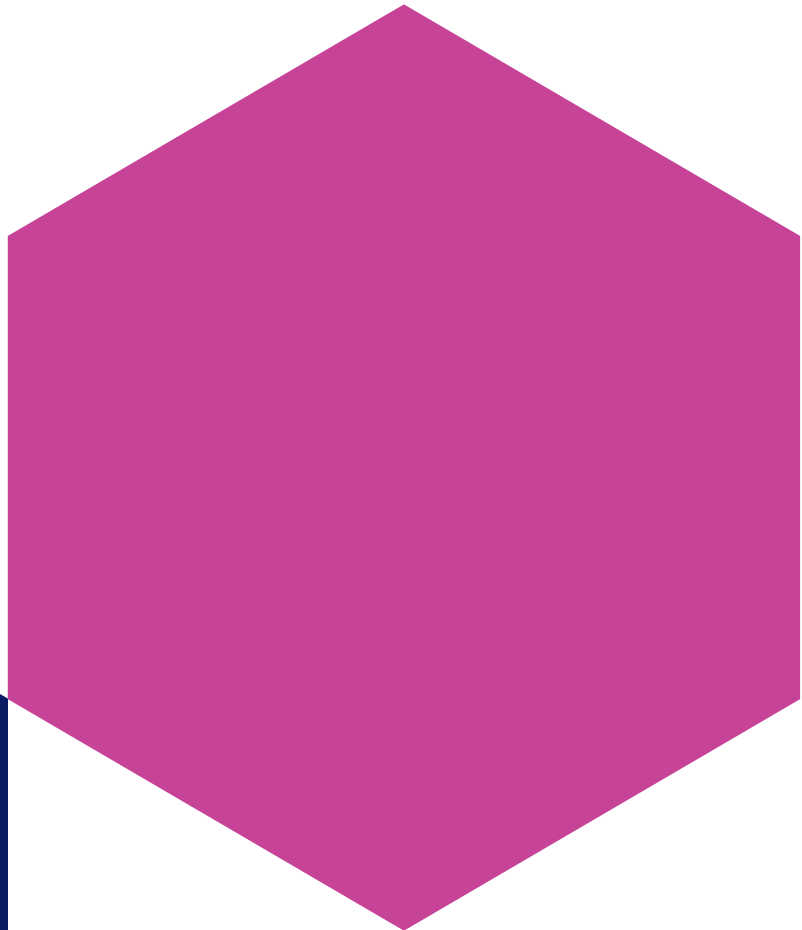
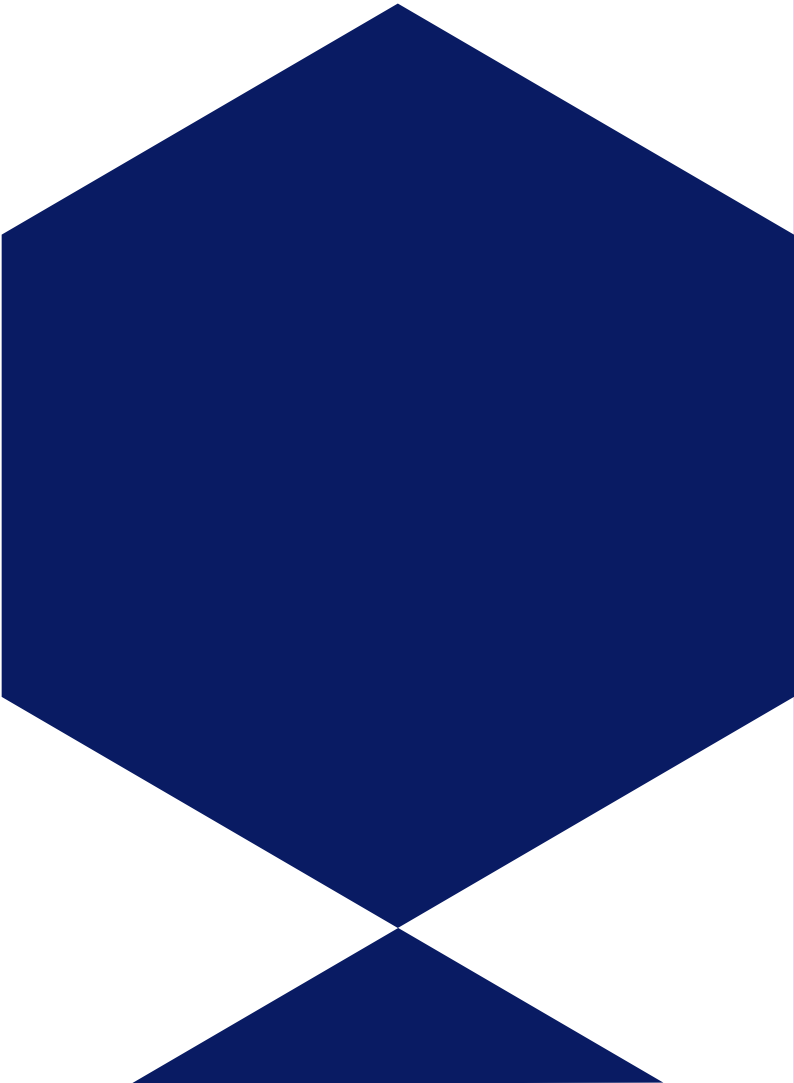




END TO END REVIEW OF SEN REPORT

Department of Education
Workstreams



Department of
Education

www.education-ni.gov.uk

This report presents information that was accurate and up to date at the time of writing.

Background

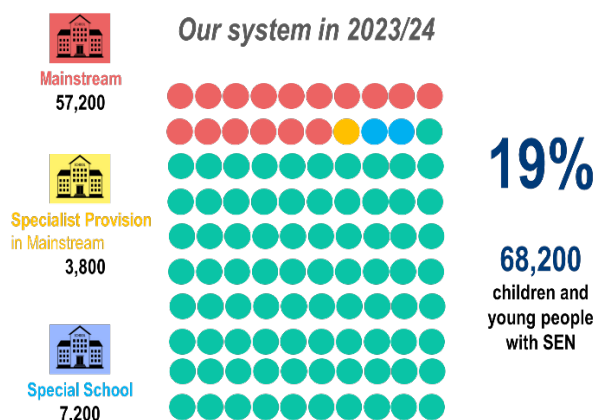
1. The Department of Education's (DE) Special Educational Needs (SEN) policy is set out through a legislative and statutory guidance framework that is –

'to identify, assess and make provision for children with special educational needs'
2. The term SEN is defined in legislation as "a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made"¹. A learning difficulty is described in the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 "where a child has significantly greater difficulty in learning than most children their age and/or has a disability which hinders use of everyday educational facilities".
3. Concerns regarding the availability, targeting and effectiveness of SEN supports across Northern Ireland's education system were identified more than a decade ago, leading to a DE review of SEN policy and ultimately leading to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016² which received Royal Assent in 2016. Unfortunately, due to a number of factors, full commencement of the SEND Act and the introduction of new SEN regulations and revised Code of Practice (CoP) have been delayed as their commencement requires affirmation by the Northern Ireland Assembly.
4. Although that legislative process has been delayed since 2017, over the same period a range of scrutiny reports have clearly articulated the pressures on the system. More recently in 2023, the Independent Review of SEN Services and Process by IPSOS³ also reported significant deficiencies in the system.



Context

5. One in five children and young people in the education system have SEN, equating to 19% of the school population. Of this, almost 27,000 (7.6%) of the whole school population have a statutory statement of SEN and 11.6% are recorded at SEN stages 1 or 2 of the new draft CoP. This represents an increase in the proportion of stated pupils (rising from 6.8% in 2022/23) and slight reduction in the proportion of pupils at SEN stages 1 or 2 (decreasing from 11.9%). The total expenditure on SEN equates to circa £541m, as per March Outturn 2023/24.
6. Figures detailed within the IPSOS report identified that the cost of employing classroom assistants reached £127.7m in 2021; with the cost of providing support for children with a statement of SEN exceeding £216m in 2023/24.



1 [Education \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1996](#)
 2 [Special Educational Needs and Disability Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2016](#)
 3 [Ipsos report](#)

End to End Review

7. The IPSOS report in 2023 stated:

“Whilst evidence suggests that the actions and projects that are set out in the Education Authority’s SEND Transformation Programme (SEND TP) are relevant and necessary to improve the delivery of SEN processes and services, the Programme has been relatively slow to become established and some of the projects have long timeframes. Furthermore, as it is currently planned, the SEND TP is heavily dependent on the recruitment of staff, this can create significant HR and administrative challenges for the EA and can extend timescales if the right staff cannot be recruited. Given the level of demand for services and the discontent voiced by those who are engaged with the SEN system (primarily, schools, parents and advocacy groups), the EA should examine ways in which some of the actions could be brought forward and evidence of progress can be shared.”

8. A recommendation from the report was:

“Within a year, DE needs to set in place a plan that will set out the actions that will be delivered to implement transformational change to SEN and the wider education system within reasonable timescales.

The plan should be led by a senior Civil Servant who is directly accountable to the Minister ... Senior Responsible Owners should be identified for each recommendation, as well as timescales for delivery and the role and responsibilities of each agency who will be involved in its implementation.”

9. In response to the IPSOS recommendation, the Department in collaboration with the Education Authority (EA), embarked on an End to End (E2E) review of SEN in early 2023 with a 12–18 month timeframe. It incorporated the work of the EA SEND TP in delivering early actions, as well as implementing work streams comprising in-depth policy review and enablers.

10. The Department’s Corporate Plan⁴ reaffirms our focus on the need of ‘EVERY child’ through a child-centric approach that results in effective policy in terms of both design and implementation. The Department’s vision for all children is that **“EVERY child and young person is happy, learning and succeeding”**. This must be no different for children and young people with SEN and/or disability.

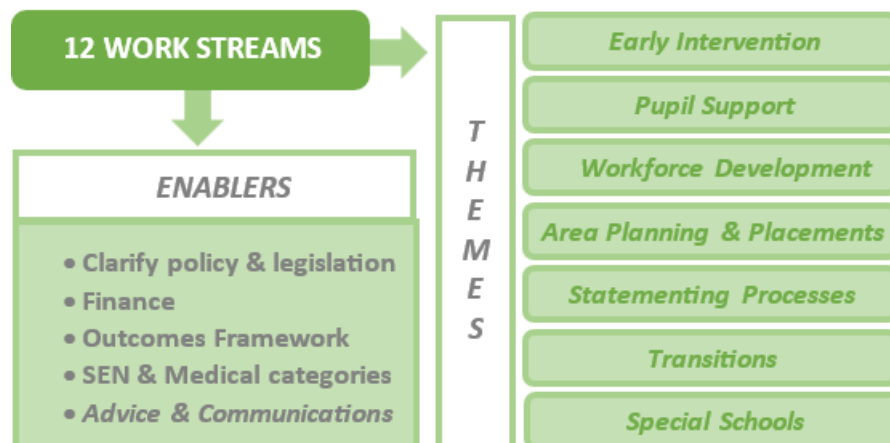


11. Our vision for the E2E review is that “children and young people with SEN/D get the **right support** from the **right people** at the **right time** and in the **right place**.”

- **Right Support** means having high quality, efficient and effective support that is evidence-based.
- **Right People** means having confident and highly skilled teaching and non-teaching staff who can access additional support to complement and enhance their practice.
- **Right Time** means effective early identification of needs and early intervention to meet those needs.
- **Right Place** means appropriate and timely placements that effectively meet the needs of the child and provide an appropriate learning environment.

4 [Every CHILD DE Corporate Plan 2023–28 | Department of Education](#)

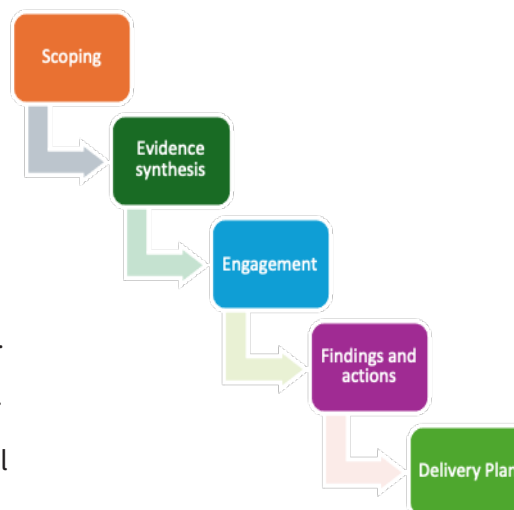
12. The E2E review dissected the SEN system into 12 workstreams, drawing on the evidence and recommendations already available from existing reviews, engagement with external, professional expertise and identifying areas for further work and improvement. The workstreams broadly represented the end to end journey of SEN from policy through to operationalisation, implementation and finally, outcomes for children.



13. The aim of the E2E was to address gaps and explore alternative options to deliver transformational change in a timelier and more cost-effective manner. More importantly, there was a need to focus on outcomes for children and young people with SEN and to ensure that the delivery model supports them to be happy, learning and succeeding.

14. Each workstream followed a similar approach:

- Clarification and scoping.
- Collation and synthesis of the existing evidence, mapping of existing recommendations to workstreams.
- Engagement with stakeholders, professional and academic expertise.
- Findings and actions to deliver transformational change.
- Culminating in a SEN Reform Agenda and Delivery Plan.



