# Funding crisis deepens challenges for children with SEND as EHCP system strains under pressure



The education of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) remains a complex and deeply personal issue for many families, with ongoing debates about the best way to provide effective support. Properly addressing the diverse needs of children with SEND is crucial to their success, yet the system designed to offer this support often falls short, leaving parents and educators grappling with significant challenges.

One parent describes having two autistic children with markedly different needs: one thrives in a mainstream school setting with adaptations, while the other finds such environments overwhelming to the point of being unmanageable. This parent emphasises that policymakers who advocate abolishing SEND-specific settings need firsthand experience of the pressures schools face daily. The point being made is that genuine inclusion is about understanding and respecting individual needs, not forcibly placing every child into a single educational framework that may be unsuitable for some. In this view, inclusion should be a tailored approach, recognising that the needs of children vary greatly.

Securing an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), which is intended to provide tailored support, is often an arduous process. A professional with experience as a teacher, barrister, and advocate for SEND law recounts how the battle to obtain an EHCP can require considerable tenacity and resilience. Despite clearly defined thresholds under the Children and Families Act 2014, local authorities frequently resist issuing EHCPs, primarily due to funding constraints. This professional's child benefitted greatly from having an EHCP throughout secondary school, enabling academic success and progression to a first-class degree. They caution that undermining SEND support could jeopardise the futures of the next generation.

However, not all agree that the existing EHCP system is fit for purpose. A former governor of two secondary schools criticises the complexity and administrative burden associated with EHCPs, suggesting that the process is overwhelmingly difficult for many parents to navigate. The time delay in securing an EHCP can result in children missing out on vital support during critical early secondary years. This perspective calls for a replacement system that is simpler and more responsive, better meeting the needs of children without imposing heavy bureaucratic hurdles on families or schools.

Financial pressures compound these challenges. Reports indicate that councils in England are increasingly relying on private special schools to support children with SEND, reflecting the strain on local budgets. Despite funding rising to £2.1 billion this academic year—a 15% increase—there is a growing concern that mainstream schools are insufficiently equipped or incentivised to accommodate pupils with complex needs. A study has revealed stagnant educational outcomes for children with SEND over the past decade, even as the costs of provision have soared, signalling a looming financial crisis.

Further analysis highlights a systemic unsustainability in funding for SEND support. The number of children requiring additional help has more than doubled, creating a projected funding shortfall estimated at £3.4 billion by 2027-28. This financial deficit discourages local authorities from fully supporting EHCP applications, exacerbating the difficulties families face. Reform advocates argue for urgent changes that both address funding gaps and encourage mainstream schools to increase their capacity to support SEND pupils effectively.

The process of obtaining an EHCP involves requesting an assessment from the local authority and providing evidence of the child's needs. Guidance from trusted sources stresses that this process should ideally be completed within 20 weeks. However, delays are commonplace, and the administrative complexity can prove daunting. This situation often leaves families in a state of uncertainty, impacting the continuity and quality of support for their children.

Ultimately, the conversation around SEND education reflects a tension between ideals of inclusion and the practical realities of provision and funding. While the principle of inclusion is widely accepted, its implementation must be nuanced and flexible to accommodate individual needs. Policymakers face the challenge of balancing fiscal responsibility with upholding the educational rights of children with SEND. Ensuring adequate, tailored support is not only a matter of compliance but a crucial factor in enabling these children to thrive and reach their full potential.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/jul/13/proper-support-for-children-with-special-educational-needs-can-lead-to-successful-outcomes), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/jul/13/proper-support-for-children-with-special-educational-needs-can-lead-to-successful-outcomes)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/jul/13/proper-support-for-children-with-special-educational-needs-can-lead-to-successful-outcomes)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/jul/13/proper-support-for-children-with-special-educational-needs-can-lead-to-successful-outcomes)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/jul/13/proper-support-for-children-with-special-educational-needs-can-lead-to-successful-outcomes)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/ffed4e97-91ab-462f-9da3-f3907649a4d3), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/02de008f-4640-4839-bda5-851c4743581e)
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* Paragraph 7 – [[6]](https://www.sense.org.uk/information-and-advice/life-stages/childhood-and-school/send/ehcps/getting-an-ehcp/), [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zfqmvj6)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/jul/13/proper-support-for-children-with-special-educational-needs-can-lead-to-successful-outcomes), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/jul/13/proper-support-for-children-with-special-educational-needs-can-lead-to-successful-outcomes)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/jul/13/proper-support-for-children-with-special-educational-needs-can-lead-to-successful-outcomes> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/jul/13/proper-support-for-children-with-special-educational-needs-can-lead-to-successful-outcomes> - An article from The Guardian discussing the importance of proper support for children with special educational needs (SEN) to achieve successful outcomes. It highlights personal experiences and challenges faced by parents and educators in securing adequate support, emphasizing the need for understanding and appropriate action to cater to diverse needs.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/ffed4e97-91ab-462f-9da3-f3907649a4d3> - A Financial Times report detailing how councils in England are increasingly relying on private schools to support students with special educational needs, with a 15% rise in funding to £2.1bn this academic year. The article highlights the strain on council budgets and the need for reform to incentivize mainstream schools to accommodate more pupils with complex needs.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/02de008f-4640-4839-bda5-851c4743581e> - This Financial Times article discusses the financial challenges faced by councils in England in providing for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). A study reveals stagnant educational outcomes over the past decade amidst rising costs, warning of a looming financial crisis and the need for urgent reforms and increased funding.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/d8d9323a-450f-47b5-acf9-105959837259> - A Financial Times report from the National Audit Office concluding that England's system for supporting children with special educational needs is financially unsustainable. Despite increased funding, the number of children requiring additional support has more than doubled, leading to significant financial deficits and a predicted £3.4bn funding gap by 2027-28.
6. <https://www.sense.org.uk/information-and-advice/life-stages/childhood-and-school/send/ehcps/getting-an-ehcp/> - A guide from Sense UK on how to apply for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) for a child. It outlines the process, including requesting an assessment from the local authority, providing evidence of the child's needs, and the timeline for receiving the final EHCP, which should not exceed 20 weeks.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zfqmvj6> - A BBC Bitesize article explaining the process of obtaining an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) for a child. It details the steps involved, including applying to the local education authority for a needs assessment, the information required, and the timeline for receiving the final EHCP, which should be within 20 weeks.