solutions, including health checks or health care being provided in schools for children with SEND, reducing the need for time out of school for medical appointments or SEND students being unable to attend school due to health needs not being met in an education setting. Practical partnerships enabling school staff to meet the needs of children with specific health conditions, through the support of nurses or other health professionals must be encouraged by DfE and DHSC, and examples must come from a national level (this could be done through the SEND code of practice). We know of examples of training given by healthcare professionals such as nurses to early years staff as in the case study below, which has then allowed a child with medical needs to continue in a mainstream setting. This 'can do' approach must be encouraged as we know from parents and families' we work with that there is a real issue with schools rejecting children with medical needs due to school staff not having access to healthcare professionals, something which could easily be addressed with the right training from healthcare professionals.

#### **CASE STUDY**

*"When they do come to our Kids nursery, we take all children, so there isn't a child that we won't support. If we don't know how to, or already have the training, we will go out there and get the training.*

*A few years ago we took a child with a tracheostomy because no other nursery would do it, and the team here were fantastic. They really took the training on. We didn't have to have a nurse or community nurse with the child there at all times, as our team were trained and equipped with what they needed. They took the emergency procedure training on, and that little girl went on a mainstream school.*

*She's now had reconstruction done and track is out and she's now in a full-time education placement. If it wasn't for the staff or the team and "Kids saying we can" – yes we will support you – it wouldn't have happened. The tracheostomy team at Southampton Hospital said they've never had a nursery within Hampshire that said they'll support a child with a tracheostomy without a nurse."*

***Kids Basingstoke nursery manager***

## **2.5 Workforce issues for teachers, SENCOs, specialists, early years practitioners and all those who work with children with SEND.**

Schools face continuing funding and budget pressures and despite the Government's announcement of a pay rise for public sector workers, schools will

continue to face tough choices as operational costs soar. The National Education Union has warned that school costs are set to rise by 3.4% in 2025-26 and school leaders are struggling to balance budgets. Increasing numbers of students with SEND, increasing mental health problems in school students, high levels of stress, burnout and difficulties in attracting and retaining teachers into the workforce are all key factors that teachers, teaching assistants and the general school workforce are grappling with.

**Government to develop a costed plan for basic SEND training for all school staff** – Lack of SEND training for the formal school workforce is impacting all those working with children with SEND as the few teachers and SENCOs who have received enhanced SEND training or hold a specialism see demand for their expertise and their workload rise. Ensuring that all teachers and school staff receive basic SEND training would help ease the pressure on SENCOs and other specialist staff in schools. A costed plan to include basic SEND training for all is essential.

**A clear plan for how health and education work jointly to ensure involvement of key Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) with SEND students in schools** – this should include details on the involvement of key professionals based in community teams such as occupational therapists and speech and language therapists in giving regular guidance and support to the school workforce as well as the children themselves. These professionals are not only crucial to SEND children receiving the right diagnosis and support at the right time but their knowledge and expertise will also be crucial to helping schools become truly inclusive. Similarly, **the involvement and guidance of health and community professionals is a necessity if children with SEND are to be in a good position to learn.** Many children with SEND will have health conditions and needs that must be addressed early on. Without good health and wellbeing, children are not in a position to concentrate and learn.

**Government must produce a comprehensive Early Years workforce strategy** – We welcome the Government's drive to expand early years provision, however these commitments must lead to demonstrably better access to early education and childcare for babies and toddlers with SEND. It is therefore essential that the issues faced by the early years workforce are immediately addressed. Every child should have an equal opportunity to play, learn, grow and thrive, but we see widespread exclusion of children with SEND from early years settings, because their needs are not being recognised or resourced. There is a shockingly low level of sufficiency of childcare places for children with SEND which has declined sharply (only 6% of local authorities have suitable childcare provision for children with disabilities<sup>4</sup>). Additionally, 20% of parents of children with SEND report being turned away by childcare providers, who felt unequipped to properly support them (Dingley's Promise, 2023). We know that historically as universal funded childcare increases, provision for children with SEND decreases. With so few childcare places available

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<sup>4</sup> p.27-28 [Childcare Survey 2024](#)

for children with SEND, too many of them are facing further disadvantage when starting school, having missed out on vital early education. The workforce strategy must attract more people into the profession and retain those who are already working there. Nurseries face severe retention and recruitment challenges among staff, while childminders are leaving the profession at an alarming rate. The Early Education and Childcare Coalition found that 57% of nursery staff and 24% of childminders are considering leaving the sector in the next 12 months<sup>5</sup>. High-quality training (which includes comprehensive SEND training), professional development and opportunities for career development must be available for all through clear career pathways.

## **2.6 What substantive training is needed for teachers, teaching assistants and all those who work with children with SEND to improve knowledge of SEND and pedagogical approaches to teaching SEND children to increase their inclusion in schools**

Teachers and staff across all education settings need to be provided with the tools to better understand various SEND conditions and how they may impact a child's learning and development needs. Basic SEND training for teachers and all school staff needs to be significantly increased within Initial Teacher Training and the Early Career Framework – currently teachers receive very little SEND training and we know from children and young people with SEND that this is not providing teachers with a good enough understanding of their needs to properly support them.

