



Thursday, October 30, 2025

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

Dear Secretary of State

Re: Urgent Concerns Regarding Delays to the Schools White Paper and SEND Reforms

I am writing on behalf of the f40 group, which represents 43 of the lowest educationally-funded local authorities across England, to express our deep disappointment at the further delays to the Schools White Paper and the much-anticipated SEND reforms.

The situation in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is now critical. Every day that passes without a sustainable solution means that children and their families are left without the right support in the right environment; schools are struggling to cope; and local authority deficits continue to grow – threatening the financial stability of many councils.

While we understand the need to get these reforms right and to build consensus, further delay will help no one. Major improvements and genuine cultural change are required now. This demands brave and bold decision-making, supported by a clear roll-out strategy that brings all stakeholders together and focuses firmly on improving outcomes for children, parents, and schools.

We need an education system where children receive support at the earliest opportunity, ideally within their local mainstream setting wherever possible. While specialist provision will always be necessary for those with the most complex needs, mainstream schools must be better equipped to meet the needs of all children, including those with SEND. This requires adequate funding, resources, training, guidance, and supportive legislation. The reforms must be backed by a funding policy that demonstrates the Government's commitment to improving outcomes for every child.

The Public Accounts Committee, Education Select Committee, and the Government's own strategic SEND advisor have all been clear in their assessments that the current system is not fit for purpose and risks failing an entire generation of children and young people.

Recent fragmented communications regarding potential changes — such as those relating to EHCPs, inclusion, and the allocation of special school places — have heightened anxiety among parents, educators, and SEND organisations. Further delays only add to this uncertainty and concern.

We are unconvinced that an extended period of additional “listening” will provide new insights. Instead, it risks diluting the scale and ambition of the reforms that are urgently required to make the SEND system sustainable.

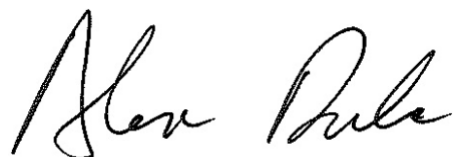
We recognise that difficult decisions lie ahead, and it will be impossible to satisfy everyone. However, each day that passes without meaningful change only deepens the crisis. Many local authorities are now in severe financial distress due to the escalating costs of SEND provision – pressures that are even more acute for the lowest-funded areas.

Given the current financial landscape, it is essential that the Local Government Fair Funding Review rebalances funding distribution and addresses the accrued and continuing High Needs deficits. Any delay in this process could force councils into taking drastic action to manage SEND-related financial pressures, including reductions in SEND or mainstream school funding.

I therefore urge you to ensure that the Fair Funding Review includes clear and decisive plans to resolve DSG pressures and provide schools with sufficient funding. Without this, any proposed reforms – however well-intentioned – will lack the foundation to succeed.

During this period, whilst you continue to gain insight in developing the reforms, as always, f40 would be very happy to work with your Ministry to act as a trusted partner and sounding board to share our knowledge and experience, where required. If you would like to discuss in more detail, please do just get in touch.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex Dale', with a stylized, cursive script.

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