

More House School

Response to HM Government's SEND Review; 'Right support, right place, right time'

July 2022



In March 2022, HM Government published a green paper on SEND, outlining proposals for changes to the management of special educational needs and disabilities provision in England and Wales. More House School contributed to the Independent Schools Council response and to the Independent Schools Association response.

More House School also submitted its own response to the public consultation. You can read the detail of that response [here](#).

Text in bold reflects the consultation questions within the consultation.

Standard text represents More House School's response.

1. What key factors should be considered, when developing national standards to ensure they deliver improved outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND and their families? This includes how this applies across education, health and care in a 0-25 system.

National Standards must promote quality of provision, but must not serve to limit the opportunities for providing high-quality provision.

Many SEND pupils are placed in independent school provision because of the freedom for innovative design of a highly effective provision which genuinely meets the pupils' SEND needs, promoting the highest possible outcomes and best possible progress.

National standards must protect the experiences of SEND pupils whilst not inhibiting access to breadth of provision. The independence of some specialist schools is fundamental to realising extraordinary outcomes for SEND pupils. It fosters aspiration and prevents SEND pupils from being denied opportunities beyond the limited capabilities of the state-maintained sector.

National standards must be able to recognise and support independent innovation, providing that quality of progress and outcomes, and appropriate safeguarding arrangements are ensured.

Introducing standards too inflexible to respond to diverse models of provision could severely disadvantage SEND pupils, limiting achievement.

National standards should serve to protect independent innovation, very often be extremely cost-efficient, such as at More House School, Frensham, from the impact of local authorities placing financial priorities above pupils' needs.

Standards must enable independent providers to protect their independence in order to ensure continued efficacy of their provision.

Standards should promote the sharing and adoption of best-practice, whilst valuing the full breadth of best practice - it is a mistake to assume that one size fits all - diversity is a great strength within SEND provision, affording pupils and families genuine choice.

2. How should we develop the proposal for new local SEND partnerships to oversee the effective development of local inclusion plans whilst avoiding placing unnecessary burdens or duplicating current partnerships?

The expertise of the independent sector should be recognised, ensuring independent providers are recognised as valuable partners. Very often, independent schools provide a solution to keeping children and young people with SEND in their local area.

In other instances, independent schools - sometimes the same independent schools, provide a solution for several different local authorities, delivering a resource not replicated elsewhere but which affords exceptional benefit both to children and their families, and to local authorities.

More House School is a good example of both the above descriptions.

Furthermore, independent schools often provide exceptional resources in terms of improving state-maintained provision in the local or wider area. For example, More House School, Frensham, delivers free training to state-maintained teachers, teaching-assistants, SENDCos, school leaders, and to other educational professionals, in order to improve the quality of provision for SEND pupils in state-maintained mainstream schools, reducing the need for such pupils to be educated in a more specialist setting. There is much scope for local authorities to engage more proactively with such resource, for the benefit of SEND and all pupils.

3. What factors would enable local authorities to successfully commission provision for low-incidence high-cost need, and further education, across local authority boundaries?

Recognition of the resource afforded by the independent sector is essential to ensure high-quality decision-making that secures the right provision at the best value, ensuring the best possible outcomes for SEND children and young people.

4. What components of the EHCP should we consider reviewing or amending as we move to a standardised and digitised version?

I welcome the standardisation nationally of the EHCP format. This will improve equity of experience for SEND pupils.

It will also reduce unnecessary administrative burdens upon providers. At More House School, Frensham, there are currently 350 pupils with an EHCP, from more than thirty different local authorities. A major focus for the school is the minimising of administrative costs around managing the vastly different formats expected from different local authorities in respect of EHCP-related documentation. For this reason, More House School uses its own format, e.g., for annual review reports, regardless of a pupil's placing local authority.

Large volumes of different professionals' commentaries are unhelpful in the final EHCP document, and would be better delivered as appendices to the main document. Such information is quickly out of date, and priority should be given to the summaries of strengths, weaknesses, identified needs, agreed targets and outcomes, and agreed provision. Such a change is likely to make plans more accessible both to professionals, and to children subjects of the plans, and make such plans more genuinely usable and effective in guiding provision.

