



Department
for Education

National conversation on SEND reform

Stakeholder toolkit

Updated 9 December 2025

Why are we engaging?

The Schools White Paper will be published early next year and will set out our proposed reforms to the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system.

Over the past year, we have held over 100 engagement events with SEND stakeholders, including young people, to learn from their experiences. Ahead of the White Paper, we are continuing an extensive programme of engagement to:

- **Listen to and understand** the views and experiences of families, educators and experts to ensure these reforms are grounded in lived experience and practical insights.
- **Gather insight and evidence** that allows us to shape a proposed reform programme that prioritises early intervention, fairness, and effective evidence-based support.
- **Encourage constructive dialogue** to rebuild confidence in the SEND system and create a shared vision for inclusive, high-quality support for children with SEND.

Join the national conversation on SEND reform

Building on our extensive engagement over the past year, we want this to be the start of the biggest national conversation on SEND in a generation.

Every voice will help shape the system our children and young people deserve.

We want to hear views, experiences and insights from as many people as possible in the coming months.

This will be followed by a period of formal public consultation and further engagement following publication of the Schools White Paper early next year.

This toolkit provides information and resources for your organisation to communicate with **children and young people, parents and carers, people working in schools, colleges and early years settings, local government and health professionals** and other interested stakeholders on SEND reform.

Overview

For too long, many families have felt unheard. This engagement is a direct line to the people who know the system best and want it to work better. It's about putting all those with lived experience at the very heart of our proposals for reform.

The SEND system needs decisive, long-term change and our reforms must rebuild the trust and confidence of children, young people, and families. We want to hear from everyone, from parents to those working in schools, colleges and early years – building a consensus on what works to help deliver lasting reform.

We know many settings are already doing a fantastic job of supporting children and young people with SEND and ensuring they are a part of early years, school and college life. We want to hear about this good practice and will consider how that's being delivered and what we can learn from them to deliver a system that works for all children and young people.

Our education system must be able to adapt to support all children and young people and to recognise where their needs change over time. SEND support should be dynamic and responsive as well as timely. A system that is inclusive by design will remove barriers for all children, ensuring high aspirations for every child and young person.

Five key principles are guiding our approach to reform

1. **Early.** Children should receive the support they need as soon as possible. Intervening upstream, including earlier in children's lives when this can have most impact, will start to break the cycle of needs going unmet and getting worse.
2. **Local.** Children and young people with SEND should be able to learn at a school or college close to their home, alongside their peers, rather than travelling long distances from their family and community. Special schools should continue to play a vital role supporting those with the most complex needs.
3. **Fair.** Every school education setting should be resourced and able to meet common and predictable needs, including as they change over time, without parents having to fight to get support for their children. Where specialist provision is needed for children and young people in mainstream, special or alternative provision, we will ensure it is there, with clear legal requirements and safeguards for children and parents.
4. **Effective.** Reforms should be grounded in evidence, ensuring all education settings know where to go to find effective practice that has excellent long-term outcomes for children and young people.
5. **Shared.** Education, health and care services should work in partnership with local government, families, teachers, experts and representative bodies to deliver better experiences and outcomes for all our children and young people.

How you can get involved

Join one of our online events

We are hosting five online events with SEND experts, each focusing on one of our guiding principles of reform. You will have the opportunity to ask questions at these events.

[You can find out more and register here](#)

Share your views with us online

We're encouraging as many people as possible to share their views online. You can share your views online here: www.gov.uk/dfe/SEND-conversation

We would be grateful for support to share these opportunities on your channels.

[Resources to support you to share these events with your audiences are available in this toolkit.](#)

Questions to guide the national conversation on SEND reform

Early

Children should receive the support they need as soon as possible. Intervening upstream, including earlier in children’s lives when this can have most impact, will start to break the cycle of needs going unmet and getting worse.

Identifying needs early	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can we notice when a child or young person needs extra help as early as possible and make sure support starts quickly - even without a diagnosis?
Supporting needs quickly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What would help nurseries, schools, and colleges give the right support straight away when they see a child or young person struggling?
Making support high quality everywhere	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How should we record and review the help a child or young person receives, so support can be adjusted quickly as their needs change?

Local

Children and young people with SEND should be able to learn at a school or college close to their home, alongside their peers, rather than travelling long distances from their family and community. Special schools should continue to play a vital role supporting those with the most complex needs.

Making local schools, early years settings and colleges more inclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What changes to classrooms, buildings or staff skills would help more children and young people with SEND learn in their local school, college or EY setting?
Building and spreading expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do you think about ideas like SEND hubs or Centres of Excellence?
Working together	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can the specialist and mainstream sector (early years settings, schools, colleges) work together to support children and young people so they can be educated close to home?

Fair

Every education setting should be resourced and able to meet common and predictable needs, including as they change over time, without parents having to fight to get support for their children. Where specialist provision is needed for children and young people in mainstream, special or alternative provision, we will ensure it is there, with clear legal requirements and safeguards for children and parents.

Support in every school and education setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What support should all nurseries, schools and colleges give to children and young people with SEND as standard, so families do not have to ask or argue to receive it?
Working with parents and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What will support parents, children and young people to feel listened to, informed, and involved in shaping the support they or their child receives – especially families in difficult situations, like those facing poverty?
Ending the postcode lottery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can we make sure children and young people get the same high-quality support wherever they live?

Effective

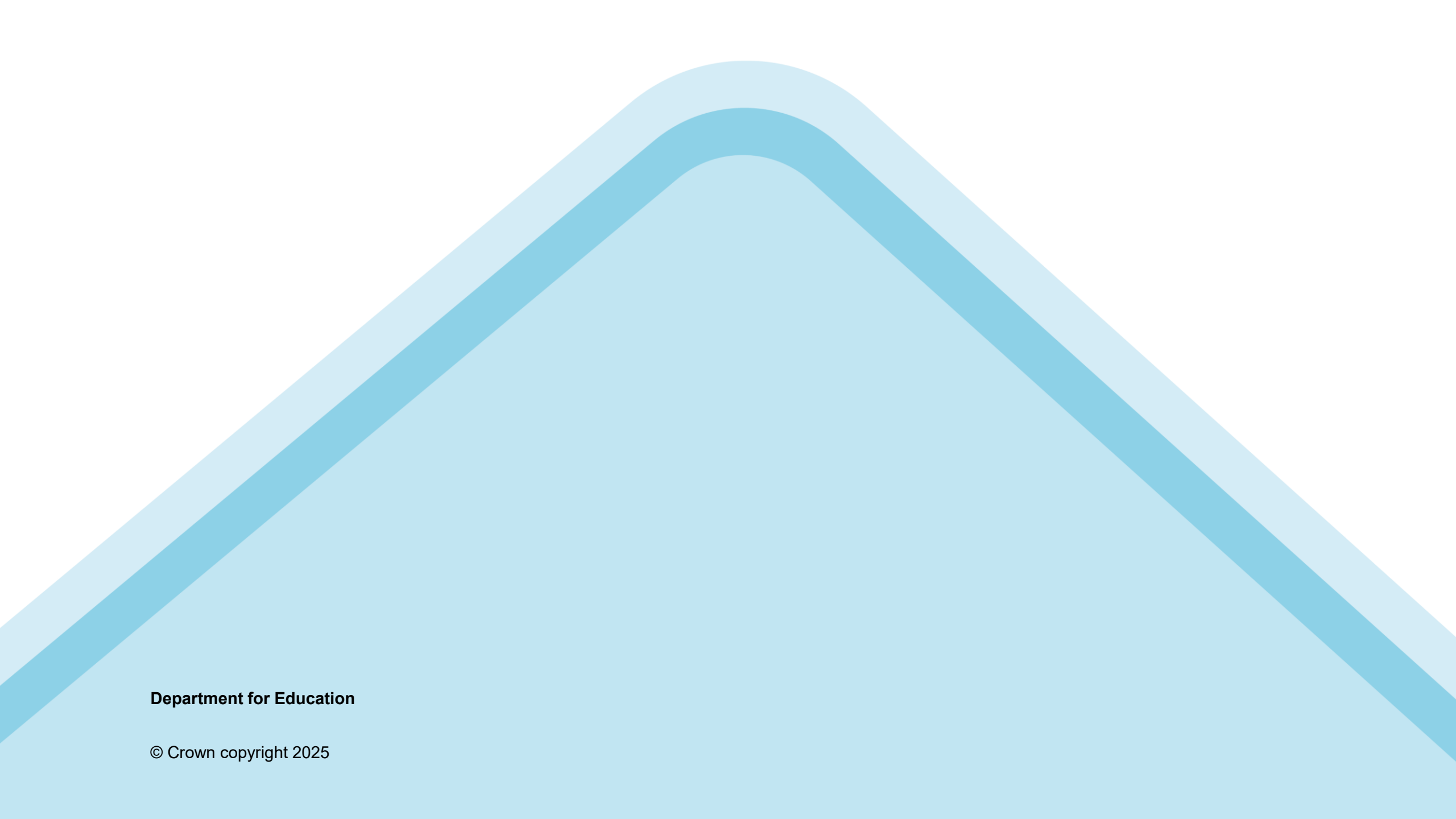
Reforms should be grounded in evidence, ensuring all education settings know where to go to find effective practice that has excellent long-term outcomes for children and young people.

Training teachers and the education workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Do you think mandatory continuing professional development (CPD) would help achieve high-quality support for children and young people? What CPD topics should it cover for different stages of education?
Supporting SENCOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">What changes do you think are required to support and enhance the role of SENCOs (or their equivalents) in education settings?
Using evidence well	<ul style="list-style-type: none">What evidence should early years, schools and colleges look at to decide the best way to support a child or young person with SEND?

Shared

Education, health and care services should work in partnership with local government, families, teachers, experts and representative bodies to deliver better experiences and outcomes for all our children and young people.

Services working together	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does good teamwork between local services (like health, education, and councils) look like, and what gets in the way of this?
Supporting transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can nurseries, schools, colleges, and employers work together to support children as they move through different stages of education, and what would a successful model for this look like?
Independent advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What would good independent support look like to help families articulate what they need and ensure the plans made for them reflect that?• When needed, what support would help families have their say in resolving disagreements around their child's provision?



Department for Education

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