15. The workstreams ran concurrently and followed an initial timeline of 12–18 months.⁵

16. The E2E review was structured around the need for collaboration and reflective consideration of the issues at a system level. Discussions with stakeholders were based on the following principles:

- Openness and honesty.
- A spirit of partnership and collaboration.
- Outcomes-focused with the needs of our children and young people and other beneficiaries in mind.
- Willingness to reflect on our own approaches and practice as partners delivering different aspects along the policy/delivery continuum.

⁵ Progress was paused for some workstreams (Early Intervention, SEN Placements and Area Planning, Pupil Support Services, Statementing, and Outcomes Framework) due to critical priorities and resource pressures.

Scoping

17. This phase of the review focused initially on establishing governance and oversight structures that could provide strategic direction, guidance and subject matter expertise. The following groups were established:

Governance Structures

- **SEN Strategic Oversight Group** – chaired by DE's Permanent Secretary and including representatives from the EA, Department of Health (DoH), Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), Higher Education Institutes and schools.
- **DE/EA SEN Programme Board** – co-chaired by the DE Deputy Secretary of Education Policy and Children Services Group (EPCS) and EA Director of Children and Young People Services (CYPS). Membership included representatives from EA, ETI, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), DoH, Trade Unions, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), the Academic and Professional Advisory Group (APAG) and the EA's Programme Reference Group (PRG).
- **Academic and Professional Advisory Group (APAG)** – membership of the group included representatives from academia and practitioners from Queens University Belfast, Stranmillis University, University of Ulster, St. Mary's University College, Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA), ETI, and Educational Psychologists NI. Representatives from the EA and DoH were also on the group.

Workstreams

18. As mentioned above, each workstream broadly represented the end to end journey of SEN from policy through to implementation and finally to improved outcomes for children. An initial piece of work was undertaken to map all of the scrutiny report recommendations against each workstream so that each workstream lead could become familiar with the content of each scrutiny report and the context in which the recommendations had been made. This aided in identifying any gaps and in scoping out specifics for each workstream as well as identifying links and interdependencies to other workstreams including the EA SEND TP.
19. Key challenges identified via contextual evidence included difficulties accessing early intervention provision due to the current referral and assessment process; accessibility and effectiveness of the specialist SEN pupil support services within the EA, the need to be more agile and child-centred; the need for better planning in relation to placing children; and the lack of continual professional development for teachers and support staff.

Evidence synthesis

20. This phase involved gathering information on effective practice in other jurisdictions and in other countries. It also involved in-depth desk-based analyses to understand what information/data was already available i.e., internet articles, journals, reports etc. Similar to researching what is happening in other jurisdictions, workstream leads also explored what information is available on alternative models specific to their area, in terms of what worked well, what hasn't worked, and formulating initial ideas of how improvements could be made to deliver better outcomes.
21. This phase was crucial to the planning for stakeholder engagement as it shaped the information required from key stakeholders i.e., parents, children and young people, schools etc. It was essential that stakeholder engagement moved beyond well-rehearsed issues and instead emphasised the development of constructive, solution-focused dialogue.

Engagement

22. In preparation for engaging directly with key stakeholders, each workstream lead reviewed the engagement already undertaken, and the outcome, to identify what further information was needed, from whom, and what method of engagement was most appropriate. This phase focused on the future and the development of potential solutions to solving well known issues.
23. A dedicated webpage⁶ ([End to End Review of SEN](#)) on the DE website was also developed allowing anyone with an interest in SEN to find out what was happening with the review and to register to get involved in the review.
24. An extensive programme of stakeholder engagement was undertaken including workshops for children and young people to ascertain their views on the support provided to them, with schools to understand how they support children and young people with SEN, and how staff are supported. Individual school visits were also undertaken to discuss the deployment of classroom assistants, pupil support services, SEN placements, SEN and medical categories, and transition process for those children with a statement of SEN. A series of workshops and focus groups (some led by parent groups such as SEN Reform NI) with various stakeholders were facilitated covering a range of workstreams to seek views and solutions including with parents/carers and with specific visioning events for special schools. The APAG and PRG combined to engage on the development of an outcomes framework for SEN transformation.
25. Below is a snapshot of experiences voiced during the engagement phase of the review depicting a balance of both negative and positive views expressed.



⁶ This webpage will no longer be updated as the End to End Review has concluded.

26. A Moving Forward Together event was held in January 2024 to bring all stakeholders together and provide an update on the E2E review. This event outlined the work carried out to date, next steps and involved key presentations from schools, academics, practitioners and professionals. The event also launched the E2E plan on a page which synthesised the E2E review into an infographic for stakeholders.

Findings and Actions

27. The findings and analyses generated by the 12 workstreams have led to the development of key actions⁷, brigaded under the thematic outcomes of **right support, right people, right time and right place** which has culminated in a SEN Reform Agenda and associated Delivery Plan.
28. Annex A of this report provides a summary of Scope, Key issues and Next Steps for each of the workstreams.
29. While the E2E review has concluded, this does not mean that engagement has halted. A number of workstreams developed collaborative working groups, and engagement will continue throughout the period of the delivery plan with these key partners.
30. Prior to the E2E review, a working group was established in 2021 to review the workload associated with SEN provision which stemmed from the Teachers' Pay and Workload Agreement. A final report from the Group was produced in December 2022 and contained 57 recommendations agreed by the working group, 11 of which members did not reach agreement on and two that were not deemed within the scope of the review. These recommendations and associated implementation will be considered further as part of the SEN Reform Delivery Plan and engagement with Trade Unions will continue throughout the lifetime of the Delivery Plan.

Delivery Plan

31. Delivery of the Plan will be led by DE, however it will require significant collaboration and partnership working with identified statutory delivery partners, VCS, and stakeholders with lived experience. The Delivery Plan contains a large number of actions to fully reflect the outworkings of the E2E review and displays the breadth of issues that have been considered under the remit of the review.