**We recommend a tiered approach with more comprehensive training given to all teachers in the conditions that make up the biggest cohorts of SEND children in schools.** According to data from the Department for Education the most common type of need amongst children in the SEN Support category in schools are speech, language and communication needs (SLC) at 25.6%, followed by social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) at 22.3%, and moderate learning difficulties (MLD) at 15.8%. Autism spectrum disorders account for the biggest cohort of children receiving EHCPs with 33% of plans being issued for children with ASD. The next highest primary needs for EHCPs were for SLC (19.5%) and SEMH (15.5%)<sup>6</sup> showing the need for **training in ASD, SLC and SEMH to be considered as priority areas for any school workforce training plan as these account for the largest cohorts of children across the SEN Support and EHCP categories.** A good level of understanding of the needs of SEND children and how certain conditions and needs may present in different circumstances should allow school staff to adapt their responses to SEND children, providing the flexible approach needed to make reasonable adjustments and adopt strategies that will more effectively support the needs of SEND children. For example, training on

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<sup>5</sup> p. 7 [Retention+and+Return.pdf](#)

<sup>6</sup> p.15

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bdc2de3effd5b79ba490fd/Special\\_educational\\_needs\\_and\\_disability\\_analysis\\_and\\_summary\\_of\\_data\\_sources\\_Aug24.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bdc2de3effd5b79ba490fd/Special_educational_needs_and_disability_analysis_and_summary_of_data_sources_Aug24.pdf)

neurodiverse conditions for teachers would allow them to more confidently understand and identify what a child's behaviours mean and what those behaviours are communicating. This will be key to reducing the need for behaviour management techniques, time out of classrooms, more expensive crisis interventions as needs escalate, and in the worst cases suspensions, exclusions and moves to alternative provision or home-schooling. Comprehensive SEND training will be one of the biggest levers for delivering a more welcoming and inclusive school environment.

**Training needs to be coproduced and co-delivered with disabled people.**

Experts in SEND, and those with lived experience, including organisations from the SEN and disability sector must be consulted in the planning and implementation of any training and development workforce strategy.

**We recommend development of a comprehensive Early Years workforce**

**strategy** for all who work in the sector. That strategy must attract more people into the profession and retain those who are already working there. High-quality training in SEND, professional development and opportunities for career development must be available for all through clear career pathways. Government should produce guidance for commissioners to ensure that family support providers are available in each local area and are able to compliment and support early years professionals. A key challenge currently is the reduction of appropriate and sustainably funded community provision which provides specialist support and could provide the SEND guidance and professional development needed in the early years workforce. Multi-agency working across education, health and community providers will be essential to successful inclusion of SEND children in early education settings.

## **2.7 Education Health and Care Plans**

### **2.7.1 How can waiting times for EHC Plans be improved?**

- **Preventative, light-touch interventions earlier in a child's life.** We know that putting the right support in place earlier on leads to better outcomes for SEND children. Earlier interventions from professionals such as teaching assistants or speech and language therapists will cost money in the short-term but should ultimately reduce the number of children waiting for an EHCP as we know that the current lack of support for SEND children earlier on (when they are in the SEND Support category) is one of the main drivers for parents seeking an EHCP, as this is the only way they can guarantee support for their child's needs. Ultimately, earlier interventions from key professionals will reduce demand and waiting lists for EHCPs as well as for more costly services already suffering from long wait times (such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health services).

**Better investment in key professionals such as occupational therapists, speech and language therapists is also essential** so that they can provide earlier support.

- **The Government should issue guidance to steer the flexible local commissioning of services proven to help families with disabled children on multiple long waiting lists for assessment, diagnosis and support.** This would lead to more innovative commissioning of community and third sector providers to provide immediate support to children and families waiting for diagnosis or services. One example of this is the Wakefield Awareness Support Project (WASP). **WASP is funded by Wakefield CCG and is delivered by Kids.** Wakefield Clinical Commissioning Group and partners worked in collaboration to reduce the numbers of children and young people awaiting ASD assessments and now have a diagnosis pathway which is compliant with NICE Guidance and is delivered in a timely way. It was initially a short-term pilot with funding received from NHS England to support children and young people experiencing emotional and mental well-being crisis. WASP is unique in its approach to supporting families of young people either on the Autistic Spectrum (diagnosed or under investigation) or who have other neuro-developmental conditions. At the heart of funding the project was the overall aim to reduce the need for this cohort of children to be referred to a core or specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and thus positively impact across CAMHS services including crisis interventions and a reduction in waiting times.
- **The Government should work with providers of SEND community services to collect and disseminate the best examples of waiting list initiatives** specifically able to meet the immediate needs of disabled children and their families and alleviate the subsequent need for costly crisis intervention.
- **The Government should reform procurement rules and practice to address the rigidity of current process** and make it easier for statutory and community organisations to work together to address out-of-control waiting lists with services that provide immediate relief.

### **2.7.2 What can be done to support parents, carers and children or young people before, during and after the EHC Plan process?**

**A Kids SEND Navigator to support children and parents/carers throughout the whole process would provide support not only to families but also ease pressures on schools and the health and care professionals involved in an EHCP.** The Navigator will be able to act as a key point of contact for parents and guide them through a complicated process. Their role includes explaining key parts of the process and expected timelines, gathering the parent view and liaising between parents, teachers and other professionals involved. This reduces stress and pressure on parents, as well as on the SENCO, and other professionals involved. Kids has pioneered the SEND Community Navigator, which provides a single point of contact for rounded support and guidance within a complicated system. With the help of a Kids Navigator children receive specialised support which centres their

needs. It also enables multi-agency working by providing a professional whose role is to facilitate this. It is a cost-effective way of providing holistic family support which we have trialled and recommend is commissioned widely.

We recommend:

- Government commission a pilot of Kids SEND Navigators at the post-16 transition stage
- Government to ensure the Kids Navigator model is recognised and integrated into the Early Years nursery expansion programme.

### **CASE STUDY**

#### ***Kids SEND Navigator in early years***

*Kids has pioneered the SEND Community Navigator model in one local area, providing a single point of contact for rounded support and guidance to ease the burden on families. The SEND Navigators work in partnership with the family to build a personalised support plan, before providing practical and emotional support, connecting families with local services, and working to help the family access the right provision and support. A strong and effective early intervention, we have started to integrate the model into other services. This includes our inclusive nursery in Basingstoke, Hampshire, where tailored support for the families makes a real difference. For example, last year, more than 40% of children in our Basingstoke nursery went into a local mainstream school - rather than special school where they were expected to go.*

*Over three years, the Kids SEND Navigator programme in Birmingham has helped more than 400 families with:*

- *Information and advice: routine, behaviour, sleep, eating, emotional wellbeing*
- *Play in the home, including sensory activities*
- *Connecting with professionals: Early Support and Inclusion Service*
- *Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy*
- *Support to apply for financial support: Disability Living Allowance, carer's allowance, Family Fund grants*
- *Emotional wellbeing support and mindfulness.*

*Most referrals come from health visitors; others come from family support services or statutory services.*

#### **How much does it cost?**

*The salary costs of a SEND Navigator for 36 hours per week are £36,973 per year. They can take a case load of 20 families at any one time – anticipated at 60 families per year. This works out at a cost of £616 per family, assuming we work with each one for 12 weeks.*

We have attached the Kids Navigator job description in the Appendix.

**Effective multi-agency working and data sharing across education, health and social care.** The lack of data sharing and partnership working across agencies impacts on the ability of professionals across education, health and social care to see the wider picture and full profile of the children they are working with who may

have SEND is a big impediment to successful inter-agency working. Better data sharing and cross-agency working will reduce wait times, duplication of work, and the need for multiple assessments. Silo-working must be addressed to ensure that professionals have a full picture and are able to work together to effectively provide early support. We have to ensure that the basics, the foundational support of SEND students is right – this will involve Government taking into account all aspects of reform, balancing short- and long-term solutions and ensuring that the basics are right for all children with SEND.

**Education, health and care staff need to take a collaborative approach which involves listening to and working with parents/carers of children with SEND.**

Parents/carers are often the experts on their children, as well as on their needs and how to best adapt practices, communication and support for their child. If a partnership approach was taken by professionals and the expertise of parents/carers recognised and valued, this would lead to a smoother and quicker process for all – with children, parents and professionals feeling listened to and respected. This type of approach would also likely lead to less costly interventions and support needing to be put in place as many support needs of SEND children are likely to require low-cost reasonable adjustments within the school – something children and parents would know but need to be able to express.

**Clear information, clear timelines, and timely actions to honour agreed support in the EHCP.** Assessments should be shared between professionals and children and families in order to reduce anxiety and manage expectations. During the process, regular updates from the key professional/SENCO (in lieu of a Navigator role) on what is happening when, likely timelines and then when the EHCP is agreed, timely action on support and interventions agreed. Many young people in our Youth Collective told us that where they had an EHCP, it frequently was not honoured. Currently parents are left to chase for the support detailed in an EHCP to be provided to their children.

### **2.7.3 How can the EHC Plan process be made non-adversarial?**

It is imperative that we get the foundations of reform right. We know that parents/carers and local authorities have reached a critical point, and that the right short and long-term approach is needed to repair relations. Many complex factors have brought us to this point – with the nature of local authority/ parent relationships at breaking point. In order to address the varied reasons for the current adversarial nature of the EHCP process, Government will need to take several steps back to unpick and assess the key issues that have led us to this point. Part of the solution will be to make earlier interventions available, practical and concrete. Parents are frequently already desperate and exhausted from fighting for support for their child when they reach the EHCP stage. Supporting children and families at the beginning of their journey will be crucial to easing tensions and finding a more collaborative way forward.

**A Navigator role** such as the one described above would be a good first step and would provide support while wider reform takes place. **Better, clearer and more respectful communication between parents and professionals will be key.** Better, more timely information from the school and local authority to the parent is needed as is knowledge of the process and an understanding of roles and steps in the process.

### 3. Current and future model of SEND provision

#### 3.1 What changes are needed so that local education authorities can effectively plan for SEND school places and to deliver new SEND schools and new SEND school places?

