



July 16, 2025

The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

Dear Secretary of State

f40 calling for an urgent review of the whole education funding system and investment and bold reform to SEND

I am writing to you on behalf of the f40 group, which represents 43 local authorities from across England that are campaigning for fairer education funding, along with major investment and reform to help solve the crisis in special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Many of our members are among the lowest funded for education in the country, so while all schools and local authorities are struggling to meet the needs of pupils in both mainstream and specialist provision right now, the challenges are far exacerbated for our members.

The current education system distributes funding unfairly, meaning some schools receive £5,000 less per pupil than others, whilst for High Needs, the lowest funded authority receives just £969 per pupil, in comparison to the highest funded area, which receives £3,600 per pupil.

We know you feel strongly that no child should be worth less than another – and all children should have access to the same resources and opportunities, regardless of where they live and their level of need. We urge you to carry out a review of the whole education funding system to ensure it is fair and needs-based.

We appreciate there will always be a difference in funding, based on specific school and pupil need and the difference in area living costs, but there can be no justification for the disparity we currently see.

f40 welcomes your commitment to solving the SEND crisis and is in support of the Government's direction of travel towards greater inclusive support in mainstream schools and a focus on Early Years and early intervention, with specialist provision for those with the greatest need.

We urge you to undertake a fundamental review of the current statutory SEND system – including the role and purpose of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) – to ensure it is totally focused on delivering the best outcomes for children and young people.

This should include steps to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and costly adversarial processes, while maintaining strong protections for those with the highest levels of need.

We believe EHCPs can be a vital tool for those who need greater support. However, their use should be more clearly defined, with a renewed emphasis on early support and effective provision within mainstream settings wherever appropriate, so that more children can thrive without the need of a statutory plan.

We know that major reform will not be easy to achieve and will not happen overnight, causing anxiety to some in the process. It's important, therefore, that the reforms are preceded by full consultation, so everyone feels confident that better outcomes for children are at the heart of the changes.

We urge Government to be bold and brave in its reform of SEND, and to invest significant additional funding to ensure the reforms are embedded and successful, so a whole generation of children does not suffer any further.

Without investment to support greater inclusion and early intervention, we feel the rise in the number of pupils leaving mainstream for specialist and alternative provision will continue.

We are at a crucial moment in time, where we can make a huge difference to the life chances of our children, including those with the greatest needs. Tinkering around the edges will not be sufficient to turn the tide or address the existential financial risk faced by many local authorities, so we implore Government to take this opportunity to reset the system, focusing on early support and outcomes instead of process and red tape, to ensure it works for children, families, schools and local authorities.

We urge you to:

- Review the whole education funding system to ensure it is fair and needs-based
- Review the statutory SEND system – including the role and purpose of EHCPs
- Invest significantly more funding in mainstream, Early Years, and local specialist SEND provision
- Provide clarity on the agreed level of mainstream SEND support, along with accountability through Ofsted
- Equip schools with the right curriculum, resources, training and guidance to support inclusion
- Better regulate the independent specialist SEND sector to ensure value for money
- Commit to paying off the cumulative local authority SEND deficits – estimated to be £5bn by March 2026.

I have attached some materials from f40, which illustrate the unfairness in funding, and would welcome an opportunity to meet with you to discuss these issues further, and to work with the Department for Education to ensure we have a fair, inclusive education system for all.

Yours faithfully



Cllr Alex Dale
Chair of f40

CC Karen Westcott
Secretary of f40

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