



Department for Education

2025-0026717

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for School Standards

Councillor Alex Dale
Chair of f40
By email: karen@dtw.co.uk

11 August 2025

Dear Councillor Dale,

Thank you for your correspondence of 16 July, addressed to the Secretary of State, regarding special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision. I am replying as the minister responsible for this policy area.

We are aware of the challenges in the SEND system, and we understand how urgently they need to be addressed. You will appreciate that these are complex issues that require a considered approach to deliver sustainable change. The department is committed to improving support for all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, including pupils with ADHD, autism and other neurodiverse conditions.

We are working closely with experts on reforms, recently appointing a strategic advisor for SEND, who will play a key role in convening and engaging with the sector, including leaders, practitioners, children and families as we consider the future of SEND reform.

As part of our Plan for Change, we are determined to fix the SEND system and restore the trust of parents by ensuring schools have the tools to better identify and support children before issues escalate to crisis point. The government is committed to ensuring excellence for everyone, so that all children have the support, skills and opportunities they deserve.

Regarding the funding system, the funding announced at the Spending Review means a significant investment in the support available for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities within mainstream schools, as well as protecting effective support currently in place.

We are taking the time needed to review the high needs national funding formula that allocates funding for children and young people with complex special educational needs and disabilities, as well as other aspects of the operation of the high needs funding system. Our aim is to establish a fair education funding system that directs funding to where it is needed, and to enable improved support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. This is in line with the reforms that we intend to set out in a white paper in the autumn.

We have also created an Expert Advisory Group (EAG) for Inclusion, led by Mr Tom Rees, that consists of experts across the SEND sector. They are advising the Secretary of State for Education and me on how to drive inclusive practice and how to improve mainstream education outcomes and experiences for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

This work forms part of the government's Opportunity Mission, which will break the unfair link between background and opportunity – starting with giving every child, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, the best start in life.

We want to ensure that, where required, education, health and care (EHC) plan assessments are progressed promptly and, if needed, plans are issued as quickly as possible so that children and young people can access the support they need. The department knows that local authorities (LAs) have seen an increase in the number of assessment requests and that more needs to be done to ensure that local areas deliver effective and timely services. This includes better communication with schools and families.

More widely, the department is committed to improving inclusivity and expertise in mainstream schools, as well as ensuring that special schools cater to those with the most complex needs. We will strengthen accountability on mainstream settings to be inclusive including through Ofsted, support the mainstream workforce to increase their SEND expertise, and encourage schools to set up resourced provision or SEN units to increase capacity in mainstream schools. We are actively working with parents and experts on solutions, including more early intervention to prevent needs from escalating and £740 million to encourage councils to create more specialist places in mainstream schools.

We want to drive a consistent and inclusive approach to supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities to achieve and thrive in mainstream settings through early identification, effective support, high-quality teaching and effective allocation of resources.

In regard to inspection, effective inspection is important, to keep children safe and to help them reach and maintain high standards. Settings will be held to account for their support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities through Ofsted, who are focusing on inclusion in their new approach to inspection.

We know that effective early identification and intervention is critical in improving the outcomes of children and young people with a special educational need or disability. An inclusive education system requires moving away from the current reliance on labels, plans and diagnoses before support materialises. In a reformed system, children and young people's needs will be assessed and identified early, so that evidence-based support can be provided at the earliest opportunity.

We know that many settings already have mechanisms in place to assess needs – we want to build on best practice and use further research to develop and support settings with evidence-based approaches for identifying needs early, whenever those needs may emerge, from the early years through to post-16.

Regarding the independent specialist sector, we know that many children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities struggle to find a suitable school placement that is close to their home and meets their needs. We recognise the important role independent special schools can play in the special educational needs and disabilities system, particularly in meeting low-incidence needs. However, independent special schools have higher costs than their maintained equivalent, and we need to ensure that placements are used appropriately and LAs should work with the sector as part of their strategic planning of SEND provision.

We recognise that local authorities are under pressure as a result of their spending on SEND. The departmental Spending Review settlement confirmed funding for reform of the current SEND system, details of which, alongside the government's intended approach to SEND reform, will be set out in a white paper in the autumn. We will work with the sector as essential and valued partners to deliver our shared mission and restore parents' trust.

I note your invitation to the Secretary of State to discuss matters further. As I am sure you will appreciate, diary pressures mean that the Secretary of State and I are unfortunately unable to accept at this time. Nevertheless, we will keep this in mind as we continue our work in this area.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Catherine McKinnell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Catherine" and the last name "McKinnell" clearly legible.

Catherine McKinnell MP
Minister for School Standards