We support the Public Accounts Committee report on '[Support for children and young people with special educational needs](#)' recommendations around the need for better data collection. Analysis at national and local government levels of **robust SEND data, beginning in the early years, will enable better local planning of school places and provision needed for children with SEND in each local area.** As part of more robust data collection, we recommend implementing data-sharing agreements between health, social care and education. Many children with SEND will have health conditions and/or regular contact with health and social care services for a disability – it will be crucial to look at health and care data, analyse the trends, understand the health conditions/ disabilities of the SEND population and plan accordingly. Health and wellbeing are essential to learning – local authority SEND planning must take health data in particular, into account to properly plan for and understand the needs of their SEND population. This will also be crucial to planning for adult services as many of these children and young people may go on to need longer-term care and support.

**Early identification of SEND** – the earlier it happens, the easier it is to plan and make decisions. There will always be a cohort of children and young people with more complex needs, whose needs cannot be met in a mainstream setting once inclusive practices are introduced – they will need a specialist setting. This is where better communication and data sharing with health and social care are crucial to anticipating and planning for this type of need and school place.

#### 3.2 What can be done to improve the effectiveness of multi-agency and joined up working across education, health and social care?

Parents and families of disabled children in receipt of services across health, care and education currently are subjected to multiple assessments similar in nature by different teams and professionals, often causing further distress to families in already difficult situations. **Clear data-sharing agreements, partnership working agreements between health, social care and education professionals** across education, community and health settings must be put in place to enable

professionals to work effectively as a holistic team around the child/ family. Families should only need to tell their story once and inter-disciplinary data sharing agreements are one way to tackle this issue and reduce workloads for under pressure professionals.

**Co-located hubs and teams** which house cross-agency professionals in local areas. Government should gather information on areas of good practice where multi-agency teams have worked holistically as a 'team around the child' and where professionals have shared working spaces to encourage and cement joint working.

### **3.3 What is working effectively within the current SEND system and how can best practice be sustained or scaled up?**

There are pockets of good practice which we must learn from and replicate. DfE should gather evidence of good practice across areas and share these nationally for others to replicate.

**Government must encourage flexible commissioning based on need** – we know this is happening in several areas – including in Basingstoke with our inclusive nursery. There are places where commissioners, providers, young people and families are working in concert to develop and deliver flexible, value-for-money and impactful services. In Essex, for example, three Integrated Care Boards came together with Kids to commission a new service for young people (and their families) who are on the autism pathway or have just received a diagnosis of autism to understand the condition, develop their own coping strategies and build a peer support network. The resulting autism hub, with bite-size resources, interactive webinars and signposting to link people to local services gives a replicable model of needs-based, flexible and joined-up commissioning based on genuine co-production with young people and their families. Please see for more details

<https://autismhub.kids.org.uk/for-professionals/>.

**When specialists and experts work within schools to provide support to SEND children we see better learning and outcomes for those children.** It is important that schools draw on the expertise of various professionals, including community-based voluntary sector organisations. As described in our answer above at 2.2, we have projects such as draw and talk therapy in schools which provide low-cost therapeutic interventions to groups of children with SEND.

Several schools have a **SEND or condition-specific base/hub attached to the school**, which works to help integrate SEND children gradually into a mainstream environment. Where schools have the flexibility to tailor support (through use of part-time timetables, a mix of time in the base and in a mainstream classroom, 1-1 support in the most challenging lessons/ subjects and so on) and to adapt spaces and resources to the needs of SEND children, outcomes have been positive. DfE should collect examples of this type of model, how it's resourced and delivered and share these examples with schools and local authorities nationally.

### **3.4 Changes needed to the curriculum in mainstream schools to enable SEND children to fulfil their potential? If so, what changes are these?**

**We need to value all types of learning, develop different ways of assessing progress and implement these urgently** if we are to raise successful outcomes for children with SEND which will put them on an equal footing with non-disabled peers. **Schools and local authorities must adhere to decision-making and practices which value and promote equity over equality.** This means ensuring that children with SEND are given the support and resources needed to give them the same foundations and opportunities afforded their non-disabled peers to reach their full potential and equal outcomes.

**Government must implement a new national curriculum with varied content, less focus on academic qualifications and a more flexible assessment framework** – A curriculum that is more varied, less focussed on academic qualifications, assessment through exams, and includes more content relevant to everyday living, sports, arts and culture and vocational options that cater to the wide spectrum of children is urgently needed. One example, taken from our submission to the Curriculum and Assessment Review (based entirely on the experiences and views of children and young people with SEND) is the need to move away from written exams as the main method of assessment. Alternatives that work better for children with SEND include verbal assessments and coursework submitted throughout the year.

Listening to the voices of young people with SEND will be a major success factor in ensuring the Curriculum and Assessment Review contributes to the delivery of truly inclusive education. The evidence we submitted to the Curriculum and Assessment Review from young people with SEND can be viewed [here](#).

### **3.5 At the points on the education pathway that SEND children are at greater risk of leaving school for long term absences, home schooling or exclusion, what reasonable adjustments and EHCP support would enable them to continue education in mainstream schooling?**

**DfE should work with SEND children, young people and families as well as SEND and disability-specific organisations and professionals to understand the key periods of greatest risk.** Understanding and planning for the key points at which SEND children are at greatest risk of non-attendance or exclusion is crucial and will decrease the need for reactive and costly interventions in the longer-term. For most disabled children the periods of risk are likely to be: in the early years due to lack of suitable nursery/childcare places; at age 4 when children enter Reception or Primary (when they are likely to be on waiting lists for assessments and diagnosis and are being assessed for a Good Level of Development); transition between primary and secondary, and moving from school to further education or training which often coincides with transitioning from children's to adult services.