Next Steps

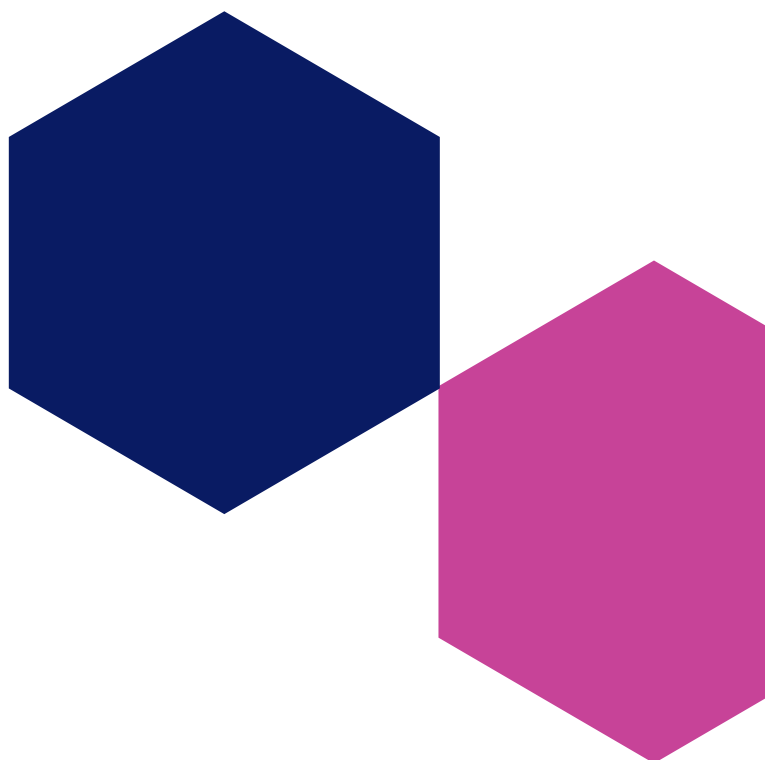
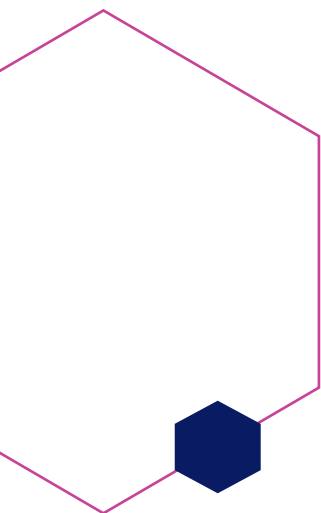
32. A SEN Reform Agenda has been developed that sets the context for reform of the SEN system including how this aligns with Executive priorities in the Programme for Government (PfG)⁸, the increase in required supports, complexity of needs and articulating the unsustainable budget trajectory should transformation not take place. The five year Delivery Plan supports the SEN Reform Agenda and will require significant investment.
33. Restructuring of the Inclusion directorate in DE will be required to move to delivery mode with the establishment of a SEN Reform Delivery team. Consideration is also being given to the governance structures that are required to oversee implementation of the Delivery Plan

⁷ There are a small number of actions that will be taken forward as business as usual.

⁸ [Programme for Government 2024–2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most' – Documents | The Northern Ireland Executive](#)

to ensure that appropriate oversight and direction can be provided, subject matter experts are effectively utilised, reporting arrangements are streamlined and duplication removed. A clear accountability and monitoring framework will accompany the delivery plan to ensure that investment is monitored, impact is measured and outcomes are improved.

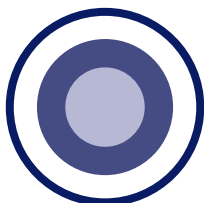
- 34. The EA SEND TP has been a key element of the E2E Review and will continue under the Delivery Plan and will be subject to the overarching delivery plan governance and accountability framework.



Annex A

Workstream Closure Summaries

Outcomes Framework & Measuring Progress



Scope

This workstream built on the work detailed in the EA TP's Outline Business Case and looked at other jurisdictions to understand how development and progression is measured for children with SEN across mainstream and special schools, leading to the development of an outcomes framework for children with SEN.



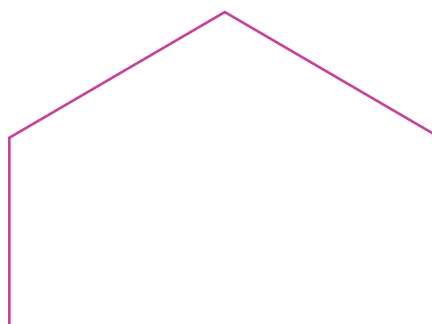
Key issues identified

- Lack of data as to how the department is doing in relation to its commitments under PfG and the Executive's Children and Young Peoples' Strategy.
- No consistent departmental view as to how 'successful delivery' is measured.

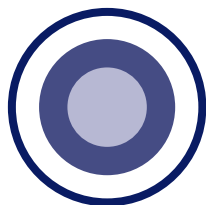


Next Steps

- Baseline measures will be articulated.
- A continuous series of 'turning the curve' exercises will take place throughout the delivery plan timespan.
- All future investment for SEN will have clear links to outcomes/ benefits.
- Outcomes Framework to be developed and published as part of the SEN Reform Agenda.



Clarification of Policy & Legislation



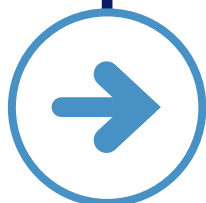
Scope

This workstream examined the existing SEN policy and legislative framework to ensure that the DE policy on SEN is clearly articulated, communicated, and understood by all. It also considered if the SEND ACT (Northern Ireland) 2016 addressed the known issues around SEN.



Key issues identified:

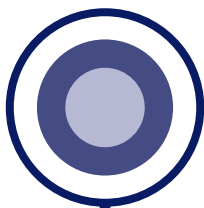
- Delays bringing forward new SEN Regulations.
- Complicated and outdated legislation.
- A required recalibration of the original policy intention in relation to the provision of statements of SEN.
- A need to consider ambitions set out in PfG and how these cascade to the DE Corporate Plan.
- A need for improved intra-departmental working to review and develop policy with a SEN / Inclusion lens.
- A need for research and evidence-based policy development.
- Necessary improvements to cross-departmental working.
- Improved use of Equality Screening/Childs Rights Impact Assessments/ Rural Impact Assessments.



Next Steps

- Development of an Inclusion Policy.
- Current SEN Policy published to set out current expectations in relation to the continuum of SEN provision.
- Recalibration of the policy intent in relation to the proportion of pupils requiring statements of SEN.
- Utilisation of Arms Length Bodies (ALBs) specifically Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and MCA to add value to and support EA in relation to the delivery of SEN policy objectives.

Finance



Scope

This workstream focused on having a greater understanding of SEN expenditure, and identification of any areas of improvement. A Finance sub-group was established involving both DE and EA Finance teams and policy areas.



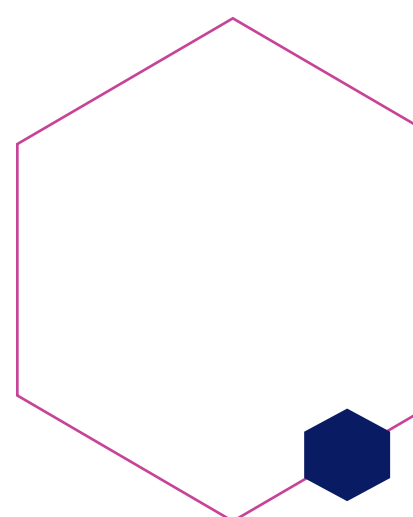
Key issues identified

- More accountability and governance from DE to the EA in relation to the overall dissemination of the block grant.
- Need for a more inclusive approach to the Common Funding Formula.
- Proposed review of the funding model of special schools.
- DE should ensure that the costs of current procurement policy within education is considered as part of the Northern Ireland Assembly Public Accounts Committee Review of Procurement.
- DE should consider links to any perverse incentives in relation to the SEN system as it currently operates.
- Greater transparency in relation to the SEN Expenditure is required.



Next Steps

- Further financial analysis will underpin the development of any new models which emerge as part of the actions from the SEN Reform Agenda.
- Consideration of the drafting of a commission plan direction as part of a governance and accountability framework in relation to Business As Usual SEN expenditure and any additional funding / investment levered for SEN transformation.
- Data development agenda with DoH for early identification of children to support placement and workforce planning.



SEN and Medical Categories

Scope

This workstream involved an examination of the current list of SEN and Medical categories and their application in schools. The workstream also engaged with other jurisdictions to ascertain how they record children with SEN.

Key issues identified

- **Recording of Information**

Not all schools actively use the information which is recorded. Some schools also capture the SEN and medical information on their own systems.

Collective agreement that there was a need to capture this information for purposes such as equality screening, shaping policy, planning for school placements and medical research etc.

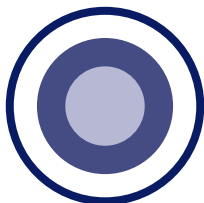
- **Definitions**

Need to ensure that new definitions are being considered and reflected on the register as appropriate.

Next Steps

- More accurate recording on both SEN and Medical registers.
- Unlikely that any changes can be made to the school management system until the new management information system is deployed through the Education Information Solutions Programme (EdIS), however clarification on definitions etc., could be issued via a DE circular.

Advice & Communications



Scope

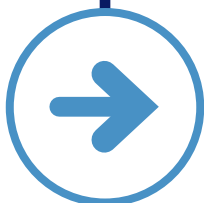
This workstream linked to all other DE workstreams, with elements also taken forward in conjunction with the EA SEND TP.

It also examined the advice provided in relation to SEN from the perspective of children, parents, schools, EA, and DoH, as well as examining progress of the recommendations from the DE SEN Learner Journey.



Key issues identified

- Lack of trust across the system.
- Parents do not feel supported/able to participate in decisions relating to their child.
- There is a need for a more collaborative approach to all decision making.
- Children and young people must be at the centre of all decisions.
- The need for improved data sharing.
- The use of technology has not been fully explored.



Next steps

- Full digitisation the Statutory Assessment & Statement process should improve communications throughout this process.
- Increased collaboration with the VCS to make use of their expertise in the co-design of resources and training.
- Take full advantage of the potential of technology.
- Explore better sharing of information across education, health partners and with parents.
- Schools must be supported by DE and the EA to facilitate the involvement of children and young people.
- Consider the role of independent advocacy support to parents at appeal stage.
- Development of easily accessible information and signposting.
- Involvement of parents/carers in the development and co-design of actions within the SEN Reform Agenda.

Statementing

Scope

This workstream examined the current statutory assessment and statementing process including how professional advice is translated into statements and how support is delivered in school as the result of a statement. It also looked at the advice and support offered to those who are making referrals into the system to identify any improvements that can be made.

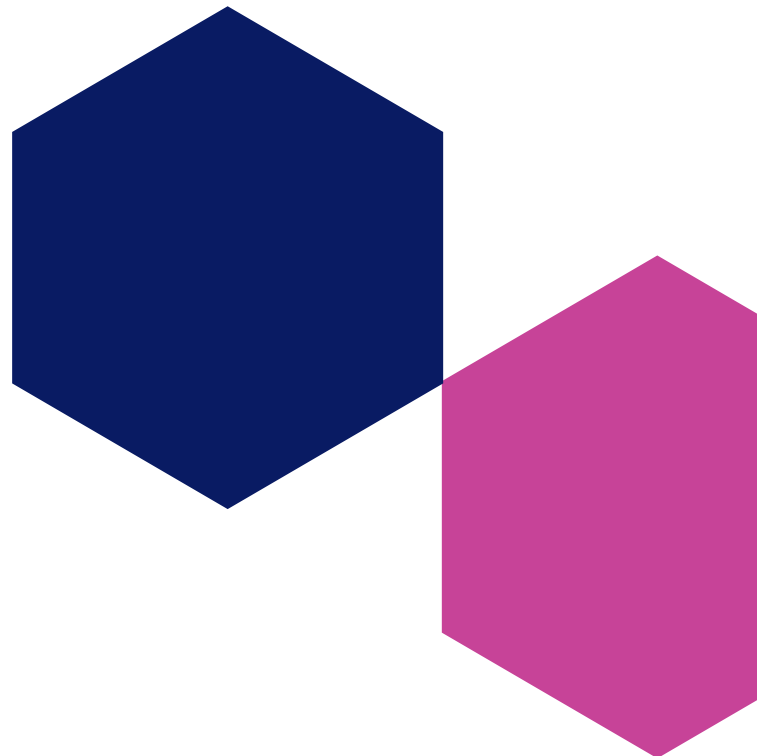
Key issues identified

- A large number of Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST) appeals are conceded by the EA just prior to the appeal hearing (often due to late evidence being received by EA which had not been submitted at the time of referral).
- Frustration from stakeholders around the lack of proactive communication from the EA.
- Evidence from the ETI report on the [Statutory Assessment \(Statementing\) Process](#) found that almost half of all principals/leaders asked were dissatisfied with the communication from the EA to both schools and parents throughout the statutory assessment (statementing) process.
- Many parents stated that they had little or no contact with their SEN Link Officer.
- Proposed and final statements difficult to understand due to the complex language or jargon throughout.
- Parents stated that the statement tended to be vague and not specific to their child.
- Need for any children identified early by Health professionals to be tracked and planned for by the EA.
- A large amount of information regarding statutory assessments is not yet held centrally or electronically making data collection and responding to queries extremely difficult and time consuming.
- The different IT systems used across Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCT) and EA makes data sharing more complex.
- Significant frustration around the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) time allocation model.
- Concerns raised about the way in which health and education advice is translated into a statement.
- Need for more effective use of Annual Review process.
- Teachers did not feel that their expertise was valued by the EA.
- Delays in the delivery of provision/support contained within a statement.
- Overwhelming sense that getting a 1:1 classroom assistant (CA) for a child was the main driver for requesting a statutory assessment.
- ETI highlighted that the removal of access to Stage 2 pupil support services following the allocation of a statement needs to be reviewed as a matter of urgency.
- The statutory assessment and statementing process remains overly bureaucratic for schools.
- Some SEN Link Officers have unmanageable caseloads.
- There is a need to streamline the data input processes within the EA.
- Better coordination between Education and Health colleagues needed during key transition stages-pre-school to primary and P7 to post-primary.



Next steps

- Full consideration to be given to the ETI report (The Statutory Assessment Process, 2024).
- The Graduated Response Framework (GRF) to be embedded in school culture.
- Digitisation of the entire statutory assessment, statementing and annual review process to allow for more effective data capture and sharing.
- EA should record and report on the levels of unmet need following full implementation of the Local IMPACT Teams (LITs).
- DE should monitor the staffing levels within EPS.
- Annual Review and Statementing documentation to be quality assured.
- Explore the timing of Annual Review meetings to enable earlier planning for transition stages.
- DE should explore the potential for Special Educational Needs Coordinators/Learning Support Coordinators (SENCOs/LSCs) to train in the delivery of certain assessment tools.
- Consideration to be given to the process for children at minus 2 years who are known to health, and referred to the EA.



Transitions

Scope

This piece of work focused on issues related to the transitions of children with a statement of SEN from education to adulthood.

Key issues identified

- Lack of trust across the system.
- Need for a collaborative approach.
- Parents/carers need the information required to help navigate through the transitions process.
- Involvement of other departments, schools, colleges, and the VCS in the design and delivery of transitions services to enable a joined-up approach.
- Data sharing must be improved – there is a need to explore how we can facilitate better data sharing across education, health partners, and with training organisations.
- Use of technology must be explored.

Next Steps

- Improvements to the Transitions process and service to be taken forward as part of the SEN Reform Delivery Plan.
- Build the trust and confidence of parents – through more easily accessible information and signposting on Transitions.
- Enhanced collaboration with VCS to ensure consistent and up to date advice.
- The involvement of other departments, schools, colleges, and the VCS in the design and delivery of transitions services.
- Explore how to facilitate improved data sharing.
- Take full advantage of the potential of technology in any improvements to communications.
- Transitions Officers to attend Annual Reviews at Transition stage where requested.
- Explore the role of Health Trust SEN Coordinators at Annual Review and Transition Stage.

Workforce Development

Scope

This workstream involved an examination of the current Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) for SEN including initial teacher education and continuous professional development.

This area also led on the priority action in relation to the deployment of CA in mainstream schools.

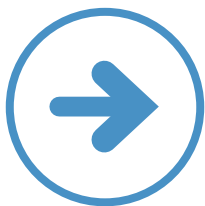
Key Issues identified

Deployment of Classroom Assistants

- School leadership is ideally placed to determine the level of professional support within the classroom.
- Some schools wish to have flexibility in deploying CAs based on their professional consideration of their pupil profile.
- Most schools would welcome the opportunity to re-profile their budget for CAs to allow for additional teaching staff or supports to be introduced.
- Lack of flexibility around the CA role due to the allocation of hours and the manner in which statements are written.
- Evidence and testing of several models of provision concluded that there is no 'universal' approach that would be optimal and a 'one size fits all' approach would not be conducive to children's learning.
- Recruitment of CA staff is proving difficult in some areas.
- Retaining staff is made difficult by the restrictive remuneration package, compounded by the grading structure and lack of clear progression/career pathways for CAs.
- The bureaucracy of the recruitment process is difficult to navigate and is unnecessarily off putting for candidates.
- There is a parental expectation that CAs are appropriately trained and carry expertise in their field; and a perception that a CA represents the only means of additional support for their child.
- There is a distinct lack of opportunities for CAs to network.
- Currently no pay increase for CAs who gain accredited training.

Teacher Professional Learning

- Desire to have increased quality, consistency, and access arrangements of SEN-focused professional learning.
- Ensure that those aspiring to be teachers, teachers and non-teaching colleagues are equipped to meet the needs of learners with SEN.
- Training for teachers to enable earlier identification of SEN.



Next Steps

Deployment of Classroom Assistants

- Under the SEN Reform Agenda, DE will consider how we support children with SEN within our classrooms, providing schools with the autonomy to adopt more flexible approaches to support.
- Adjustments to the content of a statement to remove/introduce more flexibility into assigning CA hours.
- Timely amendments to statements following Annual Review (to allow for more flexible interventions and strategies).
- Adjustments to the recruitment process for CAs.
- A review of the CA job role is required, including introduction of clear progression pathways and professionalisation of the role.

Teacher Professional Learning

- As part of the SEN Reform Agenda, DE will seek to enhance the SEN element within Initial Teacher Education. This work will build upon the priority areas for consideration identified in the ETI's Evaluation of Teacher Professional Learning (SEN).
- Develop a framework of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in SEN across the education workforce.
- Introduce mandatory accredited basic level of training in SEN for all education settings.

Special Schools

Initial scope

This workstream built on the ongoing work within DE to develop the role and expertise within Special Schools, ensuring this is disseminated across mainstream schools in supporting children with complex needs.

It also looked at reporting on the EA/DE special school development programme to affect operational improvements.

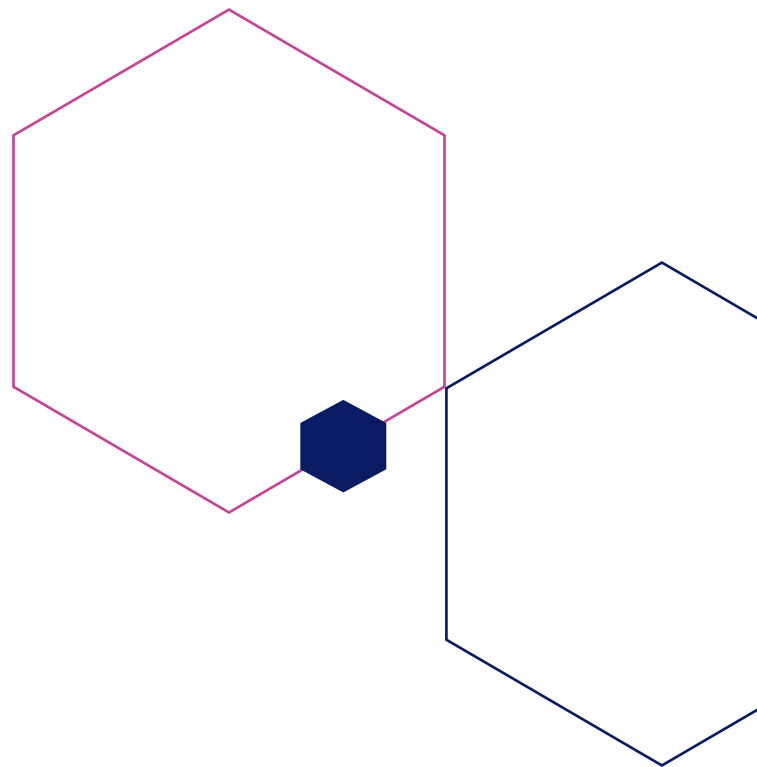
Key issues identified

- Need for clarification of designation of a special school.
- There is no clear and agreed policy framework that reflects the continuum of placement provision to support children with SEN.
- There is no formal criteria for a special school.
- The department should consider the role of the special schools within the context of a Northern Ireland defined inclusive education system.
- There is a need for a review of the funding model of special schools.
- A need for improved intra-departmental working to review and develop policy with a SEN/ Inclusion lens.
- Identified breakdown in relationship between the EA and schools.
- Necessary improvements to cross-departmental working.
- Requirement of improved professional learning across the sector.
- Consideration of the requirement for additional days to enable focus on school development.
- Development of a role for MCA.
- A need for significant investment across the special school estate.

