



Department
for Education

National conversation on SEND reform

Stakeholder toolkit

December 2025

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Why are we engaging?

The Schools White Paper will be published early next year and will set out our proposed reforms to the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system.

Over the past year, we have held over 100 engagement events with SEND stakeholders, including young people, to learn from their experiences.

Ahead of the White Paper, we are continuing an extensive programme of engagement to:

- **Listen to and understand** the views and experiences of families, educators and experts to ensure these reforms are grounded in lived experience and practical insights.
- **Gather insight and evidence** that allows us to shape a proposed reform programme that prioritises early intervention, fairness, and effective evidence-based support.
- **Encourage constructive dialogue** to rebuild confidence in the SEND system and create a shared vision for inclusive, high-quality support for children with SEND.

Join the national conversation on SEND reform

Building on our extensive engagement over the past year, we want this to be the start of the biggest national conversation on SEND in a generation.

Every voice will help shape the system our children and young people deserve.

We want to hear views, experiences and insights from as many people as possible in the coming months.

This will be followed by a period of formal public consultation and further engagement following publication of the Schools White Paper early next year.

This toolkit provides information and resources for your organisation to communicate with **children and young people, parents and carers, people working in schools, colleges and early years settings, local government and health professionals** and other interested stakeholders on SEND reform.

Overview

For too long, many families have felt unheard. This engagement is a direct line to the people who know the system best and want it to work better. It's about putting all those with lived experience at the very heart of our proposals for reform.

The SEND system needs decisive, long-term change and our reforms must rebuild the trust and confidence of children, young people, and families. We want to hear from everyone, from parents to those working in schools, colleges and early years – building a consensus on what works to help deliver lasting reform.

We know many settings are already doing a fantastic job of supporting children and young people with SEND and ensuring they are a part of early years, school and college life. We want to hear about this good practice and will consider how that's being delivered and what we can learn from them to deliver a system that works for all children and young people.

Our education system must be able to adapt to support all children and young people and to recognise where their needs change over time. SEND support should be dynamic and responsive as well as timely. A system that is inclusive by design will remove barriers for all children, ensuring high aspirations for every child and young person.

Five key principles are guiding our approach to reform

1. **Early.** Children should receive the support they need as soon as possible. Intervening upstream, including earlier in children's lives when this can have most impact, will start to break the cycle of needs going unmet and getting worse.
2. **Local.** Children and young people with SEND should be able to learn at a school or college close to their home, alongside their peers, rather than travelling long distances from their family and community. Special schools should continue to play a vital role supporting those with the most complex needs.
3. **Fair.** Every school education setting should be resourced and able to meet common and predictable needs, including as they change over time, without parents having to fight to get support for their children. Where specialist provision is needed for children and young people in mainstream, special or alternative provision, we will ensure it is there, with clear legal requirements and safeguards for children and parents.
4. **Effective.** Reforms should be grounded in evidence, ensuring all education settings know where to go to find effective practice that has excellent long-term outcomes for children and young people.
5. **Shared.** Education, health and care services should work in partnership with local government, families, teachers, experts and representative bodies to deliver better experiences and outcomes for all our children and young people.

How you can get involved

Join one of our online events

We are hosting five online events with SEND experts, each focusing on one of our guiding principles of reform. You will have the opportunity to ask questions at these events.

[You can find out more and register here](#)

Share your views with us online

We're encouraging as many people as possible to share their views online. You can share your views online here:
www.gov.uk/dfe/SEND-conversation

We would be grateful for support to share these opportunities on your channels.

[Resources to support you to share these events with your audiences are available in this toolkit.](#)

Ways to share more about the national conversation on SEND reform

Share DfE content on social media

- [DfE X](#)
- [DfE LinkedIn](#)
- [DfE Facebook](#)
- [DfE Instagram](#)

Create your own social media content

[Social media templates are here.](#)

You can submit views online here: www.gov.uk/dfe/SEND-conversation

Add an update to member emails or newsletters – suggested [newsletter content is here.](#)

Questions to guide the national conversation on SEND reform

Early

Children should receive the support they need as soon as possible. Intervening upstream, including earlier in children's lives when this can have most impact, will start to break the cycle of needs going unmet and getting worse.

The Sutton Trust and the Disabled Children's Partnership have identified that we need to improve opportunities for early support.

- How can we identify children's and young people's needs as early as possible?
- Children and young people's needs change over time. How can we ensure children and young people get support quickly without needing a diagnosis?
- What would help early years, school and college staff put support in place quickly when they identify a child has SEN?
- How should we record and review a child or young person's needs and the support they need?
- The Disabled Children's Partnership recommends all children with SEND should have a written record of the support they need. Do you agree? What are the pros and cons of this?
- Should these written records follow a national format or be designed locally?
- How could we make sure this works in every education setting around the country?

Local

Children and young people with SEND should be able to learn at a school or college close to their home, alongside their peers, rather than travelling long distances from their family and community. Special schools should continue to play a vital role supporting those with the most complex needs.

The Sutton Trust, IPPR and the Education Select Committee have all outlined the need to improve inclusion in mainstream settings, to help more children can attend their local school. We have already announced £740 million on capital spending to deliver adaptations, expanding specialist units in mainstream as well as creating new places in special settings.

- Thinking about both physical space and the skills staff need, how could mainstream settings be more inclusive?
- The Sutton Trust suggests introducing ‘SEND Hubs’ in settings. What are your views on this?
- Do you have suggestions on other ways education settings could be made more inclusive?
- The Education Select Committee suggests designating some high-quality specialist schools as ‘Centres of Excellence’ to share good practice. What do you think about this?
- How can the specialist and mainstream sector (early years settings, schools, colleges) work together to support children?

Fair

Every education setting should be resourced and able to meet common and predictable needs, including as they change over time, without parents having to fight to get support for their children. Where specialist provision is needed for children and young people in mainstream, special or alternative provision, we will ensure it is there, with clear legal requirements and safeguards for children and parents.

The Education Select Committee outlined that the DfE should provide a national framework for support available to children with SEN across all settings.

- What support should every school routinely offer to children with SEND?

The IPPR outlined how crucial it is for the government to work closely with parents to shape the reform proposals.

- What can be done to ensure parents are listened to and kept informed and that their experiences are shared to support their child's education?
- Should the way settings work with parents change for families in different situations, like those experiencing poverty?

The Disabled Children's Partnership and Sutton Trust suggest there is a postcode lottery in effective provision.

- How can we make sure children and young people get the same high-quality support wherever they live in the country?

Effective

Reforms should be grounded in evidence, ensuring all education settings know where to go to find effective practice that has excellent long-term outcomes for children and young people.

The Disabled Children's Partnership and the Education Select Committee both recommend teachers should receive CPD on inclusive practice.

- Do you think mandatory CPD would help achieve high-quality support for children and young people? What CPD topics should it cover for different stages of education?

The National Foundation for Education Research recommend that SENCOs should be empowered to become agents of change across their schools and trusts.

- What changes do you think are required to support and enhance the role of SENCOs in education settings?

Nuffield Foundation highlights areas to focus on for building an evidence base.

- What areas should we focus on when collecting evidence about SEND support?
- What kind of evidence would you want education settings to use when deciding how to help a child or young person?

Shared

Education, health and care services should work in partnership with local government, families, teachers, experts and representative bodies to deliver better experiences and outcomes for all our children and young people.

The Disabled Children's Partnership and The Children's Commissioner have highlighted the importance of local services like health and education working together.

- What does good join-up across local services look like?
- What are the main barriers stopping services from working well together?
- How should we make sure services are held accountable for working together?

The Education Select Committee recommends that families should have access to independent advocacy.

- What would good independent advocacy look like, both in mediation services and in other areas of SEND resolution?

The Children's Commissioner outlined the current challenges around transitions. The Disabled Children's partnership also outlined how councils need a plan to ensure transitions are handled well.

- How can early years, schools, colleges, and employers work together to support children as they move through different stages of education?
- What would a successful model for this look like?

Sources

Children's Commissioner

[The Children's Plan \(2025\)](#)

Disabled Children's Partnership

[Fight For Ordinary \(2025\)](#)

Education Select Committee

[Solving the SEND Crisis \(2025\)](#)

Institute for Public Policy Research

[Breaking the Cycle: A Blueprint for SEND Reform \(2025\)](#)

Nuffield Foundation

[Raising Educational outcomes for students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities \(2025\)](#)

National Foundation for Educational Research

[The MAT factor, exploring how multi-academy trusts are supporting pupils with SEND \(2024\)](#)

Sutton Trust

[Double Disadvantage \(2025\)](#)

Template social media and newsletter content

Template social media posts

Template post 1


 Join the national conversation on SEND reform

Share your experiences and ideas to help shape a SEND system that works for every child.

 Tell [@educationgovuk](https://twitter.com/educationgovuk) what works and what needs to change.


 www.gov.uk/dfe/SEND-conversation

Template post 2

 Your voice matters in SEND reform. Join the national conversation. Every voice will help shape the system our children and young people deserve.

 [Join an online event](#)

 Tell [@educationgovuk](https://twitter.com/educationgovuk) what works and what needs to change

 Help create lasting change

Every voice counts. Join the conversation today:

 www.gov.uk/dfe/SEND-conversation

Template newsletter article

The Schools White Paper will be published early next year and will set out our proposed reforms to the SEND system. Building on extensive engagement over the past year, the Department for Education has launched a national conversation on SEND reform.