**Flexible approaches from school and other key professionals involved in the child's support will be essential at these critical junctures.** We know that SEND children are overrepresented in exclusion data, that exclusion from school is a 'critical' or 'teachable' moment in that child's life and that how the adults and professionals in the child's life respond in those moments (in terms of the child, the family and in determining what approach to take) is crucial to their future decisions and outcomes. Adopting a flexible and responsive approach in the critical moment in a child's life is absolutely essential and has long-lasting consequences. Flexibility may be needed from schools around reduced timetables, flexi-schooling, reasonable adjustments within school or school policies. At these times, a rigid or zero-tolerance approach can be the straw that broke the camel's back, with SEND children already struggling to cope, feeling further pressured, which can then lead to behaviours or actions leading to exclusion or non-attendance.

Other methods for supporting SEND children at these points to maximise their likelihood of being able to remain in mainstream education include:

- Increased 1-1 support at key transition times, if possible from a key professional who is trusted by the child and family (or a SEND Navigator who has been supporting that child)
- Information sharing and clear communication between school, local authority, health, care and community professionals and the child and parents/carers. Professionals must ensure they share assessments, support plans and other key information which could be critical to supporting that child at that time.
- Ensuring home-school consistent support methods are followed (these are often from OTs/ SALT etc);
- Ensure that reasonable adjustments are made by the school that are tailored to the child at key times (ie. quiet spaces during unstructured times, allowing child to wear ear defenders; allowing child to step out of classroom when overwhelmed)
- Schools and local authorities (LAs) must be mindful of making decisions that will bring about equity not equality for students with SEND to have the same opportunities to reach their full potential and outcomes as their non-disabled peers.

**Home-schooling must remain an option for parents of children with SEND** – It should be noted that home schooling is a last resort for many parents/carers of SEND children. It is a step often taken by parents who fear their child will be excluded or that they will face fines or prosecution over poor school attendance. We have heard from parents/carers of SEND children that a large proportion of those opting for home-schooling do so not because they think it is necessarily the best option for their child but because of strict attendance policies being implemented inflexibly by schools and which they cannot meet because of their child's disability.

**Schools must follow the Equality Act 2010 and make adjustments to attendance policies for children with SEND** – Children with disabilities face a number of challenges in getting to school on time and attending regularly, some due to the nature of their disability (such as sensory issues) and some due to the complexity of their condition dictating the need for regular health or care appointments. **This makes it impossible for parents to meet school attendance targets and this inflexible application of attendance policies is discriminatory toward SEND children.** The Equality Act 2010 requires schools to make reasonable adjustments for children with disabilities – this includes adjustments to school policies. As a result of these blanket policies being enforced rigidly by schools, parents often don't feel able to work alongside the school toward a solution, especially at key points where schools may be considering excluding a child. Fines are often implemented immediately and fears from parents that they will face criminal prosecution if they cannot get their child in to school effectively force their hand to going down the home-schooling route. Home schooling should never be removed as an option but there are many children for whom home schooling is not appropriate and who have no other option. We recognise that each child is different and what works for one child may not work for another but these decisions should not be dictated by fear of negative consequences for children and families (increased stress and mental health problems for the child, potential fines and prosecution/ criminal record for parents being some of the key reasons given). Further to this, we want to acknowledge that the proposals in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (CWS) around home-schooling may be causing concern to parents of SEND children who may see these as the removal of one of their last options for safeguarding both their child and themselves. Every parent wants their child to be in school and thriving. Reforms must recognise that parents and professionals are essentially united on the outcomes they seek for SEND children.

**It is imperative that the Government has a full understanding of the different reasons why some SEND children are not in school.** We welcome Government proposals in the CWS Bill to bring greater consistency and accountability to the support for SEND children in Academies – it is essential that all schools are inclusive and that there are no longer stark variations in schools who offer places to SEND children and those who don't.

Finally, we urge the Government to look at arrangements for how schools, parents, and local authorities can more effectively work together to find the most appropriate way to support SEND children back into mainstream school from alternative provision. Alternative provision should not be the default solution, and plans to reintegrate children to mainstream should be made rather than students with SEND being left in AP with no realistic plan for helping them to reintegrate into mainstream settings.

**3.6 What can be done to reduce the disproportionately high exclusion rates for students with SEND?**

As detailed in our answer to the previous question (3.5), a flexible approach is absolutely essential from schools and local authorities. The overrepresentation of SEND students in exclusion figures is extremely concerning, with the latest [DfE data](#) showing that the rate of suspensions among pupils with an education, health, and care (EHC) plan was 10.05, which is lower than the rate for those with SEN support at 11.27. In contrast, the rate for pupils with no identified SEN was 2.69. These statistics show that those children in the SEN support cohort experienced one of the highest rates of permanent exclusions at 0.16. These figures point to the fact that schools are increasingly unable to properly meet the needs of children with SEND and provide the support they need. This in turn leads to behaviours seen as challenging – persistent disruptive behaviour being the main reason given for the largest number of exclusions – and children with SEND bearing the consequences for the system's failure to meet their needs. This is a national disgrace, and Government must take immediate action to tackle these high rates of exclusion. SEND students are being discriminated against and with exclusions, their life chances and future outcomes thrown into jeopardy.

