



18 May 2026

The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education

Dear Bridget,

We are writing as Green Party Members of Parliament in response to the latest consultation on proposed reforms to the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system.

Every child has the right to dignity, respect and the support they need to develop their full potential. But the current SEND system is leaving far too many children and young people unsupported and forcing countless families into a constant struggle just to access the help their child needs. We therefore welcome the government's ambitions for educational reform, including earlier intervention and more inclusive mainstream education.

However, aspiration is not enough. Meaningful reform to the SEND system requires sustained investment in people, capacity and culture. SEND reform will only succeed in building a genuinely inclusive education system if the government protects legal rights and provides urgent clarity on the details of implementation. Above all, the success of these reforms will depend on whether they are accompanied by a bold workforce strategy that delivers real staffing support on the ground.

Below, we have set out some specific concerns with the current plan for SEND reform.

Prioritise workforce capacity

The success of any attempt to reform the SEND system will depend on the capacity of the workforce that delivers it. The number of children with Special Educational Needs continues to rise rapidly ([DfE, 2025](#)), placing increased pressure on already stretched school staff. At the same time, there are well-documented workforce shortages across the entire SEND system, with the demand for teaching assistants, specialist staff and educational psychologists significantly outstripping supply. Recent analysis by the Education Policy Institute suggests that local authorities (LAs) in England would need to hire 1,400 additional educational psychologists just to meet current levels of need ([EPI, 2026](#)), far exceeding the extra 200 per year proposed in the government's current plan. Meanwhile, there is a longstanding nationwide teacher shortage, particularly in further education colleges, with high workload and stress driving many staff to leave the profession ([DfE, 2025](#); [NAO, 2025](#)).

While proposals such as Experts at Hand and Inclusion Bases have the potential to significantly strengthen SEND support in mainstream schools, they will require a well-resourced, highly motivated and appropriately trained workforce with sufficient capacity to deliver them. As part of its plan for SEND reform, the government must therefore urgently set out a long-term coherent workforce strategy that addresses the interlinked crises of recruitment, retention, pay, training, wellbeing and workload.

Protect legal rights

Children and young people with SEND must retain strong and enforceable legal rights to the support they need. We are deeply concerned that the newly proposed Individual Support Plans (ISPs) will not carry the same statutory duty to deliver the provision laid out in them as Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), which under current proposals would be reserved only for children with the most complex needs. This represents a fundamental shift away from enforceable legal rights towards a system where support is increasingly at schools' discretion, with significant consequences for consistency and equality of provision.

While we welcome efforts to provide support for a wider group of pupils, this must not come at the expense of accountability for those pupils. We echo the Education Committee's warning that "SEND reforms must not be based on any withdrawal of statutory entitlements for children and young people" ([Education Committee, 2025](#)). Watering down legal protections risks undermining parental confidence and weakening families' ability to secure appropriate support for their children.

We are particularly concerned that these changes may disproportionately affect those least able to advocate for themselves within the system. The new ISPs must therefore be supported by a clear statutory duty to deliver the provision they specify, and it is vital that families retain a robust right of appeal.

We are also concerned that where legal duties do exist, structural bottlenecks across education and health services mean that they will continue to be inconsistently implemented. The principles set out in this plan must therefore be accompanied by more detailed operational plans for ensuring compliance and delivery, including timely assessments, diagnosis and early intervention.

'Complex needs' and EHCPs

The government's current plan for SEND reform would restrict access to EHCPs and highly specialised provision to those with 'complex needs.' We are concerned that the meaning of this term is not currently clear enough to enable adequate scrutiny or confidence.

At present, there is no definition of what constitutes 'complex needs,' nor how decisions will be made about who qualifies for specialist support. The current plan suggests that forthcoming need profiles within 'Specialist Provision Packages' will define complex needs going forward. But the draft outline of Specialist Provision Packages simply raises further questions about how these will work, particularly since some children may require elements of support from multiple packages. Without detailed examples and transparent criteria, there is a significant risk of inconsistency, exclusion and increased local disputes.

This lack of clarity also makes it difficult for families, schools, teachers and indeed Parliament to adequately assess the likely impact of the reforms. The government must urgently publish detailed guidance on who will qualify for EHCPs and Specialist Provision Packages, including worked case studies. Clear definitions and operational detail are essential to ensure the system is fair, consistent and trusted by families.

Culture change and co-production

Progress towards greater inclusion must be driven as much by culture and practice as by structural reform. Too many children and young people continue to face barriers created by inflexible behaviour policies, limited understanding of neurodiversity and environments that do not meet their sensory needs. Without addressing these issues, changes to systems and funding will have limited impact in the classroom.