Next Steps

- Set out the vision and policy for special schools within a strategic policy framework document with associated costs for implementation.
- Set out continuum of provision within current SEN Policy statement.
- Use of ALBs to support special schools e.g., CCEA – resource development to support Northern Ireland curriculum.
- Develop enhanced opportunities for integration in partnership with health to support re-design of Allied Health Professional (AHP) model of support for special schools.
- The Review of Curriculum and Assessment must take cognisance of the requirements for special schools and the wider cohort of children and young people with SEN.
- Review of the current level of funding towards special schools.
- Link with local councils and VCS to build programmes of activity that span across out of school hours and school holiday periods (including summer).

- Set out clear timeline for discussions on delegation of staffing in special schools.
- Set out a clear plan for operational investment across special schools to include additional admin/HR/finance support and staff professional learning.
- Comprehensive CPD programme for all educational staff within special schools, designed and led by special schools.
- Any new legislation/ policy should give greater clarity in relation to designation of 'special schools'
- Co-design in conjunction with special school leaders, the 'specialist hub' model.
- DE requires a special school framework, aligned to the Strategic Area Plan for Special Schools.
- DE should ensure that there is a comprehensive plan for investment across existing special schools' sites.
- DE should link with the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (Ireland) to undertake an audit of the current estate and set out guiding principles for refurbishment and new builds to inform schools building handbook.



Early Intervention

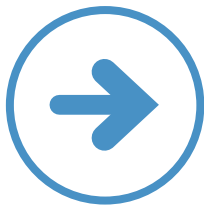
Initial Scope

This workstream included an examination of current practice and application of the CoP in the early stages in schools and early years settings and the identification of best practice in early intervention for SEN.

It also included consideration of early years SEN support models and how to increase capacity within settings.

Key Issues Identified

- Missed health and development reviews represent missed opportunity for earliest identification of need and referral to support services.
- Early education and childcare providers lack the skills / knowledge / confidence to support children with SEN.
- Long waiting lists for health services present a missed window of opportunity when intervention has most impact.
- Development programmes for 2-year-olds are patchy and inconsistent.
- There is inequity across pre-school education system.
- The staff:child ratio of 1:13 for statutory nursery settings is very challenging.
- Lack of support for settings while children are undergoing statutory assessment.
- The 'supernumerary' status of children with a statement of SEN leads to overcrowding in nursery settings.
- Issues with access to and quality of the SEN Early Years Inclusion Service (SENEYIS).
- Difficulty accessing RISE NI support – pre-school settings reported that the service was difficult to access due to threshold criteria.
- Barriers to access to AHP support in mainstream pre-school settings.
- There is a shortage of SEN-experienced CAs.
- Special education provision is not included within the scope of the standardisation of the Pre-school Education Programme to full-time provision for all children.
- Parents of children with SEN need easy access to information, resources and signposting to support their child in the home environment.
- Physical environment is not SEN friendly.
- Special school outreach support is valued.



Next steps

- Enhancing in-school support and resources to enable schools to support children at Stage 1 of the CoP.
- Improve access to AHP interventions.
- Identify opportunities for sustained investment.
- Pilot introduction of SEN CAs across statutory and non-statutory pre-school education settings.
- Address inequalities between statutory and non-statutory pre-school providers.
- Establish application-based funding pot to support pre-school settings with children undergoing statutory assessment.
- Increase the staff to child ratio for statutory nursery settings.
- Increase undergraduate places for AHPs to address supply issue with conditional employment within Education.
- Optimise partnership working with VCS.
- Introduce agreed data sharing arrangements between Health services and early education provision.
- Develop a bespoke Getting Ready to Learn Programme of parental engagement for children with additional needs to support positive home learning environments with input from AHPs.
- In partnership with Health, establish a regional developmental programme for 2-3year olds with identified or emerging SEN.
- Pilot Early Years Education and Intervention centres.

Pupil Support

Initial Scope

This workstream examined the effectiveness of the current pupil support models of delivery including evidence emerging from various reviews. This was undertaken in parallel with the EA project developing a LITs model.