Our key principles for reducing the high exclusion rates for students with SEND are detailed below and we recommend the Government take urgent action to implement these changes:

- **Providing earlier diagnosis of SEND** – taking immediate action to reduce waiting lists for assessments and providing faster diagnosis of SEND
- **Providing earlier support to SEND children** – ensuring that support and input tailored around the child from education staff as well as specialist professionals across education, health and care is provided as early as possible
- **A comprehensive SEND training plan for teachers and wider education staff** – particularly in the most prevalent conditions in children receiving SEN support and EHCPs (autism spectrum conditions, speech, language and communication disorders and social emotional and mental health). The ability of teachers and all school staff to confidently adapt their approaches and communication to SEND students is key to reducing behaviours that challenge. Training and continuing professional development in SEND for teachers is the crucial factor in tackling the high suspension and exclusion rates for children with SEND.
- **Flexible approaches from education settings in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty to make reasonable adjustments for children with disabilities** – particularly around behaviour and attendance policies which unfairly discriminate against SEND students
- **Schools and local authorities must make reasonable adjustments for children with SEND around attendance policies** – Having a special educational need or disability means that there are many reasons why children are more likely to have absences and lateness. Reasons include

more frequent medical appointments for a disability-related issue, mental health appointments, sensory needs etc needed around attendance figures – the nature of child's condition must be taken into account and reasonable adjustments made in line with the Equality Act 2010.

- **Government, local authorities and schools must do more to change attitudes towards children with special educational needs and disabilities** – Government and schools must fulfil their duties under the Equality Act 2010 to encourage changes in attitude toward disability and children with special educational needs. We know from our work supporting over 18,000 people a year that discrimination toward children with SEND, and their families is still commonplace. As in this [case study](#) from Jack, a young person referred to our School Inclusion programme, we know that discrimination and bullying are still rife, both from adults and children in the education system. If Government held our public bodies to account and insisted that they meet their duties under the Equality Act, this would be a positive first step signalling that disability discrimination will not be tolerated and must be stamped out.

**We recommend that the Government's SEND reforms consider funding programmes such as the Kids School Inclusion service: [Hull Inclusion service](#)**

**- Kids** – As a voluntary provider, Kids have often stepped in to pick up the pieces when children and young people are excluded, and we have developed a successful **Schools Inclusion programme** which helps to reintegrate SEND children into school. School exclusion factors are complex, as such the service is holistic and bespoke, getting to the root causes of emotional and behavioural issues, school factors and supporting the family through circumstantial/ home-based difficulties making sure the child's special educational needs are being met. It takes a key working approach and provides support, information and advice to the families of disabled children, working alongside education providers and other professionals to coordinate the right support. Workshops and advocacy sessions are offered to all young people facing challenges around low self-esteem, resilience, Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs and refusal to attend school.

### **3.7 What steps should be taken to improve the post-16 landscape for students with SEND? What reforms are needed to ensure that all post-16 qualifications meet the needs of students with SEND?**

As detailed in our '[On the Cliff edge report](#)' the key obstacles facing children and young people with SEND are: navigating a complex transition system, accessing post-16 education or training that can support their needs, receiving tailored careers advice, having access to and finding provision that covers independent living and life skills, having access to a wider variety of courses and opportunities across a variety of areas both vocational and academic. The Government's Curriculum and Assessment Review must increase the options and learning pathways available to children with SEND and use the opportunity to deliver learning and assessments in

more flexible and dynamic ways. It also needs to ensure that alternative vocational pathways such as the Functional Skills accredited courses in English and Maths, are recognised and accepted by further education institutions as intended. Whilst the functional skills courses are designed as an alternative to the GCSE route and offer flexible year-round assessment which often works better for young people with SEND, these qualifications are frequently not recognised or accepted by further education colleges. **There must be clear direction from DfE to further education institutions that these routes to further learning must be accepted fully as an alternative to GCSEs.** These pathways must remain open to young people with SEND to enable more of them to continue learning and progress to further education.

**Our key recommendations for the post-16 transition period are as follows**, with the majority being in line with those arising from Ofsted and CQC's recent [thematic review of local area arrangements for preparation for adulthood](#):

- A transition coordinator/ Kids Navigator for every young person with SEND
- Transition planning to formally start for all young people with SEND from age 14
- DfE and DHSC should work jointly to create a national set of standards that outlines clear roles and responsibilities across education, health and social care regarding transitions to adulthood.
- Better and more varied (vocational) post-16 curriculum pathways, training and learning opportunities with diverse courses and placements that are less focussed on academic subjects
- More tailored careers, education, information advice and guidance for all SEND children and YP across all schools (not just specialist settings who often offer more tailored transition support)
- Incentives for employers to offer more supported internships, traineeships, apprenticeships and work placements, and ensure they are open to all young people with SEND, not just those with EHC plans
- Joint/dynamic commissioning between children and adult services which includes YP and their families (commissioning of 'all age' services)
- Ensure all universal community provision is accessible and inclusive of young people with SEND

## 4. Finance, funding and capacity of SEND provision

### 4.1 What funding is currently provided and what is needed for early identification of SEND, including in Early Years settings?

