



Permanent Secretary

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Dame Meg Hillier MP
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

13 June 2022

PAC hearing on 11 May 2022 – DfE recall: SEND review

Dear Meg,

I am writing to respond in more detail on the following question raised in the PAC hearing on 11 May:

Question 26 (Angela Richardson): Has the analysis of different groups of children described in the response to Recommendation 2 in the Treasury Minute of July 2020 been published?

In our Treasury Minute response of July 2020, the Department said:

“2.5 Understanding why variation in SEN between different groups occurs is a complicated issue and requires additional analysis beyond our existing publications. As part of the SEND review the Department is exploring this issue and have built a longitudinal database to investigate further. Results of this analysis will be published alongside the review. The ‘SEND Futures’ programme of research and analysis is also working to develop a longitudinal study, which would allow a more holistic understanding of pupils’ journeys through the education system.”

We made a commitment to publish the results of analysis of a longitudinal database (based on existing administrative data). The Education Policy Institute (EPI) then began a comprehensive analysis of variation in SEND identification using the same data sources we intended to base ours on and so the commitment was delivered in a different way. They published the first strand of this analysis (“Identifying pupils with special educational needs and disabilities”) in March 2021.¹ That first strand focused on SEND identification in primary

¹ <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/identifying-send/>

school, where most new identifications take place. The second strand will pick up identification in secondary school and status changes at transition to secondary schooling.

Instead of duplicating work, we fed into EPI's analysis as part of their Steering Group for the work. We would like to reiterate our gratitude for the Education Policy Institute's work, and for how the SEND Review benefitted from discussions with them, including specifically on this analysis.

The SEND Review was a whole system review, aiming to improve the SEND system for every child and young person, no matter their specific need or condition. Nevertheless, aware of the EPI's findings, it acknowledges that there is far too much variation across schools and local authorities in the levels of identification of SEND.² In particular, our proposals to introduce national standards, and improve the skills of the workforce, will help improve consistency of identification, and reduce misidentification including that which is driven by race, or other factors.

In addition, our work separately on the SEND Futures Longitudinal Study is continuing. This work is testing if and how we could best establish a new cohort study (in addition to existing administrative data) specifically following children and young people with SEND, and their families, as they grow up and prepare for adulthood. This will allow us to understand experiences and outcomes in a more detailed and comprehensive way than ever before. The study was unfortunately delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic, but the first phase of fieldwork on feasibility is now underway.

I am copying this letter to Laura Brackwell, the Education VFM Director at NAO.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Acland-Hood', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**SUSAN ACLAND-HOOD
PERMANENT SECRETARY**

² The EPI's analysis is referenced on pp. 11, 22 and 95 of the [SEND Review Green Paper](#).