

SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan

1 Executive summary

Published on 2 March 2023¹, the new Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan sets out the Government's plans to change the SEND and alternative provision system in England. It promises to deliver thousands of additional specialist school places and 33 new special free schools.

The Plan also sets out the Government's intention to invest in training for staff, including 5,000 early years' special educational needs coordinators and 400 educational psychologists. This briefing provides a short summary of the Plan and what the implications may be for local authorities.

2 What is in the plan?

- The Government has identified local authorities in England where 33 new special schools will be built as part of the free school programme with the aim of easing pressure on special school places.
- SEND funding will be increased by more than 50% to over £10 billion by 2023-24, compared with 2019 to 2020
- New national standards will be drawn up for professionals so families know what support they should receive, who will provide it and who pays.
- A standardised and digitised EHCP (Education, Health and Care plans) process and template will be introduced to minimise bureaucracy and deliver consistency.
- The number of staff with an accredited SENCo qualification in early years setting will be increased.
- The Government will work with Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission to deliver an updated local area SEND inspection framework.
- The transition to further education will be improved by introducing common transfer files alongside piloting the roll out of adjustment passports. This will help better prepare young people with SEND for employment and higher education.

¹ <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/send-measures-do-not-address-cost-and-demand-issues-lga-governments-improvement-plan>

3 Minister's comments

Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing, Claire Coutinho said:

"Parents know that their children only get one shot at education and this can have an enormous impact on their child's ability to get on with life. Yet for some parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities, getting their child that superb education that everyone deserves can feel like a full-time job.

*"The Plan that we are publishing today sets out systemic reforms to standards, teacher training and access to specialists as well as thousands of new places at specialist schools so that every child gets the help they need."*²

4 APSE Comment

The launch of the Plan has, quite rightly, brought the profile of learners with SEND into the spotlight. The additional funding to support the Plan is also very welcome. However, several organisations in the sector have raised questions over whether there is enough money in the system to meet the level of need, noting that the costs associated with the current SEND system are baked in for years to come.³

APSE believes that the powers to intervene in schools not supporting children with SEND ought to be brought forward, and that these powers should sit with local councils, not the Department for Education. Investing local authorities with these powers will not only improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND, but relieve pressure on council high needs budgets.⁴

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² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/transformational-reform-begins-for-children-and-young-people-with-send>

³ <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/send-measures-do-not-address-cost-and-demand-issues-lga-governments-improvement-plan>

⁴ Councils' high needs deficits – the gap between the cost of providing SEND support and the funding available – currently stands at an estimated £1.9 billion, rising to £3.6 billion by 2025 with no intervention.

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