DfE wants to hear views, experiences and insights from as many people as possible in the coming months. The national conversation encourages everyone from parents to those working in schools, colleges and early years to get involved and help build a consensus on what works to help deliver lasting reform. Every voice will help shape the system our children and young people deserve.

This will be followed by a period of formal public consultation and further engagement following publication of the Schools White Paper early next year.

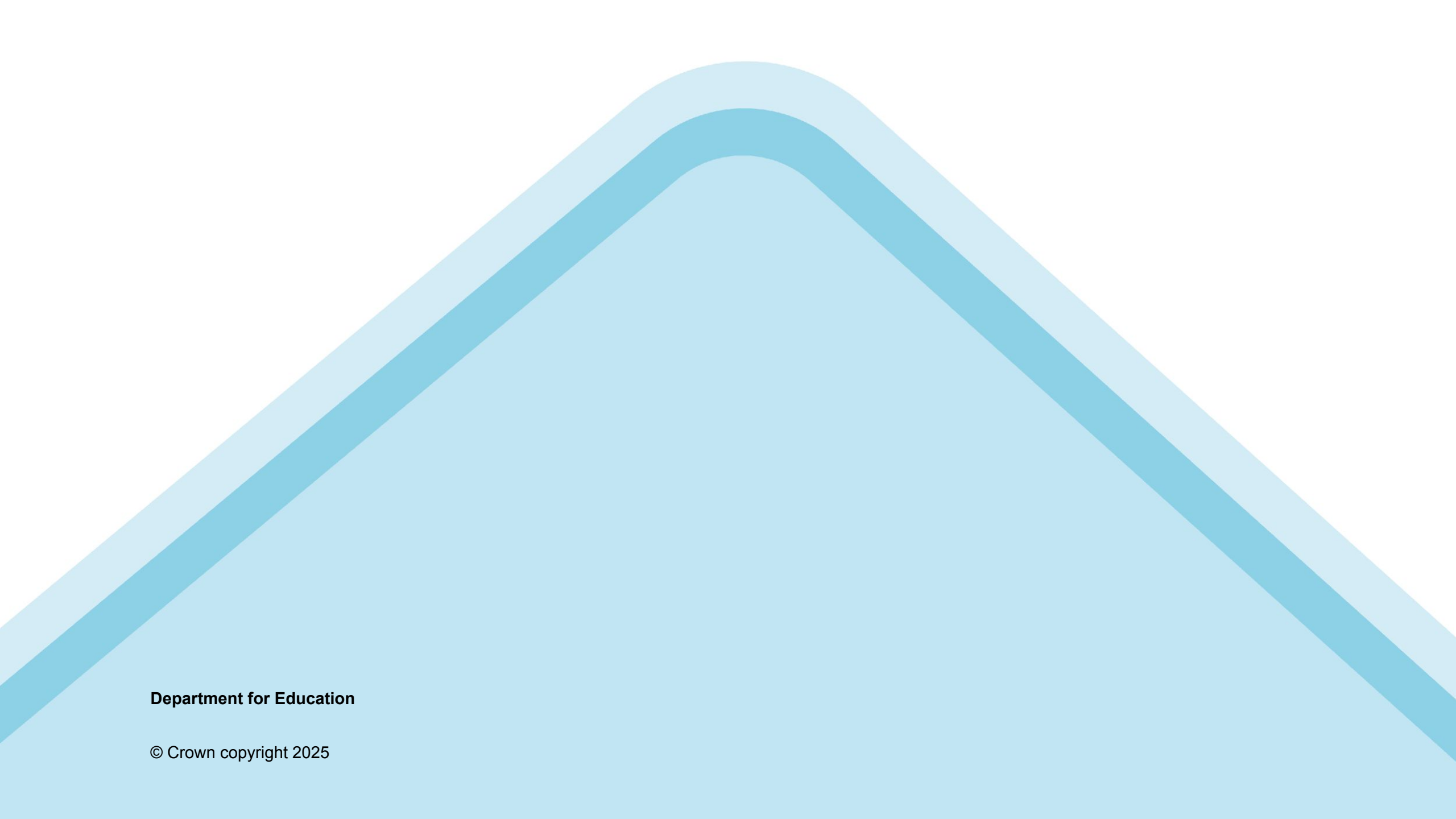
How you can get involved

Online events

Join one of five sessions and submit your questions on the key principles guiding SEND reform. You can attend as many as you like. [Sign up here](#).

Share your views online

Contribute ideas and feedback directly online at www.gov.uk/dfe/SEND-conversation



Department for Education

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