5. How can parents and local authorities most effectively work together to produce a tailored list of placements that is appropriate for their child, and gives parents confidence in the EHCP process?

To ensure SEND children and young people are not disadvantaged, all providers of appropriate provision should be included on local offer lists. This should include independent providers, who often offer a unique model of provision which can afford some pupils far better chances of realising successful outcomes than other provisions.

Independent providers should be included, whilst enabling them to retain their independence. Thus, SEND children and young people should not be denied access where to a provision which is appropriate for them, because an element of the provider's arrangements is deemed to be different from requirements placed on state-maintained providers. For example, admissions, exclusions, fees, contracting policies and arrangements.

Where inclusion on a list necessitates restriction in funding bands which would force unacceptable diminution of, or otherwise change to, a provider's model and offer for pupils, weakening the quality and efficacy, it is likely that such independent schools will find it impossible to be included. This might disadvantage SEND children and young people by denying access to a provision which can genuinely meet their needs and afford them successful outcomes.

6. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our overall approach to strengthen redress, including through national standards and mandatory mediation?

Disagree.

There are many instances in which mediation can be effective, but I do not agree that this must be mandatory, and that therefore it is beneficial in all cases. Ultimately, a child or young person's needs must be the guiding star, and those needs must be met in accordance with the recommendations of professionals, focused on outcomes.

Compromise is likely not to be in the child or young person's best interests, and is not likely to serve them or their families well, either in the short-term or long-term. Failure to invest appropriately in a young person's needs and provision at an early age results in catastrophic failure later on, and can lead to vast expenditure of the public purse in propping up for a life-time someone who leaves education as an under-achiever - in terms of qualifications, independence, socially. Getting provision right, and realising the best possible outcomes during compulsory schooling age, is far more cost-effective in the long-term.

Access to proper tribunal protects the interests of the child or young person.

7. Do you consider the current remedies available to the SEND Tribunal for disabled children who have been discriminated against by schools effective in putting children and young people's education back on track? Please give a reason for your answer with examples, if possible.

I have limited experience of this and feel unable to comment.

8. What steps should be taken to strengthen early years practice with regard to conducting the two-year-old progress check and integration with the Healthy Child Programme review?

I have limited experience of this and feel unable to comment.

9. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should introduce a new mandatory SENCo NPQ to replace the NASENCo?

Neither agree nor disagree.

Without clarity on the syllabus for the proposed NPQ, it is difficult to judge the benefit of this proposal. Ultimately, a SENCo must be able to:

- a) understand the diverse experiences and educational needs of pupils who are or may attend the school;
- b) hold a strong appreciation for the breadth of provision locally and nationally, in order to be able to support a child and their family in determining most appropriate provision;
- c) be confident in navigating the local and national frameworks for obtaining recognition and appropriate provision for a child or young person;
- d) be a confident member of the school's management and leadership team, able genuinely to influence practice and priorities in the school in support of promoting the best possible outcomes for pupils with SEND;
- e) understand best-practice and be able to support teachers and other staff within the school to develop their practice in order to promote and secure the best possible outcomes for pupils with SEND;

f) be collaborative, bringing people together in support of pupils with SEND, working closely with children, families, teachers, school leaders, local authority officers, other professionals, and also collaborating with other SENCOs in the sharing and pursuit of best practice.

Proper recognition of the most effective functions of a SENCO, powerful in realising the best outcomes for children and young people with SEND, is most important. Confidence in understanding the Code of Practice or National Standards is of lesser importance.

10. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should strengthen the mandatory SENCO training requirement by requiring that headteachers must be satisfied that the SENCO is in the process of obtaining the relevant qualification when taking on the role?

Agree.

I agree that it is vital that headteachers have confidence that their school's named SENCO has, or is undergoing the training to achieve, the requisite skills and understanding to discharge their duties effectively for the benefit of pupils with SEND. They must also be confident that the named SENCO possesses the power to be genuinely influential in the school in discharging their duties towards children and young people with SEND.