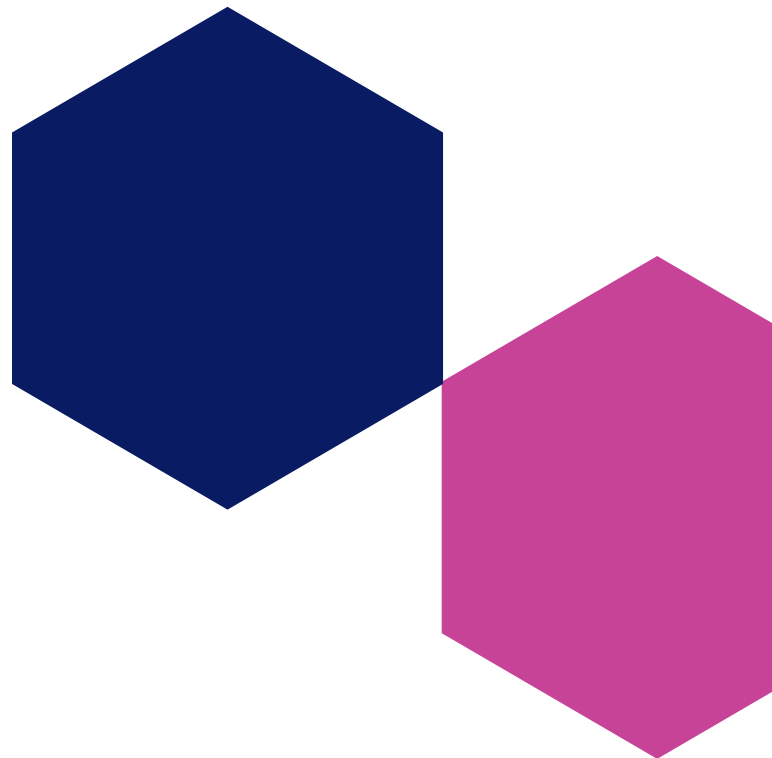
Key issues identified

- Improvements to the expertise and experience of staff in EA Pupil Support Services (PSS) is required.
- External provision for non-educational needs is not provided by EA PSS.
- The overall approach to pupil support is segregated. SEN support and welfare services are set apart so children are offered a system based solution rather than a childcentred approach.
- There are no Irish language or bilingual pupil support and assessment services, thereby disadvantaging pupils with SEN in Irish Medium Education.
- Training is viewed as out-of-date and ineffective in capacity building.
- A range of issues have been identified in the area of Hearing and Vision SEN that lack collaboration between services to resolve.
- There is no systemic measurement of effectiveness of services.
- Referral to services is difficult and takes too long due to EPS gatekeeping, restrictive criteria and bureaucratic hurdles.
- Schools are often unaware of the help available from EA's PSS.
- Outreach by Special Schools such as advice, guidance, training, intervention etc. is found to be effective.
- Support provided by MCA has been beneficial for the few who reported they had used the services, but others feel it is difficult to access. Many are unaware of how to access it.
- There is no numeracy service. Services involve many teachers qualified to teach numeracy, but it does not happen.
- The Sensory (Hearing and Vision) service lacks a permanent management structure and is unable to ensure succession planning.

Next Steps

- Regular outcomes based reporting on effectiveness of PSS.
- Early Intervention Support Programme- Pilot a model of enhanced in-school support to test effectiveness and inform long-term transformation.
- Special school expertise and MCA should be used to enhance the external support model (building on LITs).
- Health services should be delivered as part of an enhanced integrated model of pupil support (building on LITs)

- Language-based support to be available through the medium of Irish i.e., Literacy, Language and Communication.
- Other support services where appropriate to be made available through the medium of Irish.
- Numeracy support service required.
- Access to funding to ensure schools can access creative/assisted therapies to support emotional wellbeing and learning.
- Increase the number of specialist teachers/tutors in schools.
- Providing schools with flexibility to employ professional staff based on their professional consideration of their pupil profile.
- Removal of EPS gatekeeping.
- Teachers/professionals within LITs providing Stage 2 support need to be highly qualified and experienced.
- Data regarding referrals, waiting lists, interventions, outcomes to be digitised, centralised and accessible.
- Children with a statement should also receive input from PSS if necessary.



SEN Placements & Area Planning

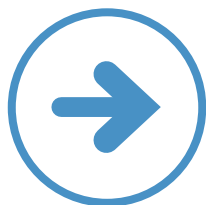
Initial Scope

This workstream aimed to understand how the education system has in recent years, been unable to provide sufficient numbers of appropriate placements for children with statements of SEN, in particular at key transition years and what can be done to address that.

Key issues identified

- The criteria used to create specialist provisions should be reviewed and considered against the existing Framework and whether it is still applicable and appropriate for use.
- Consideration should be given to developing Service Level Agreements (SLA) between the EA and schools with specialist provisions to establish clear expectations.
- Administrative and operational processes that underpin the placements process all need to be brought forward in time in the academic year.
- Additional capacity needs to be in place in line with projected need before parental preference is expressed, supported by strategic Area Planning.
- Operational Plan (OP) 2 (currently under development at the time of writing) should incorporate detailed proposals to ensure that provision is being established in advance of need and set out that detail across each Local Government District (LGD).
- EA should compile a special school 'Master Plan' detailing strategic intent for each school in the medium and long-term.
- EA should also finalise its Draft Emergency Framework.
- EA should consider a single 'Case for Change' to cover the proposed eight new special schools.
- Area Planning and capital spend should be forward thinking to ensure appropriate pathways for a child's educational journey.
- Forward planning and additional capacity in post-primary is required.
- Access to therapeutic interventions delivered by AHPs should be equitable, irrespective of where a child attends school.
- Timeliness of processes within the EA's Statutory Assessment and Review Service (SARS) is key to breaking the cycle of emergency planning.
- Gathering regional data in advance of each year's transition to allow the SARS team to anticipate where need is geographically and to engage with schools in those areas to create additional capacity and in advance of need.
- There should be a comprehensive evaluation of specialist education provision in mainstream schools and a review of the current continuum of education.
- Consideration of the removal of supernumerary status of children with a statement of SEN except for first year of admission where the child is not already placed in the setting.
- Alignment of SEN admissions at key transition years to the open enrolment as far as possible.
- Combining the EA's new GRF to support alternative models of specialist provision e.g. nurture / trauma informed practices.

- Need for a mechanism for moving a child immediately if a placement breaks down – perhaps outside the Annual Review process.
- Need to scope the rollout of full-time nursery provision in special schools to align with position in mainstream pre-school education.



Next Steps

- Finalisation of OP 2 which will prioritise special education provision.
- Socialisation of and collaboration with EA on bringing forward operational timelines and EPS involvement in Annual Reviews.
- Establish regular checkpoints with SEN Capital Investment Team and Area Planning colleagues.
- Continued engagement with Public Health Agency and DoH to refine delivery model of AHP services irrespective of educational setting.
- Further work is required with Health to ensure the growth of specialist provision does not prejudice a child's access to therapies.
- EA should ask parents to indicate their list of school preferences for post primary schools in either P5 or P6 and bring forward Annual Reviews to allow the process to be completed in advance of general admissions to Year 8.
- The EA should also consider a similar approach to the naming of P1 preferences when a child is in pre-school and who has undergone statutory assessment.
- The EA should gather regional data in advance of each year's transition, which will allow the SARS team to anticipate where need is geographically and to engage with schools in those areas to create additional capacity.
- The EA in addressing geographical pressures, must also consider the sectoral and linguistic inconsistencies in relation to the accessibility of provision.
- Reduce supernumerary status to extend only to children with a statement of SEN in their first year of admission who do not already have a place in the education setting. Following Ministerial consideration, a public consultation is due to commence spring / summer 2025.
- Schools are supported to become more inclusive through development of a competent and confident workforce. An appropriate package of training and support to be considered for newly qualified teachers. Links to in-school resource. Also consider physical learning environment.
- Provide parents with accurate online information on specialist provision and opportunities to visit schools to inform parental preference.
- Digitise the placements process so parents can monitor progress / consultations / make contact online – portal.
- For schools establishing specialist provisions for the first time, build linkages with existing special school outreach services which should be used to complement and enhance support services.
- Area Planning and capital spend is forward thinking to ensure appropriate pathways for a child's educational journey throughout the school estate.
- Streamlining of the Development Proposal process for special school changes should be considered.
- A 10 year SEN capital programme is developed informed by area planning including a masterplan for each special school.