We therefore welcome the proposed investment in new guidance, National Inclusion Standards and SEND training for all staff in schools, colleges and early years settings. This must include evidence-based guidance on how to design accessible and inclusive sensory environments and how to embed inclusive practice in behaviour and classroom management policies. It is essential that this guidance and the National Inclusion Standards are genuinely co-produced. Tokenistic engagement and consultation are not enough: the government needs to ensure that children and young people with SEND, alongside their parents, carers and educators, are treated as equal partners in the design, delivery and evaluation of SEND policy at every level. Lived experience must not be an afterthought but a guiding principle of the system.

Special school capacity

While we support the government's ambition to make mainstream education more inclusive, this must be accompanied by a sufficient supply of special school places for those children and young people whose needs cannot be met in mainstream settings. At present, many areas face acute shortages of special school places and around two thirds of special schools are at or over capacity ([DfE, 2026](#)), leaving families without appropriate local provision. Increasing specialist support within mainstream, including through Specialist Bases, will help to reduce reliance on special school placements. However, even with these improvements in mainstream settings, demand for special school places is likely to continue to outstrip capacity in some places, especially in the short term.

We are concerned that a rigid national push towards mainstream inclusion risks overlooking this reality and failing those children for whom mainstream settings are not suitable. Provision must be flexible, locally planned and responsive to need, rather than driven by a one-size-fits-all national model.

Tackle profiteering

At present, exploitative private companies are profiting from the SEND crisis by buying up special schools and services and charging excessively high placement fees to LAs, exacerbating an already unsustainable situation. Urgent action is desperately needed to address this blatant profiteering.

While the government's proposal to introduce national funding bands for independent special school placements is a welcome step in the right direction, the current plans are lacking in detail on what constitutes a "reasonable price" or how these bands will be set. Without such clarity, it is difficult to be confident that these measures will meaningfully curb excessive costs or protect public funds. We urge the government to be bold: independent providers must not be allowed to continue charging, on average, more than double the cost of state-funded special school provision ([NAO, 2024](#)).

Alongside stronger regulation and scrutiny of the independent sector, there must be a rapid expansion of state-funded special school capacity to reduce reliance on independent special schools. While the current plan for SEND reform proposes a total £3.7 billion of capital investment, we are concerned by the lack of detail concerning how much of this money will be invested in new special school capacity and how many new state-funded special school places will be created. To ensure that special school provision does not become increasingly dominated by the private sector, the government must urgently proceed with building the state-funded special schools that are currently planned for construction.

LAs must also be empowered with streamlined access to funding for increasing state-funded special school capacity. We are concerned that requiring LAs to provide detailed justification for using SEND payments to invest in new special school places instead of mainstream settings will only create unnecessary delays. The government should trust councils to exercise local democratic oversight and make data-led decisions based on the local situation.

Reform admissions

Narrow attainment-focused performance pressures are currently disincentivising some schools from admitting or retaining pupils with SEND. This is exacerbating inequities in access and requires urgent government intervention. In a recent survey, 41% of senior school leaders reported that some local schools actively discourage applications from children and young people with SEND ([Sutton Trust, 2026](#)). The gap in access to high-performing schools is especially large for children with SEND who are eligible for Free School Meals and do not have an EHCP, with top schools taking in around 36% fewer pupils in this category than live locally ([Sutton Trust, 2026](#)).

We are concerned that the current proposals for SEND reform do not do enough to strengthen fair admissions or ensure genuine accountability across all types of school, including academies, faith schools and free schools. Restricting access to EHCPs risks weakening accountability in admissions even further, since EHCPs are currently one of the main mechanisms by which LAs can direct a maintained school to admit a child or young person with SEND.

LAs must be given stronger levers to ensure equitable access across all state-funded schools. They should have the ability to direct placements for children with ISPs as well as EHCPs, including at academies, faith schools and free schools where necessary. Accountability and performance frameworks for schools must also be rebalanced so that inclusion and wellbeing metrics are treated as equal in importance to academic outcomes, not as secondary considerations. We desperately need a new approach that moves away from the current high-stakes testing and exam-driven accountability culture, which incentivises exclusion and indirect selection, towards a broader, child-centred assessment system.

We urge the government to match its ambitions with decisive action by safeguarding legal rights, investing in workforce and school capacity and delivering a transparent, accountable SEND system that meets the needs of every child and family it is meant to serve. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these proposals further with your Department.

Yours sincerely,

Adrian Ramsay MP, Waveney Valley
Dr Ellie Chowns MP, North Herefordshire
Siân Berry MP, Brighton Pavilion
Carla Denyer MP, Bristol Central
Hannah Spencer MP, Gorton & Denton

Green Party Members of Parliament