



To: Local authority Chief Exec, ICB Chief Exec

cc. Local authority CFO or s151 officer, DCS, and ICB Executive Lead(s)

15 December 2025

Dear

Thank you once again for your continued efforts to improve support and opportunities for children and young people. Every child in our country deserves the best possible start in life – backed by education and care systems that meet their needs before issues escalate, where every child feels like they belong, and which set them up for life and work. We are committed to raising standards and unlocking opportunity for all children.

Further to the Secretary of State for Education's letter to the Education Select Committee on 22 October, the government will publish the full schools white paper in the new year, building on the work already done to create a system that's rooted in inclusion, where every child receives high-quality support early on and can thrive in their local school.

We want all schools to be inclusive by design, so children in every corner of the country can have their needs met in their community. That is why the Department for Education is prioritising investment in specialist and adapted places, with last week's announcement confirming at least £3 billion investment over the next four years to create 50,000 SEND places in mainstream schools across England. This builds on the £740 million we've already invested to create 10,000 places to deliver adaptations and expand specialist units.

We know that delivering lasting change will take collective commitment and sustained effort from all of us, working together to build the inclusive system our children deserve. We are committed to supporting you to do this.

We are keen to work with local authorities towards a system that enables every child to achieve and thrive. In the new year, following publication of the schools white paper, we will ask every local area to produce a Local SEND Reform Plan, setting out how they will move to a new special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system built on the 5 [principles set out by the Secretary of State](#): early, local, fair, effective and shared.

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.

We will also ask, as part of the Local SEND Reform Plan, for more regular data submissions, focused on the key indicators of improvement. These will form a vital foundation for implementing SEND reforms in a way that reflects the unique contexts of local areas and is underpinned by data and evidence. Full details of expectations of these plans will be published alongside the schools white paper. The government will also set out further details on our support for local authorities with historic and accruing deficits and conditions for accessing such support through the upcoming Local Government Finance Settlement. Support provided to local authorities will be linked to assurance that they are taking steps to make that system a reality, in conjunction with government confirming the detail of SEND reform.

Local authorities should not wait for these details to assess their current plans to ensure they are realising best outcomes and value for young people. Like all areas of spend, we continue to expect local authorities to make sure they are doing all they can locally to manage their

system effectively, ensuring the money is being spent in line with best practice. This is a joint effort, with shared responsibility between government, local authorities, health partners, and schools. System wide change will take time, and our children and young people only get one chance. We must therefore begin this essential work now and your leadership and partnership is critical to this.

It is crucial that you use this time to work together as local system partners to agree the key actions that you will take now to prepare your system for change. For all local authorities, it is crucial that you are working with education providers in your area to ensure that your offer is high-quality. For those of you with special and AP free school pipeline schools, we expect you to be talking to your trusts and working with them to develop your local offer – recognising the expertise that high-quality trusts can bring. We are introducing an early version of the Local Partnership Maturity Assessment Tool – a practical resource, developed through the Change programme. We strongly recommend that local area partnerships use it to assess the maturity of their current practice, and plan the changes needed to strengthen their local system. This will be an integral part of the Local SEND Reform Plan.

We recommend that you:

- bring your local partnership together to start planning the changes needed to strengthen your local SEND system
- review your data and agree a baseline for your current system performance
- use the Local Partnership Maturity Assessment Tool to assess the maturity of your current practice across education, health and care
- draw on inspection outcomes, learning from departmental programmes, and sector best practice to ensure you are working towards the delivery of high-quality services that are underpinned by the five principles for SEND reform

To help with this, we have attached with this letter:

- The Local Partnership Maturity Assessment Tool (Annex A) and guidance (Annex B)
- Enabling inclusion – starting points for local areas (Annex C)
- a summary of learnings and insights from the Department for Education's Change Programme (Annex D)

Support with preparations

We aim to collaborate with local authorities to ensure every pound spent in the SEND system delivers maximum benefit for children. That is why we are disseminating best practice and case studies from previous programmes focussed on efficient spending, such as Safety Valve and Delivering Better Value, and providing all local authorities with SEND and financial advisers to help consider how these learnings can be applied. These advisers will also play a key role in supporting you to prepare and plan for reform, helping you to review your data, embed best practice and drive progress toward the delivery of high-quality, inclusive services for children and young people. They will also share the priority metrics we recommend you use to baseline your performance.

Working alongside Department for Education officials and in partnership with NHS England, they will engage with you in the coming weeks to consolidate what this means for your local area and agree the best way to support you. In addition to your usual contacts, your DfE Head of Vulnerable Children's Unit (VCU) is André Ellis, who can be contacted at Andre.Ellis@education.gov.uk

We will create opportunities for local authorities to share good practice and collaborate through Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance (RIIA) forums. The Local Government Association (LGA) will provide additional support to collect examples of high-quality, inclusive SEND practice and insights from change programme areas and share them through these forums.

We will continue to support learning from partnership projects such as the Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) and Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS).

We are acutely aware that our reforms to SEND are some of the most critical this government will deliver, and that is why it is vital we take the time to listen and get it right. We know you are working hard to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND in your area, in a challenging system, and we want to work with you to achieve the best outcomes for them and their families.

Thank you, again, for all of your hard work. We look forward to continuing the work to secure the best outcomes for children and young people and their families.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Amanda Doyle OBE

National Director for Primary Care and
Community Services and SEND executive
lead, NHS England

Dr Tim Coulson CBE

Director General, Regions Group
Department for Education

Annex A: Local Partnership Maturity Assessment Tool (see separate attachment)

Annex B: Local Partnership Maturity Assessment Guidance (see separate attachment)

Annex C: Enabling inclusion – starting points for local areas

Enabling inclusion across a local area

Starting points for strengthening the support for mainstream settings to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND:

3 areas of focus	Starting points for local areas
<p>Foundations of effective and trusting local partnership for inclusion</p> <p>Putting in place the system conditions for leadership and governance across the local area to ensure that changes are based on co-production across partners, including the voices of children, young people, and their parents and carers.</p>	<p>Review and strengthen local SEND and AP partnership arrangements by completing the Local Partnership Maturity Assessment Tool and use results to help prioritise further actions.</p>
<p>Shared ways of working to direct resources to needs across the local area</p> <p>Align operations across the local area to reduce fragmentation, ensuring partners work towards a shared vision for inclusion. This includes integrating data,</p>	<p>Build a shared understanding of local workforce capacity and development needs across partners</p> <p>Build a shared picture of current and future needs across the local area and how these can best be met</p> <p>Establish a shared vision supported by a framework of outcomes and accountabilities for partners</p>

workforce strategy, funding and establishing a clear operating model for supporting settings.

Develop a **shared model for settings to access specialist support**, advice, and training

Support for mainstream settings and practitioners to meet needs

Shift focus from reactive statutory support toward collaborative work with early years settings, schools and further education providers. Create a shared understanding of and commitment to inclusive practice, while building system capacity to identify needs and provide support.

Facilitate collaboration between settings, including outreach from specialist settings and providers

Develop **common expectations and resources** for ordinarily available inclusive practice

Ensure universal and targeted **support from specialists is well-targeted** to build capacity for early support

Develop a **consistent data-informed view of inclusion at setting level** to inform support and challenge

Annex D: Insights from the Change Programme

[Change Programme learning and insights from the REACH Consortium](#)