Our current early education and childcare system is underfunded, unnecessarily complicated and facing a workforce crisis. As members of the Early Education and

Childcare Coalition, **Kids fully backs all the recommendations for reforming early years funding included in the [Rescue and Reform](#) manifesto for change.** As research by Dingley's Promise found, 92% of early years settings stated that they have had to fund SEND provision themselves<sup>7</sup> – it is unacceptable that early years settings are having to find money themselves to fund support for children with SEND, and shows why so few settings are able to offer adequately supported places for disabled children. We fully back the recommendations made in the '[Improving Access to Funding for a more inclusive early years system](#)' report by Dingley's Promise. We've listed below key policy solutions which we feel will make a big difference and are relatively easy steps for Government to take.

- **Unlink the Disability Access Fund (DAF) from Disability Living Allowance.** Accessing adequate, timely funding (e.g. to recruit specialist staff) is a barrier for childcare and education settings in supporting children with SEND. However, we know that in many areas the DAF is not being fully used and/or getting to the settings that need it most. It is an example of red tape creating an unnecessary barrier to inclusion. This proposal will increase access for settings to early years SEND funding, by removing the need for families to apply for DLA in order for a setting to access DAF.
- **Simplify Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding processes,** ensuring they cover a child's whole entitlement (including under 2's), to increase access to early education and allow settings to provide the right support at the right time.
- **SEN Support funding must be increased and ring-fenced.** Money for children with SEND must go to children with SEND – at present this is not happening.
- **Government to publish guidance and existing good practice examples on how to conduct a SEND JSNA in partnership with community, parent or third sector, and voluntary groups affected by SEND.** 45% of children live in 'childcare deserts', meaning that there is only one childcare place per every 3 (or more) children (Mitchell Institute, 2024). These childcare deserts are overrepresented in low-income and disadvantaged areas. Added to this, we know that only 6% of local authorities have enough childcare provision for children with SEND, and even then, the provision may not be suitable for a child or family's particular needs or circumstances. Joint Strategic Needs Assessments could potentially be developed and used to identify, in each local authority, where the need for provision is greatest. Specific SEND JSNAs (Handley, et al., 2018) can identify areas or groups of focus as well as any current gaps in support. One recent example is the [Bolton Special Educational Needs and Disability Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2023](#)). Similar national guidance has been provided for mental health JSNAs ([Public Health England, 2017](#)).

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<sup>7</sup> p.2 [Jo Mini Manifesto Funding](#)

- **The Department for Health and Social Care must request and ringfence funding for SEND.** Health is essential to being able to learn and the health needs of children with SEND must be met by healthcare professionals in order for them to be able to develop, participate and learn in the same way as their peers. The involvement of health professionals is crucial to the delivery of timely assessments and diagnoses of SEND (as well as to the whole EHCP process). Further to this, the expertise of health professionals is often what is most needed to provide earlier, light-touch interventions to avoid needs escalating, leading to costlier crisis care being required at a later stage.

#### **4.2 What actions or reforms are needed to achieve financial stability and sustainability, both in the short and longer term, across the SEND system?**

##### **Short term actions**

**The Government must scrap the SEND Safety Valve system and write off local authority high needs deficits.** As noted by the Public Accounts Committee's recent report on 'Support for children and young people with special educational needs', nearly half of all England's councils are at risk of effectively going bankrupt. With an increase in demand for EHCPs, most local authorities have overspent their annual high needs budget. Continuing the Safety Valve system will only exacerbate the deficits of local authorities. Decisive action is needed now from Government to avoid further deterioration of local authorities' finances.

**Funding for SEN Support must be ringfenced to ensure that money for children with SEND is spent on children with SEND,** rather than being used to plug gaps in other areas of school spending.

##### **Long term actions**

- **Government must commit to SEND funding being spent earlier in the system and in a child's life.** We need commitment and action to move spending earlier on in a child's life starting in the earliest years. Early years settings must be supported to access funding which will better allow them to provide places for more babies and toddlers with SEND. See our detailed recommendations for Early Years funding in 4.1 above.
- As per the Public Accounts Committee recommendation – **DfE must produce a clear, costed plan to measure progress, to gather clearer data on SEND data so that funding is better targeted and utilised.** The plan must involve DHSC to ensure buy-in from health and ensure the multi-agency working that will be central to delivering earlier more cost-effective interventions and assessments.
- **Amend the Children and Families Act 2014 to place a statutory duty on health and social care to provide the provision detailed in EHC plans for children with SEND.** Successful multi-agency working practices can only be achieved through joint funding for SEND support so that each agency is held

accountable for their part of a child's provision. Whilst local authorities remain the only agency legally required to provide the support listed in an EHCP, multi-agency working will not become a reality with health and social care provision continuing to be out of reach for children with SEND.

- **A Kids SEND Navigator for every child with SEND at key transition points** (see the Kids Navigator example described in our answer above at 2.7.2)
- **DfE and DHSC should issue robust commissioning guidance to local authorities and ICBs to encourage them to identify and commission value for money programmes provided by third sector which meet family's needs in a timely fashion** including those on multiple waiting lists. Such guidance should support 'invest to save' principles, to prevent escalation and reduce the cost of crisis care in the long-term.

