

Ten principles for a new SEND system

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Confederation
of School Trusts

The voice of school trusts

Ten principles for a new SEND system

Introduction

There is wide acceptance that our current approach to education for children with special educational needs is broken. Despite the best efforts of many dedicated professionals working within it, it too often doesn't deliver for the children it is meant to help. Its bureaucracy causes frustration for parents and professionals. Its cost is rapidly rising and, if fully realised, would leave many local authorities insolvent – while at the same time many providers report being under resourced.

There have been attempts to reform the approach. However, we believe there are fundamental flaws that mean iterative changes are not a sensible option. We need a new approach, and a new concept of what a good outcome looks like for all involved. That includes seeing the SEND system as one that ensures high quality specialist provision but intrinsically involves mainstream schools.

The principles set out here seek to provide a framework for that new approach. They build on previous work set out in our [A good life](#) and [Five principles for inclusion](#) reports, and have been informed by discussions with our member trusts.

SEND is a complex system – indeed a key criticism of the current approach is that SEND itself is a blanket term that hides complexity and leads to seeing children as a series of labels rather than individuals. That complexity means ten principles cannot hope to reflect every intricacy of a new approach and more detail will be needed, but we believe these principles provide a good context for those discussions.

The principles

Policy approach

1. Create a bold vision for an education in which all young people can thrive, developing an approach rooted in dignity and expertise, shifting away from the current medicalised, deficit approach.
2. Move beyond thinking of special educational needs as a 'demand' led problem, and conceptualise this challenge as a rebirth of the whole system, aligning all the system levers (accountability, structures, inspection, curriculum, teacher development) to better support those who need it when they need it.
3. Communicate a social mission that all children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, should grow up to live rich and fulfilling lives in which they are both visible to and valued by their communities.

Workforce approach

4. Invest in research and evidence-based guidance to set standards for mainstream inclusion (akin to National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidance in the NHS) and to improve the impact of interventions delivered in the mainstream.



5. Invest in a funded and resourced national programme of workforce development so that all school staff have the knowledge, expertise, confidence and flexibility to ensure that mainstream schools can identify and support all children and young people with SEND, including those who present with a greater degree of complexity, to achieve well at school.
6. Develop and disseminate evidence-led models of effective provision, including specialist units and resource provision.
7. Mobilise the specialist expertise from across the school system to ensure learning and knowledge building between specialist and mainstream settings.

System approach

8. Reset responsibilities and accountability, ensuring that the system incentivises communities to work together locally in the best interests of all children and young people, and that school inspection gives confidence to parents.
9. Commission much stronger processes to project the demand for specialist placements and invest in a programme of national/regional planning and building to ensure sufficient suitable placements are created.
10. Reset approaches to funding so that capacity is built 'upstream' with mainstream schools given the resource, guidance and flexibility to meet the broad range of learning needs within their community, with less reliance on the statutory system for children to receive the support they need.





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