Whether the proposed NPQ can deliver what is needed is not yet clear.

11. To what extent do you agree or disagree that both specialist and mixed MATs should be allowed to coexist in the fully trust-led future? This would allow current local authority maintained special schools and alternative provision settings to join either type of MAT.

Agree.

12. What more can be done by employers, providers and government to ensure that those young people with SEND can access, participate in and be supported to achieve an apprenticeship, including through access routes like Traineeships?

Consideration must be given to transport support.

13. To what extent do you agree or disagree that this new vision for alternative provision will result in improved outcomes for children and young people?

I believe there are admirable aims within these proposals. However, there must be genuinely joined-up, collaborative work between alternative provisions and mainstream schools. Recognising that the SEND spectrum is very broad, and that behaviour and emotional needs form just one segment is important, but also recognising that it is most frequently a lack of self-esteem and belief - being

frightened of school and the future - which can inspire poor behaviour. There are, of course, very many other factors, including medical and social.

But promoting self-esteem and belief in the possibility of success in school is fundamental to supporting such children and young people to become more able to manage a mainstream school environment. There are many independent school settings who achieve exceptional outcomes in this respect.

Time-limiting placements in APs is a good ambition, but this must not be at the expense of ensuring there is the right programme of support and transition in place to ensure that return to mainstream will be successful. To move a pupil too soon, resulting in further breakdown of placement, is to fail them and to realise greater damage than previously.

14. What needs to be in place in order to distribute existing funding more effectively to alternative provision schools, to ensure they have the financial stability required to deliver our vision for more early intervention and re-integration?

I have limited experience of state-maintained schools' funding systems, and am therefore not well-positioned to comment.

15. To what extent do you agree or disagree that introducing a bespoke alternative provision performance framework, based on these 5 outcomes, will improve the quality of alternative provision?

Disagree.

The guidance with this question refers to chapter 4: paragraphs 12 - 15; however, this question appears more focused on paragraph 20.

The prescribed five areas seem very important, although I am wary of performance tables and believe the true measure of success must examine the experiences for individual children; not overall statistics. Within alternative provision and special needs, the statistical significance test can be difficult to prove, since the varying circumstances and number of influencing factors are great.

It would seem appropriate to explore the impact on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

I would also advocate for not limiting the attainment focus to English and mathematics, but valuing pupils' performance in other areas as well, promoting their self-esteem and own sense of value and worth. The narrowing of recognised success criteria for children and young people with SEND is well-recognised to be detrimental to their progress and successful outcomes.

16. To what extent do you agree or disagree that a statutory framework for pupil movements will improve oversight and transparency of placements into and out of alternative provision?

Agree.

17. What are the key metrics we should capture and use to measure local and national performance? Please explain why you have selected these.

The focus must be on outcomes for children and young people with SEND. Such outcomes must recognise the breadth of successful outcomes, and not be discriminatorily narrow in scope. Some pupils with SEND are capable of achieving very strong academic results, often in spite of previous professional recommendations. Thus, aspiration is hugely important.

Some SEND pupils's successful outcomes should be recognised in different fields, e.g., social and independence outcomes.

True effectiveness of any system must focus on outcomes, but it is not appropriate to judge success on too narrow a breadth of perceived successful outcomes criteria.

18. How can we best develop a national framework for funding bands and tariffs to achieve our objectives and mitigate unintended consequences and risks?

A national framework for funding bands presents a genuine threat to children and young people with SEND; contrary to affording equity of provision access, it threatens to greatly diminish access for disadvantaged young people.

A banding system which cannot support the individual needs of complex children and young people with SEND - those with co-occurring, or co-morbid presentations - risks placing greater financial burden on our economy in the longer-term, but reducing the necessary and proper investment into such young people at the crucial stage, weakening considerably their outcomes, and limiting their ability to contribute to society through their adult lives.

To restrict access to necessary funding for young people would be grossly short-sighted, and represent kicking the can down the road, appearing to save money in the short-term whilst building a much greater financial problem in a few years' time.

