



Claire Coutinho MP

Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing

Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/contactus/dfe

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

2 March 2023

Dear Meg,

SEND AND ALTERNATIVE PROVISION IMPROVEMENT PLAN

I am writing to inform you that today the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care have jointly published the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and alternative provision Improvement Plan for England. I welcome the continued engagement of the Public Accounts Committee on SEND and alternative provision and I wanted to set out our plans which I know will be of interest to the committee.

Publication of the Improvement Plan marks our response to the 16-week consultation period on the proposals set out in the SEND and alternative provision green paper. Through this consultation period we attended 175 events and heard from over 4,500 people, as well as receiving thousands of responses to the consultation.

I would like to put on record our thanks to all children, young people, and their families, organisations and sector groups across education, health and care who have provided feedback including via the SEND and alternative provision green paper e-consultation and through our consultation events.

It is time to deliver a more positive experience for children and young people with SEND and to restore families' confidence in the system. The Improvement Plan sets out how we will achieve this through a single national SEND and alternative provision system with the mission to fulfil children's potential, build parents' trust and provide financial sustainability. We have listened to the committee's feedback that we should not delay where changes can be made ahead of full reform, and the plan sets out how we are acting now to support and stabilise the system.

New National Standards will improve early identification of needs and set clear expectations for the types of evidence-based support that should be available in

mainstream settings, to give parents confidence in the support that should be made available for their child.

To deliver the National Standards in local areas, new local SEND and alternative provision partnerships will create evidence-based local inclusion plans that will set out how the needs of children and young people in the area will be met. These plans will be in line with the National Standards and the vision for alternative provision.

By improving early identification and the quality of support, we expect that more children and young people will have their needs met consistently through ordinarily available provision in their mainstream setting, preventing escalation of need that pushes some children to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

For children and young people who need a plan, we will reduce bureaucracy by introducing new standardised plans and supporting local authorities to use digital technology consistently.

Our investment into specialist and alternative provision places, including opening 33 new special free schools with 49 in the pipeline, means that more children will have timely access to the right support in their local area.

A three-tier alternative provision system will focus on targeted early support in mainstream schools, time-limited intensive placements in an alternative provision setting, and longer-term placements to support returns to mainstream or to sustainable post-16 destinations.

We know how important an expert workforce is in supporting children and young people with SEND or in alternative provision to fulfil their potential. We will invest in the workforce across education, health and care to build the capacity of the specialist workforce and to improve confidence and expertise in supporting children and young people with SEND promptly and effectively. This includes funding up to 5,000 early years staff to gain an accredited Level 3 early years SENCO qualification. To increase the capacity of specialists, we will use a £21 million investment to train two cohorts of educational psychologists between 2024 and 2025.

To help build parents' trust we will strengthen accountabilities, with every partner held to account, including through the new Ofsted/CQC Area SEND Inspection. Local and national inclusion dashboards will provide increased transparency, to parents and carers, of local performance, inform decision making and drive self-improvement across the system. We are proposing to test an initial prototype dashboard from April 2023 with a view to making a fully public version available in autumn 2023.

To help all children and young people to lead healthy and fulfilled adult lives, we will support young people into employment including investing £18 million between 2022 and 2025 to double the capacity of the Supported Internships programme. These are complemented by the Adjustment Passports we already produce with the Department for Work and Pensions, to support young people with SEND to enter work.

Children and young people can only get the right support within a system where costs are managed effectively. An over 50% increase in high needs funding to over £10 billion by 2023-24, compared to £6.1 billion in 2018-19, will help children and young people with SEND in both special schools and mainstream schools receive the right support. We are working hard with local authorities to improve services and address deficits, including through the existing Safety Valve programme, which has already helped authorities begin implementing plans to reform their high needs systems for the benefit of children and young people. We are also continuing to invest, through an additional £2 billion a year, from this April, secured in the Autumn statement. Of this, £400 million has been earmarked for special educational needs and disabilities and alternative provision.

Our goal is to deliver a system that is more responsive to the needs of individual children. To make sure we get this right we will use our £70 million Change Programme to establish up to nine Regional Expert Partnerships who will help us co-produce, test and refine key reforms.

We will use the findings from the Change Programme to inform decisions about future implementation and consideration of the capacity LAs and others would require to deliver the reforms. In line with this, we will of course conduct new burdens assessments as necessary ahead of implementing reforms that would require them.

The steps in the Improvement Plan cannot be delivered by government alone and local system leaders can start now in learning from and adopting good practice that already exists across the country. We look forward to working in collaboration with system leaders, parents and families, directly and through a National Board that I will co-chair with Maria Caulfield, the Minister for Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy. It is important that we work together to deliver a single national system that delivers consistently for every child and young person with SEND and in alternative provision.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Claire Coutinho', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Claire Coutinho MP
Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing