# MPs call for systemic overhaul to embed SEND support in mainstream education



A cross-party group of MPs has issued a compelling call for the Government to embed special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision firmly within mainstream education, advocating for it to become a holistic responsibility embraced by entire schools. This approach is aimed at addressing systemic issues that have left many children and their families navigating a fragmented and under-resourced SEND system, with increasing reliance on Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs).

The Education Committee's recent report highlights the need for a profound cultural shift in how SEND is approached, including significant investment in the workforces across both education and health services. The MPs emphasise that the current passivity of the health sector, particularly the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and NHS services, contributes to fractured support and obstructs progress. This divide hampers timely access to therapies, assessments, and appropriate joint commissioning, leaving families feeling isolated and without adequate support.

Since the introduction of the Children and Families Act 2014, the number of children identified with SEND has risen markedly—from 1.3 million to 1.7 million. Among these, over 1.2 million received SEN support in 2024/25, while nearly half a million children had EHCPs. Autism is the most common primary need, affecting about one in three pupils with an EHCP, followed by speech, language, and communication disorders. Despite these figures, many families are pushed toward seeking EHCPs because less formal support levels often lack resources and accountability, even though EHCPs themselves operate within a system that is not fully reliable.

The MPs caution against removing EHCPs from the system, citing evidence that inclusive mainstream schools and multi-academy trusts which genuinely meet diverse needs tend to generate fewer EHCPs. The SEND Tribunal remains a crucial mechanism for accountability, and the Committee calls for it to be empowered to issue legally binding recommendations to health services. The Government is urged to conduct focussed interventions with local authorities that repeatedly fail to meet statutory duties, learning why failures persist and supporting these areas effectively.

The report elucidates the three graduated levels of SEND support in education: ordinarily available provision, SEN support, and EHCPs. A major concern is that many families do not receive adequate support at the lower two levels due to insufficient resources and a lack of clear accountability structures. This gap forces families to seek EHCPs as a last resort, highlighting systemic weaknesses.

To rectify these issues, the Committee recommends that the Department for Education (DfE) publish a clear, evidence-based national definition of ‘inclusive’ education, alongside a unified framework for ordinarily available provision and SEN support. This framework should contain practical examples and guidance tailored to educators to ensure consistent, quality provision across settings. Furthermore, statutory requirements should be established detailing the minimum resources, specialist expertise, and equipment every educational setting must have to deliver effective SEND support.

A whole-school approach is fundamental to achieving genuine inclusivity, with recommendations to equip all frontline staff with training and resources to meet diverse SEND needs. Addressing chronic shortages of educational psychologists and allied health professionals—such as speech and language therapists and occupational therapists—is also vital. MPs advocate for a review of the national funding formula for schools to better reflect local variations in SEND prevalence, deprivation, and transport costs. The current £6,000 per pupil provision is deemed inadequate and must be automatically uprated annually in line with inflation, with funds ringfenced for SEND support.

Education Committee Chair Helen Hayes MP outlined the urgency of these reforms, stressing that the SEND system is broken and requires root-and-branch transformation. She cited examples such as the Canadian province of Ontario and schools in Norfolk, where inclusive practices are actively embedded from the start of a child’s schooling. Hayes emphasised that SEND must become a core responsibility for every frontline educational professional, supported by robust, national accountability frameworks and early intervention measures that reduce the need for EHCPs.

Responses from stakeholders underline the deep-seated challenges. Jolanta Lasota, Chief Executive of Ambitious about Autism, highlighted the erosion of trust in the SEND system, the high incidence of lost learning among autistic young people, and the impact on families, including job losses. She welcomed the report’s focus on mandatory SEND training for teachers and its protection of existing legal rights such as EHCPs. Similarly, Mel Merritt from the National Autistic Society echoed calls for urgent, meaningful reforms and greater accountability across the SEND system.

This report forms part of a broader inquiry by the Education Committee, which encompasses stabilising SEND provision in the short term and achieving sustainable improvements to outcomes up to the age of 25. The inquiry also addresses the role of health professionals in SEND support, recognising that without greater integration and accountability—particularly from Integrated Care Boards (ICBs)—progress will remain hampered.

The findings resonate with local reports, such as one from Suffolk Coastal MP Jenny Riddell-Carpenter, which reveals more than half of children with SEND in rural constituencies are missing school due to unmet needs. This underscores the call for increased specialist school places to reduce costly out-of-area placements and home-to-school transport expenses.

Ultimately, the Education Committee warns that without decisive government action and appropriate investment, the SEND crisis will deepen, perpetuating adversarial experiences for children, families, and schools. The report advocates for collaboration, clarity, and commitment to embedding inclusion across education and health sectors—ensuring every child with SEND can access the quality education they deserve close to home.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1-3 – [[1]](https://www.learningdisabilitytoday.co.uk/news/education-and-health-must-work-together-to-solve-send-crisis-mps-say/), [[2]](https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/203/education-committee/news/209313/solving-the-send-crisis-report-calls-for-culture-shift-and-funding-to-make-mainstream-education-genuinely-inclusive/), [[3]](https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/203/education-committee/news/204487/solving-the-send-crisis-)
* Paragraph 4-6 – [[1]](https://www.learningdisabilitytoday.co.uk/news/education-and-health-must-work-together-to-solve-send-crisis-mps-say/), [[5]](https://committees.parliament.uk/event/24040)
* Paragraph 7-9 – [[1]](https://www.learningdisabilitytoday.co.uk/news/education-and-health-must-work-together-to-solve-send-crisis-mps-say/), [[2]](https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/203/education-committee/news/209313/solving-the-send-crisis-report-calls-for-culture-shift-and-funding-to-make-mainstream-education-genuinely-inclusive/), [[7]](https://educationbusinessuk.net/features/finding-solutions-send-provision-crisis)
* Paragraph 10-11 – [[1]](https://www.learningdisabilitytoday.co.uk/news/education-and-health-must-work-together-to-solve-send-crisis-mps-say/)
* Paragraph 12-13 – [[1]](https://www.learningdisabilitytoday.co.uk/news/education-and-health-must-work-together-to-solve-send-crisis-mps-say/), [[3]](https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/203/education-committee/news/204487/solving-the-send-crisis-), [[5]](https://committees.parliament.uk/event/24040)
* Paragraph 14-15 – [[1]](https://www.learningdisabilitytoday.co.uk/news/education-and-health-must-work-together-to-solve-send-crisis-mps-say/), [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce398x8p25no), [[7]](https://educationbusinessuk.net/features/finding-solutions-send-provision-crisis)
* Paragraph 16 – [[1]](https://www.learningdisabilitytoday.co.uk/news/education-and-health-must-work-together-to-solve-send-crisis-mps-say/), [[2]](https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/203/education-committee/news/209313/solving-the-send-crisis-report-calls-for-culture-shift-and-funding-to-make-mainstream-education-genuinely-inclusive/), [[3]](https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/203/education-committee/news/204487/solving-the-send-crisis-)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.learningdisabilitytoday.co.uk/news/education-and-health-must-work-together-to-solve-send-crisis-mps-say/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/203/education-committee/news/209313/solving-the-send-crisis-report-calls-for-culture-shift-and-funding-to-make-mainstream-education-genuinely-inclusive/> - The Education Committee's report advocates for integrating special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) into mainstream education, making it a collective responsibility. It urges the government to invest in both education and health workforces to address the SEND crisis and enhance collaboration between sectors. The report suggests that this cultural shift will reduce the need for complex, costly education, health, and care plans (EHCPs), leading to sustainable financial management for schools and local authorities.
3. <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/203/education-committee/news/204487/solving-the-send-crisis-> - The Education Committee has initiated a comprehensive inquiry to find solutions to the crisis in special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision. The inquiry focuses on stabilising the system in the short term and achieving long-term sustainability with improved outcomes for children and young people. It examines all phases of education and development, from early years through to the age of 25, and seeks evidence from various stakeholders to inform its work.
4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce398x8p25no> - A report by Jenny Riddell-Carpenter, MP for Suffolk Coastal, reveals that over 50% of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in her constituency have missed school due to unmet needs. The report, based on a survey of 97 families, highlights significant challenges in SEND provision and recommends opening additional specialist provisions, collaborating with rural primary schools to increase capacity, conducting a national review of the SEND crisis, and securing sustainable funding commitments.
5. <https://committees.parliament.uk/event/24040> - The Education Committee is examining the role of healthcare professionals in diagnosing and supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The inquiry focuses on the challenges faced by healthcare professionals such as occupational therapists and speech and language therapists, as well as educational psychologists. It also looks at how the NHS interacts with education and local government sectors and how health services can be better held to account.
6. <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/203/education-committee/news/114698/> - The Education Committee has published the Government's response to its report on special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The report, published by the Committee of the last Parliament in October 2019, followed an 18-month inquiry into Government reforms aimed at placing children and young people at the heart of the SEND system. The Committee has agreed to undertake further work on SEND and follow-up the Government response with the Secretary of State when Parliament returns after the summer recess.
7. <https://educationbusinessuk.net/features/finding-solutions-send-provision-crisis> - The Education Committee's inquiry into the SEND crisis focuses on increasing the capacity of SEND provision, including assessing ways to help local councils plan sufficient SEND school places and examining capital investment in this area. The inquiry also considers reforms to the way SEND is funded, aiming to achieve financial stability both in the short and longer term across the SEND system. Additionally, MPs will examine the Education Health and Care (EHC) Plan system and look for potential alternatives without reducing the level of support available.