## 5. Accountability and inspection of SEND provision

### 5.1 What should Ofsted's new 'inclusion' criterion for the inspection of mainstream schools look like?

Ofsted's new 'inclusion' criterion provides an opportunity for a cultural shift in how schools view and embody inclusive practices and in how inspections are carried out. Whilst we welcome this focus on inclusion, rather than this being assessed separately from other areas, **Ofsted must apply a whole school approach and take a dynamic and holistic view of how everyone in a school demonstrates and embodies inclusive practices.** This will be key to the success of the Government's mission to transform mainstream schools into true hubs of inclusivity. This is in line with the Public Accounts Committee's recent report on 'Support for children and young people with special educational needs' which stated that SEN performance data should not just focus on academic attainment but consider wider factors.

Some of our key recommendations for Ofsted's inclusion criterion:

- **Ofsted must assess how accountability and leadership on inclusion is demonstrated and role-modelled from the very top** throughout the school (it should be put on the same footing as safeguarding with inspectors looking for evidence of how the school and everyone in it promotes and demonstrates their role in delivering a truly inclusive culture).
- **School's to be assessed on how they are meeting key points of an agreed, concrete definition of inclusion** (to be developed and published by DfE).

- **Ofsted to request and analyse key data sets** which will help to show if inclusive practices are being applied including level of exclusion rates for children with SEND.
- Other data and measures that should be prioritised by Ofsted need to look more closely at the demographics of the school population, ie. Do they have a healthy mix of children from a variety of backgrounds, how many children with disabilities and SEND, from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds etc. It will be crucial to look in more detail at how children with SEND are adjusting to the school and to ask them directly about their experiences
- **Ofsted must also assess the ability of children with SEND to attend and participate in breakfast clubs and after school provision** - how many children with SEND attend breakfast clubs, after school clubs and the quality of their experience
- Assessment of any in-school early interventions and support mechanisms for children with SEND
- Assessment of strength of relationships between school staff (especially the SENCO) and key professionals in health, social care and community services

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## **Appendix**

### **Kids SEND Navigator: role description**

#### **Job Purpose**

- To work with children and young people with SEND and their families, on a one-to-one or group basis, face to face, by telephone, virtually or within the community. Using a variety of interventions, to identify needs and to achieve positive outcomes.
- To work in partnership with parents / carers to empower them and to enable them to achieve better outcomes for their children with SEND.
- To deliver workshops and information sessions to parents and professionals both in person and online.
- To work co-operatively with children's services, health agencies and other community-based services, to provide the most effective service for children and young people with SEND and their families.

#### **Key Responsibilities**

- To work with children 0-5 years and their families with SEND, on a one-to-one or group basis, face to face, by telephone, virtually or within the community. Using a variety of interventions, to identify needs and to achieve positive outcomes.
- To work in partnership with parents / carers to empower them and to enable them to achieve better outcomes for their children with SEND.
- To plan and deliver workshops and information sessions to parents and professionals: online and in person.
- To work co-operatively with children's services, health agencies and other community based services, to provide the most effective service for children young people and families with SEND.
- To support family with completing applications for financial entitlement such as; Disability Living Allowance, Carers Allowance, Family Fund.
- To support families with children with SEND with nursery entitlement.
- To work alongside other staff and management to assess the needs of the families referred for support and participate in the reviews and evaluation of the work.
- To build up knowledge and understanding of local resources and community and statutory services, including Mental Health Teams, Social Services, Education, Health and voluntary services, and communicate effectively with them in the best interests of the child and family.
- Help plan creative and innovative responses to families' and individual's needs particularly supporting children's emotional wellbeing.

- To plan, record and evaluate the impact of interventions with children and families.
- With the line Manager, complete funding reports ensuring these evidence the impact of the work.
- To keep high-quality written records and produce reports for meetings when required
- To work alongside other Kids Practitioners and other partner agencies, to meet the identified needs of family members of children with SEND.
- Support line manager with SEND Network Meetings.
- To assist families to access, build and maintain effective relationships with other support services.
- To apply safeguarding and child protection procedures.
- To work flexibly as may be required and to carry out any other reasonable duties. Occasional weekend work will be required.

### **Person Specification**

#### **Essential criteria**

A minimum of 2 years experience supporting Children & Families with SEND.

- Experience of working directly with children with SEND and their families.
- Experience of delivering specific interventions such as Lego Therapy, Sleep Therapy, behaviour support, creativity and mindfulness.
- Experience of solution focused practice and working with families to provide information, advice, and guidance and practical support to parents of children with SEND.
- Experience of Multi-agency working
- An understanding of the impact of discrimination and an ability to work with people from diverse backgrounds.
- Excellent communication skills, both verbal and written. This should include good record keeping skills and the ability to give accurate information and practical support to people of all ages and backgrounds.
- An empathic and professional manner, supported by the ability to work collaboratively with parents and professionals in a transparent manner.
- An ability to use initiative creatively when working independently with families, which may involve flexible working hours.
- Working in a multi-agency way to offer a response to families with Children with SEND.

#### **Desirable criteria**

- Experience of writing funding reports.
- An understanding of the cultural diversity within the local area.