Within the specialist independent schools' sector, outcomes for children and young people with SEND are often extraordinary, and much greater than might have been predicted for an individual child. The success of such provision, and the use of them by local authorities and by privately-funding parents, is entirely dependent on such schools' independence and autonomy in designing a model of provision which works better for their pupils than any other provision. Should it not be of such proven quality, higher-needs pupils would not be placed in such schools, whether by local authorities or by parents.

A framework of funding bands which does not recognise the value of such provision in realising successful outcomes for complex children and young people, would risk destroying a vital component of our country's resources for special educational needs and disabilities. Those impacted would be the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, as well as the tax-payer.

Current arrangements for the funding of pupils with EHCPs in independent schools recognise the full fee within the higher needs block of funding. This is misrepresentative and fails to acknowledge that, were the pupil in a state-maintained school, the first £6,000 would come centrally. This should be taken into account rather than considering the full fee as an additional cost.

Finally, many independent schools deliver support to state-maintained schools, especially in respect of SEND specialism. Were funding arrangements to restrict income, much of that work, valued highly and considered essential in local areas, would have to cease as schools made drastic changes in order to maintain the most crucial elements of their provisions. Such change would serve to weaken considerably local area provision.

19. How can the National SEND Delivery Board work most effectively with local partnerships to ensure the proposals are implemented successfully?’

A priority must be in recognising where there are elements of our system which currently realise genuinely excellent outcomes for children and young people with SEND, and to ensure such successes are protected, fostered and promoted. We must not lose the parts of our system which are having the greatest impact on improving the experiences and outcomes of individual children and young people.

20. What will make the biggest difference to successful implementation of these proposals? What do you see as the barriers to and enablers of success?’

A blind or near-sighted approach to cutting costs is the greatest risk to children and young people with SEND.

Recognising the most effective elements of our system, including the value of the independent schools sector, will support improvement in the experiences of children and young people.

Measures, including financial, which serve to reduce the independence of such provisions, and therefore erode their efficacy in meeting needs and promoting outcomes.

21. What support do local systems and delivery partners need to successfully transition and deliver the new national system?’

All agencies need to be recognised for the value they deliver for children and young people with SEND, and for their families, and for the local area's wealth of expertise and resource, and included in forward planning. Such agencies include the specialist and wider independent schools sector.

22. Is there anything else you would like to say about the proposals in the green paper?’

Improvement to the current system is vital. The extraordinary statistics of families forced to go to tribunal, only for the judgement to rule in their favour, demonstrates the failings of the current arrangements.

There are many examples of excellent practice, where children and young people with SEND achieve remarkable outcomes which enable them to be genuinely independent in their lives, for the great benefit of society.

Neurodiversity is prevalent and can be identified in every classroom in the country. There is a stark lack of understanding and confidence amongst very many classroom teachers, who strongly desire improved training to enable them to understand how to meet the needs of SEND pupils within a mainstream classroom setting. This is the area of expertise of More House School, Frensham, and forms the essence of our programme of outreach training. We believe that for many SEND pupils, their needs can be met in mainstream schools - both in the state-maintained and independent sectors. Supporting teachers to become adept at adjusting their practice in the classroom, such that SEND learners can be accommodated, for the benefit of all pupils, is more appropriate, in many instances, than placing such SEND pupils in more specialist settings, often at exorbitant cost.

The nationally accredited training for teachers and for teaching-assistants, designed and delivered by More House School, Frensham, is supporting both mainstream teachers and SEND pupils in this respect.

Elements of the Schools white paper are concerning. The move towards more generic lesson-planning, encouraging greater one-to-one or small-group support, together with tutoring, risks weakening genuine inclusion in mainstream schools, and may not be cost-efficient. Improving classroom practice to meet neurodivergent needs can improve outcomes for all pupils. More formulaic lesson-delivery risks pushing more SEND pupils out of mainstream schools and into more specialist settings, unnecessarily.

Submitted by J. C. Hetherington BA (Hons) MSc (Ed) QTS, Headmaster, More House School